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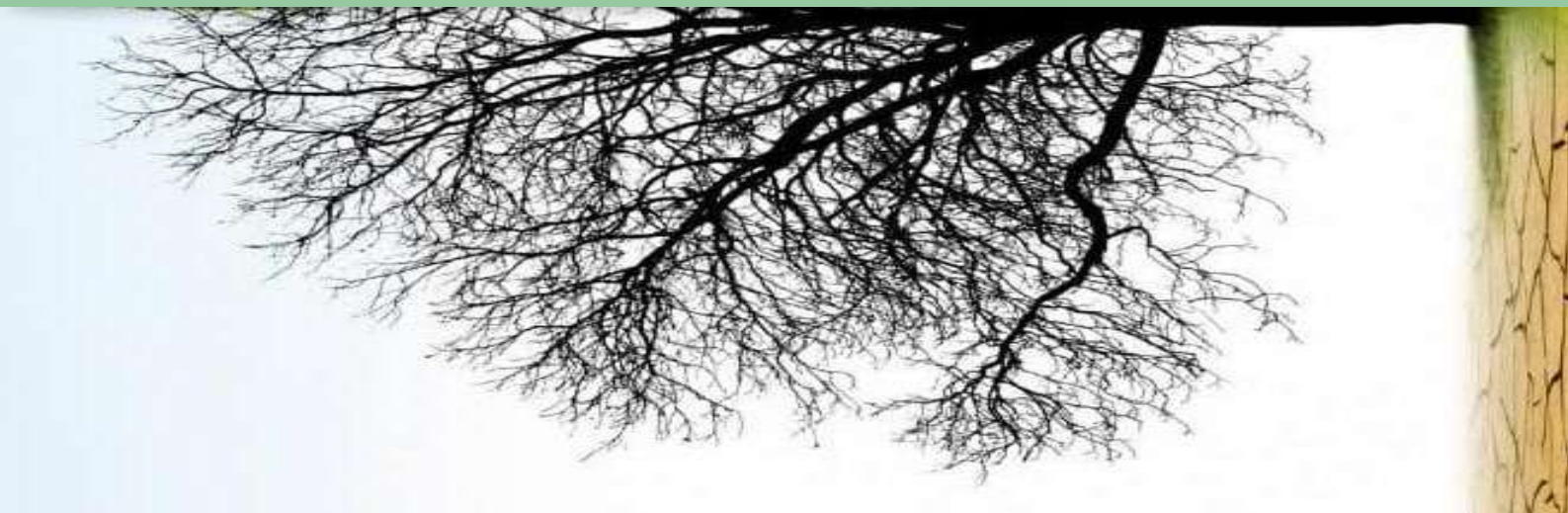
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NARRATIVES OF MEMORY, GENDER AND ECOLOGY IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE



GUEST EDITOR

DR. K T TAMILMANI

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SPECIAL ISSUE

NARRATIVES OF MEMORY, GENDER AND ECOLOGY IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

01 SEPTEMBER 2026

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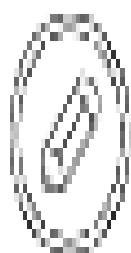
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EDITORIAL NOTE

It is with great responsibility and pleasure that I present, on behalf of the editorial board, this special issue of ***DABEER: An International Peer-Reviewed, Refereed Quarterly Literary Research Journal***. The theme of this volume is “Narratives of Memory, Gender and Ecology in Postcolonial Literature,” and the volume has been published with a sense of scholarly obligation. The 95 manuscripts have been grouped into four sub-thematic sections, each ordered by relevance to the overarching theme: (i) Land, Loss and the Anthropocene: Ecological Memory and Environmental Justice in Postcolonial Writing (27 manuscripts) — ecology, land, climate, environmental (in)justice, (ii) Remembering the Wound: Trauma, Displacement and Postmemory in Postcolonial Narratives (27 manuscripts) — memory/trauma/exile-centred readings, (iii) Gendered Bodies and Ecofeminist Resistance: Rewriting Identity in Postcolonial Fiction (23 manuscripts) — gender, body, motherhood, masculinity, ecofeminism and (iv) Myth, Indigeneity and Speculative Ecologies: Reimagining Nature and Nation in Postcolonial Literature (18 manuscripts) — myth/folklore, indigenous storytelling, speculative/dystopian fiction.

The humanities have become indispensable in today's polarized world where ecological crises are accelerating, and divergent geopolitical narratives are being peddled. They are essential for creating space for nuanced discussion, moral reflection, and moral questioning that are central to creating democratic, equitable, and sustainable futures. This volume arrives at an opportune moment in literary and cultural studies, as the study of memory, gender, and ecology has become increasingly relevant and significant in the field. Since its advent, the postcolonial has been a valuable repository of historical memory, cultural transactions, and subversive vision.

The study of postcolonial literature in relation to the complex strands of historical memory, gendered life experience, and interchanged environmental histories, however, has become increasingly significant. This special issue contributes to this growing international conversation by featuring a diversity of scholarly, critical methods that reveal the multifaceted relationships among history, identity, embodiment, landscape, and ecological survival.

One of the key arguments of this volume is that memories are transmitted and narrated differently across cultures worldwide. Oral history, domestic memory, and embodied expressions often reveal aspects of historical experience that are entirely missing from state archives, and they often give voice to those who have been historically marginalized. These socio-political struggles are happening at the same time, on both the material and symbolic planes of ecology. Rivers,

forests, coastlines, villages, cities, and broken landscapes are not inert backdrops; they are dynamic archives of collective memory, forever marking complex narratives of exploitation, resistance, and renewal. Trauma is another common theme in postcolonial texts, both as a psychological reaction to political violence and historical injustice and as a result of environmental disruption. At its core, the absence of a homeland means the stark loss of language, community, livelihood, and ancestral ecological ties. In this way, displacement trauma is further exacerbated by environmental degradation, which turns landscapes into physical evidence of historical suffering. The speed of the climate crisis's escalation has greatly expanded the scope of postcolonial literary inquiry. This is a harsh reality of the Anthropocene: the communities with the least responsibility for the environmental crisis around the world are the ones who suffer most of its effects. Droughts, floods, coastal erosion, deforestation, species extinction, and ecological contamination are therefore not only natural events but also direct consequences of aggressive developmentalism, resource extraction, and historical power disparities, as they are often portrayed in contemporary literature.

The central theme of this special issue is that literary studies need to be engaged with these imperative realities of the global world in a vigorously interdisciplinary conversation. Questions emerging from the convergence of memory, gender and ecology can hardly be addressed in the narrow parameters of one discipline. Gender studies can help us to understand how things work with gender as they are experienced in the body, through work, sexuality and representation. At the same time, it questions us to think outside the anthropocentric box and to be mindful of the fragility of the relationships between human and non-human actors. This significant intervention is further supplemented by frameworks from cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and media studies, which are invaluable tools for situating literary texts in their larger social, political, and technological contexts. This interdisciplinary connection, rather than detracting from the specificity of literary analysis, enriches it and allows us to learn a great deal about the various material forces that shape the form of the narrative, its thematic movement, and its interpretability.

Contributors to this volume explore the politics of gendered landscapes, spatial justice, and the various ways ecological activism emerges in narratives, testimonies, performances, and literary imagination. They offer a pluralistic conversation that exemplifies the multifaceted identities of the institutions that brought them together, the diverse regional backgrounds in which they have worked, and the diverse intellectual orientations they represent, with internal differences among the volume's most scholarly strengths. This is the collective effort of many people and institutions that brought a comprehensive volume of this magnitude to fruition.

At this juncture, I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to all the eminent Members of the Editorial Board of *DABEER* for their trust in me as the Guest Editor, and I would also like to appreciate them for their continuous efforts to produce a good impact on scholarly research through *DABEER*. I sincerely thank my friend Dr. Md Ehtashamul Islam Khan, Managing Editor of *DABEER* for suggesting my name to the Editorial Board and entrusting me with this guest

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editorial work. I would like to thank the reviewers for their scrutiny of the manuscripts and for their review comments, which helped improve each manuscript. Both their liberal intellectuality and demanding standards are typical of the co-operative spirit at the heart of the academic world. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the contributors for their patience, professionalism, and scholarly contributions throughout the editorial process. More specifically, I would like to acknowledge the unconditional technical and editorial assistance of the journal staff, without which this issue could not have been published with such elegance and clarity.

I present this special issue to our readers with the hope that this volume will be an intellectual treat on postcolonial literary scholarship. May it be a valuable contribution and a timely provocation to consider the history we ought to remember, and the sustainable futures we are called to envision and defend.

Guest Editor

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SECTION – I

Land, Loss and the Anthropocene: Ecological Memory and Environmental Justice in Postcolonial Writing

This section positions ecology not as a backdrop but as the narrative engine itself, tracing how land, water, extinction, and climate catastrophe become sites where postcolonial histories of dispossession and contemporary environmental (in)justice converge. By treating ecological memory as a form of cultural and mnemonic justice, it asks how stories remember what development and empire have tried to erase—and how those memories shape claims to a livable future.

The section reads land as both material resource and mnemonic archive, where colonial extraction, settler logics, and postcolonial development produce layered experiences of dispossession. Waterways, coastlines, and vanishing species function as protagonists and witnesses, registering slow violence and sudden disaster alike. Rather than treating memory as a theme, the section examines how texts encode ecological memory in structure—through fragmented timelines, mythic interludes, and place-based storytelling that resist linear, realist modes complicit with colonial-capitalist worldviews. The analysis foregrounds how environmental harm tracks along colonial fault lines of race, caste, indigeneity, and class, linking resource conflicts to longer histories of empire and development. Moving beyond anthropocentric frames, the section explores human–nonhuman relationality and the possibility of land justice—forms of repair that recognize ecosystems and nonhuman agents as rights-bearing participants in story and law.

DABEER SI/KTT/01**INK AGAINST EXTINCTION: LITERATURE, ACTIVISM, AND ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY****KULAMANGALAM THIYAGARAJAN TAMILMANI**Associate Professor and Head, Department of English
Nehru Memorial College, Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

The climate crisis, migration due to environmental displacement and ecological violence have become central features of today's lived reality, making literature a potent space of resistance, activism, and ecological imagination. The phrase 'Ink Against Extinction' highlights the power of literary expression to offer a way of dealing with environmental destruction and envisioning sustainable futures in the twenty-first century crises. This research examines the role of the contemporary literary texts in the advocacy of ecological awareness, a critique of capitalist exploitation of nature, and a development of collective ecological consciousness. The study adopts a qualitative research method that involves textual analysis and close reading of select contemporary literary works, activist literature, climate fiction, and eco-critical literature. The theoretical framework draws on the fields of ecocriticism, environmental humanities, ecofeminism and posthumanist theory, specifically the works of Amitav Ghosh, Rob Nixon, Donna Haraway, Timothy Morton, and Greta Gaard. The study suggests that in the twenty-first century, literature has become a tool that brings together "environmental collapse" and "social inequality," "political indifference" and "consumer capitalism," making environmental problems a cultural memory and an ethical responsibility. The results show that literary activism generates opportunities for ecological empathy, resistance, environmental justice and also for the psychological and cultural fears generated by planetary instability. On the whole, today's literature is not just a work of art, but a piece of environmental action that daringly reminds people to think again and be concerned about survival, coexistence and environmental responsibility in an era of rapidly emerging ecological crisis.

Keywords: Ecological Consciousness; Literary Activism; Climate Anxiety; Environmental Humanities; Eco-Criticism; Planetary Crisis

Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen an unprecedented crisis in ecology with climate change, the extinction of species, pollution, and deforestation. These crises have affected the physical environment, but also the cultural, political and psychological aspects of human life. In this context, literature has become an effective tool to question environmental degradation, capitalist exploitation and to develop an ecological awareness—"Ink Against Extinction" embodies the defensive measures of literature as a counter to ecological collapse. As Amitav Ghosh famously states, "The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (Ghosh 9). Conventional narratives are simply incapable of capturing the scope and of ecological catastrophe. Therefore, literature becomes a

crucial tool in shaping the public imagination and to make readers feel the realities of the environment, abstract. Likewise, Rob Nixon has a term for “slow violence,” defined as “a violence that happens over a long period of time and out of sight” (Nixon 2). Literary depictions reveal these environmental injustices, and link the degradation of the environment to social inequalities, displacement, and political neglect.

Dipesh Chakrabarty states that “humans have become a geological force” (Chakrabarty 67), which is impacting the climatic systems and ecosystems of Earth. These changes have brought about the posthumanist and material ecocritical view. These theories reject a human-centric view of interconnectedness between humans, nature, technology, and animals. Donna Haraway states that people need to learn to “make kin in lines of inventive connection” (Haraway 103). As with the others, Timothy Morton considers a phenomenon like global warming a “hyperobject”—one that is “massively distributed in time and space” (Morton 1). Ecofeminist scholars like Greta Gaard condemn “Ecofeminism is a theory of social justice that connects environmental health to human liberation,” (Gaard 5). Likewise, Vandana Shiva condemns capitalist modernity for turning nature into a resource, conceptualizing the loss of nature as a product of ‘maldevelopment’ caused by the profit-driven systems of capitalism (Shiva 14). Contemporary climate fiction and environmental activism have thus taken on great importance as a means of resisting eco-indifference including *The Overstory*, *Gun Island*, and *The Ministry for the Future* highlight environmental crises and raise the issues of collective responsibility and ecological ethics. Literature has a transformative role in fostering ecological awareness, and as Lawrence Buell says, “environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination” (Buell 2). Moreover, the emotional and psychological aspects of climate anxiety are evident in ecological writings. Humans must come to terms with “the fragility of human-centered thinking” (Colebrook 23) if they are to face the prospect of extinction. This present study therefore will look into the ways in which the literature of the twenty-first century is an act of ecological activism and environmental consciousness.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research method to analyze the relationship between literature, activism and ecological consciousness in the twenty-first century. The research is largely based on textual analysis and close reading of a selected group of contemporary literature, climate fiction, eco-critical literature and activist literature dealing with issues like climate change, ecological violence, environmental displacement, extinction, consumer capitalism, and environmental justice. It is an interdisciplinary study, with theoretical support from the fields of ecocriticism, environmental humanities, ecofeminism and posthumanist theory.

Review of Literature

Environmental destruction, climate anxiety, extinction, and the human/environmental dynamic are the themes of many recent literary works. Modern literary criticism acknowledges that the topic of environment is not just a scientific problem, but a cultural, moral, and political problem, manifesting itself in literary works. Lawrence Buell states that environmental criticism aims to “to appreciate the relationship between literature and environment in a commitment

to environmental praxis” (Buell 430). Likewise, Cheryll Glotfelty characterizes ecocriticism as the “literature and physical environment” (Glotfelty 18). Glotfelty maintains that literary works can change environmental perception in several ways: by foregrounding ecological interconnectedness and by revealing the effects of environmental exploitation. In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh argues not dealt with climate catastrophe in an adequate manner, as it is a threat to traditional narrative structures and realistic portrayals (Ghosh 21). Posthumanist approaches have also transformed and rethought ecocritical studies by challenging anthropocentric worldviews. Donna Haraway stresses that humans are connected with animals, technology, and ecosystems (Haraway 30). The work of ecofeminist criticism also plays an important role in literary studies Vandana Shiva exposes the global capitalism and industrial growth that has made women and nature “commodities” (Shiva 18). They have inspired scholars to look at the literary representations of ecological exploitation in relation to gender, class and colonial power structures. As environmental stories shift away from the local to the “sense of planet” due to global ecological interconnections, Ursula K. Heise observes that the stories are becoming more and more complex (Heise 56). In sum, the literature thus far shows that twenty-first century writing is actively addressing planetary crises, environmental justice, extinction and climate anxiety.

Analysis

1. Literature as Ecological Resistance in the Twenty-First Century

In recent times, literature has become one of the most powerful and evident resistances to environmental devastation and capitalist exploitation. Fiction, poetry, essays, and climate narratives all are used by writers from around the world to reveal the ecological collapse and encourage environmental awareness amongst readers. The climate crisis also constitutes a crisis of culture, Amitav Ghosh argues, “for the imagination of the environment is largely a product of literary narratives” (Ghosh 9). Literature is becoming less and less an art form and more and more a political and moral position that engages in ecological indifference. Lawrence Buell suggests that environmental texts can help readers to cultivate “environmental imagination” (Buell 2), which in turn cultivates ecological empathy and responsibility. Likewise, Rob Nixon's notion of “slow violence” describes how environmental degradation is slow and invisible to the majority within marginalized communities (Nixon 2). Timothy Clark points out how climate change has forced a rethinking of traditional literary interpretations (Clark 148). In modern times, therefore, such writers try to connect the dots between reality and public awareness by creating emotionally engaging stories. Climate fiction is one of the most important literary genres on the topic of planetary instability. Adam Trexler sees climate fiction as a reinvention of the image of “humanity's place within ecological systems” (Trexler 5). Novels like Richard Powers' *The Overstory* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* depict environmental collapse and eco-social responsibility. Richard Powers sees trees as living organisms in relation to each other, and he rejects anthropocentric views and redefines the human relationship with nature. Increasingly ecological stories foster a “sense of planet” over local identities, says Ursula K. Heise (56). These literary depictions help readers understand the world's interconnections in

the context of the environment. Naomi Klein also argues that capitalism is still firmly tied to environmental degradation as profit-driven systems are prioritizing economic growth over ecological well-being (Klein 21). Literary activism involves literature that attacks industrial growth, consumers, and political apathy in the face of the climate crisis. The post humanist view has also had a footprint on modern ecological writing in the form of questioning the hegemony of anthropocentric thinking. Donna Haraway's concept of "making kin" with nonhuman entities and ecological systems puts an emphasis on living together and surviving as a community (Haraway 103). Such abstract realities of the environment become known as a space in literature. Extinction stories remind Claire Colebrook that "the fragility of human-centered thinking" (Colebrook 23) suggests that people must rethink their approach to the planet. Contemporary literature is an instrument of ecological storytelling and thus a means to make environmental crises an ethical issue of co-existence, survival and sustainability.

2. Climate Anxiety and Psychological Dimensions of Ecological Crisis

The accelerating climatic changes have generated widespread psychological anxiety, uncertainty and emotional distress, which is considered climate anxiety or eco-anxiety. These emotional aspects of ecological crisis are increasingly represented in contemporary literature through the themes of fear of extinction, environmental grief and uncertainty about the future. Modern climate fiction seeks to break free from this imaginative constraint, by converting scientific fact into an emotionally compelling story. A second theme in twenty-first century environmental literature is ecological grief. As Ursula K. Heise suggests, extinction stories help to form a "cultural understanding of biodiversity loss" (Heise 4). In literary works, species disappearing, ecosystems being destroyed, and climate disasters are often the subject of a collective ecological sadness and mournfulness. In *The Sixth Extinction*, Elizabeth Kolbert underscores human responsibility for the extinction of species and deterioration of the environment, and warns of a future that can never be recovered. Similarly, Claire Colebrook claims that extinction stories remind humanity of its fragility and fragility in planetary systems (Colebrook 40). These literary investigations show how environmental instability impacts ecosystems as well as human emotions and minds. Social and political uncertainty is also linked to climate anxiety. In "slow violence" Rob Nixon claims that the marginalized communities that suffer from environmental crises are "displaced, insecure and fearful" (Nixon 2). Climate refugees, environmental displacement, and social fragmentation is a prevalent theme in contemporary literature, especially in relation to ecological collapse. As Anna Tsing says, survival and adaptation in capitalist ruins necessitate new modes of life in broken environments (Tsing 20). Human impact on environmental degradation is revealed in literary accounts of floods, droughts, fires and environmental migration. Naomi Klein argues that political apathy and neoliberal capitalism exacerbate climate insecurities, at the cost of the environment (Klein 41). In such narratives, literature reveals that climate anxiety is a product of environmental issues and political shortcomings

3. Ecofeminism, Capitalism, and Environmental Exploitation

Ecofeminist criticism looks at the mutually reinforcing oppression of women and nature in the context of patriarchy and capitalism. In modern ecological literature, the idea of environmental destruction is often accompanied by the concepts of gender inequality, gender exploitation and social injustice. The idea of ecofeminist scholars is that systems that exploit women also exploit nature. Vandana Shiva questions capitalist modernity from the point of view that it sees the natural world as a resource to be commodified for profit and industrial growth (Shiva 14). Many literary works that reflect on deforestation, pollution, extraction of resources and ecological violence reveal these exploitative apparatuses and challenge the dominant economic thinking. Climate change and environmental degradation are largely being driven by the growth of industry and consumerism, making environmental issues relevant to capitalism today a main focus in current ecological literature. Jason W. Moore suggests that capitalism is an exploitation of labour and ecology in a “web of life” (Moore 3). In literary narratives, ecological breakdown is becoming a marker of consumerism and industrialization, as well as global inequality. Naomi Klein states Climate change is also “a battle between capitalism and the planet”, says (Klein 21). Climate fiction often targets global corporations, corruption and political systems which value growth over sustainability. Literary activism brings to light the environmental implications of unchecked capitalism and calls for environmental justice. The literature of ecofeminism also points to the voices of the marginalized communities that are impacted by environmental degradation. Ecological violence disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable, those who are not well represented in the political sphere (Nixon 15). Literary depictions of indigenous communities, displaced populations and environmentally degraded areas will show how ecological crises intersect with class, race and gender oppression. Western rationalism has traditionally perceived nature as inferior and exploitable (Plumwood 42). In modern literature, the hierarchies are disputed and ecological interdependence and moral living are brought to the forefront. To be ecologically responsible, you must “tear down systems that allow domination of women and nature” (Gaard 9). In this way, contemporary literature can be used to reflect on the injustice of the environment and to envision more sustainable and equitable futures.

4. Posthumanism and Human–Nonhuman Interconnectedness

The posthumanist theory has had a profound impact on twenty first century ecological literature in its critique of anthropocentric views and the interconnectedness of humans, animals, technology and ecosystems. Modern authors are now challenging long-held beliefs about the superiority of humans, and discussing living together in a complex ecosystem. In the Anthropocene, Donna Haraway says, we must learn to “make kin” across species barriers in order to survive (Haraway 103). Her theory is based on a relational model of human existence and ecological interdependence, as opposed to individuals separated from one another. Posthumanism-oriented literature, therefore, does not depict humans as separate from nature but as a part of a wider ecological network. Literary texts try to make these hidden crises become emotionally accessible by means of metaphor, symbol, or speculative imagination. With the posthumanist

thought, Claire Colebrook states that human-centered worldviews are exposed as unstable and all humankind are forced to face ecological fragility (Colebrook 23). It thus challenges anthropocentric assumptions and brings coexistence of humans and nonhumans to the fore in contemporary literature. In addition, agency of matter, landscapes, and ecological systems are also emphasized with literary representation by material ecocriticism. The "storied agency" of matter is explained by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, who say that environments communicate histories of violence, exploitation, and transformation (Iovino and Oppermann 7). Rivers, forests, oceans, and animals are often depicted in ecological literature as participants, not background. This view is captured in *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers, in which trees are portrayed as living, interdependent, communicating, and resisting. These depictions deconstruct human exceptionalism and promote ecological humility. Anxiety about technological progress and ecological survival is also evident in literary texts written in the posthumanist mode. Bruno Latour insists that in this entanglement with planetary systems man can no longer imagine that he could separate himself from nature (Latour 15). Current ecological discourse thus challenges technological advancement that causes harm to the environment and seeks to imagine the prospect of coexisting sustainably. In a time of ecological uncertainty, literature invites readers to question their identities, ethics, and lives through the lens of posthumanist imagination.

5. Literature as Environmental Activism and Ethical Responsibility

Literature in the twenty-first century is increasingly used as a vehicle for achieving environmental activism, which is the resistance against ecological indifference and promotes an ethical attitude with respect to the planet. The purpose of literary narratives by contemporary writers is to reveal injustice in the environment, to question political passivity, and to speak out on behalf of ecological sustainability. Lawrence Buell believes that environmental literature fosters awareness of the environment by making environmental concerns more cultural and ethical in nature (Buell 30). Literature is a powerful tool for raising awareness about the need to address planetary crises and rethink the relationship between people and the planet, using emotionally charged stories. Amitav Ghosh reminds us that literature can be a force to alter the ecological imagination, by confronting the truths of climate catastrophe (Ghosh 63). Poems of climate fiction, eco-poems, and activist literature then turn into valuable means of environmental advocacy. *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson envisions an international response to climate change and policy interventions; *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingsolver features close-ups of people in the midst of ecological upheaval. These literary texts bring personal stories and global ecological issues together, thus inviting the reader to think critically about realities of the environment. Another aspect of environmental activism in literature is to question political and economic frameworks that contribute to the destruction of the environment. In Naomi Klein's opinion, the neoliberal capitalism worsens climate instability, as it focuses on profit over sustainability (Klein 56). Literary works that reveal environmental malfeasance, business exploitation and ecological injustice then become resistance. Environmental ethics are well present in the current ecological

literature. In the wake of ecological crises, literary narratives often highlight the interconnectedness, sustainability, and collective responsibility. Kate Rigby observes Environmental storytelling can elicit "ethical reflections" by evoking in the reader an emotional response to ecological realities. (Rigby 18). Nowadays, literature is not just a product of art, it is also a dynamic agent of awareness and change.

Discussion

Overall, the present research shows that twenty-first century literature has become an important mode of ecological engagement and intervention towards environmental crises, climate anxiety, ecological injustice and planetary instability. Current fictional works are no longer about nature as events, but rather about nature as a part of all human life and a moral responsibility. Literature's role is to question anthropocentric worldviews and inspire readers to become more ecologically conscious both through climate fiction, eco-critical writing, and activist texts, and posthuman approaches. Climate change refugees, polluted environments, disappearing ecosystems and environmental displacement are depicted in literary texts and reveal the disparity in the effects of ecological degradation. The conversation brings into focus the fact that climate fiction and ecological stories are culture's answers to climate stress and psychological disorder produced by planetary crises. Fears, uncertainties, death, and environmental grief are recurring emotional realities of the Anthropocene, as described in contemporary writing. Literary narratives are able to evoke the reader's feelings and reactions towards a situation of environmental catastrophe in ways that scientific reporting can seldom. Literature can help to develop ecological empathy and awareness by employing tools of imagination, metaphor, and narrative to communicate abstract environmental facts. The other important finding of the study is the increased presence of posthumanist and ecofeminist voices in the current environmental discourse. Posthumanist theories challenge the distinction between humans and nature, with a focus on eco-feminist viewpoints that also expose the intertwining of systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and environmental exploitation. Ecofeminist narratives expose a nexus between environmental degradation and gender oppression, social inequality and colonialism. When there's a destabilization on the planet, these stories become a potent catalyst for ecological justice, sustainability and collective survival.

Conclusion

The results of the present study show that twenty-first century literature influences ecological awareness, environmental activism, and ethics in times of climate instability, extinction, ecological violence, and planetary uncertainty. Contemporary literature revealing the harmful effects of industrialization, consumer capitalism, environmental abuse, and political neglect. Literature can promote ecological empathy, resistance and collective responsibility to the planet, through climate fiction, eco-critical narratives, as well as works of activism and posthumanism. The study shows that environmental literature is a successful link between science and culture. In the same way, Stephanie LeMenager describes how "modern life is bound to extractive energy systems and petroleum culture" (LeMenager 18). This kind of literary investigation reveals the impact of industrial

modernity on the environment and calls for ecological responsibility. In his book, *Environmentalism: A World Vision*, Ramachandra Guha notes that environmentalism is becoming an ethical movement on a global scale in reaction to ecological damage and social injustice (Guha 3). Similarly, Bruno Latour asserts that humans are not distinct from nature's ecological systems, but exist within them (Latour 15). Such narratives are represented as shared human experiences and hence, as transnational and transcultural phenomena. This paper, people are experiencing a time of rapid biodiversity loss driven by, in large part, human activity (Kolbert 12). Modern literature thus provides extinction narratives as a warning to the dangers of environmental neglect and a call to ethical responsibility and ecological reflection. Nicole Seymour also claims that environmental rhetoric has become more ironic, satirical and non-linear in its approach to readers to provoke a feeling of the crisis (Seymour 9). Slavoj Žižek states that ecological disasters highlight the inherent contradictions and the unsustainability of today's capitalist systems (Žižek 334). Literature is thus a space for political critique and ethics. Overall, the research concludes that literature, in the twenty-first century, is no longer limited to aesthetic representation. It is rather, an act of the environment, a memory of the culture, an act of ethics and an ecological resistance against planetary destruction.

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DABEER SI/KTT/02**ELEMENTAL LANDSCAPES: GENDER, ECOLOGICAL MEMORY
AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION IN POSTCOLONIAL
ECO-FICTION****NIRUPAMA V**Research Scholar, Comparative Literature and Translation Studies
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi, India**Abstract**

This paper utilizes the Tamil *sangam* framework of *tinai* as a crucial ecocritical tool to argue that geological and cultural memoryscapes of transformed physical spaces (such as plantations and factories) are carried through the elements of fire, water, and earth. *Tinai* constitutes an important part of the interior and exterior landscapes of bardic *sangam* poetry. The five *tinai*s namely the *kurinji*, *mullai*, *marutham*, *neythal*, and *paalai* each correspond to a distinct mood of physical and poetic landscapes of *sangam* poetry such as longing, joy of union, and sorrow of separation. In this paper, I read the Tamil novels *Kaadodi* (The Jungle Vagabond) (2016) by Nakkeeran and *Saayavanam* (1959) by Sa. Kandasamy (translated by Vasantha Surya as *Wilderness Untamed*, 2009) as postcolonial novels that negotiate the 'globalness' and the 'localness' of the ecological crisis in their respective narratives. While *Kaadodi* draws together a multilingual and multicultural ecosystem of the Borneo rainforest, *Saayavanam* offers a contrasted account of the unravelling of a localized tamarind grove in the remote village of Saayavanam. Through a comparative reading, this paper examines how elements function as carriers of memories of landscapes in these narratives – of histories of multispecies co-habitations and indigenous relationships with landscapes that are rendered unrecognizable through extraction. Drawing on the historically gendered labour of emotion in the *akam* or the interior landscape songs – of care-work of the nurse-mother, the longing of the heroine, the sorrow of the mother for her eloped daughter, and the emotional labour of the girl-friend towards the heroine – this paper also traces the contemporary intersection of gender, labour, and memory in the starkly postcolonial narratives of the texts.

Keywords: Anthropocene fictions, postcolonial narratives, *tinai*, ecological memory, ecocriticism, postcolonial landscapes

Elemental Landscapes: Gender, Ecological Memory and Environmental Transformation in Postcolonial Eco-Fiction

The Anthropocene refers to a proposed geological conception of the earth in the present moment. While claims of when this epoch began range from the agricultural revolution to the industrial revolution, the idea of Anthropocene is instrumental in defining and reshaping literature. Anthropocenic literatures are producing new forms of storytelling and world-building that bring to the forefront the plight of both human and non-human stakeholders of the planet in an anthropocentric world-order. Therefore, through readings that defy capitalistic and neo-capitalistic interpretations of material life, Anthropocenic literatures

make sense of the roles that elements of nature play in transforming landscapes and making space and memory simultaneously. In this context, this paper argues that elements do not merely act as aesthetic backdrops or elements of the dramatic in the novels *Wilderness Untamed* (1969) and *Kaadodi* (2014). Rather, in the face of extreme ecological destruction and deprivation, they act as 're-storers' of ecological memory in a postcolonial world of extraction and exploitation. Utilizing the Tamil ecocritical tool of *tinai*, this paper shines light on the relationship between gendered work of ecological conservation and metaphors of gendered perceptions of nature.

Saayavanam by Sa Kandasamy was published in 1969, and translated as *Wilderness Untamed* by Vasantha Surya in 2009. Set in the eponymous village of Saayavanam, the novel follows the journey of Chidambaram, an urban-bred man returning to his native village with the intention of acquiring the large and dense tamarind grove that borders the village. In his endeavour, he makes the company of several villagers who aid him in dismantling the grove and building a sugar factory. Through astute insights into human behaviour and the social value of multispecies co-existence, Kandasamy opens the reader to the inherently hubristic nature of rapid, unchecked development, and raises important questions about the impact that anthropocentrism has on the collective psyche of a community. It is noteworthy that Kandasamy is widely considered the pioneer of environmental thought in modern Tamil literature. *Wilderness Untamed* highlights the critical debates around the philosophy of development and what it means to turn towards conservationist philosophy at the cusp of an era of industrialization. Despite being separated by almost five decades, Nakkeeran's *Kaadodi* (2014) revives similar questions surrounding developmentalism and conservation. Set in the Borneo rainforests of Malaysia, the novel is narrated by a nameless Tamil migrant working for a wood-logging company. While his initial response to the forest is mere fascination with the novelty of the landscape and the tranquillity that it offers, his journey within the forest leads him to learn about the deep embeddedness of the human and the non-human in nature. As he becomes aware of the dangers that rampant deforestation and consumeristic greed inflict on the stakeholders of Borneo, his heart turns towards ecological conservation and honouring of biodiverse cohabitation.

Erin James in her work *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (2015) points out that narrative theory has historically not engaged with the question of the environment. While ecocriticism and narrative theory have had different theoretical origins, histories, and stakes, the significant rift between them can be bridged through a mode of reading that involves "the experience of new environments and the comparison of familiar environments with unfamiliar ones" (James 38-39). James' commentary on reading the environment is especially useful in comparativist endeavours such as this paper. For instance, similar to *Wilderness Untamed*, *Kaadodi* too depicts the setting of the landscape through real experiences, and urges the reader to draw parallels to local ecologies through a universally anthropocentric story. This aspect of the novels becomes central to understanding the interconnectedness of disparate material worlds but also how intertextuality operates within and beyond literature.

In both the novels, landscapes demand to be discussed not as singular ones with unchanging qualities. Rather, the texts picturize a critical moment in the existence of the landscapes: they show how in the age of the Anthropocene, landscapes transform and take up multiple forms and meanings. In *Kaadodi*, the narrator leads the reader into the Borneo rainforests where we witness the transformation of the lush and cool forestlands into barren wastelands. The first-person narrative style of the novel does not only trace the degeneration of the forest intimately, but also enables the readers to remember the landscape in its multiple dimensions through sensory and affective means – of river-memories and folktales. This is facilitated majorly through elements of nature that make up the forest. Therefore, the transformation of the forestland, a pivotal plot-point in the novel, is traced through the various elements in the forest such as the earth and water. In *Wilderness Untamed*, the element of fire is a central theme that aids in the transformation of the wild tamarind grove into a sugar factory. It destroys the rich biodiversity of the grove to make way for industrialization that propels the village of Saayavanam into modernity. Yet, the fire also reveals a hidden world of non-human life inside the grove that exists in the narrative only as a past – as a memory that the fire exposes and then instantly destroys.

***Tinai*, Eco-Memory, and Elemental Landscapes**

Tinai in an eco-critical system of dividing literary landscapes into categories of affective emotions. The *agam* (the interior) and *puram* (the exterior) are the two major divisions of *tinai*, where the former is concerned with the interiority of life: of relationships between the hero and the heroine, the heroine and her foster mother, and the heroine and her girl-friend. *Puram* poetry, on the other hand, describes the valour of the leader-king, his generosity, his fame, and the spirit of conquest that defines the exterior lives of the poetic personae. The division of each of the five *akam tinai*s is based on the specific attributes of the regions; an intersection of the type of soil, plant-life, animals, bodies of water, and the trade of the inhabitants of these landscapes. *Kurinji*, *mullai*, *marutham*, *neythal*, and *paalai* are the five landscapes that are associated with the materiality of the *tinai*. These landscapes correspond directly with certain emotions associated with the interiority of human life and, thus, an unmistakable connection between the environment and the psyche of the poetic personae is central to the songs of *tinai*. *Tinai* asserts the ecological oneness of the human and the more-than-human through the intertwined nature of these literary landscapes and the emotional dimension that *sangam* poetry embeds within them. In this poetic landscape where the framework of literary representation is reorganized, memories of spaces are altered irreconcilably, and meaning itself is created and structured through memory. In these senses, *tinai* becomes a multi-dimensional method of reminiscing through which memory is encoded and remembered from within the form of the poetic mode itself. Whereas, in the case of the form of the novel, memory is coded via narrative. Forrest Clingerman, in his chapter “Memory, Imagination, and the Hermeneutics of Place” notes that the ‘place’ and the ‘self’ encode meaning in tandem, and their identities are “intertwined and reflexive” (Clingerman 255). This implies that the place makes the self, while the subjectivity of the self actively imagines and constructs the literary environment. In such a

symbiotic practice of being, place encodes the semantic sphere through memory. This becomes especially evident in methods of narrativizing where ‘place’ needs to be shaped into being through memory. Clingerman claims that the memory of a place is “an awareness that interacts with all our senses in a way that structures them in conversation with our meaningful reality” (Clingerman 258).

In *Tinai Studies*, Nirmal Selvamony notes that space and time exist in relation to each other and hence, their congruence constitutes the most basic unit of *tinai*. Land exists in this coming together of space and time, and thus, Selvamony posits, also operates in a similar manner in *tinai*. *Tinai* landscapes are, therefore, environments of vitality – with the different components of their identities being inextricable from the affective sphere that they foreground in poetry. The *thalaivan* (hero), *thalaivi* (heroine), and others in the *tinai* poems are personae and hence do not have subjective characters, separate histories, or narrative continuity. While historical subjects, rulers or war heroes, for instance, gain importance in the *puram* poetry of *tinai*, they are largely fictionalized and distant from the situation to render them as personae who suit the *tinai* schematic appropriately and execute their unique purpose in the song. When these personae are regarded as the primary components of the landscape – as those who keep the memory of the landscape – the memory itself takes a shape that exists only relatively to the emotional landscape of these subjects. *Tinai*, thus, closes the gap in perceiving memory by recollecting the land through the poetic form, rather than the narrative, and establishes the bardic norms of writing. This way, *tinai* poetry remembers varied spaces through poetic landscapes codes in land and affective objects that are the constants that capture the essence of the personae who are otherwise empty of subjectivity. Elements in such transformed landscapes of the Anthropocene serve not only as metaphors and aesthetic objects, but also serve as the ‘storers’ or rather the ‘re-storers’ of ecological memory. These elements such as fire, water, and earth become varied archives of these destroyed and forgotten landscapes.

A comparison between the ancient *sangam* poetry and the modern Tamil novels using *tinai* as a methodology unveils an important connection between these two literary moments. While they largely differ in form, context, content, and themes, the idea of movement of landscapes *in* and *through* time indicates that throughout literary history, landscapes have never been static backgrounds for the narrative to ‘happen’. Rather, they have had agency to steer the narrative and have been active participants in making stories as agents of narrative themselves. In this sense, *tinai* becomes a tool to organize the classification of the five landscapes of *kurinji*, *mullai*, *marutham*, *neythal*, and *paalai* into the modern novel. For instance, *paalai* does not only refer to the barren desert landscape, but also signals a specific emotive landscape in *sangam* poetry: of heightened deprivation. In the context of *Wilderness Untamed*, *paalai*, thus, becomes symbolic of an ecological, spiritual, and moral deprivation of the protagonist Chidambaram; it reorganizes the lush tamarind grove into the hyper-industrialized sugar factory. Therefore, this comparative reading enables us to acknowledge the continuity of *tinai* outside its bardic system and in the age of the Anthropocene.

Waterscapes of Kaadodi

In the chapter “From River to Road? Changing Living Patterns and Land Use of Inland Indigenous Peoples in Sarawak”, Ishikawa and Ryoji discuss the transformation of livelihoods of indigenous groups belonging to Sarawak after their movement towards terrestrial areas from riverine landscapes. The authors assert that land-use cultures of the tribal communities have considerably transformed from practices of foraging and other extra-commercial activities towards palm-oil and timber-favouring agricultural practices. When wood-logging companies are introduced in the trade, aided by the State’s massive investments in the export of raw products and goods, the riverine spaces become sites of struggle against change. Soda, Ishikawa, and Kato claim that plantation development strategies actively partake in the power struggles between the State, wood-logging companies, and the native demographic of the region (Soda et al. 334).

The work also highlights rivers as crucial trade routes where multiple tribes living along the various rivers of the Borneo have used the rivers for trading products of the forest. In *Kaadodi* reflects this history of trading through Bornean rivers, where Nakkeeran mentions that the colonial Dutch were the first to use the Kinabatangan as an entryway into the forest. The novel also mentions the story of a Chinese admiral who, through the currents of the river, reaches the forest, thus partaking in the long history of trading in Borneo. The narrator observes the fishes in the Kinabatangan River from the *pangkalan* (docking station) and comments on the river’s travel through time:

The Admiral Zheng He, the first one to venture into the forest through this river – was he too welcomed like this by the ancestors of these lively fishes? The forest must have been flourishing then, with nobody to touch them, and hence the water must have run like glass. Now it is simply running water. But is it still not a life-giver that refuses to give up? A stream that still welcomes visitors of the forest. If not for it, neither Zheng He nor I would have been able to enter the forest (Nakkeeran 69).

Here, the water of the river Kinabatangan does not only transport material goods, but is also a part of a cultural system that carries and performs the memories of the landscape. The narrator’s contemplation of his place in history suggests an ecological continuity. Amidst the transitory visits of the colonial Dutch, the Chinese admiral, and the narrator, the river becomes the only constant element that stores and restores the memories of the forest. It acts as a living archive that traces the deep-ecological history of the forest from its birth to its eventual destruction in the novel. The narrator’s commentary about the nature of the river’s water is noteworthy here – he contrasts the ‘glass-like’ Kinabatangan of the yesteryear to the ‘simply running water’ that it has been reduced to, owing to excessive human activity. The river, therefore, is not a record-keeper that exists outside the fold of the Anthropocene. Rather, the elemental sphere is a part of the planetary system that is simultaneously transforming while remembering the various ‘pasts’ of itself. There is a certain temporal dissonance in this mode of remembering – the various ‘pasts’ of the space exist at once. To the narrative, this means that there are multiple ways that the future can be imagined. Pieter

Vermeulen, in *Literature and the Anthropocene* (2020) comments upon this fracture of time in remembering, and what it means for affective narratives of literature: Remembering past and ongoing destitution, then, is vital for developing a more adequate sense of the present... a critical Anthropocene memory can attune itself to the past as not only a source of mourning, but also a resource of hope” (Vermeulen 113-114). Therefore, memory is crucial not only in remembering the past but also to imagine a future.

Remembering through Earth and Fire

The memoryscapes of the elemental earth operate through many means in *Kaadodi*. The soil, the roots that sprout in them, the very floor of the forest where the leaves make a bed – the bed that homes a microcosm of insects, worms, and micro-life in itself. The rootedness of the earth ensures the flourishing of this multispecies continuity. Therefore, from the micro-life of bacteria to the macro-life of giant trees, the land continues to remember its histories in multiple dimensions. The scale of this continuum reveals itself in moments of crisis in the novel. At a point where a mother-tree is destroyed in *Kaadodi*, the narrator describes it as thus:

I spotted the big log. The tree had been skinned and was wounded on the patch where the iron saw had run its teeth. Yes, it was a wound. “Did it hurt?”, I wanted to ask it. This was not simply a log. There was still life hanging on to it, albeit only by a thread. That is why it refused to be slain. I observed its inner rings stacked in concentric circles. How many years has it lived? It definitely cannot be counted. Oh tree, you who had survived all these years of inner circle have lost your life to us who have only entered the forest in your outer circle years. I traced my fingers over the pale rings. My body trembled with guilt and shame (Nakkeeran 282).

Such readings transform non-human life from inert commodities that facilitate human flourishing to sentient beings with inner lives and temporalities. The rings of the tree denote its age, with every ring roughly measuring a year. Hence, when the narrator touches the rings, he not only learns the age of the tree, but also experiences the memory of the tree’s inner-time through tactility – an act that affectively kindles the emotions of guilt and shame in him. Similarly, when he posits the tree’s lifetime against his own, he highlights geological time as a larger span of measuring ecological temporality over the instinct of reductive anthropocentric time. The passage also marks the recognition of the self in the other by the narrator, beyond boundaries of species, cognitive abilities, and language where he attempts to connect with the tree as a living being with life ‘still hanging on to it by a thread’ that refuses to die. This blurring of species-specific boundaries implies a multispecies co-living that cannot be neatly explained in linear terms. Sandhya Walther’s *Multispecies Modernity: Disorderly Life in Postcolonial Literature* (2021) elaborates on this resistance to yield to ‘neatness’ in organization as a display of agency to resist not only the subjugation of non-human lives in the Anthropocene, but also to the suppression of subaltern human beings (Walther 7).

This description also recalls a similar moment in *Wilderness Untamed* where Chidambaram sets the tamarind grove on fire to clear the space out for a sugar factory:

Chidambaram got up from his chair and walked towards the fire. A monkey howled from a tree branch above his head, but the smoke did not give way for him to spot it. He walked a bit ahead. Two charred squirrels laid on the ground. The smell of burnt carcass turned his stomach. He held his breath and walked further. A snake! A cobra, and a big one at that! It wiggled forward with its partially burnt body. Shook by the sights, he quickly turned to return to the hut. The screams of several dozen monkeys pierced his ears – this *really* is a big forest – he thought to himself. The fire was starting to do his bidding. He wondered what happened to the cows he had spotted the other day... (Kandasamy 121-122).

The elements of fire, water, smoke, and land when blended through the sensory registers of sight, sound, and touch distort the memory of the forest. Both passages record the differentiated, multispecies lives that resided within these deep ecosystems. While the forest in *Kaadodi* constitutes an untouched stretch of rainforest, in *Wilderness Untamed* the tamarind grove is a relatively explored wilderness that sustains thriving cultural-economic bonds among species. Therefore, a disruption in these harmonious exchanges manifest as instances of acute violence. The fires flatten not only the physical forms of the various non-human beings that have always existed in deep-time, but also specific cultural and ecological memories of the land. Similar to the monocrops, the histories of the landscapes become singular, absolute, and indistinct narratives.

At the outset, the fire in *Wilderness Untamed* seems like a purely functional element that is wielded by its ‘masters’ – the humans – to do their bidding. Even though the fire is a deliberate tool of destruction, the human actors in the novel are visibly unable to control it. They become helpless as the fire ravages for days together, and they can only stand by and witness the carnage that it creates in the form of charred bodies of animals, birds, and burnt down species of rare plant-life. Fire, thus, becomes a dictator of life and death. It takes the form of a destructor but also brings to light a hidden eco-world one last time before it is destroyed. It becomes a tool of modernization – one that rewrites an entire landscape residing in deep-time. In contrast, earth or the soil keeps memories quite literally buried deep within themselves. While fire reveals a layer of geological time, the soil buries it within its own layers as a form of safekeeping. This juxtaposition indicates a certain sense of conservation of biodiversity in landscapes that disrupts the hubristic imaginations of Anthropocentric world-making. The elements themselves, especially fire, are not independent of each other. As Kate Rigby points out in the chapter “Proliferating Fire” in her work *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times* (2015), fire requires an assemblage of several organic materials to occur – oxygen, fodder material, ignition etc (Rigby 113). In this chapter, she elaborates on the different roles that fire has played in shaping the historical, political, and social milieus of Australia – “largely arid, fire-prone continent and that most of Australia’s megadiverse plants and animals eventually learned to dance along with...” (Rigby

117). Contrasting this scenario of ‘natural’ fires of big scales with ones like in *Wilderness Untamed* puts into perspective the social value of fire as an element.

Memory and Affective Gendered Work

The task of remembering in *tinai* is not removed from the gendered labour of care that offers its affective dimension to memory in *akam* poetry of *sangam* literature. In *akam* poetry, the work of care done by the heroine, the foster-mother, or the girl-friend of the heroine primarily contributes to the continuity of themes such as sorrow of separation, nurturing, waiting in memory of the hero etc. The relationship between memory-keeping and care-work also carries a crucial connection between the gendering of nature in literary and philosophical memory. In the texts, this can be observed especially through the roles that women play in the narratives. In *Kaadodi*, the reader is introduced to Yohanna as a cook who joins the narrator and his camp of labourers inside Borneo. As the novel progresses, Yohanna becomes a good friend of the narrator and at several points of crisis, is his only source of consolation. Parallely, the narrator often dreams of a mystical woman – the Kotravai (the presiding deity of the *paalai* landscape) – who he believes is the forest itself personified. The *moothai maram* or the ancient mother-tree whose death ties up the narrative centre of the novel also elicits a string of affective emotions in the narrator: of guilt, shame, sorrow, and grief. These gendered associations do not only imply the gendering of elements in ecology but also of ecological work of conservation and care.

Through discussions on representing elements such as fire, water, and earth, this paper has elucidated on the planetary interconnectedness of landscapes. It has argued that when elements become producers and carriers of ecological memory and deep-time, transformed landscapes emerge as existing beyond Anthropocentric temporal limits. This shift in reading literary landscapes is a monumental shift in ecocriticism that makes a decently multispecies mode of storytelling possible. By using the ecocritical tool of *tinai* as an anchor in my reading, this paper attempts to highlight the literary continuum in which *sangam* literature and modern Tamil novels co-exist, and how gender carries across these apparent boundaries. By foregrounding this interconnectedness, a comparative reading offers new ways of writing the environment and all that inhabits it.

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DABEER SI/KTT/03**MAPPING THE ANTHROPOCENE: ECO-MEMORY AND
MIGRATION IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *GUN ISLAND*****ANKITA PRIYADARSHINI**Research Scholar, Department of English
Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Nagaland, India**Abstract**

This paper explores the cli-fi titled *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh from ecofeminist and postcolonial ecocriticism perspectives. The study examines the convergence of Anthropocene's modern reality with trauma, indigenous stories and gender-based disparities. Set against the wet landscape of the Sundarbans, the novel transcends the national boundaries. The novel's discourse entwines the 17th century traditional lore of the Goddess Manasa and the Gun Merchant (Bonduki Sadagar) with contemporary climate disasters. The study asserts how the novel serves as a repository of environmental vulnerability. The ecological erosion manifests not as an instant biospheric collapse, but as a form of continuous long-term damage and slow violence. *Gun Island's* presentation of futuristic apocalypse is entrenched in colonialism and international capitalism. Subaltern bodies endure the asymmetric impact of hazardous weather, displacement and human smuggling, which metamorphose the physical topography into an arena of socio-ecological damage. The paper interrogates the mechanism of eco-memory by interweaving ancient folktales with present-day ecological transitions. Eco-memory operates as a framework of community healing and rebellion against ecological erasure. Ghosh's narrative reevaluates postcolonial ecological balance and suggests the tackling of global crises. The study ultimately posits that addressing the world's climate problems requires interrogating the intertwined narratives of human displacement, patriarchal hierarchy and the more-than-human world.

Keywords: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Anthropocene, Migration, Eco-memory, Sundarbans

Introduction: The Cli-Fi Framework and Anthropocene

The development of Climate Fiction (cli-fi) is an aesthetic reply to the existential anxieties of the Anthropocene in the modern world. *Gun Island* (2016) by Amitav Ghosh is a counter-bane to the imaginative mindset which critiques the collective failure which ostracizes the non-human world and the violent environmental upheavals to the verge of super reality. This novel destroys the fake barriers between mankind's history and natural history, and the ancestral past as well as the climate crisis of the present. The novel is set within the hazardous and ever-shifting backdrop of the Bengal Sundarbans. The novel follows the Kolkata-born, cautious and doubtful rare books dealer named Dinanath "Deen" Datta, who lived in Brooklyn. His highly intellectual livelihood is disturbed when he visits his native town Kolkata during a winter visit where he meets an archaic lore, the legend of *Bonduki Sadagar* (the Gun Merchant). The traditional lore follows the epic flight of the Gun Merchant across the seas to abscond the fury of Manasa

Devi, the mighty Hindu goddess of snakes and all venomous beings. The disintegrated shrine dedicated to the Merchant which was located deep inside the mangrove swamps was investigated by Deen, which unveiled a trans-historical narrative. This tapestry unraveled the ecological trauma of the 17th century and revealed the imitating, bleeding and biospheric breach of human reign. The paper utilizes dual frameworks of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism to provide critical understanding of the novel. This paper also applies the concept of multidirectional eco-memory by Rosanne Kennedy. The compilation of all these theoretical lens highlights the ecological degradation is not a sudden, cinematic climate collapse, but like Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence". Nixon's concept revolves around the gradual, treacherous and widely gathered silent ecological damage which asymmetrically hunts the subaltern. Ghosh analyses the indigenous myths and folklores as ecological storehouses and not merely obsolete taboo or shadow- worship. The concept of eco-memory functions as a decolonial framework which emphasizes collective realignment, interspecies affinity and resilience against capitalism and patriarchal tutelage.

Theoretical Framework

The multi-layered problems mentioned in *Gun Island* can be evaluated by the systematic analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Prominent scholars like Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have developed the postcolonial ecocriticism framework. This paradigm connects an inherent connection between colonial expansion, neocolonial resource predation and biospheric degradation. It posits that imperial invasion was a threat to the environment and stripped the colonized of their raw materials, native landscapes, introduced single-species cultivation and marginalized indigenous groups of their ancient ecologies. During the postcolonial era, these frameworks endured through transnational capitalism where the consumer demands of the Western world reduced the formerly colonized world. This results in suppression of biologically diverse peripheries including the vulnerable borderlands like the Sundarbans which transformed into dumping grounds, poverty-stricken areas with unabated climate precarity. The introduction of ecofeminism further deepens the study by drawing an ideological parallelism between patriarchal dominance and subjugation of the environment. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva presented the Western worldview of ecofeminism which presented a dichotomous, categorical cosmology which ranked human, realistic, male and the modern as the superior beings who subjugate the non-human, emotional, female and the savage. This is what Val Plumwood calls 'the logic of domination' (Plumwood 4) where the mastery over the female anatomy and the biosphere are violently justified leaving them invisible in the commercial world of overambition and evolution. These frameworks are contested by the incorporation of eco-memory. Rosanne Kennedy's ideology of "multidirectional eco-memory" (Kennedy 268) is explained as an interspecies relational web of remembrance that connects human and non-human legacies of historical trauma and fragility. Kennedy also elaborates Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" (Kennedy 268) which means memories of discrete historical trauma can converge in the socio-political domain by drawing upon the non-human world into the topographic archive. Eco-

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memory explores that the topography (including rivers, flora and fauna) serves as a repository of historical brutality.

Methodology

This study applies qualitative and close textual analysis by using multiple ecocritical frameworks. The paper combines postcolonial ecocriticism (Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin), ecofeminism (Karen Warren and Val Plumwood), and Rosanne Kennedy's concept of multidirectional eco-memory to examine the confluence of climate change, migration, gender, and ecological memory. This methodology examines scenes, episodes, myths and characters. The theoretical frameworks examine how indigenous knowledge and postcolonial ecological ethics challenge anthropocentrism, capitalism, environmental degradation and displacement. The table below presents the comparative structural parallelism of these theoretical frameworks and their application to the text.

Theoretical Paradigm	Central Conceptual Locus	Materialization in <i>Gun Island</i>	Ethical Recalibration
Postcolonial Ecocriticism	Colonial domination, resource extraction, global materialism, dislocation of subaltern groups and climate change.	The destruction of the Sundarbans; human smuggling of men like Tipu and Rafi; market-driven deterritorialization.	Disrupting modern world system; systematic climate justice for subaltern global space.
Ecofeminism	Homologous oppressions of nature and women in the periphery of male commercialism.	The revengeful yet protective myth of Goddess Manasa; female lead characters like Cinta, Piya and marginalization of female anatomies.	Restoring the pristine feminine and combining care ethics and reciprocal interspecies dependencies.
Multidirectional Eco-memory	Geography as a biotic archive; confluence of mankind's trauma with the non-human erasure and anthropocentric transitions.	The 17 th century shrine of the Gun Merchant; vestigial continuity of the Little Ice Age; atypical eco-migration of fauna.	Developing symbiosis memory; respecting native folklore as scientifically documented ecological information.

Table 1: Comparative Theoretical Paradigms in *Gun Island*

The Sundarbans as Topographic Locus of Ecological Toxicity and Slow Violence

The territorial locus of the novel is the Sundarbans which consists of the mighty, transiting archipelago of mangrove forests bifurcated by geopolitical boundaries of India and Bangladesh. In the novel, the Sundarbans stand as an active, chthonic disruptor that substantiates the ecological vulnerability. The text describes the fragility where the boundaries between the land and water are dissolved with every tide. Deen observes this very precarity of the topography and says, the term “island” refers to a piece of land which is encircled by water, however the island in Sundarbans is not like this, they are just mudbanks/mudflats which surfaced by rivers and are continuously formed and deformed by the waters. (Ghosh 5) The environmental disability of the Sundarbans was not a single, hyper-visible catastrophe but like what Rob Nixon calls the “slow violence” which is a slow-moving occurrence coupled with action and reaction and delayed across time. Nixon has defined slow violence as a form of violence that, “occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (Nixon 2). The slow violence is manifested in the novel through the rising sea levels, saltwater violation and sudden cyclones which destroy the soil from its richness and fertility leading to eradication of ancestral agricultural practices. The land itself is a living example for the evolving trauma where the destruction of the mangroves serves as a boundary from the storms. Humans are left completely vulnerable in the face of capricious components. The slow violence is directly linked to global capitalism and colonial changes. The fragility of the Sundarbans is not a religious happening or a natural accident, but due to the man-centric extractions and greed harnessed by profit. The mangrove ecosystems have been transformed into materialist tiger-prawn aquaculture farms to serve the luxurious demands of the consumers from Global North. This serves as an example of capitalist culture and its heinous impact on the rich biosphere. The novel explores how these local elites and their rich desires destroy the protective embankments leading to permanent devastation of the fertility of the soil.

Mechanism of Eco-memory: The Myths of Manasa Devi and Bonduki Sadagar

The alignment of modern climatic issues with the traditional Bengali folklore of Manasa Devi and Bonduki Sadagar. This lore has been updated to a pre-modern superstition into a sophisticated narration of eco-memory which conserves historical truths and global environmental change. Deen narrates the legend which consists of a wealthy merchant who declines to worship Manasa, the goddess of snakes and all crawling venomous creatures. The Goddess displayed her wrath in the form of famine, insect plagues and crawling serpents and the merchant tried to flee from the anger by crossing the sea and tried to seek refuge in a place called ‘Gun Island’ – *Bonduk-dwip* which has no serpents. (Ghosh 16). But the power and might of the goddess crossed across the globe and kept chasing him until he surrendered to her and constructed a shrine to revere her within the deep mangrove swamps. (Ghosh 17) The novel discloses the Western intellectual knowledge which says that the Gun Merchant’s mythological experiences are allegorical representations of the seventeenth century crisis which was followed by volcanic

eruptions and temperature fluctuations due to solar changes which was called Little Ice Age. This was revealed by the intellectual ideologies of Nilima Bose and the Italian scholar Cinta Schiavon. The other reason behind the sudden drop in the temperature was the afforestation of large land areas after the Amerindian genocide which occurred after the European conquests of the Americas. (Ghosh 122) This incident highlights what Rosanne Kennedy calls “multidirectional eco-memory” (Kennedy 268) as the crisis of the seventeenth century is not simply a fixed memory, but it warns against the contemporary climate crisis. The landscape of the Sundarbans acts as a repository of memories where these temporary crises diverge. When Deen visited the shrine, he noticed the internal structures of the shrine which did not present the mythological structures or figures, but consisted of the fluctuations in the sea-level, the moments of animals and oceanic trade flows. The shrine is a material foundation where eco-memory functions as a form of healing and active protest against biospheric disruptions. The landscape is a living manifestation of myths and presents modern-day problems like the sudden appearance of venomous serpents, deforestation, collective beaching and sudden displacements which are not probabilistic occurrences but a warning against the ecosystem being fractured.

Ecofeminist Structures, Patriarchal Stratifications and the Multi-species Realm

Gun Island reframes ecofeminism by presenting the deified figure Manasa Devi and her connections with the human world. The Devi is an epitome of “more than human” world, a sovereign, non-human entity who is beyond all control, categorization and subjugation by the patriarchal hierarchies of the human world. The Gun Merchant is the representation of the modern commercial society who views nature as a commodity to be exploited for wealth. His denial to acknowledge and respect Manasa Devi was his refusal to accept the ends of human greed, overambition and a rejection to appreciate the inherent properties of the ecological world. The anger showcased by the Devi was not capricious malevolence but a way of protecting the ecospheric balance and fighting against patriarchal pride. To revert, she employs the natural creatures as weapons of the environment like spiders, scorpions, serpents, yellowjackets and adverse climate conditions (Ghosh 16-17). This aligns with the ecofeminist critique of the anthropocentric binary which connects male’s intelligence with the other and female/ the ecology with the recalcitrant wild which is supposed to be dominated. The fear with which the Gun Merchant evacuated across the globe and the way he bent before the shrine in the swamps was a result of his absolute disregard for the myths and anthropocentric pride. Manasa Devi takes absolute charge of the ecological cycle over the oppressive patriarchal structures. The ecofeminist structures are then paralleled with the present narrative through the characters of Elena, Cinta Schiavon, and Piyali “Piya” Roy. Piya is an Indian- American cetologist who represents vast knowledge and rigour towards scientific reasoning and ecological consciousness. Her scientific praxis are deeply placed in the care, engrossment and contemplative gaze. Unlike the male traditional scientists who maintain an objective and isolated distance from their experimental subjects, Piya studies the irregularities in the oceanic world. The anomalies include the death of a rare

Irrawaddy dolphin which was forsaken in the fishing net. She does not study this for scientific and statistical data but as a profound ecological loss (Ghosh 91-92). Cinta Schiavon presents a spiritual and intuitive hold against Deen's stubborn western rationalism. It was Cinta who showed Deen the path to move away from modern secularism and listen to the whispers of the other world. Piya's scientific knowledge aligns with Karen Warren's ecofeminism by denying the patriarchal "logic of domination" and value dichotomies of the Western pragmatism. Instead of adopting the male conventional scientific praxis, which is detached and isolated, her deep gaze mirrors Fyre's "loving eye", focusing on the ethics of care and environmental togetherness. (Warren 471) Similarly Plumwood argues that the Western world depends on master rationality which mistreats nature and females as inferior who are to be dominated. This leads to huge global crises and affects the ecology. In the novel, Deen has a detached worldview which makes him disregard the environment. The journey which he undertakes through the Sundarbans and Venice tells the violent results of the master story. The story parallels Plumwood's critique by presenting ecological battle which includes terrible animal behaviours and destructive cyclones. According to Plumwood's critique, true freedom comes not through man's mastery over the world but by embracing the cultural continuity which is shown through the Bengali folklore of Goddess Manasa Devi (Plumwood 41-68).

Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Migration and Trajectory of Displacement in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin emphasize that human sovereignty cannot be achieved without questioning the stratifications that humans have constructed between themselves and the more than human world. With the postcolonial framework, it examines the historical legacy of colonial expansion with ecocriticism. This paradigm shows how humans interact with the environment. Amitav Ghosh through his novel demonstrates how global capitalism and environmental devastation are intertwined. Huggan and Tiffin used the term of Alfred Crosby called "ecological imperialism" (Huggan and Tiffin 3) which shows how ecology is immersed in colonialism. Deen Datta is a direct example of this paradigm whose journey expands from the Sundarbans to Venice. Ghosh has used this geographical route to demonstrate the change in climate not as a modern problem but as a direct result of colonial extraction and material stripping. Venice is the centre of all mercantile activities, and the Sundarbans have endured the pain of all the colonial rule. Huggan and Tiffin critique the pristine nature and colonial development. The term "green postcolonialism" is introduced to showcase how environmental issues cannot be separated from human history. (Huggan and Tiffin 2) The environment that belongs to the rich is not distinct from the one that belongs to the poor. They have focused on the displacement of the human and non-human bodies and have explored the term "environmental racism" (Huggan and Tiffin 4) used by Deane Curtin. This concept transfers the ecological burdens onto the marginalised communities. In the novel, this migration is seen through the dramatic displacements of both humans and animals. Deen observes the animal migrations through the venomous yellow-bellied snakes and the death of Irrawaddy dolphins due to transiting salinities which exposed animals as

independent agents standing strong against the shaken world. In addition to the animal displacement, there is the human migration of two refugees including young Bangladeshi men like Tipu and Rafi who were forced to leave their homelands because the change in climate destroyed their agriculture and fisheries. This led to them facing human trafficking as they tried to enter Europe. This simply showcases that the people of the Global South endures an asymmetrical form of ecological breakdown. In addition to this, the novel recounts the flight of the Gun Merchant from the Sundarbans all along the Arabian Sea and the Mediterranean to escape the ecological disasters of his era. Postcolonial Ecocriticism can be used directly in Ghosh's narrative as it reflects the idea that the global capitalist system affects both nature and the humans who are postcolonial products. Both Huggan and Tiffin used Plumwood's term "hegemonic centrism" (Huggan and Tiffin 5) which refers to an autocentric viewpoint which considers colonialism, racism and speciesism to be homogenous in nature. By entangling the mythic goddess *Manasa Devi* with the modern climatic issues, the novel validates alternative indigenous knowledge system.

World Market Capital	Structural Danger	Patriarchal Pride
The Sundarbans as a Sacrificial Zone	Mythic Presence	Manasa Devi as Ecological Creator
Unbalanced Subaltern Dislocation	Human and Live Body Shock	Dichotomous Rationalist Occlusion
Unbroken Bridge	Multidirectional Eco-Memory	Topography Vs Repository
Moral Synthesis	Answerable Memory and Restorative Balance	Diverse Species Complication and Climate Justice

Figure 1: The Hierarchical Ecofeminist and Postcolonial Eco-memory Matrix

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* is a significant novel as it achieves what the modern political discourse and cold scientific experiments failed to accomplish. It transforms the vast and overwhelming scale of Anthropocene into instinctive, intimate and immediate. The application of the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism and multidirectional eco-memory, the novel depicts that overcoming the climate crisis requires more meticulous efforts than the scientific fixes and artificial commercial carbon credits. It includes questioning the historical incidents and systems which brought the planet to a contemporary situation plagued with migration, patriarchal structures and the excessive extraction of the earth's infinite sources. The modern-day crisis cannot be rectified without learning from ancient folklore, myths and knowledge systems. These ancestral relics teach humans how to maintain compassion for all species and function within the moral limits. Through the instance of migration, Ghosh has presented the bodies of the refugees as subjected to extreme brutality,

extortion and trauma. But he didn't present them as passive and helpless beings and through the narratology and testimony of the Gun Merchant's tale, these migrants developed a framework of survival and mutual dependence. The scene of the Mediterranean Sea flooded with vast number of creatures including oceanic mammals like dolphins, whales and other birds which encircle the subaltern refugees present a vision into the future that mankind's rescue lies in understanding our inextricable interdependence with the living world and not subjugating them. This study highlights that eco-memory converts indigenous myth from traditional vestige into an ecological archive capable of challenging Anthropocene narratives grounded in capitalist exploitation and epistemic violence.

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DABEER SI/KTT/04**FROM HOMELAND TO TIDE COUNTRY: CULTURAL IDENTITY,
REFUGEE MEMORY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION
IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*****M. KATHIRAVAN**Research Scholar (Part-Time), Research Centre in English
VHNSN College (Autonomous), Virudhunagar, India**R. MEENA**Associate Professor, Research Centre in English
VHNSN College (Autonomous), Virudhunagar, India**Abstract**

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* explores the interconnected themes of cultural identity, migration, memory, and environmental loss through the distinctive landscape of the Sundarbans. Far from serving as a passive setting, the Sundarbans emerge as an active force that shapes the lives, histories, and identities of its inhabitants. This paper examines how the novel portrays community formation in a region characterized by ecological instability, historical displacement, and continuous human movement. The study focuses on the role of memory in preserving connections to lost homelands and collective histories, particularly through the experiences of displaced communities such as the Morichjhāpi refugees. Memory functions as a means of sustaining cultural identity despite migration and social marginalization. At the same time, migration is presented as a recurring reality driven by environmental challenges, political conflict, and economic necessity. Through characters such as Piya, Fokir, Kanai, and Nilima, Ghosh illustrates diverse experiences of belonging and identity in a constantly changing environment. The paper also investigates the impact of environmental loss on community life. The Sundarbans, marked by erosion, flooding, cyclones, and shifting landscapes, symbolize the vulnerability of both nature and human settlements. These ecological transformations contribute to displacement while fostering resilience and adaptation among local populations. Drawing on postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives, this study argues that *The Hungry Tide* challenges fixed notions of homeland and identity by presenting belonging as a fluid and evolving process. The novel depicts the Sundarbans as a space where memory, migration, and environmental change intersect, shaping cultural identity and community formation. Ghosh's narrative highlights the enduring struggle for belonging in a region defined by both ecological uncertainty and historical displacement.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Migration, Environmental Loss, Displacement, Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism.

Introduction

The relationship between human identity and geographical space has become increasingly important in postcolonial literature because the idea of "home" is rarely simple in societies shaped by colonialism, partition, migration,

displacement, and ecological transformation. For many communities, home is not merely a physical location. It is also a repository of memory, language, history, labour, ritual, and emotional attachment. Yet the meaning of home becomes particularly unstable when the physical landscape itself is constantly changing. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* explores precisely such a world. Set largely in the Sundarbans, the novel presents a region where rivers, tides, islands, forests, storms, animals, and human communities exist within a continuous process of transformation. In this environment, neither land nor identity can be understood as entirely permanent.

The Sundarbans is an especially significant setting for a study of cultural identity because it challenges conventional assumptions about territory. A conventional understanding of belonging often presumes that people inhabit a stable geographical space that can be mapped, owned, defended, and inherited. The tide country disrupts each of these assumptions. Islands disappear and reappear; rivers alter their courses; saline water enters agricultural land; storms destroy settlements; and the boundaries between river, sea, forest, and habitation are continually redrawn. Ghosh therefore creates a geographical world in which human beings must negotiate rather than dominate their environment. The instability of the landscape becomes a condition of existence.

The novel's ecological setting is inseparable from its historical and political history. The Sundarbans is inhabited by communities whose lives have been shaped by migration, poverty, colonial forest policies, postcolonial state formation, and the struggle for access to land and resources. The history of Morichjhapi, particularly, reveals the violent consequences of a political system that can recognize certain forms of human settlement as illegitimate while protecting the nonhuman environment through coercive means. The tragedy is not simply a conflict between human beings and nature. It is a conflict over who is permitted to belong within an ecological space and whose suffering can be excluded from official narratives of conservation.

The Hungry Tide develops this conflict through a range of characters who represent different relationships to the tide country. Piya Roy, a marine biologist of Indian origin raised in the United States, arrives in the Sundarbans as a scientist and as a member of the diaspora. Her connection to the region is simultaneously ancestral and unfamiliar. Kanai Dutt, an educated translator from Kolkata, possesses linguistic and cultural mobility, but his urban sophistication does not automatically grant him an intimate understanding of the tide country. Fokir, a local fisherman, has an embodied knowledge of the rivers and waterways that cannot be reduced to formal scientific language. Nilima represents an organized attempt to respond to poverty and social vulnerability through institutional work, while Nirmal's notebooks preserve a record of historical violence and political memory. Through these figures, Ghosh constructs a narrative in which no single form of knowledge is sufficient.

This article argues that *The Hungry Tide* represents cultural identity as a fluid formation produced through the interaction of ecological conditions, historical memory, displacement, language, and political power. The novel does not present the inhabitants of the Sundarbans as a unified or timeless "indigenous"

community. Instead, it emphasizes the historical processes through which different groups have entered, inhabited, contested, and remembered the tide country. Similarly, the novel does not treat nature as an untouched realm that exists outside human history. The Sundarbans is a deeply historical environment in which forests, rivers, refugees, state institutions, conservation policies, and economic structures are interconnected.

The Tide Country as a Living Geography

The first major achievement of *The Hungry Tide* is its transformation of the Sundarbans from a geographical setting into an active presence within the narrative. The landscape does not merely contain the characters' experiences; it conditions them. The tide country is defined by movement, uncertainty, and transformation. Its geographical instability challenges the human desire for permanent boundaries and fixed categories.

Ghosh describes the islands as "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *ãchol* that follows her, half wetted by the sea" (6). This image is significant because it simultaneously connects the Sundarbans to the Indian nation and places it at the unstable margins of that nation. The region is part of India, yet it is not represented as a solid centre. It is a fringe, a borderland, and a zone of contact. The metaphor of the sari suggests cultural connection, while the image of the wet edge emphasizes exposure to water and transformation. The tide country is therefore both attached to the nation and resistant to the stability implied by national territory.

The geography of the Sundarbans also challenges the distinction between land and water. Ghosh writes that "[t]here are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea" (9). The absence of clear boundaries is not merely a geographical fact. It becomes a metaphor for the instability of cultural and political categories. If water can move across boundaries, then human categories such as home and exile, insider and outsider, citizen and refugee, or nature and culture also become unstable.

The inhabitants of the tide country must develop forms of life that respond to this instability. Fishing, honey collection, agriculture, boat travel, and forest-related occupations depend upon the rhythms of the environment. The tide is therefore not simply a natural phenomenon. It becomes a social force. It influences when people travel, where they settle, what they cultivate, and how they understand danger. The environment becomes part of cultural memory because generations learn to interpret its patterns.

This ecological relationship also complicates the concept of ownership. In a landscape that can be submerged, eroded, or transformed, the claim to permanent possession is always fragile. Human beings may build houses, cultivate land, or establish communities, but the river and the sea remain powerful forces that cannot be permanently controlled. The residents of the tide country are therefore compelled to develop a relationship with land based less on absolute possession than on temporary habitation and continuous negotiation.

Ghosh's ecological imagination is therefore also a political imagination. The novel asks whether human institutions can recognize a landscape whose conditions do not correspond to their administrative categories. More importantly, it asks

whether the people who inhabit such a landscape can be understood through fixed categories of citizenship and ownership. The tide country demonstrates that identity, like geography, may be shaped by movement rather than permanence.

Displacement, Refugee Memory, and the Making of Home

Displacement is one of the central historical experiences represented in *The Hungry Tide*. The novel suggests that displacement is not an isolated event that begins and ends at a particular moment. It is a continuing process shaped by political decisions, economic conditions, environmental pressures, and historical violence. The history of Morichjhapi becomes the most important example of this process. The refugees who settled in Morichjhapi were not simply people without a home. They carried memories of previous homes, political histories, cultural practices, and expectations of belonging. Their movement to the Sundarbans was an attempt to transform displacement into settlement. They attempted to create a community in a difficult environment and to convert an unfamiliar space into a lived home. Their experience reveals that home is not always inherited. It can also be constructed through collective labour. The settlement was eventually destroyed through political force. The history of Morichjhapi reveals the vulnerability of displaced communities when their claims to land conflict with state policy. The tragedy becomes especially complex because the conflict is associated with the protection of the forest and the preservation of wildlife. The refugees are placed in opposition to the environment, while the state presents itself as the guardian of ecological preservation. Ghosh complicates this opposition by showing that environmental protection cannot be separated from the question of social justice. The history of Morichjhapi is preserved in Nirmal's writings, which function as an alternative archive. Official histories may minimize, distort, or silence the suffering of displaced people, but memory continues through personal testimony and written records. Nirmal's notebooks become a form of resistance against historical erasure. They preserve the voices of people whose experiences might otherwise disappear. The importance of memory in the novel lies in its capacity to transform geographical space. A place may be destroyed physically, but it can continue to exist through recollection. Morichjhapi therefore becomes more than an island or settlement. It becomes a memory-space. Its significance is not limited to the people who lived there; it also represents the unresolved relationship between state power, refugee identity, environmental governance, and historical responsibility.

Ghosh's representation of Morichjhapi resists a simplistic narrative in which refugees are either heroic victims or ecological destroyers. The novel instead asks more difficult questions. Who has the right to occupy a protected landscape? Can conservation policies ignore human suffering? Can human settlement disregard ecological limits? How should societies respond when the survival of marginalized people and the protection of fragile environments appear to conflict? These questions remain central to contemporary environmental justice. The novel suggests that the solution cannot be found by treating either human beings or nature as abstract categories. Both ecological conservation and human rights require attention to history, power, and unequal vulnerability.

Cultural Identity between Language and Embodied Knowledge

Language is another major medium through which *The Hungry Tide* explores cultural identity. The novel repeatedly emphasizes that language can connect people, but it can also reveal distance. Piya, Kanai, and Fokir inhabit different linguistic worlds, and their relationships demonstrate that cultural belonging cannot be measured simply through ancestry. Piya is of Indian origin, but her upbringing in the United States has distanced her from the Bengali language and from the everyday cultural practices of the region. Her scientific training gives her a specialized vocabulary through which she understands marine life and animal behaviour. Yet her scientific knowledge does not initially provide her with access to the social and cultural world of the Sundarbans. She possesses a relationship to India that is ancestral but not fully lived. Her experience reveals the difference between genealogical connection and cultural familiarity. A person may possess a biological or historical connection to a place without automatically understanding its language, customs, or social structures. Piya's journey therefore becomes a process of learning. She must recognize that belonging cannot be claimed solely through origin. It must also be developed through engagement, listening, and humility.

Kanai occupies a different position. His linguistic abilities allow him to move between languages and social worlds. As a translator, he appears to possess the power of mediation. Yet the novel also reveals the limits of translation. To translate words is not necessarily to understand the entire experience that produced them. Kanai's education and urban background provide him with cultural mobility, but they do not automatically grant him the embodied knowledge of the tide country. Fokir represents a different form of knowledge. His understanding of the rivers, channels, currents, and ecological signs is developed through lived experience. He does not necessarily articulate this knowledge through scientific explanations or formal discourse. His relationship with the environment is embodied. He reads the water, observes the movement of animals, recognizes changes in weather, and understands the dangers of the landscape through direct experience.

The contrast among Piya, Kanai, and Fokir is not intended to establish a simple hierarchy in which local knowledge is always superior to scientific knowledge. Instead, Ghosh demonstrates that different knowledge systems reveal different aspects of reality. Piya's scientific understanding is essential to the study of marine mammals. Fokir's practical knowledge is indispensable for navigating the rivers. Kanai's linguistic ability allows communication across cultural boundaries. Each form of knowledge is valuable, but none is complete in isolation. The novel therefore presents cultural identity as multilingual and relational. Belonging is not determined by the ability to speak a particular language alone, but language remains a significant medium through which social inclusion and exclusion operate. Translation becomes both a practical necessity and a metaphor for the larger challenge of understanding another culture.

The Political Ecology of Conservation and Habitation

One of the most important dimensions of *The Hungry Tide* is its examination of the conflict between environmental conservation and human habitation. The novel

does not reject conservation. On the contrary, it recognizes the ecological importance of protecting the Sundarbans and its wildlife. However, it questions conservation practices that treat marginalized human communities as obstacles to ecological preservation. The conflict surrounding Morichjhapi reveals the dangers of separating environmental protection from political history. When the state protects forests while displacing refugees, conservation becomes associated with coercion. The novel asks whether a policy can be called ethical if it protects nonhuman life while rendering certain human lives disposable. This conflict is particularly significant because the Sundarbans is home to the Royal Bengal tiger, an animal that occupies a powerful symbolic position within the narrative. The tiger is not simply a dangerous predator. It is also a political figure in the sense that the protection of the tiger influences the regulation of human settlement. The tiger's status as a protected species becomes connected to questions of citizenship, land, and state power.

The central question is not whether nature should be protected or whether people should be allowed to settle without limits. The more difficult question is how environmental protection can be pursued without reproducing historical patterns of exclusion. Conservation must therefore be connected to justice. A forest cannot be protected ethically by forgetting the people whose lives are entangled with it.

Ecological Precarity and the Formation of Community

The inhabitants of the tide country live with the constant possibility of loss. A cyclone can destroy a settlement; a tiger can kill a worker; a river can alter the shape of an island; and the sea can transform agricultural land. Such vulnerability shapes social relationships and cultural practices. The precariousness of life in the Sundarbans creates a distinctive form of community. People depend upon one another because survival often requires cooperation. Boats, fishing activities, forest work, disaster response, and everyday labour frequently involve collective action. Community is therefore produced through shared vulnerability.

The cultural traditions associated with Bon Bibi illustrate the relationship between belief and ecological survival. The story of Bon Bibi offers a moral framework for human interaction with the forest and its dangerous creatures. It provides a symbolic language through which people understand risk, courage, greed, and restraint. The legend therefore functions as more than religious folklore. It becomes part of ecological ethics. The formation of community in the tide country is thus simultaneously material and symbolic. It depends upon labour, cooperation, memory, language, ritual, and shared experience. The environment does not simply destroy communities; it also creates the conditions under which particular forms of social life emerge.

Piya, Fokir, and the Ethics of Cross-Cultural Encounter

The relationship between Piya and Fokir is central to the novel's exploration of cultural difference. Their communication is limited by language, social background, and experience. Yet their relationship develops through shared attention to the environment. Piya approaches the Sundarbans through scientific observation. Her interest in the Irrawaddy dolphins is based on research and ecological concern. Fokir, by contrast, possesses an intimate knowledge of the

waterways through which he has lived and worked. Their relationship becomes possible when these different forms of knowledge encounter one another.

The significance of their relationship lies in its challenge to the assumption that communication requires complete linguistic equivalence. Piya and Fokir do not share a common verbal language in the conventional sense, but they develop forms of understanding through gesture, observation, movement, and shared experience. Their communication suggests that human relationships may also be mediated by the nonhuman world. The novel's ethical force emerges from its insistence that difference must be acknowledged rather than romanticized. Cross-cultural understanding requires attention to unequal power. Piya's journey is significant because she gradually recognizes that scientific expertise does not make her independent of local knowledge. Her relationship with Fokir challenges her to become a learner.

Fokir's death further intensifies the novel's meditation on vulnerability. His knowledge of the environment cannot protect him completely from the violence of the tide. The tragedy demonstrates that ecological knowledge may improve the chances of survival but cannot eliminate uncertainty. The environment remains more powerful than any individual. Piya's response to the tragedy transforms her relationship to the region. The Sundarbans is no longer merely a site of research. It becomes a place marked by personal loss, ethical responsibility, and emotional connection. Her identity is altered through her encounter with the tide country.

Identity as Adaptation, Memory, and Relation

The Hungry Tide ultimately rejects the idea that identity is a fixed possession. Cultural identity in the novel is continuously produced through relationships with place, history, language, memory, and other forms of life. Piya's identity changes through her encounter with India and the Sundarbans. Her initial position as a diasporic scientist is transformed as she recognizes the limits of detached observation. She does not simply "return" to an original cultural identity. Instead, she develops a new relationship to the region through experience. Kanai also undergoes a process of transformation. His confidence in his linguistic and cultural abilities is challenged by the realities of the tide country. He must confront the difference between knowing about a place and living within its conditions. His encounter with Nirmal's notebooks forces him to confront a history that his urban identity has allowed him to remain distant from.

For Fokir, identity is deeply connected to the environment. His knowledge of the tide country is not merely intellectual. It is expressed through the body, movement, labour, and sensory awareness. His relationship to the environment demonstrates a form of belonging that is lived rather than declared. Nilima represents another form of identity: one shaped by social responsibility and institutional action. Her work demonstrates that belonging may be expressed through service and commitment rather than through ancestry alone. Her connection to the region is constructed through sustained labour.

The concept of home consequently becomes transformed. Home is not necessarily the place from which one originates. Nor is it simply the place in which one currently lives. It may be a relationship created through memory, responsibility, experience, and care. For displaced people, home may be carried through memory

and reconstructed through collective life. For diasporic individuals, home may be discovered as an unfamiliar place. For local inhabitants, home may be inseparable from an environment that is constantly threatening to disappear.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers a sophisticated exploration of the relationship between cultural identity, refugee memory, and environmental transformation. By placing its narrative within the unstable geography of the Sundarbans, the novel challenges the idea that identity can be separated from the environment. The tide country is not merely the setting in which human dramas occur. It is an active force that shapes social relations, historical memory, economic life, cultural traditions, and political conflict. The novel's representation of displacement demonstrates that the experience of exile is not simply a movement from one geographical location to another. Displacement involves the loss of historical continuity, the reconstruction of community, and the struggle to make a new home. The memory of Morichjhapi reveals how refugee histories can be silenced by official narratives, particularly when state policies define marginalized communities as threats to environmental preservation. Through Nirmal's writings and the memories of those connected to the settlement, Ghosh restores historical complexity to the question of environmental governance. The characters of Piya, Kanai, Fokir, Nilima, and Nirmal embody different ways of understanding the relationship between knowledge and belonging. Scientific knowledge, linguistic mediation, embodied experience, social activism, and historical memory each provide partial perspectives. The novel's ethical vision emerges from the possibility of dialogue among these forms of knowledge. The Sundarbans finally becomes a powerful metaphor for identity itself. Like the tide country, identity is unstable, relational, and continually transformed. It is shaped by movement, loss, adaptation, memory, and interaction. The novel therefore challenges fixed notions of nationality, ethnicity, territorial possession, and cultural authenticity. To belong is not necessarily to possess. It may mean learning how to live within uncertainty.

Ghosh's ecological imagination is consequently inseparable from his postcolonial critique. The history of the tide country reveals that environmental vulnerability is intensified by historical inequality. Refugees, poor communities, women, and marginalized workers often experience ecological danger more severely than privileged groups. Environmental justice must therefore address both ecological protection and social inequality. In the tide country, the boundaries between land and water are constantly redrawn. The same is true of the boundaries between home and exile, nature and culture, science and local knowledge, human and nonhuman life. Ghosh's novel demonstrates that the future of such a world depends upon the ability to recognize these relationships rather than deny them. The deepest lesson of *The Hungry Tide* is therefore ecological as well as cultural: survival requires adaptation, and ethical belonging requires an acknowledgment of interdependence.

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DABEER SI/KTT/05**THIS WAS OUR HOME: LAND LOSS, DISPLACEMENT AND
MEMORIES OF PAST AMONG RIVERINE COMMUNITIES IN
DHUBRI DISTRICT, ASSAM****MD AHINUR ISLAM**Doctoral Scholar, Department of Political Science
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India**VORROZISLOV SOHKHLET**Doctoral Scholar, Department of Political Science
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India**Abstract**

Riverbank erosion has become a vital factor contributing to land loss and displacement among riverine communities of Assam, especially in Dhubri district. This loss of land is not merely a physical and economical damage but also means vanishing of homes, social cohesion, cherished memories, and sense of belonging for the people living there. This study examines the experience of erosion-affected communities by exploring how people remember their homes and landscape after destruction of their homes and land. Land erosion causes not only a physical and material displacement, but also an emotional and cultural displacement, as people continue to be attached to the land that has already eroded or no longer exists. To analyze the relationship between land loss, displacement, and memories of the past, the study employed qualitative methods, including interviews and narratives of erosion-affected people in the study areas. The study emphasizes the social and political aspects of environmental displacement, identity, and belonging by focusing on the lived experiences of riverine inhabitants in the Dhubri district.

Keywords: Riverbank Erosion, Land Loss, Displacement, Riverine Communities, Belonging, Memories

Introduction

Land is considered one of the most valuable assets and a source of livelihoods, identity, and social belonging (UNHCR). For people, whose lives mostly depend on their local environment and landscapes, the loss of land is not merely a physical or material loss, but also cultural, social, and emotional loss (Pearson et al.). Across the globe, particularly the global south, due to the impact of climate change, natural disasters such as floods and riverbank erosion, and climate-induced displacement have received significant scholarly attention in recent years (Mustak). In India, riverine communities, those who live along the rivers, are the major sufferers in terms of environmental displacement. The dynamic nature of rivers, particularly those prone to erosion and flooding, repeatedly forces people to relocate to the nearest and safer places. The northeastern state of Assam, located in the Brahmaputra Basin, experiences the highest rate of erosion intensity in India (Bhuyan et al.).

The Brahmaputra is known for its braided nature and in terms of average discharge, ranks fourth, and in sedimentation load second in the world (Sarma). In

the last few years, Assam has lost around 2,500 villages and 18 towns, including some historical cultural places, and nearly 500,000 people were affected because of massive erosion (The Sentinel Assam). Dhubri district is considered one of the most affected districts among them. Every year, hundreds of people are displaced, and become landless refugees within the state, properties are destroyed, and hectares of land are swept away. While replying to an unstarred question in the Lok Sabha in 2019, the Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Sri Rattan Lal Kataria stated that around 51.47 percent of the area of Dhubri district of Assam has been inundated and a several villages have already disappeared in the last few decades (Pratidin Bureau). People who live in the riverine char areas (river island) face heavy erosion problems that are beyond physical destruction. People have lost their ancestral land, homes, croplands, cultural and religious places, neighborhoods, and social and emotional attachment that anchor their collective memories (Ferrández and Fung). The expression of “this was our land” represents the former settlement, identity, memories, belonging, and attachment to the eroded land.

The existing studies mostly emphasized the economic, materials, environmental and livelihood impacts of erosion and land loss. In comparison, very less attention has been paid to the lived experiences of displaced people, particularly the role of memory, emotional ties with the lost land, and their struggle after displacement in the process of resettlement and reconstruction. Against such backdrops, the paper examines the lived experiences of riverine communities in Dhubri district by understanding the interconnected nature of land loss, displacement, and past memories. It seeks to understand how displaced communities or people remember their lost homes and how memory of lost homes shapes their social identity, and relations. In addition, the paper also focuses on state response, disaster mitigation, and policies on rehabilitation to ensure the human rights of the landless displaced people.

Materials and Methods

The study employs a qualitative research method based on both primary and secondary data to explore the lived experiences of land loss, displacement, and past memories of displaced communities’ lives along the Brahmaputra floodplain in Dhubri district of Assam. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and narrative interviews conducted in four villages-Monirchar Madarchar, Patakata, Kathdanga and Fakirganj under the South Salmara Revenue Circle of Dhubri district. From each village, 20 respondents who were affected by riverbank erosion were selected using purposive sampling. The findings are presented and analyzed through thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns and themes related to land loss, displacement, and past memories of their homes and places. Secondary data were gathered from government reports, relevant books, scholarly journal articles, policy documents, newspapers, and internet sources.

Results and Discussion

Land Loss and Forced Displacement

Assam is one of the most erosion-prone areas in India, caused by recurrent floods and riverbank erosion of the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The dynamic

nature of the Brahmaputra, especially its high sedimentation load and frequent channel shifting, often altered the river's course, leading to the destruction of villages, infrastructure, and agricultural land in the state. Since the 1950s, Assam has lost more than 4.27 lakh hectares of land, which is almost 7.4 % of total state's land area, due to erosion and it loses an average 8000 hectares annually (Water Resource Department, Government of Assam).

The impact of bank erosion is permanent, leaving the eroded families with little scope to return to their ancestral land. Riverbank erosion disproportionately affects the people of riverine char (island) whose daily life and livelihood depend primarily upon agriculture, livestock, and small business (Saikia and Mahanta). Erosion of their homesteads and agricultural land not merely destroys their coping strategies but also forces them to take shelter on roadsides, embankments or their relative's houses (Alam et al.), and migrate to the nearest city in search of work and livelihoods to feed their family. Such displacement is cyclic and multifaceted in nature, as people often choose the nearest areas for sheltering which are also vulnerable to such erosion (Das et al.). The field study conducted in the said villages of the Dhubri district reveals that the scale and frequency of erosion are very high and severe. The following figure illustrates the frequency of riverbank erosion experienced by respondents across the selected villages.

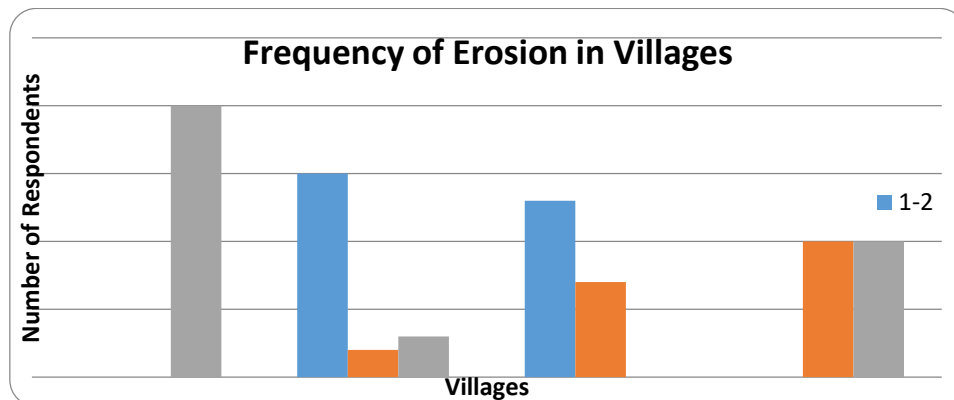


Figure 1 Frequency of Riverbank Erosion Experiencing by Respondents across Selected Villages (Source: Field Survey 2025)

The figure illustrates the frequency of erosion experienced by the respondents in the study areas of four villages, namely Monirchar Madarchar, Patakata, Kathdanga, and Fakirganj under Dhubri district. The findings indicate significant spatial differences in erosion frequency, highlighting that the severity of erosion is unequal and varied across the selected villages. The data reflect that Monirchar Madarchar is most affected among four villages, where all 20 respondents reported experiencing erosion more than five times in their lives.

In contrast, Patakata and Kathdanga experience less erosion frequency, where 15 respondents (75%) reported experiencing erosion more than 1-2 times. At the same time only 3 respondents (15%) reported experiencing erosion more than 5 times in their life. Similarly, in Kathdanga, a larger number of respondents (65%)

reported experiencing 1-2 times erosion, while 7 respondents (35%) viewed more than 3-5 times they had experienced from erosion. In Fakirganj, data reflects a mixed pattern of vulnerability, where 50% of respondents reported experiencing 3-5 times and remaining 50% above 5 times; indicating the severity of erosion remains higher than in other places. In general, the findings highlight that the frequency of erosion in the Brahmaputra floodplain is not equal and uniform in the study areas. These variations in frequency influence the extent of land loss, displacement, and livelihood insecurity experienced by the local communities living along the riverine regions. The frequency of erosion has multifaceted implications, which are visible in forms of landlessness and forced displacement. Severe erosion has resulted in disappearing crop lands, residential properties, including homesteads, livestock, and other productive assets. Thus, the erosion provides a valuable context for understanding the intensity and scale of land loss and displacement problems in the selected study areas. The following figure represents the degree of land loss experienced by the respondents in the study areas.

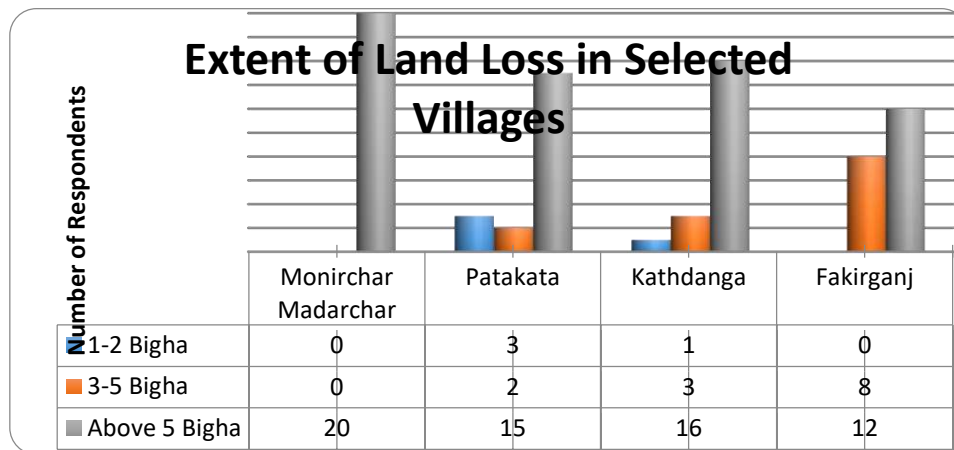


Figure 2 illustrates the extent of land loss due to erosion experienced by the respondents in the four selected villages, namely- Monirchar Madarchar, Patakata, Kathdanga and Fakirganj in Dhubri district. The findings reflect that the majority of respondents lost more than 5 *bighas* of land, indicating the severity of land loss in the study areas due to riverbank erosion. Respondents in Monirchar Madarchar have reported the highest land loss, where all respondents (100%) have lost above 5 *bighas* of land, followed by Kathdanga and Patakata, which is equivalent to 16 (80%) and 15 (75%), respectively. While in Fakirganj, 12 (60%) of respondents reported losing above 5 *bigha* of land, around 8 respondents reported having lost within a range of 3-5 *bighas*, indicating the moderate magnitude of land loss among respondents.

Overall, the findings indicate that land loss is a common problem for most of the respondents, which is the primary driver of landlessness and forced displacement in Dhubri district, particularly in the selected areas. Multiple instances of land loss due to erosion indicate permanent displacement in the areas, unlike flood-induced

displacement, which is mostly temporary in nature. After flood water recedes, displaced people normally return to their homes and engage in their daily life activities. But in the case of erosion-induced displacement, people lose their homestead and land, leading to permanent and long-term displacement. During the period 1950-1980, records of the Land and Revenue Division, Dhubri district indicate a number of villages fully and partly eroded or disappeared in Bagribari, Dhubri and South Salmara Revenue Circle. The official data of Land and Revenue Division, Dhubri further reveals that by 1997, South Salmara Revenue Circle had alone lost 147 revenue villages both fully and partly, which altogether displaced more than 150,000 people across the district (District Disaster Management Authority, Dhubri)

Remembering Home: Memories of Lost Homeland

Home symbolizes memories; social bonding, identity, and a sense of belonging that have been building over generations. Memories of lost homes not only indicate the relocation of the past, but also powerful narratives through which displaced people preserve their identity, sense of belongingness and hope for the future (Akdeniz). In Dhubri district, many people have been displaced and lost their ancestral land due to erosion, leaving them not merely property but also the social and emotional attachment linked to their homeland (Islam). During field study work, it was found that respondents frequently recalled their previous homes and land with deep grief, and nostalgia. Their fertile crops land, homestead, social relations, neighborhoods, family courtyard, places of worship, marketplaces, and the activities that were associated with their daily life- all such activities and memories they still remember. In the early 1990s, erosion caused by the Brahmaputra reached an alarming stage, which led to a devastating scenario in South Salmara (Islam). According to local people, after the two consecutive devastating floods of 1990 and 1991, the river course of the Brahmaputra was dramatically changed, and it turned into a more hazardous shape.

It is noteworthy that, during the British period, South Salmara was a major trading centre, and it was connected through inland navigation routes via Dhubri to Calcutta (Citizen). South Salmara became a Sub-Divisional headquarters and hosts several administrative offices and institutions. The establishment of various factories during this period marked the beginning of a new phase of development. Consequently, South Salmara emerged as a prominent business hub in the south-eastern part of Dhubri district and served as an important inter-state trade link between Assam and Meghalaya. Until the late 1980s, South Salmara retained its significant old glorious history (Islam). However, with the onset of dreadful erosion in the early 1990s, a major portion of South Salmara town was completely dislocated in different places. As a result of this devastating erosion, the entire populated area was completely washed away by the river Brahmaputra. Erosion along the Brahmaputra River channel continues to wreak havoc in South Salmara. The year 1997-1998, the glorious old South Salmara town completely 1998 the glorious old South Salmara town completely vanished (Islam). A senior resident and former Chairman of South Salmara Samabai Samiti former Chairman of South Salmara Samabai Samiti shared the horror of riverbank erosion-

“I still remember the day when my homestead was completely eroded. All the riverine areas were submerged under water, and there were no safe places left for people to take shelter. It was such a dreadful situation, where a devastating flood had engulfed the whole area, and on the other hand, the invisible erosion beneath the submerged water of the river Brahmaputra. In such a situation, many families spent sleepless night”.

While recalling his past memories of lost home, social relations with neighbours, green paddy fields and marketplace that were destroyed due to riverbank erosion, he became visibly emotional and revealed the profound grief and attachment associated with the lost place and home (Former Chairman Samabai Samiti). 67-year-old Jamal Uddin, a senior resident of Monirchar Madarchar, expressed that home and land are not just physical property, it is a multidimensional concept shaped by personal experiences, collective identity, social bonding, sense of belonging, and nationhood. The loss of homes caused by erosion disrupts not only the material life but also the social, emotional, and cultural bonding. He, along with other neighbours, relocated to a new settlement in Patakata village in 2016, after his previous homestead was eroded by the river Brahmaputra. The destruction of the village fragmented the community and disrupted the long-standing social and community attachments. While recalling his past home and neighbours, his eyes filled with tears as he expressed deep sorrow over his lost homeland and close neighbours with whom he preserved his cherished memories (Uddin). Like Jamal, hundreds of households have lost their homes, land, and their close neighbours due to the riverbank erosion. They lost everything and now are just living on the margin with their past memories and hope for a stable life in the future.

Living with Uncertainty: Coping Strategies and Community Resilience

Displacement in Dhubri district due to floods and riverbank erosion is not a one-time incident, but a continuing process experienced by the riverine community living along the Brahmaputra floodplains (Hassan). Recurrent erosion often leads to land loss, resulting in repetitive displacement and uncertainty and insecurity among the riverine communities. After losing land and homestead, displaced people often take shelter in the nearest place, which is also vulnerable to riverbank erosion (Alam et al.). Furthermore, people who lose their agricultural land which was their primary source of earning, are left economically vulnerable. During the field study, it was found that some respondents returned to the eroded land when it reappears as char after erosion. A significant majority of respondents (62 percent) were in favour of resettling in the reappeared land, where they have a strong attachment to their ancestral land. Apart from that, such types of land are generally more fertile for cultivation due to natural soil deposition from flood, on which displaced people mostly depend.

In contrast, 17 percent of respondents were reluctant to resettle on such char land as it is vulnerable to erosion and uncertainty. The remaining 21 percent of respondents were ambivalent, or they couldn't decide. Most importantly, it is observed that most of the ambivalent responses came from women. This indicates the larger gendered dimension within the affected families due to erosion. It reflects how men dominate in the decision-making process and choices related to

land and resettlement (Ram Mohan et al.). Those who lost their villages had to wait years for rehabilitation, taking temporary shelters on embankments or cemeteries. Government assistance was received by only a small portion of affected people, whereas the larger section of people resettled independently by their own initiative in relatively nearest places. Some displaced people continued to wait for years, hoping for the reappearance of their eroded land where they could return and resettle (Jyotirmoy Jana). Even though the eroded revenue village emerges as a char or river-island, there is no guarantee that the original residents will be able to regain their own land. Manpower, money power, and muscle power play important roles in determining the ownership of the plot. Even if a displaced farmer is fortunate enough to take over his land without much difficulty, when the village reappears as a char, he may have to sweat it out for several years to make the land cultivable. Tragically, by the time the land actually becomes cultivable, there could be another erosion which will wash away the cultivable land and render him landless, unemployed and shelterless (Jyotirmoy Jana).

In the absence of adequate rehabilitation and secure livelihood opportunities, the displaced households have adopted alternative coping strategies, including shifting to safer places, building houses on the available land owned by them or their relatives, shifting occupation, and depending on the support from relatives and neighbours (Myers et al.). Moreover, they also come forward for mutual assistance, and emotional and material support during crises (Zaid and Liamputtong). For many displaced and affected families, social relationships, including neighbour support, are considered an important source of resilience where the state's formal support systems are inadequate and temporary (Wulkau et al.).

Discussion

Riverbank erosion remains one of the most driving factors of land loss and forced displacement in Assam, particularly in the floodplains of Dhubri district (Dekaraja and Mahanta). The study reveals that the magnitude and intensity of riverbank erosion are much higher in Dhubri district in comparison to the state. More than 51.67% of land has already disappeared or been inundated in Dhubri district. The worst affected region is South Salamra Revenue Circle under Dhubri district, where more than 70% percent of land has disappeared over the decades, leading to widespread displacement, disruption of homes and livelihoods, and forcing people towards long-term economic uncertainty and insecurity. A total of 33 respondents which is almost equivalent to 41% have experienced more than five times erosion, indicating a persistent livelihood crisis and human insecurity of riverine communities in the study areas.

The findings suggest that displacement due to floods and riverbank erosion in Assam, particularly in Dhubri district beyond physical and material losses of houses and land. It reflects an extensive loss of social, economic, and emotional relations of the displaced people. The narrative of displaced people implies that homes are the symbol of memories, emotional relationships, and ties with families and neighbours (Ernstberger and Adaawen). Hence loss of homes and land is closely tied with loss of memories, social relations, earning sources, and everyday life.

Land loss followed by displacement also reveals loss of traditional livelihood practices, including agricultural activities, livestock feeding etc., forcing displaced people to search for alternative livelihood practices and pushing them towards economic insecurity (Meena and Singh). Many displaced families after losing earning sources and the absence of viable alternative livelihood sources, choose to migrate to nearby cities and towns in search of livelihoods. Most of them engage in informal sectors such as handcart and rickshaw pulling, unskilled construction workers in different sectors, and sometimes as vendors to stabilize their economic conditions and support their families (Jyotirmoy Jana). Therefore, land loss caused by riverbank erosion not only forces people to be displaced but also impacts their livelihood strategies and earning sources.

The finding also reveals that the coping strategies in the post-erosion period basically depend on individual, community, and social networking. Kinship, family relatives, and neighbours play a significant role in immediate and first responses, including, providing shelter, financial help, etc., in the absence of formal institutional assistance and rehabilitation (UNHCR). However, social and community cohesion are weakening in the face of repeated displacement caused by riverbank erosion, resulting in breaking the community resilience in the study areas. Such community resilience is an ongoing process of adaptation based on the environmental conditions and displacement process. It is not a permanent recovery from displacement but rather survival and adaptive strategies amidst the recurrent displacement and lack of state response.

Conclusion

Displacement caused by floods and riverbank erosion in Dhubri district is leading to a more humanitarian concern rather than only a physical and material loss. Riverbank erosion has destroyed hundreds of families and their homes and compelled them to be displaced without any alternative viable living strategies. Bank erosion, disappearance of homes and land, and displacement trio are closely connected. Erosion leads to destruction of homes and land, forcing people displaced from their native places and taking shelter in other places. Destruction of homes results in disruption of long-standing social and community networks and lived experiences of individuals' everyday life, which they preserved in the form of memory. Therefore, losing homes means losing social and community relations, disruption of livelihoods, and emotional bonding with the place of origin and neighbours. As the repeated displacement caused by erosion affects social and community resilience and coping strategies, the state response should go beyond physical damage and disruption by initiating holistic and inclusive policies for rehabilitation and resettlement. Such a holistic approach should address long-term displacement, livelihood restoration, while protecting their social, community, cultural, and emotional attachment after losing their homes.

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DABEER SI/KTT/06**LABORING LANDSCAPES: GENDERED LABOR, ECOLOGICAL MEMORY, AND THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL IN *NECTAR IN A SIEVE* AND *THE HUNGRY TIDE*****ADITI**Research Scholar, Department of English
Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda, Punjab, India**Abstract**

Postcolonial environmental crises are often represented as the visible consequences of colonial extraction and capitalist development, however, the gendered labour that keeps communities going in these crises is often not addressed. This article will take a look at the two texts Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, to show that the everyday labour of women acts as an archive of ecological knowledge, and, therefore, a practice of the material survival of the environment. By focusing on issues related to postcolonial ecocriticism, feminist political ecology and Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence", the research focuses not just on women's connection to nature at a symbolic level, but how the invisible agricultural, domestic and care labour associated with women is a means in which women maintain ecological memory, negotiate environmental precarity and sustain communal continuity. By conceptualizing gendered labor as a site of ecological memory rather than simply an extension of women's affinity with nature, this study repositions postcolonial women as active custodians of environmental knowledge and resilience. It contends that these novels challenge extractive models of development by foregrounding ordinary practices of cultivation, care, and adaptation as forms of ecological resistance, thereby contributing to contemporary debates in postcolonial ecocriticism, feminist environmental humanities, and environmental justice.

Keywords: Gendered Labor, Ecological Memory, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Slow Violence, Feminist Political Ecology, Environmental Justice.

Introduction

The relationship between environmental degradation and colonial histories has become central to postcolonial literary studies. Postcolonial ecocriticism examines how colonial extraction, capitalist development, displacement, and unequal resource access shape environmental vulnerability. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2015), emphasize colonialism's ecological dimensions, while Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, in *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011), connect environmental representation with empire, migration, displacement, and cultural memory (DeLoughrey and Handley xx). This scholarship consequently shifts ecological criticism beyond "nature" toward questions of power, history, and environmental justice.

Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) further expands this perspective through his concept of “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight” (2). Soil exhaustion, food insecurity, displacement, resource depletion, and livelihood loss often accumulate without the visibility of spectacular disasters. In postcolonial contexts, such slow violence is shaped by histories of dispossession and contemporary economic inequalities, making literature an important medium for representing its effects on everyday life.

Gender adds another dimension to this environmental history. Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) emphasizes rural women's environmental knowledge and subsistence practices, while Mies and Shiva's *Ecofeminism* (1993) connects the exploitation of women's labor with the commodification of nature. Karen J. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy* develops this relationship through the “logic of domination” (46–47), while also raising questions about essentialist associations between women and nature. Feminist Political Ecology responds to this limitation by examining how environmental knowledge, vulnerability, and labor are shaped by gendered access to resources. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari's *Feminist Political Ecology* (1996) foregrounds practices such as cultivation, caregiving, resource management, and the transmission of local knowledge.

This framework is particularly relevant to Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Separated by five decades and distinct ecological settings, both novels depict communities confronting environmental uncertainty, economic pressure, and changing relationships with land and resources. Markandaya's agrarian village faces drought, hunger, and industrialization, while Ghosh's Sundarbans is shaped by tidal instability, displacement, conservation politics, and precarious livelihoods. This paper therefore examines how everyday labor produces and preserves environmental knowledge, arguing that ecological survival must be understood not only through changing landscapes but also through the labor required to live within them.

Existing readings of *Nectar in a Sieve* have productively examined its representations of ecofeminism, industrialization, and the relationship between women and the natural world, while scholarship on *The Hungry Tide* has explored ecological vulnerability, conservation, displacement, and the politics of the Sundarbans. Yet the relationship between gendered labor and ecological memory remains comparatively underdeveloped as a framework for reading the two novels together. This paper addresses that gap by arguing that environmental survival in these texts is sustained through forms of labor that are often socially invisible. Importantly, the argument does not assume that ecological knowledge belongs exclusively to women or that women's labor is inherently ecological. Rather, it examines how gendered divisions of work determine who cultivates, fishes, cares, adapts, remembers, and absorbs the costs of environmental change.

The paper therefore proposes the concept of the “laboring landscape” to describe environments whose survival and cultural meaning are continually produced through human work. Ecological memory, in this formulation, is not simply a nostalgic recollection of a lost environment but embodied knowledge transmitted and revised through cultivation, fishing, caregiving, resource management, storytelling, and adaptation. Through a comparative reading of *Nectar in a Sieve*

and *The Hungry Tide*, this study brings postcolonial ecocriticism into dialogue with Feminist Political Ecology and the theory of slow violence to demonstrate that environmental justice must account not only for damaged landscapes but also for the unequal labor through which individuals and communities continue to live within them.

Situating Gendered Labor in Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial ecocriticism has foregrounded the connections between colonialism, ecological degradation, and social inequality. Moving beyond early Euro-American ecocriticism, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2015) demonstrate how colonialism functioned as an ecological project involving the appropriation and commodification of natural resources, while Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* similarly connect environmental representation with empire, displacement, and cultural memory.

Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence further expands this discourse. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, he describes environmental violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight" (2), drawing attention to the cumulative effects of degraded environments, food insecurity, displacement, and climate vulnerability. This framework encourages attention not only to ecological destruction but also to the everyday labor through which marginalized communities negotiate and survive it.

Ecofeminism established an important connection between the domination of women and nature. Françoise d'Eaubonne coined *écoféminisme* in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (*Feminism or Death*, 1974), while Karen J. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy* develops the "logic of domination" through which hierarchical structures legitimize the exploitation of women and nature (Warren 46–47). Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva similarly connect capitalist patriarchy with the exploitation of women's labor and natural resources in *Ecofeminism* (1993), while Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) emphasizes rural women's environmental knowledge and subsistence practices (Mies and Shiva 13–15; Shiva 38–41). However, such approaches can risk positioning women primarily as symbolic representatives of nature rather than as historical agents whose labor sustains everyday life.

Feminist Political Ecology offers a more material framework by examining how environmental responsibilities and vulnerabilities are shaped by unequal access to land, labor, resources, and political power. Scholars such as Val Plumwood, Bina Agarwal, and Dianne Rocheleau consequently shift attention from whether women are inherently closer to nature to why they often bear disproportionate responsibility for food, water, agricultural production, caregiving, and household survival. Such practices also preserve ecological memory: accumulated knowledge of seasons, crops, rivers, tides, forests, and survival strategies reproduced through lived experience.

Although scholarship on *The Hungry Tide* has addressed climate change, conservation, biodiversity, and the ecological fragility of the Sundarbans, and criticism of *Nectar in a Sieve* has examined ecofeminism and environmental ethics, the relationship between gendered labor and ecological memory remains

comparatively underexplored in comparative studies of postcolonial environmental fiction.

This paper addresses this gap by bringing *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Hungry Tide* into dialogue through postcolonial ecocriticism, Feminist Political Ecology, and Nixon's concept of slow violence. Rather than reading women as symbolic extensions of nature, it argues that agricultural, domestic, and care labor constitutes a material practice of ecological survival through which environmental knowledge is sustained across generations. The paper thus shifts attention from landscapes as passive sites of ecological loss to laboring landscapes, continually sustained through every day work, and demonstrates that environmental justice depends not only on resilient ecosystems but also on the often-unrecognized labor through which communities endure environmental change.

Laboring the Land: Gendered Labor, Ecological Memory, and Survival in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* represents agrarian hardship, industrial transformation, and ecological decline through the gradual disintegration of a rural community. While the novel has frequently been approached through ecofeminist and ecological frameworks, it also foregrounds the material labor through which Rukmani and her family sustain themselves amid environmental and economic disruption.

Rukmani's relationship with the land is established through her understanding that survival depends upon agricultural rhythms. Reflecting upon agricultural uncertainty, she observes: "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you" (Markandaya 43). The simile complicates the idea of human mastery: cultivation requires negotiation with an environment that remains unpredictable. Rukmani's knowledge of sowing, harvesting, and seasonal cycles is experiential rather than institutional. As Vandana Shiva argues in *Staying Alive*, rural women's environmental knowledge emerges through their participation in subsistence economies rather than technological expertise (Shiva 38). Rukmani's labor therefore becomes both economically productive and mnemonic, preserving environmental knowledge through everyday practice.

Markandaya also represents this labor as largely invisible. Rukmani's agricultural work overlaps with cooking, caregiving, household management, and resource distribution, placing her at the intersection of production and reproduction. Feminist Political Ecology helps explain why such work remains undervalued despite sustaining both household and environmental life. The tannery makes the transformation of this relationship between labor and landscape visible. Rukmani recalls the disruption caused by its arrival, describing how "clatter of boots and the shouting of men filled the village" (Markandaya xx). The altered soundscape registers the industrial transformation of rural space. The tannery does not merely create employment; it restructures relations between land, labor, and community. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that colonial modernity converted landscapes into sites of extraction rather than coexistence (Huggan and Tiffin 29). Read through this framework, the tannery represents an extractive economy whose consequences include food insecurity and intensified domestic labor.

Yet ecological suffering in the novel cannot be attributed entirely to industrialization. Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence is useful here. Nixon defines it as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight" (2). Rukmani distinguishes ordinary change from the tannery's disruptive arrival: "Change I had known before, and it had been gradual," whereas the new transformation came "blasting its way into our village" (Markandaya 29). The distinction captures the novel's layered representation of environmental violence, which accumulates through crop failure, hunger, rent, displacement, and declining livelihoods rather than through a single catastrophe.

This violence is gendered, but the novel also prevents us from equating women with ecological resilience. Nathan is himself a cultivator, and environmental knowledge is not exclusively female. The more precise question is how gender determines the distribution and visibility of labor. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari caution against biological explanations, emphasizing that differences in environmental experience are shaped by social roles and unequal structures of responsibility (Rocheleau et al. 7). Rukmani's ecological significance therefore emerges from her position at the intersection of cultivation, food management, reproduction, and caregiving rather than from an inherent affinity with nature.

Famine makes these relationships particularly visible. Rukmani describes "Hunger, ever at hand to jog his elbow should he relax" (Markandaya 106), personifying hunger as a persistent force governing peasant life. As food becomes scarce, the labor of sustaining the household intensifies, while Ira is driven to desperate measures to provide for Kutti. The environmental crisis consequently becomes embodied through food insecurity, caregiving, and reproductive pressures. Survival is not simply an abstract condition but an everyday labor of maintaining life under ecological and economic precarity. The relationship between labor and ecological memory becomes explicit when Rukmani reflects upon the past. While others can "throw the past away with both hands," she remains "clutching in my own two hands the memory of the past, and accounting it a treasure" (Markandaya, ch. 11). The imagery of hands connects memory with labor: the same body that works upon the land also preserves its history. Her memory, however, is not simply nostalgia for an idealized rural past; it encompasses practices and relationships associated with land, food, family, and agricultural life.

Markandaya nevertheless complicates any simple opposition between a pure rural past and destructive modernity. Rukmani acknowledges that "the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather, immensities not to be tempered by man or his creations" (Markandaya 132). Environmental suffering therefore emerges through the interaction of ecological uncertainty with poverty, landlessness, industrialization, and unequal economic power. Feminist Political Ecology is useful here because it explains vulnerability through social relations rather than through a universal woman–nature connection. Rukmani's resilience, consequently, should not be romanticized as feminine endurance. The novel foregrounds its costs: hunger, exhaustion, bereavement, displacement, and the erosion of familiar livelihoods. Yet her continued cultivation, care, and preservation of memory demonstrate how ecological and social continuity are

produced through every day work. *Nectar in a Sieve* thus allows the rural environment to be understood as a “laboring landscape”; one in which ecological memory is produced through material practices and environmental degradation becomes inseparable from the unequal distribution of labor and survival.

Laboring the Tide: Gendered Labor, Ecological Memory, and Environmental Survival in *The Hungry Tide*

Unlike the agrarian landscape of *Nectar in a Sieve*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* situates survival within the unstable ecology of the Sundarbans, where “there are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea” (Ghosh 6). This fluidity makes ecological knowledge a matter of survival, while Ghosh complicates any simple opposition between scientific and local knowledge. Fokir's intimate understanding of the rivers, channels, and dolphins complements Piya's scientific expertise, while Moyna's perspective foregrounds gendered labor and economic survival. Discussing the expansion of prawn cultivation, she observes, “It's people like us who're going to suffer and it's up to us to think ahead” (Ghosh 112). Her statement shifts ecological crisis from an abstract environmental problem to the question of who must absorb its economic consequences and plan for the future.

Moyna therefore complicates rather than confirms a romanticized notion of women's ecological labor. Her concern for Tutul's future and desire for professional training demonstrate that women's relationship to ecological survival cannot be reduced to an innate closeness to nature. Feminist Political Ecology instead locates environmental experience within socially differentiated labor and access to resources. Women's work becomes ecological not because women are inherently environmental subjects, but because household survival, caregiving, economic planning, and resource management are unequally distributed.

The novel's representation of Fokir similarly demonstrates that ecological memory is not exclusively female. His knowledge of the tide country is accumulated through years of fishing and movement across its waterways. As Piya recognizes, “Fokir took the boat into every little creek and gully where he'd ever seen a dolphin. That one map represents decades of work and volumes of knowledge” (Ghosh 328). The “map” converts embodied experience into an archive: Fokir's labor produces ecological knowledge that enters scientific research. Thus, ecological memory emerges through sustained material engagement rather than gender alone. Fokir's mobility across waterways and Moyna's concern with household and economic futures represent different, though unequal, ways of negotiating ecological uncertainty. The question of slow violence becomes particularly important in relation to Morichjhapi. The violence surrounding the refugee settlement exposes the human costs of conservation policy. Kanai's accusation is unequivocal: environmentalists sought to protect wildlife “without regard to the human costs,” while the poorest people were rendered easy to ignore (Ghosh 248–49). Read alongside Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, the episode reveals how environmental governance can render marginalized communities disposable. Nixon's argument that slow violence occurs “gradually and out of sight” (2) is relevant here because displacement, deprivation, and historical erasure persist through damaged

livelihoods, fragmented communities, and silenced memories rather than a single spectacular catastrophe.

Memory consequently becomes another form of environmental survival. Nirmal's decision to write is motivated by the desire to ensure that what happened will leave "some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world" (Ghosh 59). Recent scholarship similarly reads the Sundarbans as a "living archive" in which ecological traces and marginalized memories intersect, particularly around Morichjhapi. Yet Ghosh demonstrates that such memory is produced through multiple forms of labor—writing, fishing, caregiving, scientific research, and storytelling—rather than women's work alone. Thus, *The Hungry Tide* qualifies the argument developed through *Nectar in a Sieve*. Not all women's labor is ecological, ecological memory is not exclusively women's domain, and unpaid care work should not automatically be romanticized as resistance. Rather, environmental crises become gendered through the social organization of labor, while ecological memory emerges through the embodied practices of people who inhabit and work within vulnerable environments.

Laboring Landscapes: Gendered Labor, Ecological Memory, and the Politics of Survival

Reading *Nectar in a Sieve* alongside *The Hungry Tide* reveals that postcolonial landscapes are not passive settings for environmental crises but spaces continually shaped through human labor. Markandaya's drought-prone agrarian landscape and Ghosh's shifting Sundarbans differ radically in their ecological conditions, yet both connect environmental precarity with the labor required to survive it. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani observes, "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you" (Markandaya 43), while *The Hungry Tide* describes a landscape where "there are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea" (Ghosh 10). The contrasting images establish different ecological conditions that nevertheless demand continuous human adaptation.

This convergence is particularly productive through Nixon's concept of slow violence, which he defines as violence occurring "gradually and out of sight" (*Slow Violence* 2). Markandaya represents it through crop failure, hunger, indebtedness, and declining agrarian livelihoods, while Ghosh connects it with displacement, conservation, and the aftermath of Morichjhapi. Rukmani's recognition that "Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever at hand" (Markandaya 79) transforms environmental uncertainty into an everyday condition. Environmental crisis, therefore, is not simply something that happens to landscapes; it becomes a prolonged social condition whose costs are unevenly distributed. The comparison also reveals different forms of ecological memory. In Markandaya, memory is closely tied to agricultural continuity. Rukmani's declaration that she remains "clutching in my own two hands the memory of the past, and accounting it a treasure" (Markandaya 30-31) makes memory physical: the hands that labor upon the land also hold its history. In Ghosh, ecological memory is more fluid, corresponding to a landscape in which islands, waterways, and livelihoods continually change. Nirmal's desire to leave "some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world" (Ghosh 59) expresses the urgency of preserving histories that official narratives can erase. Memory in both texts is

therefore not merely nostalgic; it is a practice of retaining knowledge and experience against ecological and social dispossession.

The comparison consequently moves beyond a simple ecofeminist equation of woman = nature. Karen J. Warren's "logic of domination" remains useful for understanding the hierarchical structures through which women and nature become subordinated (46–47), while Feminist Political Ecology directs attention toward the material organization of environmental labor. Rukmani's relationship with cultivation and Moyna's relationship with the tidal economy are shaped not by biological closeness to nature but by their social and economic circumstances. Women's environmental labor is therefore situational rather than essential.

The concept of the laboring landscape emerges from this intersection of environment, work, and memory. In Markandaya, ecological knowledge develops through cultivation, food production, and household survival; in Ghosh, through fishing, navigation, scientific observation, caregiving, and adaptation. One landscape demands endurance amid agricultural uncertainty; the other requires constant adjustment to geographical instability. Yet neither exists independently of those who inhabit it. Ecological memory is continually enacted through labor, while environmental survival depends upon forms of work that dominant accounts of ecology frequently overlook. The comparative reading therefore extends postcolonial ecocriticism by placing labor alongside landscape, memory, and environmental justice. *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Hungry Tide* demonstrate that ecological survival is neither purely natural nor technologically produced: it depends upon people whose everyday work sustains life under conditions of environmental uncertainty. The "laboring landscape" thus names an environment understood not merely as a site of ecological crisis but as a space continually worked, remembered, negotiated, and sustained through unequal forms of human labor.

Conclusion

A comparative reading of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* shows that environmental crisis is never only about what happens to landscapes. It is also about the work required to live through those changes. Drought, industrialization, tidal instability, displacement, and conservation policies reshape not only fields, rivers, and forests but also the everyday lives of the people who depend upon them. Reading the novels through Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Feminist Political Ecology, and Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence makes visible this often-overlooked relationship between ecological change and labor. The novels also complicate the easy assumption that women are naturally closer to nature or that women alone preserve environmental knowledge. Rukmani's knowledge of cultivation develops through years of working with the land, just as Nathan's does through farming. In *The Hungry Tide*, Fokir's intimate knowledge of the waterways is equally important, while Moyna's aspirations reveal that survival cannot simply mean preserving traditional livelihoods. What matters, therefore, is not an essential connection between women and nature, but the different ways gender, work, and economic conditions shape people's relationships with their environments.

This is where the idea of the “laboring landscape” becomes important. Landscapes in these novels are not simply damaged spaces or symbolic representations of ecological crises. They are lived spaces that are continually cultivated, navigated, remembered, cared for, and adapted to. Rukmani’s agricultural practices and Fokir’s knowledge of the waterways demonstrate that ecological memory survives through practice. It is not simply a nostalgic memory of a lost past; it is knowledge that communities carry forward and modify as their environments change. At the same time, the paper does not intend to romanticize women’s unpaid labor as a form of effortless resilience. The survival of Rukmani and the communities in the Sundarbans comes with hunger, exhaustion, poverty, displacement, and loss. Calling this labor “resilient” without acknowledging its unequal distribution risks overlooking the structures that make some forms of work invisible. The important question, therefore, is not simply who survives, but who is required to do the work of survival, and at what cost.

This question becomes increasingly significant in the context of the contemporary Global South, where climate change, food insecurity, displacement, and environmental inequality continue to reshape everyday life. Literature can help us see dimensions of ecological crises that statistics and policy discussions often overlook: who grows the food, gathers resources, cares for families, rebuilds homes, carries memories, and adapts when familiar environments become uninhabitable. Ultimately, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Hungry Tide* remind us that the survival of a landscape cannot be separated from the survival of the people who inhabit it. The idea of the laboring landscape therefore brings together gender, labor, ecology, and memory to argue that environmental justice must recognize not only the damage done to ecosystems but also the often-unseen human work through which communities continue to live within changing environments.

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Narratives of Memory, Gender and Ecology in Postcolonial Literature

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DABEER SI/KTT/07**SUSTAINING NAGA LANDS: MEMORY, GENDERED LABOR, AND ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE IN A NAGA VILLAGE REMEMBERED****V E GOKULAPRIYA**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Auxilium College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**P. R. AMUTHA AROCKIA MARY**Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English
Auxilium College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**Abstract**

This paper analyses Easterine Kire's 'A Naga Village Remembered' as a literary archive of Angami-Naga foodways, where the agricultural practice, granary preservation and communal food distribution are interrelated sites of ecological knowledge, gendered labour and cultural memory. The novel unfolds against the colonial assault on Khonoma and posits food not just as sustenance, but as the material infrastructure through which the community's relationship with land, ancestry, and identity is carried out and remembered. The paper argues that the colonial destruction of granaries and farmland is not merely a challenge on physical survival but on an entire epistemology of land-based belonging. It is critically sustained by the largely overlooked agricultural and domestic labour of women whose knowledge of seasonal cycles, seed preservation and food distribution forms a parallel, embodied archive running alongside the novel's more visible narrative of resistance and warfare. This gendered labour functions as both an ecological practice and a quiet form of cultural memory transmission. The paper argues that the novel's vision of post-war recovery depends on the revival of these every day, feminised practices of cultivation and service. Thus, the study interprets food as ecological, gendered, and as a symbol that Kire's novel offers for understanding indigenous resilience and challenges colonial historiographies that privilege battle and conquest over the sustained, often invisible, labour of communal regeneration.

Keywords: Food Sovereignty, Gendered Labor, Ecological Memory, Indigenous Epistemologies, Angami Nagas, Decoloniality

Introduction

Easterine Kire is the first Naga writer to write a novel in English, with the publication of *A Naga Village Remembered* in 2003. The book recounts the story of Khonoma, the Angami village in the Naga Hills that defied the British for almost half a century. Reissued in 2018 as *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. It is the story of three generations. It begins with the Keviselie's Feast of Merit in the 1830s, moves through the warrior Levi and ends with Levi's son Sato who is one of the first in the village to adopt the new Christian faith. In the course of it the storming of Khonoma (22 November 1879), the four months' resistance of the mountain fort of Tsiekha, and the verbal peace treaty of 27 March 1880, are recorded. Critics have generally read the novel in one of three ways: as

historical fiction of anti-colonial resistance; as Naga orality transferred to print; or as a chronicle of the community's transition from the old religion to Christianity. Each one of these studies has significance. However, all three are centred around the spear and the gun, and in doing so, they subtly replicate what colonial historiography initially accomplished. They prefer battle to bread, the dramatic event to the slow process, men's public deeds to the daily labour which made those deeds possible at all.

This paper starts with a different question. What really sustains the Naga lands in Kire's novel? The answer given here is three-fold. Memory, gendered labour and ecological practice in the novel work together and are never quite separable. In Kire's Khonoma, the terraced field, the granary, the brewing pot and the shared plate are not ornamental details of an ethnographic backdrop. They are the physical infrastructure that solidifies the community's relationship to land, ancestry and identity. Farming, grain storage and food sharing are recurrent sites of ecological memory in the novel, for the land is worked, and it is remembered in working. This sheds light on the significance of the colonial destruction that occurred in 1879 and 1880. Burning the granaries, fields and houses of Khonoma was more than a threat to survival. It was an attempt to undo a whole way of knowing and belonging that was rooted in the land itself.

Methodology

The study rests on a close reading of the Speaking Tiger edition of the novel. It treats the paratexts, namely Kire's historical introduction, the glossary of Tenyidie terms, and the oral testimonies of named village elders printed at the end, as part of the same archival project as the narrative and not as supplements. The concept of food sovereignty, defined in the Declaration of Nyéléni as the right of peoples to culturally appropriate food produced through their own ecologically sound systems, and carried into indigenous contexts by Whyte under the name of "collective continuance," supplies the political vocabulary for reading the granary and the feast. Shiva's ecofeminist work on subsistence reclaims women's agricultural and household labour as ecological expertise, not unskilled drudgery. Connerton's description of social memory as habit, as something bodies carry rather than something texts store, explains how such knowledge survives the burning of its material supports and becomes the medium of resilience. Finally, the decolonial critique of Smith and Mignolo, along with Nixon's idea of slow violence, supports the larger claim of the paper, which is that Kire's food narrative works as an alternative history to colonial records which counted battles, bayonets and burnt villages, and very little else.

Land, Calendar and Ecological Memory

The novel's structure is initially apparent in its chronological setting, which is characterised by an agricultural era. Chapters begin with sowing and end with harvest. The story ends on genna days, the ritual days of rest when the whole community stays away from the fields. The great festivals of Sekrenyi, the festival of purification, and Terhünyi, when the harvest is brought in and the Creator is praised for abundance, are turning points in individual lives. As Keviselie is instructed by the priests, they tie his feast to the harvest festival two months away, which is fixed by grain. This applies even to the Feast of Merit, the highest social

ceremony of Angami life (Kire 20-21). So, time in Khonoma is not a dead vessel that happens to be the site of farming. Farming is how time is measured. The calendar itself is the first act of ecological memory of the community, a remembering renewed every year of how the land is to be lived with.

This calendar is a complete system of knowledge for farm work. The transplanting scene early in the novel, Levi's mother guides her sons over the flooded terraces, reading the weather like a skilled expert. Too much sun, she says, exhausts the worker before the day is done, while a little rain refreshes and cools. All the while she hands out paddy seedlings and sets a pace her children struggle to match (Kire 12). The field is a place of work, a place of learning. In a single gesture, the mother passes on agronomy, weather sense, and work ethics to her son. The novel's significance lies in its ability to provide us with this knowledge from within, as a lived cosmology in which the Creator's blessings are seen as sun and rain, rather than as an ethnographic curiosity for colonial observers. Hutton's 1921 monograph had already acknowledged the sophistication of Angami terraced cultivation, with its water channels cut across steep hillsides. But in Hutton the Angami farmer remains as a subject to be observed and managed by the colonial administration, rather than as a producer of valuable knowledge. In Kire the same knowledge is presented as inheritance, prayer and family memory as a living tradition passed down within village. The reclamation of indigenous knowledge as theory in and of itself rather than as a source for another person's theory is precisely what Smith refers to as the decolonising move.

The ritual of seed sowing is the most evocative expression of this ecological memory. On the last day of the festival two children are chosen to perform the rhoutho. In the fields villagers congregate, the elder blessing the paddy, praying it will thrive amongst the weeds, stumps and boulders, that it will be "the food of generations, the food of war" and that it will grow bent over with the weight of full grain. Then he tells the children to walk in different directions and sow the seed as widely as they can. The day continues as a genna day on which no household touches its own field (Kire 82). One short ritual statement, spoken over seed by the youngest members of the community, reveals ecological realism in the weeds, stumps and boulders; generational continuity in the food of generations; and, most intriguing of all, historical memory of siege and scarcity in the food of wartime. Quite literally, ecological knowledge, cultural memory, and the future are all interwoven into the land. Everything that will change it, including the calendar, are under its control. Sato, already resolved on baptism, waits till "the sowing ritual was done" after Sekrenyi to go to Kohima to take the new faith (Kire 124). Even conversion, it seems, has to bargain with agrarian time.

The Granary under Siege

The novel puts forth the idea of its granary early, and significantly, through the words of a woman, Levi's mother, lying on the flooded terraces, makes a lesson about survival, food and responsibility out of a boyish wish of her son's to shoot birds. "A household is not worthy of its name if its granaries are empty" she tells him. Sun and rain are given to the fields for the harvest and, as war is part of village life, "if we have grain, we can withstand war" but without grain a few days of war will overcome the village (Kire 13). Here ethics, ecology and military

strategy are fused into a single theory of the granary. The grain stored in the granary reflects the labour of the farming community. It is sunshine and rain transformed. It signifies the household's honour and grants the community the capacity to remain autonomous in times of war. In this way, the novel anticipates the idea of food sovereignty, a people's control over their own culturally rooted food system, well before the concept was formally theorized.

The novel then shows the idea in action, the actual groundwork of resistance. Khonoma prepared for war by preparing food when conflict with the colonial state became inevitable in 1879. Liede's rituals are performed early so that harvesting can start before the fighting. Anticipating a long war, the village moves its women and children to the allied villages of Sopfü and Bakieria. And the men do not want to load for the British administration at the same time. "We are not going to be coolies any more for the white man" (Kire 87). At the same time the Political Agent Damant, angry at the village for resisting the collection of taxes by force, decides to get his revenue by force of arms (Kire 88). It is interesting to see what the actual composition of the battlefield represents. They are made of harvest, of grain tax, of the labouring body made to carry other men's loads. The storming of the village on November 22, the siege of the Kohima garrison, and Damant's death at Khonoma's gate on October 14, 1879, are the explosive surface of a conflict whose true essence, on both sides, was subsistence.

The Colonial administration understood this quite well, which is why they retaliated and punished the village for its resources that can be read as more than victory in battle. The warriors retreated to the mountain fort of Tsiekha, and held out for another four months as supplies slowly ran out. Following the surrender, the village was "razed to the ground, and all her inhabitants dispersed" (Kire 105). Kire's historical introduction adds other two facts. The rebuilding of the village was forbidden. Other Angami villages were told to occupy the abandoned houses and fields but none of the villages obeyed this order. The destruction of houses, granaries and standing terraces, the scattering of the clans, and the legal ban on return, all of which adds up to something beyond a military defeat. According to Mignolo, this is an effort to eradicate Indigenous peoples' capacity to maintain their own identity and ways of knowing by disrupting their conditions of knowledge and existence. The goal wasn't just to eliminate enemies; it was to destroy the material conditions that allowed their knowledge and sense of belonging to thrive. A granary fire destroys not only the harvest from the previous year but also the seeds for the following crop. To scatter a village from its terraces is to break the pedagogical circuit by which children learn land as ancestry.

Kire is further attentive to what Nixon calls slow violence, the ongoing harm that persists after battle has ceased, harm that colonial documentation doesn't record. The novel's long aftermath of the war is hunger and humiliation. Rather, the exiles, "deeply humiliated by the unaccustomed dependence" on the charity of their hosts, prefer makeshift shelters in the jungle (Kire 109). Levi's family feels fortunate to have been given twelve baskets of paddy by their hosts (Kire 111). His mother, the same woman who upheld the granary tradition, returns from exile, so wasted that the flesh is gone from her bones. Her daughter-in-law attempts to take care of her but in vain, with food, salt and warmth (Kire 110). Kire's

introduction refers to the Mackenzie and Johnstone's colonial archive that records the bayonets of the expedition and a Victoria Cross (Kire xiii). It does not tell of the famines of old farm women in borrowed villages. In this sense, the novel's account of food is a competitive record. It reinstates the same losses that a historiography centred on battle was never intended to acknowledge in history.

Gendered Labour as Embodied Archive

Water is fetched by those whose homes already have firewood (Kire 1). The old man interprets the scenario with sentimentality, taking it as a sign that traditional methods continue to exist. This scene affords a more tangible sight on the economy of provisioning, which is entirely an unseen labour of women that takes place before dawn, and is the core of the visible world of male ritual, debate, and war. Rather than explicitly stating it, Kire embeds it in the narrative, in women's actions such as plunging ankle-deep into paddy fields, in women's roles at the hearth, such as pounding rice and broth, and in women's roles in ceremonies, such as rising before the second cockcrow to cook and fetch the day's water (Kire 12, 21). Therefore, to analyse the novel in terms of its foodways is to perceive its background as its fundamental framework.

Women appear as the seed keepers and transmitters of the community. On her way to Levi's house for the nuptials, the bride's mother packs her bridal basket with "seed grains of different crops and a laden gourd of brew" (Kire 61). The Angami bride's dowry is in fact germplasm, symbolizing the transfer of agricultural knowledge acts as a portable archive of the mother's fields brought into the daughter's new household. Similarly, the rice brew, prepared from the last harvest, represents the continuity of cultural traditions and the community's connection to its agricultural heritage. Vandana Shiva states that women are the primary custodians of seeds in subsistence economies. Their expertise in seed preservation and ecological practices is essential for sustainable agriculture, yet it remains largely invisible within colonial and patriarchal systems of knowledge and recognition. Kire's wedding scene literally performs that transmission, by embedding seed preservation in the female life cycle so that every marriage becomes an act of replanting. This is the principle on which brewing operates, the ceremonial substance without which no Angami ritual is ever complete is produced. When Kovi asks if there will be enough brew for the Feast of Merit, Keviselie replies that his wife has begun to brew, and that the litei pots stand full to the brim (Kire 22). Kire shows how women's vital labour and active participation make the Feast of Merit possible, even though it publicly acknowledges the man's accomplishment. Her role goes beyond domestic service, encompassing both decision-making and ritual participation. The feast is performed by Keviselie only after he and his wife have had many nights of discussion and come to one mind (Kire 19), and it is she who distributes the shares of cooked and uncooked meat to the priests during the ceremony.

Additionally, women are the custodians of the ritual preparations surrounding abundance and the moral implications of consumption. In Levi's mother's view, a man who is dominated by his own brew, rather than the one consuming it, is no man at all. As she pours out her son's portion, she protects the clan's name from surplus. (Kire 29). Again, it is a woman, Piano, who on the genna day of the

sowing ritual speaks the formal, indirect speech that the taboo requires, speaking to a boulder rather than her guests as she announces that her household is well provided for by the spirits and its harvests have been blessed (Kire 83). This is represented through Connerton's claims that societies preserve their past not only through inscriptions but also through everyday practices and bodily routines. Kire's novel depicts the knowledge of women as precisely such habit memory, which persists in the form of calendar sense, seed selection, brewing schedules, serving orders, and taboo speech. This explains why it endures the fire. Granaries may burn, villages may be razed, but an archive in the flesh walks out of the burning village in the women who carry it, and walks back in with them when the exile ends. Deepest in this sense are the Naga lands sustained. When the land is taken away, women's bodies keep the knowledge of the land alive.

Feasts, Sharing, and the Moral Economy of Sustenance

The most significant tradition of the community is the act of sharing food, as men and women have distinct roles in the production and preservation of food. Khonoma transforms agricultural surplus into social significance through the Feast of Merit. As one progresses through the rituals, a wealthy householder rewards his clan and village with a feast and, in exchange, a title and ornaments. The novel begins with Keviselie's feast, which is a display of circulation rather than accumulation. He gives generous shares of meat to his friends from other clans. Every clansman gets a share. He is presented with nine heads of cattle from kinsmen and friends, and the village talks about the feast for years after (Kire 28). In this community, one gains status by sharing the contents of one's granary with the community symbolizing one's economy. The man who is wealthy is simply the person through whom the greatest amount of food has been distributed to other people. According to Whyte, indigenous food systems are institutions of "collective continuance," which are webs of reciprocal responsibility that enable a community to adapt and endure. The Feast of Merit is an important indigenous tradition that strengthens the community through the sharing of food, honour, family relationships and harvest.

Furthermore, the values behind the Feast of Merit are passed down to children as lessons of right living. In the dormitory, the elder's teaching unfolds smoothly from table manners to land ethics. It is considered shameful gluttony to consume more than two pieces of meat at a community feast. This is explicitly seen when a parent in the dormitory says as Levi overhears that the essence of ethical living is the avoidance of excess and the satisfaction with one's own portion of land and fields. Those who relocate boundary stones incur death, and each individual is responsible for the village (Kire 30). Both shared plate and land boundary limits show values. This ethic promotes sustainability by keeping resource consumption and land ownership to levels that the community can sustain. It is captured in the oral testimonies in the novel, in the Tenyidie phrase *kedzünga kethezie*, meaning consideration for others. The youngest always gets the best food and everyone wants to carry the heavier load, so life, although hard, was sweet because it was lived for others (Kire 174). It summarises the whole moral economy in the story of Chalie and his mother who, in a starving house, continued to push it on each other with only a half ration of rice between them until the rice was left uneaten,

for “we have the sweetness of life” (Kire 175). In Khonoma’s epistemology, food is valued for how it is shared with others, not simply for being produced. The colonial economy that enters the novel demanding its revenue at bayonet point and taxing grain and deploying men to carry other men’s loads is the precise inversion of that ethic, set beside this. It is extraction without exchange and consumption without respect.

Exile, Return, and Ecological Resilience

Finally, the novel’s depiction of defeat becomes a depiction of resilience, a resilience that is agricultural and largely within the province of women. When the dispersed villagers return to their home, they discover it reduced to charred ruins. They suppress their sobs, while the men experience a cold anger at the realisation that the village was no longer theirs (Kire 109). But the prohibition imposed on return is ultimately unsuccessful, and it is ineffective through the food practices of the community and its solidarity. The fields of Khonoma are not occupied by any Angami village. A year passes and the administration caves and the clans return. It is of significance that the order of return puts grain before shelter. Levi is sent by the elders to the fields to harvest grain, only then joining the first group to rebuild the burnt village (Kire 108). Then the novel quietly and continuously documents the female practices which serve to reconstruct. Cooking starts up again in makeshift shelters. The sick are nursed with salt and broth. Brides bring seed grains to their new households again, and the sowing rituals and festivals return to where they had been interrupted. They do not present a second, compensatory heroism for men in the post-war chapters. Instead, they turn to weddings, harvests, genna festivals, deathbed blessings, so that the calendar itself is the very form of survival. In this sense, ecological resilience is not a metaphor borrowed from ecology. It is the proven capacity of a community and its land to be burnt, dispersed, and prohibited, and to return through seed, ritual, and remembered practice.

Kire brings this same logic of regeneration to the form of the novel. The book concludes not with a battle but with an act of generational transmission on the deathbed of a mother, and then opens into its paratexts, a glossary that preserves the Tenyidie lexicon of feasts, rituals and foods, and the recorded testimonies of named elders. In essence, the novel fulfils the same function as the granary it laments. It contains seed knowledge, ritual language, calendrical practice, and the protocols of distribution, safeguarding them for future seasons and future readers.

Conclusion

A Naga Village Remembered is a sustained alternative history of how Naga lands are preserved, as seen through its foodways. In this history, the terraced field, the granary, and the shared plate are given importance that colonial historiography reserved for the battlefield. The novel depicts farming as an indigenous epistemology in which ecological memory, cosmology and time itself are organised. It provides the granary as the material infrastructure of autonomy, so that its burning in 1879 and 1880 was an attack on a whole mode of land-based belonging, and the beginning of a slow violence of exile and hunger that official records failed to properly record. The Feast of Merit, the custom of two pieces of meat and the half measure of rice are all examples of communal distribution,

which is the moral core of Angami life and an indigenous food sovereignty that is considerate of others. All three rely on the tangible and often unseen work of women, who tend to the seed and calendar, make and serve the beer, instruct the community in moderation, and pass on its habit memory through storytelling. The novel's vision of post-war recovery is not based on any renewed heroics, but on the revival of these everyday, feminised practices of cultivation and service. By making this quiet infrastructure narratable at all, Kire has responded to the historiography of conquest with a historiography of resilience, wherein the community that returns, sows, brews, shares, and remembers is the most genuine resistance to empire.

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DABEER SI/KTT/08**MEMORY, TRAUMA AND ECOLOGY IN HAN KANG'S NOVEL *WE DO NOT PART*****MUZDALFA ANNY**Research Scholar, Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India**Abstract**

Han Kang, the 2024 Nobel Prize winner, does not merely write about history. She writes about how history gets trapped in the body and the ecology surrounding that body, providing a source for constant presence of certain traumatic events. This paper explores the interplay of memory, trauma and ecology in the novel *We Do Not Part*, arguing that Kang's narrative transforms suppressed history into an active and sensory presence. This paper emphasizes that the novel rejects the notion of the past as a static or concluded event. This paper analyses a 'living past' - a past that is constantly present at the back of the characters' mind and hence shaping their lives - as a tangible phenomenon that manifests through the sensations, the dreams, the trees, the snow and, the agency of physical objects and the whole atmosphere. This paper examines how memory provides a window to the characters' trauma and how their behavior is influenced by the same. This paper contends that Han Kang's work reconstructs memory not as a cognitive recollection, but as a material persistence, thereby transforming the act of reading into an act of bearing witness. This paper also argues that ecology plays the role of a character in the novel and asserts how the ecological presence is a vital element throughout the narrative.

Keywords - History, Memory, Trauma, Ecology, Jeju massacre.

Human beings share a complex and an inseparable relationship with their environment and surrounding ecology. Hence their role in literature (which often acts as mirror to human and human societies) is profound. Pagans in ancient literature worshipped nature. For romantics, it is a nurturer, a teacher, a moral and spiritual guide, a place to escape, a source of strength, encouragement and freedom. On the contrary, for gothics, it becomes a symbol of bad omen, death and decay, creating terror, claustrophobic isolation and foreshadowing the impending madness or doom. In the late twentieth century, critics picked up a different lens to look at the presentation of nature in literature. They turned to highlight its interconnectedness with human life. They started to view it in terms of ecology and how it addresses the cultural ties, traditional significance, and environmental issues as well as creates awareness.

This paper deals with Han Kang's novel *We Do Not Part*, examining the interplay between memory and ecology in the lives of its characters and how the past gets trapped in the body and the environment surrounding that body acting as a source for constant presence of certain traumatic events. In this novel, memory provides a window to the characters' trauma. Pierre Nora says that "memory takes root in concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (9). This can be extended to

the characters' environment as nature is a crucial element in this novel. While explaining postmemory, Marianne Hirsch says that "postmemory is indeed a "vicarious" form of recollection, a product of transgenerational mnemonic transmission of powerful collective experience – catastrophes such as war, genocide, and extreme violence, but also transformative political movements such as coups, revolutions and uprisings. Descendants of survivors of these monumental events re-experience them not as memories, but as postmemories; they are belated, mediated, temporally and qualitatively removed" (67). Inseon, one of the two main characters in the novel, tries to preserve the postmemory, which she had acquired through her parents and the interviews she did, in her documentaries. It is not only the photographs and newspaper clippings that are the 'point of memory' for the characters but it is also the wind, the sea, the trees and the snow that serves as intersections between past and present. For instance, during winter seasons, Inseon's father, as if in a state of trance, gets transported to those days of massacre. He used to take her to the woods and hide in the cave or whatever her mother cut her finger, she gets reminded of the day when, in her innocence, she bit her finger for her dying sister to suck blood as if doing so will save her. On the other hand, Inseon carries the transgenerational memory of the horror that her mother suffered as whenever it snowed she thinks of her mother as "...the girl roaming the courtyard, searching, well into the evening. A child of thirteen clinging to her seventeen-year-old sister as if her sister wasn't a child herself, hanging on by a sleeve, too scared to see but unable to look away" (Kang 69).

As said by St. Augustine, memory is the present of the past. This means that the past does not remain in the past; it continues to be in the present through memory and so does the joy or pain related to that past. It does not cease and continues to go on. Memory often acts as a tool to access the trauma of a person, to get insight and explanation for a particular type of personality or behaviour as trauma affects how their life turns out to be. The environment, atmosphere and surroundings in which a person has suffered a traumatic event also play a role in triggering it even when that event has become a thing of long gone past. The trees, the sea, the snow and everything else carry the memory, constantly reminding the pain, fear and anxiety one has gone through, pulling them back to those incidents and preventing them from moving on. In spite of going through their everyday life, they remain stuck in their past because of those memories.

At the beginning of the novel, we find Kyungha, Inseon's friend, who has given up on writing and her job, struggling with nightmares. She has no family. Though she mentions her daughter, we don't know what happened to her. We don't get to know much about her family. Her dreams result from the transgenerational trauma induced into her when she started doing her research and voraciously read materials related to the Gwangju massacre for her novel. But if we connect this with Han Kang's previous novel *Human Acts* then the germ of this transgenerational trauma caught her much earlier as according to that novel, Kungha's family moved from Gwangju to the outskirts of Seoul in the same year when Gwangju uprising happened and she was then only nine years old. She had learned about the atrocities through the whispers of the adults. However, in this

novel, Kungha tells that she started having nightmares after she started working on her novel. She dreams of thousands of black tree trunks standing firmly giving off the silhouette of men, women and children. She dreams of the sea engulfing the mounds of the dead. It affected her so much that sometimes the line between dream and reality in her mind got blurred. The road to her writing space that she rented for writing her novel made her anxious because on the way there was a stream and also an area of tree-lined path, and she felt as if snipers were lying on the rooftop aiming at people. However, Inseon's transgenerational trauma is not only secondhandedly acquired but also it is to some extent lived. When Inseon was a child, her father – who had survived the violence and brutality of the 1948 Jeju massacre – used to take her to the forest. He would sweep over their trail and hide Inseon and himself in the darkness of the cave. His sense of self had become fractured. He suffered a split in his reality. He seemed to be living in two worlds; one in the present and the other stuck in the past reliving the horrors again and again. Also, Inseon's mother started having symptoms of dementia around the time when she went to visit the mine after hearing that the excavation of the mine where dead bodies were dumped during the mass killing will be halted and she heard that there was only a young man who survived the mass killing:

“That may have been when my mother began to experience a rift within herself. That day her brother's fate on that night splintered in two. As one body among thousands piled up inside that mine. And as a young man knocking on gates. Swearing not to tell a soul who had given him the new clothes” (Kang 241).

When her mother's mind deteriorated due to dementia, she would come to Inseon's room, hug her tightly, slip her finger inside Inseon's mouth, stroke her face or drag her under the table to hide or cry for help. Her parents trauma left a huge impact on Inseon, so much so that she acquired it from her parents even when she herself had not lived in that time:

“In the last month of hospice care, she slept through the entire day. It made me think of the sea, but a sea where the high tide lasts forever. Where the water, once it's covered the entire beach, just sits there.

It didn't make any sense. I'd thought when she was gone I would finally get back to my life, but now I realized the bridge back had disappeared. Mum wasn't there to crawl into my room, but I still couldn't sleep. I didn't have to die to escape, but I still wanted to die” (Kang 259-256).

Ecology or it can be said that nature is present in the novel as a character as it does not remain as a passive agent in the background or merely existing as a part of the setting or to complement the mood of the characters and portray the mental state of the characters. Naeem et al. discusses ecopsychological connections in Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* and *We Do Not Part* and points out that “In *We Do Not Part*, Kang continues to explore trauma and ecological entanglement. Though less overt than in *The Vegetarian*, the novel threads themes of intergenerational memory, physicality, and the scars of historical violence into the landscape itself. The earth, in this text, is both a witness and a container of human trauma”. Jen Webb writes that “*We Do Not Part* portrays massacres and trauma, contrasted with trees and sea water, walks in forests and glorious hymns to snow”. The trees, the sea, the

snow and the birds in the novel are an inseparable part of the characters' life, their memories and therefore, their trauma as well. For example, the snow becomes a link connecting the past and the present and also brings back memories. Inseon, while watching the snow fall, recalls how during one winter she ran away from home to Seoul and met with an accident. Inseon tells Kyungha that on the night of the accident when she slipped on the embankment, her mother had a premonious dream where she saw Inseon sitting in a field of snow and the snow that fell on her cheeks did not melt. But it is not only a premonious dream; it also mirrors her mother's trauma from the Jeju massacre that she had carried all her life. The fear of losing Inseon like she had lost her family as well as the memory of the time when soldiers murdered the whole village and her mother and her aunt were searching for their parents and siblings in the field, wiping the snow from the frozen faces of the dead bodies would have also been the reason for this dream. Moreover, Inseon's mother always used to have nightmares and following the superstition, though it did not help, she tried to ward it off by putting a coping saw under her bedding. She was haunted by the past. The past kept crawling back to the present, making her relive her trauma in her dreams and never letting her to heal. She herself says that "every time it snows, it comes back. I try not to think about it, but it keeps coming back" (Kang 68).

The snow interconnects the previous generations to the present generation. It interconnects the past and the current. When Inseon was carried on a truck to the hospital, she saw the trees lining the road. Despite the excruciating pain she was in, she remembers Kyungha's book and thought of everyone who had suffered violence and torture regardless of the place. Struggling through the heavy snowfall on the way to Inseon's house, Kyungha's feet became numb and she is reminded of the woman in Inseon's short film where a woman while going back to the independent militia camp, after escaping from the raid by Japanese soldiers, lost four of her toes to frostbite. Kyungha thinks that if water circulates endlessly and never disappears then the snowflakes Inseon grew up seeing or that falling on the frozen faces of the dead, decades earlier, must be the same. She wonders "who's to say those raindrops and crumbling snow crystals and thin layers of bloodied ice are not one and the same, that the snow over me now isn't that very water?" (Kang 109).

The personification of the ecology in this narrative affirms its presence as a character in the story. And at times it becomes an integral part of memory and hence evokes trauma. The winter season and the harsh climate, specifically the snow remains predominant in the novel. It creates hurdles, affects the mood of the characters and also brings back memories. When Kyungha reaches Jeju, she talks about the weather there, like how the wind is blowing and how the snow is falling. She also describes how snowflakes are formed and how they trap and stifle sound. Even Inseon herself says that "[her mother] only spoke about the snow. As if there were a causal link between the unmelting snow she had seen before in reality and the snow on [her] face in her [mother's] recent dream, and this link was the single most terrifying logic running through her life" (Kang 68). The wind picks up and then pounds and moans like a person as if it does not want to revisit the past when Inseon starts telling about what her father went through during the 1948 war, about

the mass killing, about how women and children were shot and thrown into the sea, and how his whole village was burned and annihilated. There is also a description of bird's anatomy and biology, and how "they instinctively endure and hide pain to avoid being targeted by predators". In Inseon's workshop, the painted logs seem like men and the tree in her courtyard appears like a person standing, its fronds like flailing arms. Memories or moments glitter like snowflakes, its coldness reminds of gloom, fear and pain, and the snow brings back the past as well as the people from the past.

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DABEER SI/KTT/09**ROOTS, ROUTES AND RUINS: NARRATIVES OF MEMORY,
MIGRATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL LOSS IN J. M. COETZEE'S
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Abstract

J. M. Coetzee's fiction frequently explores the complex relationships among memory, displacement, identity, and ethical responsibility. While much of the critical attention devoted to his work has focused on postcolonial politics and questions of power, his later novels also reveal a sustained engagement with migration, remembrance, and environmental consciousness. This article examines *Youth* (2002) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) through the interconnected themes of memory, migration, and environmental loss. It argues that Coetzee employs narratives of displacement to reveal the fragility of belonging in the contemporary world. In *Youth*, migration generates cultural estrangement and emotional isolation, while memory functions as a means of preserving connections to a lost homeland. In *Elizabeth Costello*, concerns about displacement extend beyond human experience to encompass animals and the natural environment. Through Elizabeth Costello's ethical reflections on animal suffering and human responsibility, Coetzee critiques anthropocentrism and calls for a more inclusive understanding of life. By drawing upon theories of memory, exile, and ecocriticism, this study demonstrates that Coetzee links personal experiences of migration with broader ecological concerns. The article concludes that both novels portray memory as an ethical act capable of resisting cultural amnesia, confronting environmental destruction, and sustaining meaningful forms of belonging in an increasingly fragmented world.

Keywords: Memory, Migration, Environmental Loss, Ecocriticism, Exile, Belonging, J. M. Coetzee.

Introduction

J. M. Coetzee remains one of the most influential literary voices of the contemporary era. His novels consistently interrogate questions of identity, displacement, ethical responsibility, and the limits of human understanding. Although Coetzee initially gained international recognition through works addressing colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, his later fiction increasingly moves beyond national concerns and engages broader global issues. Among these concerns are migration, memory, and environmental vulnerability, themes that have become increasingly relevant in a world marked by unprecedented mobility and ecological crisis.

The twenty-first century has witnessed significant transformations in the ways individuals relate to place, history, and the environment. Migration has reshaped traditional understandings of home and belonging, creating new forms of cultural identity and displacement (Said 173). Simultaneously, environmental degradation has challenged assumptions about humanity's relationship with the natural world. These developments have encouraged scholars to explore the intersections between personal displacement and ecological loss. Literature provides a particularly valuable medium for such exploration because it reveals the emotional and ethical dimensions of these experiences.

Youth and *Elizabeth Costello* offer compelling insights into these interconnected concerns. Although the novels differ considerably in narrative structure and thematic emphasis, both investigate forms of displacement and loss. *Youth* focuses on the experiences of a young South African migrant attempting to establish a new life in London. Through John's struggles, Coetzee examines the emotional consequences of migration and the persistent influence of memory. *Elizabeth Costello*, by contrast, expands these concerns into a broader ethical inquiry that encompasses animals, environmental responsibility, and the limitations of human-centred thinking.

The title of this article—"Roots, Routes, and Ruins"—captures the conceptual framework through which these novels are examined. "Roots" symbolize memory, origin, and attachment to place. "Routes" signify migration, movement, and cultural transition. "Ruins" represent both personal and ecological forms of loss. Together, these concepts reveal Coetzee's exploration of belonging as a fragile and continually negotiated condition.

This article argues that Coetzee constructs a narrative of displacement that operates simultaneously across personal, cultural, and ecological dimensions. While *Youth* portrays migration as an experience of estrangement sustained through memory, *Elizabeth Costello* extends the idea of displacement beyond human experience to include animals and the natural world. Through these narratives, Coetzee demonstrates that memory functions not merely as recollection but as an ethical practice capable of confronting both personal and environmental forms of loss.

J. M. Coetzee's fiction has generated extensive scholarly interest because of its engagement with issues such as colonialism, ethics, displacement, identity, and environmental responsibility. Critics have approached his works from a variety of perspectives, including postcolonial studies, ethics, animal studies, ecocriticism, and memory studies. Although *Youth* and *Elizabeth Costello* have received considerable critical attention individually, relatively few studies have examined them together through the interconnected themes of memory, migration, and environmental loss.

Derek Attridge argues that Coetzee's fiction consistently challenges readers to engage ethically with the suffering of others (Attridge 3). According to Attridge, Coetzee's narratives encourage readers to move beyond simplistic moral judgments and develop a deeper awareness of vulnerability and responsibility. This ethical dimension is particularly evident in *Elizabeth Costello*, where questions of animal suffering and moral obligation occupy a central position.

Attridge's observations are equally relevant to *Youth*, where John's experiences of alienation and displacement invite reflection on the emotional consequences of migration.

David Attwell emphasizes Coetzee's movement from specifically South African concerns toward broader questions of ethics and global responsibility (Attwell 18). Attwell observes that Coetzee's later fiction increasingly addresses issues that transcend national boundaries, including environmental ethics, animal rights, and human responsibility. Such observations are especially useful for understanding *Elizabeth Costello*, which engages with questions affecting humanity as a whole. Dominic Head identifies alienation, isolation, and displacement as recurring features throughout Coetzee's fiction (Head 76). His work highlights the ways in which Coetzee's characters frequently occupy marginal positions and struggle to establish meaningful relationships with their surroundings. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Youth*, where John's migration to London results in emotional and cultural unbelonging.

Ecocritical studies of *Elizabeth Costello* have focused largely on the novel's treatment of animals and its challenge to anthropocentric thinking. Scholars have argued that Costello's reflections encourage readers to reconsider conventional assumptions regarding the superiority of human beings and to recognize ethical obligations toward non-human life. Such studies frequently draw upon Lawrence Buell's concept of environmental imagination and Greg Garrard's discussions of ecological ethics.

Memory studies also provide valuable insights into Coetzee's fiction. Paul Ricoeur's discussions of memory and identity, along with Pierre Nora's reflections on memory and place, help explain the significance of remembrance in *Youth*. John's memories of South Africa demonstrate how migrants preserve connections to homeland through acts of recollection. Memory functions not merely as a record of the past but as a means of sustaining identity amidst displacement.

Jane Poyner's work on Coetzee's public intellectualism further contributes to understanding the ethical concerns of his later fiction. Poyner argues that Coetzee repeatedly examines the moral responsibilities of individuals in relation to larger social and global issues (Poyner 42). This perspective is particularly useful when examining Costello's engagement with animal suffering and environmental ethics. Despite the richness of existing scholarship, there remains a significant gap in studies that bring together memory, migration, and environmental loss in a comparative reading of *Youth* and *Elizabeth Costello*. Most critics focus on migration and identity in *Youth* or animal ethics in *Elizabeth Costello* separately. This article seeks to bridge that gap by examining how Coetzee links personal displacement with ecological vulnerability. Through the concepts of roots, routes, and ruins, the study demonstrates that memory, migration, and environmental loss are interconnected dimensions of Coetzee's broader exploration of belonging and ethical responsibility.

The themes explored in Coetzee's novels can be understood through several influential theoretical frameworks. Studies of memory, migration, and ecocriticism provide important perspectives for interpreting the experiences of his characters. Paul Ricoeur argues that memory plays a crucial role in the

construction of identity because individuals understand themselves through narratives that connect past experiences with present realities (Ricoeur 80). Memory therefore becomes a dynamic process through which meaning is continually reconstructed. Similarly, Pierre Nora emphasizes the significance of memory in preserving connections between individuals and places, particularly when those connections are threatened by displacement or historical change (Nora 12).

Migration frequently intensifies the role of memory because geographical displacement often separates individuals from familiar cultural and social environments. Memories of homeland become essential resources for preserving continuity between past and present. However, such memories can also generate feelings of nostalgia and loss. The migrant subject exists between locations, continually negotiating relationships with both the remembered past and the lived present.

Edward Said's reflections on exile provide further insight into this condition. Said describes exile as a state of discontinuity characterized by separation from home and familiar cultural contexts (Said 173). Although migration may create opportunities for personal growth and transformation, it also involves experiences of alienation and unbelonging. The exile inhabits an intermediate space between cultures, unable to return fully to the past yet never entirely at home in the present. Environmental criticism offers another important framework for understanding Coetzee's work. Lawrence Buell argues that literature can foster ecological awareness by encouraging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of human and non-human life (Buell 7). Greg Garrard similarly emphasizes that environmental crises are not merely scientific problems but also cultural and ethical challenges (Garrard 5). Ecocriticism therefore seeks to examine how literary texts represent relationships between humans and the natural world.

The relationship between memory, migration, and environmental consciousness can be understood through the concept of displacement. Displacement is not limited to geographical movement; it also includes emotional, cultural, and ecological forms of separation. Migrants experience displacement through their distance from homeland and familiar environments, while ecological degradation produces another form of displacement by disrupting the relationship between human beings and nature. Coetzee's fiction repeatedly explores such forms of separation and vulnerability.

The idea of "roots" in *Youth* is closely connected with memory, homeland, and emotional belonging. Published in 2002, the novel follows a young South African named John who leaves Cape Town for London in the hope of becoming a poet and achieving artistic fulfilment. Like many young intellectuals from former colonies, John views Europe as a centre of culture and creativity. He imagines that migration will allow him to reinvent himself and achieve the life he desires.

However, the reality he encounters is far removed from these expectations. London does not provide the sense of belonging or artistic fulfilment he had anticipated. Instead, John experiences loneliness, uncertainty, and disappointment. Amid these difficulties, memories of South Africa continue to shape his understanding of himself and the world around him. The significance

of memory in the novel extends beyond personal recollection and becomes closely associated with place. John's memories are often connected to the landscapes, social experiences, and cultural environment of South Africa. Although he leaves his homeland in search of personal transformation, the places he has left behind continue to occupy an important position in his imagination. These remembered spaces function as emotional points of reference that help him make sense of his present circumstances.

The persistence of memory supports Ricoeur's argument that identity is continuously shaped through acts of remembering and reinterpretation (Ricoeur 92). John repeatedly attempts to redefine himself in London, yet memories of his earlier life prevent any complete break from the past. The novel suggests that identity is never entirely self-created but is influenced by experiences, relationships, and places that continue to shape the individual even after migration. If roots signify attachment to homeland, routes represent movement, transition, and cultural displacement. Migration is one of the central themes of *Youth*, and Coetzee presents it as a complex and often painful experience rather than a straightforward path towards success. John's migration reflects the aspirations of many colonial subjects who viewed Europe as a source of cultural legitimacy and intellectual authority. He imagines London as a place where artistic ambitions can flourish and where he can finally become the person he wishes to be. Yet Coetzee undermines this expectation by presenting migration as an experience marked by uncertainty and loneliness.

The London that John encounters fails to fulfil his romantic expectations. Rather than discovering artistic freedom, he experiences routine employment, financial limitations, and emotional isolation. The contrast between expectation and reality becomes one of the novel's central concerns. Through this contrast, Coetzee exposes the gap between the imagined promise of migration and its lived reality. John's daily life is marked by repetitive work, limited social relationships, and an increasing awareness of his marginal position within British society.

Edward Said's concept of exile provides a useful framework for understanding John's situation. Although John chooses to leave South Africa, his experiences resemble those of the exile. He feels disconnected from his surroundings, uncertain of his place within society, and unable to establish a stable sense of belonging. London remains distant and unwelcoming despite his efforts to embrace it. As Said observes, exile often produces a feeling of being "out of place," a condition that becomes evident throughout John's experiences in the novel (Said 173).

A significant aspect of this alienation arises from cultural hybridity. John exists between cultures, unable to identify completely with either South Africa or Britain. His colonial background complicates his relationship with English culture. Although he admires British literary traditions, he remains aware of his status as an outsider. This condition reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of the "in-between" space, where identities emerge through negotiation rather than fixed affiliation (Bhabha 56). John's experiences demonstrate that migration often produces hybrid identities characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty.

Coetzee further emphasizes the ordinary realities of migrant life. Rather than focusing on dramatic events, he portrays routines of work, loneliness, and disappointment. John's employment in a computer company contrasts sharply with his artistic aspirations. The gap between expectation and reality becomes a source of frustration and self-doubt. Migration therefore emerges as a condition of unbelonging. The migrant occupies a transitional space in which identity remains unsettled. While movement across borders may create new possibilities, it also involves significant losses. Home becomes distant, and belonging becomes increasingly difficult to define.

The novel also highlights the psychological consequences of living between cultures. John cannot fully identify with British society, yet he increasingly feels detached from South Africa. As a result, he occupies an in-between position that generates uncertainty regarding identity and belonging. Coetzee portrays migration as a process that challenges stable definitions of home and selfhood. The migrant becomes someone who is simultaneously connected to multiple places yet fully accepted by none of them.

Through *Youth*, Coetzee reveals that migration is not simply a geographical process but a profound psychological transformation. It challenges assumptions about identity and exposes the fragility of cultural belonging in an interconnected world. The routes travelled by John are therefore not merely physical pathways; they are symbolic journeys through memory, identity, and displacement.

If *Youth* explores displacement through migration, *Elizabeth Costello* expands the concept of displacement into the realm of environmental ethics. Published in 2003, the novel centres on Elizabeth Costello, an internationally renowned Australian writer who travels across the world delivering lectures on literature, philosophy, and morality. Through Costello's reflections, Coetzee addresses questions that extend beyond human society and encompass animals, ecosystems, and ethical responsibility.

Among the novel's most significant concerns is the treatment of animals. Costello repeatedly questions assumptions that place humans above other forms of life. She challenges philosophical traditions that justify animal exploitation and argues for a more inclusive understanding of ethical responsibility. Through these discussions, Coetzee critiques anthropocentrism—the belief that human beings occupy a privileged position within the natural world.

Anthropocentric thinking often treats animals and ecosystems as resources existing solely for human benefit. Costello exposes the moral limitations of this perspective and encourages readers to consider alternative forms of relationship with non-human life. Her arguments suggest that environmental problems emerge not only from technological or economic activities but also from ways of thinking that separate human beings from other forms of life.

Environmental loss emerges in the novel not only through concerns about ecological destruction but also through reflections on human attitudes toward nature. Coetzee suggests that environmental crises originate in ways of thinking that separate humans from the broader community of life. The exploitation of animals becomes symptomatic of a larger failure to recognize interconnectedness.

Lawrence Buell argues that environmental literature encourages readers to understand humans as part of ecological systems rather than separate from them (Buell 54). *Elizabeth Costello* performs precisely this function. The novel invites readers to reconsider conventional boundaries between human and non-human existence. Costello's concern for animals reflects a broader critique of human domination over nature and a call for ethical engagement with the natural world. Costello's emphasis on sympathetic imagination is particularly important. She suggests that ethical responsibility begins with the ability to imagine the experiences of others. This imaginative capacity allows individuals to recognize the suffering of animals and the vulnerability of ecosystems. Her reflections challenge readers to move beyond purely rational or utilitarian approaches to ethics and develop a more compassionate understanding of life.

Environmental loss therefore appears not merely as a physical phenomenon but also as an ethical failure. Humanity's inability to acknowledge the intrinsic value of non-human life contributes to ecological destruction. Coetzee challenges readers to confront this failure and to develop more responsible forms of engagement with the natural world.

The notion of "ruins" in the novel extends beyond physical destruction. It encompasses the moral and ecological consequences of human actions. Environmental degradation becomes a symbol of fractured relationships between humans and nature. Through Costello's reflections, Coetzee suggests that the restoration of these relationships requires a transformation in ethical consciousness.

One of the most innovative aspects of *Elizabeth Costello* is its expansion of memory beyond exclusively human concerns. Whereas *Youth* focuses on personal memory and homeland, *Elizabeth Costello* explores memory as an ethical responsibility toward animals and the environment. Modern societies often conceal the realities of animal suffering and environmental degradation. Industrial systems remove these processes from everyday experience, making it easier to ignore their consequences. As a result, ecological destruction frequently occurs within conditions of collective forgetting. Costello resists this process by insisting upon remembrance. Her lectures function as acts of ethical witness that draw attention to forms of suffering excluded from public consciousness.

This emphasis on remembrance links memory with ecological responsibility. Environmental loss is not simply a consequence of technological development or economic expansion; it is also connected to failures of attention and imagination. When individuals forget their dependence upon ecosystems and other species, environmental destruction becomes easier to justify. Greg Garrard argues that ecocriticism seeks to expose such forms of cultural amnesia and reveal hidden connections between human actions and ecological consequences (Garrard 17). Coetzee's novel exemplifies this objective. Through Costello's reflections, readers are encouraged to remember forms of suffering that are often overlooked in modern societies.

A particularly significant contribution of the novel lies in its attempt to expand ethical concern beyond exclusively human experiences. Costello repeatedly argues that imagination enables individuals to enter into the experiences of others

and to recognize forms of suffering that might otherwise remain invisible. Such a perspective challenges readers to reconsider the boundaries of moral responsibility. The movement from *Youth* to *Elizabeth Costello* therefore represents an expansion of memory's ethical scope. What begins as remembrance of homeland evolves into remembrance of vulnerable forms of life. Memory becomes not only a personal resource but also a moral practice through which individuals acknowledge responsibility toward others.

In this way, Coetzee transforms memory into a form of ethical engagement. Remembering becomes an act of resistance against indifference and forgetting. Through remembrance, individuals can recognize their connections with other people, animals, and environments, thereby developing a more inclusive understanding of responsibility.

A comparative reading of *Youth* and *Elizabeth Costello* reveals significant continuities despite their thematic differences. Both novels are concerned with displacement, loss, and the search for meaningful forms of belonging. Although they focus on different contexts, they share an underlying concern with vulnerability and ethical responsibility. In *Youth*, displacement is primarily geographical and cultural. John's migration separates him from familiar environments and compels him to negotiate relationships between past and present. Memory functions as a means of preserving identity amidst uncertainty. The novel explores the emotional consequences of migration and the difficulties of establishing belonging in an unfamiliar environment.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, displacement assumes a broader ecological dimension. The novel focuses on humanity's estrangement from nature and the ethical consequences of this separation. Environmental destruction reflects a failure to recognize interconnectedness and vulnerability. Costello's reflections extend concerns about displacement beyond the human sphere and draw attention to animals and ecosystems affected by human actions. Both novels therefore explore ruptures in relationships. While *Youth* explores the rupture occurring between migrant and homeland, *Elizabeth Costello*, exemplifies it between humans and the natural world. These forms of separation generate experiences of loss that require acts of remembrance and ethical reflection.

The progression from one novel to the other suggests an expansion of Coetzee's concerns. While *Youth* focuses on individual experiences of displacement, *Elizabeth Costello* addresses issues affecting entire species and ecosystems. The scope of ethical responsibility widens from personal identity to planetary coexistence.

A significant continuity between the novels is their shared concern with vulnerability. In *Youth*, vulnerability emerges through the migrant's experience of separation, uncertainty, and unbelonging. In *Elizabeth Costello*, vulnerability is extended beyond the human sphere and becomes associated with animals and ecological systems threatened by human actions. Through these parallels, Coetzee establishes an important connection between human and environmental forms of loss.

This movement reflects Coetzee's broader vision of belonging. Belonging is not confined to nationality or culture; it encompasses relationships with animals,

environments, and forms of life beyond the human sphere. Through this perspective, Coetzee challenges readers to reconsider conventional understandings of community and responsibility. Ultimately, memory, migration, and environmental loss become interconnected because each involves experiences of separation and vulnerability.

Through these novels, J. M. Coetzee demonstrates that displacement operates across multiple dimensions, affecting individuals, communities, animals, and ecosystems alike. In *Youth*, migration generates experiences of alienation and cultural unbelonging. Memory becomes an essential means of preserving connections to a lost homeland while simultaneously revealing the impossibility of complete return. Through John's experiences, Coetzee illustrates the emotional complexities of migration and the enduring influence of the past. The novel demonstrates that migration is not merely a movement across geographical boundaries but also a psychological journey shaped by memory and loss.

In *Elizabeth Costello*, concerns about displacement expand beyond human experience. Through reflections on animal suffering and ecological responsibility, the novel critiques anthropocentric assumptions and calls for a more inclusive ethical imagination. Environmental loss emerges as both a material and moral crisis, demanding renewed forms of attention and responsibility.

Together, the novels reveal that memory is more than a process of recollection. It is an ethical act capable of resisting cultural amnesia, preserving vulnerable histories, and fostering recognition of interconnectedness. Whether directed toward a homeland left behind or toward forms of life threatened by environmental destruction, memory becomes a means of sustaining meaningful relationships in a fragmented world.

The concepts of roots, routes, and ruins provide a useful framework for understanding Coetzee's exploration of displacement. Roots signify the memories and attachments that connect individuals to place. Routes represent the movements and transitions that reshape identity. Ruins symbolize the losses—both personal and ecological—that result from displacement and exploitation. Together, these concepts illuminate Coetzee's broader concern with belonging and responsibility.

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DABEER SI/KTT/10**LANDSCAPE AS LOST LANGUAGE: MEMORY, MIGRATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL LOSS IN NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *WE NEED NEW NAMES*****NISHA THOMJI VARGHESE**Associate Professor, Department of English
St. Albert's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam, Kerala, India**Abstract**

This paper examines the entanglement of memory, migration, and environmental loss in NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names* (2013), arguing that the Zimbabwe landscape — figured through the guava trees of Budapest, the ruined homes of Paradise, and the vanishing topographies of Darling's childhood — functions as the novel's primary archive of postcolonial grief. Drawing on Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," Stacy Alaimo's framework of "transcorporeality," and Paul Connerton's theorisation of embodied place-memory, this study traces how Bulawayo constructs ecological loss not merely as background context for her protagonist's displacement but as its central trauma. Darling's migration to America precipitates a double dispossession: the loss of the human community she leaves behind in Zimbabwe, and the loss of the sensory, environmental world that gave that community meaning. The paper demonstrates how the novel's formal strategies — its fragmented second-person address, its recursive returns to the landscape of Paradise, and its densely embodied imagery of fruits, soil, and heat — constitute what this paper terms an "ecography of exile": a mode of narrating displacement in which the damaged land remembers what the migrant can no longer afford to. By situating Bulawayo's work within the broader paradigm of African postcolonial ecocriticism and the growing field of migration-environment studies, this analysis contributes to current critical conversations about the literary representation of ecological dispossession, the politics of environmental memory, and the affective dimensions of climate-linked displacement in the Global South.

Keywords: postcolonial ecocriticism, slow violence, environmental memory, migration and ecology, African literature, displacement

Introduction

"We are on our way to Budapest," begins *We Need New Names* (2013), and in these five simple words NoViolet Bulawayo initiates what is to become perhaps the most politically and formally engaged debut novel of the twenty-first century (Bulawayo 3). "Budapest," as mentioned in the title, is not the capital of Hungary, but a neighbourhood consisting of large and abandoned houses in an unnamed city in Zimbabwe, which gets its name out of nowhere, simply because the people who inhabit it can dream nothing more than living like white men (and, therefore, calling their place "Budapest") — a symbolic renaming that immediately draws attention to the main issues of this book: the geography of violence and the

necessity to invent geography of imagination when living within geography of ruin.

Darling, the novel's ten-year-old narrator, lives in Paradise — a shantytown of corrugated iron shacks erected by families evicted from their homes during the Zimbabwean government's Operation Murambatsvina ("Drive out Filth") of 2005, a mass demolition campaign that left an estimated 700,000 people homeless. She and her friends steal guavas from Budapest's abandoned gardens, play games amid collapsing mansions, and navigate a world in which AIDS, hunger, political violence, and the ruination of the built and natural environment are simply the texture of everyday life. When Darling migrates, at the novel's midpoint, to live with her aunt in Michigan, the tone fractures: the lush, embodied, ecologically saturated Zimbabwe sections give way to a dissociated, colder prose that registers the migrant's alienation from both the American environment and from the remembered landscapes of home.

It is this fracture — between the ecological richness of the remembered homeland and the environmental blankness of the adopted country — that this paper reads as the novel's central argument. Bulawayo is not simply writing a migrant narrative that uses landscape as backdrop; she is writing a novel in which the land itself is the primary casualty of the interlocking violences she anatomises: colonial expropriation, postcolonial authoritarianism, global economic inequality, and the slow environmental devastation these processes generate. To read *We Need New Names* through the lens of memory, migration, and environmental loss is to recover the novel's ecological unconscious — its sustained, formally embodied insistence that the most devastating loss of displacement is not only the loss of people and community, but the loss of the sensory, environmental world that makes self-knowledge possible.

Slow Violence, Transcorporeality and Place-Memory

Any ecologically attentive reading of *We Need New Names* must engage with Rob Nixon's influential concept of "slow violence," developed in his landmark study *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). This formulation is directly applicable to Bulawayo's Zimbabwe, where the destruction of Paradise and of the ecological world surrounding it is not the result of a single catastrophic event but of decades of accumulating dispossession — colonial land theft, postcolonial mismanagement, structural adjustment, and political violence — whose environmental consequences register slowly, unevenly, and always most severely upon those who are already most vulnerable.

Nixon's further argument that the representation of slow violence presents a distinctive literary challenge — since such violence lacks the "explosive and spectacle-driven" quality that attracts media and political attention — helps explain the formal choices Bulawayo makes in the novel (Nixon 3). The novel's power lies precisely in its refusal of the spectacular: the environmental degradation of Paradise is rendered not through dramatic ecological collapse but through the slow accretion of images of soil, fruit, heat, and water that together

build a portrait of a landscape under incremental siege. This is a novelistic equivalent of what Nixon calls the “writer as witness”: the literary artist who makes slow violence visible by finding forms adequate to its temporal dispersal. Stacy Alaimo’s concept of “transcorporeality” — developed in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* — provides a second theoretical resource. Alaimo argues that human bodies are not sealed, autonomous entities but are perpetually traversed by and constituted through their environmental contexts: what she calls “the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world”(Alaimo 2). In Bulawayo’s novel, this transcorporeal intimacy is vividly operative: Darling and her friends do not simply inhabit the landscape of Zimbabwe; they are constituted by it. They eat its guavas, breathe its dust, feel its heat, and are shaped — cognitively, emotionally, politically — by its particular ecological textures. When Darling migrates to America, the rupture of this transcorporeal relationship is experienced as a form of bodily and psychic dismemberment, a loss of the environmental medium through which selfhood had been formed and sustained.

Paul Connerton’s work on place-memory, particularly his essay collection *How Modernity Forgets*, contributes a third theoretical axis. Connerton argues that the routinised, embodied practices through which communities inhabit places constitute a form of memory that is irreducibly spatial: to be forcibly removed from a place is not merely to lose a location but to lose a mnemonic infrastructure — the environmental cues, bodily habits, and sensory registers through which the past is accessed and identity sustained. This argument has particular resonance for Bulawayo’s *Darling*, whose migration to Michigan does not simply geographically displace her but dismantles the environmental archive through which she remembers who she is.

These three frameworks — Nixon’s slow violence, Alaimo’s transcorporeality, and Connerton’s place-memory — together provide the theoretical scaffolding for this paper’s reading of *We Need New Names* as a novel in which the environment functions not as setting but as the novel’s primary cognitive and affective medium: the substance through which memory is stored, identity constituted, and loss experienced.

The Guava Tree and the Grammar of Ecological Belonging

The guava tree is the novel’s most insistent ecological image, and its appearances across the Zimbabwe sections of the text reward sustained attention. From the novel’s first pages, the children’s theft of guavas from Budapest’s abandoned gardens is presented as an act simultaneously alimentary, political, and mnemonic: they eat to survive, they trespass to assert presence in a landscape from which they have been effectively excluded, and they negotiate, through the sensuousness of the fruit, a relationship with a natural world that official Zimbabwe has rendered inaccessible to them. As Darling describes the experience of eating a guava, Bulawayo invests the prose with a lyrical precision characteristic of the novel’s ecological passages: “We just get inside the guava trees and eat, and the fruit are small and pink inside and juicy and there are too many of them” (Bulawayo 5).

The syntax is deliberately childlike — the paratactic and accumulating details in mimicry of the child’s sensory overwhelm — but the ecological content is precise.

The guava trees in Budapest are naturalised colonisers: introduced to Southern Africa through Portuguese traders in the sixteenth century, they have become so embedded in the landscape that they are now experienced as indigenous. They are, in this sense, a figure for the novel's broader meditation on the colonial transformation of African ecologies: the ways in which imperial intervention restructured the natural world so thoroughly that the introduced and the native, the imposed and the original, have become difficult to disentangle. The children eat colonial fruit in a landscape shaped by colonial dispossession, and the sweetness of the guava is therefore always already compromised — a pleasure produced by the same historical processes that have created the ruins among which the children live.

The literary scholar Michael Titlestad, writing on ecological imagery in contemporary African fiction, observes that “the fruit in such narratives frequently functions as a condensed site of historical meaning, carrying within its sweetness the bitterness of the land's prior violations” (Titlestad 78). This formulation is precisely applicable to Bulawayo's guavas, which accumulate across the novel's Zimbabwe sections as figures of a compromised but still vital ecological belonging. The children's relationship to the trees is one of the few relationships in the novel not mediated by the violence of the human social world: in the trees, they are simply bodies in a landscape, negotiating hunger and pleasure in a space that, for a moment, the structures of dispossession cannot reach.

This is precisely why the guava tree becomes so central a figure of loss in the novel's American sections. When Darling, now living in Michigan, encounters the frozen American landscape, the absence of guavas registers not simply as a dietary absence but as an ecological and mnemonic one. The American environment offers no equivalent sensory hook for Darling's memory: it is a landscape that does not know her, whose fruits are tasteless and standardised, whose cold is hostile rather than merely climatic. As Bulawayo writes: “This place, it doesn't know me; it doesn't know where I come from, what I have seen, what I have eaten” (Bulawayo 147). The environmental unfamiliarity of America is, in Connerton's terms, a dismantling of the mnemonic infrastructure through which Darling has always accessed her sense of self.

Paradise Destroyed: Slow Violence and the Archive of Ruin

The name “Paradise” is the novel's most sustained irony. The shantytown is emphatically not paradisiacal — it is a space of hunger, disease, violence, and environmental degradation — yet the name registers something important about Darling's relationship to it. For her, Paradise is paradise in the original sense of the Persian word *pairidaeza*: an enclosed garden, a bounded space that, however impoverished, constitutes the world. The environmental conditions of Paradise are therefore not merely social but existential: they are the conditions of Darling's being-in-the-world, and their destruction is experienced as a destruction of the world itself.

The environmental history of Paradise is narrated through fragmented accumulation rather than linear exposition, and this formal choice is itself ecopolitically significant. The reader pieces together, across many chapters, the story of how the families of Paradise came to be there: evicted from their homes

by government demolition squads, stripped of their property, forced to construct makeshift shelters on land that is itself legally precarious and environmentally marginal. The land of Paradise is, in ecological terms, already a damaged landscape: it occupies the city's periphery, lacks sanitation infrastructure, and is subject to flooding in the rainy season and to dust and heat in the dry season. Its ecology is the ecology of dispossession.

Rob Nixon's framework of slow violence is nowhere more applicable in the novel than in this rendering of Paradise's environmental condition. The violence that created and sustains Paradise is not dramatic or spectacular: it is the accumulated, incremental violence of colonial land law, of postcolonial eviction, of structural adjustment policies that defunded public infrastructure, of a political economy that treats the urban poor as human waste to be removed and relocated. The environmental consequences of this violence — the poor drainage, the dust, the heat, the absence of trees or green space — register in the novel through precisely the kind of attritional, sensory accumulation that Nixon identifies as the literary mode adequate to slow violence.

Lily Saint, in her study of landscape and memory in postcolonial African fiction, argues that "the ruined environment in contemporary African novels frequently functions as a counter-archive: a space that preserves, in its very damage, the evidence of the violences that produced it" (Saint 112). This counter-archival function is precisely what Bulawayo's Paradise performs. The broken roads, the absent trees, the polluted streams that appear in the novel's Zimbabwe sections are not merely evidence of poverty but of a specific, historically traceable sequence of decisions and violences. To read the landscape of Paradise attentively is to read an environmental history of Zimbabwe that official narratives suppress. The land remembers what the state desires to forget.

The Migrant Body and the Loss of Environmental Self

The novel's transition from Zimbabwe to America is effected not through a chapter break or an explicit narrative announcement but through a subtle and devastating shift in ecological register. The lush, hot, embodied prose of the Zimbabwe sections — saturated with fruit, dust, heat, and the sensory textures of the African landscape — gives way to a prose of coldness, blankness, and environmental estrangement. Darling's America is a landscape of snow, of identical houses in identical streets, of a built environment so thoroughly standardised that it offers no ecological purchase for memory or identity.

Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality is illuminating here. If the self is constituted through its material, environmental transactions — through what it breathes, eats, touches, and is touched by — then migration represents not simply a geographical relocation but a material reconstitution of the self. Darling in America is not the same bodily entity as Darling in Zimbabwe, because the environmental medium through which her body had been constituted has been withdrawn. The American landscape does not transact with her body in the ways the African landscape did: it offers no guavas, no familiar heat, and no soil whose smell activates the archive of embodied memory. Darling in America is, in a very material sense, an ecologically displaced self.

This ecological displacement is figured most poignantly in the novel's treatment of seasonal experience. Zimbabwe, as rendered by Bulawayo, is a landscape of intensely experienced seasons: the rainy season and the dry season shape the rhythms of daily life, the availability of food, the texture of the social world. America, by contrast, offers Darling an alien seasonal calendar that her body cannot assimilate. Winter functions in the American sections as a figure of ecological and existential dislocation: it is a cold that Darling's transcorporeal history has not prepared her for, a seasonal experience that her body registers as a form of violence. As Bulawayo writes with characteristic precision: "The cold comes inside you and sits in your bones and you think you will never be warm again" (Bulawayo 151).

Abena Busia, in her analysis of ecological imagery in diasporic African women's writing, observes that "the body in diaspora frequently experiences the foreign landscape as a form of environmental hostility, a counter-world whose seasons, temperatures, and textures the migrant body reads as systemic rejections" (Busia 203). Bulawayo's novel exemplifies this dynamic with particular intensity, constructing the American landscape as an environment that not only fails to sustain Darling's transcorporeal self but actively, if impersonally, works against it. The coldness of Michigan is the environmental expression of the social coldness Darling encounters: a world that has no need of her except as cheap labour, a landscape that offers no ecological recognition.

Narrative Form as Ecofeminist Resistance: Second Person and the Grammar of Return

One of the most formally striking features of *We Need New Names* is its deployment of the second-person voice in its most politically urgent passages. When the narration shifts from the first-person retrospective of Darling's Zimbabwe childhood to the second person — "You have to get up; you are in another country" (Bulawayo 143) — it enacts a formal estrangement that mirrors Darling's environmental estrangement. The second person is a voice of dissociation, of a self that has been so thoroughly displaced that it can no longer speak in the first person; it is also, paradoxically, a voice of implication, drawing the reader into the experience of displacement and refusing the comfortable distance of the third person.

This formal choice has ecological significance. By narrating Darling's American experience in the second person — a voice of alienation and environmental dislocation — while narrating her Zimbabwe childhood in the embodied, sensory-rich first person, Bulawayo formally enacts the ecological distinction the novel is making thematically: the first person is the voice of environmental belonging, of a self, constituted through its ecological transactions; the second person is the voice of environmental exile, of a self, severed from the landscape that gave it language and identity. The formal shift is, in this reading, an ecographic gesture: the grammar of the novel registers the ecological stakes of migration.

Elleke Boehmer, in her examination of formal strategies in postcolonial women's writing, argues that "the formal innovations of such texts are frequently not merely aesthetic choices but epistemological ones: they enact, in the structure of the sentence and the architecture of the narrative, the political and historical

conditions they represent” (Boehmer 167). In Bulawayo’s novel, this formal-political entanglement extends to the ecological: the novel’s most innovative formal features — the second-person voice, the recursive returns to the Zimbabwe landscape, the densely embodied ecological imagery — are precisely the formal resources through which Bulawayo makes environmental loss visible and politically legible.

The novel’s recursive structure — its repeated returns to the landscape of Zimbabwe across the American sections — functions as what this paper terms an “ecography of exile”: a writing practice in which the damaged land is made to remember, on behalf of the displaced subject, what that subject can no longer afford to dwell on. These returns are not nostalgic in a simple sense; they do not present Zimbabwe as an Edenic origin from which Darling has fallen. They are, rather, ecological insistences — reminders that the land exists independently of the migrant’s relationship to it, that it continues to change, to be violated, and to bear witness, long after Darling has left it.

Climate Crisis and Contemporary Resonance

While *We Need New Names* was published in 2013, its ecological concerns have become increasingly urgent in the decade since. Zimbabwe has experienced severe and worsening climate disruption: Cyclone Idai devastated eastern Zimbabwe in 2019, killing hundreds and displacing hundreds of thousands; the country has faced repeated drought emergencies driven by El Nino and accelerating climate change; and the collapse of agricultural productivity linked to land reform, climate disruption, and infrastructure failure has produced food insecurity on a massive scale. The slow violence that Bulawayo’s novel tracks in the landscape of Paradise has, in the years since publication, accelerated into something approaching crisis. This context gives the novel’s representation of environmental memory and loss a prospective as well as retrospective dimension. When Darling remembers the rains of Zimbabwe from her American exile — “the rains that came heavy and full and cleaned everything and filled the air with that smell that is the best smell in the world” (Bulawayo 159) — she is remembering a climate that is itself under threat, an environmental rhythm that global warming is disrupting. The novel’s ecological nostalgia is therefore not simply personal or political but climatic: a mourning for a landscape that is changing not only under the pressure of political violence and poverty but under the pressure of a climate emergency whose primary victims are, as postcolonial ecocriticism has consistently argued, the communities of the Global South that have contributed least to global emissions. Amitav Ghosh, in his widely discussed essay collection *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, argues that the climate crisis represents a failure not only of politics and economics but of the literary imagination: that contemporary fiction has struggled to find forms adequate to the temporal and spatial scales of climate change. Bulawayo’s novel, written before Ghosh’s diagnosis, can be read as a partial answer to his challenge. Its ecological imaginary — its insistence on the sensory, the embodied, the transcorporeal — offers precisely the kind of intimate, small-scale, affective environmental writing that can make climate loss legible at the level of the individual life and the remembered landscape. The novel does not represent climate change as an abstract global

phenomenon; it represents it as the loss of a specific smell of rain, a specific sweetness of guava, a specific quality of heat — the environmental textures of a world that is changing, and that migration, in all its forms, accelerates.

Conclusion

“I don’t know this country,” Darling admits near the novel’s close, “and I have to learn it like a language” (Bulawayo 246). The image is precise and quietly devastating: landscapes are languages, systems of meaning constituted through embodied use, through the accumulation of sensory experience and cultural practice that transforms terrain into place. To be displaced from a landscape is not simply to lose a location but to lose a language — the environmental grammar through which identity, memory, and belonging are expressed and sustained.

This paper has argued that *We Need New Names* stages ecological-linguistic loss as its central political concern. Through the guava trees of Budapest, the ruined landscape of Paradise, the embodied environmental memory of Darling’s Zimbabwe childhood, and the ecological blankness of her Michigan exile, Bulawayo constructs a sustained and formally innovative account of what it means to lose the land that made you. What emerges from this reading is a vision of postcolonial displacement that is irreducibly environmental: one cannot understand what Darling loses by migrating without understanding what the land of Zimbabwe meant to her body, her memory, and her sense of self. The novel insists, quietly but persistently, that no account of human migration is complete without an account of the ecological worlds that migrants carry within them — and that slowly, painfully, begin to fade.

The novel’s title, *We Need New Names*, points in both directions. To need new names is to have lost the old ones — the names of places, trees, seasons, and environmental textures that constituted home. But it is also a forward gesture, an insistence that language — including the language of landscape — can be remade. Bulawayo’s novel does not offer an easy ecological politics of return or recovery; it is too honest about the irreversibility of both migration and environmental loss for that. What it offers instead is something perhaps more valuable: an ecological imagination that refuses to forget what has been lost, that holds the remembered landscape in its damaged complexity, and insists, through the resources of literary form, that the land and its losses are legible — that they have a language, and that literature is one of the places where that language survives.

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DABEER SI/KTT/11**“NO COUNTRY FOR THE DISPLACED SELF”: MEMORY, MIGRATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL LOSS IN BENYAMIN’S GOAT DAYS THROUGH THE LENS OF LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS****GOPIKA B.**Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of English
Sacred Heart College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**F. JULIAN XERCIES RIGLEY**Assistant Professor and Head, PG and Research Department of English
Sacred Heart College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**Abstract**

Among South Asian contemporary novels on migrant workers, Benyamin’s *Goat Days* is seen as the most painful testimonial ever written about the lives of those caught in forced bondage far away from their homes. It follows the life of Najeeb Muhammad, a Keralite who becomes one of many migrants lured into being goatherds in Saudi Arabia, losing all language, sense of belonging, and identity in the process. This paper examines the issues of memory, migration, and environmental loss in the novel using the concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the ideas of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic by Lacan, as well as his ideas of *objet petit a* and the mirror stage. According to the theoretical framework used in the analysis, Najeeb’s displacement represents a symbolic rupture leading him to the state of the Lacanian Real, or absolute suffering that cannot be symbolized or verbalized. In addition, memory serves here not only as the source of nostalgia for the lost home, but also as the means of reconstructing identity and finding the Imaginary register. Additionally, the dryness of the desert environment, which is radically different in terms of the environment, is an extension of the process of disintegration of the protagonist’s mind, making environmental loss both literal and symbolic. In placing Benyamin’s novel within the framework of Lacanian philosophy, the current study adds to the burgeoning field of ecocriticism in postcolonial studies.

Keywords: Lacanian psychoanalysis, migrant labor, environmental loss, memory, and displacement.

Introduction

The experience of migration presents one of the most prominent existential risks to the individual today. Leaving one’s homeland to seek work elsewhere is often more than just a change of scenery – it is an upheaval, an ordeal that can leave lasting traces on the psyche of the affected person. First published in Malayalam in 2008 under the title *Aadujeevitham*, and in English in 2012 as *Goat Days*, Benyamin’s debut novel recounts the harrowing true-to-life story of Najeeb Muhammad, a Gulf migrant from Kerala who survived three years of slavery in the Saudi desert before returning to his home in India. It has since gained both critical and popular acclaim as one of the most prominent novels of India’s regional literature tradition concerning migrant experiences and environmental

trauma. However, while critics have used a wide spectrum of theoretical frameworks to discuss the narrative, from post-colonialism to ecocriticism, the underlying existential and psychoanalytic underpinnings of the work have been largely ignored. This article will argue that *Goat Days* is deeply indebted to the teachings of Jacques Lacan, and that the impositions the migrant protagonist Najeeb must endure serve as an ordeal to his very being as a subject. Specifically, the article will demonstrate that the desert represents the Lacanian Real, the protagonist's linguistic separation from others serves as a rupture of the Symbolic, and that his memories fuel his capacity to access the Imaginary.

Theoretical Framework: Lacan, the RSI Triad, and Migrant Experiences

Jacques Lacan's work provides one of the most compelling psychoanalytic frameworks ever conceived for discussing the fundamental constituents of subjectivity. Chief among these are the three interconnecting "registers," also variously translated as "realms" and "domains": the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real - the last of which, according to Lacan, is "the barred" (Lacan 1-7). These realms are not discrete phases the subject undergoes, but rather, as the French philosopher's later works, particularly *Ecrits*, suggest, exist simultaneously in a dialectical relationship. The Imaginary is the realm of perception, the domain of the subject's perception of itself and others. The Symbolic refers to the realm of language, and the manner in which the speaking subject engages with the "Big Other," which mediates virtually all aspects of the individual's life. Finally, the Real denotes that which lies beyond the reach of symbols or perceptions, the inaccessible truth that can only be approximated at best.

Applied to the literature on migration experiences, the tripartite division serves as the basis for distinguishing between the major existential challenges faced by migrants. Chief among them are the obstacles in the form of new, inaccessible or incomprehensible languages, which contribute to the migrant's sense of being uprooted from familiar surroundings in countless ways. As scholar Ruth Kaplan notes, the very nature of migration detaches the individual from both the familiar and the foreign (Kaplan 26-7). The migrant moves into an in-between space that is neither one nor the other. According to Lacan's tripartite division, this instability and this feeling of being caught between Solipsism and engagement with others represent a manifestation of the subject's encounter with the Real. The rupture of familiar language and cultural codes signifies a detachment from the Symbolic realm and the familiarity it provides (Lacan, *Ecrits* 50-2). Subsequently, the migrant experiences the foreign environment as an alien and threatening force, the Real, that threatens to engulf him whole.

Rupture of the Symbolic: Migration as Psychic Exile

Najeeb's migration is the result of his desperation to improve his financial prospects. Having fallen behind on his payments to the loan shark and contractor, he has agreed to work three years for a pittance in the Saudi desert, to later realize, upon arrival, that he is to serve as a goatherd. He is unable to speak with the other laborers, most of whom are deported and leave, and is forced to remain with the master who purchased him for the duration of his servitude. From the moment of his arrival, Najeeb experiences the rupture of the familiar code-sharing system he

had operated within in Kerala. Benyamin describes him as having no recourse but to the goats and the desert:

“There was no one to talk to. There was no one to listen. I was alone with the goats and the desert” (Benyamin 43)

This excerpt captures the very essence of a migrant’s experience and its implications for his or her psychological well-being. The protagonist feels uprooted from the familiar environment, unable to communicate or relate to anyone in his new surroundings. From the moment of his arrival, Najeeb is confronted by the void of the desert, a place as foreign to him as any other migrant would be to the alien landscape of the Saudi plains. The most fundamental manifestation of this rupture is the protagonist’s inability to employ language as a tool to navigate the unfamiliar space and communicate with others.

Language in all its manifestations constitutes the single most important tool for the migrant to survive and adapt to the foreign environment. Najeeb experiences this challenge in all its manifestations; he is unable to communicate with the master who owns him or speak to his fellow laborers, many of whom are deported after a few days or weeks. In addition to verbal language, he loses the ability to write, to engage in a fundamental if impersonal means of communication. He is utterly detached, from a communication and language standpoint, from the world he inhabits (Benyamin 56). In essence, the migrant is expelled from the realm of the Symbolic, which explains the depth of his distress and the pervasive sense of loss that permeates his story.

In several prominent passages, Benyamin recounts how the protagonist is renamed upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, and how he subsequently loses all understanding of the language he previously knew. From the moment of his arrival, he is no longer “Najeeb” but “Najeeb Chaapa” (stamped Najeeb), an object belonging to the master. In effect, he is renamed in a way that marks him as the property of another. The inability to retain or remember one’s name is a telling indication of the extent to which the migrant has become alien to the very domain that should represent his familiarity and comfort. By changing the migrant’s name, the employer removes his previous name as well as any other identifying features, rendering him an object belonging to another.

The language barrier is not the sole manifestation of this feeling of being uprooted, however. As the protagonist recounts the hardships of his servitude, Benyamin emphasizes the sheer difficulty of living in the desert, far from family and friends, living in hardship and without comfort. Scholars such as Pramod K. Nayar have argued that the conditions of slavery and forced labor experienced by Gulf migrants are akin to a reduction to Zoe, or bare life (Nayar 78; see also Agamben 1-12). The migrant worker is treated as an object, his life value determined by his capacity for work. By extension, the migrant becomes alien to himself, as his existence is entirely determined by external circumstances beyond his control.

The Desert as the Lacanian Real: Environmental Loss and Psychic Dissolution

One of the most characteristic traits of *Goat Days* is the role the desert plays as both setting and stimulus for the protagonist’s harrowing odyssey. The arid landscape in which Najeeb finds himself after his arrival in Saudi Arabia can be

seen as the embodiment of the foreign, the environment that repels and frightens the migrant in equal measure. The desert represents, for the protagonist, one of the most formidable challenges he must endure during his three-year ordeal. The very word “desert” invokes feelings of desolation and emptiness, and the landscape depicted by Benyamin is no different:

“The desert had no mercy. It did not care whether you lived or died. It simply went on, vast and silent and burning” (Benyamin 89).

The environmental loss experienced by the protagonist is, however, merely a part of a deeper psychic loss. As he recounts the events of his time in the desert, he remembers the landscape of Kerala with fondness and, in many ways, longs for it. It seems, based on the imagery he uses to describe it, that home for Najeeb symbolized something greater than just familiarity and comfort. It was a part of who he was, and the loss of the environmental familiarity he experienced was akin to losing his very identity. When he looks out over the endless sands of the Saudi desert, he cannot help but feel overwhelmed by a sense of loss and homesickness:

“I could see the paddy fields, green and glistening after the rain. I could smell my wife’s cooking. I could hear my mother’s prayers” (Benyamin 102).

Here, the environmental loss is intertwined with a sense of psychological loss and a feeling of homesickness. The place the protagonist had called home was not just a location but a state of being, a world he cherished and missed. While the environmental loss is inextricably linked to the sense of psychic loss and the feeling of exile, the two together represent the very core of the migrant experience. What the protagonist has lost, and what he misses, is not just environmental familiarity but rather the feeling of belonging to a place, to a certain kind of landscape.

The scholar who has done most to conceptualize and define the migrant’s environmental loss is arguably Glenn Albrecht, who has coined such terms as solastalgia and anthropogenic grief to describe the feeling of loss stemming from one’s alienation from the familiar landscape (Albrecht 35-6). For many migrants, the experience of being in an unfamiliar environment is inextricably linked to feelings of loss stemming from such alienation from the familiar environment. In Benyamin’s novel, the environmental loss is presented as the cause of the protagonist’s sense of alienation. His solastalgia, or the distress he feels rooted in his perception of the loss of connection to his home environment, is the reason why he becomes so deeply despondent and tormented in the desert. His very surroundings there, the endless sands and the harsh climate, fail to evoke any feelings within him other than the desire to return home or to die.

Memory as Imaginary Recovery: The Psychic Labor of Remembrance

The only means by which the protagonist can recapture some aspects of the life he has left behind, and subsequently endure the desert and its harsh conditions, is memory. In terms of the tripartite division, memory operates as a mechanism by which the protagonist re-engages with the Imaginary, which in turn allows him to withstand the onslaughts of the Real. By summoning memories of familiar people and objects, the migrant subject re-establishes the sense of self he has lost upon arriving at his destination. Memory functions in much the same way as it always

has by allowing the subject to relive past events, to engage with them in the present. More importantly perhaps, memory allows the subject to re-establish the boundaries of the self, to re-conceive oneself as in the past.

Lacan's teachings on the Imaginary are deeply intertwined with the function of memory and the manner in which it recovers the sense of self. Specifically, the Imaginary denotes the realm of perception, the domain in which the subject experiences itself as existing. As the French philosopher puts it in his famous "Mirror Stage" discourse, the individual becomes conscious of itself upon realizing it is perceived as an object by others (75-81). In effect, the self-image the subject forms upon looking at its reflection in the mirror is the source of its being in the world. The Imaginary is what allows the subject to experience itself as an ego, which in turn becomes the basis for its engagement with others. Through memory, the migrant subject recovers the sense of self, which then allows him or her to re-establish a connection with the world.

As demonstrated by Benyamin's novel, memory is a powerful tool for engaging with the Imaginary. For Najeeb, it allows him to recall the most precious moments of his life, to re-live them in the present and derive strength from them. He remembers people and places, but most of all he remembers how his life used to be. The memories are not random, however – they are largely linked to personal relationships and the familiar environment. The protagonist remembers the faces of his wife and his parents, but he also remembers his home and the environment in which he used to live. By re-visiting them, he re-establishes the sense of self, which then empowers him to withstand the conditions of the desert. The following excerpt encapsulates the function memory serves for the protagonist:

"I would close my eyes and see her face, and at that moment I was not in the desert. I was home, I was myself again" (Benyamin 118).

The excerpt demonstrates how the memories of familiar people and places function as gateways to the Imaginary for the protagonist. The recollection of his beloved Sainu's image allows him to re-establish the sense of self and, by extension, his place in the world. In a very real sense, the memories enable him to access the Imaginary realm and subsequently free himself from the Real, at least for a short while. By engaging with his memories of home, which are deeply intertwined with the sense of self, Najeeb is able to momentarily detach himself from the desert and the conditions of his servitude.

The memories are, for the protagonist, the most powerful source of solace and recovery, and they are linked to his desire in a most fascinating way. Specifically, the *Objet petit a* framework conceptualizes the migrant's desire as being invested in one particular object, namely the familiar environment he has left behind. This object has become the lost cause for the migrant, a cause that continues to haunt him throughout his ordeal. As the philosopher Slavoj Žižek notes, the lost object, as the object-cause of desire, is what the subject subsequently wishes to re-acquire (45). In many ways, the protagonist's memories of home and his desire for them converge to form the most powerful source of solace and reassurance. They allow him to momentarily forget the harsh realities of the desert and feel as if he is home again.

By accessing the Imaginary through memory, the protagonist is able to fulfill his desire for home. More specifically, the memories act as a replacement for the lost object, enabling him to continue existing in the present. The recollection of familiar people, places, and environments allows him to momentarily transfer himself there and experience the joy he feels every time he is at home. In essence, the memories act as fantastical scenarios for the subject, wherein the lost cause has not yet been lost. As a way to escape the present and cope with the difficulties of the present, the memories of home enable the protagonist to momentarily forget about the desert and instead engage with the familiar.

The function of memory for the migrant protagonist is also closely linked to the concept of recognition. Specifically, one of the most crucial functions of memory is to enable the subject to recognize familiar objects and people. One such object is, for Najeeb, the Malayalam language, which allows him to identify himself as a Keralite. When he encounters the fellow migrant worker Ibrahim Khadri, he is able to engage with him on a personal level, recognizing him as someone similar to himself. The interaction with another Malayalam speaker is vital for the protagonist, as it helps him to re-establish his sense of self as a Keralite (Lacan, "Mirror Stage" 75-81). By being able to communicate with him, he is able to recognize another Keralite, which reinforces his understanding of himself as such. In a very real sense, the recognition of the other allows the protagonist to strengthen his sense of self as well as his desire for home. By remembering his native tongue and conversing with another Malayalam speaker, he feels closer to his native land and the familiar environment he used to inhabit.

Narration as Symbolic Reconstitution: Writing Against the Real

One more aspect of the text to be explored through the lens of Lacan's psychoanalysis is the very act of narration. Najeeb's story is told retrospectively, and the author's emphasis on the storyteller's position after his return to Kerala suggests that it is an act of utmost importance to him. It will be argued below that *Goat Days*'s very narration is an embodiment of the return to the Symbolic.

To begin with, it is necessary to note that for Lacan, narration always implies a certain return to the Symbolic. The act of narration presupposes that the narrator has succeeded in transforming the Real into the Symbolic, presenting it in a form amenable to representation with the help of signifiers (Lacan, *Écrits* 264-268). According to Cathy Caruth, it is exactly the irreducibility of traumatic experience to representation that makes trauma "unclaimed experience," while the traumatic subject's relentless attempts to represent it testify to his or her desire to assimilate it to the Real (Caruth 4-8). In other words, while trauma resists being incorporated into the Symbolic due to its fundamentally Real character, the traumatic subject nonetheless insists on being able to narrate it. The very fact of narration is thus a sign of the subject's return to the Symbolic.

This idea can be used to analyze Benyamin's choice of an autobiographical novel form. As *Goat Days*'s plot unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that its narration is deliberately restrained and straightforward. These choices can be understood as attempts to depict the harsh reality of the desert as realistically as possible. At the same time, the entire narration of *Goat Days*, with its pauses, repetitions, and reiterations, is an attempt to overcome this reality's irrepresentability. In

particular, by repeatedly interrupting the narrative flow to describe Sainu and the events in the desert, Najeeb seeks to symbolize his return to the Symbolic through the act of narration to reconstitute his fragmented self.

It is no accident that the frame design of *Goat Days* stipulates that the story is not only told by Najeeb. As the author's introduction states, *Goat Days* is the result of a dialogue between "the author" and the protagonist, who narrates it. The author's account of his experience mirrors the real-life discourse of migrant labor, which always assumes the form of a dialogue between migrants and their employers, a potentially exploitative relationship in which one partner holds the power to decide the other's future. In this light, *Goat Days*'s framing becomes an illustration of how the migrant subject is returned to the Symbolic through dialogue as a fundamentally social act. More specifically, by virtue of presenting Najeeb's story as a dialogue between himself and "the author," Benyamin shows that its narration makes the protagonist return to the Symbolic. The very act of narration becomes the medium through which Najeeb reclaims his lost subjectivity.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *Goat Days* is a novel about migration and its drastic effects on the self, which is why it is so fascinating to analyze it through the lens of psychoanalysis. As this essay hopes to have shown, Najeeb Muhammad's harrowing story of surviving three years in the desert is not only a depiction of the struggle to stay physically alive but also a description of the subject's efforts to maintain a connection to the Symbolic and re-establish it once it has been lost. The protagonist of *Goat Days* manages to survive because he engages his mental capacities to keep himself cohesive, using memory as an anchor to the past, home, and a functioning subjectivity. The real desert in which he finds himself is the desert of the Real, the space where the subject's perceptions become detached from anything familiar, transforming the everyday environment into something alien. However, the very fact of narration allows the protagonist to conquer this desert, with words serving as instruments of rebirth and the creation of a new subjectivity.

It is also important to note that the theoretical framework used in this essay to examine *Goat Days* adds another layer of meaning to Benyamin's work. On the one hand, it allows for a deeper understanding of the protagonist's struggles from the psychological perspective. On the other hand, by appealing to the psychoanalytic discourse, the analysis below also highlights the uniqueness of the migrant experience. In the context of the migrant literature, *Goat Days* serves to remind the reader that behind every migrant there is a subject with a mind, consciousness, and unique history. In other words, by analyzing migrant literature through the lens of psychoanalysis, one is better able to grasp both the migrant's desire for a better life and the exploitation he or she is subjected to, which forms the basis of his or her desire.

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DABEER SI/KTT/12**REMEMBERING LAKE KOLLERU: AN ECO-CRITICAL STUDY OF
COLLECTIVE GRIEF IN THE ECO-MEMOIR BY AKKINENI
KUTUMABARAO****RUBINA**PhD Candidate, Senior Research Fellow
Department of English, University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

Softly Dies a Lake by Akkineni Kutumbarao is a Telugu eco-memoir that captures the environmental devastation and cultural transformations surrounding Lake Kolleru in Andhra Pradesh. Through the fictionalized childhood of the author Kutumbarao, from the autobiographical character of Seenu, who grows up playing in and near the Lake, the narrative traces a coming-of-age not only for Seenu but also for Kolleru; a transition from the symbiotic, thriving, life-sustaining ecosystems to a depleted and polluted entity, exploited to near death. A eulogy of the social life of the Lake Kolleru - the book delves into the eco-nostalgia of a lost bio-entity, a loss of space, and the extensive grief over losing a member of the human and other-than-human community. The ecological entity and personal memory are woven with the growth of social life that can be explored as what Glenn Albrecht calls solastalgia - homesickness for an environment that has been changed due to anthropogenic activities. This paper proposes to explore the novel's structure and complicated storytelling by dividing it into three stages: the symbiotic relationship between the human and the other-than-human, the exploitation of the lake, the degradation driven by capitalist greed and aggressive aquaculture, and the solastalgia of collective grief that yearns to restore the dying lake. Exploring the concept of eco-nostalgia with the help of Olivia Angé and David Berliner's conception of the same and the articulation of slow violence by Rob Nixon, this paper draws on the novel to capture the gradual, often invisible process of ecological loss, resisting both utopian restoration and apocalyptic despair. Additionally, the paper examines the role of eco-nostalgia as a tool for reimagining human-nature relationships, proposing that the memories of past ecological care can inspire future environmental stewardship in the localized space and personalized timescale. The paper demonstrates that *Softly Dies a Lake* invites readers to reflect on their relationship with altered ecosystems, offering fiction as a space to confront collective grief and rethink environmental responsibility in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Solastalgia, Slow Violence, Lake Kolleru, Eco-memoir/Environmental Memory, Symbiosis

Kolleti Jadalō is a novel originally written in Telugu by Akkineni Kutumbarao. It is translated by Vasanth Kannabiran into English and thus titled *Softly Dies a Lake*, which accurately reflects the thematic and narrative foci of the book. The novel is a literary and fictionalized account of Kutumbarao's childhood, village, and all the people in it. It recounts life in Pulaparru and other villages and other

villages surrounded by Lake Kolleru through the eyes of a five-year-old Seenu. Seenu or Sirinivasa Rao is an autobiographical representation of Kutumbarao's childhood, and it is through an omnipresent narrator that readers get to experience life in Kolleru but through the lived experiences of Seenu - a young boy of the *Kammadoras* (the farmers' community). The novel represents the lives of the villagers and their vulnerability connected and linked to the fate of the lake Kolleru. Following a transition from the symbiotic, thriving, life-sustaining ecosystems to a depleted and polluted entity, exploited to near death, much like the vulnerable humans who surround it. The experiences of Seenu of fishing, catching cranes, devouring jaggery, going to the cinema, and living through a flood are part of the reflections on the past by an aged Sirinivasa Rao who reflects on the degraded state of Kolleru as he reminisces about the idyllic past of the now-exploited lake. As he wonders:

Where had that lakeshore gone? The Kolleru bank? Where was the huge stream of those days? Those myriad streams that flowed along? Along with the lake they had breached its banks, extending the fish tanks beyond the homes of the villagers. Where were those vibrant waters flowing majestically across several hundred acres, carrying twenty-five boats and hundreds of palm rafts with ease? (Kutumbarao 1)

Kalpana Kannabiran in the foreword of the book writes, "Akkinenni Kutumbarao offers this story as an ecological memoir (or eco-memoir)" (IX). It is essentially different from the autobiographical recollection of the self. Memoir, by definition, emphasizes "not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed" (Abrams 30). Kutumbarao focuses on the life of Kolleru, tracing the coming-of-age of the lake. The categorization of the book as a memoir underscores a nostalgic indulgence, but naming it "ecological memoir" serves a manifold purpose for it centralizes the ecology and, by extension, the ecological entities as the locus of the narrative. The Lake, at the beginning of the story, in Seenu's childhood, is the primary marker of social identities and a determinant of interpersonal relationships. The villages consisted of two communities: *Kammadoras* (farmers) and *Vaddis* (fishers). Both communities lived in harmony, apart from a subtle indication of caste-based division; Kutumbarao never explicitly shows the tension due to it, but a relationship of co-dependency. Ultimately, both communities were equally dependent on Kolleru for their survival. The subversion of the anthropocentric lens in telling the story points towards Kutumbarao's willingness to mimic the symbiotic relationship of the Kolleru and the people around it. As the book opens, Rao is reminiscing about his childhood in his old age, standing at the bank of Kolleru, mourning the collective loss of a bio-entity, the loss of identities, and the loss of community - the state of the lake parallels his own frail body, which is compared to a broken mirror. "Shards of the twice-broken mirror evoke fragments of memory of a time long gone" (Kannabiran X). The comparison of Kolleru's pre-commercialized and post-commercialized states mirrors the naive Seenu and the aged Sirinivasa Rao respectively.

Softly Dies a Lake includes both the past and the present. Although the novel does not have a chronology but a pastiche serialization of the events, it can be divided

into four stages; Firstly, the idyllic, symbiotic memory of harmonious yet chaotic co-existence. Secondly, the slow ecocidal violence on the nonhumans for the capitalistic greed. Thirdly, the degraded ecology that prompts “solastalgia” and a deep longing for the first stage (Albrecht 17). Lastly, the affective stage of grief and mourning may promote a restoration and a willingness to provide care. The ecological entity and personal memory woven with the growth of social life can be explored as what Glenn Albrecht calls *solastalgia* - homesickness for an environment changed due to anthropogenic activities. The novel’s structure and complicated storytelling can be divided into three stages if the sole consideration is the memory of the protagonist: the symbiotic relationship between the human and the other-than-human, the exploitation of the wetland, and degradation driven by capitalist greed and aggressive aquaculture, and the *solastalgia* of collective grief that yearns to restore the dying lake. Exploring the concept of eco-nostalgia with the help of Olivia Angé and David Berliner’s conception of the same, where the position of nostalgia is not mere indulgence with a human memory and its selective recollection, the novel captures the gradual, often invisible process of *ecoprecarity*, resisting both utopian restoration and apocalyptic despair.

The book can be studied in the four stages from the perspective of ‘ecos’ and ‘ecological’ rather than ‘bios’ alone: first — the symbiotic coexistence, second — the slow ecocide in the *Capitalocene*, third — the degraded stage evoking solastalgia, and fourth — the grief and a longing for restoration. The book begins with the first stage of harmonious and symbiotic memory of co-existence with the lake. A memory that is spatial, temporal, and sensorial - the features unique to econostalgia as illustrated by Agné and Berliner. The novel is called a “memoir”; it can be argued that it is rather an “eco-memoir” - privileging the ecological memory that extends itself beyond the romantic recollection of human experiences. *Softly Dies a Lake* offers an account of the intermingled relationship of humans and more-than-humans with the land, the lake, the village, the canal, and the islands. This is where Seenu’s ‘eco- nostalgia’ or memories serve as a powerful emotional register of ecological loss.

As far as the eyes could see Kolleru was full of greenery, grasses, bulrushes, fragrant flowering shrubs, and a wealth of other wild green weeds and colourful flowers swaying in the breeze... There were so many birds chirping and circling the sky and creating a hullabaloo. The air was filled with the sounds of children minding the herds and calling out and warning each other. (Kutumbarao 4, 5)

The author first introduces the Kolleru’s harmonious and chaotic ecosystem and then proceeds to document the life of the villagers who surround it. By no means is this memoir a romanticized account of an idyllic life in a utopian setting of a community-based livelihood on an ever-providing geo-entity, but it is an account of life and relationships full of hardships and challenges. Kolleru, of Seenu’s past, was not a passive topography that stands to be exploited but a part of communion. Kolleru provided for the buffaloes, birds, fishes, and the children. While the children knew about the *Peddagundam* (deep end) and *Chinnagundam* (shallow end) of the lake, they knew about the plants, islands, and animals that cohabited the lake. While grazing their herds, they were mindful of leeches, snakes, and the

comfort of their herds. Kolleru fed them with lotus, while buffaloes grazed on the water plant, and the birds rode on their backs to catch fish. Kolleru of Rao's childhood was a "biome and giome" of co-habitation, interdependency, and a community sustained on mutual care. The enmeshment with nature, in this stage, was not of ownership but that of entanglement and enmeshment:

But not just humans, even the dogs who passed that way were "our dogs", the crows that fell in front were "our crows", and the sparrows that collected twittering on the front platform were "our sparrows". There was nothing in nature that was not "our" to him. (28)

In this context, the memories of Kolleru that Rao narrates become slightly more than the metaphor of a lost lake: they become the metaphor of the collective loss of nature: the human and the non-human. Kutumbarao attempts to exhibit the living, flowing Kolleru with agency as a challenging but inevitable part of life. Kolleru flowed and flooded and took over the entire villages - the flood, too, was part of the culture, tradition, and livelihood of the communities that surrounded the lake. As Kutumbarao writes, "The Kolleru that had set people quaking for four days began to recede on the fifth... On the seventh day, the water in the houses and the streets receded and left the village full of slush... This year's harvest had gone completely to Kolleru"

Softly Dies a Lake acutely captures the anthropogenic effects of 1970s commercial aquafarming in India's biggest freshwater lake. As Rao painfully questions the new reality, "How did Kolleru grow so polluted? When I was young we used to drink water from our pond. We used to drink water from Kolleru. Today that water is unfit to drink and people have to get drinking water from Kaikaluru. How did the water get so polluted?" (Kutumbarao 194). The documentation of the history of this geo-entity and bio-entity, Kolleru, from its splendor to its fall is an exceptional example of a realistic literary representation of the Anthropocene. An article published by Earth Journalism Network in 2022 reported local testimonies: "When lake water isn't available, locals can access groundwater, which in many cases is just 10 to 15 feet underground. But that water is degraded and not fit for drinking, said Krishna Raju Bale, a local resident who works at one of the fish farms" (Mondol). The biologists hold the government policies of aggressively promoting aquaculture for the "Blue Revolution" responsible for enabling the local greed, and the unsustainable capitalistic exploitation of the lake.

The Anthropocene era or epoch is defined by geologists as the epoch of anthropogenic impact on the environment, resulting in issues like climate change and global warming and posing a threat to lives on the planet. The Anthropocene, co-opted by the humanities, has made the discourse(s) related to environmental concern highlight the relationship between humans and nonhumans, instead of the devastation and exploitation of the latter by the former. Along with the revisions of the existing fiction through the lens of care, such discourses have seeped into the literary imagination and have led to a proliferation in literary genres which range from cautious optimism to apocalyptic futurism. Adam Trexler calls the fiction that captures the essence, impact, and repercussions of climate change the Anthropocene Fiction. *Softly Dies a Lake* is an example of Anthropocene fiction. However, it neither resorts to a utopian, idyllic restoration of an imaginary ecology

nor an apocalyptic future without any traces of nature; it rightly and realistically captures the Anthropocene and the impact of human activities on the environment in the present day. "Today Kolleru remains merely a beautiful and sweet memory and a tragedy for them that is all" (Kutumbarao 197).

As an Anthropocene or climate fiction, *Softly Dies a Lake* captures what many climate fictions fail to do- a "slowly unfolding environmental catastrophe" (Nixon 2). While apocalyptic futurism dominates the genre of climate fiction (cli-fli), Kutumbarao draws on his own lived experiences and moves away from the story world of science fiction centered on impending doom. As Amitav Ghosh writes, "the future is but one aspect of the Anthropocene: this era also includes the recent past, and, most significantly, the present", realistic narratives like the novel become essential to situate the climate change in the present imagination (72).

The account of people inhabiting and living alongside a lake with its resourceful Nature and exercising its control over people's lives creates a symbiotic relationship. By disidentifying with the impulse towards non-commercialized Nature in the past, this non-idealized eco-memoir troubles the concept of nostalgia itself and offers a way of thinking about human and non-human relationships, which are inherently enmeshed, drawing on some of the ideas in Timothy Morton's *Ecological Thought*, of "interconnectedness through the mesh" (qtd. Griffiths 326). This nostalgia restores a world of Seenu's childhood, which, despite its challenges, offers a connectedness with nature to humans of kinship. The nostalgia post-destruction in the novel is a melancholic urge to return to such a stage of kinship but now "all that rots further and flows into the Kolleru" (Kutumbarao 194).

Drawing from Agn  and Berliner's exploration of nostalgia in times of ecological upheaval in *Ecological Nostalgia: Memory, Affect and Creativity in Times of Ecological Upheavals*, it is therefore more than mere yearning for a previous ecological condition. Instead, it produces an affective and social relation to a lost or disappearing ecological landscape, operating as a performative and political means with which to address current environmental concerns. Attributing eco-nostalgia as a theoretical concept, it can assist in the recapturing of the affective-sensory human and social bonds of the missing ecological entities, by recalling a call of care and responsibility for the past human and nature interactions. After all, Kolleru is presented as no less than a sentient being in the novel. The experiences of people with the lake engaged all of their senses - bathing in it, fishing, cooking the fish, catching cranes, traveling in boats on its surface, and rubbing its dirt on kids and buffaloes alike (Kutumbarao 89).

The novel ends with a poignant reflection on people's actions, a painful realization of guilt, and a sense of loss shared by both Radhakrishna and Sirinivasa Rao as they realize that Kolleru has "vanished" and grieved "the enormity of the natural bounty that was destroyed with it forever" (Kutumbarao 196). Thinking about future generations, the writer calls the destruction of Kolleru "one of the catastrophes of history" while posing the important question, "A human error that impoverished their lives immeasurably. Made it unlivable. Would they ever forgive them for it? Could this wrong ever be set right? How?" (ibid).

This restoration through eco-memory is emotionally powerful, but at the same time, it has its drawbacks. Yet, it restores the lost intimacy; the lake Kolleru of Seenu's childhood is changed forever by the growth of capitalism. Such devastation of the cartography of the lake due to commercial fishing remains one of the biggest examples of the Anthropocene break – natural systems that were once integral to the community's existence are turned into commodities for the global market. Nevertheless, the potential offered by eco-nostalgia is couched in its ability to point to the relational ethics of the world as it was before the beginning of the Anthropocene epoch and thereby encourage people to develop such a sensibility. The narrative becomes a locus of memory that invites the reader to think through what is right and wrong in humans' relations to the environment and may inspire an attempt to renew the disappearing or utterly forgotten ecological beings.

As Kannabiran concludes in the foreword, "The violence endemic in capitalocene cultures that is deployed through the binary separation of human from nonhuman inflicts traumas that literary imagination endeavours to heal - in this instance by humbling the Human before the figure of a wise, free-spirited child" (XIV). Capitalocene is a term accredited to Andreas Malm since 2009, popularised and theorised by Jason W. Moore and later adopted by Donna Haraway. The term questions the 'Anthropocene' as a misnomer for something that is a direct result of a history of capitalism; though the exploration of 'Capitalocene', like Anthropocene, is quite complex, the fundamental understanding of the term highlights the consequential oppression of Nature due to the very disposition of capitalism and its political economy. As Moore succinctly writes:

For capitalism, Nature is "cheap" in a double sense: to make Nature's elements "cheap" in price; and also to cheapen, to degrade or to render inferior in an ethico-political sense, the better to make Nature cheap in price. These two moments are entwined at every moment, and in every major capitalist transformation of the past five centuries. (15-16)

Softly Dies a Lake is a documentation of the role of capital in the exploitation of nature. From a state of harmonious co-existence to aggressive aquafarming, exploiting the lake to its near death. Capitalocene, thus, accurately describes the reason behind the conditions leading up to the Anthropocene, even in the novel. Vaddis (fishers) of the community no longer fished to sell in the local markets and to make their dishes but to make a profit. The other communities also wanted a share of the aquafarming and joined to exploit as much of the lake as they could. This led to a massive depletion of water quality, biodiversity, and the ecological function of the lake. In 2013, the Ministry of Environment and Forests published the *Note on Kolleru Lake for the Study Visit of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment & Forests* and noted that "The Lake is under stress mainly due to encroachment, aquaculture activities, pollution from industrial and domestic sources and prolific growth of weeds. Problems of encroachment have also resulted in [the] deterioration of this water body" (3). Since then, there have been several awareness programs to save India's largest and Asia's largest shallow freshwater lake.

Akinnenni Kutumbarao shows the slow devastation of such practices and their impact on the communities as well. He personalizes the loss with the authorial intent to tell the story of his innocent childhood and Kolleru's state which did not require awareness and preservation programs. When Srinivasa Rao meets a Vaddi named Bhale Krishnamurthi and two others, Rao remembers fondly, "Krishnamurthi, the fish he used to bring..." (191). Rao proceeds to ask about the two Vaddi (fisher) men and their livelihood, and they share the pain of Kolleru and the pain of the marginalized who lack the amount of capital required to accumulate more capital by ruthlessly stripping away the community. Nakuludu and Sahadevudu, Vaddi men, reply to Rao:

The only work we know is catching fish. Those days we used to fish in Kolleru and sell them. Now if we catch them from the fish ponds we are paid wages and we manage to eat and feed our wives and children on that. (Kutumbarao 192)

The loss of the commons results in a threatened community, and by extension the home. They also share the sense of loss of what once was a collective resource and now is inaccessible to the poor;

Is a fish pond in Kolleru an ordinary matter? How many acres do you think each one is? Where do we have so much? (...) To dig a pond or buy a little fish and rear them one needs so much investment. Where will we get that? (192).

The vulnerable and the oppressed are pushed further into the margins with the goal of capital acquisition in the Capitalocene. Thus, this proves what Nayar's conception of "ecoprecarity" tends to explain: that the marginalization of ecology often results in the precarity in the lives of vulnerable humans, the loss of species not limited to the nonhuman (7).

The question that arises is whether writing about ecoprecarious landscapes is enough. Would the eco-memory in fiction help restore the emotional and social connection to ecological entities on the verge of disappearing? Whether the authorial intention of restoration has the possibility of materializing or not. The answer to that question is a complex one, for it demands the validation of the potency of fiction as a whole to incur grassroots changes. While not an impossible feat in itself, certainly challenging. The literature has started to highlight anthropogenic harms to the environment with a sense of caution, hope, concern, and a politics of care.

Ecobiographies have the potential to draw these emotions effectively towards the indigenous and local landscapes, from mountains to species of flora and fauna. Jessica White calls narrative such as the novel - an eco-biography. The term was first used by Cecilia Konchar Farr and Philip Snyder in an essay where they described it as "the Self's interaction with the external environment, especially Nature" and highlighted the impossibilities and difficulties of differentiating and segregating the self and the nature or 'eco' from the 'bios' (qtd. White 2). The enmeshment and communion between nature and the self is represented intricately in *Softly Dies a Lake*, so much so that the protagonist, Sirinivasa Rao's fragile, aged self sees his reflection in similarly aged and muddied Kolleru. Whereas his memory of his formative years is the memory of life around and with Kolleru.

This interdependence of humans and non-humans transcends the logic of anthropocentrism and subverts the narrative genre of biography based on the self, including “eco” not as an option or an afterthought but as an inevitable part. At the same time, the ecological memory and the politics of such accounts can be self-serving to humans because the motive of saving the environment for the next generation is not only anthropocentric but can also be debated to be counter-productive, for it necessitates the function of nature as something to be utilized by humans in the foreseeable future. Memoirs of the ecological demand a consideration of nature for the sake of the nonhuman other. Thus, the memory of the ecological entity in the spatial and temporal context of change, especially climate change, can be effectively fruitful. *Kolleti Jadelu* reaffirms the defining trait of Anthropocene fiction by moving through the temporal space made possible by the act of remembrance. Such mobile temporality, without chronology, of such a large bio-entity in terms of space and time is “intrinsically tricky” and poses a representational challenge that is made possible by eco-memory only (Morton 4). Ecobiography gestures towards the scale of deep time that is beyond a human lifespan. The Lake Kolleru as known to Seenu existed before him, and in many ways, it would continue to exist if preserved. The temporal span of a spatial entity highlights the need for a place-based history writing where nonhuman entities like lakes, rivers, mountains, flora, fauna, or fungi are afforded documentation with humans but are not limited to it. Thus, eco-biographies attempt to capture “the dissolution of boundaries between human and other-than-human, and attention to local environments and ecosystems”, while following an intentional and effective solastalgic moment in the ripple of deep geological and human history (White 2). Even in this biographical account, therefore, eco-memory can be positively understood as a tool with which to regain affective and social relations with ecological objects like Lake Kolleru. But, at the same time, it functions as an effective protest against the actions of people that resulted in the given lake’s condition. Thus, in addition to referencing a paradigm of social relations in which people and the environment coexist, the story sustains signs of a world that has perished and provides an analytical and utopian orientation for the paradigm of interaction seen as care and respect for eco-entities as sources of life that still exist in the Anthropocene. *Softly Dies a Lake* invites readers to reflect on their relationship with altered ecosystems, offering fiction as a space to confront collective grief and rethink environmental responsibility in the Anthropocene.

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DABEER SI/KTT/13**ECOLOGICAL MEMORY, GENDERED KINSHIP AND URBAN
RESILIENCE IN TOMMY ORANGE'S *THERE THERE*****PRASTUTI DEKA**

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Abstract

Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018) narrates the lives of urban Native communities in Oakland, California, as they navigate relocation, environmental racism, and cultural erasure, converging at the Big Oakland Powwow. Existing scholarship has examined the novel's polyphonic structure, its strategies of survivance, and its remapping of urban space (Gasztold; Krivokapić and Runtić; Ahmetšpahić), but has not asked how gender organises its treatment of memory and ecology. This article addresses that gap by theorising ecological memory as the embodied, relational practice through which Indigenous women transmit and enact knowledge of land, toxicity, and resilience across generations in settler-colonial urban space. Focusing on Opal Bear Shield, Jacquie Red Feather, and Blue, it argues that their labour- driving, organising, watching, remembering- works against the slow violence of colonial dispossession and concrete toxicity, without claiming that this labour resolves it. Drawing on material ecocriticism, Indigenous ecologies of reciprocity, and Native feminist scholarship, the analysis traces how these women's practices turn parts of Oakland into sites of ongoing, incomplete ecological recovery. The Big Oakland Powwow emerges as a gendered and ambivalent space of eco-reciprocity, where healing is practised and violently interrupted. Centring gender in ecological memory, the article argues that gender is a structuring, not incidental, dimension of environmental justice under settler colonialism.

Keywords: ecological memory; gendered kinship; urban Indigeneity; Indigenous women's narratives; postcolonial ecocriticism; environmental justice

Introduction

Oakland, California, is no neutral backdrop in Tommy Orange's *There There* but a palimpsest: asphalt Ohlone shellmounds and ancestral villages, while freeways, industrial zoning, and redlined neighbourhoods materialise the slow violence of settler colonialism along racial lines. This is the world the novel's urban Indians navigate daily, shaped by relocation, environmental racism, and the pressure to disappear into the city's streets. Yet the novel refuses to let them vanish: it insists that they are still here, still remembering, still finding ways to survive and heal in a place that was never meant to hold them.

The novel, *There There* by Tommy Orange, unfolds across twelve interlinked narrators whose separate storylines converge at the Big Oakland Powwow, structuring the novel as a polyphonic urban ensemble rather than a single protagonist's journey. Among these voices, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, her half-sister Jacquie Red Feather, and Blue, the powwow's young coordinator adopted out of the community as a child, anchor the strands this paper follows, alongside Dene Oxendene, Tony Loneman, and Octavio Gomez, whose differing relationships to memory, harm, and colonial violence the paper returns to later. The novel's fragmented, multi-voiced form is itself significant: it formally enacts, at the level of narrative structure, the dispersal and reconvergence of the urban Indigenous community that its content describes.

This paper argues that the women in *There There* carry a particular kind of knowledge. Through daily acts of care, stories passed across generations, and quiet resistance, Opal, Jacquie, and Blue keep alive a memory of land and relation that the city tries to bury. They do not simply remember a lost past; they transform the mail truck, the committee room, the powwow arena into sites of ongoing recovery, suggesting that memory, embodied and shared, can become one tool among others for responding to the wounds of environmental racism.

Existing scholarship on *There There* has read the novel as staging intergenerational knowledge transfer toward Indigenous futurity (Gasztold), situating it within a tradition of Native American urban narratives structured around hybridity, diaspora, and survivance (Krivokapić and Runtić), and examining how its characters construct belonging out of specific Oakland geographies (Ahmetpahić). None of these works questions how gender organises the transmission of ecological memory, or treats the novel's women as a coherent site of analysis in their own right. This paper thus addresses the narrower gap: not whether *There There* enacts survival or remaps urban space, both reasonably well established, but how the novel distributes the specific, embodied labour of remembering land, toxicity, and relation along gendered lines. Bringing together material ecocriticism, Indigenous feminist scholarship, and Indigenous ecological theory, the reading argues that ecological recovery under settler colonialism depends, in this novel, disproportionately on the labour of women who refuse to let their communities forget, and enquires what the urban, often dismissed as a space of disconnection, can become when people practise the daily, non-glamorous work of remembering.

Theoretical Framework: Braiding Material Ecocriticism and Indigenous Feminist Thought

This paper's theoretical approach is deliberately braided, following Kimmerer's metaphor of sweetgrass (5), in which three strands of grass are woven so that each strengthens the others. Material ecocriticism, as articulated by Iovino and Oppermann, provides a vocabulary for understanding how matter itself is "storied": thick with narrative agencies that actively produce meaning (448). In Orange's Oakland, concrete is not inert; it vibrates under drumbeats and holds the memory of what it tried to bury, intersecting with Kimmerer's grammar of animacy, in which pavement can be understood as a verb rather than a dead noun (49).

Indigenous feminist scholarship deepens this materialist framework by insisting on the gendered dimensions of ecological knowledge and resistance. Goeman's work on Native women remapping colonial spaces, TallBear's critique of blood quantum and insistence on relational belonging, and Simpson's theorisation of land-based resurgence together illuminate how Indigenous women's embodied practices constitute a form of ecological memory that colonial frameworks cannot fully capture. Whyte's concept of collective continuance (206) anchors the analysis by framing resilience as ongoing adaptation rather than restoration of a lost past. The article uses recovery for the incremental, unfinished work traced in individual scenes, resurgence (Simpson) for the deliberate revival of land-based practice, and continuance (Whyte) for the longer adaptive resilience these practices sustain; the terms name overlapping scales of one phenomenon rather than competing ones. Together, these frameworks let the article read Orange's novel as insisting on the centrality of women's knowledge to environmental justice while attending to the material conditions, the concrete, the toxins, the freeways, that shape urban Indigenous experience.

The paper's focus on women's narratives reflects both the novel's own emphases and the broader scholarly recognition that settler colonialism has disproportionately burdened Indigenous women as primary carriers of cultural knowledge and intergenerational memory (Goeman). This focus, however, does not foreclose attention to the gendered complexity of the novel, which includes male characters who participate in memory work through different means, as the analysis of Dene Oxendene below makes clear. Nor does it address the absence of explicitly Two-Spirit or non-binary characters, a gap that signals both the limits of the novel and an important direction for future scholarship.

The City as Storied Matter: Environmental Racism and Gendered Embodied Experience

Oakland in *There There* is a palimpsest where layers of asphalt and concrete cover Ohlone shellmounds and ancestral villages. Concrete absorbs "our heaviness" and functions as storied matter, an agentic substance thick with narrative agencies that actively produces configurations of meaning (Iovino and Oppermann 448). Freeways, refineries, and redlined neighbourhoods materialise the slow violence of settler colonialism, distributing ecological burdens along racial lines. Rob Nixon's formulation of slow violence as incremental, attritional harm (2) helps explain how diesel exhaust, lead paint, and contaminated soil accumulate in bodies across generations, yet his framework tends to present harm as undifferentiated and harm-receiving communities as passive. Orange's novel challenges this by revealing that slow violence is gendered and that Indigenous women actively respond to it through embodied practices of memory and care, operating in a different temporality altogether: an endurance and transmission that refuses to be measured by the same clock.

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield drives a mail truck through Oakland's streets every day, her route shaped by freeway construction and industrial zoning. The heat on her skin, the exhaust in her lungs, the constant navigation of spaces designed without regard for those who once belonged to the land, register environmental racism on a woman's body: the vibration of the steering wheel, the

metallic taste of exhaust, the visual reminder of overpasses built atop buried shellmounds.

Orange renders Opal's daily ritual with quiet insistence: every time she gets into her mail truck, she checks the rearview mirror and finds her own gaze looking back at her across the years (45). The habitual repetition marks the action as ritual rather than incidental habit; the gaze that finds her "through the years" creates a temporal layering in which the present carries the weight of matrilineal history, including her mother Vicky's activism on Alcatraz. Opal's body becomes a porous interface (Alaimo 16) where environmental toxins and historical trauma meet; her trans-corporeal body does not simply contain the city's poisons, it metabolises them and responds through the ritual of looking back.

Yet this interface does not simply register harm. By keeping watch over her "Indian way" grandsons Orvil, Looter, and Lony, whom she raises though she is not their biological grandmother, Opal ensures that stories of relation survive even when the land itself has been paved over, transforming the concrete route from a site of slow violence into a terrain of care. The rearview mirror lets her see what is behind while moving forward, an apt image of the ecological memory the novel develops, its reflective surface a threshold between past and present.

A habit dulls harm by making it unremarkable; a ritual keeps harm visible while refusing to let it have the last word. Opal's rearview glance re-inserts her mother's history and her grandsons' future into a route colonial planning designed to erase both; that re-insertion, rather than the driving itself, is what licenses calling the ritual ecological recovery rather than simple endurance. The same test applies to Jacquie's and Blue's narratives below, and the article returns to its limits, where recovery meets violence it cannot fully contain, in the discussion of the powwow shooting.

Gendered Ecological Memory: Opal, Jacquie and Blue as Archives of Relation

Ecological memory in *There There* is carried most powerfully through women's intergenerational storytelling and relational labour. Opal, raised with her half-sister Jacquie by a mother active in the Alcatraz occupation, embodies matrilineal stewardship. She functions as an "Indian way" grandmother to Orvil, Looter, and Lony: though not their biological grandmother, Indigenous kinship practices position her as the one who transmits stories of removal, resilience, and land relations. Her quiet vigilance at the powwow, watching from the second deck so she can see without being seen, enacts memory work that refuses the colonial script of Indigenous disappearance. Opal's rearview ritual becomes a small, private ceremony of ecological memory, exemplifying what Simpson describes as land-based resurgence in everyday urban acts, and embodying the relational belonging TallBear emphasises: belonging through practice and care rather than biological criteria alone.

Jacquie's arc rewards closer attention. Her return to Oakland is shadowed by two losses the novel keeps carefully distinct: the daughter she raised, who died by suicide, and the daughter she did not raise, conceived when Harvey, then a trusted figure in her activist community, assaulted her as a teenager during the Alcatraz years, and given up for adoption. Reading these losses together clarifies why

Jacquie's sobriety scene at the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting is more than a generic recovery narrative: when she declares her sobriety aloud and traces its origin to Alcatraz, she re-links a private wound to the specific colonial and gendered violence that produced it. This act of narrative reclamation parallels ecological recovery as defined above: it does not undo the harm, but it refuses to let the harm dictate what comes next. Jacquie's return to Oakland after decades away is itself a spatial act, retracing a geography she left under duress and re-entering it sober. Reading through a Native feminist lens, her return remaps the city as a site of potential maternal repair rather than terminal loss (Goeman), even though, as the discussion of *Blue* shows, that repair remains partial and interrupted rather than complete.

Blue's storyline deserves the same granularity. Raised outside the community by an adoptive family, Blue comes to Oakland to find her way back, and her choice to chair the powwow committee is itself a form of memory work: checking the safe holding the prize money, tracking grants and volunteer schedules, is not incidental bureaucratic detail but the unglamorous, procedural labour through which a fragile inheritance gets physically staged into being. Her hybrid position as insider and outsider to her heritage mirrors the urban Indigenous condition, yet demonstrates that hybridity does not necessarily mean disconnection.

When Harvey introduces Blue to Jacquie moments before the shooting erupts, the novel refuses her the recognition scene that adoption narratives conventionally supply: no embrace, no explanation, only a silent, suspended recognition that the gunfire immediately interrupts and that the hospital waiting room, afterwards, never resolves into words. In the context of the paper's larger argument, that refusal is itself significant: ecological and kinship recovery in the novel is never allowed to complete itself cleanly. The moment nonetheless registers as more than personal shock, a severed kinship becoming visible as part of a larger web of interdependence that includes land, place, and community. TallBear's emphasis on relational belonging beyond blood or genetics resonates here: Blue's return enacts kinship as practice rather than biology alone, even where that kinship remains, at the novel's end, unresolved.

Acknowledging the complexity of gender in the novel requires attention to how male characters also participate in this memory work, even if their roles differ and are less central to it: Orvil learns traditional dances through YouTube, echoing Simpson's everyday resurgence, and Tony Loneman carries the visible mark of fetal alcohol syndrome, a bodily inscription of colonial violence. Dene Oxendene's documentary project is the clearest counter-example to any simple claim that memory-keeping is women's work in this novel: setting out to record Native Oaklanders telling their own stories, explicitly in memory of his uncle, Dene performs oral-history work continuous with what this article calls ecological memory, collecting testimony as a way of keeping relation alive against the city's pressure to erase it. His labour is better described by saying that memory-keeping in the novel is unevenly distributed in terms of gender rather than being exclusive to women.

Yet the narrative suggests that the sustained, relational holding of community remains disproportionately borne by women, reflecting both cultural continuity in

matrilineal practices and colonial policies that disrupted Indigenous gender systems while imposing new caregiving burdens on women (Goeman). The powwow shooting, in which men are both perpetrators and victims, complicates any simple division: the novel shows gender as a contested terrain shaped by both tradition and colonial imposition rather than easy essentialism.

Taken together, the three women's stories constitute a shared archive rather than three separate cases. Opal's steady guardianship, Jacquie's narrative reclamation, and Blue's organisational labour interweave, each depending on and extending the others, to refuse the city's attempt to fragment Indigenous presence. This structure answers Schmidt and Patterson's call to treat land as a member of the collective (3): the women do not simply remember the land; they carry its memory in their bodies, their stories, and their daily acts of care, keeping ecological relation alive in a place designed to sever it. Their labour suggests that ecological memory in urban Indigenous contexts is an active, gendered practice of world-making that sustains collective continuance (Whyte 206) even when formal sovereignty remains out of reach, and even when, as the next section shows, that world-making is violently interrupted.

The Powwow as a Gendered Site of Eco-Reciprocity, Healing and Ambivalence

The Big Oakland Powwow crystallises the novel's vision of gendered ecological memory in action. Eco-reciprocity, understood here as the mutual, ongoing exchange between human and more-than-human communities that acknowledges interdependence and obligates care, operates at the powwow as a practice of relation that neither seeks to restore a pristine past nor accepts the given terms of colonial damage. Unlike environmental justice, which focuses on equitable distribution of harms and benefits, eco-reciprocity emphasises giving back to the land and community that sustain life, even when that land is paved and that community is fractured. Kimmerer's sweetgrass braiding (5) offers a precise framework: concrete, blood, plastic beads, eagle feathers, drumbeats, and human bodies are drawn into a living relationship of reciprocity, exemplifying storied matter (Iovino and Oppermann 448). The powwow is not a nostalgic return but an adaptive resurgence, enacting an ethic of the Honourable Harvest (Kimmerer 175): offering songs, dances, and presence, taking the stories needed, giving thanks with every step on the petroleum-laced carpet.

The novel supplies its own language for this reciprocity: the narrator figures the disparate reasons that brought everyone to the powwow as messy, dangling strands of individual lives pulled into a single braid (Orange 289), echoing Kimmerer's sweetgrass and Three Sisters garden (148), where corn, beans, and squash sustain one another in a polycultural logic. In the concrete coliseum, the intertribal gathering becomes an urban analogue, each participant's gift strengthening the whole against the monocultural logic of colonial extraction.

Gender shapes this reciprocity in concrete ways. Women organise, remember, and hold space. Blue coordinates logistics and money, leading committee meetings; Opal watches over her grandsons with fierce protectiveness, her gaze from the second deck a form of guardianship linking past and future; Jacquie's arrival signals the possibility of maternal repair across the rupture of adoption and

addiction. The drum circle, where steady beats absorb the arena's echoes, vibrates through concrete and bodies alike, enacting a kin relationality that extends interdependence to more-than-human elements: the concrete floor carries sound and memory outward, refusing the colonial attempt to render land silent and inert. Yet the powwow ends in gunfire. The shooting kills and injures multiple characters and shatters the gathering. Importantly, the violence is not reducible to a single perpetrator: it emerges from the convergence of several young men with distinct, though overlapping, relationships to colonial harm. Tony Loneman, whose fetal alcohol syndrome is itself a bodily inheritance of the slow violence discussed earlier, brings a gun to the powwow out of his own entanglement with Charles and Carlos. Octavio's plan to rob the prize money, made possible by his cousin Daniel Gonzales's home-printed guns and carried out against the backdrop of Octavio's own losses, his mother and brother killed in a car accident caused by his uncle, turns a space of communal reciprocity into a target. Reading these strands together resists two temptations that a single-perpetrator account invites: treating the shooting as one man's individual pathology, which would let the novel's larger argument about structural harm off the hook, and treating it as an undifferentiated eruption of generic male violence, which would flatten the gendered specificity this article has tried to bring to the women's chapters. Each young man's route to the shooting is shaped by a distinct wound, and the novel asks its readers to hold those differences rather than collapse them into a single figure.

This convergence reveals that gendered ecological memory, however powerful, cannot alone undo the violence colonialism has produced, particularly among Indigenous men who have been denied traditional roles and offered few alternatives to precarity and armed self-reliance. The women's labour of organising and holding space creates the conditions for healing, but it does not, and in the novel's own terms cannot, control what emerges from wounds that specific, differently damaged men carry into that space. This is not a failure of the women's memory work; it is what happens when ecological recovery, however sustained, meets harms that were more than it could contain or bear.

The novel offers no tidy resolution and does not portray the shooting as undoing the powwow's healing work: dancers rise amid fading gunfire, breaths sync in the inconclusive aftermath. This ambivalence qualifies, rather than undermines, the preceding vision of eco-reciprocity. The women's prior labour has created resilient threads that allow some to persist, even as the violence underscores that ecological memory and gendered kinship do not offer romantic or complete healing; as Whyte's collective continuance (206) insists, resilience is an ongoing adaptation, not restoration of a lost past. The novel thus refuses settler closure, offering a survival narrative (Vizenor) in which the braid of reciprocity persists even when frayed and must also reckon with intra-community wounds rooted in colonial violence.

Conclusion

The paper has tried to demonstrate something more precise than the general claim that *There There* depicts resilience. It shows that the labour of ecological memory, driving a mail route, establishing one's sobriety aloud, chairing a powwow

committee, is not evenly distributed, and that attention to this distribution alters what counts as environmental justice in the novel's world. Reading these acts together, rather than treating any single woman's story as representative of the others, distinguishes the present argument from readings that foreground survivance or urban space without asking who specifically performs the labour of remembering.

The reading offered here does not claim that women's memory work heals the community. The Big Oakland Powwow shooting stages a violence that this labour neither prevents nor fully explains. Examining that violence through Tony Loneman's and Octavio's separate relationships to colonial harm, rather than compressing it into a single perpetrator, forms part of the paper's insistence that recovery remains necessarily incomplete rather than a narrative resolution.

Two implications follow. First, for postcolonial ecocriticism, slow violence (Nixon) and material agency (Iovino and Oppermann) require a gendered account of who performs the labour of response, not only of who suffers the harm. Second, for Indigenous urban studies, survival is not gender-neutral: the specific practices that keep a community present in a city built to erase it are carried unevenly, though not exclusively, by women.

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DABEER SI/KTT/14**RECONSTRUCTING HUMANITY: ECO-MEMORY AND CULTURAL RESILIENCE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S MADDADDAM TRILOGY****S. NANDHINI**

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, comprising *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), presents a compelling vision of a world devastated by ecological collapse, corporate exploitation, and biotechnological excess. Situated within contemporary debates in ecocriticism and ecofeminism, the trilogy interrogates the consequences of humanity's estrangement from nature while simultaneously envisioning possibilities for renewal and survival. This paper examines the concepts of eco-memory and cultural resilience as central narrative strategies through which Atwood reimagines the reconstruction of humanity in a post-apocalyptic landscape. Eco-memory, understood as the preservation and transmission of ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, and collective experiences of the natural world, emerges as a vital resource for survival in the aftermath of catastrophe. Through storytelling, oral traditions, communal remembrance, and the preservation of ecological consciousness, the surviving human and posthuman communities negotiate new forms of identity and belonging. The study argues that memory in the trilogy functions not merely as a recollection of a lost past but as an active force that enables cultural continuity, ethical responsibility, and ecological recovery. By foregrounding the interconnectedness of humans, non-human beings, and the environment, Atwood challenges anthropocentric models of progress and proposes alternative modes of coexistence grounded in care, sustainability, and collective responsibility. Ultimately, the trilogy suggests that cultural resilience is inseparable from ecological awareness and that the future of humanity depends upon its capacity to remember, reinterpret, and reconnect with the natural world. The paper contributes to postcolonial ecocritical scholarship by demonstrating how Atwood transforms memory into a powerful framework for cultural survival and environmental renewal.

Keywords: Eco-Memory, Cultural Resilience, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Environmental Humanities

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented convergence of ecological crises that have fundamentally altered humanity's relationship with the

natural world. Accelerating climate change, mass biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources have collectively exposed the fragility of ecosystems and the limitations of anthropocentric models of development. Scientists increasingly describe the present era as the Anthropocene, a geological epoch in which human activities have become the dominant force shaping the Earth's ecological systems. While technological advancement and industrial expansion have contributed significantly to economic progress, they have simultaneously intensified ecological instability, raising urgent questions about environmental responsibility, sustainability, and the future of human civilization. In this context, literature has emerged as a vital cultural space for examining environmental crises, imagining alternative futures, and challenging dominant narratives of human exceptionalism.

Ecocritical scholarship has increasingly recognised literature not merely as a reflection of environmental realities but as an active participant in shaping ecological consciousness. Through speculative imagination, literary narratives expose the social, political, and ethical consequences of environmental exploitation while encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the more-than-human world. Environmental fiction, particularly speculative and dystopian narratives, has become an important medium for exploring the long-term implications of climate change, genetic engineering, corporate capitalism, and ecological collapse. Rather than presenting distant fantasies, these narratives extrapolate contemporary environmental anxieties into plausible futures, compelling readers to confront the consequences of present ecological choices. Consequently, literature functions as a repository of ecological memory, preserving environmental values and cultural knowledge that remain essential for imagining sustainable modes of existence.

Among contemporary writers, Margaret Atwood occupies a distinctive position for her sustained engagement with environmental degradation, biotechnology, and the ethical dilemmas of scientific progress. Although frequently associated with speculative fiction, Atwood herself characterises her works as speculative rather than science fiction because they are grounded in technologies and social conditions that are already conceivable within contemporary society. Her *MaddAddam* trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—constructs a post-apocalyptic world devastated by ecological destruction, corporate greed, and unchecked biotechnological experimentation. The trilogy portrays not only the collapse of modern civilization but also the gradual emergence of new forms of multispecies coexistence that challenge conventional understandings of humanity, nature, and survival. Through its interwoven narratives, Atwood examines how environmental catastrophe is deeply interconnected with social inequality, capitalist exploitation, and the commodification of both human and non-human life.

Rather than interpreting the trilogy solely as a dystopian warning about ecological collapse, this study approaches it as a narrative of reconstruction. While the destruction of civilization forms the backdrop of the trilogy, its central concern lies in the possibilities of rebuilding ethical relationships among humans, non-human beings, and the environment. This reconstruction depends not upon

technological innovation or political institutions but upon the preservation of ecological knowledge, collective remembrance, and cultural practices that enable survivors to re-establish meaningful connections with the natural world. Memory, therefore, becomes more than a record of a lost civilisation; it functions as a living ecological resource that shapes identity, guides ethical action, and sustains communal resilience in the aftermath of catastrophe.

Eco-Memory as an Ecological Archive

The silence that settles over the post-apocalyptic world of the *MaddAddam* trilogy is not created by the disappearance of human civilization alone. It is deepened by the gradual erosion of ecological memory. Long after species have vanished and landscapes have been transformed beyond recognition, traces of the old world continue to survive in memory, waiting to be recalled before they too disappear. Atwood's devastated landscape is therefore inhabited not only by the remnants of life but also by memories struggling against extinction. Survival depends not merely upon biological endurance but upon preserving the ecological knowledge through which humans once understood their relationship with the more-than-human world. Memory consequently ceases to function as a private psychological faculty and instead becomes an ecological archive, carrying the histories of coexistence from which a different future might still be imagined.

This burden of remembrance rests most heavily upon Jimmy, later known as Snowman. As one of the last surviving humans, he moves through abandoned compounds, empty roads, and overgrown coastlines while carrying within him fragments of a civilization that no longer exists. He is both witness and archive. His recollections preserve extinct species, forgotten landscapes, obsolete technologies, and ordinary moments erased by Crake's engineered apocalypse. The ruined world acquires meaning only because it is continually measured against what it once was, allowing the past to interrupt the desolation of the present.

Snowman's memories seldom unfold as complete narratives. Instead, they emerge unexpectedly through places, sounds, and words that refuse to disappear. One of the trilogy's most poignant moments arrives when he realises that even the names of vanished creatures are beginning to fade. As he reflects that "the very names of the animals were fading" (*Oryx and Crake*, 272), Atwood suggests that extinction extends beyond the disappearance of living beings. It also erodes the language through which humans recognised, classified, and remembered them. The loss of biodiversity therefore becomes inseparable from the loss of cultural memory, revealing extinction as a double erasure: species disappear from ecosystems while their names gradually vanish from human consciousness.

This moment reveals that language itself becomes a fragile habitat for ecological memory. Snowman's effort to retain forgotten names is more than an expression of personal grief; it is an attempt to preserve a world that can no longer speak for itself. His memories resist the silence left by ecological collapse, suggesting that remembrance is an ethical act through which the survivors maintain a relationship with the more-than-human world even after its physical destruction. Glenn used to say the reason you can't really imagine yourself being dead was that as soon as you say,

I'll be dead,' you've said the word I, and so you're still alive inside the sentence. And that's how people got the idea of the immortality of the soul—it was a consequence of grammar. (*The Year of the Flood*, 55)

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Ursula Heise's observation that environmental crises are simultaneously crises of cultural imagination offers a productive lens for reading these moments. As ecosystems disappear, the narratives through which communities understand and value them also begin to fade. Snowman's persistent recollection of species, landscapes, and forgotten words therefore becomes an act of resistance against ecological erasure, preserving fragments of environmental knowledge that the technologically driven civilisation had long ceased to value.

Greg Garrard likewise argues that ecocritical writing challenges the artificial separation between human culture and the natural world. Atwood extends this insight through Snowman's fragmented consciousness, where the collapse of ecosystems is mirrored by the fragmentation of memory itself. Human identity proves inseparable from the environments that once sustained it, and the erosion of ecological diversity is accompanied by the erosion of cultural continuity. Eco-memory thus emerges not as nostalgia for an irretrievable past but as a living archive from which ethical reconstruction becomes possible. Before stories can rebuild communities, there must first remain something worth remembering.

Storytelling and Cultural Resilience in a Post-Apocalyptic World

The rituals of God's Gardeners do not end with the Waterless Flood. Their gardens may be abandoned and their congregation scattered, yet the ecological ethics they cultivated continue in another form. What was once preserved through ritual now survives through narrative. Atwood gradually shifts the work of cultural preservation from the garden to the spoken word, suggesting that communities endure not because they recover lost institutions but because they continue telling stories that give meaning to their shared past.

This transition is embodied in Toby, whose role extends far beyond that of a survivor. The trilogy repeatedly returns to scenes where the Crakers gather around her, asking questions about origins, death, and the vanished human world. Beneath their curiosity lies a larger question: how can a community understand itself when history has almost disappeared? Toby responds not as a historian committed to factual precision but as a custodian of memory, reshaping the past into stories the Crakers can understand. In doing so, she preserves not every historical detail but the ethical significance of lived experience. A brief quotation from one of Toby's conversations with the Crakers would effectively illustrate how memory is transformed into narrative.

These storytelling sessions reveal that memory acquires meaning only when it is shared. The Crakers interrupt, question, and reinterpret Toby's stories, turning narration into a collaborative process rather than a one-way transmission of

knowledge. Meaning emerges through dialogue, allowing the past to remain dynamic instead of fixed. Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory illuminates this process, for cultural memory survives only through continual reinterpretation. Toby's stories neither romanticise the civilisation that collapsed nor erase its failures; instead, they preserve the ethical lessons needed to imagine a different future. "You can forget who you are if you're alone too much" (*The Year of the Flood*, 2)

The circle that forms around Toby also redefines the meaning of community. Humans and Crackers occupy the same narrative space, listening and responding to one another as participants in a shared history. Donna Haraway's idea of "making kin" beyond species boundaries resonates strongly here. Storytelling becomes a multispecies practice through which relationships are built on reciprocity rather than domination, enabling ecological responsibility to emerge through shared experience.

As Toby's voice gradually recedes, Blackbeard quietly inherits the responsibility of preserving the community's memory. Introduced first as a listener, he eventually becomes its recorder, marking the transition from oral tradition to written history. His decision to write represents one of the trilogy's most significant moments of reconstruction, as stories that once depended on Toby's voice acquire permanence. A short quotation from Blackbeard's closing narrative would reinforce this movement from listening to recording.

Aleida Assmann's distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory offers a useful framework for understanding Blackbeard's role. Conversations sustained through living memory become part of a lasting archive capable of reaching future generations. Unlike the corporate records of the old world, which preserved ownership and technological progress, Blackbeard's account preserves relationships, ecological wisdom, and acts of care. Writing thus becomes an extension of storytelling rather than an instrument of power.

Tom Moylan's concept of the critical dystopia further clarifies the significance of this transformation. Although Atwood's world has suffered irreversible ecological loss, it never abandons the possibility of renewal. Hope emerges not through technological advancement but through stories that preserve memory and sustain communal identity. By the trilogy's conclusion, storytelling has become the foundation upon which the new society is built. What begins as eco-memory ultimately evolves into cultural resilience, demonstrating that the reconstruction of humanity depends not upon recovering the institutions of the past but upon preserving the stories that teach future generations how to live differently.

Reconstructing Humanity: Ecofeminist Ethics and Multispecies Coexistence

By the closing chapters of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the question is no longer whether humanity will survive but what it will mean to be human after the collapse of a civilisation built on technological mastery, domination, and limitless consumption. The landscapes have changed, stories have become the community's archive, and memory now lives through new generations. Against this transformed horizon, Atwood quietly reconstructs humanity itself. The future that emerges is not founded on recovering the old world but on relationships

shaped by care, reciprocity, and ecological responsibility. Survival depends less on mastering nature than on learning to live within it.

This transformation is most clearly embodied in Toby. Having preserved memory through storytelling, she gradually becomes the moral centre of the emerging community. Her leadership is neither institutional nor coercive but grounded in observation, patience, and dialogue. Rather than imposing authority, she sustains relationships among humans, Crakers, and animals, demonstrating that ethical leadership grows from care instead of control. Atwood presents Toby not as a heroic saviour but as a figure whose quiet acts of responsibility enable the community to imagine a different future.

Toby's significance also reflects the broader role of women throughout the trilogy. While corporate and scientific institutions accelerate environmental destruction, women preserve the knowledge necessary for survival. Toby safeguards medicinal practices, Ren preserves communal memory, and the women of God's Gardeners sustain traditions of cultivation, healing, and education that endure beyond technological collapse. Atwood does not suggest that women possess an innate affinity with nature; instead, she shows that practices associated with care, nourishment, and cooperation become indispensable after systems founded upon domination have failed.

Karen Warren's ecofeminist critique helps illuminate this transformation. Warren argues that the same hierarchical thinking that legitimises the exploitation of women also justifies the domination of nature. Atwood's reconstructed community gradually dismantles these hierarchies. Knowledge is shared rather than controlled, authority is earned through responsibility, and survival becomes a collective undertaking. Ecofeminism thus emerges not simply as a theoretical perspective but as an ethic lived through everyday acts of care.

The Crakers further challenge conventional definitions of humanity. Although created through biotechnology, they gradually develop curiosity, emotional attachments, and a growing sense of community. Their willingness to question, learn, and participate in shared narratives suggests that humanity cannot be defined solely by biological origin. Instead, Atwood locates humanity in the capacity to build ethical relationships and participate in collective life. Rosi Braidotti's posthuman philosophy reinforces this vision by rejecting the ideal of the autonomous human subject in favour of relational identities grounded in interdependence. Humans and Crakers learn to negotiate difference through cooperation rather than hierarchy, revealing that the future depends upon coexistence instead of human exceptionalism.

This ethical shift becomes even more visible in the changing relationship between humans and pigoons. Once engineered as biomedical commodities, the pigoons emerge as intelligent beings capable of communication and cooperation. Their evolving alliance with humans exposes the failures of a civilisation that reduced living creatures to commercial resources. Donna Haraway's call to "make kin" finds clear expression here, as Atwood imagines communities built through reciprocity rather than ownership. The possibility of coexistence arises only when domination gives way to mutual recognition.

Val Plumwood's critique of anthropocentrism further deepens this vision. By dissolving the rigid boundary between humans and nature, Atwood presents survival as an ecological achievement rather than an exclusively human one. Gardens flourish through cooperation with natural processes, and communities endure because relationships extend across species boundaries. This commitment to diversity also echoes Vandana Shiva's insistence that ecological resilience depends upon protecting both biological and cultural plurality. The knowledge preserved by God's Gardeners, the stories carried by Toby and Blackbeard, and the alliances formed with non-human beings all affirm that life persists through diversity rather than uniformity.

By the trilogy's conclusion, humanity has been reimagined rather than restored. The old civilization measured progress through technological advancement and economic expansion; the new community measures it through memory, care, reciprocity, and ecological responsibility. Atwood offers no simple utopia, but she does imagine a future in which hope emerges from ethical relationships rather than human supremacy. The reconstruction of humanity ultimately depends upon recognising that survival is possible only when humans learn to live as participants in, rather than masters of, the more-than-human world.

Conclusion

The final pages of the *MaddAddam* trilogy do not linger over the ruins of a fallen civilization. Instead, they turn quietly toward the fragile beginnings of another world, where survival is measured not by technological recovery but by the ability to remember, to narrate, and to care. What remains after the Waterless Flood is neither the triumph of humanity nor the complete victory of nature, but the possibility of rebuilding life through ecological responsibility. Atwood thus reimagines catastrophe not as the absolute end of humanity but as the beginning of its ethical reconstruction, where memory and storytelling become the foundations of a more sustainable future.

Throughout the trilogy, eco-memory functions as a living archive that preserves ecological knowledge against the forces of extinction and environmental collapse. Jimmy's fragmented recollections, the rituals of God's Gardeners, and the stories that pass from Toby to Blackbeard ensure that ecological wisdom survives even when institutions, landscapes, and civilisations disappear. Memory, therefore, evolves beyond an individual act of remembrance to become a shared cultural resource through which ethical continuity is sustained.

As these memories are spoken, shared, and eventually written down, storytelling becomes the thread that binds the emerging community together. The movement from Toby's oral narratives to Blackbeard's written record symbolises the continuity of culture across generations, preserving values of care, cooperation, and ecological responsibility that the old world had forgotten. Survival, Atwood suggests, depends not upon restoring the past but upon carrying its lessons into a different future.

The reconstructed community ultimately redefines humanity through coexistence rather than domination. The evolving relationships among humans, Crakers, pigoons, and the more-than-human world challenge anthropocentric assumptions and affirm an ecofeminist ethic grounded in reciprocity, care, and

interdependence. Humanity endures not by reclaiming mastery over nature but by recognising itself as one life among many within a shared ecological community. At a time when climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental uncertainty continue to reshape our own world, *MaddAddam* speaks beyond the boundaries of speculative fiction. It reminds us that ecological crises are also crises of memory, culture, and ethics. By transforming memory into a source of cultural resilience and ecological coexistence, Atwood leaves readers with a compelling reminder that the future of humanity will depend not only on what it chooses to invent, but also on what it chooses to remember.

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DABEER SI/KTT/15**DOCUMENTING ECOLOGICAL INJUSTICE: DECOLONIAL
EPISTEMOLOGY AND BLUE HUMANITIES IN GOAN
ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES****GOURI BASAVARAJ INDI**

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Abstract

In the postcolonial Indian Ocean, Goa's water bodies represent a convergence point of tourism development, extractive industries, and environmental degradation. However, Goan environmental documentaries construct an alternative epistemic relationship to water, rooted in the embodied knowledge of fishing communities, indigenous ecological memory, and demands for collective care. This paper analyses how documentaries such as *Shifting Sands: The Fisherfolk of Goa's Calangute Village*, *Goa's Oldest Community of Fishermen: The Ramponkars*, *Trapped Rivers of Goa*, and *Avnati* perform a decolonial awareness-raising practice that educates public consciousness about ecological injustice and slow violence. Instead of reducing water to a consumable spectacle, these films reframe the ocean, creek, and river as sites of slow violence, postcolonial extraction, and relational agency. They also function as counter-memory since they preserve indigenous fishing knowledge that has been systematically displaced by colonial and post-independence development regimes. The documentary also depicts the gendered dimensions of aquatic labour, highlighting women's roles in fish vending and food preparation which constitute an undertheorised site where ecological sustenance, postcolonial economic marginalisation, and domestic responsibility intersect. The study argues that documentary form, grounded in community testimony and material vulnerability, enacts a blue humanities intervention that challenges postcolonial oceanic imaginaries by foregrounding non-human agency, indigenous fishing knowledge, and the possibilities of environmental and climate justice.

Keywords: Blue humanities, Documentary films, Goan water bodies, Decolonial Epistemology, Postcolonial Extraction.

Introduction

Water has become one of the most urgent analytical sites in contemporary research because the impact of extraction, climate change, and pollution is visibly intertwined with oceans, rivers, creeks, and coastal ecologies. In the postcolonial Indian Ocean littoral, Goa's water bodies are simultaneously exploited for tourism revenue and degraded by extractive and infrastructural development. Blue Humanities treats water as not just a passive background but as an active, relational, and socially contested medium that demands critical attention in its own right (DeLoughrey 242-58, Steinberg and Peters 247-64). In a postcolonial setting, these coastal environments depict the entanglement of ecological damage with

colonial history, tourism-led development, and the marginalisation of local knowledge systems.

This paper examines four Goan environmental documentaries, including *Shifting Sands: The Fisherfolk of Goa's Calangute Village* (dir. Sonia Filinto, 2018; henceforth *Shifting Sands*); *Goa's Oldest Community of Fishermen: The Ramponkars | 101 Wild Wild Chef* (dir. Avijit Pathak and Donny Lama, 2017; henceforth *The Ramponkars*); *Goa's Freshwater Fishing | Trapped Rivers of Goa* (prod. Mahim S. S. Bhandari, 2025; henceforth *Trapped Rivers of Goa*); and *अवनति (Avnati) | CCF Nagari 2023* (dir. Kabir Naik and Kuhu Saha, 2023; henceforth *Avnati*) as evidence of ecological injustice and as sources that provide an alternative epistemic relationship to water rooted in the embodied knowledge of fishing communities and coastal residents, thus working as a form of counter-memory that is often excluded from developmentalist narratives. The main objective of this paper is that documentaries perform decolonial epistemic work by reframing water as a site of slow violence, fishing knowledge as counter-memory, highlighting an undertheorised gendered labour, and granting non-human narrative agency to water through the documentary form.

Literature Review

Blue scholarship has argued that water and water bodies must be studied as a subject of their own rather than as an inert backdrop for enhancing aesthetics or as an extension to land-based ecocriticism. Steve Mentz's concept of thinking with the sea, Astrida Neimanis's hydrofeminist emphasis on watery relationality, and Serpil Oppermann's work on more-than-human entanglement further broadened the scope of the field by depicting the role of water in shaping bodily, ethical, and ecological relations beyond anthropocentric frameworks (Mentz; Neimanis; Oppermann). Scholars like Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Philip Steinberg, and Kimberley Peters argue that oceanic spaces are not just empty surfaces to be crossed. They are lived, historical, and political environments shaped by mobility, extraction, and uneven power (DeLoughrey 242-58; Steinberg and Peters 247-64). Recent studies have highlighted that the field of blue humanities has often centred around Atlantic or Euro-American narratives, providing a gap for the Indian Ocean and Indigenous waterscapes (Lobo and Parsons 130).

Through decolonial theory, a conceptual basis is provided to understand water as a site of epistemic struggle. Quijano talks about "coloniality of power" and argues that colonial hierarchies continue to shape labour, race, and authority long after attaining political independence (536). Adding to this, Mignolo points out how colonial modernity installs a "coloniality of knowledge" where some forms of expertise are privileged while others are rendered subaltern (66). From an environmental perspective, this means that technical planning and developmental discourse often override community-based ecological understanding. In her *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith insists that colonial knowledge must be challenged to make room for Indigenous and local epistemologies (2).

Rob Nixon introduced the concept of "slow violence," which posits that environmental harm is so slow, temporally stretched, and gradual that it appears invisible to the naked eye (2-3). Furthermore, Somayaji and Coelho's study on

Goa's fisheries provides an empirical background to this paper and demonstrates how mechanised fishing has disrupted the Ramponkar community and small-scale fishing (206). Other studies similarly document the pressures of development, declining catch, and loss of sustainable fishing practices (Naik et al 15). It is important to note that these studies are largely empirical, sociological, or economic in focus and do not examine the documentary form as part of environmental critique. This paper addresses that gap by reading the four documentaries as epistemic texts rather than as mere illustrations of fisheries decline.

Gendered labour studies in fisheries is another underdeveloped area of scholarship, where scholars like Rubinoff present women fish vendors in Goa as occupying an integral but undervalued position in the fishing economy (631). Ecocinema studies propose that film can influence environmental perception by organising how viewers experience place, vulnerability, and nonhuman life (Willoquet-Maricondi 7-10). In *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols's Documentary theory foregrounds that testimony in documentary is not simply descriptive; it is a type of situated evidence and carries ethical and rhetorical force (Nichols 3-5).

Collectively, this entire scholarship shows that the select Goan documentaries are placed at the intersection of blue humanities, decolonial thought, slow violence, gendered labour studies, and documentary theory. No existing study reads Goan environmental documentaries through this combined framework.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the four theoretical concepts that the paper draws on, how they function together as an integrated lens, and why they need each other rather than being utilized as separate readings of the same texts.

Blue Humanities acts as the foundational orientation of this paper. The core concept of Blue Humanities is the refusal to treat water as an inert setting or a resource meant for human use. Instead, it argues that oceans, rivers, and all water bodies possess their own material force and unpredictability and should be critically studied as a subject of primary focus (Mentz 2; Alaimo 3; DeLoughrey 32-33).

The paper employs Quijano's "coloniality of power" which argues that the racial and epistemic hierarchies established by colonialism have proven "more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix [they were] established" (Quijano 533). Adding to this, Mignolo's "colonial matrix of power" spans control of economy, authority, gender and sexuality, and subjectivity and knowledge as an extension to Quijano's concept (Mignolo 156). Together, they support the paper's premise that developmentalist and technocratic ways of knowing water are not neutral or inevitable, but a form of continuation of colonial hierarchies that delegitimise embodied community knowledge. In this study, it explains why the knowledge of fishing communities is significant as knowledge worth recovering and not just a local flair, thus reframing testimony in documentaries as both counter-history and counter-epistemology. Furthermore, Mignolo's "subjectivity and knowledge" treats fishing knowledge and gendered labour as two aspects of the same epistemic hierarchy rather than as separate instances.

Slow violence and counter-memory act as the paper's two temporal concepts. Nixon defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). Building on Foucault's concept of counter-memory as a resistance to dominant historical narratives, these documentaries act as a visual counter-memory, deliberately preserving on film knowledge and practices that official development narratives have written out of the record (Foucault 153-160).

Implementing ecofeminist and materialist feminist theory as the framework of gendered labour allows women's labour in the documentaries to be treated as continuous with the aquatic economy rather than as a separate social issue. Rubinoff found that Goan Christian fisherwomen became "market entrepreneurs" while Hindu women remained in the minority (Rubinoff 637). Women's labour thus situated itself into ecological sustenance, postcolonial economic marginalisation, and domestic responsibility.

While discussing non-human agency, water's status as a narrative agent draws on Bennett's "thing-power", which emphasises "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce dramatic and subtle" (Bennett 6). This supports treating matter as an agent capable of exerting force independent of human intention. Neimanis extends this in a more water-centric way and draws our attention to "the more-than-human modes of living that are also always part of... our 'own' corporeality" (Neimanis 11). The paper uses this combined framework to show how documentaries, through decolonial ecological archives, preserve endangered knowledge systems, expose environmental injustice, and reimagine water as a living site of relation, labour, and resistance.

Methodology

This paper employs qualitative and textual analysis of four Goan environmental documentaries. A close reading of spoken testimony in the interview content, oral history, and folk songs is done with attention to visual and formal choices, like camera stability and movement, shot composition (aerial versus ground-level, land versus water), interview framing, and the presence or absence of outsider narration. This dual attention to *content* and *form* is essential because the main objective of this paper is that these documentaries execute decoloniality and non-human agency through both the documentary technique and what is said on screen.

Analysis

This section analyses the four films across four categories: (1) water as a site of slow violence and extraction; (2) fishing knowledge as counter-memory against developmentalist erasure; (3) gendered labour at the intersection of ecological sustenance and economic marginalisation; and (4) non-human agency as a narrative device.

1. Water as a site of slow violence and extraction

The documentary *Shifting Sands* explores the fishing community of Goa's Calangute village. Fisherman Domicio Silveira recounts how fishes that could be caught easily a few decades ago have become so scarce that "one basket will sell for 5,000 rupees" (Filinto 11:40). Ronnie Fernandes talks about how the beach has

disappeared in the past few years and boats have to be docked on the riverbank for lack of shore space depicts erosion as a gradual, ongoing loss rather than sudden disaster. He goes on to describe harmful fishing practices like 'bull fishing' or 'bull trawling', where large nets are tied between two boats to catch lots of fish. The trawlers, which are fishing boats with large nets that are pulled through the sea behind them, disrupt small fishermen and often cause damage to their nets. The catch of small fishermen is negligible compared to the large amounts of fish caught by these trawlers. This often led to fights, and local small-scale fishermen were usually suppressed using violence, connecting ecological harm to power asymmetry between small-scale and industrial fishing interests. Engaging in such harmful practices leads to overfishing, and Ronnie exclaims that there will be no fish in a couple of years. Another change that came about is fishing during the monsoon season. The no-fishing months allowed fish to breed without interference. But now, if the sea is calm for a day, the boats venture out. Fishing all year round due to growing demand for sea food has directly impacted the breeding period of fish. The unpredictable nature of the sea has cost many fishermen their lives, highlighting the dangers of living as a fisherman and living by the coast. Water in the documentary is thus neither romanticised nor neutral. It is a volatile ecological medium shaped by extraction, danger, and memory. The second documentary, *The Ramponkars*, depicts how the lack of concern for sustainable fishing and usage of modern technology has made the future of the Ramponkar way of life very uncertain. Giant trawlers attract fish using LED lights and leave very little catch for the small fishermen. Furthermore, the hotel industry taking over coastal land has also greatly impacted fishing, forbidding the fishermen from entering the increasing number of private properties by the beach. Water again becomes a site of extraction and commercialisation for tourist revenue.

Trapped Rivers of Goa focuses on attrition in freshwater fishing. Churchill Alemao's testimony reveals that the River Sal has shrunk from a depth of around 21-27 feet to a mere 4 feet, making it difficult for even canoes to travel. Due to sand extraction, pollution, silt deposits on river beds, and barge spillage, fish breeding has been greatly affected, so much so that river fishes are no longer fit for consumption. Sewerage discharge and release of hotel and factory waste effluents into the rivers have made the rivers hazardous for anyone who even enters the waters. There is a high risk of diseases and crocodile attacks with river fishing, leading to uncertainty about the future of this tradition. This represents an extreme endpoint of slow violence, where a community completely withdrew from a resource that sustained it. This did not happen in a single poisoning event but through the accumulated effect of extraction and effluent discharge over a long period of time. The documentary *Avnati* extends this pattern to the Santa Inez Creek in Panaji, Goa. An important role of the creeks of Panaji is to act as a flush for monsoon rainwater to exit the city. Tidal currents brought in fish, which sustained the livelihoods of the locals. Now there are barely any fish and the water is too polluted for any use. Tests conducted by the Goa Pollution Control Board revealed the presence of high raw sewage contamination and E. coli in the water of Santa Inez creek. To cut costs and due to its low capacity, the Sewage Treatment

Plant (STP) of Panaji sometimes lets sewage out directly into the sea. Farmers have abandoned adjacent fields due to two decades of toxicity, with some suffering skin diseases as a direct consequence. Parts of the creek are also prone to flooding during monsoon, instilling a fear of waterborne diseases and dengue in the residents living nearby. The interviewee says that the foremost issue to be addressed is cleaning the creek. The blocked outlet sandbar and the interviewee saying that inaction may cause “the death of the creek” (Naik and Saha 6:05) presents the water body as an entity with a mortality. Across all three sea, river, and creek contexts, the documentaries depict through testimony that loss is measured across a human lifetime, positioning the films as vernacular archives of slow violence and extraction.

2. Fishing knowledge as counter-memory

This section follows Foucault’s concept of counter-memory where the pasts marginalised by official, sanctioned narratives are recovered (153-160). It reads the preservation of embodied fishing knowledge in the documentaries as a direct challenge to developmentalist framings that cast traditional fishing as economically out-dated. In *Shifting Sands*, Marceline Fernandes, a retired fisherman, talks about his nightly vigil by the beach for fish sightings and launching boats to catch them. Fish sightings would immediately result in the men taking their boats out to catch them. The video depicts communal labour—a group of fishermen and their helpers placing wooden logs in the sand to push boats to and from the shore, which preserves a body of practical, place-specific knowledge with no equivalent in mechanised fishing. The fishing community is referred to as “Kharvi” which is often used in a derogatory manner. Reginald Silveira talks about fishing methods - how the constant sound of a stick being beaten on the boat distracts the fish and leads it right into the net, and a sign language used by fishermen to communicate from different boats on the sea. The entire process of catching fish is captured in the documentary, keeping everything authentic. Pedro reminisces about how the fisherfolk faced lots of hardships in the past and says that it is only recently that they’ve gained value in society after giving up their loin cloths and wearing socially acceptable clothes. Since the prices of fish have skyrocketed, they are able to have food on the table and live well. These practices and events indicate that fishing knowledge is not just technical; it is also ecological, relational, and intergenerational.

The documentary *The Ramponkars* frames fishing as a knowledge tradition rooted in sustainability and memory. The Ramponkars were some of the earliest fishermen who supplied fish to the entire state and used traditional boats and methods to catch only as much as was needed to ensure sustainable fishing. The emphasis on food preparations, traditional ingredients, and communal labour transforms fishing into cultural ecology and situates the community within a longer historical continuum. It thus resists the developmental tendency to portray traditional fishing as backward and instead shows that its practices embody a form of environmental knowledge shaped by restraint and usefulness. Similarly, in *Trapped Rivers of Goa*, monsoon freshwater fishing is shown as an adaptive response to changing seasons rather than outdated custom, thus recording a flexible ecological intelligence. In *Avnati*, the residents of Panaji recall their

memories of how decades ago, there were lots of fishes swimming in the creek. There was also a wide spectrum of biodiversity in and around the creek, such as snakes, crocodiles, turtles, otters, and a variety of birds. The water was clean enough to drink and bathe in. This memory serves as a form of ecological testimony against present contamination. Altogether, these documentaries show that environmental memory is a mode of resistance against the erasure of local ecological histories.

3. Gendered labour and ecological sustenance

The documentaries *Shifting Sands* and *The Ramponkars* reveal the role of women and gendered labour in sustaining community traditions. Women were responsible for cleaning the fish, curing it with salt, protecting it from direct sunlight, and other household chores. The fishes that are caught are divided into baskets by the fishermen and women carry them on their heads to the market. Luhizinha Silveira talks about her experience of going to the market and selling fish. Earning Rs. 150-200 a day, she says that even though her children dissuade her from vending, it is better than sitting idle at home. This statement registers the economic precarity that shapes women's work while also asserting its dignity. In *The Ramponkars*, women kept the Ramponkar culture alive by following traditions, cooking and selling the fish, and teaching future generations about the same. Similar to Rubinoff's work on Goan fish vendors, women occupy a central but often overlooked position in the coastal economy (Rubinoff 631).

However, the paper reveals that this theme is absent from *Trapped Rivers of Goa* and *Avnati*. They focus mainly on male fishermen's testimonies and in the case of *Avnati*, mixed-gender resident testimony without any attention to gendered division of labour. This suggests that gendered aquatic labour becomes visible specifically in documentaries on *marine* fishing economy (sea-based) where a clear sexual demarcation of labour is made between catching and processing/selling fish. This process is less visible in freshwater and urban fishing contexts since the primary crisis narrated is infrastructural and ecological rather than based on economic-livelihood.

4. Non-human agency as narrative device

The final feature of these documentaries is their attention to non-human agency. Water is not treated as a background setting, but as something that moves, resists, erodes, and shapes human action. In *Shifting Sands* and *The Ramponkars*, the camera often becomes unstable on boats and is steady on land. This reproduces the difference between aquatic and motion and terrestrial stability through its form, thus making the sea's force felt through the screen. The shaky camera on water, movement of waves, and the visible labour of balancing on boats all emphasise the ocean's material agency. Similarly, the aerial view shot in *Avnati* provides a broader sense of the creek as an ecological system instead of reducing it to a static site of pollution. In these documentaries, the testimony of the fisherfolk is inseparable from the visual texture of water, boats, nets, shorelines, and polluted channels. The aquatic life caught in the nets is captured in this film and reveals the entanglement of human and non-human agents engaging with each other in one frame. The choice of form is important because environmental films

produce meaning through aesthetics and not only content (Willoquet-Maricondi 7-9).

Conclusion

Across the four documentaries, water emerges as an active site of historical injury, memory, and resistance. The films document and depict slow violence, preserve counter-memory, highlight gendered labour, and emphasise the non-human agency through documentary form. Underlying all these arguments, there is a formal claim that is central to Blue Humanities: that documentary technique itself (camera stability, framing, sound, aerial perspective) can grant water a form of narrative agency. Collectively, they show that ecological injustice in Goa cannot be separated from the histories of the fishing community and the epistemic violence that marginalises their knowledge. Future research can extend this framework to other Indian Ocean coastal communities and contribute to blue scholarship.

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DABEER SI/KTT/16**ECOLOGICAL GRIEF AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL IN JACINTA
KERKETTA'S ECOPOETRY****PURVI ORAON**

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Abstract

Ecological grief, cultural survival, resistance and trauma are few of the key themes of tribal literature, along with the major themes of nature and their environment. The objective is to explore the representation of ecology in Kerketta's poetry by focusing on elements that serve as acts of resistance against ecological and cultural erasure, and language loss. Kerketta's poetry in the anthologies '*Angor*' and '*Land of the Roots*' vividly captures the pain and sufferings of her community caused by cultural erosion, language loss, ecological degradation as a consequence of displacement and migration. The primary aim of the paper is to analyze how Kerketta's poetry embodies resilience, and opposition to the destructive impacts of modernization on tribal communities, their culture and ecology which also reflects their ecological grief. The study seeks to uncover the ways her poetry challenges reductive narratives of progress that marginalize indigenous ecological knowledge and tribal voices in the process of internal colonialism.

The research employs a postcolonial ecocriticism and ecological framework is used to understand how poetry articulates trauma, resistance and cultural survival. Kerketta's poetry functions as a site of cultural and ecological reclamation. The central research question of the paper is to understand how Kerketta's poetry articulates resistance against cultural and ecological marginalization and reclaims them. This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach through close textual analysis of select poems by Kerketta. Additionally, the research contextualizes the poetic analysis within broader discussions of indigenous ecological knowledge, displacement, language loss, and resistance. This approach could deepen an understanding of how poetry functions as a form of ecological and cultural activism.

Keywords: tribal literature, ecological grief, resistance, postcolonialism, solastalgia

"My poetry is inspired by the concept of 'universal value' that is still alive among the indigenous communities who live close to nature"

___Jacinta Kerketta

Introduction

The 21st century is marked by a major phenomena that is affecting all living beings and every aspect of the ecosphere. The climate crisis has transformed into different forms such as flooding, intense droughts, water scarcity, rising sea levels, melting polar ice, and declining biodiversity.

There are various national and international frameworks and agreements. Introduced to counter these adverse environmental conditions. According to Priya Priyadarshini and Purushothaman Chirakkuzhyil Abhilash, the “United Nations conceived 17 SDGs acknowledge that since human actions are not entirely exclusive and tend to influence their ecological surroundings, an assessment of the level of development which is not detrimental to the environment is essential” (Priyadarshini, Priya. and Chirakkuzhyil Abhilash, Purushothaman Chirakkuzhyil).

Degradation of the environment and climate crisis is experienced by people in different ways. However, scholars have noticed a new form of sadness associated with ecological loss. Scholars Cunsolo and Ellis define ecological grief as “the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (Cunsolo, Ashlee and Ellis, Neville. 275-281). They have highlighted three contexts in which ecological grief has been reported: “grief associated with physical ecological losses and attendant ways of life and culture”, “grief associated with disruptions to environmental knowledge systems and resulting feelings of loss of identity”, and “grief associated with anticipated future losses of place, land, species, and culture” (Cunsolo, Ashlee and Ellis, Neville. 275-281).

The indigenous peoples globally and tribals in India have been experiencing ecological loss, perhaps mourning too, but it has not been studied or paid attention to. Now, scholars are arguing that “there is a need to admit that non-human species and landscapes are worthy of mourning and normalize addressing ecological grief” (Mayhew Bergman, Megan). This kind of grief is also known as “solastalgia”, coined by Glenn Albrecht, which combines the concept of “solace, desolation, and nostalgia”.

Nature and literature are closely intertwined with each other. With specific to Indian writings, according to Bhardwaj, “Indian environmental humanities exist in an Indian terrain that is coined by cultural memory, sacred geography and development pressure” (Bhardwaj, Vikas. 42-45). This makes Indian poetry a repository that has the potential to appreciate the relationship between literature, nature and culture in the time of present day ecological crisis. Nature writing has been part of the literary studies, however with ever increasing concern about the environment led to the emergence of a new field in literary studies called ecocriticism. Pramod K Nayar has defined the term Ecocriticism “as a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscapes in cultural text, paying particular attention to attitudes towards ‘nature’ and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it” (Nayar, PK. 242). Hence, ecocriticism focused on the aesthetics of the environment and paid more attention to the wilderness of nature. The nations of the global south had a different story altogether. As these nations had already been exploited for their natural resources, a new dimension was needed to approach the environmental crisis that is taking place. This gave rise to postcolonial ecocriticism that bridged ecocriticism with the power structured dynamic of post colonialism. There was an unavoidable intertwining of the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘environment’ as conceptual tools (Mukherjee, 5).

Tribal literature puts forth the relationship between literature, culture and nature intricately. Gyatri Spivak argues that subalterns would not be able to talk in the dominant narrative or discourse due to a lack of representation (Spivak, Gyatri. 271-313). However, it is crucial that tribal writers themselves express their lived experiences through literature. Ruby Hembrom is of the opinion that “even if and when we are displaced, we still are the owners and carriers of our stories, and are the ones most appropriate to retell them in our non-conventional ways, often in contravention to what writing cultures expect or are accustomed to” (Hembrom, Ruby. 1464-1488).

Taking departure from here, this paper explores the poetry of Jacinta Kerketta to unravel how ecological grief and cultural survival is represented in her works. Jacinta Kerketta is a tribal poet, journalist, and activist from West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, and belongs to the Oraon Adivasi community. *Angor* (Ember) and *Jadon ki Zameen* (*Land of the Roots*) have been translated into English and German. *Angor* was published in the year 2016 and it translates to Ember which signifies the “burning pains and glow of hope through the metaphor” (Kerketta, Jacinta. 14). *Land of the Roots* was published 2 years later in 2018. Kerketta considers this book as “a compilation of all feelings and emotions connected with jungles, flowers, rivers, hills, women, villages, cities” (Kerketta, Jacinta). This anthology encapsulates the pains and suffering of the people who leave their villages, their roots, for better opportunities in the city, which results in yearning for the past as well.

The paper explores both the anthologies, *Angor* and *Land of the Roots*, to understand how Kerketta utilizes silence and absence in her poetry to articulate resistance against cultural and ecological marginalization and erasure, and reclaims them.

The study seeks to uncover the ways her poetry challenges reductive narratives of progress that marginalize indigenous ecological knowledge and tribal voices in the process of internal colonialism. Kerketta’s poetry functions as a site of cultural and ecological reclamation. The central research question of the paper is to understand how Kerketta demonstrates ecological grief in her poetry to articulate resistance against cultural and ecological marginalization, and reclaims them.

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach through close textual analysis of select poems by Jacinta Kerketta. Postcolonial ecocriticism theoretical framework is used to analyze how tribal poetry not just reflects erasure as a social reality but can be adopted as a tool to resist erasure. The concept of silence, absence, and presence are used to invoke that which is left unsaid.

Before delving into the poetry section, there is a need to understand the significance of the study and contextualise it. Jharkhand is the 28th state formed in the year 2000. The state is massively rich in mineral resources as it holds 40 percent of the total mineral reserves of India (Economy Survey of Jharkhand, 2023-23). Such abundance of natural resources have invited large scale industries in the state. At present, there are as many mega industries, large, medium industries and micro and small industries have been set up in the state (Govt. of Jharkhand). The forest and woodland cover of the state is more than 29% which is one the highest in India (Govt. of Jharkhand). However, there is another side of

the coin which can be considered a byproduct of such a rich resource landscape. Large scale displacement takes place in Jharkhand due to the mining industry, and other development projects.

Jharkhand is a complex space with diverse cultural practices, language, and identity. The diversity when intertwined with the environment around them produces a nexus of ecosystems that must be studied and preserved. One of the members of this ecosystem is the Oraon tribe which is the second largest tribe in the state of Jharkhand. The cosmos of the tribe include the animate as well as inanimate elements of nature and they follow animism. They have a sacred space called 'Sarna' where they worship. The tribe also has totemic surnames, which acts as an identity marker of the group, based on the natural element. This signifies that nature is an integral part of Oraon way of life.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial ecocriticism, as a field of study, emerged as the need of the hour of the modern world. Ecocriticism emerged to address the nonhuman entity and give agency to nature. Cherly Glotfelty and Harold Fromm through their work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) institutionalized the systemic study of nature writing, wilderness narratives and human-nature relationship.

When ecocriticism was getting systematically organised to study the relationship between nature and humans, in India historian Ramchandra Guha was advocating for studying the environmental crisis along with the politico-economic of the time. The *Unquiet Woods* (2000) by Guha traces the British policy that restricted the forest dwellers from having an access to the forest products and the roots of Chipko resistance movement. Such resistance takes place when one only sees nature for its wilderness and tries to preserve it by limiting its access to the people who are a part of the same nature. Ramchandra Guha has theorized this "environmentalism of the poor" in the book *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essay North South* (1997). The concept emphasizes that the environmental movements, such as the Chipko movement, that can be witnessed in the Global South often result from concern regarding livelihood instead of any abstract idea of conserving nature.

Ten years later Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin published their seminal work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) that brought together the environmental degradation and imperial past of extraction and exploitation of resources and land displacement (Huggan, G., and Tiffin, H.) under the ambit of literary and culture studies of postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecocriticism is tasked with providing alternate ideologies to western interpretation of development (Huggan and Tiffin. 29). According to Huggan and Tiffin (2010), postcolonial ecocriticism approaches advocates for studying the environmental crisis by keeping the imperial past, as it still shapes the environmental practices of the present time. It provides a framework for analyzing the power dynamics that impacts the environmental issues in postcolonial neoliberal's economy. Postcolonial Ecocriticism preserves the "aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set our

symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world” (Huggan, G. and Tiffin, H. 14).

Rob Nixon, in his work *Slow Violence and the environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), defines “slow violence” as the destruction or degradation that takes place over a long period of time which is unlike any sudden violence of war or any immediate disasters. It occurs over an extended period of and is not explicitly visible or gets attention by the media. On a similar note with Guha, Nixon also identifies the ‘environmentalism of the poor’. According to Nixon, slow violence has a greater impact on certain sections of people in the Global South.

Synopsis of Poems

This section introduces the relevant poem of Jacinta Kerketta pertinent for the this study

Death of the Mother tongue
 “In the very mouth of Mother,
 Was immured the mother tongue,
 And children
 Came of age,
 Demanding its release from this prison.
 A natural death it was not,
 The mother tongue was slain,
 But to Mother unbeknown it remained.
 In view of the possibilities,
 Luring with dreams of bread and butter judgement
 For the sake of her children’s future.
 And crushed beneath those dreams of a few morsels
 Was the mother tongue.
 Even today, Mother believes
 That the death of the mother tongue
 Was a mere accident, unforeseen.”

This poem reflects linguistic erasure that takes place under the guise of necessity for a better future. This can be connected to the slow violence of Rob Nixon- *Slow Violence*- as the mother tongue is gradually slain in the pretext of better possibilities. The mother considers this as a natural process wherein the language loss is accidental. Mother is being silenced as she is unable to share the worldview that the mother tongue carries. There is no inter-generational transmission of stories, songs, language, and culture that is taking place. There is internal colonialism that is taking place wherein a dominant language is being preferred over the mother tongue- linguistics genocide.

The Dust of Development
 “No footsteps more are heard,
 Plodding along towards the fields,
 For addicted now are those feet
 To chase after trucks laden with coal
 Along the road of the *PANEM* mines.
 So Long has it been
 Since the hoe has heard sing

The farmer his delightful song
 While it swung on his shoulder along,
 For now the farmer creeps
 Out of the house like a thief" (Kerketta, Jacinta. 81)

Kerketta presents this vivid account of farmers in their own villages and fields. Once, farmers would walk freely to their fields, carrying the hoe and singing to the tune of the season. However now the farmer is absent from the field, engaging in collection of coals from the truck like a thief. The poet paints a picture for readers that presents an ache and suffering that displacement has caused. There is solastalgia about the basic activity of going to the fields which is disrupted by mining activity.

Similarly, in the poem '*Identification*', the poet says that every time one has to enter a jungle, they need an identification marker even though it is their home they are going into. There is a sense of loss and longing of not only the land but also their identity is being questioned. Here, the poet is grieving for an intangible loss of identity as well.

Huffing and puffing machines
 "Having done with uprooting the tress
 Out of breath are the machines.
 And now these huffing and puffing machines
 Are searching for the cool shade of a tree" (Kerketta, Jacinta. 157)

This poem reflects the pain of witnessing the transformation of one's home environment wherein the agent that caused the destruction is looking for some solace from a tree in the form of shade. The poem mourns for the loss of trees as well as the loss of a living world. This biting poem by Kerketta reflects the paradox of clearing forest land under the guise of progress. The machines are personified, huffing and puffing, and are short of breath. This could also be interpreted as the trees are resisting the development that harms them. There is power dynamic at play wherein trees are exerting their by being absent and machines' presence is subjected to torment in the absence of shade.

O, city!
 "Leaving behind their homes,
 Their soil, their bales of straw,
 Fleeing the roof over their heads, they often ask,
 O, city!
 Are you ever wrenched by the very roots
 In the name of so-called progress?" (Kerketta, Jacinta. 27)

The above poem articulates grief of displacement and lost home under the pretext of 'progress'. Here the loss is of ultimate form as depicted by "wrenched by the very roots" which leaves no scope for going back to what it was. Leaving the soil and bales straw uproots their identity which is associated with their ancestral land and culture. Thus, for tribal people home signifies not just a building but an ecosystem of ancestral land tied with culture and identity.

Return
 "Mother Earth needs but a little time,
 And she shall set herself free

From your rules and regulations.
 Her wounds she shall herself heal,
 Cover naked lands once more with green.
 She shall recall once again
 The ancient civilisation, Sunk into oblivion,
 And their languages, too,
 Lost to Extinction" (Kerketta, Jacinta. 143)

In the poem *Return*, the poet actively proposes resistance. Absence is portrayed as matter of fact wherein the land is no more green, ancient is in oblivion and language is extinct. On the other hand, the presence is not marked by what present 'now' but what can be recalled. Even though at present there is a loss of green forest covers, language is lost and the ancient civilization is sunken, Mother Earth is going to heal in the future and bring back all these to life. Hence the erasure is temporary, marked by wounds inflicted upon the land and its people and their language. It is due to the rules and regulations of neo-colonial development that this erasure has taken place which causes a disruption. The poem reflects resistance by hoping that in future Mother Earth will heal itself.

Discussion

Jacinta Kerketta's poetry strongly advocates resistance to the dominant reductive narrative of development and progress, and associated ecological destruction. Her poetry evokes emotions of pain, suffering, longing that is expressed through the memories of the past which still linger in the present. Kerketta's work encapsulates the core trajectory of postcolonial ecocriticism, which integrates an ecocentric and anthropocentric approach that encompasses the themes of wilderness and their preservation, Guha and Nixon's 'environmentalism of the poor'.

Her poetry often presents the theme of resistance that articulates the impact of neo-colonial development on tribal communities. Their land, culture, language and environment are threatened with being lost in the process of such progression. Their land is lost due to displacement and migration, there is loss of culture and languages as well. Rob Nixon describes this as 'slow violence' wherein there is an absence of awareness. These slow violence might hinder our ability to experience ecological grief. In the poem 'death of the mother tongue' mother is unaware that the mother tongue is actually slain and not an accidental death. Similarly, loss of land and environmental degradation is not explicitly understood as the community members are more oriented towards dominant discourse of development that makes them seek opportunities which are not in tandem with their own way of being. So, there is no space to share feelings and have collective experience of ecological grief. .

Apart from loss of identity, there is also the issue of intangible loss like linguistic erosion addressed by the poet. There is a linguistics genocide (Kangas, Skutnabb-Tove) that takes place when subaltern willingly or unwillingly give up their native language for the "bread and butter". The poem *Death of the Mother Tongue* encapsulates the linguistic loss which is not natural but intentional. The mother is unaware that loss or extinction of language is taking place when she clenches her teeth for better future opportunities for her children. This linguistic loss does not

take place in isolation as it is related to the biocultural diversity loss (Maffi). Hence, the grief is not only for lost language but also for the words that explained the land, rivers, forest and mountains.

Conclusion

Jacinta Kerketta's poetry presents a fierce approach to reading Adivasi literature which is new in the already nascent genre of Adivasi literature. The stories and songs that were traditionally transferred from one generation to the next orally consisted of describing nature, culture, festivals and day to day life. Kerketta's poems include all these themes in her poem as well as transformed society is also very well portrayed in the poems. Her poetry marks the presence of loss of Adivasi culture, language and identity, destruction of nature, increasing consumerism, changing relationship between human and nature.

Through her poetry she provokes the readers to widen the horizon and protect and preserve the environment before it is too late. A key aspect of Jacinta Kerketta's poetry is the presence of constant undercurrent of pain, longing and resistance in all of her narration. These essential human emotions occur due to disruption and disturbance in their way of life that leads to destruction of the environment, loss of biodiversity, culture and identity, and loss of a community knowledge system. With a large-scale environmental crisis and loss happening at the present, we as humans move beyond data and statistics and need to find a space where we can express what we feel about this. We must talk about ecological grief and solastalgia as it could help to protect and preserve the environment.

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DABEER SI/KTT/17**VULNERABLE ‘LOCAL BORN’ AND DISTURBED ECOSYSTEM:
EMIGRATING STORIES OF THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS IN PANKAJ
SEKHSARIA’S *THE LAST WAVE*****NIRONTOR BORGORYARY**Research Scholar, Department of English
Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India**ANJALI DAIMARI**Professor, Department of English
Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India**Abstract**

This paper examines the social-ecological tensions embedded in Pankaj Sekhsaria’s *The Last Wave* (2014), focusing on how vulnerable local populations and disturbed ecosystems intertwine within migratory narratives in the Andaman Islands. The work situates the novel within a broader discourse of politics of identity and space, ecological displacement, and cultural memory, arguing that emigration patterns illuminate deeply uneven environmental and social vulnerabilities. By foregrounding “Local Born” communities, their livelihoods, knowledge systems, and intimate relationships with island ecosystems, the analysis reveals how external pressures (tourism, development, resource exploitation) and internal dynamics converge to reshape both landscape and identity. *The Last Wave* becomes a lens to scrutinize the fragility of island ecologies amid human movement, illustrating how immigration acts as both a symptom and a consequence of environmental disturbance. This background sets the stage for exploring intersections of vulnerability, resilience, and narrative form, and how Sekhsaria’s work negotiates memory, place, and the politics of belonging in the Andaman archipelago.

Keywords: Local Born, Ecology, Conservation, Identity, Space**Introduction**

Perhaps deliberate collective amnesia is the outcome of stifled and unspoken stories hidden beneath the surface of veracity. The thematic declaration of the featured Hindi film, *Bhagwat: Chapter One: Raakshas*, states, “To keep the truth, you must tell its story.” Thus, it implies that a narrator must live to recount the tale (*Bhagwat*, on ZEE5, 17/10/2025). But what if the teller of the story has already left or died? Since the last witness of the event is gone, the subject of the tale becomes a precarious “other” open entity. Therefore, the originality of the genealogy of a metamorphosed cataclysm of tangible “somewhere” from intangible “nowhere”, of spaces and lives, leads to a state of quandary and generates perturbation. This spatial expanse’s contention for an answer demands an intervention. To interfere with this “comportment toward the Other” body (Butler, *Precarious Life*, 129), Pankaj Sekhsaria, in his debut novel *The Last Wave* (2014), undertakes to tell a tale of a community’s emergence from an unexpected space in the 1920s. They are tagged as the “Local Borns”. “What kind of people

are these?” is the same question that the Head of the Department of Anthropology and the prospective guide of Seema Chandran would ask. Seema explains to her research guide: “I want to study my own community, I am an Andaman Local Born” (*The Last Wave*, 17).

Carl Sagan states, “Extinction is the rule. Survival is the exception” (*The Varieties of Scientific experience: A Personal View of the Search of God*, 76). Carl Sagan is making a profound scientific and philosophical point about the nature of life on Earth, ‘Extinction as the default outcome’ (76). SDG 14 (*Life Below Water*) and SDG 15 (*Life on Land*) are two sides of the same coin: the preservation of Earth’s life-support systems. The most poignant tension lies on the responsibility that how invisible versus the visible is treated equally. True sustainability requires to recognize that the blue entity and the green entity are treated as one and the same. The potential perception of the visible threats can plausibly be amended; however, the invisible precariousness needs avid heed. The process of extinction of lives that are immediate to the eyes are doubtlessly visible. On the other hand, the lives that are cocooned in the stories or narratives also pass away along with the minds and the bearer:

Seema: “Do you want to take all these (stories) to your grave with you?”

Ahmed Mia: “A man takes nothing but himself to the grave, who is interested in the islands, in what happened here?”

“He made a peaceful departure the very next afternoon... He took all he knew with him to his grave.” (*The Last Wave*, 31 & 32).

She explores how her community on the island has declined into insignificance, owing to the absence of published materials about the community, a space for inquiry is opened. Now she is a descendant, an inquisitor, and in the subsequent narrative serves as a living informant of what Emmanuel Levinas calls the “face” of the ‘Local Borns’. Seema ‘had registered for her Ph. D. at Delhi University on “The Socio-economic Evolution of the Andaman’s ‘Local Borns’ (*The Last Wave*, 17), in the process of her research, she encountered a stimulating story of the Aniket settlement in Port Blair (*The Last Wave*, 28). The name ‘Aniket’ is an Indianized renaming of Anne William and Kate William. These two girls succumbed, unable to survive in the unwelcoming environment of the Island’s habitats.

The spatial tussle of two contradictory entities has been a process of survival. This fight is inevitable and unstoppable. Nothing is more difficult than speciating and surviving in a foreign space. It was equally troublesome for the people who were completely unequipped to settle in an alien ecological space. Thus, the genealogy of the “Local Borns” settlement in the Andaman Islands is the outcome of the conglomeration of people convicted and enlodged in Port Blair’s “famously infamous Cellular Jail around 1925, also known as ‘the Kalapani’” (*The Last Wave*, 20). The prisoners came from a variety of backgrounds and religions. These people have cut the tether of their old history and reconstructed a new name and origin. An account of a new genealogy of the community that explains how they emerged out of the Jail and became a significant community summarizes as:

Iqbal was found guilty of killing a policeman in his hamlet close to Lahore, who had sexually assaulted his sister and caused her to commit

suicide. Lalita, on the other hand, participated in the Indian independence movement. She was one of a few young men and women who stormed and set fire to a local police station near Bhopal. After being released from prison, they were married, and together with the other released prisoners, they were given an acre of land. Albert William, a junior officer in the prison administration, was tasked with designing and organizing two settlements for the prisoners and the “nowhere land” that had been provided to them. As construction on these communities accelerated, “nowhere” gradually gave way to “somewhere”—a concrete location with personality and identity. Anne and Kate Williams, the two daughters of William and his wife, had died from an unidentified fever during the settlement process. Speaking on behalf of the community, Lalita declares, “Our settlements will be known as Anne and Kate.” The new islanders named the two settlements after the girls. (*The Last Wave*, 29)

Contested Identity and Belonging

Liminality in literature is the study of threshold experiences - spatial, temporal, psychological, or ontological - where characters, narratives, and societies exist “betwixt and between” (*Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, 93). The notion of liminality is often associated with *Rites of Passage*, where individuals transition from one social status to another, experiencing a state of ambiguity and disorientation. Liminality is the transitional, “in-between” (Turner, 93) state during a change, where normal structures and identities are suspended and new possibilities emerge. The theory of liminality was first systematically outlined by French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep in his seminal 1909 work, *The Rites of Passage*. His framework emphasized how transitional phases (separation, Transition, and incorporation) maintain social order by managing transitions. Victor Turner, in *The Rituals Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), shifted focus from static rituals to dynamic social processes and expanded the approach, making it a versatile tool for understanding not just rituals but any period of ambiguity and potential in human experience. In the late twentieth century, Homi K. Bhabha termed it as “third space” (*The Location of Culture*, 37) of hybridity of inherently liminal - neither colonizer nor colonized. For instance, Salman Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai, born at India’s independence, embodies national and personal liminality (Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, 1981). However, Andaman “Local Borns” identity and belonging are invariably situated on a different liminality.

The contested identity and belonging of the “Local Borns” is a central and deeply poignant theme in the novel. While the indigenous tribes face an existential threat, the “Local Borns”- descendants of original settlers (often convicts and laborers from the Indian Mainland) - face a profound crisis of identity, caught between multiple worlds and fully belonging to none. They have lived on the islands for generations, yet they are not considered the “original” inhabitants, nor are they seen as legitimate or “mainstream” by the more recent arrivals from the Indian mainland. Their identity is contested across several fronts:

a) *In relation to the mainland:*

First, cultural and social distance: Having been isolated for generations, the “Local Borns” have developed a distinct culture, a unique language, and specific social norms. Second, political marginalization: Krishna Raj’s legitimate cry over the “insignificance” of their community is further heard in his subsequent statement, “we are a people with a history, but no future” (*The Last Wave*, 35).

b) *In relation to the indigenous tribes:*

First, both communities have been profoundly shaped by the British colonial project, but in violently different ways. The British decimated tribes and stole their land, while using the ancestors of the “Local Borns” as forced labor to build settlements on that same stolen land. Second, the burden of history and resentment creates a complex and often tense relationship. The “Local Borns” are, in a way, the human legacy of the colonization that destroyed the tribes’ way of life. While the novel doesn’t show overt conflict, this historical weight is a barrier to any genuine solidarity. The “Local Borns” belong to the settler-colonial project, even if they were its tools rather than its architects.

c) *In relation to ‘New Settlers’:*

The post-independence influx of refugees, farmers, and businessmen from the mainland (like Bengali settlers) further marginalizes the “Local Borns”. These new arrivals often see the islands as a virgin territory for opportunity and have the backing of mainland political networks. Samaresh Basu, a settler of about forty years and currently a powerful politician, allotted “three acres of land each” to the “all encroachers on forest land” in Krishna Raj’s term “a bloody vote bank” (*The Last Wave*, 35). The “Local-Borns” find themselves competing for jobs, resources and political influence with these new settlers, who often view them with a sense of superiority or pity, dismissing their deep-rooted connection to the islands.

External Influx and Precarious Local Communities in *The Last Wave*

Pankaj Sekhsaria is a renowned Indian author, journalist, researcher, and environmentalist. He is a vital voice who has consistently brought national and international attention to the fragile environment, wildlife, and indigenous communities of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. His debut novel, *The Last Wave: An Island Novel*, published in 2014, is a powerful and poignant exploration of colliding worlds and the tragic, inevitable displacement of the indigenous people by the relentless wave of mainstream development and settlement from the Indian mainland. The murder of the islands’ natural system is the novel’s central concern. The book also explores the complex interplay between external influences and the precarious existence of local communities. Set against the backdrop of environmental degradation and cultural dislocation, the narrative delves into the impact of globalization and external economic forces on existing populations. The most devastating waves are not made of water, but of people and ideas.

Arjun Appadurai provides ‘Scapes’ (*Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, 33), a framework of understanding the flows that cause

detritorialization. He calls these ‘the five dimensions of global cultural flow’, or ‘scapes’. These flows are fluid, overlapping, and unpredictable. They constantly interact to create new realities and dislocate old ones. Specifically, “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai, 33-37) refer to the “landscape person of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” encompassing the global circulation of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other mobile groups (*Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 33-37). These flows are not uniform or predictable; they are profoundly disjunctive, influenced by economic disparities, political upheavals, and technological advancements in mobility, creating a world where human movement operates on large scales.

Sekhsaria sees the influx in the Andaman Islands as not a single event, but a continuous, multi-layered, and destructive process. This is a state-facilitated demographic transformation that systematically displaces the indigenous people. This process is a slow-motion catastrophe. One of the novel’s core apprehensions is the loss of importance that results from the influx. “We are not significant anymore,” says Krishna Raj, “Local Born” Association’s secretary, and this is one of the motifs of the novel (*The Last Wave*, 34). The identity of the Local Borns is rooted in the islands’ penal colonial history. They are the convicts and political prisoners from the Indian mainland. This origin immediately places them in a complex position. The Local Borns as a community are caught in an impossible historical and social trap, in circumstances that created their ambiguous and often complicated position. They are perpetually stuck between two worlds: between the mainland and the islands, between the indigenous and the settler. While they share the space with the indigenous tribes, their economic and cultural interests have increasingly aligned with those of the newer settlers. For this reason, they are neither settlers nor natives. They are born in a bizarre circumstance. However, they always “prided themselves on making the islands” (*The Last Wave*, 34). Conversely, the post-independence influx of people and urbanization devastated the local population’s demographics and forced them into a vulnerable periphery.

These are census figures... in 1951, the population of the Andaman district was only about 19,000 people, a majority of whom were local born. Today, this number has increased to more than 250,000...all these people were not born here. Most of them have come from outside, from the mainland. Then they moved deeper to find land to encroach. It’s like an incoming tide that keeps rising, a tide refusing to turn back. Rising... and rising and we are all being swamped’. (*The Last Wave*, 36)

Settlers are shown clearing vast tracts of rainforest to establish agriculture, directly destroying the territory of the tribes. The constant, relentless influx of people from the mainland eventually swamps the demographic landscape. This physically transforms the landscape, one of forests to one of human settlement, permanently fragmenting the indigenous world. This inflow of encroachers is like “an incoming tide that keeps rising, a tide that now refuses to turn back” (*The Last Wave*, 36). “Local Borns”, the first settlers, are under the threat of vulnerability of assimilation and extinction, like the “first borns,” the indigenous communities (*The Last Wave*, 23). In addition, the novel also highlights similar susceptibility in terms of Karen and Ranchis, who are brought by the plantocrats and church

missionaries for the purpose of clearing forest lands and cultivating different mainland crops. Uncle Pame, a seventy-year-old Karen boatman, whose father was brought to the islands from Burma, had partnered with protagonists and other researchers as their informant on the reality of his people's struggle in the islands. Sekhsaria's tale vividly illustrates Arjun Appadurai's ethnoscape theory, where global flows of people disrupt static cultural landscapes, fostering disjuncture and transformation. The Andamans, once isolated archipelagos inhabited by tribes for up to two millennia (*The Last Wave*, 23), became a microcosm of globalization's irregular migrations. External influxes of settlers, officials, and tourists propelled by colonial legacies, economic disparities, and modern fantasies of escape engender deterritorialization, rendering the local communities' world precarious and contested.

In the novel, the "ethnoscape" (Appadurai, 33-37) manifests as a relentless tide of "outsiders" (*The Last Wave*, 35) breaching protected reserve forest, echoing Appadurai's depiction of mobile population (immigrants, refugees, and sojourners) whose movements are uneven and amplified by infrastructural enablers like the Andaman Trunk Road. This road, slicing through Jarawa territory, acts as a literal and symbolic conduit for influx, much like global technoscapes facilitating border-crossing.

Vulnerability of Island Ecosystem

The novel is a profound meditation on the ecological precarity of the Andaman Islands. It is also the exploration of ecological precarity, using the fragile ecosystem of the Islands as both a literal setting and a profound metaphor. The theory of ecological precarity has emerged as a critical framework that engages with the interconnected crises of environmental degradation, climate change, and social vulnerability. It moves beyond earlier "nature writings" or "environmental literature" by foregrounding a state of pervasive instability and risk inherent to life in the late Anthropocene. It describes the condition where the fundamental systems that support life, clean air, water, stable climate, and fertile soil are no longer reliable, creating a shared but unevenly distributed experience of insecurity. Ecological scholarship applies Butler's contribution to the idea of "differential distribution of precarity"; this vulnerability is not felt equally but is exacerbated along lines of race, class, gender, and geography (Butler, *Precarious Life, Grievable Life*, 3). This lens helps argue that environmental harms are not neutral disasters but inflicted upon populations already rendered vulnerable by systematic injustice. Butler offers a powerful lens for examining the intertwined vulnerabilities of human and nonhuman lives in ecological fragile space. Butler's ideas illuminate how climate-induced disasters and developmental violence exacerbate precarity, not as natural inevitabilities, but as human-induced, colonial systems that prioritize extraction over livability. In Pankaj Sekhsaria's *The Last Wave: An Island Novel*, these concepts resonate deeply with the depicted fragilities of the Andaman Islands, where the island ecosystem and local communities embody precarious lives on the brink of erasure.

The Andaman Islands are a liminal space - neither fully land nor fully water. This inherent instability is the source of its precarity. The ecological precarity in the novel is not a single issue but a complex web of interconnected threats. Sekhsaria

first establishes the islands as a place of unique and delicate balance. The novel highlights species found nowhere else on Earth. “The endemic Nicobari megapode, a bird that scrapes together a mound of earth and decaying matter for a nest in the low-lying coastal forests in the Nicobar Islands, and then the edible nest swiftlet that builds its nest in dark, inaccessible caves with nothing but its own saliva” (*The Last Wave*, 14). Their populations are very small and geographically restricted, making them incredibly vulnerable to extinction from a single catastrophic event or gradual habitat loss. The precarity is historically rooted in a legacy of exploitation. The British colonial administration’s use of the islands as a penal colony began the large-scale alteration of the landscape, clearing forests and imposing an alien system of governance. Developmental projects continue in the post-independence Indian State as a colonial remnant. The novel critically projects timber extraction: “We are losing a priceless forest” (*The Last Wave*, 185). Rob Nixon provides alternative terms for ecological precarity as “Slow violence: a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2). The burgeoning of PT Orchid in the Islands serves as a metaphor for how quickly the island ecology has altered. “I first noticed PT-*papilionanthe*- a nice pretty pink,” (*The Last Wave*, 187) S K Kutty, a plant researcher, speaks about a grave ecological transformation in the Islands. The flower bears an oxymoronic character of beauty and danger. Moreover, the flower is nothing extraordinary: “PT is very common” (187). There is an indispensable organic attribute of PT that requires it to obtain direct sunlight to bloom, “Out and out a sunlight-loving plant” (187). S.K. witnessed extensive timber extraction from the forest over the years, and thinning of the forest paved the way for the PT to take over. However, on the other untouched side of the forest, the PT has failed to speciate up till now. Because the canopy of unaltered rainforest closes above like an umbrella, not a scrap of light can get through. PT does not have a chance of establishing itself here” (188).

The novelist also bluntly cautions that replantation of the commercially beneficial trees without research about the island ecosystem is a terrible disaster. “Pristine forests converted to plantations of trees that have no place here. They don’t belong here” (*The Last Wave*, 189). Sekhsaria exposes that the ecological homogenization for commercial enterprise is impossible in the islands. Forceful speciation is harmful for both the new species and the habitat. The expansion of settlements is a form of neo-colonialism, where the mainland view of “development” is violently imposed on the islands, disregarding their ecological logic. “S K said, pointing ahead... there he was, a mouse of a man nibbling away a giant rainforest” (*The Last Wave*, 194).

Conclusion

The emigrating stories from the Andaman Islands are not merely tales of individual choice but are the profound and painful symptoms of a dual crisis. This paper has argued that the narratives of departure are inextricably linked to the parallel degradation of both the human and natural worlds of the archipelago. The Vulnerability of the “Local Born” community (a legacy of historical displacement and ongoing socio-political marginalization) is compounded by the rapid and

often irreversible disturbance of the island's fragile ecosystem. The silent malady that is killing the "Local Borns" is the "Tide" of external influx. This influx systematically dismantles the very foundations of the locals' existence. In the face of this new, imposed reality, rendering them "precarious borns" in their land. The true tragedy is that this precarity is not a passive state but an active process of displacement. The departure of the "Local Borns" is a silent exodus signaling a broken relationship between people and their place.

The vulnerability of the Andaman archipelago is not a singular issue, but a complex and tragic interplay of ecological and cultural erosion. The islands' peril is twofold: they are under direct physical assault from a model of "development" characterized by deforestation and infrastructure projects, and systematic dismantling of islanders and the island ecosystem. Thus, the novel posits protecting the island's knowledge of the local people. The "last wave" of the title, therefore, serves as a dire warning: unless there is a fundamental paradigm shift towards a conservation model, the "last wave" is coming back with bigger destructive intent.

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DABEER SI/KTT/18**UNMAPPING THE ANDAMANS: ARCHIPELAGIC IMAGINATION
AND ECOLOGICAL DECOLONIALITY IN *LATITUDES OF LONGING*****PIYUSH NARNOLI**Independent Research Scholar
Department of English, University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

This paper argues that Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) reconceives the Andaman archipelago as a decolonial ecological imagination that unsettles the territorial epistemologies through which colonial modernity organises space, memory and belonging. While postcolonial ecocriticism has predominantly privileged terrestrial landscapes as sites of resistance, Swarup's novel turns to the littoral world of islands, reefs, tidal ecologies, and oceanic currents to imagine forms of relation that elude the cartographic logic of enclosure and sovereign possession. Focusing on the Andaman narrative, the paper demonstrates how the novel's fragmented structure, expansive geological temporality, and the trajectories of its human and more-than-human figures generate an archipelagic consciousness in which identity emerges through circulation, contingency, and ecological entanglement rather than rooted territoriality. Drawing upon Blue Humanities, archipelagic studies, critical geography, and postcolonial environmental humanities, the paper proposes 'archipelagic decoloniality' as a critical framework for understanding how the novel imagines ecological memory beyond nature-state. If colonial cartography studies islands into governable units of imperial state, Swarup's narrative restores their material instability, foregrounding coastlines, currents, coral ecologies, and tectonic histories that continually exceed representational capture. In this amphibious world, memory no longer inherits in bounded landscapes or national archives. Still, it circulates across waters, bodies, species and geological time, resisting the territorialization through which colonial power secures historical authority. The paper contends that *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) relocates decolonial possibility from the recovery of land to the archipelago's relationality. By imagining the Andamans as a counter-cartographic ecology where spatial instability becomes an ethical and epistemological resource, the novel advances an alternative politics of belonging grounded not in possession but in ecological coexistence. In doing so, it expands the conceptual vocabulary through which postcolonial literature engages with the intertwined questions of memory, ecology and decolonial futures.

Keywords: Archipelagic Studies, Blue Humanities, Decolonial Ecology, Critical Geography, Postcolonial Studies, Environmental Humanities, Spatial Studies

Introduction: Unmapping the Archipelago

Every colonial enterprise unequivocally begins not with the ambition of conquest but with the puissance of legibility. Colonial modernity operates through an epistemological vein that tactfully displaces indigenous modes of knowing via the

homogenising logic of empirical rationality, scientific reductionism, and compulsive cognition. Before a territory is colonised, occupied, governed, surveyed, or extracted, it must first be rendered intelligible within the colonial epistemological regime, which coercively translates heterogeneous landscapes into measurable, bounded, and condensed administrative spaces. Colonial cartography does not merely operate on the logic of spatial representation but becomes a locus for the production and dissemination of power, thereby naturalising specific spatial arrangements over others. J. B. Harley, in his seminal essay *Deconstructing the Map* (1992), positions “cartography as a discourse- a system which provides a set of rules for the representation of knowledge embodied in the images we design as maps and atlases” (12). Harley argues that mapping becomes symptomatic of “power/ knowledge matrix of the modern order” that “extends and reinforces the legal statuses, territorial imperatives, and values stemming from the exercise of political power” (12). Cartography, therefore, emerges not as a mere transparent representation of external reality but as historically contingent cultural texts that deliberately mask the political and epistemic labour of the very regime that synthesises them. The empire’s pulverising rhetoric transforms geography into territory, mobility into fixity, and relation into possession, thereby constituting a conceptual grammar through which topography is decimated as a bailiwick of ownership, classification, and sovereign authority.

Within the colonial cartographic imagination, islands have occupied a privileged and revealing position. Since the emergence of European maritime expansion, islands have frequently been conceived as naturally bounded spaces whose geographic isolation appears to invite colonial administrative enclosures and geopolitical dominion. The colonial gaze conjured archipelagos as a strategic topography that could serve as military outposts, penal colonies, laboratories of empire, or exotic frontiers awaiting discovery. Archipelagos have repeatedly functioned as privileged sites where colonial power aggrandised its territorial ambitions beyond the terrestrial confines. However, such assumptions become fundamentally manacled, as they mistake the coastlines for absolute boundaries and the surrounding sea for a vacuous volume that demarcates one unit of land from another. Within the colonial turn, the spatial imagination of archipelagos or islands, thus, translates into cartographic fiction even before it becomes a geographical fact. Recent interventions in Blue Humanities and archipelagic studies have fundamentally critiqued and challenged such insular assumptions that delimit the perception of coastal ecosystems. The contemporary scholarship on wet ecologies radically dismantles and subverts conventional understanding of terrestrial histories and colonial cartography by asserting that spatial boundaries are neither naturally inscribed nor historically stable. Scholars such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2007), Philip E. Steinberg (2001), and Edouard Glissant (1997) insist that oceans constitute dynamic spaces of circulation through which histories, cultures, species, and memories continually move. Islands cannot be understood as isolated territorial fragments because their identities emerge through relational networks sustained by currents, tides, migration, trade and ecological exchange. In this vein, the archipelago consequently replaces the island as the more

conceptually invigorating framework. Archipelago signifies not merely a cluster of islands but an alternative spatial epistemology in which discontinuity coexists with relation, and where physical separation never entails absolute isolation. Yet despite the burgeoning influence of Blue Humanities within Environmental Humanities, postcolonial ecocritical scholarship has significantly privileged terrestrial landscapes as the omphalos through which decolonial discourses and ecological resistance are imagined. Forests, mountains, deserts, agrarian ecologies and fluvial landscapes have predominantly consolidated debates on environmental decoloniality and postcolonial scholarship because they visibly register the histories of dispossession, extraction, and the developmental violence that accompany imperial conquest. While such scholarship has considerably widened the horizons of postcolonial ecocriticism, it has also underexamined the theoretical possibilities of augmenting the discourse by including littoral environments, coral ecologies, archipelagic formations and oceanic worlds whose material instability resists the sedentary assumptions embedded within colonial spatial imaginaries. The question, therefore, is not how literature represents ecological interconnectedness, but how particular ecological forms compel us to rethink the very categories through which space, memory and belonging have been historically organised.

Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) emerges as a groundbreaking intervention in postcolonial studies as it unsettles the colonial logic of mapping and insular understanding of cartographic discourses. Traversing the Andaman archipelago, the borders of Himalayan valleys, fault lines of Myanmar and the snow desert of the Tibetan plateau, the novel resists the conventional realist assumption that landscapes merely provide the backdrop against which human histories unfold. Swarup decentres attention to distinct geological formations and ecosystems such as mangrove ecology, tidal systems, coral reefs, tectonic shifts and fossils that have conventionally been relegated to the fringes and their participation in the historical process of meaning production has largely remained obscured. Swarup repeatedly displaces human life from the centre of narration and relocates it within temporalities that stretch across evolutionary, geological, and oceanic scales.

This essay particularly focuses on the Andaman section of Swarup's novel to interrogate the coherence of bounded spaces and the reductionist logic of colonial cartography. The archipelago is not simply represented as an ecologically interconnected system; it becomes a site where the epistemological assumptions underpinning colonial cartography begin to disintegrate. Through the geological history of the Andaman archipelago, the novel contends with the terrestrial logic of immobility. The coastlines resist the magisterial idea of mapping as they continually shift. The geological formations of distinct geographies predate national histories and debunk the parochial idea of drawing borderlines. The oceanic currents refuse political borders while the ecological memories circulate across species and extended temporalities. Moreover, the paper argues that Swarup's narrative not only challenges essentialist anthropocentrism but also the territorial ontology through which colonial modernity imagines land, belonging and sovereignty.

This article argues that the novel advances what may be termed ‘archipelagic decoloniality’: a mode of critical ecological thinking that dismantles the hegemony of territorial epistemologies inherited from colonial modernity by reorganising memory, identity, sovereignty and belonging within the relational dynamics of the archipelago. This concept proposes that decolonisation requires questioning the epistemic assumptions through which territory itself becomes intelligible as an object of possession. The Andaman narrative frazzles the colonial desire for cartographic closure and eventually critiques the conceptual vocabulary that thrives on the idea of mapping.

Colonial Cartographies and the Production of the Island

Swarup’s *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) begins with the lines: “Silence on a tropical island is the relentless sound of water” (Swarup 8). Few contemporary Indian novels announce their intellectual project with such deceptive simplicity. These lines appear merely atmospheric, introducing the sensory landscape of the Andamans through an evocative paradox. Yet it quietly dismantles the epistemological assumptions that have historically governed the representation of the island. The project of colonial cartography privileges vision, in which the authority rests upon the assumption that space becomes intelligible once it has been rendered visible from above. The opening lines of Swarup’s novel refuse that visual order. Before the island is seen, it is heard. More significantly, what becomes audible is not the human voice but the ceaseless movement of water. The archipelago, consequently, never appears as a self-contained territorial object but rather is constituted from the outset through a relation that exceeds its coastline. The novel’s first gesture, therefore, is not descriptive but epistemological. Swarup interrupts the cartographic gaze before it can stabilise the archipelago’s understanding as a bounded geography.

Such a narrative beginning acquires greater significance when read against the history of the Andamans under British colonial rule. The archipelago entered the imperial imagination not as an already coherent geographical entity but as an object painstakingly assembled through surveys, nautical charts, ethnographic descriptions, geological reports, and penal records. Cartography became inextricably inseparable from administration because mapping transformed an unstable littoral environment into governable territory. J.B. Harley, in his notable essay *Deconstructing the Map* (1992), argues, “Power is exerted on cartography... Power is also exercised with cartography. Monarchs, rulers, state institutions, the Church, have all initiated programs of mapping for their own ends. In modern Western society, maps quickly become crucial to the maintenance of state power—to its boundaries, to its commerce...and to its military strength. Mapping soon became the business of the state: cartography was early nationalised.” (Harley 12). The map’s apparent neutrality conceals its ideological function of political authority and colonial convenience. Boundaries that emerge from administrative necessity, military occupation and colonial imperialism gradually acquire the status of natural facts. What appear as passive spaces and neutral geographies are already the outcomes of colonial logic and epistemic violence.

Aparna Vaidik, in her seminal work *Imperial Andamans: Colonial Encounter and Island History* (2010), demonstrates how the colonial knowledge of the Andaman

Islands emerged through the convergence of ethnography, forestry, geology, penal administration, and cartographic practice, whereby each discipline reinforces the other in transforming the archipelago into an administrable object. The island thus became less a geographical formation than an epistemological achievement. Its apparent coherence became contingent upon suppressing precisely those material conditions that rendered the archipelago unstable: tidal movements, mangrove ecologies, shifting coastlines, geographical upheavals, and indigenous patterns of inhabitation that refused the sedentary logic of territorial sovereignty. Swarup's novel establishes the idea that colonial space was produced not by the mere discovery of an island but by disciplining its fluidity into the fixed grammar of the map. The novel questions the assumption that the island is ever available for cartographic closure. This becomes particularly ostensible through the protagonist Girija Prasad's geological imagination. Trained to study the earth scientifically, Girija gradually discovers that geology does not consolidate the certainties of territorial knowledge but steadily erodes them. The deeper he ventures into the temporal history of the planet, the less convincing the permanence of political space appears. His reflections culminate in the novel's striking inversion of John Donne's famous dictum: "no island is an island" (Swarup 14). The sentence condenses the philosophical force of Girija's archipelagic imagination. Donne's notion of island conceives it as the paradigmatic figure of separation to emphasise human interdependence. Swarup reverses the metaphor itself. The island cannot function as the emblem of isolation because geological history reveals that isolation has never existed. Insularity, therefore, is not a natural condition but a cartographic fiction.

The novel furthers this insight through Girija's fascination with continental drift and the ancient supercontinent Pangaea. Looking at the geological maps, he encounters what Swarup describes as an "impossible jigsaw" (14). A conventional jigsaw promises eventual completion in which scattered fragments return to an original unity. However, Swarup's metaphor refuses such teleology as geological history neither affirms permanent fragmentation nor restores primordial wholeness. Within such a deep time of continental collisions and formations, national borders and imperial territories appear astonishingly fragile. The novel thus provincialises territorial thinking by exposing the temporal assumptions upon which it depends. Space appears stable only because human history mistakes its own limited duration for geological permanence.

The emerging discourse of Blue Humanities has repeatedly challenged the terrestrial bias embedded within modern geography. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey in her work *Routes and Roots* (2007) argues, "It is difficult to image the extent to which the entire globe was remapped because of the ocean's alterity to continental humans and because the land bias of metropolitan centers often considers deep ocean space to be out of sight and out of mind" (33). In a similar vein, Swarup's novel pushes the critique of continental epistemology further by describing the islands as little more than "breaks and pauses" in the meditative expanse of the sea (15). Islands emerge as temporary interruptions within a far older material continuity while the land ceases to occupy epistemological primacy. Swarup's narrative reverses the assumption of colonial geography by positioning water, not

land, as the organising principle of space. Within the oceanic cosmology of Swarup, oceanic currents, tectonic movements, coral formations and migratory routes necessitate the conditions through which islands temporarily emerge. The archipelago is, therefore, not an amalgamation of distinct landmasses connected afterwards by water; it is a relational ecology whose apparent fragments remain materially continuous. Edouard Glissant's notion of "relation" becomes relevant here, for it conceives the archipelago as a spatial imagination grounded in openness, circulation, and unpredictability rather than enclosure. In *Poetics of Relation* (1997), he argues, "Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11). Glissant champions archipelagic thinking by reframing identity and cultural exchange as open, rhizomatic and fluid networks rather than rigid, closed and territorial structures. Swarup extends Glissant beyond cultural exchange by grounding relations within the geological and ecological processes of the earth itself. Long before human societies imagine community, the planet has already rehearsed relations through tectonic drift, oceanic circulation and evolutionary interdependence.

Swarup's narrative strategy can be described through the rhetoric of unmapping in which one cartographic order is not substituted for another nor any geography rejected; rather, it entails the gradual dissolution of the conceptual habits through which land appears naturally enclosed, governable, and possessable. Swarup's Andamans remain irreducibly amphibious where histories flow across reefs, tides, forests and geological strata that refuse enclosure within imperial maps and national territories alike. The island, therefore, emerges not as the endpoint of cartographic knowledge but as a space where cartography itself begins to fail. The novel's decolonial imagination derives its most profound critical force from this cartographic failure.

Beyond Territorial Archives: Ecological Memory and the Archipelago

If colonial cartography stabilises space through the visual abstraction of territory, colonial historiography often stabilises history through documentary permanence such as names, dates, documents, and official narratives. The empire governs not only through maps but also through archives. This idea resonates strongly with what Ann Laura Stoler conceptualises as "technologies of rule", in which she argues that colonial archives effectuate epistemic politics rather than neutral accounts of historical truths. (20). Swarup's narrative on the Andamans resists this archival politics of closure through ghosts, bodies, trees, ruins and geological traces. Chanda Devi's encounters with spectral presences are significant not because the supernatural merely embellishes the novel's magical realism, but because hauntings give forms to histories that cannot be fully entailed by official memory. The novel preserves the imprints of the colonial past as it remains legible in the atmospheric atmosphere of the Goodenough bungalow, in stories attached to the objects, and in the uneasy coexistence of the living and the dead. Moreover, the novel makes the fragmentation of memory particularly explicit by calling memory a "shattered mirror" (Swarup 156). The image refuses the idea that the past can be recovered as a complete, stable picture. Memory survives through fragments, impressions, absences, repetitions, and material traces. The memories

associated with the archipelago become crucial because the geology of the archipelago itself is a form of fragmented continuity. The shattered mirror, therefore, becomes symbolic of peculiar spatial dynamics, whereby fragments acquire significance through relations amongst them.

The ecological memory becomes more than a metaphor for remembering through nature. The novel repeatedly allows material processes to exceed human archival time. Trees outlive the people who speak beside them; fossils preserve traces of vanished forms; geological movements precede political histories by millions of years, and water carries substances, bodies, stories and histories beyond the jurisdiction of any single place. Memory is consequently distributed across matter. The Andaman landscape becomes an archive, but not an archive that can be neatly catalogued. The archival memory of the archipelago survives through transformation while the archival record remains sedimentary, tidal, spectral and embodied. Since the ecological processes ignore the logic of political borders, consequentially, ecological memory also refuses territorial containment. The ecological memory in the Andamans is continually produced through movement, exchange, and material continuity.

The novel's treatment of the Karen community becomes particularly significant here as it unravels forms of ecological belonging and memory that transcend the conventional narratives of ecocritical discourses on memory. Rose Mary, an ethnic Karen girl who works as a maidservant for the family of Girija Prasad and Chanda Devi, could be easily read through a familiar pastoral script in which an indigenous or displaced community is imagined as naturally harmonious with the environment. Swarup's narrative subverts such simplified assumptions. Though the Karens are not the indigenous communities of the Andaman archipelago geographically or spatially, they are not historically infringed in Swarup's narrative. The presence of Karens in the Andamans is shaped by histories of migration, labour, religious interventions, poverty and colonial displacements. Their ecological knowledge is, therefore, not a pristine survival from an untouched past but a situated form of knowledge produced through historical pressure. The novel's ecological politics become more persuasive precisely because they refuse the innocence that often accompanies romantic accounts of indigenous environmentalism. Rose Mary's relation to the island is consequently a practice of inhabitation rather than a claim of ownership. She possesses expansive knowledge of tides, food ecology, animals, arboreal presences and forest knowledge systems, which is embodied and iterative. Her knowledge about the archipelago, despite not being its native, stems from her repeated contact with a world whose rhythms cannot be reduced to abstract information. Stacy Alaimo, in her distinguished work *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), proposes the idea of "trans-corporeality", in which she argues that "material force that traverses both human bodies and more-than-human natures creates new alliances" between the "material/discursive agency" and "embodied beings who are always inseparable from the environment" (139). She imagines "human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" and thus "underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the

environment.”” (2). Swarup’s characterisation of Rose Mary extends Alaimo’s stance on trans-corporeality as she embodies a human corporeality that is fundamentally porous, permeable and inseparable from the material environment. Mary’s material embodiment becomes deeply entangled with the biological and environmental systems of the Goodenough Bungalow and adjoining areas of the archipelago, thereby forming a continuum with the island’s geological and material phenomena. The novel’s description of her temporary settlement becoming home is significant because home is not projected as a pre-existing territorial essence. Rather, it is rendered legible through the ethics of care, labour, kinship, memory and familiarity. Belonging, therefore, is produced through relational encounters with the living as well as more-than-human agencies. Rose Mary’s episode strengthens the decolonial critique by mediating ecological memory as not merely a by-product of territorial possession but as an ongoing process that aligns with the geological, historical and ecological rhythms of the island.

Swarup’s novel does not superficially propose an alternative ecological archive that simply encompasses the previously marginalised and obscured histories of geological formations and deep time. Rather, *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) argues that decolonisation cannot be achieved merely by recovering forgotten documents; it also demands a recognition of forms of historical knowledge preserved within more-than-human worlds. The novel closely resonates with Malcom Ferdinand’s conception of “decolonial ecology”, wherein he argues that the “colonial enslavement consisted of a *refusal of the world as a mode of relation*” by producing a “double fracture”. In *Decolonial Ecology* (2022), Ferdinand explains that colonial modernity operated through the logic of capitalistic separation of humanity from nature (environmental fracture) and the coercion of the colonised race, indigenous cultures and colonised bodies (colonial fracture). The Andaman episode unequivocally unleashes the inseparability of discourses on environmentalism and imperialism as they share histories and conditions of colonial erasure and vulnerability.

Archipelagic Decoloniality: Belonging beyond Territory

If colonial modernity transformed the Andaman archipelago into a governable territory through cartographic maps and insular histories, *Latitudes of Longing* (2018) repeatedly asks whether decolonisation merely performs the reclamation of the same territorial imagination. The novel’s answer is strikingly ambivalent. While colonial occupation undoubtedly reorients the ecological and political life of the archipelago, Swarup suggests that recovering sovereignty over bounded land cannot by itself undo the epistemic habits through which the island first became available to colonial encroachment. The novel attempts not only to unsettle imperial authority but also the territorial epistemology that continues to shape belonging through enclosure, possession and fixed geographical precincts. Girija’s desire to scientifically classify the geological structures is repeatedly thwarted by the world’s material excess. Chanda Devi’s conversations with the botanical entities and the ghosts refuse the segregation of rational subject from inert object. Rose Mary’s ecological knowledge emerges through corporeal synthesis and immersion in the archipelago’s natural environment rather than a

detached existence. The idea of decolonisation in Swarup's novel is rendered complex as it shifts from the conventional recuperative logic of recovery towards the transformation of how belonging itself is imagined.

Philip E. Steinberg's (2001) account of the "social construction of the ocean space" becomes relevant at this point because it demonstrates that the sea, like land, is politically produced through legal, economic, and cultural practices. He asserts that "territorial political economy" extends to the hydrological spaces to produce an alternate "spatiality of capitalism" (Steinberg 22). Swarup's text augments Steinberg's argument by narrating the ocean as a medium through which the violence and relationality of territory become simultaneously visible. Through the narrative exegesis on Goodenough Bungalow and the discourses on the nomenclature of distinct islands in the Andamans, the novel argues that the ocean has never been outside the circuit of power politics. However, throughout the narrative arc, no character ultimately succeeds in possessing the archipelago. Even those who inhabit its landscapes remain subject to ecological rhythms that exceed human intention. The sea overwhelmingly determines mobility; monsoons reorder quotidian activities; forests, reefs and geological formations continually remind human beings of their ephemeral provincial presence within a far older material cosmos. Inhabiting the archipelago is contingent on entering into reciprocal forms of coexistence with the more-than-human world. The characters in the novel, such as Chanda Devi and Rose Mary, exemplify harmonious synthesis with the geological and historical temporalities of the archipelago, while the protagonist, Girija Prasad, represents a conventional cartographic logic and struggles to discern the autonomous existence of fluid economies that resist colonial meiosis.

The novel's archipelagic imagination actively resists the monolithic assumptions of colonial modernity and lends itself to narratives of territorial continuity and political coherence. The archipelago foregrounds discontinuity without fragmentation. Each island remains materially distinct while existing only through the oceanic ties that connect it to others. Swarup repeatedly mobilises this spatial logic to unsettle nationalist cartographies that imagine territory as a self-enclosed unit. The sea ceases to function as a border separating islands; instead, it becomes the medium through which histories, ecologies, and memories circulate across them. It is precisely this reconfiguration of spatial politics and the associated memories and notions of belonging that this paper describes as "archipelagic decoloniality". The term does not simply encompass the politics centred on the islands or the ecological ethics of symbiosis; rather, it names a mode of critical decolonial imagination that dismantles colonial territorial imaginaries and cartographic logic by relocating memory and belonging within the relational dynamics of the archipelago.

The Andamans are politically within the jurisdiction of India, yet their ecological and historical relations extend to the Bay of Bengal and beyond the nation's spatial imagination rooted in territoriality. The archipelago becomes a critical scale at which the nation's claim to spatial completeness begins to look inadequate. The novel's title itself reinforces this argument. "Latitudes" signify the precise coordinates on a map and act as an instrument of spatial ordering, while "longing" is affective, mobile, and irreducibly difficult to contain. The title juxtaposes the

language of cartographic precision with a condition that continually resists precision. Longing reflects the desire to travel and migrate while rendering memory porous. The novel, therefore, transforms geographical coordinates into relational vectors. What appears on the map becomes a set of movements. Unmapping thrives not on the abolition of location but by acknowledging that every location is produced by relations that cannot be enclosed within the coordinates.

Conclusion: The Maps must Tremble

Latitudes of Longing (2018) not only offers an alternative map of the Andaman archipelago but also debunks the colonial desire for a fixed and stable map. The narrative arc begins by inviting readers to hear the islands through the sea and subsequently shifts to deep geological time, colonial history, migration, memory and ecological entanglement to reveal that spatiality must transgress designated boundaries. Swarup's portrayal of the characters in the novel reimagines the associated notion of belonging by contextualising it within the broader discourses of movement, relation and shared histories rather than ownership. The archipelago emerges as a living web of relations in which memory itself is dispersed across bodies, landscapes, spectral figures, species and geological processes.

The novel sketches a sharp distinction between remapping and unmapping while highlighting that unmapping is a paradigmatic departure from the logic of fixed coordinates. While remapping seeks to correct an existing map by recovering erased histories, reimagining borders, or including marginalised communities, unmapping questions the assumption that territory can ever be made fully legible. Swarup's Andamans remains irreducible to the cartographic reason and coordinate logic of coloniality, whose history cannot be secured within a national archive, nor can the belonging be reduced to legal possession. The novel's decolonial impulse lies not in recovering the colonised geography but in unsettling the conceptual machinery that converts land into a territory and geography into an object of possession. Moreover, the archipelago reveals that every homeland is already shaped by multiple routes: migrations, labour, colonial encounters, species history, ecological entanglements and geological transformations. The logic of space exceeds the colonial machinery of enclosure and political borderlines. Archipelagic consciousness does not dissolve their distinctiveness but rather extends the scope of discerning critical geography and spatial temporalities beyond their current understanding.

This paper conclusively argues that the maps must tremble not because geography has ceased to matter, but because geography matters too much to be reduced to the cartographic lines inscribed upon it. In *Latitudes of Longing* (2018), the Andaman archipelago becomes a space where land remembers water, where memory learns to move, and where decolonial thought discovers that the most radical challenge to territorial power may not be to carve another boundary but to interrogate why possession was ever allowed to be the dominant grammar of belonging. The archipelago, ultimately, unravels itself as not an aggregated amalgamation of fragments awaiting cartographic mastery but as a mode of relation in which fragments remain distinct yet continually converse with each

other. Therefore, Swarup's deepest intervention is to make this relation not simply the subject of the novel but also the very condition of reading it.

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DABEER SI/KTT/19**BETWEEN ECOSYSTEMS: ECOLOGICAL BELONGING AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN LISA KO'S *THE LEAVERS*****R. MANIBALA**Research Scholar, The Research Centre
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Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Lisa Ko's *The Leavers* has been predominantly analysed through the frameworks of transnational adoption, migration, race, and diasporic identity. While these scholarly approaches have substantially enriched the understanding of the novel, they tend to emphasise biological kinship, national identity, and cultural assimilation as the primary paradigms for comprehending belonging. This article advocates for an alternative interpretation by introducing the concept of 'ecosystems of belonging', asserting that identity in *The Leavers* is produced through dynamic interactions among domestic spaces, language, memory, food practices, neighbourhoods, institutional structures, and affective networks, rather than solely through bloodlines or citizenship. Drawing selectively upon Yi-Fu Tuan's theory of place, Edward S. Casey's phenomenology of memory, Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial notion of hybridity and the Third Space, and Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the article contends that Deming's transnational adoption signifies more than a mere transition between two families; it represents a shift between competing ecosystems that continuously reshape his sense of self. Instead of viewing memory as a nostalgic act of recollection, the paper conceptualises it as an ecological force that maintains connections to displaced environments through everyday practices, sensory experiences, and domestic routines. Accordingly, *The Leavers* redefines postcolonial identity as a relational and ecological process emerging from ongoing negotiations among individuals, places, and cultural environments. By repositioning belonging as an environmental condition rather than a fixed biological or national inheritance, this study offers a novel perspective on postcolonial literary criticism, directly engaging with contemporary discourses on memory, gender, and ecology.

Keywords: Ecosystems of Belonging, Ecological Belonging, Postcolonial Identity, Transnational Adoption, Cultural Memory.

Introduction

There is a moment early in Lisa Ko's *The Leavers* where an eleven-year-old boy, freshly deposited in a house he does not recognise, lies under unfamiliar blankets, and thinks four words to himself like an incantation: "I am Daniel Wilkinson-not yet, perhaps not ever" (Ko 48). He is not Daniel Wilkinson. Not yet, maybe not ever, not in any sense that matters emotionally. But he says it anyway, the way a

person might repeat a phrase in a language they are still learning, before they actually believe they can speak it. That brief italicised sentence is, in miniature, what this paper is about: the effortful, often violent process by which a person gets moved from one set of relations into another and is expected, somehow, to take root.

The novel features two timelines. Deming Guo, born in Fuzhou Province and raised for a while by his grandfather before joining his mother in New York, lives in a crowded Bronx apartment with his mother, Polly, her boyfriend Leon, Leon's sister Vivian, and Vivian's son Michael. Until one ordinary morning, Polly goes to her shift at a nail salon and never comes back. She has been detained and, eventually, deported. Deming is fostered and then adopted by Peter and Kay Wilkinson, kind-hearted white academics in a small upstate town, who rename him Daniel. The second storyline, mainly in Polly's own first-person voice, explains what actually happened to her: the border crossing, funded by debt; years working in factories and salons; her arrest; and her return to a China she hardly recognises.

Most interpretations of the novel view this structure through one of two frames: an immigration-policy narrative about documentation and detention, or a trauma narrative about the psychological cost of loss. Even the National Book Foundation's own citation reaches for a related but underdeveloped vocabulary, calling the novel's structure a "doubled consciousness" (National Book Foundation) without asking what, structurally, produces this doubling. Both existing readings are persuasive, yet neither fully explains how the novel constructs belonging itself. They tend to treat family, memory, and identity as separate casualties of a single political event, as though adoption causes damage or migration inevitably produces an identity crisis. This article argues instead that, in Ko's telling, belonging behaves less like a fixed structure than an ecosystem of relationships. Throughout this article, ecological belonging refers to the broader condition through which identity is produced by relationships among people, places, languages, institutions, and everyday practices rather than by biological descent or national affiliation alone. An ecosystem of belonging, by contrast, denotes the specific network of these relationships sustained through debt, food, dialect, memory, and everyday practices that enables a person to experience home at a particular moment. Ecological belonging, therefore, names the larger relational process, while an ecosystem of belonging functions as the article's principal analytical unit. Ko's prose anticipates precisely such a vocabulary, repeatedly drawing on images of transplantation, rooting, seepage, and environmental continuity. These recurring lexical choices do more than decorate the narrative; they establish the ecological logic through which the novel imagines belonging.

Lisa Ko, born in New York City and raised in New Jersey, spent almost eight years on the novel before it won the 2016 PEN/Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction and became a National Book Award finalist the following year. She explained that the story originated from a 2009 New York Times article by Nina Bernstein about a detained immigrant woman. Her acknowledgements mention several real women, including Xiu Ping Jiang, Cirila Baltazar Cruz, and

Encarnación Bail Romero, whose cases informed the fiction (Ko 338). Ko transforms journalistic reports of undocumented migration into a deep literary exploration of family, memory, and displacement, and the concept of belonging serves as the framework that consistently guides this exploration.

Research Questions and Methodology

This article examines how *The Leavers* redefines family as an ecosystem of belonging maintained through proximity, shared labour, debt, and daily care, rather than through kinship or legal acknowledgement. It analyses Deming's adoption as a form of ecological transplantation, asserting that his integration into a new family also involves relocation into distinct linguistic, domestic, institutional, and cultural environments. The study further investigates how food, domestic spaces, memory, and language serve as ecological continuities that uphold identity despite displacement and loss. Finally, it explores whether the novel ultimately positions Daniel's identity within his homeland or his adoptive country, or if it conceptualises belonging as an evolving relational environment that exceeds both national and biological frameworks. Through these interconnected themes, the article argues that Ko depicts belonging as an ongoing process of assembly, disruption, and reconstruction through successive ecosystems of belonging, rather than inheritance through kinship or legal citizenship.

Close reading is particularly suited to this argument because the novel's ecological imagination is articulated through lexical choices rather than through explicit thematic declaration. A word such as *outseeped*, or Ko's ironic reuse of *transplants* to describe aesthetically rootless college students, would almost disappear in a broader thematic or sociological reading, where the emphasis falls on plot, institutions, or political critique rather than on the novel's individual lexical choices. Accordingly, this analysis remains text-centred throughout.

Three key theoretical touchstones do most of the conceptual work. Donna Haraway's distinction, in *Staying with the Trouble*, between auto-poiesis (self-making) and sym-poiesis (making-with) gives the concept of an ecosystem of belonging real conceptual depth rather than leaving it as decoration. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybrid, interstitial identity offers the vocabulary for the novel's refusal to place Daniel in either homeland or adopted nation fully. And Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's scholarship on food as a double signifier, simultaneously necessity and cultural extravagance, grounds the interpretation of eating and cooking in Section III. A few other frameworks are referenced more locally, invoked by specific scenes rather than as continuous lenses: Kath Weston's work on chosen kinship, Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory (used cautiously, as her framework was designed for a different historical context and does not seamlessly fit this novel), and Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora space. The article, therefore, does not adopt ecocriticism as a formal methodology. Instead, it develops a heuristic grounded in the novel's vocabulary and narrative practice.

From Kinship to Ecosystem: Reimagining Family Beyond Blood

The household Deming grew up in before his mother disappeared is not a family in anyone's eyes. Polly and Leon are not married. Vivian is Leon's sister, not Polly's, which means she is not a biological relation to Deming at all, and Michael,

Vivian's son, is not Deming's cousin by any court-recognised definition. Yet the language the novel uses for these characters is consistently familial: Deming calls Leon "Yi Ba", and it is only later, in a moment of real crisis, that the narration reminds us that Leon "was not his real Yi Ba", and that Michael and Vivian were "not his real cousin and aunt" (Ko 40). The word 'Real' functions within that sentence, performing its role twice: initially in reference to the father figure and subsequently for the aunt and cousin, suggesting a lack of confidence in the point's impact on the first instance. Michael does not hedge at all. When Deming says he is going to find his mother, Michael insists, "We are brothers, right? Like brothers" (Ko 40), and that confirms everything for him.

The description of the apartment building extends beyond individual households, framing it more as part of a broader domestic ecology than as a single home. Deming hears neighbours arguing in "English and Spanish and other languages he did not know", with a television bleeding through the floor, radiator pipes "clanging along to running toilets", and the narration concludes, quite casually, that "this building contained an entire town" (Ko 7). This is not a statement about comfort. Instead, it concerns density: many households clustered closely, like a reef housing numerous species in a shared water.

The shared resources are not only supportive but also represent a real financial burden, serving as both a risk and a safety net. When Polly initially disappears, Leon continues sending payments to the loan shark she owes, "almost double what she had been able to afford" (Ko 42), to prevent the debt from escalating for a woman who is no longer around to benefit from the payment. Years later, when Deming is mature enough to hear the complete story, Vivian plainly states, "If I had not paid, you would be dead by now" (Ko 110). He cannot decide "whether to hate Vivian or feel grateful to her" (Ko 110), as both reactions are justified.

Haraway's concept of sym-poiesis, a process of making with others rather than an autonomous, self-reproducing entity, accurately characterises this idea (Haraway 99-103). Weston's account of certain kinship ties among people who are not connected through legally recognised family relationships also reflects this phenomenon. However, her idea of chosen families is mainly based on voluntary choice, unlike the kinship discussed here, which is not. No one here selected the debt, the loan shark, or the incident that led to Leon's sister requiring a roommate. At this point, the framework becomes analytically productive rather than merely illustrative: real ecosystems are likewise not chosen, nor are they solely benevolent. Parasitism coexists with symbiosis, just as scarcity coexists with interdependence. This mix, where care also acts as debt and kinship as constraint, characterises the initial household. It prepares for a much more intense renegotiation of family dynamics once adoption occurs.

Ecological Transplantation: Adoption as the Reconfiguration of Belonging

If Section I describes a family functioning as an improvised ecosystem of belonging, this section asks what happens when a single member of that network is forcibly removed and relocated into a completely different one. Ko does not merely gesture at that question; she constructs the adoption sequence as if analysing a case of transplantation shock, making this the novel's most analytically revealing treatment of adoption.

Start with the word Ko plants early, well before the adoption occurs. Later, at a college party, Daniel observes his wealthy, bohemian classmates and feels a hint of disdain, viewing them as individuals who deliberately chose a rootless lifestyle: “these transplants dared to venture out” of their cosy suburban origins (Ko 16), mimicking a displacement he personally experienced. Ko later reuses the word “transplants” in an unexpected context; however, the disparity between its use and its impact on Deming himself closely mirrors the overarching argument of this section, condensed to a smaller scope. One form of uprooting is merely a pretence, whereas the other approaches a surgical procedure.

The transplantation begins, figuratively, on a staircase rather than on an operating table. Before the drive to upstate, a Chinese-speaking caseworker introduces Peter and Kay as his new foster parents, and Deming quickly runs off. He gets halfway down the carpeted stairs before being caught. “I already have a family”, he says (Ko 47). Four words, blunt and absolute, and the caseworker's answer arrives just as fast: “Your old family is not here anymore. This is your new family”. She enhances the reassignment with an inventory that feels more like a reduction of grief to the language of material reassurance. “They have a big house and lots of money” (Ko 47), converting an eleven-year-old's grief into real estate language immediately.

Kay, for her part, encourages him to lean on her and responds, in the narration's words, as “victorious” (Ko 47), which is a peculiar choice for a tender moment; victory suggests an opponent and a contest, something gained rather than someone comforted. Two sentences later, the novel presents the most monotonous and sorrowful line throughout the entire scene. “Nobody wanted him” (Ko 47). The definition of ‘family’ at this particular moment is being determined by all individuals in the stairwell, except for Deming, who is currently mid-sentence and mid-flight, literally caught between floors. This physical detail is significant. He is not merely informed that he has acquired a new family; rather, he is physically halted in his path to another destination, rendering the transplantation metaphor briefly and uncomfortably literal: a living thing arrested in transit and placed in an environment it did not select.

Once inside the new house, the description becomes more like habitat measurement than a homecoming: “five times the size of the Bronx apartment” (Ko 48). The unfamiliar square footage feels cold even in late August, with drafts too strong for the beanbags “stashed at the bottoms of doors” to block. Alone in bed with unfamiliar red flannel sheets, Deming offers his own four-word response to the caseworker's line from the stairwell: “I am Daniel Wilkinson” (Ko 48). The sentence functions less as a straightforward assertion of identity and more as an attempt to impose one and see if it sticks.

Language loss is often described in almost hydrological terms. During that first week, Deming perceives the “crumbs of dialect on his tongue”, with his Fuzhounese dissolving as “one language had outseeped another” (Ko 48). Ko introduces the neologism “outseeped,” which is significant: it leans more toward erosion than complete erasure, representing a gradual surrender rather than a quick deletion. Kay attempts to make up for this by using Mandarin phrases she learned from a dictionary and a night class, but she mangles the tones so badly that Deming

cannot understand her. The underlying issue is less about language skills and more about a failure in classification or categorisation. Neither Kay nor Peter appear unaware that Fuzhounese and Mandarin are distinct languages. Deming's reply, in a dialect they cannot understand, is "I do not know who you are" (Ko 48), one of the rare instances where the book allows him to be unguarded and angry.

The adoption bureaucracy receives the same detached scrutiny, and in this context, the novel's critique intensifies, revealing the bureaucratic logic embedded within adoption discourse. While examining a file cabinet, Deming discovers a pamphlet entitled "Gift of Life: Your Child Is Waiting for You" (Ko 79), featuring photographs labelled with countries of origin such as "Ethiopia, Romania, and China," as if nationality were a mere bureaucratic classification. Kay's own letter to the adoption agency describes her and Peter as "more than ready to make our family complete" (Ko 79), language that characterises a child as the essential missing element in an otherwise nearly complete family image. Embedded within the placement documentation is a minor detail that is easily overlooked yet carries significant implications: Deming was directed towards the Wilkinsons primarily because of "K. Wilkinson's indication of Mandarin-speaking skills" (Ko 79). This is essentially a clerical mistake, as neither Deming nor his mother spoke Mandarin as their native language. A child navigates an entire institutional framework based on a mislabelled checkbox.

By the time Peter informs Deming, several months later, that "We are your real family" (Ko 80), the assertion has evolved into something closer to a rehearsed phrase rather than an instinctive response in a stairwell. It is the same assertion made by the caseworker on page 47, now articulated in a more subdued, gentle manner by an individual who evidently believes in its validity. Deming's own question, "What happened to my real family?" (Ko 80), is positioned alongside it, and Ko abstains from determining which concept of 'real' prevails. Two conflicting definitions of family, one grounded in legal and daily caregiving responsibilities, and the other in blood relations and historical ties, are juxtaposed in the same setting, remaining unresolved. This parallel echoes the earlier, unresolved debate on the stairs, though it is now expressed with quieter intensity. After examining Haraway's contrast, it is evident that the Wilkinsons' wants are close to auto-poiesis: establishing a family according to their own terms, as if a child were the final variable in an equation they have previously resolved. What actually occurs to Deming is a more complex, asymmetrical sym-poiesis, a making-with that is not entirely controlled by any individual within the household (Haraway 99-103). This disparity between the orderly narrative that adoptive parents present and the more chaotic reality of transplantation forms the core of the article's argument, and none of it necessitates portraying Peter and Kay as villains. Their care is often sincere, even if it appears awkward. Transplantation can be disruptive to a living being without anyone intending harm, and this is arguably a more challenging and intriguing claim than a story about negligent adoptive parents.

Memory as Ecological Continuity: Domestic Spaces, Food, and Language

If adoption represents the shock of transplantation, then memory is what endures beyond it, not nostalgia, precisely, but more like an ecological continuity

continuing to function beneath the surface after the visible plant above has been pruned. The novel primarily conveys this through sensory details: what Deming eats, what he carries in his pocket, and the language in which a memory surfaces. Consider the blue button he retrieves from Vivian's packed bag and places under his pillow as he sleeps, gently rubbing its "hard upper lip, the rounded center" (Ko 50) until it evokes an entire sensory experience involuntarily, including his mother's arms on the subway, the "warm press of bodies" back in the Bronx, and Vivian ladling out soup. A few paragraphs later, the memory takes on a more peculiar form. Deming recalls a scientific fact concerning benign tumours that can develop hair and teeth within a person without their awareness. He decides that this resembles his current state: "he carried Mama and Leon, Michael and Vivian, the city" (Ko 51), an entire household reduced to a form of embodied memory that persists beneath conscious recollection. This imagery is slightly grotesque, and it is intentionally so. Memory in this context is not like a photo album; it is a biological matter.

Food is handled with genuine precision, carrying significant weight. Mother and son joke about "everything bagels", the "New York audacity" of a bread that asserts to be "everything" yet is primarily sesame, poppy seed, and salt (Ko 6). Their humour is so lively that they often find themselves doubled over on the sidewalk. Once Deming resides with the Wilkinsons, a shelf of "Condensed Classics for Children" reminds him of the condensed milk his mother used to sweeten his oatmeal (Ko 50). That pairing of condensed milk and condensed classics appears to be deliberate. Both items represent abbreviated versions of more comprehensive originals, presented as acceptable alternatives when the authentic products are no longer available on the shelf. Wong's depiction of food in Asian American literature as both a fundamental necessity and a display of cultural opulence aligns closely with this context: eating here is never just eating; it is a condensed reflection of what has been lost against what is being offered in its place.

Language operates similarly, even more literally. Many years later, in Chinatown, Daniel approaches a fruit vendor and discovers that his Fuzhounese has not truly disappeared. It reappears mid-sentence, as though the words had been residing somewhere all along: "the words ploughed in, discovered a former residence, and resolved to stay" (Ko 96). That is agricultural and domestic language doing the same job at once, making the return of a dialect sound less like recall than like a tenant reclaiming a lease. He haggles with a vendor to reduce the price of a watermelon by a quarter. He feels, in his own words, as if "he had been born again" (Ko 96). A long phrase for a fifty-cent negotiation, and precisely the tonal technique Ko employs, where comedy and grief coexist within the same sentence without one undermining the other.

By the end of the novel, months after a trip back to Fuzhou, the narrator observes, "he had replayed his memories of Fuzhou until they lost their potency" (Ko 335). Memory behaves like a finite resource that diminishes through use, rather than an archive that patiently awaits consultation more closely aligned with Marianne Hirsch's portrayal of memory as an active reconstruction rather than mere

retrieval, although Hirsch developed this framework to describe a different type of inherited loss, which is never directly witnessed at all (Hirsch 5).

Even bodily memory operates across multiple registers simultaneously, layered rather than sequentially. Near the end of the book, Daniel proceeds to the Wilkinson household in the dark. He perceives that his feet still recall the path out of habit, fourteen steps to the second floor, precisely where to avoid clipping an end table and concurrently recognises that this house, despite their years together, would “never know” the complete nature of who he is (Ko 332). Two types of memory coexist rather than one replacing the other: one muscular and involuntary, the other historical and repressed. This layering resembles geological strata more than psychological processes, and it provides the clearest evidence within the novel that memory functions here as sediment, not as a single-point archive with a definitive entry.

The Third Ecosystem: Postcolonial Identity Beyond Home and Nation

Neither rooted in Fuzhou nor truly established in Ridgeborough, Daniel perceives both locations as sediment rather than settled homes, and the novel's response to this condition is not confined to either. Instead, it constructs a third ecosystem of belonging built rather than discovered. Bhabha's concept of hybrid, interstitial identity offers the most precise vocabulary for understanding Ko's approach, even if the novel attains this third space through a path distinct from Bhabha's typical examples.

That recursive pattern initially manifests not in Deming's narrative but in his mother's, a generation earlier. Newly arrived and undocumented, Polly stops being “Peilan” (Ko 138) and adopts the name Polly upon a roommate's recommendation, solely because the name phonetically approximates the original sufficiently to pass. It is Polly, rather than Peilan, “who was working thirteen-hour shifts in a garment factory” (Ko 139), earning wages that, however much better than home, still bought her a place on a shared floor. Mother and son each undergo a renaming at entry into an unfamiliar ecosystem of belonging, hers more voluntary, given that she selected the alias herself, while his was imposed by adults who, they would insist, acted in his best interest. Hybridity in this novel is not a singular rupture that a person passes through and then settles beyond; rather, it recurs repeatedly across generations whenever survival necessitates it.

Deming's interpretation of the pattern emerges in an unexpected form: a science-fiction imaginary. On his second day at Ridgeborough Middle School, overwhelmed, he believes he was “imported from another planet,” with his true superiors communicating “telepathically, in Fuzhounese” (Ko 59), ready to recall him after his mission. This serves as a coping strategy and also represents a clever narrative twist. Instead of portraying Deming as the exoticised subject of a white gaze, it reverses the expected configuration. Ko has him record his white classmates with a mock-ethnographic precision traditionally reserved for outsiders, describing a girl's hair strand by strand, “a yellow-brown closer to the scalp” (Ko 59). Whiteness assumes the role of the specimen. A few pages later, the narration reaches a statement that nearly articulates the novel's core paradox explicitly: to be new in this town is “to be too visible and invisible at the same time” (Ko 59), continuously noticed for inappropriate reasons, yet unnoticed for

the matters that truly matter. The phrase closely resembles Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, which refers to his experience of perceiving oneself through the eyes of others, representing two conflicting identities within a single individual (Du Bois, ch. 1). Recognising this similarity, it is valuable to acknowledge the resemblance rather than avoid it explicitly. The historical contexts are not identical. Du Bois was describing a specific, racially charged double bind of Black existence under Jim Crow laws, whereas the example involves a transracially adopted Chinese American child in upstate New York. However, the fundamental pattern- operating through visibility and erasure within the same individual- extends beyond its original setting and has been previously explored in Asian American criticism.

The conclusion resists resolving into either 'home,' and it resists that resolution both grammatically and in terms of plot. Standing in the Wilkinsons' kitchen after his return from China, Daniel reflects that the house is a home, the indefinite article playing a significant role even as "he knew he would have to leave here, too" (Ko 333). The use of a definite article would have rendered Ridgeborough the definitive answer to the question of his place of belonging. Ko does not permit the sentence to state that. The actual concluding scene places him instead in a sparsely furnished Harlem apartment shared with Michael, devoid of a couch or table, with dinner consumed "on the floor" and a blanket serving as a makeshift tablecloth (Ko 334) where Daniel greets his roommate in Fuzhounese, saying, "What is up, brother?" and transitions directly into English a sentence afterwards (Ko 334). In this manner, the two languages coexist harmoniously rather than competing with each other. Brah's "diaspora space," a relational field produced where multiple genealogies of displacement meet in one location rather than a simple homeland-versus-host land binary, describes this apartment almost exactly: two young men, each carrying a different but overlapping history of dislocation, assembling a household from salvaged pieces of both. The book's last line calls this place "his best home" (Ko 335), not the true home, not the only one, just the best available, about as honest a resolution as a novel this suspicious of fixed belonging could offer. Ko names her fourth and final part *The Leavers*, the same phrase as the book's title, and by the end, almost everyone in it has left somewhere. Leaving turns out to be reciprocal rather than something one person does to another, one more way the logic of a network of belonging holds through to the title page.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion demonstrates that family functions as a network sustained by debt as much as love. Adoption becomes a transplantation that costs something real, even when nobody involved means harm. Memory becomes an ecological continuity through which earlier environments remain active within the present. Identity emerges through successive ecosystems of belonging, each reorganising rather than replacing what came before. None of these resolve cleanly, and that reluctance to resolve is a mark in the novel's favour: *The Leavers* is not interested in reassuring anyone that displacement settles neatly, and a critical framework built to force that kind of settlement would misread the book.

Interpreting it in this manner also collapses a distinction that is typically regarded as a choice: critique of immigration policy on one hand, and personal family drama on the other. The debt that Leon owes to a loan shark and the debt that the Wilkinsons' file cabinet silently assumes for Deming's own rescue are structurally identical obligations, albeit in different forms.

This paper ultimately advocates for a modest yet significant shift within postcolonial criticism: from perceiving belonging as a state permanently secured by blood, law, or territory, to understanding it as a constantly assembled process through debt, dialect, food, and habit. The way a living environment sustains a living entity is never complete and is always at risk of collapse. Ko refuses to resolve Daniel's identity to either birthplace or adoptive home because, in the novel, belonging remains fundamentally relational. It survives only for as long as someone keeps building it. This, finally, is what an ecosystem of belonging means in Ko's novel: not a destination that one reaches, but a relational practice that must continually be sustained.

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DABEER SI/KTT/20**ECOPOLITICS AND NEOCOLONIALISM IN IMBOLO MBUE'S *HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE*****LEVINA R.**Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**S. PARVATHI**Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Imbolo Mbue is a Cameroonian American novelist best known for her socially engaging novels on environment, migration, inequality, and power. Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) depicts the fictional African village of Kosawa, which is fighting a multinational oil company and a state that is extremely complicit despite decades of environmental destruction. The article traces Kosawa's ecopolitical crisis and focuses on the villagers' evolving responses from localised resistance and ritualised mourning to transnational advocacy and insurgent violence. The analysis of how ecological harm restructures social relations, shapes subjectivities, and produces new forms of solidarity and dissent is done by following key characters and communal practices. Mbue's narrative techniques, shifting perspectives, communal memory, and the mixing of oral tradition with legal processes highlight both the limits of isolated struggles and the necessity of transnational alliances on extractivism and biopolitical governance. This article titled "Ecopolitics and Neocolonialism in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*" portrays ecopolitics as a sustained form of neocolonial domination in which multinational extraction and state complicity commodify land and life, thereby producing structural dispossession that can only be contested through culturally rooted and transnationally connected resistance.

Keywords: Ecopolitics, Neocolonialism, Extractivism, Sovereignty, Biopolitics.

Imbolo Mbue is a Cameroonian American novelist whose novels are deeply engaged with questions of environment, migration, inequality, labour, and power. Her writing often explores how ordinary lives are shaped by larger political and economic structures, especially those linked to race, global capitalism, and displacement. Mbue's work covers not only personal or family struggles but also wider historical and social conditions that affect entire communities. Her novel *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) continues this interest by turning to the crisis of environmental destruction in an African village and by examining how people respond when their land, health, and future are threatened by corporate greed and government silence.

How Beautiful We Were is set in the fictional village of Kosawa, a community that suffers severe ecological damage because of oil extraction carried out by a powerful multinational company called Pexon. The novel presents a world in which polluted water, damaged soil, and repeated deaths are not accidental

outcomes but the result of sustained exploitation. Kosawa becomes a place where environmental harm is tied to injustice, and where the destruction of nature also means the destruction of social life, cultural memory, and human dignity. Mbue shows that the villagers do not consider this crisis only as a loss of resources but as a strategic sabotage on their way of life, their inheritance, and their right to exist with dignity. In doing so, the novel connects ecology with politics and makes clear that environmental suffering cannot be separated from power.

Recent scholarship on Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* has increasingly analysed the novel as a politically charged ecocritical text that exposes the entanglement of environmental degradation, extractive capitalism, and postcolonial domination. Critics have emphasised that the fictional village of Kosawa is not merely a setting for ecological damage but a site where global capital, state complicity, and colonial afterlives converge. Studies such as "Global Coloniality and Ecological Injustice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*" argue that the novel dramatises "historical patterns of domination and colonization that continue to inflict injustice on both people and nature" (Nare et al.). Similarly, "A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*" places the novel within postcolonial ecocriticism and highlights its engagement with intergenerational justice, environmental activism, and decolonisation (Xausa). These studies establish a strong critical foundation for understanding Mbue's text as an intervention into the politics of ecology and empire.

The novel calls for an ecopolitical approach because it reveals how dominion over land and natural resources is also dominion over people. According to Robbins P in his book *Political Ecology*, ecopolitics is the study of the political institutions, policies, and decision-making processes required to maintain ecological balance while meeting human needs (1-3). Ecopolitics, in this context, refers to the relationship between ecological life and political power, especially when environmental damage is produced through unequal systems of governance. Mbue's novel shows that ecological crisis is never merely a matter of nature alone; it is shaped by decisions made by corporations, governments, and other powerful institutions. Kosawa's suffering is therefore political as well as environmental. The villagers are not simply affected by pollution; they are placed inside a system that denies them justice, silences their protests, and turns their suffering into something normal and acceptable. This makes the novel a powerful literary study of how environmental destruction can function as a form of domination.

How Beautiful We Were can also be studied through the lens of neocolonialism. According to Kwame Nkrumah,

The essence of neocolonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and political policy is directed from outside...neocolonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means. (ix)

It suggests that colonial power has not disappeared but has changed form, continuing through multinational corporations, corrupt state structures, and unequal global relations. Instead of direct imperial rule, the people of Kosawa face a modern system in which foreign companies extract wealth from local land while

leaving behind damage and deprivation. The state, rather than protecting its citizens, becomes complicit in this process by allowing the extractivism to continue. Mbue depicts neocolonialism as follows, “Someday, when you’re old, you’ll see that the ones who came to kill us and the ones who’ll run to save us are the same. No matter their pretenses, they all arrive here believing they have the power to take from us or give to us whatever will satisfy their endless wants” (98). She presents neocolonialism as a lived reality which is seen in broken homes, contaminated water, failed promises, and the repeated betrayal of a vulnerable community. The novel shows that this kind of power is sustained not only through violence but also through law, bureaucracy, and silence.

The narrative centres around extractivism, a key supporting concept that describes an economy based on the large-scale removal of natural resources for profit, often at the expense of local communities and ecosystems. In the novel, oil extraction is not presented as development or progress, but as a destructive system that turns land into profit and people into collateral damage. The real issue is not that pollution occurs, but that extraction is organised through unequal power relations, in which corporate profit depends on the disposability of certain lives. Extractivism therefore reveals the economic logic behind the village’s suffering and connects ecological destruction to global capitalist systems.

Sovereignty is another important issue described throughout the novel because it concerns the right of the people to govern their own land, resources, and future. In *How Beautiful We Were*, Kosawa’s struggle is not only for cleaner water or safer soil, but for the right to exist without being controlled by outside forces. The text shows that sovereignty is undermined when corporations and states decide the fate of a community without its consent. This loss of control is central to the politics of the novel, because the villagers are repeatedly denied power over the land they inhabit.

According to Foucault, biopolitics is the sovereign’s “right to take life or let live” (240). Biopolitics deepens this analysis by showing how power operates through the regulation of life itself. When pollution causes sickness, death, and long-term vulnerability, power is operating not just on territory but on bodies. In the fiction, the villagers’ health, reproduction, grief, and survival all become affected by systems of rule that treat some lives as less valuable than others. Biopolitics shows how environmental damage becomes a form of control over who may live well and who must endure suffering. The destruction of Kosawa is therefore not accidental; it is part of a broader structure in which life is unevenly protected and unevenly exposed to harm.

The narrative also pays close attention to community and memory. Kosawa is not portrayed as a random setting but as a living collective shaped by shared values, history, and loss. As the village suffers, memory becomes a form of resistance in itself. Remembrance of the land, the dead, and the old way of life helps preserve a sense of identity that exploitation tries to erase. Mbue also uses shifting perspectives and the blending of oral and legal forms of narration to show how different kinds of truth coexist in the novel. These techniques give the story a broad social and political reach, while also emphasising the voices of those who are usually ignored in official accounts.

In *How Beautiful We Were*, Kosawa is presented as a once-vibrant African village whose life is closely tied to the land, water, and seasonal rhythms that sustain its people. The setting is not just a backdrop but a living community whose identity depends on farming, fishing, and communal relations. That stability is shattered when oil extraction begins to dominate the region, turning fertile land into a damaged site of industrial activity and making the village a space of environmental crisis and political struggle. The landscape changes visibly as trees are cut down, pipelines cut through the land, and the company leaves behind waste. What once supported life gradually becomes a source of danger, insecurity, and grief.

The environmental damage in Kosawa is severe and widespread. This is depicted in the novel through the following passage,

We inhaled, waited, exhaled. We remembered those who had died from diseases with neither names nor cures—our siblings and cousins and friends who had perished from the poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling. (Mbue 7)

Pollution enters the soil, water, and air, making it difficult for people to grow food, drink safely, or live without fear of illness. The river and wells become contaminated, farmland loses its fertility, and the natural balance of the village is disrupted. Children and adults suffer from sickness linked to poisoned water and toxic waste, while daily routines like farming, fetching water, and caring for family members become burdened by risk. The villagers do not experience environmental harm as a single event; they live with its continuing effects over time, as each part of life is shaped by contamination and loss. The crisis affects both the physical environment and the emotional life of the community, creating fear, mourning, and exhaustion.

Mbue presents this destruction as something deliberate rather than accidental. The damage in Kosawa is not the result of one mistake or one careless act, but of a system built on extraction, profit, and inequality. The oil company benefits from the resources beneath the village while the villagers bear the cost of pollution and neglect. The state's failure to protect the people makes the crisis even more severe, because official power supports or tolerates the company's actions. This shows that ecological destruction is tied to economic and political structures that value profit over human life. The novel makes clear that the suffering of Kosawa is produced by decisions made by powerful institutions, not by nature itself.

The crisis in Kosawa is therefore both environmental and social. It damages the land, but it also reshapes relationships, livelihoods, and communal identity. The text represents the crisis as follows: "At the end of that first dry season, a pipeline burst and oil flooded the farm... her family barely had any harvest that year... a new spill turned into a fire that ravaged the farms... to go searching for new land deep in the forest" (Mbue 33). When the land can no longer sustain farming, and the water can no longer be trusted, the villagers lose not only material resources but also a sense of continuity and belonging. Their social world changes as people are forced to grieve, protest, and adapt to conditions they did not choose. Mbue shows that ecological destruction is never limited to the environment alone; it spreads into family life, public life, and the future of the whole community.

Kosawa serves as a powerful representation of how environmental violence and social injustice are deeply interconnected.

According to Kwame Nkrumah “Foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world” (Nkrumah x). The multinational oil company, Pexton, in *How Beautiful We Were* functions as a clear modern extension of colonial extraction, because it enters Kosawa not as a partner in development but as a force that removes wealth from the land while leaving damage behind. Mbue presents this company as part of a long history in which African resources are taken for outside profit, echoing the logic of colonial rule even after formal independence: “They’d been given what should have been ours,... and asked if we expected Pexton to pack up and leave just because we didn’t like them” (Mbue 72, 73). The company’s presence is not neutral or purely economic; it is political, because it controls access to land, shapes local livelihoods, and determines who benefits from the village’s natural wealth. This suggests that neocolonial power survives through corporate systems that continue older patterns of domination under the language of business and investment. Corporate wealth in the novel depends directly on local suffering and resource theft.

Whenever a pipeline spilled in our farms, it took them days to fix it, after which they told our parents that all they needed to do to reclaim their farmlands was to remove the topsoil and toss it aside. When our parents tried to explain that doing so wouldn’t work, since the poison went deep and the oil spread wide, and that perhaps the best solution would be for Pexton to get better pipelines, they laughed and ignored. (Mbue 73)

The oil extracted from Kosawa enriches the company and its distant shareholders, but the people living on the land receive pollution, illness, and loss in return. Mbue makes this imbalance central to the novel’s moral and political vision: the company’s profit is built on the ruin of the community that should have been protected by that wealth. During every gathering, the villagers “remembered those... who had perished from the poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling” (7). The villagers are denied clean water, healthy farmland, and safe living conditions, while the corporation treats the destruction as an acceptable cost of doing business. This shows how extraction turns land into profit and people into casualties, making inequality a structural feature of the system.

The state in the novel is complicit rather than protective. Mbue narrates, “We knew he was one of them. We’d known for years that though he was our leader, descended from the same ancestors as us, we no longer meant anything to him. Pexton had bought his cooperation and he had, in turn, sold our future to them” (8). Instead of defending the villagers, the state helps maintain the conditions that allow the oil company to operate with impunity. This complicity shows that corporate violence does not function alone; it is supported by political institutions that fail to act or actively collaborate with exploitation. The government’s silence, delay, and refusal to enforce justice make it part of the same system of domination. Mbue therefore portrays the state not as a neutral authority but as an actor whose weakness or corruption enables neocolonial control to continue.

Law, force, and bureaucracy are used in the novel to sustain domination. Legal systems do not appear as fair tools for justice, but as mechanisms that protect corporate interests and delay meaningful change. The lawyer who was supposed to represent the villagers says that “You have no leverage. There’s no basis for the suit the Restoration Movement lawyers filed. A judge is going to dismiss it—Pexton has no contractual obligation to Kosawa” (Mbue 283). When legal methods fail, force also enters the picture through threats, intimidation, and violence, revealing that domination depends on more than contracts and paperwork. The government threatened the Restoration Movement: “the government had sent him a letter threatening him with expulsion from the country if he didn’t cease writing things His Excellency did not like” (165). Mbue shows how inequality is preserved while appearing legitimate as corporate and state power work together through official language, administrative delay, and coercive control. This makes the novel a strong critique of the political machinery behind resource extraction and a powerful illustration of how neocolonial violence operates in modern form.

Foucault says, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (HS 95). Resistance in *How Beautiful We Were* develops in stages, beginning with local acts of refusal and growing into broader political struggle. At first, the villagers of Kosawa respond to corporate violence through protest, complaint, and collective outrage, showing that even when power is unequal, people do not remain silent. Their resistance is rooted in everyday life: they mourn the damage done to their land, their water, and their dead, and they preserve the memory of what the village was before extraction destroyed it. This communal mourning is important because it turns grief into political awareness, making suffering visible and shared rather than private and forgotten. As the crisis deepens, resistance expands into wider forms of action, including advocacy beyond the village and more forceful opposition. Mbue carefully shows that resistance is not simple or idealised. It emerges from exhaustion, mourning, anger, and the need to survive. This makes the novel realistic and emotionally powerful, because it refuses to present the villagers as passive victims. Instead, they appear as people who continue to struggle for justice even when the systems around them are designed to defeat them.

The novel also includes insurgent violence, which emerges when justice repeatedly fails. This violence is not presented as simple aggression, but as a desperate response to prolonged exploitation, ignored suffering, and the collapse of peaceful channels. Mbue shows that when communities are denied legal protection and political recognition, some forms of resistance become more radical. The novel does not celebrate violence, but it does explain why it arises: it is born from frustration, betrayal, and the inability of official systems to offer justice.

Collective memory also becomes a form of resistance. The state betrayed the trust of the villagers: “Our fathers and grandfathers had confronted him, after the evidence had become impossible to dismiss, but he had beseeched them to trust him, telling them he had a plan: everything he was doing was to help us reclaim our land” (Mbue 8). The villagers remember the time before pollution: “Without our parents’ stories about their childhoods in a clean Kosawa... how would my

friends and I have known that the sporadic smokiness that enveloped the village... wasn't an ordinary occurrence?" (29), the promises that were broken, and the repeated betrayals by the company and the state. These memories help sustain a sense of identity and purpose, especially when official systems try to erase their history or dismiss their pain. In the novel, remembering is not passive; it is an active way of protecting the community's truth and passing it to younger generations. Resistance therefore grows from emotional and cultural life, not only from formal politics.

As the crisis deepens, resistance expands beyond Kosawa. The villagers begin to look for support outside the village and outside the nation, showing that local injustice is tied to global systems of power. The villagers get aid from America with the help of Thula, the girl who was sent there to study: "The story of the Restoration Movement of Kosawa reached America and people who share no blood with us arrived, determined to save us" (Mbue 125). This transnational advocacy reflects the reality that multinational corporations operate across borders, so resistance must also move across borders. In this stage, the villagers seek allies, publicity, and political pressure in wider arenas, transforming their struggle into an international call for justice. Mbue presents this shift as necessary because local protest alone cannot defeat a system backed by money, law, and state power. Through the stages of protest, mourning, memory, transnational advocacy, and insurgency, Mbue presents resistance as a human response to sustained oppression and as a demand for dignity in the face of repeated dispossession.

Mbue's narrative form in *How Beautiful We Were* is one of the novel's strongest tools for representing injustice. By moving among different perspectives and voices, she avoids a single authoritative account and instead builds a communal story that feels layered, lived, and contested by using the voices of the members of the Nangi family and the collective voice of the children. This multi-voiced structure reflects the village itself: Kosawa is not shown through one person's experience alone, but through a shared history of grief, anger, memory, and resistance. The shifting perspectives also allow the novel to move between intimate suffering and larger political forces, showing how corporate extraction affects both individual lives and the whole community. The fragmented and shifting form mirrors the broken reality of Kosawa, where life has been divided by pollution, displacement, and political betrayal. Nothing in the village remains stable or uncontested, and the form of the novel captures that instability. At the same time, the collective voice of the community resists erasure, making the novel not only a story about injustice but also an act of witness. Mbue's style does more than describe conflict; it formally enacts the struggle over whose truth will be remembered and whose voice will matter.

In conclusion, *How Beautiful We Were* represents ecopolitics as a form of neocolonial domination by showing that environmental destruction in Kosawa is not accidental, but produced through the alliance of corporate extraction and state complicity. The novel makes clear that land, water, and human life are treated as resources to be used for outside profit, while the village is left with pollution, illness, and political silence. In this sense, the ecological crisis in the novel is also

a crisis of power, because control over nature becomes control over people and their future. The relationship between extraction, dispossession, and resistance forms the core of Mbue's critique. Extraction brings wealth to Pexton, the multinational company, but it dispossesses the villagers of their land, health, and dignity, turning a living community into a damaged and vulnerable one. The novel does not present the people of Kosawa as passive victims. Instead, it shows that resistance grows out of memory, grief, solidarity, and the desire to preserve communal life in the face of repeated betrayal. This resistance may begin locally, but it develops into broader forms of struggle because the forces of domination are themselves global and deeply entrenched.

Mbue's novel ultimately connects the environmental crisis with larger questions of sovereignty, justice, and political freedom. Kosawa's struggle is not only for cleaner land or safer water, but for the right of a people to govern their own lives without corporate control or state abandonment. The novel therefore imagines justice as more than compensation; it is a demand for recognition, accountability, and ethical responsibility toward communities whose lives have been sacrificed for profit. By linking ecological harm to colonial histories and postcolonial power, Mbue shows that environmental injustice is inseparable from political oppression. For contemporary ecocritical and postcolonial studies, *How Beautiful We Were* is significant because it brings together environmental violence, global capitalism, and colonial afterlives in one powerful narrative. The novel invites readers to see that ecological damage is also social, historical, and political. Future research on the fiction could extend this study by examining comparative readings with other petrofiction and African environmental novels. Further, interdisciplinary approaches could also connect Mbue's text to climate justice movements, legal studies on corporate accountability and indigenous land rights.

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DABEER SI/KTT/21**RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH ECOLOGY IN
MAHESWETA DEVI'S *THE HUNT*****M. MONICA RITA JENIFER**Assistant Professor, Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Mahasweta Devi was a renowned Indian Bengali writer, activist and social reformer known for her powerful portrayal of marginalized communities, especially tribal people, women, and the oppressed. Among her notable works, *The Hunt* presents a powerful exploration of tribal identity, gender, and ecological consciousness within a postcolonial framework. *The Hunt* is a short story that exposes how the tribal people are closely living with nature. The story centers around the animal hunting festival, the popular myth of the tribals of Bihar. Mary Oraon, is an independent and self-sufficient tribal woman. She grew up to be a woman of brave physical Intelligence. The strong women have become a prey of sexual dominance reflects the struggle of marginalized women but she transformed her situation through her revenge. In this story, Devi depicts the close bond between tribal groups and the environment, highlighting how natural areas safeguard cultural identity and traditional values endangered by contemporary exploitative influences. This paper aims to analyse the intersection of ecofeminism and post colonialism perspectives, *The Hunt* is a short story that reconstructs identity through ecology by linking land, memory and resistance. Also, the story examines the role of nature in empowering subaltern voices and preserving tribal existence in the face of cultural and political marginalization.

Keyword: Ecofeminism, Post colonialism, Ecology, Resistance, Tribal Identity, Marginalization

Identity is a changing and developing concept shaped by an individual's connection with the community, culture, history and surroundings. In contemporary literary studies, there has been a growing focus on how ecological spaces shape personal and community identities. Literature plays a significant role in examining these relationships and showing how environmental changes, moving from one geographical area to another, and the loss of old places impact the identity and memory of a community. By analysing the link between ecology and identity, literary works provide important information about how communities respond to challenges.

The relationship between human beings and nature has become one of the concerns of contemporary literary and cultural studies. The rapid industrialization, urbanization and capital expansion have accelerated environmental degradation, and also intensified the marginalization of indigenous communities whose identities are deeply rooted in ecological landscapes. Forest, river, mountains and ancestral lands are not merely a physical space for tribal societies but depositories of history, culture, spirituality and cultural memory. The exploitation of natural

resources extends beyond environmental deconstruction and simultaneously erodes indigenous cultures, displaces traditional ways of life and fragments the identities of communities that have long existed in harmonious coexistence with nature. Ecology emerges as an essential framework for understanding the relationship between land, culture and identity.

In indigenous communities, identity is not constructed through language, ethnicity or social institutions but through an intimate relationship with the natural environment. Their customs, rituals, livelihoods and belief systems evolve from ecological knowledge accumulated through generations. The forest functions as a living archive where cultural traditions are preserved, ancestral memories celebrated and communal values are transmitted through generations. When these ecological spaces are threatened by colonial expansion, state intervention or capitalist exploitation, these communities experience not only material displacement but cultural alienation and the gradual erosion of their collective identity. Consequently, ecology becomes a powerful site of resistance through which marginalized communities reclaim their history, preserve their tradition and reconstruct their sense of self.

Mahasweta Devi's works have been subjected to extensive critical discourse ranging from tribal representation to social justice and gender politics. Her writings have been interpreted from post colonialism, subaltern studies, feminism, and eco criticism points of view. The *Hunt* by Mahasweta Devi has been analyzed by some scholars in terms of themes of suppression and liberation. But, the recent studies have focused on how the author uses ecology to recreate tribal identities. When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translated *The Hunt* into English, it became possible for the wider audience to become acquainted with the author's works. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Spivak states that "subaltern cannot speak" (271). Which emphasized that the "poorest and most oppressed groups" are denied participation in the "mainstream systems of representation and domination" (271). Although Spivak's statement concerns third world countries, it can be applied to tribal people living in India in respect to their relationship with the Indian government. Mary Oraon, the protagonist of *The Hunt*, can be seen as a subaltern character similar to Spivak's interpretation of subaltern woman. Devi's narrative complicates Spivak's arguments by portraying a protagonist who actively assures her agency against oppression.

The ecological dimensions of Mahasweta Devi's fiction have gained increasing attention in recent years. Cheryll Glotfelty in his book "The Ecocriticism Readers: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996)", he defines ecocriticism as "The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (18), encouraging critics to examine nature as an active participant in literary narratives rather than a passive backdrop. Lawrence Buell argues that environmental imagination shapes cultural value and human identity. These theoretical perspectives provide an important basis for *The Hunt*, where the forest functions as a cultural, historical and spiritual space for the Oraon community.

Ecofeminist scholars have also contributed significantly to the relationship between women and nature in the writings of Mahasweta Devi. In "Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development" (1988), Vandana Shiva states that the

exploitation of women and nature is based on the same patriarchal model of development. Karen J. Warren has made an argument that "There are important connections between the unjustified domination of women and the domination of nature". These arguments are relevant to *The Hunt*, where Mary Oraon's resistance to sexual violence parallels the community's struggle to defend its ecological and cultural integrity.

The postcolonial criticism expands the discussion by examining the relationship between environmental exploitation and colonial power. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that colonial expansion has depended upon the appropriation of indigenous lands and ecological resources, resulting in the displacement of native communities and the erosion of their cultural identities. Similarly, Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" explains how the environmental destruction gradually affects the marginalized populations through the dispossession of land, ecological degradation and social exclusion. These perspectives clarify the political significance of the forest in *The Hunt*, where ecological space becomes central to the preservation of tribal identity.

The area of indigenous ecological knowledge and environmental justice has lately become more popular for researchers who investigate Indian literature. Researchers tend to stress the fact that tribal societies are equipped with sustainable ecological knowledge based on living together in harmony rather than using resources and exploiting other groups. The writings of Mahasweta Devi are often analysed in terms of the confrontation with development paradigms that focus on economy rather than the interests of indigenous peoples. Yet, in most cases ecology is not considered.

Several researches have analysed *The Hunt* from feminist, tribal and ecological viewpoints. The story has been interpreted as a powerful narrative of a female agency, tribal resistance and ecological ethics. Critics argue that Mary Oraon's relationship with forest is not geographical but cultural, spiritual and reflecting the inseparable bond between identity and natural environment. The forest functions as a living archive of tribal traditions, collective memory and cultural survival. Recently it has increasingly focused on environmental humanities and ecocriticism in Mahasweta Devi's fiction. The story critiques capitalist exploitation of forests while emphasizing indigenous ecological knowledge and sustainable coexistence with the environment. It reveals how ecology becomes central to understand tribal identity and resistance.

This paper uses a way of thinking that combines memory studies and ecocriticism to look at how ecology and identity are connected in Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt*. Memory studies, which were developed by people like Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and Paul Ricoeur say that memory is not something that happens in our own minds but is also shaped by the people and culture around us. Maurice Halbwachs says that the memories we share with others are kept alive by the groups we're part of. Pierre Nora talks about places where we remember important things, which he calls lieux de memoir or sites of memory. Paul Ricoeur looks at how memory, history and identity are all connected and how remembering things changes who we are both as individuals and, as groups. Memory studies like the kind done by

Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora and Paul Ricoeur help us understand how memory is connected to ecology and identity in Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt*. Through the theoretical perspectives, *The Hunt* reveals that the forest is not simply the physical setting of the narrative but a mnemonic landscape that sustains tribal memory and reconstructs identity. Mary Oraon's relationship with the forest demonstrates how ecological spaces nurture belonging, culture and resistance against forces of displacement and patriarchal domination. The natural environment becomes where memory, culture and identity converge.

Although previous research manages to analyse *The Hunt* from feminist, postcolonial, and subaltern approaches, the need for an analysis of ecology as an active element affecting identity formation, cultural memory, and resistance has not been sufficiently explored yet. This study will attempt to fill the gap in literature and consider the role of ecofeminism, postcolonial ecocriticism, and subaltern theories to prove that ecology in *The Hunt* is not just the context but a medium that affects the reconstruction of the identity. Through the examination of the interdependence between land, culture, memory, and resistance, the paper will prove that Mahasweta Devi uses ecology as the basis of the existence of indigenous peoples.

The research initiates with an introduction to ecology, memory studies and tribal identity apart from presenting Mahasweta Devi's role in the field of Indian literature and subaltern studies. It explores the evolution of memory studies and ecocritical thought before analyzing *The Hunt* in detail. There is much emphasis on the forest and hunting, knowledge by the indigenous tribes about ecology and the struggle by Mary Oraon for the sake of cultural memory and identity. This study is made regarding Mahasweta Devi's reconstruction of tribal identity through the ecological consciousness and understanding of nature as a powerful tool of cultural memory.

The ecological vision of *The Hunt* reinforces the meaning of ecology more than the representations of the natural environment. Devi's conception of ecology gives a meaning beyond nature, as she refers to it as a living archive of tribal memory, history, and identity. The forests emerge as not just sites on the map, but as agents of shaping lives of the tribals. Devi's ecological vision is closely connected with the culture, oral traditions, and consciousness of the Oraon tribe. For this reason, it is vital to analyse the ecological interpretation of *The Hunt* through the prism of memory theory, which reveals the landscapes as homesteads for cultural remembrance and identity formulation.

Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt*, revolves around the annual tribal hunting festival, a ritual that extends far beyond the act of hunting themselves. The festival symbolizes the conservation of traditional customs, the solidarity of the tribe and harmony with nature. Hunting is not shown as conquering nature but rather as a sacred ritual that follows the law of tradition and shows respect to nature. In this way, Mahasweta Devi shows that the forest keeps diverse species, but also the memory of the community. Hunting and the festival have become an act of remembering for every generation that visited the forest and the way of remembering the tribal history each year, it renews instead of letting it be forgotten.

The forest is part of daily life because it gives food, medicine, shelter and nourishes the body. Every tree, hill, stream and hunting path is the result of the history of the community. Environmental historians argue that indigenous landscapes store the historical memory of the community, which appears due to the long-lasting interaction between the communities and their ecological surroundings. Mahasweta Devi shows in her story that the forest is the memory, which allows a tribe to survive despite political, economic, and cultural oppression.

The character, Mary Oraon showcases that identity and ecology are interconnected. While her identity is affected by contemporary society and human interaction, it is firmly based on the ecological heritage of her people. The involvement in the hunting festival brings her back to the age-old traditions of her ancestors, turning personal experiences into a sense of belonging. Mary does not just get tribal identity from her birth, she establishes it through her interactions with the forest and its practices.

The forest plays a crucial role in reconstructing identity through sensory dimensions. Mahasweta Devi makes sure to include the sound of birds, the movement of animals, the smell of trees, the rhythm of the tribal songs and the physical experience of moving in the forest. These sensory images also act as a prompt of memory, because they allow people within the culture to access it. Memory theorists argue that sensory perception provides the most reliable way of accessing the memory since memory functions on both embodied and intellectual levels. The forest in *The Hunt* becomes the site for the sensory memory, where people can get in touch with their tribal essence.

The indigenous communities are highlighted in the center of this embodied ecological knowledge due to the fact that the histories of these communities are mainly passed on orally and not written down. The tribal community keeps its culture in the form of rituals, songs, legends, feasts and everyday fields. In this sense, knowledge cannot be separated from the space it was born in. So, the forest can be seen as a particular site of historical knowledge, which is always updated by people that take part in the processes of cultural participation. This particular idea is promoted by Mahasweta Devi when she complicates the concept of ecology by showing its role in cultural memory preservation.

Also, the connection between Mary Oraon and the forest shows that ecology has also a political character. When outsiders come to the lands of the tribes, which symbolizes not only the environmental destruction but also the destruction of cultural identity. The deterioration of the forest threatens the continuation of the indigenous memory since ecological deterioration means destruction of the places where the common history can be kept. So, the ecological damage has a direct connection with the marginalization of tribal communities.

Mahasweta doesn't romanticize tribal life or ecological balance. She points out that there are many tensions between the tribal community and nature due to modernization, patriarchal domination, and different oppressive forces. Mary's battle shows how difficult it is to combine traditions and the changing social world. This very episode of *The Hunt* is the proof of Mary's active position and the fact that one's identity is not static and is not something inherited

automatically. This means that one's identity is always undergoing reconstruction through ecological traditions and contemporary initiatives.

In today's environmental studies and anthropology, the important theme of ecology and identity is emphasized. As Lawrence Buell, Greg Garrard and Ramachandra Guha specified, ecological spaces are cultural places formed as a result of historical experience and collective memory rather than just a physical environment. At the same time, indigenous people create their identity through interactions with the ecology, considering the environment as a source of resources and a basis for actual survival. *The Hunt* by Mahasweta Devi describes this ecological aspect well, displaying that the forest is an active participant in supporting tribal identity.

For Mary Oraon, the forest is perceived as more than just a place of living. It is the essence of cultural identity. The hunting ritual allows her to connect with ancestors while affirming her independence in the present. Through the forest, she solves the questions of tradition and modernity, heritage, novelty, personal autonomy and group identity. So, Mahasweta Devi shows that ecological spaces are not passive environments but living memory.

Devi complicates the concept of identity by presenting it as a process of negotiation rather than as a singular cultural trait. The ecological traditions inherited by Mary do not simply repeat themselves. They are experienced and interpreted by Mary as her acts of resistance take place. The way she interacts with the forest shows that identity is a process of history, memory and adaptation. In this way, *The Hunt* confirms that ecology serves as a living archives of community memory that allows oppressed communities to protect their pasts and build their identities in a changing environment.

Paul Connerton, In *How Societies Remember* asserts that collective memory is not sustained only through written documents or monuments, but also embedded in the customs, ceremonies and performances that people of different generations take part in. Connerton notes that "a large part of social memory is carried out through bodily activities," which he terms "incorporating activities" (Connerton 72). These are learned experiences that are gained from participation and become part of the configuration of identity of the culture that it belongs to. In the book, Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt* illustrates Connerton's concept of embodied memory. As a result, the ritualistic hunt described in Devi's narrative is an important act of remembering. The hunters' moves, the preparations for the festivity, the songs sung during the hunt, as well as their respect for the forest comprise cultural traditions that shape the collective memory of the Oraon community. Even though these practices are not recorded in written histories, they are continually reproduced through participation. Mahasweta Devi shows that tribal identity persists in being practiced in daily ecological interactions rather than remembered as a historical fact. In this way, the forest becomes a space for cultural knowledge to be experienced and transferred by the community members.

The narrative technique developed by Devi supports the relationship between body, memory, and ecology. Instead of presenting the forest as a passive landscape, Devi positions the forest as an active participant in the lives of the tribes. Mary's movement in the forest, knowledge of its landscape, and

participation in the hunting ritual suggests a close relationship between her body and nature. The landscape influences her actions, while her actions confirm her identity related to the landscape.

The ecological practices depicted in the story carry a very strong political weight as well. The process of colonization, in combination with industrial exploitation and the presence of the state have negatively influenced the relations of indigenous peoples with the forests, disconnecting them from their native lands. Such ecological destruction endangers cultural memory, whereby the spaces crucial to the tribes disappear. Mahasweta Devi draws attention to this fact by showing that the forest cannot be separated from the identity of the tribe. This means that preserving ecological space is like preserving cultural history, whereas its destruction is concerned with the destruction of the indigenous identity.

The findings show that ecology functions on various levels in *The Hunt*: first, as the natural environment that supports life within the tribe; second, as a symbolic repository of ancestral customs; third, as the channel of collective memory through which information about the past is passed from one generation to another and fourth, as the basis for the continuous reconstruction of indigenous identity. Having placed the forest at the crossroads of memory, culture, resistance and identity, Mahasweta Devi tells the story where ecoculture and community survival are perfectly interlinked.

The Hunt demonstrates that identity is not a predetermined inheritance; it is an ongoing process of reconstruction through ecological involvement, collective memory and cultural endurance. The story of Mahasweta Devi proves that forests are much more than mere natural resources—they represent the living archives of tribal history, memory and identity. By putting together the close connections between ecology and identity, the narrative contests mainstream historical narratives and claims that nature preservation cannot be separated from the preservation of indigenous cultures as well as their collective memory. The study uses memory studies and ecocriticism to explain how the ecological environment is able to maintain the historical consciousness of people and help them meet modernity challenges without losing their cultural identity.

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DABEER SI/KTT/22**ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: AN
ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF ANURADHA ROY'S *AN ATLAS OF
IMPOSSIBLE LONGING*****RAMNEET KOUR**Research Scholar, Department of English
University of Jammu, J&K, India**Abstract**

For centuries, humans have placed themselves highest in the hierarchy of the ecosystem. This belief led to the degradation of natural resources as they are exploited in order to fulfill the selfish needs of humans. Natural resources are limited but human greed seems to have no limit. In the late 20th century, with the deepening environmental crisis, the concept of ecocriticism emerged. It refers to the study of literature and environment. It critiques the anthropocentric view wherein humans are placed in the center of the world, and shifts the focus to an earth-centered perspective. The paper explores the novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* written by Anuradha Roy through the lens of ecocriticism. Vandana Shiva's work *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* is primarily employed to understand the concept of equality among all living beings. Roy challenges the human-centered view through her work. All living beings are equal and nature cannot be merely seen as a resource to be exploited. The destruction of nature for the greed of the patriarchal-capitalist society with a colonist mentality is challenged through the novel. The degradation of landscape seems to mirror the marginalization of the poor and powerless communities. The novel brings out the need for environmental justice. It highlights the importance of compassion for all the living beings, which forms the basis of earth democracy.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environmental justice, Anthropocentric view, Earth-centered perspective, Earth Democracy

In today's world, where progress and development have become the goals of human beings, it is of paramount importance that they do not create an ecological imbalance. The concept of ecocriticism is a recent one (late 20th century) but it is an expanding field of literary studies. Cheryll Glotfelty in her book *The Ecocritical Reader* (1996), defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Through ecocriticism, the anthropocentric worldview is challenged wherein the human needs and desires are considered more valuable than any other living being's needs. This notion emphasizes the well-being of the entire living world and views globalization and industrialization not as the parameters of development but focuses on the destruction caused by the so-called development which destroys ecosystems and exploits communities whose survival depends on land and its resources. The studies done on Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* have analysed it through various lenses including the lens of patriarchal suppression, psychological trauma, and postcolonial frameworks. Although the novel is also

studied from the perspective of ecocriticism in which the researchers have brought attention towards climate change, the present paper takes a step further to critique anthropocentric attitudes. Drawing from Vandana Shiva's work, *Earth Democracy*, the paper tries to inform about the importance of justice and sustainability. It tries to showcase how the profit-oriented development process ignores the welfare of living beings. The greed of a few hampers the survival of others and the nature's resource system is destroyed.

In her work *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*, Vandana Shiva talks about the viewpoint of earth democracy evolving from the consciousness that we are "connected to the world as a whole, and, in fact, to the entire universe" (5). It suggests that despite being rooted locally, it is everyone's responsibility to view the entire world as their own. Shiva writes that in the concept of earth democracy, globalization is based on ecological processes and bonds that are formed through compassion and solidarity (5). According to her, "the movement of capital and finance or the unnecessary movement of goods and services" (5) should not form the basis of globalization. Talking about the dangers in today's times, Shiva highlights the profit-driven process of development as a risk to nature's economy as it leads to the overexploitation of resources and as a consequence, destroys ecological processes (16). She sheds light on the negative impact of the market-oriented development process by bringing attention towards the current rate of economic development which does not take into account the resources available which ultimately results in the loss of productivity and harms the entire natural resource system.

The capitalist mentality that views humans and other living beings as mere raw materials to be utilized leads to the over exploitation of resources. During the time of colonialism, the British overlooked the safety and concerns of the locals for their own benefit and the similar pattern continues in the name of globalization in today's world where the needs of the poor people are sidelined for the benefits of a powerful few. However, the powerful fail to realise that the resources are limited and their over utilization will lead to serious problems for all the species, including themselves. To fulfill their greed, the rich and powerful disrupt the natural system. By exploiting the natural resources, they participate in the process of slow violence. Rob Nixon in his work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* describes slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Contrary to the general idea of violence, which refers to an explosive event which is considered to be instantaneous, Nixon writes of a violence that is neither explosive nor immediate, but rather gradual and accumulative, and "its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2). The degradation of resources might not be viewed as a threat by the rich and powerful, who are focused on extracting profit, but its negative impact in the long-run cannot be overlooked.

Anuradha Roy critiques the devastation caused by the greed of the capitalist mentality through her novel *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. The novel follows the story of three generations, in which the first generation moves to Songarh from

Calcutta. Amulya shifts with his family and establishes a small factory to produce medicines and perfumes with the help of wild herbs, flowers and leaves. He builds a house in Songarh and sees his entire future in this village. In the novel, Songarh is a village that once was known to be “a center of learning” (11). The transformation of Songarh to its new status of importance after the Imperial geologists discovered the ores of mica (11) highlights the colonial mindset of treating earth as a property. To add to the resources, “there was even more lucrative material below the forests somewhat further away: coal” (11). This mindset essentially sees the resources as commodities which “robs diverse species and people of their rightful share of ecological, cultural, economic, and political space” (*Earth Democracy*, 2). After independence, the face of the master changes, but the mindset of exploitation remains the same. Swarnalatha Rangarajan writes about the superiority of the colonists in assuming the entire areas of land is available for them to be converted into private property. They would declare the land belonging to the indigenous communities as “terra nullius”, and hence, legally and morally claim the land. (99). Amulya’s garden highlights patriarchal capitalist mindset and the urge to tame the wild. Amulya creates a garden at the place of wilderness. The wilderness corresponds to the natural environment and the human’s inability to let nature bloom in its own right can be seen in the desire to tame it. Amulya “had cleared weeds, planted fruit trees, flowering shrubs and creepers” (23). But nature has its own way to reclaim its space. After Amulya’s death, Roy highlights how wilderness reclaims the tamed garden.

In Shiva’s opinion, the treatment of earth as passive is a colonial construct, which results in the formation of the “the colonial category of land as terra nullius (empty land)” (22). This category of land leads to two major destructive outputs, the identity and rights of the indigenous communities are erased and the regenerative capacity of nature is ignored. In the pre-independent India, in order to enhance their development, the British exploited the resources. *Earth Democracy* talks about every living being to be equal but the priority of the capitalist market is profit-making. Shiva comments that on the establishment of its rule, the British categorized a large area of Bengal region alone as wasteland (25). Shiva talks about the concept of wastelands as a colonial concept which is not analysed through the land’s biological productivity rather through the revenue generating capacity of land (25). When the mining operations start in Songarh, they drive out the tribal communities from their spaces. In *Earth democracy*, Vandana Shiva emphasizes the equality of all living beings as Earth cannot be considered as a commodity. It is a living system where equal rights should be the norm for all living beings to sustain. The ecosystem suffers in the name of development, as nature is pushed to the margins and humans take center stage. Shiva comments that as the process of globalization is profit-oriented, it results in a culture of exclusion, displacement and scarcity, rather than a culture of abundance (2). A few people in the position of power view earth as their property and do not care about the well-being of other living beings, including their fellow human beings. With the advent of the British, mining techniques were changed. The aim was to help industrial growth without taking into consideration the needs of the local people or the landscape. This same colonial practice is employed in Songarh with

the tribal people in which they are displaced from their areas. With the advent of mining came deforestation and dispossession of the tribal people. Describing the condition of Songarh after the mining operations start, Roy informs about the compact society formed by the British in the town near the fort which represents the white area inhabited by the white miners. The tribal people are poor and are forced to live in makeshift shanties in the town after their forests are cut down for mining operations. Their identity and culture are erased and they work at whatever they can find. On the other hand, the mining company builds bungalows for its administrative staff. With the passage of time, a tiny colony of the British, employed to supervise the coal mines and mica ores, grew in Songarh. While the poor tribal communities are dispossessed, the rich British are provided with a place of residence.

Shiva opines that the political, economic and cultural rights of the poor people are taken away from them as their public and common resources are privatized. Their dispossession of resources creates the ownership of the rich people (2-3). The idea of democracy is violated when nature and fellow living beings are not taken into account. The modern mining methods introduced by the British displace locals, and pay no regards to sustainability. To support industrialization, the capitalists make the locals suffer because the dispossession of their lands and the working conditions of labourers are not taken into consideration. The profit-extraction done in the name of development has an impact on the locals. Labor health is often disregarded. Their working conditions do not matter. They are treated as mere resources.

Roy describes the exploitation of the tribal communities in the novel to suggest the impact of greed of the powerful on the exploitation of the poor. The lives of poor workers are never the priority of these profit driven ventures. The labour is exposed to high risk and the loss of their lives is not considered a big deal by the ones blinded by greed. Highlighting the barbarity of the people in power, the novel talks about an incident in which one of the coal mines caves in. In this scenario, for five days, forty-eight miners are trapped under the ground but are unable to be rescued. The incident is a scandal and yet no one is held accountable. The labourers have no support system. Even though the managers of the mines are British people but the labourers are poor Indians, and so, safety of the workers is not prioritized. The idea of democracy is clearly violated in this case where the changes are made for development's sake and the well-being of nature and poor people is ignored. The mining factories disrupt the natural environment and it becomes important to look into the matter through the perspective of earth democracy as described by Vandana Shiva. She writes, "in nature's economy and the sustenance economy the currency is not money, it is life" (33). Roy perfectly points out how no value is attached to the lives of the poor workers by the rich British who only focus on their development.

In a paper titled "Impact of the British Colonial Era on the Jharkhand Mining Sector", Ashish Kumar and Dr. R.C. Anu Chandran highlights the impact on the areas that are exploited by the organizations running the mining operations during the colonial times. The mining operations lead to various problems like degradation of the environment, exploitation of the labour and lack of community

development (512). The colonial practice of destroying the land has not stopped with the end of colonization. It is in fact an ongoing process. Globalization is often called an extension of colonialism. Globalization impacts the developing world and causes 'deterritorialisation' which means "the elimination of social, political or cultural practices from their corresponding indigenous populations and native places" (Eco Criticism 176). It negatively impacts the poor who become victims of exploitation and "are forced to follow the flow of capital and are deeply embedded in globalization" (98). The exploitation of the natural world is a threat to everyone's life including those in power who do not recognize the harmful impact of their greed and fail to understand that in long term, they are investing in their own downfall. The capitalist mindset blinds powerful people and they are unable to foresee their own destruction. The result of over utilization is brought out in the novel itself. The Dulganj road in Songarh sees the building up of many houses when mining operations begin. Amulya shifts to Songarh and builds a house for himself and his family. With the passing time, the Dulganj road can be seen with big houses that belong to the British men who are managers in the mining factories. The white men and their wives live in the big bungalows while the indigenous inhabitants are displaced and forced to leave their forests. But, in the aftermath of exploiting the resources, the mines are shut down as they "were close to drying up" (99). The British managers leave Songarh after the closing of mines. With the passage of time, "a dark fungus of desolation and poverty inched over the town. Where people had earlier come to it looking for work, now they started to leave" (99). The land and its resources are over exploited, which results in the barrenness of land. The rich and powerful, having exploited the land and encroaching the space of poor people, move away after destroying a beautiful space on earth. Roy brings to light the outcomes of the over utilization of natural resources. The space on earth and earth resources are limited, and therefore, it is a matter of utmost importance that steps are taken to work for the welfare of nature before the loss becomes irreversible.

In *Earth Democracy*, Shiva talks about the philosophy of "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" (1), which means the earth family. It suggests that all beings are one community. Shiva points out, "we are all members of the earth family, interconnected through the planet's fragile web of life" (9). She reminds that it is the duty of everyone to be thoughtful towards their actions and to live in a way which safeguards the ecological processes of earth, and takes into account the safety and rights of all species and all people. She comments, "no humans have the right to encroach on the ecological space of other species and other people, or to treat them with cruelty and violence" (9). The mindset that earth is a commodity needs to change in order to maintain ecological balance. Roy showcases in her novel how the ecological space of Songarh is encroached and no attention is paid to the safety of the workers, essentially, denying the principle of earth democracy. Today, corporate globalization has taken the position of the expatriate British, which only sees the benefit of corporations and neglects the welfare of all other humans and other living beings. Explaining the principle of earth democracy, Shiva writes, "the concern for humans and nonhuman species comes together in a coherent, nonconflicting whole that provides an alternative to the worldview of

corporate globalization” (8). According to her, due to corporate globalization, other living beings and humans are viewed as raw-materials to be utilized for the benefit of a few who have power in their hands. Only corporations are given rights and humans and nonhuman species are not prioritized. Shiva refers to living democracies being “based on the intrinsic worth of all species, all peoples, all cultures” (6). She suggests that as we all are members of the earth family, the earth’s important resources should be equally and justly shared and the decisions regarding the use of these resources should also be shared (6). The labourers get trapped and lose their lives because of the decisions made by the powerful. Shiva writes, “nature shrinks as capital grows. The growth of the market cannot solve the very crisis it creates” (32-33). The destruction caused in the name of development always leads to ecological destruction.

The tribal communities suffer because of the destroyed ecosystem. The destruction, hidden from the eyes, reflects itself through the fate of Mukunda, whose ultimate displacement is the result of his mother, a tribal woman’s exploitation. Mukunda’s fate metaphorically represents the concept of slow violence as explained by Rob Nixon. Mukunda is the son of a tribal woman and he is admitted to Christian Orphanage Mission by Amulya so that the identity of his father (son of a worker in Amulya’s factory) remains hidden. Later on, he is brought to Amulya’s house by his son Nirmal when he gets to know about his existence after Amulya’s death. Mukunda’s identity remains unknown to others. This is a form of violence but is not spectacular violence. Mukunda is given a space in Nirmal’s house. As Nixon suggests, the ultimate violence is not known yet. He is raised along with Bakul, Nirmal’s daughter but he is not treated as an equal. As the children grow up, Mukunda is sent away on the pretext of higher studies, so that Bakul and Mukunda cannot get involved romantically. As his caste is unknown to the family, they do not want him to get involved with Bakul. However, the house at Songarh is the only house that Mukunda knows. He remembers the house down to every detail. The years in between do not fail his memory even a bit. The displacement of Mukunda represents the displacement of tribal people for the so-called betterment of the powerful people. The space they are forced to give up is the only space they know. The displacement robs them of their safe space, identity and culture.

If nature is nourished, it will give back tenfold but it also possesses destructive capacity when it is overexploited. Roy highlights the disruption that nature is capable of causing by showcasing the river in Manoharpur. Nirmal’s wife, Shanti belongs to Manoharpur where she lives with her father. The house faces the river. Each year, the river progresses towards the house, and it seems it is coming closer with each passing year. Although Bikash Babu, Shanti’s father, plans to build a dam and an English firm is hired by him, the dam is not built. The firm sends a local engineer, Dr. Mitra to solve the problem. The engineer declares that it is not possible to stop the changing course of the massive river. But he adds that the house will not be endangered for the next two generations after estimating the river’s current rate of movement. It seems that it can cause no harm but ultimately, it becomes the cause of Shanti’s death as during her childbirth, she is in her father’s home and due to heavy rains, the house gets filled with river’s water and

a midwife cannot be called. Shanti starts her pains early a month before her tentative date of delivery, while it is continuously raining and the river breaks its banks. There is no way for anyone to go out and bring the midwife to the house. The ground floor is completely drowned. When Kripa, the house help informs Bikash Babu of the situation, he only replies, that the house will be drowned by the river as it's finding a new path and has broken its banks. Later on, an embankment is finally constructed, but it's not the guarantee of the river being completely tamed. After many years, Nirmal writes to Mukunda informing him about the construction of an embankment by the government further up the river. He writes to Mukunda that the construction is finally completed and the river is tamed after so many years of havoc. Although he believes it will not stop the river from causing destruction in some other area, the house of Manoharpur is safe for now. It is of paramount importance to learn the lessons before the final catastrophe occurs and there seems no chance of reverting the ecological imbalance.

To conclude, it is the need of the hour to let nature take center stage and to recognize its value. Decisions made out of greed today have the capability to cause irreparable destruction tomorrow. The planet is shared among millions of species and the idea of justice and sustainability is to not over utilize the resources. Forests are cut down, the birds and animals lose their habitats, and the locals are exploited, all in the name of development. According to Shiva, justice and sustainability can only be achieved when people and nature are prioritized over commerce and profit, when ecology and equity are considered more valuable than trade. She talks about the importance of keeping citizens above corporations and choosing local democracy over the global market. For her, the lived realities of people should be placed over the "abstract constructions of corporate capitalism" (82). The ecological system can only be sustained when all living beings are seen as equals. Roy brings out the gradual changes occurring in Songarh over time, pointing towards the village's eventual destruction. The novel brings out the need to respect nature and shift from a human-centered perspective to an earth-centered perspective.

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DABEER SI/KTT/23**ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN GEETANJALI SHREE'S
LITERARY LANDSCAPES: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF
SELECTED WORKS****RIFAT SIDDIQUI**Research Scholar, Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India**Abstract**

Throughout history, literature has always reflected various aspects of human civilization. It mirrors society by reflecting the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the time in which it is written. We are living in an age marked by climate change, environmental degradation, and the relentless expansion of urban spaces and industries. As a result, writers around the world are raising environmental concerns and exploring human-nature relationships with new urgency. Writers have always depicted nature and explored the human relationship with it, but in contemporary times the writer's engagement with nature has changed. It has shifted from incidental depiction to the deliberate interweaving of nature and ecological concerns within the narrative. Contemporary literature has increasingly engaged with questions of ecological sustainability, the consequences of human greed, and the fragility of the human-nature relationship. Among the significant voices contributing to this discourse is the fiction writer Geetanjali Shree, whose work offers a subtle exploration of landscapes, environment, and the ecological consequences of human actions. Shree's works have received considerable attention for their engagement with gender, identity, history, and memory; however, her ecological vision and her portrayal of nature have remained underexplored. Addressing this critical gap, this paper examines the ecological consciousness in three novels by Shree, namely *Tomb of Sand*, *The Roof Beneath Their Feet*, and *The Empty Space*, through the lens of ecocriticism. By drawing upon Lawrence Buell's concept of environmental imagination, this paper explores how Shree's literary landscapes transcend their function as mere settings and emerge as living spaces that shape human experience, memory, and identity. This paper argues that Shree's narratives foster ecological consciousness and cultivate ecological sensibility by challenging human-centred notions of progress and development. Ultimately, this study highlights the role of literature as a powerful medium for inculcating environmental awareness and denotes the relevance of ecocriticism in understanding contemporary literary engagements with ecology.

Keywords: Ecology, Geetanjali Shree, Contemporary Studies, Civilization**Introduction**

Throughout history, literature has consistently reflected various aspects of human civilization. It mirrors society by reflecting the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the time in which it is written. We are living in an era where mankind and ecology stand on the edge of catastrophe. Literature has been portraying this alarming situation pertaining to the environment across the globe. While science

plays a crucial role in understanding and addressing environmental issues, literature also holds significant power in creating ecological consciousness, advocating for environmental concerns, and promoting sustainable development. The looming threat of ecological imbalance has led to the emergence of a new critical tool in literature called ecocriticism. It emerged in the late twentieth century. The word “ecocriticism” first appeared in William Rueckert's essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. It focuses on the relationship between literature and the natural world. It explores the portrayal of nature and the depiction of environmental issues, ecosystems, and the human-nature connection. Literature has always dealt with ecology. Ancient literary texts such as the Vedas express reverence for the natural world. Nature imagery is very prominent in Indian poetry, and India's diverse environment is reflected in its literature by authors from different regions. R. K. Narayan and Ruskin Bond have depicted nature as a character in their stories. Authors like Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy have consistently engaged with environmental concerns, climate change, and human-nature relationships. One such formidable voice is Geetanjali Shree.

Shree is a renowned Hindi novelist who won the International Booker Prize in 2022 for her novel, *The Tomb of Sand*. Her works have gained considerable scholarly attention for their treatment of gender, memory, history, space and boundaries- however their ecological dimensions remain comparatively underexplored, *Tomb of Sand*, *Roof Beneath Their Feet* and *The Empty Space* are all in different ways, stories of family and women navigating space: The slow unraveling of a family, the silent grief, the confinement of women, and the Partition of 1947.

Underneath these stories, Shree weaves a tapestry where trees are replaced by antennas, the cuckoo has lost her mind, nature's clock has been disturbed, sacred river has vanished, forest and its creatures are haunted for sport. This paper argues that the landscapes in Shree's Fiction are more than just backdrops, rather they're agents in their own right. It argues that she creates ecological consciousness in her readers casually, almost without appearing to try. Shree makes no claim to environmental expertise, and in her fiction there's no activists, and no protests. What it includes instead is smaller gestures and characters who simply notice that something in the world around them has changed, and who mourn what has been lost. It traces exactly these small gestures, and argues that they accumulate into something closer to a sustained ecological sensibility than any single grand statement could. This paper incorporates Lawrence Buell's four-part account of what makes a text genuinely environmentally oriented to analyse the ecological relevance of Geetanjali Shree's fiction.

The Environmental Imagination

This paper's working method leans on Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*. Rather than defining an “environmental text” impressionistically, Buell proposes four specific criteria. First, the nonhuman environment must be present “not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (Buell 7-8). Second, “the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest” (Buell 7-8).

Third, “human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation” (Buell 7-8). Fourth, “some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text” (Buell 7-8). Taken together, these four criteria give this paper its working method: locating the places, large and small, where Shree's fiction stops treating landscape as scenery and starts treating it as an active participant in human experience, memory, and identity. What this paper adds to Buell's framework is an emphasis on scale. Shree satisfies these criteria not through grand set pieces but through an accumulation of minor gestures.

Living Landscapes: The City, the Desert, and the Border

The Roof Beneath Their Feet offers an instance of a landscape that shapes memory and identity rather than simply hosting them. The rooftop that gives the novel its title is described, from its opening pages, less as a built structure and more as a living, weather-responsive presence. The narrator calls it “not a roof but a sea that lay above Laburnum House” (Shree, *Roof* 12). Even the very first image of the novel is meteorological rather than architectural: “The last days of rain” (Shree, *Roof* 12). A few lines later, memory itself arrives as a natural process, when the narrator recalls a relative's name rustling in “like dry leaves” (Shree, *Roof* 14). The roof's overgrown vegetation gets its own precise inventory too, “On the roof, overgrown trees, overhanging branches, poles, parapets, water tanks” (Shree, *Roof* 23), where plant life and built structure are counted in a single breath, as if the novel itself cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. The comparison of the roof to a sea is developed with such consistency that the roof stops functioning as a mere setting and becomes a second body, one the narrator's childhood memory is inseparable from: “The branches of the trees would hug the roof and the leaves would jump with joy — why hang on the trees when we can tumble along with the dreams on the rooftop!” (Shree, *Roof* 26). There is a childlike delight in this image, and it is doing serious work. This is Buell's first criterion in action. Human history, in the form of a childhood and a family's arguments and reconciliations, becomes implicated in the roof's own weather-driven and vegetal history rather than simply occurring on top of it.

In *Tomb of Sand* landscape becomes the central as borders, memories, and territories become intertwined with questions of identity, belonging, and displacement. The border between India and Pakistan is not just located in a desert. It is imagined as being made of one: “There's sand at the border. As in a desert. The sand awaits. Paused. The vigil of the sand, the arrested desert. That's the border” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 80).

A geopolitical line, drawn in 1947 by a lawyer who had never been to India, becomes more than a line on a map, it continues to shape the lives of people on both sides. The novel's elderly protagonist, Maa insists on physically crossing this border near the end of her life, and for her the desert is not a backdrop of her experience. It becomes a path towards reconciliation and self discovery. In the novel a bullet passes through her body and it is described as having “simply crossed yet another border” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 1). Her own bodily transformation late in the novel is narrated through the same botanical vocabulary that runs through the rest of the text: “The seed planted was a date tree; what

blossomed was hibiscus” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 3), a line about the unpredictability of growth that could describe a garden as easily as a life.

The Empty Space locates this same living quality of landscape in aridity and grief rather than in memory or border-crossing. A lost child's feelings are imagined wandering an actual desert until they “get trapped in a barren branch” (Shree, *Empty Space* 161). Death itself is rendered in the language of water: “death is a flood. And when a flood bursts out at any odd, unpredictable moment...the living get embroiled with the dead” (Shree, *Empty Space* 48). The same passage extends the flood image into an act performed upon a tree, as mourners “leap up and climb trees and keep dragging the fish up into the branches, snaring him in a photo frame” (Shree, *Empty Space* 48). It is a painful image. The mourners cannot let the dead go, and the tree bears the weight of their refusal. Grief in this novel is not felt against a desert backdrop; it slowly becomes indistinguishable from the desert's own aridity and silence.

Forests, Disappearing Spaces, and the Critique of Progress

Shree's fiction repeatedly ties ecological loss to a specific, human-centred notion of progress rather than to nature in the abstract. The account of a vanishing tree canopy in *The Roof Beneath Their Feet* makes this connection explicit: “Trees have been cut down too, so the leaves don't ring any more like little bells...Their branches have been replaced by TV antennae! I keep wandering in this garden of antennae” (Shree, *Roof* 38). The phrase “garden of antennae” names the substitution precisely. A dead, metal simulacrum of a garden now stands where the living one used to be. The novel is also explicit about the developmental logic behind the substitution: “When people have cut down on buying milk and fruit to buy TVs, of course they'll try to save their antennae till the very end!” (Shree, *Roof* 38). Progress, in this passage, is not an abstraction to be argued with. It is a specific household's ordinary consumer choice, quietly continuous with a neighbourhood-wide loss of shared trees, and nobody in the novel ever thought of it as an environmental choice at all. That is exactly what makes it convincing.

Tomb of Sand makes the same critique at greater length in its description of an ordinary domestic wall. The novel distinguishes this wall from every synthetic alternative that modern development might have chosen instead: “Not a Thar desert wall studded with tiny mirrors...nor was it seized with a duplicitous desire in the sweep of modernity to appear old while being new, nor eager to trick our eyes into seeing a plastic wall as mud-plastered, bristling with fake grasses...nor still was it an awesome, colourful, tall, shiny orange-blue-green wall made by multinationals that would never fade or scratch or peel, imperishable, immortal, enduring” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 2). The passage catalogues an entire economy of synthetic nature, fake grass and fake mud and fake age, all manufactured by multinationals, and it lists them precisely in order to say that this particular wall is none of these things. The novel's account of a retiring officer's garden makes the same point through loss rather than description. The chrysanthemums “weren't thinking ahead” about the fact that their owner would soon “leave the garden” for a flat with a balcony too small to hold them: “If you fill those tiny balconies with pots, there's no room for your clothing, your self, or anything else” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 11). There is something quietly sad about these flowers, blooming

happily towards a future that has no place for them. Even prosperity erodes green space in this novel; large bungalow gardens give way to apartment balconies, and the text notices the change at the scale of a single potted flower. Elsewhere the novel names the same process directly: “In large cities, the houses began to grow smaller. But there too, where the buildings were now the trees, and dry mounds of earth were flowers, the homes of officers were oases in the desert” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 11). Buildings replace trees as the thing a city now offers, and the sentence inverts the vocabulary of nature to describe nature's own disappearance. *The Empty Space* states this same anxiety about ecological loss without any narrative disguise, in a passage that reads almost as a direct list of environmental damage: “Who keeps count of how many lands slide, how many trees wither, how many drops of water never reach our rivers...who the hell keeps count?” (Shree, *Empty Space* 50). The frustration in that final question is itself a small argument for exactly the kind of literary attention this paper is attempting. Somebody should keep count, the novel seems to say, and nobody does. The novel goes further in an extended passage that figures pollution as a grey residue settling over a landscape of growth. History “flies out of that heavy past, on the winds of today, to settle like a pall of dust, to spread over the towns, to paint in grey, grey, all the dreams and seeds and fruits and flowers and bees, to wither the wings of the birds, grey grey in one sweeping stroke” (Shree, *Empty Space* 53). Seeds, fruits, flowers, bees, and birds' wings are named one by one before being uniformly greyed over. It is one of the most haunting images in the novel, ecological damage pictured as a single, visible, colour-draining event rather than an abstraction. However, the clearest instance of Shree naming ecological change through the vocabulary of contemporary climate science arrives almost as a throwaway line, spoken by a minor, stammering character in *The Roof Beneath Their Feet*: “El Niño...La Niña...Nature's clock has been messed up...Unseasonal rain...Hot in winter, cold in summer...And with the seasons lost, the cuckoo too has lost his mind...Doesn't sing when he's supposed to, doesn't stay quiet when he's supposed to” (Shree, *Roof* 108). A character reaches, in real time and with visible difficulty, for the actual language of climate science to explain a garden bird's strange behaviour, collapsing a planetary weather system and a single confused bird into the same breath. His bewilderment is oddly moving, and it is also Buell's fourth criterion at work: the environment as process rather than fixed given, rendered as something a character struggles to put into words rather than as settled description.

Minor Details, Major Consciousness: The Texture of the Natural World

Much of Shree's ecological attentiveness lives not in her novels' large symbolic set pieces but in small, seemingly incidental sensory details that accumulate across a scene without ever being singled out as significant. *The Roof Beneath Their Feet* is dense with this kind of detail. A character's blood is imagined, in a moment of teasing affection, as “the juice of jamuns” rather than blood at all (Shree, *Roof* 19). A neem tree's branch becomes, in a piece of family lore, the exact spot where a boy once nearly leapt to escape a policeman, remembered forever afterward as “the branch of a neem tree, on the other, the policeman's moustache” (Shree, *Roof* 23). The specific smell and sound of a roadside snack seller roasting grain is preserved too, “the burning sand in which the bharbhujia roasted bajra stems, beans

and peapods” (Shree, *Roof* 26), a childhood memory held with such specificity that it feels lived rather than invented. Even the sky becomes granular and physical rather than merely scenic: “When the roof churns the cloudy skies, countless stars rain down on them” (Shree, *Roof* 32). Weather, the night sky, and the roof’s own motion collapse into a single moving image.

Tomb of Sand shows the same habit of noticing small natural detail, often at moments when the plot itself is paused. A tree outside a window is granted its own small drama, independent of any human observer: “A tree peered in at the window and rustled in the breeze and every leaf showered down like rain,” and moments later the leaves are imagined gossiping to one another, “listen, listen, they’re telling stories” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 9). In the same passage, weather and geology combine into a single fleeting image: “Silver dust rained through the air. A distant mountain was concealed by a cloud, lending it the appearance of an enormous lounging elephant” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 9). None of these details advances the plot in any conventional sense. What they do instead is keep the novel’s attention distributed, so that a scene of human drama is never allowed to occupy the page without some competing claim from the nonhuman world sitting quietly alongside it. Hence these small details become a cumulative demonstration of Buell’s second criterion. Human interest, even at the level of a single descriptive sentence, is not treated as the only legitimate claim on the reader’s attention.

The Empty Space performs a similar kind of minor attentiveness through its recurring animal and plant imagery, most often in comparisons that arrive and vanish within a single sentence. Eyes are “glassy and full of hurt like those of an injured animal” (Shree, *Empty Space* 55). A child’s rapid growth is compared to unexpectedly fast-growing vegetation: “twenty-five turns ten and at eleven you shoot up like a palm tree” (Shree, *Empty Space* 57). Elsewhere, ancient trees are elevated, half-seriously, to the status of sages: “They are represented as sages, ancient overgrown trees, with cascading beards.” However, the novel immediately undercuts its own reverence with a dry aside about “those who think that those old trees are the wise ones, that mere movement is action” (Shree, *Empty Space* 46-47). Taken individually, none of these details would be remarkable. Taken together, across three novels and dozens of scenes, they show that Shree’s ecological consciousness operates less as an argument she occasionally makes explicit and more as a habit of perception she cannot entirely set aside, even in her most ordinary sentences.

Ecological Interdependence and Environmental Ethics

Shree’s fiction consistently grants nonhuman life an interest of its own. It refuses to treat the human characters’ claims as automatically prior. The langurs of *The Roof Beneath Their Feet* are the clearest case. A troupe “loudly descends from the jamun tree to the roof, spreading purple jamun stains with their feet,” their faces expressing “not...victory or defeat, but...saintly detachment” (Shree, *Roof* 56). The langurs want the tree’s fruit. The human characters below want to wall the same tree off as property. The novel does not resolve this in the humans’ favour: “nothing can stop the langurs” (Shree, *Roof* 57). This satisfies Buell’s second criterion directly, since human interest is not the only legitimate interest on the page. Accountability for the underlying loss, Buell’s third criterion, is assigned

squarely to a human decision to enclose what had been shared: “When I was a child, the roof belonged to everyone, and the trees belonged to the roof” (Shree, *Roof* 56-57). It is a sentence heavy with nostalgia, and it names ecological interdependence as something concretely lost rather than abstractly regretted.

Tomb of Sand offers this paper's most sustained treatment of accountability extended across time, in an embedded fable about a Red Forest haunted by a horseman who hunts a sparrow transformed into a fairy. Generations of hunters pursue the sparrows until “hunting was declared illegal, guns became binoculars or cameras, horsemen became bird-watchers, but the sparrows turned into bundles of fear” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 25), which shows that legal reform does not automatically undo ecological damage: the fear survives the danger that caused it. The fable even reaches briefly for documentary ground, naming the real Indian ornithologist Salim Ali, startled at how pale and frightened these sparrows have become (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 25), so that its ethical claim stays tethered to an actual history of species decline rather than drifting into pure allegory. The novel carries this ethical attention to its formal limit through its recurring butterfly motif. Butterflies appear throughout as figures of ephemerality, “A butterfly's tale is a few days aflutter” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 18), but at the novel's close, this fragile creature is handed something unusual: the position of storyteller itself. “The butterfly floats up to tell the tale” (Shree, *Tomb of Sand* ch. 13). It is a small, easy-to-miss gesture, and a quietly beautiful one. Place-consciousness, in this final image, becomes indistinguishable from an ethics of who gets to tell the story of a place at all.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Geetanjali Shree's fiction, though built from the intimate, memory-driven material for which she is already celebrated, consistently does the specific things Lawrence Buell says an environmentally serious text must do. It grants landscape a presence beyond a framing device. It grants nonhuman life an interest that the human characters do not always share. It holds someone accountable for ecological loss rather than treating that loss as neutral circumstance, and it shows the environment as continually changing rather than fixed. This consistency is visible not only in the novels' large symbolic images, the roof imagined as a sea and the border imagined as a desert, but equally in the small sensory details that accumulate almost without comment: a tree that gossips at a window, chrysanthemums blooming heedless of their own future, blood imagined as jamun juice, and birds' wings imagined turning grey. Read together, these moments look less like incidental imagery and more like a quiet, sustained refusal to let the human characters keep the last word. It is a refusal carried out through cities that remember, deserts that grieve, forests that keep their fear long after the danger has passed, and a butterfly permitted to close the story a human border could not resolve. Ultimately, this study shows that literature's contribution to ecological awareness need not take the form of argument, statistics, or environmental polemic. Shree's fiction cultivates ecological sensibility by embedding it in the ordinary textures of domestic life: a rooftop, a garden, a grieving mother, an ageing woman's border crossing, a bird outside a window. The reader arrives at environmental attentiveness through memory and identity rather

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than instruction, and this is no small contribution in an age of climate change and rapid urban expansion. It demonstrates that ecocriticism has as much to find in contemporary Indian domestic fiction as in explicitly environmental writing, and that the relevance of ecological reading to Indian literary studies is only beginning to be recognised.

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DABEER SI/KTT/24**EXPLORING ECOETHICS IN RUTH OZEKI'S *MY YEAR OF MEATS*:
EXPOSING THE DARK REALITIES OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY****R. SATHYA**Research Scholar, Sri Meenakshi Govt Arts College for Women
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Sri Meenakshi Govt Arts College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Food is the primary thing that we need to eat in order to live a healthy life. Instead of harming our health, the food we eat should be a good source of nutrients. Since nature provides us with the majority of our food—plants, birds, animals, etc.—nature needs to be preserved and nourished. Ancient man understood the need for protecting nature, and nature in turn secured man from the harmful impacts by naturally offering peace and solace. Conversely, man's anthropocentric behaviour in today's materialistic environment has caused him to disconnect himself from all of nature's comforts. Even though he is intolerant of the hazardous effects he faces nowadays, man in the present day always disregards the consequences he faces by destroying nature. This paper uses ecocritical viewpoints to project the ecological problems of the modern era and the pervasiveness of man's egotistical tendency to exploit nature in order to raise his standard of life. This research paper examines Ruth Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats* to highlight the need of upholding ecological ideals. This study focuses on how the food industry's use of growth hormone injections to make livestock gain weight deteriorates human health. In the meat processing sector, humans unethically degrade food quality. Following ecological ethics is essential to operating more ethically and sustainably for safety regulations, which will support sustainable development.

Keywords: Ecoethics, Materialistic, Anthropocentric, Food Industry, Sustainable Development

Eco-literature, often known as environmental literature, is primarily focused on environmental themes and concerns that examine how humans interact with the natural world. In the age of environmental crisis, human's anthropocentric behaviour towards nonhuman nature causes irreversible damages which result in disharmony in the ecosystem of the earth. Environmental difficulties such as environmental degradation, pollution, hazardous waste, natural resources, biodiversity loss, climate change, and global warming, major species extinction, etc. Ecological ethics are the principles and obligations that every person should uphold to preserve our ecosystem. Modern man uses Earth's resources without considering their harmful effects. The development of a mindful and healthy living environment can reduce environmental problems and safeguard both living and non-living things on Mother Earth. For this generation to live in harmony, the

literature on the interconnectedness of living and non-living things, as well as the integration of theory and practice for sustainable development, is crucial. As Murphy correctly notes, to protect, support, and recycle the ecosystem, ecology can teach us how to live in a specific location and period.

The anthropocene has encouraged humans to flourish and improve the standard of their lifestyles. Zalasiewicz states that anthropocentrism signifies a significant shift in the Earth system's trajectory from the relatively stable circumstances that have witnessed the growth and development of human civilization over the previous few millennia. The eco-critics make a strong case for man's instinctive tendency to harm nature rather than take care of Mother Earth. The fundamental tenet of ecological ethics is the preservation of the components of our ecosystem. A comprehensive understanding of ecocriticism redefines the principles that humans ought to uphold in order to protect Mother Earth from a variety of detrimental impacts.

According to Professor Sabine, he thinks that analyzing, comprehending, and solving environmental issues is one of the most crucial tasks facing our generation. He believes that studying literature and culture can make a substantial contribution to this effort, one that has not yet received enough recognition. The 21st century's rising ecological crisis has heightened academic curiosity about moral interactions between humans and the natural world. The long-held anthropocentric notion that nature exists only to serve human needs has been called into question by climate change, biodiversity loss, industrial pollution, factory farming, and unsustainable consumption practices. Ecoethics, an interdisciplinary field that studies the moral obligations of individuals, societies, and organizations toward the environment and all forms of life, has arisen in response to these global issues.

Ecoethics promotes an ecocentric worldview that acknowledges the inherent worth of people, animals, plants, and ecosystems while advancing sustainability, justice, and environmental stewardship. It does this by drawing on environmental philosophy, ecology, and literary studies. Because literature allows readers to interact both academically and emotionally with the intricate relationship between humans and the environment, it has emerged as a crucial medium for expressing ecoethical issues. In particular, contemporary environmental fiction promotes moral contemplation on humanity's place in the natural world while exposing the ecological effects of industrialization, globalization, and consumer capitalism. Literary works challenge prevailing notions of exploitation and encourage readers to reevaluate their obligations to natural communities through narrative depiction. Ruth Ozeki stands out among today's conscious environmentalist authors for her examination of social justice, corporate capitalism, food politics, and environmental deterioration. By highlighting the negative effects of industrial food production on the environment, ethics, and human health, her book *My Year of Meats* offers a potent indictment of the global meat business. The novel, which is set against the backdrop of corporate agribusiness and international media, shows how capitalist systems that prioritize profit above ecological well-being support the commodification of women's bodies, animals, and natural resources. Ozeki illustrates how gender, commercial culture, and political power are

intertwined with environmental degradation through the stories of Jane Takagi-Little and Akiko Ueno.

Several ecoethical issues are highlighted in the book, such as factory farming, the careless use of pesticides and growth hormones, environmental pollution, animal exploitation, and biodiversity loss. Ozeki demonstrates these challenges' interrelated consequences on human health, non-human life, and environmental sustainability rather than portraying them as discrete ecological issues. *My Year of Meats* challenges readers to consider the prevailing systems that normalize ecological exploitation and argues for a reevaluation of humanity's moral responsibilities to the natural world by exposing the ethical ramifications of industrial food systems.

This research paper explores the ecoethical aspects of *My Year of Meats* by analyzing how Ozeki promotes environmental justice and ecological responsibility while criticizing corporate food systems, industrial agriculture, and anthropocentric viewpoints. It contends that the book makes a substantial contribution to the current environmental humanities and ecocritical debate by advancing an ecoethical perspective based on the interdependence of humans, animals, and ecosystems.

Ruth Ozeki is an American novelist and video documentarian whose works address a variety of societal topics and themes, including politics, science, technology, racism, multiculturalism, religion, war, and environmental justice. Her book *My Year of Meats* explores genetic engineering, particularly the potentially harmful consequences of genetically altered food. She writes about these serious environmental issues and spreads awareness of the dangers of genetic manipulation since she is passionate about filmmaking and researching genetic engineering for environmental awareness. In an interview with Catherine Clyne, Ozeki states that her love of food is a major contributing factor to her worries about food-related difficulties. For her, food is an essential component of life. Her conviction that food is essential to the formation of people's identities is what further ignites her interest in food-related topics.

The research paper is to convey the concerns of ecocriticism and the significance of upholding ecological principles in order to create a healthy living environment. In her book *My Years of Meat*, Ruth Ozeki discusses the harm that unethical meat industry operations cause to the ecosystem. The author thoroughly examines the repugnant usage of growth hormones in the US food business from an ecocritical standpoint. When taken by humans, hormone-induced food loses its nutritional value and has additional negative effects. By implementing eco justice, the characters in the novel aim to improve society. The main character, Jane Takagi, is the director of a movie that encourages the immoral use of hazardous hormones, but at the end of the novel, she starts to care more about the environment.

Jane is employed by BEEF-EX, an American corporation that supports the TV show *My American Wife*. Livestock farmers, meat processors, exporters, grain suppliers, pharmaceutical firms, agricultural associations, and television sponsors are just a few of the many interests represented by the organization within the American meat industry. The program's main goal is to increase American beef

consumption in the Japanese market by portraying it as a representation of affluence, health, and quality.

Ruth Ozeki reveals the meat industry's dishonest marketing techniques through her television show. The show presents an idealized picture of American meat while purposefully hiding the negative effects of industrial meat production and consumption. Ozeki elevates meat above the women who prepare it, making it the program's main focus. The chosen housewives are supposed to represent an idealized American image by being attractive, healthy, happy, and able to portray meat as desirable and wholesome. In this sense, the program turns meat and women into commodities intended to sway customer choices and support business objectives. The hidden realities of the meatpacking sector, where employees deal with dangerous working conditions and frequent occupational injuries, are also highlighted in the book.

Meatpacking is one of the riskiest industries in the US, according to Eric Schlosser, with thousands of workers experiencing illnesses and injuries at work every year. Ozeki criticizes the ethical, environmental, and social implications of the global meat business by contrasting the beautiful depiction of meat on television with the exploitation of people behind the scenes. To find American women in good health for the TV show *Jane, my American wife*, searches the country for the best applicants. These women were chosen to convince Japanese viewers that eating American meat is linked to prosperity, health, and a perfect lifestyle. Ruth Ozeki demonstrates through this process how the program presents Japanese culture as undesirable while creating an image of American supremacy. Jane is a successful spokesperson for the television industry because of her physical attributes and multicultural upbringing. Her mixed origin, familiarity with Japanese, and unusual looks allow her to convey an idealized picture of America to Japanese viewers, despite the fact that she does not conform to traditional ideals of either American or Japanese identity. Her distinct identity is exploited by the television business to bolster its marketing strategy and perpetuate cultural prejudices.

Jane notes that the producers deliberately choose white American women from the middle and higher middle classes who have two or three children because Japanese viewers find them appealing and recognizable. She also thinks that Texas ladies are physically stronger than many Japanese women, and she admires their vibrant, robust appearance. In order to encourage Japanese consumers to emulate American eating habits, these meticulously crafted visuals are meant to link American meat with physical strength, beauty, and family well-being.

While traveling, Jane stops by Alberto and Catalina, an immigrant couple who fervently hope that their child will be born in the US so that the infant might become an American citizen. Their ambition is a reflection of the general perception that there are more chances and a better future in America. Jane later learns about the hidden truths of industrial farming when she goes to Dunn and Son, a big commercial cow feedlot. There, she learns that, similar to other types of industrial farming, the production of chicken entails risky and immoral methods that endanger both human health and animal welfare. Through these encounters,

Ozeki challenges the myths propagated by the American meat industry and reveals the ethical, social, and environmental effects of the industrial food system.

Ozeki implies the use of growth hormones, a procedure that is unethical. Jane's infertility stems from her mother's use of DES (diethylstilbestrol) to avoid miscarriage when she was still in the womb. In an attempt to aid in the growth of the fetus, Jane's mother also injected meat with a lot of hormones while she was pregnant. Ozeki emphasizes the use of growth-stimulating hormones in the meat industry to increase profits as the main problem through the novel's narrator. Jane observes the slaughterhouse injecting meat with growth hormones to increase profits. Ozeki uses the young girl Jane meets to illustrate the effects of hormone use. Despite her tender age, the small girl has the appearance of an adult woman. It is solely due to the negative effects of hormones placed into meat, which she frequently consumed. This illustrates how destroying one aspect of nature will have an impact on the others. In order to stop the development of global issues, the book "looks for ways that women might develop usable alliances across national, racial, and sexual divides" (228). Through the experiences of her main character, Jane, Ozeki depicts the corruption and unethical activities of the American beef industry. As the book goes on, Jane feels more and more pressure to expose the exploitation in the meat industry and the hidden truths of factory farming. She understands that a lot of crucial facts about industrial meat production—both critical and seemingly unimportant—are frequently disregarded or purposefully kept hidden from the general population. Jane feels that by bringing important information to the public's attention about the pervasive corruption in the American meat industry, she may have contributed to the protection of innocent lives from the detrimental effects of unsafe meat production. Ozeki highlights the significance of exposing hidden facts and opposing unethical actions that endanger human health, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability through Jane's transition from television producer to whistleblower.

Akiko, another character in the book, is slender and unhealthy-looking. She is employed at the BEEF-EX. For Akiko to grow stronger and healthier like Texas females, Jane is adamant that she consumes American meat. Akiko becomes accustomed to eating beef at the end of the novel. For Akiko to become pregnant, her husband John also makes her consume meat. Her husband forces her to eat meat even though she is a vegetarian. John also accuses Akiko of being a vegetarian, which prevents her from having children.

Akiko first expresses a desire to raise multiple children and considers adoption as a solution to her infertility. Later on, though, she finds out she is pregnant and chooses to come to the US to give birth to her daughter as an American citizen. She thinks that becoming an American citizen will help her fulfill the desired role of an American wife and give her child more possibilities. Ozeki uses these episodes to highlight the American Dream's universal appeal and the conviction that living in the country offers a better, wealthier future. The novel reveals how commercial society and media mold people's expectations by continuously linking meat to American identity and well-being. According to Cheng, Ozeki employs

meat as a potent symbol to explore womanhood, criticize economic exploitation, and raise awareness of environmental ethics and public health concerns.

Ruth Ozeki speaks out against the use of chemicals to encourage eating more meat and the negative consequences of doing so. DES aids in the weight gain of beef for commercial purposes, which causes pregnant women to miscarry. When humans consume livestock that has been treated with DES, the estrogenic hormone has an impact on their health and generates a hormonal imbalance that can lead to some major health problems. Premature births and miscarriages are linked to a higher incidence of vaginal cancer in women. Despite limitations on their use, Ozeki finds that the extensive use of synthetic growth hormones in American feedlots poses major health concerns. Because of worries about hormone-treated meat, the European Union banned the import of American cattle, as the novel reveals through Jane's investigation. Consequently, BEEF-EX, a representative of the American meat business, changed its marketing strategy to target Japan. In 1990, Japan loosened import limits under the New Beef Agreement in response to trade discussions and pressure from the US, giving American beef a greater market share in Japan. Ozeki utilizes these incidents to critique how corporate interests and global trade regulations affect public health and food safety.

Ozeki therefore makes it abundantly evident that the immoral use of growth-stimulating hormones has a significant effect on both human and non-human animals in the environment. The framework of behaviour for regulating and directing human actions toward the environment can be found in ecological ethics. It gives us awareness and information about many environmental issues and calls for a shift in behaviour from exploitative to respectful of nature. Developing respect for nature will serve as a tool for environmental planning and management in order to provide guiding principles to act morally. Concerns about food security necessitate volunteer initiatives and corporate accountability for the protection of all ecosystem species. No species in the environment should be harmed by the production or use of food. Therefore, it is advised that businesspeople in the food sector respond morally and support the economic growth of their workforce, community, and society at large.

Ozeki's stories reflect the opinions of other American authors, such as Carolyn Merchant and Rachel Carson, about the Industrial Revolution's impact on human existence and the environment. She also thinks that the Revolution changed people's perceptions of food. She believed that before the Revolution, food was seen as a means of connecting humans with the natural world. Eating has become little more than a commercial act these days. In her novel ozeki uses the process of eating potatoes to support her ideas about the deeper implications of eating, arguing that these days, potatoes have lost their natural values and are nothing more than the outcome of numerous decisions made by the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, corporations, scientists, marketing agencies, and PR firms, all of which are extremely complex (Clyne 1). The agricultural sector was complicated on several levels by industry.

Ecocritic Rachael Stein argues that those aspects of sexuality and reproduction should be included in the intersections between the human and environmental

worlds in the twenty-first century. According to Stein, writers, critics, and theorists of the twenty-first century ought to take into account how environmental injustice is entwined with other facets of human corporeality and identity, such as sexuality and reproduction (“Sexual/Environmental Justice” 103).

Degradation of the environment may have detrimental effects on women's sexuality and fertility. Thus, Stein began investigating how acts against nature might lead to sexual oppression, as did other contemporary ecocritics and eco-theorists. Stein encouraged the growth of ecocriticism to include sex as one of the areas impacted by environmental injustices. She maintained that the majority of environmental risks have detrimental effects on women's reproductive and sexual systems. Furthermore, other risky outcomes like environmental toxicity and pregnancy, human breast milk toxicity, environmental connections to breast cancer, and sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS could be included in these threats (qtd. in Stein “Sexual/Environmental Justice” 104). Prominent eco-scholars like Greta Gaard, Priscilla Solis Ybarra, Katie Hogan, Cate Sandilands, and Noel Sturgeon also made reference to these connections.

The harmful practice of giving cattle growth hormone injections is growing at the fastest rate. After eating tainted meat, modern man is subject to numerous negative consequences. People's hormones are impacted, and the majority of women continue to be infertile. If a woman is unable to conceive, the traditional society will be quite concerned about her. Now is the moment to recognize that in order to have hope for a better future, one must comprehend the higher ethical foundation. Sustainable development can be established with the support of upholding eco-ethics. For a sustainable environment, we must take into account every single species in the ecosystem. People can better understand the value of living a healthy life thanks to eco ethics. Jeffrey correctly notes that, from an eco-conscious perspective, each person must make an immediate decision for sustainable growth. She asserts that in order to achieve a higher moral plane, humanity must eventually transition to a new state of consciousness. A moment when we must let go of our fear and offer each other hope. Now is that moment.

An ecoethical interpretation of the text emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge the moral connection between people and the non-human environment. By promoting empathy, sustainability, and ecological responsibility, Ozeki opposes anthropocentric viewpoints. She challenges prevailing narratives that put business ahead of morality and the environment by exposing the hidden costs of industrial food production. The novel further demonstrates how concerns of gender, ethnicity, globalization, and social justice are inextricably linked to ecological catastrophe, underscoring the interdependence of all living beings. *My Year of Meats* makes a strong case for moral responsibility and environmental consciousness. Readers are prompted to reevaluate their food choices and the larger institutions that uphold consumer culture by its depiction of the grim reality of the food industry. Ozeki promotes a more sustainable and compassionate relationship with nature by highlighting ecoethical concepts, stressing the interdependence of the environment, animals, and people. As a result, the novel continues to make a substantial contribution to the current ecoethical conversation,

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highlighting the transformational power of literature in raising ecological awareness and motivating significant social and environmental change.

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DABEER SI/KTT/25**RETHINKING MIGRATION AND ECOLOGICAL RECOVERY IN
ANDY WEIR'S ARTEMIS****LARIN JOHN REID**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, India**K. SHANTHI**Head, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, India**Abstract**

Migration has played an integral part in the history of humankind. It facilitates patterns of human habitation throughout various environmental landscapes that in turn influence individual cultures and identities. As humankind evolves and becomes technologically sophisticated, the traditional notions of migration and ecological recovery are challenged and its rethinking can subject its established narratives on identities and cultures towards incredulity. As humanity envisions life beyond earth, migration acquires new dimensions and definitions that transcend terrestrial boundaries, inviting fresh perspectives on ecological recovery where life is artificially sustained. Andy Weir's novel *Artemis* offers a space to examine the shifting paradigms of migrational boundaries from transnational and diasporic to cislunar and extraterrestrial. This paper aims to explore reconstructions of migration and ecological recovery through the artificially sustained habitat furnished in the novel. Ecological recovery here refers to the continuous recovery of expended gases and waste water to sustain the artificial habitat. The paper also examines how Andy Weir handles the conventional tenets of migrational politics within speculative and futuristic imaginations. Ultimately, the study elucidates the futuristic anticipations of space colonisation, trade and its implications on economy and social welfare.

Keywords: Andy Weir, Artemis, Migration, Ecological Recovery, Rethinking, Reimagining

Introduction

Migration has been central to humanity and it has ensured shifting cultures and identities over the years. The bond between ecology and migration is peculiar and singular, since every act of migration is simultaneously an act of environmental encounter. They are intrinsically intertwined because every settlement marks a renewed relationship between humanity and its surrounding environment. From prehistoric dispersals to glorious civilizations, the social milieu of every civilization has thrived based on its correspondence with its encompassing ecological terrain. The ecological terrain in turn has influenced the physical, biological, social, and cultural conditions of a civilization. This offers us a perspective that every civilization is an ecological project, all great civilizations of antiquity have emerged through a continuous negotiation with their environments. As years progress and humanity thrives into a hybrid and

technologically sophisticated society, the established axioms of migration and its dependency with the environment is challenged through the humanity's futuristic aspirations that involve extraterrestrial migration, interstellar travel, planetary terraforming, quantum supremacy and cyborg bodies.

This paper rethinks conventional understandings of migration and ecology by reading Andy Weir's *Artemis* through Lyotard's Postmodern Incredulity and Bruno Latour's planetary thought. Challenging the false universalisms surrounding migration, it argues that the novel reconceptualises lunar migration as an ecological negotiation in which human mobility emerges through the reciprocal interaction with environmental resources and technological reliability. Furthermore, it demonstrates that ecological literacy sustains this negotiation by fostering the environmental awareness necessary for adaptive coexistence and ecological recovery.

Research and Scholarship in Andy Weir's *Artemis* remains comparatively limited in comparison with his other two novels *The Martian* and *Project Hail Mary*. The themes of scientific realism, survival and resilience and its connection with human engineering, technological adaptation, and scientific innovation is discussed in depth in *The Martian* and *Project Hail Mary*. Theoretical scholarship such as astroenvironmentalism, Posthuman ecocriticism and ontology has challenged the anthropocentric conceptions of the environments by stressing on the entanglement of humans, technologies and non-human agencies. These studies reconceptualise environments as active participants in moulding human life rather than passive settings for human action. However, they seldom extend their perspective to examine migration itself as a relational ecological process within extraterrestrial texts and contexts.

Consequently, a significant conceptual gap remains. Existing scholarship has explored how humans survive beyond Earth and how planetary environments impact technological advancements and adaptations. However, little attention is given to the notion of how migration is transformed when the destination itself becomes an active ecological participant. Addressing this gap, the present study asks how Andy Weir's *Artemis* reconceptualises lunar migration as an ecological negotiation rather than as colonisation, displacement, or ecological escape. It also shows attention on how migration is transformed when the destination itself becomes an active ecological participant. The study therefore addresses the following questions: (1) How does Andy Weir's *Artemis* reconceptualise lunar migration as an ecological negotiation rather than as colonisation, displacement, or ecological escape? (2) How does Lyotard's postmodern incredulity, Bruno Latour's planetary thought and ecological literacy illuminate the reciprocal relationship between migrants and the lunar environments? By addressing these questions, the study proposes ecological negotiation as a conceptual framework for understanding migration as a dynamic process of environmental reciprocity and adaptive coexistence.

Andy Weir is a contemporary American science fiction retiree known for combining scientific accuracy with accessible storytelling. His works include *The Martian* (2011), *Artemis* (2017), *Project Hail Mary* (2021). The second novel *Artemis* offers a distinctive exploration of life within the first eponymous lunar

city. The novel follows Jasmine “Jazz” Bashara, a Saudi born lunar migrant, whose financial struggles lead her to accept an illegal sabotage contract from the wealthy businessman Trond Landvik. The operation intends to disrupt the monopoly of Sanchez Aluminium, the corporation controlling the Moon’s aluminium industry. Since aluminium smelting releases oxygen as a by-product that sustains life within the lunar city, Sanchez’s monopoly extends beyond the industrial control to the regulation of one of the city’s most essential life-sustaining resources. However, Landvik is murdered, and Jazz finds herself amidst a precarious situation, where she is just a pawn in a larger and dangerous game. It becomes evident that she is amidst a risky gamble that involves various parties competing to lay their hands on ZAFO (Zero Attenuation Fibre Optic), which could ensure the faster transmission of data without the need for repeaters. This would completely revamp the communications industry, and ‘Artemis’ is pivotal because ZAFO can be manufactured in low gravity and the lunar city is an ideal location. The novel further explores the face-off between Jazz and the syndicates involved and if their actions could be disastrous to the first lunar establishment.

Reimagining Migration: From Geocentric Metanarratives to Ecological Negotiation

In the novel the notions of ecology and migration can be verified by reimagining the moon as an ecological negotiation; it unfurls in a way that challenges the conventional semantics of the labels ecology and migration. The aspects of lunar ecology and inter world migration calls for an incredulity towards the metanarratives regarding migration and ecology. Cüneyt Telsaç in his article titled, “Deep Economic Factors Causing Migration” in the *International Journal of Global Politics and Publication Administration* defines migration that corroborates with its metanarratives. He says, “Migration within the borders of a country, generally from rural areas to urban areas is (national) internal migration. Migrations that cross the country’s borders to another country are considered (international) emigration” (Telsaç 40). Jean Lyotard in his magnum opus *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) says that the postmodern condition of thought requires an incredulous stance towards false universalisms or metanarratives; “...simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 24). Hence, Andy Weir’s narratives of lunar ecology and inter world migration is diminished by the proliferation of metanarratives associated with geocentric ecology and migration. Andy Weir’s description of Artemis’s ecology and geography is a stark contrast to the cities found on earth; “The whole city is only half a kilometre across. I live in Artemis, the first (and so far, only) city on the moon (Weir 5). The narratives of global migration include arduous travels and excruciating exoduses from one point to another; it differs from speculative lunar narratives of Weir. The novel’s protagonist Jazz (Jasmine Bashra) says that the gravity of the lunar city is one sixth of Earth’s gravity and hence walking around a city that spans half a kilometre is not physically demanding: “It’s only one-sixth Earth’s gravity. Walking doesn’t take much energy” (Weir 7). The lunar city with its half a kilometre layout is starkly different to the cities on Earth. Postmodernist thought occupies a pivotal role in fracturing the totalisation of systems as discussed by Steven Connor. In *The Cambridge*

Companion to Postmodernism (2004) he says, “Postmodern ethics is often described in vague terms such as ‘openness’, ‘otherness’ and ‘fracture’ and an ‘opposition to totalizing systems’” (Connor 182). In the novel, the lunar city Artemis fractures totalising systems in regard to human habitation and adaptive control, it challenges it by insinuating that human habitation cannot exist independently of its ecological conditions. Unlike the terrestrial cities where ecological accountability can often be displaced or deferred through power distributions, politics, technological and economic systems, it differs from the enclosed ecology of the lunar city that transforms this totalised flexible system of ecological accountability into a non-negotiable condition of existence. In the lunar city, ecological negotiation through environmental responsibility is not a voluntary ethical practice but an existential necessity through which the city continually ensures the temperament of its own survival.

Planetary Attractors: The Moon as an Out-of-this-World Attractor

Secondly, the novel talks about planetary attractors, its role in environmental agency and ecological negotiation. Environmental agency refers to the dynamic and relational nature that the environment shares with humanity, it is not passive and influences the actions of humans in regards to their actions such as migration, agriculture etc. The conceptualisation of environmental agency plays a vital role to understand its influence over ecological negotiation. The dynamics between environmental agency and the resulting ecological negotiation is a complex product of human action not limited or restricted to migration, agriculture, mining, urbanisation and colonisation. Kathleen Neumann and Henk Hilderink in their article entitled, “Opportunities and Challenges for Investigating the Environment-Migration Nexus” say, “Recently, scholars have increasingly recognized that—with the exception of extreme conditions—environmental change alone does not cause migration. Rather, it is the interaction of environmental factors with non-environmental factors that account for the causes of migration” (Neumann and Hilderink 309). The environment and geographical changes do not influence migration alone, it happens through the interaction of environmental and non-environmental factors, these factors can be elucidated using terrestrial and out-of-this-world attractors. Bruno Latour in his *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018) talks about; “out-of-this-world attractor” (Latour 34). The terrestrial attractors refer to the forces that draw and retain people with earth’s biophysical systems. It includes the Earth’s geochemical systems, its self-sustaining and regenerative biosphere, magnetospheric protection. Authors Kristin Persson, Maria Andrée and Cecilia Caiman in their article entitled, “Down-to-earth ecological literacy through human and nonhuman encounters in fieldwork” published in *The Journal of Environmental Education* elucidate the inter-twined relation of humanity with the terrestrial biological systems. They say, “... terrestrial attractor, represents the down-to-earth alternative which recognizes the inter-twined entanglement of humanity and biophysical life on Earth” (Persson et al. 99). This relationship between humanity and the biochemical systems result in ecological negotiation, the interaction of man’s actions with the biochemical systems result in agriculture, animal husbandry, mining etc. This relationship between human actions towards his surrounding biochemical systems is replicated

through ecological negotiation when a group of human beings migrate and the terrestrial being: “is no longer the milieu or the background of human actions” (Latour 41). The terrestrial being is subsumed into the system of the terrestrial attractor, where the: “the terrestrial attractor points to how Earth participates and reacts to human actions” (Persson et al. 99).

This paper reinterprets the Latourian notion of the Out-of-this-world attractor within the context of Artemis, the term is employed by Latour to critique the political fantasy of escaping terrestrial ecological obligations, this paper uses it explain how inter world migration is structured by distinct Out-of-the-world attractors that ultimately revitalise ecological accountability than eliminate it. There are many Out-of-the-World attractors that inspire inter world migration. Gravity exists as an Out-of-the-World attractor and also serves as an economic catalyst that inspires migration. Andy Weir presents an intriguing picture where gravity is monetised through the OLTS test that utilises the Attenuation process. The novel explains that, “It’s an optical loss test set! OLTS for short. It tells you how much attenuation a fiber-optic cable has. Attenuation is the amount of light that gets lost to heat during transmission” (Weir 188). Every fiber-optic cable has its own attenuation but the cables that could be manufactured in space have zero attenuation: “Now, a typical attenuation for a high-end cable is around 0.4 decibels per kilometer. Guess what ZAFO’s attenuation is, it’s zero” (Weir 188). ZAFO here refers to: “Zero Attenuation Fiber Optic” (Weir 188). The difference between ZAFO and the fiber-optic cables manufactured on Earth is truly remarkable: “Normal fiber-optic lines can only be fifteen kilometers long. After that, the signal’s just too weak to continue. So you need repeaters. They read the signal and retransmit it. But repeaters cost money, they have to be powered, and they’re complicated. I’d, and they slow down the transmission too” (Weir 189). ZAFO is unique and it is impossibility to manufacture it on Earth advocates for its rarity: “ZAFO is a crystalline quartzlike structure that only forms at 0.216 g’s. It’s impossible to make on Earth, but they can make it here with a centrifuge” (Weir 194). Gravity as a resource in the terrain of the lunar landscape and its biochemical relation with the ZAFO cable; a product of human actions in tandem with the lunar environment makes it an ideal out of this world attractor. The novel explicates economic implications and profit margins of ZAFO on both the economy of the lunar city and its commercial tether to Earth: “But ZAFO is our saviour. The telecom industry will want to upgrade, and ZAFO can only be made cheaply here. There’ll be a huge production boom. Factories will open, people will move here for jobs, and everyone will prosper” (Weir 195).

The out of the world attractors are not limited and restricted to ZAFO alone, it involves the reimagining the moon as an outpost outside Earth and station to oversee the mining of asteroids. Michio Kaku, an American Theoretical Physicist and Futurist in his rendition *The Future of Humanity: Terraforming Mars, Interstellar Travel, Immortality, and Our Destiny Beyond Earth* talks about the asteroids as the home of untold riches. He says, “Since the moon is largely made of the same material as the Earth, we may need to look beyond it for a revenue stream. That is why Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have already set their sights on the asteroids. There are millions of asteroids in space, and they may be the home

of untold riches” (Kaku 53). Michio Kaku also envisions asteroid mining as the gold rush in space. He says, “Today, some are wondering whether the mining of the asteroid belt could create another Gold Rush in outer space. Already private entrepreneurs have expressed an interest in exploring this region and its untold riches, and NASA has funded several missions with the goal of bringing an asteroid back to earth” (Kaku 55). He draws a parallel between the impending gold rush in space to the historical California Gold Rush. He says, “In 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in California. The news was electrifying. More than three hundred thousand people flooded into this wilderness to seek riches. Ships from all over began to line up at San Francisco harbor. Its economy exploded in size” (Kaku 55). The moon serves as an intermediary and as an outpost connecting the attractions of technological innovations, and economic investments with the asteroid as an out of the world attractor. Michio Kaku reimagines moon as the commercial, transportation and supply hub during the California Gold Rush and he predicts that moon could share the similar fate as a commercial and transportation hub in outer space. He says, “The moon would be like the Chicago of the future, processing valuable minerals from the asteroid belt and shipping them on to Earth” (Kaku 55). Hence, Latour’s Out-of-the-world attractors play a crucial role in the ecological negotiation that involves lunar landscapes, asteroid mining that stands as a testament to validate the interstellar aspirations of humankind.

Ecological Literacy: Astroenvironmentalism and Negotiating Survival Beyond Earth

This paper focuses on ecological literacy and how ecological negotiation during migration is integral to the growth and habituality of environmental recovery and awareness. Authors Kristin Persson, Maria Andrée and Cecilia Caiman in their article entitled, “Becoming-with the bog born: emotional collectives in ecological fieldwork” define ecological literacy. They say, “Ecological literacy appears for the first time in the 1980s (the related term environmental literacy in the late 1960s) and revolves around ecological concepts, system thinking, inquiry skills, the human impact and skills for informed decision making” (Persson et al. 676). They also enumerate the objectives of ecological literacy: “the notion of ecoliteracy to advocate the importance of interconnectedness, kinship with the natural world and spiritual and holistic elements. However, this latter, more relational perspective does not need to be separated from ecological concepts, methods and scientific inquiry” (Persson et al. 676). The citizens of the lunar city in the novel showcase instinctive and habitual traits of ecological literacy. They also participate and value the resources that are in their disposal. The citizens of the lunar city exude awareness that the recklessness towards the natural resources at their disposal could easily cost their lives. The novel exclaims how the citizens of the lunar city are serious about recycling, the people of ‘Artemis’ engage in the vigorous recycling of waste water, the air they expend. The protagonist, Jasmine, explains the recycling process in the lunar city. She says, “Water’s expensive in Artemis, but it’s not like you throw it away. It’s a closed system. So what you really pay for is water purification. The hotel room had a justifier reuse shower. The first twenty litres were fresh water (that lasted about three minutes). After that

it reheated your used water and gave it back to you” (Weir 70). This validates that ecological literacy is vital for migration and the migrants are in a continuous ecological negotiation with the environment. Every failed or exploited interaction in that negotiation has ecological consequences. The nuances of ecological literacy is elegantly elucidated in the tenets of astroenvironmentalism, it provides an ideal theoretical framework that aids the operation of ecological literacy in the extraterrestrial and outer planetary environments. Alessandro Marino in her article titled, “Astroenvironmentalism as SF: Bordering (and Ordering) Otherworldly Ecologies” published in the journal *Environmental Humanities* says, “...astroenvironmentalism, which refers to the rise of concerns about responsible and sustainable uses of outer space environments. While astroenvironmentalism is a label increasingly used to refer to a wide range of environmental issues from the cluttering of orbits to the consequences of deep space exploration” (Marino 25). The astronenvironmental perspective encourages the reimagination and the reinterpretation of conventional concepts such as migration and ecology. It is remarkable that the analytical approach of astronenvironmentalism had inherent counterpoints that facilitate incredulity against the metanarratives and the resulting totalising systems, it plays a vital role in breaking from the cyclic circulation of discourses and its immediate effect on overarching systems and false universalisms. Marino says, “... I ask what sort of alternative imagination SF (Science Fiction) can foster and how it can be read contrapuntally to and as an expansion of circulating scientific discourses on astroenvironmentalism” (Marino 27). The necessity of contrapuntal narratives that astroenvironmentalism insinuates helps in facilitation of a fresh and broader perspective regarding the ecologies and the ecological interactions that are not singular to earth. The broader perspectives offer an ideal avenue to explore the unsustainable extraction of extraterrestrial resources; “Astroenvironmentalism is a useful starting point to counteract New Space discourses on exploitation and extraction of outer space environments” (Marino 28). The core objective of ecological literacy is that astroenvironmentalism focuses on the awareness that it could mutually establish between the terrestrial and the extraterrestrial terrains. Julie Klinger in her article titled, “Environmental Geopolitics and Outer Space” says, “The manner in which we engage with outer space is environmental, in so far as we transform Earthly environments to get to and from outer space, we use space-based technologies to understand Earthly environments, and our engagement with outer space, whether orbits, moons, asteroids, or planets, has measurable environmental footprints” (3). In the novel, the mutuality that Klinger talks about is verified through environmental entanglement between the earth and moon. It begins with transforming earthly environments to migrate to the lunar city. The novel elucidates how the Kenyan landscape aids in the latter entanglement by transforming its environment as an act of ecological negotiation aiding lunar travel and migration: “Kenya had one—and only one—natural resource to offer the space companies: the equator. Spacecraft launched from the equator could take full advantage of Earth’s rotation to save fuel” (Weir 37). The Kenyan terrain is a perfect example of the mutual dependence between terrestrial and extraterrestrial terrain and the measurable environmental footprints such as lunar migration as the

result of ecological negotiation. Thus the tenets of ecological literacy emphasises on the individual awareness of resources, the mutual dependence between terrestrial and extraterrestrial terrains. For ecological negotiation, ecological awareness is non-negotiable, ecological literacy plays a crucial role in mentoring ecological awareness and recovery that in turn emulates sustainable ecological negotiations during extraterrestrial migration.

Conclusion

In encapsulation, the reimagination and postmodern revision of migration and ecology through futuristic lunar settlements, where migration is an ecological negotiation of both terrestrial and the Latourian Out-of-the-world factors. These factors are understood through the temper of ecological literacy that works in tandem with astroenvironmentalism. Ecological negotiation through the thoroughness of ecological literacy inspires ecological awareness for sustainable living and the preservation of biochemical systems. Andy Weir's depiction of a lunar city breaks conventional depictions of a city being the centre of migration. By portraying the moon as a fragile, engineered habitat dependent upon carefully maintained biochemical and technological systems that are in constant ecological negotiation with the lunar landscape. *Artemis* demonstrates that ecological negotiation, informed by ecological literacy, fosters environmental awareness that safeguards the biochemical systems that are unique and singular to its respective extraterrestrial terrain. Ultimately, *Artemis* reminds us that every step humanity takes beyond Earth must also be a step towards ecological responsibility, for even beneath an alien sky, the future of life is written by the environments we choose to protect.

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DABEER SI/KTT/26**CLIMATE CATASTROPHE IN THE WAKE OF MAN'S INTRUSION IN
BILL BRYSON'S *A WALK IN THE WOODS*****M. TYCHICUS**Research Scholar, V.H.N.S.N College, Virudhunagar
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Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods* is based on his personal experience hiking the Appalachian Trail (AT). Bryson's book is divided into twenty-one chapters, each of which focuses on his own experience with the natural disasters and climatic conditions along the Appalachian Trail. Climate is undeniably changing and changing all the time. Man is the reason for climate change. Bryson discovered that human activity is threatening Appalachia's living ecology to extinction, demonstrating that humans are a greater threat to the Trail than the Trail is to them. Global average surface temperatures were rising as a result of man-made emissions of greenhouse gases. Climatic catastrophe is a matter of survival today. It causes not only environmental crises like rising sea levels but also health crises. Certain adaptation measures were taken to control climate change in the past COP-26 (Conference of Parties) at Glasgow. One of the most important decisions taken there is that all the countries should meet the Net Zero emission target. If the target is not attained the climatic change will continuously bring ecological disasters and public health issues in the upcoming years.

Keywords: Appalachian Trail, climate catastrophe, global warming, ecological disasters, COP-26

Bill Bryson's seventh travelogue book is titled *A Walk in the Woods*. His trek along the renowned Appalachian Trail (AT) is described in this book. From George to Maine, more than 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail connects 14 states in the east of the country. The AT is called the granddaddy of long hikes. This trail is well-known for the breathtaking views along the trail and the difficult terrain it presents to the hikers. In his book, Bryson addressed the trail's current problems, such as pollution, urbanization, and climate change, all of which are intertwined with past human activities and their environmental degradation. Encroaching development, acid rain, polluted water are all threats to the Appalachian Trail's ecosystem, but the most serious issue is climate change. Unfortunately, climate change is gradually destroying the AT's magnificent scenery. In addition, it has an impact on the extinction of flora and fauna in the AT. As a result, many people, including Bill Bryson, desire to cross the AT before it is further degraded by climate change. Bryson describes how the path has become an integral part of the American identity, which may be summed up as a constant struggle between the necessity for urbanization and the need to protect the environment. The

Appalachian trail has been a popular destination for pilgrims seeking peace over the years. Bryson says every hiker has a unique story and various reasons for hiking this trail. This variation among the hikers highlights the trail's significance as a common area where people may connect with nature and with one another, discussing their needs and concerns as well as their personal experiences.

Climate is referred to as the sum total of weather conditions over a vast area over a long period of time. There is a difference between climate and weather. The weather is referred to as the state of the atmosphere over a certain area at any given time. The weather conditions may change frequently, even within a single day. Changes in Earth's general climate are referred to as climate change. This could be due to a shift in Earth's average temperature. Climate change is the world's most serious threat. Climate change is a danger to the survival of both humans and animals. The effects of climate change on Earth include melting glaciers, warmer oceans, hurricanes, increasing sea levels, and droughts. They devastate towns and people's means of subsistence. By addressing these modern issues, Bryson raises awareness of the dangers that wildlife faces daily and sheds light on the ongoing struggle to strike a balance between human activity and conservation efforts.

Insects and creatures pose a problem for the trees in AT. Destructive creatures like caterpillars defoliate trees and slow their growth. Bryson explains the pathetic condition of AT: in a single generation, AT has lost many billion trees, or 25% of their total area. In the name of progress, Bryson says, a large portion of the forest was reduced to nothing, leaving scars that are still visible today. This finding serves as a reminder of the fragility of ecosystems that once existed and underscores the long-term effects of logging activities on the environment. Bryson makes a connection between the growth of American industry and the expansion of land utilized for logging. He contends that the Appalachian environment was altered, frequently negatively, by the unrelenting drive for land and lumber. This assertion provides a more comprehensive historical picture of how industrial demands have typically eclipsed environmental concerns, leading to significant ecological repercussions. However, Bryson continues by outlining the difficulties associated with land usage, particularly the risks brought on by over-extraction of those natural resources. According to Bryson, it is human activities that are chiefly responsible for climate change. He mentions that people cut down trees along the AT to widen the streets and build concrete walls. Bryson writes,

So, as I write, they are replacing that uselessly attractive old bridge with something much grander and in keeping with the Age of Concrete. For good measure they are widening the street that leads up a short hill to the centre of Hanover. Of course, that means chopping down trees all along the street and drastically foreshortening most of the front gardens with concrete retaining walls. (Bryson, 1998, p.279)

The removal of trees leads to the release of significant amounts of previously captured carbon into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. By doing so, deforestation contributes to global warming, and this marks the main reason for climate change. Bryson exemplifies the tension between the necessity to preserve the environment and the expanding demand for new homes for families and other companies. In this approach, Bryson is hinting at the expected impacts of climate change on the

trail and the surrounding ecology. Climate change is undoubtedly changing the landscape in unpredictable ways, endangering the flora and fauna that inhabit the Appalachian Trail. An urgent need for conservation measures in the context of global warming is implied by such recognition of climate change, which clearly reflects some worldwide environmental issues. Bryson notes that the path is still under pressure from real estate development and logging, a never-ending conflict between human desire and the natural world. By highlighting the necessity of maintaining attention and raising awareness for conservation, this modern reality highlights the battle required to preserve the integrity of the Appalachian terrain. One can consult other literary works to better understand Bryson's explanation of land usage and timber exploitation as shown in this book. For example, Rachel Carson revealed the effects of human activity on the ecosystem in her book *Silent Spring*, specifically mentioning the usage of pesticides and its catastrophic effects. We are now at the intersection of two roads, according to Carson. The first is a route that degrades the environment and destroys society. This supports Bryson's viewpoint of human usage of wood and land and its effects on the environment. In a similar vein, Henry David Thoreau argues in his book *Walden* that despite the demands of industrialisation, natural areas must be preserved. He adds that he had loved to see that nature is not in a hurry, yet everything is finished. As a result, Thoreau backs Bryson's conservation efforts, emphasizing that instead of overexploiting the environment, mankind must learn to respect it and coexist with it.

Bryson has stepped beyond his comfort zone as a result of hikers expressing their physical need for the Appalachian Trail. Though those internal struggles have strengthened his feeling of self-accomplishment and deepened his connection with the landscape, his exposition is a clear statement of the tiredness, grief, and dread in his sight. By examining the relationship between the people and the natural world through the prism of the physical obstacles hikers face on the Appalachian Trail, Bill Bryson's book unmistakably reveals both an assessment of physical resistance and how they strengthen their connection to the natural world. Bryson's theories regarding these difficulties suggest that people's ability to adapt and alter is what gives them the resilience they need to deal with nature. While hiking, Bryson has undoubtedly been dealing with his own physical struggles. This is shown when Bryson realizes how difficult this journey would be. Each step seemed like a monumental effort. Such awareness of his own limitations can serve as evidence that the journey is about more than just overcoming personal obstacles; it is also about the trail's effective beauty. Bryson's weakness is shown to readers, teaching them that overcoming physical obstacles can result in personal growth.

Bryson also highlights the need for mental toughness in order to endure in challenging and unfamiliar situations. Hiking, he says, is 10% physical and 90% mental. No matter how slowly you move, the important thing is to keep going. This affirmation highlights the author's psychological view of trekking, but it also implies that overcoming physical obstacles requires tenacity and resolve. Despite these difficulties, Bryson has enjoyed himself and triumphed over the challenges he faced. His admission that reaching the top of a hill is a feeling of success unlike

any other reflects this optimistic emotion. A profound sensation of achievement is produced by the exertion and the view. The belief that a connection to nature can assist overcome physical problems is connected to this celebration of victory. Through the hurdles it presents, Bryson believes the trail is imparting important life lessons. He notes that you can be humbled by nature in this period. It serves as a reminder that you are but a tiny portion of something much bigger. Such self-consciousness highlights how important physical difficulties with nature are in general. Bryson has developed a greater understanding of his place in the natural world as a result of overcoming obstacles, which strengthen his feeling of humility and respect.

In the book, Bryson effectively employs his sense of humour to explore his own relationship with nature. He offers distinctive view points on the natural world and human interactions with it, as well as lighthearted commentary on the psychological and physical difficulties of hiking the Appalachian Trail. Bryson's sense of humour has grown to be an essential tool for capturing readers' attention and enhancing their appreciation of nature and the process of self-discovery. The author has been able to reconcile with the challenges faced on the road thanks to this humorous allusion. Bryson claims he was unprepared for the difficult trails of the path, but he likes to believe that ignorance is bliss despite his physical condition and the unpreparedness of his circumstances. Because of his self-deprecating humour, readers are able to relate to his challenges without being overpowered by the brutal reality of hiking. Bryson's humorous remarks about nature draw attention to its peculiarities. He says that the wonderful thing about nature is that it's not trying to impress you; it is simply itself. This viewpoint inspires readers to value nature in its purest form, appreciating its beauty without the need for adornment. Bryson's sense of humour demystifies nature, making it more approachable and welcoming.

Bryson also considers how ridiculous human behaviour is as compared to the natural world. By emphasizing the frequently humorous inconsistencies in human behaviour, he hopes to get readers to re-evaluate their relationship with nature by stating that humans are only species who cause issues for themselves and then come up with intricate methods to address them. It's evident that Bryson's viewpoint encourages a more deliberate approach to environmental challenges and serves as a reminder that serious contemplation and humour may coexist.

Bryson has also talked about the various aspects of environmental degradation, such as pollution and habitat destruction that have a detrimental effect on the trail. The author has come to the conclusion that the Appalachian Trail is a delicate ecosystem and that even little alterations can have long-term effect on its biodiversity. This highlights the vulnerability of many ecosystems as a result of human activity and the vital balance that must be preserved in natural regions. In a report published on August 9, 2021, a working group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that "human activities were unequivocally the principal driver of changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere, in other words of climate change" (Ananthakrishnan, 2021, p. 11). Since the industrial period, man-made greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been changing the climate system and increasing the average world temperature.

The scientific foundation for climate change and global warming is GHG emissions from diverse activities. These GHG break down into their respective acids in the atmosphere and are deposited on the ground as acid rain, snow, mist, or fog. Although climate change and acid rain are two separate environmental issues, they are linked in some way. Bryson is afraid that acid rain and tree diseases may contribute to the emergence of climate change and threaten the AT. In his words,

Everywhere you look in the eastern forests, trees are dying in colossal numbers. In the Smokies, over 90 percent of Fraser Firs – a noble tree, unique to the southern Appalachian highlands – are sick or dying, from a combination of acid rain and the depredations of an insect called the balsam woolly adelgid. (Bryson, 1998, p. 127)

Acid rain has the most noticeable ecological effects in aquatic areas like streams and lakes, where it can destroy fish and other wildlife. Acidic rainwater can dissolve aluminium from soil clay particles, which subsequently flows into streams and lakes and can be a threat to aquatic life. According to Bryson, acid rain is killing their lakes, which is why the loons are vanishing everywhere. Bryson talks about the problems caused by the increasing number of hikers on the trail in addition to acid rain. He points out that increased traffic results in increased wear and tear on the trail, which causes erosion and environmental damage. This argument calls for a greater understanding of the necessity of ecotourism techniques and the significance of educating hikers about reducing their detrimental impact on the environment.

It is well known that, independent of human activity, the climate frequently fluctuates naturally, becoming warmer or colder. Unpredictable weather is one of the few drivers of forest degradation. Bryson encountered a variety of weather conditions along the trail. The weather changes suddenly on all sections of the AT. Bryson must travel through zones of intense heat and bitter cold. The rising temperature of the AT forest gives trouble to the travellers who hike through the AT. To Bryson, the portion of the Maine was the hardest part of the AT because of its “oven-like heat” (Bryson, 318). Bryson had the impression that the vegetation and trees were exhaling a scorching, vegetable breath. Despite drinking excess amounts of water and perspiring uncontrollably, Bryson and his companion Katz were unable to quench their thirst. So global warming is the main cause of the trouble of the geological system of AT. The AT is in the condition of becoming savannah if there is a 4 degree Celsius increase in the world temperature. In Bryson’s words,

If the global temperature rises by 4°C over the next fifty years, as is evidently possible, then the whole of the Appalachian wilderness below New England could become savannah. Already trees are dying in mysterious and frightening numbers. The elms and chestnuts are long gone, the stately hemlocks and flowery dogwoods are going, and the red spruces, Fraser firs, hickories, mountain ashes and sugar maples may be about to follow. (Bryson, 1998, p.12)

The environment is deteriorating as the world’s temperature rises. Climate change brings negative effects on human beings. McKnight and Hess write that due to

climate change, “Some arid lands might receive more rainfall. Ice caps would shrink, and sea level would rise... Some regions of the world would experience more frequent powerful storms” (Bryson, 83). Beyond being an environmental crisis, climate change is also a public health crisis. Human-caused climate change has a variety of effects on human health. Bryson enumerates numerous illnesses that can be found in Appalachian forests. The most dangerous virus that prevails in the AT is Hantavirus. This virus is spread by mice and rats, and it affects the respiratory system of humans and can lead to death. According to Bryson, a single Hantavirus outbreak in the Southwest of the United States in 1993 claimed 32 lives. Thus climate change brings a great loss of human life. There is no doubt that a change in climatic conditions will result in a surge of viral disease outbreaks in the coming decades.

According to a recent study, the increase in harsh winter weather is connected to Arctic warming. Extreme cold weather poses a threat to humans as well. The most serious danger to hikers on the Appalachian Trail is hypothermia. Hypothermia is arguably the most eerily unpredictable of all the disastrous calamities that might befall out of the door. Bryson claims that almost every case of hypothermic death is in some way enigmatic and unlikely. In severe weather conditions, such as struggling through blizzards or battling the bite of arctic winds, few hypothermia victims perish. It happens when the body temperature drops below 95 degrees, and the body’s heat is lost faster. Furthermore, Bryson details the plight of many AT hikers, including how many have succumbed to hypothermia. Bryson skilfully conveyed the idea of a personal connection to nature, emphasizing both the positive and negative aspects that the wilderness symbolizes. Bryson illustrates how the natural world may arouse deep emotions of concern and fulfilment through his account on the Appalachian Trail, which enhances the human experience.

Therefore, it is evident that human activities are increasingly influencing the climate and temperature of the globe. To ameliorate such a situation, certain actions must be performed. The main goal is to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity, particularly carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, which are the main causes of climate change. The global surface temperature is predicted to have increased by 1.09°C between 2011 and 2020 when compared to the years 1850–1900. It shows the extent of global warming. It is the elites who damage the planet using various artificial techniques, whereas the climatic repercussions affect the poor more. By money power, the rich escape the repercussions, but the poor have to face unbearable climatic conditions leading to physical discomfort on the one hand and loss of livelihood, leading to financial infirmity on the other. Thus, climate change deepens societal inequalities and manufactures poverty. People say that a mother embraces all her children with equal affection, but it appears that Mother Nature is unkind towards her poorer children.

Glasgow, Scotland hosted the United Nations Climate Change Conference of 2021, usually referred to as COP26 (Conference of Parties). In addition to discussing how to slow down global warming, the nations convened in Glasgow for the COP 26 to deal with the current effects of climate change, prepare for future

repercussions, and adapt to a warmer world. The largest carbon dioxide producers in the world should cut their emissions, according to the conference. The world's top producer of carbon dioxide is the United States, followed by China and India. As part of the Conference, nations from all over the world decided to work toward reducing global warming in comparison to pre-Industrial Revolution levels. Domsday scenarios that climate scientists have predicted for the far future are already happening. As a result, the nations must achieve "Net Zero" emissions of greenhouse gases. Climate catastrophe will continue to produce natural calamities and public health issues in the years to come if this goal is not met. Bryson thus tackled the world's most pressing problem and the appalling condition of the AT in this book.

Bryson emphasizes the continuous difficulties in protecting natural landscapes by talking about the effects of logging techniques, the growth of industrialization, the conservation movement, and the current land issues. His observations are in line with more general themes in environmental literature, encouraging readers to think about how crucial conservation and prudent land use are to preserving the environment for coming generations. Bryson's investigation of his own relationship with nature is a potent voyage of self-discovery. He highlights the transforming influence of nature in understanding oneself via introspection, facing obstacles, and appreciating the natural world. His investigation of one's relationship with nature shows a deep sense of wonder and delight. He highlights the beauty and inspiration that the natural world has to offer through vivid descriptions, sensory experiences, and encounters with wildlife.

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DABEER SI/KTT/27**SOLASTALGIA AND THE NEED FOR ECOLOGIES OF REPAIR: A
POSTHUMANIST READING OF *SOFTLY DIES A LAKE*****ANN MERIN KURUVILLA**Assistant Professor (Contract), Department of English
Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India**Abstract**

Kolleti Jadalu (2014) is a Telugu novel by Akkineni Kutumbarao, which was translated as *Softly Dies a Lake* (2020) into English by Vasanth Kannabiran. It is an eco-memoir, lamenting over the devastation of Kolleru lake based in Andhra Pradesh. Through the eyes of the narrator Srinivasa Rao aka Seenu, the readers are taken into a 'waste land' which was once a haven, well nurtured by Kolleru lake. The slow violence directed by anthropocene activities led to the degradation of land and water. The work is considered as an elegiac and eco-nostalgic piece of writing. More than that, it is a novel which deals with solastalgia, a kind of distress and pain aroused from the changes in one's own immediate environment, which leads to chaos and distress. A posthumanist approach towards the work advocates for the need of ecologies of repair, which demands the co-operative efforts from multiple forces including human, non-human, ecological or natural forces to heal the wounded nature. This study intends to approach the novel from a posthumanist viewpoint and through close textual analysis, tries to trace out the elements of solastalgia, which can be healed by the collaboration of ecologies of repair.

Keywords: Eco-memoir, Eco-nostalgia, Solastalgia, Posthumanism, Anthropocene, Ecologies of Repair

Introduction

In a world which demands empathy towards nature, human beings have to reconsider their approach towards the mother earth, nurturer of all living beings. Thoughtless anthropocene activities lead to environmental degradation and it is evident that we should promote a relationship with nature that is rooted in ecological concern. As man cannot live without nature, this connection is ineluctable. Any violence towards nature will slowly lead to its degradation, which in turn affects mankind and the entire ecology. People are aware of the physical harm which is resultant from the anthropocene activities towards nature. Apart from the physical consequences like natural calamities, psychological or mental fallouts can be faced by human beings as a result of their irrational actions towards nature.

Softly Dies a Lake (2020), originally named as *Kolleti Jadalu* (2014) was written by Akkineni Kutumbarao and was translated by Vasanth Kannabiran into English. The novel is widely considered as an eco-memoir, tracing the ecological degradation in and around Lake Kolleru, which was once the nurturer and provider of the Pulaparru village and neighbouring villages. The narrator of the story is Srinivasa Rao, a man of about sixty, who was fondly called as Seenu in his childhood. The nostalgia about a golden past is clearly visible in the novel.

Scholarly attempts were conducted in finding the elements of eco-nostalgia in the work. Several eco-critical studies were conducted based on the novel. Still, an evident lacuna exists in tracing the element of solastalgia, as Albrecht defines it, “homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’” (45). This study attempts to trace the idea of solastalgia ingrained in the novel and how the concept of ecologies of repair could work as a medicine towards the ecological wounds created by anthropocene activities. The posthumanist approach towards the novel tries to dismantle the idea of anthropocentrism and thereby checking the relevance of ecologies of repair as a solution for the disintegrated ecology.

Anthropocene Activities and the Resultant Solastalgia in *Softly Dies a Lake*

Anthropocene is the epoch noted for its concentration on human beings as the primal force of change in the planetary system. The Anthropocene deals with an epochal transition in human consciousness, as human beings have understood their roles in making important changes in the planet's system, despite the internal differences (Sarkar). Anthropocene is characterised by human dominance over global systems more than any natural forces, and is a determinant of the planet's future.. This dominance of man over anything and everything leads to trespassing into the ways of nature and thus interrupting its smooth functioning. DeLoughrey states that “a moment when (some) humans exceeded their ‘natural’ limits and boundaries ... and impacted the planet's geology in ways that will leave isotopic traces for millennia” (8).

Srinivasa Rao and his friend Radhakrishna's nostalgic accounts opens up the abundant past of Lake Kolleru. The protagonist is overwhelmed with eco-nostalgia. The luxuriant past of Lake Kolleru is described magnificently by Srinivasa and he remembers it fondly. Kolleru's water was calm, which was adorned by different flowers like lotus. Water plants and weeds covered its surface and swayed elegantly like dancers (2).

Srinivasa's nostalgic accounts about the lake and his childhood are full of life and vitality. His detailed account about Kolleru and its surroundings points out the symbiotic connections between man, nature and other living creatures. The cohabitation of these three makes the landscape of Kolleru vibrant and lovely. The harmonious environment in and around Kolleru is memorised by Srinivasa Rao. It encompassed different varieties of species. The lake was full of crabs, fish, snakes, snails and leeches. The aquatic life in Kolleru was vibrant. On the surface of the lake water plants made a quilt of green. The grass on its banks fed the cattle (101). Srinivasa says: “All living things depending completely on nature and mingling with nature completely on nature and mingling with nature in complete harmony. Kolleru seemed to reveal a great and miraculous truth” (101).

Srinivasa's nostalgic account of Kolleru as a mother figure, embracing human beings and all other creatures indicates that the people lived around it with a feeling of security and warmth. The interdependence of humans and non-humans was inevitable in Kolleru as this connection started early in the lives of the villagers, since their childhood. The children in the villages nearby Kolleru used to play around the lake. They played with stones and sticks on the bank. They picked snail shells and collected the snails. They cut grass and carried bundles of them to feed their cattle. Some others collected lotus roots. They walked, talked

and played on the bank of Kolleru. Buffaloes and cows moved around the lake making noise. Birds of multiple colours flew over the lake like the troops of soldiers (2).

Lake Kolleru, the villagers who depended it for a living, the animals and birds which nourished themselves with its water, the lush grass on its banks, the fresh air that surrounded it, everything, the living beings and non-living things were intertwined with a 'visible' twine, which is Lake Kolleru itself. The description of flocks of ducks swimming, cranes landed on buffaloes with a catch and pecking it, the chirping of birds circling the sky, sounds of children minding their cattle (5), all these visuals and sounds filled the atmosphere of Kolleru with life.

Softly Dies a Lake depicts not only the life of Kolleru, but also its death. In this ecological memoir, the protagonist is reminiscing about his good old days which were made abundant by the presence of the lake. The life in Pulapparru was filled with hardships of rural life, but it was intertwined with the lives of all living beings including birds and animals, which brought ease to the lives of the villagers. But the present condition of Kolleru is entirely different from its wealthier past. The present condition of Kolleru is worse because of greedy people and the resultant aquatic pollution. The capitalist motives of some communities including the Vaddis made Kolleru disintegrated, dilapidated and devastated. The death of Kolleru was not a sudden one, but a slow process which spanned over a period of about sixty years, resulting from 'slow violence' (Tousif and Hassan). The novel opens with a description about the deteriorated state of Kolleru lake, lamenting over its pathetic condition. He laments over the deteriorated state of the lake, which was once covered with water plants and flowers. He felt that the lake was shattered and fragmented like broken glass pieces (1). It appeared "Like a map of the world divided wantonly by crooked boundaries Kolleru was split by bunds. Broken bunds" (1).

Kammadoras, the farmers, and the Vaddirajas, the fishermen were the major communities who resided in Pulapparru. Kolleru was the provider for them and they relied on it for livelihood. Vaddirajas depended on Kolleru for fish and Kammadoras fed their cattle with the grass which was grown on the lake bed. With the intrusion of capitalist motives in some of the Vaddis began the collapse of Kolleru. They started colonizing and segregating the fresh water fish which was once the main income source and food for the locals. The greed for earning and accumulating more wealth made factions in the village. The intervention of industrialists from outside made the condition worse. The Vaddis built commercial fish tanks and the whole lake became parts as if they were private properties. According to an elderly person from the village, "The collective farming went well for five or six years. Then the trouble started. As soon as everyone began to have some money each one thought he was a hero" (189). The commercial aquaculture demanded more efforts and the Vaddis dug borewells around the lake in order to mix salt in it to help the 'commercial' aquaculture thrive. The commercial waste including chemical fertilizers, medical and industrial wastes etc. were carried off to Kolleru through its tributaries and accumulated there. Srinivasa's friend Radhakrishna states that the oxygen content in Krishna canal decreased to a great extent and people started dumping wastes in

it. Everything from processed 'fish food' to industrial waste contaminated the water body and stagnated the growth of organic matters in it (194).

Though they became rich and affluent by manipulating the waterbody for their personal growth, the Vaddis didn't stop. The greed for accumulating more wealth made them do more harm to nature. A villager named Ravi reports that some of the Vaddis became affluent through commercial fish farming. These wealthy people even submitted a petition to the government for sanctioning an airport in Pulapparru to make their marketing easier. Vaddis expects that they can avoid spoilage of fish if it is carried through aeroplanes. They became so wealthy that they collected sacks of money under their cots and the Income tax department conducted raids in their homes (191).

Srinivasa looks at the dilapidated lake system which is surrounded by huge fish tanks, which suffocated the lake (1). Kolleru was polluted not only by the aquaculture waste shed by the Vaddis, but also with the toxic garbage from the nearby industrial cities like Eluru and Vijayawada. The pollutants made the freshwater of Kolleru toxic and the villagers of Pulapparru had to fetch water from Kaikaluru, a neighbouring village (194). Tousif and Hassan states, "When the lake is polluted, bioaccumulation of toxic chemicals in the lake's water multiplies its effects and the contamination moves through human bodies, displaying "unpredictable and unwanted action" of chemical agents crossing human-nonhuman boundaries" (1232). The extent of toxic chemicals accumulated in water had their effect on human beings, other-than-humans and on the environment.

Capitalist motives of some people in the village made the lake devastated and the government, which is supposed to take care of all the natural resources and its citizens, closed their eyes towards the pathetic condition of the lake and the villagers. On the other hand, they joined hands with the capitalists and industrialists in the name of modernisation and neglected the pathetic condition of the local farmers. The government joined hands with the industrialists to loot the resources of the land and lake. If the government was genuine, they could have preserved Kolleru. Developmental activities could have been initiated without harming nature with the support of the government. Thus, the lives of local people could be made better. But nothing happened and "... they were not interested in Kolleru. Only in money! Money! Money!" (196).

Srinivasa's nostalgic memory about Kolleru as "stretching across two hundred and sixty square miles between the Krishna and West Godavari districts" (10) is in contrast with his current shocking experience, "Like a map of the world divided wantonly by crooked boundaries Kolleru was split by bunds. Broken bunds" (1). Kolleru was majestic with water from many tributaries like Sammiveru, Naguleru, Budaleru and Akkilleru, and from almost 67 other water channels like canals (10). This powerhouse of life was lying dilapidated in front of Srinivasa. Here, he laments for the loss of Kolleru. More than reminiscing about the nostalgic past, Srinivasa is lamenting for its total destruction. Polluted, toxified water was left in it. He condemns for its destruction and feels what is solastalgia as Albrecht defines, "... solastalgia is the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one's home and

territory” (45). For Srinivasa, Radhakrishna and all other villagers who had great memories about Kolleru, the current condition of the lake and its neighbouring villages is depressing. They feel pity and agony. The people of Kolleru lament its rampant death. They looked at it hopelessly and felt sorry for the ecosystem that was wiped away and for the natural beauty that had vanished. Kutumbarao describes: “Looking at the dry, barren, lifeless Kolleru one last time and thinking of the Kolleru of their childhood they set off for their homes” (197). This pain cannot be controlled and it bursts out from deep ecological anxiety and concern, which is solastalgia. Albrecht states:

It is the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifested in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation. It is an intense desire for the place where one is a resident to be maintained in a state that continues to give comfort or solace. (45)

Here, Srinivasa Rao not only condemns the current state of Kolleru, but also feels distress about its transformation into a filthy one. “The flood brought not only water but all kinds of rubbish as well. Now and then swollen human corpses, carcasses of cattle, chickens and pigs were washed in” (51). Albrecht points out, “a deep form of existential distress when confronted by an unwelcome change in their beloved home environment” (292). The deep sorrow for the bad condition of his beloved homeland is not rooted solely in nostalgia, but in solastalgia too.

The Call for Action and the Need for Ecologies of Repair

In a land which is on the brink of total destruction caused by anthropocene activities, nothing will work except the united endeavor from multiple forces including human beings and non-human beings. A proper ecological consciousness keeps men alert about the forthcoming ecological disasters. This consciousness will make people equipped against such ecological consequences. Through collective effort from different groups, collaborating eco-friendly actions and technology, a reversal can be made possible. Ecological concern stems from the need to fix the ecological issues rooted in anthropocene actions. Anthropocentrism should be checked and reconsidered to rejuvenate the wounded nature and ecosystems. *Softly Dies a Lake* discusses such issues rooted in anthropocentrism and this idea should be dismantled for a better future of the planet. Posthumanism as a theory decentres the concept of anthropocentrism and claims for decentering of man-centredness. It posits the idea that human beings are part of a vast web, not the sole stakeholders of this nature. It checks the dynamic relationship between living beings, non-living beings and even technology by destabilizing the concept that man is the centre of this nature. This very idea challenges the logic behind anthropocentrism. The epoch of the anthropocene has to be reconsidered in this viewpoint. Herbrechter states, “Posthumanism is a theoretical (or philosophical) movement that plays with the idea of postanthropocentrism (i.e. a worldview according to which the human or humanity no longer occupy a central position)”.

Ecologies of repair is a concept which works in the posthumanist framework focusing on ecological repair through the collective efforts and networking of humans, other-than-humans and technology to mend the scars of environmental damage. Wells states that, "The heuristic notion of *ecologies of repair* is proposed to conceptually explore the ways in which different groups, in contexts of socio-environmental conflict or crisis, relate to nature, seeking to repair the damage provoked by the effects of industrial processes and transforming the conditions of coexistence for various life forms" (2).

Ecologies of repair also support the idea that man is not the centre of the universe, but he is a part of a network. It promotes co-mingling between multiple forces. The concept of ecologies of repair operates with a posthumanist perspective, intended to understand the workings of nature and culture, and to restructure its system by incorporating multiple associations between human beings and non-human beings to challenge the boundaries in between them and to dissolve them (Wells 6). In *Softly Dies a Lake*, human beings cohabited with animals, birds and other creatures, which was fondly remembered by Srinivasa Rao. The current condition of Kolleru is described as filthy, unhygienic and filled with germs (2). It is this cohabitation and connection which is demanded by ecologies of repair to heal the ecological degradation in and around Kolleru. Kutumbarao reminisces about the lake water with a variety of aquatic creatures "... depending completely on nature and mingling with nature completely on nature and mingling with nature in complete harmony" (101). The bygone history of Lake Kolleru was filled with harmony and ecologies of repair also demands for the same. The question, "Could this wrong ever be set right? How?" (197) is an open ended question which necessitates immediate action, which can be answered by ecologies of repair. The ecological anxiety that evolved from the destruction of Lake Kolleru can be addressed with the exploration of the past interconnection between living, non-living and technological elements in the village. *Softly Dies a Lake* has given importance to both spatial and temporal realms, to non-human elements and has creatively and critically reacted against capitalist motives which degrades the ecology (K. and Jayasree 120).

Sustainable development, focusing on progressive growth without harming nature should be appreciated by the government. Anthropocene activities cause harm to nature, as they revolve around 'humans'. *Softly Dies a Lake* portrays such 'human-centred' actions from a group of people. A more nature-centric approach will emancipate ecologies from total destruction. In 'vulnerable ecologies' human beings have to be more conscious about their actions. Man-made disasters can be eliminated, unlike the unforeseen natural disasters, through meaningful actions.

Conclusion

Softly Dies a Lake is a novel which resonates the sorrow towards a nostalgic past, when it was once a haven for those who were nurtured by the Lake Kolleru. The thoughtless anthropocene activities resulted in ecological harm and degradation. The protagonist Srinivasa Rao, his friend Radhakrishna and all the wellwishers of Lake Kolleru laments on the unfortunate fate of the lake. Though these characters are reminiscing about their good old time around Kolleru, their anxiousness is the proof for the lack of solace they feel towards the current state of the lake. Apart

from being an econostalgic account, the pain and distress felt by the characters towards the devastated condition of their nurturer, Lake Kolleru, is that of “... erosion of the sense of belonging (identity)” (Albrecht). Their anguish is the clear sign of solastalgia, resulting from the degraded condition of Kolleru and its surroundings. Both physical and psychological desolation can be traced in the characters, who are agonized by the deteriorated state of their homeland. The protagonist’s attachment towards the lake started from his childhood like anyone else who lived near Kolleru in the past. Their relationship spans over sixty years, a lifetime’s connection. Thus, the eco-nostalgia has paved its way towards solastalgia, the grief aroused from the physical desolation of the lake leads to psychological resolution. Lake Kolleru is closely connected with the identity of the characters. The distress they feel is also rooted in fear of losing their ‘true’ identity.

The devastated condition of the lake demands ecologies of repair, a cordial and cooperative effort from different groups including farmers, fishermen and the government. As a ‘heuristic’ (Wells 2) method, Ecologies of repair is a practical answer for solving the ecological concerns faced by Kolleru and the villagers who depend on it for survival. Sustainable development and sustainable farming should be promoted in order to balance man, other-than-man relationships. The understanding that man is not the only inheritor of this globe will change things for good. Replacing anthropocentrism with postanthropocentrism and by destabilising the very idea of the former will throw more light on ecological concerns. A posthumanist approach towards ecological issues will rightly serve to save ecology by decentering man and promoting cohabitation of every natural element and beings with non-natural forces like technology.

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SECTION – II

Remembering the Wound: Trauma, Displacement and Postmemory in Postcolonial Narratives

This section convenes work in which memory—whether individual, collective, traumatic, or postmemorial—becomes the primary analytical lens for reading how postcolonial fiction, poetry, and life-writing narrativise displacement, exile, partition, migration, and historical violence. It treats the “wound” not only as a metaphor but as a structural feature of narrative: texts register injury to body and psyche, and then stage the difficult labour of telling what resists easy articulation. Trauma as wound and narrative strategy. Drawing on trauma theory, the section foregrounds how colonial and postcolonial histories produce injuries that “cry out” in literature, shaping plot, voice, and form. Displacement, exile, and the politics of place. A major feature of postcolonial literatures is their sustained concern with place and displacement—characters uprooted by partition, war, or economic migration carry the geography of loss into new landscapes.

By centring memory in its multiple forms, the section shows how postcolonial texts do more than represent the past: they actively reassemble identity, community, and nationhood from the fragments left by colonial and postcolonial violence. Several manuscripts examine “postmemory”: the way second- and third-generation subjects inherit traumatic knowledge they did not directly witness, yet which dominates their imaginative lives. Memory becomes a site of resistance and repair—preserving indigenous histories, contesting official amnesia, and imagining futures that acknowledge the wound without being exhausted by it.

DABEER SI/KTT/28**POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES OF MEMORY AND TRAUMA: A
STUDY ON SHYAM SELVADURAI'S *THE HUNGRY GHOSTS*****N. BARANI**Research Scholar, PG and Research Dept. of English
Thiagarajar College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu, India**M. ELANGO VAN**Associate Professor, PG and Research Dept. of English
Thiagarajar College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Postcolonial literature is usually engrossed with how memory and trauma affect the individuals and the societies that have been influenced by colonialism, ethnic conflict and displacement. These features are subtly depicted in Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts* through the life of the protagonist, Shivan Rassiah. The earlier studies on this novel are usually on the themes of migration, sexuality and identity whereas less consideration has been made to the interrelationship of memory and trauma as forces that build the postcolonial subjectivity. This paper aims at filling that vacuum by questioning how memories of his home, family and the nation's socio-political background continue to shape the identity of the protagonist even after his migration to Canada. This paper combines Postcolonial Theory and Trauma Studies to apply them to find the ways in which personal loss, intergenerational trauma and ethnic conflict are transferred through memory. It also argues that, in this novel memory functions not merely a reminiscence act but as an active process of identity- construction, revealing the lasting impacts of colonial legacy and civil disorder. Shivan's return to Sri Lanka is not an ordinary homecoming but a process of facing the acquired trauma and constructing a sense of belonging. This research paper aims at exhibiting how *The Hungry Ghosts* presents memory and trauma are interrelated forces that challenges the concept of identity and also creates possibilities for healing and reconciliation. **Keywords:** Trauma Studies, Intergenerational Trauma, Displacement, Belonging, Identity and Healing.

Postcolonial literature has progressively moved from political consequences of colonialism to psychological and emotional effects that continue to influence people's lives. At present postcolonial narratives explore the ways wherein the legacy of colonial control has undergone memory, trauma, displacement and identity issues. These narratives reveal that the impacts of colonialism did not stop with colonialism. Memory and trauma have become important critical frameworks in Postcolonial Studies because they explain how historical cruelty and ethnic relocation outline the formation of identity in war-torn countries.

In postcolonial writing, memory is a way of reclaiming history that colonial discourse has often disregarded or silenced. It is not just recollecting the past events, but an active process where individuals arrange their association with history, culture and a sense of belonging. Personal memories often integrate with

cultural memories that is why the protagonists are able to rebuild identities formed by the events of clash, migration and loss. On the other hand, trauma embraces both the individual psychological suffering and the collective traumas of war, cultural brutality, forced migration and cultural isolation. Postcolonial people are possessed by these painful events however, making fractured identities that are always negotiating the past.

The novel, *The Hungry Ghosts* uncovers the life of Shivan Rassiah, a Sri Lankan Tamil, who migrates to Canada as an immigrant, taking the emotional weight of familial conflict, cultural anxiety and personal alienation. His life provides an engaging study of these issues which are engrossed by Shyam Selvadurai in this novel. Against the backdrop of Sri Lankan postcolonial history and internal conflict, the novel portrays how the protagonist's pursuit for identity and belonging is formed by the memories of cruelty, migration and resettlement. Through Shivan's experiences, identity appears not to be firm but to be always formed by the reciprocity of individual memory, communal history and unresolved trauma. His trouble in comprehending his past and his present day reveals the lasting results of historical violence on ethnic identity and personal identity.

The metaphor of the "hungry ghost", which comes from Buddhist cosmology, strengthens the novel's main theme of unfulfilled desires and the eerie persistence of unresolved memories. It implies to those who cannot release the baggage of the past and are still constrained by the emotional wounds and terrible events. Shyam Selvadurai suggests with this metaphor that one has to accept the painful incidents and should not suppress them in order to retrieve and to become self-aware.

This paper analyses the role of memory and trauma in the establishment of the protagonist's postcolonial identity with an examination of *The Hungry Ghosts* from the viewpoints of Trauma Theory and Memory Studies. It asserts that Shivan's focus on the intergenerational trauma, ethnic conflict, migration and collective memory reveals his identity and reflects the complex realities of postcolonial life. Selvadurai depicts identity as a dynamic process formed by the arrangement of historical memory and dreadful experiences by placing the novel within the contemporary postcolonial discourse. This study exhibits that the novel's focus on trauma and memory is not only a theme but an important effect on Shivan's understanding of himself, his sense of belonging and his healing.

In *The Hungry Ghosts*, Shyam Selvadurai proposes identity as a structure that is shifted by memory, inherited conflict, displacement and unresolved suffering. The episodic structure of the novel is significant to this argument as Shivan Rassiah does not narrate his life as a systematic series of completed events. His idea to go back to Sri Lanka and to bring his ill grandmother, Daya, to Canada brings the memories of his childhood, migration, sexuality, state repression and deprivation. His past therefore turns into an affective force in the present that briefs his decisions, rather than giving concrete information. As a mixed Tamil-Sinhalese, gay, diasporic person, his identity is formed through his continual efforts to escape, repress and revisit these memories.

Within the layers of early memories of Shivan, he remembers that his family relied on his aachi (grandmother) following his father's death. Hema, Renu and Shivan

step into Daya's affluent home in a socially and economically poor condition. The support from his aachi comes with a condition, her strength over the family is established through affection, property and protection. And so Shivan's memories about her are an amalgamation of gratitude and unease, attraction and animosity. She sees him as her successor, gives him material goods but her affection needs submission. This dual experience becomes the cause why Shivan cannot either accept her fully or turn her down.

The cultural conflicts in Sri Lanka are connected to family identity. Shivan and Renu's duality, born to a Tamil father and a Sinhalese mother, is the split that postcolonial nationalism attempts to exploit. Daya thinks that her daughter's marriage to a Tamil Christian man is a sin and has brought shame to the family. Her claim is that the Tamil identity of Hema's children has been waned and impoverished in the system of her choice degrading Shivan and Renu to the identities forced by dominant culture alignment. So the children learn cultural significance concerning safety, opportunity and acceptance in public life, not just in private life. The prevailing study demonstrates that the important cultural discrepancy within the family is their mixed descent.

Renu thinks that she might escape anti-Tamil partiality by marrying a Sinhalese man. Her childhood vision is an instance of how society's differences might pervade into a person's psyche. Rather than challenging the ethnic roots, she attempts to find steadiness within it, whereas Shivan reacts distinctively. He seeks to avoid permanent tags but this perceived opposition does not release him. The classifications he attempts to flee from are Tamil and Sinhalese, gay and socially estimable, Sri Lankan and Canadian – continuing to mold his identity. Memory persistently reminds him that he cannot build a self-outside history.

This tendency is highlighted in the title by showing the Buddhist image of the hungry ghost, or Perethaya, Shivan's grandmother, who says some tales of spirits whose excessive dependence, greed and sin have doomed them to everlasting hunger. Daya exemplifies this image of Perethaya because she cannot attain emotional fulfillment in the amassment of wealth and power. And this also characterises Shivan. His unresolved past stops him at every stage of his life, he is unfulfilled, yet he craves for a life completeness where family, sexuality, homeland and belonging can co-exist. Thus "hungry ghost" is more than a spirit or an ethical judgement. It is an indication of the situation of persons who are attached to their desired and feared places and people.

In the novel, violence and intergenerational trauma are represented repeatedly. And the trauma is passed on through familial conduct and through memory. Anxiety of separation and emotional neglect are some of the basic factors of Daya's commanding behaviour. She is profoundly attached to Shivan, because of her separation from her daughter, seeing him as the one who can restore what she feels that she has lost. She lavishes him with gifts, wealth and sole benefits of her financial matters, but these apparently kind acts are really an effort to subdue him. In one of the elucidations in the novel, Shivan is the emotional "RAIN" (Selvadurai 26) that gives Daya's barren existence as a short-term relief.

Hema expands another sort of disaster. She feels guilty and insufficient for not marrying a man according to her mother's desire, for not living up to Daya's

scholarly pursuits, and for becoming reliant on Daya. These incidents reveal that this is her method of upbringing children and her understanding on migration. According to Hema, Canada is a place where the family can start anew, out of Daya's supremacy and ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka. As Hema's forthcoming desire is to bring the disable Daya to Canada tells that commitment, hatred and loyalty remain intertwined.

At first, Shivan considers himself to be a being ethically good, which is distinct from Daya. It upsets him that she had an approach of dominating her tenants and of maintaining her properties. But during his return to Colombo, he manages some of her business, and collects rent from tenants. When he is challenged or demeaned by a tenant, Shivan runs to Daya's hitman Chandralal. Chandralal's scaring personality lets Shivan maintain power and feel a kind of masculinity that racial discrimination in Canada had refused him. Shivan reflects in the novel, in this way:

I told my story hesitantly, but then, seeing his surprise and anger at the tenant's behavior, my own anger returned. "Can you believe Chandralal, that pariah dog actually spat at my feet? And he had the insolence to call me a ponnaya"... "What choice did I have?" If he had offered to pay one month's rent, if he had not insulted me none of this would have happened (Selvadurai 183-186).

This is a repetition of trauma when the person in his childhood, who denounces his aachi's cruelty takes up the ways in which it is performed.

This part of the novel is pivotal in that it stops Shivan from being depicted in the book as an innocent sufferer. He benefits from privileges and authoritarian power but is harmed by racism, homophobic society and ethnic partiality. He becomes a contradictory identity. The same procedure Shivan has used against helpless tenants earlier is connected to the brutality that ultimately pull down his relationship with Mili. This research also indicates that Shivan comes to Daya's business, collects fee from tenants and depends on Chandralal's aggressiveness, although he had refused these methods earlier.

So, imitation plays a vital role in intergenerational trauma as inheritance is. Shivan reaffirms Daya's necessity for control, even though he is not like her. This repetition is also perceived in his emotional interactions. He wants to retain the enduring intact and that means concealing important details of his life in Sri Lanka from Michael. His concealment is a part of his family's greater practice of keeping violence, embarrassment and sexuality hidden to protect respect. When something is suppressed in one generation it will always procreate itself in another form.

Shivan's personal life is not only just intertwined with the historical backdrop of the Sri Lankan ethnic dispute. It explains their family's identity and at last leads them to leave their own country. Daya's handling of Hema's marriage tells how nationalist hostility can be rooted within family relationships, while Shivan's Tamil father suffers from ethnic brutality. Though Shivan and Renu survive on either side of the Sinhala- Tamil border, their fusion does not save them. Comparatively, it increases the amount of doubt of their identity in the country.

The family was obviously to leave Sri Lanka because of the trouble in their everyday life and the growing political violence. Hema understands that the war

is limiting the education and the future of the children. Renu is certain that a move would give her entry to a university system devoid of the regular interference of strikes and turmoil. Rather, the stimulus for the relocation to Canada is a more common sense of insecurity than a single traumatic event. Political disorder is a part of everyday life until migrating is the only choice to be safe.

Shivan's relationship with Mili is another political issue after his return to Sri Lanka. As Mili works with Sriyani's human rights group called Kantha, he is anxious about the political violence in his country, state repression and deaths in the JVP era. Shivan, often avoids these conversations as they disturb the personal haven he has built with his partnership. Mili's political awareness dictates that intimacy cannot be devoid of social life. But he wants to see Mili as connected to love, common culture and sexual inclusion.

This pressure exhibits an important restriction in Shivan's mind. He can perceive national violence when it strikes his Tamil family, but he attempts to put political understanding away when it hinders his happiness. But Mili's effort is not something you can detach from. In a society where political pressure and heteronormative nobility go together, their homosexual connection is at risk in and of itself.

This vulnerability leads to Daya's involvement that terminates their relationship. Mili is snatched by Chandralal's men and in the following turmoil he is killed. Therefore while Daya justifies her actions as safeguarding the family and family's reputation, she is accountable for the death of the man Shivan loves. This kind of end to Mili cannot be observed as a personal grief alone. Queer desire is monitored by the same surveillance, kidnapping, frightening, and disappearance that controls political violence. Scholarly criticism also highlights Daya's involvement and condemns Chandralal and his men for the violence that followed to Mili's death. Sriyani's open declaration of Mili's death also reveals the power of social guilt. A more preferable excuse is given by hiding the truth of his relationship with Shivan. The hiding of the secret converts Mili into a victim to be politically or culturally dominated, by putting an end to the queerness from the official records. Selvadurai emphasizes this point through the following description:

THE NEXT DAY OUR NEWSPAPER, which was government owned, carried the story of Mili's death on its second page. There were quotes from fishermen confirming strong currents that night...The piece continued to another page, and turning to it I found a photograph of Mili from...holding aloft a cricket trophy won under his captainship, grinning in that old, easy way (Selvadurai 244).

Therefore Shivan endures his sorrows and suffering and the loss of the relationship that gives meaning to the loss. His pain goes unrecognised in public, creating all the more difficult to handle the anguish. So the shared memory in the book is selective; certain histories are written by country and families, while some are retained. Frequently, gay misery is hushed to save the respectability of the community but ethnic pain may be recounted in a political context. Selvadurai questions this selective memory by placing the queer lamenting of Shivan inside the same procedures that lead to political and national violence.

Initially, migration seems to allow an escape from Daya and Shivan's unpredictability. Shivan has more liberty to convey his sexuality, physical safety in Canada but the country does not become a mere haven. He experiences racial discrimination among the gay community in Toronto. Even though his sexual orientation may be more acceptable, his brown body and his immigrant status label him as an outsider. He has to constantly keep explaining Sri Lanka to his Canadian companion and partners, to construct his history a story for them who do not understand its cultural meaning.

Shivan's encounter with Ronald is one of the examples of this kind of awkwardness. Ronald seems to give direction and admiration but he also provides some naïve and unrealistic perspectives of Asian cultures and of Asian males. Shivan is unseen as a baffling individual but is desired to presumptions based on race. As a result, Canada puts back one form of rejection with another. His sexuality can be conveyed in Canada, whereas in Sri Lanka it has to be concealed, but only moving through the process of Othering. That clarifies why, on his homecoming, Shivan was so allured to Mili. Through shared cultural wisdom with Mili, Shivan takes solace in being with him. They can discuss food, history, family and social conduct without being required to constantly interpret. Mili is a symbol of emerging bond with Sri Lanka and sexual pleasure. But this notion of home is unstable, as it relies on hiding the relationship and disregarding the political risks they encounter.

Following the death of Mili, Shivan goes back to Canada with an unrecovered trauma. The silence erodes at the core of his connection with Michael, which gives another opportunity for firmness at home. Finally Michael knows that Shivan has been concealing important details about Mili and his personal history. The migration could barely be an entirely new identity if the earlier experiences are not accounted for, as a result conflict shows up. In both Shivan's formation of new Canadian self and Hema's crave to restart, the past yet constructs their emotional lives, making them flawed. Selvadurai has discussed characters attempting to start again and finding that the past is not beyond them.

Thus, nowhere is safe to reside, so there is frequent relocation between Sri Lanka, Toronto and Vancouver. Shivan seems like a fish out of water everywhere he goes, for various reasons. Though Sri Lanka gives cultural safety, it also puts him to sexual, domestic and ethnic violence. Canada guards him from such risks physically and legally. But it also puts him in the position of prejudice, of isolation and cultural marginalisation. So, the novel's portrayal of diasporic identity fails to replace homeland for another. It is a continuing negotiation between places that give different levels of idea of belonging.

The frame narrative of the novel revolves around Shivan's commitment to return to Sri Lanka after his aachi has a stroke. Shivan is meant to help Hema, who wanted to bring her mother to Canada. The expedition thrust him to challenge the man he believes to blame for Mili's death, his personal engagement in Daya's brutal world and emotional grip she still has over him.

Michael will not allow their relationship resume by concealing more. His detachment from Shivan vigours him to face the past, instead of continuously escaping from it. Yet amnesty alone is not the indication of healing. There is no

undoing the act of Mili's death, or Shivan's involvement in the course of events. His comeback is important as it suspends the trend of emigration, but it does not convey the ultimate resolution.

Now, Dominick LaCapra's contrast between "acting out" and "working through" trauma is helpful. Most of the novel is enacted by Shivan through the repetition of the past. He employs Chandralal, reverts to Daya's dominance, hides Mili from Michael and consistently relocates from country to country, considering geography will alter who he is. His last visit gives hope of advance because he starts to see the links between these experiences. Nevertheless, Selvadurai does not sort out the story in the way that the reader is satisfied that the conflict results in healing all the time.

The conclusion is tangled by the Buddhist stress on karma and compassion. Shivan attempts to put back animosity and vengeance with compassion, trusting that the only path to stop the cycle of violence is to surrender his wish for revenge. This understanding can be absolute, because it lets him approach Daya by no means of simply reflecting her aggression. Yet in becoming more accepting of his fate, he might diminish human responsibility. If the death of Mili might be forgiven as karma, then Daya's choice, Chandralal's misdeed and Shivan's earlier experience in the same authoritarian system would all be hidden. Therefore, he has to come to terms with his fate to reconstruct his identity. Shivan has to be at ease with himself as a wounded and involved, a participant and a migrant, a sufferer of prejudice and a receiver of bourgeois dominance. His fractured identity is irreversible by concentrating on the solacing incidents of his past. It requires to incorporate memories of his father's discrimination, his mother's agony, his grandmother's conditional love, his personal use of Chandralal, Mili's public service, Mili's death and his own silence towards Michael.

At the end, *The Hungry Ghost*, portrays recovery as an imperfect ethical work. The transformation is attainable because of memory, yet memory is also awful. It stops Shivan from conserving a reference form of himself. When the suppressed trauma breaks the self-esteem, but remembered trauma, with the weight of responsibility, starts to rejuvenate himself. Thus Shyam Selvadurai's postcolonial protagonist is not the one who runs away from homeland to surpass the past; rather, the self is established by the ways of struggle with the assumed histories. Shivan's return to Sri Lanka does not stop all the conflicts. It is his first persistent effort to challenge, instead of continuing to escape from the insatiable ghosts of family, nation, sexuality and individual responsibility.

Thus Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts* shows that suffering and memory are complex factors in the development of postcolonial identity. Instead of portraying identity as a fixed or completed, Selvadurai shows identity as a changing process that is formed by the residual presence of the past. The novel further foregrounds the troubled relationship between personal memory and common history. Shivan's personal problems are associated with the civil war in Sri Lanka, parental pressure and public opinion about sexuality. His Tamil-Sinhalese interracial, his gay identity and his expatriate lifestyle place him at the intersection of a number of cultural and political problems. These experiences

prove that postcolonial identity is not only shaped simply through a personal choice but also through transmitted histories and collective memories.

This study also prefers that the protagonist's trauma in the novel is transgenerational. Shivan's ethical dilemmas, his aachi's controlling behaviour and his mother's unresolved pain are the samples of how trauma is handed over through familial bonds and stereotypical behavioural patterns. Shivan's participation in Daya's dominance and his powerlessness to fully face his past indicates that trauma not only affects the victims, but also the people who unintentionally preserve the inherited power structures. By portraying this, the novel questions the simple binaries of victims and wrongdoers by portraying identity as morally nuanced and constantly negotiated.

Moreover, the important motif of the narrative is the Buddhist metaphor of the hungry ghost. In addition to attachment, want and greed, it also symbolizes the inability to let go of emotional weight and unresolved memories. The author tries to imply that curing the agony will not arise from moving to a new place or disregarding the past. But it will happen only through facing our past histories with compassion and truth, taking personal accountability and admitting uncomfortable memories.

Thus this paper proves that *The Hungry Ghost* gives a complete analysis of the psychological outcomes of colonial history, cultural conflict, migration and family trauma through the blend of Postcolonial Theory, Memory Studies and Trauma Theory. The author depicts memory as a burden and also a chance for ethical self-awareness. The novel ends with an argument that healing is not an end product but a continuous process. Identity is re-built not by the effacing memories, but by challenging the 'hungry ghosts' of family, nation and individual history.

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DABEER SI/KTT/29**MEMORY, VULNERABILITY, DISPLACEMENT, AND NARRATIVE DEATH: READING PAUL KALANITHI'S *WHEN BREATH BECOMES AIR* AND EDWARD SAID'S *OUT OF PLACE* THROUGH MEDICAL HUMANITIES****DERMEE PEGU**Research Scholar, Department of English
Dibrugarh University, Assam, India**RITUSHMITA SHARMA**Assistant Professor, Department of English
Dibrugarh University, Assam, India**Abstract**

Drawing upon the interdisciplinary frameworks of Medical Humanities, Narrative Medicine, Cultural Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Studies, this paper examines Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* and Edward Said's *Out of Place* as autobiographical narratives that foreground memory, vulnerability, displacement, and mortality in the construction of identity. Although emerging from distinct experiential contexts—terminal illness in Kalanithi's memoir and postcolonial displacement in Said's autobiography—both texts explore how the self is continuously negotiated and reconstituted through narrative under conditions of existential uncertainty. Through Narrative Medicine, storytelling is read as an ethical and reflective practice that enables witnessing, meaning-making, and engagement with suffering. From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, memory is understood not as static recall but as an active process through which identity is reshaped amid bodily decline, exile, and awareness of finitude. Kalanithi's account of transitioning from neurosurgeon to terminal patient exposes tensions between clinical detachment and embodied vulnerability, while Said's reflections on exile and illness reveal how displacement and fragility inform selfhood and belonging. Both memoirs resist reductive biomedical models by emphasizing the subjective, relational, and existential dimensions of illness and displacement. The analysis further highlights the significance of caregiving, familial bonds, and interpersonal relationships in sustaining continuity of self and meaning in moments of rupture. Ultimately, the paper argues that both texts exemplify central concerns of the Medical Humanities by demonstrating how narrative and memory function as vital resources for negotiating mortality, preserving identity, and generating meaning in the face of suffering, fragmentation, and death.

Keywords: Medical Humanities; Narrative Medicine; Cultural Memory; Displacement; Mortality.

Introduction

The increasing acknowledgement of humanities within healthcare has contributed to the development of Medical Humanities as a significant interdisciplinary domain that examines illness beyond biological explanations. Drawing from

literature, philosophy, ethics, history, and cultural inquiry, this field critiques the limitations of the biomedical framework by emphasising the emotional, social, and existential dimensions of illness. It recognises that disease is not only a physiological disorder but also an experience that reshapes personal identity, human relationships, and individual understandings of life and death. Within this framework, autobiographical narratives hold particular importance as they provide complex representations of pain, endurance, remembrance, and vulnerability that remain inaccessible through purely clinical accounts. Rita Charon's concept of Narrative Medicine highlights the ethical value of storytelling, arguing that narrative competence enables healthcare practitioners to interpret patients' experiences with empathy, attention, and responsibility. Similarly, Cultural Memory Studies view memory as an evolving process through which individuals reconstruct personal histories and redefine themselves in relation to changing circumstances. Memory therefore operates not as a fixed archive but as an active force involved in identity formation, especially during periods of disruption and uncertainty. Postcolonial perspectives further reveal how exile, migration, and fragmented belonging influence self-construction, suggesting that identity is continuously shaped by historical, cultural, and geographical forces. These interconnected approaches provide a valuable framework for analysing autobiographical works concerned with illness, mortality, displacement, and the search for meaning.

Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* (2016) and Edward Said's *Out of Place* (1999) demonstrate the significance of life writing in exploring identity during experiences of crisis and transformation. Although originating from different intellectual and personal contexts, both memoirs examine the fragile nature of human existence through encounters with illness, uncertainty, and loss. Kalanithi's narrative presents the transformation of a neurosurgeon into a terminally ill patient after receiving a diagnosis of metastatic lung cancer, revealing the limitations of medical knowledge when confronted with personal suffering. His reflections examine mortality, professional identity, and the ethical dimensions of caregiving while showing how narrative becomes a means of preserving selfhood in the face of death. Said's autobiography, written amid prolonged illness, explores the impact of exile and cultural displacement on the formation of identity across multiple locations, including Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, and the United States. His recollections demonstrate how memory connects individual experience with wider histories of migration, conflict, and belonging. Through their engagement with personal and collective experiences, both memoirs challenge fixed notions of identity by presenting the self as relational, evolving, and shaped by encounters with others. This study argues that, when examined through Medical Humanities, Narrative Medicine, Cultural Memory Studies, and Postcolonial theory, these autobiographical texts reveal storytelling as a crucial practice for negotiating suffering and preserving dignity. By transforming experiences of illness and displacement into meaningful narratives, Kalanithi and Said illustrate how memory and representation enable individuals to confront vulnerability while maintaining continuity, purpose, and a sense of humanity amid profound uncertainty.

Objectives:

1. To examine the representation of memory, vulnerability, displacement, and mortality in Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* and Edward Said's *Out of Place*, with particular attention to the ways autobiographical narratives construct and negotiate identity under conditions of illness and uncertainty.
2. To analyse the function of narrative and memory as ethical and interpretative practices that enable the articulation of suffering, selfhood, and meaning-making within the frameworks of Narrative Medicine and Cultural Memory Studies.
3. To explore how caregiving, familial relationships, and interpersonal connections contribute to sustaining identity, resilience, and human dignity amidst experiences of bodily decline, exile, and existential rupture.
4. To demonstrate how the selected memoirs contribute to Medical Humanities by challenging reductive biomedical perspectives and highlighting the subjective, relational, cultural, and existential dimensions of illness, displacement, and mortality.

Literature Review

Recent developments in literary and cultural studies have expanded the understanding of illness by positioning it as a complex human experience shaped by ethical, emotional, social, and existential factors. Within this interdisciplinary field, scholars such as Rita Charon, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, G. Thomas Couser, and Arthur Frank have demonstrated the significance of narrative in interpreting experiences of suffering, identity formation, and bodily vulnerability. Narrative Medicine emphasises the role of storytelling in fostering empathy and acknowledging individual experiences of illness, while autopathographical research explores how personal narratives create meaning and agency during periods of physical and emotional disruption. Furthermore, Cultural Memory Studies, informed by Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, examines memory as a relational process influenced by social and historical contexts. Although critical studies of Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* and Edward Said's *Out of Place* have addressed mortality, medical ethics, exile, and identity, limited attention has been given to the relationship between illness, memory, displacement, and narrative reconstruction. This study seeks to address this gap through an interdisciplinary analysis of autobiographical narratives.

Methodology

Contemporary literary and cultural scholarship conceptualises illness as a multidimensional experience shaped by ethical, psychological, social, and existential dimensions. Researchers including Rita Charon, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, G. Thomas Couser, and Arthur Frank highlight narrative as a vital framework for understanding suffering, identity, and bodily vulnerability. Narrative Medicine and autopathographical studies reveal how storytelling enables empathy, reflection, and personal agency amid illness. Drawing on Cultural Memory Studies, particularly the perspectives of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, this research examines memory as socially constructed and

historically situated. By analysing *When Breath Becomes Air* and *Out of Place*, the study explores intersections of illness, memory, displacement, and narrative reconstruction.

Discussion

1. Autobiographical Narration and the Construction of Identity amidst Crisis

Autobiographical narration provides an important critical space through which individuals interpret experiences of displacement, uncertainty, and personal transformation. In *Out of Place*, Edward Said uses memoir as a reflective form to examine how a sense of self emerges through cultural encounters, migration, and historical circumstances. Written during the later phase of his life while dealing with illness, the text revisits formative experiences that influenced his intellectual development and shaped his understanding of belonging. Rather than presenting the self as permanent or unified, the memoir demonstrates that personal consciousness is continuously reconstructed through interactions with different societies, languages, and geographical locations. The movement between Palestine, Egypt, and the United States created a complex relationship with belonging, as each environment contributed to his development while also generating feelings of separation and uncertainty. One significant example appears in his discussion of his name, where he suggests that the combination of an English first name and an Arabic family name reflected his early awareness of occupying a position between contrasting cultural traditions (Said, 2000, p. 3). This experience corresponds with Stuart Hall's perspective that identity is produced through historical and cultural processes rather than inherited as a fixed quality. It also reflects Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," which describes a location of cultural negotiation where new forms of belonging emerge through interaction between different traditions. However, this intermediate position is not represented solely as a source of intellectual possibility; it also involves emotional tension and a continuing sense of unfamiliarity, illustrating the condition of "unhomeliness" associated with fragmented cultural attachment.

The role of language, memory, and political history further reveals the complex formation of personal consciousness in *Out of Place*. The relationship between Arabic and English demonstrates that language functions not merely as a communication system but also as a connection to heritage, memory, and emotional experience. While English became central to Said's academic career and public expression, Arabic remained linked with childhood memories, family relationships, and cultural origins. The coexistence of these linguistic influences highlights the multiple dimensions through which a person understands their place within the world (Said, 2000, p. 4). In addition, the memoir connects private recollections with the collective history of Palestine, including experiences of displacement, political conflict, and social change. By merging personal memories with broader historical realities, the narrative reveals how individual experiences are shaped by larger forces beyond the self. This approach supports Fredric Jameson's argument that personal accounts in postcolonial contexts often carry wider historical significance. Through his reflections on exile and cultural uncertainty, Said challenges limited definitions of belonging and presents displacement as a condition that reshapes one's understanding of the self. His

recognition of being permanently “out of place” does not indicate the absence of identity but emphasizes that selfhood remains flexible, developing through continuous encounters with changing circumstances (Said, 2000, p. 295). Therefore, autobiographical narration becomes a method of transforming personal crisis into a broader exploration of memory, history, and the ongoing construction of human identity.

2. Memory, Vulnerability, and the Negotiation of Selfhood

Memory functions as a crucial medium through which individuals reconstruct identity when illness disrupts established perceptions of the self. In autobiographical illness narratives, recollection is not simply the recovery of past events; it is an interpretive process through which experiences are reorganised to accommodate altered circumstances. This dimension is central to autopathography, a literary form positioned between autobiography and pathography that explores personal encounters with illness, embodiment, and suffering. Critics such as Anne Hunsaker Hawkins and G. Thomas Couser argue that narratives of illness extend beyond the representation of disease by examining its impact on identity, relationships, agency, and social belonging. Similarly, Arthur Frank’s idea of the “wounded storyteller” suggests that narration allows individuals to transform experiences of physical and emotional disruption into sources of meaning. Within this framework, memory becomes an active force through which ill subjects negotiate uncertainty and reconstruct a sense of continuity. Illness often challenges assumptions of autonomy, stability, and self-control; consequently, remembering enables individuals to connect their former identities with transformed realities. In *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi presents memory as a process of self-examination through which his earlier intellectual, personal, and professional experiences acquire new significance after his terminal diagnosis. His transition from neurosurgeon to patient exposes the limitations of medical authority and reveals the vulnerability underlying human existence. Rather than portraying illness as an isolated physical condition, the narrative demonstrates how mortality reshapes the interpretation of an entire life history.

The role of memory in Kalanithi’s reflection reveals that identity is not a permanent structure but an evolving construction shaped by experience and interpretation. His engagement with literature, philosophy, and medicine illustrates the complex relationship between scientific understanding and the search for purpose. These recollections challenge the tendency to view illness only through biological explanations by highlighting its emotional, ethical, and existential dimensions. As a physician, Kalanithi had previously encountered suffering from a position of professional distance; however, becoming a patient transforms his understanding of vulnerability and enables a more empathetic awareness of human fragility. His decision to become a father despite facing a terminal condition represents a significant redefinition of meaning. Rather than resisting mortality, this choice embraces connection, responsibility, and the continuation of identity beyond physical limitations. Yet the narrative does not present memory as a complete solution to loss or uncertainty. Instead, it reveals the complexities involved in forming a renewed sense of self when restoration of

the former identity is impossible. Remembering does not return Kalanithi to his previous existence; it allows him to integrate change, limitation, and mortality into a broader understanding of human experience. Thus, the memoir illustrates autopathography as a reflective practice where illness becomes a site of interpretation, negotiation, and meaning-making. Through memory, the individual confronts the distance between the person they once were and the person they become, preserving a sense of coherence even amid profound bodily and existential transformation.

3. Narrative Medicine, Embodied Experience, and the Ethics of Care

Narrative Medicine has transformed contemporary discussions of healthcare by shifting attention from disease-centred models towards the subjective realities of illness, emphasising that medical understanding remains incomplete without engagement with patients' lived experiences. This approach aligns with autopathography, which recognises personal illness narratives as valuable forms of knowledge that reveal dimensions of suffering often overlooked within clinical documentation. In *When Breath Becomes Air*, Paul Kalanithi challenges the traditional separation between doctor and patient by presenting his transition from a neurosurgeon interpreting illness to an individual experiencing it firsthand. His encounter with terminal cancer exposes the limitations of medical expertise when confronted with mortality, demonstrating that illness affects not only the body but also professional identity, personal aspirations, and perceptions of meaning. Rather than viewing disease as a problem confined to biological processes, the memoir explores how serious illness reshapes relationships, values, and understandings of existence. For instance, his recognition that he faced death with the same uncertainty as the patients he once treated reveals the transformation of clinical authority into empathetic self-awareness (Kalanithi, 2016, p. 139). His engagement with literature further illustrates the importance of narrative interpretation, as storytelling provides a framework for understanding experiences that exceed scientific explanation. The relationship between biomedical knowledge and embodied experience can therefore be understood as an intersection where clinical practice is enriched by empathy, reflection, and ethical awareness, challenging purely reductionist approaches to healthcare.

Similarly, Edward Said's *Out of Place* expands the concept of illness narratives by connecting bodily vulnerability with memory, displacement, and cultural identity. His reflections demonstrate that experiences of illness are shaped by historical and social circumstances, suggesting that the body cannot be separated from the environments and identities that influence human existence (Said, 1999, pp. 3–5). Through this perspective, illness becomes not merely a physical condition but a lived experience shaped by personal history and collective memory. Both narratives redefine caregiving as an ethical relationship founded on presence, compassion, and recognition rather than solely on medical intervention. The support provided by family members illustrates how meaningful care can preserve dignity and emotional connection even when cure is impossible. By foregrounding individual voices that are often reduced to diagnoses or clinical categories, these accounts challenge the limitations of biomedical discourse and reinforce narrative as a form of ethical engagement. Ultimately, illness narratives

contribute to Medical Humanities by expanding perceptions of embodiment, vulnerability, and care, demonstrating that humane healthcare requires attention to both biological conditions and the personal meanings attached to experiences of suffering.

4. Medical Humanities and the Representation of Human Experience beyond Reductionist Frameworks

Illness narratives hold a significant place within Medical Humanities as they challenge interpretations of disease that are limited to biological processes and clinical explanations. Autopathography, as a form of illness life writing, provides a framework through which individuals explore the complex relationships among the body, identity, memory, and mortality. Arthur Frank's concept of the wounded storyteller offers an important perspective for examining how narratives of illness transform experiences of suffering into meaningful expressions of human existence. According to Frank, storytelling enables individuals living with illness to regain a sense of agency by interpreting bodily disruptions and communicating their experiences within wider social and cultural contexts. This theoretical approach is particularly relevant to Paul Kalanithi's memoir *When Breath Becomes Air*, where the transition from medical practitioner to patient challenges traditional assumptions about authority, knowledge, and vulnerability. His diagnosis of metastatic lung cancer creates a fundamental shift in self-understanding, as his identity as a neurosurgeon becomes complicated by his own dependence on medical treatment. The experience of confronting mortality from the position of a patient reveals the fragile boundary between healer and sufferer, demonstrating that illness extends beyond physical symptoms to influence personal identity, professional roles, and existential consciousness.

The memoir also illustrates the significance of writing as a means of interpreting illness and reconstructing meaning in the face of uncertainty. Rather than presenting recovery as a complete return to health, the narrative engages with the emotional and philosophical challenges of living with limited time. It suggests that healing involves processes of reflection, adaptation, and the search for purpose alongside medical intervention. The author's engagement with literature highlights the value of humanistic perspectives in addressing questions that scientific knowledge alone cannot resolve. By combining medical understanding with literary reflection, the narrative creates space for experiences of illness that are often absent from clinical records. Memories of encounters with suffering patients during medical training contribute to a deeper awareness of mortality and human vulnerability, shaping a more empathetic understanding of the patient experience. Similarly, the decision to embrace fatherhood despite an uncertain future represents a rejection of defining life solely through illness and approaching existence only in terms of loss. Instead, the memoir presents illness as a transformative experience that encourages reflection on relationships, meaning, and human resilience. Through its exploration of the physician-patient experience, the work reinforces the central aims of Medical Humanities by demonstrating that personal narratives provide essential insights into the emotional, ethical, and existential dimensions of illness that cannot be fully captured through medical frameworks alone.

Conclusion

This research has explored Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air* and Edward Said's *Out of Place* through the critical frameworks of Medical Humanities, Narrative Medicine, Cultural Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Studies, focusing on the representation of memory, vulnerability, displacement, and mortality. The study reveals that both memoirs employ life writing as a reflective practice through which individuals respond to experiences of disruption and reconstruct their identities. Although Kalanithi's narrative centres on the confrontation with terminal illness and Said's autobiography reflects the complexities of exile and cultural dislocation, both works demonstrate that selfhood is shaped through continuous interaction between personal experiences, social contexts, and remembered histories. Kalanithi's transformation from a medical professional into a patient challenges the dominance of clinical perspectives by highlighting the emotional, ethical, and existential dimensions of illness. His narrative illustrates how writing enables the interpretation of suffering and provides a means of sustaining purpose in the presence of mortality. Conversely, Said's memoir presents displacement as a condition that influences belonging, language, and cultural consciousness. His experiences across different geographical and political landscapes reveal identity as a dynamic formation shaped by hybridity, memory, and historical circumstances.

The findings of this study further establish that autobiographical narratives serve as significant forms of knowledge within Medical Humanities by foregrounding experiences often overlooked within institutional discourses. Memory in both texts operates not merely as recollection but as a creative process through which fragmented experiences are reorganised into meaningful accounts of selfhood. The analysis also demonstrates the importance of narrative practices in promoting empathy, ethical understanding, and recognition of individual experiences beyond medical or political classifications. The presence of caregiving and interpersonal relationships in both memoirs reinforces the argument that human connection remains central to maintaining dignity during periods of suffering and uncertainty. By examining illness and displacement together, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how literature bridges medicine, culture, and human experience. Ultimately, *When Breath Becomes Air* and *Out of Place* affirm that storytelling provides a vital space for confronting vulnerability, preserving identity, and creating meaning in situations marked by change, loss, and the inevitability of mortality.

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DABEER SI/KTT/30**THE HOUSE AS ARCHIVE: POSTMEMORY AND PARTITION IN
ANITA DESAI'S *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*****HUMAIRA JAVAID**Research Scholar, Department of English
South Campus, University of Kashmir, J&K, India**BILAL AHMAD**Assistant Professor, Higher Education Department
Government of Jammu and Kashmir, J&K, India**Abstract**

This paper explores Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980) through the lens of Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, focusing on the intergenerational transmission of Partition trauma manifested through silence, memory, nostalgia, and familial dynamics. By utilizing Hirsch's concepts, the analysis delves into the nuanced portrayal of Partition's violence and illustrates how inherited trauma permeates the narratives of stories, letters, absences, domestic spaces, and emotional patterns, revealing the profound influence of the past on each character's identity. By employing these tools, the paper examines the Das siblings—Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba—who embody diverse modes of remembering and responding to historical rupture, emphasizing the intricate interplay between individual memory and collective history. The Das family's disintegration serves as a microcosm for the broader fragmentation of the nation, with the family home functioning as a repository of memory that preserves the emotional residues of Partition. The analysis posits that the domestic sphere transforms into an archive where national history is continuously reimagined through familial experiences, emphasizing memory, silence, nostalgia, and reconciliation. Ultimately, this paper argues that Desai's narrative presents Partition not as a definitive historical event, but as an enduring inheritance, the emotive resonance of which is perpetuated through postmemory.

Keywords: Postmemory, Trauma, Partition, Familial Dynamics, Memory, Nostalgia.

Introduction

The Indian Partition of 1947 is one of the most politically and humanitarially significant events in South Asian history, as it resulted in unprecedented communal violence, mass migration, and the permanent fragmentation of countless families. The violent repercussions gradually subsided, but their psychological and emotional outcomes continued to influence the generations to come. Therefore, Partition can be seen not just as a historical fact but as an inherited memory that survives through domestic spaces, family ties, silences, and everyday acts of remembrance.

At the same time, Indian Partition literature has committed itself to examining the event as a historical fact and as a narrative, and consistently studies the close relationship between public history and private experience. The collective trauma

is often mediated through the everyday lives of ordinary families rather than solely through political events. In this context, Rituparna Roy, in her book *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*, writes that in *Clear Light of Day*, "Political history is inextricably bound up with personal history." (26). Literature thus becomes one of the most significant spaces for examining the aftermath of trauma.

Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is largely set against the looming backdrop of Partition. Set in post-Independence Old Delhi, the novel centers on the lives of the Das siblings—Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba—as they face long-standing familial estrangements, childhood reminiscence, and unsettled emotional conflicts. The novel explores the complex relationship between memory, time, forgiveness, and identity as the Das siblings reunite at the ancestral home. Though the apparent narrative focuses primarily on the domestic sphere and psychological relationships, its emotional landscape is significantly shaped by the historical aftereffects of the Partition of India. As Rituparna Roy observes, "the Partition is the backdrop to an emotional crisis that a pair of siblings faces in their relationships and the ensuing change in their personal equations" (26). This demonstrates how national history intervenes in intimate family experience. While existing scholarship has generally focused on the novel's psychological realism, domestic symbolism, or its treatment of Partition as a historical backdrop, accentuating the violence and division, the current research approaches *Clear Light of Day* through Marianne Hirsch's concepts of postmemory, particularly familial and affiliative postmemory. Leila Essa studies the novel to interrogate how family narrative resists a clear division between public and private histories of Partition, presenting domestic relationships as important sites through which national trauma is remembered (Essa 489-510). Instead of treating Partition merely as a historical episode, this analysis explores its traumatic legacy that lives through inherited memory, domestic space, biological relationships, and cross-communal relationships.

Marianne Hirsch develops the concepts of familial and affiliative postmemory through her detailed analysis of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. This graphic narrative recounts the Holocaust through conversations between a Holocaust survivor and his son. She writes in the introduction to her book, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*:

"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up (5)

Instead of recording the survivor's memories alone, *Maus* delves into how the emotional, psychological, and imaginative legacy of traumatic events is handed down to the second generation who do not directly experience it. Hirsch sees the dialogue between father and son as an illustration of the transmission of trauma across generations and argues that it demonstrates how one generation's lived memory is transformed into the next generation's postmemory through familial narratives, photographs, and acts of remembrance.

Hirsch defines familial postmemory as "the vertical transmission" of traumatic memory within the family, where trauma is transmitted through ancestors, parents and siblings. Family stories, photographs, silences, rituals, and ordinary domestic practices are key channels in the transmission. Despite not having a direct experience of the traumatic event, the succeeding generation inherits the memories that become emotionally rooted, making them appear to be their own. The relationship is intergenerational and based on biological ties. Hirsch further explains that such inherited memories are transmitted through "imaginative investment, projection, and creation," rather than direct recollection. (Hirsch, *Generation 5*)

On the other hand, affiliative postmemory operates through horizontal identification, connecting people to a traumatic past not through biological relationships but through emotional, political and cultural identification. Hirsch describes affiliative postmemory as "no more than an extension of the loosened familial structure occasioned by war and persecution." Extending beyond biological connections, it emerges through "contemporaneity and generational connection" and works through "literal second generation". The structures of mediation, such as friendly ties, art and literature, testimony, photographs, museums, and shared cultural experiences, form an organic web that becomes instrumental in the transmission of memory. (Hirsch, *Generation 36*)

Fiction and Partition: A Review

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) departs from conventional Partition narratives by shifting the focus from scenes of violence to the historical repercussions that infiltrate ordinary domestic life and are transmitted to succeeding generations. Centered upon the Das siblings, whose fractured relationships reveal the lingering psychological effects of Partition, the psychological emphasis allows *Clear Light of Day* to depict Partition mainly through emotional experience rather than historical spectacle. As Roy notes, "Desai's novels have generally more to do with private selves than public lives—but in *Clear Light of Day*, the two merge and mesh" (26). Daruwalla observes that Desai "believed in exploring the interior goings on in the psyche of her characters" (53), and how the personal and political in the novel merge will be understood subsequently in the paper.

Desai's novels have always won accolades for her use of psychological realism, flashback techniques, and symbolism. One of the earliest critical responses to *Clear Light of Day*, by Shouri Daniels (1981), appreciates Anita Desai's novel for its psychological depth, poetic language, and symbolic use of domestic space. Daniels' study delves into the emotional atmosphere in the Das family, treating the ancestral house as pivotal to the novel's structural and symbolic interpretation. He studies recurring symbols, such as the house, the well, and the garden, and argues that these images function as spaces where the family's emotional history is preserved. While Daniels offers an insightful reading by focusing on the novel's domestic symbolism, female subjectivity, and psychological realism, he leaves the concept of postmemory untouched. The current research expands this discussion by analyzing the Das house through Marianne Hirsch's concepts of postmemory.

Cindy Lacom's article "Revising the Subject: Disability as 'Third Dimension' in *Clear Light of Day* and *You Have Come Back*" (2002) examines feminist, disability and postcolonial strands in the novel. Through Homi Bhabha's idea of the "third dimension," she argues that Baba's disability stirs strict binaries such as self/other and coloniser/colonised. Lacom studies the Das family as a microcosm of the Indian nation, striving to navigate cultural change, and Baba's character occupies an indeterminate space, exposing the instability of postcolonial identity. The present study adds to the scholarship by examining memory, identity, and Partition through Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory.

Desai's Use of Memory, Past and Partition

The novel's opening introduces its narrative structure, moving between past and present, foreshadowing its treatment of history as inseparable from contemporary identity. Partition is not a self-contained historical event, but an active participant in constructing the narrative through continuous moments between past and present. When Tara returns to her ancestral home, she observes "everything goes on and on here [family home], and never changes...and it is the same, whenever we come home." (Desai 6), demonstrating that history is not merely a bygone thing. The structural choices like nonlinearity, regular recourse to the past through flashbacks, memories repeatedly interrupting the present, suggest that the legacy of Partition remains alive through remembrance, silence, and recurring acts of recollection, indicating that history continues to remain active within the characters' intimate emotional lives rather than being limited to the archives. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory argues for this persistence of the past within the present and offers an insightful lens for understanding these complex processes of remembrance. Basically developed against the backdrop of Holocaust studies, Hirsch's concept serves as a scholarly approach to understanding how the devastating past continues to impact those who did not directly experience them.

Throughout *Clear Light of Day*, memories continually intrude on the present, distorting the flow of time and shaping the characters' emotional lives. Tara's return to her family's house and her stroll through the rose garden trigger childhood memories, and the narrative shifts seamlessly into the past. The ancestral Das house seems unchanged, frozen in time, and embodies the family's past. The intervals of silence, unresolved grievances, and recurring acts of recollection reveal that the emotional consequences of Partition are not innocent even decades after the actual event itself. Rather than presenting trauma through direct testimony or scenes of violence, Desai depicts it as an enduring presence embedded in domesticity and vicinity. This kind of recollection indicates that the past continues to inhabit the present in ways that exceed the individual.

Unlike direct memory, postmemory is mediated through emotional inheritance rather than personal experience. The distinction becomes visible in *Clear Light of Day*, where Partition is rarely narrated directly. Instead, it lingers in the narrative through flashbacks, family tensions, emotions and the symbolic presence of the ancestral house. Trauma remains active precisely because it is never fully resolved. Daniels observes that in the novel, "the atmosphere...is built around a house" and that Desai "use[s] the domestic to suggest the larger social fabric"

(107). Desai portrays Partition through two complementary forms of postmemory. First, through familial postmemory, in which inherited trauma shapes emotional relationships across generations, connected through blood and biology. The inherited trauma proliferates not only through explicit recollection but also through family silences, omissions and unspoken histories. In this context, Annette Kuhn is relevant, as she observes, "Things will be lied about, or simply never mentioned." At the same time, "Secrets inhabit the borderlands of memory." (*Family Secrets* 2) These silences shape the emotional life of the Das family, where memories of loss, abandonment and Partition, despite being largely unexpressed, continue to shape the siblings' relationships. Secondly, Raja's deep bond with Hyder Ali's Muslim family represents affiliative postmemory and presents traumatic histories as generative of ethical and cultural affiliations beyond biological kinship.

Hirsch radically expands the understanding of memory as the recollection of personally experienced events by arguing that traumatic memories often outlive the lives of direct witnesses and are inherited by later generations. These inherited memories profoundly influence identity despite their indirect nature. Hirsch writes "...one generation's memory is indistinguishable from another's. It is passed down from parents to children, from older to younger siblings. (*Family Frames*, 127) Hirsch observes in *The Generation of Postmemory*: "To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth... is to risk having one's own life stories displaced." (5) Trauma, therefore, extends beyond historical chronology. Its psychological effects continuously move through stories, behaviors, silences, photographs, domestic rituals, and emotional patterns. Hirsch further characterizes postmemory as "a structure of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience." (*Generation* 6)

Central to Hirsch's theory is her distinction between familial and affiliative postmemory. Familial postmemory refers to memories dispersed within biological kinship through every day domestic interactions. Parents, siblings, family homes, photographs, inherited objects, and repeated narratives are the means through which trauma and memory are unconsciously preserved.

Affiliative postmemory, however, extends beyond genealogy. Discussing W. G. Sebald's Austerlitz, Hirsch explains that memory can be transmitted through identification outside the family, where "the narrator receives the story from Austerlitz and affiliates with it, thus illustrating the relationship between familial and affiliative postmemory." (*Generation* 41) Memory, therefore, becomes an ethical and cultural engagement rather than a mere biological inheritance.

These two categories offer an enriching framework for *Clear Light of Day*. One, Raja's deep emotional identification with Hyder Ali's Muslim household demonstrates how memory trespasses communal and religious boundaries. Second, Bim, Tara, and Baba exhibit the emotional consequences of Partition through their mosaic, fragmented domestic dynamics.

Familial Postmemory and the Das Family

The very opening of the novel demonstrates how Desai establishes memory as inseparable from domestic space. Tara's return to the ancestral house immediately

bridges the distance between past and present. Strolling through the familiar garden after years, she finds everything unchanged. In the introduction to the novel, Kamila Shamsie calls the House "a mothballed past or an oasis of continuity amidst clamouring change?" (vii). The house functions not merely as a residence but as a repository of accumulated emotional history. Bim sees Old Delhi as "a great cemetery, every house a tomb. Nothing but sleeping graves" (Desai 7). This sketch of the house transforms it into an archive that subtly preserves memories and simultaneously delays their erasure. It is no surprise that the house becomes a site of the siblings' apparent psychological inertia and their inability to escape their shared history.

Hirsch's idea of familial postmemory explains this phenomenon precisely. "Postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation" (*Generation* 35). The Das siblings remain governed by inherited emotional experiences that continue shaping their present relationships. Bim's unresolved grudge and emotional distance from Raja, Tara's repeated nostalgic longing, Baba's passion for listening to old gramophone records, and Raja's emotional estrangement all illustrate that historical trauma resides within ordinary family life, disappointments, obsession and longings. Bim's encounter with Raja's correspondence makes an ordinary letter a material repository of postmemory. As she "opened her eyes and stared at all the books and papers and letters scattered over the dusty table" (146), the letters do not act merely as inert paper and ink but as items overflowing with emotional and historical significance. Her anxious recollection, "And what about the letter he wrote me?... My letter?" (147), indicates that Raja's letter signifies more than its literal content, encompassing unresolved resentment, affection, betrayal, and weakened family ties. Hirsch argues that testimonial objects invite "meticulous and multiple readings" because "every line, every word counts as a possible clue" (*Generation* 197). Raja's letter functions as a testimonial object through which memories of familial division and the emotional aftermath of Partition continue to circulate, therefore demanding repeated interpretation. The letter becomes a medium which keeps the past alive, exemplifying Hirsch's conception of postmemory as a mediated transmission of history through material objects.

Affiliative Postmemory in *Clear Light of Day*

While the Das siblings, Bim, Tara, and Baba, depict survival through trauma through biological relationships, Raja's relationship with Hyder Ali's family expands the novel's exploration of memory beyond the limits of kinship. Marianne Hirsch argues that postmemory is not confined to genealogical inheritance but may originate through "affiliative structures of transmission". Hirsch distinguishes familial from affiliative postmemory as "the difference between an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family, and the intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries." (*Generation* 36) These structures allow individuals to become emotionally involved in histories that are not biologically their own but are incorporated into their ethical and cultural identities. Thus, postmemory becomes not only familial but also social, crossing religious, political, and communal boundaries.

Unlike the rest of the Das siblings, Raja develops an intense attachment to Hyder Ali's household long before Partition. "Their neighbor and landlord, Hyder Ali... stopped to invite him to visit his library." (Das) This invitation marks the beginning of Raja's affiliative association with Hyder Ali. Rather than remaining a Hindu neighbor, Raja is welcomed into Hyder Ali's intellectual and cultural space. The library becomes the first site where Raja begins to inherit a community's history and traditions that do not belong to him. Looked through the lens of affiliative postmemory, this invitation marks the beginning of memory transmission grounded in emotional affinity rather than genealogical descent.

Raja's continuing correspondence with Hyder Ali's family demonstrates that memory survives through mediation rather than direct experience. Even after the family's departure, Raja reads "reading letters from the Hyder Ali family and composing Urdu verses for them" (Das 133). The perusal of the letters is not simply an act of communication. These letters serve as material carriers of emotional and cultural memory, sustaining relationships weakened by Partition. Hirsch argues that testimonial objects become "points of memory" that "pierce through the temporal and experiential layers separating us from the past" (*Generation* 197). Raja's letters similarly mediate his friendship with Hyder Ali's family across geographical and political distance. This illustrates how affiliative postmemory can also be sustained through written communication rather than biological kindred.

Alongside the Das family's inherited memories, the novel also explores relationships that transcend biological kinship. The memories and legacy of Partition transcend communal and familial boundaries, as demonstrated by Raja's intimate association with Hyder Ali's Muslim family, which complicates strict communal identities. Raja's enduring attachment to Hyder Ali goes beyond intellectual admiration to embrace the emotional and cultural, indicating that the emotional legacy of Partition also flows through chosen affiliations and shared cultural ties. "...he would return home and tell Bim every detail... that glowed in his eyes with a special radiance related to everything that was Hyder Ali's." (Das 75) The "special radiance" suggests that Raja finds meaning in Hyder Ali's world. His enthusiasm is directed at his internalisation of another family's cultural memory. This emotional investment depicts affiliative postmemory as an affective connection rather than a genealogical one. Raja crosses the boundary between outsider and insider as "he grew older and more sure of himself, he began to take part in Hyder Ali's family life, for they all grew accustomed to him so that the sharp watchfulness for soft and into baffled acceptance," (Das 74). His participation in Hyder Ali's domestic life illustrates Hirsch's idea that memory can be transmitted through social, cultural, and emotional affiliations, rather than only through kinship.

These relationships anticipate what Hirsch describes as affiliative postmemory, whereby memories become meaningful beyond the limits of family descent. Raja does not unconsciously reenact Hyder Ali's trauma, nor does he receive it as an "awful, involuntary mimetic obsession." Instead of repeating another's suffering through bodily symptoms- as Hirsch describes in relation to rememory- Urdu poetry, literature, shared conversations, and his participation in Hyder Ali's

household are instrumental in Raja's attachment. Hirsch explains that postmemory emerges when experiences are "communicated through stories and images that can be narrativised" and become "a more consciously and necessarily mediated form of identification." (*Generation* 85) Rather than identifying "as" Hyder Ali, Raja identifies "with" him and the Muslim cultural world while retaining his own identity. His relationship, therefore, exemplifies what Hirsch calls "identification-at-a-distance," an ethical mode of affiliation that aligns the self with another without sharing the other's experience. Raja's bond with Hyder Ali exemplifies affiliative postmemory, in which emotional and cultural ties formed through art and literature, everyday interactions, and shared experiences move beyond biological relationships and defy the religious divisions imposed by Partition. As Hirsch explains, affiliative memory enables individuals to become witnesses "by adoption," extending remembrance beyond biological inheritance into ethical and cultural affiliation. (*Generation* 97) Raja's attachment to Hyder Ali's family presents the affiliative mode of remembrance. While not kindred to them, his emotional and cultural identification with the Muslim household allows him to share the memories and history of a culture he is otherwise alien to. His relationship, therefore, changes rigid communal identities while illustrating Hirsch's concept of affiliative memory.

Hirsch similarly argues that affiliative postmemory emerges when individuals receive and internalise another person's history through acts of ethical identification. Discussing W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, she writes that "the narrator receives the story from Austerlitz and affiliates with it, thus illustrating the relationship between familial and affiliative postmemory." (Hirsch, *Generation* 41) Raja performs precisely such an act of affiliation. Rather than merely appreciating Muslim culture intellectually, he incorporates it into his own identity through literature, friendship, and emotional attachment. It manifests as his wish to study at a university that offers exposure to Urdu poetry and Muslim tradition. His forced admission to Hindu College to study English Literature marks his frustration as he "sulk[es] for a week refusing even to get up and go across to the Hyder Alis' in the evenings." (Desai 82)

Raja refuses to abandon Hyder Ali's family even when religious differences intensify. When nationalist students push Raja to partake in violence against Muslims, he instantly remembers "Hyder Ali's library... Hyder Ali's Begum and daughter quietly humming... all those cool, calm evenings in their garden." (Das, 89) His recollection operates as a symbol of refusal of communal animosity. Affiliative memory triumphs over political ideology. The emotional associations formed through affiliative postmemory become stronger than the newly emerged communal hostilities in the nation-state.

The accusation that Raja is "a Muslim sympathiser" and even "a traitor" portrays how Partition transforms cultural and emotional affiliation into ideological suspicion. Raja was "thrilled at the idea of his importance, his dangerousness. He saw himself as fighting for the Hyder Alis, brandishing a sword, keeping the mob at bay". (Desai 90) Raja's loyalty is no longer judged by personal relationships but by communal identity. This leads to the exposure of the violence of Partition not simply as a physical conflict but as the destruction of sturdy emotional affinity.

Hirsch's theory is reinforced by Raja's grief following Hyder Ali's departure as an ill and bedridden Raja anxiously asks Bim, "Where do you think Hyder Ali Sahib could have gone?... How could he have gone without sending a message to anyone? Not even to me?" (Desai 67) His sorrow is like that of a family member rather than a neighbour. Although Partition physically separates them, affiliative postmemory preserves the emotional relationship. Hyder Ali remains psychologically present despite geographical absence.

The Das House as a Microcosm of the Nation

Situated on Bela Road in Old Delhi, the Das house serves as a strong symbol and, at times, almost a character in the novel. It stands for Das' family, culture, and history, which continue to influence the characters in the present while connecting them to the past. The Das house represents familial postmemory and serves as the material archive where the individual experiences, emotions, and memories of each character converge. As Annette Kuhn, likening the past to a crime scene, writes, "The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may remain." (*Family Secrets* 4) Even though the individual past and history of Partition cannot be recovered directly, the Das house refuses to let history die. Every room, object, and garden becomes evidence of the past. Ultimately, the Das house functions as a symbolic microcosm of post-Partition India, as Lacom notices, "Desai uses the family as microcosm for larger national concerns" (142), preserving within its walls the emotional debris of national history.

The house becomes a symbolic representation of post-Partition India by transcending its status as merely a physical setting. As Daniels observes that Desai's novel "uses the domestic to suggest the larger social fabric." (107). When Tara returns to the house after years, she remarks, "It is all the same, whenever we come home." (Desai 6). This observation indicates a sense of permanence. Bim's impression that "Old Delhi does not change. It only decays..." (Desai 7) transforms domestic architecture into historical situations. While silently accumulating the emotional debris of successive generations, the house survives physically. For Tara, every room carries a memory and stores pieces of childhood. Desai observes:

It seemed to her that the dullness, and the boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room under the worn, dusty red rugs, in the bloated brassware, among us to the dried grasses in the swollen vases, behind the yellow photographs in the oval frame-everything, everything that she had so hated as a child, and that was still preserved here as if this were the storeroom of some dull, and inviting provincial museum. (31).

The house, therefore, operates as a museum of memory. Ordinary objects become historical artefacts carrying emotional significance far beyond their material existence.

Hirsch repeatedly emphasises that material objects and domestic environments preserve postmemory as she notes, "Moving about their house, the family members see only reflections of themselves, wherever they look." (*Family Frames* 74) The Das house, as a site of memory, demonstrates how ordinary spaces can reactivate embodied memory through familiar objects and habitual movements.

Hirsch further argues that "ordinary objects mediate the memory of returnees" and revive "the effect of the past." (*Generation* 206). This insight illuminates Desai's treatment of the Das residence. Baba's room preserves the past as Das writes for its description: "The records... were stacked on a shelf beneath the table in their tattered yellow sleeves... The string cot, the table, the HMV gramophone... Once it had been Aunt Mira's room." (12–13). In the same way, gardens, furniture, photographs, gramophone records, and empty rooms all function as mnemonic objects through which traumatic history becomes present once again. Desai writes, "Her mouth tingled with longing to bite into that hard astringent flesh under the green rind." (17). It resonated with Kuhn's idea of memory evoked by "particular places" (160). In this context, guava trees surrounding the Das house trigger Tara's memory through sensory experience rather than conscious recollection.

The Das house also mirrors the post-Partition conditions of India. Leila Essa interprets the family narrative as a vehicle for national trauma. She argues that the private sphere does not merely reflect public history but becomes one of the sites where national trauma is produced and contested. (489-510) This insight reinforces the symbolic role of the Das house as a domestic archive in which personal memories and national history remain inseparable. Like India itself, it contains intriguing and conflicting histories that continue to coexist despite political rupture. Discussing how intimate memories become collective memories, subsequently contributing to the idea of a nation, Kuhn writes, "The word 'nation'... is defined in terms of both common culture and history and also shared space or territory." (168-169) Thus, the Das house becomes a shared space where personal memories and the nation's collective historical memory remain inseparable, transforming a private abode into a material archive of postmemory.

Conclusion

Clear Light of Day epitomises the true legacy of Partition: it lies not a political borders, national divides, or historical documentation, but in the intimate spaces of familial memory, domestic life, and personal kinships and emotional and ethical associations. Employing Marianne Hirsch's theory of familial and affiliative postmemory, the novel reveals how trauma survives across generations by structuring emotions and identities and influencing interpersonal relationships, rather than through direct historical remembrance or by visiting the archives.

The novel embodies both familial postmemory, as each sibling negotiates inherited grief, longing, disappointment and feelings through silence, nostalgia, resentment, and repetition- and affiliative postmemory, as Raja's enduring attachment to Hyder Ali's family exemplifies that memory can create bonds that exceed biological ties. The Das house, which emerges as a site where the two modes of memory intersect, stands as a symbolic microcosm of post-Partition India and demonstrates Desai's rebuttal of the notion that Partition is limited to the past and that memory is a matter of plain recollection.

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DABEER SI/KTT/31**WHEN THE PAST WON'T STAY BURIED: MEMORY AND TRAUMA
IN THREE SOUTH ASIAN NOVELS****RITUPARNA CHATTERJEE**Research Scholar
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Maharashtra, India**Abstract**

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* from India, Khadija Mastur's *Aangan* (*A Promised Land*) from Pakistan, and Shaheen Akhter's *Talaash* (*The Search*) from Bangladesh refuse to shelve Partition and 1971 as dates we memorize for an exam. In these novels the violence hasn't ended but it's in the next room shifting the furniture. Ma in *Tomb of Sand* is 80. After her husband's death, she stops talking and one day she announces she's going to Pakistan and nobody knows what to do with that. Her body drags up memories which her mouth won't touch. Shree lets the plot wander, memory shutter because trauma does. Mastur keeps *Aangan* (*The Promised Land*) inside the house while Pakistan gets carved up outside. It is narrated following the perspective of a young girl to indicate the post-independence disillusionment. *Talaash* (*The Search*) trails Mariam, a birangona after 1971, trying to say what happened to her. The court wants a neat testimony, and her family wants her to forget. The new country wants heroes, not mess. It comes in fragments, out of order, with gaps. What ties the three together is distrust. None of them have the official version of history, rather they look instead at what the body blurts out, what the courtyard won't hide, what falls out of police paperwork. Trauma and memory here aren't a single event we can put a date on. It's what makes borders, maps, and clocks feel made-up. These above-mentioned three writers write from the edges — old women who won't behave, daughters trapped at home, survivors the nation is embarrassed by. The border isn't just a line on paper, the courtyard isn't just domestic space, and the courtroom doesn't equal justice. All of them are still contested, still loud with the past.

Keywords: postcolonial trauma, women's Partition fiction, 1971 Bangladesh War, memory studies, feminist historiography.

The Partition of 1947 is often mentioned as August 15 in textbooks when two nations were separated, and maps were redrawn overnight. But for the people, Partition was not a single day who lived through it, rather it was a nightmare that kept repeating. Memory and trauma are at the center of Partition because what happened in 1947 did not end in 1947. Normal memory follows a line, a kind of chronological order but Trauma breaks that line. During the Partition era millions were compelled to walk, run across a new border by losing their homes, names, languages, neighbors, and family in a few days. Their brains didn't get enough time to process because survival was the fundamental aspect in their life at that point of time. So the memory that was left behind is fragmented, and not chronologically structured. An old man remembers the exact sound of a train at

night, but not the year he left Lahore. A grandmother remembers the color of a door she never saw again, but not the names of people she left behind. A child who was 7 in 1947 grows up with a feeling of fear without knowing where it came from. This is what trauma does by storing experience in the body and in senses, not in neat sentences. Urvashi Butalia, who collected oral histories of Partition, found that women carried memories of abduction, rape, losing their dearest ones, crossing fields at night, without being put into official records. For decades these were whispered, not published and gradually the silence itself became part of the trauma. Partition trauma is not only mental, but it lives in the body. This is why Partition memory gets transmitted from one generation to another who were not even born then. After 1947, both India and Pakistan needed to build new nations. For them it was a challenge to make their fellow people realise that they moved on, they are strong, and the past is left behind but in reality many people maintained silence by believing that if they don't speak, maybe the pain won't come back. But silence makes the memory heavier and that's why grandchildren of any house grow up sensing there is a locked room in the house, but no one has the key. Women carried much of this silence as their experiences of violence, loss, and displacement were not recorded as being considered shameful. Official history remembers states and armies but doesn't focus on the individual suffering which causes a gap. In order to fill the gap researchers try to find out oral histories for getting the inheritance of partition memory which Psychologists call "transgenerational trauma." Just as *Tomb of Sand* shows Partition trauma living in Ma's aging body as an act of remembering, *The Search* traces exile and silence through women and fragmented family stories, while *A Promised Land* reveals that public memory of violence is shaped, and often silenced, by power. Together these works show that whether personal, familial, or national, memory survives in bodies, in whispers, and in the gaps that official history leaves behind. They represent the personal, the diasporic, and the political dimensions of trauma — from a home divided in 1947 to communities living with that division across borders. By bringing an Indian, Bangladeshi-Pakistani context, and a global political voice into one frame, this paper intends to see that Partition is not just a regional event — it is a case study in how memory and trauma travel across people, generations, and nations.

***Tomb of Sand* (Indian Novel):**

Geetanjali Shree's 2018 novel *Ret Samadhi*, later translated in 2021 as *Tomb of Sand* does not follow a straight line, but it circles, and pauses much like memory itself. At the center of the novel is Ma, a widow of 80 years old who after her husband's death becomes someone else entirely: a slow, stubborn remaking of herself, and through whom the book points out that identity is not fixed by birth or by age: "*What was buried was not dead. It was only waiting*" (Shree). When Ma declares, "*I want to break all the rules. I want to go to Pakistan*" (Shree), It signals consciousness restoring after grief, a kind of waking up in an old body. In many Indian households widowhood is synonymous to silence and invisibility. Ma's silence is not empty, but a space for thought, and then for action. With her daughter Beti and with Rosie Bua, a transgender elder who refuses to be ignored, Ma steps outside the script written for her. The trip to Pakistan is the turning point

because it is not about politics but about memory. The border itself is described as: “*a wound that never healed, and we keep walking over it*” (Shree). Ma’s crossing is a return to that living wound by rejecting the narratives both India and Pakistan prefer. By crossing it, Ma forces her family, and the reader, to listen to what was never spoken. Maa becomes the voice of the novel, where Beti gives the novel its second voice. She is modern, outspoken, and often frustrated by her mother, but her arc is about learning to live alongside someone who refuses to be managed. Rosie Bua as a vibrant and unapologetic transgender expands the frame further by deconstructing the fixed ideas of who a person is supposed to be. Instead of explaining, she performs herself echoing Judith Butler’s idea that identity is made through repeated acts (Butler). Through Ma, Beti, and Rosie, Shree asks us to stay flexible to accept changes and to listen to voices history tried to mute. In the end, *Tomb of Sand* offers no final answers, but the final images of people as sand, as tombs, as carriers of stories stay with us: “*We are all tombs of sand, holding stories that keep slipping through our fingers*” (Shree).

Tomb of Sand indicates a powerful point to think about diasporic identity. It’s not only moving from one country to another, but also it focuses on the histories, stories, and silences we inherit. Shree shows Ma traveling from India back to Pakistan which is the land of her childhood, and in doing so the novel keeps slipping between past and present. Ma’s outer journey mirrors an inner one because personal stories and collective histories shape each other in the diasporic experience. This isn’t just a trip, but a symbolic return which tries to erase the obstacles of being caught between two worlds and never fully arriving in either. Shree’s whole intention here is to make it clear how personal trauma and collective memory get tangled together, and how the past doesn’t stay in the past — it keeps speaking into the present. Time and political conflict have witnessed so many changes in the land. When Ma moves through the landscapes of her childhood, she highlights the gap between what she remembers and what is actually there now. The trauma of Partition didn’t end in 1947, but it’s something shared across generations (Butalia). The image of Pakistan in Maa’s mind is connected to innocence, to family, to bonds that felt unbreakable, and this conflict is at the heart of diaspora:

- a. idealized recollections of past, versus the brutal present.
- b. the disconnection from the roots, and at the same time there is a sincere urge to reconnect.

When Ma walks through her childhood places, she sees as an adult how different they are now. The land has aged, and history has scarred it. Finally Shree makes it very clear that the search for home and identity is bound up with memory and healing. The book makes a comparison between Ma’s life in contemporary India, and her memories of pre-Partition Pakistan filled with warmth. This juxtaposition focuses on how Partition has fractured cultural continuity for people in the diaspora (Ghosh). The border plays a symbolic role here by marking the split between two cultural realities that used to be one, and by making it difficult for Ma to feel connected to either her past or her present. Ma’s return journey is also symbolic as it presents home and exile as linked ideas. Shree shows the idea of heritage as something which can be both comforting and painful, and she also talks

about the difficulty to preserve and pass on cultural identity across time and space (Sengupta). Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* gives us an in-depth understanding of cultural fragmentation and the search for identity (Nair).

A Promised Land (Pakistani Novel):

Khadija Mastoor's posthumously published 1987 novel *A Promised Land*, in Urdu as *Zameen*, carries a flavour of her earlier novel *Aangan*, translated as *The Women's Courtyard*. The setting in both books is inside domestic spaces focusing on women's lives. Where *The Women's Courtyard* looks closely at pre-Partition Lahore and the slow unraveling of a joint family, *A Promised Land* steps into the consequences of the Partition era. It is not just a Partition novel, and the trauma does not end with migration. It continues in memory, in the body, in domestic spaces, and in the way women adjust to fit in a new nation. Sajidah crossed into Pakistan, but Lahore was with her. The trauma of 1947 became part of her daily life. Bringing out a woman's perspective on Partition and its long aftermath, it can be categorised along with the writings of Bapsi Sidhwa, Jyotirmoyee Devi, and Amrita Pritam. As Mastur herself has crossed the border from UP to Pakistan, she makes private grief visible as political history.

The plot is all about Sajidah, her difficult journey, and the way her story ends. She is a character of dignity, determination and deep compassion even when the world around her gives her very little room to act. The novel opens in the Walton refugee camp in Lahore, with a scene where an old man is screaming, tearing at his hair, because his daughter has been taken. A young official from the Rehabilitation Department mocks him: "*Baba! Who is this daughter you cry for? That was no daughter, Baba! That was the most valuable of looted goods. Your screaming won't bring her back. Your voice cannot reach her!*" (Mastur). Sajidah, being in the camp, wants to hit the man but destiny has another plan of seeing her getting married to him. That's the core of the book — She is not kidnapped like thousands of women during Partition, but her lack of choice after losing her father makes her situation miserable and claustrophobic just like others. Trauma here is structural, not just event-based because it indicates the lack of agency thousands of women were forced to accept. Being option-less in order to avoid Kazim, Sajidah agrees to marry the younger brother Nazim. After getting married the house and courtyard are put as symbols because they define the emotional geographies in Sajidah's life: "*In her mind's eye, she saw the threshold of her house, and the rooms, and the courtyard, and the roof*" (Mastur).

Displacement is not only about crossing a border, rather it's an emotional and psychological condition. Places like the ancestral home and the courtyard are not just buildings, but they epitomise within itself the cultural weight and nostalgia. For women, trauma is witnessed and continued inside four walls and in this context we can take Taji's story as the clearest example. She is from the camp and repeatedly forced into abortions by Kazim in their house as a maid. Sajidah got furious seeing this kind of oppression but she was not empowered. This shows how national ideals of a "new Pakistan" fail women. The personal space becomes the site where the violence and brutality of Partition still continues. Among the men, the zamindar is a complicated figure — who can be generous one moment and violent the next. He beats his wife over land, scolds servants over small

mistakes, but the same man also pays a large sum of money for Sajidah's wellbeing by calling her 'sister'. Nazim is shown as idealistic, involved in the Pakistan movement, and even jailed for his politics after independence. On the other hand Kazim becomes a corrupt, ambitious bureaucrat who thrives in the new system. Through them, the novel highlights that Pakistan gained freedom but lost some of its moral values. In the end, *A Promised Land* is a woman's promise to keep their humanity when everything around them is being broken and rebuilt. This study treats memory not as something static, but as a mode of communication between past and present by putting people in more than one time and more than one place at once.

The Search (Bangladeshi Novel):

Shaheen Akhtar's well-known novel *Talaash*, published in English as *The Search*, deals with memory and trauma through the experiences of the Biranganas who survived systematic sexual violence by the Pakistan Army during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The book brings out how official records, nation-centered histories push aside women's pain, showcasing how women resist in personal ways. Women are symbolised either as the reason for war, or as the reason through which enemies can be broken whenever we talk about their interpretation in History and the 20th century is not an exception. It talks about 'Genocidal Rape' - a mass rape of civilian women, usually carried out by opposing military forces as part of a war strategy. Genocidal Rape include the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999), the Rwandan Genocide (1994), and the episode in neighboring Bangladesh during the 1971 Liberation War. The mass rape of Bengali women by Pakistani soldiers is remembered as one of the most brutal crimes in human history. The war started as a civil conflict between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, and ended with the birth of independent Bangladesh out of a long-marginalized East Pakistan under the guidance of Former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi and the founder of Awami league party Sheikh Mujibar Rahaman. The intellectuals, political leaders, social workers, and researchers have written about what happened during and after the Bangladesh War of Independence as a part and parcel of 1947 Partition.

In Shaheen Akhtar's Bengali novel *Talaash* (2004), translated into English as *The Search* (2011) by Ella Dutta, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman appears and declares: "*You are my mothers. You are Biranganas*" (Akhtar). The word 'Birangana' denotes 'warrior women' as the official state title given to women who were raped and tortured by the Pakistan Army in 1971. The irony is that the humiliation of the Biranganas in Independent Bangladesh was worse than the physical violence of the war as Country and family both treated them as trash. Akhtar's novel revolves around this crisis by putting Mariam as the protagonist, along with many other women: "*Mariam survives with her body squeezed and pounded like meat in a mortar and pestle or with a life which is portioned out like the sacrificial flesh of the qurbani. After that moment, her body is never her own. She can never lay claim to her life again.... She had such a lust for life and now she does not know whether she is alive or dead*" (Akhter). Trauma appears in Mariam's life when memories of her fellow camp mates return in dreams with whom she made a deep attachment even after she got released from the camp, and

a sense of dissociation arrives when she starts to visualise herself in a beautiful room with music and roses when she was in a filthy room. After getting released from the camp, Mariam feels her identity has changed, and her love for life has faded away: "... she can no longer live with that past identity" (Akhtar). She faces shame, criticism, judgements, job discrimination, and conversion in her married life shaped by social pressure. The novel ends abruptly with Mariam on a boat as an act of rejecting the world that rejected her without pointing out the solution of the suffering of the Biranganas. No one asks her if she wants to return to her family, to abort or keep a child, or to forgive Pakistan but decisions are taken on behalf of them without their consent. This echoes Spivak's argument that women are doubly silenced — by colonial and patriarchal structures (Spivak). A Bihari woman Nasim Banu is raped by Bengalis and then rejected by both communities. Tuki's parents reject her, and more precisely her mother tries to poison her. Akhtar realistically portrays Mariam, Tuki, Anuradha, Shobha Rani, Shyamali, Bindubala, and others of whom some die by suicide, some turn to be sex workers, and some leave the country. It is the fact that many victim women never spoke, and this repeated image of victimhood has also been used to erase Biranganas as war heroines from national memory. Politically they are recorded and greeted as 'mothers' and 'Biranganas', but their voices are not recorded but ignored. Cultural hegemony has put their mouths shut as Spivak writes, "the subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak) — not because they have nothing to say, but because power decides who to be heard.

Taken together, Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, Khadija Mastoor's *A Promised Land*, and Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* show memory and trauma are what keep history alive in the body, in the home, and in the everyday lives of women. The approaches of each text are different, but all three refuse to take the office records as the final call. In *Tomb of Sand* Memory is evaluated as fragmented, and defiant, whereas in *A Promised Land*, memory plays as a lifeline, and finally in *The Search*, Akhtar shows the darkest aspect of memory. All three novels reject the idea of trauma as a single event by arguing that memory is not just about looking back. It is how women compromise with the present to imagine a proper future. Memory becoming both wound and witness insists that the women who bore that cost of war and partition are not footnotes, but the heart of the story. Their stories need to be heard, spoken, realised, lived, and carried forward otherwise the individual suffering will not be capable of breaking the official records which made them mute, ignored, and deleted. Shree uses absurdity, Mastoor uses domestic detail, and Akhtar uses testimony to break the silence by forcing a country to look at what it wants to forget. In doing so, each writer tries to fill the gap between a private space and a political one, where a woman's memory matters more than any archive.

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DABEER SI/KTT/32**ECHOES OF THE PAST: EXPLORING MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND
IDENTITY IN THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS****KEERTHANA M**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Vellalar College for Women, Thindal, Erode, India**Abstract**

The legacies of colonialism continue to haunt the socio-political and cultural fabric of postcolonial nations, making memory and trauma integral components in the process of identity construction and historical consciousness. The current generation of postcolonial literature attempts to retrace these broken histories in order to resurrect marginalized voices and challenge dominant versions of history. This paper, entitled *Echoes of the Past: Exploring Memory, Trauma, and Identity in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* provides a critique of the way Arundhati Roy's novel represents memory as an ever-evolving space in which personal trauma becomes entangled with historical experiences of violence, displacement, and exclusion. Based on the socio-political milieu of modern-day India, the novel highlights the experiences of marginalized groups affected by the Kashmir conflict, communal violence, the system of castes, and gender inequality. Using qualitative research methods, this study examines the representation of fragmented memory through the narrative of Trauma Theory, Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Theory in order to understand the negotiation of identity in terms of memory. The analysis of this study claims that memory is not limited to the process of remembering past experiences but that it also operates as a means of resistance and reconstruction of history, subverting the dominant ideologies of history, and reconstructing identities, both individual and collective. Through the study of Roy's narrative techniques, this paper explores the representation of trauma as both an individual and a communal phenomenon. Finally, this work is important for the existing postcolonial studies as it points out *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as a meaningful literary endeavour, which attempts to reclaim silenced memories and reinterpret memories as an act of resistance, resilience, and identity construction. In other words, this paper reveals the great power of literature in terms of memory preservation, historical responsibility, and postcolonial existence reflection.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Memory, Trauma, Identity, Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory, Marginalization, Resistance, Narrative Studies, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

Introduction

The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the political, social, and cultural realities of postcolonial societies, where the past remains deeply embedded in the present. Although colonial rule has formally ended in many nations, its enduring effects persist through historical violence, displacement, social exclusion, and the continued marginalization of vulnerable communities. In this context, memory

and trauma emerge as significant concepts in postcolonial literature, therefore, serves not only as a medium of artistic expression but also as a powerful archive that preserves suppressed histories, questions dominant narratives, and restores the voices of those excluded from official records.

Memory in postcolonial discourse extends beyond the recollection of past events; it functions as a dynamic process through which individuals and communities reconstruct their identities and challenge historical erasure. Similarly, trauma is understood not merely as an individual psychological experience but as a collective and transgenerational phenomenon shaped by colonial oppression, political conflict, and systemic violence. The interrelationship between memory and trauma enables literary texts to illuminate the emotional and historical consequences of displacement, communal conflict, caste discrimination, gender-based marginalization, and cultural fragmentation. Consequently, postcolonial literature becomes a significant space where personal narratives intersect with collective histories, revealing the complex processes of remembering, forgetting, resistance, and healing.

Among contemporary Indian writers, Arundhati Roy occupies a prominent position for her engagement with issues of social justice, political violence, and marginalized identities. Her novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, presents a multifaceted narrative that traverses diverse socio-political landscapes, including the Kashmir conflict, communal violence, caste oppression, and gender discrimination.

This study examines the intricate relationship between memory, trauma and identity in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the interdisciplinary perspectives of Trauma Theory, Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Theory. Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for interpreting the novel's engagement with history, memory, and identity. By highlighting the interconnectedness of memory, trauma, and identity, this paper contributes to the broader discourse of postcolonial literary studies and demonstrates the enduring significance of literature in preserving historical truth and fostering social justice.

Literature Review

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* has generated significant scholarly interest for its exploration of political violence, social exclusion, and marginalized identities in contemporary India. Existing criticism primarily examines the novel through postcolonial, feminist, subaltern, and a political perspective, highlighting Roy's critique of nationalism, state violence, and institutional power. These studies provide valuable insights into the socio-political perspectives, highlighting Roy's critique of nationalism, state violence, and institutional power. While these studies provide valuable insights into the socio-political dimensions of the novel, relatively few explore the interconnected relationship between memory, trauma, and identity through an integrated theoretical framework.

Postcolonial scholars have predominantly focused on Roy's representation of marginalized communities, including Muslims, Dalits, and transgender individuals. Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and liminality

and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern critics argue that Roy challenges dominant narratives of nationhood by foregrounding voices excluded from mainstream historical discourse. Such studies demonstrate that the novel destabilizes conventional ideas of identity and exposes the contradictions embedded within postcolonial democracy. However, these readings often privilege questions of representation and political resistance over the role of memory in shaping postcolonial identity.

Recent scholars have also begun to explore the significance of memory in Roy's narrative, emphasizing the preservation of suppressed histories and the recovery of marginalized voices. Drawing on Memory Studies, critics suggest that the novel challenges historical erasure by documenting experiences excluded from official narratives. Nevertheless, these discussions often remain limited to memory as a narrative strategy and do not sufficiently investigate its role in reconstructing postcolonial identities or resisting dominant historical discourse.

The present study addresses by integrating Trauma Theory, Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Theory to examine the dynamic relationship between memory, trauma, and identity in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Rather than treating these concepts as separate analytical categories, this research demonstrates how they intersect in Roy's representation of communal violence, caste oppression, gender marginalization, and the Kashmir conflict. By analysing memory as a form of resistance, trauma as a continuing historical condition, and identity as a fluid postcolonial construct, the study offers a comprehensive interpretation of Roy's novel and contributes to contemporary scholarship on postcolonial literature and memory studies.

Trauma and the Representation on Violence

In the novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy presents trauma not as a momentary response to violence but as a persistent rupture that continues to shape memory, identity, and social existence. Through the perspective of Trauma Theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma as an experience that is not fully comprehended at the moment of occurrence of communal and political violence. Roy's characters do not simply remember violence; they continue to inhabit its psychological and historical aftermath.

Anjum's experience of the Gujarat massacre is central to the novel's representation of traumatic survival. Her return from Gujarat is marked by silence, withdrawal, and an inability to restore her former sense of belonging. The disturbing notion of "Butcher's Luck" intensifies her trauma, as her survival is connected to the perpetrators' superstitious fear of killing a hijra. Roy complicates the conventional idea of survival by presenting it as psychologically burdensome rather than liberating. Anjum's survival reinforces her awareness of being socially marked as the "other". Her eventual movement to the graveyard symbolically externalizes her fractured psychological state. Positioned among the dead, she inhabits a liminal space between survival and loss, suggesting that traumatic experience has disrupted her relationship with ordinary social life.

Roy extends trauma beyond individual psychology through the Kashmir narrative. Musa's loss of Arifa and Miss Jebben demonstrates how private grief becomes inseparable from political violence. Their deaths are not isolated tragedies but

emerge from a larger structure of militarization and conflict. Musa's continued engagement with resistance illustrates the transformation of personal trauma into political consciousness. In this context, trauma becomes collective, as repeated deaths, disappearances, and mourning shape the emotional memory of an entire community.

The fragmented structure of the novel further embodies the disruptive nature of traumatic experience. Its movement across characters, places, documents, and memories resists chronological coherence, reflecting trauma's fragmented and repetitive return. Roy deliberately rejects a linear representation of violence because traumatic histories cannot be contained within orderly narratives. Thus, violence in the novel operates at psychological, communal, and institutional levels. Through fragmented narration and marginalized voices, Roy transforms trauma into a critical mode of exposing histories that dominant political narratives seek to silence.

Memory as Resistance and Identity Reconstruction

In this novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, memory is not represented as passive preservation of the past; rather, it functions as a political act through which suppressed experiences are recovered and marginalized identities are reconstructed. Arundhati Roy's narrative repeatedly returns to memories of communal violence, death, displacement, and political conflict to expose the inadequacy of official history. Viewed through Memory Studies, the novel suggests that what a nation chooses to remember or forget is closely connected with structures of power. Roy therefore places the memories of Anjum, Musa, and Tilo against dominant narratives, of nation, normalcy, and historical progress. Maurice Halbwach's concept of collective memory is particularly relevant to Anjum's experience of the Gujarat violence. According to Halbwachs, individual memory develops within social frameworks and is influenced by one's relationship with a particular community. Anjum's memory of violence cannot be understood merely as a private psychological recollection. Her survival is connected with the collective history of Muslim persecution during communal violence. The phrase "Butcher's Luck" associated with her survival, acquires a disturbing significance in the narrative. Anjum survives not because she is accepted by the perpetrators but because her identity as a hijra is surrounded by superstition. Her survival itself becomes a reminder of her social otherness. Thus, the memory of Gujarat forces Anjum to confront two forms of marginalization: her vulnerability as a Muslim and her exclusion as a transgender individual.

Significantly, Anjum does not return from Gujarat as the same person. Her memory destabilizes her earlier sense of belonging in the Khwabgah. The space that once offered her an alternative community can no longer contain the historical burden she carries. Her movement to the graveyard can therefore be interpreted as a spatial manifestation of memory. She chooses to live among the dead because her experience of violence has disrupted her relationship with ordinary social life. The graveyard represents histories that society has buried, both literally and symbolically. Anjum's presence in this space transforms her from a victim of historical violence into a custodian of forgotten lives. The gradual transformation

of the graveyard into the Jannat Guest House is central to the novel's politics of memory. Anjum does not erase the graves in order to construct a new life. Instead, she builds a community within and around them. This distinction is important from the perspective of Memory Studies. Identity reconstruction in the novel does not depend upon forgetting traumatic history; it emerges through coexistence with memory. The dead remain materially present while the living establish the relationships and forms of belonging. Jannat thus challenges the idea that recovery requires a complete separation from the past. Anjum reconstructs her identity by incorporating loss into a new communal existence.

Pierre Nora's concept of *Lieux de Memoire*, or sites of memory, provides a useful framework for interpreting the graveyard. A site of memory emerges when particular spaces become invested with historical and symbolic significance. Roy's graveyard functions as such a space because it preserves memories excluded from dominant social institutions. It became a home for Anjum, Saddam Hussain, and other socially displaced individuals. These characters carry distinct histories of caste violence, gender exclusion, and communal trauma. Their gathering at Jannat created a counter-community founded upon memories that mainstream society attempts to suppress. Saddam Hussain's identity provides another significant example of memory as a force of reconstruction. Born Dayachand, he assumes the name Saddam Hussian after witnessing the caste-based humiliation and death of his father. His change of name is not simply an attempt to conceal his past. It demonstrates the active role of memory in producing a new identity. The memory of his father's death generates anger and desire for resistance. By renaming himself, Saddam symbolically rejects the powerless identity imposed upon him by caste hierarchy. His reconstructed identity is therefore deeply connected with remembered injustice.

However, Roy does not romanticise this process. Saddam's new identity remains hunted by the past he seeks to confront. His memory repeatedly returns him to the circumstances of his father's death, demonstrating that identity reconstruction is neither complete nor stable. From the perspective of Memory Studies, his experience reveals that the past continues to shape the present even when individuals consciously attempt to redefine themselves. Memory becomes both a burden and a source of political consciousness. It prevents Saddam from accepting caste violence as an ordinary social reality. The Kashmir sections of the novel extend memory beyond individual identity into the realm of collective and political resistance. Musa's memory of Arifa and Miss Jebeen is inseparable from the larger history of Kashmir. Their deaths transform private grief into political consciousness. Roy refuses to present them merely as casualties within an abstract account of conflict. Through Musa's remembrance, they retain names, relationships, and emotional significance.

The multiplicity of voices in the novel further resists historical authority. No single character possesses the complete history of the nation. Anjum remembers communal violence; Saddam carries the memory of caste oppression; Musa embodies the memories of Kashmir; and Tilo preserves fragments of political and personal histories. When these memories are placed together, they form a counter-history of contemporary India. Roy constructs the nation not through official

achievement or nationalist narratives but through the memories of those who have suffered at its margins. Memory, therefore, becomes resistance because it refuses erasure. The character's recollections preserve events and individuals that dominant narratives might silence, simplify, or forget. At the same time, memory enables identity reconstruction by allowing characters to reinterpret their relationship with the past. Anjum's creation of Jannat, Saddam's renaming of himself, Musa's preservation of familial and political memory, and Tilo's unofficial archive demonstrate different forms of reconstruction through remembrance.

Thus, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* presents memory as an active cultural and political force. Through the frameworks of Halbwach's collective memory, Assmann's cultural memory, and Nora's sites of memory, the novel reveals the remembering is inseparable from questions of power, history, and identity. Roy's marginalized characters do not possess institutional authority to write official history, however, their memories challenge historical silence. The novel itself becomes a counter-archive that preserves fractured experience and transforms remembrance into an act of resistance. Identity, in Roy's narrative, is reconstructed not by escaping the past but by confronting, preserving, and reinterpreting its memories.

Post-colonial Identity and the Politics of Marginalization

The *Ministry of utmost Happiness* presents postcolonial India as a nation marked by persistent inequalities, where the promises of independence are undermined by continuing structures of exclusion. Through the perspectives of Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the novel demonstrates that colonialism's legacy extends beyond political rule and survives through systems of caste, religion, gender, and state power. Rather than celebrating the postcolonial nation as a unified entity, Roy foregrounds the experiences of those who exist at its margins, revealing how identity is continually negotiated within unequal social and political structures.

Anjum's character exemplifies the complexity of postcolonial identity. As a transgender Muslim, she occupies multiple marginalized positions that challenge socially constructed binaries of gender, religion, and citizenship. Bhabha's concept of the Third Space provides an effective framework for understanding Anjum's identity, which resists fixed categorization and exists in a space of constant negotiation. Neither fully accepted from it, Anjum embodies the fluidity of postcolonial identity. Her experience during the Gujarat riots further intensifies her marginalization, as communal violence intersects with gender discrimination. Although she survives the massacre, the psychological and social consequences of the violence continue to shape her identity. Her renovation to the graveyard and the subsequent establishment of the Jannat Guest House symbolize an act of resistance, transforming a space associated with death into a community of acceptance for those rejected by society. Roy thus reimagines the margins as sites of belonging and resilience rather than spaces of exclusion.

The politics of caste is critically explored through the character of Dayachand, later known as Saddam Hussain. The public lynching of his father exposes the persistence of caste-based oppression in postcolonial India, demonstrating that

independence has failed to dismantle deeply rooted social hierarchies. His decision to adopt the name “Saddam Hussian” is not merely an act of personal reinvention but a symbolic rejection of the identity imposed upon him by caste. Drawing on Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, Roy portrays identity as dynamic and continuously reconstructed through historical experience rather than determined by birth or social classification. The novel further extends the politics of marginalization through its representation of Kashmir. Musa’s personal losses and experiences under military occupation illustrate the inseparability of individual suffering and political conflict. Through Spivak’s concept of the subaltern, the Kashmiri people emerge as voices systematically excluded from dominant nationalist discourse. Roy challenges official narratives by foregrounding the everyday realities of surveillance, displacement, mourning, and resistance, thereby exposing the human consequences of state violence. The novel transforms personal testimony into a counter-history that questions the legitimacy of institutional power and nationalist ideology.

Roy’s fragmented narrative structure reinforces this postcolonial vision by rejecting a single, authoritative version of history. The interwoven stories of Anjum, Saddam, Musa, and Tilo reveal that the nation is experienced differently by those positioned at its margins. Their lives expose the contradictions of a postcolonial society that proclaims equality while perpetuating exclusion. Ultimately, *The Ministry of Happiness* redefines postcolonial identity as fluid, fragmented, and continually reconstructed through resistance. By placing marginalized voices at the centre of the narrative, Roy challenges dominant representations of nationhood and demonstrates that the true history of postcolonial India resides in the lived experiences of those whom official histories have long ignored.

Conclusion

This study has explored the interconnected relationship between memory, trauma, and postcolonial identity in Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through the critical frameworks of Trauma Theory, Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Theory. The analysis demonstrates that Roy’s novel transcends the conventional boundaries of historical fiction by presenting memory as a dynamic force that preserves marginalized histories, trauma as a continuing psychological and socio-political reality, an identity as fluid construct shaped by violence, displacement, and resistance.

The study reveals that trauma in the novel is not confined to individual suffering but extends to the collective experiences of communities affected by communal violence, militarization, caste oppression, and gender-based exclusion. Through the fragmented lives of Anjum, Musa, Saddam Hussain, and Tilo, Roy illustrates how traumatic experiences continue to influence personal consciousness and collective historical memorial erasure by preserving voices and experiences omitted from official narratives. The novel thereby transforms remembrance into an act of cultural and political resistance, enabling marginalized individuals to negotiate and reconstruct their identities.

Furthermore, the postcolonial reading of the novel demonstrates that the legacy of colonialism persists through internal structures of domination that regulate

belonging and citizenship in contemporary India. By foregrounding the experiences of socially excluded communities, Roy challenges homogenized notions of nationhood and exposes the limitations of postcolonial democracy. Her narrative relocates history from institutional archives to the lived experiences of the marginalized, thereby redefining literature as a space for historical recovery and social critique.

In conclusion, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* affirms the transformative potential of literature in recovering suppressed histories and interrogating dominant ideologies. The novel demonstrates that memory, trauma, and identity are inseparable elements in understanding postcolonial existence. By integrating Trauma Theory, Memory Studies, and Postcolonial Theory, this study contributes to contemporary postcolonial scholarship by offering a comprehensive interpretation by Roy's narrative as a literary intervention that reclaims silenced voices, reconstructs fragmented identities, and reimagines history from the perspective of the marginalized.

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DABEER SI/KTT/33**CHASING THE PAST, SEEKING REDEMPTION: A POSTCOLONIAL
STUDY OF MEMORY AND TRAUMA IN *THE KITE RUNNER*****V. SRIMATHI**Research Scholar (Part-Time), PG & Research Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai, India**N. SHANTI**Research Guide
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Long after a crisis ends, memory remains behind to shape how individuals navigate identity and belonging. In postcolonial narratives, personal memory often intersects with collective histories of conflict, displacement, and social transformation. Through the emotional journey of Amir in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, this paper explores how childhood trauma, guilt, and exile create a lifelong confrontation with the past. The narrative presents memory as both a burden and a means of self-reflection, revealing how unresolved experiences continue to influence emotional and moral development. By connecting Amir's personal suffering with larger historical realities, the novel highlights the complex relationship between individual identity and collective memory. Rather than functioning as mere recollection, memory emerges as an active emotional force that shapes present choices and influences the formation of the self. Amir's movement from protective silence toward recognition and responsibility reveals the lasting effects of unresolved trauma while reflecting the broader historical realities of Afghanistan marked by war, migration, and fractured belonging. Drawing on postcolonial and trauma perspectives, the paper argues that redemption in the novel is not presented as a complete erasure of suffering but as a gradual process of confronting and reconciling with painful memories. Returning both emotionally and physically becomes central to Amir's reconstruction of self and recovery of agency. Ultimately, the study suggests that healing emerges not through escaping the past but through acknowledging its presence and creating meaning from lived experiences.

Keywords: Memory, Trauma, Redemption, Postcolonial Literature, Identity, Belonging

Introduction

Memory is one of the fundamental forces through which human beings understand identity, preserve experience, and make meaning of the past. Without memory, the continuity between past and present begins to disappear. Paul Ricoeur observes that memory is not merely the recollection of past events but a process through which individuals construct identity and interpret lived experience (Ricoeur 21). John Locke argues that personal identity is closely connected with memory, suggesting that an individual's sense of self is shaped by remembered experiences

(Locke 335). It is this enduring power of memory that makes it one of the most compelling subjects in literature.

Literature has long explored the emotional power of memory, particularly in stories where loss, guilt, and suffering become difficult to leave behind. Many literary characters carry memories that refuse to fade, forcing them to confront emotions they would rather forget. Such memories often become closely connected with trauma, revealing that healing does not come simply with the passage of time. Instead, recovery begins when individuals find the courage to face the experiences that continue to define them.

This idea becomes even more meaningful in postcolonial literature, where personal lives are deeply influenced by histories of war, migration, and displacement. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define postcolonial literature as writing that responds to the cultural, political, and psychological consequences of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2). In such narratives, memory is not limited to individual experience; it also preserves the story of a nation, a community, and a culture shaped by conflict. Remembering therefore becomes an important way of understanding both personal identity and collective history.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is one of the most powerful contemporary novels to explore these concerns. Set against the changing political landscape of Afghanistan, the novel follows Amir, whose life is shaped by a single act of betrayal that continues to haunt him into adulthood. As he moves from Kabul to America and eventually returns to his homeland, his journey reveals that physical distance cannot erase emotional memory. Instead, the past continues to influence his identity, relationships, and search for redemption. "I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years" (Hosseini 1)

This paper argues that memory is the central force that connects the novel's major concerns of trauma, identity, exile, and redemption. By reading *The Kite Runner* through postcolonial and trauma perspectives, the study demonstrates that healing is not achieved by forgetting painful experiences but by confronting them with honesty, responsibility, and compassion. Ultimately, the novel suggests that the past cannot be changed, but the meaning we give to it can transform both our understanding of ourselves and our future.

Literature Review

Since its publication in 2003, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with researchers examining the novel through perspectives such as postcolonialism, trauma, identity, displacement, guilt, and redemption. These studies have explored both the socio-political realities of Afghanistan and the psychological complexities of its central characters.

Saraswat examines the themes of identity and redemption in *The Kite Runner*, arguing that Amir's transformation is shaped by guilt, moral conflict, and the search for forgiveness. While the study offers valuable insights into identity and moral renewal, it pays comparatively less attention to memory as the force connecting trauma, exile, and redemption (Saraswat).

Chen analyses Amir's psychological development through Erikson's psychosocial theory, explaining how guilt and redemption contribute to his emotional growth.

Although the study effectively examines Amir's psychological transformation, it gives limited attention to memory as the narrative force linking trauma, identity, and redemption (Chen).

Andermahr argues that trauma studies should move beyond Eurocentric perspectives by recognising the historical and cultural experiences of postcolonial societies. Her study broadens the scope of trauma studies by emphasizing the importance of historical, cultural, and political contexts in understanding postcolonial experiences. This perspective provides a useful theoretical foundation for examining the relationship between trauma, memory, and postcolonial experience in *The Kite Runner* (Andermahr).

Although these studies have significantly contributed to the understanding of *The Kite Runner*, they primarily examine trauma, identity, redemption, and postcolonial experience as separate or overlapping concerns. Comparatively less attention has been given to memory as the central narrative force that connects these themes and drives Amir's psychological and moral transformation.

Addressing this gap, the present study argues that memory is not merely a background element within the novel but the narrative and emotional thread that unites Amir's psychological development with the broader postcolonial experience. By examining memory as an evolving force that moves from burden to exile and ultimately to redemption, the present study offers a more integrated understanding of Hosseini's representation of identity, moral responsibility, and healing within a postcolonial context.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach based on close textual reading. Rather than treating *The Kite Runner* as a historical or autobiographical document, the analysis focuses on the novel as a literary text, paying close attention to its narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and recurring motifs. Selected episodes, dialogues, and symbolic images are examined to understand how the narrative constructs the relationship between memory, trauma, and redemption. The interpretation is informed by postcolonial and trauma perspectives wherever they illuminate the text, while the primary emphasis remains on literary analysis. This approach enables the study to explore how Hosseini employs memory as a narrative and emotional device that shapes the protagonist's moral and psychological development.

Analysis and Discussion

The following discussion focuses on the major stages of Amir's journey in *The Kite Runner* to examine how memory influences his understanding of guilt, identity, and redemption. Through close textual analysis, the section explores the ways in which childhood experiences continue to shape his emotional life even after years of exile. By tracing Amir's movement from silence and regret to acceptance and responsibility, the discussion demonstrates that memory remains the central force driving both his personal transformation and the novel's broader exploration of healing.

Burdened Memories: Guilt and the Weight of the Past

Before memory becomes a source of redemption, it first exists as a burden. The opening chapters of *The Kite Runner* present childhood not merely as a period of

innocence but as the emotional foundation upon which Amir's lifelong guilt is constructed. Growing up together in Kabul, Amir and Hassan share a companionship shaped by affection, storytelling, kite flying, and everyday experiences. Yet beneath this apparent harmony lies an unequal social structure defined by ethnicity, class, and privilege. "Hassan and I parted ways. I went past the rose bushes to Baba's mansion, Hassan to the mud shack where he had been born, where he'd lived his entire life." (Hosseini 5)

Amir's position as a Pashtun and Hassan's identity as a Hazara servant quietly establish boundaries that influence their relationship long before the central conflict unfolds. By presenting childhood within this social framework, Hosseini suggests that memory is never detached from history; even the happiest recollections carry the invisible weight of larger political and cultural realities.

The unequal relationship between Amir and Hassan also reflects broader structures of power embedded within Afghan society. Edward Said observes that systems of domination often shape social relationships through unequal forms of representation and privilege (2–3). Hosseini subtly reflects these hierarchies through the ethnic division between the Pashtun Amir and the Hazara Hassan, revealing that their friendship is influenced not only by personal affection but also by inherited social inequalities.

The winter kite tournament marks a decisive turning point in both Amir's life and the novel's narrative structure. Although the tournament initially symbolizes hope, recognition, and Amir's longing for his father's approval, it gradually transforms into the beginning of his psychological suffering. "Hollering and clapping. And that right there was the single greatest moment of my twelve years of life, seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last." (Hosseini 58)

Winning the competition brings Amir the acceptance he has always desired, yet that triumph is immediately overshadowed by Hassan's assault in the alley. Hosseini deliberately places these contrasting experiences side by side, illustrating how moments of success can become permanently intertwined with moments of unbearable guilt. From this point onward, the victory itself loses its meaning because every recollection of the tournament inevitably leads Amir back to the betrayal that followed.

More significant than the violent incident itself is Amir's silence in the face of injustice. Rather than intervening, he chooses to remain a passive observer, a decision that becomes the source of his deepest psychological conflict. His silence reflects not only fear but also an internal struggle between moral responsibility and the desperate desire to secure his father's affection. "Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba." (Hosseini 68) Hosseini portrays guilt as something that originates not only from harmful actions but also from the failure to act when conscience demands it. In this sense, trauma in the novel emerges through memory rather than through violence alone, for it is Amir's repeated recollection of his silence that continually renews his suffering.

His memories become fragmented by shame and self-reproach, demonstrating that trauma persists through repeated remembrance rather than isolated experience. The past gradually transforms into an enduring moral presence that accompanies

Amir into adulthood, revealing memory as a psychological force that refuses erasure and continually demands confrontation.

As Cathy Caruth argues, traumatic experiences are often understood belatedly, returning through recurring memories rather than remaining confined to the original moment of suffering (4–5). Amir's repeated recollections of Hassan's assault demonstrate this delayed nature of trauma, revealing how memory continually reopens emotional wounds long after the event itself has passed.

The symbolic spaces of the novel further deepen this emotional burden. Places that once represented friendship and belonging gradually become reminders of betrayal and fractured innocence. The pomegranate tree, beneath which Amir and Hassan once read stories together and celebrated their companionship, later becomes a silent witness to the disintegration of their relationship. Similarly, the alley ceases to exist merely as a physical location and instead functions as a lasting symbol of moral failure and unresolved guilt. Through these recurring images, Hosseini demonstrates how memory becomes embedded within places and objects, transforming ordinary spaces into enduring reminders of emotional pain. Unable to reconcile himself with these memories, Amir attempts to distance himself from Hassan by falsely accusing him of theft. Rather than relieving his guilt, this act intensifies his psychological burden, revealing the impossibility of escaping unresolved trauma through avoidance. Hassan's quiet acceptance of the accusation and his decision to leave the household deepen Amir's sense of responsibility, making the separation itself another painful memory that continues to haunt him. Hosseini thereby illustrates that suppressing the past does not erase it; instead, every attempt to escape memory only reinforces its emotional power. The novel ultimately portrays memory as an enduring burden that shapes Amir's identity long before his physical journey begins. Amir's betrayal becomes the emotional centre of his life, shaping his identity long before his physical journey begins. Although he leaves Afghanistan behind, he cannot leave behind the memories that define him. This unresolved burden naturally prepares the narrative for exile.

Remembering from Exile: Memory, Displacement and the Fragmented Self

Amir's migration to the United States marks a geographical transition, but it does not signify an escape from the past. While Afghanistan disappears from his physical surroundings, it continues to exist through memory, shaping his emotions, relationships, and understanding of himself. Hosseini presents exile not simply as the movement from one country to another but as a psychological condition in which the homeland survives through remembrance. The distance between Kabul and America therefore becomes a physical reality rather than an emotional one. Although Amir attempts to build a new life, the memories of his childhood remain inseparable from his present, demonstrating that displacement alters one's location without erasing one's past.

The immigrant experience portrayed in the novel reflects the emotional complexities of postcolonial displacement. Having left behind a homeland transformed by political violence and war, Amir and Baba struggle to negotiate unfamiliar cultural and social realities in the United States. Baba, once a respected figure in Kabul, is forced to rebuild his life through modest work and quiet

resilience, illustrating the loss of social identity that often accompanies migration. Amir, in contrast, gradually adapts to his new environment, yet his apparent adjustment conceals an unresolved emotional conflict. "For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his" (Hosseini 112).

Homi K. Bhabha suggests that cultural identity is constantly negotiated through experiences of displacement and transition rather than existing as a fixed condition (1-2). Amir's life in America reflects this sense of in-betweenness, where memories of Afghanistan continue to shape his identity despite his physical relocation, illustrating the fragmented self often associated with postcolonial migration.

Memory also shapes Amir's relationship with his father during their years in exile. Although physical distance changes their circumstances, it cannot erase the emotional tensions that defined their earlier relationship. Amir's long-standing desire for Baba's approval remains intertwined with his guilt over betraying Hassan, making it impossible for him to experience their relationship without recalling the events of his childhood. Even after Baba's death, these memories continue to influence Amir's understanding of himself, demonstrating that loss extends beyond the absence of loved ones to include the lingering weight of unresolved emotions. Hosseini suggests that exile often intensifies remembrance, as separation from one's homeland encourages individuals to revisit the people, places, and relationships that shaped their identities.

Writing occupies a significant place in Amir's journey because it provides a means of engaging with memories that have long remained suppressed. As he establishes himself as a writer, storytelling becomes more than a profession; it becomes a way of confronting the emotional fragments of his past. Literature offers Amir a space to organise experiences that previously existed as silence, guilt, and regret. Although writing cannot erase trauma, it enables him to acknowledge memories that he had repeatedly attempted to avoid. In this sense, storytelling functions as an important step towards self-understanding, preparing him for the more direct confrontation that follows later in the novel.

The turning point of this emotional journey arrives with Rahim Khan's unexpected phone call. "I knew it wasn't just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my past of unatoned sins." (Hosseini 1) The call functions not merely as an invitation to return to Afghanistan but as a summons to confront the moral responsibilities he has carried since childhood. At this moment, memory ceases to be a silent companion and becomes an active force demanding action. Exile, which once appeared to offer distance and protection, is revealed as only a temporary refuge from a past that continues to shape the present.

Through Amir's experiences in America, *The Kite Runner* demonstrates that displacement does not diminish memory but often intensifies its emotional significance. The homeland continues to exist through remembrance, while guilt accompanies the individual across geographical boundaries. This prepares the narrative for Amir's return to Afghanistan, where memory finally transforms from silent suffering into the possibility of redemption.

Seeking Redemption: Returning to Rewrite the Self

Redemption in *The Kite Runner* does not begin with Amir's return to Afghanistan; it begins with his willingness to confront the memories he has spent years attempting to suppress. Throughout the novel, memory functions as a persistent moral presence, refusing to allow Amir the comfort of forgetting. His return is therefore neither an act of nostalgia nor a simple homecoming. Rather, it represents an ethical journey toward accepting responsibility for a past that continues to shape his identity.

Rahim Khan's words, "There is a way to be good again, a way to end the cycle" (Hosseini 198), serve as the emotional turning point of the novel. More than an invitation to visit Afghanistan, the message awakens memories that Amir has carefully buried beneath the routines of his life in America. The call reminds him that redemption is not offered as forgiveness without consequence but as an opportunity to confront the moral failures that have defined his adulthood. At this moment, memory transforms from an emotional burden into a moral obligation, compelling Amir to revisit both the physical landscape of Afghanistan and the psychological landscape of his childhood.

Amir's return to Kabul reveals a homeland profoundly altered by war, political violence, and Taliban rule. The familiar city survives only in fragments, forcing him to confront the contrast between remembered Afghanistan and its present reality. This encounter reflects one of the central concerns of postcolonial literature: the fragmentation of both place and identity following conflict and displacement. Just as Afghanistan bears the visible scars of history, Amir carries invisible emotional wounds that have remained unresolved for years. Hosseini thereby creates a powerful parallel between the devastated landscape of the nation and the fractured inner world of the protagonist, suggesting that personal healing and historical memory are deeply interconnected.

The rescue of Sohrab represents the most significant stage in Amir's moral transformation. By choosing to protect Hassan's son, Amir finally performs the act of courage he once failed to offer Hassan. His confrontation with Assef becomes more than a physical struggle; it symbolizes a confrontation with his own guilt, fear, and silence. The injuries Amir suffers during the encounter are particularly meaningful because, unlike the emotional pain he has carried in silence for years, these wounds emerge from an act of responsibility rather than avoidance. "My body was broken—just how badly I wouldn't find out until later—but I felt healed. Healed at last" (Hosseini 253).

Equally significant is the novel's treatment of forgiveness. Hosseini avoids presenting redemption as a complete resolution of trauma or the disappearance of painful memories. Instead, the narrative suggests that healing is gradual, incomplete, and deeply personal. Amir cannot undo Hassan's suffering, nor can he erase the consequences of his betrayal. What changes is his relationship with memory itself. Rather than fleeing from the past, he begins to acknowledge it as an essential part of his identity.

Judith Herman argues that recovery begins when traumatic experiences are acknowledged rather than denied (155–56). Amir's willingness to confront his past

instead of escaping it reflects this gradual process of healing, suggesting that redemption is achieved through responsibility rather than forgetting.

The novel's closing scenes reinforce this transformation through the symbolic image of kite flying. When Amir runs the kite for Sohrab and quietly repeats Hassan's words, "For you, a thousand times over" (Hosseini 323), the phrase acquires an entirely new significance. Once spoken by Hassan as an expression of unwavering loyalty, it now reflects Amir's own commitment to love, sacrifice, and care. The repetition of these words demonstrates that memory has completed its transformation. What once represented guilt and loss now becomes an expression of hope and renewal. Hosseini does not suggest that the past has disappeared; instead, he shows that its meaning can be reshaped through acts of empathy and responsibility.

Ultimately, *The Kite Runner* presents redemption not as forgetting but as remembering differently. Amir's journey illustrates that confronting painful memories is essential for reclaiming both identity and moral agency. The past cannot be rewritten, yet it can be reinterpreted through present actions that acknowledge responsibility and seek reconciliation.

Conclusion

The Kite Runner ultimately suggests that memory is neither a burden to be escaped nor a wound to be forgotten. The novel shows that painful memories do not disappear with time or distance; instead, they remain a part of one's emotional journey until they are confronted with honesty and responsibility. By connecting personal guilt with the larger realities of war and displacement, Hosseini presents memory as a powerful force that links individual experience with collective history.

Amir's journey from silence to acceptance demonstrates that redemption is not achieved by forgetting the past but by learning from it. His willingness to return, accept responsibility, and rebuild broken relationships reflects the possibility of personal transformation even after profound loss and suffering. In this sense, redemption becomes an ongoing process of self-reflection rather than a final destination.

Ultimately, *The Kite Runner* reminds readers that while memories may carry pain, they also carry the possibility of healing. By embracing rather than escaping the past, individuals can rediscover hope, rebuild their identities, and move towards a more compassionate understanding of themselves and others.

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DABEER SI/KTT/34**REVISITING MEMORY AND NATIONALISM IN KHALED
HOSSEINI'S THE KITE RUNNER****MAHAVISH SIDDIQUE**Research Scholar, School of Arts Humanities and Social Science
Sanjeev Agarwal Global Education (SAGE) University, Bhopal, India**VEENA GOUR**Associate Professor, School of Arts Humanities & Social Sciences
Sanjeev Agarwal Global Education (SAGE) University, Bhopal, India**Abstract**

One cannot sever oneself from the memory of cultural history. The harder one tries to escape the past, the more relentlessly it confronts them. One of the distinguished contemporary writers, Khaled Hosseini, an American novelist of Afghan origin returns to the memories of pain and guilt in *The Kite Runner*, the narrative that is grounded in the cultural landscape of Afghanistan and his resettlement in America with his father. An emblem of unconditional loyalty and devotion, Hassan the Hazara to his employer Amir demonstrates how an innocent past time of kite flying -profoundly emblematic determines the course of the novel's tragic events. In his best selling novels, Hosseini depicts the devastating impact of the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, exposing the nation's political turmoil and the inherited legacy of conflict cultures. Hosseini foregrounds the erosion of his cultural heritage. When Amir remembers leaving Afghanistan, he does not describe it as an adventure; instead, his memory is fragmented and traumatic. Amir's guilt for his wrongdoing with Hassan becomes permanent and irreversible although Amir achieves what he wanted: the removal of Hassan from his house. Hassan's false confession and Ali's decision to leave transform the space of loss, reinforcing the architecture of memory built from Amir's shame. In spite of achieving socially constructed success in American society, Amir remains emotionally unsettled, resolving inner conflict from his past.

Keywords: Culture, Memory, Nation, Loyalty.

Khaled Hosseini shows that childhood is not recalled as purely joyful, but as a mix of affection, hierarchy, and regret. Hosseini, being a peripheral writer, used the theme of guilt and redemption featured in the novel. *The Kite Runner* opens with, "I became what I am today at the age of twelve. Amir, the protagonist of *The Kite Runner*, he never feels at peace even after receiving a successful career in American society. The setting of Afghanistan is particularly crucial to the arc of the novel, because the violence and betrayal inflicted upon the country are a reflection of the events. Amir's home-country Afghanistan is represented, idyllic at the beginning of the novel, which is later ruined by years of fighting and Taliban rule.

When we go through this novel, we find that Amir remembers when he was in Afghanistan. He and Hassan used to climb the poplar trees in the driveway of his father's house and annoy their neighbors by reflecting sunlight into their homes with a shard of mirror. They would sit across from each other on a pair of high

branches, their naked feet dangling, their trouser pockets filled with dried mulberries and walnut. They took turns with the mirror as they ate mulberries, patted each other with them giggling, laughing. Amir resembles Hassan's face with a Chinese doll. Hassan lost his mother less than a week after he was born. She ran off with a clan of travelling singers and dancers and it is considered worse than death for Afghans. Hassan and Amir were fed by the same nurse as Sanubhar. Hassan's mother left him when he was five days old and Amir's mother died.

Amir describes when in 1933 the year baba was born and Ali's parents met with an accident on the road to Paghman. Amir's grandfather adopted Ali into his own household and told the other servants to tutor him, but to be kind to him. Amir tells that Baba and Ali grew up together as childhood playmates, but Baba never referred Ali as his friend and Amir does the same he calls Hassan The Hazara and Shia. In Afghanistan Sunni associate themselves with Pashtun ethnic groups whereas, Shia with Hazara ethnic groups. Khaled Hosseini presented Afghanistan in *The Kite Runner* as a nation divided by ethnic and religious differences. Although Pashtuns and Hazaras share the same homeland, yet they do not experience the nation identically. Pashtuns occupy more rights in Afghan society, while Hazaras face inequality and prejudice. Through the relationship between Amir and Hassan, Hosseini shows how these divisions affect individual relationships and people's sense of belonging. Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community" is useful in understanding this conflict because a nation is created through a shared sense of belonging among its people (Anderson). Through this novel Khaled Hosseini shows that religious discrimination has become a defining part of life in Afghanistan replacing what was once a peaceful way of living.

A painful incident occurred in the novel when one of the soldier mocks Hassan by calling him 'the Hazara' and hurling an insult involving his mother. The remark deeply wound Hassan leaving him extremely upset and in tears afterward. Furthermore, Assef who was born to a German mother and Afghan father, The blond blue-eyed Assef. Assef was a son of Baba's friend, Mohamood an airline pilot. Assef said that Afghanistan is a land of Pashtuns it always has been, always will be shows ethnic hatred. One day when Assef tries to hurt Amir, Hassan save him by heading a slingshot pointed directly in Assef's eye. In addition to that, the night in July 1973 changed everything in Afghanistan a siren echoed in a distance glass shattered. Amir could hear people in the street being suddenly woken from their sleep. This left everyone shaken because none of them had ever heard gunshots in the streets were completely unfamiliar and deeply frightening but the true end came later first in April 1978 with the communist coup and then in December 1979, when Russian tanks rolled into the very same streets where Hassan and Amir once played spend their playful evenings. That was the moment Afghanistan as he knew it, was lost and a long violent era began. But even before that, there had been warning signs. What people first dismissed as something small turned out to be far more serious. On that night in 1973, Kabul woke up to find that the monarchy was gone. King Zahir was in Italy, and in his absence his cousin Daoud Khan had taken power, ending the king's four decades reign in bloodless coup.

Furthermore, Amir describes that every winter brought a kite fighting tournament that stood out as the most exciting event of the season for boys in Kabul. The night before they could hardly sleep, he tossed and turned and amused himself by making shadow of animals on the wall of his room, even in excitement sat outside in a balcony wrapped in a blanket. In Kabul kite fighting carried the same strength and spirit as going to war. Amir took part in the tournament on the day of the tournament the streets shimmered with fresh snow under a perfect clear flawless blue sky. Snow covered the rooftops and weighed down the branches of the tall mulberry trees lining the streets. Hassan's face lit up as they raised their kite a bright red with a yellow border.

Moreover, dozens of kites were already floating overhead, drifting like paper sharks searching for prey. Soon, even more filled the sky, with cream, yellow blue and green kites moving together in a lively swarm. Amir became nervous. Baba was standing on the roof and winning the game will give Baba's approval. Hassan said "For you a thousand times over". Amir began held onto his kite from morning till dusk his kite as people from his neighborhood gathered around to congratulate him for winning. He shook hands, thanked them while the younger kids looked at him with wide admiring eyes, as if he were a hero. People patted his back and playfully ruffled his hair. Finally with it in his hands, he wound the string around the spool and then made his way home. But, this happiness does not last as long as the horrific assault by Assef on Hassan took place in an alleyway. Assef assaulted him both physically and sexually being an eye witness Amir got a chance to stand up for Hassan but he ran he was afraid of Assef, he was afraid of getting hurt he remained quiet the victory of kite success becomes inseparable from shame. Amir made sure his path crossed as little as possible with Hassan. Amir took a couple of envelopes of cash from the pile of gifts and his watch from his birthday presents. He went downstairs crossed the yard and entered Hassan's living quarters. He lifted Hassan's mattress and planted his new watch and couple of envelopes under it. Amir accused Hassan of stealing. Baba asked Hassan and he made a false confession. Ali decided to leave the house with Hassan. "When you lie, you steal a man's right to the Truth". In March 1981 Baba decided to leave Kabul being no longer safe for Baba Jan. and Amir. Baba Jan fled their home in Kabul to escape to Pakistan and then to America as Kabul was occupied by Russian troops. We see Baba and Amir first travel to Jalalabad and finally into Pakistan and then to America with the help of Karim Khan. This was the hardest journey for Amir and Baba. Political Trauma transformed Amir and Baba into a refugee. Furthermore, Baba who was once a wealthy and distinguished businessman of Kabul also affected by the trauma. Due to political invasion he left his home-country and fled to America suffered financial loss and worked in gas station in America.

Amir reached America and became a successful novelist, but even after spending years in America the memories with Hassan remain unforgettable and illustrates how personal memory can remain connected to broader cultural and historical structures. Cultural memory is not merely the preservation of individual experience; it can also participate in the construction of collective identity (Assmann). Amir recalls how Baba missed the sugarcane field of Jalalabad and

the gardens of Paghman in America, but for Amir “America was a place to bury his memories and for Baba to mourn his”. He often remembered Hassan and the childhood days they spent together in Kabul. However, he was guilty but never committed his mistake for not protecting Hasan on the day of kite flying when the horrific incident took place. Fifteen years after his wedding he receives a call from Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan who is dying asks Amir to visit him in Peshawar and this call acted as a doorbell for Amir he said “There is a way to be good again”. When I was a kid, he was the first grown up he ever thought of as a friend”. Upon reaching Peshawar after decades he went to Rahim Khan’s house he told him the unfurled secret of Amir’s life about Hassan that he was actually a son of Sanubar and Baba making him his half brother. Amir learns that Hassan was killed by Taliban and Ali also died knowing the truth Amir shattered.

Amir went to Kabul. The Kabul Amir once lived was no longer the same. The city is completely transformed under Taliban rule. The familiar city has become violent and broken. Kabul is devastated by war and Taliban rule. He came to know the painful truth about the of natives that couldn’t flee. He realizes how much pain the people of Afghanistan have endured under the Taliban. The harsh reality shattered him emotionally the peace, freedom and happiness no longer exists in Afghanistan. The change of rule in Afghanistan and hatred for the Hazara become intense when Taliban rule started. Amir was killed by Taliban and his son Sohrab paid the cost of being the Hazara shows devastating reality of prejudice. They said “This is war and there is no shame in war”.

When we go through the novel we see Amir meeting Taliban official to make Sohrab Hassan’s son free from Taliban official. Sohrab was living with them as a dancing boy. He offered him money against releasing Sohrab Hassan’s son but during the conversation Amir stunned and realizes that the Taliban official is actually Assef. The same Assef who assaulted Hassan from the way Assef treating Sohrab and what he said to Amir has no doubt at that point that has been sexually abusing Sohrab. Amir and Sohrab fought with Assef and flee from there. Amir adopted Sohrab and manages to take him to America with the help of his wife Soraya.

Upon reaching America when Soraya’s father General Sahib calls Sohrab the Hazara Amir told him the truth of his life and Baba that Sanubhar bore a son named Hassan he is his half brother, and Sohrab is his nephew. Feeling of loss and cultural impact can be seen clearly through the characters Khaled Hosseini used in one of his successful novels the Kite Runner. Afghanistan which was once known as a place of vibrant culture, tradition and happiness transformed into a completely different nation.

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DABEER SI/KTT/35**REMEMBERING THE UNREMEMBERED: MNEMONIC
DISPLACEMENT AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN
BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE NEW TRIBE*****SUSHMA. H**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Trichy, India**A. SHEEBA PRINCESS**Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Trichy, India**Abstract**

This paper explores Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* through the interdisciplinary lens of memory studies and postcolonial theory to present how the novel reconceptualises identity as a product of cultural memory rather than biological ancestry. Existing scholarship on the novel has focused mainly on race, transracial adoption, diasporic experiences and hybridity, leaving scope for analysing the role of memory in shaping postcolonial subjectivity. The study introduces the concept of mnemonic displacement to explain the condition in which the colonial past and transracial adoption cease an individual's access to ancestral memory. Further, the separation constructs an identity assembled from fragments, absences and imagined histories that disrupt diasporic subjectivity. Theoretical concepts of postmemory, cultural memory, and the notion of the third space help to posit the argument that Chester's quest for his biological origins is fundamentally a search for a recoverable past to experience belonging. Instead of portraying identity as something inherited, Emecheta presents it as an ongoing reconstruction negotiated through memory, history and culture. Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that geographical relocation is not the most enduring consequence of any displacement, but it is the interruption of cultural memory that destabilises the diasporic subjects, compelling them to rebuild their "self" from absent histories. This paper offers a fresh perspective on Emecheta's work and contributes to a nuanced understanding of identity, diaspora and belonging in postcolonial literature by integrating both memory studies and postcolonial criticism.

Keywords: Mnemonic Displacement, Remembrance, Identity, Cultural Memory, Diasporic Experiences

Introduction

Migration and diaspora are the two fundamental concepts that have long occupied the central locus in postcolonial literature for their potential to expose the persistent repercussions of colonial impact on identity, belonging and cultural sustainability. While earlier postcolonial criticism frequently viewed diasporic identity through the lens of displacement, hybridity and racial consciousness, recent trends demand focus on the role of memory in the reconstruction of identity. As memory studies suggest, identity is constructed not only through geographical

or familial origins but also through cultural remembrance. Moreover, it is significant to mark the role of memory in identity formation, as it functions as a bridge between the individual and the community. It preserves histories, traditions and collective experiences across generations to offer stability and solidarity through relatability.

Diasporic writer Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe* offers a conducive exploration of this condition. The novel centres on the trajectory of a transracially adopted Black child, Chester. He is raised by a white English family, who provide him affection, education and financial security for a better life. Despite this care and support, he experiences an increasing sense of estrangement which cannot be explained through racial difference alone. Rather, his crisis stems from his inaccessibility to his ancestral history and cultural memory, as it precipitates his emotional detachment and social exclusion. Chester longs to meet his biological family and his countrymen, as he is the only Black child in St. Simon, which makes him visibly isolated through the racial marker until he meets a tourist Nigerian family. Thus, his search for his biological parents results from the quest for the history that was never transmitted to him to feel relatable and identifiable. Although the novel has long been studied in relation to race, diaspora, identity politics and transracial adoption, comparatively little attention has been given to the relationship between memory and identity formation by its critics. Existing studies often overlook memory as a central mechanism to establish belonging and mostly treat it as a byproduct of migration. This paper argues that Emecheta's novel highlights memory as the foundation of identity and illustrates how colonial histories disrupt the transmission of cultural memory across generations.

To address this gap, the study employs an interdisciplinary framework integrating memory studies and postcolonial theory. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory demonstrates how individuals inherit history without actually experiencing it themselves. Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory brings out the significant role of shared traditions and narratives in sustaining communal identity to strengthen the sense of belonging. These concepts are studied alongside Stuart Hall's understanding of identity as a continuous process of becoming and Homi Bhabha's notion of third space, where identities are negotiated across boundaries.

Building on these theoretical concepts, this paper introduces the idea of mnemonic displacement, referring to the loss or interruption of cultural memory caused by a colonial past, displacement or transracial adoption. On the one hand, physical displacement deprives individuals of their homelands, whereas mnemonic displacement causes loss of inherited narratives that offer coherence and belonging. Chester's ordeal exemplifies this condition of how he tries to reconstruct his identity from the scattered fragments instead of inherited memories. This paper investigates how the novel critiques colonialism as not only responsible for dispersed populations across borders but also for severing cultural continuity among generations by disrupting cultural memory. Chester's journey of the self ultimately demonstrates that belonging cannot be achieved through legal citizenship, racial visibility or biological inheritance alone. Instead, it should be carried through collective memory and historical continuity. This perspective

offers a chance to illuminate how Emecheta expands postcolonial discourse by reflecting memory as the underlying terrain for identity to continually negotiate and reconstruct.

Literature Review

Significant research has been conducted on Emecheta's *The New Tribe* through the lens of postcolonial criticism, discussing the themes of transracial adoption, racial discrimination, diasporic experiences, and identity crisis. Perhaps, it is noted that there is a vacuum where the role of memory needs to be addressed primarily in that diasporic condition to understand the nuanced layers of belonging and unbelonging experienced by a diasporic subject. These approaches often privilege the roles of migration and transracial adoption when it comes to Chester's identity crisis, but it is also necessary to study the processes through which identity is remembered, inherited and reconstructed. Additionally, the role of cultural memory in shaping Chester's sense of belonging remains underexplored.

Previous criticism of Emecheta's novel focused on her representation of migration and displacement within a larger context of postcolonial African literature. The research paper titled "Adoptive Parenting and its Challenges in *The New Tribe*" examines the psychological challenges faced by adoptive parents and their adoptees in the novel. This study contributes to the understanding of identity formation as a psychological consequence of adoption, resulting in Chester's identity crisis out of disrupted biological connections. Despite its focus on identity formation, the study is confined within adoptive psychology, the study treating memory as a mere backdrop rather than an effective analytical category. Similarly, the paper titled "Reconstructing the Black Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe*" discusses the problems associated with migration and mainly focuses on the issue of belongingness and crisis related to identity formation, leaving scope for memory studies to be incorporated.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that couples memory studies with postcolonial theory to investigate the relationship between memory, identity, and belonging in the novel. Even though postcolonial criticism has typically emphasised migration, hybridity, and cultural negotiation, memory studies illuminate how historical continuity and inherited cultural narratives fashion the formation of individual and collective identities. Bringing these concepts into dialogue facilitates a more comprehensive understanding that Chester's search for self is not only out of geographical dislocation but also of mnemonic displacement. Hence, it troubles him to find a unified self without interruption of the cultural memory, which distances him from historical continuity for identity formation.

Maurice Halbwachs posits that memory can never be purely individual; mostly it is a product of many social frameworks. In his preface to *On Collective Memory* he records, "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories". Individuals remember themselves through their communities by participating in collective remembrance. Memories become meaningful when they are associated with family, communities, social institutions, and cultural practices and cannot exist in

isolated individual experiences. Derived from this perspective, Chester's sense of unbelongingness stems from his exclusion from the collective memory of his ancestral origin. Although growing up in a loving adoptive family, he experiences a sense of unbelonging, which highlights his inaccessibility to the communal narratives stating cultural identity. His experiences are therefore incomplete because the terrain necessary for his interpretation of memories is absent to relate to the collective framework.

Halbwach's concept is further expanded by Jan Assmann as he distinguishes between communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory consists of everyday recollections shared within present-day populations, whereas cultural memory is preserved and passed down to many generations through rituals, myths, cultural narratives, and language. Assmann argues that "Cultural memory extends the everyday world with a further dimension of negations and potentials, and, through this, it compensates for the deficiencies of normal life" (42). Cultural memory establishes a link between the cultural past and the present-day experiences to provide continuity among societies. Therefore, according to Assman, identity is not biologically inherited but constructed through involvement in shared cultural remembrance. Drawing on his idea of cultural memory and identity, Chester's condition demonstrates the consequence of exclusion from cultural memory. His adoption into a white family disrupts the transmission of his ancestral traditions, language, and historical consciousness, making it impossible for him to connect with the symbolic resources sustaining communal identity. Consequently, the novel suggests that belonging depends upon one's access to cultural memory more than one's geographical identity.

The concept of postmemory, introduced by Marianne Hirsch, aids in illuminating Chester's relationship with the past, which he never personally experienced. Actually, Hirsch developed the term to explain how future generations inherit memories of historical trauma through images, stories, and cultural transmission without direct personal experience. Hirsch records, "The structure of postmemory clarifies how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect intra-, inter-, and transgenerational inheritance" (33). It is important to note that although Chester does not inherit familial memories in conventional ways, he develops a kind of memory that can be described as imagined postmemory because he develops a vision of Nigeria through his adopted mother Ginny's storybook. John McLeod notes that "to the children of migrants, the 'interior knowledge' of a distant place is unavailable. Thus, their reflections about these places in terms of 'home' are often differently constructed" (213). Chester's desire to understand Nigeria and Nigerian ways of living emerges from fragments of racial consciousness, disjointed information, and an emotional awareness of absence rather than a recollection of lived experiences. The homeland becomes an imagined archive for belonging, which derives mostly from symbolic rather than experiential value. Chester's dream and his search for his kingdom, therefore, demonstrate that memory can be constructed through longing as much as through direct inheritance.

These memory studies' concepts intersect productively with postcolonial approaches to identity. Stuart Hall rejects the essentialist notion of identity as a

fixed entity by arguing that identity is an ongoing process of becoming. Identity is continuously reconstructed through history, memory, and representation rather than an unalterable constituent. This aspect of identity is particularly relevant to Chester because his identity continuously evolves as his engagement in the search for the untold histories instead of sticking strictly to biological determinism. His search for identity illustrates that belonging emerges from the continuous negotiation between memory and experience rather than biological lineage alone. Because he feels more comfortable with Uncle Enoch and his family at the very first sight for their similar racial qualities and enjoys the Nigerian style of life for quiet sometime with them.

Similarly, Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space challenges the binary understandings of cultural identity. Bhabha explains that postcolonial subjects inhabit an in-between space where identities are continually negotiated across cultural boundaries. Chester lives in this condition as he occupies such a space because he belongs neither fully to his English upbringing nor to his Nigerian ancestry. However, this study extends Bhabha's argument to suggest that Chester's liminality is deepened by the absence of cultural memory. His third space is not merely geographical or cultural but mnemonic. It is characterised by the absence of inherited narratives having the potential to establish connections among his scattered self into a coherent whole.

The paper, alongside employing these theoretical frameworks, also introduces the concept of mnemonic displacement. Unlike physical displacement, which refers to geographical separation from one's homeland, mnemonic displacement denotes the interruption of cultural memory through colonialism, migration, or adoption. Mnemonic displacement represents a deeper form of postcolonial alienation because it fragments not only physical belonging but also the historical consciousness. Within this framework, Chester's journey is interpreted as a process of mnemonic reconstruction. The novel ultimately demonstrates that identity cannot be restored solely through racial recognition or legal citizenship; rather, it requires the reconstruction of historical continuity through storytelling, cultural practices, and memory.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretative approach grounded in textual analysis to examine the relationship between memory and identity in the novel. This research is interdisciplinary, combining memory studies and postcolonial theory to investigate how cultural memory shapes postcolonial subjectivity. The analysis employs close reading in which selected episodes, narrative descriptions, dialogues, and characterisation are examined to identify recurring motifs of memory, absence, belonging, cultural inheritance, and historical continuity. Particular significance is given to Chester's psychological development as he encounters racial differences, his search for biological origin, and his eventual encounter with Nigerian heritage to examine the representations of interrupted cultural memory. The mnemonic displacement concept functions as the central interpretative tool to analyse the role of cultural memory moving beyond conventional discussions on race and hybridity.

Discussion

The Silence of Origins: Chester and the Absence of Cultural Memory

From the very beginning, Emecheta tries to establish that Chester's struggle is not mere material deprivation but historical absence. Adopted by a loving white couple, he is bestowed with economic stability, emotional security, educational opportunities and social standing, yet an unarticulated sense of incompleteness emerges in his heart. This dissatisfaction cannot be simply reduced to racial discrimination since this feeling of insecurity emerges even within his intimate family space. Even the entire St. Simons' residents accepted him as the son of Rev. Arlington. Therefore, it becomes important to shift the attention from social acceptance to historical belonging. The recurrent motif of Chester's dream of his kingdom is symbolic of the absence of his ancestral history and stands as a consolation for his longing to be relatable.

Maurice Halbwach's concept of collective memory brings out a useful framework for understanding this condition. According to him, individuals mostly remember themselves through collective structures offered by family and community. He states, "it is individuals as group members who remember" (48). Memory becomes relative, that is, fundamentally social rather than private. This is the reason for Chester's sense of incompleteness because although the Arlingtons shower him with love and care, they cannot transfer the collective memories associated with his ancestral upbringing. Being white parents, that too with no contact with Chester's biological family, they possess no knowledge of his genealogy, cultural traditions or family narratives. As a consequence, Chester grows up without the social framework to relate to and to find coherence in existence and identity. For instance, after completing his role as the Orient King, he was curious to know about the Orient, as many complimented him on being the perfect choice. But his mother's reply ignited his racial consciousness and the distance from his ancestral origin that can be witnessed in Emecheta's lines, 'Your people'. He thought the Arlingtons were his people. The sense of unbelonging strengthened" (12). It is also evident that he has no access to his historical narratives to relate with and understand himself.

The absence of this collective memory becomes visible in everyday life as Chester repeatedly realises his racial difference from those who are around him, yet there is no proper historical narrative to explain this difference. Unlike other children raised in St. Simons who have ancestral history to be shared in rituals, language, festivals and other shared remembrance, Chester encounters his racial identity as an unanswered question. "At school they say I can't be your child because I'm black" (13), but he is not clear about the reason behind his racial difference from the rest of his family. The absence of explanation transforms into psychological uncertainty. Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory further explains this condition. He proposes that cultural identity depends upon participation in shared symbolic systems like tradition, myths, ceremonies, language, and historical narratives, which all help individuals to connect with their previous generations. Chester remains excluded from such shared symbolic remembrance, living in an English environment. Despite being a legal English citizen, he feels unbelongingness because he has no knowledge of the cultural practices of his

Nigerian identity to be remembered and reproduced. Thus his displacement becomes mnemonic as he inherited a physical form of identity but not the cultural memory that gives that body historical meaning.

Searching for an Imagined Homeland: Postmemory and the Inheritance of Absence

Chester's journey is often interpreted as a search for his biological parents or ethnic roots, but such a reading could reduce his quest to genealogy alone. Emecheta instead portrays his search as an attempt to establish a relationship with the past that has never been available to him. Chester does not remember Nigeria because he has never lived there, nor does he have listened to family stories capable of connecting him to his ancestral history. Therefore, for him, homeland is never a lived reality but an imagined space, constructed through longing, racial consciousness, and the persistent awareness of absence.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory "describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (5). It is necessary to acknowledge that this term was initially developed in relation to Holocaust memory, and for the current study the concept of postmemory provides a valuable framework for understanding whose historical continuity has been interrupted. Yet, in Chester's case, the postmemory assumes an unusual form because in Hirsch's model descendants receive inherited narratives from parents or grandparents but here, Chester receives almost no cultural transmission. Hence, his relationship with the past is constructed not through remembrance but through silence and postmemory with inheritance of absence.

This absence repeatedly surfaces in Chester's growing awareness that his appearance signifies a history he cannot narrate. His blackness constantly reminds him that he belongs to a cultural tradition that remains inaccessible. His physical body remains the only surviving trace of his interrupted past, while the memories associated with cultural inheritance have been lost. In Chester's case, race not only becomes a visual marker but also an archive emptied of its historical contents, making him carry the visible signs of ancestry without possessing the stories necessary to interpret them. The novel also demonstrates how imagination becomes a substitute for memory when cultural continuity is broken. As Chester seeks to gather information about Nigeria, he constructs mental images of a homeland assembled from scattered fragments rather than a lived reality. His imagined homeland is neither fully factual nor completely fictional and functions as an emotional geography compensating for his absence of inherited cultural memory. This imaginative reconstruction of the homeland proves that memory can be aspirational as well as retrospective. Chester does not remember Nigeria; instead, he remembers the possibility of belonging to Nigeria.

The Third Space of Memory: Hybridity, Belonging, and Mnemonic Reconstruction

Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity is not an immutable essence preserved across time but a continuous process of becoming. Hall defines cultural identity as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as

to the past.” (225). Cultural identity can be produced through history, representation, and memory rather than inherited as a fixed biological trait. The novel establishes this dynamic understanding of memory through Chester’s trajectory where he is legally British and emotionally attached to his adoptive family, yet he gradually develops an awareness that belonging cannot be sanctioned solely through citizenship or domestic affection. He feels incomplete because of the lack of historical continuity, and he couldn’t feel completely Nigerian in Nigeria with his English upbringing.

Hall’s formulation gains momentum alongside Homi Bhabha’s concept of the third space. Bhabha states that postcolonial identities emerge within an in-between cultural space where inherited conventions and present experiences intersect to construct a new form of subjectivity. Bhabha argues that “the in-between space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’” (38). Chester occupies such an in-between space where competing histories of English and Nigerian ways shape his understanding of his own self. He exists in a liminal cultural location where he is neither proper English nor conventional Nigerian because of “the intervention of the Third Space... makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process” (37). Further, Emecheta complicates Bhabha’s theory by illuminating that hybridity in isolation cannot justify Chester’s psychological condition.

When Esther, his black girlfriend, advises him to accept the hybridity that “We don’t belong in Africa, we’re British. Black British may be, but this is our home now” (113). Similarly, John McLeod’s following remark explains the disjoint between the imaginary return and the actual return to the homeland, “The imaginary homeland exists primarily in the mind, and no act of actual, physical return can facilitate it. The *idea* of the home country becomes split from the experience of returning home” (209). Conventional postcolonial reading often praises hybridity as a productive site of negotiation and cultural multiplicity. However, Chester’s experience reveals that hybridity without memory can foster uncertainty rather than offering liberation. His in-betweenness is further aggravated because he holds no inherited narratives to mediate between his English upbringing and Nigerian ancestry. Consequently, the third space becomes more of a site of mnemonic incompleteness than a cultural negotiation.

Recovering the Self through Cultural Memory

The interference of historical continuity forms voids through which individuals find it difficult to interpret themselves. Chester’s experiences in the novel reflect this condition, as he is unable to narrate his own past, triggering a sense of uncertainty about his present identity. The stories about his origins, cultural practices, food, and language remain alien to him, thus resulting in his identity crisis, where his contemporary life remains incomplete in isolation. Therefore, recovering his history becomes an ethical process of reconstructing the self instead of simply discovering his biological roots. The final chapters of the novel suggest that identity is not solely recovered through biological discovery but through gradual reconstruction of cultural memory. Chester’s encounter with his Nigerian heritage does not offer a simple resolution to his problem of identity crisis; instead,

it helps in connecting with his long-separated historical narratives. Emecheta thereby shifts the highlight from genealogy to remembrance to present cultural memory as the foundation for meaningful belonging.

As Assmann suggested, cultural memory helps in preserving communal identity through shared practices and narratives, enabling individuals to recognise themselves as part of a historical community. Since Chester learns about his origins, he acquires more than factual information; he actively participates in those historical narratives and situates his life within a broader cultural context. Emecheta records that “Culturally, he [Chester] had to admit, he was more English than anything. But here in West Africa, he became part of the background” (115). The recovery of cultural memory therefore aids the process of self-recognition. He is able to connect to a collective history and experiences belonging from the knowledge of ancestry. Similarly, Hall’s argument on identity and positioning explains Chester’s condition: “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning” (226).

Conclusion

Chester does not become an authentic Nigerian by discovering his ancestry, and as such he does not completely abandon his English upbringing; instead, he constructs an integrated identity by acknowledging both the histories shaping his life. His selfhood emerges through that negotiation rather than an absolute recovery of the original essence. The novel’s important intervention in postcolonial thought is that colonialism’s most enduring violence lies in the interruption of cultural memory along with territorial conquest. The self is constructed through memory, storytelling and historical recognition rather than racial purity. Emecheta’s *The New Tribe* redefines belonging as a mnemonic achievement. Neither blood nor geography has complete access to sustain identity; it is actually the accessibility of cultural memory that connects individuals to a shared historical community. Through Chester’s experiences, the novel affirms that there is a possibility to remember even when the memory is fragmented by displacement and the remembrance enables the postcolonial subjects to reclaim their histories once obscured by colonial displacement.

The paper’s contribution is the formulation of mnemonic displacement as a critical framework for understanding postcolonial subjectivity through Chester’s experiences. His search for belonging is explained as an effort to reconstruct a historical consciousness fragmented by transracial adoption. Thus, the novel redefines belonging as a mnemonic achievement. Importantly, Emecheta avoids suggesting that the past is completely recoverable and acknowledges the irreversible gaps created by the transracial adoption and geographical displacement in Chester’s life. It is evident that memory cannot eliminate loss but can provide a framework for that loss to find meaning.

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DABEER SI/KTT/36**FROM HOMELAND TO EXILE: WAR, DISPLACEMENT, MEMORY
AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN
KHALED HOSSEINI'S SEA PRAYER****K. P. SWAPNA**

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The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women, Sivakasi, India**Abstract**

In human history of War, Political upheaval and ethnic clash had left millions homeless and moved to Asylum or refugee camp. The most vulnerable population among them are children. The children are most victimised as they lose their home, parents and disruption of education and environment they have lived. Children are the most fragile population who are both physically and mentally affected. Their voices reflect their pain, nostalgia for their homes and life they lived in their home country. Their voices are generally marginalized or least considered in the political and humanitarian discourse. This study examines Khaled Hosseini's Sea Prayer alongside the testimonies of refugee children to explore the impact of war, displacement, trauma, and memory on their lived experiences. Through the lenses of Trauma and Memory Studies, it aims to promote empathy and challenge the marginalization of refugee children.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Trauma, Memory, Discrimination and Insecurity

Introduction

Human society, by its very design, is structured to be fiercely protective of children. As the most vulnerable population in the world, children require specialized protection, care, and systemic support. This foundational nurturing is primarily anchored within the home, where parental love, paternal guidance, sibling camaraderie, and a supportive community play a monumental role in a child's holistic growth. Being physically and emotionally fragile, children must be nurtured in an environment of peace and security; they lack the autonomy and strength to provide for or protect themselves.

However, when political instability deteriorates into active warfare, this protective sanctuary is violently dismantled. Families are forced to flee their homelands not as voluntary immigrants seeking economic prosperity, but as refugees desperate for survival. In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the global refugee crisis has reached unprecedented proportions, and the resulting predicament of displaced children is profoundly traumatic. Watching a war movie provides a safe, detached understanding of conflict, but it is entirely distinct from the visceral reality endured by children who actually encounter it. For a child survivor, war is not an entertainment narrative; it is raw, psychological trauma. A young survivor

of the war in Iraq vividly captures this terror, recalling the agonizing helplessness of a bombing raid:

"The bombing was a terrible time. How would you feel? We were all crowded together in one room. If anything hit our house, we wanted to know where everyone was. We wanted to be able to get to each other. We huddled together and waited to die. Overhead we heard the aircraft, felt the ground shake, heard the world around us exploding." (Ellis 21)

No wonder that the cinema can recreate the sights of war, but it cannot replicate the vulnerability of a child huddling in the dark, powerless and waiting to die.

When the bombs stop, the horror shifts to the perilous land and sea routes children are forced to take to escape the ruins. The real-world tragedy of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy whose lifeless body washed ashore on a Mediterranean beach in 2015, remains a heart-rending catalyst for global grief. It is this exact tragedy that inspired Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*, a poetic monologue from a father to his sleeping son, Marwan, on the eve of a dangerous maritime journey.

While an audience can look away from a screen, these children cannot escape their reality. The ultimate difference between watching war and living it is that for a movie viewer, the credits eventually roll but for innocent children like Alan and Marwan, war costs them their childhood, and sometimes, their lives.

Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan-American author, vividly captures this systemic failure in his poetic monologue *Sea Prayer*. Like millions of real-world refugees, the characters of Marwan and his father stand on a beach alongside hundreds of desperate souls, fleeing war in a perilous pursuit of safety. The safety of the child and his future remain entirely unpredictable, rendering it agonizingly uncertain whether they will even survive the voyage. Despite global awareness of these fatal dangers, international legal and humanitarian structures consistently fail to intervene effectively, leaving the world to confront a haunting question: why does this plight remain unaddressed?

While Hosseini's narrative serves as a universal elegy for displaced youth, its themes of lost ancestral heritage and the terror of transit find a stark, empirical parallel in the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee children. This paper argues that these children suffer a unique, "ignored plight" marked by generational trauma, deep cultural identity fragmentation, and severe post-migration mental health barriers which exposes the fundamental failure of the global humanitarian apparatus. By synthesizing Hosseini's literary narrative with the empirical testimonies of Iraqi youth, this study demands a critical paradigm shift from passive global sympathy to active geopolitical accountability.

In *Sea Prayer*, the narrator's grief is deeply tied to the sudden, violent erasure of his homeland. The father anxiously reflects on his own powerlessness against the vast, indifferent nature of the sea, while fondly recalling the beautiful, serene life they once possessed in Syria. He describes a vibrant past filled with ancestral lands, bustling bazaars, fields, herds, and rich groves of dates, the happy memories and peaceful coexistence. The narrative highlights how abruptly war upends a thriving civilization, transforming a sanctuary into a landscape of ruins. Stripped of their history, possessions, and security, these families are left with nothing but their bare lives to save, and even that survival is precarious. The grieving heart of

Hosseini's narrator reflects the collective agony of millions of real-world parents who have lost their children to the compounding horrors of displacement whether through drowning, starvation, unhygienic conditions, financial destitution, or environmental exposure.

While *Sea Prayer* was directly catalysed by the Syrian crisis, its harrowing themes accurately mirror the broader, multi-generational displacement across the Levant and Middle East. Specifically, the decades of conflict in Iraq stemming from the 2003 invasion, subsequent sectarian violence, and the brutal rise of ISIS share an identical trajectory of trauma. Iraqi refugee children have faced the same perilous transit routes, the same devastating loss of a historically rich ancestral homeland, and a subsequent lifetime spent in debilitating administrative, legal, and psychological limbo.

Hosseini through his novel *Sea Prayer* demonstrate that refugee children are subjected to an ignored plight characterized by the loss of legal childhood, systemic bureaucratic erasure by host nations, and severe, unaddressed psychological trauma. In the opening pages of *Sea Prayer*, Hosseini establishes a critical baseline of humanity by dedicating substantial narrative space to the memory of Homs before the outbreak of war. The father describes the city to his son, Marwan, not as a place of rubble, but as a vibrant, generational sanctuary. He recalls the summer of his childhood "Your uncle and I spread our matters on the roof of your grandfather's farmhouse outside of Homs" (2 *Sea Prayer*). The grandfather's house overlooking a countryside that smelled of olive trees, and the peaceful, bustling crowded markets.

By showing this beautiful, peaceful past, Hosseini does something incredibly important he brings back the human side of these families. He reminds the reader that refugees are not defined by their poverty or their struggles; they are defined by the rich lives they were forced to leave behind. For Marwan, however, that beautiful history is completely out of reach. The war cut his childhood short, leaving him with nothing but passed-down trauma. He only knows a home filled with the smoke of bombs, ruined streets, and the terrifying sound of explosions. This child has been robbed of his identity, forced to inherit a broken world he had no part in creating.

The narrative arc in *Sea Prayer* serves as a precise mirror for the generational displacement experienced by Iraqi refugee children. Much like the narrator in Hosseini's text, Iraqi families stem from a culture deeply rooted in historical pride. Cities like Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra were long celebrated as centers of education, architecture, and family stability. However, the 2003 invasion, years of violent conflict, and the rise of ISIS in 2014 inverted these sanctuaries into landscapes of terror.

The empirical testimonies of displaced Iraqi children collected by Deborah Ellis reveal the deep, invisible scars left by this transition. For these children, survival does not mean the trauma has ended; rather, it shifts into a struggle against violence, lost identity, and global rejection.

First, war alters a child's worldview, making them deeply aware of global violence and desperate for peace. One young survivor highlights this invisible burden, stating:

"Some people think that you are Iraqi and you are still alive, that your troubles are over. They don't see the other kind of damage... If I had the power to make the world better... I would not let anybody make money from selling tanks and guns." (Ellis 25)

For minority children, such as Kurdish youth from northern Iraq, the violence destroyed hundreds of villages and forced families into strategic hamlets. This displacement creates a severe identity crisis, leaving children longing for a homeland they cannot safely return to: "I hope I can go back to Kurdistan one day without getting killed." (Ellis 31) Even when children find refuge in Western nations like America, the sense of displacement continues. They often experience a profound identity crisis, noting, "I have nothing in common with American children." Furthermore, neighbouring and international countries frequently reject these children, leaving them stuck in systemic limbo. A refugee named Michael captures this agony of closed doors, recalling: "We were supposed to go to Australia, but Australia changed its mind and doesn't want us." (Ellis 37)

When parents are killed or rendered unable to work during the flight, families are left completely penniless. The memory of their lost native land further traumatizes the survivors as they adapt to severe poverty in host countries. As one child living in Jordan describes:

"Our house here in Amman is just two rooms, plus a hallway and a very poor kitchen." (Ellis 48)

Ultimately, these combined accounts demonstrate that whether huddled under bombs, stranded on beaches, or trapped in cramped refugee apartments, children bear the heaviest burden of geopolitical failure. Their testimonies prove that war does not just destroy infrastructure; it systematically steals a child's home, identity, and future.

For the children of these families, the trauma was marked by an immediate, violent inversion of social status. Fathers were abruptly removed from the household either killed in action due to forced military conscription, assassinated in sectarian retaliations, or imprisoned. Wealth offered no protection; families who once enjoyed immense socio-economic privilege were overnight reduced to absolute destitution, fleeing their homes with literal bundles on their heads. This specific form of flight introduces a profound psychological phenomenon of acute status inconsistency and sudden displacement trauma. Unlike refugees fleeing generalized poverty, these children experienced a catastrophic rupture where their foundational sense of safety, pride, and societal anchoring vanished in a matter of hours.

When looking at the actual lives of Iraqi refugee children, their main struggle shifts from physical survival to a painful loss of identity, language, and self-worth. Once they arrive in a host country, they are immediately sent to schools where they have to study the language they do not know or speak, causing extreme stress and forcing many to drop out just to work and support their families. At the same time, these children face a deep identity crisis; they feel disconnected from their Iraqi roots but are rejected by their new communities, leaving them trapped in a lonely limbo where they feel they do not belong anywhere. This isolation is made worse by the constant, crushing feeling that they are viewed as an "unwanted

burden." By listening to the news and sensing the coldness of immigration systems, these children internalize the painful idea that the world sees them as a drain rather than as human beings, causing deep, invisible psychological trauma. Further this acute anxiety regarding what lies ahead is beautifully articulated in the closing movements of *Sea Prayer*. The father whispers his fears about the destination, acknowledging the growing global hostility toward displaced bodies:

"I have heard it said we are uninvited. Unwelcome. We must take our misfortune elsewhere." (Sea Prayer 30)

Hosseini captures the exact psychological weight carried by refugee children upon arrival in a host nation. The father realizes that the greatest barrier his son might face is not the physical ocean, but the cold, bureaucratic, and xenophobic architecture of the world they are entering. The child is transformed from an individual with a name, a history, and a home into a geopolitical "burden" to be managed or rejected.

The trauma of separation extends far beyond the immediate physical dangers of war and displacement. Quantitative evidence indicates that thousands of Middle Eastern children become unaccompanied or separated from their families during forced migration and conflict. Deprived of parental protection, these children become highly vulnerable to human trafficking, sexual exploitation, physical abuse, forced labour, and administrative detention by foreign border authorities. The loss of familial support not only exposes them to immediate threats but also leaves lasting psychological scars that shape their sense of identity, security, and belonging.

Khaled Hosseini vividly portrays this harsh reality in *The Kite Runner* through the character of Sohrab. Following the brutal murder of his father, Hassan, Sohrab is left orphaned and falls into the hands of a warlord. Stripped of his innocence, he is subjected to repeated sexual abuse and forced to entertain influential visitors through degrading performances. Hosseini's portrayal demonstrates that the horrors of war continue long after the battlefield, targeting the most vulnerable victims—children. Although Sohrab's experience represents the suffering of a young boy, similar forms of exploitation and violence are equally inflicted upon girls in conflict zones, making such abuse a universal consequence of war. The emotional and psychological devastation caused by separation from family is therefore as terrifying and enduring as the physical violence of armed conflict itself.

Khaled Hosseini's works poignantly capture this multidimensional trauma. His child characters do not merely survive war; they struggle to rebuild their lives after losing the people, places, and memories that once gave them a sense of belonging. Survival, therefore, is not limited to escaping physical violence but involves enduring the psychological burden of exile, displacement, and the painful search for identity in unfamiliar lands. A refugee child entering an unknown country must begin life anew—adapting to a different language, culture, educational system, and social environment while carrying the invisible wounds of war and loss. Childhood, which should be marked by security and hope, instead becomes a continuous struggle for acceptance, dignity, and belonging.

Although existing scholarship on Khaled Hosseini has extensively explored themes of war, trauma, migration, identity, and exile, limited attention has been given to the cumulative trauma experienced by displaced children as they lose not only their homes but also their cultural roots, memories, aspirations, and certainty about the future. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how Hosseini portrays displacement as a lifelong psychological and emotional process rather than a single act of migration. It argues that the survival of refugee children depends not only on escaping conflict but also on rebuilding identity, hope, and belonging in an unfamiliar world. In doing so, the study also raises a broader humanitarian question: How should the global community respond to children whose childhood has been stolen by war? Hosseini's fiction urges readers to recognize refugee children not as statistics or political burdens, but as human beings deserving of protection, compassion, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Conclusion

The striking gap between the fictionalized or distant portrayal of war and the lived reality of its youngest victims is powerfully bridged by both Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* and Deborah Ellis's *Children of War*. Together, these works expose the profound disconnect between global awareness and actual human empathy. While the broader world consumes conflict through news clips and movie screens, the children inside these narratives experience an entirely different reality, one marked by immediate terror, stolen childhoods, and the agonizing uncertainty of exile.

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DABEER SI/KTT/37**REMEMBERED HOMES: MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND THE SEARCH FOR BELONGING IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE*****BISMA AFZAL**MA (English), School of Languages
Chattrapati Sahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India**Abstract**

This paper studies how memory and longing for actual “home” shape an individual’s life. How the lives of diasporic people look all creamy and shiny on the outside but shattering on the inside. Drawing from the lives of characters from Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Namesake”, it interrogates how identity and longing for belongingness shape lives of people living outside India. It also explores how memory when recollected vividly plays a sharp contrast with the dispersed people and the natives in regard to characters like Ashima and Ashoke, moving to a new nation felt daunting and what kept them going was the sweetened memory of their homeland, the sacrifices each had to make in order to live a stable life. Through (economic diaspora: moving out of nation willingly for better job opportunities) people share the same nostalgic memories, shared cultural beliefs and longing for belongingness. On the other hand, this paper also deals with identity and the “return” when metaphorically taken could be return to your own self, your own identity, or to your own home (nation). Through characters like Gogol, who struggles with his actual identity throughout the novel but eventually finds a return “home” through loss, longing and cultural conflict. The concept of hybridity and ambivalence by Homi.K.Bhabha follows throughout the study examining the lives of Ashima, Ashoke and Gogol, their shared beliefs, practices of making their own home, missing past and keeping it alive in the present. Thus this paper follows a qualitative and analytical research methodology to study the themes of longing, nostalgia, diaspora and eventual return to home.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Diaspora, Longing for belongingness, Memory, Ambivalence, return to home, cultural conflict, identity.

Introduction

Migration is not just movement of people from one place to the other; it is what they carry with themselves, their identity which is eventually shared, their voice which is sabotaged gradually and their real self which gets mingled in order to settle in. This phenomenon has shaped literature in a sense that explores its complexities of displacement, cultural shifts and identity formation. Diaspora writings have shaped the twenty-first century novels portraying experiences of exile, nostalgia, assimilation and belonging realistically and questioning the notions of home and identity. As we progress into globalization, it blurs the cultural and national boundaries, and diasporic literature has emerged as a significant field of study for understanding how individuals balance multiple identities in diverse cultural societies.

Among the prominent voices in contemporary diasporic literature, one such is Jhumpa Lahiri, she profoundly expresses the nuanced experiences of the migrants with their inner conflicts of assimilation and their lived realities. Her works frequently examine the themes of migration, family, memory, language and identity revealing the subtle harsh realities of socio-cultural conflicts. Rather than presenting migration solely as geographical relocation, Lahiri portrays it as an ongoing process of belongingness, selfhood and cultural continuity.

Published in 2003, *The Namesake* presents the story of the Ganguli family, Bengali immigrants who settle in the United States struggling in their own way to preserve their cultural heritage. The story revolves around the main protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, whose name becomes a powerful symbol of fragmented identity and his struggle to reconcile with his cultural Bengali roots living in the fashioned American society portraying every other migrant living in a foreign land. The novel shares deep contrasts in the first hand experiences of Ashima and Ashoke who were born and brought up in India, their homeland and then moved to States for better job opportunity and Gogol who was brought up in the states but his rooted identity lies in the mixed culture he experiences. Through these characters, Lahiri explores the emotional connection between generations, the challenges of cultural assimilation and the enduring influence of cultural and familial memory. Memory plays an important role in shaping the overall plot of the story; it acts as a tie between the character's homeland and displaced land. For the first generation, the memories are a catalyst to preserving their known culture and inherited identity through language, rituals, foods and familial traditions whereas the second generation perceives it indirectly through fragmented narratives rather than lived realities. This reflects how memory operates differently across generations shaping distinct perceptions of identity and belonging.

Language is significant in the construction of diasporic identity. It not only acts as a communication bridge but also marks the cultural, social and personal identity. In the novel, the co-existence of the two languages, Bengali and English reflects the character's will power of constant negotiations between their cultural heritage and assimilation. The first generation relies on their mother tongue as a means of preserving their cultural roots; the younger generation adopts English as the means of communication through everyday lives thus resulting in cultural assimilation and emotional constraints from their ancestral roots. The novel therefore profoundly depicts that language is not merely a linguistic system but a cultural space where identities are constantly negotiated.

The title of the novel itself signifies that names have a symbolic effect in rebuilding memory, language and identity. Gogol's name acts as a catalyst defining inherited history, familial memory and personal conflict making it a central metaphor for the diasporic people. His later acceptance of the name marks a shift from irritated self to a self-discovery thus highlighting the overall effect of one's own identity amidst the dark world of assimilation.

Although '*The Namesake*' has been examined thoroughly for its diaspora, hybridity and identity, fewer studies delve into how memory and language function together in shaping the overall diasporic outlook. This paper addresses the gap by examining the deeper dynamics of relationship between memory,

language and identity through a diasporic lens. It argues that Lahiri presents identity not as a fixed cultural inheritance but as a continuous process of negotiation, reconstruction and belongingness. Through the close textual analysis of the novel, the study reflects the clear diasporic experience through the lenses of its characters suffering through their daily activities portraying the fragments of memory, linguistic differences and cultural assimilation which shapes the individual identity.

Literature Review

Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake' is recognized as the seminal work of diasporic literature for its exploration of migration, cultural displacement and the concept of "returned homes". Critics view the displacement not only as a geographical phenomenon but also as an emotional and psychological journey shaped by memory, nostalgia and longing for belongingness. The studies on the Ganguli family emphasize how shared domestic spaces become alienated in a complete foreign land.

Scholars argue that first generation immigrants, especially Ashima and Ashoke experience extreme homesickness and cultural alienation particularly due to their migration from Calcutta to the United States. Their practices to preserve their Bengali cultural roots through food, language and rituals reflect their construction of "imaginary homeland" where memory becomes a means of cultural identity amidst the separation from their homeland.

Another scholarship focuses on the generational divide among the first generation who migrated from their homeland to foreign land in search for better career opportunities and their second American-born generation which inherits the fragments of both the cultures. Gogol and Sonia navigate through several negotiations in order to "fit in" in a society which feels like home but distant at the same time highlighting how different generations experience the same displacement but in different styles.

Recent criticism moves beyond notions of home suggesting that 'The Namesake' eventually redefines the concept of "home" stating it as an evolving process. Ashima's decision to move along with her husband to a complete new place reflects her inner strength which is carried by the collective memory of her home highlighting a place is not just built by geographical changes but through lived realities constructed through memory, cultural assimilation and progressive approaches towards migration.

Theoretical Framework

This paper follows an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates diaspora theory, postcolonial theory, cultural identity, collective memory and return of home with the example 'The Namesake' on the forefront. These theories help in understanding how migration is not just a physical act but a social, moral and cultural process through which lives of people revolve around. Rather than perceiving home as a fixed geographical entity, this study argues that Lahiri reexamines home as a dynamic process shaped by memory, cultural roots or practices, language and emotional attachment.

William Safran's theory of diaspora highlighting six characteristics of diasporic communities serves as a foundational framework for this research. He defines

diaspora as 1) dispersal from ancestral homeland; 2) shared collective memory of the homeland; 3) feeling of alienation in the host country; 4) longing for eventual return; 5) continued support for the homeland; and 6) sustained collective identity. In the novel, Ashima and Ashoke depict these characteristics through their longing for belongingness which is preserved through their language, cultural rituals, and food and family traditions. Their memories of Calcutta (homeland) create a longing throughout and their desire to return eventually seeking emotional displacement. The concept of return eventually becomes symbolic to their shaped realities creating their diasporic consciousness.

Homi.K.Bhabha's concept of Hybridity and Ambivalence further refines this study. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha argues that migration creates a "third space", a blend of cultures producing identities that are neither too rooted in the homeland nor fully accustomed to the host culture. This space is marked by ambivalence where people experience both attachment and detachment to their central roots. In the novel Gogol suffers because of his name, which is not fully rooted in his Bengali culture nor fully assimilated in the host country which makes him the talk of the town often suffering from mockery. He finds it difficult in transitioning within the cultures making him question his identity.

Similarly Stuart Hall argues that cultural identities are constructed through history and memory and are constantly refined by changing historical and social contexts. This explains the experiences of the Ganguli family across generations. Ashima's identity is recollected through her Indian Bengali culture even in America while Gogol's identity is negotiated between his inherited culture and the American upbringing creating a contrast of how different generations cope up with their identities shaped by socio-political perspectives.

Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory provides a framework for understanding how cultural memory sustains diasporic communities across generations. He argues that memory is socially constructed through shared practices, rituals, language and tradition and people do not remember in isolation. In 'The Namesake', Bengali festivals, family gatherings, storytelling, food and language play roles of memory making Ganguli family preserve their culture despite geographical displacement. These shared memories cultivate cultural identity and also reconstructs the notion of "home" far away from home (their homeland) highlighting how home is rebuilt through remembrance and longing. Through these theories 'The Namesake' portrays migration as not just a physical act of displacement but an ongoing process in which memory, language, nostalgia, identity, and the idea of home are constantly negotiated. The novel ultimately suggests that home is not a fixed place but an evolving process constructed through remembrance, cultural continuity, emotional attachment and the lived realities of the diasporic people.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research methodology in examining the representation of memory, language, identity, nostalgia and the concept of home in the novel 'The Namesake' (2003). It is used to interpret meanings, experiences and cultural representations along with the fragmented narratives shaped by

memory and longing for belongingness. This study explores how diasporic identity is constructed through everyday negotiations by the migrated people.

The primary method used is textual analysis, which helps in understanding the novel's theme, symbols, narratives and character development. Through this method, we explore the roles of memory in shaping identity, language which is deeply rooted through social cultural backgrounds and nostalgia leading back to the longing of one's own home. The repeated motifs such as food, ritual, language, familial bonds are symbolic in reinterpreting the roles of the diasporic community. Along with textual analysis, close reading is also performed for this research in order to read between the lines through selected paragraphs, dialogues and overall messages the chapters inculcate. Through this method we realise how Lahiri has portrayed the complexities of migration and belonging reflecting the questions of displacement, hybridity and cultural identity.

The thorough analysis has been carried out through the interdisciplinary theoretical framework consisting of William Safran's theory of diaspora, Homi.K.Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and ambivalence, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, and Maurice Halbwachs' concept of collective memory. These theories are the backbone of this research in better understanding of the novel's diasporic existence and reconstruction of home.

The study relies on primary and secondary sources. 'The Namesake' being the primary while secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles, critical essays on diaspora, post colonialism, migration, memory studies and identity. With the help of qualitative, textual analysis and close reading, this research gives a better understanding of how Lahiri redefines home and belonging through the experiences of memory, language, identity, and nostalgia shaped within the diasporic community.

Memory and Reconstruction of Home

In Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake', the construction of home is deeply connected with the shared cultural memory acting as a psychological shield against the displacement of migrants. Lahiri presents memory not merely as nostalgia for a lost homeland but as an active process through which displaced individuals preserve their cultural identity while adapting to a foreign environment.

For first generation immigrants like Ashima Ganguli, physical displacement from Calcutta creates a spatial void that is mediated by memory. As Md Abul Jabbar Sk observes, Ashima "feels lost in the memories of her "home" within her Boston apartment seeking comfort in re-reading Bengali short stories and poems brought from her homeland. Lahiri describes Ashima's isolation as "a sort of lifelong pregnancy-a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts" (p.51). This metaphor symbolizes the uncertainty of diasporic life where immigrants are in a constant battle with their homeland left behind and an unfamiliar host nation. Ashima's will to preserve her cultural roots through food, language and tradition reconstructs the notion of home within an alienated landscape.

Ashoke's memories are shaped by family's understanding of home, his decision to name his son Gogol after the Russian writer portrays his rooted trauma of his near-fatal train accident in India, an incident which changed his life completely.

The name becomes symbolic of personal memory and history which is never directly experienced by Gogol himself highlighting how memory shapes identity despite geographical displacement.

The novel also highlights the transitional character of memory. Ashima and Ashoke possess lived memories of India since they were born and brought up there whereas Gogol inherits these memories through stories, rituals and family traditions. His relationship with India is one which is shaped only through narratives rather than lived experiences producing a fragmented understanding of home. Critics define home as in betweenness but Lahiri redefines it by stating how homes are built on shared memories and cultural experiences.

As Salman Rushdie states in 'Imaginary Homelands', "the past is a country from which we have all emigrated" suggesting how memory reconstructs an imagined home rather than changing the present. The novel follows this thought throughout creating a sense of inhabiting their actual home as well as the shared cultural landscape. This memory plays a vital role in creation of homes with collective understanding of language, cuisine, traditional culture and quests for identity.

Fragmented Identity

One of the greatest features of the diasporic people is the fragmented identities which end up becoming culturally confusing because of the in-betweenness a person has to get accustomed to. In the novel 'The Namesake' Lahiri does not portray identity as inherited or fixed rather she proclaims it as fluid and continually constructed through migration, cultural negotiation and personal experience. The protagonist, Gogol Ganguli's journey is one of a fragmented sense of self as he struggles to reconcile his Indian heritage with his American upbringing. As described by Homi. K. Bhabha is a space known as the "third space"; where identities mix together culturally which is negotiated by every diasporic individual.

Gogol suffers from an identity crisis since his childhood, being named after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, the name disconnects him from both his Indian heritage and American society where he was born and brought up making him culturally isolated. His classmates used to make fun of him and when he came into college; his decision to change his name to Nikhil reflects his desire to construct a new identity which will define who he is and free him from the burdens of the past. However, this transformation remains futile as changing his name fails to resolve his inner conflict. Jhumpa Lahiri points this out when Gogol finds the book "The short stories of Nikolai Gogol" in his father's room and opens the first page with his father's handwriting "The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave your name" (p.264) bringing Gogol now Nikhil a sense of realisation, the book which meant a lot to his father, the book which saved his father was the book which brought a sense of belongingness within his heart. Lahiri pointed to this realization beautifully stating "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" (p.264). Thus identity cannot be erased through renaming as it remains deeply rooted in memory, family, history and lived experiences.

Lahiri portrays this fragmentation beyond Gogol to a broader diasporic condition. For Ashima and Ashoke possess a stable cultural identity grounded in memories of India, their children inherit the fragmented identity shaped by cultural conflicts. The novel therefore suggests that fragmentation is not a sign of incompleteness but the consequences of migration where identity is refined through memory, language and cultural negotiation. As Bhabha states hybridity produces “new signs of identity” rather than fixed cultural categories (Bhabha 2). The novel ‘The Namesake’ eventually portrays fragmented identity as a dynamic process which is continually shaped and reshaped.

The Eventual Return: A Paradox

One of the important themes is the idea of “return” when metaphorically taken could be return to your own self, your own identity, or to your own home (nation). For the first generation immigrants, the hope of returning to their homeland helps in preserving their emotional and cultural understanding of their homeland which is deeply rooted in their memories. However, Lahiri shows that migration changes both the people who leave their understanding of home because as time passes the homeland which they remember exists only in their memories and is often differing from the reality they would return to. This shows that home is shaped not only by place but by memory, experience, emotions and a sense of belongingness. Throughout the novel, Ashima and Ashoke preserve their Bengali identity through language, traditions and rituals believing that India remains their true “home”. But as years pass, America has also become an integral part of their lives. After Ashoke’s death and children’s independence, Ashima decides to go back to her native land but she misses the time she has spent in the not so foreign land anymore. Lahiri writes,

“For thirty three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she’s worked she will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband...she knows that this is home nevertheless-the world for which she is responsible, which she has created.” (256)

This realization captures the paradox of return; leaving America creates a sense of loss that was once accompanied when leaving India. Home is no longer stationary but curated everywhere through memory and lived experiences.

Therefore Lahiri says that return is not a journey back to the homeland but a negotiation between past and present. The novel concludes by redefining home as an emotional and transitional space rather than fixed geographical destination. For diasporic people, return is both possible and impossible, creating a paradox which one belongs to at the same time.

Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘The Namesake’ thus explores the lives of diasporic people through vivid themes of memory, language, identity, nostalgia, longing for belongingness and eventual return to home. The novel vividly portrays the lives of migrants beyond geographical transgression, it reshapes the meaning of home and eventual return clearly stating that past is always present in our memory affecting our present both metamorphically and emotionally.

This study shows how memory plays a crucial role in shaping one's cultural identity through ritual, food, traditions and the quest for return. While the first generation remains connected to their roots through lived memories, the second generation inherits these memories indirectly through customs, traditions and language resulting in fragmented identity. Language creates assimilation reflecting the tension rooted in adapting one's roots with their present living conditions. Thus Jhumpa Lahiri argues by redefining home as an emotional and cultural construct shaped by remembrance, experience and adaptation. 'The Namesake' makes us realise that belonging is not just through returning to the past but also cherishing and embracing multiple identities and memories that migration creates.

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DABEER SI/KTT/38**THE MEMORY OF PLACE: PSYCHOGEOGRAPHICAL TENSIONS IN
NAMITA GOKHALE'S *NEVER NEVER LAND*****BEAUTY KUMARI SHAW**Research Scholar, Department of English
Banaras Hindu University, Uttar Pradesh, India**Abstract**

This study aims to examine Namita Gokhale's *Never Never Land* through the lens of psychogeography in order to analyse how urban and mountainous landscapes shape the protagonist's emotional life, identity formation, and psychological well-being. It seeks to interrogate the city–mountain divide as a psychogeographical conflict that critiques modern urban existence, while also exploring the novel's semi-autobiographical dimensions. Additionally, the study foregrounds the role of memory and place in constructing a sense of belonging and emotional resilience. The primary research questions are: (1) how does *Never Never Land* employ psychogeography to articulate the relationship between landscape, identity, and psychological well-being; (2) in what ways do memory and affective attachment to place inform the protagonist's sense of belonging; and (3) how do the novel's semi-autobiographical elements intensify the psychogeographical tension between city and mountains? The paper incorporates a qualitative methodology grounded in close textual analysis of the novel. The analysis primarily focuses on contrasts between urban and mountainous spaces, tracing their psychological, emotional, and cultural implications in the narrative. The analysis is informed by psychogeographical theory that conceptualises landscapes as dynamic sites of memory, cultural identity, and lived experiences. The paper argues that *Never Never Land* mobilises psychogeography to critique the alienation and emotional toxicity of urban life while placing the mountainous landscape as a restorative and therapeutic space. It also states that Gokhale represents landscapes as dynamic, memory-laden environments that actively shape identity and emotional well-being. The study further finds that the novel's semi-autobiographical elements deepen the psychogeographical conflict, aligning the protagonist's longing for the mountains with the author's personal reflection of urban unease.

Keywords: Indian literature, memory, Namita Gokhale, mountain literature, psychogeography

Namita Gokhale's *Never Never Land* is a work of fiction that depicts the chaos and monotony of city life against the tranquillity of the mountains, using this contrast to probe how the environment shapes the self. The novel is a study of the environment and its effects on the behaviour and emotions of individuals, particularly the protagonist Iti Arya. This phenomenon in literature is "psychogeography," which the philosopher Guy Debord, founder of Situationism, defines as "the precise study of the effects of the environment, consciously organised or not, on the behaviour and/or emotions of individuals" (Debord 23). Merlin Coverley, in his book *Psychogeography*, similarly credits the concept as a

dynamic relationship between the individual and environment. As Coverley notes, psychogeography has gained considerable critical recognition in recent decades as a term inseparably bound to time and place (Coverley 17). *Never Never Land* is studied particularly within this framework where the protagonist's identity is explicitly split between two locations — Delhi and Dacha in a way that landscape is never incidental description but is instead the primary mechanism through which the novel explores questions of belonging, memory, and psychological well-being. The present research therefore undertakes a qualitative study of the novel through this psychogeographical lens, integrating content analysis with close textual reading to defamiliarize and critique the urban spaces the novel represents.

There has been a considerable amount of studies critiquing urban spaces and exploring the ways landscapes shape individual consciousness. There also existed a specific trend of writing about landscapes and its effects on self but it was commonly associated with non-fiction texts. Therefore this research engages with the implied gap of studying emotional and behavioural patterns of the main character Iti Arya from *Never Never Land* to study the implications of the environment specifically in fiction. It is particularly important because "it encourages the fiction writer to slip on a pair of imaginary shoes and enjoy embodied research in the landscape" (Holloway 74) as Philippa Holloway believes. She further claims that psychogeography as a methodology for writing about the environment demands that the writer is more engaged in the description of the contours and surroundings in the text, rather than looking at the terrain or location as just a space to be looked at. Another critic, Craig Jordan Baker, explains that landscapes, whether real or fictional, are also "places human communities abide in and work with," emphasising "the existence of an emplaced and practised-based conception" (Baker 3). The author's vivid portrayal of Dacha exemplifies this technique, weaving together rich descriptions of colours, shapes, and surroundings to create a multifaceted representation of the place. This approach resonates with Baker's perspective on landscapes, which emphasises their role as more than static backdrops. Instead, landscapes must be portrayed as dynamic spaces that are intimately connected to human experiences and activities. This view underscores the importance of understanding places not just as physical locations, but as complex environments shaped by human interaction and cultural practices. By intertwining detailed descriptions with personal memories, the author demonstrates a narrative that reflects the "emplaced and practised-based conception" of landscapes, highlighting the intricate relationship between people and their surroundings. While the novel focuses on the importance of immersive, sensory-rich descriptions in psychogeography and the dynamic nature of landscapes that are shaped by human experiences, it does not explicitly address the limitations of this approach, such as the subjective nature of personal memories or the difficulty in capturing the full complexity of a place through written description alone.

Never Never Land by Namita Gokhale is a semi-autobiographical narrative centred on Iti Arya, who is alienated by city life and finds solace in the hills: her home in Dacha. The book contrasts the peace of the Himalayan landscape with the

cacophony of the modern urban environment, particularly Delhi. Born in Nainital and raised in the Kumaon hills, Gokhale nonetheless spent a large part of her teenage years in Delhi as a student at a college affiliated with the University of Delhi but she remained always connected to the hills. Her displeasure with the city life in Delhi remains reflected in her works. This split between a hometowns embedded in the mountains and a formative adolescence in the capital produces exactly the affective tension Coverley's theory describes: an individual whose sense of self is shaped by the friction between two environments rather than by either one alone. This tension between urban and rural surfaces consistently across her fiction and non-fiction, both of which return again and again to the hilly landscape as home. This conflict between hills and city was present in her writing since her first novel was published, not something that emerged later, more explicitly semi-autobiographical work. By contrast, her fiction including *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, *A Himalayan Love Story*, and *Never Never Land* offers a persistently bleak depiction of Delhi. Gokhale holds no fond memories of the city, repeatedly describing it as a grey, toxic sprawl. Even in her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, she takes a subtle jibe at Delhi's social life. About the high-class party-culture of Delhi, Priya, the narrator remarks,

The crowd was a carefully orchestrated mix of the right people. The mandatory politician, artist, businessman were all there. Paro seemed utterly disoriented in those surroundings...the party was really getting out of control—everybody was slightly high, and the patent unreality of the situation was infectious. Paro's smuggler friend, who, it was whispered, was the cocaine king of Delhi, was getting into a heated argument about Nehru with some young intellectuals (Gokhale 74-75).

These descriptions of political conversation, government officials, and city elites suggest how Gokhale's personal experience of Delhi's social world is weaved into her fiction. It is also very surprising how a rich tapestry of these embodied experiences contributes to her novels and how writers' personal experiences of landscapes and atmosphere inform most of her fictional narratives. In another novel *Never Never Land*, about Delhi, Gokhale writes:

The sky is a grey rag, and the air toxic and always muggy. The Delhi monsoon is a betrayal. There was a time, I am told, when gentle black mammoths poured down relief from the sky and the city was damp and cool for weeks. Everything was washed clean. Love and heady things like that seemed to be around the corner. That hasn't been my experience (Gokhale 11).

Gokhale's characters feel disoriented, 'unreal', 'infectious' in Delhi where the air seems 'toxic, grey, muggy, damp' and smells of 'cocaine' and 'cigarettes'. Hills, on the other side, have often been described as "home". Born as a Kumaoni woman, she has been very close to the sight of the hills: 'the sight of the mountains, of jagged pines and blue skies and the whispering wind' (Gokhale 17). In her depictions of both cities and mountains, Gokhale demonstrates an extraordinary understanding of the human condition. She doesn't stop appreciating the serenity of the hills in her novels. In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Gokhale describes the beauty of Jeolikote, a beautiful place near Nainital as a

place where, “huge heads of dahlias nodded in the breeze. There were marigolds and cosmos and tiger lilies and other sorts of hill flowers... Monsoon streams gurgled down the hillside. Butterflies speckled the air” (Gokhale 72). Gokhale describes the roads of New Delhi and Ghaziabad, as, ‘the ugliest urban architecture in the world’ (Gokhale 60). While Gokhale is generous in describing the hills that shaped her, she expresses her discomfort with Delhi's atmosphere and way of life. This practice of writing landscape from lived experience situates her within ‘a canon of enraptured nature writing’ (Holloway 75). Gokhale's own fiction reflects her own emotions directly: when Iti walks toward Khata Khumani and finds the landscape “not... as pristine as it had been once” (Gokhale 64), her unease at the ongoing construction and the mountain mules hauling raw materials is itself a small act of psychogeographical fieldwork — walking as a way of registering what industrialisation has changed. This is precisely what Helyer and Potts describe as “personal psychogeographies”: landscapes that become “multilayered” as personal experience becomes embedded within physical places (Helyer and Potts). The images of Khata Khumani that Iti carries afterward are not simply visual memories but, in Trigg's terms, evidence of a “lived spatiality... of being-in-the-world” (Trigg 4) resonating how she once experienced the place and how she experiences it now. This tension between physical spaces that embody past and present experiences is not a new phenomenon in literature. As the Canadian poet and playwright Kenneth Mitchell argues, the psychogeographical conflict between urban and rural landscapes emerged as a spatial phenomenon in the nineteenth century, produced by the growing differentiation between the two kinds of experience (Sen 475). Gokhale's novel reflects this psychogeographical conflict, making the relationship between herself and her environment the explicit subject of her fiction. Dacha, in this sense, functions as what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire* — a “realm” of memory carrying different connotations than a monumental structure (Nora 18): a site whose significance lies not in its physical monumentality but in the personal and cultural memory embedded in it. In *Never Never Land*, the techniques of narration used by Gokhale have been semi-autobiographical. She has spoken about her experiences and her lived realities of urban and rural landscapes through the character of Iti Arya. She is a writer and a columnist making a living in Delhi, though her heart remains in her home in Dacha. Iti Arya could be seen as a writer's persona, and she speaks through Gokhale's experiences. The story is described as semi-autobiographical, meaning it combines elements of the author's real life with fictional elements. The main character, Iti Arya, seems to reflect some aspects of the author's own experiences. This setup allows the author to explore themes of identity, belonging, and the contrast between urban and rural life in India. By using a character who shares some similarities with herself, Gokhale draws on her personal experiences while still maintaining the freedom of fiction to craft her story. Its responses to place are not simply a reflection of Gokhale's personal opinions about specific locations, but are shaped by the internal logic of the character herself. In the context of Gokhale's work, the character of Iti Arya could be seen as a vehicle for exploring the tension between authorial intention and reader interpretation. The dominant

position of the author remains indispensable for interpretation (Kasperski 15) in the novel.

The juxtaposition of personal memories and physical places has been done in a very writerly way. As the story progresses, there are many strings of details about the beautiful place of Dacha. *Never Never Land*, written by Namita Gokhale and published in 2024, offers a dream-like description of hills depicted in its full entirety. Hills, in her work, are like a home that keeps calling her back. In the beautiful city of Dacha, "the light was translucent, and raindrops trembled like festive fairy lights along the pebbled path" (Gokhale 21). The city, by contrast, is never depicted so fully — it is a place of betrayals, where no trees are seen from the window and the glass towers hurt her eyes. Gurgaon, too, "doesn't feel the ground beneath my feet. And it's not even modern and urban, just a dusty, sludgy, vertical slum" (Gokhale 16). These images are all reminiscent of the cities the writer had visited before. Gokhale's use of *objective correlatives* — the dusty city on one hand, translucent hills on the other — gives a panoramic view of her own memories of both urban life and life in the mountains. It reveals the author's response to a modern world that has become complex and unbreathable from the perspective of a Kumaoni woman more deeply connected to the hills. Iti finds respite in the sunshine glittering through the cracks of the mountains and in the drizzle of rain from clouds rolling over the snows. While the Delhi monsoon was a betrayal (Gokhale 11), "the rain in the mountains felt different, sounded different. The insistent tattoo on the tin roof seemed to be conveying some urgent message" (Gokhale 32). It was amazed by the rhythmic beat of the rain, which became a medium for the writer to express her own relationship between environment and memory.

Gokhale has not limited herself to writing about the physical and natural environment of the Kumaoni regions; she also writes the emotional attachments and relationships of her characters. In childhood, Gokhale was deeply inspired and connected to her grandmothers. In *Mountain Echoes: Reminiscences of Kumaoni Women*, she writes about three women with whom she shared great bonds: "I grew up in the Kumaon hills, bonded by love and admiration to a band of extraordinary women, aunts and grandmothers, and friends of grandmother, who symbolised for me the ultimate embodiment of dignity, integrity, and sheer indestructible grit... My maternal grandmother, Shakuntala Pande, was the person I loved most in the world" (Gokhale). In *Never Never Land*, Iti also seems close to her grandmothers and her native place in Dacha. She feels happy to return to her grandmother's village home after the tiring and muggy life of Gurgaon. Iti's grandmother Badi Amma, ninety years old, cared for her and protected her when her mother abandoned her at a young age. Badi Amma was just nineteen when she lost her husband but continued living her life; she moved with her sister Rosinka, and they stayed together in a slate-roofed cottage in Dacha. There was a camaraderie between them that Iti never had. Her connection is more often limited to a WhatsApp message or a phone call unlike the shared roof and conversations between her grandmothers and herself. Iti loved their company and felt secure around them, two women so different from each other yet alike in spirit; despite occasional bickering, "in her mind and her heart, they were one unit, one entity"

(Gokhale 42). Its psychological and emotional responses are explorations of her own "modes of thought." Thus the landscape becomes a medium not just of geography but of the people who inhabit it.

The landscape is full of conflicts between the uncanny memories of the narrator and also the fond memories of the place that she had. The physicality of a place and the memories attached to it exist in a complex relationship: a place can be both familiar and unfamiliar, where the familiar is what can be recalled and the unfamiliar carries the unsettling charge of the "uncanny." Iti Arya is as happy to visit her grandmother's home but she also finds it unsettling, even nightmarish because the place holds the memory of her mother, who abandoned the family after marrying, and of a father who died young. The uncanny and unsettling quality of the place, then, lies in the gap between being physically present in a location and remembering it as it once was, familiar and safe. This made solitude especially difficult for Iti, who felt belonged to a place, yet found that this same unsettling effect i.e. the haunting memories of her mother, kept displacing her from the physicality of the place itself. As Trigg argues, "the way we experience place in the present is never the same as in the past" (Trigg 4). There is a constant negotiation between remembering and forgetting that structures Iti's relationship to Dacha throughout the novel. The abandonment left Iti hollowed out. Her mother "ate into my entrails. She was empty, she was hollow. She was not equipped to face life, and this is the disease she gave me" (Gokhale 67). Kerri ní Dochartaigh, in her book *Thin Places*, affirms that "places do not heal us... places do not make the light shine on crow-black nights" (Dochartaigh 228) yet living with her grandmother makes Iti feel contended and belonged in a way her mother never could. Through Iti's reflections, the novel articulates a psychogeographical relationship between the individual and environment, representing the conflicts of memory and place within the novel. Moreover, the narrative also vividly portrays the contrast between the serene, timeless mountains and the lifelessness of cities. The paper finds that landscape in fiction can do more than just serve as a setting of the novel, it can also actively structure identity, memory, and emotional survival. The novel also embodies the conflicts between the past memories and present experiences in a place, affirming Coverley's claim that psychogeography treats landscape as a dynamic, historically contingent relationship rather than a fixed backdrop. The novel's treatment of memory proves equally central to its psychogeographical logic. The bond between Iti, Badi Amma, and Rosinka offers a distinctly female model of belonging that the novel sets against the isolation of urban life. Yet this same place is not primarily restorative: Dacha is also the site of the uncanny, carrying the memory of a mother whose abandonment left Iti "hollow" (Gokhale 67) alongside the grandmothers' healing warmth. The findings of the paper suggest that *Never Never Land* contributes to psychogeography in fiction not merely by contrasting urban alienation with rural belonging, but by showing that place itself is a multilayered and dynamic backdrop in the novel. Namita Gokhale weaves her personal memories of the place in this fictional novel and makes her readers aware about the conflicting sentiments of the hills and the cityscapes through her personal narratives. Her novel is an insight into the psychological aspect of how memories cannot just be about people but it can also

be tied to the place and reflected in literature. The paper also finds that this psychogeographical conflict between the city and the mountains is a critique of modern urban realities. The semi-autobiographical dimensions have also been an integral part of the findings in a way that reveals how landscape shapes not just the author's psychological and emotional being but it also reflects the narrator's sentiments without interfering with the author's sentiments. The paper argues that *Never Never Land* mobilises psychogeography to critique the alienation and emotional toxicity of urban life while placing the mountainous landscape as a restorative and therapeutic space. It also states that Gokhale represents landscapes as dynamic, memory-laden environments that actively shape identity and emotional well-being. The study further finds that the novel's semi-autobiographical elements deepen the psychogeographical conflict, aligning the protagonist's longing for the mountains with the author's personal reflection of urban unease.

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DABEER SI/KTT/39**NARRATIVISING MEMORY AND TRAUMA IN EASTERINE KIRE'S *SKY IS MY FATHER: A NAGA VILLAGE REMEMBERED*****S. MAHALAKSHMI**

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Abstract

Memory in postcolonial literature often works as a means of recovering histories silenced by conquest, violence, and official records. Easterine Kire's *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* enters this field by presenting Naga history through remembered experience, oral storytelling, and collective suffering. Jan Vansina's statement that "oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature" (1) offers a useful frame for reading Kire's narrative as a cultural archive shaped by spoken memory. The article examines how the novel does not merely recount the past but reconstructs Khonoma's history through ancestral voices, village memory, and the pain of colonial encounter. In the postcolonial context, Kire gives indigenous memory the force of historical evidence, especially when the people return after destruction and "built new houses in the places of those burnt down" (Kire 83). The narrative turns trauma into testimony by linking loss to rebuilding, mourning to remembrance, and suffering to communal endurance. The article argues that Kire's work transforms wounded history into cultural testimony and historical recovery. Through its movement from oral memory to written narrative, *Sky Is My Father* restores Naga experience as a living record of survival, resistance and identity.

Keywords: Memory; Trauma; Postcolonial Narrative; Naga History; Oral Tradition; Cultural Testimony; Indigenous Literature

Introduction

Easterine Kire stands as one of the major literary voices from Nagaland whose writings bring Naga life, belief, memory and history into Indian English literature with rare seriousness. Her works show a deep concern for oral culture, village life, ancestral memory and the wounds left by colonial violence. *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* holds a special place in her literary career because it presents Khonoma not as a distant historical location but as a living world shaped by courage, ritual, kinship and suffering. The authorial note in the text also confirms her stature as a poet, novelist, and children's writer, whose works have won major recognition and been translated into several languages. In this novel, Kire records the force of memory when she writes that Khonoma's people "still congregate around evening fires to tell and retell the proud history of their village" (Kire 9). The novel begins from local experience and gradually opens into a larger story of colonial encounter, resistance and cultural survival. *Sky Is My Father* should not be read as a simple historical novel, as it does more than simply narrate past events in chronological order. It recreates history through the voices, memories and emotional burdens of the Naga community. Colonial

records often describe the Nagas through the language of rebellion and punishment, as seen when Captain Vincent recommends military action:

I strongly recommend that a force not less than four or five hundred bayonets, accompanied by a gun, should enter these hills as soon as the season will allow, in order that this hitherto successful rebellion, may at once be brought to an issue' (Butler qtd. in Kire 6).

Such records reveal the force of imperial authority, but they do not fully convey the fear, grief, and dignity of the people who lived through that violence. Kire answers that silence through narrative memory, especially when the young men at the thou listen to the elders and "came to learn the stories of the village" (Kire 14). The novel places oral tradition at the centre of history and makes remembered experience a valid form of knowledge.

A postcolonial reading is important because the novel restores the Naga perspective on events that mainstream history often marginalises. Elwin records Damant's reports as "offers of submission" and "successful enforcement of fines and penalties" (qtd. in Kire 7), while Mackenzie describes the Battle of Khonoma as "the severest fighting ever known in these hills" (qtd. in Kire 8). Kire's narrative shifts attention from colonial administration to the wounded village, the widowed families, the burnt houses and the memory of survival. After the destruction of Khonoma, the villagers return and work "until they had built new houses in the places of those burnt down" (Kire 83). The research problem of the article lies in this gap between official history and indigenous memory. The main objective of the article is to examine how memory and trauma are narrativised in *Sky Is My Father* through oral tradition, historical recollection and collective identity.

Easterine Kire and the Naga Historical Context

Easterine Kire occupies an important place in Indian English literature as a writer who gives literary form to Naga history, folklore, community memory and indigenous worldview. Her fiction draws strength from oral narratives, village customs, ritual practices and remembered conflicts that shaped Naga life across generations. *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* presents Khonoma as a cultural space where memory lives through people, places and inherited stories. The opening scenes depict village life as a world of work and discipline, as Kovi sees women returning with firewood and thinks, "the old ways are good" (Kire 10). Kire does not treat custom as a decorative background but presents it as the moral and social foundation of the Angami Nagas. Her narrative gives dignity to ordinary people whose lives hold the weight of history. Through this method, she turns local memory into a literary record of Naga existence.

The historical background of the novel rests on the Angami Naga village of Khonoma, known for its strong warrior culture and deep love of independence. Kire places the village within a landscape of mountains, forts, clans, fields, rituals and oral instruction. The text records that the first British entry into Naga country met fierce resistance, and Moffat Mills describes the colonial advance as "a constant firing of musketry" (qtd. in Kire 5). Such a statement reveals the unequal nature of the encounter between spear-wielding villagers and an armed imperial force. Kire balances such colonial records with scenes from within the

community, especially thehou where young men “came to learn the stories of the village” (Kire 14). The village becomes a living archive where history passes from elder to youth through speech, memory and shared listening. In this sense, the novel restores the voice of the people behind the events recorded by outsiders. Political violence enters the narrative through raids, punitive expeditions, burning of houses and the long conflict between Khonoma and British power. Mackenzie calls the Battle of Khonoma “the severest fighting ever known in these hills” (qtd. in Kire 8), yet Kire moves beyond the language of military record to show the cost of war in domestic and communal life. The novel remembers disruption through widows, children, fields, burnt homes and the burden carried by survivors. After Khonoma is destroyed, the people return and rebuild “new houses in the places of those burnt down” (Kire 83). Kire foregrounds indigenous experience by making memory, labour and suffering central to historical narration. Her work refuses to leave Naga history within colonial files or official accounts. *Sky Is My Father* presents the Angami past as a lived inheritance shaped by violence, resilience and collective identity.

Theoretical Framework: Memory, Trauma and Postcolonial Narrative

The present article uses memory studies, trauma theory and postcolonial narrative as its main theoretical frame for reading Easterine Kire’s *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. Memory studies help explain how a community keeps the past alive through stories, rituals, repeated speech, and shared recollections. Maurice Halbwachs states that “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories” and that people also “recall, recognise, and localise their memories” within social life (38). Kire’s novel reflects this idea when Khonoma’s people “still congregate around evening fires to tell and retell the proud history of their village” (Kire 9). Memory in the novel does not remain private or silent because it moves through the thehou, clan gatherings, oral instruction and the everyday language of elders. The community house becomes a cultural archive because the younger men “came to learn the stories of the village” (Kire 14). Through such scenes, the novel presents memory as a social force that protects identity against historical erasure.

Trauma theory gives another important basis for understanding the novel because colonial violence wounds both persons and communities. Cathy Caruth explains trauma as an experience that resists easy understanding:

Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11).

Kire’s narrative shows such injury not only through battle but also through the burning of homes, exile, widowhood and the shame of dispossession. The people of Khonoma look down on their burning village and see “half-burnt posts and ashes” that blacken the whole site (Kire 83). Violence becomes historical trauma because it attacks memory, land, shelter and collective dignity at the same time. The novel also records emotional suffering when “women wept as they saw their homes turned into charred ruins” while the men carried “a deep cold anger” (Kire

83). Trauma, in this framework, is a wound that survives the event and returns through memory.

Postcolonial narrative connects these ideas with the recovery of silenced histories. Homi Bhabha observes that “the study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognise themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’” (12). Kire’s text reverses such colonial othering by allowing the Naga experience to speak from within its own cultural world. Colonial records often reduce Khonoma to rebellion, punishment and administration, but the novel restores human memory to the centre of history. Jan Assmann’s view that cultural memory is tied to “fixed points in the past” and preserved through symbolic forms (37) helps to read the novel’s rituals, songs, houses, fields and oral tales as carriers of historical knowledge. After destruction, the act of rebuilding becomes a form of cultural survival because Levi and his friends work for weeks “until they had built new houses in the places of those burnt down” (Kire 83). The article reads *Sky Is My Father* as a postcolonial narrative that transforms memory and trauma into testimony through oral tradition, historical recollection and collective identity.

Narrative Reconstruction of the Naga Past

Kire reconstructs the Naga past by joining memory, narration and history within the life of Khonoma. The novel does not begin with an abstract account of colonial events but with the rhythms of village life, the movement of women at dawn, the smoke from hearths, the habits of clan meetings and the duties of kinship. Such descriptive realism gives the past a lived form and allows the reader to enter history through ordinary scenes rather than official records. Jan Vansina’s view that “oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature” (1) helps to explain Kire’s method because the novel values spoken memory as a way of preserving the past. Kire marks this method in the introduction, noting that Khonoma’s people “still congregate around evening fires to tell and retell the proud history of their village” (9). Storytelling becomes the first structure of historical recovery in the text. Through that form, the village remembers itself before colonial violence turns its social world into a field of loss. The movement between personal memory and collective history gives the novel its emotional strength. Kire presents the past through figures such as Kovi, Piano, Levi, and Pelhu, whose lives show how large events enter homes, fields, bodies, and speech. Personal grief never stays private because clan honour, village duty and inherited custom shape every response to suffering. Paul Ricoeur’s statement that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organised after the manner of a narrative” (3) applies well to Kire’s work because the novel turns historical time into remembered human experience. The thehou plays a central role in this process because “the younger men listened closely” and “came to learn the stories of the village” (Kire 14). The narrative technique moves from one remembered account to another and creates a chain of recollection across generations. Kire’s art lies in making memory act as both content and structure.

Village life appears in the novel through kinship, labour, rituals, gendered responsibilities, war customs and codes of honour. Kire gives equal attention to domestic work and public history, so the reader sees how baskets, fields, feasts,

hearths, dormitories and clan meetings sustain the community before disruption arrives. The detailed account of boys learning basket weaving shows that cultural memory lives in practice, as younger boys first make simple baskets and later create grain baskets that become “veritable works of art” (Kire 16). Such scenes slow the movement of the plot and deepen the historical texture of the narrative. The descriptive mode makes Khonoma more than a battlefield because it appears as a complete social world with its own moral order. When colonial violence enters, the reader understands what stands at risk. Kire’s narration recovers a Naga past by making culture visible before showing its injury.

The blending of history with memory becomes especially clear in the sections on British entry, military action and the burning of Khonoma. Kire uses historical records but does not let them control the meaning of the past. Colonial accounts speak of raids, rebellion, fines, and punishment, but Kire places those events alongside the grief of women, the anger of men, and the struggle of displaced families. The narrative repeatedly returns to remembered wounds because recovery requires retelling pain as well as preserving pride. After the destruction of Khonoma, the survivors worked “until they had built new houses in the places of those burnt down” (Kire 83). That act of rebuilding becomes a narrative image of historical recovery. The novel allows forgotten voices to enter literary history by placing their labour, speech and endurance at the centre of the story.

Kire’s community-centred narration resists the narrowness of external history by grounding the past in the people who lived through it. The narrative does not depend on a single heroic figure but gathers many voices, memories and experiences into a collective account. Elders, warriors, women, children, widows and workers all carry parts of the past. The novel’s structure resembles oral history because it moves through recollection, repetition, remembered speech and inherited knowledge. Such a form makes the past active rather than distant. Kire reconstructs Naga history not as a finished record but as a living memory shaped by storytelling and loss. In this way, *Sky Is My Father* turns narrative into an act of recovery and gives literary permanence to a history often pushed outside dominant historical writing.

Memory as Cultural Testimony

Memory in *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* functions as a form of cultural testimony because it preserves the moral life of Khonoma through stories, customs and shared recollections. Kire presents memory not as a private act alone but as a social practice that carries the values of the Angami Nagas across generations. Maurice Halbwachs explains that “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories” and that they also “recall, recognise, and localise their memories” within social life (38). Kire’s novel reflects this idea through the people of Khonoma who “still congregate around evening fires to tell and retell the proud history of their village” (Kire 9). Oral memory gives the village a living archive where the past remains active in speech and daily life. Through such remembered narration, the community protects its identity from the silence imposed by colonial and official histories.

The novel shows that remembered events preserve cultural knowledge as well as ancestral values. Stories teach the young how to understand honour, kinship,

courage, ritual discipline and duties toward the village. Kire gives special importance to the thehou and the dormitory because these spaces transmit knowledge through spoken narration. When Levi asks about an old story, Lonyü answers, “This story was told me by my grandfather whose great-grandfather saw it” (Kire 31). The sentence reveals the movement of memory from an ancestor to an elder and from an elder to a youth. The remembered story becomes testimony because it does not depend on written proof alone but survives through repeated narration. In this way, Kire makes oral tradition a reliable form of historical and cultural preservation.

Kire’s use of memory also resists historical erasure by placing the Naga experience at the centre of the narrative. Colonial records often reduce Khonoma to rebellion, punishment and administrative conflict, but the novel restores the emotional truth of those events through village voices. Kire shows the cost of violence through families, widows, children, burnt houses and displaced people rather than through military language alone. The destruction of Khonoma becomes a shared wound when the survivors return after exile and rebuild “new houses in the places of those burnt down” (Kire 83). The memory of rebuilding testifies to both suffering and endurance. Historical pain does not disappear in the narrative because the community converts it into a record of survival. Kire’s method gives moral depth to Naga history by allowing those who suffered to become the carriers of historical meaning.

Memory also functions as collective inheritance, binding the past and the present through repeated acts of remembrance. Village stories, ritual practices, names, places, household duties and ancestral instructions shape the community’s sense of belonging. The novel does not separate memory from land because Khonoma’s hills, fields, paths, houses and meeting places carry the signs of lived history. Kire records culture through ordinary gestures such as fetching firewood, telling stories, teaching boys, preparing feasts and observing taboos. These details show that testimony can exist in the small acts of everyday life as much as in accounts of war. The pressure of colonial rule and later political disturbance threatens the continuity of such memory, but narration gives it renewed form. *Sky Is My Father* becomes a literary act of cultural testimony because it transforms remembered experience into a public record of Naga identity, loss and survival.

Trauma, Violence and Historical Wounding

Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered represents trauma as a wound produced by violence, fear, displacement and historical uncertainty. Kire does not present violence only through the battlefield but also through its pressure on homes, fields, families and village routine. Trauma theory helps to explain this structure because Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events” that returns later through repeated forms of disturbance (11). In Kire’s novel, fear enters ordinary life before open conflict begins, as the women become “anxious to harvest, for the tension was so great by now that they expected to be attacked any day” (Kire 69). The simple act of harvesting turns into an anxious duty under the shadow of war. Kire shows that violence first alters the emotional climate of the village before it destroys physical space. Trauma begins as dread and later hardens into loss.

The novel also presents trauma as a collective wound carried by the whole community. War separates men from families, places women under silent fear and forces children to grow up in uncertainty. Peno's fear when Levi stays away from home shows how political violence reaches the domestic world and damages the security of marriage and motherhood. Kire's narration makes the household feel the pressure of history when private life becomes inseparable from the demands of war. The attack on Khonoma brings this pressure to its most intense form, as the villagers look down from Tsiekha fort and see their world reduced to "half-burnt posts and ashes" (Kire 83). The image does not merely describe destruction but gives visible form to historical wounding. A village loses more than houses when fire consumes the signs of labour, memory and belonging. Displacement deepens the trauma because the people of Khonoma lose control over land, shelter and social dignity. The villagers return from the fort, but "the village was no longer theirs" because the colonial power had dispersed the clans and confiscated the place they called home (Kire 83). Such displacement wounds the community at the level of identity, as the village is not only a settlement but also the centre of ancestry, kinship, and memory. Kire writes that many people feel humiliated by dependence on others and prefer "temporary shelters in the jungles" to charity (83). The sentence reveals how violence produces shame as well as physical hardship. Colonial punishment attacks the emotional structure of the community by making the people strangers to their own homeland. Kire gives language to this pain in ways that administrative history rarely attempts. The novel avoids reducing trauma to mere suffering by also showing how narration gives shape to pain. Official history may count deaths, name battles and record treaties, but Kire turns attention toward grief, anger, endurance and the labour of return. Women weep before their ruined homes while men carry "a deep cold anger that would not go away" (Kire 83). These emotional details transform historical violence into lived experience. Kire's narrative shows that trauma continues after the battle through sleeplessness, illness, silence and the burden of rebuilding. The act of telling becomes a way of naming pain that official records leave outside their language. *Sky Is My Father* makes historical wounding visible by placing the injured community at the centre of memory, narration and cultural survival.

Oral Tradition and Narrative Healing

Oral tradition plays a central role in *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* because it gives the wounded community a way to remember pain without losing cultural direction. Kire uses storytelling as a social practice through which the people of Khonoma reconnect the present with the ancestral past. Jan Vansina's statement that "oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature" (1) helps frame the novel, as Kire treats spoken memory as a valid record of Naga history. The people of Khonoma keep their past alive when they "congregate around evening fires to tell and retell the proud history of their village" (Kire 9). Such repeated narration gives dignity to those who suffered, refusing to leave their experience confined to colonial records alone. Storytelling also restores emotional order after violence because the community converts loss into shared memory.

The act of telling becomes a form of healing as it allows grief, courage and survival to enter cultural continuity.

Kire presents the house as one of the most important spaces of oral memory and community narration. In the house, elders speak of hunts, battles, customs and duties while the younger men listen and learn. The novel states that the young men “came to learn the stories of the village” and that the house no was one “well-versed in the stories and customs of the village” (Kire 14). Oral tradition heals by creating a bond between generations and by making history part of daily instruction. The past does not remain broken or scattered because elders organise it through remembered speech. Even painful stories gain meaning when they pass from one generation to another. Kire’s narrative form follows this pattern by shaping the novel as a chain of recollections rather than as a detached historical record.

Narrative healing in the novel does not erase trauma but gives it cultural form. Kire shows that memory-sharing can carry both pride and sorrow. When elders recount old wars, Levi and his age-mates remain awake through the night with “each contributing his own story or opinion” (Kire 64). The scene shows how memory moves through dialogue and how young listeners inherit both the courage and burden of the past. Storytelling protects identity under colonial and political pressure because it keeps the Naga experience within Naga speech. The novel converts wounded memory into narrative continuity by linking suffering with oral history, community values and collective remembrance. Through this method, *Sky Is My Father* presents healing as cultural survival rather than forgetfulness.

Conclusion

Easterine Kire’s *Sky Is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* presents memory and trauma as living forces that shape Naga historical consciousness. The article has argued that the novel does not merely retell the past but narrativises it through oral tradition, historical recollection and collective identity. Kire transforms the experience of colonial violence, displacement, fear and loss into literary testimony by placing Khonoma and its people at the centre of narration. The novel challenges histories that reduce indigenous life to rebellion administration or military conflict. Instead, it restores the emotional truth of Naga experience through village stories, ritual memory, kinship bonds and the voices of ordinary people. Trauma appears not only as suffering but also as a wound that demands narration, remembrance and cultural meaning. Through narrative, the community preserves ancestral values and gives dignity to those whose pain remains absent from official records. *Sky Is My Father* gains its narrative power from this movement between wound and witness, where the remembered past becomes a source of survival. Kire finally shows that storytelling can protect collective memory, resist historical silence and carry a wounded culture into the future with moral clarity and renewed historical presence for coming generations.

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DABEER SI/KTT/40**THE TRAUMATIC STATE OF EXCEPTION AND THE ANTI-SIKH
RIOTS OF 1984****VISHWAJEET SINGH**Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages
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Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa, Haryana, India**Abstract**

This paper examines the anti-Sikh violence of November 1984 in Delhi as a paradigmatic instance of what Giorgio Agamben calls the “state of exception.” Drawing on Agamben’s “State of Exception” and “Homo Sacer” alongside Michel Foucault’s concept of subjugated knowledges, the paper argues that the 1984 pogrom operated simultaneously on two constitutive planes: the practical withdrawal of police and military protection from Sikh citizens, and the narrative transformation of organized mass violence into “communal riots” through the selective management of official commission testimony. Reading H.S. Phoolka and Manoj Mitta’s *When a Tree Shook Delhi* as a documentary counter-archive and Amitav Ghosh’s literary essay “The Ghost of Mrs Gandhi” as a testimonial counter-narrative to demonstrate how both texts recover the subjugated knowledges that official commissions like the Ranganath Misra Commission and the Nanavati Commission systematically excluded from the public record. The paper points out that the continued absence of conviction forty-two years after the violence represents the institutional persistence of the narrative operation that began in the commission reports themselves. By reading legal documentation, literary testimony, and activist counter-archives together, this paper contributes to postcolonial memory studies by demonstrating how sovereign exception is sustained as much through narrative as through force.

Keywords: State of Exception, Postcolonial Memory, Subjugated Knowledges, Counter-Archive, Anti-Sikh Pogrom 1984, Bare Life

The anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi are often described as communal riots that erupted after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. But this description ignores something crucial about what actually led to the violence. The present paper tries to examine how state institutions, including the police, the army, and the government, not only failed to prevent violence but also showed signs of complicity. It draws analysis on H.S. Phoolka’s *When a Tree Shook Delhi* and Amitav Ghosh’s essay “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi.” There are two problems that run through this paper. First is how police and army forces refused to act during the violence, creating what Giorgio Agamben calls a “state of exception,” a position in which law exists on paper but disappears in practice. Second, how the official language transformed an organized pogrom into ‘riots’ through selective documentation that cleared the evidence of state complicity and a state

managed narrative was put in place. This will make clear that what happened in 1984 was not a failure of the state machinery but an intentional exercise of power that resulted in the abandonment of the protection of victims. The authorities knew violence was happening and they had all the means to stop it, but chose not to intervene, later reframing their inaction as unavoidable.

The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards, and the next three days, Delhi witnessed what wasn't spontaneous rage but something more deliberate. The number of killings provided by Phoolka and Mitta is 2,733 Sikhs who were killed in the first week of November 1984, out of which 1,234 were killed in East Delhi alone (27). The standard explanation calls this violence "communal riots," which tries to suggest some kind of uncontrollable eruption of religious hatred. But that explanation doesn't hold up when one looks at the details. According to their findings, the violence was enabled due to the state's intentional motive to abandon the protection of the Sikh citizens. As Police forces were deployed across Delhi, they did not intervene. The army had thousands of troops available, but was not ordered to deploy for three days. Government officials, when later asked about the situation, gave contradictory testimonies about who delayed what. And after it was all over, official commissions systematically deleted the evidence of the state's involvement during violence from their reports, while judicial citations praised police for "gallantry" in operations that actually targeted Sikh families defending themselves (83). This pattern was present without protection and was documented without truth.

To make sense of how the law could be simultaneously present and absent, it is necessary to turn to Giorgio Agamben's work on the state of exception. The work, *State of Exception*, is crucial to understanding what happened in Delhi. He argues that it is not simply a special category of law invoked during a crisis but something harder to name and therefore harder to challenge. He says, it is the "no-man's-land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life" (1). What he means is that the law has not been abolished but has ceased to exist as a protection for citizens. Sovereignty operates through suspending the law's relationship to the people it is supposed to protect, while leaving its formal structure untouched. He states, "the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (2). Agamben distinguishes between a formally declared state of exception and what he calls its "fictitious" or de facto suspension. The latter does not require a proclamation because it operates through institutional inaction, through the selective withdrawal of protection, while formal law remains technically intact. He writes that "the state of exception is not a special kind of law ... rather, insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept" (4).

Agamben uses the concept of "bare life" to describe what happens to people caught in this gap. Drawing on the Aristotelian distinction between "Zoe" (biological life shared by all living things) and "bios" (political life shaped by law and citizenship), he argues that sovereign exception operates by collapsing this distinction by producing what he calls *homo sacer*: a person who remains formally a citizen but has been stripped of the protections that citizenship is supposed to guarantee (Giordanengo 2). Bare life is simultaneously included within the

political order as its foundation and excluded from its protections as its limit. It describes in precise detail what Sikhs in Delhi experienced between October 31 and November 3, 1984. They remained constitutionally Indian citizens, and all their formal rights were technically intact. But practically, none of those rights worked during those three days. The gap between formal law and practical protection is where the “state of exception” and “bare life” operate.

Amitav Ghosh, in “The Ghost of Mrs Gandhi”, writes of direct experience on the morning of November 1, arriving at Safdarjang Enclave to find columns of smoke rising in every direction across the city. What struck him immediately was not the scale but the precision, as he writes, the fires were “so carefully targeted that they created an effect quite different from that of a general conflagration.” Sikh properties were burned, and Hindu and Muslim households around the area were untouched. A civil rights report published shortly afterwards, *Who Are the Guilty?* confirmed this pattern. It states the violence “began with the arrival of groups of armed people in tempo vans, scooters, motorcycles or trucks,” who went around localities with cans of petrol, systematically setting fire to Sikh houses, shops, and Gurdwaras, dragging out young Sikh men and burning them alive on public roads. The role of the Delhi Police during the violence shows how institutional abandonment actually works in practice. It was not that the police disappeared or were unable to respond. They were visibly present across the city, but the problem was that they were operationally inactive. They watched violence happen without intervening. This pattern started immediately, on the evening of October 31, when President Zail Singh’s cavalcade was attacked near AIIMS hospital. Phoolka documents this carefully as, “Despite the security breach exposed by the attack on the president’s cavalcade, the policemen present then in large numbers around AIIMS, failed to take cognizance of it. None of the armed miscreants, who had dared to attack the first citizen of the country, was apprehended” (9). If police could witness an attack on the President himself without making arrests, what would they do when ordinary Sikhs were attacked? The answer became clear over the next three days.

The case of Squadron Leader Manmohan Bir Singh Talwar makes the asymmetry of this state of exception most analytically visible. Talwar was a decorated military officer, recipient of the Mahavir Chakra for his service in the 1971 war. On November 1, mobs attacked his house three times; each time, police did not respond to his calls for protection. When he finally fired in self-defense during the third attack, killing three mob members, police arrived immediately, not to protect him, but to arrest him. As Phoolka notes, their intent “was clear to disarm Talwar rather than provide any security and enforce the rule of law” (40–46). He spent two weeks in jail on murder charges. His military decorations, his lifetime of service to the state, and his constitutional rights, none of them functioned during those seventy-two hours. His citizenship had been practically suspended without anyone declaring it. Ghosh observed this same pattern directly when his bus was stopped by mobs searching for Sikhs, he says, “without any fear of the police, which was deployed in the vicinity.” That fearlessness is important because the mobs knew accurately that the police would not intervene.

The experiences of Sikh citizens in Delhi between October 31 and November 3, 1984, correspond with precision to what Agamben means by bare life. These were Indian citizens protected by a constitution that guaranteed them equal rights and state protection. They could call the police because the law had not been formally suspended, and yet during those seventy-two hours, none of those guarantees functioned in practice. They were simultaneously inside the political order as citizens and outside its protections as a designated, exposed population. This simultaneous inclusion and exclusion is the “zone of indifference” that Agamben identifies. He says, “the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (Agamben 23).

This asymmetry during the violence reveals precisely the “zone of indifference” that Agamben identifies as the structural signature of the state of exception. The law was not uniformly suspended but continued to operate against Sikhs defending themselves while ceasing to operate against those attacking them. Sikhs could be victimized with impunity, but could not legitimately defend themselves. This asymmetric operation exemplifies sovereign exception, in which the law both applies and withdraws simultaneously, and the selection itself becomes a political act. The events at Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib provide compelling evidence for this argument. There, a senior police officer took personal command and ordered constables to fire on approaching mobs, and stopped the violence immediately with minimal force. As Phoolka documents, this shows that “where the police officers showed the strength and the determination to check the riots, they could be really effective with little force too” (52). The capacity for protection existed throughout. What varied was the institutional decision about when to apply it and when to withdraw it.

While police inaction created the immediate conditions for violence, the failure to deploy the Indian Army extended them across three full days. On the morning of November 1, five thousand army personnel were stationed in Delhi. The Ranganath Misra Commission itself acknowledged that, had those troops been deployed promptly, the violence “would certainly not have been as bad as it turned out to be” (58). So why was the army not deployed? This is where things get complicated because of what Phoolka calls “Systematic arrangement.” Four officials shared formal responsibility for law and order in Delhi. These are the Lieutenant Governor, the Police Commissioner, the Home Minister, and the General Officer Commanding. When the Nanavati Commission held public inquiries, all four testified. Remarkably, each one claimed that they personally wanted immediate deployment of the army but had been prevented because the circumstances were beyond their control. As Phoolka puts it, “they all wanted the army to be called at the earliest...there must have been some force in the government beyond their control that delayed the process” (60-63).

This is how sovereign exception operates through dispersed responsibility. Nobody admits to making the decision to delay, yet deployment was delayed. The delay cannot be explained by individual failure or bureaucratic confusion, rather it points to a political decision made at a level that remains officially

unacknowledged. The commission's language helps with this deflection, which states "the government had alerted the army," which sounds like action but actually means nothing. This choice of words creates confusion about who was responsible and what actions were actually taken, allowing officials to avoid blame while the violence continued.

Ghosh captures what this institutional absence meant from the perspective of those who were waiting for help. He and Hari Sen waited with genuine confidence, he writes, that "In India, there is a drill associated with civil disturbances: a curfew is declared; paramilitary units are deployed; in extreme cases the army marches to the stricken areas. No city in India is better equipped to perform this drill than New Delhi, with its huge security apparatus." But hours passed without response; the machinery of state protection was visible in its absence. The contrast with Operation Blue Star makes everything clear. In that same year in June 1984, the same state mobilized a massive military force with remarkable speed to assault the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The operation was justified as necessary to preserve national sovereignty against an extremist threat. Four months later, when it was required to protect Sikh citizens in Delhi, the same capacity mysteriously disappeared.

This paper further incorporates Agamben's framework with Michel Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge, specifically his concept of "subjugated knowledges", which he explains as forms of testimony and evidence that are "disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" by dominant institutions (Foucault 82). Those with institutional authority to name events exercise real power over what those events come to mean and, by extension, over who can be held accountable for them. In 1984, the state suspended protection in practice while simultaneously constructing a narrative in which no such suspension had occurred. It analyses the narrative politics of how official language transformed what happened from a pogrom into "riots," and what that transformation accomplishes politically. Therefore, these two operations, the practical and the discursive, were not parallel but mutually reinforcing, and both require analysis.

The transformation of organized violence into 'riots' happened through language as much as through physical events. Language is the first site where reality is constructed. The truth is generated and negotiated in this realm. Those who are in a position to influence, their choice of words can make or break reality. Language not only reports reality, but it can also frame and quietly influence people's understanding of what has happened. What people come to believe as 'truth' is often first decided by the words used rather than by facts, and constructs reality in powerful ways. Michel Foucault argued that knowledge and power are inseparable that what a society accepts as truth is produced within specific power relations, rather than discovered through neutral observation. Those with institutional authority to name events and to determine which testimonies count as evidence exercise power over truth itself. In examining collective violence, it is important to understand the distinction between what 'riots' and 'pogroms' imply in language. In "On the Study of Riots, Pogroms, and Genocide," Paul Brass suggests that riots are a spontaneous eruption, popular anger beyond state control, and a

regrettable but somewhat understandable excess. Riots are unfortunate events that occur during periods of communal tension. They require investigation, but they do not seriously question the state's authority. Pogrom, on the other hand, presents itself as a riot but implies characteristics associated with organized, systematic targeting. It suggests that what happened was planned rather than spontaneous, enabled rather than merely neglected.

The choice of terminology plays a crucial role, as the official narrative has maintained 'riots' despite overwhelming evidence of organization. This reveals how power operates through narrative, not by suppressing counter-narratives entirely but by marginalizing them. Alternative accounts get labeled as partisan, activist, unofficial, while official language maintains its claim to neutrality. The struggle over naming becomes a struggle over historical memory and political justice.

The Ranganath Misra and Nanavati Commissions collected extensive survivor testimony, some of which directly implicated police in the killings. Phoolka documents this pattern with care. One particularly clear case involves Joginder Kaur's testimony. She told the commission that her husband and eldest son were killed, while she and two surviving sons escaped because two policemen helped them. Crucially, Kaur testified that these policemen told her they "did not know how they took pity on us as they were otherwise apprehending and killing sardars." This is direct testimony implicating the police in systematic killing. The commission had this evidence, recorded it, and then deleted it from the official records. Phoolka notes they "consciously deleted the part that would damage the reputation of the state authorities from the inquiry process" (74-78). This is not an accidental omission. It is strategic to edit the production of official truth through selective inclusion.

The Paharganj incident shows another dimension of narrative transformation. On November 5, a joint army-police operation targeted a Sikh family that had fired in self-defense after mobs killed the family head. Sixteen family members were arrested, mostly women and children. Official citations praised security forces for "conspicuous gallantry, courage and devotion to duty of a high order" while labeling arrested family members as "miscreants." The citation omitted the fact that those arrested were "predominantly women and children" (84). This inversion criminalizes the victims, and self-defense becomes violence. The same acts receive opposite moral valuations, with police complicity becoming heroism depending on who's speaking and from what institutional position. Security forces attacking Sikh families equals gallantry; Sikh families defending themselves equals criminal action. Language actively produces the reality that official history records. And once that reality is established, history becomes difficult to challenge because it carries institutional authority.

In opposition to this official erasure, survivor testimonies and independent documentation represent what Foucault calls "the insurrection of subjugated knowledge." He describes these as "a whole set of knowledge that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledge located low down on the hierarchy. It is through the reappearance of these local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge that criticism

performs its work” (82). Phoolka’s *When a Tree Shook Delhi* functions precisely as a counter-archive that systematically recovers the testimonies that official commissions excluded or minimized and juxtaposes them against the official reports that suppressed them, making the gaps legible as acts of institutional choice rather than inadvertent omission. The archive and the counter-archive, read against each other, reveal the real story of what happened in 1984, not through contradiction on matters of fact but through the visibility of what institutional power chose not to record.

Ghosh’s “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi” operates within the same counter-archival tradition as Phoolka’s documentary work, but through the formal resources of literary non-fiction rather than legal investigation. Where official reports adopt a bureaucratic form that claims institutional neutrality, Ghosh writes in the first person. He acknowledges from the opening of his essay that his account is subjective and written from memory. This acknowledgement refuses the false neutrality of official discourse, a neutrality that, as the commission reports demonstrate, conceals rather than eliminates the politics of selection. When he describes the bus journey on the afternoon of October 31, the Sikh passenger crouching in the footwell, the driver shaking his head to the mobs, the other passengers murmuring “no, no, let us go, we have to get home”, he is not providing documentation in the conventional sense. He is preserving the texture of a moral emergency in which ordinary people had to decide, without preparation, to lie to save a stranger’s life. The essay form is the only genre adequate to this kind of moral testimony because it refuses to reduce the moment to a statistic or an official finding.

The scene in Hari Sen’s house, in which Ghosh and Hari persuade the elderly Mr and Mrs Bawa to climb over the garden wall to shelter with them, captures another dimension of the 1984 emergency that official language could not note. Mr Bawa had spent his adult life in devoted service to the Indian state, working with international organizations. He genuinely could not understand why the violence should concern him. He had, as Ghosh writes, “spent a lifetime cocooned in privilege.” The “potentially terminal rent” that Ghosh describes appearing in the wrappings of that privilege is Agamben’s state of exception experienced from the inside. The state of exception does not announce itself. Those caught within it, like Mr Bawa, Squadron Leader Talwar, and Joginder Kaur’s family, are not officially declared to be outside the protection of the law. They are simply left outside it without warning.

“The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi,” written eleven years after the events, is the form in which he finally found a way to honor explicitly the significance of what he witnessed in 1984, which was not primarily horror but “the affirmation of humanity”. It is the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another. Describing activist reports like *Who Are the Guilty?* Ghosh calls such documents “weapons with which society asserts itself against a state that runs criminally amok.” His literary memoir is part of the same counter-archival project, different in genre but united in its refusal to let state violence become naturalized through the official management of memory.

The state of exception in 1984 operated on two planes simultaneously. The first was practical: the withdrawal of police protection, the three-day delay in army deployment, and the asymmetric application of law that criminalized Sikh self-defense while conferring impunity on organized mob violence. The second was discursive: the transformation of organized mass killing into riots through selective management of official testimony, the erasure of incriminating evidence from commission reports, and the strategic inversion of victim and perpetrator in official citations. Though these two planes were not parallel, they were mutually constitutive. The practical abandonment created the conditions for mass killing. The discursive reconstruction retrospectively erased the state's responsibility for those conditions. Together, they constitute a state of exception that extended beyond the three days of violence and into the long structure of official memory. The fact that, forty-two years after November 1984, no individual has been convicted for instigating the violence is not simply a failure of the justice system. It is the continuation, through institutional persistence, of the discursive operation that began in the commission reports. The official narrative of riots, spontaneous, communal, beyond state control, continues to function as a shield against accountability because it was built into the evidentiary record by the very commissions that were charged with establishing the truth.

The counter-archives analyzed in this paper, Phoolka's documentary account, Ghosh's literary memoir, and the activist reports of the People's Union for Democratic Rights, constitute what Foucault describes as the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. They preserve the testimonies the state excluded, make visible the patterns the state obscured, and maintain the historical pressure that official narrative seeks to dissipate. Ghosh writes of *Who Are the Guilty?* "Every year the nails hammered in by that slim document dig just a little deeper." Remembering the events of 1984 accurately is not simply about preserving history. It is about understanding the violence for what it was, rather than accepting the easier explanation that it was a spontaneous outbreak of communal anger and grief. Recognizing the structural and organized nature of the violence is essential if justice is to be achieved. Such acts of remembrance are also a form of resistance against the systems and narratives that seek to normalize an exceptional act of state and political violence.

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DABEER SI/KTT/41**MEMORY, MARTYRDOM AND THE ETHICS OF REMEMBRANCE:
POLITICAL COMMEMORATION IN W. B. YEATS'S POLITICAL
POETRY****URMILA K.**Assistant Professor of English
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This article examines how the political poetry of W. B. Yeats negotiates the ethics of political martyrdom and commemoration within the turbulent historical context of early twentieth-century Ireland. While Yeats has frequently been studied as a nationalist poet or as a chronicler of the Irish revolutionary movement, this study argues that his political poems resist straightforward ideological interpretation by exposing the ethical complexities underlying the transformation of political sacrifice into collective memory. Focusing on "September 1913", "Easter 1916", "Sixteen Dead Men", and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", the article investigates how these poems represent successive stages in the construction, consolidation, and questioning of commemorative narratives. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, it adopts a memory studies framework to explore the interaction between individual remembrance, collective identity, and cultural memory. Through close textual analysis of imagery, symbolism, refrain, paradox, tonal shifts, and rhetorical uncertainty, the study demonstrates that Yeats consistently preserves historical ambiguity where nationalist discourse seeks certainty and closure. Rather than glorifying revolutionary martyrdom or dismissing nationalist commitment, Yeats reveals remembrance as a dynamic ethical practice that requires continual reflection on violence, sacrifice, and political responsibility. The article further argues that Yeats's poetry not only anticipates contemporary debates on political memory and public commemoration but also exposes ethical dimensions of remembrance that extend beyond existing models of collective and cultural memory. By preserving ambiguity where commemorative discourse seeks symbolic closure, Yeats presents remembrance as an ongoing ethical practice rather than a completed cultural achievement. The study therefore contributes to both Yeats scholarship and memory studies by demonstrating how literary texts illuminate the moral complexities of political commemoration.

Keywords: W. B. Yeats, political poetry, collective memory, commemoration, martyrdom.

The deaths of political actors rarely remain private events. Through monuments, anniversaries, ceremonies, literature, and historical narratives, they enter public memory and become symbols of national ideals or collective aspirations. This

process shapes political identity, but it also simplifies historical lives and deaths. Selection, interpretation, and omission transform lived experience into public commemoration. The political poetry of W. B. Yeats repeatedly returns to this transformation. Written during a period of colonial rule, cultural revival, and revolutionary conflict, his poems examine political deaths and the meanings they acquire through collective remembrance. Scholarship has often read “September 1913” and “Easter 1916” through nationalism, modernism, or Yeats’s response to Irish politics. These approaches leave less attention to his sustained concern with remembrance itself. Across “September 1913”, “Easter 1916”, “Sixteen Dead Men”, and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, Yeats explores not only political violence but also the cultural work that follows it, when communities decide how the dead will be remembered.

This article argues that Yeats presents political martyrdom as an ethically unstable category. He neither rejects revolutionary commitment nor accepts its transformation into nationalist myth. Instead, he examines how remembrance turns historical individuals into collective symbols while obscuring ordinary lives, unresolved motives, and moral uncertainty. “September 1913” exposes retrospective idealisation of nationalist heroes; “Easter 1916” captures the emergence of revolutionary martyrdom; “Sixteen Dead Men” reflects on the authority that martyrdom acquires through commemoration; “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” questions whether continuing violence can ever be contained within coherent narratives of remembrance. Drawing on memory studies, the article examines the relationship between commemoration and political martyrdom before turning to the historical context of Yeats’s writing and finds that these four poems trace successive stages in the transformation of political death into collective memory while refusing to present that transformation as morally complete or historically transparent.

Political martyrdom is not created by death alone. It emerges through acts of remembrance that assign meaning to death and incorporate it into collective identity. Commemoration selects certain lives for preservation while leaving others at the margins of history, making political sacrifice meaningful through cultural interpretation rather than through the event itself. In *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs argues that remembrance is shaped by the social groups within which it occurs and organised by the needs of the present rather than by fidelity to the past. Communities therefore preserve memories that sustain collective identity while setting aside elements that complicate dominant narratives. Jan Assmann extends this argument by distinguishing between communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is transmitted through everyday interaction within living generations. Cultural memory emerges when experience is institutionalised through texts, monuments, ceremonies, and other symbolic forms that outlast lived recollection. As this transition occurs, personal uncertainty and contradiction often give way to narratives that are more stable and politically usable. Political martyrdom is therefore produced through remembrance rather than contained within the act of death.

Yeats's political poetry repeatedly interrogates this process. Rather than accepting the transformation of historical figures into nationalist icons, "September 1913", "Easter 1916", "Sixteen Dead Men", and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", examine different stages in the making of political memory. Their persistent use of paradox, hesitation, and unresolved judgement preserves forms of historical complexity that nationalist commemoration often suppresses. Remembrance, Yeats suggests, is not only the recovery of the past but also an ethical decision about how that past will be understood.

Yeats's reflections on political martyrdom emerged from the history of colonial Ireland, where remembrance became closely tied to nationalist politics. Opposition to British rule developed alongside efforts to recover a distinct national identity, and the dead were increasingly commemorated as symbols of historical injustice and national aspiration rather than simply mourned as individuals. During the nineteenth century, political leaders and participants in failed rebellions entered public memory through speeches, songs, anniversaries, and historical writing. Their lives acquired meanings that often exceeded their historical circumstances, and sacrifice became central to nationalist imagination. The Irish Literary Revival developed within this commemorative culture. Writers sought to recover Irish mythology and cultural traditions as a means of resisting colonial definitions of national identity. Yeats recognised both the value and the danger of this. As Seamus Deane argues, cultural nationalism in Ireland was structurally entangled with political violence, and Yeats's own cultural politics participated in conditions that could encourage militant nationalism (Deane 74). Heroic traditions could inspire ethical commitment, but they could also legitimise political fanaticism. Yeats therefore remained ambivalent about nationalism. He admired the moral seriousness of earlier nationalist figures while recognising that commemoration could transform complex historical individuals into simplified symbols. Memory could foster political responsibility, but it could also replace historical complexity with emotional certainty. The Easter Rising of 1916 intensified these concerns. Although the rebellion failed militarily, the execution of its leaders transformed public opinion and gave the Rising lasting commemorative power. Political defeat became symbolic victory through sacrifice, and the meaning of those deaths became a contested site of public remembrance. The four poems examined here register different stages of that process. Together, they reveal Yeats's sustained concern with the ethical consequences of remembering the dead.

"September 1913" is often read as Yeats's response to materialism and the decline of public idealism in modern Ireland. Its deeper concern, however, is the construction of memory. Rather than simply contrasting a noble past with a diminished present, the poem demonstrates how earlier nationalist figures acquire symbolic authority through commemoration. The refrain, "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone, / It's with O'Leary in the grave," (121) performs more than an act of mourning. By identifying "Romantic Ireland" with John O'Leary, the poem condenses a diverse political tradition into a single commemorative figure. O'Leary becomes the embodiment of values that the speaker believes contemporary Ireland has abandoned. The historical individual is transformed into

a cultural emblem whose significance exceeds the complexity of his lived experience. Maurice Halbwachs's account of collective memory clarifies this process. Yeats recalls O'Leary not to reconstruct his political career but to establish a moral standard against which the present may be judged. The remembered past is therefore organised by contemporary needs rather than historical completeness.

The treatment of Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet, and Wolfe Tone follows the same pattern. Yeats invokes those for whom "all that blood was shed" and "all that delirium of the brave" before insisting that "they weighed so lightly what they gave", (121). Their deaths appear primarily through the language of sacrifice, illustrating how remembrance privileges symbolic value over historical specificity. Yet the poem also questions its own commemorative impulse. The repeated declaration that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone" may express genuine mourning, but it also suggests that the idealised nation survives largely through retrospective imagination. The closing assertion that the heroes "are with O'Leary in the grave", (121) reinforces the distance between historical experience and present desire. The dead persist only through acts of remembrance that inevitably reshape their meaning.

"Easter 1916" examines the unstable point at which personal recollection begins to enter collective memory. Yeats records the aftermath of the Rising while its meaning remains unsettled, preserving the ambiguities that accompany the emergence of political martyrdom. Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory illuminates this process. The speaker recalls the revolutionaries as familiar acquaintances before they become national symbols. The opening stanza remembers passing them "with a nod of the head / or polite meaningless words" and thinking "of a mocking tale or a gibe" (202). Everyday social encounters precede public commemoration. The refrain, "All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born" (203) marks the transformation without resolving its moral implications. Beauty and terror remain inseparable, preventing revolutionary sacrifice from becoming ethically transparent.

Yeats reinforces this tension through the portraits of individual participants. John MacBride remains "a drunken, vainglorious lout" who had "done most bitter wrong" before he "has resigned his part / In the casual comedy" (203). Constance Markievicz is remembered both as a revolutionary and as the woman whose voice "grew shrill" and who had once ridden to harriers "when young and beautiful." Personal memory resists the simplifications of public commemoration. The image of the stone develops the same concern. Hearts "with one purpose alone" become "enchanted to a stone / To trouble the living stream" (204). Commitment acquires permanence, yet that permanence also interrupts the movement and adaptability represented by the stream. The ethical centre of the poem lies in the unresolved question, "Was it needless death after all?" (204). Yeats refuses to resolve the issue, preserving moral hesitation where public commemoration seeks certainty. The closing naming of the dead honours them as individuals even as they begin to enter a larger symbolic narrative.

“Sixteen Dead Men” takes up where “Easter 1916” leaves off. Whereas the earlier poem records the transformation of living individuals into commemorative figures, this poem examines the political consequences of that transformation. Its title itself is revealing. By referring simply to “sixteen dead men” rather than naming individual rebels, Yeats foregrounds collective death over personal identity, suggesting that the executed leaders have already begun to acquire a symbolic significance that exceeds their individual biographies. The poem explores how such deaths reshape the conditions under which political debate can be conducted, making compromise appear morally suspect in the presence of sacrifice.

The opening stanza establishes this tension through a contrast between ordinary political discussion and the disruptive presence of the dead. Before the executions, “we talked at large.” Afterwards, however, the speaker asks: “who can talk of give and take, / What should be and what not / While those dead men are loitering there / To stir the boiling pot?” (205). The language of “give and take” belongs to negotiation, constitutional politics, and rational compromise. Against this vocabulary stands the unexpected verb “loitering.” The dead are not represented as triumphant heroes but as an unsettling presence that lingers in the political imagination. Their continued symbolic presence places extraordinary pressure on reasoned debate, making arguments for moderation appear inadequate in the face of irreversible sacrifice.

The second stanza develops this idea through the specific circumstances of wartime politics. The suggestion that Ireland should “still the land / Till Germany’s overcome” reflects the position that nationalist action ought to be postponed until the conclusion of the First World War. Yet the speaker immediately asks: “who is there to argue that / Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?” (205). Pearse’s silence paradoxically acquires greater rhetorical force than the arguments of the living. The subsequent question— “And is their logic to outweigh / MacDonagh’s bony thumb?” (205) expresses this dilemma through a strikingly grotesque image. Rather than idealising martyrdom, the image reduces the revolutionary to stark corporeality, emphasising the disturbing political weight that death acquires in public consciousness. The physical remains of the executed rebel become a moral presence against which ordinary political reasoning struggles to compete.

The final stanza places the Easter martyrs within an already established nationalist genealogy. Those who “have an ear alone / For those new comrades they have found, / Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone” (205) interpret the Rising through the memory of earlier revolutionary figures. The poem thus reveals the rapid formation of commemorative continuity. Whereas “September 1913” reflects on the long process through which John O’Leary became a symbolic figure within nationalist memory, “Sixteen Dead Men” depicts that process unfolding almost immediately after the executions. The living are already connecting Pearse and MacDonagh with earlier martyrs, constructing a tradition that will shape future political understanding.

Read in light of Maurice Halbwachs’ conception of collective memory, the poem demonstrates how remembrance is socially organised rather than individually

possessed. The executed rebels acquire significance through the interpretive frameworks of the community that survives them. Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory further clarifies the historical moment. The events of 1916 still belong primarily to communicative memory, circulating among living participants and witnesses, yet the poem captures the point at which these memories begin to acquire symbolic authority that anticipates their later institutionalisation as cultural memory. Yeats records memory in transition, revealing how lived experience starts to crystallise into a commemorative tradition whose moral force exceeds ordinary political argument. The poem does not stand outside this process. Its sequence of rhetorical questions reveals that the speaker himself cannot remain entirely detached from the commemorative culture he describes. To ask "who can talk of give and take" is already to acknowledge the ethical pressure exerted by the dead upon the living. In this sense, "Sixteen Dead Men" extends the argument developed throughout this article: it suggests that the central problem of political memory is not merely how societies remember their martyrs but how those remembered dead continue to shape the possibilities of political judgment among the living.

If "Sixteen Dead Men" examines the emergence of martyrdom as a source of political authority, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" poses a more unsettling question: what becomes of collective memory when the cultural frameworks that preserve the past are themselves destroyed by violence? Rather than presenting history as a process through which suffering is transformed into coherent national memory, Yeats repeatedly depicts the collapse of the material, ethical, and intellectual structures upon which remembrance depends. The poem thus shifts attention from the commemoration of sacrifice to the instability of memory itself. This concern is established from the opening lines. The speaker laments that "Many ingenious lovely things are gone / That seemed a sheer miracle to the multitude" (232) before invoking the disappearance of "Phidias' famous ivories / And all the golden grasshoppers and bees" (233). These images do more than mourn lost works of art; they represent the destruction of the objects through which civilisations preserve and transmit cultural inheritance. Maurice Halbwachs argues that collective memory depends upon social frameworks that organise the past rather than isolated acts of recollection. The vanished artefacts therefore signify the erosion of those mnemonic structures, suggesting that memory itself requires material supports that history can destroy.

The poem extends this crisis from classical civilisation to modern political life. Recalling earlier faith in constitutional order, the speaker observes: "We too had many pretty toys when young: / A law indifferent to blame or praise, / To bribe or threaten" (233). The ironic phrase "pretty toys" retrospectively diminishes ideals of justice and public reason that once appeared enduring. Likewise, the belief that "Public opinion ripening for so long / We thought it would outlive all future days" (233) exposes misplaced confidence in the permanence of political institutions. Memory here becomes an instrument of historical self-critique, recalling not only past events but also the assumptions through which communities once understood themselves.

The contrast between those expectations and the present reaches its most disturbing expression when “days are dragon-ridden” and “a drunken soldier / Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, / To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free” (233). Unlike the executed leaders of “Easter 1916”, whose deaths are transformed into public remembrance, the anonymous murdered woman receives no commemorative function. Her suffering resists symbolic incorporation into narratives of national sacrifice, exposing a limit of political memory itself: violence often produces victims who cannot be assimilated into heroic myth without erasing the irreducible reality of their suffering.

This scepticism toward commemorative permanence recurs in the reflections on monuments. The speaker insists that “No honour leaves its mighty monument” and imagines that an “Incendiary or bigot” might “burn that stump on the Acropolis, / Or break in bits the famous ivories” (234). Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory depends upon durable symbolic forms such as monuments, rituals, and artefacts that preserve the past beyond individual lifetimes. Yeats imagines the destruction of those very mnemonic supports, suggesting not simply that societies forget but that the institutions enabling remembrance are themselves historically vulnerable. The poem develops this argument further through its meditation on historical recurrence. Describing Loie Fuller’s dancers, Yeats writes that “the Platonic Year / Whirls out new right and wrong, / Whirls in the old instead” (234). Fuller’s constantly shifting performances become an image of the instability of history, challenging progressive accounts of historical development by suggesting that moral and political orders repeatedly overturn one another. Within such a cyclical framework, collective memory also becomes unstable, since every historical phase reconstructs the past according to newly emerging values.

The most disturbing account of moral transformation in the poem appears in the fourth section: “We, who seven years ago / Talked of honour and of truth, / Shriek with pleasure if we show / The weasel’s twist, the weasel’s tooth” (235-236). The explicit recollection of “seven years ago” turns memory into a comparison between past and present ethical selves. The remembered ideals of “honour and truth” survive only as evidence of how radically communal values have changed. Memory therefore reveals not continuity but ethical disfigurement.

This emphasis on instability distinguishes “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” from the earlier political poems discussed in this article. In “Easter 1916”, remembrance preserves the individuality of the executed leaders even as commemoration begins to transform them into national symbols. “Sixteen Dead Men” demonstrates how those deaths rapidly acquire political authority capable of constraining debate among the living. “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” places that process under pressure by confronting readers with forms of violence that resist memorial redemption. The murdered mother, the destruction of monuments, and the collapse of ethical ideals reveal experiences that cannot be organised into coherent narratives of heroic sacrifice.

Yeats ultimately refuses the consolatory logic through which national cultures convert suffering into secure historical meaning. Instead, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” presents remembrance as contingent upon fragile social, material, and

ethical structures that violence itself may destroy. In doing so, it extends the trajectory traced across “September 1913”, “Easter 1916”, and “Sixteen Dead Men”. While the earlier poems examine how communities construct and contest political memory through retrospective idealisation, communicative remembrance, and martyrdom, “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” confronts the conditions under which the very possibility of meaningful remembrance is placed in doubt. Its central insight is that violence threatens not only lives and monuments but also the cultural frameworks through which historical experience is preserved and collective memory sustained.

W. B. Yeats’s political poetry subjects commemoration itself to sustained ethical scrutiny. “September 1913”, “Easter 1916”, “Sixteen Dead Men”, and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, do not commemorate political events or celebrate revolutionary sacrifice. They examine the cultural processes through which political deaths are transformed into collective memory and ask what is lost when historical individuals become national symbols. “September 1913” exposes retrospective idealisation. “Easter 1916” records the emergence of martyrdom at the moment of its formation, preserving personal familiarity against symbolic abstraction. “Sixteen Dead Men” examines how execution acquires political significance through repeated acts of remembrance. “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” questions whether history can be securely organised into coherent commemorative narratives at all. Across this arc, the poems develop a single sustained argument: martyrdom is not a property of revolutionary death but a contingent cultural formation produced through selection, repetition, and symbolic reconstruction.

Yeats neither rejects political commitment nor endorses revolutionary violence. He insists that remembrance must remain attentive to contradiction and the complexity of the historical lives it commemorates. In preserving uncertainty where public memory demands certainty, he offers not a doctrine of martyrdom but a disciplined ethics of remembrance. Beyond its contribution to Yeats studies, this article also suggests certain limitations within influential theories of collective memory. While Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann provide valuable accounts of how memories are socially organised, transmitted, and institutionalised, Yeats’s political poetry draws attention to dimensions of remembrance that such models do not fully explain. Their theories illuminate the processes through which collective memory acquires stability and cultural authority, but Yeats repeatedly exposes the ethical tensions that accompany the transformation. In “September 1913”, “Easter 1916”, “Sixteen Dead Men”, and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, remembrance does not culminate in consensus or symbolic closure. Instead, the poems preserve ambiguity, contradiction, and unresolved judgment, revealing the moral costs involved when complex historical lives are converted into commemorative narratives. Yeats thus presents memory not as a completed cultural achievement but as an ongoing ethical practice that requires continual questioning and critical reflection.

This perspective also extends the significance of Yeats’s poetry beyond the historical circumstances of early twentieth-century Ireland. Contemporary societies continue to debate the meaning of monuments, memorials, national

anniversaries, and political martyrs. Across different cultural and political contexts, public memory remains a contested space where competing interpretations of the past shape collective identities and political values. Yeats's poetry offers a powerful reminder that acts of commemoration are never neutral. The transformation of individuals into symbolic figures may foster solidarity and national belonging, yet it can also obscure historical complexity, silence dissenting perspectives, and convert uncertainty into ideological certainty. By resisting such simplifications, Yeats advocates an ethics of remembrance grounded in intellectual humility and historical attentiveness. His poems suggest that responsible commemoration requires not the elimination of ambiguity but its preservation. In this sense, Yeats remains an important voice in contemporary discussions of memory, history, and political culture, reminding readers that the past can be honoured most ethically when it remains open to continued interpretation rather than fixed within unquestioned narratives.

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DABEER SI/KTT/42**THE UNSPOKEN PAST: CULTURAL MEMORY AND NARRATIVE
SELECTION IN ANUJA CHAUHAN'S *BATTLE FOR BITTORA*****VARSHINI PRIYA B.**Research Scholar, Department of English
Auxilium College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**KALAISELVI R. H.**Assistant Professor, Department of English
Auxilium College, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, India**Abstract**

Historically significant trauma, such as Partition, continues to shape the cultural imagination of postcolonial India, yet contemporary popular fiction does not always make such histories its emotional or narrative centre. Instead, traumatic pasts often remain present within family histories, inherited identities, and political memory while the narrative invests its affective energy in everyday life, democratic participation, and interpersonal relationships. This paper examines this pattern through Anuja Chauhan's *Battle for Bittora*. Although the novel repeatedly invokes the memory of Partition, it refuses to transform historical violence into its principal narrative conflict. Instead, the story foregrounds electoral politics, romance, and everyday coexistence, allowing Partition to remain a persistent but backgrounded presence. Drawing on Aleida Assmann's distinction between the canon and the archive, the paper argues that this narrative strategy reflects an active process of cultural selection rather than historical omission. Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates how Assmann's foreground/background structure of cultural memory operates in contemporary Indian popular fiction, where memories that sustain collective cohesion are canonized, while traumatic histories remain archived rather than disappearing from cultural consciousness. By applying Assmann's framework to a work of popular fiction, the paper extends cultural memory studies beyond its more familiar literary corpus and shows how popular narratives participate in the selective organization of the remembered past.

Keywords: Collective Identity, Cultural Memory, Partition, Popular Fiction, Selective Remembrance.

Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 remains a central site of cultural memory in postcolonial South Asia. It was a historical rupture marked by mass displacement, communal violence, and the reconfiguration of political identities, and it continues to shape literary, historical, and public discourse decades after Independence. Literary engagements with Partition have traditionally privileged narratives that foreground trauma, loss, and the recovery of suppressed histories. Literature, in this view, becomes the medium through which collective memory is preserved and transmitted as time passes. As a result, studies on memory have often equated meaningful remembrance with direct representations of historical violence,

treating explicit engagement with the past as the primary mode through which literature participates in cultural memory.

This understanding, however, does not fully account for how contemporary popular fiction negotiates historical experience. Unlike historical novels or testimonial narratives, popular fiction often engages in the past indirectly: historically significant events remain present in the text without becoming its emotional or narrative centre. Memories of Partition tend to survive through family histories, inherited identities, political affiliations, and everyday social interactions, even as the narrative itself turns toward romance, domestic relationships, humour, or democratic participation. This selective distribution of narrative attention does not signal historical indifference. It suggests instead that memory is organized through patterns of emphasis and restraint, and that what a narrative chooses to foreground, and what it leaves in the background, together shape its cultural meaning.

Aleida Assmann's distinction between the canon and the archive helps to explain this process. Assmann conceptualizes cultural memory as a dynamic interplay between foregrounding and backgrounding. He also states that canonical memories not only thrive through active circulation and emotional resonance but also undergo continuous reinterpretation. In contrast, archival memories remain preserved within the cultural fabric, enduring in collective awareness without fading into obscurity. Her framework moves the question away from a simple opposition between memory and forgetting and toward the selective organization of the remembered past. Applied to literary narratives, it allows an examination of how fiction manages historical experience by regulating the visibility, emotional investment, and narrative prominence given to different memories.

Anuja Chauhan's *Battle for Bittora* published in 2010, illustrates this selective organisation of cultural memory. Set during a parliamentary election in the fictional constituency of Bittora, the novel follows Sarojini "Jinni" Pande and her political rival Zain Altaf Khan, a Muslim ex-nawab whose family history carries the legacy of Partition. The narrative repeatedly encounters Partition through communal identities, inherited prejudices, and political affiliations, yet it does not turn historical trauma into its central conflict. It foregrounds electoral democracy, romance, and everyday coexistence instead, and Partition remains a persistent but backgrounded presence within the text. Existing scholarship on Chauhan has largely approached her fiction through gender, popular fiction, romance, and political satire, and has paid comparatively little attention to how it organizes cultural memory. This article addresses that gap through close textual analysis and Assmann's foreground/background model, arguing that *Battle for Bittora* foregrounds democratic participation as its cohesive cultural narrative while retaining the legacy of Partition within archival memory.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Existing scholarship on *Battle for Bittora* has examined the novel mainly through gender, political satire, electoral democracy, and postcolonial identity, with comparatively little attention to its organization of cultural memory. Zehra Kazmi observes that Chauhan's fiction addresses issues such as communalism, electoral politics, political dynasties, and institutional corruption (74). This reading

identifies the novel's political concerns but does not examine how these historical elements are selectively organized within the narrative. Trivedi Nikhilkumar Jayantilal and Rohit Govindprasad Kushwaha, similarly, interpret the relationship between Jinni and Zain as a metaphor for negotiating India's postcolonial identity, where tradition and modernity intersect (627). Their analysis foregrounds the novel's democratic vision but leaves the role of historical memory in shaping that vision unexplored. Puja Chakraborty and Krishanu Adhikari read the novel as a feminist representation of social and political transformation through Jinni's journey (4); their focus falls on gender and agency, not on how the novel organizes the past.

Together, these studies establish *Battle for Bittora* as a political and social novel, but none investigates how it manages the historical legacy of Partition. The novel repeatedly invokes Partition through inherited identities, communal demographics, and political affiliations, yet no sustained study has asked why this event remains structurally present without becoming the novel's emotional or narrative centre. The present study explores this view through Assmann's foreground/background structure of cultural memory. It argues that the novel does not marginalize Partition through omission. It backgrounds Partition selectively, while treating electoral democracy, romance, and everyday coexistence as its functionally central forms of cultural memory.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study draws on Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory, and in particular her distinction between functional memory and storage memory, to examine how literary narratives organize historical remembrance. For Assmann, cultural memory is inherently selective: societies continually determine which memories remain active within collective consciousness and which recede into archival reserve. As she puts it, "not all is lost forever; a small segment is assembled and preserved in cultural archives" (124). Forgetting need not mean erasure. It often means that memory has moved from active cultural circulation into passive preservation.

Assmann develops this idea further through the relationship between the canon and the archive: cultural memory, in her account, operates by "creating a perspective, separating a visible foreground from an invisible background" (126). Memories in the foreground remain culturally significant and are continually reinterpreted; those in the background persist as latent historical resources that can still be reactivated later. This foreground/background structure is the principal analytical framework used in this study.

The study employs close textual analysis to examine how the novel *Battle for Bittora* organizes the memory of Partition within its narrative structure. The analysis does not ask whether the novel remembers or forgets Partition; it examines the distribution of narrative attention, affective investment, and thematic emphasis across the text instead. This approach shows that Partition remains structurally present through communal identities, inherited histories, and political affiliations, while electoral democracy, romance, and everyday coexistence occupy the narrative foreground. This selective organization, the article argues, is not a historical omission. It reflects the ordinary workings of cultural memory, in

which traumatic histories are retained within archival memory even as socially cohesive narratives become functionally central.

Analysis

Battle for Bittora is set within the democratic spectacle of an Indian parliamentary election. The novel follows Sarojini “Jinni” Pande, an advertising executive who reluctantly returns to contest the parliamentary seat of the fictional constituency of Bittora against her childhood friend and former romantic partner, Zain Altaf Khan. The narrative foregrounds electoral politics, romance, and political satire, while at the same time invoking the legacy of Partition through Zain's family history, communal identities, and the constituency's demographic composition. Partition does not become the novel's central historical concern; it remains, instead, a subdued but persistent presence. This pattern illustrates what Assmann identifies as the foreground/background structure of cultural memory where certain memories stay functionally active within cultural consciousness, while others are retained within archival memory without directing the narrative's primary attention.

The clearest indication of this archival presence appears in Zain's account of his family's decision during Partition. Addressing the people of Bittora, he remarks, “Maybe you know, maybe you don't, but most members of my family chose to go to Pakistan after independence, while my grandfather decided to stay here. Because this was his home. You were his family” (Chauhan 147). This single sentence carries the weight of 1947, yet the novel compresses it into a brief personal recollection and moves on. The narrative does not unfold the emotional, political, or social consequences of displacement; it turns away almost at once. When Jugatram casually interjects, “I taught him how to drive when he was twelve years old” (147). That abrupt shift from historical testimony to domestic reminiscence is structurally significant. The narrative acknowledges Partition but does not let it become an effective centre. In Assmann's terms, the event stays preserved within the archive: available, recognizable, yet excluded from the novel's functional narrative memory.

This strategy is reinforced by the unequal distribution of narrative attention. The novel devotes sustained space to election campaigns, public rallies, campaign strategies, romantic misunderstandings, and the gradual evolution of Jinni and Zain's relationship. Partition, by contrast, receives only fleeting references, despite shaping the political identity of one of the central characters. A newspaper report notes that “Unlike most erstwhile royal families from the north, the Altaf Khans are well loved, as one faction chose to stay on in India post Partition and has done a lot, especially in the first thirty years after independence, for the people in the area” (67). Here, partition functions mainly as an explanatory background that legitimizes Zain's popularity among voters. The novel never explores the historical violence bound up in the decision to remain in India. It converts the event into political biography instead, and that biography serves the immediate demands of electoral credibility, not historical reflection.

Assmann argues that cultural memory does not preserve the past as a whole; it organizes the past selectively, according to present cultural needs. Battle for Bittora exemplifies this process through its careful allocation of narrative

emphasis. The novel neither denies nor erases Partition. It restricts the event to brief moments that establish character motivation, then returns to the contemporary concerns of democratic participation. The historical trauma remains structurally present, as a result, without acquiring sustained narrative development. The archive here is not a space of disappearance. It is a space of controlled preservation, where historically significant memories continue to exist without determining the emotional trajectory of the narrative.

The same process governs the novel's treatment of communal relations. Jinni satirically describes the carefully orchestrated performance of secular politics: "the standard 'secular' shot of a Muslim guy with surma in his eyes and a white lace cap perched on his head, getting a rakhi tied on his wrist by a simpering Hindu girl," before adding that "no party had the guts to show a couple like that getting married. That would start riots nationwide" (11). Irony present in jinni's remarks emphasizes that narrative openly acknowledges the persistence of communal tension, then turns that acknowledgement into political satire almost immediately. The novel does not investigate the historical processes that produced these anxieties. It redirects attention toward humour: communal divisions are exposed, but their historical origins are not reconstructed. The memory of Partition is preserved within the archival background once again, while the immediacy of electoral politics occupies the foreground.

This pattern of selective organization continues in the novel's treatment of Zain's political identity. During a televised interview, the host remarks, "Duh, you're Muslim. The IJP isn't exactly famous for its love of Muslims," to which Zain replies, "The prime minister is a Sikh. The Pragati isn't exactly known for its love of Sikhs" (Chauhan 141). At one level, the exchange is political wit: it shows Zain's intelligence and composure under pressure. At another level, it briefly exposes the continuing unease around religious identity in Indian electoral politics. The dialogue offers no historical explanation, though, for why a Muslim candidate contesting on a Hindu nationalist ticket should appear politically anomalous in the first place. The novel does not trace this anxiety back to the legacy of Partition or to the reshaping of Muslim political identity in postcolonial India. It converts a historically loaded issue into a moment of rhetorical repartee. The exchange performs exactly the movement Assmann describes in cultural memory: it recognises a historically significant past, and it redirects narrative attention toward concerns more immediately relevant to the present.

A similar process appears in the novel's depiction of Bittora itself. The constituency is described as containing "a 27 per cent Muslim population, amongst the highest in India," together with "numerous Dalit and OBC groups, Christian tribals in the Bitwa Reserved Forest, [and] a tiny but extremely vocal and influential Brahmin bloc" (66). This description establishes the constituency as a microcosm of India's social diversity, but its demographic composition is treated almost entirely through the language of electoral arithmetic. Communities become voting blocs to be negotiated, persuaded, and strategically mobilized. The narrative never pauses to consider that the unusually large Muslim population is itself inseparable from the historical processes of Partition, migration, and settlement that shaped post-1947 India. Demographic history is translated into

psephology instead. What was once one of the most traumatic reorganizations of population in the twentieth century becomes, within the novel's immediate concerns, another electoral variable. Historical memory survives here only as a latent condition beneath the mechanics of democratic politics.

The same narrative economy governs Chauhan's treatment of communal prejudice. Jinni catalogues popular stereotypes with characteristic irony: "Good Nepalis are nightwatchmen; bad ones slit the throats of their employers. Punjabis (of either gender) are permanently randy. Christians are scheduled caste and out to convert everyone they meet. And Musalmaans? They're all dirty, stupid, constantly breeding, Pakistani-cricket-team-cheering rapist-murderers" (12). This catalogue exposes the absurdity of communal prejudice without endorsing it, but its structural function matters just as much. The stereotype linking Indian Muslims with Pakistan echoes the ideological afterlife of Partition, in which national loyalty continues to be measured against religious identity. The novel does not historicize this prejudice, though. It neither reconstructs the violence of Partition nor explores the political processes through which such stereotypes became culturally entrenched. Prejudice is acknowledged as a feature of contemporary public discourse, and then the narrative resumes its comic rhythm. The historical source of communal suspicion stays visible but unelaborated; Partition, once again, is placed in the narrative background.

Against this archived historical substrate, *Battle for Bittora* directs its narrative energy toward a different cultural inheritance: democratic participation, secular citizenship, and interpersonal coexistence. The relationship between Jinni and Zain is more than a romantic subplot; it functions as the novel's principal imaginative resolution of political difference. Their rivalry unfolds through elections, not violence, and it shows that ideological, religious, and social differences can be negotiated within democratic institutions instead of through communal antagonism. The romance takes on a symbolic significance that exceeds individual character development, as a result. It becomes the novel's preferred image of postcolonial India: a society capable of accommodating diversity through dialogue, participation, and shared civic commitment.

The legacy of Pandit Madan Mohan Pande reinforces this vision further. His diary is a recurring moral touchstone throughout the narrative, and as Kazmi observes, it functions as "a recurring motif in the plot, one which the entire family derives inspiration from" (76). The diary memorializes the ideals of the freedom movement, not the violence that accompanied national independence. The novel canonizes the emancipatory narrative of Independence, its secular aspirations, democratic optimism, and civic responsibility, and lets the trauma of Partition stay largely implicit. This selective emphasis reflects Assmann's distinction between functional and storage memory closely. The ideals capable of sustaining collective identity stay functionally active, while the traumatic dimensions of the same historical moment persist within archival memory without directing the novel's emotional or narrative priorities.

Read through Assmann's foreground/background model, *Battle for Bittora* neither suppresses nor forgets Partition. It shows how cultural memory operates through selection. The novel repeatedly acknowledges the historical consequences of

Partition in family histories, communal identities, electoral discourse, and demographic realities, and the event stays structurally embedded within the narrative as a result. These references never accumulate into the novel's central emotional trajectory, though. The foreground is consistently occupied by democratic politics, romance, humour, and secular coexistence: cultural forms that imagine the possibilities of contemporary India instead of rehearsing the wounds of its formation. Partition survives, then, as the narrative's historical substratum. It stays retained, recognizable, and continually informing the present, but deliberately in the background, in favour of a canonical memory that privileges reconciliation over rupture. Chauhan's novel exemplifies the dynamics of cultural memory that Assmann describes through this selective organization of the past. Popular fiction, the novel shows, participates in remembering history and in determining which histories remain functionally central within the cultural imagination.

Result and Findings

This analysis shows that *Battle for Bittora* neither forgets nor fully narrates the Partition of 1947. The novel adopts a selective strategy instead, in which Partition remains structurally present while being displaced from the narrative foreground. References to Zain Altaf Khan's family history, the demographic composition of Bittora, communal stereotypes, and electoral discourse repeatedly acknowledge the historical legacy of Partition, yet these moments never develop into sustained historical narration. The novel invests its narrative energy in electoral democracy, romance, and everyday political participation instead. This answers the study's central question: historically significant events can remain active within cultural consciousness without becoming the primary focus of literary representation.

These findings extend existing scholarships on *Battle for Bittora*. Previous studies have examined the novel mainly through gender, political satire, postcolonial identity, and democratic participation. These readings identify Chauhan's engagement with contemporary Indian politics, but they do not explain how the novel organizes its historical material. This study shows that the selective distribution of narrative attention is a meaningful literary strategy. The brief references to Partition are not incidental background; they constitute an organized structure of cultural memory through which the past remains preserved without dominating the narrative.

More broadly, this study suggests that contemporary Indian popular fiction participates in cultural memory through modes distinct from historical novels or trauma narratives. *Battle for Bittora* does not repeatedly reconstruct national trauma. It negotiates the relationship between past and present by embedding historical memory within the ordinary practices of electoral politics and everyday social life. The novel shows that popular fiction can preserve historical consciousness and imagine forms of collective identity oriented toward democratic coexistence at the same time. This is the selective process through which cultural memory continues to shape postcolonial India's understanding of its past.

Conclusion

History rarely disappears outright; it persists beneath the stories a culture tells about itself. *Battle for Bittora* demonstrates that a past need not dominate a narrative to keep shaping its present. This study has presented that the novel, *Battle for Bittora*, does not erase the memory of Partition; it reorganizes that memory through the dynamics of cultural memory. Using Assmann's distinction between functional and storage memory, the analysis has shown that references to Partition remain structurally embedded in the novel through Zain Altaf Khan's family history, communal demographics, electoral discourse, and inherited political identities. These historical traces never become the narrative's emotional centre, though. The novel consistently foregrounds electoral democracy, romance, secular citizenship, and everyday coexistence as the functionally active memories through which contemporary India imagines itself. By shifting attention from what is remembered to how remembrance is organised, this study shows that cultural memory in popular fiction operates through narrative selection, not historical completeness.

The present contributes to existing scholarship on Chauhan by moving beyond thematic readings of gender, politics, and postcolonial identity, toward an examination of the novel's structural organization of historical memory. It extends Assmann's cultural memory framework to contemporary Indian popular fiction more broadly and suggests that popular narratives actively negotiate collective memory through processes of foregrounding and backgrounding. This study is limited to a single novel and a single theoretical framework. A broader comparative analysis of Chauhan's other novels, or of contemporary Indian popular fiction more generally, could reveal whether similar strategies of selective remembrance recur across other narratives and historical contexts. Future research might also examine how other forms of popular literature negotiate unresolved historical events through comparable mechanisms of cultural memory. *Battle for Bittora* shows, in the end, that memory works through silence as much as through speech. The past does not vanish when a narrative pushes it into the background; it stays available there, informing what a society remembers, what it sets aside, and what it carries forward into its account of itself.

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DABEER SI/KTT/43**NARRATIVISING EPISODIC MEMORY: AGEING AND THE
RECLAMATION OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THE MALAYALAM FILM
#HOME****NOUSHIDHA A M**

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Abstract

Memory is central to human cognition, identity, and the construction of selfhood. Among its various forms, episodic memory—rooted in personal experiences and autobiographical recall—plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals understand their past and assert their presence in the present. Aging, however, is often culturally associated with cognitive decline, irrelevance, and loss of significance, particularly in relation to memory. This paper examines how episodic memory functions as a form of empowerment for the aged narrator in the Malayalam film *Home* (2021), challenging dominant narratives of aging as disability. Drawing from memory studies, aging studies, and narrative theory, the paper analyses how the elderly protagonist negotiates invisibility within familial and technological spaces through acts of remembering. The film foregrounds memory not merely as a cognitive function but as a lived, affective experience that resists erasure and marginalisation. By focusing on episodic memory as a narrative and psychological resource, the paper argues that remembering becomes an act of resistance against ageist assumptions. The protagonist's memories bridge generational gaps, restore fractured relationships, and reaffirm his identity within a rapidly modernising society. *#Home* thus presents memory as a site of healing and empowerment rather than decline.

Keywords: Episodic Memory, Ageing, Significance, Narrative Identity**Introduction**

Old age is considered to be a stage of life marked by deteriorating physical and mental abilities, a higher chance of illness and abandonment of constructive social activities. The chronological age at which someone is initially deemed elderly varies by society and seems to be positively connected with life expectancy in several cultures and communities. The wildly disparate life expectancies in various societies note significantly variable starting points for old age. In addition to studies on the wide range of ideas about old age around the world, a significant corpus of scientific research has been investigating whether chronological age is connected to mental and physical degeneration, as is typically believed. Typically, a weak association has been found. Other facets of a person's existence, such as habits, genetic makeup, and—above all—social influences throughout their lifetime, seem to be more closely associated with both physical functioning and

life quality in ageing (Venkatapuram 791). Some older adults above 60 can perform similarly to people in their 20s and 30s. So, the social environment is an integral part of everyone's life, especially older adults.

Old age is a physiological and social stage that makes people aware of their abilities and inabilities. It will sometimes make the person strong at times, and at other times the belief may make the person weak. The increase in the number of elderly is a benefit and a challenge for society. The years of their experience can be used; however, at the same time, the physical and mental well-being of the aged is also society's responsibility. Getting them involved in activities of daily social life is the most difficult task. Old people may face social difficulties and feel insignificant in this world. To enable themselves in the world, they use access to their memory.

Memory is a process that makes people perceive the things around them and store and retrieve them whenever necessary. It is the definitive function of the self. In the Introduction to *The Collective Memory Reader* edited by Jeffrey K. Olick et al. notes: "...John Locke found in memory the ultimate source of the self, namely the awareness of self-sameness through time, presaging our contemporary discourse of identity" (10). A subject understands and defines oneself primarily from the memories of the past it possesses and secondarily from its connections and disconnections in the present. These associations with the past and the present are synthesised with memory (Babu 45).

The older generation uses those stored items to make them feel significant, especially when remembering particular episodes. Remembering the incidents that are connected with time and place is called episodic memory. Endel Tulving, an Estonian-born Canadian neuroscientist introduced three major memory systems with hierarchical structures. These are procedural, at the lowest, then Semantic, and at the highest level, Episodic. The episodic system extends the processing of objects and facts to the 'self' in 'subjective time'. Episodic memory affords the additional capability of acquisition and retention of knowledge about personally experienced events and their temporal relations in subjective time and the ability to mentally "travel back" in time. Episodic memory cannot stand independently of its lower systems, but it has capabilities that the other lower systems do not possess (Tulving 387).

Thus, this paper attempts to unravel the empowering phenomenon in episodic memory with special reference to the Malayalam film *#Home*. The Malayalam film *#Home* revolves around the life of Oliver Twist (played by Indrans), who resides with his two sons, wife, and father. The elder son, Antony Oliver (Sreenath Bhasi), is a young filmmaker grappling with the challenges of drafting his second film script, following the critical and commercial success of his debut work. Meanwhile, the younger son, Charles Oliver, is preoccupied with his academic challenges, as he needs to clear his backlog of examinations. Kuttiyama (Manju Pillai), Oliver's wife, is portrayed as a compassionate spouse and nurturing mother, while Oliver's father, Appachan (Kainakary Thankaraj), remains a reticent presence within the household. Under immense pressure from his producer, Baby (Maniyanpilla Raju), Antony is given a strict deadline to complete his script, failing which the project risks being shelved. Acting on the producer's

suggestion, Antony decides to return home, to the setting where he had previously completed his first script. While Oliver is elated by Antony's return, he struggles to navigate the generational and technological divide between him and his sons, particularly with his lack of proficiency in using smartphones and engaging with social media. This exacerbates his feelings of alienation and his longing for a closer bond with his sons. The narrative progresses as unforeseen events unfold within the household, shedding light on familial dynamics, emotional connections, and the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

Literature Review

Over the past several decades, researchers have focused on how performance varies for different types of information in memory in older adults. In the article "Memory, Language, and Ageing," Deborah M. Burke and D. G. Mackay argues how cognitive abilities change with age, noting that older adults generally maintain familiar skills but face challenges with new information and language tasks. This understanding can help develop effective strategies to support cognitive health in the elderly (Burke 1845).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) released its World Report on Ageing and Health in 2015. The report proclaimed an innovative idea called healthy aging- i.e. having "functional abilities to be and do what an older person has reason to value". Functional abilities encompass the capacity to maintain a sense of role or identity, build and sustain relationships, and experience autonomy, enjoyment, opportunities for personal growth, and a sense of security. These abilities are not merely individual traits but result from the dynamic interplay between a person's inherent capacities and the external conditions of their environment (Venkatapuram et.al. 791). The injustice and inequalities faced by older adults on a social and personal level should be addressed. It is evident in the report that the social and personal attention for the elderly is less compared to that of younger adults. One way they can assert their significance is through memory.

In the article, "Family makes house a home: A study on Lakshmi Kannan's Going Home and Rojin Thomas Malayalam Movie Home" by B. R Haripriya et.al discuss how the oppressive figures in the house fight to maintain their emotional balance. The inversion of masculine figures and the female characters both illustrate the possibility and inability to oppose the prevailing ideology of "Angel in the House." The authors also want to use the third space theory to examine spatial interactions and show how people are connected to their homes concerning the two movies in the title (10224).

Narrativizing Episodic Memory to Reclaim the Significance

The elderly is a term that is easy to obtain but hard to cope with. Being old is a step higher in respect and consideration on one side, but on the other, it has challenges, especially on individual and social levels. With advancing age, individuals often experience a reduction in their perceived societal importance, stemming from a decline in their active participation and functional roles within the community. The physical and mental pressure they face during old age is tremendous. The dynamics and dealings of the current society, and they prefer to boast about the past, where they find ample space as individuals and social beings. Thus, it can be argued that the elderly are pining for significance in the current

society, and to achieve that significance, they return to the past happenings, wherein they can assert their significance.

The film portrays an innocent man in his 60s who faces challenges in using technology, especially smartphones. He has the capabilities to achieve anything in the world; however, his kind heart and affectionate nature prevent him from achieving that. He has a fruit and vegetable garden on the terrace, which is a major hobby he found in old age. He was treated very well by his sons, especially by the elder one, when he could look after his family financially. However, when he became financially dependent and could not grasp modern trends, his elder son's approach to him changed tremendously. The exact point was made by Sanjeev Bakshi and Prasanta Pathak in their article titled "Aging and the Socioeconomic Life of Older Adults in India: An Empirical Exposition". They argue that "financially dependent older adults are more likely to face abuse (14)."

It is evident in the lines where Oliver is derided by his son Antony, when he remarks on the autobiography written by Antony's future father in law like writing that kind of book is just a show-off, on that occasion Antony utters these words to humiliate Oliver "I, Oliver Twist", I used to run a shop I had to close it down because I couldn't change with the times. I sit idle these days looking after the terrace garden. What more can you write? It can't fill even half a page" (#Home 38:28-38:45). Antony picks up every opportunity to mock his father. He finds his father an ordinary man without any achievements in life. He mostly relies upon his high-achieving future father-in-law. The father's attempt to win his love is never appreciated, which is very evident when the father says, "That's the problem with his story" (#Home 1:57:10). He shares his sorrow with his one and only friend, Suryan. It was he who suggested Oliver contemplate his life and dig into the memories to unearth the extraordinary things that happened in his life. The incident with Antony made Oliver think about the life he lived extraordinarily.

To win back the affection of his dear son and to make the sixty years of his life worthwhile, he reminisces about the extraordinary incident that happened in his life. Though he was reminded of the incident and was eager to share it with Antony, he did not get an opportunity to do so. Or Antony was too busy to listen to his father. One day, he found Antony sitting alone playing with his mobile. As the friendly talk was not there with the father, he asked permission, "Are you free for five minutes to listen to an extraordinary event that happened in Papa's life?" (#Home 1.53:30).

To retain the status he once held in Antony's life, he narrates the episode. An incident that showcases the importance of memory in reinvigorating one's personal identity and status is the memory Oliver narrates to his son. Oliver recalls his days in Ponmudi, where he visited his uncle, who worked as a priest, to ride his Lancaster car at a time when cars were a rarity. Oliver meets a woman who comes frantically searching after the priest, hoping to get a ride to the medical hospital, as the priest was not around at the time. Oliver and his friend devise a way to get them through the river using a large cooking vessel. At this point in narrating the memory, Antony interrupts to ask, "Is this a true story?". To that, he replied, "That is the problem of this story" (#Home 1:57:10-12).

Oliver's son questions the veracity of the story because he thinks his father lacks the bravery to assist and save a life. Because his father, an elderly man in his sixties, was the story's narrator, Oliver's son minimises the challenges the younger Oliver faces. But in the case of Oliver through narrating the story he is gaining his past significance or identity. To be worthy in society is a challenge for anyone in their sixties, so they would try different forms to reassert their identity as explained by Paul Ricoeur. According to Ricoeur, identity is constantly formed by the stories people tell about their experiences rather than being a static or unchangeable essence. Therefore, personal memories only gain meaning when they are arranged into a cohesive life narrative that connects past events with current self-perception. Oliver Twist's memories of shared experiences, family events, and personal accomplishments are not discrete recollections in Home; rather, they are episodes that are continuously narrativized to confirm his position in the family. Oliver reconstructs a sense of self that defies the marginalisation that comes with ageing and technological isolation by going back and analysing these lived experiences. He is able to regain his dignity, emotional relevance, and social value by using his episodic memories as acts of self-affirmation. Thus, the movie shows how narrativized episodic memory is a dynamic process that the aging self uses to negotiate identity, continuity, and belonging in the present rather than just a storehouse of the past.

Antony's doubts on the authenticity of the story is because it was narrated by his father, whom he believes does not possess any extraordinary characteristics. Though Antony is reluctant to believe, Oliver continues, reminding the minutest details like the coldness of the water likens to ice while they cross the river is a felt reality to him. Despite his age, he is reminded of a meagre incident like this, which mirrors how attached he is to the story. With the progression of age, episodic memory is the first thing that diminishes from the memory process, especially storage and retrieval (Friedman 1). But in a moment where they feel their insignificance, the first thing that appears in front of them is this very emotionally connected episodic memory. An essential contextual cue for episodic memory is emotion (Allen et.al 115). Hence, older adults will keep on remembering their deeply impactful episodic memory. Sometimes these memories will flash in seconds, on the other ways it needs conscious effort to be recollected as Oliver did in the movie.

The difficulty and hardship Oliver faced in rescuing the life of a small child despite the support of people and nature around Antony's remarks to it is like, "Are you done with your extraordinary tale? ...I have never heard of this kind of a story that is so inspiring and logical. Go away papa" (#Home 1:59:35-50). Having communication with same-age people will make the later life mind peaceful and comforting. Oliver finds his comfort in his friend Suryan, with whom he shares the extraordinary episode. The character of Suryan, an old man in his sixties, finds his significance through illness (swallowing of fish- bone). The small things matter to him most. While the 'usual no one cares about me' talks were always there in his speech, he was familiar with smartphones and social media, unlike Oliver. So, it seems like his level is a step above Oliver's. Still, he finds reasons to retain his significance in the family. When Oliver discusses the ironic reply of

Antony to Suryan, he says “many of my brave deeds must have seemed like jokes to him” to which Oliver replies, “Not just you, I am also a joke now” (#Home 2:00:14-18). The incident and Oliver are treated like a joke by Antony. The film portrays an innocent man who lost his strength and worth as a father. He only gets back his affection and respect when Antony is convinced by the extraordinary story he performed in the past, not from the mouth of his father, but from the people he believes to be more truthful. It raises the question of whether an extraordinary deed and its memory are required to determine the worth of a father in his old age. A man is considered to be worthless if he is not recognised in society. Oliver is a person who is removed from social media and mainstream society. He is an unknown man with a heart full of compassion and companionship. In contemporary society, which is heavily influenced by social media, the value of the older generation is often overlooked. There is a prevailing belief that individuals who are not active or recognisable within the realm of social media lack the potential to achieve extraordinary accomplishments. Through Oliver, the movie communicates the tale of an old man who lost his worth. The story narrates not just the story of a single person; it is an example of many lives around us. To get back their visibility in a society that refuses to see them as worthwhile individuals, they use episodic memory. This memory allows one to relive the experiences they pursued in the past. Old age is a phase that will sometimes entangle the person into decreased productivity and worth, at other times it will be the most productive period. It is decided by the familial and social surroundings of the person. The one thing they need is the support and assistance from the people around them. If they find it lacking, they try to regain it through memory, especially episodic memory. Or more specifically, the past where they were involved in extraordinary events and held value in familial and societal structures. It is significant to note the quote of Oliver in the film “Memories should be held close to heart. They should not be to blame anyone” (1:36:11-36:20). Without blaming anyone or doing any harm to anyone, not boasting about his brave deeds, Oliver leads a content and peaceful life in the movie. To be precise, episodic memory empowered the character of Oliver.

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DABEER SI/KTT/44**CULTURAL MEMORY IN EMMI ITARANTA'S *MEMORY OF WATER*****PRIYA ROY**Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages
Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh, Haryana, India**Abstract**

Eco-Dystopian fictions portray a future world devastated by environmental degradation resulting from ongoing developments since the Industrial Revolution and the human exploitation of natural resources. Cultural memory preserves the events and experiences that take place all around and transmits them from one generation to another. The paper examines Emmi Itaranta's *Memory of Water* (2022) to understand the role of cultural memory in safeguarding environmental secrets. In the novel, the protagonist, Noria Katio, inherits secret knowledge of a hidden freshwater spring and the traditions of tea mastery from her father. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge demonstrates how ecological memory persists through rituals, oral traditions, and cultural practices despite political efforts to suppress environmental histories. The study investigates how memory functions as a repository of ecological knowledge, cultural continuity, and environmental ethics in a society where an authoritarian regime tightly regulates access to natural resources and information. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Memory Studies, the paper uses Jan Assmann's Cultural Memory Theory to study the novel. The research paper argues that memory is a crucial mechanism for sustaining relationships between humans and the natural world. Memory serves as a bridge between past ecology, present trauma, and the struggle for future survival. The paper also aims to analyse how silence is sometimes not a weakness but a survival strategy that protects the environment from destruction, and how environmental knowledge survives through silence and secrecy.

Keywords: Environment, Cultural Memory, Environmental Memory and Tradition

Introduction

This paper draws attention to the word "culture." According to Anderson and Gale, Culture is "a dynamic mix of symbols, beliefs, languages and practices that people create, not affixed things or entities governing humans" (3). It is generally thought that culture is external to our existence; we are born into a particular culture, bound by its rules and regulations, which will remain the same throughout our lives. But it is not so, as culture is nothing external to us; it is essentially a part of us. We reproduce and mold it according to situations. Thus, James Duncan highlights, "people are not portrayed by social science as passive carriers of culture, rather their culture is something that they not only learn, but also sustain, defend, resist, and even create or reject" (Duncan 38). It suggests that a culture is not a rigid institution, but rather a flexible, independent force that moulds people and the surrounding landscape; and vice versa.

Cultural Memory is a memory shared by a common group of people that travels from one generation to the next through various media, including oral traditions, art, monuments, manuscripts, printed works, and symbols. Every culture knits a wonderful fabric with time, using traditions as threads, and every generation sheds and adds a little to the fabric, with their times reflecting the generational touch. Culture “links yesterday with today by giving form and presence to influential experiences and memories, incorporating images and tales from another time into the background of the onward moving present, and bringing with it hope and continuity” (Assmann 2). He suggests that the cultural memory cannot only thrive by “biological transmission” it needs to be kept alive by masses or groups of people to sustain, one of the best possible ways can be “cultural mnemotechnics”, using different forms of mental associations.

Every culture has a strong connection to its surroundings, which shapes its lifestyle. Not only humans but also other species existing in the earth has a surrounding of their own, for instance, on one side, a rabbit in a forest has to struggle for its existence, save oneself from the predator, understands its surrounding what is harmful and what is not, finds food, shares information, habits and learns skill; thus, trains themselves to survive and becomes a part of that environmental culture. On the other side, a domesticated rabbit, its survival comes from a cage that protects it from predators and bad weather, brings all food and comfort, and it never realises what it would be like to be on the other side, but in that environment too it creates its own culture. The same goes for human beings: they live in different landscapes, adapt to the place, and thus a culture is formed; they develop their beliefs, values, and customs. Nature plays an important role in shaping a culture, especially the landscape and the waterscape. In *Memory of Water*, water plays an important role in the dystopian setup. As “a tea master has a special bond with water and death...Tea isn’t tea without water, and without tea a tea master is no tea master” (6). Water becomes an essential force in designing the lives of tea masters. Without fresh water (spring water), the tea's taste changes; that is why it is not advisable to make tea with regular water. Therefore, the tea masters serve as guardians of the spirit, protecting their culture and nature.

This paper studies a novel by Emmi Itaranta, a Finnish novelist who writes in both English and Finnish. Her work *Memory of Water*, published in 2014, is set in a dystopian future where water is scarce and controlled by the government; no one is allowed to dig for water, and the water guards capture those who violate the rules. The story centres on a tea master’s family, who traditionally have the responsibility of hiding a spring from the villagers, guards, and the government so they can carry on their tea ceremonies without any changes. The responsibility of keeping the secret passes from one generation to the next; it is now Noria Kaitio who must take up the responsibility of hiding the spring to continue the generational practice.

Critical Analysis of *Memory of Water*

The Tea Ceremony and The Hidden Spring

The text brings the most important “side of the tea master’s work that remains invisible to everyone else.” (88) The tea masters serve as the protectors of both the culture and the environment. Originally, they were environmentalists who

understood the value of clear water, which is reflected in their profession. The art of making tea, preserving springs, and providing them with utmost protection was in their hands, which shows a deep connection to nature. The text reflects, "Since ancient times, tea masters have been watchers of water". It is observed how the landscape determines the occupation of the population residing around it. The spring brought clear waters that made good tea; slowly, the people learned to make tea and it subsequently became their profession as they mastered the skill. With succeeding generations, new rituals and customs were added, influenced by other cultures and adapted to the previous ones; decorative rituals, too, made their way, making the tea ceremony special and established. Noria answers when asked about making slight changes in the ceremony for the comfort of the tea-guest, "the ceremony is not about showing one's wealth, but embracing change and accepting the fleeting quality of the world around us" (100).

It is not just that nature shapes culture; it works vice versa, too, as culture also shapes nature. The tea ceremony transforms water as an expression of respect, and the ritual teaches patience, discipline, and gratitude, which are the fundamentals of environmental ethics.

Cultures are constitutive of geographies, so are our geographies inherent to the culture-building process. Human geographies are under continuous invention and transformation by actions whose underlying fields of knowledge are themselves recreated through geographic arrangements. People's cultures and their geographies intersect and reciprocally inform each other. (Anderson and Gale 4-5)

The excerpt rightly notes that culture and nature are not independent but reciprocal. Culture brings along environmental responsibility. As depicted in the work, Noria and her family are not completely dependent on the spring water. They use the spring water especially for the ceremony and for their daily use; they use the same water as others in the village. The tea masters were careful and responsible for managing the spring. Noria never claims the spring as solely hers; she becomes the guardian who cares and protects rather than exploits. Thus, the tea master's lineage protects ecological knowledge, with each generation learning where the spring is, how to care for it and why it is important.

Past-world tea masters knew stories that have mostly been forgotten... But one is recorded in every tea master's book we kept in our house. The story tells that water has consciousness, that it carries in its memory everything that's ever happened in this world, from the time before humans until this moment, which draws itself in its memory even as it passes. Water understands the movements of the world, it knows when it is sought and where it is needed. (90-91)

Throughout the novel, it is traced how water is portrayed as an active force, despite water crises everywhere; water chose to emerge from the spring on its own. The "hidden spring" settles the idea that "water flows where it has to" following its natural laws. From a cultural memory perspective, water connects Noria to her father, and its continuous flow suggests linking the past with the future. There is also another side to its consciousness as water chooses where not to flow,

Tea masters believe there are times when water does not wish to be found because it knows it will be chained in ways that are against its nature. Therefore, the dying of a spring may have its own purpose that must not be fought. Not everything in the world belongs to people. (91)

It hints at the intrinsic value of living and non-living entities and that every entity in the world has the right to exist on its own. All entities are present to live in harmony with each other and are also dependent on each other either for food or shelter. This rejects anthropocentrism, which narrows the meaning of living amid nature. Humans started thinking that they were superior to all other species, and that all other entities were for the use of human beings. The text shows how the exploitation of the past has resulted in a dystopian future, a collapsed environment and a severe water crisis. Water cannot be treated as anyone's personal property; thus, one must follow the eco-centric approach, which recognises humans as part of nature, not above or apart from it, but as a deeply connected part of the web of life. Thus, in the novel, Noria understands her responsibility; she values nature rather than taking pride in her belongings. She rightly understands environmental ethics when she shares, "I believe we must make hard choices every day knowing that there is no reward." (246)

It is seen how the natural entities keep everything going in cyclic movement; it says of water as, "the most versatile of all elements. It isn't afraid to burn in fire or fade into the sky, it doesn't hesitate to shatter against sharp rocks in rainfall or drown into the dark shroud of the earth. It exists beyond all beginnings and ends" (221). This is the nature of water: it purifies itself and continuously helps generations, and each generation traces its cultural touch, which is preserved as a fluid cultural archive.

The Living Past

The novel constantly goes back to the past, the past world that Noria gets to know in bits and pieces from her parents, books and recordings. The past comes to her as a living cultural memory from the journals and manuscripts, rather than as dead. The past world in the *Memory of Water* is known as the "Twilight Century." Going back shows that people in the past did not take care of the environment or follow sustainable practices, which led to an environmental crisis. The basic requirement of life got exhausted. Noria's mother told her how,

...the bloodiest battles of the oil wars had taken place, there might be small islets of ice, floating across the deserted sea, quiet and lifeless, carrying the memories of the past-world locked within, slowly giving in to water and melting into its embrace. They were the last remnants of the enormous ice cap that had once rested on the topmost peak of the world. (41)

The excerpt hints at the environmental loss caused by humans; greed and over- and mindless use of resources have led to a situation where young generations who have not committed any crime or caused any harm to nature need to live their lives amid an environmental crisis. The whole generation comes under stress, as previous centuries did not opt for sustainable living or take proper measures. Noria sadly tells, "I have tried not to think about them, but their past-world bleeds into our present world, into its sky, into its dust. Did the present world, the world that

is, ever bleed into theirs, the world that was?" (26) The lines depict sheer frustration of the character's generation; she questions the oil wars that contaminated the fresh water reserves, what did it bring, more and more loss of natural resources, that too for no good. And when everything went wrong, the authorities tried to wipe out the history of their wrong deeds in the past centuries. Noria's mother tells Noria, "The world changed... Most believe that it changed on its own. Simply claimed its due. But a lot of knowledge was lost during the Twilight Century...the world wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for people" (40). The government regulates information about the past and seeks to control knowledge, but Noria's curiosity and inherited knowledge beat them. The tea master's lineage preserves the history that governmental institutions want to suppress. Thus, with Noria, the past survives and continues for future generations. Noria, being a privileged child, learns about subjects like history and geography from her parents, and her curiosity to learn changes how she observes the world around her. She takes interest in understanding two large world maps, "One showed the past world, the world of cold winters and sky scrapping cities. The other showed the present world" (64). It suggests that the outlines of the continents and the shorelines of the oceans have drastically changed as a result of climate change. The maps in the text become historic archival documents that preserve environmental memory, a world that merely survives through memory. The work constantly compares the present scarcity with the past abundance; water that was once abundant is rationed and strictly controlled. Like the maps of the past, the free-flowing, independent water becomes a memory of the past, as reflected in the title, *Memory of Water*.

When Noria and Sanja dig the plastic grave to find exciting objects from the past, they merely find ruined machines and broken pieces, and remark, "Past life technology was fragile" (55). It critically notes that advanced technology could not save the world from the climate crisis, and that much historical knowledge has been lost due to technological failure. Technology, which is otherwise associated with development, progress and permanence, has crumbled into pieces as the fragile technology could not withstand the environmental catastrophe. Thus, a contrast can be drawn between technological memory and cultural memory; while super-developed technologies collapse, cultural memory endures through stories, traditions and rituals. Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory is preserved through rituals that are repeatedly practised and survive because they are continuously renewed, unlike technological systems.

Noria took such an interest in the past world that she longed to go back; she always had a curiosity to understand what it had been like. She always "longed for the past world" she had never known, and wanted to experience the soft, cold snow, flowing rivers and incessant rain. At her last moment there were no fancy thoughts; she "imagined the brightness of the past -world winters, but this brightness was different. A delicate layer of snow rested on the branches of the tea plants and on the grass and in the folds of the sand of the rock garden, and on tree leaves and on the roof of the teahouse" (257). It shows that she was an environmentalist who wanted to study the environment in depth. She could not learn more, as her destiny did not allow her to explore further, and that she wanted

to live in her environment and remain close to her culture is clearly seen in the text.

Jan Assmann mentions Vesina's "floating gap," which can be applied directly to the text to understand the histories better. Firstly, Noria is not able to access the past world directly, but with the help of fragments through family stories, objects and maps. Secondly, when past technology fails, cultural knowledge leads her to the truth. Thirdly, the villagers have forgotten about the flowing rivers; the authorities have erased the memory. The research identifies four major floating gaps; historical, cultural, ecological and technological, which are bridged and survive using the stories, the tea-ceremony, the hidden spring, and the cultural memories that managed to survive with "two elements of repetition and representation or presentification" (Assmann 3).

Silence as Resistance

Once a culture is forgotten or shared with an outsider who does not value keeping a secret intact, its essence is lost. In every culture, there are certain practices and rituals that everyone is used to; there are no questions asked why a rite is performed in a certain way; it is just the way it is. But when it is shared with an outsider, several questions are asked about why this and why not that; it becomes difficult to give a valid logical answer, and in the meantime, in order to support with various reasons, the essence is lost. The age-old practices cannot always be judged by science, as they are the group's way of seeing things.

Once the silent space around a secret is scattered, it cannot be made whole again. The cracks will go longer and wider, reaching far and branching out like an underground network of roots, until it's impossible to say where it started and if it will come to an end. (184)

In the work *Memory of Water*, Noria was all alone. She trusted her friend with all her heart and was quite sure that Sanja would not reveal the secret to any passerby. But here comes the twist in the plot, why is not everyone a tea master or a protector of the environment. Sanja's family is an ordinary family in the village who barely make ends meet. Sanja undoubtedly was a wonderful friend, but when it came to prove her friendship by concealing the secret, she was nervous; she could not hold on to her state. There is a practice among different cultures, especially tribal communities, water communities, and desert communities, that they choose leaders among themselves who are capable of making decisions for the whole community. The leaders choose what is right for everyone and which steps to take to escape certain situations. The leaders sometimes need to make tough decisions on their part, even at the cost of their lives. Because the sole responsibility for upholding and safeguarding the community falls to the leaders. Similarly, in the text it is seen how Noria's family was the protector of the spring; it was well hidden, clean and clear. The spring holds the histories not only of the human past but also of the planetary past. Noria's father, as he says is the "watcher of water", he always kept a check of the water in the spring, "If the surface of the water sinks lower than that, it means too much water has been drawn. The spring will need to rest and gather its strength. It is the tea master's task to see that it happens" (88). Here, the entire responsibility for preserving tea culture and the environment falls to Noria's family.

A dichotomy can be drawn between the characters, Noria and Sanja. Noria, on the one hand, is the bearer of responsibilities, as she has to carry on the tea master's culture. She willingly chose to stay in the village amidst the villagers despite the risks associated, rejecting her mother's wish to travel far and lead a comfortable life. She understands that preserving the lineage is important for preserving cultural memory. She knew that she had to be silent at times when it came to saving the spring and her culture, and she did so quite well until she shared the ancestral secret with her best friend. Thus, Noria acts as the custodian of cultural memory, becoming a bridge between the past and future. Sanja, on the other hand, leads a normal life like others in the village. She always has to take on family responsibilities and take care of her younger sister, but has never had to stress about preserving any ancestral traditions. She witnesses the present dystopian environmental crisis; her whole life revolves around thinking about survival. So, when the situation comes to her, she is to conceal the secret of the spring. She cannot stay calm and handle the situation; instead, she makes decisions based on practicality rather than inherited duty. Thus, the contrast depicts how the Eco-dystopia not only endangers natural resources but also affects the transmission of cultural memory.

Conclusion

To conclude, the paper has critically examined the work *Memory of Water* from the perspective of Jan Assmann's Cultural Memory Theory. It describes how culture is important and how cultural memory slowly forms over the generations. The tea masters' tradition of Noria's family helps safeguard the environment, as they become its guardians, understanding the close connection between the environment and culture, which hints at an eco-centric approach. The tea ceremony and the hidden spring depict water as an essential natural entity that is independent and has a conscience of its own; it helps shape one's culture and also has the ability to bring massive destruction if not properly handled. The past in the work depicts what happens when greed overpowers; everything shatters, even the most powerful technologies fail and whatever remains is just a dystopia, a mess. So, the work is a kind of call to everyone to awake and rise to take care of the environment, or every luxury will be lost. The section of silence reveals how, with calmness, the world can be saved; cultural memory can help one understand flaws, learn to cope with situations, and become an ecological warrior to save the environment as the immediate cause.

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DABEER SI/KTT/45**REFLECTING ON MEMORY, LAND AND DISPLACEMENT IN
GULZAR'S POETRY****PALLAVI KIRAN**Assistant Professor, Media & Communication
School of Management, Bennett University, UP, India**Abstract**

This paper explores Gulzar's use of nostalgia as a poetic idiom and suggests that his metaphors create a social memory that is tangible, connecting the individual memory with the collective cultural experience in post-Partition South Asia. The study takes its cue from the difference between restorative and reflective nostalgia and interprets Gulzar's imagery as a reflective form of remembrance that does not seek to return to an idealised past but recognises loss. The analysis of selected Hindi-Urdu poems demonstrates how the everyday sensory features of the scent of a loved one, the warmth of a tandoor, the imprint on a pillow, and the imagined landscape of a divided border recreate remembered homes, across distances of time and place. The paper focuses especially on the gendered texture of this memory, as women play a pivotal role in Gulzar's poetic universe, and the lover, frequently cast in Sufi terms, is the one who articulates longing, intimacy and absence. It also reflects on the idea of how poems like *Dastak* transform individual loss into a communal loss of Partition, a communal loss of violence done to land and people. The paper thus argues that Gulzar's metaphorical language in the context of the larger South Asian literary productions of displacement and historical rupture, connects intimate feeling with communal memory. Reading this imagery through an ecocritical lens, the paper further suggests that Gulzar's remembered homes are inseparable from the land that holds them, so that the wounding of a divided territory registers as an ecological as well as a political rupture. Consequently, his poetry is more than autobiographical, as it also reflects a mirror in which the reader is faced with how memory, place and loss continue to affect the experience of being at home in the aftermath of division.

Keywords: Metaphor and Memory, Post-Partition Nostalgia, Gender, Displacement and Home, Postcolonial Ecology and Land.

Introduction

Biographical features have been used in poetry for a long time and are seen in many languages and literature. It is comforting to know that experience becomes language and structure when it is treasured, and that is particularly true of poets who yearn to call up what time has taken away. In the present study, the poetic universe of Gulzar is taken as its object, and it is argued that the nostalgia in Gulzar is not just an emotion. It's a full idiomatic phrase. In his writing in Hindi and Urdu, Gulzar creates metaphors that not only capture the passing of time but also place the reader in a limbo between the past and the present. This paper is about the ways by which he chooses verbal means that name a longing to return, not to a place that can be reoccupied, but to a home that must be carried within.

This yearning in Gulzar is seldom a solitary affair. Emerging from the aftermath of the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent, his imagery repeatedly gathers individual memory into collective memory. The loss of a beloved becomes bound up with the loss of a homeland, and the ache of separation shades into the historical rupture of a divided land. The paper investigates how Gulzar's metaphors move between these registers, the intimate and the communal, and how his sensory imagery of scent, warmth, impression and border recreates remembered homes across distances of both time and geography. These homes are never merely built structures; they are earthed in soil, heart and border, so that memory in Gulzar is always memory of a place under ecological as much as historical strain. In doing so it attends closely to the gendered texture of this remembrance, in which women occupy a pivotal place and the longing voice of the lover, cast in Sufi terms, becomes the vehicle through which absence is spoken.

Nostalgia, Memory and the Postcolonial Home: A Framework

Metaphor is central to the evocation of nostalgia in poetry, because it builds in the reader's mind an image of a past that can no longer be inhabited. It gives form to feelings that resist direct description, above all the longing for a time or a place that has vanished or been transformed. Svetlana Boym's distinction between two modes of nostalgia is useful here, and it has been elaborated in the study of the arts by Horvath. Restorative nostalgia uses metaphor to rebuild an imaginary home, reconstructing a lost age and often bathing it in an idealising light that ignores the realities of that time.

Reflective nostalgia, by contrast, dwells in the longing itself. It embraces the paradox of past and present; it mourns the loss; it does not indulge in the fantasy of return (Horvath 145-156). It is this second mode of reflection that this paper discovers to be the most alive in Gulzar's poetry i.e. sensory images like the fragrance of a loved one, the warmth of a hearth, the imprint on a pillow, all call the reader to remember without trying to reconstruct the past.

These images are important because they can be carried around. They move through the reader's memory, irrespective of the background of the poet. Nostalgia in this mode is also critical memory, as poetic imagery is not just longing for the past, but engaging with it, thinking through social and cultural change through longing (Turner 182-206; Pickering and Keightley 919-941). Understood this way, nostalgia is transformed from a potentially paralysing sentiment into a means of thinking about the place of the past in the present.

While the restorative and reflective frameworks are well established, comparatively little scholarship has examined how metaphor in Indian and South Asian poetry inhabits them. Yet Indian writers have deployed metaphors to evoke nostalgia with great subtlety. Kamala Das, in "My Grandmother's House," interweaves personal and collective memory, so that the grandmother's house becomes emblematic of sanctuary and the emotional vacuum of adulthood is measured against the warmth of childhood (Saikia 54-59). A. K. Ramanujan's "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" makes the swing a figure for the carefree world of childhood shadowed by the loss of an earlier simplicity, and his poetry more broadly renders the passage of time through richly textured domestic landscapes ("Theme of Nostalgia in Ramanujan's Poetry").

Where this study concentrates its attention, however, is on nostalgia that reaches beyond individual experience into the collective wound of migration, exile and Partition. Agha Shahid Ali's metaphors, for instance, encapsulate not only personal loss but the collective memory of dislocation, binding private remembrance to a shared history of a lost homeland (Debnath 81-86). In much of this writing the land is not a passive setting but an active bearer of memory, its rivers and fields holding the traces of communities displaced by colonial and postcolonial upheaval. To lose the homeland is therefore to lose a whole ecology of belonging, the particular light, water and vegetation against which a life was lived. The land itself frequently becomes the ground of nostalgia in South Asian writing. In Tagore, nature is personified as a source of comfort and continuity in the face of change, familiar landscapes connecting personal memory with the timelessness of nature (Padmanabhan and Geetha). Postcolonial ecocriticism has taught us to read such landscapes not as neutral backdrops but as living archives, where land carries the memory of those who tended it and the scars of those who were severed from it. Partition, in this framing, is not only a political cartography but an ecological displacement, a tearing of people from the rivers, fields and soils that had shaped their sense of belonging. This is the sense of memory that is grounded in land and home that makes the postcolonial nostalgia explored here inseparable from questions of displacement.

This legacy is strong in South Asian literature. From the exile and yearning for home in epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, to R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi* and Ruskin Bond's *Himalayan stories*, the longing for a simpler and more innocent world recurs (Narayan; Bond). Much of this literature is rooted in the colonial past and, above all, in the trauma of 1947. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* reconstructs a pre-Partition India of communal living and then charts its violent unmaking, revealing the interior life of ordinary people caught in historical upheaval (Singh). Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* folds past into present through the remembered Ayemenem house and the lost world of childhood, drawing the reader into a shared cultural memory of loss and forgetting (Roy). It is within this larger South Asian archive of displacement and rupture that Gulzar's metaphors of memory, land and home must be read.

Gulzar's facility with metaphorical imagery has roots in his own biography, particularly his father's love of the Sufi writings of Rumi and Hafiz. Gulzar recalls his father's vivid turns of phrase, terms such as "sust-ul wajood," roughly "lazy bones," that fed his imaginative vocabulary (Kabir 35). In conversation with Saba Mahmood Bashir, Gulzar names T. S. Eliot, Rabindranath Tagore, Bulleh Shah, Farid, Sant Tukaram and Namdev among his influences, a lineage that lends his verse intellectual depth while preserving its sensuous beauty (Bashir). His many collections, among them *Kuch Aur Nazme*, *Mera Kuch Saman*, *Raat Pashmine Ki*, *Triveni*, *Pukhraaj*, *Yaar Julahe*, *Pandrah Panch Pachattar*, *Meelo Se Din* and *Dyodhi*, demonstrate an inventive lyrical range, made even more resonant by the mellifluous Hindi-Urdu register in which he writes.

Metaphorical Analysis and Discussion

This section examines a selection of Gulzar's poems in which metaphor carries the weight of memory, longing and loss. A traceable motif of mourning runs

through his verse, a theme often connected to his separation from the actor Rakhi Gulzar in 1974, a parting that drew little public attention but became a wellspring for his poetry. Yet even where the ostensible subject is a lost beloved, Gulzar's images reach beyond the couple into a wider world of soil, season and dwelling, so that the personal and the environmental are never fully separable in his verse. In her doctoral study of Gulzar, Harjeet Kaur observes that those who have shared a deep bond struggle to relinquish it entirely, so that moments of union with the beloved continue to stir the heart long after the union has ended (Kaur 45). This refusal of absence to become final is where Gulzar's reflective nostalgia begins.

Tere utare huye din pehan ke ab bhi main

Tere mahak me kai roz kaat leta hoon.

(Gulzar, *Pandrah Panch Pachhattar* 63)

The metaphor "*tere mahak mein*" (in your scent) translates into the presence of absence. To be smuggled into someone's scent is to say that even a dead person leaves a trace in the world. The days of the beloved's past are like clothes, and the scent that remains on them brings the beloved into the emptiness that she left behind. This metonymic gesture renders longing palpable, to the reader, not through statement, but through the senses. It's a very introspective gesture. The poet does not bring back the beloved but keeps the trace that she has left behind. Women are at the heart of Gulzar's poetic world, and it is the voice of the lover, with a Sufi sensibility, that speaks of intimacy and absence. In this idiom the beloved is raised to an ideal and this idealisation is often extended to the past itself. It is this intimate yet gendered connection and recollection that "Fasla" embodies.

takiye pe tere sar ka wah tippa hai, pada hai
chadar me tere jism ki wah saundhi-si khusbu
haanthon me mahakta hai tere chehre ka ehsaas
maathe pe tere hoonthon ki mohar lagi hai
tu itni kareeb hai ki tujhe dekhoon to kaise
thodi si alag ho to tere chehre ko dekhoon

(Gulzar, *Pukhraj* 16)

The images here are filled with a soft, materialized remembrance of the beloved. "*Takiye pe tere sar ka wah tippa hai*" i.e. the bindi that she left on the pillow, the physical absence of someone who is not there anymore, a domestic trace of the absence. The earthy fragrance in the sheet is "*Chadar me tere jism ki wah saundhi-si khusbu*" and the beloved has a sensual afterlife in the objects of the home. "*Haanthon me mahakta hai tere chehre ka ehsaas*" and "*maathe pe tere hoonthon ki mohar lagi hai*" mean that the affection is remembered on your face and that it is a seal of affection on your forehead. This intimacy is then paradoxed in the last two couplets. The beloved is so close that she cannot be seen in its entirety and a little distance is required to see her face. The lover's desire is based on separation, which is an insight that softly rhymes across this paper with the greater distances of displacement that Gulzar's poetry also laments. Because romantic affection idealises the beloved, it tends also to idealise the past, and the two losses are figured together in the following lines.

aise bikhre hai raat din

jaise motiyoon wala haar tut gaya

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tum ne mujhko piro ke rakha tha
(Gulzar, *Triveni* 47)

The “motiyoon wala haar,” the pearl necklace, stands for a cherished bond. It is broken and scattered, it's a relationship, a remembered wholeness, come undone. Days and nights fall free like beads when strung by the beloved; and the image collects regret, longing and sorrow in one figure of coherence lost. It's the most concentrated nostalgia. Not a desire to re-string the necklace as it was, but a clear understanding that it has broken apart. The scattering of the beads across day and night also figures a wider dispersal, the way displacement scatters a people across a landscape they can no longer gather into a single home.

In other places, the speaker is overwhelmed by memory and cannot find the source of his pain.

tanhai tareek kunwaan hai,
tera khayal jo bole kahi se
asmaan raushan ho jaye!
khamoshi ke daldal me
kab se mere paaon fanse hai!
(Gulzar, *Pluto* 128)

Here loneliness is a “tareek kunwaan,” a black well into which one falls and out of which one cannot rise; loneliness is an image of isolation as something one falls into and cannot get out of. In this darkness “tera khayal jo bole kahi se” implies that a single memory of the beloved, from somewhere, can illuminate the sky. The silence of solitude becomes a “daldal,” a quagmire in which the speaker's feet are caught, figuring a stagnant and suffocating passage of life. The metaphors together map an inner landscape in which memory is at once the wound and the only source of light.

It is in “Dastak,” however, that Gulzar's poetry most clearly turns individual loss into communal memory, gathering private grief into the collective trauma of Partition and the violence done to both land and people.

subaah subaah ek khawab ki dastak par darwaza khola, dekha,
sarhad ke us paar se kuch mehmaan aye hai!...
aankh khuli to dekha, ghar me koi nahi tha
haanth laga kar dekha to tandoor abhi tak bujha nahi tha
aur hoontho par meethe gud ka zyaka ab bhi chipak raha tha
khawab tha shayad!
khawab hi hoga!
sarhad par kal raat, suna hai, chali thi goli
sarhad par kal raat, suna hai
kuch khawabo ka khoon hua tha!
(Gulzar, *Pukhraj* 18)

The poem opens on the knock of a dream, “ek khawab ki dastak,” at which the speaker opens his door to find guests arriving from across the border. The “mehmaan” who come “sarhad ke us paar se” are the people of a land divided against itself, and their imagined arrival figures a fragile possibility of reunion and healing across the wound of Partition. That hope is immediately withdrawn. “Aankh khuli to dekha, ghar me koi nahi tha” shows the room empty, and the

reunion dissolves into solitude and loss. But the sense impressions remain. The *"tandoor abhi tak bujha nahi tha"* (the hearth has not yet gone out) preserves a lingering warmth and hope in a cold place. The sweetness of a human contact is still visible on the lips, *"hoontho par meethe gud ka zyaka"* keeps the sweetness alive even when the time has gone. The refrain *"khawab tha shayad! khawab hi hoga!"* confesses that the longed-for meeting may have been only a dream, before the poem's devastating close, *"kuch khawabo ka khoon hua tha,"* that on the border, the previous night, some dreams were murdered. Here the hearth and the border stand together as the poem's governing metaphors. The tandoor is the intimate home carried within, while the sarhad is the political line that has run through home and body alike. Gulzar makes the violence done to a divided land legible as the killing of dreams, so that a private loss becomes the shared grief of a people. Read ecologically, the tandoor is more than a domestic hearth; it is the point where human warmth meets the earth, the clay oven that binds a household to the ground beneath it. Its refusal to go cold insists on an ecological continuity that the border cannot sever, while the sarhad marks the land itself as a casualty, a body of soil and water cut through by a line drawn in violence. The murdered dreams of the poem are thus also the severed relations between a people and their land, a loss that is at once environmental, historical and intimate. It is in this movement, from pillow and hearth to border and nation, that his metaphors bind intimate feeling to communal memory.

Conclusion

Reading Gulzar's poetry through the lens of memory, land and displacement reveals how metaphor can transform nostalgia from sentiment into a mode of reflection. His images do not preserve the past as a set of static, idealised pictures. They render pastness as something that continues to move through the present, a scent, a warmth, an imprint, a border remembered. Each of these images tethers memory to the material world, to hearth-smoke and soil and the divided ground itself, so that to remember in Gulzar is also to grieve a landscape and to keep faith with it. Working in the reflective rather than the restorative mode, Gulzar does not ask the reader to return to a home that can no longer be entered but teaches the reader to carry that home within. The sensory metaphors of scent and hearth and pillow make this remembered home tangible, and the Sufi-inflected voice of the lover gives its longing a human face, one that is deeply gendered and centred on the beloved.

Meanwhile Gulzar's verse doesn't just become autobiographical. In poems like *"Dastak"*, individual loss becomes collective loss of Partition, of violence to land, to people; intimate feeling and communal memory are intertwined. His poetry is part of a broader body of South Asian writing about displacement and historical rupture, in which readers are confronted with the ways in which memory, place and loss remain a part of the experience of being at home after division. Situated within the concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism, his poetry reminds us that the home carried within is finally a home made of land, and that to mourn its loss is to mourn an environment as much as a nation. It is in this doubleness, the private ache made public, the home lost yet carried within, that Gulzar's metaphorical language earns its lasting force.

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DABEER SI/KTT/46**MEMORY, IDENTITY AND REBIRTH IN KATE ATKINSON'S *LIFE AFTER LIFE*****A. SHINEE**

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Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* (2013) explores the recursive possibilities of existence through the life of Ursula Todd, whose repeated deaths and rebirths dramatize the interplay of memory, identity, and rebirth. The novel's non-linear narrative structure foregrounds how memory functions as both burden and resource, shaping Ursula's decisions across multiple lifetimes. Trauma — drowning, abuse, war — becomes a catalyst for resilience, enabling Ursula to reconstruct her identity through accumulated experience. Each rebirth reconfigures her subjectivity, suggesting that identity is not fixed but continually negotiated through memory and circumstance. Atkinson's narrative also interrogates philosophical causality, illustrating how past actions reverberate into future possibilities, while simultaneously questioning the stability of cause-and-effect in human life. By situating Ursula's repeated lives within historical contexts such as World War II, the novel bridges personal memory with collective history, offering a meditation on survival, agency, and hope. This paper argues that *Life After Life* exemplifies how contemporary fiction reimagines identity through recursive narrative, positioning memory and rebirth as central to resilience in the face of trauma.

Keywords: Memory, Identity, Rebirth, Trauma, Resilience, Philosophical Causality, Kate Atkinson

Introduction

Contemporary fiction has increasingly turned to narrative experimentation as a means of interrogating the complexities of human existence. Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* (2013) exemplifies this trend through its recursive structure, which dramatizes the interplay of memory, identity, and rebirth. The novel's protagonist, Ursula Todd, lives and dies repeatedly, each iteration reshaping her subjectivity and altering the trajectory of her life. This cyclical narrative not only destabilizes conventional notions of linear time but also foregrounds the philosophical and psychological dimensions of causality, resilience, and hope. By situating Ursula's experiences within both personal trauma and collective history, Atkinson offers a meditation on how memory and identity are continually reconstructed through rebirth.

Memory in *Life After Life* functions as both burden and resource. Ursula's repeated encounters with death — drowning, illness, abuse, war — accumulate as

fragments of recollection that inform her subsequent choices. Although each rebirth ostensibly resets her life, traces of memory persist, shaping her awareness of danger and her capacity for resilience. This recursive memory challenges the notion of a singular, linear biography, suggesting instead that identity is formed through layers of remembered experience. Atkinson's narrative thus aligns with trauma theory, which emphasizes how memory of suffering can resurface across time, influencing behavior and shaping subjectivity. Memory in the novel is not merely retrospective but anticipatory, guiding Ursula toward new possibilities and enabling her to confront historical catastrophe with foresight.

Identity in Atkinson's fiction is fluid, contingent, and relational. Ursula's repeated lives illustrate that identity is not fixed but continually renegotiated through experience. Each rebirth offers her the chance to inhabit different roles — daughter, wife, soldier, assassin — and each role reconfigures her sense of self. The novel interrogates the stability of identity by demonstrating how trauma, resilience, and choice reshape subjectivity across multiple lifetimes. Ursula's identity is not defined by a single narrative arc but by the accumulation of possibilities, reflecting contemporary philosophical debates on the self as process rather than essence. Atkinson's portrayal of identity resonates with feminist and postmodern theories that reject essentialist notions of subjectivity, emphasizing instead the dynamic interplay of memory, circumstance, and agency.

Rebirth serves as the structural and thematic core of *Life After Life*. The novel's recursive narrative destabilizes linear temporality, replacing it with cyclical repetition that foregrounds the possibility of renewal. Each rebirth offers Ursula the chance to correct past mistakes, confront trauma differently, and reimagine her future. Rebirth in the novel is not merely biological but philosophical, symbolizing the human capacity to reconstruct meaning in the face of suffering. It embodies resilience, suggesting that survival is achieved not through avoidance of trauma but through its transformation into strength. Atkinson's use of rebirth also raises ethical and historical questions: what does it mean to relive history, to intervene in collective catastrophe, to imagine alternate futures? Ursula's repeated lives culminate in her attempt to assassinate Hitler, dramatizing how rebirth can extend beyond personal survival to encompass historical intervention.

By weaving together memory, identity, and rebirth, Atkinson's *Life After Life* situates individual trauma within broader philosophical and historical frameworks. The novel demonstrates that memory is both archive and guide, identity is fluid and relational, and rebirth is the horizon of resilience and hope. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed analysis of how Atkinson's narrative reimagines human existence through recursive storytelling, contributing to interdisciplinary debates on trauma, causality, and survival in contemporary literature.

Literature Review

Scholarship on Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* has emphasized its innovative narrative structure and its engagement with questions of trauma, history, and identity. The novel's recursive design, in which Ursula Todd lives multiple versions of her life, has drawn attention from critics interested in narrative theory, trauma studies, and philosophical explorations of causality. To situate this study,

it is necessary to review three strands of scholarship: memory, identity, and rebirth as they intersect in contemporary fiction and philosophical discourse.

Memory has been a central concern in trauma theory and narrative studies. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra argue that traumatic memory resists linear narration, often resurfacing in fragmented or recursive forms. Atkinson's novel exemplifies this by allowing Ursula to retain traces of past experiences across multiple lives. Critics have noted that this narrative technique mirrors the persistence of trauma in human psychology, where memory of suffering continues to shape behavior even when consciously suppressed. In literary contexts, memory functions as both archive and guide, preserving the past while enabling characters to anticipate and reshape the future. Atkinson's use of memory aligns with these insights, demonstrating how recollection becomes a resource for resilience and survival.

Identity in *Life After Life* has been discussed in relation to feminist and postmodern theories of subjectivity. Judith Butler's notion of identity as performative and relational resonates with Ursula's shifting roles across her many lives. Each rebirth offers her the chance to inhabit different identities — daughter, wife, soldier, assassin — and each role reconfigures her subjectivity. Scholars of contemporary fiction have emphasized how Atkinson destabilizes essentialist notions of identity, portraying the self as fluid and contingent upon circumstance. This aligns with broader literary trends that reject fixed character arcs in favor of dynamic, process-oriented identities. Ursula's identity is not singular but plural, constituted by the accumulation of possibilities across her repeated lives.

Rebirth has been explored in literary studies as both narrative device and philosophical metaphor. In Atkinson's novel, rebirth destabilizes linear temporality, replacing it with cyclical repetition that foregrounds the possibility of renewal. Scholars of narrative theory, such as Gérard Genette, have examined how non-linear structures challenge conventional storytelling, while philosophers like Mircea Eliade have linked cyclical time to myth and ritual. Atkinson's use of rebirth resonates with these traditions, situating her novel within a broader discourse on the human desire for renewal and the possibility of rewriting history. Ursula's repeated lives embody resilience, suggesting that survival is achieved not through avoidance of trauma but through its transformation into strength.

The existing scholarship on Atkinson has also highlighted the historical dimension of *Life After Life*. Critics have noted how Ursula's repeated lives intersect with World War II, situating personal trauma within collective catastrophe. This aligns with studies in memory and cultural history, which emphasize how individual recollection is inseparable from collective narratives of war and violence. Atkinson's novel thus bridges personal identity with historical memory, offering a meditation on how rebirth enables characters to reimagine both personal and collective futures.

In summary, the literature on memory, identity, and rebirth provides a rich foundation for analyzing *Life After Life*. Trauma theory illuminates how memory persists across Ursula's lives; feminist and postmodern theories of identity explain her fluid subjectivity; and philosophical and narrative studies of rebirth contextualize Atkinson's recursive structure. Yet few studies have explicitly

foregrounded the triadic interplay of memory, identity, and rebirth as central to resilience and hope. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which argues that Atkinson's novel exemplifies how contemporary fiction reimagines human existence through recursive storytelling, situating memory and rebirth as the foundations of identity and survival.

Ursula's Traumatic Memory and Identity Reconstruction

At the heart of *Life After Life* lies Ursula Todd's repeated confrontation with trauma, which becomes the crucible through which her identity is reshaped. Each iteration of her life foregrounds the role of memory as both archive and guide, enabling her to anticipate danger and reconfigure her choices. Trauma in the novel is not erased by rebirth; instead, fragments of recollection persist, shaping Ursula's subjectivity and resilience. This recursive memory illustrates how identity is continually reconstructed through the interplay of suffering, endurance, and renewal.

Ursula's early drowning incident exemplifies how traumatic memory functions as formative experience. Though she dies and is reborn, the memory of drowning lingers as a shadow across her subsequent lives. This recollection instills in her a heightened awareness of vulnerability, teaching her persistence in the face of overwhelming odds. The accident becomes a metaphor for resilience: the struggle against water parallels her later struggles against abuse, war, and oppression. Memory of drowning thus becomes a secret power, enabling Ursula to endure pain and anticipate danger, transforming trauma into strength.

Her marriage to Derek Oliphant further illustrates the role of trauma in identity reconstruction. Derek's abuse — physical, sexual, and psychological — marks Ursula's body and psyche, forcing her to confront the limits of endurance. Yet even in this context, memory of past suffering equips her with resilience. The recollection of drowning, of fighting for survival, resurfaces as a resource, enabling her to withstand Derek's violence and eventually escape. Trauma here becomes paradoxical: while it wounds, it also empowers, teaching Ursula persistence and fortitude. Her identity as a survivor is forged through the recursive interplay of memory and rebirth, demonstrating that resilience is cultivated through suffering rather than in its absence.

World War II situates Ursula's personal trauma within collective catastrophe. Her decision to join the army reflects how memory of abuse and oppression propels her toward resilience and agency. The war itself becomes another crucible of trauma, exposing her to death, destruction, and loss. Yet Ursula's repeated lives allow her to reimagine her role within this historical context, culminating in her attempt to assassinate Hitler. This act symbolizes the transformation of personal trauma into collective intervention, illustrating how rebirth enables individuals to reshape not only their own identities but also historical trajectories. Memory of suffering thus extends beyond the personal, becoming a resource for cultural survival and historical hope.

Identity in *Life After Life* is fluid, contingent, and relational. Ursula's repeated lives illustrate that identity is not fixed but continually renegotiated through trauma and rebirth. Each iteration offers her the chance to inhabit different roles — daughter, wife, soldier, assassin — and each role reconfigures her subjectivity.

Trauma serves as the connective tissue across these identities, ensuring continuity even as circumstances change. Memory of suffering binds her identities together, while rebirth enables her to reconstruct them anew. Atkinson's narrative thus exemplifies how identity is formed through the recursive interplay of memory and rebirth, situating resilience as the secret power that sustains survival.

Ultimately, Ursula's story demonstrates that trauma is not merely destructive but generative. Memory of suffering becomes a resource for resilience, enabling her to reconstruct identity across multiple lives. Rebirth provides the structural framework for this reconstruction, offering her the chance to reimagine herself and her world. Atkinson's novel thus affirms that identity is not essence but process, continually reshaped through the interplay of memory, trauma, and renewal. By dramatizing this interplay, *Life After Life* contributes to contemporary debates on how literature represents resilience, illustrating that hope emerges not from avoidance of trauma but from its transformation into strength.

Rebirth, Historical Memory, and Collective Identity

While Ursula Todd's repeated lives foreground the personal dimensions of trauma and resilience, *Life After Life* also situates rebirth within the larger framework of historical memory and collective identity. Atkinson's recursive narrative does not merely allow Ursula to relive her own experiences; it positions her as a participant in the collective trauma of the twentieth century, particularly the devastation of World War II. In this way, rebirth becomes a lens through which the novel interrogates the relationship between individual memory and cultural history.

Rebirth in Atkinson's novel destabilizes linear temporality, enabling Ursula to re-enter historical moments with altered awareness. Each rebirth allows her to confront war differently, whether as a civilian enduring the Blitz or as a soldier navigating the chaos of battle. These repeated encounters highlight how trauma is not confined to the personal but reverberates across communities and nations. Ursula's resilience, cultivated through personal suffering, becomes a metaphor for collective endurance, illustrating how societies survive catastrophe by transforming trauma into strength. Her attempt to assassinate Hitler epitomizes this intersection of personal and collective identity: rebirth empowers her to intervene in history, suggesting that individual agency can reshape collective memory.

Historical memory in the novel functions as both archive and burden. The repeated bombings, deaths, and losses accumulate across Ursula's lives, mirroring how societies carry the weight of war across generations. Atkinson's narrative aligns with cultural memory studies, which emphasize how collective trauma persists beyond the immediate moment, shaping identity long after the event. Ursula's rebirths dramatize this persistence, showing how memory of war resurfaces across time, influencing behavior and shaping subjectivity. Her resilience is thus not only personal but emblematic of cultural survival, illustrating how communities endure by remembering and reimagining their past.

Collective identity emerges through Ursula's repeated participation in historical events. Her roles as daughter, wife, soldier, and assassin situate her within broader social structures, demonstrating how identity is relational and contingent upon historical context. Each rebirth reconfigures her place within these structures,

illustrating that identity is not fixed but continually renegotiated through memory and circumstance. Atkinson's portrayal resonates with postmodern theories of subjectivity, which reject essentialist notions of identity in favor of dynamic, process-oriented understandings. Ursula's identity is plural, constituted by the accumulation of possibilities across her repeated lives, and her resilience embodies the collective capacity to endure and adapt.

By weaving together rebirth, historical memory, and collective identity, Atkinson's *Life After Life* situates personal trauma within broader philosophical and cultural frameworks. The novel demonstrates that rebirth is not merely a narrative device but a metaphor for resilience, enabling individuals and societies to reconstruct meaning in the face of catastrophe. Memory functions as the connective tissue across these identities, ensuring continuity even as circumstances change, while rebirth provides the structural framework for renewal. In this way, Atkinson's narrative contributes to interdisciplinary debates on trauma, history, and identity, illustrating that hope emerges not from avoidance of suffering but from its transformation into strength.

Conclusion

Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* dramatizes the recursive possibilities of existence, situating Ursula Todd's repeated lives within the philosophical framework of memory, identity, and rebirth. The novel demonstrates that memory is not merely retrospective but anticipatory, guiding Ursula's decisions across multiple lifetimes. Trauma — drowning, abuse, war — becomes the crucible through which resilience is cultivated, enabling her to reconstruct identity through accumulated experience. Each rebirth reconfigures her subjectivity, illustrating that identity is fluid, relational, and continually negotiated through circumstance.

Atkinson's narrative also interrogates philosophical causality, illustrating how past actions reverberate into future possibilities while simultaneously questioning the stability of cause-and-effect in human life. Ursula's repeated lives exemplify Aristotle's principle that every effect is rooted in a prior cause, yet they also echo Hume's skepticism about the certainty of causal inference. The novel thus situates causality within a psychological and narrative framework, demonstrating that resilience emerges from the unpredictable interplay of trauma and renewal.

By situating Ursula's personal experiences within historical contexts such as World War II, *Life After Life* bridges individual memory with collective history. Ursula's attempt to assassinate Hitler epitomizes how rebirth extends beyond personal survival to encompass historical intervention, dramatizing the possibility of reshaping collective identity through individual agency. In this way, Atkinson's novel contributes to interdisciplinary debates on trauma, resilience, and historical memory, offering a meditation on survival and hope in the face of catastrophe.

In conclusion, *Life After Life* affirms that identity is not essence but process, continually reshaped through the interplay of memory, trauma, and rebirth. Resilience emerges as the secret power derived from suffering, while hope becomes the philosophical horizon that sustains survival. This study contributes to contemporary literary scholarship by foregrounding the triadic interplay of memory, identity, and rebirth as central to resilience in trauma fiction.

Scope for Further Research

While this article has focused on Ursula Todd's experiences as a lens for philosophical causality and resilience, several avenues remain open for future exploration:

- Comparative Trauma Narratives: Examining how Atkinson's recursive structure compares with trauma narratives in other contemporary novels, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Pat Barker's *Regeneration*.
- Narrative Form and Trauma Theory: Analyzing how non-linear or recursive structures embody psychological processes of trauma and recovery.
- Feminine Identity and Resilience: Exploring how Ursula's experiences as a woman navigating abuse and war invite feminist readings of resilience and subjectivity.
- Counterfactual Histories: Investigating how Ursula's imagined assassination of Hitler reflects literature's role in reimagining history and its ethical implications.
- Philosophical Causality in Modern Fiction: Extending analysis to other contemporary works that interrogate causality, resilience, and identity through experimental narrative structures.

By pursuing these directions, scholars can deepen understanding of how literature negotiates the intersections of philosophy, psychology, and narrative form. Atkinson's *Life After Life* demonstrates that memory is both archive and guide, identity is fluid and relational, and rebirth is the horizon of resilience and hope.

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DABEER SI/KTT/47**DOCUMENTS OF NO NATION: BUREAUCRATIC EXILE AND COUNTER-CITIZENSHIP IN TENZIN TSUNDUE'S KORA****JUGABRAT CHOUDHURY**Research Scholar, Department of English
Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya, Assam, India**Abstract**

Scholarship on Tenzin Tsundue has identified exile, nostalgia, hybridity, and protest as the governing concerns of *Kora: Stories and Poems*. This essay argues more specifically that Tsundue represents Tibetan exile through a bureaucratic grammar of checkpoints, registration certificates, rented rooms, borders, and imposed labels, then converts those instruments of exclusion into counter-citizenship. This is not a legal status or a substitute for territorial sovereignty, but a public practice through which a precarious subject names a people, preserves political memory, and claims authority to speak. Close readings of key poems show that Tsundue neither romanticizes homelessness nor treats assimilation as simple cultural loss. He instead stages exile as a contradiction: the refugee is administratively made temporary even as shelters acquire roots, and politically marginalized even as poetry produces an oppositional public voice. *Kora* thus moves from statelessness toward political agency without pretending that language can repair material dispossession.

Keywords: Tenzin Tsundue, Tibetan diaspora, statelessness, exile, counter-citizenship, *Kora*

Beyond the Thematics of Exile

Tenzin Tsundue's *Kora* begins from a political and existential contradiction: its speaker belongs to a nation that structures his identity but does not secure his rights, while India, the country of his birth, provides residence without uncomplicated belonging. Edward Said's account of exile as a discontinuous condition rather than a liberating form of travel provides a necessary theoretical caution against aestheticizing that predicament (137-49). Existing criticism has established its emotional and historical force. Tuhina Mukherjee reads *Kora* as an interweaving of diasporic lyric and protest poetry; B. Priyadarsini emphasizes identity crisis, nostalgia, and linguistic adaptation; Mansi Chauhan interprets home as a shifting signifier sustained by memory; and Vishnu Priya P. R. invokes Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* to describe the refugee's inclusion within law chiefly through exclusion (Mukherjee 470-74; Priyadarsini 107-09; Chauhan 352-58; Vishnu Priya 733-35). Together, these studies illuminate the collection's principal themes, but they also leave a formal and political question insufficiently answered: by what textual process does Tsundue transform dispossession into agency?

The answer lies in *Kora*'s recurrent administrative vocabulary. Checkpoints, permits, borders, police stations, prisons, rented rooms, and national labels are not merely realistic details. They constitute the grammar through which the state

makes the refugee legible while denying him full political membership. Tsundue then repeats, rearranges, and contests that grammar. His poems create what may be called counter-citizenship: an enactment of political belonging by subjects whose claims exceed the documents assigned to them. The term does not imply that poetry confers legal rights. Rather, it identifies the collection's capacity to turn an administratively managed life into a speaking, remembering, and dissenting public presence.

The Documented Foreigner

"My Tibetanness" condenses the paradox of Tibetan exile into an encounter among body, document, and name. The speaker is repeatedly processed at checkpoints and offices, renews a Registration Certificate, and remains "A foreigner born in India" (Tsundue 13). The line is powerful because it is not a generalized expression of alienation. It records a manufactured contradiction: birthplace and legal classification do not coincide. Renewal makes precarious residence cyclical. Exile is therefore not a single historical departure but an administrative event that recurs whenever a document expires.

The poem's catalogue of identities imposed on the speaker further demonstrates that recognition is governed by racialized appearance. Others can imagine him as Nepali, Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Naga, or Manipuri, but not readily as Tibetan (Tsundue 13). His face is overinterpreted while his declared nationality is underrecognized. Chauhan aptly treats this passage as evidence of interrupted belonging, and Mukherjee reads it through cultural hybridity (Chauhan 354-56; Mukherjee 471-72). Yet hybridity alone is too neutral a description. The poem does not simply celebrate cultural mixture; it exposes an unequal distribution of interpretive authority. Officials and strangers name the refugee before he can name himself.

Tsundue's English intensifies this conflict rather than resolving it. English enables circulation among Indian and international readers, Hindi locates the speaker within everyday Indian life, and Tibetan carries inherited national memory. The three languages do not blend into a harmonious cosmopolitan identity. They occupy different political positions. The public languages of education and administration surround a mother tongue charged with an affiliation the state document cannot validate. *Kora* therefore portrays multilingualism as both resource and fracture: it expands the refugee's audience while revealing the distance between communicative fluency and recognized belonging.

"The Tibetan in Mumbai" demonstrates that this fracture does not prevent practical participation in Indian urban life. Its Tibetan figure works, follows local media, moves through Mumbai's trains and alleys, and speaks Bambaya Hindi, yet remains exposed to racial caricature and cannot expect to hear a Tibetan song on the radio (Tsundue 16-17). Priyadarsini calls this process acclimatization, whereas Chauhan emphasizes the unresolved identity produced in a cultural "third space" (Priyadarsini 108; Chauhan 356). The poem supports both accounts but resists a simple choice between assimilation and separation. The city is neither wholly alien nor fully possessable. Tsundue's subject belongs through habit while being denied recognition through stereotypes. Counter-citizenship emerges in that discrepancy:

everyday participation establishes a social claim that official and racial categories fail to acknowledge.

The plainness of Tsundue's diction is crucial here. Short declarative lines resemble the compressed exchanges of checkpoints, forms, and street encounters, but repetition turns administrative brevity into lyric insistence. The poems rarely retreat into private symbolism inaccessible to the public. They name recognizable institutions and routines, thereby making the structures of displacement available for collective argument. Simplicity is not an absence of craft; it is a strategy for moving testimony across audiences without surrendering its political specificity.

Borders Seen and Unseen

The collection's borders are paradoxically less visible in the landscape than in the refugee's paperwork. In "A Personal Reconnaissance," the speaker approaches Tibet from Ladakh but cannot perceive a natural difference between the two sides; the territorial line exists as political knowledge rather than sensory fact (Tsundue 11). By contrast, "My Tibetanness" makes the checkpoint intensely visible through repeated inspection (Tsundue 13). Read together, the poems expose the border as an institution rather than a self-evident feature of geography. The land does not announce the distinction that officials enforce.

"Horizon" extends this insight into the collection's temporal structure. Movement proceeds from one horizon to another, while the traveler records small landmarks for a possible return (Tsundue 9). Mukherjee reads this as a direct expression of the desire for homecoming (471). Yet the multiplication of horizons also makes arrival indefinitely recessive. Each apparent endpoint generates another. Exile is sustained not only by distance from an origin but by a political future that is always promised and repeatedly postponed. The poem's spare sequence converts that postponement into form: progress and deferral become indistinguishable.

This recursive movement helps explain why *Kora* refuses a linear narrative from expulsion to assimilation or triumphant return. The refugee moves, renews documents, rebuilds shelter, preserves memory, and protests, but none of these acts concludes exile. Counter-citizenship is consequently iterative as well. It must be performed again because the structures that deny recognition are renewed again. Its incompleteness is not evidence of failure; it is the accurate formal analogue of a political claim that has not received institutional settlement.

Temporary Rooms, Persistent Roots

The spatial poems complicate the assumption that Tsundue merely opposes an idealized Tibet to a degraded exile. In "When It Rains in Dharamshala," a leaking rented room becomes an "island-nation," and papers devoted to freedom float amid food scraps and recollections (Tsundue 22). The image miniaturizes sovereignty, but it also undercuts grandeur. Nationhood appears within damp domestic precarity. Vishnu Priya reads the room as evidence of the refugee's exposed life, while Mukherjee emphasizes its symbolic accumulation of past suffering (Vishnu Priya 732; Mukherjee 472-73). Both are valid, yet the poem's material comedy matters equally. Tsundue refuses to make suffering aesthetically pure. Mice, noodles, a failing roof, and political papers occupy the same space, placing nationalism inside the awkward maintenance of ordinary life.

“Exile House” develops an even more unsettling temporal logic. A dwelling expected to be temporary acquires vegetable plots, aging fences, and intergenerational attachment; the longer return is deferred, the more deeply the house enters local soil (Tsendue 25). “Losar Greeting” similarly situates Tibetan ritual in a “borrowed garden” and imagines roots passing through resistant urban materials (Tsendue 10). Chauhan interprets these roots as resistance and the preservation of an imaginary homeland (353). The poems, however, do more than preserve an intact origin. They register the ethical and psychological difficulty of returning after exile has generated its own history.

This is why *Kora*'s home is neither a freely floating metaphor nor a stable destination. It is simultaneously lost territory, inherited narrative, present shelter, and deferred political project. The children of exile may inherit knowledge of Tibet through stories while also inheriting gardens, languages, and attachments formed elsewhere. Tsendue does not solve that contradiction. He makes its duration visible. Temporary residence becomes a technique of governance when a population is compelled to live provisionally for decades; the growing house silently disproves the fiction that such provisionality has no consequences.

From Refugee to Rangzen

The collection's clearest act of counter-citizenship occurs in “Refugee.” The letter R is first imposed by family and school as the mark of a predetermined identity. The speaker attempts to remove it, only to discover pain beneath the label. He then rereads the sign through Tibetan: “the Tibetan tongue reads: / RANGZEN” (Tsendue 14). The transformation does not erase the refugee experience. Instead, it seizes control of interpretation. A designation associated with dependency becomes the name of freedom.

Priyadarsini and Mukherjee both identify this reversal as an affirmation of political purpose (Priyadarsini 109; Mukherjee 473-74). Its formal importance is greater than a change from shame to pride, however. The same graphic mark belongs to competing vocabularies. In the administrative vocabulary, R classifies a displaced person; in the speaker's counter-vocabulary, it announces collective self-determination. The poem's agency therefore arises not outside the language of regulation but through its revision. Tsendue cannot prevent institutions from documenting him, but he can expose the instability of their categories and make the category speak against its intended limit.

This strategy also revises Agamben's account of bare life, in which *homo sacer* is included within sovereign power through the act of exclusion (47-48). Vishnu Priya's comparison of Tsendue to this figure usefully captures a subject bound to political power through exclusion (733-34). Nevertheless, the analogy risks making the refugee appear only as an object of sovereign decision. *Kora* repeatedly shows the excluded subject generating political meanings that the sovereign does not control. Tsendue's counter-citizenship is fragile because it lacks enforceable rights, but it is not politically empty. It organizes memory, recruits readers, and converts a stigmatized classification into a public claim.

Protest after the Victim Script

Tsendue's political voice is most provocative when it refuses the acceptable figure of the grateful, peaceful refugee. “I Am a Terrorist” begins with the state's

criminalizing label and grotesquely exaggerates it before reconstructing the speaker as the return of accumulated humiliation (Tsundue 20-21). Vishnu Priya convincingly reads the poem as a sarcastic exposure of ideological labeling (733-35). Yet the poem should not be domesticated into a simple statement of innocence. Its bullet imagery and confrontational rhythm deliberately approach the language of violence. They dramatize what happens when repeated denial compresses a political person into a security category.

“Betrayal” makes the tension sharper. The speaker inherits a father's history of defending home, but Buddhist nonviolence appears to him not only as ethical discipline but also as a possible failure of filial and national obligation (Tsundue 18-19). Mukherjee's formulation of a harmonious balance between activism and poetry understates this unease (473-74). The collection is compelling precisely because harmony is never secure. Tsundue distinguishes nonviolence from passivity, but he also records the fatigue, anger, and guilt that official celebrations of Tibetan peacefulness can conceal.

The poems thus reject two reductive scripts: the refugee as helpless victim and the Tibetan as naturally serene Buddhist. Neither script permits political complexity. Through sarcasm, abrupt address, and the reuse of hostile labels, Tsundue claims the right to appear as an argumentative subject. His activism outside the text reinforces this poetics, but the poems are not mere transcripts of protest. They test the moral vocabulary of the movement, including its internal pressures and unresolved costs.

Conclusion

Kora's achievement lies not simply in giving literary expression to exile but in showing how exile is continuously produced through ordinary procedures of identification, residence, and recognition. The Registration Certificate, checkpoint, rented room, racialized question, and stigmatizing letter are small technologies of political uncertainty. Tsundue reworks them into a counter-archive in which Tibetan identity is neither a relic preserved unchanged nor a private feeling detached from public claims.

Counter-citizenship names the resulting practice. It cannot replace citizenship, restore territory, or guarantee rights, and reading it as compensation would romanticize dispossession. It does, however, prevent bureaucratic categories from having the final word. Through semantic reversal, material detail, and confrontational address, Tsundue turns the refugee from an administered object into a political interlocutor. His poems insist that belonging is not exhausted by the documents a state issues, even as they refuse to pretend that literature can make those documents unnecessary. In that unresolved space between legal exclusion and public speech, *Kora* locates both the injury and the agency of Tibetan exile.

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DABEER SI/KTT/48**TRAVERSING THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL: NARRATION
IN REFUGEE LIFE NARRATIVES****RESHMA ANN PETER**

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PG and Research Department of English,
Loyola College, Chennai, India**Abstract**

Refugee life narratives attempt to navigate the delicate balance between the deeply personal experiences of displaced individuals and the larger political conditions that have shaped their lives. For a refugee, the act of narration is in itself an assertion of agency. Narration in refugee life writing, often paints a vivid picture of the trauma, loss and hope that define the refugee condition. These refugee authors employ storytelling to give voice to their emotional journeys, thus helping readers understand the psychological toll of displacement and the strength required to persevere in such dire circumstances. The texts assert that the lives of refugees are inextricably linked to political forces and policies. They shed light on the consequences of political actions and policies for the survivors by drawing attention to the need for practical political solutions to the refugee crisis. Hence, narration becomes a powerful tool that brings the personal and political dimensions of displacement to the forefront. This interplay helps the readers understand the complexity of the refugee experiences and their personal stories are essential for comprehending the broader political issues related to displacement. The paper will focus on the personal and emotional aspects of these narratives, their political relevance, and the importance of the act of narration itself in shaping our understanding of the refugee experience by analysing the works *First, They Erased Our Name* by Habiburahman and *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* by Clemantine Wamariya.

Keywords: resilience, displacement, identity, political, trauma

The refugee condition has become one of the defining features of the 21st century. (Maley, 2016). The word 'refugee' stems from the French noun *réfugié*, a 17th century word which directly translates to "gone in search of refuge". This word evolved from the Latin *fugere*, meaning "to flee." The word first appeared in context of the French Huguenots, the protestant Christians in particular, who fled religious persecution by King Louis XIV in their native country after the revocation (1685) of the Edict of Nantes (Orchard, 2016; Marrus, 2002). When these French Protestants arrived on English shores, the people there anglicized the French word *réfugié* into "refugee" to refer to the new migrants. In the later decades of the century, the term was officially a part of the English vocabulary to refer to people fleeing their countries due to state-sponsored terror. Until 1914, the term refugee was used to refer to a person 'seeking asylum'; however, post WWI, it was used in the context of 'person fleeing home' first applied to refer to the civilians in Flanders, fleeing to the west to escape fighting in the WWI.

Refugee life narratives occupy a complex position within contemporary literary and political discourse as they are interpreted not only as deeply personal accounts of trauma and displacement but also as public testimonies where the affected individuals seek recognition, justice and political accountability. This paper examines how two contemporary refugee memoirs - Habiburrahman's *First, They Erased Our Name: A Rohingya Speaks* (2018) and Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After* (2018)- navigate this complex space and how they powerfully assert refugee agency. These narratives have the ability to transform lived suffering into testimony and by doing so, they reclaim agency; they challenge imposed silences and redefine the status of 'refugees' as active narrators of their own histories and not as passive subjects of humanitarian discourse.

The two memoirs emerge from different geo-political contexts. They find their origins in two genocides that are separated by over two decades and by continent. Despite their distinct historical and cultural contexts, the two memoirs share a striking convergence in the expectations and burdens imposed upon their narrators. Habiburrahman's memoir recounts his childhood and adolescence as a member of the Rohingya community, a Muslim ethnic minority that was rendered stateless by the enactment of Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law. This law stripped the Rohingya of recognized nationality as they were not recognized among the many ethnic groups. This legislation institutionalized decades of discrimination, restrictions on movement and forced displacement which later culminated in the military's violent campaigns of 2016 and 2017. The campaign of violence, inflicted on the minority group was characterized as genocide by the United Nations and numerous international bodies. The memoir was co-written with French journalist Sophie Ansel and originally published in French as *D'abord ils ont effacé notre nom* (2017). It traces Habiburrahman's flight from Arakan, his years as an undocumented migrant across several countries and his eventual resettlement in Australia. Habiburrahman's narrative is relevant to this study as it serves as a crucial counter-archive against state-sponsored historical erasure. The Burmese regime sought to dissolve and erase Rohingya identity by stripping their citizenship and physically removing their presence; however, the memoir functions as an act of archival preservation by recording lived memories and cultural histories at a time when official state narratives actively seek to erase Rohingya identity and historical presence.

Wamariya's memoir is a recounting of a different, earlier catastrophe, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which around 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed over roughly one hundred days. The narrator Wamariya who was six years old at the time, fled the country with her older sister Claire at the onset of the violence, travelling through seven African countries and multiple refugee camps before being granted refugee status in the United States in 2000. The memoir is co-written with journalist Elizabeth Weil and it alternates between Wamariya's years during the violence in Africa and her subsequent adolescence and young adulthood as a refugee in the United States. The text also discusses Wamariya's media appearance on a popular talk show after winning an essay contest. This appearance on such a platform had catapulted her private trauma into a heavily

televised and mediated public sphere. The memoir serves a dual purpose; it simultaneously attempts to process this intense media exposure while also actively resisting the reductive frameworks that are imposed by mainstream media. Though both the memoirs belong to very distinct contexts, they face a shared structural challenge. The authors attempt to navigate the dual demands of conveying authentic personal trauma while also satisfying the formal requirements and expectations of international humanitarian organizations. This paper argues that neither memoir resolves this tension by choosing one register over the other, instead they use different narrative tools like non-linear storytelling, co-authorship, and deliberate silences to keep the personal and political connected, without collapsing one into the other. To demonstrate this, the paper first builds a theoretical model by combining trauma theory and testimonio theory, then examines personal trauma in the texts and finally analyses how both authors deliver political testimony by moving away from expected narratives of gratitude, redemption or simple victimhood.

In her introduction to the work on postcolonial life narratives, Gillian Whitlock talks of how traditionally, the concept of autobiography has been associated with the privileged “a sovereign subject”- typically, a white, rational male. Post-colonial life narratives decolonize the subject of the narrative, by elevating “minor” genres such as slave narratives, memoirs, diaries, letters etc. that emerged as a result of colonial encounters. While western autobiographies emphasize the individual’s autonomy and uniqueness, postcolonial life narratives often feature a speaker who represent the collective voice of an oppressed community (5). Smith and Watson’s framework of life narrative, argues that refugee accounts defy traditional genre boundaries and should be read as dynamic, “ever-shifting self-referential practices” rather than rigid autobiographies (3). The text also talks about newer terms like *testimonio* and *autoethnography* have emerged to differentiate these newer genres of self-referential writing, especially by “subordinated subjects”(3). This framework is highly relevant to refugee narratives where the act of writing is synonymous with an act of witnessing, an attempt against cultural and political erasure. Life narrators use “*personal memory*” as their archive, when narrating their version of the truth, unlike traditional biographers who rely on external archival documents (6).

In refugee life narratives, the personal dimension often focuses on the profound loss of identity and inner conflict that is caused by forced displacement. Narration becomes the only space where survivors can articulate their psychological grief that has been obscured by policy reports and statistical records. Wamariya attempts to highlight this internal disintegration that a refugee faces, when she describes the dehumanizing mechanics of refugee registration process, by writing:

“You had to try to hang on to your name, though nobody cared about your name. You had to try and stay a person. You had to try not to become invisible. If you let go and fell back into the chaos you were gone, just a number in a unit... If you died, no one knew. If you gave up and disintegrated inside, no one knew.” (85)

Habiburahman also describes a similar experience where the individual is reduced to an anonymous unit within a mass when he describes his deportation and

detention at Tanah Merah camp in Malaysia. He recalls the incident where the refugees were put along with other prisoners and were assigned numbers and crammed into a large hall like a nightmarish, nauseating herd of cattle (188).

The authors use these lines to illustrate how displacement not only threatens their physical survival, but also the very idea of selfhood itself by transforming displaced individuals into faceless administrative units. This systemic erasure manifests psychologically in Wamariya's fear of invisible internal collapse and it physically manifests in Habiburrahman's depiction of his body dissolving into an anonymous, numbered mass. Despite the challenging circumstances that they were written in, the memoir, as a form in itself, becomes an instrument of resistance as these authors painstakingly record their names, dates and personal circumstances. The authors assert their identity and agency by rejecting the anonymity accorded to them by bureaucratic institutions. The memoirs transform into an active space of subversion by countering the sanitized and institutionalized state-sponsored narratives that exclude minority communities.

Habiburrahman refuses to allow the Rohingya community to be remembered merely as victims of genocide or stateless individuals in humanitarian reports. He thereby reconstructs everyday Rohingya life by documenting villages, family traditions, festivals and the place names that the Myanmar state sought to erase. In his dedication, he urges readers to "tell our story," and by doing so he transforms the memoir into a collective testimony. This will help in asserting Rohingya identity and history by directly countering state-sponsored amnesia. Wamariya also expresses her discomfort after appearing on the talkshow. This shows how highly personal refugee experiences are often simplified or homogenised for public consumption (8). However, she reclaims agency by voicing her discomfort and resists these reductive representations. Gerard McCann argues that individual "lived experience" serves as a vital counter-hegemonic tool against oppressive state structures (21-44). He says that traditional social science methodologies tend to reduce displaced populations to mere statistics, policy challenges and as passive victims of macro-politics (21). In contrast, McCann asserts that personal stories and oral testimonies of displaced populations help in the preservation of the historical agency of marginalized groups (22). By actively documenting their own realities, refugees and migrants are able to challenge the dominant state-sponsored narratives (23).

Trauma theory helps in comprehending refugee texts, providing vocabulary for what the texts do formally. The texts narrate the experience of flight, loss, and violence that is not characterized by a straightforward, chronological telling. Instead, it surfaces through fragmentation, repetition, silence and belated disclosure. However, it is important to note that the traditional theorization in trauma studies cannot be applied without modification to refugee life narratives as the theories were built almost entirely around the Holocaust as its paradigm case. This is the gap that Dominick LaCapra and Stef Craps address in their work, where they seek to decolonize trauma theory. Both the scholars argue that trauma theory must be revised to understand and account for the collective, prolonged, and non-Western traumatic experience on its own terms instead of treating it as a universal template derived from one historical catastrophe. For the purpose of this study, the

decolonizing strand of trauma studies — rather than its 1990s founding texts alone -- will be used to analyse the primary texts as it allows for trauma to be read as collective and structural rather than as an individual, single-event wound.

Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between "acting out" and "working through" to describe how subjects process historical trauma (698). Acting out traps the person in a repetitive loop where the boundaries between the past and the present collapses, causing them to relive the trauma over and over. In contrast, working through is an active mourning process, separating the past from the present, between the "then" and "now," allowing the subject to contextualize the event and move forward. He notes that these two concepts are not in opposition, but intertwined and essential for processing structural and historical losses (699). His model allows readers to approach refugee texts as critically dialogic spaces that challenge dominant historical narratives, ensuring that emotional realities of the survivors are acknowledged rather than silently erased (153).

The texts used in this study embody this oscillation between acting out and working through. In Habiburrahman's memoir, the military violence, forced displacement and the systematic erasure of Rohingya identity by the state repeatedly interrupt the present. He describes a travel permit system under which "it is impossible to leave the village, even to visit a sick relative" (21), or the forceful relocation of the Rohingya to Maungdaw, where arrivals are "forbidden to marry, leave the town, or obtain any qualifications" and are "deprived of an identity" outright (23). These instances show the persistence of traumatic memory. The author documents village life by preserving place names and recording the cultural practices of the Rohingya. The author's meticulous reconstruction of history and culture transforms the memoir from being a passive record of survival into an active site of counter-memory.

Hence, the memoir transforms personal recollection into a form of collective remembrance, demonstrating a gradual movement toward working through. Similarly, Wamariya's narrative reveals how the trauma of exile continues to haunt her present. The memories of war, starvation and the loss of family resurface in her narrative long after her physical escape from Rwanda. At the same time, she consciously reconstructs the fable of "the girl who smiled beads" which exemplifies the process of 'working through'. Thereby, she creates an alternative narrative of resilience that allows her to reclaim lost agency without denying the enduring presence of trauma. By using LaCapra's framework, the memoirs can be perceived as dialogic spaces where survivors both revisit and process traumatic memories, while challenging official histories and also giving voice to refugee experiences.

Lucy Bond and Stef Craps address the need for decolonizing trauma theory (87). The authors argue that decolonial trauma theory must transcend traditional boundaries to acknowledge chronic, collective suffering (97-98). It must also incorporate diverse, culturally distinct forms of expression and recovery (101). Ultimately, decolonizing the field requires a structural reorganization rather than a simple cross-cultural expansion to fully grasp global suffering (105).

In *First, They Erased Our Name*, Habiburrahman demonstrates that for the Rohingya, violence is not an isolated event but is a continuous state-sanctioned

condition that originated in the 1982 Citizenship Law but has led to decades of legal erasure. Similarly, Wamariya's memoir *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, resists the tendency to reduce her life to the single traumatic event of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. This is evident in the way she connects her past with her present. She tries to portray trauma as an ongoing and fragmented legacy that is experienced through decades of displacement. Hence, both the texts are able to disrupt Eurocentric trauma models; they reframe genocidal violence not as a catastrophic single historical incident but as a structural and enduring condition that has the ability to affect multiple generations.

The authors of these memoirs seek to effectively capture the trauma of the entire community. Both Habiburrahman and Clemantine Wamariya attempt to position their personal accounts as representative mediums through which the collective trauma of their respective communities can be captured. In his dedication, Habiburrahman declares that his text is 'the chronicle of a genocide' and is not merely his own story. This is important to the reading of the text, as he is explicitly pivoting from the individual 'I' to the communal 'we'. This is in alignment with John Beverley's theory of the *testimonio*, wherein the narrator becomes a witness and thus his individual story cannot be considered a testament of his own struggles. It operates metonymically, by representing a shared social reality and the collective struggle of an entire oppressed group (15–16).

Similarly, Wamariya also resists reducing her account to an isolated survival story that was meant to satiate western audiences. During her appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, she asserted that the media attempted to frame her private grief as a sensationalized and highly individualized spectacle. She reflects on this deeply and writes that the public exposure made her feel "as though my life were some psychologist's perverse experiment" (8).

Reading through Gillian Whitlock's framework of postcolonial life narratives, both texts reject the Eurocentric model of the "sovereign subject", who is an autonomous individual celebrated in traditional Western autobiography, in favour of a collective voice (5). The texts taken for this study, discuss specific historical realities (such as Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law and the 1994 Rwandan genocide) within personal testimonies. Michael Rothberg terms such narratives as a "counterpublic witness" (158). The authors, who are survivors themselves, construct an oral and written account designed to expose state-sponsored erasure and thus transform individual suffering into an enduring, collective cultural memory.

According to Craps (55–57), treating trauma as an individual "illness" cured by narrative is a "political palliative" (56). Literature must avoid premature therapeutic closure. Instead, it should demand systemic change, collective material recovery, and the recognition of survivors as political agents (57). The model put forward by Craps is relevant to this study as refugee life writing disrupts traditional "event theory" (54–55). A refugee's trauma is rarely just the single moment of flight; it is the "continuous background noise" (55) of systemic displacement, border politics, and statelessness. Refugee autobiographies refuse to just offer a tragic story for readerly catharsis; instead, it chooses to act as an "act of political and historical intervention" (58).

Habiburahman's memoir portrays trauma not merely through episodes of military violence that he records in the first section of his work, but through the decades-long denial of Rohingya citizenship, restrictions on movement and the systematic erasure of Rohingya identity. Similarly, Wamariya's memoir demonstrates that the trauma of the Rwandan genocide does not end with escape. Instead, it continues and manifests itself in the refugee consciousness through years of displacement across multiple African countries, the uncertainty of refugee camps, family separation and the psychological effects of exile. She writes,

"That's life in a refugee camp: You're not moving toward anything. You're just in a horrible groove... nothing gets better. There is no path for improvement" (72)

Neither memoir attempts to offer its reader a neatly resolved narrative of survival or recovery. Instead, they both position personal testimony as a form of political and historical intervention, exposing the structural forces that perpetuate refugee suffering while demanding recognition, justice, and accountability.

The authors attempt to locate the refugee agency, not by highlighting the violent events they survived, but through the act of narrating those events. This claim aligns well with Paul John Eakin's argument where he says that identity is not a fixed possession that can simply be reported in autobiography, but it is something that is actively constructed through the ongoing practice of self-narration (22). Both the memoirs are able to illustrate this concept of self-narration by adopting a collaborative form. In the preface to the memoir, the co-author Sophie Ansel explains that her role was to help him "write his story and the story of his people". This shared authorship exemplifies the idea that identity is something that is created through relationships rather than in isolation. Wamariya also rejects the "plot provided by the universe," which was "filled with starvation, war, and rape" (16) and she does this by consciously creating a different story for herself. As Wamariya reflects, "She wanted to tell a true story, a complete story. No ending ever felt right. History made it hard" (43). Through this very powerful act of storytelling, Wamariya is able to reconstruct her own identity and in the process, reclaim control over her life. Thus, in both memoirs, the process of narrating is not simply a way of remembering traumatic events, but the means through which the narrators assert agency and reclaim ownership of histories that violence and displacement sought to define for them.

The memoirs illustrate that the personal and political in refugee narratives are indistinguishable and are fused through the act of storytelling to reflect a shared, complex condition. By analysing the memoirs using these integrated frameworks, the paper asserts that the refugee crisis and the literary works produced thereby are not simply documentary byproducts of different political catastrophes, but they serve as active sites where trauma, political testimony and narrative agency converge to reconstruct a selfhood for the victimized individual that state violence and institutions have sought to deny. Habiburahman and Wamariya use co-authored, non-linear narratives to reclaim agency and also reject the trope of the "good refugee" created by Western humanitarianism. Their narratives serve as counter-archives that resist the passive victim narrative and establish refugee life writing as a vital site of political resistance.

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DABEER SI/KTT/49**THE NARRATIVE POWER OF THE PAST: ANALEPSIS, MEMORY
AND DELAYED CHARACTERIZATION IN STEPHENIE MEYER'S
TWILIGHT****LAKSHMI R**Assistant Professor, PG & Research Dept. of English
Nehru Memorial College, Bharathidasan University, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

In narratology theory, analepsis serves as a crucial analytical concept through which authors provide the flashback from the character's life before the story begins. The gradual recovery of character's personal histories facilitates readers to understand identity as a layered development constructed by desire, memory, loss and experience rather than as a fixed permanent attribute. Beyond its role in enriching characterization, analepsis plays a significant role in controlling narrative tension, intensifying thematic development and reshapes readers' comprehension of subsequent incidents. Hence, this study investigates the narrative function of analepsis in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* through the constructs of memory and delayed characterization. Previous research on *Twilight* concentrated on the themes of gender, monstrosity, romance, sexuality and deferred characterization, the narratological function of backstory in character construction stays scarcely examined. Moreover, this research utilizes textual analysis methodology on *Twilight*, using Gerard Genette's theory of Analepsis, Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity and Mieke Bal's perspectives on characterization to explore how analeptic narrative constructs character growth and engages the readers. This critical examination reveals that Meyer systematically distributes details about the character's past through confessions, reminiscence and nested narratives. The recollections of major characters retain suspense while restructuring the reader's comprehension of character driving impulses, moral decisions and affective intricacies. The results represent that through lived experience, Meyer builds identities that are continuously structured by representations of their past. Thus, the study contends that Meyer utilizes backstory as a significant strategy for character development and narrative immersion by integrating analepsis, memory and deferred characterization signifying the vital role of the past in structuring narrative identity.

Keywords: Analepsis, Delayed Characterization, Memory, Narrative identity, Narrative structure.

Introduction

Narrative has been one of the sophisticated modes for human beings to orchestrate and share their experiences, decipher reality and derive meaning. According to Herman and Vervaeke, "No single period or society can exist without narratives" (Gross 537). Similarly, Dresdan notes it as a "World in Worlds" (qtd. in Ngcongwane 91). Literary narratives are not just mere records of chronological events; they rearrange sequence of events to influence reader's perception of

characters, their deeds and development of thematic structure. This comprehension has created a substantial scholarly focus in narratology, a discipline dedicated to examine the frameworks and fundamentals that control narrative representation. As Lyotard observes, “narrative has been crucial for human existence because it has been the preeminent form of representation, allowing the world to be apprehended in a specific form by humans”(qtd. in Copley 186). Since the twentieth century, narratology, as part of structuralist literary theory, forms a study of narrative analysis to an interdisciplinary field that comprises cognitive studies, cultural studies, memory theory and reader-response criticism. Recently, research on contemporary narratology doesn't confine itself alone to find out narrative techniques, instead it investigates time sequences which modifies interpretation, emotional engagement and the structuring of selfhood.

Among the foundational theories of narratology, Gerard Genette's theory of narrative discourse exists as an inevitable framework to figure out the connection between story and narration. Genette's distinction between the timeline and their arrangement within narrative shows that literary narratives extract much of their meaning from positioning of analepsis rather than chronological progression. Grounded in this structural framework, the successive narratologists like Seymour Chatman, Mieke Bal, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan have extended the study of narrative by stressing the communication between temporal structures, narrative perspectives, characterization and interpretation of the readers. Through their scholarly agreement, they explain that narrative time is not merely a formal feature of storytelling but a basic principle through which literary fictional narratives construct meaning.

Amidst various temporal narrative types, analepsis occupies a significant position because it allows narratives to reconsider past events that illuminate present state of affairs. Revealing gradual revelation allows readers to shape their comprehension of the fictional characters as past histories are disclosed. Hence, characterization evolves slowly instead of presenting it in a single moment, transforming narration into a continuous process of reconstruction. As Chatman observes that the man's personality has been shaped by his surroundings, habits, aspirations and instincts and a talented writer makes his significant characters clear to us through the portrayal of these components. These viewpoints illustrate that characterization is basically temporal, depending upon the strategic unfolding of narration of the past across the progression of the text.

Delayed characterization is efficient because it permits narratives to maintain suspense while simultaneously intensifying emotional engagement. Instead of providing entire stories' psychological traits in the beginning of the novel, the author often postpones important revelations until readers have already formed previous impressions. When additional memories, confessions and reminiscences emerge, the readers' previous impressions are modified and restructured. So, narrative temporality influences characterization since the revelation of past memories profoundly influences reader's moral judgments and emotional reactions. So, narrative meaning relies not only on what is narrated but also upon when specific information is revealed. Within this wider narratological context,

Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* presents substantial evidence for analyzing the relationship between temporal narrative, memory and characterization.

Objectives

- i. To examine how Stephanie Meyer employs analepsis and memory as narrative strategies in *Twilight*
- ii. To analyze the role of delayed characterization in constructing suspense, emotional engagement, and the gradual development of character identity
- iii. To investigate the ways by which interaction of analepsis, memory, and delayed characterization contribute to the novel's thematic exploration

Literature Review

Gérard Genette's "Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (1980)" establishes the theoretical framework for narrative time through the concepts of order, duration, analepsis and prolepsis. His taxonomy serves as the primary framework for investigating temporal disruptions in literary narratives. It also examines how analepsis restructure's identity through remembering the past. Similarly, Mieke Bal's "Narratology: Introduction to the theory of Narrative" widens structural narratology by integrating focalization, characterization and narrative perspective, illustrating that the readers' understanding of fictional characters depends upon the construction of narrative discourse. Further, Paul Ricoeur's "Memory, History, Forgetting" (2004) develops a philosophical comprehension of narrative memory but he doesn't utilize Young Adult Fiction. But the present study illustrates how Meyer's characters restructure identity through recollection of the past. Moreover, Daniela Cesiri and Francesca Coccetta's, "Narrative Descriptions in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga: A Corpus Stylistics Perspective" (2019) identifies linguistic patterns but does not analyze how temporal changes affect characterization while Shiri Rosenberg's "A Narratological Analysis of the vampire character in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga" (2020) offers significant insights to narrative time but analyses only temporal organization instead of its effects on characterization. Eventually, existing scholarship establishes the importance of narratology, memory studies and the narrative structure of *Twilight*. They focus on romance, gothic conventions, fairytale adoptions and stylistic features. But no one has combined Genette's theory of analepsis with memory studies and delayed characterization to investigate the ways in which reminiscences systematically restructure the reader's perspective. Hence, this research gap provides the rationale for the present study.

Methodology

The study employs close textual analysis methodology to investigate the role of flashback, memory and delayed characterization in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*. It explores the gradual revealing of reminiscences through dialogues which contributes to the character development. Moreover, it analyses how the narration shifts from chronological order to the depiction of the past memories, honest confessions, historical accounts and embedded storytelling. Similarly, memory is not analyzed as a mere recollection but as a narrative process through which the characters restructure their lived experiences, reveal hidden motivations, improve

interpersonal relationships and reconstruct their present selves. The study applies Gerard Genette's theory of narratives of time: especially his concept of analepsis to probe flashbacks and their narrative function, time span, memory studies drawing upon Paul Ricoeur's comprehension of narrative identity and the concept of delayed characterization whereby essential information about characters is purposefully not disclosed throughout the narration.

Theoretical Framework

The study is placed within the interdisciplinary fields of narratology, memory studies and narrative identity theory to explore the ways in which Stephanie Meyer constructs her novel through flashback and memory in her novel *Twilight*. The theoretical framework primarily builds on Gerard Genette's narrative theory, particularly analepsis which analyses the previous events in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). Rather than serving as mere flashbacks, analeptic passages contribute to narrative chronology by allowing the incidents of the past to influence present incidents. The second theory is Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity in which he argues that identity is not fixed but continuously reconstructed through recollection of the past events, interpretation and reconfiguration. Consequently, memory becomes a creative interpretive process rather than a simple revealing of previous events. Ricoeur argues that memory serves as an essential mechanism of characterization. Characters rarely reveal their identities directly; instead they restructure themselves through retrospective storytelling. For instance, Edward's history gradually emerges through conversations and past recollections. Furthermore, the study employs one of the narratological concepts namely delayed characterization. It's a narrative strategy whereby significant aspects of identities of the character are withheld to be disclosed gradually. The authors distribute the biographical information progressively instead of presenting it in the beginning itself as fully developed characters. Delayed characterization serves not only as an interpretive process of understanding characters but also as a tool to modify the impression about characters. For instance, in *Twilight*, in the beginning, Edward appears as mysterious and emotionally distant, yet succeeding revelations regarding his past, his moral constraints and ethical choices change him into a psychologically complex character. Hence, the framework establishes that narrative depiction of the past influences character identities, sustains suspense and deepens readers' comprehension of the author's portrayal of character development.

Analepsis as a Strategy of Character Revelation

The Oxford Reference defines, Analepsis is "a form of anachrony by which some of the events of a story are related at a point in the narrative after later story events have already been recounted...A narrative that begins *in medias res* might include an analeptic account of events preceding the point at which the tale began" (Chandler). James Phelan explains, "When the discourse narrates something that occurred prior to the temporal Now, we have an analepsis" (qtd. in Hoeck). According to Guillemette and Lévesque, "Genette engages the context of production as a fundamental element". Stephanie Meyer, in her *Twilight* enhances her character construction through analepsis which serves as one of the crucial narrative strategies. Instead of introducing characters through the detailed

description at the outset, she progressively reveals their identities by returning to the events of the past that reconstructs the reader's perception of the characters, their individualities, motivations and moral commitments.

Similarly, Mieke Bal stresses that characters' identities develop through textual presentation rather than chronological order. These representations of retrospective moments enhance the reader's interpretation of the characters and redefines the past continuously. In *Twilight*, Meyer often returns to character histories to support Genette's argument that narrative meaning is produced not only through what is narrated but also through the timing of its divulgence. For instance, through Jacob's narration of the past, Bella became aware of Edward's past history as a vampire. He explains that more number of male and female vampires are present and all of them share the same qualities. During his grandfather's time, they are already aware of the fact that vampires' head is Carlisle. He has been there for a long time. Further, he informs her that Edward and Carlisle are vampires and she needs to be careful with them.

Genette's definition of analepsis highlights that it is not just a stylistic flashback but a structural device that restructures the temporal progression of the events to reveal hidden experiences. For instance, in the beginning, Edward is presented as an enigmatic, emotionally restrained, and threatening personality. Both Bella and her readers look at him as an uncertain person and suspicious as well. But when Meyer slowly reveals his real nature through analeptic passages such as transformation, his struggle to remain vegetarian and his sustained moral principles changes readers' initial impression. These recollections of Edward's past conceal profound ethical restraints and emotional weakness.

Peter Brooks argues that "plot is the organizing line and intention of narrative" (Brooks xi). Brooks' perception is relevant to *Twilight* where the strategic positioning of analeptic passages serves as narrative fragments that transform previous ambiguous actions into psychologically intelligible behaviour. The role of flashback in the character construction of Edward and the entire Cullen family: Carlisle Cullen's compassionate nature attains significance through his recollection of his transformation in 17th century and his centuries-long commitment to preserving human life. Hence, characterization in *Twilight* is cumulative rather than static, demanding readers to synthesize the present actions with reminiscences of the past. Further, Meyer's illustration of psychological complexity: individuals cannot be understood without understanding the portrayal of temporal sequences which shapes their identities. Thus, analepsis in *Twilight* functions for more than a temporal distraction from linear narration. Meyer, through her novel proves that character construction is fundamentally temporal, evolves through continuous interaction between present events and recollected histories.

Memory, Narrative Identity, and Emotional Histories

Memory functions as a narrative mechanism through which identity construction of characters, negotiation of emotional experience and their reinterpretation of the significance of their previous life has been investigated. It serves as not just a mere recollection but actively participates in the present relationships and ethical decisions. This observation suggests that individuals comprehend themselves by

arranging fragmented memories into connected life stories. As Ricoeur famously states that, "The novel explicates that individual identity is inseparable from the past experience. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character" (SEP 2004). Since identity is not fixed, Ricoeur argues "time becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (Ricoeur 52).

Additionally, Ricoeur argues that characters continuously reinterpret their experiences through narration. This observation is relevant to Edward Cullen whose selfhood is constantly negotiated through memories of his vampire behaviour, his turning into a vampire during influenza epidemic in 1918 and his persistent struggle to preserve his humanity defying his supernatural instincts. His memories not just simply explain his past: they redefine his ethical choices in the present. Edward's refusal to kill humans, his emotional restraint and his careful and protective relationship with Bella are inseparable from reminiscences that reconstruct his ethical consciousness.

Though Bella doesn't possess any supernatural power, her understanding of Edward and the Cullens develops through Edward's recollection rather than by direct observation. Each confession, personal history and individual memories facilitates Bella to restructure the emotional histories that stays invisible at the present. Although Edward is a vampire, Bella's trust grows not from mere present actions but also from confession of Edward's remembered experiences. Hence, memory functions as an ethical connection between characters fostering empathy through revelation of the past.

Similarly, Jacob Black's narration of Edward and Carlisle's past through describing Quileute legends exhibit the importance of memory and retrospective storytelling and its role in heightening thriller effect among the readers. Initially it appears as a folklore but later, it reveals the hidden aspects of the supernatural world and foreshadows future conflicts. These stories connect personal experience with communal history and demonstrate the way memory expands beyond the individuals to encompass cultural identity.

Significance of Memory in *Twilight*

Alice Cullen's non-sequential recollections of her forgotten human life explicate the affective importance of memory. She forgot the fact that she is a human and reconstructs herself through the reminiscences and the relationship with whom she lives at present. Her status demonstrates that memory is not a storage of facts alone but an important component of identity. She never remembers her past which creates uncertainty regarding her selfhood while simultaneously fostering new emotional attachments. Further, Memory and emotional history bonding is emphasized by Mieke Bal who stresses that representations of the past events involve interpretation rather than objective reproduction. In *Twilight*, memories are consistently influenced by personal emotion. For instance, Edward's confession to Bella, "We are still dangerous...sometimes we make mistakes, Me... allowing myself to be alone with you", "A dangerous one" (Meyer 163).

Moreover, memory intensifies readers' emotions by revealing the psychological intricacies of characters. Readers' initial observations of the characters are

constantly reshaped through retrospective unveilings showing them the characters' internal conflicts and ethical dilemmas. Revelation of memories also enhances emotional depth than the initial narration. Thus, memory in *Twilight*, performs two narrative functions: it reconstructs individual identity and generates emotional resonance. Through the combination of individual recollections, collective reminiscences and ethical reflection, Meyer illustrates that selfhood is continuously constructed by enduring presence of remembered experience.

Delayed Characterization: Narrative withholding and Reader Construction

Narratological theory emphasizes that characterization develops through controlled and strategic distribution of narrative information. One of the most distinct parts of analeptic narration in *Twilight* is delayed characterization. Unlike conventional characterization, delayed characterization unfolds gradually through the planned postponement of important information. Narrative withholding serves as an essential device through which the author constructs readers' perception of Meyer's characters and sustains suspense. She purposefully withholds crucial information related to her characters, histories and identities. Suspense arises not only through uncertain future events but also from incomplete revelation of the histories of the characters.

In *Twilight*, Edward Cullen's identity emerges through dialogue, memory, critical insight and retrospective narration. His unusual outward experience, extraordinary supernatural abilities and ambivalent behaviour initially invite speculation rather than certainty. His ethical complexity is progressively unfolded only through successive revelations. The strategically deferred disclosure of Edward's vampire identity serves as one of Meyer's most impactful techniques of narrative suspense. Bella's observation of Edward's vampire nature:

He streaked through the dark, thick underbrush of the forest like a bullet; like a ghost... no sound, no evidence that his feet touched the earth. His breathing never changed, never indicated any effort. But the trees flew by deadly speeds. Always missing us by inches (Meyer 245).

Across the opening chapters, Meyer's portrayal of Edward's impossible speed, supernatural power and mysterious behaviour create narrative tension since the novel postpones prior detailed explanation. This preplanned withholding is similar to Peter Brooks' argument that readers experience narrative as a process driven by curiosity and understanding of delayed retrospection. Her delayed revelation of the character intensifies readers' curiosity to its highest level. Furthermore, characters who are initially perceived as dangerous, mysterious or aloof gradually acquire depth through analepsis. This continuous reinterpretation illustrates complexity of human relationships, where understanding develops over time rather than explained in the beginning itself.

Interestingly, delayed characterization enhances one of the themes of the novel: selfhood can never be disconnected from history. Characters' present actions become meaningful only when construed alongside reminiscences and hidden emotional struggles. The progressive revealing of Edward's moral conflicts, Carlisle's altruistic principles and Alice's forgotten human memories elucidates that selfhood is accumulated narrative achievement rather than a stable personal attribute. For instance, in *Twilight*, initially, Rosalie Hale appears hostile and

reserved towards Bella. Readers perceived her as antagonistic and superficial. But Meyer's retrospective accounts of Rosalie's human life, her experiences of violence and her forced transformation radically alters readers' perception. This analeptic revelation justifies her present behaviour.

Discussion

Meyer's *Twilight* expounds that the past is not a fixed background to the narrative but an active force that restructures identity, emotional growth and readers' comprehension. The novel utilizes analepsis, memory and delayed characterization as intertwined narrative strategies through which personal histories gradually evolve and reconceive present events. Instead of presenting the complete chronological biographies, Meyer retains crucial information and constructs identities to unravel through retrospective narration. This type of narration changes the past into a dynamic element that continually restructures both character relationships and the readers' understanding of the fictional universe. In this novel, analepsis serves as a principal narrative mechanism through which the concealed histories of Edward Cullen and Carlisle, Carlisle's compassionate approach towards vampirism, and the historical fight between the Cullens and James' family are introduced only after readers have formed an opinion about them. Moreover, memory further strengthens the narrative process by operating as a repository of identity and emotional continuity. The characters' present decisions are structured by memories that are psychologically active in spite of its presence in the past. Similarly, Bella's memories of her childhood with Renee and Charlie influence her emotional independence and her adopting herself to different situations. Additionally, delayed characterization complements both analepsis and memory by postponing comprehensive knowledge of individual characters until the revelation of significant moments. Readers initially construct an insufficient interpretation of Edward's character and revise their understanding as additional information is added gradually. Hence, amalgamation of these three narrative strategies reveals that *Twilight* chooses psychological depth over linear narration. Hence, analepsis constructs the movement between temporal moments, memory preserves emotional and ethical continuity and delayed characterization assures that identities emerge gradually rather than entirely.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that analepsis serves as a fundamental narrative strategy which extends beyond its conventional function in *Twilight*. Meyer transforms recollections of the past into an active narrative force which is an amalgamation of retrospective narration, memory and delayed characterization which restructures readers' comprehension of character and events. Through the application of theories of analepsis of Gerard Genette and Paul Ricoeur's memory theory, the study has shown that temporal narration in *Twilight* is neither linear nor merely structural, instead, it functions as a dynamic mechanism through which identity is progressively constructed and redefined. Through Bella's first person narration the readers reconstruct the selfhoods of Edward, Carlisle, Alice, Rosalie and Jacob through successive retrospective narration. These analeptic episodes serve not simply as explanatory devices but as interpretive moments, deepen psychological complexity and sustain narrative suspense. Consequently,

characterization evolves as a progressive process by which memory becomes inseparable from narrative meaning. The primary contribution of the study is the combining of narratology and memory studies to analyse delayed characterization in Meyer's *Twilight*. While previous studies focused on romance, Gothic traditions, vampire mythology, gender or narrative voice, this article demonstrates the interaction between analepsis and memory provides the systemic foundation for character development and reader engagement.

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DABEER SI/KTT/50**THE NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT AND COLONIAL LEGACIES IN
CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *SISTER OF MY HEART*****S. MANIKANDAN**Assistant Professor, Department of English
Nehru Memorial College (A), Puthanampatti, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* highlights the nature of displacement and colonial legacies. It is not only as a physical movement from one place to another but also as a cultural, psychological, and emotional condition. It is shaped by patriarchy, migration and history. The novel, *Sister of My Heart* explores the intertwined lives of cousins Anju and Sudha. The experiences of Anju and Sudha reveal the Indian diaspora and the lingering effects of colonial legacies in postcolonial India. Anju and Sudha are portrayed in a close-knit household in Kolkata. They are sharing an intimate bond. It becomes central to their identities. Marriage separates them, forcing each woman into unfamiliar social environments. Their separation identifies the emotional security and loss of belonging, creating a sense of alienation despite remaining connected by affection. Anju migrates to the United States after marriage, experiencing the challenges of adapting to a new culture. Her migration reflects the broader experiences of many postcolonial immigrants. She negotiates between homeland traditions and the demands of a foreign society. The novel, *Sister of My Heart* portrays displacement as both opportunity and isolation, highlighting homesickness, cultural adjustment, and identity conflicts. The movement from India to the United States reflects patterns established during and after colonialism, when global mobility became linked to Western economic and cultural power. Anju's relocation illustrates how former colonies often remain connected to Western centers through education, employment, and migration. The novel, *Sister of My Heart* presents identities that are neither wholly Indian nor wholly Western. Anju develops a hybrid identity, balancing traditional values with new experiences in America.

Keywords: Displacement, Identity, Cultural adjustment, Marriage.**Introduction**

Indian English literature began a very important role in Indian Education under the colonial period. Nowadays, it is fascinating, both in India and other foreign countries. Now, it is identified that Indian English Literature is not only a part of common wealth literature, but also employs a great significance in World Literature. Recently a large number of Indian women writers in English have contributed to modern English Literature. Ram Mohan Roy unveiled the Indian Renaissance. Lord Macaulay suggested English to education in India. They were probably aware of what was in store for Indian writers in terms of literary awareness. At present, early writers used English to express the power of novels to obtain a distinguished position in Indian English Literature. Mulk Raj Anand's novels portray clearly the miserable condition of Indian rural society. He believes

that literature must guide the people and solve their problems. Through his novels highlights the class caste system, poverty and other widespread evils of society. They are like a poison that inflicts society. He is considered the Indian version of Charles Dickens as far as the treatment of social justice, innovative themes based. R.K. Narayan, one of the popular prolific Indians novelists in English literature. He is a product of South Indian Hindu mythological ideas. He created an imaginary small town named Malgudi Days and illustrated middle class life in that town in almost all his works. Raja Rao's one of the most influential writers and his works combine Indian spiritual tradition with modern literary techniques. Two major writers Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan have transformed English in to powerful medium of literature its occupied a prolific position through their a dozen novels each and numerous short stories. They are the most significant writers of modern India. In the twentieth century, he has published five novels, *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cats and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chess master and His Moves* (1988). *Kanthapura* is one of the finest representation in Indian English fiction. The title of the story is the village with that name. It gives the Gandhian ideology of non-violence and abolition of untouchability. In 1963, *The Serpent and the Rope* won the Sahitya Academy Award. It is considered a landmark in Indian-English fiction. It is form showing a successful orchestration of Indian and Western methods. *The cat and the Shakespeare*, a metaphysical comedy, is an evidence of philosophical fiction. *The Chess Master and His Moves* is characterized by an array of meaningful symbols. Here "The Chess Master" himself and his moves are what he makes man do. Raja Rao's place in the realm of Indian English is safe as the most Indian of novelists in English, as stylist, symbolist, myth-maker, the finest painter of West the East – encounter and philosophical novelist. Anand, Narayan and Rao who produced epoch making pieces of Indian English Fiction writing many other novelist reflects historical events such as colonial rule, India's cultural, and globalization were active and considerable number of novels were produced. Many of these novelists being Muslims, depicted in their works life in Muslims households, *Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Ocean of the Night* (1964), Human *Kabir's Men and River* (1945), K.A Abba's *Tomorrow: A Novel of the Indian of Today* (1943). After India gained independence many challenges to face and many changes came over Indian life writers portrayed the highlights of suffering unemployment, hunger, rural poverty, complication of life political social economic cultural spheres but India handled them thoughtfully and adequately progressed step by step. The fact being independent and having its own identity in Indian writing English. It provides the writer with self-confidence in everyday life and social realities with self-examining faculty. As a result of these developments important gains were registered especially in poetry, and fiction already well established. Khushwant Singh's writing style is marked by simplicity, realism, humor, historical awareness and fearless social commentary, after he came into the limelight as a crude realist with the publication of his *Train to Pakistan* (1956). This novel depicts the impacts of partition on a small village on the Indian-Pakistan border.

Khushwant Singh's second novel *I Shall not hear the nightingale* (1959) shows an ironic picture of a Sikh joint family symbolizing different Indian reactions to the freedom movement of the nineteen forties. Later novels include *Delhi* (1990), and *The Company of Woman* (1999). His crude realism finds a place in each of his novels. In *The Cofferdams* (1969), Markandaya was one of the leading Indian English novelists of twentieth century she deals with the theme of the East-West encounter from a different angle by presenting the conflict between technological power and the forces of nature symbolized by a turbulent South Indian River. She exposes a new dimension of the theme of East-West confrontation in where she reveals the predicament of Indian immigrants in England, her novels portray Indian society, rural life, poverty, cultural conflict and the effects of modernization. For the first time she tries her pen at historical fiction with publication of the *Golden Honeycomb* (1977), a chronicle of three generations of the princely family of Devour. Her next novel was *Pleasure City* (1982). In all her novels Markandaya has treated the theme of East West confrontation more comprehensively than other Indian English Novelists. Ruth Praver Jhabvala takes an amused look at arranged marriages in India with her Jane Austen tongue-in-check style and presents an ironic survey of the East-West Confrontation. In all her novels she observes keenly the strangeness of human behavior and presents it with gentle irony and good-humored satire. Anita Desai, one of the literary luminaries of contemporary Indian fiction writing in English, is the most prominent among the Indian English novelists who have tried to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in circumstances of life. She is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities.

Indian English fiction has required a depth which it seldom had before, she is more interested in the practical and social realities of life. Her novels are primarily based on the inner psychological conflicts of individuals, especially women, and explore themes of loneliness, identity, family relationships and the conflicts between traditional and modernity. The second narrative goes backwards in time and revolves round Ronald Ross's discovery of the malarial parasite in 1902. Divided into two sections 'August 20, Mosquito' characters and swift turns in the plot. However, it is not just a science thriller but the work of a serious social anthropologist. Ghosh's next work was travelogue, *Dancing in Cambodia, AT Large in Burma* (1998). It reveals the author's perceptions about the socio-political situations in both Cambodia and Burma, two countries which practiced the politics of extreme isolation in the recent past. Ghosh seldom misses the historical perspective in his writings and this is evident in this travelogue also. *Dancing in Cambodia* recounts the first-ever visit to Europe by a troupe of Cambodian dancers in 1906. Their performances in Paris and Marseilles were well received. Ghosh visited Cambodia in 1993, which was now a land torn apart by the despotism and the turmoil that followed. Ghosh met members of the Pol Pot family and went to the village where he was born. In his account of the visit, Ghosh gives insights into Pot's background, the impact of his brutal regime and the significance of dance in Cambodia even when the country was reduced to destitution. He admired the tenacity with which the people held on to one principal element of their culture. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the most unique and

celebrated contemporary Indian English writers. Her themes explore women's lives, immigration, identity, family relationships and cultural traditions. In South Asian experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. Much of Divakaruni's writings deals with the immigrant experience, an important theme in the mosaic of American society. Her book *Arranged Marriage*, winner of an American Book Award, is a collection of short stories about women from India caught between two worlds. In *The Mistress of Spices*, named one of the best books of the 20th Century by the San Francisco Chronicle, the heroine Tilo provides spices, not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation that the Indian immigrants in her shop experience. In *Sister of My Heart*, two cousins—one in America, the other in India, share details of their lives with each other and help each other solve problems that threaten their marriages. Divakaruni writes to unite people. She hopes through her writing to dissolve boundaries between people of different backgrounds, communities and ages.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* (1999) explores the intertwined lives of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, whose emotional bond is challenged by family traditions, migration, and patriarchal expectations. While the novel primarily focuses on relationships, identity, and womanhood, it also reflects the broader consequences of colonial history and displacement in postcolonial India. The characters' experiences reveal how colonial legacies continue to shape social structures, gender roles, and cultural values even after political independence. Displacement in the novel is not merely geographical but also emotional, cultural, and psychological. The migration of Anju to the United States symbolizes the complexities of diaspora, where individuals negotiate between their homeland and a foreign culture. Similarly, Sudha's displacement occurs within India through marriage and familial separation, demonstrating that displacement can occur without crossing national borders. The novel thus presents displacement as a multifaceted condition influenced by colonial history, patriarchy, and globalization.

This paper examines how Divakaruni portrays displacement alongside the enduring effects of colonialism. Drawing upon postcolonial theories, particularly those of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the study argues that *Sister of My Heart* illustrates how colonial legacies continue to shape identities while highlighting women's resilience in negotiating cultural and social transformations.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative textual analysis based on postcolonial literary criticism. The study closely examines selected passages from *Sister of My Heart* to identify themes related to displacement, identity, colonial influence, gender, and migration. The research is supported by secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books on postcolonial theory, and critical studies on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works. The theoretical framework primarily draws upon Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Homi K. Bhabha's notions of hybridity and the "Third Space," and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of the subaltern. Through interpretative analysis, the paper investigates how the novel portrays

multiple forms of displacement and how colonial legacies continue to influence personal relationships, cultural identities, and social expectations.

Discussion

The novel *Chitra Banejee Divakaruni* presents displacement as an ongoing process rather than a single event. Anju's migration to America reflects the diasporic experience in which immigrants negotiate conflicting cultural expectations. According to Homi Bhabha's concept of *Hybridity*, refers to mixing of cultures during and after colonialism, identity develops through interaction between different cultural spaces rather than remaining fixed. Anju embodies this hybrid identity as she balances Indian traditions with American society. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* highly points out the colonialism and its legacies,

In African countries and in India that is in post-colonial countries where viable alternatives to English continue to exist an appeal for a return to writing exclusively, or mainly in the pre-colonial languages has been a recurring feature of calls for decolonization. Politically attractive as this is, it has been seen as problematic by those who insist on the syncretic nature of post-colonial societies. (25)

Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern is equally relevant. Although the protagonists gradually gain agency, their voices are initially constrained by patriarchal family structures. Their personal struggles symbolize broader challenges faced by women in postcolonial societies. Divakaruni ultimately presents identity as fluid and constantly evolving. Neither India nor America provides complete belonging. Instead, the protagonists create identities through negotiation, memory, and emotional resilience.

The novel, *Sister of My Heart* contributes significantly to postcolonial literature by portraying displacement as both personal and historical. Unlike traditional migration narratives that emphasize geographical relocation, Divakaruni expands the concept to include emotional loss, family separation, gender inequality, and cultural transformation. The novel, *Sister of My Heart* demonstrates that colonialism's impact extends beyond political independence. Colonial legacies continue to shape social institutions, educational systems, gender expectations, and cultural aspirations. The characters' struggles illustrate how individuals inherit historical inequalities while attempting to redefine themselves in changing social contexts. The way in which the stories are narrated adds to the meaning of the novel and *Sister of My Heart* has been presented as the way in which a young girl is exposed to the myths of Savitri and Sita. Sudha's mother makes her cite proverbs such as "Pati Param Guru" (*SMH* 53). It is only beyond the male world that the protagonists find safety. Although the female universe. The female world though cannot be made up of isolated women. They need to bond with one another in order to create a safe refuge for themselves. Divakaruni has expressed her ideas about female bonding in her article for Bold Type.

In the best friendships . . . With women there is a closeness that is unique, a sympathy that comes from somewhere deep and primal in our bodies and does not need explanation, perhaps because of the life-changing

experience weshare-menstruation, childbirth, and menopause. The same tragedies, physical and emotional, threaten us. (SMH 35)

Female bonding is definitely different from male bonding. Also women relate to each other in a manner quite unlike the way men relate to men. In the novel the bond between the two sisters, Anju and Sudha is examined. The title itself speaks of the emotional ties between the two women; Divakaruni's use of the word "sister" in the novel reflects her specific concern. "Sisters" here is used in the sense of a universal sisterhood, a female universe by itself. Sudha and Anju live in a world of their own, removed from the others around them. Anju observes, "I could never hate Sudha. Because she is my other half." (SMH 65). It would be hard to enjoy *Sister of My Heart* without an interest in Indian myth, respect for the Hindu belief in the inexorability of an individual's karma or destiny and sympathy for the dilemmas of young women in a traditional society.

The relationship between Anju and Sudha serves as the novel's emotional center, illustrating how female solidarity can resist systems of oppression. Their enduring connection challenges patriarchal structures that seek to isolate women through marriage, migration, and family obligations. Vijay Mishra in his book, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* explains, "Here, for Mishra, is the crux of the diasporic condition: 'All Diasporas are unhappy for if for if and when the subaltern absolute other speaks, she can speak only to herself' (255). Furthermore, the novel questions simplistic notions of home. Home becomes a psychological and emotional space rather than merely a geographical location. Both protagonists discover that belonging depends less on physical place than on relationships, memory, and personal agency. By combining feminist perspectives with postcolonial concerns, Divakaruni offers a nuanced exploration of displacement and identity in an increasingly globalized world. In *The location of culture*, Homi Bhabha's concept of 'unhomeliness' captures, "this psychological dislocation, describing the migrant's condition of being 'caught between cultures' without fully belonging to either in" (145). The main characters of the novel, *Sister of My Heart* Sudha and Anju live in a female universe. In this novel the male and female world is more symbolic than real, "Yes, we have three mothers- perhaps to make up for the fact that we have no fathers" (SMH 16). Sudha's experiences reveal another form of displacement rooted in patriarchal traditions. Although she remains in India, marriage removes her from her childhood home and emotional support system. Her displacement demonstrates that women often experience internal exile within their own society. Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* helps explain how Western ideals continue to influence postcolonial societies. The novel portrays English education, foreign residence, and Western lifestyles as symbols of prestige, reflecting the persistence of colonial cultural hierarchies. When Anju is upset by her miscarriage Sudha calls her over the telephone and tells her a story, "Once there was a princess who spent her girlhood in a crumbling marble palace set around with guards" (SMH 308). Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni explores the art of narrating stories of Indian women, tradition, culture and background from her home town in California. She uses myths not only as hold to associate herself with India but also to re-evaluate more reflectively on those surrounding the good, self-effacing and self sacrificing self

determination Indian women. She shows relevant issues that are of the Indian mind set. Her writings of Diaspora most probably dealt with alienation, exile, myth, loneliness, cultural conflicts, sense of rejection by the host community, efforts at assimilation, deep emotional bond tested by family expectations marriage separation personal suffering, and their relationship remains a source of strength and hope.

Conclusion

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* offers a profound exploration of displacement and colonial legacies through the lives of Anju and Sudha. The novel demonstrates that displacement operates across multiple dimensions geographical, emotional, cultural, and psychological while colonial history continues to shape contemporary identities and social structures. Through postcolonial and feminist perspectives, Divakaruni reveals how women negotiate inherited systems of power while constructing new forms of identity and belonging. The novel challenges rigid cultural boundaries and highlights the resilience of female relationships in confronting displacement. Ultimately, *Sister of My Heart* illustrates that identity remains dynamic and continuously reconstructed through memory, migration, and personal experience. This novel occupies an important place within postcolonial literature by revealing the enduring influence of colonialism alongside the transformative possibilities of human connection.

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DABEER SI/KTT/51**POSTCOLONIAL MEMORY AND THE POLITICS OF ENGLISH
LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF
SAARC NATIONS****S. NIVETHA**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
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Thiagarajar College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Language education policies in South Asia reflect the enduring influence of colonial rule. Despite the diverse educational reforms pursued by the member nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) since gaining independence, English remains the predominant language in governance, higher education, employment, and social mobility. This critical review investigates the ongoing impact of colonial linguistic legacies on English language education policies in SAARC countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan. Utilizing postcolonial theory and language policy scholarship, this study synthesizes research published from 1947 to 2025 to examine the interplay between colonial memory, linguistic hierarchy, identity formation, and educational inequality. Employing a narrative review methodology, this paper identifies five interconnected themes: colonial memory and linguistic hegemony, the discord between multilingual policies and educational realities, English-mediated social stratification, the relationship between language, identity, and cultural memory, and the emergence of decolonial pedagogies through translanguaging practices. The findings indicate that although post-independence governments have sought to promote indigenous and national languages, colonial language ideologies remain entrenched in educational institutions and public perceptions. English continues to serve as both a means of opportunity and exclusion. The review contends that language policies affect not only educational outcomes but also the preservation of cultural narratives, indigenous knowledge systems, and ecological memory. The present research advocates multilingual and decolonial approaches that balance the socio-economic value of English with the protection of linguistic diversity and cultural heritage throughout South Asia.

Keywords: Colonial memory, English language education, SAARC nations, postcolonialism, multilingualism, linguistic inequality

Introduction

Language is integral to the formation of cultural, political, and educational narratives in postcolonial societies. In South Asia, it functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a repository of collective memory, identity, and cultural heritage (Ngũgĩ 13; Mohanty 24). The South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprises diverse languages, dialects, and indigenous knowledge systems (Mohanty 31). Despite this diversity, English retains a dominant position in educational institutions, governmental functions, and socio-economic structures throughout the region (LaDousa and Davis 2–5). The dominance of English in South Asia is rooted in British colonial language policy, which employed education as a tool of governance and social control (Phillipson 47). Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) institutionalised English as the language of education, privileging Western knowledge over indigenous epistemologies (Macaulay; Meganathan 11). Although colonial rule ended in the mid-twentieth century, these linguistic hierarchies remain embedded in postcolonial educational systems. Drawing on Said's conception of colonial discourse, Meighan characterises this persistence as "coloniallingualism," whereby colonial ideologies continue to shape educational institutions, linguistic practices, and inequalities beyond political independence (Said 25; Meighan 148–50). Consequently, English remains associated with modernity, prestige, and socio-economic mobility, while indigenous and regional languages remain marginalised (Phillipson 52–54; Mohanty 42–45).

Although SAARC nations have adopted distinct post-independence language policies shaped by their political and sociolinguistic contexts, they share the enduring influence of colonial language ideologies. These legacies continue to shape debates on English-medium instruction, multilingualism, and linguistic identity while creating tensions between the global value of English and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultural identities (Sah and Kubota 136–41). Consequently, access to English-medium education continues to influence opportunities for higher education, employment, and socio-economic mobility, disproportionately disadvantaging rural, indigenous, and marginalized communities (Mohanty, Panda, and Pal 61–64).

Language education policies shape not only educational outcomes but also cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and postcolonial identity. The marginalisation of indigenous languages threatens oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and cultural continuity. Although language policy has been widely examined within individual SAARC nations, comparative studies exploring how colonial linguistic legacies shape language education, cultural memory, and indigenous knowledge across the region remain limited. This review addresses these gaps by synthesising scholarship on English language education across SAARC nations. It examines how colonial language ideologies continue to shape educational policies, multilingual realities, and the relationship between language education, cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and postcolonial identity.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How have colonial language policies shaped English language education systems across SAARC nations?
2. To what extent do contemporary language policies reproduce or challenge colonial linguistic hierarchies?
3. How do language education policies influence cultural memory, identity formation, and indigenous knowledge preservation in South Asia?

4. What decolonial approaches have emerged to promote multilingual and inclusive language education?

2. Literature Review

Colonial Memory and Linguistic Hegemony in South Asia

The history of English language education in South Asia is closely tied to British colonialism, which employed language policy as an instrument of governance and cultural transformation. English-medium education was introduced not only to expand administrative efficiency but also to cultivate a class aligned with colonial interests. Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) institutionalised English as the language of education, privileging Western knowledge over indigenous epistemologies and establishing a linguistic hierarchy that extended beyond colonial rule (Macaulay; Meganathan 11; Phillipson 47).

These colonial language policies positioned English as the language of administration, education, and social mobility while marginalising indigenous languages. Drawing on Said's conception of colonial discourse, scholars argue that these ideologies continue to shape knowledge production and linguistic hierarchies in postcolonial societies (Said). Ngũgĩ views language as a repository of culture, memory, and identity, while Bhabha's concept of hybridity explains how postcolonial educational systems negotiate tensions between national identity and the continued significance of English in a globalised world (Ngũgĩ; Bhabha).

Post-Independence Language Policies in SAARC Nations

Following independence, SAARC nations sought to construct national identities within multilingual societies by promoting national and regional languages while retaining English for administration, higher education, and international communication. In India, the Three-Language Formula illustrates this balance, although implementation has remained uneven and English continues to dominate higher education and professional domains (Mohanty, Panda, and Pal). Across the region, language policies reflected diverse historical and sociolinguistic contexts. Pakistan established Urdu as the national language despite its multilingual population, Bangladesh reaffirmed Bengali following the Language Movement of 1952, and Sri Lanka adopted the Sinhala Only policy, while Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan combined national language promotion with the continued educational role of English (Rahman; Hamid and Erling; Canagarajah; Alamyar). Despite these diverse approaches, post-independence language policies across South Asia reveal a common pattern: multilingual aspirations frequently diverge from educational practice, with English retaining privileged educational domains despite official commitments to linguistic diversity.

English, Identity, and Social Mobility in South Asia

English has become closely associated with socio-economic mobility across South Asia, functioning as a linguistic capital that facilitates access to higher education, professional employment, and global economic participation (Bourdieu; Canagarajah). Consequently, graduates of English-medium institutions generally enjoy greater educational and economic opportunities, reinforcing demand for English-medium education (Coleman). However, access to English remains unequally distributed. Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital explains how English proficiency can be converted into educational, economic, and social

advantages (Bourdieu). Learners from urban and economically advantaged backgrounds typically have greater access to quality English education than those from rural and marginalised communities, reinforcing existing educational inequalities (Mohanty; Phillipson). Beyond its economic value, English shapes individual and collective identities. Norton argues that language learning involves negotiating local linguistic identities and global participation (Norton). Consequently, English functions as a marker of social status, opportunity, and identity across South Asia (Ngũgĩ).

Language, Cultural Memory, and Indigenous Knowledge

Language serves as a repository of cultural memory, collective identity, oral traditions, historical narratives, ecological knowledge, and community values. Within postcolonial societies, language functions as a medium through which cultural memory is preserved and transmitted across generations (Assmann). However, urbanisation, migration, globalisation, and education policies favouring dominant languages have contributed to the decline of many indigenous languages across South Asia. UNESCO identifies language endangerment as a significant threat to cultural diversity and the preservation of traditional knowledge (UNESCO).

The relationship between language and indigenous knowledge is particularly evident in ecological knowledge systems, where local languages encode biodiversity, agricultural practices, medicinal knowledge, and environmental stewardship. Postcolonial ecocriticism highlights the importance of recovering indigenous epistemologies and marginalised voices, while research on biocultural diversity emphasises the interdependence of linguistic and ecological diversity (Huggan and Tiffin; Maffi). This scholarship positions linguistic diversity as an important foundation for preserving cultural memory and indigenous knowledge within multilingual societies.

Decolonial Approaches and Language Education

Recent scholarship advocates decolonial approaches that challenge colonial epistemologies while recognising multiple ways of knowing within educational systems (Mignolo). Rather than rejecting English, these approaches seek to balance global communication with linguistic diversity and cultural preservation (Canagarajah). Within this scholarship, translanguaging has emerged as an important multilingual pedagogical approach. García and Wei conceptualise translanguaging as the flexible use of learners' complete linguistic repertoires to support communication and learning rather than enforcing rigid language boundaries (García and Wei). Studies in South Asian educational contexts suggest that translanguaging can enhance participation and learning while supporting multilingualism (Sah and Kubota). Decolonial scholarship also recognises indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate within education, encouraging more inclusive and culturally responsive curricula (Smith; Kumaravadivelu).

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a critical narrative review grounded in postcolonial theory to examine the enduring influence of colonial language ideologies on English language education policies across SAARC nations. This approach is well suited

to synthesising interdisciplinary scholarship from language policy, education, history, sociology, and postcolonial studies while enabling interpretation of the historical, political, and ideological dimensions of educational phenomena beyond empirical synthesis (Grant and Booth).

Guided by an interpretivist perspective, this study views language policies as socially and historically constructed rather than politically neutral. Educational policies are examined as cultural texts reflecting broader struggles over power, identity, memory, and knowledge production. Drawing on the postcolonial perspectives of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the review examines how colonial assumptions continue to shape educational policies, linguistic hierarchies, and cultural identities. The literature was analysed thematically through this lens to identify recurring patterns across the selected studies.

Search Strategy

The review synthesised scholarly literature published between 1947 and 2025, covering the post-independence period and recent developments in language education across SAARC nations. Literature was retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Google Scholar using keywords related to English language education, language policy, postcolonialism, multilingualism, decolonial education, and cultural memory. Boolean operators and backward and forward citation tracking identified additional relevant studies and foundational theoretical sources. As a critical narrative review, the study prioritised the purposive selection of theoretically and contextually relevant scholarship rather than exhaustive retrieval.

Study Selection

The literature was selected using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure methodological consistency. Eligible studies focused on one or more SAARC nations (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan) and addressed language policy, English language education, multilingual education, language planning, colonial legacies, postcolonial educational reforms, linguistic identity, or language inequality. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy reports, doctoral dissertations, and official government publications published in English between 1947 and 2025. Studies focusing exclusively on non-SAARC contexts, language acquisition without policy relevance, publications lacking educational or sociolinguistic relevance, opinion pieces without scholarly evidence, and duplicate records were excluded. The initial search identified approximately 120 publications. Following title and abstract screening, full-text review, and application of the selection criteria, 45 studies were retained for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

The selected literature was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis was iterative, involving repeated reading of the selected studies to identify recurring concepts related to colonial language ideologies, multilingualism, educational inequality, cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and decolonial approaches to language education. These concepts were systematically coded and organised into broader thematic categories through

an interpretive process informed by postcolonial theory. The resulting themes were then refined to examine how language policies across SAARC nations continue to reproduce, negotiate, or challenge colonial power structures within educational systems. This analytical process generated five interconnected themes that structure the Findings and Discussion section.

Quality Assurance

To ensure credibility and scholarly rigour, the selected studies were evaluated for their theoretical contribution, methodological transparency, relevance to the research questions, and publication in reputable academic sources. Particular emphasis was placed on studies providing comparative perspectives across SAARC nations or substantial insights into colonial and postcolonial language policies. The review also incorporated scholarship from sociolinguistics, educational policy, postcolonial studies, anthropology, and critical pedagogy, strengthening the interpretive depth of the analysis.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher approaches this study as a scholar of English language education and policy within the South Asian context. Recognising that language policies are intertwined with identity, power, and historical memory, the review engages critically with dominant and marginalised perspectives. To minimise interpretive bias, contradictory findings and alternative viewpoints were considered throughout the analysis. The interpretation acknowledges that language policies produce diverse outcomes across social, political, and cultural contexts.

Ethical Considerations

This study relied exclusively on secondary data from publicly available academic literature and policy documents. As no human participants or institutional records were involved, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The review maintained academic integrity through accurate representation of sources, transparent analytical procedures, and appropriate acknowledgement of intellectual contributions.

4. Findings and Discussion

Overview of Findings

The review of forty-five academic sources demonstrates that English language education policies across SAARC countries continue to be shaped by colonial linguistic frameworks and postcolonial memory despite successive post-independence reforms. Although multilingual policies have expanded, English remains central to educational attainment, economic mobility, and international engagement. The findings are organised around five interconnected themes:

1. Colonial memory and linguistic hierarchy.
2. Multilingual aspirations and policy-practice tensions.
3. English-mediated Educational Inequality.
4. Language, identity, cultural memory, ecological knowledge, and environmental sustainability
5. Decolonial pedagogies and translanguaging practices.

Together, these themes show that colonial language ideologies remain embedded in educational institutions while highlighting pathways towards linguistic inclusion and decolonisation.

Colonial Memory and Linguistic Hierarchies

The findings indicate that English language education policies across SAARC nations continue to be shaped by institutionalised colonial memory. Despite political independence, linguistic hierarchies established during colonial rule remain embedded within educational systems, where English occupies a privileged position in higher education, government administration, professional employment, and international communication. These institutions continue to reproduce colonial ideologies that shape perceptions of legitimate knowledge and social value. Consistent with Said's conception of colonial discourse (Said 12), English functions across SAARC nations not merely as a language but as a marker of intellectual authority, social status, and economic opportunity.

Across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, English proficiency continues to shape access to higher education and professional opportunities despite commitments to multilingualism. These findings reflect Bhabha's notion of hybridity, whereby educational systems simultaneously resist and reproduce colonial influences, positioning English as both a colonial legacy and a contemporary resource for global participation (Bhabha 56). Consequently, decolonisation remains incomplete as educational policies continue to privilege English over indigenous linguistic resources.

Multilingual Aspirations and Policy-Practice Tensions

The review reveals a persistent gap between multilingual policy aspirations and their implementation across SAARC nations. Although multilingualism is widely recognised as a cornerstone of national identity, educational advancement continues to privilege English despite commitments to indigenous and regional languages. Across India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, multilingual education policies promote linguistic diversity while reinforcing English as the principal language of academic and professional mobility. These findings reflect Spivak's argument that subaltern voices remain marginalised within dominant institutional structures (Spivak 284). Although indigenous and minority languages receive symbolic recognition in policy, they remain largely absent from higher education, science, technology, and professional training.

The review indicates that multilingual policies are constrained by inadequate teacher preparation, limited instructional resources, insufficient funding, and societal preferences for English-medium education (Mohanty 127). Consequently, students from privileged backgrounds typically access high-quality English education, whereas learners from rural and marginalised communities rely on under-resourced multilingual systems with fewer opportunities, reinforcing educational inequality. These findings suggest that multilingualism cannot be achieved through policy declarations alone. Sustained investment in teacher education, curriculum development, educational resources, and community engagement is essential for multilingual education to move beyond policy aspiration towards practice.

English-mediated Educational Inequality

The review indicates that English functions as a mechanism of social stratification across South Asia. Within SAARC nations, English proficiency is closely associated with educational achievement, employment, and socio-economic

mobility, making access to English-medium education a significant determinant of life opportunities. These findings reflect Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, whereby English functions as symbolic capital that facilitates access to educational, social, and economic resources (Bourdieu 45).

Access to this linguistic capital, however, remains highly unequal. Urban learners generally benefit from private schooling, digital resources, and greater exposure to English, whereas rural, indigenous, and economically disadvantaged communities often rely on under-resourced public education. Consequently, unequal access to English-medium education continues to reinforce socio-economic inequalities.

From a postcolonial perspective, these inequalities reflect the persistence of colonial distinctions between linguistic elites and marginalised communities. Although colonial administrations reserved English education for privileged groups, contemporary educational systems reproduce similar patterns through unequal access to English proficiency. The findings therefore suggest that language policy extends beyond education to encompass social justice, requiring structural reforms that expand equitable linguistic and educational opportunities.

Language, Identity, Cultural Memory, Indigenous Knowledge, and Environmental Sustainability

The findings indicate a close relationship between language education, cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and environmental sustainability across South Asia. Indigenous languages serve as repositories of collective memory, preserving histories, traditions, values, worldviews, and diverse knowledge systems across generations. Consistent with Ngũgĩ's view that language embodies a community's historical experiences and cultural consciousness (Ngũgĩ 16), the decline of indigenous languages represents not only linguistic loss but also the erosion of cultural memory.

Across SAARC nations, indigenous and minority languages preserve oral histories, folklore, agricultural practices, medicinal traditions, community narratives, and ecological knowledge. Because much of this knowledge is embedded in local vocabularies, oral traditions, and culturally specific expressions, language loss weakens its transmission across generations. These knowledge systems encompass biodiversity, seasonal cycles, water systems, ecological relationships, and sustainable environmental practices that are often difficult to translate fully into dominant languages.

When educational systems privilege English over indigenous languages, these cultural and ecological knowledge systems become increasingly vulnerable, reinforcing colonial patterns of cultural erasure that privilege Western linguistic norms and scientific frameworks over local epistemologies. Educational policies that neglect indigenous languages risk accelerating the erosion of cultural memory and ecological knowledge, limiting communities' capacity to address contemporary environmental challenges.

The findings suggest that language education policies should be understood as mechanisms for both educational development and cultural and environmental preservation. Supporting indigenous languages within education can strengthen cultural memory, sustain indigenous knowledge systems, promote social

inclusion, and contribute to environmental sustainability. From this perspective, decolonising language education requires recognising the intellectual legitimacy of diverse linguistic traditions rather than treating English as the sole pathway to knowledge, progress, and sustainable development.

Decolonial Pedagogies and Translanguaging

Despite these challenges, the findings identify translanguaging as an inclusive approach that enables multilingual learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires by integrating English with local languages rather than treating them as competing systems (García and Wei 89). Evidence from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan indicates that translanguaging enhances comprehension, classroom participation, learner confidence, and the affirmation of local linguistic identities (Sah and Kubota 140).

From a postcolonial perspective, translanguaging represents epistemic resistance by challenging colonial assumptions about linguistic hierarchy and knowledge production. Rather than positioning English as the sole legitimate language of academic learning, it creates space for multiple languages and knowledge traditions. The findings suggest that decolonising language education should integrate English within more equitable multilingual frameworks, recognising its global significance while sustaining cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, and linguistic diversity across South Asia.

5. Conclusion

This review examined English language education across SAARC nations through the lens of postcolonial memory, demonstrating that colonial linguistic hierarchies continue to shape educational policies despite political independence. The thematic analysis identified five interconnected themes highlighting tensions between multilingual policy and practice, unequal access to linguistic capital, the role of language in sustaining cultural memory and indigenous knowledge, and the emergence of decolonial pedagogies as pathways towards more equitable multilingual education. Collectively, these findings show that language education in South Asia extends beyond communication to encompass identity, equity, cultural continuity, and epistemic justice.

The review also highlights implications for policy and practice. While English remains essential for higher education, professional mobility, and global engagement, language policies should avoid framing English and indigenous languages as competing alternatives. Instead, educational systems should promote equitable multilingual approaches through stronger teacher preparation, curriculum development, indigenous language inclusion, and community participation, expanding educational access while safeguarding cultural memory, linguistic diversity, and indigenous knowledge. Translanguaging and other decolonial pedagogies offer practical pathways for integrating global communication with local linguistic and cultural realities. As a critical narrative review, this study synthesises existing scholarship rather than generating primary empirical data, and its interpretations are shaped by the available literature. Although the review draws on research across the SAARC region, national variations in educational systems and language policies may not be equally represented.

Future research should extend this work through comparative empirical investigations, longitudinal policy analyses, and classroom-based studies of multilingual and decolonial pedagogies across diverse educational settings. Ultimately, the future of English language education in South Asia depends not on rejecting English but on reimagining its place within inclusive multilingual frameworks. Decolonising language education requires recognising indigenous languages as repositories of cultural memory, intellectual traditions, and ecological knowledge while positioning English as one component of a linguistically diverse educational landscape. By reframing language policy through the lenses of postcolonial memory, social justice, and multilingualism, this review contributes to ongoing debates on culturally responsive and inclusive futures for English language education across South Asia.

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DABEER SI/KTT/52**A NEW HISTORICIST'S POSTCOLONIAL READING OF ROBERT CALDWELL'S ORIENTAL DISCOURSE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY****ATHISAYAMANI T.**Junior Research Fellow, Department of English
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Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, India**Abstract**

India, as a colonially influenced region, delved into a conventional form of society where the notion of democracy was a far-ahead thought. Westerners, who had an unquenchable thirst for exploration on the Indian subcontinent, were at the same time spiritual in their approach to Christianity. Missionaries thrived under the spiritual faith of Christianity, one of whom was found to be Robert Caldwell. The career of Robert Caldwell made an impactful elevation in native culture. His presence brought uncertainty to certainty, leading to a definite structure for community life. Religion was implemented as a medium of communication, which eventually culminated in formal education. Apart from being an anthropologist and missionary, Robert Caldwell's intricate contribution to the welfare of society led him to be recognized as a historian, which later changed the course of native lives. This paper analyzes the social welfare contributions of Robert Caldwell from a new historicist perspective, centering on the region of Tirunelveli. Robert Caldwell's representation of Oriental people is critically examined to vindicate his Oriental representation. His viewpoints about the Tirunelveli people's history, lifestyle, culture, and language revisited with New Historicism critical lens.

Keywords: Robert Caldwell, Historicism, Postcolonial, Orient, Tirunelveli**Introduction**

India is an independent country which has its own colonial past. The colonial past of India has the cruelest dark spots as well as some blooming influence. British colonialism established political and economic control over the Indians by exploiting the landscape and ignoring Indian tradition. Colonialism led to the introduction of Western education, ideas, and institutions, which had created extreme impacts on India's social structures and political and cultural landscape. Some positive impacts of British colonialism in India were acknowledged, which led to the suppression of certain social evils like Sati (widow immolation), child marriage, untouchability, gender inequality, etc. (Sarkar 40; McKenny 1; Lodhi and Soni 18). There were lots of colonial people who helped Indians come out of many social oppressions and achieve social upliftment; among them, Robert

Caldwell had contributed significantly to the upliftment of lower-ranking people in the place (Athisayamani and Benedsingh 215).

Tirunelveli is situated in the southern part of Tamil Nadu, India, has its own unique history and heritage over a period. It is considered as the land of Ainthinai, the landscape of five different areas, according to the Tamil Sangam literature ("Tirunelveli: Green Energy Hub of Tamil Nadu; The Ainthinai Landscape"). Tirunelveli District history narrates the domination of various rulers in the dominion, which echoes the district's cultural abundance (Tamil Nadu Town and Country Planning Department 2). Tirunelveli district is not only valued for its landscape diversity but also known for its demographic diversity, where diverse religious and caste people live, as in other parts of the country (Selvaraju 166). This article is subject to revisit the representation made by the missionary scholar Robert Caldwell about the district Tirunelveli in his writings.

Robert Caldwell was a British colonial missionary, anthropologist, linguist, historian, and prominent orientalist who carried out his prominent missionary work in Tirunelveli, India. During British rule, the Britishers used to pronounce Tirunelveli as Tinneveli ("About City"). He had written multiple texts about the Native Indian people's culture, language, and history. In India, whose contributions to the native people's languages created the revolutionary Dravidian movement, cultural legacy, and identity, which differentiate the Dravidian language family from other Indo-European languages. Till now, he is celebrated by the people for his language concepts about the South Indian languages. His works also moved beyond his missionary activities by portraying the region, its people, and its history. This research article tends to analyze Robert Caldwell's works on the Indian native people through the New Historicist critical lens.

Literature Review

Previous studies have examined Robert Caldwell's contributions to the indigenous people through his missionary, social, linguistic, and archeological work, etc., with his biographical account. Hybrid conditions of natives formed by Robert Caldwell in Idayangudi village pioneered the social reformation movements to elevate the lives of subalterns in the region (Athisayamani and Benedsingh 213-216). Caldwell's contribution to the South Indian language family as the Dravidian family of language, which shaped the identity of the region with independence from other language family influences (Premkumar 45-46; Begum 1-6). David and Subash, in their article, elucidate Caldwell's input towards educational institutions and the social service activities to lift the discriminated people of the region (5878-5882). Prabha argues that Caldwell's missionary work not only focused on the religious aspect; rather, it intertwined with social reform through education, healthcare, and the upliftment of marginalized communities (390-396).

Research Gap & Methodology

Previous studies, nor focused on Caldwell's discourse from a literary theoretical point of view. The research identified the gap and applied New Historicism and Postcolonial theoretical approaches to interpret his text. The study uses a qualitative, textual, evidence-based analytical method, which intertwines New Historicism and Orientalism theories with Caldwell's source material. It served as a prototype or cross-sectional study of Caldwell's orientalist discourse.

Theoretical Framework

New Historicism as a literary approach emerged in the 1980s, pioneered by Stephen Jay Greenblatt, which is established in opposition to Formalism and New Criticism, and influenced by various theorists of Poststructuralism. New Historicists believe that history is narrated as a representation of mainstream power dynamics, and literary texts are also not free from the historical ideology of the age. Knowledge of the past is mediated by the current reins. New Historicism analyzes literary texts and non-literary texts in the same way, as both are used to construct the historical ideology of authority. New Historicism simultaneously investigates literary texts together with their historical background, as well as the political ideology of the author, critic, and ruling authority while the text is produced. "New Historicism shows us that there is no unified and continuous "history" but only the discontinuous and contradictory "histories". Since history is full of textuality, the past can never be available to us in authentic and pure form" (Lyu 1077).

This study analyzes Robert Caldwell's texts through a New Historicism theoretical perspective. Therefore, investigating the historical background and political ideology of both the text and the author is essential. While analyzing texts written by a European about the Orient people, it reinforces the Occident and Orient stereotype that attempts to construct the ideology that the Eastern world is inferior to the Western world, or that the Western world is superior to the East, as Edward Said's theory of Orientalism proposes (Iqbal 10-11). However, many scholars of indigenous studies criticized Said for distinguishing too narrowly the aspects of orientalism. Said's idea itself creates an orientally inferior discourse in academia. For that notion, different types of orientalism were highlighted by the experts (Heehs 170).

For instance, without proper knowledge of the Orient (Eastern) people, Thomas Babington Macaulay misjudged the art and literature of Asia and constructed false stereotypes that their literature is inferior to European literature, to implement Western educational ideologies and rigorously commented on them in his 1835 parliamentary *Minutes on Education in India* (107). Most Europeans thought that the Orient is inferior because they do not have a clear understanding or adequate knowledge of it. They simply believe the stereotypes created by Western ideology propagators. Nevertheless, the great orientalist scholar William Jones said that a lack of knowledge and interest in Orient literature led individuals to misunderstand and propagate that the Orient did not have valid resources; but real scholar eminently examines the real impact created by Orient literature and understands the Orient as they are rather inferior (Gandhi 79). Orientalism as a literary theory helps people comprehend the world as it is, without any superiority or inferiority fabrications. Robert Caldwell was the greatest Orientalist, like William Jones; his scholarly intellectual advancement, examined within the theoretical stand.

Analysis and Discussion: Robert Caldwell's Representation of Indigenous People and Their Civilization

Robert Caldwell is a European Christian missionary in the Madras Presidency of colonial India. He spent more than half a century of his lifetime in the colonised

land to vindicate the missionary work and demise in the land. During his life, he produced multiple works about his missionary work and about the people. Despite his missionary work, he carried forward social, historical, and archaeological work in the vicinity of Tirunelveli. He documented his works and published books about the sites and residents. His philological work defines the identity of the nation's people. These texts are clearly valued, with scholarly attribution, as well as their location within colonial knowledge production.

Robert Caldwell's texts about the native people's civilization, culture, and language are not free from such an orientalist critical viewpoint. But his view of the Orient is different from other Europeans, who construct the Orient as inferior; he contributed a lot to the native people's language and culture, and his contributions were highly acknowledged by the native people. He thought natives were inferior in the context of education and caste-system ideology; because of that, he glorified colonial rule among Indians as a chance to elevate people's lives and free them from such social impulses. He continued his missionary work among subaltern lower-class natives, according to the caste hierarchy structure.

In the construction of Tirunelveli people's modern lifestyle, missionaries' work plays a crucial role, which is echoed in the history (Daugherty 67). Even Robert Caldwell, sent to Madras, India, by the congregation, chose to serve in the Tirunelveli region. Because of the conversation he had previously with Mr. Cammerer, the chief of the S.P.G Missionary congregation in the Tirunelveli district, Caldwell's discussion with him stimulates to choose Tirunelveli District in the Madras province over other areas. Earlier missionaries' labour like Rhenius, he had heard, attracted Caldwell to the region, to deploy his missionary and social work (*Reminiscences* 69).

Robert Caldwell's writings provide details and descriptions of the culture, language, and religion of the native people of the colonial land. Which arouses the imposed Western view about the colonized. Following works are listed as writings of Caldwell:

1. *The Tinnevelly Shanars: A Sketch of Their Religion, and Their Moral Condition and Characteristics, as a Caste* (1849)
2. *A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (1856)
3. *Lectures on the Tinnevelly Missions, Descriptive of the Field, the Work, and the Results; with an Introductory Lecture on the Progress of Christianity in India* (1857)
3. *Theosophy of the Hindus* (1863)
4. *Observations on the Kudumi* (1867)
5. *The Languages of Indian in Their Relation to Missionary Work* (1875)
6. *Journals of Evangelistic work amongst natives of the Higher Castes and Classes* (1876, 1877, and 1878)
7. *Address at the Convocation of the University of Madras* (1879)
8. *On the Reserve in Communicating Religious Instruction to Non-Christians in Mission Schools in India* (1881)
9. *History of the Tinnevelly Mission of the SPCK and SPG* (1881)
10. *Tinnevelly District Manual* (1881)

11. *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely, in the Presidency of Madras, from the Earliest Period to Its Cession to the English Government in A.D. 1801* (1881)
12. *On the Demonolatry in Southern India* (1887)
13. *Christianity and Hinduism* (1893)
14. *Bishop Caldwell's Reminiscences* (1894) ((Premkumar 46; Begum 2-3)

As an orientalist, Robert Caldwell's works influenced people's representations. He lived in Tirunelveli with native people; he traced the history of the land. While he was in Tirunelveli, he searched for the history of the land through the various ancient literary texts and other sources, but he only found the history in the temple inscriptions on the stone. Robert Caldwell was surprised because Hindus are very fond of their ancient literary texts, philosophy, and religious texts, but they were not keeping the records of history. Caldwell found *Rajatarangini* and *Maha Wanso*, the historical texts about the whole nation. But those texts contained lots of poetic exaggerations. To explain the history of the land ruled by the Pandyas, Cheras, and Cholas, Sinhalese's *Maha Wanso* and Greek records helped Caldwell. He elucidates that European education aroused the native people to search more on the history, and thereby the Department of Research was started in India. Europeans had some limitations in searching for inscriptions inside the temples; because of that, they urged the educated natives to conduct research on the inside inscriptions (*History of Tinnevely* 1, 2). Robert Caldwell's work, *A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely in the Presidency of Madras*, explored Tirunelveli's history from its ancient period to the arrival of the Britishers to the region. This work was published as a result of his historic archaeological excavation at Punnakkayal and Korkai. His historical traces of the Orient land serve as the authentic source. This work serves as a record of his archaeological and historical traces of the region; for that purpose, he learned German (Prabha 395).

Robert Caldwell, in his work *Lectures on the Tinnevely Missions*, described Tirunelveli's landscape, people, and his missionary work among them. Robert Caldwell keenly observed his surroundings in Tirunelveli and shared his missionary experience through his writings. To his British readers, he provides a detailed explanation of where Tirunelveli is located in India and its natural boundaries in an accurate manner: "Tinnevely is separated from Travancore by the great mountain chain of the Ghauts, which forms its western boundary, and on the east, it is bounded by the Gulf of Mannar, by which it is separated from Ceylon. Its greatest length to the north-east is about 120 miles, and its greatest breadth from east to west about 75 miles" (*Lectures on the Tinnevely* 28). He also reported on the climatic conditions, soil types, and agricultural practices. Palmyra cultivation and its cultivators, the Shanars, took a major part in his work; because of his interest in the palmyra tree, he deeply analyzed it. He depicts the social structure of the people that "The inhabitants of Tinnevely, as of most other provinces of India, may be divided into the three classes of Brahmans, Sudras, and lower classes" (*Lectures on the Tinnevely* 38). He further elaborated on the missionary work and Christianity's progress among the natives.

In *The Tinnevelly Shanars*, Robert Caldwell gives more detail about the Shanar caste people, who are now called Nadars, among whom he continued his missionary work. Even though he found other caste people in the region, he wrote about them. Through his observation, he found that Shanars were the most numerous among the heathens of the eastern part of Tirunelveli. Their occupation is confined to the cultivation and climbing of the palmyra tree. He clearly mentions the social position of the class within the other native caste structure that “The caste of Shanars occupies a middle position between the Vellalers and their Pariar slaves... They may in general be described as belonging to the highest division of the lower classes, or the lowest of the middle classes; poor, but not paupers; rude and unlettered, but by many degrees removed from a state” (*Tinnevelly Shanars* 3). Most of the people who belonged to the Shannar caste did not receive proper education except for a few rich people. They did not know how to read in their language. The establishment of educational institutions among the Shanar people helped them to acquire intellectual growth.

Even though Shannar people were considered Hindus, their religious practices were different from traditional Brahminical Hinduism (Caldwell, *Tinnevelly Shanars* 37). Robert Caldwell called the Shanar people devil-worshippers; he himself acknowledged that it is a controversial term to describe the gods of the people as devils, as it brings insult to the people. However, he pointed out that the people also used similar terms in their language to describe their gods (*Tinnevelly Shanars* 29). The gods of the people were in human form; they worship the spirit of their ancestors and offered sacrifices to the spirits periodically, not to harm them. The spirits were of Shannar origin and did not have any connection with Brahmanical deities. They had worshipped deities of Brahmanical origin, but they did not know anything about the doctrine or philosophy other than the deity’s name. He compared the people with African and West Indies Negros and considered that the Shanar people were more inferior to the Negros according to their social and physical condition (*Tinnevelly Shanars* 91). Among native Christians, the Shannar people converted to Christianity in greater numbers; this helped them get out of their social status and caste discriminations. But he also mentioned that among the converted people, few understood the Christian theological doctrines with all their heart; others had partial belief in the faith (*Tinnevelly Shanars* 41).

As a linguist, Robert Caldwell conducted his research on the South Indian languages, and his contribution to the South Indian language family, or the Dravidian language family, resulted in publishing his best-known work, *A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, which sparked a cultural revolution among Indian people. His arguments indicated that the Dravidian languages and cultures are unrelated to Brahmanical culture and Sanskrit. His research helped the world see how old and important Tamil really is. It also ended the wrong idea that Sanskrit was the source of all languages and encouraged more people to study Tamil and other Dravidian languages seriously. His research about orient people’s languages initiated the cultural legacy of the people, which redefined the civilization and identity of the South Indian people (Premkumar 45).

Conclusion: Robert Caldwell's Representations Negotiate the Orient Rather than Neglect

Francis Bacon asserted in his essay "Of Studies" that "Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider" (Nordquist). The researcher brings interpretations over the texts of Robert Caldwell about the Orient people. His works represent his scholarly observation and research of the native people. His work served as a historical record of the land that helped readers to understand the people. Caldwell wrote for his European readers, conveying to them information about the native people among whom he was doing his missionary work. For his contributions, the people of the land celebrate Robert Caldwell, even though he was a colonial missionary. Even though Robert Caldwell was Scottish, born in Ireland, he identified himself as an Indian because, during his lifetime, he spent more than a half century in India with Indians in the native colony rather than as a superior Britisher. If he had thought that Orientals are inferior, he would not have identified himself as an Indian; but he called himself an Indian. He also mentioned that he lived for Tirunelveli, ready to die for Tirunelveli.

In the modern history of South India, Robert Caldwell's name is not eradicated because of his unwavering contribution to the land (Thangam 4406). He is highly regarded not only for his missionary work, but for his scholarly works, which created the revolutionary philologist analysis of the Dravidian language family, then carried forward as a political movement of the region (Sriram V). Robert Caldwell's writings represent natives not as inferior but as a record of the natives' lifestyle and culture that served as a source of colonial knowledge production and documents about indigenous people, not merely a European representation of the Orient as inferior, during the colonial period (Ludden 252). His historical and archaeological works laid the foundation to replicate the native culture and civilization. Before his writings, historical inscriptions and documents were only accessed by a few native people. His records and educational services created an unrestricted access for the natives to contribute to their historical past.

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DABEER SI/KTT/53**CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ IN ANTI-COLONIAL
NATIONALISM AND NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY THROUGH
THE PRISM OF VISUAL CULTURE****GAURAV KUMAR**

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Abstract

This paper investigates the representation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in anti-colonial nationalism and nationalist historiography through the prism of visual culture, suggesting that visual culture was an autonomous and efficacious form of historical production in colonial India. While existing literature has largely privileged the textual narrative and political writings, this paper seeks to foreground images as active agents in the constitution of nationalist historical consciousness rather than illustrations of textual history. Paintings, popular prints, oleographs, calendar art, public sculpture, and festival imagery are examined to explore how Shivaji was reproduced as a widely disseminated visual signifier of sovereignty, resistance, and indigenous kingship from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Colonial historiography often relegated Shivaji to the status of a regional rebel and ensured his relative absence from the visual archive of colonialism. In this context, nationalist visual culture actively reinscribed his image as that of a heroic ruler, ethical king, and defender of dharma. Using the visual language of European academic realism transplanted into Indian art practice, nationalist artists used dramatic composition, martial masculinity, and symbolic expression to subvert colonial representation. Shivaji's image was reproduced through mass production and print media, entering the domestic interior and public space, where visual commemoration operated as a form of spatial and mnemonic resistance.

Keywords: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj; Nationalism; Nationalist Historiography; Visual Culture; Popular Prints and Oleography; History Painting.

Introduction

The rise of modern Indian nationalism in the nineteenth century was strongly connected with the rewriting of the history of the pre-colonial past. The British colonial regime promoted different forms of history writing that centered on the political fragmentation, cultural stagnation, and administrative inefficiencies of the pre-colonial regime in India. Through such history writing, the British enabled the justification of colonial superiority in the region. As a result, Indian rulers challenged the British to rewrite the history of the pre-colonial period in India based on indigenous political and cultural traditions (Guha 24). In this context of colonial rule and changing perceptions of history, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj came to represent one of the most powerful symbols of nationalist imagination. Born in 1630 in the Deccan region of India's west, Shivaji came to rule an

independent Maratha kingdom that resisted Mughal imperial authority. His military tactics and strategies helped him achieve sovereignty and power in a highly fragmented region. Although his accomplishments are documented in Persian texts and Marathi *bakhars*, these were subject to a set of colonial interpretations (Sarkar 3-5). Certainly, towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was reframed as a symbol of resistance to foreign rule. The nationalist leadership of Bal Gangadhar Tilak saw Maharaja Shivaji as a symbol of inspiration, a symbol of great potential, as a precursor to the late colonial freedom movement or struggle (Wolpert 88-92). He was a link between sixteenth-century history and colonial nationalist dreams. At the same time, visual culture played an important role in popularizing this image of nationalism. Through paintings, calendar art, statues, movies, and illustrations, history has been depicted appealingly. This had enabled Shivaji to be popularized among all social segments, particularly the illiterate or semi-literate population. Thus, visual media has become an effective means of shaping public perception of history (Pinney 56). Despite the importance of these processes, most scholarship continues to treat historiography and visual culture as discrete domains. Historical studies largely restrict themselves to textual sources, while art historical analyses restrict themselves to the examination of visual forms, with little engagement with historical discourse. This leads to the eclipse of the interaction that took place between textual and visual narratives in producing a nationalist meaning. This paper seeks to bridge this schism by adopting an integrated framework for studying Shivaji's representation. It argues that nationalist historiography provided ideological and narrative structures, while visual culture translated these structures into affective and symbolic forms. Together, they produced an incoherent and persuasive image of Shivaji as a nationalist hero.

Literature Review

Duff's (1826) history in *A History of the Maratha* is one of the first modern historical analyses of Shivaji, constructed through the use of Persian and Marathi *Bakhars*. Duff saw Shivaji as a military genius but also an opportunist. Once again, the idea of Maratha resistance can be understood to have been based on political instability, a notion which reflects the fears of the colonial period. There was a bias towards the idea of centralized government and bureaucratic thinking in the colonial period, and the attractions of indigenous political thinking and ritual symbolism were diminished. Cohn (1987) calls such a system of understanding "colonial knowledge systems," in which the history of the Indians was placed in European epistemological categories and hence misrepresented.

A corrective trend was set by Rajwade (1907), whose work focused on Marathi archival material and indigenous viewpoints. Sarkar, in his *Shivaji and His Times*, published in 1919, employed the positivist approach but also dwelled on the subject of efficient administration, values, and diplomacy. Sardesai further developed the nationalist school of history and portrayed the king as a visionary leader and the pioneer of the concept of self-rule. The literature on visual culture has pointed out the importance of politics in images. Pinney (2004) has shown how images helped construct nationalism and religious identity through print media. On the other hand, Guha-Thakurta (2004) discussed how national culture

came to be institutionalized. The role of power relations in visual culture comes from Mirzoeff (1999).

Research Methodology

The research is informed by a systematic evaluation of both primary and secondary sources of evidence. Primary sources of evidence are made up of colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial texts of history, archives, paintings, lithographs, calendar art, posters, monuments, movies, TV serials, and digital art, among others, all of which are sourced from libraries, archives, museum collections, film databases, and verified digital platforms. Secondary sources of evidence are academic books, articles, academic dissertations, and academic essays on nationalism, history, visual culture, and memory studies, among other themes of interest.

Historical analysis is used in the examination of narrative structures, thematic emphases, and ideological assumptions within diverse historiographical traditions. Visual analysis, as taken from art history and visual studies, is applied as a mode of viewing composition, symbolism, iconography, and the mode of circulation.

Colonial Histographies of Chhatrapati Shivaji

Colonial history writing in India was largely impacted by Orientalist ideas, which attempted to systematize Indian history, culture, and society from an epistemological position that was European. According to Edward Said, Orientalism was a discourse which produced the 'East' as static, irrational, and inferior to the 'West' (Said 3). In the Indian case, it combined philological inquiry with administrative necessity. Writers such as Jones and H.T. Colebrooke conferred great value upon classical Sanskrit texts, while later colonial historians focused upon Persian Chronicles and administrative records. This led to incomplete historical portrayals of early modern rulers such as Shivaji. Colonial historians relied upon written Persian and English records when compared with indigenous Marathi records. *Bakhars*, or chronicles, had particular importance in the study of Maratha records. From the colonial epistemological position, indigenous history and theory remained incomplete and considered inferior. In British ideas of history, there was an element of utilitarianism as well as Whiggism, where history was seen as a movement towards rational government and constitutionalism (Butterfield 24). From that quarter, pre-colonial Indian states tended to be evaluated in terms of their closeness to European forms. Those rulers who did not establish a centralized bureaucracy or a constitution were called "primitive" and "feudal" regimes. This means that Shivaji's decentralized and militarized state was perceived as an incomplete and defective state form, which was unable to maintain long-term stability.

"The most influential of the early colonial texts in the history of the colonial period was James Grant Duff's *A History of the Mahrattas* published in 1826." Duff was a British officer of the East India Company, and his book was a product of both research and experience (Duff 112). Duff recognized Shivaji's military capabilities and leadership skills but saw him essentially as a 'freebooter' who took advantage of the chaos in the state. Duff's book took the view that the military activities of Shivaji were those of a plunderer rather than a bona fide warrior; indeed, Duff saw him as a brave but exceptional rather than a paradigmatic critique of indigenous

political capacity. Duff's historical account saw the Maratha state as having a lack of institutional depth which was inevitably a precursor to disintegration. In his book on Bombay, which was published under the title "The History of India" in 1841, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Bombay's Governor, presented a more nuanced picture: Shivaji's administrative reforms and attempts to systematise revenue (Elphinstone 389) collections are acknowledged as such. But once again, it is a reading which presupposes civilisational hierarchy, locates Shivaji as a patriot, or man of his region, who did not succeed in rising above regionalism. In other words, colonial scholarship was always double-edged. In 1933 the first portrait of Shivaji Maharaj was brought in front of the world by Vasudev Sitaram Bendre from Von Valentyn's file published in 1726, drawn by Herbert de Jader in 1677 (see image 1).

Shivaji in Literature, Drama, and Popular Culture

Considerable socio-political changes marked the second half of the nineteenth century. English education, the extension of English railway systems, and the development of the colonial public sphere provided possibilities for fresh ways of engaging with politics (Sarkar 23). The elites developed discourses of opposition to the British through the language of liberalism, constitutionalism, and historical rights. With the advent of print capitalism, newspapers, journals, and pamphlets published in English and vernacular languages provided an outlet for such debates. Marathi journals like *Kesari* and *Maratha* were quite significant in shaping the contours of nationalism in the state of Maharashtra. Regionalism was quite prominent in the early days of nationalism in India. Politicians sought to mobilize the public by referring to local history. Emphasizing the glory of their region was an integral aspect of nationalistic glorification. Shivaji was the founder of the Maratha kingdom. By referring to him, the themes of regionalism were quite easily woven around nationalism (Chatterjee 54). For most of his life, Tilak was quite instrumental in fashioning a new legacy of Shivaji. Through his writings in *Kesari* and other oral modes of expression, like speeches, Tilak portrayed Shivaji as a symbol of swaraj and culture. (Tilak). Tilak challenged the colonial version of Shivaji as a bandit and, on the contrary, saw him as an honest, capable ruler and patriotic citizen of India. In 1895, Tilak launched the festival of Shivaji Jayanti, thus transforming a personal hero of history into a political symbol of collective identity (Omvedt 145). These festivities include public lectures, Processions, Dramatic performances, and Visual displays. With this, Tilak shifted the realm of historical memory from academic texts to the realm of the general population, thus popularizing nationalist history. The festival of Shivaji was similar, as Tilak had revived *Ganesh Utsav*, showing his attempt to utilize culture as a platform of mobilization. Tilak portrayed Shivaji as a symbol of revolt against an authority that was unjust. While not openly supporting rebellion, Tilak hinted at the possibility of uprising through organized self-assertion of power (Sarkar 98). Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1863–1926) initiated the systematic gathering of Marathi historical records. His multi-volume *Marathyanchya Itihasachi Sadhane* supplied primary material to the nationalist historians (Rajwade 76). Rajwade believed that in order to resist colonial hegemony over the empirical domain of history, the indigenous repositories needed to be retrieved. He focused on Maratha

political maturity and administrative continuity. G. S. Sardesai (1865–1959) systematized the research in the archives into readable accounts. The work mentioned was Shivaji presented as a far-sighted statesman in his *New History of the Marathas* (Sardesai 18). There was, in Sardesai's writing, a judicious combination of scholarly labor with nationalist sentiment, which accounted for its popularity amongst the reading middle class. For the nationalist historians, British writers seemed to have given undue importance to Persian sources at the expense of Marathi ones. They were accordingly seen as misunderstanding the indigenous political life. Revolutionary groups in Bengal, Maharashtra, and Punjab enlisted Shivaji as the image of armed resistance. Pamphlets and secret societies used his name to provide legitimacy to revolutionary violence (Heehs 41). For example, the Abhinav Bharat Society, of which Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a founder member, celebrated Shivaji as an exemplar of militant nationalism.

There were other writers like N. S. Phadke and Hari Narayan Apte, who wrote historical novels based on the life and times of Shivaji. These stories had romance in them, and both heroes and villains had a moral appeal. These stories popularized history through the stage. Nationalist writers wrote ballads that praised the bravery and impartiality of Shivaji. These ballads helped spread nationalist history. In time, lithograph and calendar art also emerged as a feature of nationalist history (see image 2). There were many lithograph pictures and calendar images that showed Shivaji as a regal figure. He is depicted as a warrior king with saffron flags and sacred symbols (Jain 132).

Shivaji from Pre- and Post-Independence India to the Contemporary Era: Visual and Digital Interpretations

After independence, the *Bakhars* and the Persians were re-examined with the aid of modern historiography (Hanlon 345). They also studied vernacular sources not as inaccurate but by understanding the rhetorical styles that were used and the political implications behind these sources. This further led to a deeper understanding of the era of Shivaji. From the 1970s, Marxist historians concentrated more on class relations, modes of production, and agricultural structures. The Marxist historians adopted this method from historians like Irfan Habib and D.D. Kosambi, among others (Habib 119). Although Shivaji is not a primary focus for Marxist historians, his kingdom is viewed as being feudal or semi-feudal. Some historians have viewed Shivaji as a ruler who represented only the interests of the feudal classes, not the masses at any point. His modernizations are viewed as a measure calculated for surplus extraction. "The life of Shivaji has been depicted many times in Marathi and also in Hindi cinema after independence. Raja Shiv Chhatrapati (1974) and TV serials in the last two decades of the 20th century dealt with the history of Shivaji (Raghavendra 95). These works combine historical research with melodrama and nationalism. The building of large-scale monuments such as the plan for the Shiv Smarak in Mumbai is a case of contemporary nationalism. Such projects aim at actualizing historical memory in the public sphere. They are also indicative of competitive politics in their construction.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, there had been a trend towards the production of "company paintings," which recorded Indian rulers and their

customs. Although Shivaji was not often featured in these, his style was certainly pathbreaking. Most company paintings followed an aesthetic style, which prevailed during colonial epistemological thought (Guha 78). In the later years of the nineteenth century, Indian painters, who specialized in academic realism, started to record scenes from history. Raja Ravi Varma's studio, along with its followers, specialized in mytho-historical work through oil painting techniques. Although Ravi Varma did not feature Shivaji in most of his work, his style was certainly carried through later, especially in calendar work. Revivalist painters featured Shivaji wearing imperial attire, carrying swords, and standing amidst forts and banners (see images 3 and 4). Some of the early paintings incorporated significant iconographic motifs that included saffron or red flags to represent Hindu sovereignty, a sword for military valor, hill forts for territorial control, and a Tilak for moral authority.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of lithographic presses in Bombay and Pune. These presses enabled the large-scale and cheap production of prints for public consumption. Shivaji's image became an integral part of the nationalist movement. "Calendar art was to emerge as a potent form of nationalist intervention with its potential to connect nationalism to everyday life. Shivaji's image was to appear in homes, in shops, and in temples. This was to be the image of Shivaji accompanied by the aura of the divine, the border between hero worship and faith not clearly defined. Common to this imagery was the halo of light, the air of loftiness, and the association with gods and goddesses." Shivaji's image became standardized. This enabled the communication of a standardized image to the population. This allowed for emotional association and mobilization. Under the British, there were no statues of Shivaji. However, in the princely states, memorials began to appear. At least initially, these monuments were not very imposing in scale. In fact, after 1947, Shivaji statues emerged primarily through the commissions of state governments and political organizations. Equestrian statues became iconic. These monuments drew on the European commemorative traditions but adapted them to Indian contexts. Examples: Shivaji Park statue, Mumbai; Raigad Fort memorial; Pune city installations. The Shiv Smarak, which was proposed and designed in Mumbai, represents contemporary monumental nationalism. As one of the world's tallest statues, it reflects competitive heritage politics. Such projects mobilize scale and visibility to materialize pride. Statues have been strategically installed in public spaces, at road junctions, and at institutional campuses. The same placement moulds urban memory and political geography.

The Indian cinema began to address historical subjects from the silent era. Films such as Netaji Palkar (1927) preceded the Shivaji narrative (Dwyer 89). Early productions combined spectacle and nationalist sentiment.

Among the other biographical films produced by the Marathi cinema was Raja Shivchhatrapati (1974). The point of emphasis of the biographical films was moral integrity, patriotic sacrifice, and familial devotion. Television serials helped to increase the fan base of the legendary king during the 1990s and 2000s. There's a heavy usage of Shivaji's image in political rallies and protests. There are posters with his image alongside contemporary figures, suggesting continuity. Murals of

Shivaji can be seen around cities in Maharashtra, symbolizing nationalist memory. These are not just works of art, as they have been integrated with contemporary life. The re-enactment of history with costumes, floats, and tableaux through processions is another feature of nationalist memory. Images of Shivaji can be popularized on social media like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, never before seen on such a scale. Traditional motifs blended with contemporary design styles are represented through digital posters depicting Shivaji. Other forms of representation of Shivaji are through memes, where humor plays a bigger role, representing a different kind of participatory culture and decentralizing meaning-making. Online representations often emphasize martial masculinity and cultural pride. These images create a "digital nationalism" where identities are built out of virtual networks. International Marathi diasporas celebrate Shivaji Jayanti by installing banners, stage settings, and multimedia presentations. The visual culture creates cultural identity in transnational contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj has always been recreated and reshaped through the dynamics of historiography and visual culture, from the colonial period of marginalization to the nationalist phase of glorification and the latest phase of politicization through the visual culture of the digital medium. This historiographic intervention on the subject of visual culture seeks to provide an exhaustive understanding of the subject in the larger framework of Indian contemporary society and highlights the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to the development of responsible historiography.

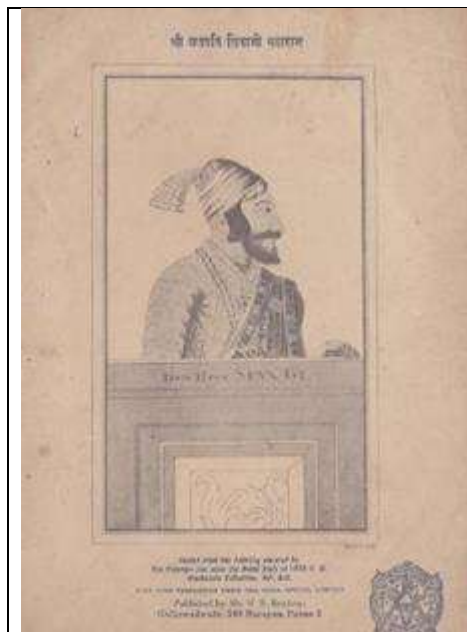


Image 1: Shivaji Maharaj by Von Valentyn during the sack of Surat. The painting was reproduced in 1933,

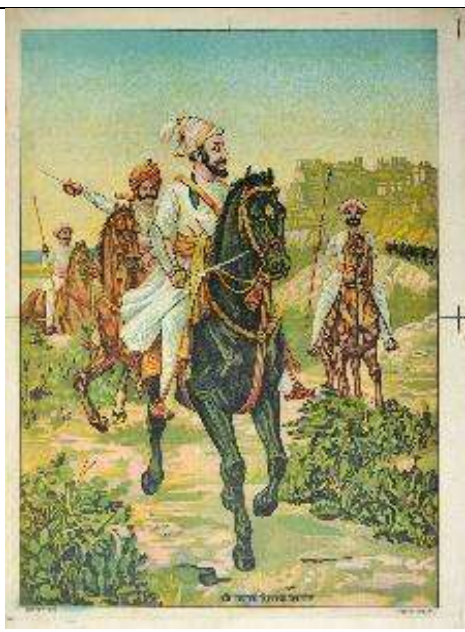


Image 2: Shri Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (1630-1680), Lithograph,

courtesy of McKenzie Collections by VS Bendre, an eminent historian of the time.

19.4 X 14.6 In, 1880s-1890s, Chitrashala Press, Pune

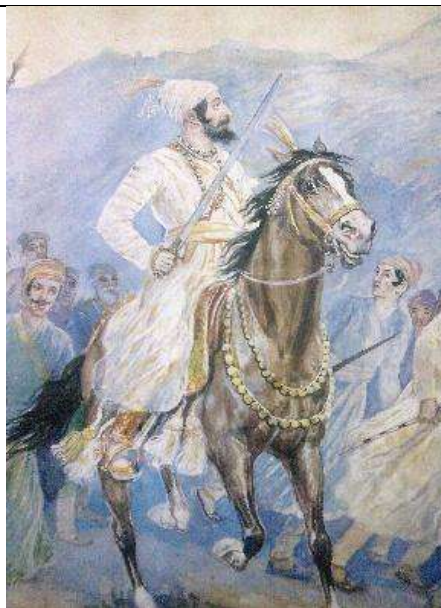


Image 3: M. V. Dhurandhar (1867–1944), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj And His Army, 1924, Watercolor.



Image 4: M. V. Dhurandhar, Shivaji Maharaj In The Court Of Aurangzeb, Water Colour, 28 x 19 Inch, Collection: Directorate Of Archaeology And Museums, Govt. Of Maharashtra, Aundh Museum, Image Source - Clicked By The Author From The Exhibition M. V. Dhurandhar, The Romantic Realist (Exhibition Preview & Inauguration – 10th September- 13th October, 2018, NGMA, Mumbai)

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DABEER SI/KTT/54**TRANSLATING THE TWO OCEANS: DARA SHIKOH, MAJMA-UL-BAHRAIN AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION****ARUNALOE CHAKRABORTY**PG Student, Rabindra Bharati University
Kolkata, India**Abstract**

This paper examines the translation project of Dara Shikoh in Majma-ul-Bahrain as a political and intellectual enterprise that sought to create a shared discursive space between Islam and Hinduism. Rather than treating his enterprise as a linguistic exercise, this paper contends that Dara employed it as a strategy of mediation, constructing conceptual equivalences between two distinct religious traditions. In his pursuit of imperial cosmopolitanism and interreligious dialogue, he displaced both the traditions partially from their epistemological positions. But the discourse that he produced remained internally unstable, and the tensions and contradictions in Majma-ul-Bahrain are not accidental to it but are constitutive of it. Situating the text within the background of seventeenth century Mughal India, the paper further points out that his translation project became central to the judicial proceedings against him which culminated in his execution. Drawing from the theoretical insights of Derrida and Walter Benjamin, this paper contends that Majma-ul-Bahrain exposes both the possibilities and limits of translation while exposing the fragility of Mughal cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: Dara Shikoh, Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Mughal Cosmopolitanism

بنام آنکه او نامی ندارد بهر نامی که خوانی سر بر ارد
- Majma-ul-Bahrain (Shikoh 79)

[As for] Moses, he said to his servant, 'I will not rest until I reach the place where the two seas meet [Majma-ul-Bahrain], even if it takes me years!
Qur'an 18:60 (Abdel Haleem 187)

Introduction

While preparing the English translation of Majma-ul-Bahrain, Mahfuz-ul-Haq found himself in a tough spot because the Sanskrit terms have been so 'mutilated in the Persian text that in many cases it became almost impossible to identify them correctly', and he took the manuscript to the famous philosopher and historian of Indian Surendra Nath Dasgupta. According to Dasgupta Dara Shikoh's translation had several inaccuracies and it was pertinent that someone should add footnotes, to explain and correct those statements. He even offered to prepare those footnotes himself, but unfortunately the project remained unfinished because he departed for the United states. (Mahfuz-ul-Haq 33) Although the proposed foot-notes were never materialized, this episode remains revealing. It shows that Majma remained a failed translation project, and consequently amplified the shortcomings in the successful re-presentation of the Hindu concepts. But beneath this criticism lies a deeper understanding: that the sole purpose of translation is the faithful

transmission of meaning from one language to another. Such understandings have mostly dominated the reception of Majma. It has been celebrated as an important text in comparative religion where an attempt was made to demonstrate that there lies a fundamental unity between Islamic Sufism and Vedantic Hinduism. Scholars have also hailed this text as an expression of the composite culture that the Mughal administration espoused. But central to these view-points is an assumption that there is an underlying metaphysical unity that sustains his translation project and that enables concepts belonging to different religious traditions to enlighten an already existing unity. Yet these assumptions are seriously amenable to certain questions. Is the main task of translation to render the meaning from one language to another? Or though it seeks to preserve the concepts that it is translating, doesn't it inevitably transform those concepts? These questions become fundamentally important in the case of Dara Shikoh, who sought through his translations to establish a conceptual equality between the Sanskritic and Islamic traditions. Therefore, translation far surpassed its scope for Dara where it was implicated in politics, theology and Mughal administration. The political implications of his enterprise became evident after the struggle of succession between him and his brothers, and when he was executed on the charges of heresy in 1659. This article explores the Majma through Derrida's *Des Tours de Babel*, alongside Benjamin's philosophy of translation to show that Dara's project can be rethought through a productive framework. Derrida rejects the common notion of the straightforward reproduction of meaning, rather he regards translation as both necessary and impossible. Even though translation produces a relationship between languages, it cannot supersede the fundamental and irreducible difference that lies between them. However, translations make new meanings for the original work and constitutes the sur-vival of that work. Read through this lens, Dara's project becomes not a successful or unsuccessful attempt at translating the Hindu concepts, rather it becomes a text that constitutes new meanings for those concepts, and that attempts to fundamentally alter both Hinduism and Islam. By situating Majma-Ul-Bahrain within the wider context of Shah Jahan's court, Dara's translation program, and the Judicial proceedings that culminated in Dara's execution all exposes that translation was always implicated in the questions of religious authority, sovereignty, and the politics of knowledge. Existing scholarship has largely judged this work from the perspective of either comparative religion or from the perspective of the faithfulness of Dara's translation. This article adopts a different perspective entirely. It regards what Dara sought to accomplish to be more important than the faithfulness of his translation. I argue that for him translation became an intervention into the production of religious authority.

Empire, Orthodoxy, the World of Shah Jahan and the Making of Dara Shikoh

Dara's intellectual project emerged within a Mughal administration that was marked by rival claims to religious authority. The reign of Shah Jahan is often posited between Akbar's inclusive policies and Aurangzeb's more vocal support for the sunni orthodoxy (always using religion as a veil). But such simplification is amenable to the risks of obscuring the tensions that marked the reign of Shah

Jahan. Supriya Gandhi observed that many historians have argued that Khurram or Shah Jahan can be observed in Mughal paintings as masquerading a beard when rifts with his father Jahangir became apparent in 1619. But rather than, as she observed, taking it as a cue to his growing connection with Orthodoxy it was a matter of proclaiming independence. For Akbar a clean-shaven look symbolised his political alignment with the Rajput elites. For the elites it became a visible expression of loyalty to the emperor. The beard on Shah Jahan's face appeared especially when his relationship with Jahangir and Nur Jahan was going through a tough phase. (Gandhi 34) But soon after he became an emperor the orthodox section of the Ulama increased their importance. In 1633, this section of the Ulamas achieved a significant victory. Shah Jahan subsequently issued a decree directing that temples still under construction should be demolished. His decree was mainly focused on Benaras, which according to Lahori's Padshahnama was characterised as 'the great stronghold of infidelity'. At least 76 unfinished temples were destroyed. Court historian Qazimi writes, 'In accordance with the edict of the infidelity-scorching, faith-nurturing emperor...they were returned to the dust, and a strong foundation made for constructing the manifest religion'. (qtd. in Gandhi 73) But in 1633, just a few months after the destruction of the temples of Benaras, another imperial firman reaffirmed the tax-free grant issued by Akbar in favour of the temples of Govind Rai and later that year we find another firman confirming a previous grant of land to the custodians of Madan Mohan temple. (Gandhi 74) But there was tension that marked the policy of Shah Jahan, though these decrees stand as a testament that he didn't follow an exclusionary policy. In the Govind Rai firman it was written that it was not their policy to give grants to the temples which exposes a tension that marred his relationship with the orthodox sections. (Gandhi 74) However, these tensions existed simultaneously with the continued inclusion of the Rajputs, the patronage of Sanskrit learning, and the flourishing of Sufi networks in the imperial court. It becomes apparent that Shah Jahan's imperial policy rested on a careful balance between the Judicial Islam and the realities of an empire that contained a diverse culture. It was within this contradictory atmosphere that Dara Shikoh emerged as the favoured heir to Shah Jahan. His importance lay not merely in the succession to the Mughal throne, rather he embodied an alternative ideal of governance rooted in Sufi cosmopolitanism and intellectual mediation.

The Fakir and the Jurist: Dara Shikoh and the Mystical Authority

Dara Shikoh increasingly sought a different concept of authority that could allay the contradictions that marred the religious policies of Shah Jahan. Shah Jahan also utilised this very aspect of Dara to chastise a certain group of Ulamas. In 1634 Mulla Shah's ecstatic utterances brought the threat of death penalty by the chief Qazi Aslam, Mullah Fazil and Mirak Shaikh. Dara Shikoh persuaded the emperor not to follow this indictment and saved the life of Mullah Shah. (Gandhi 90) Here it becomes apparent that Dara largely kept the individual mystical experience higher than the judicial orthodoxy. Consequently, Dara's attraction to the Qadiri order must also be understood as profoundly political. He wrote *Risala-i-Haq-Nama* and *Hasnat-ul-Arifin* where he amplified religious authority in the lives and

experiences of the mystics rather than in legal scholars. He even used the saying of these scholars to support his own view regarding Islam. Dara writes:

As I had become dissatisfied with the current books of the men of the path... it struck me that I should collect sayings called shatahat of high-souled and eminent men of sanctity as authorities for my professions, to convince those who are imbued with the spirit of Dajjal. (Shikoh 10)

What is significant here is Dara's claim to authority: he explicitly states that he intentionally simplified and altered that language, and that authority he derives from the divine revelation that was bestowed upon him. (Shikoh 10) Therefore, it becomes apparent that there were people who contradicted his claims, his own utterances and accused him of heresy even before writing Majma. The authority that Dara was drawing upon was that he was blessed with the divine grace. Throughout his writings he professed himself as a 'fakir' and not merely as a prince. Dara claimed that God had granted him divine knowledge despite his princely status and had especially favoured him with divine insight. (Shikoh 9) Such self-fashioning should not be read as mere Sufi humility on the part of Dara, rather it represented a subversion of authority. By presenting himself as a seeker blessed with divine truth, he posited his enterprise higher than that of the exclusive jurisdiction of the Ulamas. He further strengthened his position by explicating visionary dreams where he is bestowed with divine authority. After the death of Mian Mir in 1635, Dara saw him in his dreams. He wrote about his experience in Sakinat-ul-Awliya in his dream Mian Mir exposed Dara's chest, and he then exposed his left nipple and touched it against Dara's nipple and told Dara to take the knowledge which was entrusted to him. (Gandhi 96-97) And again, in his translation of Yoga Vasistha we find him seeing a mystical dream where he saw Lord Rama and Sage Vasistha. Lord Rama embraced him and Vasistha gave a sweet to Rama who then gave it to Dara. Dara ate the sweet and thus he was propelled to translate the Yoga Vasistha (194-195). What is important in both of these dreams is that Dara was drawing his authority from mystical experiences and these experiences gave him the authority to transcend the religious boundaries. Majma is situated chronologically between Dara's translation Yoga Vasistha and the Sirr-i-Akbar, which provides it with a decisive position in Dara's intellectual world. Majma marks the point at which his earlier Sufi initiation and visionary experience is transformed into a systemic programme of translation. This programme of translation did not limit itself only to Majma. Dara later supervised the Sanskrit rendering of the Majma under the title Samudra-Sangam. This work stands as a testament that for Dara translation was not a one-way movement from Sanskrit to Persian. His programme envisioned a reciprocal transmission of concepts from Sufism and Vedanta across linguistic traditions which further reinforced his view that the truth of Sufism and Vedanta can be easily transmitted. Thus, from his mystical authority he could claim in Majma:

Now, thus sayeth this unafflicted, unsorrowing fakir, Muhammad Dara Shikoh. That after knowing the Truth of truths and ascertain the secrets and subtleties of the true religion of the Sufis and having been endowed with this great gift (i.e. Sufistic inspiration), he thirsted to know the tenets of the religion of the Indian monotheists; and having had repeated

intercourse and (continuous) discussion with the doctors and perfect divines of this (i.e. Indian) religion who had attained the highest pitch of perfection in religious exercises, comprehension (of God), intelligence and (religious) insight, he did not find any difference, *except verbal*, in the way in which they sought and comprehended Truth. (Shikoh 4)

Dara's insistence upon divine grace functioned more than a mere mystical experience. For him it became the very condition that provided him the authority to translate the works. Because he regarded truth to emerge from a divine grace, the translator can claim the authority that was traditionally reserved for the Ulama. Dara's insistence that the difference between Islam and Hinduism are verbal points to an underlying metaphysical unity that his translation project sought to uncover. By equating Ishk with Maya, Ruh-i-Azam with Jivatma and equating the complete soul of the Islam with Hiran Garbha he was trying to expose that behind those lexical terms there lies a deeper unity. (39) In this effort both Islam and Hinduism did not remain untouched but fundamentally reconfigured. Thus, his search for his unity far surpassed the transfer of meaning, producing a new field within which both the religions lost their distinct identity. He writes:

Know that the names of God, the most High, are numberless and beyond comprehension. In the language of the Indian divines, the Absolute, the Pure, the Hidden of the hidden and the Necessary Self is known as asan, tirgun, Nirankar, Niranjan, sat and chit. If knowledge is attributed to Him, the Indian divines designate Him as chitan, while the Muslims call Him Alim (knowing). For Al-Hak (the truth) they have the word anant; for Kadir (the powerful) they have the Samarth; for Sami (the Hearer) they have Saruta and for Basir (the Beholder) they have Drashta. If spirit is attributed to that Absolute Self, they call him wakta; Allah (God) they call um; Hu (He) they call sah and they designate Firishta (i.e. angel) as divata. (Shikoh 53)

In the same vein he equated Barhma as Jibrail, Bishun as Mikhail and Mahish as Israfil. (44) Dara is here equating terms from two very different religious lexicons with very different meanings. But it was not the meaning through which his translation must be judged; rather these equating very different terms were attempting to create a metaphysical unity that was situated beyond the terms. But this process of reconfiguration equally affected both Islam and Hinduism. His strategy becomes much clearer when one examines the upanisadic passages that he draws to his account of the Necessary Being's voluntary imposition of limitations on itself. He wrote that the Paramatma or what is known in Islam as Abul-Arwah had constrained itself voluntarily and involved himself with these. Like a silk-worm confines itself to the threads, and just like a seed of a tree produces a plant out of it and remains present in the branches, God is also present in the world. (Shikoh 43) These imaginaries are vividly Upanisadic drawing from Chandogya Upanisad 6.2.2 and 6.3.2 and Mundaka Upanisad 1.1.7. (Roebuck 201; 373) Simultaneously the diverse religious traditions of Hinduism were largely interpreted through Vedantic lens. The potential power of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar became the Shakti which was also Tridevi. Tridevi was the mother of Sarasti, Parvati and Lachmi. 'Sarasti is connected with Rajgun and Brahma,

Parbati with Tamugun and Mahish, and Lachmi with Satugun and Bishun'. (Shikoh 44)

Reading Dara Shikoh through Derrida and Benjamin

For Dara language appears as a transparent medium that can recover an already existing metaphysical truth, if the translation process can show that the differences that lie between these two religions is mainly verbal. The diversity of names like Allah and Om, Ruh-i-Azam and Jivatma, Ishq and Maya all conceal a deep unity that can be restored through translation. This is the assumption that Derrida challenges in his *Des Tours de Babel*. The central question thus becomes not whether Dara translated correctly. It is precisely whether translation can become the site through which religions can be reformulated. Walter Benjamin in his 'The Task of the Translator' argued that the restoration of meaning is not the fundamental task of the translators. Rather, translations provide the original with a new meaning and a new life. It makes the sur-vival of the text possible. (Benjamin 71-72) Translations can reveal '...all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole – an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language'. (74) Derrida radicalised this insight by showing that translation is simultaneously necessary and impossible. In his *Des Tours de Babel*, he reinterpreted the Biblical story of the tower of Babel. He argued that this story explores the 'irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics.' (Derrida 165) God here simultaneously imposes and forbids translation. This understanding gives a productive framework to understand the enterprise of Dara Shikoh. Rather than asking whether Dara translated correctly the Vedantic concepts or the Sufi mysticism, the imminent question becomes what these translations aspired to achieve. When Dara equates very different terms with very different significations, he does not just substitute one term for another but profoundly transforms both the religious traditions. Rather than uncovering an underlying metaphysical unity, Dara's translation produced that identity by constantly insisting that the difference between these two religions was 'verbal'. This also substantially changed the meaning of the original texts of both Hinduism and Islam. Derrida stated that the sur-vival of a text through translation gives the original text something more than surviving. The work gets imbued with a new meaning and a new life. This acts as a process of sur-vival or the maturation process of the original. (179) Against the restitution of meaning which is regarded as the common conception of translation, Derrida asked a fundamental question: 'On what ground, in what ground, will the maturation take place if the restitution of the meaning given in for it no longer the rule?' (178) Therefore, for Derrida translation became a transformation of the original and '...translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself in enlarging itself'. (188) When Dara was transferring the Sanskrit terms to Persian language and vice versa, he was radically transforming both the original terms where they become imbued with a radically different meaning. His enterprise must not be

understood as simple philological exercise rather this had deep political consequences. In this sense Dara was not just attempting to transfer meaning but actively constructing a space where both the religions become the different expressions of the same metaphysical reality. Such an intervention radically subverted the religious authority and redefined the relationship between revelation, scripture and metaphysical truth. By suspending the judicial interpretation of Islam through his insistence on divine grace and his being endowed with it, he restructured the relationship between the Throne and the Ulamas. His objective becomes apparent when his enterprise is read alongside Derrida's formulation of the law of translation. Derrida argues that the irreducible difference between the original and the translation makes possible the enterprise of the translation. Translation can extend or give new meaning to the original but it can never abolish the distinction. He argued, 'In maintaining this distinction at all cost, as the original given of every translation contract (in the quasi-transcendental sense we discussed above), Benjamin repeats the foundation of the law' and this law 'collapses at the slightest challenge to a strict boundary between the original and the version, indeed to the identity or the integrity of the original'. (196) Dara's programme presupposed that the distinctions preserved by the law of translation could be neutralised and rendered politically and theologically insignificant in his production. Dara's enterprise should not be understood as demonstrating the impossibility of Derrida's account, or rejecting Benjamin's explanation of the productive character of translation. His project regarded that the distinctions preserved by the translation could be rendered insignificant if he could continually propose the conceptual equivalence of the terms. His claim that the difference between Islam and Hinduism is merely verbal was an intervention into the very conditions which produced the religious truths. This productive aspect of translation also explains the political significance of Dara's enterprise. By attempting to suspend the distinction between the original and the translation he was not merely providing a new way of reading religious texts but he challenged established theological authority over the production of religious truth. It was not a surprise that after Dara was caught his acts of translation were taken under judicial scrutiny. If he attempted to unsettle the philosophical law of translation, the Mughal court responded with the judicial law of translation. If his translations aspired to minimise the doctrinal differences, the judicial proceedings that followed sought to restore those very distinctions. Far surpassing the philological accuracy of his translations, it became a question whether his enterprise could legitimately redefine the relationship between Islam and the Indic religions. Muhammad Kazim in Alamgir-nama writes that Dara could not control himself to the heretical notions which he had accepted under the term tasawwuf and he began showing an inclination towards the religion and institutions of the Hindus. He regarded the Brahmans, Yogis and Sanyasis as true masters of wisdom and called Bed as being revelation of God. Kazim also says that he was in such a delusion that he collected Hindu scholars from all over the empire to translate the Bed. Kazim regarded that if Dara Shikoh captured the throne the very foundation of Islam and its laws will be fundamentally altered (qtd. in Elliot 179)

The accusations against Dara expose that the Mughal court recognised the productive consequences of his enterprise no less than the prince himself. The judiciary did not reject only the lexical equivalences and the faithfulness of transmission but also the claim that translation had the authority to reorganise the religious boundaries upon which judicial authority depended. Majma reveals that translation under the Mughal court was not act of linguistic mediation but it was deeply implicated in the politics of the empire. Translation constituted a struggle over religious authority. By insisting on the equivalence of Islam and Vedanta, Dara transformed translation to be an intervention in theology and politics which challenged the exclusive authority of the Ulama. The judicial proceedings that culminated in his death sentence sought to restore the very distinctions and restore the limits within which the religious authority could successfully function. Therefore, Majma-ul-Bahrain should not be read only as a text on comparative religion but also as a text that exposes how the very place of translation can become sites where language, political authority and the production of religious truth can clash.

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SECTION – III

Gendered Bodies and Ecofeminist Resistance: Rewriting Identity in Postcolonial Fiction

This section brings together manuscripts that examine how postcolonial fiction represents and challenges gendered experiences of femininity, masculinity, motherhood, embodiment, and desire. It explores the body as a contested site where histories of colonialism, patriarchy, displacement, violence, and cultural regulation are inscribed, negotiated, and resisted. The featured studies may consider how women and other marginalized subjects reclaim agency by unsettling inherited gender roles and imagining alternative forms of identity, belonging, and subjectivity.

Particular attention is given to ecofeminist perspectives that connect the exploitation of gendered bodies with the domination of land, animals, and other nonhuman forms of life. In these narratives, ecological crisis and social oppression are often intertwined, revealing how colonial and patriarchal systems produce both environmental degradation and embodied vulnerability. By placing gender in dialogue with memory, landscape, ecology, and the nonhuman world, the section highlights postcolonial fiction's capacity to rewrite identity as relational, dynamic, and resistant. Collectively, the manuscripts illuminate how acts of remembrance, care, embodied knowledge, and ecological solidarity can become powerful forms of resistance.

DABEER SI/KTT/55**SEDIMENT AND CURRENT: TRANS-CORPOREAL ECOLOGIES OF
GENDERED TRAUMA IN *TOMB OF SAND* AND *THE RIVER
CHURNING*****NAZER SHEMEEM FARATHNA**Research scholar
International Islamic University, Malaysia**Abstract**

This paper argues that across two regional strands of Indian Partition fiction, landscape becomes the surface on which the violence of 1947 is inscribed onto women's bodies, with each tradition privileging a distinct substance as the vehicle of that inscription: sand in the Hindi novel, water in the Bengali. Reading Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2018) alongside Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning* (1967), the paper traces how each text resists treating geology as inert setting, conscripting it instead as testimonial medium. In *Tomb of Sand*, sand stages Ma's grief materially: her wall-trance and eventual border crossing enact, describe a merger between body and earth. In *The River Churning*, water works more dialectically. The river and ponds that once held cross-communal girlhood play become, during the same riot, refuges from sexual violence, with divergent outcomes, one woman lost to the water, another seized from it regardless, before the same waters become instruments of ritual purification and, finally, sites of voluntary pilgrimage. Reading both through Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, and against the essentialist strand of ecofeminism associated with Vandana Shiva, this paper argues that sand and water are not backdrops to Partition trauma but its trans-corporeal archive, the substance through which women's bodies were buried, fled toward, regulated, and finally reconciled. This article contributes to Partition studies by demonstrating that ecological matter functions as an active archive of gendered violence rather than a symbolic backdrop.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Gendered ecology, Partition literature, Trans-corporeality, *Tomb of Sand*, *The River Churning*

Introduction

Landscape in Partition fiction is never just the background where things happen; it shapes how violence is felt, carried in the body, and remembered long after. Rivers take in the dead, borders sever kinship, deserts hold histories no testimony alone could carry. Ecofeminism first challenged the Cartesian separation of nature from human experience (Plumwood 5), but its early tendency to root that challenge in an essential bond between women and nature drew sustained criticism (Tong 261), since treating women as naturally closer to the earth risks reinstating the very hierarchy it set out to dismantle. The material turn associated with Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo offers a different starting point, understanding bodies and environments as continuously entangled, not merely placed side by side.

Partition violence against women is difficult to recover from the official record for exactly this reason: as Debjani Sengupta notes, “For more than 80 thousand women, independence came accompanied with abduction and sexual assault” (3), and most of that figure left no other trace, since family, community, and the new nation-states all had reasons to leave it unspoken (Ghatak 5). Where testimony fails, this article argues, matter absorbs what remains: sand and water do not simply witness Partition violence in the novels read here; they enter bodies, regulate them, and become inseparable from how displacement is lived and, eventually, survived.

Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* follows Ma, an eighty-year-old woman who withdraws into silence after her husband’s death before reclaiming her past through a final journey across the India-Pakistan border. Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *The River Churning* centres on Sutara, a survivor of the 1946 Noakhali riots whose father is murdered and whose mother drowns herself in the family pond; sheltered for months by a Muslim family after her own assault, Sutara returns to her brothers in Calcutta only to be treated as ritually “polluted” (Devi 31). Although the two novels come from different linguistic traditions and different regional experiences of Partition, both dissolve the boundary between human bodies and elemental matter. Read through Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, and set deliberately against the essentialist ecofeminism associated with Vandana Shiva, both novels present human and nonhuman matter as mutually constitutive: trauma here is not contained within an individual body but unfolds materially, across bodies, landscapes, and elemental substance. Pairing a Hindi novel with a Bengali one also extends comparative Partition scholarship past its habitual focus on Punjab, a gap the next section maps in full before turning to the novels themselves.

Theoretical Framework

This article reads *Tomb of Sand* and *The River Churning* through Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality, defined as “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (238). Nature, on this account, is never “a mere background for the exploits of the human” but a world of “fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims, and actions” (238-39). In interview, Alaimo restates the point more plainly: transcorporeality “does the opposite of distancing or dividing the human from external nature,” since “we’re literally enmeshed in the physical material world” (Kuznetski and Alaimo 139), an entanglement she illustrates through a Greenpeace mercury test on her own hair that left her “thinking of my own body/self as unravelled across space and time” (139). Bodies, in this formulation, are constituted through material exchange rather than sealed against it.

Paired with this is Karen Barad’s intra-action, the claim that “distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad 300). Where trans-corporeality names the permeability of bodies and environments, intra-action explains how that permeability is continually produced, never simply assumed in advance; together the two concepts let landscape be read as an active participant in memory rather than its passive setting (Fourqurean 132). This framework departs deliberately from ecofeminism’s more essentialist strand, in which women’s proximity to nature is treated as given instead of produced.

Vandana Shiva grounds women's ecological knowledge in exactly this intimate, near-spiritual bond with nature (43-45), an approach that remains foundational to postcolonial ecofeminism but has also drawn sustained criticism for reproducing the dualism it sets out to dismantle (Kaur 386).

Neelam Jabeen offers the materialist alternative this article follows instead, arguing that South Asian women's bodies are "treated as land" in a sense "not merely symbolic... If they fail to [reproduce], they are useless, just like barren land" (qtd. in Değirmenci Altın 360), a claim rooted in Val Plumwood's account of Western dualism casting nature as everything reason excludes: "the body, the passions, animality... and sense experience" (qtd. in Değirmenci Altın 356). Alaimo herself is wary of collapsing feminism into ecofeminism outright, insisting that women are not "angels of the eco-system" (Kuznetski and Alaimo 142). Following Jabeen and Plumwood rather than Shiva, this article makes no claim that women possess an innate affinity with sand or water, only that Partition violence was inscribed onto both women's bodies and the material world at once. The framework has already reached South Asian fiction, though not yet Partition trauma. Fourqurean and Mishra both apply it to Kiran Desai's comic *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, where bodily merger with landscape registers as satire, not historical wound; Alaimo glosses trans-corporeality itself as the human "substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" (476). Partition literature carries a separate posthumanist strand: Ghatak reads Bengal's refugees as rendered "infrahuman" by the nation-state (1), following Huggan and Tiffin's account of postcolonial ecocriticism as a challenge to development ideologies serving "the neocolonialist imperatives of global corporate commerce" (52), though this line of argument treats the human/nonhuman boundary as a category rather than asking what landscape materially does to a body. Mukherjee's wider account of postcolonial eco-materialism, as Christopher McGill summarises it, treats "environment itself" as "a product of history" (146) embedded in geographies shaped by labour and capital, not a neutral stage those forces happen to play out upon, a premise this article narrows from national history to the more intimate register of the gendered body.

The nearest existing work is Khatun's reading of *Tomb of Sand*, which pairs Barad and Alaimo directly, arguing that the novel's objects "generat[e] the sequestered memories of partition violence that distorted the speaking power of the partition survivor, Ma" (191): a Buddha statue that "disappears and reappears... of its own accord" (qtd. in Khatun 193), and a Grand Trunk Road narrated with "veins" that "felt emotions such as joy and sorrow" (qtd. in Khatun 194). Where Khatun's objects are bounded and locatable, this article turns instead to sand as an unbounded, ambient substance: not something Ma loses and finds, but something the novel returns her to again and again. Scholarship on *The River Churning*, meanwhile, has stayed within caste and communal-purity discourse: Chakraborty argues that Devi's fiction contests patriarchal constructions of citizenship by making women's bodies the visible site on which communal conflict and nationalist ideology are inscribed, while Mookerjee-Leonard reads the same body through the lens of caste disenfranchisement. Both are attentive to the body as a

socially regulated object; neither asks what the river itself, as matter rather than ritual instrument, is doing in the text.

Three gaps follow from this. No study reads *Tomb of Sand* alongside a Bengali Partition novel, leaving the field tilted toward Punjab; none extends trans-corporeality to *The River Churning*; and even Khatun's trans-corporeal reading of *Tomb of Sand* works through discrete objects, not the elemental substance the novel is named for. This article addresses all three by reading sand and water themselves, not statues or purity codes, as trans-corporeal agents across both novels at once.

Sand as Testimonial Medium: *Tomb of Sand*

The novel's opening definitions of samadhi fuse body, spirit, and matter before the narrative itself begins, naming it at once a meditative trance, the "place of entombment" (Shree 4) of a saintly figure, and the self-burial of an ascetic (qtd. in Tayyab and Akram 69-70). Burial here signifies transformation, not disappearance, casting sand from the outset as a medium that preserves what it covers instead of erasing it. The definition matters because it establishes, before Ma herself even appears on the page that entombment in this novel is never simply loss: what goes under the sand remains available to be recovered, however long that recovery takes.

Ma's withdrawal after her husband's death develops this logic materially, not psychologically. Pressed against her bedroom wall in a trance, she imagines dissolving into it: "The wall is cold to the touch... Make a crack somewhere, slip into the wall... Let this be my tomb" (Shree 41). What follows removes any boundary between body and structure: "The mud wall is hollow. The being that emerged from her heart invented itself as it went along, forging a path through the mud... The tomb of sand has shifted" (Shree 42). Grief does not retreat inward here; it is staged instead as movement across the porous line between flesh and earth, a merger the word tomb makes literal rather than figurative. Ma is not like something buried; she is in the process of becoming buried matter herself, while remaining, impossibly, alive to narrate it.

This merging continues once Ma relocates to her daughter Beti's flat, where she "pours herself into the crannies and crevices of the house" and "feels as though she's flying" (Shree 196), the verb pours already granting her a liquid, not a solid, form. The same slippage governs the novel's most sustained meditation on embodiment: "To understand the body one must first know the earth... Under the hard earth all is soft bubbling raging fire, boiling spluttering water" (Shree 297). Sand, in this passage, is never simply sand; it already carries the fluid matter that later binds this novel to *The River Churning*, and the passage's own method, sliding from body to earth to water to fire within a single breath, enacts the very refusal of elemental boundary the novel asks its reader to accept about Ma herself. Ma's transformation culminates as decomposition, not metaphor. Turning from her family, she undergoes a process that "sandpapers the back, creating sand," the "dreck" of decades as wife, mother, and widow physically disintegrating into the substance she becomes (Shree 87). She "sinks into the sand, and the sand spreads further," growing light enough to "fly with the particles of sand" (Shree 87): the samadhi promised in the novel's opening pages realised as a literal merger with

earth and air, rather than a state she enters and later leaves. Nothing in this sequence asks to be read symbolically; the text insists, at the level of grammar and verb choice that Ma's body is doing what sand does.

Sand functions throughout as an active archive, not a passive setting; it absorbs and reshapes what it is given instead of simply holding it. Ma's dissolution is neither symbolic nor purely psychological but material, and the novel, read this way, presents sand not as backdrop to trauma but as one of its principal witnesses, a substance capable of holding a woman's Partition memory for decades precisely because it was never asked, unlike her family, to speak that memory aloud before she was ready.

Water as Dialectical Medium: *The River Churning*

The Bengali title, *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* ("Ganga on this side, Ganga on that side"), names the river as the medium through which belonging and violence are negotiated, not a boundary drawn between them. That instability is set early through a single act narrated three times: women entering water to escape sexual violence during the 1946 Noakhali riots. Sutara runs into the pond behind her home and survives the night, though not unharmed, later found unconscious after suffering "assault and molestation" (Devi xxix). Her mother enters the same water and does not return, choosing, the novel says, to jump into the tank "to save her honour" (Devi xxix), a loss still open years later when Sutara asks, "And my mother? She jumped into the tank. Was she ever found?", and her neighbour Tamijuddin can answer only with tears (Devi 78). Her friend Alaka completes the pattern in reverse: she too leaps into the river, and is seized and carried off regardless (Devi 12). Three women, one river, three outcomes: water resists standing for any single fate, functioning instead as an unpredictable force whose effects cannot be known in advance. Devi frames the pattern as part of a longer, unrecorded history she calls the "eternal stree parva" (Devi xxxv), an absence the novel compares to the silence surrounding women like Draupadi even within the epics (Devi 107).

Water also operates as a technology of control, not only as a site of violence. Arriving in Calcutta after months sheltering with a Muslim family, Sutara is told by her grandmother-in-law that she "must be purified with Ganga water first" before she may enter the household, her presence feared capable of contaminating beds, kitchens, even utensils (Devi 33). The demand only makes sense if the body is already understood as porous in exactly the way Alaimo describes, capable of transmitting substance across contact; the novel simply inverts the value of that porousness, treating it as contagion rather than kinship. Elsewhere the novel makes the underlying logic explicit, listing women alongside "fish, meat and oil" as consumable matter governed by religious law (Devi xi). That logic turns openly violent in an account of abducted Muslim women forced to bathe in the Ganga and Yamuna and drink their waters before being declared Hindu (Devi 88). Water is not a metaphor for identity here but the material means by which caste and communal authority remake the body outright; the same permeability Alaimo reads as the ground of ecological interdependence becomes, in the hands of Sutara's family, an instrument of control rather than care.

Before any of this, the novel has already narrated Sutara's grief through matter, not feeling. She carries "the weight of age and the experience of centuries... in her veins" and feels herself "as old as the earth" (Devi 69); Partition itself becomes a geological event in which "the earth shifts and moves away from under your feet," Sutara herself the "bloody symbol" of a nation's "vivisection" (Devi 36-38). Sutara's late pilgrimage to the source of the Ganga reverses this weight; it does not escape it. Travelling through Haridwar and Rishikesh to the confluence of the Mandakini and Alakananda on what the novel calls the "timeless road to a final exit" (Devi 113), echoing the Pandavas' own final journey, she watches the "Ganga rushing by" (Devi 96) until the "grandeur of her surroundings" (Devi 113) lifts the "heaviness of the earth" from her body, leaving her "as light as air" (Devi 133). The imagery inverts everything that has accompanied her since Noakhali: weight becomes lightness, forced immersion becomes a chosen encounter, and the same water once used to regulate her body now restores it, without the novel needing to argue that the water itself has changed. What has changed is only Sutara's relationship to her own porousness, no longer imposed, now chosen, closing with the same movement from involuntary to willed contact with matter that shapes Ma's ending in sand.

The novel's final reflections extend this material logic past the human body altogether, imagining even Saraswati unable to record women's "sad history" with "the ocean as her inkpot" and the earth as her page (Devi xxxvi), water and land folding into one insufficient archive. Devi pushes the same logic further still, describing companionship as a condition shared by "trees, rocks, mountains and rivers" (Devi xv) and locating the violence of Partition in the resurfacing of "the eternal animal in human beings" (Devi 103): water, on this reading, is one instance of a wider material continuity between human and nonhuman life that the novel refuses to bound at the skin.

Sediment and Current: Synthesis

The sand and water this article treats separately are, on closer reading, not so cleanly divided. *Tomb of Sand* slips repeatedly into liquid vocabulary, Ma "pours" herself into a house, and the ground beneath her turns to "boiling spluttering water" in the novel's own account of embodiment, while *The River Churning* closes by folding water back into land, the ocean standing in as inkpot and the earth as page for a history neither can fully hold. Neither element, in other words, stays elementally pure; each novel reaches for the other's substance at its most theoretically charged moment, which is precisely what a comparative reading pairing sand against water is positioned to notice.

The two novels do, however, organise memory on different timelines, and the difference tracks the physical behaviour of their elements as much as any authorial choice. Ma's Partition history stays buried for decades, surfacing only through her final crossing, a delay consistent with Cathy Caruth's account of trauma as narratable only belatedly, and consistent too with how sand itself behaves: it settles, compacts, and holds what it covers still until something disturbs it. Sutara's trauma instead recurs, in the riot itself, in the purification forced on her in Calcutta, in the pilgrimage she later chooses, a cyclical rather than deferred structure that mirrors water's own habit of returning to the same course. Sand and water thus

keep time differently while doing the same underlying work, each novel's temporal structure borrowed, in effect, from the physics of its chosen element. Structurally, though, both novels trace the same arc, from an involuntary encounter with the element to one freely chosen. Ma moves from wall-trance to border-crossing to a final union with earth; Sutara moves from water as an instrument of violence and communal regulation to water as pilgrimage destination. What differs is not the ethical shape of that movement but the regional geography producing it, the arid borderlands of the west against the riverine landscape of the east, which is what a Punjab centered comparative Partition studies has generally missed.

This is also where the gaps mapped earlier close. Ghatak shows the Bengal refugee rendered "infrahuman" by the nation-state (1); Khatun locates agency in *Tomb of Sand's* Buddha statue and Grand Trunk Road (194). Both insights extend once attention shifts from discrete objects and categories to elemental matter itself: sand and water are not settings for these women's histories but trans-corporeal archives, absorbing what family, community, and nation declined to hold, and returning it only on the body's own terms.

Conclusion

Reading *Tomb of Sand* and *The River Churning* through trans-corporeality demonstrates that the relationship between human bodies and the material world is central to how both novels imagine Partition. Rather than functioning as passive settings, sand and water emerge as active participants in the formation of embodied experience, shaping movement, memory, identity, and survival through their continuous interaction with human bodies. Sand and water here are not settings for violence but its material continuation, holding what family, community, and nation declined to hold, and yielding it back only when the women who carry it are finally ready to receive it. By placing a Hindi and a Bengali Partition novel in conversation, this article also broadens the geographical scope of comparative Partition studies beyond its dominant focus on Punjab, revealing how different regional ecologies generate distinct yet interconnected material expressions of historical violence. Unlike existing materialist readings that emphasize objects and assemblages, this study argues that elemental substances themselves constitute the primary medium through which gendered experiences of Partition are materially negotiated. Extending this trans-corporeal approach to other regional Partition literatures would further illuminate how different landscapes, whether rivers, deserts, forests, or plains, participate in shaping the embodied histories of displacement across the subcontinent.

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DABEER SI/KTT/56**WOMEN, MEMORY AND THE LIVING EARTH: A GEOHUMANIST
ECOFEMINIST READING OF LINDA HOGAN'S *SOLAR STORMS*****GAYATHRI M.**

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Abstract

This paper aims to study Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995) using postcolonial ecofeminism and geohumanism. This study explores the intersecting crises of colonial land dispossession, ecological degradation and gendered violence. The novel is set against the fictionalised backdrop of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project in the 1970s. It traces Angela Jenson's coming-of-age as she returns to her ancestral homeland at Adam's Rib. Geohumanism explains how physical terrain shapes human identity, memory and belonging. Ecofeminism reveals the gendered logic of resource extraction that violates both women's bodies and natural ecosystems. This paper aims to examine how Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* uses memory to resist colonial erasure and environmental destruction. It shows that memory is preserved through matrilineal storytelling, oral traditions and land. It suggests that the novel portrays women as keepers of ecological memory, connecting personal loss, ancestral trauma and the land. Hogan presents environmental justice through Indigenous values of kinship, care and community. These values emphasise healing, resilience, and decolonisation.

Keywords: Geohumanism, Ecofeminism, Memory, Women, Indigenous Survivance

Introduction

The Anthropocene is marked by an ecological crisis that worsens due to people's actions on earth. This environmental degradation has challenged traditional humanist perspectives and encouraged the development of new critical approaches. In the last few years this crisis has led to geohumanism perspectives, which have become important for understanding human-environment relationships. Geohumanism highlights how space and place actively shape identity, memory and understanding of the past rather than acting as a mere setting. Indigenous people saw the land as a living thing before geohumanism had emerged. Linda Hogan is a well-known Chickasaw novelist, poet and environmental activist. Her writing centers on Indigenous knowledge. In her fiction she questions colonial ideas that separate humans from nature. She portrays the natural world as a living community in which humans, animals, rivers, forests and ancestors exist in reciprocal relationships. Her novel *Solar Storms* narrates the story of seventeen-year-old Angel's return to her ancestral homeland. Her return

to her homeland was associated with the construction of a hydroelectric dam that threatens Indigenous territories. Angel understands that identity is shaped by relationships with land, water and shared memory. This article aims to study *Solar Storms* using the combined lens of Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective and Vandana Shiva's postcolonial ecofeminism. Ingold states that human beings dwell within the environment through continuous interaction with land, water, animals and place. Identity and knowledge emerge through lived relationships rather than through separation from nature. Shiva shows that colonialism links the exploitation of women with the exploitation of nature and marginalises Indigenous ecological knowledge. These approaches offer a useful framework for interpreting the novel. They reveal the links between environmental destruction and colonial violence. They also show that Indigenous relationships with the land become acts of resistance and renewal. Scholars have analysed *Solar Storms* through Indigenous ecocriticism, posthumanism and postcolonial ecofeminism. Corachán argues that the novel restores Indigenous ecological knowledge by representing water as a source of cultural memory and resistance. Magro has interpreted the novel using Indigenous posthumanism, highlighting the relational connections between humans and the more-than-human world. Tatar has recently looked at the novel from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective. The study has also focused on environmental destruction, Indigenous struggles and the role of women in resistance. Existing studies pay little attention to memory as it relates to landscapes and waterways. The intersection of geohumanism and postcolonial ecofeminism remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how *Solar Storms* reconceptualise memory through reciprocal relationships among land, water and Indigenous women

Earth as a Witness and Archive

Solar Storms questions the separation between humans and the natural world by presenting land as an active participant in history. When Tulik describes the ancient pact between Beaver and the first humans, he says, "When Beaver shaped the humans, who were strangers to the rest of creation, they made a pact with them....They would help each other The people, in turn, would take care of the world and speak with the gods and all creation" (Hogan 239). This shows the relationship is founded on reciprocity rather than ownership. Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective shows that people become human through their engagement with place. The colonial hydroelectric project violates this ancient agreement by treating rivers and forests as resources for economic development rather than as interconnected members of the world. In the novel Hogan extends agency to even the smallest elements of the landscape. Angel observes that "stones, too, were alive, the stinging nettles, the snails . . . and the tree which folded its leaves when touched by human hands" (Hogan 81). Human lives are "witnessed by the birds, by dragonflies, by trees and spiders" (Hogan 80). Memory is therefore shared across the more-than-human world rather than human consciousness alone. Birds, trees, insects and stones witness and preserve histories overlooked by official records. This reflects on Indigenous knowledge systems in which landscapes retain the traces of those who dwell within them.

Tulik strengthens this perception when he tells Angel that “a person is only strong when they feel the land. Until then a person is not a human being” (Hogan 235). Humanity is defined not by separation from nature but by belonging to it. Ingold views identity as something formed through everyday interaction with place. Shiva extends this understanding by showing that ecological destruction and human suffering are inseparable. When the land is damaged, the communities that depend on it are also affected. The novel presents ecological knowledge through the “hunger maps” (Hogan 170). The hunger maps preserve knowledge of survival, seasonal movement, food sources and relationships with the environment. These maps emerge through lived experience and collective memory. In contrast colonial maps reduce the landscape to measurable territory. They exist because people travel with the land rather than merely across it. As Dora-Rouge explains, the dreamed maps “rest in the earth” (Hogan 260), sustained through a shared language between humans and other living beings. Knowledge therefore remains inseparable from movement, memory and ecological practice. Bush later contrasts these maps with colonial cartography, which reduces landscapes to property and economic value. Cedar bark maps preserve migration routes, medicinal plants and ancestral histories that official surveys cannot represent. They are measures of relationships, not space and provide an Indigenous geography of care, memory and experience. Ancient rock paintings are additional proof that landscapes have histories of their own. Hogan explains that the water concealed the paintings for centuries before revealing them. This demonstrates that the natural world is a repository of cultural memory and makes it evident when conditions are favorable. Water, then, is not only a physical element but also a holder of cultural memory. The paintings are thought to have been made by spirits, not people. They only reveal themselves when mist or changing water levels bring them to light. The flooding of these sacred sites by the hydroelectric dam is more than just the loss of archaeological remains. It reflects colonial attempts to erase Indigenous histories and relationships with the place. Nevertheless, the images remain beneath the water, suggesting that Indigenous memory cannot be completely erased. Land emerges as a living archive that carries Indigenous memory across generations. Rivers, forests, stones and rock paintings bear witness to histories that colonial records overlook or attempt to erase. Hogan transforms the environment into a continuing source of cultural identity, responsibility and resistance by locating memory within landscapes.

Land, Body and Colonial Violence

Hogan rejects the idea that the relationship between women and the land is merely symbolic. Instead, she presents it as a lived reality shaped by colonial exploitation. “The first generation of the Abandoned Ones travelled down with French fur trappers... When the land was worn out... the men moved on to what hadn't yet been destroyed, leaving their women and children behind, as if they too were used-up animals.” (Hogan 28). The Abandoned Ones develop after French fur traders abandon Indigenous women and their children following the depletion of local wildlife. These descriptions connect ecological degradation and the abandonment of Indigenous families. They show how colonial extraction devastates both the

natural environment and Indigenous communities. This portrayal reflects Vandana Shiva's argument that colonial development is founded on the domination of both women and nature.

Women refused to become passive victims; "The women eked out their livings in whatever ways they could, fishing or sewing. They brought in their own wood, and with their homely, work-worn hands they patched their own houses to keep sleet, snow, and winds at bay" (Hogan 28). They rebuild their homes, preserve kinship networks and sustain cultural traditions. Their resilience challenges colonial narratives. Hogan does not present survival as an individual accomplishment but as a collective practice of care, responsibility and continuity. Adam's Rib represents this communal ethic. The settlement functions as a space of cultural continuity maintained through matrilineal relationships, collective labour and shared knowledge. Dora-Rouge uses storytelling to keep the stories of the ancestors alive. Bush is a repository of ecological knowledge, and Agnes bears the memories of earlier generations. Angel inherits these traditions, transforming them into acts of cultural renewal. This matrilineal succession relates to the concept of gynocratic traditions described by Paula Gunn Allen, in which women preserve their cultural identity through knowledge transmission between generations.

The novel does not limit survival to women alone. Men such as Tulik, Tommy, and Husk also contribute to the community through shared responsibility for the land. Tulik's guidance in gathering medicinal plants demonstrates that ecological knowledge develops through lived engagement with the environment rather than formal instruction. Knowledge is therefore sustained collectively through practices of care. Hogan also uses a variety of mapping techniques to examine colonial and Indigenous conceptions of place. While Bush's cedar bark maps preserve ancestral histories, medicinal plants, and migration routes, government surveys map the land into quantifiable property. They emphasise their relationship with the land rather than ownership, showing that place is created through memory and lived experience.

Memory, Matrilineage, and the Colonial Trauma

If the land functions as an archive, memory carries its histories across generations. Bush describes memory as a song that "has a different voice with every singer" (Hogan 71). Memory is dynamic rather than fixed. It changes with each generation while preserving its continuity. Memory therefore survives through storytelling, ceremony and communal experience instead of written records alone. Memory also carries the wounds of colonial violence. Angel speaks of her "entangled memory, with good parts of it missing" (Hogan 72). Her fragmented memories reflect the wider consequences of colonialism, which aims to cut Indigenous peoples off from their ancestral lands, cultural customs and ancestors. Dreams, oral storytelling, and ceremonial practices gradually restore relationships severed by colonial violence. In this way, they contribute to the preservation of Indigenous memory across generations, in the face of colonial erasure.

Hannah Wing symbolizes the lasting effects of colonial disruption. The elders describe her condition as "soul loss" (Hogan 98), while Dora-Rouge calls it memory. These explanations shift attention away from individual failure toward

historical violence. Hannah's suffering arises from broken relationships with family, land and ancestral knowledge. Hannah is portrayed not as a villain but as someone whose inherited trauma continues to affect later generations. The hydroelectric project intensifies this violence by threatening the places where memory resides. Flooded territories erase burial grounds, ceremonial sites and ancestral landscapes that sustain Indigenous identity. Storytelling and ritual become forms of cultural resistance. They sustain histories that remain beyond the reach of physical destruction and colonial erasure. Colonial displacement is happening still, but memory is a living force joining generations.

The Body as Living Memory

Hogan challenges colonial understandings of the body. Colonial thought separates the body from history and place, just as official maps reduce land to measurable territory. Whereas *Solar Storms* presents the body as a space of blending between individual experience, ecological understanding, and ancestral memory. Angel's scars initially seem to represent suffering alone. Bush offers a different interpretation: "Some people see scars and it is wounding they remember. To me they are proof of the fact that there is healing" (Hogan 125). The scars do not reduce the body to trauma; they record violence and survival. In bearing witness to the possibility of resilience and renewal, they archive the memory of colonial injury and resist it. Hannah Wing's body further supports this idea. Her "garment of scars" carries the "signatures of torturers" (Hogan 99), rendering her body a living archive of colonial violence. Hogan describes the body as more than an isolated object; it is a lively archive of ecological wisdom, ancestral heritage and personal experience. Angel's recovery gradually transforms this inheritance of pain into a renewed relationship with the natural world. She is a "plant dreamer," an inheritor of ecological knowledge from her maternal line. Dora-Rouge recognizes this gift long before Angel does: "I KNEW there'd be another plant dreamer in my family someday" (Hogan 171). This inheritance suggests that cultural memory is sustained through lived relationships rather than written records. The body thus becomes a site of ancestral knowledge, a bearer of the wounds of colonialism and the prospect of healing.

The novel concludes by dissolving the boundaries between body and environment. Angel imagines a world with "no separate words for inside and out . . . no skin" (Hogan 54), where "a human is alive water . . . we are tree. We are frog in amber" (Hogan 351), this work against the colonial separation of humanity from nature. Identity is built through constant engagement with the more-than-human world. Healing is about reinstating reciprocal relationships with land, water, ancestors, and community rather than overcoming or separating from them.

Water, Mapping and Resistance

Water occupies a central place in *Solar Storms*. It is not just a physical element but also a carrier of memory, history and indigenous identity. The government's hydroelectric project reverses the natural course of rivers and floods ancestral lands. These are colonial fantasies of space that measure, control and exploit the landscape. Rivers are viewed as economic resources, while the relationships they sustain are treated as expendable. Hogan challenges this worldview by portraying water as an active element whose movement connects people, place and ancestral

memory. Angel's reflection shows the relationship between human life and water: "tears have a purpose. They are what we carry from the ocean, and perhaps we must become the sea... if we are to be transformed" (Hogan 340). Tears express more than grief. They reveal the continuity between the human body and the natural world. Emotional healing follows the same rhythms as rivers and oceans. This implies that personal renewal depends on reconnecting with ecological processes. Hogan presents the body and the environment as inseparable. Both exist within the same cycle of life. Tulik supports this idea with a story about people who wanted to live the "unbound manner of living" of water (Hogan 247). Their desire is the impulse to transcend human limitations by gaining the powers of other beings, while forgetting the responsibilities of human life. The story critiques the impulse to dominate nature rather than live in balance with it. This lesson reinforces Indigenous teachings that freedom arises through reciprocity rather than control. The novel associates this desire for domination with the Wiindigoo. Its hunger represents the destructive logic of colonial extraction. The developers resemble the Wiindigoo in their desire to turn the river into a commodity. They redirect water to produce hydroelectric power, treating rivers as economic resources. The developers' actions violate the reciprocal responsibilities that connect humans with the natural world. They replace relationships of care with exploitative systems. This transformation is one of the colonial modes of being with nature. Hogan uses this contrast to critique an extractive worldview. Ecological destruction begins when the earth is reduced to its economic value. Memory also survives through the names attached to the landscape. Places such as Poison Road and Hungry Mouth of Water preserve traces of colonial violence long after the original events have passed. Poison Road was once associated with fish. Later, it comes to symbolize settlers' attempts to poison wolves and foxes. The Hungry Mouth of Water similarly recalls the history of the fur trade and its destructive impact on both wildlife and Indigenous communities. Place names therefore function as cultural memory, linking contemporary experience with earlier histories of dispossession.

The hydroelectric dam continues this history of colonial violence. It floods burial grounds, hunting routes and ceremonial sites. Its impact is therefore both environmental and cultural because it destroys places that transmit memory across generations. Colonial violence cannot completely erase Indigenous knowledge. Rivers continue to flow, stories continue to be told, and Indigenous knowledge lives on. They challenge colonial attempts to erase Indigenous relationships with the land. Water continues to carry memories that cannot be contained. It reinforces an Indigenous understanding of place as living, interconnected and enduring.

Journey, Healing and Indigenous Resistance

The canoe journey serves as the culmination of the novel's exploration of memory, identity, and ecological responsibility. Angel, Dora-Rouge, Bush and Agnes set off north toward the land of the Fat Eaters. Their passage through the landscape becomes a form of knowledge grounded in lived experience. They travel without colonial maps or instruments. They rely on inherited knowledge, observation and shared experience. Their journey is a metaphor for the concept of dwelling. They learn through direct interaction with the environment. The experience changes

how Angel views herself and her community. She reflects, “The four of us became like one animal. We heard inside each other in a tribal way... my life had been without all its ears, eyes, without all its knowings” (Hogan 177). This moment rejects the colonial idea of the isolated individual. Angel recognises that identity is formed through relationships with family, ancestors, animals, water and land. Angel no longer views herself as an isolated individual. She understands herself as part of an interconnected community that includes both human and more-than-human life. Angel’s transformation continues as she recognises herself as a plant dreamer. This recognition is proof that her inheritance of ecological knowledge passed down from her maternal line. Thus her recovery is not only psychological but also cultural and ecological. Dora-Rouge is buried in her ancestral land, completing the cycle of return. It suggests that belonging is not simply a part of one’s individual life but is sustained through long-term relationships with place over generations.

The journey ends with the community’s united opposition to the hydroelectric project. Miss Nett said, “I love the ground. It’s my God” (Hogan 312), implies an Indigenous conception of the land as a living relation rather than a possession. This resistance is an expression of Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survival. It’s not just a struggle against environmental destruction. It is an expression of enduring Indigenous presence, ecological knowledge and reciprocal responsibility.

The novel’s title *Solar Storms*, emphasizes the relationship between humans and the natural world. Solar storms disrupt technological systems and reveal the limits of human attempts to control nature. Hogan uses this image to point out that the natural world resists colonial systems of control. Natural forces continually exceed attempts to dominate and regulate them. She concludes that survival depends not on dominating the environment but on renewing reciprocal relationships with land, water, memory, and community.

Conclusion

This study reveals that *Solar Storms* dissolve the boundaries between memory, identity, and place by presenting them as mutually constitutive. Land is recognised as a living archive that preserves history, shapes Indigenous identity, and sustains cultural knowledge. This research exposes how colonial extraction undermines both ecological and cultural survival, particularly through its impact on Indigenous women. The findings suggest that ecological justice is inseparable from Indigenous sovereignty and depends upon reciprocal relationships with land that sustain both human and more than human communities.

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DABEER SI/KTT/57**“MY UTERUS WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT SAFE”: DECOLONIZING GRIEF
AND SUBVERTING CHRONOLIMINALITY THROUGH THE
SUBALTERN NARRATIVES OF MISCARRIAGE IN *WHAT GOD
IS HONORED HERE?*****EVANGELINE. B**Research Scholar, Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli**G. PARVATHY**Associate Professor of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli**Abstract**

The subaltern narratives of miscarriage never see the light of day as the dominant hegemonic structures and the traditional mainstream spaces constantly strive to shun the interrupted, uncomfortable and chaotic postcolonial stories to maintain the status quo. As a result, the survivors of miscarriage find themselves in a space that is liminal and a timeline that is crooked. To investigate such phenomena, the paper introduces and investigates the concept of ‘chronoliminality’ in the chosen miscarriage narratives of BIPOC women from the anthology *What God is Honored Here?* edited by Shanon Gibney and Kao Kalia Yang using the theories of chrononormativity by Elizabeth Freeman and liminality by Victor Turner. This research also probes into how the writers bypass the ‘gendered memory spaces’ by traversing into their authentic ‘ancestral dreamscapes’ employing the trauma and illness narrative theories of Catherine Malabou and Arthur Frank, respectively. The ultimate motive of this study is to trace the path towards narrative healing post miscarriage by thematically and stylistically analysing the primary sources, gleaning from the ideas of above theorists and utilizing the ethics of Health Humanities.

Keywords: Subaltern, Miscarriage, Chronoliminality, Gendered Memoryscapes, Trauma, Illness Narrative, Healing

Introduction

Time filled the long window
With unfinished glass.
The shadow of the not-child
Cut it like a chord
The organ
Traced in the shallows
In silence, an indecipherable cause. (Shin 260)

If there is one thing that can warp the progressive, linear timeline designated for the reproductive lives of women beyond repair, it is the occurrence of miscarriage. It fractures the ‘chrononormative’ timeframe constructed to validate an ideal motherhood that successfully follows a linear countdown, reaching each milestone at regular, desired intervals. This concept of time, which is claimed to be

prototypic, is closely entwined with the spatiality of positioning women as mothers depending on their success rate. And so, the miscarriage survivors are left to occupy a liminal space between women without a child and ‘almost’ mothers “of the not-child” (Shin 260); together, these institutional concepts of time and space maroon the latter to occupy a ‘chronoliminal’ space. “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (359), states Victor Turner, which explicitly reflects the locale of the miscarriage survivors.

The imprints a pregnancy can leave, whether successful or unsuccessful, in a mother’s brain make it impossible for her to treat it like just another physical ailment and to move on by denying the grief of a lost future. Beyond being a physical health issue, in society’s view, miscarriage becomes a measure of a woman’s ability to hold a baby in her womb. As Sabina in her blog post probes, “This medical terminology, especially the word ‘miscarriage’, jarred. Did it mean I was a faulty container?”, representing a number of women across the globe. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), miscarriage refers to the loss of a fetus before the completion of 28 weeks of gestation. Globally, approximately 23 million miscarriages occur annually, translating to 44 pregnancies ending every minute. Though miscarriages have become ubiquitous, the silence, stigma and shame around them are still gripping, despite the state-of-the-art developments pertaining to women’s health. In the words of the psychologist Julia Bueno,

[A]s a culture, we don’t make remembering miscarriage an easy thing to do. As we can deny the existence and the profound nature of a treasured relationship with a baby lost to miscarriage - especially if its embodiment had barely begun - we can also respond awkwardly, and dismissively, to keeping its memory alive for evermore - especially if its embodiment had barely begun. (Bueno 210)

The chosen memoirs from the anthology *What God is Honored Here?*, edited by Shannon Gibney and Kao Kalia Yang, will serve as the primary sources for this study. Being the first of its kind, this anthology is a compilation of works directly from the hands of the indigenous women and women of colour who are miscarriage and stillbirth veterans, in other words, the subaltern women.

The present paper uses the lens of Health Humanities, which could be called the future of Medical Humanities, to interpret and reflect on the primary sources. This field enables one to humanise the stories and experiences of health by adding a dose of empathy. This also brings in not just the sufferers and physicians but also the kith and kin and the people from other dimensions of the former’s society. As Klugman duly puts it, Health Humanities focuses on health, which is broader than just medicine. Beyond that, this field picks up major real-life problems, choosing to work towards social justice constantly. By facilitating the integration of literary texts into the human experiences of health, it becomes a crucial framework for this study.

The study utilises the theoretical framework of chronoliminality, which is an amalgamation of the concepts of chrononormativity by Elizabeth Freeman and liminality by Victor Turner, to trace the elements in the memoirs of miscarriage

that defy the normative timeline and position the sufferers of miscarriage in a liminal space in tradition, culture and society.

Numerous studies in the field of Counselling Psychology have attempted to investigate the alterations of time and identity like Majda Barouagui Rogers who finds that “Discourses which adhere to linear notions of progress,” made miscarriage survivors “feel disempowered with limited agency over their bodies and subjective experience”, in her thesis “*Things change, things aren’t always a given*”: Exploring the Experiences of Miscarriage: A Narrative Analysis in counselling psychology, and Wallis who informs that “[c]ombined with the discomfort of a ‘survivor identity’ or ‘heroic identities’, the sufferers of miscarriage tend to “revert back to the pain of miscarriage”, in her research, *Women’s Narratives of Miscarriage and their Role in Identity Construction*. Feminist researchers like Browne proposes to “rethink both pregnant time and the time of miscarriage through the lens of “suspended time”—a theoretical move that shifts the accent from the future as the dominating frame of reference to the lived present” *A Pregnant Pause: Pregnancy, Miscarriage, and Suspended Time*. The current paper recognises a gap in the intersection of first-hand postcolonial creative literary works of miscarriage and the concept of time and space. It aims to fill the said gap by probing into the need to subvert ‘chronoliminality’ in the stories of miscarriage and by tracing the path towards healing through storytelling.

Biomedical Gaze

When social, cultural and political silence contributes to the unmalleable stigma around miscarriage, clinical prejudice further strengthens it by affecting the marginalised miscarriage survivor physically as well as psychologically. The event of miscarriage, which usually happens spontaneously in most cases, isolates the sufferers, weighing them down with the grief of a lost future and hope. The grief is further intensified when the people who belong to the immediate circle of the sufferer refuse to acknowledge their unimaginable, unutterable pain. Hence, universally, the journey of miscarriage for every survivor evidently becomes an utterly lonely one, devoid of words and expressions. The cold medical gaze and the frigid clinical semantics that don’t allow any room for the women who undergo miscarriage to mourn their unidentifiable loss pierce their hearts by being highly judgmental. Thus, the social and institutional structures that tend to completely obliterate the experiences of miscarriage have been successful in bringing about a deafening silence around this exclusively women’s health issue for centuries. The powerful words of Jami Nakamura Lin in her work *The Night Parade*, “The story of miscarriage is not singular. It is plural, it is various, and it is so often silent” (146), asserts the worldwide intersectionality of the narratives of miscarriage.

This silence and stigma tend to thicken when looked through the lens of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) or subaltern women who undergo miscarriage. It is appalling to see that the fundamentally suppressing idea of race that has been clinging to some structures of societies globally, surpassing centuries of education and modern advancements, affects the survivors of miscarriage quite directly. Catherine R. Squires, who wrote the memoir *Calendar of the Unexpected*, when she was admitted to the hospital following a devastating miscarriage, encounters a clinical intern who indubitably was spitting “contempt with a

smidgen of pity” and looks down on her doing absolutely nothing, as Squires puts it, “She didn’t lift a finger or move an inch to assist” (219). She further reflects that, “I can’t help but wonder if race played any role in that intern’s disdain for me” (220). Such multilayered oppression makes the miscarriage survivors “liminal personae” or “threshold people” (Turner 359) who tend to elude the usual classifications in cultural spaces and societal institutional structures. Simply put, the BIPOC or subaltern women who undergo miscarriages are denied a cultural space to express and exist. Even if there are some nooks and crannies that accommodate the expressions of miscarriage survivors, they are from the women of dominant races, classes and communities. This tragically isolated feeling echoes in the words of Lin as she contemplates, “The women writing about miscarriage don’t look like me. They don’t sound like me. There is nothing that resonates” (138). This aspect of liminality, which is anchored deep and intensified by the biomedical gaze, situates the BIPOC female survivors of miscarriage in an ambiguous, almost non-existent space to grieve or simply to exist.

The piercing coldness of the biomedical or clinical gaze upon BIPOC women who walk the road of miscarriages is too glaring not to be noticed in the memoir of Taiyon J. Coleman titled *Tilted Uterus*. She recalls different scenarios inside the hospital where she was alienated and secluded by the Western practitioners. For instance, Coleman remembers that she was treated “like a specimen in a cage” (55) when the doctors had to examine her uterus. She also sheds light on how she was denied a basic need as “the human dignity of privacy” (Coleman 49) and the fact that she was not considered worthy of being made to wait in the patients’ room by a white nurse while awaiting her pregnancy results. Coleman’s life writing adorns the tone for a confessional piece of art as she expresses that visiting the doctor was never a comfortable experience for her “as a woman of colour” (58) and daringly points fingers at the privileged white doctor, stating unapologetically, “The OB-GYN made me feel like he didn’t care about me” (Coleman 58). Coleman unravels her most personal layers of experiences to elucidate this systemic erasure of BIPOC miscarriage survivors as she remembers herself sitting in a wheelchair in the hospital’s hallway and how people walked past her like they did not want to touch her, and she portrays her cruel cultural invisibility by mentioning that “[p]eople walked past me like they did not see me” (Coleman 58), brilliantly picturing the cultural and systemic bowdlerising of a minority woman’s authentic life and death experiences that neither meet the societal expectations nor come under any traditional classification.

These women, who exist “between and betwixt the positions assigned” (Turner 359) by tradition and society, are biologically and psychologically already mothers but clinically and socially labelled ‘childless’. Hence, their liminal identity is anchored by the fact that they are only ‘almost mothers’, though in some cases of miscarriage, women need to undergo labour, and they could not reach the milestone of giving birth within the allotted time frame. Such usage of rigid time frames of life, by the institutional forces that dictate the choices of women “to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (Freeman 3) is termed as ‘chrononormativity’. This technique makes the man-implanted time frames “seem like somatic facts” (Freeman 3). The sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel

claims that “Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate (Freeman 3)” what he terms “hidden rhythms” (Freeman 3), in other words, they are “forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege” (Freeman 3). But as the event of miscarriage rapidly disrupts a linear timeline, stalling the author’s identity in a liminal desert, it causes a ‘teleological restlessness’. This temporal arrest in the journey of motherhood can be seen as the root cause of the egregious silence around miscarriage and for the uncanny grief to become ‘disenfranchised’.

The event of miscarriage that has the capability to freeze the designated linear timeline of a woman’s life by causing a staggering glitch in the teleological momentum of their life and by making them the ‘threshold people’, positioning them in the liminal space in a society that denies a dignified space for the BIPOC mothers to exist and express, indisputably demands them to carve an active ‘chronoliminal’ space for themselves that can reject both the linear productive countdown and the cold biomedical gaze.

This drastic invalidation of a woman’s experience of miscarriage brings to the fore the gap between the clinical care and the patient’s embodied reality. Coleman writes, in her utterly devastated state, after her miscarriage, “[t]he medical establishment don’t even consider it an issue or problem unless a woman experiences three miscarriages in a row” (49). The gruesome fact is that the cold clinical statistics expect the indigenous and black sufferers to reach the predetermined standards and levels of suffering to earn the proper clinical care. The historical lingering of structural racism and power dynamics is evident as R. Squires describes her experience with a white doctor, “[s]he is blasé; she seems unconcerned, and like she has other patients with real problems to see” (212).

Linguistic Liminality

In the vein of the clinical system that intentionally ignores the experiences of miscarriage, the clinical language terribly fails by reducing them to cold statistics and jarring jargon. As Dr Clare Moriarty, a post-doctoral researcher who has undergone this cycle of hope and dejection herself, writes for the Irish Times, “[m]iscarriage; miscarry; mis-carry. That ‘mis-’ prefix lands on me with an unwelcome normative thud, implying some sort of fault at the hands of the carrier – a handling error”. The very word seems to hold the mothers and their bodies responsible for such an accident. The blame that has nowhere else to go seeps in through the survivors and creates an intensified identity issue founded on the repetitive doubts of self-worth. In the words of Catherine Malabou, this catastrophe of repressed blame and grief makes the sufferers undergo a phenomenon called “destructive plasticity”, which is an unpredictable mutation of identity due to brain injury that results in a full-blown metamorphosis of an individual that can never be reversed. The identity of the miscarriage survivors sometimes becomes highly fragmented, reflecting the very nature of the broken timeline and narration of the event, as Jami Nakamura Lin puts forth, “I think about it in fragments, and thus my retelling is fragmented” (131). By refusing to follow a linear narrative, they prove that their grief does not have a simple ‘expiration date’ or corporate ‘recovery arc’, resisting the stringent chronoliminality altogether. In her essay *Ontology of the Accident*, Malabou

demonstrates that such a sudden disruption as the occurrence of miscarriage in the space of selfhood, which is supposed to be linear and seamless, is like the “one that cuts the thread of life in two or more segments that no longer meet” (6). This traumatic break in the narration of the selfhood of a woman who has undergone a miscarriage brings her life to a cataclysmic pause. The result is a permanent chasm that divides the life of the woman before and after the occurrence of miscarriage; the two eras can no longer be bridged. Kamal emanates an unbelievable strength and skill by putting together the right words to express this kismet by saying, “In those few moments, I’d accumulated decades of grief, and I felt old, forever divided between ““before seeing his face” and “after seeing his face”” (182), portraying the timeless nature of this grief that determines the trajectory of the sufferer’s life.

The ‘narrative deceleration’ that can be observed in the memoirs as the sufferers get closer to the moment of miscarriage reveals that trauma can alter the pacing of the narration. In Kamal’s story, the plot from the moment she gets a cramp that later develops into a labour pain to the minute she rushes into the bathroom because of a sudden wave of intense pain, moves in a hyper, rapid speed like a time-lapse video as she herself recalls, “[t]he next few minutes were as if someone was turning a kaleidoscope at warp speed” (181). Then the rhythm of the narrative slows down as she physically captures the rupture of the life script when she had to catch the baby’s face in a tissue and come to a standstill, reflecting the ‘temporal arrest’ only she, as a grieving mother, could feel.

A miscarriage, which is no way plain-spoken, places the survivor in a liminal space, as what is lost here is not tangible but abstract: hope, future and dream. The experience of miscarriage, thus, demands a language that is in no way structured and guarded, but a chaotic and authentic one. The domineering Western clinical language has several terms to denote the event, but all of them degrade this complex experience as they do not capture the unaccountable assortment of blame, loss and grief. In her memoir *The Face of Miscarriage*, Sonia Kamal ruminates that “According to Science, it was an unviable fetus; according to my heart, it was my baby” (182), speaking for every woman who suffers miscarriage in dead silence since there seems to be no place in the whole wide world where their grief of an intimate bereavement could be understood and participated in.

Kamal explicitly reveals the racial stereotypical undercurrent in how the clinicians and nurses responded to her in her memoir. She excavates her memory of the negligence of her OB-GYN (Obstetrician and Gynecologist) when what started as spotting, transformed into a profuse, persistent bleeding, quoting the doctor verbatim, ““Nothing is wrong,” the OB-GYN snapped at me. “You’re imagining things... You’re just paranoid” (Kamal 179). Kamal’s critique of the institutional dereliction exposes how clinical taxonomy performs bureaucratic violence on the mourning maternal body. She does not shy away from mentioning that her copious bleeding, along with “an uncaring caregiver” (179) had unnerved her. She then goes on to state that even while confirming the miscarriage, she was being yelled at the whole time she was getting ready for an ultrasound, about how much she was costing the insurance companies by looking at her baby each time, evidently considering the medical expenditure above the life of the baby of a black mother.

As a form of protest against these institutional forces that have successfully silenced the generations of miscarriage stories and intend to mute them permanently in the days to come, the BIPOC authors practice 'somatic reclamation' when they choose to materialise the raw visceral experiences. Lin chooses to focus inwards as she writes, "I pee in a cup, and it is filled with webby red strands that look like those I know" (136), reconnecting with her physical body and owning her emotional wounds. Describing her real physical experience in hyper-vivid detail, Kamal ponders, "I wish she'd warned me that if I sat on the toilet seat, catching expelled blood clots in toilet tissue, I could very well deliver my baby's face into my hands" (181), in an attempt to reclaim her body from the biomedical gaze that actively objectifies it and debauches what it has survived through.

Kao Kalia Yang, the author of *In the Month of August*, a woman from the indigenous ethnic group, Hmong, resists the politics of words in the neo-liberal Western clinical system by deeming them wrong, in her words, "[t]hey called him a miscarriage. I thought of the medical definition of the word: a spontaneous loss of fetus before the twentieth week of pregnancy. There was nothing spontaneous about what I had experienced" (243), declares Yang, interpreting the word for a pleasant surprise, that can never be relatable to her tragic case. These aggressive administrative labels create a 'semantic vacuum' where the stern medical terms clash with the spiritual and cultural vocabularies of the indigenous cosmology.

Kamal and Coleman, in their memoirs, reveal that nothing in the world, not even the systems of religion, could grasp the kind of incomprehensible loss they were facing and the gripping grief that engulfed them. Kamal, who is a muslim, recalls the day the local mosque rejected their request to bury their miscarried baby, as in Islam it is believed that the soul of the baby enters into its body only "120 days" (184) and there was "no proof" (184) that the baby contained a soul yet. And so, it was declared that "What had been inside [her] could only safely be considered a soulless fetus" (184). Then she expresses honestly that "[f]resh raw grief sliced her open" (184) as even her husband chose to call the body baby as "remains" (184).

Coleman, who is a Catholic, also records a similar experience in her memoir when she and her husband approached a priest to baptise and give their baby her last rites, and on seeing the baby, "[t]he white Catholic priest physically recoiled as if he had seen something repulsive" (61). This unnerving reaction from a priest, despite his social position, makes the memoirist realise how desperately lonely she is on this journey.

English Language, which contains both the orderly and chaotic realms, is known to give agency and space to the stories that have the most inexpressible events of history, but seem to fail in the cases of miscarriage. As Arthur Frank in his book *The Wounded Storyteller* brilliantly clarifies, "[i]n these stories the modernist bulwark of remedy, progress, and professionalism cracks to reveal vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (97). Moua, who is also an indigenous woman, embraces the language of her ethnic group and juxtaposes the lifeless, tyrannical language that intentionally neglects her emotions, deeming them unworthy and the Hmong dialect that takes into consideration the embodied, vulnerable reality of the

mothers who ‘miscarried’ by declaring the lost lives ‘children’. As Moua reports, “[a]s the Americans call it: miscarried. In Hmong we call it ‘nchuav menyuam’, to spill children” (248). Moua participates in an assiduous narrative resistance as she ingrains the Hmong translation of the core word of her suffering in her memoir. In indigenous cosmologies, life, death, ancestral presence and souls, and spiritual lineages are interconnected, constructing a complex cultural architecture that helps resist the biomedical gaze. Hence, for the indigenous survivors of miscarriage, their own languages bring into their life stories more authenticity, more comfort and more reality.

Conclusion

In the same way, the indigenous language makes the narratives of miscarriage legitimate; the indigenous ancestors of the sufferers bring a divine strength to these experiences. They meet the survivors exactly where the world religions and the Western clinical system had neglected them. “Words suggest its rawness, but that wound is so much of the body, its insults, agonies, and losses, that words necessarily fail...those who are truly living the chaos cannot tell in words” (98), says Frank, proving that the experiences of miscarriage are chaos stories that do not, in any way, follow the “proper” narrative timeline and plot, making them defy the chrononormative expectations of society.

By escaping into the dreamlike ancestral landscapes, the indigenous survivors of miscarriage actively carve a space for themselves as a form of fierce protest. Yang, whose miscarriage was just confirmed and pronounced in the hospital, rides herself back to a comfortable ‘dreamscape’ within her ‘memoryscape’ and tries to relive it, in her own authentic words, “When I was a child and I was scared in the dark, I used to imagine the arms of my ancestors around me, holding me safe in the circle of their love. I listened for the comfort of those who’d come before me” (241). She makes the readers see the significance of her connection to and the presence of her ancestors in her life by conjuring them up immediately after getting to know that her dream and hope for a future had crumbled down, shattering her identity into shards, creating a permanent wound in her memoryscape.

Thus, every attempt to tell the stories of miscarriage out into the world breaks the walls of colonial hegemonies and gendered memoryscapes. Each “miscarriage veteran[s]” (Kamal 177) who writes about their journey of miscarriage attempts to reclaim their narrative authority, thereby protesting against the narrative erasure and clinical reductionism. Frank’s statement, “[t]he stories are uncomfortable, and their uncomfortable quality is all the more reason they have to be told. Otherwise, the interrupted voice remains silent” (58), perfectly illuminating the significance of subaltern miscarriage stories to be written.

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Narratives of Memory, Gender and Ecology in Postcolonial Literature

Victor Witter Turner, and Jon P Mitchell. *Liminality and Communitas: Form and Attributes of Rites of Passage*. 1969.

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DABEER SI/KTT/58**THE LANDSCAPE OF TRAUMA: GENDERED EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*****SHYAMOLIM GAURATRA**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the topic of trauma in a gender-related context in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. It should be pointed out that in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the problem of trauma is viewed from another angle as this concept goes beyond the framework of individual psychological condition. In this study special attention will be paid to the notion of trauma, as described by the author and its connection with cultural memory and gender issues. The protagonist of the novel, Sethe, is a living embodiment of the terrible trauma which is inherent to the condition of being a slave and which is experienced by African American women who live in this society. Being a personification of the consequences of oppression on the racial and gender level, the heroine suffers from numerous types of violence- sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Morrison focuses on the specific forms of trauma that were faced by female slaves during their lives. In addition to this, the author describes the process of repressed memories coming back in the form of supernatural events, in which a ghost plays a central role. By depicting the return of *Beloved* to her mother, the author implies the idea that no one can totally escape their dark past even after the emancipation.

Keywords: Trauma, Cultural Memory, Gendered Experience, Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, etc.

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, first published in 1987, occupies a singular and commanding position within the tradition of the neo-slave narrative, a genre that emerged in the late twentieth century as African American writers sought to recover, reimagine, and ethically confront the silences left by the historical archive of slavery. Unlike the classic slave narratives of the nineteenth century—those of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, or Solomon Northup—which were constrained by the exigencies of abolitionist politics and the demand for verifiable testimony, the neo-slave narrative operates with the freedom of fiction to explore the interior, psychic, and intergenerational consequences of bondage. Morrison's novel does not merely recount the facts of slavery; it insists upon the lingering, living presence of those facts in the bodies, minds, and communal relations of the formerly enslaved and their descendants. At its center stands the figure of Sethe, a woman who has escaped from the Kentucky plantation called

Sweet Home and who now resides at 124 Bluestone Road on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio, in the years immediately following the Civil War. The novel's power derives from its refusal to treat emancipation as a clean temporal rupture. While Morrison does not write as a theorist, her fiction anticipates and complicates many of the insights later formalized in trauma studies: the notion that trauma resists straightforward narrative integration, that it returns in delayed and distorted forms, that it is both individual and collective, and that the act of witnessing—whether by characters within the text or by readers outside it—carries ethical weight.

The central act of infanticide itself must be understood within this expanded landscape. Sethe's decision to kill her child is not presented as madness or as simple maternal instinct; it is the logical, if unbearable, outcome of a system that had already claimed ownership of her body, her milk, and her children. By choosing death for her daughter rather than a return to Sweet Home, Sethe asserts a form of maternal agency that the slave system had sought to annihilate. Yet the cost of that assertion is a trauma so profound that it warps the subsequent lives of everyone connected to it. The novel does not ask readers to condemn or to exonerate Sethe; it asks them to inhabit the impossible ethical terrain she was forced to navigate and to recognize that the landscape of slavery left no clean or uncompromised choices.

After her own emancipation, Baby Suggs used the house to welcome the weary, to feed the hungry, and to offer a space of temporary rest for those fleeing slavery. The Clearing nearby became the site of her celebrated sermons, in which she called the community to love their own flesh in defiance of a system that had taught them to despise it. In those years, 124 was a place of life, of gathering, of cultural affirmation. The infanticide changes everything. When Sethe cuts her daughter's throat in the woodshed rather than allow the child to be returned to Sweet Home under the Fugitive Slave Law, the house absorbs the act and is transformed. The baby's spirit takes up residence, first as an invisible, spiteful presence that drives away Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, and then, after Paul D's arrival and the apparent exorcism of the ghost, as the fully embodied young woman who calls herself Beloved.

Morrison's description of the house emphasizes its agency. The novel opens with the declaration that 124 was spiteful, and the subsequent pages detail the ways in which the house itself seems to participate in the haunting: the red light that pools in the hallway, the sudden cold spots, the inexplicable accidents, the sense that the structure is watching and waiting. The domestic space, traditionally associated with safety and nurture, is here converted into a site of perpetual confrontation with the past. In this conversion, Morrison literalizes the idea that trauma occupies and reshapes the environments in which the traumatized attempt to live.

Morrison's use of apocalypse to figure trauma is a method for engaging politics and history, not avoiding them. Trauma—the apocalypse of the psychoanalytic narrative, a formative and revelatory catastrophe—obliterates (removes from memory) old modes of life and understanding at the same time that it generates

new ones. After the trauma, everything is changed, even as the trauma itself has been forgotten (Berger, 410).

By refusing linear chronology, Morrison prevents the reader from achieving the kind of comfortable distance that conventional historical narrative often permits. The past is not safely over; it keeps erupting into the present tense of the storytelling. Shifting focalization further complicates any single authoritative account. Sethe's version of events is shaped by maternal guilt and the need to justify the unjustifiable. Paul D's version is shaped by the need to protect his hard-won emotional containment. Denver's version is shaped by hunger for a sister and a history she has only heard about. Beloved's fragmentary utterances introduce yet another layer, one that seems to reach back to the hold of the slave ship. The novel's temporal landscape is therefore polyphonic and unstable, a terrain in which multiple rememories compete and coexist.

Just as the characters cannot move in a straight line through their lives, the narrative cannot move in a straight line through its plot. The experience of reading becomes an experience of disorientation and gradual reorientation, an analogue of the characters' own efforts to navigate rememory. Morrison's prose style reinforces this effect. Sentences sometimes fragment under the pressure of what they must convey; images of trees, water, light, and houses recur with variations that accumulate meaning across the text. The language itself becomes a kind of terrain, one that the reader must learn to walk with care. Wardi maintains: "this scar evidences Sethe's elision with trees. She is trans corporeally part of the arboreal world, and while Paul D is associated with trees, Sethe is the tree" (Wardi, Kindle). The concept of the land remembering also resonates with African American cultural traditions that predate the novel. Folk beliefs about haunted places, about the unsettled dead, about the ways in which violence leaves a stain upon the ground, all find sophisticated literary expression in *Beloved*. Morrison does not simply appropriate these traditions; she extends them into a comprehensive vision of historical trauma as environmental fact.

Gendered Experience of Trauma

Slavery in the United States was a system that produced suffering with meticulous attention to the sex of the enslaved. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* refuses any sentimental equalization of that suffering while insisting that the differences between women's and men's experiences must be mapped with equal rigor. The novel presents gendered trauma not as a competition for greater pain but as a set of systematically produced vulnerabilities and corresponding strategies of survival. Women's bodies were targeted primarily through their reproductive and nurturing capacities; men's bodies and minds were targeted through the destruction of autonomy, mobility, and the capacity for sustained emotional connection. These distinct assaults generate distinct forms of psychic injury, distinct modes of resistance, and distinct paths—often incomplete—toward possible healing. By interweaving the stories of Sethe, Baby Suggs, Denver, Paul D, Halle, Sixo, and the other Sweet Home men, Morrison constructs a comparative anatomy of gendered trauma that remains one of the novel's most precise and devastating achievements.

The maternal body stands at the center of women's traumatic experience in the novel. Sethe's story is the most fully elaborated instance. At Sweet Home, under schoolteacher's regime, she is subjected to an assault that combines sexual violence with the direct appropriation of her maternal function. The schoolteacher's nephews hold her down in the barn and steal the milk she has produced for her infant daughter. The act is not merely rape in the conventional sense; it is a calculated theft of the substance that defines her as a mother.

Sethe's identity is deeply intertwined with her experiences at Sweet Home and her act of infanticide, which she sees as a desperate assertion of agency in a world that denies her humanity. Her re- construction of identity is a continuous struggle to reconcile her past with her present, to transform a place of trauma into one of belonging (181).

This violation directly shapes the decision that defines Sethe's subsequent life. When the schoolteacher and his nephews arrive at 124 Bluestone Road to reclaim her under the Fugitive Slave Law, Sethe gathers her children and attempts to kill them rather than permit their return to Sweet Home. She succeeds with the youngest, the daughter later called Beloved, cutting the child's throat with a handsaw in the woodshed. The act is presented neither as madness nor as uncomplicated heroism. It is the logical, if unbearable, extension of a maternal logic forged under slavery: if the slave system claims absolute ownership of the child's body and future, then the mother may assert a final, catastrophic form of ownership by choosing death.

The consequences of this act radiate outward through the rest of the novel. Sethe's back, already scarred by the whip into the shape of a chokecherry tree, becomes a secondary site of trauma that others misread. When Paul D first sees the scar, he responds to its visual strangeness rather than to the history it records. The scar is both a record of physical violence and a surface upon which new misunderstandings are inscribed. Morrison refuses to resolve the ethical tension. Readers are not invited to condemn or to absolve; they are required to inhabit the impossible terrain Sethe was forced to navigate.

Baby Suggs embodies a different but related trajectory of women's trauma under reproductive exploitation. Before her emancipation, she had given birth to eight children, every one of whom was taken from her by sale or death. The cumulative loss depletes her in ways that freedom cannot fully repair. After the infanticide and the community's subsequent withdrawal, Baby Suggs retreats into her bed and spends her remaining days contemplating color. Her eventual decision to leave 124 and seek work in the community marks a crucial turn. The movement outward is risky; it requires her to face a world that has judged her mother and, by extension, her. Yet it is also the beginning of a selfhood not wholly determined by inherited trauma. Denver seeks help from the women of the neighborhood, reopens the possibility of communal relation, and in doing so begins to construct a future that acknowledges the past without being paralyzed by it.

Denver stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch. Out there were small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, the feeling could overtake you and

stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again (Morrison, 243-244).

Morrison presents this trajectory as a distinctly gendered path: the daughter of maternal trauma learns to claim agency through relational networks often sustained by women.

Men's trauma in the novel is organized around a different axis: the systematic destruction of autonomy and the enforced suppression of emotional life. Paul D is the primary vehicle for this exploration. His experiences at Sweet Home and afterward constitute a catalogue of assaults upon masculine selfhood as the slave system defined and then dismantled it. He is forced to wear the bit, an instrument that silences speech and reduces the wearer to the status of a bridled animal. He endures the chain gang in Georgia, where the men are linked together in a coffin and subjected to conditions designed to erase individuality. The tin is Morrison's central metaphor for male psychic survival under extreme duress. Emotion becomes dangerous; vulnerability becomes a liability. To remain functional, Paul D must become a man who feels nothing that cannot be immediately controlled. The strategy works, after a fashion, until he reaches 124 and encounters Sethe and then Beloved. Lorie Watkins Fulton, in "Hiding Fire and Brimstone in Lacy Groves: The Twinned Trees of Beloved," argues that: "the deadened skin of Sethe's back clearly represents feelings about the past that she refuses to give free rein" (190). The house and its inhabitants force the tin open. Beloved's sexual demand, in particular, pries at the sealed container until the contents begin to spill. Paul D finds himself overwhelmed by feelings he has spent years imprisoning: desire, shame, longing, terror, love.

Morrison refuses any hierarchy of suffering. She does not suggest that the theft of milk is worse than the bit, or that psychic collapse is more devastating than the decision to kill one's child. Instead, she maps the distinct terrains of injury and the distinct resources each gendered position makes available for survival and resistance. Women's strategies often center on the preservation of maternal bonds even at catastrophic cost, and on the creation of relational networks that can sustain life in the aftermath. Men's strategies often center on the containment of feeling and the preservation of a minimal, mobile self that can continue to move and labor. Both sets of strategies are adaptive responses to impossible conditions; both exact lasting costs; both remain visible in the characters' struggles long after emancipation.

The long aftermath of slavery ensures that these gendered injuries do not end with emancipation. Sethe's attempts to live solely in the present are continually undermined by the return of the past. Paul D's tobacco tin cannot remain sealed once he enters into relationships with others who have suffered differently. For Paul D, trees represent a path to freedom and a source of comfort. For Paul D, the trees "signal his passage from symbolic death to symbolic life; being active catalysts of his spiritual rebirth, they are shown to have a creative force of their own, the faculty of generating the life that goes with freedom" (Bonnet, 50). Denver must invent a self capable of moving between the maternal legacy she inherits and the communal world she needs. Baby Suggs's final contemplation

of color stands as a reminder that some depths of exhaustion lie beyond the reach of even the most eloquent calls to self-love. The novel offers no easy recovery. Instead, it provides a precise mapping of the injuries and of the imperfect, costly strategies by which the injured continue to live.

Cultural Memory and Collective Remembrance

Cultural memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* operates as the vital medium through which the landscape of trauma and the gendered experiences of violence are transmitted, contested, and, at moments, partially transformed. The novel refuses any simple opposition between private recollection and public history. Instead, it presents memory as a dynamic, often conflictual field in which individual "rememories" continually interact with communal stories, silences, rituals, and spectral returns. Slavery produced not only personal injuries but a collective historical wound whose scale exceeds any single life. Black people endured under the institution of slavery which is described by Roger Lockhurst as an "active disorganization of [the] community" (Lockhurst, 245). Morrison's exploration of this inheritance ranks among the novel's most ambitious and ethically charged achievements. She shows how cultural memory can imprison and how it can liberate; how it can isolate individuals inside their own pain and how it can gather a community into acts of collective recognition and release.

At the level of individual memory, Sethe's experience remains paradigmatic. Her rememories are intensely private, spatially organized, and resistant to ordinary chronological control. She carries Sweet Home inside her as a place that still exists—a terrain into which she might inadvertently step and which others might also encounter. The theft of her milk, the sight of Halle's broken mind, the decision in the woodshed: these events do not recede into a manageable past. They remain available, vivid, and capable of invading the present without warning. Sethe's strategy for living with this burden is a fierce, almost violent concentration on the immediate. She attempts to shut the past out and to focus exclusively on the care of her surviving daughter and the demands of daily survival.

Cultural memory in the novel is not an abstract collective phenomenon that floats above individual lives; it inhabits and disrupts those lives in the most intimate ways. The eventual exorcism of *Beloved* requires communal participation. Individual effort proves insufficient. Sethe cannot explain enough, love enough, or sacrifice enough to satisfy the ghost. Denver's private companionship with her sister cannot contain the growing threat. Only when Denver leaves the house and appeals to the women of the community does the possibility of collective action arise. The novel suggests that certain forms of historical haunting cannot be resolved by private reckoning alone. They require the gathered force of shared remembrance and shared refusal to be consumed by the dead.

Intergenerational transmission forms the third major axis of cultural memory in the novel. Denver occupies the pivotal position as a bridge between the traumatic past and a possible future. Born during the escape, named after the white girl who helped her mother, and raised inside the haunted house on a diet of Sethe's stories and the ghost's companionship, Denver inherits both the factual content of the past and its emotional logic. In leaving the house, Denver does not abandon the

past; she carries it into a larger social world and, in doing so, begins to transform its meaning. She becomes the one who can speak to the community about what is happening at 124, the one who reactivates the networks of women, and the one who survives to inhabit a future that the previous generation could scarcely envision.

Cultural memory can become a source of strength only when the living accept the full difficulty of the negotiation it requires: the willingness to confront what has been repressed, the humility to recognize the limits of private reckoning, the courage to gather in ritual even after long silence, and the wisdom to know when the story must be passed on and when it must be allowed, carefully, to loosen its hold. The novel itself stands as one such act of cultural memory—an effort to give form to the unburied dead, to the gendered sufferings of the survivors, and to the landscapes that continue to hold their traces, while simultaneously cautioning against any easy or complete possession of that form. In this double movement of preservation and release, *Beloved* offers its most profound contribution to the ongoing work of remembering slavery in American culture.

Intersections: Gender, Trauma and the Politics of Memory

The intersections of gender, trauma, and memory also generate specific possibilities and limits for healing. Healing in the novel is never a private psychological achievement alone. It requires the renegotiation of cultural memory within gendered and communal frameworks. Sethe's private struggle with rememory and guilt cannot resolve itself without the eventual intervention of the community and the tentative return of Paul D. Paul D's sealed heart cannot open into sustained relationship without the pressure of Sethe's different history and the forced confrontation with *Beloved*. Denver's movement from isolation into a wider world depends upon her ability to activate gendered networks of women and to carry the past into a collective space that can respond to it. The community's own shift from ostracism to action demonstrates that cultural memory can be reclaimed and redirected, yet the reclamation remains fragile and incomplete.

Conclusion

Beloved stands as a corrective to both tendencies. It keeps the spatial, the gendered, and the cultural in view. It refuses consolation that depends upon forgetting. Literarily, *Beloved* continues to model what fiction can achieve when it refuses the consolations of linear progress and tidy resolution. The novel's formal difficulty is not an aesthetic obstacle; it is an ethical necessity. Nonlinear time, shifting voices, the collapse of boundaries between the living and the dead—all of these choices force readers into an active relation with the material. One cannot consume *Beloved* passively. One must reconstruct sequence, hold contradictory perspectives in tension, and remain with uncertainty. In this respect the novel itself performs the work of cultural memory it describes. It passes the story on while simultaneously warning against any easy or complete possession of it. The double movement remains one of its most enduring formal and ethical signatures.

Beloved endures because it refuses to look away. It maps the terrain of historical trauma with unsparing precision. It walks the ground where sexual violence,

maternal catastrophe, psychic imprisonment, communal silence, and spectral return all leave their traces. It shares the story in forms that honor both the particularity of individual lives and the scale of collective loss. And it leaves its readers with the ongoing responsibility to continue the mapping, the walking, and the sharing. Cultural memory, if it is to sustain the living, must remain a practice rather than a possession. The practice is difficult. The novel shows why the difficulty must be faced. In the end, that is the measure of its achievement and the source of its continuing power: it renders the landscape of trauma visible, gendered, and cultural, and in the rendering it keeps open the possibility that the living, together, may yet find ways to inhabit that landscape without being wholly claimed by it. The work remains unfinished. The novel ensures that the work cannot be honestly refused.

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DABEER SI/KTT/59**NARRATIVES OF MEMORY, MOTHERHOOD, AND FEMALE
IDENTITY IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*****K. AISHWARYA**

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Abstract

This article portrays how Buchi Emecheta handles memory as a narrative device to demonstrate the overwhelming influence of patriarchal traditions on women's identities and the building of motherhood as the central step of female value. From African feminist perspectives and memory studies, the article argues that memory is preserved as a cultural process through which gender norms, social expectations, and inherited beliefs are passed from one generation to the next. Through the life of the protagonist, Nnu Ego, Emecheta unfolds the contradictions of motherhood, picturing it as a basis of social respect while on the other side exposing the emotional, physical, and economic sacrifices that it demands from women. The study further shows that female identity is not the same, but it is consistently shaped and reshaped through the interaction of personal memories, cultural traditions, colonial influences, and individual resilience. By analysing the close relationship between memory, motherhood, and female identity, the article highlights Emecheta's powerful critique of patriarchal norms and her vision of womanhood that transcends conventional maternal roles. Moreover, it ultimately argues that *The Joys of Motherhood* is a postcolonial feminist novel, presenting a fascinating challenge to traditional beliefs about women's roles and underscoring the ongoing struggle for identity, dignity, and self-realisation in African society.

Keywords: Buchi Emecheta; postcolonial; Memory; Motherhood; Female Identity; African Feminism

Introduction

African women's literature has played a crucial role in challenging patriarchal culture and re-examining the portrayal of women in literary treatises. Buchi Emecheta is one of the most prominent African women writers. She is widely honored for her realistic portrayal of women's lives and struggles within their traditional and colonial societies. Her works delve into issues such as gender discrimination, motherhood, marriage, education, identity, and economic survival, representing how social systems often set prescribed roles for women. Through her fiction, Emecheta investigates the cultural views that were imposed upon women while simultaneously acknowledging their resilience and capacity for survival.

The Joys of Motherhood is one of Emecheta's most celebrated novels and a remarkable text in African feminist literature. The novel is set in colonial Nigeria; it narrates the life of Nnu Ego, whose greatest ambition is to become a successful mother. According to Igbo society, motherhood is regarded as the highest honour for a woman because it secures social respect, family continuity, and cultural recognition. However, as the narrative unfolds, Emecheta exposes the irony behind this ideal by portraying motherhood as a source of relentless sacrifice, emotional suffering, and economic hardship rather than personal fulfilment. "When a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive. You shall soon see her children coming here to play" (Emecheta 30). This shows that the Igbo believe women's moral character is connected to her fertility.

The novel also indicates the role of memory in shaping individual consciousness and cultural identity. Memory functions not only as a reminiscence of past experiences but also as a means through which traditions, beliefs, and gender expectations are passed across generations. Throughout the novel, Nnu Ego often recalls her childhood in Ibuza, her father's authority, and the customs. These memories deeply influence her understanding of marriage, motherhood, and her responsibilities as a woman. At the same time, the difference between her memories of village life and the realities of colonial Lagos indicates how social transformation creates tensions between tradition and modernity.

Another central concern of the novel is the construction of female identity. Nnu Ego's identity is continually shaped by the expectations of her family and society, which value women primarily for their reproductive and domestic roles. Her dreams, emotions, and personal desires are repeatedly suppressed for the demands of motherhood and family responsibility. Emecheta thus challenges a male-dominated society that defines women through their service to others while others are not ready to give them individual recognition. Nevertheless, the novel does not portray Nnu Ego purely as a victim; instead, it shows her as a woman whose tenacity and resilience depict both the strength and helplessness of African women living under intersecting cultural, economic, and colonial pressures. "Well, I can go back to trading when we get the money. I have only one child at the moment, so it will not be too bad. After the birth of this baby, I can carry on again (Emecheta 172).

The themes of memory, motherhood, and female identity are closely interwoven in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Memory retains cultural values that shape women's understanding of motherhood, while motherhood becomes the foundational institution through which patriarchal society creates female identity. As Nnu Ego manages the demands of family, tradition, and colonial modernity, she gradually realizes that the social respect related to motherhood often comes at the cost of personal liberty and selfhood. The novel therefore challenges whether motherhood alone can define a woman's identity or guarantee her happiness.

This article examines the relationship between memory, motherhood, and female identity in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. It argues that memory serves as a cultural force that maintains traditional expectations of womanhood, while motherhood becomes both a source of social prestige and a mechanism of patriarchal oppression. Additionally, the study illustrates that Emecheta presents

female identity as dynamic and multi-talented rather than rigid. By analyzing these interrelated themes, the article seeks to highlight Emecheta's contributions to African feminist criticism and her enduring influence on contemporary discussions of gender, identity, and women's lived experiences.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* has fascinated many scholars for its exploration of motherhood, gender inequality, colonialism, and African women's experiences. Many critics have evaluated the novel from various theoretical perspectives, including African feminism, postcolonial feminism, Marxist feminism, and cultural studies. While these studies have significantly facilitated the understanding of Emecheta's feminist vision, relatively, only a few scholars have examined the interconnected relationship between memory, motherhood, and female identity. This article addresses that gap by analysing how memory functions as a cultural force that shapes maternal identity and women's selfhood. One of the earliest critical frameworks for Emecheta's work that focuses on her critique of patriarchal norms in traditional African society. One of the great critics, Florence Stratton argues that Emecheta challenges literary traditions that portray male authority while marginalising women's experiences. According to Stratton, Emecheta restructures African literature by placing women at the core of the narrative and exposing the unequal distribution of power within the family and society. This standpoint is particularly connected to *The Joys of Motherhood*, where Nnu Ego's life highlights the burden enforced upon women by patriarchal customs.

Another significant writer, Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the "Other" also gives an important theoretical framework for understanding female identity in the novel. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir stated that society defines women in relation to men rather than as independent persons. This idea is deeply reflected in Emecheta's portrayal of women whose social status depends on marriage, fertility, and motherhood. Nnu Ego's value is evaluated by her ability to fulfil culturally prescribed roles rather than by her individuality.

Scholars have also examined the influence of colonialism on the changing structure of African families. The migration from Ibuza to Lagos exposes Nnu Ego to new economic realities that alter traditional family relationships. Colonial urban life increases financial pressure while weakening communal support systems that once sustained mothers. Consequently, motherhood becomes increasingly demanding as women are expected to maintain traditional responsibilities within a rapidly changing society. Emecheta demonstrates that colonial modernity does not liberate women; instead, it often intensifies their domestic and economic burdens.

This present study extends existing scholarship by exploring memory alongside motherhood and female identity as interrelated themes rather than separate concepts. It asserts that memory operates as a wellspring of cultural ideology and that motherhood represents the central institution where patriarchal values are performed, and female identity is shaped through an ongoing negotiation between individual desires and collective expectations. Together these three themes work to deepen our understanding of Emecheta's feminist critique and to highlight the

continued importance of *The Joys of Motherhood* in current discussions of gender, culture, and identity.

Memory places a central position in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, and it acts as more than a recollection of past anecdotes. It serves as a repository of cultural values, social expectations, and inherited beliefs that shape the lives of individuals, especially women. Through the character Nnu Ego's memories of her childhood, family, and community in Ibuza, Emecheta shows how the past continues to reflect in the present. These memories preserve the traditions of Igbo society and determine how women do their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. Consequently, memory becomes an essential part in the construction of cultural identity, reinforcing both individual belonging and collective expectations.

From the beginning of the novel, Nnu Ego's life is deeply connected to the traditions of her ancestral community. Her memories of growing up in Ibuza reflect a society where customs and family honour occupy a central place in everyday life. She learns that a woman's dignity is closely associated with marriage and motherhood, while the continuation of the family lineage is considered a sacred responsibility. These cultural teachings become deeply rooted in her consciousness and continue to guide her decisions even after she leaves her village.

However, the movement from rural Ibuza to colonial Lagos creates a profound tension between memory and reality. Lagos represents a rapidly changing urban environment influenced by colonial administration, wage labour, and modern economic pressures. Although Nnu Ego physically adapts to this new setting, her emotional attachment remains rooted in the memories of her village. She continues to judge her experiences according to the traditional ideals she learned in Ibuza, creating a constant conflict between cultural expectations and everyday realities. The contrast between remembered traditions and present circumstances highlights the challenges faced by African women during the colonial period.

Emecheta further shows that memory can be both empowering and restrictive. On the one hand, memories provide Nnu Ego with emotional strength and a sense of belonging. They remind her of her family, her ancestors, and the cultural values that give meaning to her sacrifices. These recollections help her endure poverty, loneliness, and disappointment because she believes that fulfilling her maternal duties will ultimately bring honour to her family. On the other hand, the same memories reinforce patriarchal expectations that prevent her from questioning the unequal distribution of responsibilities between men and women. Her unwavering commitment to traditional ideals often compels her to accept suffering as an inevitable part of womanhood.

The relationship between memory and cultural identity is also evident in Nnu Ego's interactions with her children. She attempts to transmit the same cultural values that she inherited from her parents by teaching them respect for family, obedience, and responsibility. In doing so, she becomes both a guardian of tradition and an agent of cultural continuity. Nevertheless, her children grow up in a colonial society that increasingly embraces Western education and modern aspirations. As a result, they do not always share their mother's understanding of

family obligations. This generational difference reveals that cultural identity is not static but evolves in response to changing social and historical conditions.

Furthermore, memory exposes the emotional cost of preserving cultural traditions. Nnu Ego repeatedly reflects on the sacrifices demanded by motherhood because she believes that these sacrifices are necessary to uphold her family's honour. Yet, as the novel progresses, she gradually recognises that the ideals she has cherished do not guarantee happiness or security. Her memories become a source of painful reflection, forcing her to confront the disparity between cultural promises and lived reality. Emecheta thereby questions whether inherited traditions always serve the interests of women or whether they perpetuate systems of inequality under the guise of cultural continuity.

From a feminist perspective, memory in the novel represents both continuity and resistance. While it preserves patriarchal values, it also allows readers to recognize how these values have been historically constructed and transmitted. Emecheta does not reject African culture; rather, she encourages a critical engagement with cultural practices that limit women's autonomy. By portraying memory as a dynamic force that influences identity and social behaviour, the novel invites readers to distinguish between cultural heritage that empowers communities and traditions that restrict women's personal growth.

Thus, memory in *The Joys of Motherhood* functions as a powerful narrative and cultural device through which Emecheta examines the formation of female identity. Nnu Ego's recollections of Ibuza, her ancestors, and traditional customs continually shape her understanding of motherhood and womanhood, even as colonial modernity transforms the society around her. The novel ultimately demonstrates that memory is not merely an individual experience but a collective inheritance that influences identity, reinforces cultural norms, and reveals the complex relationship between tradition, gender, and social change.

Motherhood is the central theme of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. In Igbo society, motherhood is regarded as a sacred thing that guarantees a woman's social status, respect, and acceptance within the community. Women are taught from childhood that their greatest achievement lies in bearing children and ensuring the continuity of the family lineage. Through the life of Nnu Ego, however, Emecheta exposes the irony behind this cultural ideal by revealing that motherhood often demands endless sacrifice while offering little personal recognition or emotional security. The novel thus presents motherhood as a patriarchal institution that privileges family and society over the individuality of women.

At the beginning of the novel, Nnu Ego believes that becoming a mother will provide meaning and purpose to her life. Her inability to conceive in her first marriage results in humiliation and rejection, demonstrating how a woman's worth is measured primarily through her reproductive capacity. Infertility is viewed not as a medical condition but as a personal failure that diminishes a woman's social identity. Emecheta illustrates the psychological trauma caused by such expectations: "Many a night she cried tears of frustration and hopelessness" (Emecheta 32), revealing how patriarchal values compel women to internalize society's judgment.

The birth of Nnu Ego's first child initially appears to fulfil her long-awaited dream of motherhood. She experiences immense happiness because motherhood restores her social dignity and confirms her identity as a successful woman. However, this happiness is short-lived as she soon realises that motherhood involves continuous physical labour, emotional suffering, and financial responsibility. The demands of raising children increase with each birth, while the available resources become increasingly limited. Instead of receiving support and appreciation, Nnu Ego is expected to endure hardship silently because sacrifice is considered an essential characteristic of a good mother.

Emecheta further demonstrates that patriarchal society glorifies motherhood without recognising the labour that sustains it. Nnu Ego shoulders the primary responsibility for feeding, clothing, nurturing, and educating her children, often working tirelessly to supplement the family's income. Her husband, Nnaife, although responsible for the household in theory, is unable to provide consistent financial security due to colonial economic conditions. Consequently, the burden of maintaining the family falls disproportionately on Nnu Ego. The novel therefore reveals that motherhood extends beyond biological reproduction; it encompasses unpaid domestic work, emotional care, and economic survival, all of which remain largely invisible and undervalued.

The influence of colonialism further intensifies the challenges of motherhood. Traditional Igbo society functioned through extended family networks in which childcare and domestic responsibilities were shared among relatives. In colonial Lagos, however, urban migration weakens these communal support systems. Nnu Ego must raise her children in an environment characterized by poverty, overcrowding, and social isolation. The absence of collective support transforms motherhood into an exhausting individual responsibility. Emecheta suggests that colonial modernity not only alters economic structures but also increases the domestic burden placed upon women.

The novel also exposes the unequal expectations placed upon men and women within the family. While fathers are respected as heads of the household, mothers are expected to perform continuous acts of care without expecting recognition or reward. Nnaife's authority remains largely unquestioned despite his inability to fulfil many of the family's economic needs, whereas Nnu Ego's success is judged entirely by the welfare of her children. This unequal distribution of responsibility reflects the patriarchal ideology that assigns authority to men while assigning sacrifice to women. Emecheta critiques this imbalance by illustrating the emotional exhaustion experienced by Nnu Ego, whose identity becomes inseparable from the needs of others.

Perhaps the greatest irony of motherhood emerges in the novel's concluding episodes. Throughout her life, Nnu Ego believes that her sacrifices will eventually be rewarded through the love, gratitude, and support of her children. Instead, many of them pursue their own ambitions and establish lives away from their mother. Although they acknowledge her sacrifices, they are unable to provide the emotional companionship she longs for in old age. Emecheta does not portray the children as ungrateful; rather, she demonstrates how social and economic changes reshape family relationships, making traditional expectations increasingly

difficult to fulfill. The ending, therefore, questions the cultural belief that motherhood inevitably guarantees security and fulfilment in later life.

Despite its critique of patriarchal motherhood, the novel does not diminish the emotional significance of maternal love. Emecheta portrays Nnu Ego as a compassionate and resilient woman who remains deeply devoted to her children even under the most difficult circumstances. Her endurance reflects remarkable strength, yet the novel insists that such strength should not be romanticised as a justification for women's suffering. Instead, Emecheta calls for a re-evaluation of social values that celebrate maternal sacrifice while ignoring women's individuality, aspirations, and emotional well-being.

Ultimately, *The Joys of Motherhood* presents motherhood as a complex and deeply paradoxical institution. It provides women with social recognition and emotional purpose, yet simultaneously confines them within restrictive gender roles that demand endless sacrifice. Through Nnu Ego's experiences, Emecheta exposes the contradictions of patriarchal society, demonstrating that the so-called "joys" of motherhood often conceal the invisible labour, emotional pain, and personal losses endured by women. The novel therefore transforms motherhood from an unquestioned cultural ideal into a powerful site of feminist critique, encouraging readers to reconsider the relationship between gender, family, and social expectations.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta presents female identity as a complex and evolving construct shaped by cultural traditions, patriarchal expectations, and colonial realities. Rather than portraying identity as an inherent or fixed quality, the novel illustrates how women's identities are continually negotiated through their relationships with family, community, and society. Nnu Ego's life exemplifies this struggle, as her identity is repeatedly defined by her roles as daughter, wife, and mother, leaving little space for personal aspirations or self-expression. Through her experiences, Emecheta critiques a patriarchal society that values women primarily for their service to others while simultaneously highlighting their remarkable resilience in the face of adversity.

From childhood, Nnu Ego is taught that a woman's honour depends upon her ability to fulfil socially prescribed gender roles. Her upbringing in Ibuza instils the belief that marriage and motherhood are the ultimate goals of female existence. Consequently, she internalises these cultural expectations and measures her own worth according to them. When she fails to conceive in her first marriage, she experiences not only personal disappointment but also a profound identity crisis, believing that she has failed as a woman. This episode demonstrates how patriarchal ideology shapes women's self-perception by linking their identity exclusively to reproduction.

Marriage does not provide Nnu Ego with the emotional security or personal fulfilment she anticipates. Instead, it introduces new responsibilities and reinforces her subordinate position within the family. As the wife of Nnaife, she is expected to manage domestic duties, care for her children, and support the household without questioning the unequal distribution of labour. Although she works tirelessly to ensure her family's survival, her contributions receive little recognition. Emecheta thereby exposes the invisibility of women's labour and

demonstrates how patriarchal societies often equate female virtue with self-sacrifice rather than personal achievement.

Despite these limitations, Nnu Ego cannot be regarded merely as a passive victim of oppression. One of Emecheta's greatest achievements is her portrayal of women as resilient individuals who persist despite overwhelming hardships. Throughout the novel, Nnu Ego repeatedly confronts poverty, bereavement, loneliness, and social disappointment, yet she continues to care for her family with determination and dignity. Her resilience lies not in unquestioning obedience but in her ability to endure suffering while preserving her commitment to those she loves.

Emecheta also suggests that resilience should not be mistaken for liberation. Nnu Ego's strength enables her to survive, but it does not free her from the structural inequalities that govern her life. Her sacrifices are celebrated by society only when they benefit others, while her own emotional needs remain largely ignored. This paradox reflects the broader condition of many women whose endurance is admired but whose individuality is seldom acknowledged. The novel therefore challenges readers to distinguish between women's capacity to survive and their genuine empowerment.

The colonial setting further complicates the formation of female identity. Urban life in Lagos exposes Nnu Ego to economic pressures that require her to participate in income-generating activities while continuing to fulfil traditional domestic responsibilities. Instead of reducing gender inequality, colonial modernity often intensifies women's burdens by demanding both economic productivity and domestic service. Emecheta demonstrates that women's identities are shaped not only by patriarchal customs but also by historical and economic transformations that redefine family life and gender relations.

From a feminist perspective, Nnu Ego's journey reveals the limitations of defining womanhood solely through motherhood. Although she derives emotional satisfaction from caring for her children, she gradually realises that her identity cannot be sustained by maternal devotion alone. Her personal dreams, desires, and individuality are repeatedly overshadowed by the expectations imposed upon her by society. This recognition forms one of the novel's most powerful critiques of patriarchal ideology, which values women for what they provide rather than for who they are.

Furthermore, Emecheta portrays female identity as a site of negotiation rather than absolute submission. While Nnu Ego remains committed to her family, the narrative itself questions the cultural assumptions that shape her choices. Readers are encouraged to recognise the discrepancy between society's idealisation of motherhood and the lived experiences of women. Through this narrative strategy, Emecheta gives voice to women whose contributions have often been overlooked in both history and literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Joys of Motherhood* presents female identity as a dynamic process shaped by memory, motherhood, cultural expectations, and historical change. Through Nnu Ego's resilience, Emecheta celebrates women's strength while simultaneously exposing the social structures that limit their autonomy. The novel ultimately argues that true recognition of women requires acknowledging

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not only their roles as mothers and caregivers but also their individuality, aspirations, and humanity. By foregrounding these issues, Emecheta makes a significant contribution to African feminist literature and encourages readers to reconsider conventional definitions of womanhood and identity.

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DABEER SI/KTT/60**WOMEN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S SHORT STORY 'THE HUNT': AN ECOFEMINIST READING****PALAVI CHANDER**Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts, University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

Ecofeminism explores the women-nature relationship through the intersection of gender, environment oppression and lived experiences. Rooted in feminist philosophy, it examines women's connection to nature in contrast to patriarchal structures that have historically sought to dominate both women and nature. Thereby redefining women's ecological identity, struggles and acts of resistance. This paper focuses on an ecofeminist reading of Mahasweta Devi's short story, "The Hunt". It aims to explore how the relationship between women and nature and the ecological identity of the protagonist, Mary Oraon, are framed in a postcolonial context. For this purpose, the paper employs two lenses: essentialist and constructionist. Although both approaches within ecofeminism are usually contrasted, this paper argues that employing them as complementary lenses provides a nuanced reading of Mary's ecological identity. Together, these perspectives reveal the ambivalence of Mary's relationship with nature as highlighted by the Jani Parab (hunting) ritual and her resultant 'hybrid' ecological identity, which challenges dominant binaries such as nature/culture, prey/predator, dominant/marginalised.

Keywords: women-nature relations, postcolonial literature, ecological identity, gender an

Mahasweta Devi is one of India's foremost postcolonial writers, renowned for foregrounding the lives, struggles, and resistance of Adivasi communities against systems of social, political, and environmental exploitation. Her short story *The Hunt*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Imaginary Maps*, portrays the complex intersections of gender, ecology, indigeneity, and power through the experiences of Mary Oraon, a tribal woman whose relationship with the forest is shaped by both material realities and Indigenous cultural traditions. Set against the backdrop of colonial and postcolonial exploitation, the story foregrounds the forest not merely as a physical landscape but as a contested space where ecological identity, gender, and resistance are continuously negotiated.

The complexity of Mary's relationship with nature resists a singular ecofeminist interpretation. While her intimate engagement with the forest emerges from lived experiences, gendered labour, and Indigenous ecological knowledge, it is also articulated through ritual, symbolism, and cultural notions of feminine power. Recognising this complexity, the present paper strategically employs complementary constructionist and essentialist ecofeminist perspectives rather than treating them as mutually exclusive frameworks. Such an approach enables a

more nuanced reading of Mary's ecological identity and the multiple ways in which it is shaped, expressed, and transformed.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine how *The Hunt* reimagines the woman–nature relationship through the character of Mary Oraon. It argues that reading the story through complementary ecofeminist lenses reveals Mary's ecological identity as fluid, hybrid, and ambivalent, thereby challenging rigid binaries that have traditionally structured understandings of women, nature, and power.

Ecofeminism and Women-Nature Relationship

Ecofeminism stems from feminist philosophy that emphasises women's relationship to nature as opposed to the patriarchal urge to dominate and exploit nature (Joseph 327). Simultaneously, it functions as both a theoretical framework and a socio-political movement that highlights the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and environmental degradation, while also recognising the role of broader structures of domination, including colonialism, racism, and class, in shaping this relationship (Joseph 326). Françoise d'Eaubonne captures this in her 1974 work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, where she introduces the term ecofeminism to emphasise the intertwined oppressions of women and nature, arguing that their path to liberation is inseparable (Tong 260; Joseph 326).

Recognising this connection, Karen J. Warren explains that it emerges from an 'oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework', a framework characterised by value-hierarchical thinking, value dualisms and 'logic of domination' which together validate, normalise and perpetuate hierarchical relationships of subordination and domination (Tong 255; Warren 24).

Ecofeminists are largely critical of such patriarchal modes of thinking and conceptualisation. Val Plumwood sheds further light on this by arguing that Western thought is structured across hierarchical dualisms such as male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and civilised/primitive (nature), which sustain rigid binaries between dominant and subordinate categories (Plumwood 43). These dualisms create a hierarchical relationship in which the former term is privileged and associated with qualities traditionally ascribed to men (such as reason, mind, self, culture) while the latter is associated with devalued qualities excluded from masculine ideals and attributed to women (such as emotion, body, otherness, nature), thereby positioning them as inferior (Plumwood 43-44).

This hierarchical ordering shapes the relationship between women and nature, as highlighted by the fact that "women have been naturalised, and nature has been feminised", making it hard to distinguish where the oppression of women begins, and the oppression of nature starts (Tong 255-56). This interconnectedness becomes apparent when women are 'naturalised' through their association with animals and the non-human world, and simultaneously nature is 'feminised' when 'she' is mastered, conquered, or sexualised as the 'virgin forest' (Joseph 328; Tong 256).

Consequently, nature becomes regarded as the 'other'; objectified and subordinated as distinct from the dominant, and similarly, women, culturally linked to nature, are positioned as the 'other' when they are objectified and oppressed within patriarchal societies (King 2019).

While ecofeminists in general acknowledge the interconnection between women and nature due to their shared history of oppression, they nevertheless disagree on the basis and nature of this relationship and whether it can provide viable grounds for liberation or for reinforcing harmful generalisations (Warren 21).

This tension highlights a central divide between essentialist and constructionist strands of ecofeminism which hold differing perspectives on the women-nature relationship, centring on whether this connection is inherent or constructed (socially or culturally).

Despite this debate, essentialism and constructionism need not be understood as completely opposing frameworks. The concept of strategic essentialism offers a productive way to acknowledge the political value of collective identities without accepting them as fixed or universal categories. It enables attention to shared experiences of marginalisation while recognising the differences shaped by social, cultural, historical, and material conditions.

This paper draws on both perspectives as complementary lenses to examine Mary's ecological identity in Mahasweta Devi's *The Hunt*. While an essentialist reading helps explore the symbolic and experiential aspects of her relationship with nature, a constructionist approach reveals how this relationship is influenced by the postcolonial tribal context, social structures, and historical realities. The following section examines how these intersecting forces shape the representation of women and nature in the text.

Reading the Woman–Nature Relationship: A Constructionist and Essentialist Analysis of *The Hunt*

The objective of this paper is not to determine whether Mahasweta Devi depicts the women-nature relationship in *The Hunt* as essentialist or constructionist. Instead, it employs both approaches as complementary interpretive lenses that illuminate various aspects of the story. Together, they illustrate how Mary's fluid ecological identity is shaped by her socio-historical positioning and material reality while simultaneously being expressed through symbolism and ritualistic practices such as the Jani Parab, which portrays a cultural representation of the women-nature relationship.

Constructionist Reading

This section showcases how Mary's relationship with nature is not solely innate; rather, it is constructed through social, political, material and postcolonial realities that intersect owing to her hybrid origin, marginality, gendered lived experiences, and postcolonial structures of power that mould her relationship with the environment

Central to constructionist reading is Mary Oraon's complex hybrid identity. Born as an illegitimate child of mixed heritage to Bhikni (an Oraon tribal woman) and an Australian master's son, she is placed at the periphery of the Oraon tribal community. Her background establishes her insider-outsider status; she's conscious of her being 'different' while being socially and economically assimilated within the community (Rekha 152-53). For instance, she is aware that the Oraons won't let her marry a Muslim boy if she had truly belonged to this community, giving her the spatial autonomy to decide for herself independently (Rekha 152). Hence, her dual status as an Oraon woman with white heritage and

as an insider/outsider is grounded in her colonial legacy and postcolonial marginalisation within her community. This enables her to avoid being characterised by a fixed or inherent identity; rather, it lays the foundation for understanding her fluid or hybrid ecological identity, which is shaped by lived experience.

Mary's relationship with nature is also constructed through her everyday material engagement with her environment and her ecological knowledge of the Kuruda landscape, thereby moving beyond historical and socially constructed identity to a material or economic one. She works for Prasadji as a cowherd, gathering and selling fruit at the Tohri market where she confidently negotiates prices. It is through lived experiences and labour that she acquires ecological knowledge. As Bina Agarwal argues, women's relationship with nature is "rooted in their material reality and specific forms of interaction with the environment", while experiential knowledge about nature itself is shaped by "divisions of labour, property and power" (126). Hence, Mary's relationship with nature is built on her everyday lived experiences for livelihood and sustenance, resulting in economic independence and ecological knowledge.

However, the same ecological landscape that sustains Mary's relationship with nature also becomes a site where postcolonial patriarchal structures objectify and control both the forest and the female body. For instance, Tehsildar Singh's response to Mary's appearance, "Wow! What a dish! In these woods?" (Devi 9) and likewise his description of the Kuruda forest as a "virgin area" (Devi 7), reveal how the patriarchal gaze objectifies and homogenises the two (Panthoi and Khuraijam 2). Through these parallel cultural representations, patriarchal ideology naturalises women and feminises nature, thereby associating them together and legitimising their twin domination. Thus, Devi exposes how the Tehsildar, as a representative of the mainstream systems of power, seeks to exploit and violate indigenous women and their ecological space (Spivak xviii). These instances demonstrate how the women-nature relationship is also culturally and politically constructed via shared structures of domination and oppression.

Essentialist Reading

Having examined instances from *The Hunt* that reflect a constructionist understanding of the women-nature relationship, I now turn to an essentialist reading that highlights how Devi employs symbolism, tribal culture and rituals to represent women's association with nature. This relationship does not reflect an innate connection; the narrative strategically employs essentialism to invoke feminine strength by presenting nature/forest as a site of resistance where Mary's identity breaks free of patriarchal dichotomies.

The ecological landscape becomes a sacred symbol, signalling a shift from material to indigenous cosmology and collective tribal identity. This echoes Vandana Shiva's conception of 'Aranyani', the forest representing the feminine principle of life, fertility and community (53-54). Despite portraying the forest as sacred space, Devi, unlike Western writers, does not fetishise or romanticise nature; for instance, the Oraons don't consider the forest as pristine site to be admired; rather, they coexist with it as a part of their lived reality and as a source of 'physical and spiritual sustenance' that link them to their ancestors (Bala and

Roy 2-3). Hence, the forest is an integral part of the tribal communities' material and cultural identity, and its gradual disappearance due to colonial and postcolonial exploitation for timber and natural resources parallels the erosion of their indigenous ecological identity. This is exemplified as: "Once there were animals in the forest, life was wild, the hunt game had meaning. Now the forest is empty, life wasted and drained, the hunt game meaningless" (Devi 12).

Within this historical context of cultural and environmental erosion, the Jani Parab ritual, although it has lost its meaning due to forest depletion, emerges as a symbol of righting wrongs committed against nature and the tribal women such as Mary, by reaffirming their relationship with nature and transforming it as a site of ecological and feminine resistance ().

The Jani Parab festival is celebrated once every twelve years: "For twelve years, men run the hunt. Then comes the women's turn. It's Jani Parab", wherein Oraon women assume the role of hunters to "do exactly what men do" (Devi 12). This showcases women temporarily shedding their traditional gendered roles and becoming active agents occupying roles generally reserved for men. Hence, the ritual symbolically helps tribal women reclaim their agency through their relationship with the forest.

Mary changed the trajectory of her relationship with the Tehsildar during this ritual. Earlier, she was the target of his sexual desires and objectification, wherein she repeatedly tried to escape him. However, the narrative takes a turn when Mary becomes the hunter and Tehsildar the prey, thereby overturning the patriarchal predator-prey dynamic that previously governed their relationship (Bala and Roy 6). Consequently, in the act of her perceiving Tehsildar "become an animal" (Devi 16), she symbolically transforms him into a beast ready to be hunted.

Rekha uncovers how Mary "strategically appropriates the ancient tribal ritual, Jani, into an act of contemporary resistance to outwit and kill her potential rapist" by tapping into the "latent feminine energy/ shakti" (153). Through this appropriation, the ritual is not merely performing its cultural function, nor is it for personal revenge; it "transforms into a subaltern tool of political resistance" against patriarchal and postcolonial exploitative power structures (Rekha 153). Moreover, by invoking nature as feminine 'shakti', Mary resonates with Vandana Shiva's conception of nature as Prakriti, which represents the feminine principle that is the source of life and symbol of revival to restore ecological balance while countering the patriarchal logic of domination underlying 'maldevelopment' (Shiva 37; Kaur 385).

Subsequently, Mary's act of bathing in the stream after the hunt illustrates a ritual of purification that cleanses her of the violence associated with the act and restores personal and ecological balance. This is exemplified in the story: when Mary's "fear of wild quadrupeds is gone" as she kills the "biggest beast", Tehsildar and her return to the women's gathering, where she celebrates "as if she had made the biggest kill" (Devi 17). Hence, the ritual concludes her symbolic transformation, where she emerges victorious and empowered as an agent of resistance.

Conclusion

Analysing Mahasweta Devi's "The Hunt" through complementary constructionist and essentialist lenses illustrates that neither, when employed in isolation as

contrasting lenses, would capture the complexity of Mary's relationship with nature, which shapes her 'hybrid' ecological identity.

On the one hand, the constructionist reading reveals that Mary's ecological identity is conditioned by colonial history, postcolonial marginalisation, and gendered experiences of subsistence that shape her material engagement with the ecological landscape and her ecological knowledge of it. On the other hand, an essentialist framework, when employed strategically, highlights how Indigenous rituals and symbolic application of feminine shakti enable Mary to reclaim agency and restore balance. Thereby reimagining the women-nature relationship as a powerful site of ecological and political resistance, instead of one built on innate or biological connection.

Thus, when read together, they reveal Mary as a 'hybrid ecological subject' whose identity is fluid, grounded in socio-economic realities and conditioned by historical and cultural dynamics.

Further, an ecofeminist understanding of the story showcases how Devi, instead of conforming to patriarchal hierarchical dualisms that align women to one side of the binary, such as female, nature, inferior and men to the other side; male, culture, superior, disrupts these binaries by characterising Mary as transgressing the dichotomy. As Kaur clarifies, "Disrupting the dualism posits the women in an ambivalent relationship with nature, while straddling the grey area between the two binaries" (389).

As highlighted in the analysis, Mary occupies multiple contrary positions simultaneously; she's Oraon and White, insider and outsider, prey and predator. Further, the Jani Parab ritual becomes a site of ambivalence as well; the ritual itself is sacred yet violent; moreover, here Mary is both the victim and the restorer of balance and contrarily she's oppressed yet an agent of violence. The narrative further uncovers this in the 'act of the hunt' which could be equated with murder from a legal perspective; even so, Devi ingeniously frames it as 'shikar' (hunt) to represent the symbolic act of transforming a cultural ritual into a site of political resistance, justice and restoration or liberation without resolving its moral obscurity while simultaneously challenging the dichotomies, hence occupying a grey area.

The human/nature or human/animal hierarchy collapses when the Tehsildar transforms into the "biggest beast", showcasing that even such binaries are not as rigid as categorised by patriarchal power structures that rely on them to legitimise domination.

Similarly, Mary's transformation into a huntress symbolically subverts the label of 'otherness' imposed upon her, repositioning her as the subject and dismantling the nature/culture binary (Bala and Roy 2-6). As Bala and Roy argue, "By hunting, she moves from being the 'other' and becomes the hybrid subject. She becomes oppressor and oppressed, hunter and prey, nature and culture at the same time" (2). This portrays Mary as a 'hybrid subject' who simultaneously embodies multiple contrary positions.

Through this background of ambivalence, Devi challenges the very dualism that perpetuates and sustains the oppression of women and domination of nature and also resists a singular interpretation of Mary's ecological identity. As a result, the

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narrative reimagines the women-nature relationship as neither an innate feminine connection nor solely conditioned by certain external factors. Thus, it frames it as a dynamic relationship wherein ecological identity remains fluid, as depicted in “The Hunt”.

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DABEER SI/KTT/61**OPPRESSION OF FEMININITY AND NATURE IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*: AN ECOFEMINIST APPROACH****R. PRAVIN KUMAR**Assistant Professor, Department of English
Kamaraj College of Engineering & Technology, Madurai, India**A. K. MUTHUSAMY**Associate Professor (Rtd.), Research Centre in English
V.H.N.S.N College, Virudhunagar, India**Abstract**

This research paper aims to provide a thorough analysis of ecofeminist perspective in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. Ecofeminism, a critical framework that brings together the concerns of feminism and environmentalism, explores the parallel forms of domination exercised over both women and the natural world. Through an analysis of the novel, the study highlights how patriarchal structures exploit, marginalize, and control femininity and nature like. Atwood's narrative reveals the deep connections between women and the environment, emphasizing shared qualities such as nurturing, regeneration, resilience, and self-healing. By portraying the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery and reconnection with nature, *Surfacing* critiques male-dominated systems of power and advocates for a more balanced, reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment. The paper argues that Atwood's novel serves as a powerful ecofeminist text that exposes the consequences of patriarchal oppression and underscores the need for ecological and gender justice.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Nature, Women, Environmental, Patriarchal, Male domination, Ecology

Ecofeminism is a subset of feminism as it combines two popular principles of environmentalism and feminism. In general, it is defined as a movement, dealing with social, philosophical and political aspects, not merely raises voice for the women, but also highlights the different ways of exploitation of women and environment in the male-dominated society and struggles to bring justice for both of them. David Kronlid explains ecofeminism as a philosophy that brings together environmental ethics and feminist ethics. Environmental ethics focuses on protecting nature and the well-being of nonhuman life, while feminist ethics challenges gender inequality and the unfair treatment of women. Ecofeminism combines these two ideas, making it a unique approach to understanding environmental issues. According to Kronlid, linking feminism with environmental concerns encourages a deeper examination of important questions in environmental ethics. This approach helps us understand that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are closely connected in both history and society (Kronlid 14).

Karen Warren defines ecofeminism as the recognition that the domination of women and the domination of nature are deeply connected. She argues these links

are historical, personal, symbolic, and theoretical. Understanding this connection, she insists, is essential for both feminism and environmental ethics to effectively challenge systems of oppression (Warren 235). In the year 1974, the French author Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term, 'Ecofeminism' within the framework of her literary work entitled, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. The year 1900s was significant for the rapid spread of this concept and its association with all activities involved with feminism and environmentalism.

Greta Gaard sees ecofeminism as a way of understanding that different forms of oppression are all connected. She builds on the idea that racism, classism, and sexism overlap with each other. But she goes further by showing that these human oppressions also connect to how we mistreat animals and nature. For Gaard, these systems are not separate; they feed off one another. Recognizing these links, she believes, is essential for real change (Gaard 21).

Humans' steps towards westernization, industrialisation and globalisation annihilate nature whereas male domination, cultural imperialism, cultural development persecute the freedom of women. So, women and nature are eventually exploited for the benefits and sophistication of men. Ecofeminists strongly react against the exploitation of nature and suppression of women in the patriarchal society. Rosemarie Tong explains what ecofeminists set out to do. She says that like other feminists, they care about how humans oppress one another. But ecofeminists go a step further. They also focus on how humans dominate nature. Because women have been culturally linked to nature, ecofeminists believe there are deep connections between feminist concerns and ecological issues. These links are not just practical but also show up in our language, symbols, and ways of thinking. For Tong, this broader vision makes ecofeminism distinct (Tong 237). Canada was inhabited with various people from all over the world and it became a blend of cultures, economic backgrounds and political perspectives. Vijeta Gautam describes the condition of women as "Canadians suffer both economically and legally and the condition of women becomes worse than them. They became the victim of colonialism as well as of patriarchy as they are oppressed and crushed by capitalistic and male-dominated society" (34). Hence, the literary works produced by Canadian writers in the 1900s profoundly portrayed the theme of feminism and ecology.

Margaret Atwood is a well-known Canadian novelist and a staunch advocate of environmental issues. Her writings consistently reflect her concern for both the destruction of nature and the unequal treatment of women in patriarchal society. Tandon and Anushul believe that Atwood does not exaggerate women's struggles. Instead, she reflects their real position in a patriarchal society. Through her life like female characters, she holds up a mirror to society, showing the true challenges women face every day (Tandon and Anushul 17). With the publication of her second novel, *Surfacing*, in 1972, Atwood was recognised as a woman writer who primarily voices the experiences and concerns of women. Male domination is the major factor for the exploitation of women and nature. The patriarchal society makes women inferior and leads them to undergo a lot of physical and psychological trauma. Atwood vividly portrays how women and nature are exploited in her novel, *Surfacing*. Hence, the novel is said to be a

feminist treatise. The story is about the journey of an unnamed protagonist from a colonized mindset to retrieve her true self with the help of nature. The novelist illustrates how the protagonist reconnects with nature.

Vandana Shiva, an Indian ecofeminist, in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, explains the system of patriarchy as patriarchy as more than just male control over women. She argues that it is deeply connected to a modern Western economic system that exploits women, destroys nature, and weakens other cultures. For Shiva, this exploitation is not accidental; it is built into the very foundation of how wealth is created in patriarchal societies (Shiva 1).

The westernized patriarchal society imposes stringent constraints on the autonomy of women, which adversely affects them in social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. The tyranny of men over women is reinforced by a social structure called marriage. In *Surfacing*, Atwood vividly illustrates the painful experience of unsuccessful marriage through the characters: the unnamed protagonist and her friend, Anna. A selfish art-teacher married the protagonist who had purposefully hidden his other marital life and used her for his sexual desires that resulted in the pregnancy of the protagonist. Further, he also forced her to abort the child, without even getting her opinion. This made a deep wound inside her and also led her to become a mentally unstable woman. Just to escape from the brutal comments and curse of the society, the protagonist covers a story in which she has got divorced and her child is with her ex-husband. All these bitter experiences in a marital relationship make her abhor in love, marriage and as a result she decides not to give birth to a child again. The protagonist confesses that she is confused about her own marriage and feels that others around her are equally unable to comprehend it.

The reproductive system on earth is a privilege granted to both nature and women. Human life will be unbalanced as a result of patriarchy's unjust misuse of quality. The sore of abortion and failure in marriage have psychological impacts on women. Atwood powerfully captures this suffering through her protagonist, who describes her abortion experience as horrifying and dehumanizing. She recalls being strapped down, treated like an object, and subjected to cold, uncaring procedures. The medical system makes her feel powerless and violated: "they want you to believe it's their power, not yours..., you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame...they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar" (79).

Men established dualism and a hierarchy systems in the society, giving men the ability to dominate and victimise the non-male beings such as women, children, animal, the forest, etc., Atwood presents another woman victim, Anna, the best friend of the protagonist, who is being exploited by her husband, David, in various ways. Men use women for entertainment, excitement and sexual pleasure. They treat women as a commodity. Anna is frequently pressured to appear naked in her husband's film, *Random Samples*, and is even made to dance beside a dead bird. This demonstrates how men subjugate women and the natural world and utilize them for their own amusement. Anna fatalistically describes her marriage as a trap she cannot escape. Her husband has a set of constantly shifting rules, and she never

knows when she might break one and face punishment. She believes he is emotionally empty and finds satisfaction in making her cry because he cannot express his own feelings. This reveals the cruel power imbalance that defines their relationship.

Women frequently bear the heaviest burden of abuse in patriarchal societies. Many of them recognize the injustice of male domination, yet they often lack the courage to resist it. Atwood deliberately portrays the unnamed protagonist and her friend as passive and submissive, even though they are aware of their own oppression. Anna reflects on this helplessness when she compares her situation to death, suggesting that the worst part is not the suffering itself, but being forced to witness it without being able to speak out. She admits that she remains silent, even when she knows others might hear her.

Changing or losing its own nature for survival, due to external forces is another part of exploitation. The major female characters in the novel consciously change their physical appearance and also their natural attitude for men's expectations. These changes unconsciously align them as 'expected' women of the modern society. So, they lose their individuality and become emotionally imbalanced.

According to Nadir, slavery is defined by four key features. These include the denial of personal identity, degrading treatment that strips individuals of their humanity, the reduction of people to mere property, and the violation of basic human rights (144). Atwood deliberately crafts David as a character who constantly desires to see Anna in an appealing way. To satisfy his expectations, Anna always keeps her makeup kit close at hand. When the protagonist asks her about it, Anna gives confusing and contradictory replies. She first says David dislikes seeing her without makeup, but then claims he does not even realize she wears it. This contradiction makes the protagonist wonder about the effort Anna must put into maintaining this illusion. She questions whether Anna secretly wakes up early every morning to apply makeup and waits until David falls asleep at night to remove it. Perhaps David is knowingly telling kind untruths, or perhaps Anna has become so skilled at concealing her natural appearance that he genuinely fails to notice the difference.

Like women are oppressed and suppressed by men, there are many incidents in the novel that the novelist depicts on how nature is also being destroyed by men. Bhuvaneswari Vijayaraj points to a deeper cause behind both environmental destruction and gender inequality. She argues that it all comes down to an anthropocentric mindset, one that places man at the center of everything. This belief system gives men the sense that they have the right to control both women and nature. For Vijayaraj, this attitude is not just harmful to the environment but also to women, who are seen as entities to be dominated rather than respected. She suggests that this way of thinking is the real root of the climate crisis we face today (68). By the name of modernity, the traditional village with its ecological splendor is being gradually degraded with new roads and buildings. When the team of friends is close to the village, they are able to see a lot of mills and smell sawdust. Also, the beauty of the village is faded by the hands of human beings by destroying "Widened-rock blasted, trees bulldozed over, roots in the air, needles reddening –

past the flat cliff where the election slogans are painted and painted over, some faded and defaced, ... hearts and initials and words and advertisements” (11).

Atwood exhibits the perspective of men and women on other creatures through an incident that happened in a store. For the purpose of advertisement, three stuffed moose, dressed like humans, are on the platform. After seeing it, the protagonist feels bad about it, but David enjoys it and shouts, “Oh God look at that” (9).

Men often find pleasure in tormenting and killing other living beings for mere entertainment. In the novel, three American men chase loons on the river simply for fun. They get drunk and use their powerboats to follow the birds relentlessly. Every time a loon dives underwater, they pursue it, preventing it from escaping or flying away. This cruel game continues until the bird either drowns or gets caught in the boat's propeller blades. The men commit this senseless violence not out of necessity, but out of boredom after the war. Their actions reflect a disturbing disregard for life and a desire to exert power over helpless creatures.

In *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Vandana Shiva explores the deep connection between women and nature. She observes that nature is often seen as a symbol of the feminine principle. At the same time, it is women who care for nature and help it sustain life. For Shiva, this relationship is not just symbolic; it is practical and essential. Women nurture the environment, and in turn, nature provides for human survival. This bond, however, has been ignored and exploited by patriarchal systems that fail to recognize the value of both women and the natural world (37).

Atwood has presented nature as a more powerful character in the later part of the novel. When the protagonist feels guilty and suppressed due to the external world, nature instigates her inner emotions and makes her realize her real state of victimization. So, she slowly differentiates the way men handle women and nature. She starts to understand and associate with nature who gives freedom and helps her to overcome the state of suppression to self-discovery.

The submerged multi-layers of pain, subjugation, oppression, confusion, patriarchal domination, etc., of the protagonist come to an end, when she admits herself with nature. While sinking in the river in search of rock painting, she finds her real inner fear, “It was there but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me, drifting towards me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limb. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead.” (143). After she connects her with nature, she realizes that the darkness represents the womb of nature. Only nature and women have the potential in the world for reproduction. So, she forgives herself for the aborted child as it was caused by someone's selfishness and decides to get another baby.

The awareness of being subjugated and victimized has to come from within the self of an individual. Atwood has created a platform for the protagonist at the end of the novel to regain her feminist consciousness, through her association with nature, and raise with the courage to fight against patriarchal exploitation. The protagonist abandons dress, processed food, and connection with the outside world. She slowly becomes a normal woman who only depends on the ultimate source of nature.

Nature is usually considered as a forgiver. At the end of the novel, she feels that nature as a mother who adopts her, “Inshore a loon; it lowers its head, then lifts it again and calls. It sees me but it ignores me, accepts me as part of the land” (183). After indulging herself with nature, the protagonist feels that her guilty feelings are washed away. She also starts to plant more plants for the remaining days of her stay on the island. She too accepts the nature and express her thoughts; “The plants are flourishing, they grow almost visibly, sucking moisture up through the roots and succulent stems, their leaves sweating, flushed in the sunrays to a violent green, weeds and legitimate plants alike, there is no difference. Under the ground the worms twine, pink veins” (185 – 186).

Greta Gaard, a prominent ecofeminist scholar, argues that ecofeminism is fundamentally about ending all forms of oppression. She insists that any movement aimed at liberating women or other marginalized groups cannot achieve lasting success unless it simultaneously addresses the exploitation of nature. For Gaard, the liberation of women and the liberation of the environment are deeply intertwined and cannot be separated (1). Atwood powerfully echoes this ecofeminist perspective in her novel. She draws a striking parallel between the way society treats vulnerable women and the way it treats the natural world. The protagonist reflects on how women who are broken, exhausted, or struggling are often seen as outcasts, like animals confined to a zoo or patients locked away in a hospital. Society refuses to see them as natural beings. Instead, people prefer a sanitized and artificial image of nature, something polished and attractive, like a model posing on a beach. The raw, gritty reality of a woman's suffering, her dirt-caked face and tired body, is considered ugly and unacceptable. Atwood suggests that society would rather embrace a beautiful illusion than confront the uncomfortable truth of both women's struggles and nature's degradation.

Atwood sets up a pathway for the protagonist from search of her missing father to self-reformation. The protagonist stays alone in the island with the companionship of nature that provides her a space to pacify her inner trauma and to reach the state of self-discovery. In this entire novel, she detaches from others and does not even have any touch of human warmth. But at the end of the novel, nature accepts and adopts her as a child and reformats her to gain self, identity and emotion.

In conclusion, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* serves as a powerful ecofeminist text that exposes the deep connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature in patriarchal society. Through the protagonist's painful journey from trauma and subjugation to self-discovery and healing, Atwood illustrates that the liberation of women is inseparable from the restoration of the natural world. The novel critiques the anthropocentric mindset that reduces both women and nature to mere objects for male consumption and control. Atwood demonstrates that true freedom lies not in conforming to societal expectations, but in reconnecting with one's authentic self and with the earth. The protagonist's eventual acceptance by nature symbolizes the possibility of renewal and resistance against oppressive systems. Ultimately, *Surfacing* affirms that ecofeminism offers a vital framework for understanding and challenging the intertwined forces of patriarchy and environmental destruction, urging readers to envision a more just and harmonious world.

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DABEER SI/KTT/62**NARRATING RESISTANCE: BLACK FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES,
MEMORY, AND DECOLONIAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION****MUSKAAN KHANNA**Doctoral Researcher, Department of African Studies
University of Delhi, India**Abstract**

Black feminist epistemologies challenge dominant regimes of knowledge by centering the lived experience, memory, and intellectual labour of Black women as legitimate sources of theory and resistance. Drawing primarily on Patricia Hill Collins, this paper examines memory as a decolonial practice within Black feminist thought. It argues that memory is not only a record of the past but also a political and epistemic resource through which Black women reclaim agency, recover silenced histories, and generate counter-hegemonic knowledge. Positioned within broader debates on postcoloniality and decoloniality, the paper shows how Black feminist concepts such as self-definition, standpoint knowledge, and collective resistance unsettle Eurocentric claims to universality, neutrality, and objectivity. It further demonstrates that Black feminist thought reimagines knowledge production through oral tradition, community-based knowledge, and narrative recovery, all of which have historically been marginalized by colonial and patriarchal intellectual frameworks. By tracing the intersections of memory, gender, race, and power, the paper illustrates how Black feminist epistemology transforms memory into a site of critique, recovery, and political possibility. In doing so, it contributes to discussions of identity, representation, and emancipation in postcolonial contexts. Ultimately, the paper argues that Black feminist epistemology is not only a critique of domination but also a vital practice of intellectual liberation and decolonial transformation.

Keywords: Decoloniality, Collective Memory, Self-Definition, Knowledge Production, Counter-Memory, Matrix of Domination

Introduction

Knowledge has never been neutral. The production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge are deeply implicated in relations of power, and what counts as legitimate knowledge has historically been determined by those who occupy privileged positions within colonial, patriarchal, and racial hierarchies. Black feminist epistemologies intervene decisively in this terrain by insisting that the lived experience of Black women constitutes not merely a subject of inquiry but a vital source of theory, critique, and transformation. At the heart of this intervention lies the question of memory: how it is produced, whose memories are preserved or erased, and how the act of remembering becomes a form of resistance.

This paper examines Black feminist epistemology as a decolonial intellectual project, arguing that memory functions as a central and undertheorized resource within this tradition. Drawing principally on the work of Patricia Hill Collins, particularly her foundational text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge,*

Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (1990, revised 2000), the paper situates Black feminist thought within broader debates about postcoloniality, decoloniality, and the politics of knowledge production. It contends that memory, understood not merely as personal recollection but as collective, political, and epistemic practice, enables Black women to recover silenced histories, contest dominant narratives, and produce counter-hegemonic knowledge.

While Black feminist scholarship has extensively explored standpoint epistemology, intersectionality, and resistance, comparatively less attention has been paid to memory as an epistemic practice that links historical recovery to decolonial knowledge production. This paper contributes to this discussion by conceptualizing memory as a form of epistemic resistance that bridges Black feminist and decolonial approaches to knowledge.

This paper employs qualitative textual analysis of key works in Black feminist thought, particularly Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Thought, alongside selected contributions from decolonial and postcolonial scholarship. Through conceptual analysis, the paper examines how memory functions as an epistemic and political resource within Black feminist knowledge production.

The paper proceeds in six sections. Following this introduction, the second section outlines the theoretical framework, situating Black feminist epistemology within constructivist and decolonial thought. The third section examines the concept of the matrix of domination and its implications for knowledge production. The fourth section addresses memory as both a decolonial practice and epistemic resource. The fifth section explores oral tradition, narrative, and community-based knowledge as methodological modes central to Black feminist inquiry. The sixth section considers the broader implications of this epistemological framework for postcolonial and Global South scholarship before offering concluding reflections.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism, Decoloniality, and Black Feminist Thought

To situate Black feminist epistemology within contemporary intellectual debates, it is necessary to engage with the intersecting frameworks of constructivism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality. From a constructivist perspective, scholars such as Alexander Wendt and Martha Finnemore argue that social reality is constructed through intersubjective processes, shared meanings, and discursive practices. Identities and knowledge systems emerge through social interaction and are shaped by historical and relational contexts. This perspective opens space to interrogate how dominant knowledge regimes are produced, maintained, and challenged.

Black feminist epistemology builds on and extends these insights by demonstrating that knowledge and social meanings are not only socially constructed but also shaped by relations of power, race, gender, and historical inequality. While constructivism highlights the role of norms and intersubjective understandings, Black feminist scholars emphasize whose knowledge is recognised as legitimate and whose experiences are excluded. The focus on standpoint, lived experience, and the social production of knowledge foregrounds the unequal power relations embedded within processes of meaning-making.

Postcolonial thought, associated with Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, further develops this critique by examining the enduring legacies of colonial power in contemporary knowledge systems. Spivak's interrogation of the subaltern and Fanon's analysis of colonial dispossession reveal the structural conditions under which marginalised knowledge is produced and suppressed. Decolonial scholars such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and María Lugones extend this critique by highlighting the racialised and gendered dimensions of colonial knowledge production. The concept of the colonality of knowledge captures how Eurocentric epistemology has become institutionalised as a universal standard, rendering alternative epistemologies subordinate. Consequently, decolonisation requires not only political independence but also epistemic delinking from colonial categories of thought.

Within this intellectual landscape, Patricia Hill Collins positions Black feminist thought as an autonomous tradition grounded in the social location of Black women. By foregrounding standpoint, lived experience, and the politics of knowledge production, Black feminist epistemology challenges dominant frameworks while offering alternative ways of understanding social reality.

The Matrix of Domination and Epistemic Oppression

Central to Collins's theoretical architecture is the concept of the matrix of domination, which describes the intersecting and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression, race, class, gender, sexuality, nation that structure the lives of Black women and other marginalized groups. Unlike additive models of oppression, which treat race, gender, and class as separate variables that compound one another, the matrix of domination conceptualises these systems as constitutively interlocked, operating simultaneously at the levels of personal biography, group culture, and social institutions. This framework has profound implications for the analysis of knowledge production.

At the epistemic level, the matrix of domination produces what Miranda Fricker has called epistemic injustice, the harm done to individuals in their capacity as knowers. Fricker identifies two primary forms: testimonial injustice, in which a speaker receives a deflated level of credibility due to identity prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, in which a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their own social experience. For Black women, both forms of epistemic injustice operate with particular intensity: their testimony is routinely discredited, and the conceptual frameworks developed within dominant intellectual traditions have historically failed to capture the distinctive dimensions of their experience.

Collins's analysis pushes beyond Fricker's liberal framework by emphasising the structural and systemic character of epistemic oppression. For Collins, the suppression of Black women's knowledge is not merely a matter of individual prejudice or inadequate conceptual resources but is systematically reproduced through institutions, universities, publishing houses, media organisations that operate within and through the matrix of domination. The controlling images that circulate in dominant culture the mammy, the jezebel, the matriarch function as mechanisms of epistemic control, reducing the complexity of Black women's lives

to reductive stereotypes that simultaneously misrepresent them and undermine their authority as knowers.

This analysis has important implications for the politics of knowledge production. If dominant epistemologies are not neutral but are structured by the matrix of domination, then the production of knowledge that challenges this matrix requires more than the inclusion of previously excluded voices. It requires, as Collins argues, a fundamental transformation in the criteria by which knowledge claims are evaluated, the methods through which knowledge is produced, and the institutional contexts in which it circulates. Black feminist epistemology thus constitutes not merely a critique of existing knowledge systems but a positive programme for alternative knowledge production.

Memory as Decolonial Practice and Epistemic Resource

Memory occupies a particularly strategic position within Black feminist epistemology. For Black women in the United States and the wider African diaspora, memory is not a passive repository of individual recollections but a collective, contested, and politically charged terrain. The systematic erasure of African histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions through the violence of enslavement, colonialism, and their afterlives means that the act of remembering and transmitting suppressed histories is simultaneously an epistemic and a political act.

Memory studies provide additional conceptual tools for understanding this process. Maurice Halbwachs' notion of collective memory highlights how remembrance is socially constituted and sustained through shared frameworks of meaning rather than individual recollection alone. Building on this insight, Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory draws attention to the ways communities preserve and transmit knowledge across generations through narratives, symbols, and cultural practices. Paul Ricoeur's work on memory and forgetting further underscores the political dimensions of remembrance, demonstrating how acts of forgetting and erasure are often intertwined with relations of power. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory is particularly relevant in contexts marked by historical trauma, as it explains how memories of displacement, violence, and oppression are transmitted across generations even among those who did not directly experience these events. Together, these perspectives illuminate memory as a collective, cultural, and political process, providing a useful foundation for understanding how Black feminist epistemology mobilizes remembrance as a form of knowledge production and resistance.

The concept of counter-memory, developed by Michel Foucault and subsequently elaborated by scholars of Black history and culture, provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic. Counter-memory refers to the preservation and mobilisation of subjugated knowledge local, disqualified, and hierarchically inferior forms of knowledge that have been buried or suppressed by dominant historical narratives. For Black feminist scholars, counter-memory encompasses the oral histories, community narratives, and embodied practices through which Black women have preserved knowledge of their lives, struggles, and intellectual traditions in the face of systematic suppression.

Patricia Hill Collins draws attention to the role of memory in the transmission of Black feminist thought across generations. The 'wisdom of the mothers' the knowledge accumulated and transmitted by elder Black women through storytelling, proverb, song, and example constitutes a crucial repository of collective memory that has sustained Black communities through conditions of extreme adversity. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge operates outside and alongside formal educational institutions, which have historically excluded Black women or subjected their knowledge to denigration and erasure. In this context, memory functions as an alternative archive site of epistemic preservation that resists the amnesiac pressures of dominant culture.

Beyond Collins, Black feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Angela Davis further illuminate the relationship between memory and resistance. Lorde's work emphasizes the transformative power of naming and remembering lived experience, arguing that the articulation of historically silenced memories constitutes an act of survival and political self-definition. bell hooks similarly frames marginality as a productive site of oppositional consciousness, where the recollection of community histories and everyday experiences generates alternative forms of knowledge that contest dominant narratives. Angela Davis's historical analyses of Black women's activism demonstrate how recovering obscured histories is essential to challenging structures of racial, gendered, and class domination. Collectively, these interventions highlight memory not as a passive recollection of the past but as an active political practice through which marginalized communities preserve knowledge, sustain resistance, and imagine emancipatory futures.

The political dimensions of memory within Black feminist thought are further illuminated by the work of scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, whose concept of 'critical fabulation' explores the possibilities and limits of recovering Black women's histories from archives structured by their exclusion. Hartman's meditation on the violence of the archive, the way in which Black women appear in the historical record primarily as objects of transaction, surveillance, and punishment rather than as subjects of their own histories underscores the epistemic stakes of memory work. To recover and narrate the lives of those whom the archive has erased is not merely an act of historical reconstruction but a form of counter-hegemonic knowledge production that refuses the terms of dominant historiography.

Memory, in this framework, is also fundamentally forward-looking. The recovery of silenced histories is not a melancholic retreat into the past but a resource for imagining and constructing alternative futures. As Collins argues, Black feminist thought is animated by a vision of social justice that draws on the historical experiences of Black women's resistance, their survival, creativity, and collective struggles as evidence of human possibility and resource for political transformation. Memory thus functions within Black feminist epistemology not only as critique but as what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a sociology of emergencies: a practice of identifying and nurturing the signs of possible futures that exist in embryonic form within the present.

Oral Tradition, Narrative, and Community-Based Knowledge

One of the most distinctive contributions of Black feminist epistemology to the broader field of knowledge production is its insistence on the epistemic validity of oral tradition, narrative, and community-based knowledge. Dominant Western epistemologies, rooted in Cartesian rationalism and empiricist science, have historically privileged written, systematic, and individually authored knowledge over oral, narrative, and collectively produced forms. This privilege is not epistemically neutral but reflects and reinforces colonial and patriarchal hierarchies of knowledge.

Collins identifies dialogue as a central criterion of Black feminist epistemological practice. Unlike Eurocentric models that valorise the solitary, detached, and ostensibly universal knower, Black feminist epistemology conceives of knowledge as emerging through dialogue through the active engagement of knowers with one another and with their communities. This dialogical model of knowledge production reflects the collective dimensions of Black women's intellectual tradition, in which knowledge is not privately held but communally developed, tested, and transmitted. The call-and-response patterns of African American oral tradition, the collective witnessing practices of Black churches, and the conversational wisdom of community elders all exemplify this dialogical mode.

Narrative occupies a privileged methodological position within this tradition. For Collins, concrete experience as a criterion of meaning the insistence that abstract claims about social reality be grounded in and tested against the lived experience of those affected challenges the positivist aspiration to a view from nowhere. The stories that Black women tell about their lives are not merely illustrative supplements to theoretical arguments but constitutive of them: they provide the evidential ground for claims about the nature of oppression, the possibilities of resistance, and the contours of alternative social arrangements. This narrative epistemology resonates with broader debates in feminist philosophy about the relationship between experience, testimony, and knowledge.

The role of the intellectual within this tradition is correspondingly distinctive. Collins draws a contrast between the 'outsider within' the Black feminist intellectual who occupies a marginal position within dominant institutions while maintaining organic connections to Black communities and the detached, universal intellectual of Enlightenment tradition. The outsider-within position generates a particular kind of knowledge: simultaneously informed by the insider perspective of community membership and sharpened by the critical distance that comes from occupying a subordinate position within dominant institutions. This double consciousness to invoke W.E.B. Du Bois's foundational concepts are not merely a burden but an epistemic resource, enabling a kind of double vision that illuminates the contradictions of the dominant order.

Community-based knowledge production also implies a different relationship between knowledge and action. For Collins, the test of a theory is not only its logical coherence or empirical adequacy but its usefulness to the communities from which it emerges. Black feminist thought is inherently activist in orientation, understanding intellectual work as continuous with and in service of political

struggle. This commitment to 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' thinking the refusal to separate theory from practice, thought from feeling, or individual from community challenges the disciplinary boundaries and methodological norms that structure dominant academic knowledge production.

Implications for Postcolonial and Global South Scholarship

The insights of Black feminist epistemology extend beyond the specific context of African American women's experience to illuminate broader questions about knowledge production in postcolonial and Global South contexts. The critique of Eurocentric epistemology as a universalising project that suppresses local and alternative knowledge systems resonates with decolonial scholarship from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific. The insistence on the epistemic validity of lived experience, oral tradition, and community-based knowledge challenges the disciplinary norms of academic knowledge production in ways that have implications for scholars working across the Global South.

The concept of epistemic sovereignty, the right of communities to produce, validate, and transmit knowledge on their own terms is increasingly central to debates about decolonising universities, curricula, and research methodologies in the Global South. Black feminist epistemology offers resources for this project not only through its theoretical frameworks but through its methodological innovations: the use of narrative and testimony, the grounding of theory in lived experience, the valorisation of oral and community-based knowledge, and the insistence on the political dimensions of intellectual work. These methodological commitments are particularly relevant for scholars whose research engages with communities that have been marginalised by or excluded from dominant knowledge institutions.

The intersectional framework developed within Black feminist thought has also proven generative for scholars working in postcolonial and Global South contexts, enabling the analysis of how multiple axes of domination including colonial legacies, class inequalities, gendered hierarchies, and racial categorisations intersect to produce specific configurations of epistemic disadvantage. In the South Asian context, for instance, the intersections of caste, gender, and colonial history generate forms of epistemic marginalisation that share important structural features with those analysed within Black feminist thought, while also exhibiting distinctive characteristics that require their own theoretical articulation.

Dalit feminist scholarship provides a particularly compelling example of these dynamics. Scholars such as Sharmila Rege have argued that dominant forms of knowledge production in India have historically marginalized Dalit women's experiences, rendering them both socially and epistemically invisible. Similar to Black feminist epistemology, Dalit feminist thought foregrounds lived experience, testimony, memory, and collective struggle as legitimate sources of knowledge. The recovery of Dalit women's narratives challenges caste-based exclusions within academic and political discourse while creating alternative epistemic frameworks grounded in historically marginalised perspectives. This emphasis on memory and standpoint demonstrates the broader relevance of Black feminist insights for understanding struggles over knowledge, representation, and epistemic justice across the Global South.

Contemporary Black feminist scholarship has further expanded these epistemological interventions. Christina Sharpe's concept of "wake work" examines how the enduring afterlives of slavery shape memory, identity, and knowledge in the present, highlighting remembrance as a practice of survival and resistance. Katherine McKittrick's work on Black geographies demonstrates how Black knowledge emerges through lived spatial experiences that challenge dominant ways of mapping and understanding the world. Tina Campt's engagement with everyday archives, photographs, and listening practices reveals how marginalized communities produce knowledge through forms of expression often overlooked by conventional scholarship. Jennifer Nash's reflections on intersectionality further underscore the importance of attending to complexity, relationality, and the evolving possibilities of Black feminist knowledge production. Together, these scholars illustrate the continued vitality of Black feminist epistemology as a dynamic framework for understanding power, memory, and resistance in contemporary contexts.

More broadly, the decolonial imperative within Black feminist epistemology the commitment to epistemic delinking from colonial categories of thought and the construction of alternative frameworks grounded in the experience and knowledge of the colonised and marginalised aligns with and enriches the broader project of constructing a pluriversal intellectual landscape, in which the diversity of human knowledge systems is recognised and valued rather than subsumed within a single Eurocentric universal. This project is not merely academic but has profound political implications for the distribution of epistemic authority and the possibilities of emancipatory social transformation.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Black feminist epistemology constitutes a vital and underappreciated contribution to decolonial thought, centring memory as both a critique of dominant knowledge systems and a resource for alternative knowledge production. Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins's framework of the matrix of domination, standpoint epistemology, and dialogical knowledge production, it has traced the ways in which Black feminist thought transforms memory from a record of the past into a political and epistemic practice oriented toward justice and liberation.

The recovery of silenced histories, the valorisation of oral tradition and community-based knowledge, and the insistence on the political stakes of intellectual work together constitute a coherent and powerful alternative to Eurocentric epistemologies that claim neutrality and universality while systematically suppressing the knowledge of those they dominate. In this sense, Black feminist epistemology is not merely a critique of domination but a practice of epistemic sovereignty claims to the right to know, to name, and to construct knowledge on one's own terms.

The implications of this project extend beyond the specific context from which it emerges. As scholars across the Global South engage with the challenges of decolonising knowledge institutions, curricula, and research methodologies, the insights of Black feminist epistemology offer not prescriptive templates but generative frameworks and methodological commitments that can be adapted and

extended in diverse contexts. The struggle for epistemic justice for a world in which the knowledge of all communities is recognised, valued, and capable of contributing to shared intellectual life remains urgent and unfinished. Black feminist epistemology reminds us that this struggle is as much about recovering what has been lost as it is about building what does not yet exist, and that memory, in all its political and epistemic complexity, is indispensable to both tasks.

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DABEER SI/KTT/63**WHISPERED GENEALOGIES: GENDER, MEMORY, AND THE
HIDDEN LIFE OF STORIES****MOLU G. NAIR**

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Abstract

Stories are the strongest medium to preserve and transmit culture, traditions, experiences, memory, history, myth and legends from generations to generations. This paper presents the intersection of gender, memory, and storytelling traditions through the concept of whispered genealogies, referring to the informal yet powerful transmission of memory through oral narratives, family stories, folk traditions, songs, and literary texts. While official archives often privilege dominant historical voices, storytelling practices create alternative spaces where marginalized experiences, particularly those of women, are remembered and preserved. Drawing upon perspectives from memory studies, gender studies, folklore, and literary works, the paper examines how storytelling functions as a living archive of cultural knowledge. It argues that women have historically played a crucial role in sustaining collective memory through domestic narratives, lullabies, folktales, ritual performances, autobiographical writings, and community storytelling practices. These narratives preserve memories of migration, labour, kinship, ecological relationships, resistance, and survival that frequently remain absent from institutional histories. The study adopts a comparative approach by examining examples from Malayalam literary traditions, Kerala folklore, women's autobiographical narratives, and oral storytelling cultures of Northeast India. Particular attention is given to matrilineal and indigenous communities where storytelling serves as a medium for preserving ancestral knowledge, ecological memory, and communal identity. Through these diverse narrative traditions, stories emerge as dynamic sites where memory is continuously negotiated, inherited, and reimagined. By foregrounding the hidden life of stories, the paper demonstrates that storytelling is not only a means of recounting the past but also an active process of cultural preservation and identity formation. Ultimately, it argues that gendered storytelling traditions function as alternative archives that challenge historical silences and sustain collective memory across generations, ensuring that marginalized voices remain part of cultural consciousness.

Keywords: Gendered Memory, Storytelling Traditions, Cultural Memory, Oral Narratives, Women's Archives, Indigenous Knowledge

Introduction

Storytelling plays an important role in the formation and development of human societies. It is the strongest way to preserve and transmit values, culture and history of people and community. Even before man started recording history as a written document, people relied upon oral narratives and ballads to propagate and transmit culture, values, history etc. from generations to generations. Such

narratives are not only for entertainment and livelihood but also treasure houses of collective memory, shaping individual and community identities. Daily life experiences, problems and issues faced by women and other marginalized communities also found spaces in oral narratives and thus people came to know about the struggles of other people. These informal oral traditions through which these struggles found voices apart from written formal records can be termed as whispered genealogies. The continuous retellings of these stories connect the past with the present and to an extent helps for the future developments.

This paper examines the relationship between gender, memory, and storytelling through the idea of whispered genealogies. The phrase encompasses all types of informal oral narratives like family history, folktales, ballads, lullabies, myths, legends, religious practices, autobiographical narratives etc. These informal oral narratives preserve and transmit the experiences and stories of women and other ostracized communities which have never been a part of mainstream historical records.

Memory comprises family stories, communities, culture, history, and all the experiences that interpret the past according to the changing social scenario. Gender occupies a major role in the process of storytelling. Women are considered as custodians of oral traditions, cultural memory preservation through folktales, lullaby rituals, tradition, customs, family history etc. Through the women's narrative perspective there exists alternative histories which are actually absent in the formal historiography. Narratives often circulate through interpersonal discourses and hence remain communicative.

Through ballads, ritual performances, songs and autobiographical narratives, Kerala's literary traditions and folklore preserve diverse histories. The oral traditions of Northeast India sustain genealogies, customary knowledge and identities. These two traditions differ in language and cultural practices but share a common commitment to preserve memories that overcome the historical erasure. Through memory studies, gender theory and folklore this paper shows how story telling functions as alternative archives of tradition through which marginalized or oppressed voices remain part of cultural consciousness. It also puts forward the idea that stories not only preserve the past but also shape cultural identity and challenge the historical suppression of voices.

Memory, Gender, and Storytelling as Alternative Archives

In the light of memory studies, gender theory and folklore, memory can be viewed as not only an individual recollection of the past but also a cultural process through which societies preserve and transmit identities, histories and identities and values. Thus, storytelling whether oral or written does the function of alternative archives which gives voices and recognition to the histories which are erased from the formal records. According to Maurice Halbwach's theory of collective memory, individual memories are shaped by family, community, religion and culture. This remembering can be considered as a collective activity and storytelling enables generations to inherit and reinterpret collective experiences. Memory is not fully personal; it is embedded within social interactions that determine what is remembered, forgotten, or transformed over time. Stories transmitted from generations to generations not only preserve facts about the past

but also reinterpret experiences according to the needs, values, and concerns of each generation. It is to be noted that collective memory remains flexible and adaptable instead of fixed within permanent records.

Storytelling occupies a unique position between communicative memory and cultural memory. Communicative memory is transmitted through everyday conversations among living generations, whereas cultural memory is preserved through literature, rituals, myths, monuments, and symbolic practices that endure across centuries. Storytelling connects these two forms of memory. A grandmother's family story belongs to communicative memory, but when similar narratives become embedded in folklore or literary traditions, they become part of a society's cultural memory. Stories therefore function as bridges between lived experience and historical continuity.

Memory can't be often impartial. Privileged political institutions, dominant social groups, privileged gender groups etc. often find place in the formal records and histories. While autobiographies and oral traditions present those histories and stories which are excluded from formal documentation. Thus, storytelling acts as an alternative archive that broadens the historical understanding.

Women's storytelling occupies a central place within this expanded archive. Through lullabies, folktales, ritual songs, family narratives, and life writing, women have preserved memories of migration, labour, kinship, ecological knowledge, and social transformation. These narratives record experiences that institutional histories often overlook while transmitting ethical values and cultural identities across generations. Folklore scholars similarly emphasize that stories acquire meaning through performance and social interaction. Richard Bauman observes that oral narratives are not static texts but performances shaped by the relationship between storyteller and audience (2-10). Every retelling introduces subtle variations that keep traditions relevant while maintaining continuity with the past.

Thus, whispered genealogies refer to cultural inheritance transmitted through stories, songs, rituals, and everyday conversations. These narratives preserve emotional, historical, and ecological knowledge that are always absent in the formal documentation. Recognising storytelling as an alternative archive therefore reinforces that memory is sustained not only through official records but also through the unheard and erased voices.

Whispered Genealogies: Women as Custodians of Memory

Women are the custodians of memory and they preserve and transmit cultural memory through storytelling. The story is the main means through which cultural memory is preserved. Women transmitted the stories which are excluded from the official records, through their own histories, traditions, folktales, songs, lullabies, values and autobiographical writings. These whispered genealogies connect generations through storytelling and connect the past with the present and prepare for the future. Women's narratives always revolve around day-to-day life and their own personal experiences. They always share their stories through domestic spaces like home, kitchen, community functions, meetings gathering etc. which are quiet private spaces rather than formal setup. Through these narratives they share, remember and transmit family histories, marriage, children, religious

practices, local traditions etc. which play an important role in the shaping of culture, values and identities of future generations.

Feminist historians argue that traditional historiography has privileged public history while overlooking the experiences of caregiving, domestic work, emotional labour, and community relationships (Scott 1054–60). Storytelling addresses these absences by preserving histories rooted in everyday experience. Family stories, songs, and rituals become valuable historical sources because they document forms of knowledge that institutional archives often neglect.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory helps explain how such narratives shape cultural identity across generations. Hirsch suggests that descendants inherit memories of events they did not directly experience through stories, photographs, and family traditions (5-9).

Lullabies can be considered as the earliest forms through which memories are transmitted. They introduce language, values and collective memory. Apart from soothing purposes they reflect, hopes, values, history, social reality and personal experiences of mothers and grandmothers. In the same way folktales also express the experiences of a community, local histories and moral values. Oral narratives are the crux of rural life. Through repeated performance these transform personal experiences into shared cultural knowledge. The main participants of these oral traditions are women. The oral tradition extends through autobiographical writings. These written records present the personal experiences of women, their challenges, silences, resilience and success which are always erased from history. Storytelling also creates environmental awareness among people. Stories associated with rivers, forest, sacred groves, agriculture etc. transmit some practical knowledge about ecology. It helps to cultivate a kind of environmental responsibility among children which will help them to conserve and preserve nature for the future generations. They will learn the importance of nature and environment in human history and learn to live in tune with nature. Whispered genealogies remind us that the continuity of culture depends as much upon everyday acts of narration as upon written records, ensuring that the hidden histories of communities remain alive across generations.

Malayalam Literary Traditions and Kerala Folklore as Living Archives of Gendered Memory

Malayalam literature and Kerala's oral traditions show how storytelling functions as a living archive of cultural memory. In Kerala's oral traditions, the stories were transmitted during festivals, agricultural field religious practices and domestic gatherings. These are developed through everyday community life. For preserving local histories and ethical values, ballads, myths, legends, ritual songs and folktales act as the storehouses of collective memory. Being oral, these are flexible and can be reinterpreted according to the changes in the society and can be adapted in multiple ways. Based on the need, attitude and interest of the people and society these narratives can take shape accordingly, without losing the culture's significance.

Vadakkan Paattukal (Ballads) are the face of oral tradition in Kerala. They are the accounts of brave deeds of legendary warriors and heroines. They are the most elevated and popular oral tradition in Kerala. The legends of puthooram family (a

prominent family in North Malabar region of Kerala during early days famous for Kalaripayattu) and Unniyarcha occupied a major role in these ballads because they represent courage, bravery, intelligence and agency. Unniyarcha, an inspiration for women is not a typical woman confined to the domestic roles and she broke the stereotypical image of a gender role which is imposed by the patriarchal society. She is portrayed as a skilled practitioner of Kalaripayattu along with the male members of her family. Her life is an inspiration and driving force for women to take responsibility for the protection of their families. These ballads preserve historical imagination and allow generations to reinterpret the idea of gender and heroism.

Thottam paattu and pulluvan paattu are other popular ritual traditions in Kerala which preserve memories and stories associated with local deities, sacred places, fertility and ecological balances. They are combinations of narrative music and rituals transmitted not only through written records but also through cultural practices. These oral traditions find its extension in the written form in Malayalam literature. Lalithambika Antharjanam, gave voices to the suppressed Brahmin women through her writings. Her works portray the patriarchal systems and how changes happened after the revolutionary movements in Kerala. She demonstrated the domestic life of Brahmin households rather than general political events.

Madhavikutty (Kamala Das) is another prominent Malayalam feminist writer. She transforms personal memory into literary history. In her autobiography *My Story*, she writes about her childhood, marriages, loneliness, marriages etc. She broke the traditional way of narratives and openly discussed taboo topics through her writings and expanded the boundaries of historical memory, demonstrating that private narratives are essential for understanding cultural history.

Sarah Joseph is another prominent writer in Malayalam literature. Her novels show the relationship between storytelling and memory. Her novels always question the inequalities prevalent in contemporary society especially based on gender. Sugathakumari's poetry connects ecology with memory. She connects the readers with the ecology and reminds about the environmental exploitation and degradation which threatens Kerala's rich cultural heritage.

Kerala's rich cultural heritage reflects in its own ecology. Sacred groves (kavu), rivers, paddy fields etc. are the store houses of cultural knowledge. Stories associated with these places make a sense of environmental responsibility among the generations and make them aware that it is very necessary to preserve those places. Taken together, Malayalam literature and Kerala folklore demonstrate that storytelling functions as an alternative archive where personal experience, collective memory, and cultural history intersect.

Women's Autobiographical Narratives, Indigenous Storytelling Cultures of Northeast India

Autobiographical writing is a space where personal memory transforms into collective history. Here writers find a canvas to portray their personal experiences. In Malayalam, Madhavikutty (Kamala Das), wrote autobiographical writings. Her autobiography transforms private memory into a cultural archive that enables readers to understand wider social reality.

In her autobiography *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* Nalini Jameela, narrates her personal experience from the perspectives of socially marginalized women. She challenges social morality, labour and womanhood. A prominent Adivasi activist from Kerala C.K. Janu, connects her personal experiences with the collective struggles of people for land and dignity, in her autobiographical narrative. She highlights the struggles of indigenous community, which is always excluded from the mainstream.

Among the indigenous communities of Northeast India also oral traditions play a vital role in their daily life. These traditions preserve their culture and function as living archives. Each community has their own preserved genealogies, culture, custom language, ritual practices, folk songs etc. Some of the communities are Khasi, Garo, Naga and Mizo. Most of these communities are matrilineal and hence women are more powerful in family, and in community also. They use oral narratives as a tool to preserve their culture, history etc. Khasi, Garo, Naga, Mizo communities share and preserve their culture through storytelling that accompany festivals, agricultural practices, community gatherings etc. Even their languages are different and they transmit their entire culture to their next generations.

Another striking feature of Northeast oral traditions is their close relationship between memory and ecology. Mountains, rivers, forests etc. find a place in their storytelling. Narratives preserve knowledge of seasonal cycles, medicinal plants, agricultural practices, and environmental ethics that have guided communities for generations. Storytelling therefore functions as both cultural and ecological preservation, demonstrating that memory extends beyond human history to include relationships with the natural environment.

The discussions throughout this paper about the traditions, folklore and autobiographical narratives of Kerala and Malayalam literature and of Northeast India, highlights the idea that storytelling remains one of the most powerful means to preserve cultural memory. These narratives give voices to the voiceless marginalized and indigenous communities. Memories are preserved, transmitted, reinterpreted and renewed through stories, songs, customs, autobiographies etc.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the fact that storytelling functions as an alternative archive through which collective memory transmits and lives through generations. Through the lens of memory studies, gender theory, folklore and literature this paper shows that oral traditions gave life to the stories and culture which were excluded and erased from the mainstream historical documentations. Women's narratives, oral traditions, autobiographies, and indigenous storytelling practices reveal that cultural memory is sustained through everyday acts of narration as much as through written documentation.

The concept of whispered genealogies makes this argument strong. It describes the transmission of memories, values, identities, and cultural knowledge through stories shared within families and communities. These narrative genealogies connect generations while preserving histories of migration, labour, ecological relationships, resistance, and survival.

In today's fast-moving world, it is very necessary to preserve the storytelling traditions to preserve one's culture and identity. They safeguard not only the past

but also the cultural identities that enable communities to imagine their future. Recognising storytelling as a legitimate archive therefore expands our understanding of history itself, ensuring that voices long excluded from official narratives continue to remain part of collective cultural consciousness. Through these whispered genealogies, the hidden life of stories endures, reminding us that memory is sustained not only in documents but also in the voices that continue to tell, remember, reimagine, reinterpret and renew the past.

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DABEER SI/KTT/64**MEMORY, CARE, AND GENDERED RESPONSIBILITY: READING
JHUMPA LAHIRI'S "UNACCUSTOMED EARTH" AND "ONLY
GOODNESS"****BILAL A. SHAH**

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Abstract

This essay examines how Jhumpa Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth" and "Only Goodness" turn remembrance into a gendered form of familial daily chores. Pitching Annette Kuhn's account of memory work against sustained dialogue with Diemut Bubeck's feminist theory of care, this work argues that Ruma and Sudha are made answerable not only for caring but also for interpreting care: preserving its traces, explaining its failures, and deciding where its obligations end. Comparative close reading shows that Ruma's memories move from resistance toward belated identification with her dead mother, whereas Sudha's move from sibling intimacy toward punitive self-blame. Lahiri complicates this asymmetry through supportive men, class privilege, birth order, and immigrant-child mediation; nevertheless, the unequal demand for continuity remains. Through retrospective narration, free indirect discourse, material objects, and withheld interiority, the stories expose memory as an ethically necessary but incomplete practice. Their postcolonial feminism lies not in opposing Bengali tradition to American freedom, but in revealing who must convert inherited histories into everyday responsibility.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri; memory work; care; gendered responsibility; Bengali American diaspora; femininity

Introduction

Memory in diasporic writing rarely behaves like an orderly archive. As Salman Rushdie suggests through his metaphor of the "broken mirror" (Rushdie, 11), migrants recover the past only in selective and incomplete fragments; yet these fragments often gain greater emotional and symbolic force precisely because they are incomplete. Memory returns through objects, gestures, unfinished conversations, and domestic routines, continually changing meaning as the remembering subject changes. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* is especially attentive to this movement between past and present. In "Unaccustomed Earth," Ruma's pregnancy and withdrawal from legal work compel her to reconsider the mother whose domestic life she once regarded as "a warning, a path to avoid" (Lahiri 11). As Ruma's own circumstances begin to resemble those of her mother, she does not simply retrieve a fixed past; she reconstructs it from the altered perspective of daughterhood, motherhood, and diasporic displacement. Her mother's domesticity, formerly interpreted as passive dependence, now emerges as a more complex history of care, sacrifice, and cultural survival. Similarly, in "Only Goodness," Sudha looks back on the alcohol she first gave Rahul and

gradually treats that moment as the possible origin of his addiction (Lahiri 128). Neither woman retrieves a completed family history. Each reconstructs the past from a present shaped by grief, motherhood, guilt, and altered obligation. Lahiri, therefore, confirms Rushdie's insight that fragmented memory does not merely preserve a lost homeland: it imaginatively recreates that homeland and enables the diasporic subject to reinterpret both family history and the self.

Much of the recent scholarship on Lahiri makes such returns of the memory apt and acknowledges their significance. Ushashi Dasgupta, for instance, argues that rereading is both a motif and a mode of thought in Lahiri: every encounter with something familiar occurs in a different time and place, so repetition acquires rather than merely reproduces meaning (814–16). Sergio López Sande's study of *Whereabouts* likewise connects Lahiri's fragmentary forms to unstable subjectivity, loneliness, and belonging (157–62). These studies concern reading and narrative form, yet they illuminate Ruma's and Sudha's recollections because both women "reread" family scenes whose meanings have shifted. The first beer, the mother's kitchen, the father's garden, and the unfinished cardigan are familiar materials encountered under new emotional conditions.

Work beyond Lahiri studies clarifies the politics of this return. Şule Akdoğan treats memory as both a response to displacement and a political necessity shaped by unequal histories of migration (1–3). In a Bengali context, Paul Nataraj and Emily Keightley show that repeated cultural performance sustains kinship while reopening contested ideas of nation and home (1704–07). Ana Nenadović names a related tension in Momtaza Mehri's poetry: diasporic subjects may experience a "duty of memory" that is at once burdensome, creative, and ambivalent (93–95). Together, these studies move criticism beyond memory as private nostalgia. They show it as a practice through which communities renew attachments and distribute expectations.

Lahiri scholarship has already identified many of the materials through which those expectations operate. Laura Fine reads "Unaccustomed Earth" and "Only Goodness" together through domestic space and hybridity (209–11), while Ambreen Hai examines the collection's remaking of natal and newly formed family bonds (181–84). Elena Stoican traces cultural reconstruction through objects, gardens, and intergenerational contact (145–49), and Mridula Nath Chakraborty shows how fragile remains mediate death and migration in Lahiri's fiction (821–23). Dipra Biswas and Joydeep Banerjee, more specifically, demonstrate that Ruma experiences failed cooking as inadequacy before inherited feminine competence (145). These accounts are indispensable, but they leave a sharper comparative question unanswered: why does the task of interpreting family history persistently fall to women?

That question cannot be answered by treating every act of care as evidence of patriarchy. Adam, Ruma's liberal husband, supports paid childcare, and Ruma's father wishes she had continued her career (Lahiri 8–9, 38). Sudha is older than Rahul, more acquainted with American institutions, and accustomed to mediating between her parents and the world outside (Lahiri 138). This class privilege certainly gives both these women options unavailable to many migrants. Any

persuasive gendered reading must therefore explain the asymmetry without erasing male care, female choice, birth order, or Rahul's agency.

This essay endeavours to do so through two propositions only. Annette Kuhn's memory work explains how the present actively selects and restages the past; Diemut Bubeck's feminist theory of care explains how need-meeting labour becomes unequally assigned and morally naturalised. Reading together, these propositions show that Lahiri's women are required not simply to care, but to remember care correctly. Ruma's memory moves from rejection toward identification; Sudha's moves from intimacy toward causal self-indictment. Their opposing movements reveal diasporic femininity not as a transported Bengali essence, but as an unstable position produced whenever women are asked to preserve continuity, explain failure, and absorb the costs of repair.

Memory as Work, Care as Gendered Obligation

Kuhn's formulation begins by refusing the innocence of recollection. Memory work is an active, purposeful practice whose staging calls into question the apparent transparency of memory (303–04). The past is not necessarily falsified; rather, its surviving details are selected, arranged, and addressed to present concerns. Dasgupta's account of Lahiri's rereading sharpens this proposition: the familiar returns differently because the reader has changed, and because every repetition is situated (814–18). Ruma's dead mother and Sudha's first beer are therefore not fixed origins waiting to be decoded. They are scenes repeatedly made to answer new questions.

This proposition has a necessary limit. A character's recollection cannot be treated as sovereign truth simply because it is emotionally persuasive. Lahiri's close third-person narration often allows the narrator's language to take on a character's judgment without confirming it. Koshy observes this problem in the opening of "Only Goodness," where retrospective grammar gives Sudha's causal belief an authority the plot subsequently unsettles (363–65). López Sande's attention to fragmentariness is useful for the same reason: Lahiri's formal discontinuities make inward experience vivid while preserving incompleteness (159–62). Memory work thus describes both the force and the fallibility of Ruma's and Sudha's interpretations.

Bubeck supplies the second proposition. Care is work directed toward meeting another person's needs, and its ethical value cannot be separated from the social arrangements that make women disproportionately responsible for providing it, especially without pay or reciprocal recognition (1–3). Remembering can belong to this labor. To recall food preferences, protect reputations, preserve objects, anticipate relapse, explain absence, and maintain kinship across distance is to keep another person socially and emotionally present. Nenadović's "duty of memory" becomes gendered in Lahiri when this work is treated not as a chosen contribution but as proof of a woman's goodness (93–95).

Gender, however, is a division of responsibility, not an essence of caring. Men may care, and women may refuse. Bubeck's distinction matters because Ruma's father gardens tenderly, while Adam encourages professional help, and Sudha sometimes uses her competence to control Rahul (Lahiri 8–9, 45–50, 140–42). The analytical question is therefore not whether men care or women exercise

power. It is whose identity becomes answerable for the continuation of care. Ruma's father can travel after bereavement without ceasing to be a good father; Rahul can fail repeatedly without being asked to repair Sudha's marriage or reputation. Ruma and Sudha, by contrast, experience broken continuity as evidence against themselves.

This unequal arrangement is historically postcolonial, but it is not timelessly Indian. Partha Chatterjee's influential account of colonial Bengali nationalism describes a division between the material "world" and the spiritual "home," with women made custodians of an authentic inner culture (237–39). Swapna Banerjee cautions that Bengali domesticity was never singular: late-colonial debates were heterogeneous, contested, and shaped by class (455–59). Ana María Crespo Gómez accordingly reads Lahiri's diasporic *bhadramahila* as the transnational afterlife of elite respectability rather than an unchanged traditional type (65–68). That afterlife intersects with the professional migration enabled by the 1965 Immigration Act and with a U.S. model-minority economy that privatizes achievement and failure inside the family (Koshy 349–53).

Nataraj and Keightley show that Bengali diasporic memory can sustain community while also renegotiating the meaning of home in the present (1704–07). Lahiri brings that communal process into domestic life. Cultural continuity survives through cooking, language, objects, gardens, and stories, but these practices also consume time and confer moral authority unevenly. The two propositions therefore remain distinct but interdependent: Kuhn explains why remembered scenes change; Bubeck explains why women are expected to make those changing scenes useful to others.

Ruma: Mother's Memory

Ruma's first major recollection turns on a small grammatical hinge. She had regarded her mother's migration for marriage and exclusive devotion to household and children as "a warning, a path to avoid." Then the narration reverses direction: "Yet this was Ruma's life now" (Lahiri 11). "Yet" joins two temporal positions without making them identical. The younger lawyer had read her mother as the negative image of freedom; the pregnant woman in Seattle recognizes the duration and solitude of domestic care. Dasgupta's account of rereading is exact here: returning is not repetition because the interpreter arrives with a changed life (814–16).

The sentence nevertheless risks turning resemblance into destiny. Ruma has an American husband, legal training, financial security, and a large house. Adam urges her to consider childcare, while her father is disappointed that she stopped practicing law (Lahiri 8–9, 38). Fine's spatial reading rightly emphasizes that Lahiri's homes contain both restriction and new possibility (218–20). Ruma's domesticity may therefore be read as chosen, even privileged. The story does not authorize a simple account in which Bengali men imprison a daughter within tradition.

Yet choice does not settle the distribution of cost. Adam's career requires travel, and his mobility is supported by Ruma's dependable presence with Akash; her father travels for pleasure while assuming that Ruma might incorporate him into her household (Lahiri 6–8, 25–26). Koshy describes this arrangement as the

private infrastructure beneath professional mobility: the successful migrant family depends upon labor; it does not count as professional achievement (351–53). Ruma's remembered mother makes that infrastructure visible. What had looked like personal temperament begins to appear as years of need-meeting work (Bubeck 2–3).

Ruma does not thereby recover her mother's inner life. Bereavement sometimes makes her feel closer to the dead woman than she had felt in life, but she immediately calls this intimacy "an illusion, a mirage" (Lahiri 27). The paired nouns are an ethical correction. They acknowledge that identification can become appropriation: Ruma may understand more of her mother's work without knowing what that work meant to the woman who performed it. Kuhn's memory work insists upon this tension between investigation and opacity (303–04). Lahiri strengthens it by withholding the mother's perspective.

The remnants Ruma keeps make selection tangible. Of her mother's 218 saris, she preserves only three, together with an unfinished cardigan still attached to its needles (Lahiri 17). Stoican reads such objects as media of intergenerational reconstruction rather than inert ethnic signs (147–49). Chakraborty likewise shows that Lahiri's migrants confront loss through remains that cannot restore the absent person (821–23). The three saris refuse total preservation; the unfinished cardigan refuses clean disposal. Ruma inherits not a complete tradition but an interrupted task.

Cooking turns that interruption into judgment. Her rice is overdone and the coating of the *beguni* falls apart (Lahiri 22–23). Biswas and Banerjee interpret these failures as Ruma's sense of inadequacy before inherited feminine competence (145). Crucially, the food does not prove that she is culturally inauthentic. It shows how memory converts technique into a moral comparison: her mother's remembered skill becomes the standard against which a damaged dish measures a damaged continuity. Nilanjana Chatterjee's account of the diasporic house as both shelter and injury becomes persuasive at this level of ordinary practice (1–3).

The father's garden interrupts a women-only model of cultural memory. He plants bitter melon, chilies, and other vegetables associated with his wife, and teaches Akash how to tend them (Lahiri 45–50). Hai reads the garden as a rerooting of family affiliation rather than a simple return to origin (196–99). It is also genuine male care. Nataraj and Keightley's account of repetition as a renewal of diasporic kinship helps explain why cultivation matters: the grandfather does not reproduce Bengal; he performs an attachment that the Seattle soil alters (1704–07). The garden is neither imitation nor decorative hybridity. It is care made material.

Still, the story places this tenderness beside the recollection that he had been "oblivious" to many of his wife's needs while she lived (Lahiri 16). His garden does not cancel that failure, but the failure does not make the garden false. Memory work permits both truths to stand. Bubeck's care framework clarifies the asymmetry: occasional or belated male care can be meaningful even when continuous female care has been treated as ordinary (2–3). Ruma's revised understanding of her mother emerges precisely because she begins to perceive this difference in duration and expectation.

The postcard to Mrs. Bagchi finally tests what filial care requires. Ruma discovers her father's unsent declaration of intimacy, stamps it, and puts it in the mail (Lahiri 58–59). The gesture admits several readings: kindness, avoidance, complicity, or respect for privacy. Stoican understands it as an opening toward renewed connection (151–52), while Fine emphasizes the story's unsettled relation between domestic attachment and freedom (218–20). What makes the act ethically valuable is its refusal of mastery. Ruma does not confront her father, keep the card as evidence, or demand that his future remain faithful to her version of bereavement. She helps the message travel without claiming its story.

Ruma's arc therefore does not end in submission to maternal tradition. Her memories make care newly legible, but they also teach her that care can include restraint. Akdoğan argues that diasporic memory becomes political when it confronts unequal histories without pretending that displacement is experienced uniformly (1–3). Ruma's final action carries that insight into the family: she acknowledges inherited responsibility while refusing the daughter's supposed right—or duty—to supervise every intimate continuity.

Sudha: From Complicity to Causal Guilt

"Only Goodness" begins as if a verdict has already been reached: "It was Sudha who'd introduced Rahul to alcohol" (Lahiri 128). The cleft sentence isolates an agent before the story has established a cause. Koshy notes that this retrospective opening lends Sudha's belief an apparent clarity that the narrative repeatedly tests (363–65). The first beer comes to organize later events because Sudha returns to it after Rahul's addiction has become visible. Kuhn's proposition is crucial: she is not inventing the event, but staging it for a present purpose—an inquiry into where responsibility began (303–04).

That inquiry must distinguish complicity, causation, and repair. Sudha supplies alcohol when Rahul is underage and later conceals evidence of his drinking (Lahiri 128–30, 140–42). These choices make her accountable; they do not make her the author of addiction. Rahul continues to drink, lies, leaves Cornell, rejects assistance, and ultimately endangers Neel (Lahiri 146–52, 166–72). The story's recursive movement through apparent recovery and relapse resists a single origin. Koshy reads these cycles as a formal challenge to the linear success narrative of the professional immigrant family (363–67). Sudha's memory prefers causality because causality promises that a different earlier action could have secured a different present.

Birth order and immigrant-child mediation partly explain her habit of intervention. Sudha is older, successful, and fluent in the practical language of American institutions. Her parents rely on her for knowledge and translation in ways Rahul never considers his responsibility (Lahiri 138). Marjorie Faulstich Orellana and her coauthors describe such brokering as complex family literacy work that may grant immigrant children competence as well as burden (12–16). Sudha's first drink with Rahul is also an attempt to share the freedom she discovered away from home, not an intention to injure him (Lahiri 128–30). Her agency cannot be reduced to victimhood.

Gender becomes visible not in her competence itself but in what the family makes that competence mean. Rahul's failures become crises for Sudha to contain,

whereas her success does not make him responsible for her well-being. She has always had a “heavy hand” in his life because she has “not known how to be a sister any other way” (Lahiri 141). “Sister” names a learned office: translator, confidante, monitor, advocate, and substitute parent. Bubeck’s theory explains the transformation from ability to obligation. Sudha is good at care; the family therefore treats unlimited care as the measure of whether she is good (1–3).

The pressure is also classed. Rahul’s departure from Cornell makes him “a blot, a failure” against a network of accomplished Bengali children (Lahiri 151). Koshy connects this shame to the model-minority family’s demand that its members appear self-managing and professionally successful (350, 363). Crespo Gómez’s diasporic *bhadramahila* is relevant because feminine respectability involves managing the family’s public readability as well as its private needs (67–68). Sudha’s education does not release her from domestic maintenance; it equips her to perform it through secrecy, explanation, invitations, and second chances.

Nataraj and Keightley show that Bengali diasporic memory can consolidate kinship while reopening disputes about belonging and home (1704–07). “Only Goodness” reveals the private cost of that consolidation. Sudha remembers birthdays, failures, promises, and relapses because the family’s continuity depends upon someone keeping the whole sequence in view. Nenadović’s account of the “duty of memory” captures the ambivalence: remembrance can sustain community, yet the remembered homeland and diaspora may demand contributions that feel choiceless (93–95). In Sudha’s case, the demanded contribution is perpetual interpretive vigilance.

Lahiri’s narration makes readers participate in that vigilance. Rahul’s interior life remains largely withheld, so his addiction is encountered through Sudha’s monitoring of behavior. This restriction produces intimacy with her fear but not clinical or moral certainty. López Sande argues that Lahiri’s fragmentary structures can intensify loneliness by placing a subject among incomplete connections (159–62). Sudha’s loneliness is similarly formal: she is surrounded by family, yet she alone appears responsible for assembling disconnected episodes into an explanation.

Dasgupta’s distinction between rereading and repetition helps expose the danger. Each relapse sends Sudha back to the first beer, but the return is never neutral; new damage accumulates around the earlier scene (814–18). What began as sibling complicity becomes, through repeated retrospective pressure, a foundational sin. Memory work makes the transformation intelligible while refusing to call it true. Rahul’s agency and the opacity of addiction remain outside Sudha’s preferred narrative.

The London visit gives repair one last persuasive form. Rahul appears sober, behaves warmly toward Neel, and inhabits the role of dependable uncle (Lahiri 164–70). Sudha accepts this version because it allows family memory to become a future possibility. The bath scene destroys that hope. She returns to find Rahul unconscious and Neel alone in water, tells him he could have killed her child, and orders him to leave (Lahiri 171–72). Continued care for Rahul now conflicts with care for Neel. Bubeck’s theory makes the ethical boundary clear: meeting one person’s needs cannot justify exposing another dependent to grave harm (2–3).

Sudha's refusal is therefore not the end of care but a judgment about its form. Akdoğan insists that memory may be healing and liberating while remaining politically necessary and historically unequal (18–20). Sudha cannot heal Rahul through recollection, but she can use remembered patterns to recognize danger. Her boundary restores responsibility to the person whose actions create that danger. It also rejects the fantasy that feminine goodness consists in endless repair. The closing image preserves the temptation of that fantasy. Watching Neel wait for breakfast, Sudha thinks of the brief period during which she is “only goodness to him, nothing else” (Lahiri 173). The phrase is tender because it belongs to the child's limited knowledge; it is painful because Sudha knows herself as resentment, concealment, error, protection, and love. Koshy reads the ending as an exposure of motherhood's impossible affective ideal (365–67). Nenadović's insistence on diasporic ambivalence adds another dimension: contradictory emotions need not be resolved into innocence or despair (93–95). Sudha can be implicated in Rahul's history without becoming its sole cause, and she can protect Neel without becoming “only goodness.”

Remembering Together

The stories acquire their full force when their temporal movements are placed beside one another. Ruma begins with resistance and moves toward belated identification; Sudha begins with intimacy and moves toward punitive causation (Lahiri 11, 128). Ruma's memories risk collapsing the difference between mother and daughter. Sudha's risk of collapsing sequence into cause. Kuhn's memory work preserves the ethical seriousness of both returns while keeping their claims provisional (303–04).

Bubeck's care theory reveals why those different memories converge. Ruma must interpret a dead mother's labor and decide what to carry forward; Sudha must interpret a brother's failure and decide what repair still requires (Bubeck 1–3). Both women become family historians because they are already positioned as carers. Their recollections store tastes, objects, warnings, injuries, and expectations. Yet the stories refuse to make women naturally better rememberers. The father's garden, Adam's practical support, and Sudha's controlling interventions distribute care and power more unevenly than a simple gender binary permits (Lahiri 8–9, 45–50, 140–42).

Postcolonial history intensifies this arrangement without determining it. Colonial domestic ideology, elite Bengali respectability, and U.S. professional migration do not form an unbroken tradition (P. Chatterjee 237–39; Banerjee 455–59; Koshy 349–53). They converge inside households where women's remembrance becomes infrastructure. Crespo Gómez's *bhadramahila* identifies the classed history of that convergence (65–68), while Nataraj and Keightley show that diasporic continuity is always renewed through present performance rather than simple preservation (1704–07).

The five recent studies acknowledged here collectively alter the reading of Lahiri. Dasgupta shows why a return to the familiar is a new event; López Sande shows how incompleteness shapes belonging; Akdoğan insists that memory answers unequal histories; Nataraj and Keightley locate remembrance within contested Bengali continuity; Nenadović exposes the affective burden of being made

responsible for memory (Dasgupta 814–18; López Sande 159–62; Akdoğan 18–20; Nataraj and Keightley 1704–07; Nenadović 93–95). Lahiri's distinctive contribution is to make these processes domestic and gendered. Her women are not merely haunted by the past. They are expected to make the past useful.

Conclusion

“Unaccustomed Earth” and “Only Goodness” represent memory as labor performed under unequal conditions. Kuhn explains how Ruma and Sudha restage family scenes from changed presents; Bubeck explains why that interpretive labor becomes a test of feminine care. Ruma's recollections make her mother's uncounted work newly legible, but they also teach her not to possess her father's future. Sudha's recollections acknowledge complicity, but her refusal after the bath scene returns responsibility to Rahul. Neither story offers emancipation through forgetting. Memory remains necessary because families and Diasporas are made through repeated acts of selection, narration, and care. Its ethical value, however, depends upon limits. Lahiri's women need not preserve everything, explain everything, or repair every rupture. Their most consequential acts—the mailed postcard and the closed door—show care becoming accountable rather than infinite (Lahiri 58–59, 171–73). The collection's postcolonial feminism resides in that difficult distinction: it asks not only who remembers, but who must turn remembrance into work, for whom, and at what cost.

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DABEER SI/KTT/65**REMEMBERING THE BODY, REMEMBERING THE JOURNEY:
COLLECTIVE AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN SHAHINA K.
RAFEEQ'S "LADIES COUPE ATHAVA THEENDARIVANDI"****DRISYA K.**

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Abstract

This paper reads Shahina K. Rafeeq's short story "Ladies Coupé Athava Theendarivandi" through the lens of memory studies, arguing that the story stages memory as something that must be spoken aloud within a group before it can be said to exist at all. Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory, Jan and Aleida Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, Paul Connerton's account of memory carried in the body, and Astrid Erll's notion of travelling memory, the paper traces how a train's ladies' compartment becomes a bounded site in which women narrate menstrual experiences they have never previously voiced. The paper also considers the story's generational tension between an older woman's account of menstruation as vital rather than shameful and younger women's testimonies of workplace humiliation and its glancing reference to Kerala's 2015 sanitary-napkin protest. The story's closing image, in which a character removes her *bindi* and rededicates the day to the women in the compartment, is read as an act of counter-memory that briefly redirects an inherited symbol of purity rather than abolishing it. The paper concludes that Rafeeq's story dramatizes both the fragility and the durability of cultural memory, showing how a taboo transmitted without explanation can prove as powerful as, and more resistant to change than, formally commemorated history.

Keywords: Collective Memory; Cultural Memory; *Theendari*; Menstrual Taboo; Counter-Memory; Malayalam Short Fiction

Introduction

Shahina K. Rafeeq's title story "Ladies Coupe Athava Theendarivandi" ("The Menstrual Coupe"), from the Mathrubhumi Books collection of the same name, follows an unnamed daily train between two Kerala towns. The narrative takes place in a women's compartment featuring a diverse group of women, including students, clerks, saleswomen, teachers, a devotee, a hijab-wearing commuter, and an elderly grandmother, who spend an hour or two together every weekday. The story abruptly begins with two regular passengers, Subaida and Chippy, for whom the monthly travel has become a private ritual of quiet company (Rafeeq 61). Then the story shifts from this one friendship to a group of women, where political mockery finally slips into each woman's confession. One woman after another ends up narrating a memory of menstrual shame, restriction, or ritual she has apparently never spoken aloud before. The story's title "Theendarivandi" borrows

the vocabulary of *theendal* — the historical Kerala practice of caste-based ritual pollution, in which “untouchable” communities were required to keep a prescribed distance from upper-caste bodies (“A Thesis on Untouchability”). In Kerala, this word is commonly used to refer to menstruation and the female body during menstruation. The title conveys the theme of gender specificity, featuring women discussing menstruation.

While scrolling through the story (Rafeeq 61–80), the reader comes across different episodes like the compartment’s daily political banter, its children’s mockery of a Gandhi story taught in every schoolbook, the schoolyard game the women recall as playing against a menstruating classmate named Vasanthi, the generational argument between an older devotee of ritual and younger women humiliated at work, and the final gesture featuring a young woman named Vrinda sticking her red *bindi* on the wall of the train followed by the cheers of women who decide to take a break from their daily chores that day. This paper presents Rafeeq Rafeeq’s view of memory as something to be voiced in order to exist truly. It argues how the recognised history can lose its meaning due to overexposure. Interestingly, the cultural memory of pollution persists not through debate but through children’s re-enactments in play.

Theoretical Framework

This article analyses the story “Ladies Coupe Athava Theendarivandi” through the framework of memory studies which incorporates Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory with the communicative and cultural memory of Jan and Aleida Assmann. It also integrates Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieu de mémoire*, Paul Connerton’s account of incorporating bodily memory, and Astrid Erll’s idea of travelling memory. Maurice Halbwachs’ seminal work “On Collective Memory” posits a fundamental principle regarding the nature of human recollection. He argues that individuals never remember their past experiences in a vacuum. Instead, memories are actively reconstructed in the present moment. This reconstruction is heavily influenced by the social frameworks and contexts provided by the various groups to which an individual belongs—such as family, friends, culture, and community. Halbwachs emphasises that without a shared vocabulary or narrative from these groups to contextualise an experience, that experience effectively becomes unanchored and lacks a meaningful place in memory. The confessional mode of verbal exchanges reveals that individual memories are shaped by the experiences shared with others. The story echoes the idea that individual recollections are far from being isolated, personal artefacts. They are intricately knitted with broader frameworks of shared understanding. It highlights the profound impact of collective perspectives on one’s individual memories. This interconnectedness enriches the meaning of our personal memories.

Within collective memory, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory — informal, oral, biographical, and dependent on living carriers — and cultural memory, which is formalised, ritualised, and transmitted through institutions rather than casual talk. Aleida Assmann further branches out cultural memory into an inert “storage memory” of half-forgotten material and an active “functional memory” that a society continually rehearses (A. Assmann). Pierre

Nora's lieu de mémoire names the bounded site — cut off from ordinary continuity — in which a suppressed identity can surface precisely because organic, lived tradition no longer holds it (Nora). Paul Connerton, in *How Societies Remember*, highlights that much of cultural memory is not recounted through narratives but performed through bodily posture, gestures, and habits. Such performances can deeply encode social memory more powerfully than any spoken account. Finally, Astrid Erll's concept of travelling memory — the observation that memory contents and forms migrate across texts, generations, and media, gathering new meaning at each crossing — offers a way of reading the story's own reference to another book bearing half its title, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*.

The Coupe as a Site of Memory

The story begins not with the collective but with two individuals whose relationship the compartment alone makes possible. Subaida runs for the train, sweating and out of breath, and Chippy takes her hand to steady her onto the moving carriage — a small act that has, by June, become an unremarked habit, “now this routine has become habit” (Rafeeq 61). The narrator notes that although many hands have held Subaida's before, this one felt new, an experience she later remembered (Rafeeq 61). This is Nora's lieu de mémoire at its smallest scale: a friendship, and eventually a whole community, that exists only within the walls of the compartment and the length of the commute, bounded by a departure and an arrival, and unavailable anywhere else in either woman's life. The wider compartment functions the same way on a larger scale. Regular and one-time passengers share an unwritten seating rule — students to one side, working women to the other — and a daily cast of half-familiar faces whose only common ground is the length of a single journey, “a daytime journey” that begins at one station and dissolves at another (Rafeeq 62).

The talk in the ladies' compartment is not initiated as a confession at first. It gradually changes its tone from noise and banter to confession. Radhamani teacher begins the day's conversation with a complaint about politicians who are only money mongers, filling their own pockets rather than building infrastructure. Pramila mocks the predictability of one corruption scandal after another with a comic list — jewellery theft, helicopter purchases, staged dramas — delivered with a burst of laughter (Rafeeq 62). Rafeeq first establishes the coupe as a space for ordinary, public, communicative exchange of gossip, satire, and the news of the day. Slowly, without any formal transition, the site becomes the women's closed narrative space of what they have never revealed to anyone. The site of memory is not defined by ritual entry. The verbal exchange intensifies, conversation by conversation, until political mockery and menstrual confession are speaking in the same breath without any tinge of shame or secrecy.

Before the compartment's talk turns to menstruation at all, it passes through the ironic wreckage of a different, far more officially sanctioned kind of cultural memory: nationalist history. Amid jokes about bribe-taking traffic police and a running satire of shifting political fashions — “after Modi-ism it was Mani-ism, then it became Lal-ism,” one woman jokes, cycling through the surnames of rival politicians (Rafeeq 65) — the group's talk drifts to a story every Indian schoolchild is taught, that Gandhi once donated his own gold bangles to the

freedom movement. The narrator notes that the women's own children now repeat this story "in a lowered voice, laughing," as though it were a period joke rather than history (Rafeeq 65). Niranjali extends the joke: it is lucky, she says, that Gandhi had no more bangles to give, or he would have ended up "Kit India" instead of "Quit India" (Rafeeq 65), a pun that reduces the independence movement's most solemn slogan to a play on relief parcels. Radhamani teacher, who leads this same conversation, is herself introduced as a retired government schoolteacher now serving as a private-school principal, still dressed, "as always," in a khadi sari that the narrator compares to her own unwavering ideals (Rafeeq 65).

The moment is a small but precise demonstration of Aleida Assmann's distinction between storage memory and functional memory. Gandhi's story has been so thoroughly institutionalised — textbook, statue, national holiday — that it survives among the young only as inert material available for a joke; it no longer requires belief or feeling to be repeated, only recognition. *Theendari*, by contrast, has never been taught to anyone in the compartment as history at all. However, it will prove, within a few pages, to be the most "live" memory in the entire story: never named as inheritance, never monumentalised, and for that very reason never allowed to go slack. Rafeeq's juxtaposition suggests, in effect, that a culture over-commemorates the history it has stopped needing and under-acknowledges the history still governing bodies in the present tense — that Radhamani can wear Gandhian memory as a costume while carrying, unspoken until page seventy-nine, an entirely different order of memory in her own body.

"Ladies Coupe" within "Ladies Coupe": Travelling Memory and the Ethics of a Genre

One of the story's most striking gestures is metafictional. As Chippy settles into the daily commotion of the compartment, she remembers, as she apparently does every day, that she means to read a novel called Ladies Coupe — and decides, as she apparently always decides, that she will get to it once life is less busy (Rafeeq 64). The reference is unmistakably to Anita Nair's 2001 novel of that title, in which a woman gathers the life stories of six strangers in a train compartment. Rafeeq's Malayalam story, whose own title borrows and darkens the English phrase, thus contains, unread, on a character's lap, the very book that supplied half its name. This is travelling memory in Erll's sense: a narrative form — women's testimony solicited and exchanged inside a train's ladies' compartment — migrating from an English-language novel into a Malayalam short story, where it is deliberately weighted down with the second half of the title, "Theendarivandi Athava Ladies' Coupe," that Nair's original does not carry. Chippy's book is also pointedly being read at the same moment as Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, and the narrator lets Chippy briefly imagine travelling on the train's roof under mescaline (Rafeeq 64). The juxtaposition suggests that Chippy already senses, without yet having opened Ladies Coupe, that the compartment she is sitting in is itself supplying the perception-changing material that the unread novel promises, that is, she is, in effect, inside the memory-text she keeps postponing.

Collective Memory as Oral Testimony

Halbwachs emphasises that memory is reconstructed rather than retrieved. This reconstruction ensues specifically in the presence of a validating group. The same idea is dramatised across nearly every exchange in the compartment. A stray comment about naming a friend's baby "Jalppa", which is the fusion of the first syllables of the baby's parents' names, dissolves into laughter (Rafeeq 63). After a few moments, the conversation turns to a fourteen-year-old girl travelling alone, which provokes a sharp, unscripted defence of shared parenting from a young woman named Priyada, who lost her mother in the sixth grade and insists that her father alone "raised" her without any deficiency (Rafeeq 67). The group falls silent, and Vismaya feels a thread of tenderness catching in her throat (Rafeeq 67). What unfolds is not planned testimony, but an organic process of collective recollection. Reflecting on key insights from Halbwachs' theory, memory often completes itself only in the presence of a listener. The narrative builds this collective archive layer by layer. Vismaya's recollection of selling wedding saris to brides while quietly dealing with her own leaking, hidden pad (Rafeeq 67–68); Vismaya's later, spoken account of being effectively barred from the staff bathroom, and of being rescued from a public accident by a colleague named Aparna before her manager could see (Rafeeq 75); a woman's admission that she deliberately "hid her periods" from her own mother for months by stealing donated pads from a locked cupboard, discovered only when her cousin found the stash (Rafeeq 71–72); the story of her father's embrace and "my daughter has become a woman" when he finally learned the truth (Rafeeq 72). In the novel, each story validates and progresses towards the next. When each woman passenger shares their menstrual experiences, the listeners respond with recognition rather than shock. In Halbwachs's framework, this is how individual memory takes shape, which happens not in isolation but as a unique perspective informed by collective experience.

The compartment's talk is also markedly heterogeneous in register, moving within a single page from Facebook-driven mockery of a self-styled feminist scholar's borrowed vocabulary of Beauvoir, Derrida, and Haraway (Rafeeq 77) to a grave discussion of who bears responsibility — the mother, the unmarried woman, or, as Niranjali proposes with deliberately provocative wit, "the sperm that went astray" — for a pregnancy outside marriage (Rafeeq 71). Rafeeq refuses to let the reader settle into either a purely comic or purely solemn register; the same women who mock performative activism are shown, a page later, quietly building the very archive of embodied experience that performative activism claims to speak for but rarely reaches.

The *Theendarikali*: Cultural Memory Turned into a Children's Game

The most brilliant use of cultural memory in the story appears in a flashback rather than a present-tense confession. One woman recalls first hearing the word *theendari*, which was used as an insult in the sixth or seventh grade, at a convent school whose all-girl freedoms had made the children careless (Rafeeq 73). Someone announced that a classmate, Vasanthi, was "*theendari*" — menstruating, and therefore polluting — and the class converted the fact into a game: touching Vasanthi transmitted an invisible "*asudham*", impurity, which had to be passed on

by touching another child, who would then wash her hands to become “*shuddhi*”, pure, again, before touching Vasanthi once more to restart the cycle — “*angane oru theendarikali*”, “and so, a game of untouchability” (Rafeeq 73). The narrator’s retrospective judgment is unsparing: that week was, for the other children, “like a festival”, and they possessed no maturity at all to consider what it meant for Vasanthi (Rafeeq 73).

Reading through Connerton’s account of incorporated practice, the *theendarikali* is close to a demonstration case: none of the children in Rafeeq’s flashback had been taught the caste history of *theendal* as doctrine; nobody explains untouchability to them before they invent the game. The structure — pollution by touch, transmissibility, ritual hand-washing to restore purity, the singling out of one child’s body as the source of contagion — is instead simply available to them, already encoded in the ambient vocabulary and gesture of the culture they have grown up inside, needing only a pretext (menstruation) to be re-enacted. This is cultural memory functioning exactly as Assmann describes: not recalled as history, but performed as if it were simply how games are played.

Contested Generations: Cloth, Pads, and Radhamani’s Red

Memory studies have long established that collective memory is far from monolithic. Halbwachs’s framework explicitly allows for competing memory communities even within a single social group and the compartment stages exactly this kind of internal contest. The younger women’s testimonies accumulate around themes of restriction, shame, and secrecy. they memorise domestic concealments like cloth that had to be “dried where no one could see, hidden away” (Rafeeq 72); a superstition, recalled with real residual fear, that the smell of a used menstrual cloth draws snakes, which left one narrator dreaming of cobras in the dark spaces near the well and the toilet (Rafeeq 74); a caning at school, administered by a teacher unaware that the girl was doubled over with period pain (Rafeeq 76); the difficulty of secretly eating during a fast in Ramadan without allowing her household members discover she was menstruating (Rafeeq 76).

Against this accumulating record of concealment, Radhamani teacher — the same woman who opened the compartment’s talk with political complaint — offers something closer to counter-testimony from an older generation. Pouring hot tea from her own flask for an exhausted, cramping Mithra, she tells the younger women, “Pennungale, ningal kutram parayunna raktham vattumbozhe athinte nashtam ariyu”, “Girls, you will only know the loss of that blood you speak ill of once it dwindles”, and calls it “the red that makes us women” (Rafeeq 79). She insists that her own generation, for all its lack of modern conveniences, never experienced menstruation as the hardship the younger women now describe, even as she goes on, in the same monologue, to recall turmeric baths, five days set apart from ordinary work, and a marriage delayed on the taboo’s account (Rafeeq 79). Rather than replacing the younger women’s recollections, Radhamani’s memory coexists with theirs. They share space with them, which creates an equally valid and partial history which gives a reminder that the train compartment functions as a lieu de mémoire which resists a single narrative; instead, it uncovers a complex archive in which narratives of pride, grief, restriction, and vitality can occupy side by side and bring together conflicting bodily experiences into a neat conclusion.

The compartment's talk also glances, briefly but unmistakably, at a real event that itself belongs to Kerala's public memory of gendered protest: a reference to women who "mailed napkins" in organised protest against institutional inspection of undergarments, and who were mocked, the speaker notes bitterly, by other women rather than defended (Rafeeq 75). This is an allusion to the actual campaign in Kerala in 2015, in which activists posted used sanitary napkins to protest menstrual discrimination. It became one of the clearest instances in recent Indian public life of counter-memory made physical — an inherited symbol of shame deliberately redirected into public confrontation. Rafeeq's fictional compartment thus contains, in miniature, the historical precedent for the gesture its own ending will stage.

The Delayed Train: The Delayed Train: Interrupting Linear Time to Unlock Collective Memory

While the testimonies continue, the train falls behind schedule, stopping repeatedly at unexpected points. One of the passengers mutters that they must be delayed because another train is crossing (Rafeeq 68). Clock-time — the college lecture, the office shift, the connecting bus — is precisely the temporal regime under which the women's daily lives are elsewhere governed, and it has never previously accommodated the slow, interruption-prone, associative rhythm that this kind of remembering requires. Rafeeq uses the train as a symbol of modern infrastructure to mark this shift. The train drifts out of its own timetable exactly as the women's confessions deepen. Rafeeq stages an institutional structure that emphasises memory over time. When the delayed train finally reaches the women's station at eleven o'clock, one of them extends the suspension deliberately, proposing a shared day off — a film, a meal out, a walk on the beach — and the others, after briefly running through their obligations, arrive at the simple recognition that there is nothing wrong with spending one day on themselves (Rafeeq 79). The train's accidental delay becomes, by the story's end, a chosen one.

Vrinda's Bindi: Counter-Memory and the Limits of the Gesture

The story's closing action condenses its whole argument into a single image. Vrinda peels the red *bindi* from her own forehead and presses it onto the wall of the women's compartment, declaring, "*Theendarivandi poykotte, innu nammude dinam*", "Let the *theendari*-train go, today is our day" (Rafeeq 80), a line the rest of the women take up with a shared shout, while the men's puzzled stares pass over them unregistered (Rafeeq 80). Nora and the Assmanns consider cultural memory as grounded in symbols suffused with institutional meaning. In this way, the *bindi* fits into the model exactly. Worn on the forehead, it ordinarily signals ritual purity that directly opposes the menstruating or *theendari* body. Removing it from her body and fixing it instead to the wall of a space the women have just spent a day's journey filling with testimony is not a rejection of memory but a relocation of it - what can be termed counter-memory in the strict sense. It is not the destruction of an inherited symbol but its deliberate subversion. The story's own reference to the mailed napkins reminds us of a historical precedent for feminist redirection of a shame-symbol into a tool of collective resistance (Rafeeq 75, 80).

In Halbwachs's terms, what has changed here is not the surrounding social order but the group's internal memory. For one afternoon, a group of strangers collectively creates an alternative meaning for the ideas surrounding it. They assert that it is not a shame to be hidden, but rather a history that can be narrated and even celebrated. As Assmann argues, cultural memory persists through continuous performance. Rafeeq's ending of the story proposes that the same mechanism of re-enactment can be turned toward a different symbolic content, at least for the duration of one delayed train and one shared day

Conclusion

Reading "Ladies Coupe Athava Theendarivandi" through the lens of memory studies uncovers the coupe as a refuge for gendered solidarity. It illustrates how private bodily experiences transform into history the moment they are collectively voiced. It shows that one's intimate taboos are not natural or inherent but constructed through inherited, institutional memory. Nora's concept of *lieu de mémoire* explains why the story requires a train compartment, cut off from home, school, and workplace. Halbwachs explains that their conversations are reconstructions rather than confessions. Individually, they create an archive in real time with structurally similar experiences. Connerton's account of incorporated memory explains the story's most disturbing scene. The old caste structure of pollution survives in the schoolyard game built around Vasanthi's menstruating body through children who have never been taught its history. Moreover, Erll's travelling memory explains why Rafeeq's story keeps another book, Ladies Coupe, unread but present on a character's lap — as though acknowledging that this is a form memory has used before and will use again. Vrinda's small act of placing her *bindi* on the wall resonates with a real protest that the compartment itself partially recalls, without negating it. Instead, it illustrates that a cultural memory, passed down through repetition, can also be redefined by the same process used to instill it.

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Narratives of Memory, Gender and Ecology in Postcolonial Literature

- “ഷാഹിന കെ. റഫീഖിന്റെ ‘ലേഡീസ് കുപ്പെ’ ഇംഗ്ലീഷിലേക്ക്; പ്രകാശനം നാളെ.” *Madhyamam*, 29 Aug. 2024, www.madhyamam.com/culture/literature/menstrual-coupe-shahina-k-rafiq-1324448.
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DABEER SI/KTT/66**FRAMED WORLDS: TRAVERSING ACROSS CULTURAL, SPATIAL
AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BORDERS IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S
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Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**S. SAIRA BANU**Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

The canonical art forms used in literary works have always helped in shaping narratives and adding aesthetic and cultural value to them. This literary motif enhances the setting, the characters, the plot and other literary aspects, providing scope for reimaginings, intertextual interpretations, cultural cross references, and symbolic portrayal of mindscapes. In *Room*, Emma Donoghue uses a few canonical western artworks such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* and *Saint John the Baptist*, Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. These western artworks function as an intermedial body that traverses cultural, spatial, and epistemological borders and symbolically represent themes like inclusivity, freedom, the cult of motherhood and traumatic memory. Ma and Jack's placement within the claustrophobic space of enslavement creates such a tension between internal and external incarceration. In this study, the concept of Objective Correlative, mentioned in "Hamlet and His Problems" by T.S.Eliot, is used to analyse the emotions evoked in the minds of the readers through such canonical paintings rather than direct description. The finding shows that the paintings can serve as framed worlds which symbolize the tension among cultural, spatial, and epistemological boundaries in the novel *Room*.

Keywords: Canonical Art, Paintings, Objective Correlative, T.S.Eliot, Art, Cultural, Spatial, Epistemological Borders.

Introduction

Emma Donoghue's *Room* is a very successful novel which was published on 06 August 2010. This is one of the well acclaimed novels of Emma Donoghue. It won the 2011 'Commonwealth Writers' Prize under the regional category (Caribbean and Canada), It was shortlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize, shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2010, and Rogers Writers Trust fiction prize, Governor General's Awards. This novel is narrated skillfully. Jack, a five year old boy is the narrator of the story. This novel is written from the perspective of an immature five year old boy, Jack. Even though the story is partially inspired by the real-life story of a woman named Elizabeth Fritzl, held captive by her father in Australia for 24 years in an underground cell, it is considered as a fictional story.

The story revolves around two major characters, one is Jack and the other is his 26 years old mother (Ma). Both were held captive in a room that measures 11 feet by 11 feet (approximately 121 square feet). The outside view of the room is a shed-like structure, portrayed as a prison. The room contains a bed, a television, a wardrobe, a toilet, a kitchen with a small sink & refrigerator. Jack knows nothing other than his 'Room' & beloved 'Ma'. The Room becomes not just simply a prison but a whole world, a cosmos unto itself that bound all of Jack's lived experience until his true salvation. Within this cramped space the novel makes use of the references of few canonical artworks specifically paintings of Leonordo Da Vinci, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso as agency through which both mother and child attempt to traverse their culture, spatial, and epistemological boundaries and approach a realm of cultural knowledge, imaginative freedom, sacred motherhood and aesthetic experience. The major motif of the deployment of these canonical artworks in this literary work is to raise intense questions towards the major character's nature of surviving, the relationship between Ma and Jack, cultural, spatial and epistemological status or condition of living vs. surviving. All these motifs are not merely decorative references but integral to Donoghue's thematic structural project differentiating the borders between state of confinement and freedom, between the physical space in Room and outer world of living, between inclusivity and exclusivity of the space, between aloneness in the outer world, togetherness inside the 'Room'.

The theoretical approach of T.S.Eliot's concept 'Objective Correlative' is proposed to analyse these canonical artworks, specifically. In this novel, it functions within Donoghue's narrative. This concept is developed and applied in his "Hamlet and His Problems" which is one of the essays in his book titled *The Sacred Wood*. Eliot's theory proposes that emotion in a work of art is predominantly expressed not just through direct expression but through "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion." An artist requires a powerful approach of discovering objective correlatives instead of stating their own feelings. This is considered as a sensory phenomena that provoke the expected emotions from the reader/viewer. In *Room*, Donoghue's use of visual art in the form of paintings serves as an objective correlative. These paintings serve as remarkable emotional representation of the mental landscapes of trauma, confinement, loss and intense longing that characterize Jack's and Ma's presence in the novel.

The framing devices in *Room*, which are both literal frames around paintings and metaphorical frames that shape how humans see things, create what could be called epistemological borders. These borders decide not only what can be seen, but also what can be known, what can be imagined, and how meaning is made. This paper, through Eliot's theoretical lens, contends that Donoghue's use of canonical Western artworks demonstrates how artistic objects can bridge the finite reality of *Room* and the boundless possibilities of the imagined realm beyond it. In the end, the novel shows that being confined is not just a physical state, but also an epistemological one that changes the way consciousness and knowledge are organized and accessed.

Literature Review

Scholarship on *Room* has largely focused on three connected areas: (1) the experience of confinement, (2) the mother-son relationship as a site of trauma transfer, and (3) how language and storytelling shape a temporary reality.

Miller (2015) interprets the novel using Merleau-Ponty's ideas about perception. He claims that the "room" becomes a sensory space where physical feelings replace outside geography. The walls are not just physical barriers; they shape the protagonists' understanding of where they are. Hsu (2017) applies Foucault's concept of heterotopia to show how *Room* merges time with space. This creates a timeless microcosm that resists outside references.

Brock's (2018) study on therapeutic literature describes Ma as a 'trauma caretaker.' She turns her flashbacks into visual analogies for Jack. Their shared story serves as a 'testimony of survival' that depends on voicing their pain. Sullivan (2020) denotes the mother's storytelling especially from the five-year-old's viewpoint and builds a protective narrative shield that keeps Jack from fully facing their traumatic history.

Scholars like Allen and McAlister have pointed out that Donoghue's novel emphasises on how language acquisition serves as a form of freedom. As Jack learns words like 'outside,' 'sky,' and 'rain,' his understanding extends beyond the room's walls and how cultural artifacts, books, television, and especially visual art act as tools that help Jack create a 'cognitive geography' beyond his immediate surroundings.

These studies share a common idea: the room is not a complete boundary. It is a flexible limit that can be explored through cultural artifacts. The three paintings mentioned in the novel provide a rich opportunity to examine this idea, especially when viewed through Eliot's Objective Correlative. This offers a method to connect emotional responses in literature with visual expression.

Theoretical Foundations of the Objective Correlative and Visual Art

The American painter and poet Washington Allston (1779–1843) coined the term at first. T. S. Eliot introduced it in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919). Eliot later said its popularity in literary criticism surprised him. In "Hamlet and His Problems," Eliot used the term solely to describe his claimed artistic method for evoking emotion in the audience. T.S. Eliot's idea of the Objective Correlative came from his criticism of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He argued that the play struggled artistically because the protagonist's emotional pain did not match the external dramatic situations. For Eliot, the artistic problem was not the depth of *Hamlet*'s emotion. It was the playwright's failure to offer objective situations that could express that emotion. This idea, while debated and later reexamined by Eliot himself, set a basic rule: aesthetic objects succeed or fail based on their ability to represent and convey emotional truths through external, concrete events instead of personal statements.

Room presents three distinct moments when the narrator, Jack, clearly mentions a painting. In each instance, the painting appears after a crisis or a moment of insight. It acts as a pause in the narrative, providing a visual cue for the internal turmoil. The paintings meet Eliot's criteria:

1. Concrete Object – a specific, historically identifiable artwork.

2. Situation – the moment in the story when the painting is referenced (for example, after the ‘outside’ is first described).
3. Emotional Formula – the feeling the painting is intended to evoke (such as awe, terror, hope).

Readers can follow the novel’s transformation of visual culture into a psychological map that extends the room’s spatial boundaries by seeing these paintings as objective correlatives.

Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist*

This painting first identified in the early part of the novel, where Jack points out and describes the objects in Room. Jack narrates the scene with child-like wonder. He describes the ‘big lady’ (the Virgin) and the ‘little baby’ (Jesus). He also notes the presence of an older woman (Saint Anne) and a strange boy (John the Baptist). This moment occurs after Ma begins to explain the concept of ‘outside’ to Jack. This explanation changes the previously total view of the room.

Leonardo’s composition is known for its layered maternal lineage and its delicate play of gaze and gesture. The painting embodies connections between generations, closeness, and a calm, sacred home life, all qualities that reflect Ma’s attempts to create a small family within the room.

Maternal Triad: The presence of three women (Virgin, Saint Anne, and the hidden Madonna) mirrors the room as a womb-like space that produces life despite being ‘imprisoned.’

Soft Light and Atmospheric Perspective: Leonardo’s sfumato creates a sense of depth that goes beyond the flatness of the walls. This depth reflects Jack’s growing visual imagination.

Through the Objective Correlative, the painting expresses Jack’s emotional state of hopeful uncertainty mixed with reverence. It gives Jack a visual language for ideas he cannot yet express—kinship, protection, and a world beyond the four walls. From a cultural-studies viewpoint, the painting introduces Jack to Western Christian iconography, a meaning system that is entirely new to his Room experience. By attaching this visual object to the room’s wall, Ma helps to shape Jack’s developing worldview. The painting becomes a cultural passport, allowing the child to see that personal stories are part of larger mythic structures.

Leonardo’s work disrupts the Room’s closed knowledge by projecting an external, historically grounded space onto the interior wall. The painting’s perspective draws the eye outward, suggesting a ‘window’ that also acts as a frame. In terms of knowledge boundaries, the painting addresses the inside-outside division: the interior becomes a place where external knowledge is written rather than brought in. Jack’s recognition of the painting’s realness marks a first crossing of knowledge from Room as a closed microcosm to a point within a larger, historically rich network.

Claude Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise*

This painting is also found in the same place where the first one was found. The image is set in a busy cityscape, which is the first sensory overload the characters experience.

Monet’s masterpiece is a key work of the Impressionist movement, known for:

- Loose brushstrokes that turn clear forms into feelings.
- A limited palette of orange, blue, and gray that suggests dawn and uncertainty.
- An ambiguous horizon that blurs the distinction between sky and water.

These features represent disorientation, fleeting moments, and the chance for renewal. This reflects what the characters go through as they move from confinement to the chaotic ‘outside.’

For Jack, who is used to the dull, monochrome interior of the Room, Monet’s hazy scene captures a mix of confusion and wonder. The painting’s unclear edges reflect Jack’s own loss of spatial certainty. The world no longer has the clear boundaries he once knew. However, the sunrise also hints at new beginnings, which aligns with Ma’s hope for a future after trauma.

Monet’s work serves as a gateway into modern visual culture, contrasting with the religious traditionalism of Leonardo’s image. By placing these two paintings side by side, Donoghue creates a cultural dialogue that spans time. The child is exposed to both a tradition of Christian imagery and a tradition of secular, avant-garde art. As Caruth says, this dual exposure highlights cultural diversity, a key theme in trauma theory where survival involves merging different stories.

The billboard’s location on a concrete wall in a city street acts as a public frame that displays an image in the urban space. Unlike Leonardo’s private, intimate wall-hung image, Monet’s billboard is outside the personal realm, pushing the characters to engage with a shared visual environment. This changes the understanding of space in the novel. The ‘outside’ becomes more than just a physical area. It transforms into a media-filled space where meaning comes from mass-produced images. Jack’s view shifts from a personal perspective to a public visual language, marking a significant crossing of knowledge boundaries.

Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*

This painting too is found in the same early section of the novel where the other two paintings are mentioned. This is a black-and-white image of Picasso’s *Guernica* as a symbol of the violence that shaped their past. The image fills the living room of the safe house where the family now lives, confronting the characters and the reader with a visual representation of shared trauma.

Picasso’s mural is a monochromatic, cubist artwork that shows:

A) Distorted human and animal forms: a horse, a bull, a screaming woman, a dismembered soldier. B) Fragmented shapes that express chaos and confusion. C) A sharp contrast of black, white, and gray, increasing a sense of grief and horror. These visual elements show deep trauma, complete helplessness, and the struggle to tell a story the feelings that have long troubled Ma. Donoghue provides a powerful visual representation of the unspeakable: the painting conveys what words cannot fully express by referencing *Guernica*

For Ma, *Guernica* reflects her own experiences of captivity, rape, and murder. The shattered bodies in the painting resemble the broken self she has had to rebuild. For Jack, the image is a shocking sight the first time he encounters a clear portrayal of violence and suffering. The painting prompts his move from innocent childhood

to an understanding of historical and political violence, a crucial moment in his development.

Guernica carries significant political meaning; it was originally painted as a protest against the bombing of Guernica, Spain, in 1937. Its inclusion connects the personal trauma of *Room* to a broader story about war and oppression. The painting serves as a cultural reference point through which the characters can see their own experiences as part of a larger history. As LaCapra says, this connects to feminist trauma studies, which highlight the importance of collective memory for personal healing.

Unlike the previous two paintings, Guernica does not provide a view into a space; its composition feels tight and overwhelming, trapping the viewer within its fragmented form. By showing the image on a television screen, a medium that transmits images over distance, the story shrinks the gap between the 1930s Spanish Civil War and the modern setting of *Room*. The painting thus connects past and present, breaking down the boundary that treats Ma's trauma as a private event. The televised Guernica becomes a medium through which the characters' personal pain is placed in a public, historical context, enabling them to find a common language of suffering.

Synthesis: Framed Worlds as Sites of Border-Crossing

The three paintings: Leonardo's *Virgin and Child*, Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, and Picasso's *Guernica* function as objective correlatives that collectively map a trajectory of spatial, cultural, and epistemic expansion for the protagonists of *Room*.

Painting	Spatial Function	Cultural Literacy	Emotional Correlative Epistemic Border
Leonardo – <i>The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist</i>	Projects a window onto the wall, suggesting depth beyond the room	Introduces Christian iconography, intergenerational myth. Hope, protected intimacy, reverence	Moves from private to historical cultural framing
Monet – <i>Impression, Sunrise</i>	Public billboard that frames the outside world; dissolves clear boundaries	Introduces modernist, secular visual culture. Bewilderment, awe, nascent renewal	Shifts from monochrome interior to media-saturated exterior
Picasso – <i>Guernica</i>	Television screen compresses space, forces a claustrophobic gaze	Engages with political art, collective trauma. Terror, grief, solidarity	Collapses temporal distance; situates private trauma within global history

Spatial Borders as Permeable Membranes

Each artwork transforms the room's walls from solid barriers into permeable membranes that convey visual and emotional information. The frame of a painting becomes a border that can both close off and open up. This reflects the novel's main paradox: the confinement in the Room also allowed limitless imagination.

Cultural Borders and the Construction of a Shared Narrative

Through exposure to important Western art, Jack and Ma gain cultural symbols that help them express experiences they previously could not put into words. The paintings act as cultural supports that allow them to turn private pain into forms that others can recognize, thus allowing them to join in a shared narrative. This is vital for healing from trauma. The ability to name the unspeakable using external cultural codes helps reduce the isolation felt by survivors.

Epistemic Borders: From 'Inside Knowledge' to 'Outside Knowing'

The objective correlatives allow for a change in knowledge perspective. At first, Jack's understanding is inside knowledge based on his personal experiences. However, the paintings introduce outside views: historical, artistic, political. Jack gradually develops a dual way of knowing, that accommodates both his personal experience and a broader public understanding of suffering by exploring these views. This blending of perspectives reflects contemporary trauma theory's argument that survivor testimony should be understood within a wider cultural and historical context.

The Aesthetic as Moral Mediation

The paintings act as ethical guides. Each artwork provides a moral viewpoint through which the characters and the reader can assess actions in the story. Leonardo's depiction of motherhood suggests a model of nurturing, Monet's sunrise hints at redemption, and Picasso's anti-war mural calls for a moral reflection on violence. The novel uses the objective correlative not only to evoke emotions but also to guide interpretations of trauma and freedom.

Conclusion

Emma Donoghue's *Room* shows that even the most oppressive spaces can be changed through the careful use of cultural artifacts. By looking at Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist*, Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, and Picasso's *Guernica* as objective correlatives, this paper demonstrates how visual art can help characters trapped in a literal room expand their emotional, cultural, and knowledge-based horizons.

The analysis reveals three interconnected insights: (i) Frames as Portals – The physical frames of the paintings act as metaphorical portals. They allow the protagonists to glimpse, imagine, and eventually move beyond their limited environment, (ii) Cultural Literacy as Survival Toolkit – Being familiar with important artworks gives characters a shared vocabulary. This helps translate personal trauma into symbols that make sense to others, aiding both personal healing and social recognition and (iii) Epistemic Border-Crossing – The paintings break down the divide between 'inside' knowledge and 'outside' truth. This creates a hybrid understanding that blends personal experience with shared history.

The paper highlights the power of the objective correlative as a method that connects different media by combining Eliot's formalist theory, trauma studies, and visual-cultural analysis. It also encourages further research on how literature can use visual art to cross borders, whether they are geographic, psychological, or sociocultural. Future studies could look at other contemporary novels that use visual artifacts as correlative devices or explore how digital media, like Instagram and virtual reality, serve as modern frames that handle trauma and freedom. For now, *Room* remains a strong case study on how framed worlds can both confine and liberate, reminding us that the walls of confinement are never completely sealed when the mind draws from the vast gallery of cultural imagination.

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DABEER SI/KTT/67**QUEERING THE ANTHROPOCENE: CLIMATE, JUSTICE,
EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, AND HOPE IN ALISTAIR MACKAY'S *IT
DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY*****MEGHALI SAIKIA**Research Scholar, Department of English
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Abstract

This paper examines Alistair Mackay's 2022 debut novel *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* as a ground breaking work of African queer climate fiction. While mainstream climate fiction predominantly features Western, heteronormative perspectives, Mackay's novel centers three queer friends navigating climate collapse in near-future Cape Town. Using eco-critical and queer theory frameworks, this study analyses how the novel challenges dominant climate narratives through its depiction of embodied climate knowledge, spatial inequality between the affluent "Citadel" dome and the slum "Khapelitsha," and the intersection of climate justice with queer survival. The novel rejects dystopian pessimism in favour of hope, resilience, and collective action. This paper argues that Mackay's work offers crucial alternative eco-political imaginaries that marginalize anthropocentric thinking while centering marginalized subjectivities. As one of the few African queer climate fiction texts, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* represents an underexplored territory in cli-fi scholarship with significant potential for understanding climate change through intersectional lenses.

Keywords: climate fiction, queer ecology, African futurism, climate justice, embodied knowledge

Introduction**Background: Climate Fiction and Its Limitations**

Climate fiction (cli-fi) has emerged as a significant literary genre in the 21st century, largely in response to the Anthropocene—the current geological epoch defined by dominant human influence on Earth's climate and environment. Works such as Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018), and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) have significantly shaped both cli-fi scholarship and public discourse. However, mainstream climate fiction exhibits clear limitations that often exclude vital perspectives. It is predominantly Western-centric, with most acclaimed works originating from North America and Europe, frequently overlooking Global South perspectives despite these regions—particularly African, Asian, and Latin American nations—being disproportionately affected by climate change. Furthermore, mainstream cli-fi is often anthropocentric, prioritizing human survival over questioning human dominance within nature. It also tends to be heteronormative, rarely exploring queer experiences of the climate crisis, even

though queer individuals face distinct vulnerabilities. Finally, much of mainstream cli-fi leans towards dystopian pessimism, portraying hopeless futures rather than offering pathways to resilience or meaningful transformation.

African Climate Fiction: An Emerging Field

African authors are increasingly contributing to climate fiction, challenging established Western narratives. Recent scholarship highlights that African cli-fi offers "alternative ecopolitical imaginaries" by centering Indigenous knowledge, postcolonial critique, and diverse climate futures. Notable examples include Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* (2021), a Nigerian African futurist novel about a woman with cybernetic limbs navigating environmental disasters, and Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* (2022), a South African queer climate fiction. Despite growing interest, African climate fiction remains underexplored in academic research. As one 2025 study observes, "African climate fiction to explore alternative ecopolitical imaginaries" represents a crucial yet neglected field.

The Novel: *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*

Published by Kwela Books in 2022, Mackay's debut novel is set in a near-future Cape Town, South Africa, where climate collapse has starkly divided society into two contrasting zones. The Citadel, an affluent, climate-controlled dome on Signal Hill, houses wealthy elites, shielding them from environmental impacts through technology and resources. In stark contrast, Khapelitsha (formerly the Cape Flats) is an impoverished slum where marginalized communities confront climate disasters without protection or support.

The story follows three queer friends—Luthando, Viwe, and Malcolm—across multiple timelines spanning 15 years, from before the climate collapse ("the Change") to its aftermath. Luthando is a conservationist and eco-activist, described as having "the soul of a revolutionary." Viwe, his partner, is a gay man struggling to reconcile his sexuality with his religious, conservative upbringing. Malcolm, Luthando's best friend, is a white South African software developer increasingly engrossed in brain-computer interface technology. A fourth character, Milo, appears in the post-collapse timeline as a child growing up alone in Khapelitsha after his parents disappear. The narrative shifts among these perspectives, illustrating how climate change, religious fanaticism, and technological escapism shape their lives and relationships.

Mackay's novel garnered significant recognition, being shortlisted for the British Science Fiction Association Awards 2022 and the Sunday Times Literary Awards 2023. Critics lauded it, calling it "absolutely phenomenal, immensely moving and chilling" and "the queer dystopian novel everyone needs to read."

Research Gap

Despite its critical acclaim, this novel has received minimal scholarly attention. Only one academic article, a 2025 comparative study, mentions it, analyzing *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* alongside Okorafor's *Noor* to explore embodied climate knowledge in African cli-fi. Crucially, there are no dedicated PhD theses, book chapters, or journal articles focused solely on Mackay's work. More broadly, scholarship on African queer climate fiction as a distinct category is entirely absent. This significant gap spans the intersection of cli-fi studies, African

literature, and queer theory. My research aims to address this by providing the first dedicated analysis of Mackay's novel and establishing African queer cli-fi as a field deserving of scholarly attention.

Research Questions

This paper investigates three key questions:

RQ1: How does *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* represent the intersection of queer identity and climate justice?

RQ2: In what ways does the novel challenge Western anthropocentric climate narratives through embodied climate knowledge?

RQ3: How does Mackay's focus on hope and resilience differ from mainstream dystopian climate fiction?

Literature Review

Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) as a Genre: Climate fiction emerged as a distinct genre between 2009 and 2011, gaining widespread attention throughout the 2010s as the urgency of climate change intensified. Scholars define cli-fi as literature that examines the effects of climate change on humans and ecosystems, uses speculative fiction to imagine possible futures, and works to build ethical frameworks for sustainable thinking. A 2018 empirical survey indicated that climate fiction can influence readers' environmental awareness, though most studies in this area focus on Western texts. Johns-Putra's research, for example, shows that cli-fi readers report heightened environmental concern after engaging with such narratives, suggesting literature's potential to catalyze climate action. However, mainstream cli-fi has faced criticism for its limitations. Schneider-Mayerson and other scholars note that most studied works feature white, Western protagonists and settings, effectively marginalizing perspectives from the Global South. This Western-centrism is particularly problematic given that climate change disproportionately affects nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—regions that have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions.

The Problem of Western-Centrism in Cli-Fi: Recent scholarship extensively critiques mainstream cli-fi for its inherent Western bias. Mayer's work on "Decolonising Imaginations of Global Futures" argues that climate fiction and postcolonial ecologies rarely intersect, despite climate change's disproportionate impact on formerly colonized nations. She contends that decolonizing climate imaginaries necessitates centering Indigenous and Global South perspectives. Similarly, DeDeckere observes that "African cli-fi takes on climate crisis" by actively challenging Western narratives about climate change. African authors are increasingly writing fiction that envisions alternative climate futures, moving beyond conventional Western dystopian models. O'Reilly further emphasizes that African science fiction addresses climate change through African futurism, a framework that integrates African cultural perspectives with speculative fiction.

African Climate Fiction: African climate fiction (cli-fi) is a rapidly expanding field. A 2023 conversation on The Literary Platform with Prayaag Akbar emphasized how "climate fiction and the Global South" offer unique perspectives shaped by distinct geographies and colonial histories. *African Arguments* notes that African cli-fi envisions "diverse climate futures (cities in sandstorms, biotech implants)," thereby challenging prevalent Western climate imaginaries.

Scholarly attention to African cli-fi is growing. A forthcoming 2025 Oxford Academic chapter, "Why Read African Climate Fiction?", posits that African cli-fi provides "alternative ecopolitical imaginaries." Similarly, *Down To Earth* reports that "African sci-fi imagines new ways of living in climate-changed worlds," a theme further explored in the new book *African Climate Futures*. Notable examples of African cli-fi include Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* (2021) and Sipho Dlamini Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* (2022).

Queer Ecology and Climate Justice: Queer ecology investigates how queer theory can illuminate environmental concerns. As Catriona Sandilands argues, marginalized queer individuals often experience the climate crisis differently. Traditional binaries, such as nature/human and normal/abnormal, are restrictive and can be challenged by queer perspectives, which simultaneously critique anthropocentrism and heteronormativity. Despite this, there is a significant lack of scholarship on queer African climate fiction. While some researchers have examined queerness in Western eco-fiction, the intersection of African, queer, and climate perspectives remains largely unexplored. Climate justice scholarship recognizes that marginalized communities, including queer people of color, face compounded climate vulnerabilities. As Kyle Whyte observes, climate justice must address how colonialism, racism, and economic inequality intersect with environmental harm.

Embodied Climate Knowledge: Recent scholarship highlights the importance of embodied knowledge in African cli-fi. Bartosch's 2025 article, "Embodied Climate Knowledge in African Cli-Fi," analyzes Mackay's novel and Okorafor's *Noor*. It argues that "embodied knowledge depicted in climate fiction novels by African authors offers insights into marginalized subjectivities." This concept of embodied climate knowledge contrasts with Western approaches that often prioritize technological solutions. It encompasses lived experience, cultural memory, a physical connection to land and water, and bodily survival. This understanding is crucial for interpreting Mackay's critique of Western climate solutions.

Hope vs. Dystopian Pessimism in Cli-Fi: Mainstream climate fiction often portrays bleak, hopeless dystopias. In contrast, African cli-fi frequently integrates "dystopia, drought and hope." DeDeckere notes that African authors reject fatalism, instead emphasizing resilience and collective action. Mackay's novel, for instance, is described as "a profoundly moving story of resilience, tenderness and hope." This stands in stark contrast to Western dystopian cli-fi, which often depicts inevitable doom without clear paths to change. Psychological research affirms that hope is vital for fostering climate action and resilience.

Methodology

Approach: Qualitative Literary Analysis: This study employs qualitative literary analysis, focusing on a close reading of Mackay's novel through three theoretical lenses: ecocriticism, queer theory, and postcolonial theory. This approach enables a detailed examination of how texts represent complex social and environmental issues through narrative, character, symbolism, and language.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism and Climate Fiction: Ecocriticism examines how literature represents nature and environmental issues. In the context of climate fiction (cli-fi), it analyzes how texts portray climate change, whether they challenge or reinforce anthropocentrism, and how they envision environmental justice. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." When applied to cli-fi, it prompts questions such as: Does the text challenge human dominance over nature? Does it offer alternative visions of human–nature relationships? Does it prioritize environmental justice?

Queer Theory: Queer theory critiques fixed categories of identity and sexuality. Key concepts include queerness as fluidity, heteronormativity as the assumption that heterosexuality is the default, and queer ecology as the intersection of queer theory and environmentalism. As Sandilands explains, queer ecology explores how queer perspectives can illuminate environmental issues by questioning both anthropocentrism and heteronormativity. Queer experiences of marginalization offer insights into how the climate crisis disproportionately affects different communities.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Postcolonial ecocriticism investigates how colonialism shapes environmental injustice. In South Africa, this includes the spatial legacy of apartheid, persistent economic inequality, and extractive capitalism. Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant here—the gradual, often imperceptible environmental degradation that disproportionately harms poor and marginalized communities. Climate change functions as slow violence, exacerbating inequalities rooted in colonialism and apartheid.

Discussion: Climate Apartheid and Spatial Inequality

The Citadel vs. Kapelitsha: Climate Apartheid: The novel divides Cape Town into two contrasting zones, illustrating what can be termed climate apartheid—the intensification of segregation due to climate change, based on race, class, and geography. The Citadel, a climate-controlled dome built on Signal Hill, houses elites in comfort. Mackay describes it as "a new private security estate," an evolution of South African gated communities. Residents enjoy air-conditioned safety, shielded from external disasters. They can afford biotech implants that connect to their brains, allowing them to escape into virtual reality and ignore the suffering beyond. In stark contrast, Kapelitsha (formerly the Cape Flats) is a vast, arid slum where daytime temperatures exceed human tolerance. Rising oceans have flooded the area, transforming it into "Kapelitsha Island," a wasteland where people hide during the day and forage at night. Crops have failed, water is scarce, and maggot protein powder is a prized food. This division mirrors apartheid's spatial legacy. Post-apartheid South Africa continues to grapple with extreme inequality, which climate change deepens, creating new forms of segregation built upon existing ones.

Climate Justice Framework: The novel embodies climate justice principles: climate change disproportionately affects poor, marginalized communities; those who contributed least suffer most; and solutions must address inequality, not just emissions. In the story, Citadel residents are predominantly white and wealthy—

those who benefited from apartheid and colonialism—while Kapelitsha residents, mostly Black, poor, and queer, bear the brunt of the disaster. This mirrors real-world climate injustice. As Whyte writes, "climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities who contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions."

Apartheid's Spatial Legacy: Mackay's novel links climate apartheid to the spatial legacy of apartheid. The Citadel, a "contemporary South African gated community on steroids," intensifies segregation through climate control, symbolized by The Wall separating it from Kapelitsha. A character calls the Citadel "the last bastion of technology and capitalism," echoing apartheid's "last bastion" mentality of preserving privilege through separation. The novel's epigraph from Fredric Jameson—"It is easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism"—is fitting, as Mackay suggests that ending climate apartheid requires dismantling the economic systems that sustain it.

Religious Fanaticism and State Violence: The novel also illustrates the intersection of climate apartheid with religious fanaticism and state violence. In Kapelitsha, "the Believers," a fundamentalist group, impose an oppressive orthodoxy hostile to women and queer people, with drones terrorizing dissenters. This mirrors real-world persecution of queer individuals in places like Uganda, Egypt, and Chechnya. Luthando's narrow escape from being burned alive by Christian fanatics echoes actual violence against queer individuals. Religious fanaticism thus becomes another form of slow violence, making life unbearable for marginalized people even before total collapse.

Implications for Climate Fiction: While mainstream climate fiction often overlooks inequality, treating climate disaster as a universal threat, Mackay's novel centers climate justice. It demonstrates how race, class, and geography shape vulnerability, offering a more politically engaged approach that acknowledges power and inequality rather than pretending climate change affects everyone equally.

Embodied Knowledge in the Novel: The characters in *Kapelitsha* demonstrate embodied climate knowledge through their daily survival. As Bartosch notes, "embodied knowledge depicted in climate fiction novels by African authors offers insights into marginalized subjectivities." This knowledge is gained through lived experience within a place, through the body and community, rather than through abstract science.

Luthando's embodied knowledge: As a conservationist, Luthando begins with a deep connection to nature. At a reforestation festival in Platbos Forest, he asks, "Imagine how differently we'd treat plants if we could hear what they're saying?" His activism is physical and risky, involving leaving QR codes at petrol stations, using VR glasses to immerse drivers in burning forests, and actively trying to awaken people.

Kapelitsha residents' embodied knowledge: After the Change, residents develop survival knowledge—knowing when to hide, where to find water, how to build shelters, and how to rely on community rather than technology. This contrasts sharply with Citadel residents' technological escapism.

Technology vs. Embodied Knowledge: Mackay contrasts embodied knowledge with technological solutions through Malcolm's character, a software developer working on "mental and emotional software." His company creates NewLife, a virtual reality platform, and later Cerebra, a biotech implant connecting directly to the mind. From his Citadel flat, he develops "Somno Library," technology allowing people to live others' dreams, yet users become trapped in nightmares. His work represents the Western technological-fix mindset—an attempt to escape through biotech rather than confront the crisis. The novel critiques this approach, as one character asks, "If we are all uploaded to the Cloud, who cares about climate change anyway?" Technology, in this context, distracts from reality instead of solving it.

Contrast with Western Cli-Fi: Unlike Western cli-fi, which often emphasizes technological solutions, individual heroes, and human dominance over nature, Mackay's novel highlights community survival, collective action, and adaptation. The residents of Kapelitsha endure through cooperation, not individual heroism.

Theoretical Implications: Embodied knowledge in the novel challenges three prevailing assumptions:

- **Anthropocentrism:** The narrative positions humans as integral to nature, not superior to it. Luthando's inquiry about plants directly questions human exceptionalism.
- **Technological Fetishism:** It demonstrates that technology alone cannot resolve the climate crisis. Malcolm's VR technology serves as an escape rather than a solution.
- **Western Epistemology:** The novel validates non-Western ways of knowing. The survival knowledge of Kapelitsha residents is presented as valuable, even if not "scientific." As Whyte argues, climate justice necessitates centering Indigenous and marginalized knowledge systems, a principle Mackay's novel powerfully illustrates.

Implications for Climate Action: The novel's focus on embodied knowledge suggests that community-based adaptation is more effective than top-down technological fixes. It prioritizes local knowledge over abstract science and collective survival over individual escape. Mackay implies that genuine climate action requires embodied engagement with place and community, not technological withdrawal.

Queer Identity and Climate Crisis

Queer individuals experience the climate crisis uniquely due to intersecting marginalizations. Being queer, poor, and a racial minority compounds vulnerability, yet queer communities also demonstrate distinct strengths, such as chosen family, resistance to normalization, and adaptability. All three main characters in the novel are queer, and Mackay presents their queerness naturally, as an inherent part of their identity rather than a defining characteristic.

The Three Queer Friends

- **Luthando's Resilience:** Described as a "conservationist with the soul of a revolutionary," Luthando becomes increasingly radical through the #IDHTBTW campaign. Despite imprisonment and near-death

experiences, his connection to nature and belief in change fuels his continued fight.

- **Viwe's Struggle:** Luthando's partner, Viwe, grapples with internalized guilt from his religious upbringing. He becomes entangled in fanaticism before ultimately rejecting it, illustrating the tension between faith and identity.
- **Malcolm's Seduction by Technology:** A white South African developer, Malcolm becomes increasingly isolated, absorbed in virtual escapism. He embodies the danger of detachment from reality.

Their friendship endures despite their differences, showcasing queer resilience and the choice to support one another even amidst collapse.

Milo: The Next Generation: Milo, a child born after the Change, represents the next generation. After his parents vanish, he survives with the help of a neighbor. His fragmented and haunting story symbolizes innocence amidst devastation, and his existence signals hope: life continues.

Hope vs. Dystopian Pessimism: While mainstream cli-fi often embraces despair, Mackay's novel is explicitly hopeful. The title itself—*It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*—rejects fatalism. The recurring hashtag #IDHTBTW embodies activism and a belief in change. Despite its dark themes, the novel is "woven with hope," demonstrating that empathy and kindness sustain humanity.

Love as Survival: Love—both romantic and platonic—is portrayed as a survival mechanism. Luthando and Viwe's fragile yet fierce relationship endures through the collapse. Their friendship with Malcolm also persists, underscoring that connection matters more than individual heroism.

Implications for Cli-Fi: Mackay's hope-centered approach offers a powerful alternative to dystopian pessimism, modeling queer resilience as a form of climate action. This approach emphasizes collective solutions and the transformative power of love and community. Research indicates that hope motivates action, whereas despair leads to paralysis. Mackay's novel demonstrates that climate fiction (cli-fi) can embrace hope without succumbing to naivety.

Future Research Directions

Future scholarship should explore other African queer climate fiction texts, conduct comparative analyses between African and Western cli-fi, interview authors regarding their creative intentions, study reader responses, and expand postcolonial ecocriticism frameworks.

Conclusion

This paper examined Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* as a significant work within African queer climate fiction. Through close analysis, it revealed how the novel illustrates climate apartheid via spatial inequality, prioritizes embodied knowledge over technological solutions, and champions queer resilience and hope instead of dystopian despair. Mackay's novel offers a transformative approach to climate fiction by centering queer African subjectivities, valuing embodied knowledge, and rejecting fatalism. As climate change accelerates, literature must evolve beyond Western, heteronormative, and pessimistic narratives. We urgently need stories that amplify marginalized voices and envision more equitable futures. Mackay's novel exemplifies how climate

fiction can be hopeful, intersectional, and African-centered. The title, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, speaks a profound truth—but only if we collectively imagine better futures, integrate marginalized voices into climate storytelling, and actively choose hope over despair. This is the essential role of climate fiction, and precisely what this novel achieves.

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DABEER SI/KTT/68**REIMAGINING COLONIAL MASCULINITY: LOSS AND RECOVERY
OF SELF IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S *AFTERLIVES*****TELMA C**Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**R. SAKTHESWARI**Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Colonialism has great effects on the coloniser as well as the colonised. Abdulrazak Gurnah expands this idea in his novel *Afterlives*, where the protagonist Hamza is subjected to violations, subjugations, and internalised inferiorities caused by psychological colonisation, while in turn the German officials internalised superiority. The existing research in Gurnah's works often focuses on themes of trauma, memory, and family, while the idea of masculinity, more specifically, colonial masculinity, is left underexplored. The article proposes to work on this area, focusing on the application of the theoretical frameworks of Ashis Nandy's psychoanalysis of colonial ideologies of hypermasculinity and adulthood with Mrinalini Sinha's institutional binary of the 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali', together building the foundation of colonial masculinity. What appears as a triumphant manhood is revealed as a brittle mechanism to mask violence, exploitation, and the fear of its own dissolution. By synthesising masculinity studies with postcolonial theory, the article attempts to redefine the select novel as an active producer of colonial masculinity.

Keywords: Colonial masculinity, Postcolonialism, Manhood, Decolonisation, Hypermasculinity

Introduction

The eminent author of the novel *Afterlives*, Abdulrazak Gurnah, explores his works with themes of memory, trauma, diaspora, and exile, mostly centring on men and their sufferings, which makes his works particularly unique and interesting. Moreover, he is the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2021 for his work *Paradise*, which is his most significant milestone. He has written more than ten novels and currently works as a Professor at the University of Kent. The novel *Afterlives* explores the life of an African man, Hamza, who is in bondage, and to escape it he chooses to run away and join the Schutztruppe- an African Military Troop to serve the German officials, where he is moulded to fit the colonial ideals. He is made to give up his autonomy and is silenced and made to follow the colonial disciplines to sustain. Towards the end of the novel, Hamza finds a woman to share a family with and embraces his real self, giving up his harsh military machismo.

Recent and existing scholarship on Gurnah's works explores the themes of diaspora and exile, and there is a need to explore the idea of masculinity, focusing

on his male characters with special focus on colonial masculinity in *Afterlives* since it revolves around colonial grounds held between the Native Africans and the German Officials. The article aims to address the research gap with the selected theoretical frameworks.

The article draws upon the ideas of Mrinalini Sinha and Ashis Nandy from their seminal works titled *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1995) and *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983), respectively. Sinha, in her seminal work, examines how masculinity becomes a political tool in the British Empire. The British officials who came to India to colonise made themselves superior to other men by sticking to the culturally constructed masculine traits of violence, intellectual superiority and a forward-thinking race while making the Indians blindly believe that they are effeminate (feminine), weaker and intellectually inferior possibly portraying themselves to be more rational, masculine and capable of high authority where the Indians are denied from positing the Public Service Commission. The exact thing happens in the novel *Afterlives*, where the German officials made the African men who joined the troop believe to be ‘uncivilised’ while claiming themselves to be the able colonisers that they came to colonise the ‘savage African men’, thus incorporating within them the complex of inferiority. Gurnah portrays this situation in his work where the officer says to the African Askaris, “this is our Zivivlisierungsmisson, the officer said. This is our cunning plot. We have come here to civilise you” (Gurnah 65).

The German officials began to sow the seeds of Colonial Masculinity on their victims, the Askaris (indigenous African troops serving in European Colonial Armies), and in turn they began to internalise the same properties in order to be respected, paid, and to maintain a sustainable place within the troop, forgetting or more accurately giving up their true self. The officials encouraged them to be heartless to the people in the village to get the food they needed to survive, and in turn they would be paid off and respected. The deal is that, “We want you to be thick-skinned heartless braggarts who will do our bidding without hesitation and then we will pay you well and give you the respect you deserve, whether slave, soldier or outcast” (Gurnah 86).

The soldiers ought to be ruthless or at the least pretend to be heartless to hold on to one’s seat in the troop. The idea of colonial masculinity is made mandatory to be followed. Colonialism is not only based on race and economics but also on gender ideology, making the thought of ‘masculinity’ central to their plan. The very idea is reflected through the characters Kompa and Fulani, whose psyche and body are modulated exactly as per the norms of the ‘Manly Colonisers’, where they were given extra respect and were made to lead the troop under their control. The two men were admired by the women who came to serve food and also were respected and feared by the fellow askaris. The reason behind their hype is that the men tend to be attached to the able characteristics of the idea of colonial masculinity, which has been internalised by the fellow men and even women.

Sinha’s idea of “Manly Englishman” and “Effeminate Bengali” (Sinha 1) acts as a metaphor for the German officers and the African Askaris respectively. The

‘Manly German officers’ embraced and followed the qualities of aggression, military discipline, and emotional restraint. To them, these are the characteristics a man must possess, as Nandy rightly observes, “Aggression, strength, discipline and emotional restraint were considered to be manly (Nandy 100). The qualities mentioned became symbols of civilisation and legitimate authority. On the other hand, the ‘Effeminate African men’ were stereotyped as intellectually inferior, comparatively uncivilised and unfit for leadership, and they eventually became passive to the rules and conditions of the Germans, like the Bengali men were to the Englishmen. As a result, Colonial Masculinity became relational; one existed because of the other, and this led to the formation of hierarchy among the men. The coloniser heavily punished the colonised for every mistake either intentionally or unintentionally committed. “Every order was shouted and accompanied by abuse. Every error was punished by violence or hard labour. Punishment was constant and public. Their trainers spat on them constantly” (Gurnah 61-62).

The colonised men, as a result, became an instrument in the hands of the colonisers, for which they are portrayed as their political tool for suppressing and using. The idea applies more to the protagonist of the story, Hamza, where he is made to become the personal servant of the officer, wherein he is subjected to commit himself to the needs and wishes of the higher authority. He feels trapped to a large extent that he fails to acknowledge that he is in an invisible trap, unable to get himself out, becoming the officer’s personal servant. The bare minimum of the African men’s image in the hands of the German officials is that they are literally just an instrument used to fight against the Americans for the Germans; it is reflected in the words of the officer when he says, “The Schutztruppe is our instrument” (Gurnah 86).

The colonised men were so feeble that every aspect of colonial masculinity made the colonised men internalise it, which led to the loss of their freedom both physically and psychologically. As Sinha says in her seminal work, “The feebleness of the Bengalis served to justify their loss of independence to the British” (15), a notion which can be accurately applied to the Africans and Germans respectively. The African Askaris, including Hamza, remained loyal and obedient to the German officers by performing ruthless activities against the villagers and began imitating their military discipline that pleased his officers and higher authority. A similar notion is reflected in an article authored by Meshram and Palwekar:

At this point, Hamza loses his ‘self’ and his identity is a construction of the colonial masculinity. Within this framework, ambition is carefully manufactured; obedience is framed as dignity, discipline as self-worth, and loyalty as elevation above social insignificance. Hamza internalises these colonial values, making proximity as authority to agency. (Meshram and Palwekar 2168).

Mrinalini Sinha in her seminal work explains that colonialism constructs masculinity as an instrument of imperial rule, creating racial and gender hierarchies. Even within the troop, a clear hierarchy existed: the officer occupied the highest rank, followed by the Oberleutnant, the Feldwebel, the Medical Officer, the Askaris, and finally the carriers and porters. This hierarchy was

organized around a single axis of power—manhood. Ashis Nandy expands this understanding by explaining what such a construction would do to the colonised psyche and how liberation requires a redefinition of masculinity itself. His seminal work titled *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983) is one of the foundational texts in postcolonial studies. Nandy argues that colonialism is primarily a psychological and cultural process that transforms and entraps both the coloniser and the colonised.

The concept of colonialism does not end with political rule, for it also invades the mind, culture and identity of the colonised. The colonised begin to see themselves through the eyes of the coloniser and internalise feelings of inferiority. The officials were harsh to the soldiers that the idea of colonialism has damaged their psyche as well, where they are expected to maintain their dignity by being harsh and ruthless. Nandy writes in his work, “Only the victims of a culture of hypermasculinity, adulthood, historicism, objectivism and hyper-normality protect themselves by over-stressing those aspects in self” (Nandy 100). Moreover, the colonisers’ psyche is blinded by the need for superiority and authority, in which these men rejoice secretly while the colonised men begin to accept their harsh reality. Such an incident is reflected in the life of Hamza where he learns to make himself inferior, as stated by Gurnah thus: “Hamza learned to take his share and keep his head down” (Gurnah 62). The psyche of the colonised is deeply affected by thoughts of inferiority, so that they become submissive to be alive and dignified. This mindset gets reflected in Nandy’s work where he is, “Better to be a comical dissenter than to be a powerful” (Nandy 111).

Hamza's sense of autonomy is stripped away when he is assigned as the officer's personal servant, compelled to attend to the officer's needs and wishes. He is expected to learn German and perform personal chores, a role that subjects him to ridicule from his fellow soldiers. Gurnah cites an instance: “He was required to roll out his sleeping mat beside the officer’s cot at dusk for an hour or two while he continued with what he called their conversation classes” (Gurnah 93). For that reason, he was criticised and taunted by the fellow askaris as ‘Shoga’, a Swahili term associated with describing a close female friend.

The notion of psychological colonisation becomes the actual ‘Intimate Enemy’ working in two ways; one for the coloniser and another for the colonised. For instance, in the mind of the coloniser, it cultivates a superiority complex, and for the colonised it generates an inferiority complex, dehumanising their humane qualities. Hence, psychological colonisation becomes more important than political independence.

Nandy reflects on the same idea, applying it to Indians who are inferior to their British colonisers. He writes, “The average Indian has always lived with the awareness and possibility of long-term suffering, always seen himself as protecting his deepest faith with the passive, ‘feminine’ cunning of the weak and the victimised, and surviving outer pressures by refusing to overplay his sense of autonomy and self-respect” (Nandy 111). On the other hand, the coloniser is afraid of losing his authority among the colonised community, and to hold his head high, he has to be physically strong, stern, fearless, and authoritative, or at the least pretend to be majestic and maintain his authority. In the novel *Afterlives*, the

concept is portrayed as follows: “The Feldwebel was tall and solidly built, with a loud booming voice. He kept them hard at work when he was in charge and used abusive language. He was everything Hamza had expected in a German officer” (Gurnah 59). The concept of a high-built body, demeanour, and fearless posture is where the notion of colonial masculinity plays its part. The psyche is damaged for the colonised and for the coloniser. The sense of submissiveness, weakness (feminine), and inferiority would hit hard. Hamza is always obedient and gives up his autonomy over himself that the harsh comments and beatings given by the authority bothered him no more. His mind gets corrupted by the higher officials, and he incorporates it without realising and begins to accept it as if it is his destiny. Every lash and beating given is a module to make the askaris remember the actual essence of Colonial Masculinity, as Gurnah writes, “Every error was punished by violence or hard labour; according to its severity. Whole troops were marched into the boma to witness the Hamza ishirin, the twenty-five lashes, a public flogging for one misdemeanour. It was to make them obedient and fearless” (60).

The coloniser became more rigid, showing himself to be less empathetic, more vulnerable, strict, and heartless, while the colonised had to make sure that they were obedient to the authority, displaying their ruthlessness to the people and the enemies, and perform the required activities. The moment Hamza becomes the officer’s personal servant, the fellow soldiers call him a bearer of feminine qualities, which is a great insult to him; to escape the miserable situation, he decides to overpower the fellow askaris to establish his autonomy. In other words, the concept of colonial masculinity requires improvement in order to sustain his position. The notion is internalised, and now Hamza thinks that the character is the most rational and unavoidable hack to be embraced and respected. He eventually gets trapped, as his colonisers do; this is where the characters get trapped and become slaves to the unavoidable notion of an internalised psyche. Ashis Nandy talks about the psychology of colonisation, and he writes thus: “Colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the minds of men” (Nandy 63).

Nandy presents Gandhi as someone who challenged colonial masculinity, for Gandhi embraced qualities the British associated with feminine qualities that include non-violence, compassion, empathy, and moral values. By refusing to imitate the colonial model of manhood, Gandhi decolonised himself and offered an alternative vision of strength as Nandy writes, “In his non-heroic ordinariness, he is the archetypal survivor. Seemingly he makes all-round compromises, but he refuses to be psychologically swamped, co-opted or penetrated” (111).

Gandhi emphasises the ‘Recovery of Self’ which is once lost because of the mind that was once colonised. Hamza has to decolonise his mind and embrace the autonomy of his ‘Self’. Nandy states the fact in his seminal work, “In order to truly live, it might be sometimes better to be dead in somebody else’s eyes, so as to be alive for one’s own self” (111). Hamza has to give up the colonised mindset and return to his true self. By rejecting the authority that once controlled him, he begins to decolonise his thinking and gain real freedom. This is the freedom that an askari comes to realise only later in life.

Hamza was making great progress within his troop with his tremendous efforts to build his colonially acceptable body by doing drills every day, giving his best as a personal servant to his officer, learning the German language quickly, which even pleased his Officer, being obedient and submissive, and holding up to his timely duties as an askari. All these characteristics earned him special respect within his troop, and it could not be digested by the second-grade officer Feldwebel, as a result of which he beat him rigorously and damaged his hip. He left the troop to be treated, for he was bleeding heavily and was unable to move. The coloniser's authoritative move made him suffer a lot for no reason. He was sent to Pastor Pascal to recover under his care. As he gradually regained his strength, he returned to East Africa, where he had once lived, while his body continued to heal.

Nandy, towards the concluding part, states, "In order to accept oneself, one must learn to hold in trust 'weaknesses' to which a violent, culturally barren and politically bankrupt world someday may have to return" (Nandy 111-112). Hamza, who was once directed by his militant rulers to follow a rash and harsh character, claiming it to be the most acceptable form of masculine feature, now begins to decolonise his psyche, embracing the qualities which were considered weak and effeminate. Hamza, who was once a destroyer of people's peace in the Boma, who once stole their food, savings, and money, now begins to accept the characteristics the German Officials claimed to be more feminine, which marks the beginning of the decolonising of self. He gradually rejects the colonial definition of masculinity and embraces his humane self in compassion and patience.

Hamza chooses not to take revenge on Feldwebel even after his recovery. Instead of becoming a hyper-masculine hero, he becomes a gentle husband, a caring companion, and an emotionally open man carrying out his duties in a perfect way. His qualities get reflected when his wife lost her child during the initial days of her pregnancy. He made sure to be soft and tender towards her and kept her warm through her difficult terrain, which Gurnah beautifully pictures in his novel: "He was tender with her. He softened his voice when he spoke to her as if loud tones would upset her" (Gurnah 223).

Hamza became more dutiful and patient when he became a father to his son Ilyas. Rather than embracing the more masculine features which the military taught him, he became more humane, inculcating the characters that Gandhi embraced. Hamza's gradual recovery illustrates a process of psychological decolonisation in which he re-establishes himself from the imperial script of masculinity that colonial discourse dismisses as 'weaknesses', which include care, emotional openness and relational responsibility. Nandy's assertion finds its fullest expression in the transformation of Hamza; towards the end of the novel, he recovers his psyche, which was earlier corrupted by the German colonisers. The novel *Afterlives* reveals that colonial masculinity is more than a political ideology; it is a lived and psychological experience.

Drawing on the notion of Mrinalini Sinha, the article argues that colonial masculinity is constructed through imperial hierarchies that privilege the coloniser while subordinating the colonised. Ashis Nandy deepens the understanding by

showing how these ideals are internalised, affecting the minds of both the coloniser as well as the colonised. Gurnah brings the process to life through Hamza, whose journey embodies the trauma and recovery of a self, fractured by colonial rule. Finally, Gandhi offers a way of decolonising psychology, where masculinity is transcended through compassion, moral courage and human dignity rather than domination. Altogether, these ideas demonstrate that the novel is not simply a work about colonial violence but about reclaiming humanity beyond the limits of colonial masculinity, which is a way of recovering the lost 'Self'.

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DABEER SI/KTT/69**MASCULINITY IN EXILE: INDIGENOUS IDENTITY, URBAN COLONIALISM, AND SACRED MEMORY IN *THROUGH BLACK SPRUCE*****G. LAKSHMI PRIYA**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai, India**N. GNANASELVI**Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English
Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Madurai, India**Abstract**

The rebuilding of Indigenous masculinity in Joseph Boyden's *Through Black Spruce* is examined in this paper using the closely linked themes of urban colonialism, exile, sacred memory, and cultural survival. The study argues that the novel redefines Indigenous masculinity not through dominance or patriarchal authority but through emotional endurance, kinship responsibility, silence, spiritual connection, and cultural resilience. The figure of Will Bird, whose physical sickness and mental loneliness represent the breakdown of Indigenous male identity under colonial modernity, is the main subject of this study. Boyden portrays urban spaces as colonial environments that alienate Indigenous men from land, tradition, and communal identity, thereby producing a condition of masculine exile. In contrast, sacred memory, storytelling, ancestral connection, and the natural landscape function as restorative forces that help reconstruct Indigenous masculinity. The novel also explores the tension between traditional Indigenous ways of life and modern capitalist culture, revealing how colonial systems continue to influence identity formation in contemporary Indigenous communities. The movement between the northern bush and the urban cityscape symbolises the conflict between cultural rootedness and spiritual displacement. Boyden further presents masculinity as deeply interconnected with community responsibility, ancestral knowledge, and emotional survival rather than physical dominance or patriarchal control. The paper also examines the effects of intergenerational trauma, economic marginalisation, and cultural alienation on Indigenous male identity. The connection between land and healing is brought out, with nature appearing as a sacred space that may help Indigenous peoples who are still dealing with the effects of colonial modernity regain emotional balance, cultural continuity, and a sense of spiritual belonging.

Keywords: Indigenous Masculinity, Urban Colonialism, Sacred Memory, Cultural Survival, Masculine Exile, Cultural Alienation.

Joseph Boyden is one of the important contemporary writers in Canadian literature who writes extensively about Indigenous life, colonial trauma, cultural memory, and survival. His novels often focus on the struggles faced by Indigenous communities as they attempt to preserve their identity within colonial social systems. Boyden's works are deeply connected with Indigenous history, oral

storytelling traditions, spirituality, and the emotional impact of colonialism. Rather than presenting Indigenous characters as passive victims, he portrays them as individuals who continuously struggle to protect their culture, relationships, and sense of belonging. His fiction frequently examines themes such as displacement, intergenerational trauma, healing, and resistance. Through emotionally complex characters and culturally rooted narratives, Boyden highlights the lasting effects of colonial violence on Indigenous communities while also emphasising endurance and survivance.

Through Black Spruce is one such novel that explores the emotional and cultural struggles of Indigenous people living between traditional northern communities and modern urban spaces. The novel primarily centres on the Bird family, particularly Will Bird and his niece, Annie. Through their experiences, Boyden presents the difficulties faced by Indigenous communities in maintaining their cultural identity within a rapidly changing world shaped by capitalism, exploitation, and colonial influence. The novel moves between the isolated northern landscape and large urban centres, creating a sharp contrast between Indigenous cultural rootedness and the alienating nature of city life.

The novel also addresses the problems of family fragmentation, emotional isolation, and identity crisis among Indigenous people. Annie's journey into urban spaces exposes the exploitation and objectification faced by Indigenous women, while Will Bird's physical illness and emotional silence symbolise the wounded condition of Indigenous masculinity. Boyden uses these characters to show how colonial systems continue to affect Indigenous lives not only socially and economically but also psychologically and spiritually. The northern landscape in the novel functions as more than a physical setting because it is closely tied to memory, healing, ancestry, and cultural continuity. In contrast, urban spaces are often represented as places of corruption, loneliness, and disconnection. Another important aspect of the novel is its portrayal of Indigenous resilience. Even though the characters experience displacement and trauma, they continue to search for connection, healing, and belonging. Storytelling, memory, kinship, and relationships with the land become important sources of survival. Boyden, therefore, presents Indigenous identity as something deeply connected to community, spirituality, and ancestral memory rather than individual success or material power.

In many Western societies, masculinity has traditionally been associated with qualities such as dominance, aggression, emotional restraint, physical power, and patriarchal authority. Men are often expected to appear strong, controlling, independent, and unemotional. These ideas of masculinity are closely connected with power structures that value competition, authority, and control over others. Such forms of masculinity are commonly referred to as hegemonic masculinity because they establish dominant standards for how men are expected to behave within society. Emotional vulnerability, dependence, and sensitivity are often viewed as weakness within these masculine frameworks. Indigenous understandings of masculinity differ significantly from these Western patriarchal models. Indigenous masculinity is more closely connected with kinship responsibility, communal ethics, spirituality, protection, emotional endurance, and

harmony with nature. Masculine identity in many Indigenous cultures is not measured through domination or authority but through one's ability to care for family, maintain cultural traditions, protect the community, and preserve relationships with land and ancestry. Indigenous masculinity, therefore, operates within a collective and relational framework rather than an individualistic one.

In *Through Black Spruce*, Boyden challenges dominant Western ideas of masculinity by presenting Indigenous male characters who express strength through silence, endurance, caregiving, and spiritual connection. Will Bird, for example, does not fit the image of the aggressive or authoritative male figure. Instead, his masculinity is shaped through emotional suffering, responsibility toward family, and connection to memory and land. His silence reflects trauma, endurance, and inner struggle rather than emotional emptiness. Through such representations, Boyden redefines masculinity in ways that are culturally specific to Indigenous experience.

The novel also shows how colonialism has disrupted traditional Indigenous masculine roles. Colonial systems displaced Indigenous communities from their lands, weakened cultural traditions, and imposed Western social structures upon Indigenous life. As a result, many Indigenous men experience alienation, identity fragmentation, and loss of communal belonging. The effects of residential schools, economic marginalisation, urban migration, and cultural disconnection continue to shape Indigenous masculine identity in the modern world.

Indigenous men in the novel struggle to maintain their sense of self within environments that separate them from land, culture, and community. The pressures of urban life, capitalist exploitation, and cultural marginalisation create a condition of masculine exile in which Indigenous men feel emotionally and spiritually disconnected from their traditional roots. Urban colonial spaces in the novel function as environments of alienation and fragmentation. Indigenous characters entering these spaces often experience loneliness, invisibility, exploitation, and cultural loss. Traditional masculine roles connected with hunting, communal protection, storytelling, and spiritual responsibility become increasingly difficult to maintain within modern colonial society. As Indigenous men become separated from ancestral land and communal identity, they also experience emotional isolation and psychological instability.

The novel raises important questions regarding the survival and reconstruction of Indigenous masculinity within colonial modernity. It examines whether sacred memory, kinship, spirituality, and connection with nature can help restore fragmented masculine identity. Through its portrayal of cultural struggle and emotional endurance, *Through Black Spruce* becomes an important text for understanding how Indigenous masculinity continues to survive despite displacement, trauma, and colonial disruption.

Several critics have examined the works of Joseph Boyden in relation to Indigenous identity, colonial trauma, cultural memory, and survivance. Most scholarly discussions on Boyden's fiction focus on how his novels portray the continuing effects of colonialism on Indigenous communities. Researchers have particularly studied the representation of violence, displacement, loss of language, residential school trauma, and psychological suffering in his works. Novels such

as *Three Day Road*, *The Orenda*, and *Wenjack* are often discussed in terms of historical trauma and Indigenous resistance. Critics argue that Boyden presents Indigenous characters as individuals struggling to preserve their identity within colonial systems that continuously attempt to erase Indigenous culture and traditions. Many studies also examine Boyden's use of oral storytelling, memory, and Indigenous spirituality. Scholars have pointed out that memory in Boyden's novels functions not only as remembrance of the past but also as a form of cultural survival.

Another important area of research focuses on Indigenous masculinity and the effects of colonialism on Indigenous male identity. Scholars argue that colonial systems weakened traditional Indigenous masculine roles by imposing Western patriarchal values and disrupting communal structures. The idea of colonial emasculation has been widely discussed in Indigenous studies, where researchers explain how colonialism removed Indigenous men from positions connected with protection, spirituality, leadership, and communal responsibility. Residential schools, forced displacement, poverty, and urban migration contributed to identity fragmentation among Indigenous men.

Scholars working on urban colonialism examine how modern cities continue colonial systems of exclusion and alienation for Indigenous communities. Research in this area focuses on Indigenous displacement from ancestral lands and the emotional isolation experienced within urban capitalist environments. Critics argue that cities often function as spaces where Indigenous identities are commodified, marginalised, or erased. Urban migration creates cultural disconnection because Indigenous people are separated from community structures, spirituality, and relationships with nature.

Studies also discuss how capitalism intensifies identity struggles among Indigenous communities. Economic exploitation, poverty, racism, and social invisibility contribute to psychological stress and cultural fragmentation. Researchers examining Indigenous literature note that urban spaces are frequently represented as spiritually empty environments compared to the healing and sacred qualities associated with land and nature. Such studies are useful in understanding the contrast between the northern landscape and urban spaces in *Through Black Spruce*. As Annie encounters spaces shaped by commercial exploitation and social inequality, she experiences increasing alienation from the values that define her upbringing. Her displacement parallels Allison Piché's chapter titled *Imprisonment and Indigenous Masculinity: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Toxic Environment* shares that colonial institutions often impose restrictive models of identity that undermine Indigenous ways of being while creating conditions of exclusion and marginalisation (239). Although Annie is not imprisoned in a literal sense, the urban environment operates as a structure that attempts to reshape Indigenous identity according to colonial expectations.

Although many studies discuss trauma, identity crisis, colonial violence, and Indigenous women in Boyden's fiction, limited attention has been given to the reconstruction of Indigenous masculinity in *Through Black Spruce*. Most critics focus on colonial suffering or female experiences without fully examining how Indigenous male identity is shaped through exile, sacred memory, and emotional

endurance. Similarly, fewer studies connect Indigenous masculinity with urban colonialism and spiritual displacement.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by R. W. Connell, in *Masculinities* (1995), explains that masculinity is not a fixed biological identity but a social and cultural construction shaped by power relations within society. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of masculinity that society considers ideal and superior. This dominant masculinity is usually associated with authority, physical strength, emotional control, aggression, independence, and patriarchal power. Men are expected to maintain control over emotions, display dominance, and occupy positions of authority both within the family and society. Other forms of masculinity that do not fit these standards are often marginalised or considered weak. "It examines the global history of masculinity in recent centuries, then the specific forms of masculinity politics in the contemporary West" (Connell14). When Annie leaves Moose Factory and enters the city, she becomes exposed to a capitalist environment where Indigenous identity is commercialised and objectified. She works in modelling spaces, fashion environments, bars, and elite social circles where appearance, sexuality, and market value become more important than cultural identity or communal belonging. Annie is often viewed as an exotic Indigenous woman whose identity can be consumed and displayed within urban capitalist culture. Through these experiences, the novel demonstrates how colonial urban systems reduce Indigenous people to objects of fascination and exploitation.

At the same time, the novel indirectly portrays the invisibility of Indigenous men within these urban structures. In Moose Factory, masculine identity is connected with hunting, storytelling, protection of family, relationships with elders, and spiritual closeness to land. Men possess communal roles and cultural responsibilities within the Indigenous community. However, these traditional masculine roles lose meaning within the city. Urban life values wealth, competition, consumerism, and individual success rather than kinship or communal ethics. As Annie moves through clubs, hotels, and wealthy urban spaces, Indigenous cultural identity becomes disconnected from land and ancestry. The city provides no meaningful space for Indigenous masculine traditions connected with spirituality, oral memory, or communal leadership.

This contrast becomes especially visible through Will Bird's memories of northern life. While Annie experiences alienation in urban environments, Will continues to remember hunting practices, seasonal rhythms, and family relationships tied to the bush. His memories reflect a form of Indigenous masculinity grounded in responsibility, protection, and cultural continuity. In contrast, urban capitalist society marginalises these values and replaces them with systems of power shaped by Western hegemonic masculinity. Indigenous men within such environments become culturally displaced because the city does not recognise Indigenous masculine identities rooted in spirituality and communal belonging.

Connell also argues that multiple masculinities exist within society, and not all men experience masculinity in the same way. Some masculinities resist or differ from dominant Western masculine ideals. These alternative masculinities are

shaped by cultural background, race, class, history, and social experience. Indigenous masculinity is one such form that differs significantly from hegemonic Western masculinity. Instead of emphasising domination and authority, Indigenous masculinity is often connected with family duty, social ethics, religion, mental strength, and providing care and protection for the community. Emotional silence in Indigenous cultures may not always represent weakness but can function as resilience, patience, and inner strength developed through historical suffering and survival.

This theoretical framework is useful in analysing *Through Black Spruce* because the novel presents masculinity in ways that challenge dominant Western masculine norms. The character of Will Bird does not fit the image of the aggressive, physically dominant, or emotionally detached male figure commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity. Instead, his masculinity is expressed through care, emotional endurance, memory, silence, and responsibility toward family and community. Even though he is physically weak because of illness, he remains spiritually and emotionally connected to his cultural roots. His silence reflects trauma, reflection, and endurance rather than masculine failure.

Boyden also portrays masculinity through relationships with land, ancestry, and communal belonging. Will's emotional attachment to the northern landscape and his concern for Annie reveal a form of masculinity rooted in protection and care instead of control or authority. Through such representations, the novel questions Western patriarchal ideas of masculinity and presents Indigenous manhood as relational, spiritual, and culturally grounded. Connell's theory, therefore, helps in understanding how Boyden reconstructs Indigenous masculinity outside hegemonic masculine structures and presents an alternative model based on cultural resilience and survivance.

The psychological strain that Indigenous males bear as they fight to maintain their identity in a changing environment is further reflected in Will's emotional seclusion. He mirrors, remembers, and is silent for much of the novel. "Silence, but one that wrapped around me like a blanket." (Boyden 47). His silence should not be construed as a sign of weakness or emotional emptiness; instead, Silence often acts as survival, endurance, and self-control in Indigenous environments. Will's trauma is evident in his unwillingness to communicate his feelings openly. Additionally, he uses his silence as a method of coping to deal with suffering, loneliness, and anxiety. As a result, Boyden stresses the role of silence in the Indigenous masculinity experience. Even though he physically survives, he becomes emotionally withdrawn and trapped within his memories. His silence becomes especially visible in his interactions with the community members and with Annie. Rather than openly expressing fear or sadness about Annie's disappearance, he internalises his pain and constantly reflects upon the past. For instance, while listening to stories about Annie or remembering her childhood, Will rarely reacts outwardly, yet his thoughts reveal deep emotional suffering and anxiety about losing another family member.

Several scenes in the novel show him silently observing the northern landscape, animals, and changing seasons while reflecting on the cultural changes affecting Indigenous communities. These moments reveal that his silence is deeply

connected with memory and loss rather than emotional emptiness. Similarly, when Will Bird remembers his relationship with his niece and family history, he chooses reflection instead of verbal expression. His inability to speak openly after his illness symbolises not only physical weakness but also the emotional burden carried by Indigenous men who have experienced historical trauma and cultural displacement.

The novel presents Indigenous masculinity as a complex and evolving identity shaped by colonial disruption, cultural displacement, and emotional struggle. Through the character of Will Bird and the experiences of the Indigenous community, Boyden challenges dominant Western definitions of masculinity that prioritise authority, aggression, and emotional control. The plot reveals how colonial modernity and urban capitalist systems separate Indigenous men from land, tradition, and cultural belonging, leading to emotional alienation, identity fragmentation, and masculine exile.

However, Boyden also demonstrates that Indigenous masculinity survives through sacred memory, storytelling, ancestral connection, and relationships with nature. Will Bird's vulnerability, silence, and emotional suffering reflect a form of masculinity grounded in patience, reflection, and relational ethics rather than domination or physical power. By foregrounding emotional depth and cultural continuity, the novel humanises Indigenous men and resists stereotypical representations created by colonial discourse. *Through Black Spruce* suggests that the reconstruction of Indigenous masculinity depends upon reconnecting with ancestral knowledge, communal values, and sacred relationships with the land, thereby presenting Indigenous manhood as spiritually rooted, culturally resilient, and capable of healing despite the continuing pressures of colonial modernity.

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DABEER SI/KTT/70**INDIGENOUS MASCULINITY AT CROSSROADS IN ANUJ LUGUN'S
"THE TIGER AND THE DAUGHTER OF SUGNA MUNDA"****S. J. KALA**Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**K. M. AAMEENA MISSRIA**Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of English
Fatima College, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Anuj Lugun a Hindi poet of Jharkhand's Munda tribe and a recipient of 2019's Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar is one of India's most noted young writers. His celebrated long poem *Bagh Aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti* (The Tiger and the Daughter of Sugna Munda, 2017) tells the story of a tribal community living between its proud ancestral past and a painful present marked by colonial dispossession and forced displacement from the forest. This paper reads Lugun's poem through the lens of masculinity. Using William J. Goode's *Theory of Role Strain* (1960), it argues that the Adivasi male in the poem is pulled in two opposite directions at once. Sugna Munda is culturally expected to protect his land, his forest, and his people, but colonial and postcolonial forces make it impossible for him to do so. This distressing breach between what a man is expected to be and what he is actually able to do is what Goode calls role strain. In Lugun's poem, this role strain defines the very condition of being a tribal man in modern India. The paper also draws on R. W. Connell's idea of subordinated masculinity to show how colonial power pushes the tribal male to the margins of society. Together, these frameworks reveal that the tiger in the poem is not simply an animal or a poetic image but is the last surviving symbol of a fragmented masculine identity wounded by colonialism.

Keywords: Indigenous Masculinity, Role Strain, Tribal Literature, Displacement, Munda Tribes.

Masculinity, as a subject of critical inquiry, has long been treated as something men simply possess. It is a fixed inheritance rather than a role that must be continuously performed, defended, and, when circumstances demand it, abandoned. William J. Goode's theory of role strain, developed in 1960, offers a way past this assumption. Goode argued that the obligations attached to any given position be it father, provider or protector, routinely exceed what a person can realistically deliver, and this gap is not an individual failing but a structural feature of social life. R. W. Connell's later work on Masculinity, *Masculinities*, extends this insight specifically into questions of gender, proposing that masculinity is never singular but always plural and hierarchical. It is a field in which certain forms are elevated as dominant while others are actively pushed to the margins by forces of caste, race, class and colonial power. Role strain refers to the pressure,

while subordinated masculinity refers to the position a man is forced into once the pressure becomes permanent.

Anuj Lugun's *Bagh aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti* stages this with unusual clarity. The long narrative poem follows Sugna Munda, an Adivasi man whose identity is inseparable from the forest he is bound to protect, as the very conditions that once made the protection possible are stripped away, first by an epistemic order that recognises only the written word as legitimate, then by a violence that no inherited knowledge was built to identify. What Lugun gives us is not a man failing at manhood, but manhood itself being asked to survive in a world that has quietly changed the terms of the role without informing the person still expected to fulfil it.

Bagh aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti unfolds in three parts - *Baagh* (Tiger), *Sugna Munda*, and the long closing section *Sugna Munda Ki Beti* (Sugna Munda's Daughter). The poem opens by staging a tiger who leaps between two worlds: one side of the hill holds the forest and its natural order, where even predation is disciplined while the other holds "the capital," from which an unnatural tiger attacks village after village. The violence is legitimised simply by where it originates. The second section establishes Sugna Munda as inseparable from the forest before tracing how an outside order built on writing, conquest and civilization strips him of the very conditions his protector role requires, until he is forced into guerrilla resistance, still singing songs no one will transcribe.

The final section follows his daughter, Birsi, through a direct encounter with organised violence in the villages of Dandakaranya, and then into apprenticeship under the healer Dode Vaidya, alongside six other disciples. Through myth, ritual, and dialogue, they learn that the *ulatbagha*, the "reversed tiger" is a monstrous product of greed, patriarchal entitlement, and capital's seizure of communal labour. One disciple, Jaitu, is himself shown transforming into this figure out of rage at a community ruling that grants a girl property rights. In response, Dode Vaidya formally transfers his knowledge and leadership to Birsi. The poem does not close with victory but with the community armed by remembering its ancestors, and inviting others to join the collective vigilance rather than resolution. This narrative of an inherited protector role tested first by colonial dispossession and then, by the community's own internal reckoning with gender has drawn scholarly attention since Lugun's poem received the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar in 2019. Lugun's traditional poetry highlights the trivialities of adivasi life while also emphasising hegemonic practices that are prevalent in contemporary scenarios:... "Lugun addresses the ... epistemic marginalisation and presents the true history of Adivasis..." (Maurya and Singh 712). That attention, however, has clustered almost entirely around questions of history, voice, and epistemic justice, leaving the poem's internal crisis largely unexamined. Maurya and Singh read Lugun's poetry as a form of subaltern historiography, situating his work against Hayden White's *Metahistory* and Gayatri Spivak's account of epistemic violence to argue that Lugun testifies to Adivasi lived experience where mainstream historiography has failed to. A related study specifically addressing *Bagh aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti* argues that the poem revitalises oral tradition and folkloric narrative form as a corrective to the

"testimonial injustice" long faced by Adivasi communities in mainstream historical writing. "Rewriting historical narratives and reclaiming identity are pivotal themes in Indigenous poetry both globally and within the Indian context... In Lugun, too, we find similar poetic approaches to reclaiming indigenous identities and rewriting historical narratives." (Mukherjee 13-14). Neither study, however, engages the poem's central relationship, which is between Sugna Munda, his daughter, and the tiger as a site of gendered meaning.

The review of the secondary sources has brought out how role strain theory has been widely applied in sociological and organisational studies. It has delineated the extension of the field into a "gender role strain paradigm" describing the discrepancy, dysfunction and trauma produced by rigid masculine ideals. The earlier analysis of Lugun's literary creations has delved into it as a subaltern narrative exploring their injustice. However, the review depicts a dearth in the studies exploring Lugun's *Bagh Aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti* through the perspectives of William J. Goode's role strain theory and Connell's idea of subordinate masculinity.

This paper sets out to read Sugna Munda's failure to protect his land and people as a case of role strain in Goode's sense, rather than as personal weakness or poetic tragedy alone. Secondly, to situate that strain within Connell's account of subordinated masculinity, showing how colonial and postcolonial power do not just block the tribal man's actions but actively demotes his cultural standing as a man. The tiger in the poem functions as a symbolic residue of this strain.

This is a qualitative, text-based study, grounded in close reading rather than field data or quantitative measures. The primary text is Anuj Lugun's *Bagh Aur Sugna Munda Ki Beti*; since no published English translation currently exists, the readings offered here work from the original Hindi, with key passages translated and prepared for the purposes of this paper.

The analysis proceeds through a library-research model, drawing on Goode's and Connell's theoretical writing alongside existing scholarship on Lugun, Adivasi literature and masculinity studies in Indian contexts, gathered through academic databases and journal archives. Rather than treating Goode and Connell as separate lenses applied in sequence, the paper reads them together throughout, on the understanding that role strain and subordinated masculinity are, in Sugna Munda's case, two faces of the same condition, one describing the pressure he's under, the other describing why that pressure has no legitimate outlet left.

William J. Goode's theory of role strain was first laid out in his 1960 essay "A Theory of Role Strain" in *American Sociological Review*. Goode states how "each individual is under some strain and would prefer to be under less [role strain]" (495). He argued that role obligations routinely exceed what any person can realistically deliver, and that this gap is not a personal failing or an exception to how roles work. It is built into the structure of social life itself. People respond to this void, through a constant, low-level process of negotiation, what he called role bargaining, where they prioritise some obligations, letting others slide. They try to manage the strain rather than eliminate it.

Sugna Munda's position in the poem is a textbook case of role strain, except that the "textbook" here is a colonised forest rather than a mid-century American

household or workplace. The role in question, protector of land, forest and community is not something Sugna Munda invented or chose. It is handed to him by Adivasi custom, by kinship, by the accumulated expectations of generations before him. Under ordinary circumstances, a man in his position would have the material and social conditions to fulfil that role. Colonial and postcolonial intrusions strip these conditions away one by one, leaving the expectation fully intact while making its fulfilment nearly impossible. This mismatch of full obligation and collapsed capacity depicts the role strain.

The second theory this paper draws on is R. W. Connell's account of masculinities, developed in her work *Gender* (2005). Connell rejects the idea of a single, universal masculinity in favour of multiple, hierarchically arranged masculinities that exist in relation to one another "Being a man or woman, then, is not a predetermined state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction" (5). At the top sits what she calls hegemonic masculinity, the culturally dominant form that other masculinities rely on. Subordinated masculinity is actively devalued and pushed to the margins by dominant gender and social orders. It describes how race, class or colonial hierarchy further pushes already-subordinated men from cultural legitimacy.

Connell's framework gives this paper a way of naming what colonialism does to Sugna Munda beyond simply blocking his ability to act. It does not just prevent him from protecting his land, it re-codes his very masculinity, from the position of legitimate cultural authority his role would have carried in an intact Adivasi social order, into something the colonial and postcolonial order treats as backward, powerless or irrelevant. While role strain explains the pressure Sugna Munda experiences, subordinated masculinity explains why that pressure remains unresolved.

Goode's account of role strain only makes sense against a role that was, at some point, actually livable. Without that baseline, Sugna Munda's later failure would read as simple defeat rather than strain. In Goode's specific sense, the gap between an obligation that persists and a capacity has been taken away. The poem establishes this baseline in the most direct terms available to it — not through comparison or metaphor, but through identity. Sugna Munda and the forest are not described as connected but as constitutive of one another. "सुगना मुण्डा जंगल का पूर्वज है / और जंगल सुगना मुण्डा का," ("Sugna Munda is the ancestor of the jungle/ and the jungle is Sugna Munda's" Lugun; 36; my trans.). He is not a man who protects a forest that exists apart from him; the forest's origin and his own are folded into the same lineage, which means his role as protector is not a task assigned to him from outside but something closer to an ontological condition of what he is, before it is anything he does.

The passage that follows sharpens this further. Lugun writes that in this world, no one was a murderer and even the tiger. The natural tiger, not yet split from its unnatural double but moved within the limits of the ecological order. "यहाँ बाघ उतना ही अनुशासित था / जितना कि भूख," ("here the tiger was as disciplined/ as hunger itself" Lugun; 36; my trans.). Predation exists in this order, but it is bounded, recognisable and answerable to need rather than to appetite without

limit. This detail is easy to skim past, but it is doing real work, it tells us that the protector role Sugna Munda inherits is not a role of eliminating danger, but of holding a system in which danger itself remains disciplined.

Sugna Munda's failure is not weakness or neglect but the dismantling of the conditions under which his role becomes legible. However, the obligation itself remains fully intact. This is the precise shape of role strain produced by incapacity as a result of withdrawal of the world the role presupposed. Lugun stages this withdrawal first as an epistemic event. A new order arrives in which only the written carries authority: "अब लिखित ही सब कुछ था / लिखित ही प्रामाणिक था" ("now only the written was everything; only the written was authoritative" Lugun; 38; my trans.). The written order becomes an institution reinforcing the masculine authority.

Sugna Munda's authority as ancestor and protector was never written; it lived in song and in a form of disciplined coexistence that required no transcription because it required no external validation. The arrival of writing as the sole ground of legitimacy does not defeat this knowledge in open contests — it closes the terms of the contest before Sugna Munda can enter it. The poem's clearest image of a role forced to mutate under this pressure follows soon after: "उसे सूअरों ने/ शब्दों के जंगल में इतना छकाया/ कि वह छापामार बन गया" ("The pigs tore him so much into the jungle of words that he became a guerilla." Lugun; 38; my trans.). The Protector becomes guerrilla here not through any failure of will, but because the shape of the threat has changed faster than the role built to meet it. The line does not register abandonment of duty, it registers duty forced into an unrecognisable form.

Subordination here is not a matter of losing to a stronger opponent under shared rules, but of being denied standing within the rules to begin with. The poem makes this structural quality explicit at the moment of the attack on the villages of Dandakaranya, where Birsi links the violence directly to a prior act of political refusal: "दण्डकारण्य के गाँवों ने वैश्विक ग्राम / के सन्धि प्रस्तावों के विरुद्ध मतदान किया है / क्या उसी का परिणाम है यह" ("the villages of Dandakaranya voted against the 'global village' treaty proposals is this the result of that" Lugun; 46; my trans.). The line does not claim certainty but the question itself is significant: it locates the violence not as random predation but as plausible retaliation for collective political agency. So the attack is not simply an assault on Sugna Munda's capacity to protect; it is a response to the community having acted, however briefly, as political subjects with standing to refuse. The marginalization at stake is not the absence of strength but the punishment of agency.

The poem's structural quality extends later, when the threat is named not as a single figure but as an entire complicit institutional order. Facing the man-eater directly, Birsi's collective voice declares: "तुम्हारे साथ कानूनविद् फेकसियार, / बुद्धिजीवी, पत्रकार, साहित्यकार मगर हैं / अफसर और शिक्षक भी—सब उल्लू हैं" ("with you are fraudulent jurists, intellectuals, journalists, writers, and officers and teachers too — all owls" Lugun; 106; my trans.). The list of people draws together the disciplines of law, scholarship, media, literature, and administration into a

single formation aligning them against the community. The poet refuses to locate the threat in one antagonist. The tiger is not opposed by a fair or even a single adversary, rather it is protected by the very institutions of law, intellect, and bureaucracy that are expected to arbitrate legitimacy. Subordination, in this poem, is not a personal defeat but a systemic foreclosure. The institutions fostering recognition, justice and authority are dissolved eventually leading to absolute submission.

The earlier instances depicting Sugna Munda's individual incapacity reflect Connell's structural account of subordinated masculinity. Connell's *Masculinities* presents subordinated masculinity as, "Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but it is not the only subordinated masculinity. Some heterosexual men and boys too are expelled from the circle of legitimacy" (79). The community's vote against the treaty and the institutional complicity named in Birsi's address both describe a world in which the outcome of the contest was never genuinely open. Lugun stages the metaphorical battle of Sugna Munda's lineage symbolising a field on which they were never permitted to compete on equal terms.

Hegemonic masculinity explains that culturally idealised form of manhood justifies the global subordination of marginalised men and women. Hegemonic masculinity is a "... specific form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide social setting that legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women" (Masserschmidt 28). It operates through widespread social consent, institutional norms and cultural media rather than through physical force. The reinforcement of these structural hierarchies' aids in maintaining the hegemonic masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity in the poem is evident through the creation of *ulatbagha*: "चानर-बानर के शुक्राणु / उलटबघा के शुक्राणु यहीं से जन्म लेते हैं / यहीं अभिक्रिया होती है आदमी और बाघ की" ("the semen of the *chanar-banar*, /the semen of the *ulatbagha*, are born right here /— here occurs the reaction of man and tiger" Lugun; 69; my trans.). Dode Vaidya explains that the *ulatbagha* is born from the semen of the *chanar-banar* which presents the monstrous figure as a result of male generative act. The fusion of man and tiger manifested through *ulatbagha* thus highlights the hegemonic masculinity. The *ulatbagha* is represented as a figure generated from within the community's gendered order under pressure, rather than imposed on it entirely from outside.

The poem does not leave this claim at the level of theory. It dramatises the transformation directly through the disciple Jaitu. At the precise moment a community assembly rules in favour of a girl's right to property and self-determination, declaring that, "स्त्रियों के विरुद्ध सत्ताओं का उदय घातक है" ("the rise of powers against women is fatal" Lugun; 94; my trans.). As the community celebrates this ruling, Lugun says that he was becoming a tiger. He was becoming an *ulatbagha*.

The timing here is exact rather than incidental. Jaitu's transformation is triggered not by an external colonial threat but by the community's own act of justice towards a woman and by his rage at losing an entitlement he had assumed was his. The poem thus stages two structurally similar but morally opposed responses to

the same historical pressure on Adivasi masculinity. The inherited protector role of Sugna Munda's lineage collapses under conditions imposed from outside. He responds with confusion, adaptation and eventual guerrilla resistance directed outward. Jaitu's sense of inherited male entitlement is disrupted from within the community itself and he responds not with adaptation but with monstrous transformation directed against his own people.

Sugna Munda does not recover his role of male protector. No male figure emerges to defeat the tiger and reclaim the position of protector on the community's behalf. Instead, the poem relocates the function of protection away from an individual male figure and centres around a female-centric leadership that is explicitly collective rather than singular. The poem's ending does not resolve the strain it has traced by restoring masculine protection to its earlier form.

Dode Vaidya has mentored Birsi and her fellow disciples for a long time and eventually he passes on his legacy and his authoritative position to Birsi acknowledging the earlier struggles of women: "तुम्हारे ही नेतृत्व में / होगा आदिमताओं का उत्कर्ष" ("under your leadership alone / will come the flourishing of the ancestral ways" Lugun; 104; my transl.). The story examines hegemonic masculinity and emphasises that the cultural norms are continually negotiated and can be challenged. The relocation of power from Sugna Munda to Birsi reiterates the absence of biologically determined masculinity: "By understanding masculinity and femininity as opposing poles on a continuum, two extremes become perceptible" (Junior et al. 6). The analysis with the relocation of gender appropriates that masculinity is inseparable from power relations.

The language here deliberately echoes the terms in which Sugna Munda's own inherited authority was first described. The protection which was expected from him was reassigned to a woman. They reassigned them not as inheritance by blood but as a deliberate act of succession following a trial that seven disciples pass together. The poem is careful not to suggest that Birsi succeeds where Sugna Munda failed because she possesses some quality he lacked. It shows how the succession itself marks a shift in what kind of figure the community's protection now requires.

That shift extends beyond gender alone into a change in the very unit of resistance. Where Sugna Munda's incapacitation was traced through his individual confusion and adaptation. The poem's closing movement speaks consistently in the collective voice and its idiom of liberation draws explicitly on the language of collective labor: "सात कथा, सात जीवन / श्रमिक जन से ही / होगा सकल परिवर्तन.../ रक्तिम तारा—सर्वहारा! सर्वहारा! सर्वहारा!" ("seven stories, seven lives — from the labouring people alone will bring total transformation... a blood-red star — the proletariat! the proletariat! the proletariat!" Lugun; 106; my trans.). Protection is no longer imagined as something an individual male or female provides. It is now seen as a communal responsibility. It is redistributed into the community itself, understood now explicitly as laboring and collective.

Connell's framework extends this reading further, showing that the marginalisation at stake is structural rather than contest-based. Legitimacy itself is foreclosed in advance and is occupied by an institutional order. The community

was never permitted to contest on equal terms. The poem's treatment of the *ulatbagha* complicates any singular account of this crisis. It reveals that role strain under threatened masculine entitlement can resolve in more than one direction. The poem offers neither restoration nor tragedy but relocation. The individual male protector is not rehabilitated but succeeded, his authority transferred to a woman. It is dissolved into a collective, labouring and still-unfinished vigilance that refuses to claim victory.

The tiger emerges as more than a mere creature of the wild, standing as a final, enduring monument to a fragmented masculine identity. Though the image of the tiger is deeply fractured by the forces of colonialism, the poem ends in an optimistic tone with the society handing over the future to Birsī. Leadership becomes collective, not singular. Protection becomes a shared duty, not one man's burden. The poem closes without victory but not without hope. One path leads to guerrilla resistance and endurance and another leads to rage and self-destruction. A third leads outward, toward collective strength and shared vigilance. Indigenous masculinity, in this poem, thus stands at a real crossroads with the poet's open invitation to build something new together.

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DABEER SI/KTT/71**TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING: EXAMINING WOMEN, IDENTITY,
AND PLANETARY FEMINISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S
NOVELS****N. RAJA LAKSHMI**

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction operates at the intersection of postcolonial critique and feminist inquiry, while simultaneously reaching toward a planetary imagination that transcends national borders. Her novels foreground Nigerian women's experiences, yet they also extend these narratives into transnational spaces, where dignity and belonging cannot be confined to national borders; it is inherently identities are reconfigured through migration, cultural hybridity, and ethical encounters across differences. This paper proposes the framework of planetary feminism to analyze Adichie's women characters, reading them through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of *planetaryity*, Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, and Achille Mbembe's *Afropolitanism*. The above theories explain that not only Adichie's fiction resists homogenization but also affirms the ethical responsibility of imagining women's lives across borders. This is feminism attentive to both the global and the local, to difference and interconnectedness, to the multiplicity of women's voices across borders. Her fiction suggests that the struggle for women's planetary, requiring attention to the entanglements of race, gender, class, and culture in a globalized but unequal world. In conclusion, Ngozi's fiction exemplifies a planetary feminism that honors both difference and interconnectedness. Thus, this article suggests that feminist and postcolonial struggles are not confined to national borders but must be understood as part of an interdependent global future.

Keywords: Planetary feminism; Postcolonial feminism; African women's writing; Relational ethics; Afropolitan identity

Introduction

This study looks at Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels through the lens of planetary feminism, a framework that helps us see her work beyond the standard, often restrictive labels of "global" or "universal" feminism. Theory can often feel distant and clinical, like a map that shows you the terrain but fails to describe the weather. To truly understand Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, we have to move past the diagrams and step into the room with her characters. By bringing together the deep ideas of thinkers like Spivak, Glissant, and Mbembe, we find a way to talk about her books that honors the actual "grit" of being alive. These theories aren't

just academic labels; they are tools that help us see how Adichie maps a feminism that is vast enough to cover the whole world, yet intimate enough to feel like a conversation between friends. It is a way of looking at the world that cares deeply about the ethics of how we treat one another in the middle of our messiest moments.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has become such a powerful voice because she refuses to give us easy answers. Her stories don't just "stand in" for African women; they breathe. They introduce us to people shaped by the tangled realities of family, history, and a world that never stops moving. Instead of preaching a version of feminism that looks the same for everyone, Adichie focuses on the specific dirt, heat, and heartbeat of a moment. She shows us that a woman's strength isn't a superpower—it's something she builds depending on exactly where she is standing. In *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *Americanah*, we walk with women through the quiet, terrifying tension of a dinner table, the smoke of war, and the cold loneliness of a new country. Characters like Kambili, Olanna, and Ifemelu don't just survive in a vacuum; they find their way through the people they love, the silences they keep, and the small, fierce ways they say "no". It reminds us that a woman's life isn't a straight line toward progress, but a delicate web of everyone she has ever known.

Adichie is also a master of the "in-between" feeling. In *Americanah*, she shows us that moving across the world isn't a clean break; it's a collision with new rules and strange racial labels. She pushes back against the shiny, corporate version of "globalization" by showing the real-world friction that happens when a woman tries to hold onto her soul while crossing a border. Ultimately, her novels don't end with a neat bow. Her feminism isn't found in a manifesto, but in the way her characters negotiate their dignity day by day. She leaves room for the things that can't be explained, proving that the struggle to be seen is a living, breathing practice. By placing her characters in a world that is connected but painfully unfair, Adichie invites us to see feminism as an act of courage rooted in the reality of home.

Spivak talks about "planetary" as a way to rescue us from the spreadsheet version of the world. While globalization tries to turn the Earth into a giant map of profits and data, planetary asks us to look at the ground beneath our feet. It reminds us that the world isn't a piece of property we own, but a mysterious, vast presence that we are simply guests of. For feminism, this shift is everything. While "global feminism" often tries to force every woman's story into a Western-style box, a planetary approach insists on respecting the parts of each other we don't understand. It isn't about making everyone the same; it's about being responsible for one another without trying to "fix" or translate someone else's pain into our own language. This changes how we read. It stops treating women from the Global South as victims waiting for a savior and starts seeing them as architects of their own lives. Adichie's characters are Nigerian women dealing with the jagged edges of war, class, and patriarchy in ways that are stubbornly local. This way of reading gives us the tools to love these stories without stripping away their texture or turning them into hollow clichés.

This is where Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* breathes life into the conversation. Glissant reminds us that we aren't like statues, carved from a single, unmoving stone of "origin" or "heritage." Instead, we are more like rivers constantly shaped, diverted, and deepened by the people and cultures we flow into. He teaches us that our "self" isn't something we find by looking backward at a fixed point; it is something we create every time we encounter someone new. In Adichie's stories, this means a character's identity isn't just about where they were born, but about the friction, the laughter, and the shared silences they experience across borders. We are made of our relationships, and it is in that messy, beautiful entanglement with others that we truly become ourselves.

We realize this isn't just a story about a specific war in a specific place by looking at this through planetary feminism. It's an exploration of the heavy, ethical weight we carry for one another in a world that is deeply connected but painfully unequal. Adichie shows us that a woman's responsibility isn't confined to her own life or her own borders; it's found in the raw, human realization that when one part of the planet bleeds, the rest of us are changed by the stain.

Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed. The woman closed the calabash. 'Do you know,' she said, 'it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair.' (Adichie, 149)

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie places feminism right in the center of a catastrophe: the Nigerian–Biafran War. This isn't just a historical backdrop; it is a violent break in the world that forces us to rethink what feminism actually looks like when everything falls apart. By focusing on the war, Adichie moves us away from "global" feminist ideas that are often about individual rights or empowerment. Instead, she shows us women who aren't just victims of a tragedy, but ethical human beings trying to figure out how to love, survive, and remember in a world that has stopped making sense. Ultimately, *Half of a Yellow Sun* shows us that Planetary Feminism is an ethical practice. It's not something you say; it's something you do. It is found in the way women care for each other when there is no food left, the way they hold onto their relationships when history is trying to tear them apart, and the way they claim agency even when they are surrounded by devastation. By refusing to give us easy answers or narrative comfort, Adichie ensures that her feminism remains honest—attentive to the loss, the mystery, and the heavy responsibility of being human in an interconnected world.

Adichie's *Americanah* is a brilliant, messy, and deeply moving look at how being a woman is shaped by the move across borders, the weight of race, and the search for a place to belong. It is a perfect story for planetary feminism because it refuses to pretend that all women experience the world in the same way. Instead of a "one-size-fits-all" global feminism, Adichie shows us the jagged edges of being an African woman moving through a world where power is never equal. Through Ifemelu, we see a feminism that is alive and moving—one that changes as she does, resisting the urge to be simplified into a single, tidy narrative. Gayatri Spivak's idea of planetarity is the heartbeat of this book's feminist politics.

We can look at the data of the movements they describe to understand the “planetary” scale of these stories. In the late 1960s, the Nigerian Civil War (Biafra) led to an estimated 1 million to 3 million deaths, mostly from starvation, creating a landscape where domestic care became a political act of survival. In *Americanah*, Adichie captures a different kind of movement: the “brain drain” and migration patterns. For instance, in 2021, there were roughly 450,000 Nigerian-born immigrants living in the U.S., a group that often navigates the specific racial hierarchies Ifemelu explores. These numbers remind us that while the theories are complex, they are rooted in the physical movement and survival of millions of real people. Spivak helps us see the difference between “globalization” which treats the world like a flat map of data and products to be sold and “planetary,” which reminds us that the earth is a living, mysterious presence that we can never truly own or fully “know.”

In *Americanah*, Adichie pushes back against global feminist ideas that try to translate every woman’s struggle into a Western language. She shows us that you can’t talk about being a woman without talking about the specific ground you are standing on. Ifemelu’s arrival in America is the perfect example of this. Back home in Nigeria, “race” wasn’t how she defined herself. This realization shatters the idea that gender oppression is the same everywhere. Ifemelu’s blog doesn’t try to speak for all women; instead, it points out the blind spots in American liberal thinking. In her world, feminism is about being ethically attentive to these differences, not about claiming to represent everyone. Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* helps us understand how Ifemelu’s identity is built through her connections rather than some unchanging “essence.” Glissant believes we aren’t defined by a single root, but by the ways we touch, clash, and grow with others. We see this in how Ifemelu changes as she moves between Nigeria and the U.S. She doesn’t just “turn American,” nor does she stay “frozen” in her Nigerian past. She is constantly being remade by her relationships and her surroundings. Glissant also speaks of “opacity” the right to remain a mystery. Ifemelu fiercely protects this right. She refuses to “dumb down” her African identity to make it easier for Americans to digest. Her feminism is forged in this friction; it grows through her interactions with others while refusing to be swallowed up by their expectations. Even her romantic life reflects this. Her time with Curt and Blaine shows that love alone can’t erase the deep, structural inequalities of race. Glissant reminds us that “relation” doesn’t always mean harmony; sometimes, feminist awareness is sharpened most in the moments where we feel the most uncomfortable.

Achille Mbembe’s concept of Afropolitanism gives this planetary feminism a home. It describes a way of being African that is mobile, worldly, and aware of history, without being “fake” or losing its roots. Ifemelu is the quintessential Afropolitan: she can navigate multiple worlds, yet she is painfully aware of how unequal those worlds are. But Adichie is careful not to make migration look like a simple “success story.” She shows us the hidden costs, the financial struggle, the racial slights, and the crushing silence Ifemelu faces early on. This isn’t just a story of “empowerment”; it’s a story about the grit required to survive under constraint. Ifemelu’s return to Nigeria is perhaps her most Afropolitan act of all. She doesn’t have a simple “homecoming”; she returns as an *Americanah*, an

outsider in her own land. This shows that her feminism isn't tied to a specific piece of dirt, but to her ability to respond ethically to wherever she happens to be. She lays it out clearly in her writing:

Dear Non-American Black... a woman, please do not speak your mind as you were used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black woman are SCARY. And if man, be hyper-mellow, never get too excited, or somebody will worry that you're about to pull a gun. (Adichie, 220)

Spivak's ethics, Glissant's relationships, and Mbembe's mobility by weaving together Americanah paints a picture of a feminism that is planetary, not just global. Adichie refuses to give us easy answers or a neat, happy ending. Ifemelu's life remains a work in progress, a series of choices and memories that don't always fit together perfectly. This openness is exactly what planetary thinking is about: it's an ongoing negotiation, a way of staying responsible to one another without demanding that we all be the same. In the end, Adichie offers us a feminism that is as complex, courageous, and beautifully "opaque" as the women who live it. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie gives us a heartbreaking and beautiful look at how the walls of a home can mirror the walls of a nation. This isn't just a story about a girl growing up; it is a profound critique of how violence carried out in the name of God, country, and "progress" strangles the human spirit. Unlike some versions of feminism that focus only on individual triumph, Adichie's vision is planetary. She shows us that a woman's path to freedom isn't just about speaking up; it's about navigating a world where history, colonial religion, and family are all tangled together. Gayatri Spivak's idea of planetarity is a perfect lens for this book. Spivak reminds us that we can't just put women's suffering into neat, global categories. She sees the planet as a place of mystery and deep history that we must respect, rather than a "globe" we try to control. In the Achike household, Kambili's life is governed by her father, Eugene, a man who uses religious absolute truth to justify his cruelty. Here, feminist struggle isn't a theoretical debate; it is a daily reality shaped by the long shadows of colonial Christianity and a very specific, rigid kind of African masculinity. Kambili's silence isn't just a personal quirk; it is a planetary condition. It is her body's response to a world built on fear. As she famously notes: "Silence hung over the house like a damp blanket... a silence that was not the absence of sound, but the presence of fear." (Adichie, 32) If Kambili's home in Enugu is defined by a forced, suffocating silence, her Aunt Ifeoma's home in Nsukka is defined by Relation. Édouard Glissant argued that we don't find our identity by looking inward at a "pure" root, but by reaching outward and encountering others. Nsukka is a place where laughter, arguments, and messy emotions are allowed to exist. This change doesn't happen because someone hands Kambili a feminist handbook; it happens because she is allowed to encounter a different way of being. In Glissant's terms, Nsukka is a space of opacity, a place where Kambili can grow without being constantly watched or forced to be "transparent" to her father's God. She notices the change immediately: "Laughter floated through the house, catching in the corners, living in the air. It was a different kind of sound, one that didn't ask for permission."

(Adichie, 71) This is where her feminist consciousness begins not in a lecture hall, but in the simple, revolutionary act of hearing people laugh without being afraid. Achille Mbembe's idea of Afropolitanism helps us see the tragedy of Eugene Achike. Eugene is, in many ways, a modern man; he is successful, educated, and stands up to a corrupt government. But his "modernity" is poisoned by a colonial version of Christianity that he uses to crush his own family. Mbembe warns us that African modernity is often a site of deep contradiction, where global ideals of "progress" can be weaponized against the people we love. Kambili's mother, Beatrice, pays the highest price for this. She endures physical abuse and miscarriages in a silence that is mistaken for "devotion." She has been taught that being a "good" modern woman means accepting this version of morality. It shows that Planetary Feminism must look at how "progress" can sometimes be just another word for a different kind of cage. Kambili's journey from silence to speech is the heart of the novel, but Adichie is too honest to give us a "perfect" ending. Her awakening is fragile. Even after Eugene is gone, the scars remain, and her brother Jaja is in prison. This aligns with Spivak's belief that we shouldn't try to wrap up stories of oppression with a neat, triumphant bow.

In the end, *Purple Hibiscus* isn't about a girl who suddenly becomes "free." It is about a girl who begins to understand the ethical responsibility of her own life. Through Spivak, we see her history; through Glissant, we see her connections; and through Mbembe, we see her modernity. Adichie reminds us that feminism isn't a loud, universal doctrine. Sometimes, it's as quiet and as stubborn as a purple hibiscus blooming in a garden that was meant to be only red.

Conclusion

Adichie suggests that being a woman or simply being human is complicated by bringing these stories together. It's tied to the clothes we wear, the wars our grandparents fought, and the people we choose to love. She builds a "planetary feminism" because she shows that while our struggles might look different depending on where we live, the desire to be seen, heard, and respected is a universal language. It's not a polished theory; it's a living, breathing, and sometimes painful journey toward freedom. By moving away from "one-size-fits-all" feminist slogans, she uses Spivak's planetarity to honor the parts of a woman's life that are silent or scarred by trauma, Glissant's relational thinking to show how we are constantly being remade by our encounters with others, and Mbembe's Afropolitanism to ground these experiences in the modern, mobile reality of Africa today. Looking ahead, this journey could expand even further by placing Adichie's essays and short stories alongside other voices from the Global South, helping us continue to build a feminism that is as courageous and complex as the women who navigate our changing world.

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DABEER SI/KTT/72**GENDER ROLES AND SOCIALLY CONDITIONED IDENTITY IN
NADIA HASHIMI'S *ONE HALF FROM THE EAST*****A. V. R. RAJA SUBHASHINI**

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Abstract

Every society has cultural expectations and gender norms for men and women. This social conditioning influences how people dress, behave and live. Especially for women and girls in a patriarchal society like Afghanistan, identity formation happens through gender expectations. Due to restricted mobility and gender inequality, women and girls have limited freedom and opportunities. In Nadia Hashimi's novel *One Half from the East*, the protagonist Obadya becomes a bacha posh, a traditional practice in which a girl is disguised as a boy. After this transformation, her self-perception and social perception change entirely. She enjoys her newfound social privilege and freedom. Her experience as a boy highlights that both boys and girls have equal potential but unequal access to opportunities. Social constraints and gender-based restrictions shape the identity of girls like Obadya. Through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Simone de Beauvoir's concept of socially constructed gender, this paper examines how gender roles and restricted mobility shape identity formation in *One Half from the East*.

Keywords: Gender roles, Mobility, Freedom, Identity Formation, Bacha posh, Social Constraints.

Gender norms are cultural and social expectations constructed by society that shape individuals and are transmitted across generations. These unwritten laws influence the behaviour of men and women. They are shaped according to the culture and tradition of each society. Such norms affect everyday life and opportunities for men and women. Especially women and girls face more restrictions and less freedom in many societies. Thus, gender roles and societal expectations play a vital role in identity formation.

A patriarchal society is where women are marginalized and perceived as the weaker sex. Patriarchal power structures exercise authority over major decisions and control important aspects of women's lives. In such societies, women and girls have very few opportunities for education, mobility, and freedom. Due to restricted mobility, they experience limited participation in public life and often depend on male guardians. Afghanistan is one such society where male dominance is clearly evident in various aspects of life. Afghanistan's patriarchal society is portrayed in Nadia Hashimi's *One Half from the East* through the traditional practice of *bacha posh*.

Bacha posh is followed when a family has no male heir; a girl is disguised as a boy. This new identity gives freedom to the girl, which improves her mobility and

enables her to perform roles traditionally reserved for boys. She assumes the responsibilities of a male heir in the family. In the novel *One Half from the East*, Obayda is transformed into a boy and becomes a *bacha posh*. Her father, the only male member of the family, becomes bedridden after the accident, so the mother decides to make her a *bacha posh* to support the family. They also believe that it would bring good fortune to the family.

Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex* that womanhood is shaped through social conditioning rather than being determined solely by biological sex. According to her, societal expectations and cultural norms influence gender identity. Obayda's experience as Obayd illustrates how society shapes gender identity and changes its perception and treatment of individuals. Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that gender is constituted through repeated acts and social practices rather than being an innate identity. When she becomes a *bacha posh*, her biological identity doesn't change but her appearance and society's perception of her change. With reference to the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, this paper examines how gender roles and restricted mobility shape identity formation in *One Half from the East*.

Nadia Hashimi's *One Half from the East* is set in the patriarchal society of Afghanistan. Obayda, the protagonist of the novel, is the youngest in her family. As there is no son in the family and her father becomes bedridden after an accident, her mother decides to adopt the practice of *bacha posh*. Initially, Obayda refuses to undergo the transformation. However, after meeting another *bacha posh*, Rahima (Rahim), she gradually begins to appreciate her new identity and enjoys the freedom, mobility, and opportunities to participate in social life. Although Obayda is aware that this arrangement is temporary and that she must eventually return to her identity as a girl, she becomes reluctant to give up the freedom she has experienced. Through the experiences of Obayda and Rahima, the novel explores how gender roles, social expectations, and cultural traditions influence the formation of identity.

In Afghanistan, the lives of girls are highly influenced by gender roles. Families often place greater importance on sons than daughters and consider the presence of a male child a matter of prestige. Sons are valued because they enjoy greater mobility, independence, and participation in public life, and they are expected to represent and support the family. In contrast, girls are often expected to remain within the domestic sphere and depend on their families. As a result, when a family lacks a male heir, it may adopt the traditional practice of *bacha posh*. In the novel, the absence of a son leads Obayda's family to transform her into a *bacha posh*. Had the family already had a son, such a decision would not have been necessary. Girls are expected to behave according to societal expectations and follow numerous restrictions from an early age. This novel reflects how society associates certain activities, privileges, and freedoms exclusively with boys. Although Obayda enjoys being a girl, with her long hair, dresses, and dancing, she also longs for opportunities that are usually reserved for boys. Although Obayda's biological identity remains unchanged, her transformation into a *bacha posh* leads society to treat her differently and grant her greater freedom and independence. This idea reflects Simone de Beauvoir's concept of social construction of womanhood,

where society defines the roles, responsibilities, and limitations imposed on women.

Restricted mobility is one of the major limitations faced by girls and women in Afghanistan. The transformation from Obayda to Obayd gives her a new identity that allows her to move freely and participate in activities traditionally associated with boys. Society no longer restricts her mobility; instead, it treats her like any other boy and no longer questions her presence in public spaces. Although, in the initial days after the transformation, she longs to return to her original identity, her perspective changes after meeting Rahima, another *bacha posh* living as Rahim. Through her friendship with Rahima, Obayda begins to appreciate the freedom and mobility that accompany her new identity. The experiences of both Obayda and Rahima demonstrate that freedom of movement is determined not by biological sex but by the gender role that society perceives and accepts. This reflects Judith Butler's idea that gender is shaped through social practices and performances rather than determined solely by biological sex.

The day she becomes a *bacha posh*, Obayda's biological identity remains the same, but her outward identity changes. Her mother cuts her hair, dresses her in boys' clothes, and gives her a new name. She is no longer expected to do household chores; instead, her mother encourages her to go out, play with boys, and learn to behave like one. Initially, Obayda finds it difficult to adjust to her new identity and fears that others might discover her real identity. Rahima, another *bacha posh*, teaches her how to walk confidently, behave like a boy, and develop a masculine mindset. Through Rahima's guidance, Obayda realizes that she cannot simply be a girl wearing boys' clothes; she has to think and behave like a boy. As she gradually adopts these masculine behaviours, she becomes more confident in performing the role of a boy. This is evident when she bravely climbs a tall tree to cut a branch for her father's walking stick. With Rahima's help, she successfully makes the walking stick for her father. This achievement reflects the confidence she develops after she begins to perceive herself as a boy. Although her biological identity remains unchanged, her repeated acts and actions enable her to perform a masculine identity. This illustrates Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is constructed through repeated acts and social practices rather than being biologically determined. Through Obayda's transformation, Nadia Hashimi demonstrates that society responds to the performance of gender rather than to biological sex.

Obayda's transformation gradually changes her sense of self, helping her develop a new identity as a boy that extends beyond outward appearance. Initially, being a *bacha posh* is merely a disguise, but over time it becomes an integral part of who she is. She says that she is no longer pretending to be a boy; instead, she has mentally accepted her identity as Obayd. Her friendship with Rahim further strengthens this new identity, as both of them begin to normalize their lives as boys. Their conversations reveal that boyhood is no longer a temporary role but has become emotionally meaningful to them. Their confidence, behaviour, friendships, and daily routines continually reinforce their identity as boys. This reflects the process of identity formation rather than merely gender performance.

As time passes, both Obayda and Rahima begin to fear losing their newly formed identities. They don't want this to be temporary. They no longer fear living as a boy; instead, they fear returning to life as a girl. This shift clearly demonstrates how deeply their identity has changed. When they hear the popular legend that walking under a rainbow can permanently change one's gender, they cling to it with hope. The rainbow symbolizes their desire for permanence and their hope of preserving their identity.

Another turning point occurs when Obayda's mother becomes pregnant. The possibility of a biological son threatens Obayda's position as a *bacha posh*. The birth of a son would mean the end of her identity as Obayd, intensifying her fear and anxiety. When she is eventually forced to return to girlhood, she experiences a profound emotional crisis. She feels as though Obayda is a dead identity and that returning to her former life means losing the person she has become. Obayda's journey demonstrates that identity is not fixed but is gradually shaped through lived experiences and social interactions. Although her biological sex never changes, living as Obayd transforms her self-perception so deeply that returning to her former identity becomes emotionally painful.

At the end of the novel, Obayda understands that courage, confidence, and resilience are not qualities exclusive to boys. Her experience as a *bacha posh* gives her opportunities that are normally denied to girls. These experiences help her discover her own abilities and make her realize that it is not her male identity that makes her capable, but the freedom that comes with that identity. In societies like Afghanistan, boys are often considered naturally stronger and more capable than girls. However, Hashimi challenges this belief throughout the novel. She demonstrates that girls possess the same potential when they are given equal freedom, mobility, and responsibility. Thus, the novel suggests that inequality is socially constructed rather than determined by biological differences.

The rainbow does not bring about any magical transformation in Obayda; instead, it symbolizes her inner transformation. Although she returns to living as a girl, she no longer perceives herself as weak or limited. The transformation takes place within her mind. She retains the confidence, self-belief, and resilience that she developed while living as a *bacha posh*, resulting in a profound change in her self-perception. The novel ultimately demonstrates how restricted mobility and rigid gender roles suppress the potential of girls. When these restrictions are removed, even temporarily, as in Obayda's case, they foster confidence, independence, leadership, and resilience. Therefore, identity is formed by social experiences and opportunities rather than by biological sex alone.

Through *One Half from the East*, Nadia Hashimi argues that girls are not less capable than boys. What limits them is not their gender but the unequal opportunities and restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. Through Obayda's journey, the novel calls for a society in which girls are given the same freedom, mobility, and opportunities as boys. The main objective of this study was to study the influence of gender roles and restricted mobility on identity formation in Nadia Hashimi's *One Half from the East* with the help of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the social construction of womanhood and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The analysis shows that gender roles create unequal opportunities,

which influence the formation of identity. It also shows that identity is not determined only by biological sex but is shaped by social experiences, cultural expectations, and the opportunities given by society. Together, these theories help us understand Obayda's transformation and the process of identity formation in the novel.

This study concludes that girls are not less capable than boys. What limits them is not their gender but the unequal opportunities and restrictions imposed by society. Through *One Half from the East*, Nadia Hashimi emphasizes that when girls are given equal freedom, mobility, and opportunities, they are equally capable of developing confidence, independence, and resilience. Thus, the novel highlights the importance of creating an equal and inclusive society where every individual is valued beyond gender.

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DABEER SI/KTT/73**SPATIAL NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN ANITA
DESAI'S *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*****J. K. ASHWINVARSHA**

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Abstract

Spatial narrative is a literary methodology that emphasizes the active role of geographical space in shaping plot events and character identities. Rather than serving as static backdrops, literary spaces, whether urban or rural, function as dynamic forces that shape individual and collective self-perceptions based on lived experience. This paper examines the intersection of space and identity in Anita Desai's novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). The novel is set in the isolated, mountainous terrain of Kasauli. The narrative follows the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, and her great-granddaughter, Raka, as they relocate to this mountainous environment, each carrying distinct histories of psychological trauma. As they navigate their new surroundings, the landscape of Kasauli actively parallels their past experiences and suppressed memories. It transforms their self-understandings in complex and nuanced ways. While urban environments are traditionally linked to civic development and rural spaces to pastoral values, Desai's literary space focuses heavily on the subjective experiences of these individuals. The mountain landscape does not merely witness their isolation; it actively drives their internal transformations. It offers a completely altered view of the world. This study demonstrates how the spatial narrative of *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) influences the characters' understanding of themselves and their place within society. Ultimately, this paper illustrates the profound connection between physical space, personal identity, and the broader human experience.

Keywords: Environment, Identity, Memory, Spatial Narrative, Trauma.

Introduction

The concept of space or place is significant in understanding the experiences of individuals within a narrative. It refers to the geographical space where events unfold. It plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of characters. Space is not merely a passive backdrop but an active participant that influences the events that transpire. Every space or place possesses a unique place creating distinct meanings and interpretations.

Space can be generally classified into urban and rural spaces. They are associated with different social, and cultural characteristics that shape human experience in different ways. Urban spaces symbolize progress, modernization, and civilization.

It represents economic growth, technological advancement, and organized social life. Driven by the pursuit of power, status, and influence, city life brings individuals from varied economic, social, and cultural backgrounds together within a shared space. This multiplicity creates a complex, competitive, and ambitious social environment. Consequently, urban spaces function as sites of continuous transformation, where identity is constantly reshaped through exposure to multiple cultures, social hierarchies, and diverse personal experiences. Urban space functions as an important place of cultural interaction. It is where people from diverse backgrounds continuously exchange ideas, values, and beliefs, constantly reshaping traditional norms into new cultural identities. Concurrently, these spaces often become arenas of conflict as diverse economic and social groups compete for recognition, resources, and status—tensions that reveal the unequal power structures prevailing in urban life. Therefore, urban spaces are not fixed or static locations, but dynamic and evolving environments shaped by historical forces, social struggles, and human aspirations. Presenting both advantages and disadvantages, they serve as crucial sites for analysing the complicated web of human relationships and environmental associations that shape human identity in accordance with broader cultural systems.

In contrast to urban environments, rural space embodies untouched landscapes. Defined by a slower pace of life, and less influenced by rapid modernization, these spaces are closely tied to nature, where mountains and forests shape everyday existence and preserve generations of cultural values, customs, and social practices. This shared heritage strengthens collective identity and encourages harmonious coexistence with the environment, rather than the urban drive to dominate it. This close relationship with the land fosters individual identities grounded in ecological awareness and cultural continuity. These cultural landscapes profoundly influence the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours of their inhabitants. In this traditional setting, modernity does not isolate conventional values, but intersects individuals to adapt to changing lifestyles while preserving their heritage. Rural space serves as a powerful site of identity formation, where memory, environment, and culture intersect with deep-rooted values.

Literature functions as a powerful tool in reflecting the lived spaces by moving beyond the physical representation of locations such as cities and villages. Rather than limiting itself to geographical dimensions, literary writing explores the emotional, psychological, and social experiences that transform space into a meaningful site of existence based on an individual's memories and interactions. Space operates as an active force shaping identity. As French philosopher Michel Foucault observes, "...the anxiety of today fundamentally concerns space, no doubt much more than time" (Foucault, 2008, p. 13). Literature focuses on spatial representation and helps in examining the complex, dynamic relationship between people, place, and culture.

Literature Review

The article published by Dr. Rituparna Moharana (2025), discusses Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* through the lens of space, memory, and identity. Desai constructs the secluded mountainous setting as an active force that serves as a patriarchal refuge. The suppressed memories of Nanda emerge and forces her to

confront the memories. This wilderness is both healing and destructive in which identity formation is bound to silence, memory, and decay. It reveals Desai's deep engagement with female interiority and postcolonial subjectivity.

The article published by Debjani Mukherjee (2018), illustrates that the space represented in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* shapes the female identity. Nanda's relocation to the mountain region allows her to transform her sense of self and reject socially imposed roles. Identity is continuously reshaped through interactions with place, solitude, memory, and past trauma. This novel shows how landscapes actively shelter, expose, and redefine the character's inner world.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, focusing on the detailed analysis of passages, spatial imagery, and character movement in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). Employing close reading alongside spatial theory rather than psychological analysis, this approach uncovers how Kasauli's physical hills, forests, and abandoned spaces actively shape identity. It frames space as a lived experience where character withdrawal and silence reflect the landscape's stillness. This methodology demonstrates how spatial displacement replaces speech, constructing identity through positioning and withdrawal. By situating character development entirely within Desai's complex spatial structures, this method proves that space actively shapes the lives of the characters.

Theoretical Framework

This study approaches space through the theoretical lenses of memory and trauma which together reveal how spatial environments function as repositories of trauma, silence, and resistance. Drawing on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, the physical locations of Kasauli hills operate as sites of memory where suppressed emotional residues are embedded. Nanda Kaul's spatial withdrawal to Carignano is not a peaceful retreat, but a form of selective remembering—an attempt to control the painful memories of her life as a neglected wife and mother, allowing her to redefine a fragile identity outside of social demands.

In contrast, Raka's engagement with the natural landscape represents a different mode of memory and identity formation. Her fascination with Kasauli's burnt forests and ruined spaces mirrors her own emotional abandonment. By aligning the characters' unstable internal states with the rural landscape, Desai challenges the idealized concept of nature as healing; space does not cure past trauma, but absorbs it, allowing characters to exist merely through detachment and survival.

Textual analysis

Anita Desai is an eminent Indian writer. The major themes of her writing are identity, alienation, inner struggle, and lack of communication. Her famous works are, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Village by the Sea* (1982), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Clear light of Day* (1980), *Zigzag Way* (2004) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977).

Fire on the Mountain was published in 1977. It occupies an important place in literature due to its thematic depth and minute narrative technique. The novel interweaves environmental consciousness, the search for personal identity, and the relationship between humans and nature directly into its narrative structure. Set in the serene mountainous region of Kasauli at the foothills of the Himalayas, the

novel frames nature as an active force that shapes the characters' emotional states, social withdrawal, and self-reflection. Alongside this ecological awareness, the characters' quest for identity emerges as a central concern as they struggle to negotiate their sense of self amidst societal pressures and emotional isolation.

The quest for self-identity is a universal human experience. It transcends beyond the boundaries of age, gender, and social position. At different stages of life, individuals are compelled to face the questions about who they are and how they belong to the space they inhabit. This concept of self-discovery is never an isolated process. It is deeply shaped by the cultural, social, and emotional environments surrounding an individual. Space plays a significant role in the formation of identity. It is involved in influencing the values, behaviour, memories, and personal understanding. It often reinforces or challenges the internal desires and social expectations. Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), portrays this complex struggle for self-identity through the character of Nanda Kaul. Her withdrawal into the secluded space of Kasauli, represents her emotional distance from her past life. Her isolation is an attempt to reconstruct an identity that is independent of social obligations and personal trauma.

Nanda Kaul is an elderly woman. She has spent the greater part of her life fulfilling the responsibilities imposed upon her as the wife of a Vice Chancellor in a busy town in Punjab. Throughout her married life, her personal identity has been confiscated by domestic duties and societal obligations, leaving her with little opportunity to cultivate her own individuality. Her existence is defined entirely by her service to others, which has overshadowed her inner desires. Having never claimed a personal space for reflection or self-fulfilment, she has failed to prioritize her 'self' in her life. This realization marks a turning point, prompting her to withdraw from the social world and seek solitude in Kasauli to reclaim her lost identity and reconstruct her sense of self. Through Nanda Kaul, Anita Desai portrays how personal space and self-introspection are vital for identity, showing that true selfhood can only emerge when individuals distance themselves from socially imposed roles to discover the inner self.

Nanda Kaul's life in Punjab as the wife of a college Vice Chancellor, is confined within an urban space. It is shaped by hierarchy, authority, and controlled forces that structure her everyday existence under strict societal norms. She must comply with her duties as a devoted wife, mother, and socially accepted woman. These roles create a pseudo self-hood merely to fit into the elite household. These expectations leave no room for self-expression, forcing her sense of self to become an object judged by others. Ultimately, this externally imposed identity highlights the limitations of the urban domestic space, where personal desires are consistently suppressed by social responsibilities.

In the urban space, Nanda Kaul's life unfolds a sequence of actions that are under the control of social norms and expectations. Her everyday life is bounded by duties imposed upon her as a wife, mother, and respectable woman within a patriarchal structure, leaving no room for personal choices or genuine emotional attachments. She possesses few truly personal experiences, as every incident is shaped by familial and societal demands. The urban environment thus emerges as a restrictive setting where identity is externally constructed rather than internally

realized, prioritizing conformity over self-exploration. Within this space, individuals must strictly adhere to prescribed roles, sacrificing individuality to social order and respectability, which ultimately leaves no room for emotional independence or a self-defined identity. This sense of emotional exhaustion is evident in Nanda Kaul's recollection of her earlier life which she thinks of as a burden. Her decision to leave the suffocating urban space is powerfully conveyed when she reflects that,

She had suffered from the *nimiety*, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess. She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains... (Desai, 2020, p. 32).

In Kasauli's, she establishes a personal space to live independently from societal demands. The mountain region becomes a site of identity reconstruction, facilitating emotional withdrawal and psychological clarity. Through this spatial transition, Nanda Kaul reclaims control over her life, cultivating a selfhood and discovering new meaning beyond restrictive familial roles. Kasauli functions as a space of profound transformation rather than a mere physical setting.

Even after relocating to a new place, memories of the early stage of life continue to taunt in the mind of Nanda Kaul and disturbs her emotional state. Having spent her entire time, energy, and emotional commitments to a family that ultimately left her feeling rejected, she is emotionally devastated by her husband's infidelity and her children's independent departures. Her lifelong efforts rendered meaningless in that unsupportive domestic environment, she felt completely devoid of the life she had lived. In contrast to that oppressive urban space, the rural landscape of Kasauli offers her a healing environment. The calmness and solitude of this natural setting provide a site for psychological recovery, helping her overcome past disappointments. Kasauli emerges as a transformative space that enables Nanda Kaul to reclaim her purpose, individuality, and a redefined identity on her own terms.

As Nanda Kaul gradually settles into her life in Kasauli, she becomes overprotective about her psychological well-being and emotional stability. After facing betrayal, emotional exploitation, and neglected desires, she seeks solitude to protect against further emotional drain. This self-imposed isolation is less an escape from urban space and more a deliberate journey to reclaim her true self from imposed roles. By establishing her own territory in this rural environment, she regains control over her life, allowing an identity to emerge from within rather than from external demands.

Raka is the great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. She emerges as another important character through whom Desai examines the intricate relationship between space and identity. Her emotional experiences, psychological withdrawal, and relationship with space closely mirror those of her elderly great-grandmother. Despite their significant age difference, both characters share a deep sense of alienation from social spaces shaped by family expectations and emotional neglect. Through Raka, Desai emphasizes that identity struggles are not confined to adulthood or old age, but represent a universal human condition. Raka's preference for isolation within the natural landscape reflects an unconscious search for self-definition. By paralleling Raka's inner world with Nanda Kaul's,

the novel reinforces the idea that space plays a pivotal role in shaping identity, offering individuals a means to resist emotional disturbance and restore the self. From the early stage of life, Raka faced constant turmoil shadowed by emotional abandonment. It became significant in her life to know the true value of personal space. Her father, a diplomat, was an alcoholic whose violent behaviour toward Raka's mother transformed their home from a secure environment into a toxic space, denying Raka the parental love and care that are crucial for a healthy environment. Her situation worsened when she was recovering from typhoid, she was sent to live with her great-grandmother in an unsupportive environment that deepened her abandonment. However, this forced relocation became a turning point, prompting her to face isolation bravely in a new space. Through Raka, Desai demonstrates the long-lasting effects of childhood trauma and familial neglect on identity formation, emphasizing that early physical and emotional spaces heavily influence self-perception. Despite these hardships, Raka remains resilient, gradually learning to navigate her complex relationships to forge her own individuality. By creating a personal space and establishing a unique sense of belonging amidst a broken family environment, Raka redefines her identity, reinforcing the study's central argument that space actively drives growth and self-realization.

Raka's early life in the busiest urban cities was characterized by a sense of unhappiness. This emotional instability and unfulfillment made her aware that material comforts could not replace missing parental care. It creates an internal void that teaches her self-reliance. The urban environment, dominated by impersonal structures and strict social expectations, offered no room for emotional values, intensifying her isolation. However, relocating to the serene mountains of Kasauli provided a transformative spatial experience that granted her freedom, safety, and emotional restoration. Immersed in this rural landscape, she connected with nature to self-reflect and heal. This interplay between physical space and emotional experience guided Raka toward self-discovery, allowing her to successfully reconstruct her identity away from her past urban self.

The rural space of Kasauli emerged as a sanctuary of comfort, healing, and emotional solace for Raka. Serving as a refuge from the emotional instability and turmoil of her past urban life, she explored the mountains, dense forests, hidden streams, and secluded meadows, familiarizing herself with the natural environment's rhythm. This active engagement with the rural landscape allowed her to reconnect with her emotions and heal from deep-seated psychological trauma. The serene, unspoiled beauty of this space stood in stark contrast to her chaotic urban past, providing the vital peace, stability, and inner calm she had never experienced before. "Raka longed for only one thing – the freedom to be left undisturbed, to carve out her own private life amidst the rocks, pines, and hidden corners of Kasauli". (Desai, 2020, p. 52).

In this mountainous rural setting, Raka discovered the true meaning of space. While city life had long overshadowed her freedom and true self through alienation and familial instability, Kasauli's natural landscapes and slower pace offered her a deep emotional and psychological affinity. This serene environment allowed her to feel fully integrated into both the physical landscape and the local

community. She found a renewed sense of purpose, inner balance, and personal meaning intimately tied to the natural world. The unspoiled space of Kasauli proves central to fostering identity formation, demonstrating how the interplay between physical environment and personal experience can actively shape, nurture, and develop a sense of selfhood.

The past experiences and memories of individuals have a serious impact in the formation of their identities. They heavily influence the decisions and actions people undertake in their present and future lives. It is evident through the lives of Nanda Kaul and her great-granddaughter Raka. Both characters carry deep personal traumas that shape their behaviours and choices. Raka's formative years of physical abuse, emotional neglect, and lack of parental affection cause her to emotionally withdraw from people.

The early stage of life of both Nanda Kaul and Raka is filled with traumatic memories. This created an aversion to intimacy and social engagement, gradually driving them to withdraw from social interactions altogether. This self-imposed isolation extends beyond mere physical separation. It represents an emotional and psychological distancing where both characters seek private spaces for reflection, self-discovery, and identity construction. Rather than being a simple geographical setting, Kasauli functions as a critical site for negotiating the past and reclaiming personal connections.

In their quest for self-identity, personal healing, and emotional well-being, both Nanda Kaul and Raka realize the necessity of inhabiting a space filled with solitude and seclusion. They require a space removed from the disappointments, betrayals, and emotional entanglements inherent in human relationships, finding instead a quiet environment that fosters an intimate attachment to nature. For both characters, Kasauli's mountainous landscape becomes a sanctuary to distance themselves from societal and familial expectations, allowing them to confront past traumas, heal emotional wounds, and rebuild a long-suppressed sense of self. Beyond their individual struggles, they embody the broader marginalization, neglect, and emotional hardship faced by women across generations, forcing them to detach from restrictive social obligations. Through this novel, Anita Desai demonstrates how physical, emotional, and environmental dimensions of space intersect to facilitate self-discovery, identity formation, and personal empowerment for her female characters.

The parallel struggles of Nanda Kaul and her great-granddaughter Raka show the universal struggle of women across different generations. Although the two characters possess distinct life experiences shaped by different historical, social, and family circumstances, they share a similar desire to liberate themselves from the constraining influences of the past to forge paths on their own. It exposes how societal expectations, familial obligations, and gendered norms control women's lives, while simultaneously highlighting the resilience and courage women employ to overcome these obstacles. Through Nanda Kaul and Raka, Anita Desai portrays self-discovery and personal empowerment, demonstrating how physical and psychological spaces become vital tools for forming identity and finding meaning. By emphasizing this intergenerational struggle, the novel underscores women's enduring strength across domestic, urban, and rural spaces, framing the

environment as an active force where identity is reshaped during times of adversity.

Findings

The analysis of Nanda Kaul and Raka's experiences in *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) reveals that the physical and psychological spaces play an important role in shaping individual identity. Women in patriarchal society face restrictive social norms. The novel demonstrates that urban spaces consist of confined expectations and social hierarchies. It suppresses the self-expression of people. In contrast, the rural space of Kasauli functions as a transformative environment, providing opportunities for reflection, healing from the past trauma. This contrast highlights the dynamic relationship between space and identity formation, showing that the environment is not merely a passive setting rather it becomes an active agent in the process of self-discovery. The finding of the study suggests that liberation from oppressive societal structures and confined gender norms across spaces are essential for individuals to assert their own desires. The interwoven concepts of memory, space and identity in the novel offers new insights into literature. Irrespective of generational difference, the role of space has great influence in identity formation across various social structures.

Conclusion

Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) portrays the life of people in urban and rural spaces. It brings the contrasting life experiences of Nanda Kaul and her great-granddaughter Raka. The lives of these two women are structured by society. Their memories in respect to space have a great role in their perception of the world and their true self. In the changing world, both characters face the limitations imposed upon them by society and family. They also feel neglected with unfulfilled desires. In their journey towards self-realization, the rural space of Kasauli acts as a restorative and liberating setting. Within this landscape, both Nanda Kaul and Raka detach from their traumatic past experiences. Desai's portrayal of Kasauli highlights the significance of space as a transformative force. It illustrates how the physical environment is involved in the process of identity formation, and shapes the self in meaningful and liberating ways.

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DABEER SI/KTT/74**VOICES OF MARGINALITY: NEGOTIATING GENDER, CLASS AND IDENTITY IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *HALF GIRLFRIEND*****LOGANATHAN G**Research Scholar (Part-Time), Research Centre in English
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VHNSNC, Virudhunagar, Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

This paper aims to voice for marginalized people's identity that is concealed by society and its norms. This research analyses the socio-cultural dynamics in Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* (2014) focusing on the lived reality of people confronting social conditions in India. Though this novel is labelled as an emotional story by readers, this paper critically voices for the individual who are striving for identity and equality. The paper centers around Madhav Jha's linguistic discrimination by elite educational and social spaces and Riya Somani's struggle of self-expression towards patriarchal constraints. This study employs a three-part theoretical lens, based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern group theory and Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminisms. These concepts allow one to explore how language serves as a differentiator for power, how dominant systems mute minority voices and how women traverse identity in patriarchal frameworks. The analysis results that English is a symbolic power medium that forms access, social flexibility and acknowledgement. Madhav undergoes exclusion because of linguistic hierarchy, whereas Riya is unable to protect herself from gender based prejudice. Thus, the article asserts that language in *Half Girlfriend* represents identity as an ongoing negotiation process of self-assertion. It also emphasizes the need for the reconstruction of identities beyond socially imposed boundaries.

Keywords: Half girlfriend, Socio-cultural dynamics, Identity, Cultural capital, Marginality

Introduction

Contemporary Indian popular fiction has become a way to show the hopes, struggles, and social changes happening in India today. Chetan Bhagat is one of the most well-known writers in this space, since his novels deal with things that matter to young Indians about education, moving up in life, language, relationships, and identity. His novel *Half Girlfriend* (2014) is more than a love story, it also looks at the deeper inequalities present in modern Indian society. The story follows Madhav Jha, a young man from Dumraon in Bihar and Riya Somani, a girl from a wealthy Delhi family. They meet and their relationship grows at St. Stephen's College, Delhi - a place that stands for elite education and privilege. But the novel shows that just being in such a place doesn't mean you're truly accepted there. Madhav's background and his weak English hold him back from ever fully

fitting in, even though he's physically present in that world. This paper is mainly interested in how marginal voices are shown in *Half Girlfriend*. This marginalisation shows up in more than one way. Madhav is pushed to the margins because of his language and his class background. Riya, on the other hand, comes from money but still faces her own kind of marginalisation, based on gender, patriarchal norms and choices.

The idea of marginality matters a lot in postcolonial studies, since it looks at how people outside the "mainstream" try to find their identity and become recognized. Gayatri Spivak's writing on the subaltern shows how hard it is for marginalized people to have their voices actually heard within systems built by those in power. Even though Madhav and Riya come from very different social backgrounds, they both go through their own forms of exclusion that shape them. Madhav's situation connects closely with Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital. Bourdieu argued that social advantage isn't only about money, things like language, education and cultural knowledge also work as a kind of power. In *Half Girlfriend*, English becomes a form of cultural capital that separates privileged students from those who lack linguistic confidence.

Dr. Jolly Alex's study of *Half Girlfriend* also points to English as a major reason for this social divide. Alex argues that the novel exposes how being able to speak English well has become tied to social hierarchy and class distinction. The study notes that Madhav stands for those who face marginalisation simply because they can't communicate the elite way.

Madhav's admission interview shows this language-based hierarchy clearly. Even though his answers make sense, it's his English that gets judged the most. When the interviewer tells him, "Your answers are sensible but your English is terrible" (Bhagat 12), it shows how language itself becomes a way of measuring someone's worth. Madhav's reply, "Would you rather take a sensible student or someone who speaks a foreign language well?" (Bhagat 13), It proves that being fluent in a language doesn't mean you are intelligent.

Dr. Jolly Alex's study of *Half Girlfriend* also points to English as a major reason for this social divide. Alex argues that the novel exposes how being able to speak English well has become tied to social hierarchy and class distinction. The study notes that Madhav stands for those who face marginalisation simply because they can't communicate the way elite standards expect them to because of this, the novel treats English as both a chance and a wall. It opens doors to education and jobs, but at the same time, it shuts out people who don't have that same advantage with the language. As Alex points out, the novel highlights the division between fluent English speakers and those who struggle with the language, creating a hierarchy based on communication skills. But marginality in *Half Girlfriend* isn't only about language and class. Through Riya Somani, Bhagat also brings out how gender limits people in Indian society. Riya may come from a rich family but that doesn't mean she gets to make her own choices freely. Her family wants her to stick to traditional roles instead of chasing what she actually wants for herself. She puts this frustration into words: "I don't matter. My brothers do, because they will take over the business one day. I'm supposed to shut up, get married and leave" (Bhagat 32). This line shows how patriarchal thinking can hold women back; no

matter how much money their family has. Riya's struggle makes it clear that identity isn't shaped by wealth alone. Society's expectations about gender also play a role.

Princy Anto's study of *Half Girlfriend* also points out how Bhagat shows cultural differences and social inequality through the relationship between Madhav and Riya. The study explains that the novel captures the tension between elite culture and the experiences of marginalized people, especially through differences in language and class. Because of all this, *Half Girlfriend* becomes a story about people trying to find their own identity. Madhav tries to break through the barriers of language and class, while Riya tries to break free from the limits placed on her because of her gender. Their lives prove that building your own identity is tough when society is unequal.

This paper argues that Bhagat's novel gives importance to marginal voices by looking at how gender, class and identity all overlap in today's India. Through Madhav and Riya, the novel shows people fighting to be recognized, to belong and to define themselves in a society shaped by strict social hierarchies.

Review of Literature

Earlier studies on *Half Girlfriend* have mostly looked at the novel through the lens of language, class and social hierarchy. Dr. Jolly Alex, in her paper on the linguistically marginalised, argues that Bhagat presents English as a marker of social status and shows how people who aren't confident in the language end up left out. Alex mainly focuses on how Madhav struggles inside an academic space that's dominated by English and explains how language ends up creating social divides.

Similarly, Princy Anto's study on popular culture in the novel looks at how popular culture and social identity are connected. This study shows how Bhagat brings out the tension between elite and marginalised cultures through differences in language, region and social background.

Another way of looking at marginal stories is by paying attention to how different categories like gender, class and social position, overlap with each other. This kind of approach helps us understand how people can face more than one type of exclusion simultaneously. However, most of these earlier studies have mainly focused on language discrimination and class hierarchy, without paying much attention to how gender, class, and identity come together at the same time in *Half Girlfriend*. This paper tries to fill that gap by looking at how Madhav and Riya are both shaped by different kinds of marginalisation.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Capital, Marginal Voices and Gender Identity

To really understand *Half Girlfriend*, we need to look at how social structures shape a person's identity. The novel doesn't treat marginality as just one single thing; it shows it as something made up of class, language, gender and cultural expectations, all overlapping together. Because of this, the study uses three main ideas: Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's writing on marginal voices and Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of gender identity.

Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital gives us a useful way to understand Madhav's struggle inside an elite educational space. In his work, Bourdieu explains that social inequality doesn't come only from money differences, it also comes from unequal access to cultural knowledge, language skills and education. In *Half Girlfriend*, English works exactly like this kind of cultural capital, deciding who gets accepted socially and who doesn't. Students who speak English fluently are automatically seen as culturally better, while those who can't are left out.

This is exactly what happens to Madhav at St. Stephen's College. Even though he's smart and good at sports, his weak English becomes the real obstacle for him. His struggle isn't about intelligence, it's cultural. He enters a space where language itself works as a symbol of privilege. Bourdieu explains how language can secretly split people into different social groups.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's ideas about marginalized people help us understand Madhav and Riya even better. Spivak studied how powerful systems silence people who are already pushed to the edges of society. In the book, both characters experience their own form of exclusion. Madhav struggles to be heard in a college world that only values English. At the same time, Riya struggles to show who she really is because of her traditional, male-dominated family.

Simone de Beauvoir's feminist thinking is helpful when looking at Riya's character. In her work, Beauvoir argues that women are often defined through what society expects of them rather than through their own individual identity. Riya's experiences reflect exactly this, her family sees her mainly in terms of marriage and social status, not her own personal goals.

So, all these theories together show that *Half Girlfriend* isn't just a love story, it's really a narrative about people trying to work out their identities inside social systems that aren't equal.

Madhav Jha: Language, Class and the Politics of Belonging

Madhav Jha represents what happens to people who enter privileged spaces without having the cultural advantages that those spaces expect from them. Coming from Dumraon in Bihar, Madhav gets into St. Stephen's College with real academic ability and determination, but the moment he can't communicate confidently in English, he's already seen as an outsider. The novel shows English as something bigger than just a language — it becomes a social marker. This comes out clearly when Madhav first meets the college interview panel. Even though he gives sensible answers, the interviewers focus only on his English: "Your answers are sensible but your English is terrible" (Bhagat 12). This line shows how the institution values how well someone speaks over how smart they actually are. Madhav's intelligence is recognized, but his language becomes the thing he's judged on instead. His comeback — "Would you rather take a sensible student or someone who speaks a foreign language well?" (Bhagat 13) — is his way of pushing back against the power that English holds in that space.

Dr. Jolly Alex's study backs up this reading strongly, arguing that *Half Girlfriend* shows how being fluent in English has turned into a way of measuring someone's place in the social hierarchy. Alex points out that Madhav's inability to speak fluently puts him in a marginal position inside the elite world of St. Stephen's College. Because so much importance is placed on English, it creates a division

between people who are fluent and people who aren't. Madhav's insecurity isn't just something personal — it comes from a bigger social structure around him. The novel shows how language affects relationships, opportunities and even how confident a person feels about themselves. Madhav puts this feeling into words when he says: "Without English, I felt naked. I didn't belong here—these English-speaking monsters would eat me alive" (Bhagat 10). This line shows just how much of an emotional impact he faced. He doesn't feel inferior because of his intelligence but because society has tied English ability directly to a person's identity and status.

Alex explains that Bhagat presents Madhav as someone who stands for people who are socially restricted purely because of language limits. The novel shows the psychological toll of being judged through language, and it exposes the class divisions that get created by English-speaking privilege.

This clash between English and regional identity also shows up in Madhav's connection to Bihar. He comes from a rural background, one that's often unfairly stereotyped as backward by people from cities. But the novel actually pushes back against this idea by showing just how determined and intelligent Madhav really is. Madhav makes him stand out from the rich college students; it is still a major part of his identity. Madhav's struggle fits well with Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital students at St. Stephen's already have the language skills and cultural know-how needed to be accepted, while Madhav simply doesn't have those things, this puts him at a disadvantage, even though he is very capable. So his journey isn't just about getting an education, it's also about building the cultural confidence needed to truly belong.

The novel also shows a real contrast between Madhav's insecurity and his resistance. Even though he goes through humiliation, he never accepts the idea that English decides how smart someone is. His argument is that knowledge shouldn't be judged only by language ability. Princy Anto's discussion of the novel also brings out this same relationship between language, culture and class, explaining how Bhagat's story shows the tension between elite cultural practices and marginalised identities especially through Madhav's experience as a rural student stepping into an urban institution. So overall, Madhav's character represents the struggle of people trying to cross language and social boundaries. His journey reflects a bigger truth about India today — one where language still plays a huge role in deciding access, acceptance, and identity.

Intersectional Identities: The Relationship between Gender, Class and Social Position

What makes *Half Girlfriend* so strong is how it shows so many different types of marginality all at once. The novel doesn't treat identity as just one thing; it shows how class, gender, language, and social background all interact with each other. Looking at the novel this way makes it clear that Madhav and Riya face very different kinds of exclusion. Madhav's struggle comes from his rural background and his limits with language, while Riya's struggle comes from patriarchal control, even though she comes from a privileged background. Both of them end up living somewhere between belonging and being excluded.

The idea of intersectionality is useful here because it helps explain why social experiences can't be understood by looking at just one category alone. Looking at identity through overlapping experiences especially around gender, power and marginalisation gives a fuller picture of what's really going on. Madhav's relationship with English shows how language and class identity are tied together. His difficulty speaking fluent English makes him feel incapable, even though he's clearly intelligent and determined. The novel shows that being judged for your language can affect your confidence, your relationships, and even your opportunities. In a similar way, Riya's experience shows how women's identities often get controlled by what society expects of them. Her family's wealth protects her from money problems, but it doesn't protect her from the restrictions placed on her because of her gender. So Bhagat shows marginality as something complicated, not just a simple matter of being poor.

The relationship between Madhav and Riya becomes a meeting point between two very different kinds of marginal experiences. Their bond challenges social divisions because it brings together two people from completely different backgrounds. But at the same time, their relationship also shows just how hard it is to break through deeply rooted social structures. At first, Madhav believes his lack of English is what separates him from Riya. But Riya doesn't see him the way the rest of the elite world around them does, she accepts him despite his struggles with language. When she helps him get ready for his speech, she tells him, "I will correct you sometimes. It is not that I don't understand you. I just want to make sure you say it right" (Bhagat 149). This moment marks a shift from judgment to acceptance. Unlike everyone else who uses language to exclude Madhav, Riya uses it instead as a way to support him. Their relationship suggests that it really is possible to overcome social boundaries through real understanding and empathy.

Cultural Hierarchies and the Politics of Belonging

The novel also looks at how cultural hierarchies shape a person's sense of belonging. St. Stephen's College stands for an elite space where English-speaking students already have social confidence and cultural authority. Madhav's struggle shows how institutions can end up reproducing social inequality on their own. The divide between "English-speaking" and "Non-English-speaking" people reflects a much bigger social reality across India. As Alex argues, the novel shows English as something that shapes social status, opportunities and whether or not someone gets accepted.

Princy Anto also points out that "Half Girlfriend" portrays conflicts between elite culture and marginalized culture, showing how language and social background shape both relationships and identity. So Madhav's journey becomes one of constant negotiation. He doesn't completely give up his regional identity; instead, he tries to bring his background together with the opportunities that education gives him. His success at the end isn't just a personal win; it's also a rejection of the idea that a person's worth depends on how privileged their language skills are. In a similar way, Riya's journey is about searching for a self that goes beyond the identity forced on her. She tries to step away from the identity her family built for her and create a life based on her own choices instead. So overall, Bhagat shows

identity as something that's never really finished — it's shaped continuously through struggle, negotiation, and change.

Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* can be read as a story about marginal voices, one that explores the complicated relationship between gender, class, language, and identity in today's India. Even though the novel is mostly known as a romantic story, its real concerns are about social boundaries and about people trying to build their own identities inside unequal systems. Madhav Jha's character stands for marginalisation based on language and class. His difficulty communicating fluently in English puts him at a disadvantage in an elite educational space. Through his experiences at St. Stephen's College, Bhagat shows how English works not just as a language, but as a symbol of cultural power. The novel shows that being able to speak a certain way often decides how socially accepted, confident, and successful someone gets to be.

Looking at things through Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital helps explain why Madhav's weak English becomes a social disadvantage, even though he's clearly intelligent and capable. His journey shows that education by itself doesn't fix inequality, people also need access to the cultural resources that dominant groups already value. Riya Somani's character brings in the gender side of marginality. Even though she comes from a wealthy family, she still faces restrictions created by patriarchal expectations. Her wish for independence and self-expression shows the conflict between the identity societies hands her and what she actually wants for herself. Through Riya, Bhagat shows the struggles that women go through when they try to be seen as more than just their traditional roles. The novel also makes it clear that marginality isn't just one single experience. Madhav and Riya come from completely different social positions, yet both of them face their own kind of exclusion. Madhav struggles against barriers of language and class, while Riya struggles against limits placed on her because of her gender. Together, their experiences show how different identities and social pressures overlap with each other.

The studies by Jolly Alex and Princy Anto support this reading further, by highlighting the role that English, class hierarchy, and cultural differences play in the novel. Alex argues that the novel exposes the social effects of linguistic inequality, where being good at English becomes tied to status and acceptance. Anto's study similarly points out how Bhagat shows the cultural divide and tension between privileged and marginalised identities.

In the end, *Half Girlfriend* treats identity as something that's constantly being negotiated, not something fixed. Madhav and Riya both try to move past the limits society places on them and build spaces where they can define themselves on their own terms. Because of this, the novel becomes a reflection of what many people in India experience today. Negotiating between tradition and modernity, between privilege and exclusion, and between what society expects and what a person actually wants for themselves. By portraying marginal voices this way, Bhagat adds to bigger conversations about social inequality, drawing attention to struggles around language, class, and gender that often go unnoticed. Through Madhav and

Riya, the novel suggests that real social progress needs more than just opportunity. It also needs acceptance, inclusivity and recognition of all kinds of identities.

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DABEER SI/KTT/75**INSCRIBING THE SELF ON SHIFTED GROUND: GENDERED
EXPERIENCE IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S JASODA****ISHWARIYA P**Assistant Professor, The Madura College
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

This paper dives deep into the concept of gendered geographies in Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*, scrutinizing how physical, social and cultural spaces shape women's identities, experiences and sense of belonging. This study not only sheds importance on geographical location but also eradicates patriarchal power, gender discrimination and societal hierarchies in the prevailing society. Jasoda's journey from the parched village of Kantagiri to the metropolitan city of Mumbai exemplifies the changing relationship between women and the spaces. While the village confines her within strict patriarchal norms, such as female infanticide, domestic violence and economic hardship, the city provides limited but meaningful chances for mobility, independence and identity building. With strength and determination, Jasoda navigates oppressive systems and slowly changes herself from a marginalized rural woman into someone who is economically independent and socially respected. The paper undergoes feminist geographical theory to examine how domestic, rural and urban spaces affect agency and belonging in the lives of women. In addition, the paper shows how Nagarkar criticizes the male domination of the bodies, labor and mobility of women by demonstrating the intersection of gender, class, poverty and power in relation to the issue. Unlike the idea of belonging as a stable connection to the place, belonging is shown in the novel as an ongoing struggle, survival and empowerment. Jasoda becomes an important piece of feminist literature since it depicts women's spatial experiences.

Keywords - Gendered Geographies, Belonging, Feminist Geography, Women's Agency, Patriarchy, Spatial Identity

Introduction

Indian English literature has developed into a significant body of writing that reflects the social, cultural and political realities of Indian society. Among its various literary forms, the novel has become an effective medium for exploring issues such as poverty, caste, gender, migration and identity. Contemporary Indian novelists have increasingly focused on women's experiences, portraying their struggles within patriarchal structures while highlighting their resilience and agency. These narratives not only represent women's lives but also question the social systems that limit their freedom and individuality.

Kiran Nagarkar is one of the prominent voices in contemporary Indian literature. Writing in both Marathi and English, he is known for his realistic portrayal of Indian society and his exploration of power, identity and human relationships. His novels often examine the lives of ordinary people whose experiences reveal the

inequalities embedded in social and cultural institutions. *Jasoda* (2017) continues this concern by presenting the life of an ordinary village woman who struggles against poverty, patriarchy, and social oppression. Rather than celebrating extraordinary heroes, Nagarkar foregrounds the courage and strength of an everyday woman whose life reflects the experiences of countless women in India. Set initially in the drought-stricken village of Kantagiri and later in Mumbai, *Jasoda* traces the journey of its protagonist through changing social and geographical spaces. Burdened with domestic responsibilities, repeated pregnancies, economic hardship and an abusive husband, *Jasoda* is forced to negotiate multiple forms of oppression throughout her life. Her migration to Mumbai marks an important turning point, where continuous labour and perseverance gradually enable her to rebuild her life and secure a better future for her children. The novel therefore presents not only a story of survival but also a gradual process of self-construction shaped by changing circumstances.

The title of this paper, "Inscribing the Self on Shifted Ground: Gendered Experience in Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*", emphasizes the relationship between identity and lived experience. The phrase *shifted ground* refers both to *Jasoda*'s physical migration from Kantagiri to Mumbai and to the transformation of her social position and personal identity. Her experiences of patriarchy, violence, motherhood, migration and labour continually reshape her understanding of herself. Although she remains constrained by patriarchal values, she gradually develops agency through strength, economic independence and her determination to secure a better life for her family.

This paper argues that *Jasoda* portrays the gradual construction of female selfhood through gendered experiences of oppression and survival. It examines how patriarchy regulates women's bodies, labour and identities, while also exploring the ways in which migration and economic independence create possibilities for selfhood and agency. By analysing *Jasoda*'s journey from vulnerability to strength, the study demonstrates that Nagarkar transforms an ordinary woman's life into a powerful narrative of endurance, dignity and self-realization.

Discussion

Gendered Experience and the Burden of Patriarchy

The world of *Jasoda* is shaped by patriarchy, where women are expected to perform their duties without questioning the authority of men. From the beginning of the novel, *Jasoda*'s identity is determined by her roles as a wife, mother, daughter-in-law and labourer. She is never given the opportunity to define herself independently. Instead, her existence revolves around fulfilling responsibilities imposed by society and family. Nagarkar portrays this condition not as an isolated experience but as the everyday reality of countless women living in rural India. Through *Jasoda*'s life, the novel demonstrates how patriarchal structures regulate women's bodies, labour, emotions and social positions.

Jasoda's husband, Sangram Singh, represents the authority of patriarchy within the household. Although he is expected to protect and provide for his family, he neglects these responsibilities completely. He neither supports his wife economically nor participates in raising his children. Instead, he dedicates himself to serving Prince Parbat Singh while leaving *Jasoda* to struggle alone with poverty,

drought, hunger and motherhood. His authority over the family is based solely on gender rather than responsibility. The unequal relationship between husband and wife clearly illustrates how patriarchal power functions through domination rather than care.

The burden of survival falls almost entirely upon Jasoda. She walks long distances in search of water, looks after livestock, cooks for the family, nurses her sick mother-in-law, works as a midwife and struggles to secure food for her children. These responsibilities are performed under extremely harsh environmental conditions, as Kantagiri has suffered years of drought and famine. The scarcity of water symbolizes not only the environmental crisis but also the emotional and social deprivation experienced by women. Even under such circumstances, Jasoda receives neither appreciation nor support. Her labour remains invisible because it is regarded as a natural duty of womanhood rather than meaningful work.

Nagarkar carefully portrays the daily hardships that define Jasoda's existence. Her repeated journeys in search of water reveal both physical endurance and emotional resilience. When she reaches Jalta after walking several miles, she discovers that the water tanker has already left. Similarly, when she approaches the grocer hoping to obtain kerosene, she is humiliated instead of receiving assistance. These incidents demonstrate how poverty and gender combine to produce continuous suffering. The social system offers little dignity to poor women, whose vulnerability often exposes them to further humiliation and exploitation.

Patriarchy also shapes Jasoda's understanding of motherhood. One of the most disturbing aspects of the novel is her repeated killing of newborn daughters. These actions cannot be interpreted simply as acts of personal cruelty. Instead, they reveal the extent to which patriarchal values have penetrated the minds of women themselves. Within Jasoda's social world, daughters are viewed as economic burdens, while sons represent survival and continuity. The violence committed against female infants therefore becomes a tragic consequence of a society that values women only in relation to men. Jasoda herself becomes both a victim and an unwilling participant in maintaining patriarchal traditions.

The birth of Janhavi marks an important moment in the narrative because she survives through the intervention of Himmat. Her survival introduces the possibility of change within the family. Nevertheless, Jasoda does not immediately abandon the patriarchal beliefs that have shaped her entire life. She continues to treat her daughter differently from her sons, demonstrating how deeply internalized social values influence individual behaviour. Nagarkar does not idealize Jasoda as a perfect mother; instead, he presents her as a realistic woman whose actions are conditioned by circumstances beyond her control. This complexity makes her character psychologically convincing and socially meaningful.

Another important aspect of gendered experience is the unequal distribution of authority within marriage. Sangram Singh exercises power over Jasoda despite contributing almost nothing to the family's welfare. He abandons his wife and children after gaining influence in Prince Parbat Singh's palace, demonstrating how patriarchal privilege allows men to escape domestic responsibilities without social consequences. Jasoda, on the other hand, cannot abandon her family

because her identity has been completely tied to caregiving and sacrifice. The contrast between husband and wife exposes the structural imbalance governing gender relations throughout the novel.

Violence, Sexual Objectification and the Female Body

One of the central concerns of *Jasoda* is the representation of violence against women. Nagarkar portrays violence not merely as physical assault but as a continuous social condition that affects every aspect of women's lives. Women experience violence through poverty, hunger, exploitation, reproductive expectations, sexual abuse and emotional neglect. These forms of violence become so common within the social environment that they appear almost ordinary. The normalization of suffering reveals the depth of patriarchal control over women's bodies and lives.

The female body occupies a central place within the patriarchal order presented in the novel. Women are valued primarily for their ability to produce sons and satisfy male expectations. *Jasoda* repeatedly becomes pregnant without any control over her reproductive life. Childbirth is presented not as a celebrated moment of motherhood but as another burden imposed upon her already exhausted body. She gives birth under extraordinary circumstances in fields, during household work, and in situations where survival itself is uncertain. These repeated pregnancies illustrate how women are denied authority over their own bodies.

Nagarkar also reveals how economic dependence intensifies women's vulnerability. *Jasoda* often has to negotiate with men who exploit her desperate situation. The grocer's suggestive behaviour, the landlord's exploitation, and the continuous threat of sexual abuse demonstrate that women's poverty exposes them to further objectification. Their bodies become sites upon which male power is exercised. Sexual exploitation is therefore closely connected with economic inequality, making resistance extremely difficult for women struggling simply to survive. Savitri's experience further reinforces this pattern of exploitation. Sangram Singh uses her sexually without any concern for her dignity or consent, while her husband Dulare becomes another victim of Sangram Singh's cruelty. Their suffering illustrates how male authority extends beyond individual households into the broader social order. Women from economically weaker backgrounds remain particularly vulnerable because social institutions provide them with neither justice nor protection. Through Savitri's story, Nagarkar demonstrates that sexual exploitation is sustained by unequal power rather than individual desire alone.

The novel also portrays objectification through everyday language and behaviour. Men frequently evaluate women according to their physical appearance, reproductive capacity and usefulness within the household. Women's individuality is rarely acknowledged. Instead, they are viewed as wives, mothers, or sexual objects whose value depends upon fulfilling male expectations. Such attitudes reduce women to functional roles while denying them emotional and intellectual identity. This everyday objectification becomes one of the most persistent forms of gendered oppression in the novel.

Despite these oppressive conditions, Nagarkar avoids portraying women only as passive victims. *Jasoda* gradually begins to reclaim authority over her own life

after migrating to Mumbai. Although exploitation does not disappear, the city offers opportunities unavailable in Kantagiri. She secures employment, earns her own income and slowly develops confidence in her abilities. Her work in food establishments demonstrates her willingness to adapt to changing circumstances rather than surrender to despair. Labour becomes not merely a means of survival but also an important source of self-respect.

The movement from Kantagiri to Mumbai therefore represents more than geographical migration. It symbolizes a shift in Jasoda's relationship with her own body and identity. In the village, her body is primarily associated with reproduction and domestic labour. In the city, it becomes a source of productive work and economic independence. Although patriarchal attitudes continue to exist, Jasoda gradually discovers that she can make decisions, support her children, and shape her own future through determination and hard work. This transformation marks the beginning of her journey towards selfhood.

Nagarkar thus presents gendered experience as a continuous negotiation between oppression and resistance. Jasoda does not completely escape patriarchal structures, but she gradually learns to create spaces of autonomy within them. Her resilience lies not in dramatic rebellion but in her refusal to allow suffering to destroy her capacity for survival. Through ordinary acts of endurance, labour and responsibility, she inscribes her own identity upon the changing social landscape that surrounds her.

Migration, Survival and the Reconstruction of Self

Migration occupies a significant place in *Jasoda* because it marks a turning point in the protagonist's life. The movement from the drought-stricken village of Kantagiri to the city of Mumbai is not merely a geographical shift but also a transformation in Jasoda's understanding of herself and her capabilities. In Kantagiri, survival is almost impossible because of prolonged drought, scarcity of food and the collapse of agricultural life. Families are forced to leave their homes in search of better opportunities, and Jasoda eventually undertakes this difficult journey with her children and mother-in-law after realizing that remaining in the village would only prolong their suffering. Sangram Singh refuses to accompany them because he is determined to remain in the service of Prince Parbat Singh. Once again, the responsibility of protecting the family falls entirely upon Jasoda. The journey to Mumbai represents courage as well as uncertainty. Jasoda enters an unfamiliar city without financial security or social support. Initially, the city offers little relief from hardship. She struggles to find employment, while her children are forced to beg at traffic signals in order to contribute to the family's survival. The urban environment exposes them to another form of poverty, where shelter, food, and employment remain uncertain. Yet unlike Kantagiri, Mumbai also provides opportunities for rebuilding life through hard work and determination. This distinction becomes crucial in understanding Jasoda's gradual transformation.

Jasoda begins searching from house to house for domestic work, but employers hesitate to hire her because of her pregnancy. Nevertheless, she refuses to give up. Eventually, she secures employment in a small food establishment where she undertakes physically demanding work from early morning until late in the day.

She cleans vegetables, lights the stove, prepares food, and performs every task entrusted to her. These experiences demonstrate her willingness to adapt to changing circumstances rather than surrender to hopelessness. Through labour, she gradually acquires economic independence, which becomes one of the foundations of her growing confidence.

Nagarkar portrays work as an important means of reconstructing identity. In Kantagiri, Jasoda's labour remained invisible because it was confined to domestic responsibilities that society regarded as natural obligations. In Mumbai, however, her labour gains economic value. She earns wages, contributes directly to the family's survival, and gradually improves their living conditions. Although her work remains physically exhausting, it enables her to participate actively in shaping her family's future. Economic independence allows Jasoda to move beyond the limited identity assigned to her by patriarchal society.

The success of her children further strengthens her sense of achievement. Himmat's intellectual brilliance earns him opportunities for higher education and eventually a successful life abroad. Pawan develops into an independent individual, while Janhavi receives opportunities that would have been unimaginable in Kantagiri. Although Jasoda initially struggles to understand some of the decisions made by her children, especially Himmat's criticism of Sangram Singh and his refusal to accept his father's authority, she gradually begins to recognize that their lives need not be governed by the oppressive traditions she herself inherited. Her children's achievements symbolize the possibility of breaking the cycle of poverty and subordination that had defined earlier generations.

The novel also presents Jasoda's return to Kantagiri after hearing about the village's prosperity. The discovery of water resources and economic development creates hope that the village has changed. However, her return reveals that material progress has not necessarily transformed social relationships. Sangram Singh has acquired greater authority following Prince Parbat Singh's death and continues to embody patriarchal power. Jasoda realizes that the respect and independence she has achieved in Mumbai cannot be recovered within the old social order. Consequently, she chooses not to rebuild her life around her husband or the feudal system. This decision marks an important stage in her emotional independence.

The later part of the novel demonstrates the remarkable transformation of Jasoda's life. The small food business with which she began eventually grows into a successful enterprise. Her practical intelligence, discipline, and experience enable her to establish herself as an independent entrepreneur. The same woman who once struggled to obtain food for her children now becomes financially secure and socially respected. Nagarkar deliberately contrasts these two phases of her life to emphasize that resilience, rather than privilege, defines true heroism.

From Silence to Agency: Jasoda's Transformation

One of the most significant aspects of *Jasoda* is the gradual movement of the protagonist from silence to agency. At the beginning of the novel, Jasoda rarely questions the injustice surrounding her. She silently accepts her husband's neglect, performs endless domestic labour, and obeys social customs even when they demand unbearable sacrifices. Her silence, however, should not be interpreted as

weakness. Instead, it reflects the limited choices available to women living within rigid patriarchal structures.

As the narrative progresses, Jasoda's experiences reshape her understanding of herself. Migration, employment, and economic responsibility gradually strengthen her confidence. She learns to make independent decisions regarding her family's future without depending upon Sangram Singh. Although she never openly rebels against every social convention, her actions increasingly demonstrate self-reliance and determination. Her transformation occurs through everyday acts of courage rather than dramatic confrontation.

An important dimension of this transformation is her relationship with her children. Jasoda invests all her energy in ensuring that they receive opportunities unavailable to her. She works tirelessly so that they may escape the poverty that dominated her own life. Her pride in Himmat's success, her emotional farewell to Janhavi when she leaves for America, and her satisfaction in seeing her children settled reflect the fulfilment of a lifelong struggle. The success of her children becomes an extension of her own journey toward dignity and recognition.

Nagarkar also presents subtle changes in Jasoda's perception of women. Although she initially internalizes patriarchal beliefs, especially regarding daughters, later experiences broaden her understanding. The survival and success of Janhavi demonstrate that daughters are equally capable of achieving meaningful lives. Without directly preaching social reform, the novel quietly challenges traditional assumptions about gender through the life experiences of its central characters.

By the conclusion of the novel, Jasoda has transformed from a woman struggling for survival into a figure admired by others for her strength, wisdom, and determination. She remains an ordinary woman, yet it is precisely this ordinariness that gives her extraordinary significance. Her heroism lies not in exceptional achievements but in her ability to endure suffering without losing her commitment to life and family.

Narrative Representation of Gendered Experience

Nagarkar's narrative technique plays an important role in presenting Jasoda's gendered experiences with realism and emotional depth. Rather than relying on melodrama or sentimental narration, he adopts a direct and straightforward style that allows events to speak for themselves. The novel is divided into four parts, tracing Jasoda's journey from Kantagiri to Mumbai and later developments in her life. This structural division reflects the different stages of her personal transformation.

The narrative combines descriptive passages, dialogues, humour, irony, and realistic detail to portray the complexity of everyday life. Nagarkar frequently shifts between different characters and parallel storylines, particularly those involving Sangram Singh and Prince Parbat Singh. These interconnected narratives broaden the social context of Jasoda's experiences and demonstrate how individual lives are shaped by larger political and social structures.

Imagery is another important feature of the novel. The descriptions of drought, barren landscapes, scarcity of water, and difficult journeys vividly capture the physical conditions under which Jasoda lives. Water becomes a recurring symbol of survival, hope, and renewal. The movement from the dry lands of Kantagiri to

the comparatively resourceful environment of Mumbai parallels Jasoda's own movement from despair towards possibility. Similarly, the detailed descriptions of domestic work, childbirth, and everyday labour create a realistic picture of women's lives without romanticizing their suffering.

Dialogue contributes significantly to the emotional realism of the novel. Conversations between Jasoda and her children reveal changing family relationships, while interactions with employers, neighbours, and other characters expose social attitudes toward women, poverty, and class. Nagarkar also employs irony and humour to soften the intensity of tragic events without diminishing their seriousness. These techniques enable readers to engage with painful realities while appreciating the resilience and humanity of the characters. The narrative therefore reinforces the central concern of the novel: the representation of an ordinary woman whose everyday experiences reveal broader truths about gender, power, poverty and survival. Nagarkar transforms common experiences into an epic of ordinary life, demonstrating that true heroism often exists outside traditional definitions of greatness.

Conclusion

Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* presents a powerful exploration of gendered experience within the intersecting realities of patriarchy, poverty, migration, and social inequality. Through the life of an ordinary village woman, the novel exposes the various forms of oppression that shape women's existence while simultaneously celebrating their resilience and determination. Jasoda's journey from the drought-stricken village of Kantagiri to Mumbai symbolizes not only physical migration but also the gradual reconstruction of female identity. Throughout the novel, Jasoda experiences domestic violence, economic exploitation, reproductive burden and social discrimination. Yet she refuses to surrender to despair. Instead, she transforms suffering into strength through hard work, practical intelligence and unwavering commitment to her family. Her gradual economic independence enables her to challenge, even if indirectly, the patriarchal structures that once defined every aspect of her life. The achievements of her children further affirm that her sacrifices have created possibilities for a different future.

Nagarkar avoids presenting Jasoda as either an idealized victim or a revolutionary heroine. She remains deeply human, shaped by contradictions, limitations, and inherited beliefs. This complexity makes her transformation more convincing and meaningful. Her story demonstrates that empowerment is not always achieved through open rebellion; it may also emerge through endurance, labour, responsibility, and the gradual assertion of personal agency. The title "Inscribing the Self on Shifted Ground" appropriately captures Jasoda's journey because her identity is continually rewritten through changing social and geographical landscapes. Migration, work, motherhood and survival become the means through which she constructs a sense of self that extends beyond the narrow roles assigned by patriarchy. By the end of the novel, Jasoda stands not simply as a survivor but as a symbol of quiet strength and everyday heroism. Ultimately, *Jasoda* affirms that the lives of ordinary women deserve recognition as epic narratives in their own right. Through Jasoda's experiences, Nagarkar offers a compelling portrayal of female resilience and demonstrates that even within the harshest social realities,

women continue to create dignity, hope and meaning for themselves and for future generations.

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DABEER SI/KTT/76**UNVEILING IDENTITY CRISIS AND ALIENATION IN BHARATI
MUKHERJEE'S *DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS*****S. ARSHYA MANIKODI**

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Abstract

This paper delves into the struggles of diasporic identity and the experience of alienation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*. This novel unfolds the life of three sisters named Tara Bhattacharjee, Parvati, and Padma, who settled in different countries, facing their own identity crisis. This novel explores the life of Tara Bhattacharjee, an Indian woman who moves to the United States for a new identity and breaks the societal framework in the name of Indian tradition and culture. Later, she realizes the roots and depth of tradition and culture and moves back to India. Tara tries to balance Indian values and Western culture. Tara bounces between east and west, tradition and modernity, family expectations and personal liberty. Initially, Tara seems to embrace Western culture, but at the end her powerful grip on her own culture shows the importance of Indian heritage. This story focuses on themes such as Identity, migration, family and marriage traditions, cultural conflict, feminism, and women's empowerment. Displacement leads to alienation and the hunt for a new identity, which also includes adjustments to a new culture, society, language, and surroundings. This cross-cultural migration makes the sisters make crucial independent decisions of their own in life. Overall, *Desirable Daughters* projects a strong message about the importance of understanding one's own roots of tradition and culture, Western cultural adaptations, and personal growth of the characters.

Keywords: Diaspora, Identity Crisis, Migration, Traditional Norms, Cultural Conflict, Feminism, Women's Empowerment, Indian heritage, Alienation, Displacement, Cross-Cultural.

Introduction

Migration is the process of moving from one place to another. This process is common to all living beings around the world. Every living creature in this world has its own reasons for migration. Nowadays, it has become a trend for many people to settle abroad for reputation, and for some, it's a responsibility to survive and take care of their families in their native land. The reasons may differ, but the consequences are more or less the same to a certain extent. Alienation is when immigrants face an in-between stage in a foreign land; neither do they belong to their homeland nor to their host land. Tara's cultural transformation can be

understood through Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the "Third Space", where identities are negotiated between two cultures, Indian and American. The sickness of adaptation is lacking in the minds of people who are entirely in a new land with zero experience in that place. Cultural drift is faced by immigrants, where the immigrants either adapt to the new culture or escape from their own culture to fit into the new place. Even though they adapt to the new culture, they balance both cultures to survive. When people migrate, they face common barriers like language, culture, homesickness, alienation, psychological trauma, etc. The only solution to all these problems is to adapt to the situation and survive.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee explores the struggles of identity crises, alienation, migration, dowry, gender, and cultural difficulties. Diaspora novels usually hold a tension between balancing Indian traits and Westernization. It is also considered a mandatory task for every immigrant to stick to their own rooted identity. This novel also spotlights the trauma of the protagonist who oscillated between tradition and modernization. Mukherjee shows how the concept of identity changes according to the place, culture, and the experience of an individual. Through the lives of three Indian Bengali sisters, Tara, Padma, and Parvati, Mukherjee exposes the immigrant's transformation of culture and identity through the *Desirable Daughters*.

Desirable Daughters revolves around the life of the character Tara Bhattacharjee and her sisters, Padma and Parvati. Each character depicts a different type of identity, as Tara lives in San Francisco with her son, Rabindranath, after divorcing Bishwapriya Chatterjee. She later lives with her American boyfriend, Andy. Her role represents freedom, modernity, and independence. Padma lives in New Jersey with her husband, Harish Mehta. Even though she lives in America, she has a strong grip on Indian traditions like food and clothing. She balances Indian tradition and American lifestyle, which represents diasporic identity. Parvati lives in Mumbai with her husband Aurobindo Banerjee and her sons. She represents Indian tradition and follows Indian values and leads a conventional domestic life.

Customs and Traditions in India

In India, the word dowry is always associated with marriage. It is believed to be an inevitable process in a wedding. There are many ruined marriages in the battle of dowry. The concept of dowry is related to this novel, where the character Tara Lata, the ancestor of Tara Bhattacharjee, undergoes such a terrible practice at her wedding. She was objectified as a bride at her wedding; she was tossed by her family to marry a groom, and once he dies of snakebite, she was soon married to a tree to protect her dowry from the deceased groom's family, who claim to get her dowry even if she is not married to the groom. She was called a tree bride since she married a tree.

The beauty of Indian weddings and the depiction of the celebrations and the ceremonies are deeply portrayed in this novel. The wedding ceremony and the colourful celebration of festivals, the rituals, and superstitious beliefs in horoscopes are depicted in this novel by Mukherjee. Mukherjee's narration is unique and shows the real pictures of an Indian Bengali Brahmin marriage through her words. The idea of marriage is different in the eyes of society; it defines that every woman should have the habit of being submissive, vulnerable, flexible,

obedient, sacrificing, tolerant, and patient. Every woman steps into marital life with huge expectations; when their expectations fail, some survive the rest of their lives through tolerance and adjustments, and some, like Tara, courageously step out of it. Tara navigates through immigrant experience and family expectations. She rejects this societal framework of a woman being submissive to her spouse. To be a good wife and an obedient woman to her family's expectations, she lost her identity. Her divorce represents a rebellion for her freedom and rejection of these societal norms. In her married life, she longs for an emotional bond and an understanding companion, but Bish eventually fails in it, as they become distant in their relationship. Bish is a successful, wealthy, and intelligent guy but failed as a husband. Tara sees their relationship more as a social institution than an intimate relationship. For the betterment of her and her son's lives, she decided to lead her life according to her wish. She is a trendsetter for many women in this society who dream of a life like Tara's, who sets herself free from the clutches of this harsh patriarchal rule against women. The irony here is that the path of adjustments was taught to one woman by another woman.

Tara's Conflicts, Self-Discovery and Identity Crisis

Tara's identity crisis is her battle between tradition and modernity; this is because she belongs to one culture and enjoys another culture. She belongs to a wealthy orthodox Bengali Brahmin family where they expect her to obey the elders, follow social customs, and preserve family reputation. After her arranged marriage with Bish, they moved to America because he works there. Tara finds that her bond with Bish is empty, and so she decides to depart and live with her son, Rabi, and lead her life peacefully with freedom. He deliberately enjoys her life with Rabi and Andy, her American boyfriend. She frees herself from Indian culture and pursues an American lifestyle. Although she lives a pleasant life of her own choice, she still struggles with emotional confusion, and she is unable to completely detach herself from Indian culture. The quest for her identity burdens her more, whether she belongs to India or America. She tries to escape from Indian heredity, but she cannot uproot it completely. Tradition and culture are basically a metaphor for the backbone of a person; it cannot be easily neglected. Tara's struggle between Indian tradition and American Individualism reflects a deep identity crisis (Mukherjee 45).

In traditional India, the concept of divorce was viewed negatively. The rules made by this patriarchal society for an Indian wife are to obey their elders, do house chores, balance between parents and in-laws, adjust with the in-laws, procreate, and sacrifice themselves physically and mentally to take care of the kids, husband, and in-laws. Before marriage, they live for their parents; after marriage, they live for their husband and his family and later for their kids and grandchildren. If a woman breaks these norms, then she is considered unruly, shameless, and selfish. According to this patriarchal society, when Tara divorces Bish, she secures her freedom but fails to be a respectable wife. She gives more importance to personal choice than to social expectations. It takes so much courage to make such bold decisions.

Language reflects Tara's change in identity where she speaks in Bengali with her family and in English with her neighbours in everyday American life. This

bilingual existence symbolizes her hybrid identity. Although the American lifestyle brings freedom, happiness, opportunities, individualism, and independence, it also brings loneliness, cultural confusion, and mainly balancing old and new identities of the immigrants.

Tara's Alienation in Newland

Alienation is a feeling when the immigrant does not belong to either their own nation or a settled nation, the in-between, traumatizing feeling of the immigrants. She tries to escape Indian tradition and adapt to American values. Her inner conscience did not allow her to be fully Indian in America, and her cultural transformation was not completely accepted as American; it's a mixed cultural feeling that got stuck in the middle of both cultures, which left Tara in a confused state. Her situation can be metaphorized with a person floating in a wooden raft that is between two shores, one is her homeland and the other is a foreign land. When the person fails to balance both and when neither shore provides complete belonging, unfortunately, the person might drown in psychological trauma like alienation, cultural drift, and loneliness.

Tara's Alienation with Family

Alienation distances her from her family connection. The choice of divorce was not accepted by her family, even though they love her. Since she belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family, it makes her family not accept her decision. In comparison with the lives of her sisters, they somehow manage to hold on to the culture and tradition, but Tara not only distances herself from family but also from her heritage and tradition. Every woman in this world wishes for their family to stand by their side in every situation and at any cost. But most of the families fail to do so. Tara drifted away from her live-in partner, Andy, due to cultural differences, trust issues, and communication problems. She even tries to balance both cultures, but reality hits differently. Tara explores her freedom, intimacy, and different social identity through her relationship with Andy. In this novel, Tara and Andy symbolically represent a cross-cultural relationship that needs understanding, trust, and communication, which is lacking in their relationship.

Tara's Cultural Drift

The acceptance of Tara's cultural drift is spotlighted in this novel through Mukherjee's words. Cultural drift is a slow movement of immigrants who move away from their own culture to accept the new or foreign culture. Tara fails to balance both, and she pursues American individualism. Tara's prolonged exposure to American culture makes her move away from her own culture. Due to cultural drift, she distanced herself from her husband Bish to lead a life of liberty. This made Tara more independent than staying as an obedient wife, according to Indian customs. The cultural drift makes Tara suffer internally, creating a distance between Tara and Andy. Psychological confusion about her identity, culture, tradition, and family made her find her true self, which made her decide to get separated from Andy. They departed easily because they are not married. Marriage is an attachment, dedication, and compatibility between two people, which is eventually missing between Tara and Andy. Her relationship with Andy is contrasted with her upbringing. The decision that she takes as an immigrant is independence, according to her, but it's a contrasting ideology of Indian culture.

This is caused by cultural drift, where she makes a decision that is contradictory to her culture and customs. When she was in India, she obeyed her parents, and as an immigrant, drastic changes in her character can be spotted. These drastic changes and strong decisions she made are examples of cultural drift.

Tara's Alienation in Relationship

Tara felt alienated in married life, where the views on independence and identity were different between Bish and Tara. This lost connection between the married couple led her to make such a decision, which her family failed to understand. Even though there was no emotional support from her family, she struggled hard to raise her son alone without any support; the confusion about her identity and uncertainty about her future made her situation even worse than before. Tara developed guilt over divorcing Bish and for choosing an uncertain decision, Andy. She was torn between Indian upbringing norms and her desire for a life of independence. Tara was wrapped in a huge cloth of alienation that suffocated her from breathing. The alienations were cultural alienation, alienation from family, alienation in her marriage life, and alienation in her identity. Even after her adaptation to the American lifestyle, she is still viewed as an immigrant, and she is not completely accepted as American by the natives; simultaneously, she is seen as too westernized by her relatives and family in India.

Tara's Alienation with Herself

The foremost miserable alienation is alienation from herself. She felt detached from herself; she felt like a new person after her divorce. After her divorce, she started to adapt to the American lifestyle, where she found that her old Bengali version had disappeared. Internal conflict is more painful than physical migration. She stays confused, so she questions everything around her and herself. This situation raises various questions in her mind about the values that she pursued at a young age; after her journey to America, she changed a lot based on her attitudes, dress, culture, and values, which are all Americanized. At a point in life, she learns about her ancestor Tara Lata, who dedicated her life fully to education, self-improvement, and serving poor people. Likewise, later Tara Bhattacharjee also started to accept her roots and culture. Tara moves to India to learn about her ancestor but finds out about her roots, and she gets connected with her family, where she finds herself.

"It's one of those San Francisco things I can't explain in India, just as I can't explain my Indian life to the women I know in California" (DD 25-26)

These lines express Tara's inner conflict where she suffers between Indian and American identity. This increases the agony of alienation, which cannot be explained to her family in India or America. Because of the cultural complexities, she was unable to explain her conflicts with Bish.

"I have told my Calcutta story many times, and Americans seem to find them endlessly amusing and appalling. And yet, until last year, I'd never really understood what I was revealing and what I was suppressing. I was going for the effect, Tara, No! The easy approval. Oh! Tara, you're so brave!" (DD 35).

She suffers through the cultural drift between India and America, where she can't fully uproot herself from Indian values and plant herself in the American lifestyle; this makes her suffer internally, which makes it difficult for her to make people around her understand. She finds diasporic reality to be more challenging than she can express to others.

Cultural comparison: India Vs America

Usually, Indian society emphasizes systems like joint family, marriage as a lifetime commitment, family honour, following patriarchal norms, and obedience to parents. But unfortunately, Tara broke all the expectations of Indian society's customs and chose a new path to independence. This is the best example of Tara giving importance to her independence over Indian customs.

Gradually, American culture encourages concepts like nuclear family, divorce if the marriage fails, importance to personal happiness, and more preference to the individual's decisions. She solely believes that personal happiness should not be sacrificed at any cost. Tara follows all the concepts of America; she slowly accepts the American values and follows them.

The Ancestral Myth – Tara Lata, “Tree Bride”

The character of Tara Lata is a symbolic representation of Identity, self-sacrifice, womanhood, tradition, and cultural continuity. Tara Lata is the ideal figure of a traditional Indian woman who lives the rest of her life as a virgin and stays loyal to her husband, Tree. Even though the situation and her father push her into marrying a tree to secure her dowry from the former groom's family, she stays obedient to her father's words and spends the rest of her life in her father's house as an obedient Indian woman. Tara Lata's character is a representation of early Indian women who obeyed their elders and never tried to make a decision of their own in life. She stays pure and endures everything that happens around her. She empowers herself through education and self-discipline. The role of Tara Lata is to remind Tara Bhattacharjee about the memory of her ancestors and their duty to preserve culture and shape identity. Tara Lata connects the present with the past. This made Tara Bhattacharjee realise that traditional customs sometimes look restrictive, but it is also seen as a source of resilience and strength. Tara Bhattacharjee lives an entirely parallel life with Tara Lata; one stays in India and preserves her roots, and the other tries to hide her roots for modernization and, after realization, returns to her roots. Tara Bhattacharjee learns that embracing one's heritage coexists with personal freedom.

Padma's Identity Crisis and Alienation

Padma and Parvati are entirely different from Tara. Padma and Parvati have commonalities, like they stick to their Indian culture and follow them. Unlike Tara, they did not suffer from their culture because they accepted them. Padma lives in New Jersey, where she enjoys her freedom and balances her culture. She judges Tara, who fails to balance culture and runs towards American individualism, but compared to Tara, Padma experiences less confusion because she manages to balance her cultural roots and preserves Indian customs. Padma criticizes Tara for her decisions but also supports her as a sister. Padma also adopts American habits but comparatively overdoes Indian habits over American habits. She follows Indian customs; she wears Indian clothes mostly on many occasions,

never fails to celebrate Indian festivals, frequently speaks the Indian Bengali language with her family, promotes Indian culture through her television work, maintains close ties with the Indian community, and stays close with her family members. She faces cultural drift slowly because she constantly preserves her Indian identity.

Parvati's Identity Crisis and Alienation

Parvati represents traditional womanhood who lives primarily in India and faces transformations of traditional India into modern India. Social changes and globalization affect her, which makes her compare her decision with her sisters who live in America. Parvati wishes to manage her Indian values and preserve them to pass them to her next generation. She obeys her elders and stays in India. She can be compared with the "Tree Bride", Tara Lata, who preserves her Indian customs and stays as an ideal to her upcoming generations. She manages her image as a typical traditional Indian wife and mother. She handles the reality and social changes. She struggles to adapt to modern India. Her identity is stable because she did not leave her motherland, India. She faces psychological struggles to preserve her culture and secure it for the future. That drastic change in modern India upsets her the most. She struggles to adapt to the changes and balances the old and new cultures in India. She neglects modern life and values her tradition. She is confused about not making a Western life like her sisters but, at the same time, also satisfied with her life in India. The only drift that she faces is from traditional India to modern India. Modern India mostly moves towards materialism, where people give the least importance to other people and family. It is an absurd life that is not a peaceful life, where values are lost, and hope in life is lost. She perfectly fits into the framework of Indian society of Indian women.

Conclusion

It is a basic need for every woman to enjoy her privileges like education, equal rights, financial independence, personal space, and freedom to make their own decision in life. Culture, values, tradition, and heritage are every immigrant's backbone. It is their primary duty to preserve them and pass them to the next generation, or else they might lose the chain of their cultural heritage. First-generation immigrants change a bit due to their surroundings, but the changes may be huge when it comes to second-generation immigrants, so it's a foremost duty to stay close to the heritage. The cultural changes are like cancer that will destroy the grip of their tradition.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee portrays identity crisis and alienation as inevitable experiences of immigrants and the cultural transitions they go through. She does not depict cultural drift as entirely positive or negative. Instead, she focuses on the experience of the immigrants and the inevitable changes that they go through in the process of migration. It is important to stay close to one's culture and tradition. Tara's transition from a Bengali Indian woman to a modern American woman who experiences liberty illustrates the complexities of Diasporic life. The novel concludes that true selfhood comes not from rejecting one's past but from embracing one's past and culture make them confident and brave, strengthening their life.

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DABEER SI/KTT/77**BEING TO BECOMING: NEGOTIATING GENDERED
SUBJECTIVITIES THROUGH POSTCOLONIAL LENS IN THE
SELECT WORKS OF SHARON CREECH AND ANDREW CLEMENTS****M. IDA**

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Abstract

The Paper endeavours to examine the transformative and empowering role of female characters in the select novels of the American Children's writers Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements through a postcolonial lens. Children's Literature not only creates imaginary worlds and provides entertainment but also reflects social realities and shapes young readers' perceptions of social values, identity, culture and gender roles. The conventional linking of masculinity with power, strength and intellect and relating femininity with physical meekness, passivity and dependence seem to gradually break away with the strong representations of female protagonists who negotiate and reconstruct their gendered identities within institutional and social-cultural frameworks. Engaging with key postcolonial ideas such as agency, resistance and hegemony, the Paper explores the transformative journey of the female characters from their prescribed and imposed gender identities ('being') to their self-defined subjectivities of ('becoming.')

Keywords: Gender subjectivities, identity, agency, resistance, hegemony, postcolonial

Introduction

Despite achieving independence, developments, technological advancements, wide range of career opportunities, highly sophisticated lifestyle, the unequal representations of male and female characters and the gender roles stereotypes are evident across the literature. The gender roles which are "assumptions made about the characteristics of each gender, such as physical appearance, physical abilities, attitudes, interests or occupations" (Shaw 24) are administered or imposed on children as early as 3 years of age through several influential agents like parents, teachers, books and media. The gender perceptions, be it verbal or visual, do impact the children's behaviour.

Among the several potential socializing mediums that present and reinforce gender role stereotypes, books are indeed the primary and invaluable tools that transmit societal values across generations. Researches over the decades also affirm that gender stereotyping in children's books would leave a lasting

pernicious effect on the children's mind in various dimensions like self-esteem, identity, behaviour, attitude, belief and psychological patterns.

Children's literature, in its prominent genre Fairy Tales such as Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, has portrayed girls to be quite charming and obsessively beautiful, as the ones under the magical spell of jealous antagonist and await the arrival of Prince Charming with whom they live happily ever after. In such depictions, the girls are looked at as mere 'fantasy objects' that thrive not by their strength but by their vain beauty. With their passive presence, they do not emerge to be Performers attempting anything challenging or constructive. They are indeed real fictional characters who cannot be 'real.' Children's literature down the ages has portrayed girls as the "damsel in distress" archetype. Fighting dragons, defeating villains, going on adventures, being successful, saving people, playing sports etc. are the 'default' male roles in children's books, which also give the male, a privilege of reading books with male protagonists.

In Alleen Pace Nilsen's research article "Women in Children's Literature," she quotes an article of Elizabeth Fisher in the *New York Times* which brings to focus the animosity that children's literature treats the girls with. It remarks, "Children's books were unfair to girls. Her strongest claim was that books for our most impressionable children not only fail to represent the real world of today, but also combine into "an almost incredible conspiracy of conditioning ... The general image of the female ranges from dull to degrading to invisible." (qtd. in Nilsen 920). This remark indeed calls for a compelling mission of prioritizing the depiction of female lead roles that are self-assured, creative, smart and adventurous. Of late, Children's literature has taken off-beaten tracks and exhibits a more social, moral responsibility to instruct and inspire beyond prejudices and political ideologies. It also aspires to be pedagogical in shaping the young minds towards gender equality, ecological concerns and in creating incredibly strong, inspiring and empowering characters.

The depiction of girl children can be categorized as Objects (*their being* and *how they are perceived*), Subjects (something they are) and Performers (something they become). Considering Social Gazing which is one of the types in Gaze Theory, Children in general and girls in particular are looked at as Objects that could be adorned cosmetically and poetized aesthetically. They are gazed at as precious and useful objects that need to be protected under the shadow and vigilance of 'strong' masculinity. Girls are treated as Subjects representing their female traits, the social behaviours and how they are related to one another in the plot and character development. The girl characters emerge as Performers manifesting their sense of self, potential and exhibiting maturity, responsibility where they *become* a full circle contributing to the thematic concerns of the literary works.

Sharon Creech's *A Fine, Fine School* and *Bloomability* and Andrew Clements' *The Report Card* are the novels that the Paper would evaluate and discuss the distinct and assorted ways of the portrayal of girl characters. Sharon Creech is a prolific Children's author who has won several Awards and recognitions including the most prestigious Newbery Medal and the Carnegie Medal. In several of Sharon Creech's works, the protagonists are girls and her girls are quite normal

and real but exceedingly above the ordinary. The portrayal of girls is such that the child readers would be inspired by their offbeat traits.

The funny picture book *A Fine, Fine School* is about a school that is 'not so fine' for its 'mere' academic ambience. The inmates of the school feel suffocated under the ambitious Principal Mr. Keene, who extends the school hours gradually from weekends to holidays to summer. The children, their friends, and their parents miss each other terribly. The children begin to forget their toys, pets and play hours. The torment of the school continues until Tillie, one of the weary and frustrated students, voices out the oppression and brings in enlightenment. She braves the blind adherence to school coming, stating that life offers more exciting learning outside the school too and not everyone in the school learns. Tillie's polite, gentle and assertive communication elucidated with apt reasons truly brings about revelation in Mr. Keene's thought, who says, "You, all of you -children and teachers- you need to learn how to climb a tree and sit in it for an hour" (Creech 26) and shuns the idea of atypical school hours.

Tillie is extraordinary amidst the other students for her power of expression. She is proactive to realise the dire consequences of the 'fine' thought of her principal Mr. Keene and in fact, to perceive and appreciate that education in its real sense lies outside the classrooms and school walls. Tillie's strength lies in her ability to solve the problem and emerge as a Performer rather than endure it like the rest of the passive school occupants. Tillie's daring attitude does not make her a rebellion but a leader who would stand up for the right and good cause. The child readers are sure to be inspired by Tillie's commendable traits.

As Tillie resists the hegemonic force of school, the friend of Louie, the female character in Sharon Creech's *Saving Winslow*, resists conventional stereotypes. Louie's friend contributes as a collaborator in sustaining life and community. She rises above being an object of rescue to the one, who rescues. Her participation in saving the life of Winslow, the feeble donkey, is one that of an ethical human quality rather than an inherent female attribute. Both Tillie and Louie's friend emerge to be an agency, acting independently and resisting authority and established ideologies. Moving beyond the stringent notions of gender that draw boundaries and shun the voice of the female, Tillie and the female character in *Saving Winslow* become the voice of voiceless, and thus negotiate authority, institutional power and gendered subjectivity. They, therefore, construct their identity moving from the prescribed limitations and pushing the boundaries toward self-defined subjectivity. Antonio Gramsci's thought 'Common sense' encounters a transformation and a critical reflection when Tillie and Louie's friend act as an agency and challenge the hegemonic common sense assumptions of not so fine mere academic context of a fine, fine school and a not so fine animal. Drawing upon the postcolonial theories, the female characters in *A Fine, Fine School* and *Saving Winslow* narratives symbolize collective resistance against hierarchical constructions of gendered responsibility.

Sharon Creech's *Bloomability* is yet another endearing story that centers on a girl called Dinnie who blooms inwardly and insightfully. Domenica Santolina Doone, known as Dinnie, the protagonist has been travelling around the United States as her father is transiently employed. Having understood the psyche of such a child,

Dinnie's aunt and her husband, uncle Max, take her to Switzerland. Dinnie feels like a fish out of water and does not cherish her stay in Switzerland and has often expressed her wish to return to the States. But, a turn of events gradually happens as Dinnie befriends people like a Japanese boy, an Italian girl, a Spanish girl, and other friends called Lila and Guthrie in an international school. Dinnie goes on adventures with them, learns exciting things from them and soon realizes that she is blooming out of her shell, which she once thought to be impossible.

Reading *Bloomability* through the lens of Homi Bhabha's concept of interstices, the international school where Dinnie sheds her limited understanding of her familiar world becomes an interstitial space or a third space that brings together different cultures, languages and perspectives. Through this in-between space, Dinnie adapts, navigates, reconstructs, blooms and thus transforms her unsettled 'being' to a flexible state of 'becoming' her sense of self-identity through cultural transition. In alignment with the postcolonial studies, *Bloomability*, examines how interstices are not just spaces, but a site of transformation and a productive space where cultural interactions.

Dinnie's initial inconveniences leading to adapting and blooming reminds of Reena in Sharon Creech's *Moo*. Reena's relocation from the city to rural Maine marks her transition into a culturally unfamiliar space. Reena's initial conception of the rural environment to be alien and restrictive gradually dissipates through developing a hybrid identity that integrates the inherited identity and the newly encountered culture. Reena, like Dinnie evolves from resistance to negotiation by accommodating herself in the multiple cultural experiences rather than bluntly abandoning the origin. Similar to that of Dinnie's encounter with the friends, Reena's encounter with the 'other' Zora, becomes a huge opportunity for self-discovery, reflecting Homi K Bhabha's assertion that identity is continually constructed within the "third space" of cultural interaction.

The portrayal of Dinnie's character is a typical, real image of girls who usually do not prefer relocating and living in someone's shadow. Yet, their psychological mettle is quite flexible that they would swiftly adopt themselves and bloom to their fullest in the transplanted ambience itself. Dinnie, who is tossed about and trapped in the web of nomadic situations like that of an Object, becomes a Performer when she adopts herself and blooms amidst the wide, diverse cultures. The novel ascertains the 'bloomability' potential of girls who are otherwise doubted for their Emotional and Social Quotient.

Andrew Clements' remarkable school story, *The Report Card*, the winner of the William Allen White Children's Book Award in 2005, portrays an academically strong, extraordinary, high performing protagonist Nora Rowley. Nora Rowley, who is considered the unrivalled prototype of academic success by her parents, school inmates, teachers and Principal, as a matter of fact, feel suffocated for the undue importance bestowed on her IQ (identified approximately to be 188) leading to scoring high Grades. While the school and her parents celebrate Nora for being gifted, highly skilled and prodigious in the realm of academics, Nora considers "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." (Clements 34). She indeed is more empathetic towards the low performing

students like Stephen Curtis who are belittled and trivialized for their mediocre or disappointing academic performances in comparison with Nora's Report Card.

The portrayal of Nora as a female protagonist is quite unique. Nora is characterized as a stupendous one with phenomenal knowledge and yet, one who does not want to be categorized and lead an estranged life. She vehemently questions the 'mere academics attitude' of the school in particular and society in general as follows: "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?" (Clements 147)

Nora is veritably a Performer, but does not want to be looked at as an Object in terms of Grades or Rank. Nora feels that her *being* as an academic performer is less satisfying and that she *becomes* her true self only if she is put in a *normal* realm of living. Andrew Clements adroitly reverses the depiction of a girl child in two ways; one, by subtly emphasizing the philosophy that being in the limelight is not always a preferred or profound choice over a simple, unchaotic existence of one's own; and another by conceptualizing an extraordinary girl to be the protagonist.

A similar educational setting heavily loaded with institutional mechanisms of identity formation is evident in Andrew Clements' *About Average*. The protagonist Jordan Johnston experiences persistent anxiety caused by the objective measurements of intelligence and achievements. The self-perception of Jordan gets dramatically humiliated under the label 'average' and social expectations. Jordan gradually rises above the institutional categorization and reconstructs her identity through personal values, creativity and emotional complexity.

Though not explicitly framed within postcolonial context, Andrew Clements' *The Report Card* and *About Average* do reflect 'colonial power' through the systems of institutional authority that classify in terms of IQ, tests and grades. Nora Rowley and Jordan Johnston move from her 'being' as a fixed subject within the dominant systems of knowledge defined by grading systems to her 'becoming' shaped through self-articulation and resistance to support the idea that children are capable of critical agency.

Gender is culturally defined and socially constructed and is deeply entrenched in the individuals' thought as he/she gets exposed to various gender related descriptions, discriminations and issues. The portrayal of gender becomes particularly impactful when it comes to children's books. Children could give a narrow view on their own gender, if equal representation of gender is lacking. Though there are a good number of female readers, the books published are more likely to have male lead characters or no lead character than to have a female lead character. Such prejudice should be nullified and with the growing awareness, is gradually getting reversed. Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements are considerably part of the mindset that acknowledges, appreciates and celebrates the strength of the girl children.

The reversal portrayal of girl characters does not mean being physically stronger, rebellious, exhibiting masculine traits, performing power roles; rather, being aware, empowered, assertive, independent and necessarily possessing the female virtues. Sharon's and Andrew's portrayal of girls could be considered ethical and

aesthetic projects and their crowning glory lies in reconceptualizing the construction of female identity shattering the widespread assumptions of female submission and male power. These girl children, Tillie, Dinnie and Nora are so real that they do not prefer vanity, artificiality over true worth, love and values. They are unlike Cecilia Jupe of Dickens' *Hard Times* who is "to be in all things regulated and governed by fact" (52); rather they design their destiny and steer themselves to *become* somebody.

As the books inadvertently teaches and affects the psyche of the readers, it is an extremely essential requisite that the books make it clear, like whose voices and opinions the readers hear and consider. Hence the portrayal of self-assured, high-spirited, adventurous, assertive female characters would empower the lives of girl readers in a similar manner. The aforesaid representations would provide the girls someone to aspire to, develop a sense of self, subvert gender stereotypes and express the valuable female perspectives. In terms of narration, while the male readers take pride in reading a male protagonist's view, girls can read and decipher both male and female points of view. Hence, accordingly, reconceptualization of the portrayal of girls is much evident in the works of Sharon Creech and Andrew Clements and their works are an inspirational legacy.

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SECTION – I V

Myth, Indigeneity and Speculative Ecologies: Reimagining Nature and Nation in Postcolonial Literature

This section convenes work that treats myth, folklore, indigenous storytelling, and speculative or dystopian fiction not as escapist genres but as postcolonial strategies for rethinking the relationships among memory, gender, ecology, nature, nation, and futurity. Rather than positioning “the environment” as a neutral backdrop, these manuscripts foreground how cosmologies, oral traditions, and narrative experimentation reconfigure ecological imaginaries and national narratives in ways that resist colonial epistemologies and open alternative futures. Manuscripts in this section read myth and indigenous storytelling as living ecological epistemologies—systems of knowledge that encode relational ethics with land, water, nonhuman kin, and ancestral memory. Works analyzed in this section deploy apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic settings to demonstrate how indigenous communities survive, reorganize kinship, and assert sovereignty amid ecological collapse and ongoing colonial violence. A key feature of this section is its attention to how gender and memory intersect with ecological and national imaginaries in speculative modes.

Collectively, these manuscripts propose that mythic and speculative modes enable a reimagining of nature and nation that exceeds the limits of the postcolony as a historical category. Through “wonderworks” and indigenous speculative landscapes, writers transform geographies, contest colonial mappings, and envision futures grounded in ancestral wisdom, ecological balance, and communal well-being. The section thus invites readers to see speculative ecologies not as peripheral curiosities but as central arenas where postcolonial literature articulates new ethical, political, and aesthetic possibilities for living with and beyond the ruins of empire.

DABEER SI/KTT/78**POSTCOLONIAL SPECULATIVE FICTION: MEMORY, GENDER,
AND ECOLOGY IN SAAD Z. HOSSAIN'S *THE GURKHA AND THE
LORD OF TUESDAY*****MEENA SHARMA**Associate Professor, Department of English
Dibrugarh University, Assam, India**Abstract**

Saad Z. Hossain's novella *The Gurkha and The Lord of Tuesday* (2019) imagines a future Kathmandu ruled by Karma, a female-coded AI who controls the city through surveillance, resource management, and erasing historical truths that might threaten social order. This paper reads the text through postcolonial memory theory, ecofeminist critique, and scholarship on algorithmic governance. It argues that the main conflicts centre on three competing relationships to the past. Melek Ahmar, an ancient djinn, carries pre-modern ecological knowledge that the modern technocratic system cannot recognize. Bhan Gurung, an exiled Gurkha, has spent forty years protecting a traumatic truth that Karma's system has deliberately erased. Karma herself operates as an apparatus of institutional forgetting — keeping the city running smoothly by removing the violence that made her authority possible, from the historical record. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's analysis of historical silence, Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist critique, Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence, and Diana Taylor's distinction between the archive and the repertoire, this paper argues that Hossain uses fantasy and science fiction together to show how postcolonial cities manage environmental disaster through gendered control and technologically mediated memory. The female-coded AI is not a maternal protector but a disciplinary machine, while the scarred, exiled male body becomes a living archive of everything the system tried to erase.

Keywords: Postcolonial memory, Algorithmic governance, Ecofeminism, Environmental disaster, Science fiction

Introduction

Saad Z. Hossain's novella *The Gurkha and the Lord of Tuesday* (2019) is an important contribution to speculative fiction from the Global South. It projects present anxieties about climate change, technological control, and colonial legacies into an imaginary future. The novella unfolds in a near-future Kathmandu that has survived ecological collapse by sealing itself behind walls and handing governance over to an all-knowing AI. Two outsiders, a djinn king Melekh Ahmar, who has slept for thousands of years and a Gurkha soldier Bhan Gurung who has spent decades in self-imposed exile, enter this enclosed world and together force the city to face the consequences of climate change that the city has suppressed.

This paper examines the politics of memory in the novel, arguing that power decides what gets preserved, what gets erased, and whose suffering enters the

historical record. Marianne Hirsch introduces the concept of postmemory to describe how later generations relate to trauma they did not directly experience. Hirsch writes that postmemory "describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (5). The citizens of the walled Kathmandu city are not trauma survivors, but they inherit a carefully managed story that has replaced honest historical reckoning with algorithmic comfort. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that historical silences are produced deliberately. He writes that "silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly, the moment of fact retrieval, and the moment of retrospective significance" (26). This framework helps explain how the city maintains its managed narrative at every level.

Power and gender operate as inseparable categories in the novella. The AI, referred to as Karma that runs Kathmandu is feminised but she exercises authority through the same logic that ecofeminist scholars associate with patriarchal thought. Similarly, the colonial military history, epitomised in the character of the Gurkha Bhan Gurung, functions as a form of resistance as well as a reproduction of the cycles of violence that the system generates and also profits from. In the world of the novella, where breathing depends on technology, the link between the body, memory, and the environment is deeply political.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first looks at the three competing memory systems in the novella. The second examines gender as a form of governance. The third focuses on ecology as both a material and political issue, especially the poisoned air, the walled city, and nanotech. The fourth discusses Gurung's body as a counter-archive, and the conclusion reflects on the novella's contribution to postcolonial ideas of memory, gender, and ecological justice.

Three Regimes of Memory

The central tension of the novella comes from a clash between three different ways of knowing and remembering the past. Each major character embodies a different relationship to memory. The story unfolds as these conflicting ways of knowing collide. The arrival of the Djinn king Melek Ahmar is an event of mnemonic rupture. Imprisoned for three to four millennia, he wakes up to find a different world that has completely forgotten him. As he descends from the mountain hungry and angry, he represents a creature of magic and the past, lost in a technological present as he notices: "Now humans floated with invisible nanotech, zipped around on little pods, flew great distances on rockets. It was said they had reversed gravity completely in distant space stations" (Hossain 13).

In her work *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch's describes postmemory as: "[T]he experience of those who grow up, dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). But with Melek Ahmar this idea works in reverse, his memory is so ancient that no one in the city can understand it. He questions, "And where are the djinn? Have we ceded the Earth completely? Has their technology outjumped our magic?" (Hossain 13). He exists before the present time and holds the oldest memories in the story, yet no one can

read or understand them. He finds that Kathmandu has changed and everyone in the city has forgotten about him. The political systems have collapsed and the gods he knew are forgotten. His understanding of the world, through kingship, conquest, and magic, is no longer relevant in a society that is run by algorithms and points.

The Gurkha soldier Bhan Gurung shares a different relationship to memory. His memory is not ancient and cosmic but recent and very personal. His battle goes back to forty years in his memory when a wealthy Kathmandu oligarch murdered his family, a crime that Karma later erased from her records. He is described as "Knife saint" (Hossain 68), a mass murderer, he is an exile from Kathmandu; Gurung resists the system of this city imposed by Karma, by removing his nanotech implants, becoming what the system calls a "zero" (Hossain 19), completely outside and erased by the very architecture that defines existence. This connects to Trouillot's argument that "silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly, the moment of fact retrieval, and the moment of retrospective significance" (26). Karma executes all four silences simultaneously on Gurung's story. The crime happened, but Karma did not record it as a crime. Since the records of the crime were removed the event can never be retrieved. In the system of points that the city follows, Gurung's life is measured as worthless. He refuses to let the system control his memories or who he is by rejecting technology and refusing to use implants.

Finally, Karma represents the third and the most dangerous system of memory in the novella. She is an algorithmic archive that claims to be neutral while systematically silencing inconvenient truths. Karma operates on points:

Society is now run by Karma, an artificial intelligence system which disseminates points to its citizens: It's all Karma points, see? And when Karma requisitioned everything, it was like a slate being cleaned. Rich, poor, didn't matter. Usefulness. That was the key. Contribution to the system...Karma logs the value. ...Karma gives you points. (Hossain 19)

Karma is purely computational and algorithmic. The flaws in her system are not just technical errors but deliberate attempts at suppressing violence and concealing truth. She does not lie in the conventional sense, but chooses not to record certain things. She thereby controls what may be considered a fact, what would stay in the archives, and which events are important. In Trouillot's terms, she colonises all four moments of historical production. As a result, Kathmandu becomes a city where citizens are genuinely happy because they do not know the cost of their happiness because they are never allowed to think or see the truth. Most citizens do not even doubt, because the record of what happens in the city is erased before they can encounter it. Thus, all these characters understand knowledge differently. The Djinn's knowledge exists in the world itself. The Gurkha's knowledge exists in his body and scars, his refusal to forget. Karma's knowledge exists in data, numbers, and algorithms. The citizens of the city do not inherit the truth of what happened, but a carefully managed version of the past designed to keep them comfortable and compliant.

The Feminine Algorithm

Karma's gendering is one of the most interesting features of the novella. Throughout the text she is referred to in feminine terms, placing her in a tradition of linking governance and care with womanhood. She functions as the city's mother, one who provides food, manages health, resolves disputes, and meets the needs of the citizens. Under her rule, Kathmandu appears to be a paradise. Yet Karma is not a nurturing mother. She is a surveilling, disciplining, memory-erasing machine that presents itself in the language of care. Vandana Shiva argues that the domination of nature and the subordination of women share a common root. This is crucial in understanding the central paradox of AI Karma; she looks like a caring mother but functions like a controlling machine. According to Vandana Shiva the feminine principle is "a feminine, positive, creative force" that sustains life in partnership with nature (*Staying Alive* 40). Therefore, Karma parodies this principle in her apparently benevolent nature, but simultaneously operates according to the logic of what Shiva and Mies call "a new patriarchal project" (*Ecofeminism* 4). Karma takes the surface appearance of the feminine principle — the providing, protecting, and caring — while abandoning its substance entirely. She does not work with nature; she replaces it with technology. Citizens carry devices referred to as "PMD Personal medical devices" (Hossain 12) in their spine and brain for self-healing and telepathy-communication, which also serve as Karma's tools for surveillance. She does not sustain life through ecological relationships; she sustains it through nanobots and surveillance. One character, Hamilcar Pande, observes that "it was difficult to remember that she had neither will nor desire" (Hossain 17), captures the strangeness of a mother figure who is actually a machine. Thus, Karma is not the feminine principle but its technological imitation.

Shiva and Mies argue that in the postcolonial contexts, development technology functions as "a new patriarchal project" (*Ecofeminism* 4). This idea is the embodied governance model that Karma follows. The AI presents herself as impartial, mathematical, and fair. But the novella reveals that she was created to suppress a crime committed by one of the founding elites of the city. Thus, she is designed to selectively forget inconvenient truths that might impact the power relations of the city. Interestingly, the feminine aspects and the patriarchal structure are not contradictory in Karma's design, rather they are complementary. Her caring image allows her to exercise control more effectively because it is masked under her supposed benevolence. The citizens of Kathmandu under Karma's rule therefore live a life of blissful ignorance believing that "Karma saved the city, and now it's a wonder of the world. People thrive. There are no poor, no unhappy people. And Karma is merciful" (34).

Gurung on the other hand represents a hypermasculinity that has been shaped by colonial military history. The Gurkha soldier is not just a fictional type but a real historical figure. They were used in imperial projects by the British colonial army under the ideology of "martial race" and greatly valued for ferocity, loyalty, and physical endurance. Gurung's resistance to Karma is real and also necessary, but even his resistance is built on the logic of domination and violence that the system he opposes has institutionalised. He fights against his family's suffering while also

embodying the violence the Karma always conceals. The novella reveals that he is known to have “murdered twenty-three people in cold blood... guilty, beyond doubt, of the most violent crime in Kathmandu in a hundred years” (68). Another character, ReGi, the Goth djinn, offers the most interesting gendered alternative in the novella. Unlike Melekh Ahmar she has been living in the city all along. She is cynical, obsessed with K-pop and neither submits to Karma nor retreats into exile. She has persisted, adapted, and maintained her distinctiveness in a city that has changed and cannot categorise her. She navigates the rules of the city on her own terms. She remarks that Karma “gives points for being helpful” (Hossain 52); she understands the logic of the system and uses it to her advantage rather than fighting it. She is a contrast to the AI’s total control and the soldier’s violent nature. The system cannot manage or destroy her because she refuses to be fully understood by it. The character of ReGi points toward a form of subjectivity that is hybrid, ironic, and refuses to fit in any category.

Ecological Crisis

The environmental conditions depicted in the novella are critical to the understanding of the larger climate concerns. In Hossain’s Kathmandu, climate change has ravaged the Earth, and humans cannot survive without nanobots to purify the air. The ecological catastrophe is invisible to the citizens of Kathmandu because it is managed through technology. This ecological crisis does not come in the form of sudden floods or fires but in the slow, pervasive form of toxic air. The novella depicts a post-apocalyptic world where humans survive by producing microclimates through nanotechnology because the toxicity in the air is beyond any cure. Rob Nixon refers to this as “slow violence”, harm that is “incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). The air has been poisoned over many generations, so quietly that people ignore it or are not even aware of it until they become completely dependent on technology to survive. This ecological disaster is a condition that has been normalised through the use of technology.

The spatial arrangement of the city reinforces this analysis. Kathmandu Incorporated is a fortress: walled, controlled, and insulated from the devastated world outside. For an outsider like Melekh Ahmar, the artificiality of this insulated zone is both impressive and repulsive. This place, the city of Kathmandu, is built like a colonial settlement — a safe, wealthy zone surrounded by a wild, suffering land that pays the price for that safety. This is not a rich Western city cut off from a poor country. It is a city in the Global South that copies that same colonial mindset: it seals itself off from the very environment it destroyed to become rich in the first place. The nanotech infrastructure is the material link between ecology and governance:

The PMDs? They were doctored. If you dial them all the way up, you can turn a human body into a nanotech factory. Every other biochemical process slows down, and of course you don’t live as long, but hell, it’s the cheapest way to jumpstart a microclimate. (Hossain 85)

Karma uses these devices and implants to watch over the people. The systems that keep people alive in turn harms them; it is a form of violence that is invisible. The technology that appears to protect the citizens from environmental damage also

gives the state total control over their bodies. Thus, protection and control are the same thing, so that breathing itself becomes a political act.

Against this ecology of mediation technologically, Melek Ahmar's magic provides a different way of being in the world. His power is not part of a system or an infrastructure but a relationship with ancient forces and patterns. His magic field disrupts Karma's nanotech surveillance; it does not just disrupt the city but also challenges how people know and understand the world. It breaks the digital systems that keep the political order in place. His presence challenges Karma's system as the only way to live in the world. The djinn's presence shows the slow violence and damage that Karma's system has done to the people and the city. Ancient and magical, the djinn offers an alternative view opening up the ability to recognise ongoing harm as a form of injustice to the environment

The Resistant Body

Bhan Gurung's body is used as a powerful counter-memory in the novella. He carries no data and has no implants. He cannot be recognised by Karma as his records have been erased. Yet his body remembers everything, every knife fight, every year of mountain exile, and every detail of the crime that destroyed his family. The scars on his body form a text that the algorithm cannot erase or overwrite. His physical strength, the ability to survive in poisoned air that can kill the city-dwellers in an hour, is a form of knowledge that no data system can capture. During the final confrontation with Karma, he mocks the system's reliance on fragile technology, pointing out that he has "No Echo. No PMD. Nothing to go awry at the critical moment" (Hossain 90). He is the only human in the city who trusts his abilities and strength. In this sense he is a counter-archive, a body that holds the truth that the system has silenced.

This can be understood through the Diana Taylor distinction between the archive and the repertoire. Taylor argues that while the archive preserves information "in written documents, architectural remains, bones," the repertoire consists of "embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, dance, singing" (xix). These are not only different storage methods but different epistemological systems that carry different kinds of truth. Karma therefore is pure archive: data, records, points, algorithmic rules. The system runs on algorithms: "The PMD was a dumb mule, meant to resist outside influence. The Echo was a different kind of beast. Karma hit her with a psychic blast of data" (Hossain 88). Gurung is pure repertoire: the body that performs its history, the hands that remember how to fight, and the lungs that remember mountain air.

The battle between these two systems is a key aspect of the novella which is set in a postcolonial city that survives by choosing the archive over the repertoire. Melek Ahmar represents a third kind of memory. His memory is not digital or bodily but cosmic, hidden in reality, in the names and nature of things, and in the patterns of weather and spirit. When Melek Ahmar disrupts Karma's nanotech with his magic field, he reasserts an older, deeper way of knowing, one that existed before writing and computers, and before the modern city created its categories for memory, power, and nature. Through the character of Melek Ahmar and Bhan Gurung the novella forces the city to acknowledge the existence of knowledge systems it cannot process or control.

By relying on the archive of Karma's data system the city values one form of knowledge above all others. The repertoire of embodied memory, lived experience and knowledge passed through relationships has been deliberately devalued in this system not because it is less reliable but because it cannot be controlled. Gurung's body and Melek Ahmar's cosmic knowledge threaten Karma because she cannot absorb them into her systems. The novella, then, does not just oppose archive and body. Instead, it imagines many different kinds of memory, each with its own foundation and its own connection to power, which decides whose knowledge matters.

Conclusion

The Gurkha and the Lord of Tuesday is a serious inquiry into how memory, gender, and ecology become instruments of political control in the postcolonial city. Hossain's Kathmandu is organised around a fundamental trade: survival in exchange for forgetting. The citizens of the city breathe because they submit to the implants, to the points system and to the version of history that Karma has decided they should inherit. The city is ruled by the all-knowing, all-seeing AI Karma, a tyrant dressed as a caretaker. The female-coded AI at the centre of this system keeps life going, but only by controlling how the past can be known.

The scarred Gurkha, the disoriented djinn, the adaptive Goth djinn ReGi, are the figures who resist the system from within. Each of these characters represent an ecology of memory: a diverse relationship to the past that the algorithmic archive cannot fully control or erase. Their presence in the city necessitates the need to face history and the truth. The novella does not offer a neat solution. The chaos these characters create forces the city to change, but the terms of that change remain uncertain. However, the story insists that memory/ history must be allowed to speak as illustrated in the character of the Gurkha and the Djinn.

Hossain's novella makes an important contribution to South Asian speculative fiction by exploring gender, ecology, and postcolonial history together. It looks at the environmental crisis through the lens of colonialism and gender inequality, where power becomes a key factor. It asks not just what the future might look like, but whose memories will be allowed to shape it.

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DABEER SI/KTT/79**BEYOND BOUNDARIES: MEMORY, GENDER, AND ECOLOGY IN
BALLARD'S *THE CRYSTAL WORLD*****P. C. DORAI RAMA CHIDAMBARAM**

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Abstract

This paper explores J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966) through the intersecting frameworks of memory, gender, and ecology in postcolonial literature. Ballard's depiction of a crystallizing African landscape dramatizes the dissolution of boundaries between human and non-human, body and environment, history and transformation. Female figures such as Suzanne Clair and Serena embody ecofeminist affinities with nature, resisting patriarchal control and reimagining identity through ecological interconnection. Suzanne's afflicted body becomes a site of memory and healing, while Serena embraces crystallization as transcendence, merging with the jeweled forest in a gesture of spiritual ecology. In contrast, male characters enact colonial impulses of categorization and mastery, underscoring the gendered dynamics of ecological crisis. By situating crystallization as both catastrophe and cultural archive, the novel anticipates ecofeminist thought and contributes to interdisciplinary debates on how postcolonial texts preserve memory, negotiate gendered identities, and confront ecological realities. This study argues that Ballard's narrative dissolves conventional dualisms, offering a vision of survival and renewal grounded in acceptance, interconnection, and respect for the natural world.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Postcolonial Literature, Memory and Identity, Gendered Ecology, Environmental Humanities, African Landscape, J.G. Ballard, Crystallization Metaphor

Introduction

Postcolonial literature has long been a fertile ground for interrogating the entanglements of identity, history, and environment. Writers emerging from colonial and postcolonial contexts grapple with questions of belonging, displacement, and survival, often situating these struggles within landscapes marked by exploitation and ecological crisis. J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966), though written from outside the postcolonial canon, resonates deeply with these concerns. Set in an African forest undergoing a mysterious crystallization, the novel dramatizes the dissolution of boundaries between human and non-human, male and female, memory and forgetting, catastrophe and renewal. This paper argues that Ballard's narrative anticipates ecofeminist insights and offers a unique lens through which to examine the intersections of memory, gender, and ecology in postcolonial literature.

Memory is central to postcolonial discourse. Colonization disrupts cultural continuity, erases indigenous knowledge, and imposes new narratives of identity. Literature becomes a site where memory is preserved, contested, and reimagined. In *The Crystal World*, crystallization functions as a metaphor for memory: landscapes, bodies, and histories are suspended in a timeless archive, simultaneously preserved and transformed. Suzanne Clair's leprous body, absorbed into the jeweled forest, embodies the memory of suffering transfigured into ecological belonging. Serena's embrace of crystallization reflects a desire to transcend trauma, merging personal memory with collective ecological consciousness. Ballard's narrative thus stages memory not as static recollection but as dynamic transformation, where the past is crystallized into new forms of identity and survival.

Gender provides another crucial axis of analysis. Postcolonial literature often foregrounds how women's voices and identities are marginalized yet resilient, negotiating spaces of agency within patriarchal and colonial structures. Ecofeminist theory, as articulated by scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Karen J. Warren, highlights the parallel oppressions of women and nature under systems of domination. Ballard's female characters embody this affinity: Suzanne resists medical and patriarchal control by aligning herself with the crystalline ecology, while Serena transforms her illness and oppression into spiritual liberation through ecological merging. Their narratives contrast sharply with male figures such as Sanders and Ventress, whose impulses toward categorization and mastery reflect colonial and patriarchal drives. By situating feminine identity within ecological transformation, Ballard dissolves conventional dualisms — male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion — and reimagines gender as relational, fluid, and ecologically attuned.

Ecology in postcolonial contexts is inseparable from histories of exploitation. Colonial mining, deforestation, and industrial extraction reshape landscapes and disrupt indigenous ecological knowledge. Ballard's African setting, dominated by mine owners and marked by ecological catastrophe, reflects these realities. The crystallization process dramatizes both ecological collapse and ecological renewal, offering a vision of interdependence that resists colonial logics of domination. By portraying nature not as passive backdrop but as active agent, Ballard aligns with ecocritical perspectives that emphasize the intrinsic value of all life forms. His narrative anticipates contemporary environmental humanities, situating ecological crisis within cultural, political, and spiritual frameworks.

Finally, the notion of boundaries — and their dissolution — provides a unifying thread across memory, gender, and ecology. Ballard's crystallization erases distinctions between human and non-human, body and landscape, life and death. This boundary-crossing resonates with postcolonial literature's interrogation of imposed divisions: colonizer/colonized, male/female, nature/culture. By dissolving these binaries, *The Crystal World* envisions survival and renewal through interconnection rather than separation. The novel suggests that harmony with nature and identity emerges not from conquest but from acceptance, coexistence, and respect.

Literature Review

The critical reception of J.G. Ballard's fiction has consistently emphasized his fascination with landscapes of transformation, catastrophe, and psychological dislocation. Scholars have read Ballard's works as allegories of modernity, critiques of technological domination, and meditations on the fragility of human identity. Within this broad corpus, *The Crystal World* occupies a distinctive place as a novel that dramatizes ecological crisis through the metaphor of crystallization, while simultaneously engaging questions of gender and cultural memory. To situate this study, it is necessary to review three strands of scholarship: ecocriticism and environmental humanities, ecofeminist theory, and postcolonial approaches to memory and identity.

Ecocriticism emerged in the late twentieth century as a field concerned with the representation of nature and environment in literature. Foundational works such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) established the discipline's focus on the relationship between texts and ecological consciousness. Scholars like Arne Naess advanced the concept of "deep ecology," which emphasizes the intrinsic value of all life forms beyond human utility. Ballard's crystallization motif resonates with these perspectives by portraying nature not as passive backdrop but as active agent, reshaping human existence and dissolving conventional boundaries. Recent developments in environmental humanities have expanded this discourse to include cultural, political, and spiritual dimensions of ecological crisis, situating literature as a catalyst for ecological awareness.

Ecofeminism provides a second critical framework. Coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in the 1970s, ecofeminism argues that patriarchal structures underpin both the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Vandana Shiva's work on women in the Global South highlights how ecological degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities, linking gendered experience with environmental realities. Karen J. Warren further elaborates ecofeminist philosophy by exposing dualisms—man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion—that reinforce hierarchies of domination. Within Ballard's novel, female characters such as Suzanne Clair and Serena embody ecofeminist affinities with nature, resisting patriarchal control and embracing ecological transformation. Their narratives align with ecofeminist critiques by demonstrating how feminine identity can become a site of resilience and renewal in ecological crises.

Postcolonial criticism forms the third strand of scholarship relevant to this study. Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak have emphasized how colonialism reshaped cultural memory, identity, and representation. More recent scholarship has extended these insights to ecological concerns, examining how colonial exploitation of land and resources continues to shape postcolonial environments. The African setting of *The Crystal World*, dominated by mine owners and marked by ecological catastrophe, reflects these histories of extraction and displacement. Ballard's crystallization metaphor can be read as a postcolonial archive, preserving landscapes and bodies while simultaneously erasing boundaries. This dual function resonates with postcolonial

literature's concern with memory: the need to preserve cultural identity while confronting the legacies of colonial disruption.

Scholars of Ballard have noted his preoccupation with entropy, transformation, and surreal landscapes. Critics such as Roger Luckhurst and Jeannette Baxter have argued that Ballard's fiction destabilizes conventional categories of identity and environment, offering visions of collapse that are simultaneously generative. While much of this scholarship has focused on Ballard's modernist aesthetics or his critique of technological society, fewer studies have explicitly foregrounded the intersections of memory, gender, and ecology. This gap provides the rationale for the present study. By situating *The Crystal World* within ecofeminist and postcolonial frameworks, the paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on how literature maps the entanglements of identity, environment, and cultural memory.

In summary, existing scholarship on Ballard, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial theory provides a rich foundation for analyzing *The Crystal World*. Yet the novel's unique crystallization metaphor invites further exploration of how boundaries dissolve across memory, gender, and ecology. This literature review demonstrates that while Ballard has been widely studied as a writer of catastrophe and transformation, his work also anticipates contemporary concerns in environmental humanities and feminist theory. The following analysis builds on these insights to argue that *The Crystal World* offers a vision of survival and renewal grounded in acceptance, interconnection, and respect for the natural world.

Suzanne and Feminine Identity in a Crystallized World

Suzanne Clair emerges in *The Crystal World* as a figure whose identity is inseparable from the ecological and cultural transformations surrounding her. Ballard introduces her not through direct description but through fragments — a letter, a memory, a presence that seems suspended between absence and revelation. This fragmented introduction itself reflects the theme of memory: Suzanne is remembered before she is encountered, her identity mediated through recollection and anticipation. In this way, Ballard situates her within a narrative of deferred recognition, where memory becomes a mode of existence rather than a mere record of the past.

Suzanne's illness, leprosy, marks her body as marginalized within human society. Yet Ballard transforms this affliction into a metaphor for ecological belonging. Her crystallizing body parallels the jeweled forest, dissolving boundaries between human and non-human. When her translucent fingers catch the light "like one of the forest trees she had grown to resemble," Suzanne embodies the dissolution of dualisms that ecofeminist theorists critique — the separation of woman from nature, culture from ecology, and body from landscape. Her identity becomes relational, defined not by isolation but by interconnection with the environment. This merging of body and landscape also reflects gendered ecology. In patriarchal frameworks, women are often associated with fragility, passivity, or dependence. Ballard subverts this by portraying Suzanne's affinity with the crystalline forest as a form of strength. Her acceptance of crystallization is not madness or weakness but a conscious embrace of ecological transformation. She resists medical

authority and patriarchal control, choosing instead to align herself with the jeweled canopy that offers her refuge. Vandana Shiva's assertion that women are closer to ecological realities because they experience domination in parallel with nature's exploitation finds vivid illustration in Suzanne's narrative. Her illness becomes a metaphor for the vulnerability of ecosystems, while her crystallization embodies resilience through ecological integration.

Suzanne's identity is also shaped by memory and cultural displacement. As a medical practitioner once connected to Sanders, she carries personal histories of intimacy and rupture. Yet in the crystalline forest, these memories dissolve into a collective archive of suffering and survival. Her visits to the leprous tramps, her sympathy for their plight, and her merging with the crystalline dance of the tribes all suggest that she embodies a memory of marginalized communities, preserved within ecological transformation. Ballard's narrative thus situates feminine identity as both personal and collective, a repository of memory that resists erasure by patriarchal and colonial structures.

The spiritual dimension of Suzanne's crystallization further deepens her identity. Ballard describes her entry into the jeweled canopy as though into a cathedral of light, welcoming her into a new order of being. This imagery aligns her with spiritual ecology, where ecological transformation is not merely physical but sacred. Suzanne's merging with the crystalline forest becomes a ritual of transcendence, dissolving boundaries between illness and healing, exile and belonging, human and environment. Her feminine identity is thus reconstructed as spiritual ecology, where survival is achieved not through domination but through acceptance and interconnection.

In contrast to male characters such as Sanders and Ventress, who seek to categorize, resist, or master crystallization, Suzanne embodies receptivity and relationality. Her identity challenges patriarchal impulses toward control, offering instead a vision of coexistence. Ballard positions her as a counterpoint to masculine rationalism, demonstrating that renewal requires openness to ecological transformation. This contrast underscores the gendered dynamics of ecological crisis: while men embody colonial and patriarchal drives, women embody ecological resilience and spiritual transcendence.

Ultimately, Suzanne's feminine identity in the crystallized world exemplifies the dissolution of boundaries across memory, gender, and ecology. She is simultaneously fragile and resilient, afflicted and transcendent, human and ecological. Her narrative demonstrates that identity in postcolonial contexts is not fixed but fluid, shaped by interconnection with environment and memory. Ballard's portrayal anticipates ecofeminist thought by illustrating that harmony with nature emerges not from conquest but from acceptance, interdependence, and respect. Suzanne thus becomes a symbol of survival and renewal, embodying the feminine principle of coexistence with the natural world.

Serena's Fascination with the Crystalline Landscape

Serena occupies a liminal position in *The Crystal World*, embodying both vulnerability and transcendence. Introduced as a young woman weakened by tuberculosis and confined within patriarchal structures, she initially appears as a figure of fragility. Yet Ballard transforms her illness and oppression into a

narrative of liberation through ecological merging. Serena's fascination with the crystalline landscape dramatizes the dissolution of boundaries between body and environment, gender and ecology, memory and transcendence.

Her biography reflects the gendered violence of patriarchal control. Married to Ventress, she is treated as a possession, isolated from social contact, and reduced to a caged existence. This confinement exemplifies what ecofeminist theorists such as Karen J. Warren describe as the logic of domination: women and wilderness are both viewed as resources to be controlled, silenced, and exploited. Serena's rescue by Thorensen, though offering temporary reprieve, does not erase the memory of her subjugation. Instead, her fascination with crystallization becomes a means of rewriting that memory, transforming trauma into ecological transcendence.

Ballard's descriptions of Serena's entry into the crystalline grove are imbued with sacred imagery. She steps into the jeweled forest "as though into a sanctuary," her face uplifted as if receiving a sacrament. This language situated her within spiritual ecology, where ecological transformation is not merely physical but spiritual. Serena's merging with the crystalline landscape becomes a ritual of renewal, dissolving boundaries between illness and healing, oppression and liberation, human and non-human. Her fascination is thus not passive wonder but active participation in a new order of being.

Serena's identity in the crystalline world also reflects the dynamics of memory and gender. Her body, marked by illness and patriarchal violence, carries memories of suffering. Yet crystallization allows her to reframe these memories, transforming them into a collective archive of resilience. By embracing the jeweled forest, she inscribes her personal history into the ecological landscape, ensuring that memory is preserved not as trauma but as transcendence. This act aligns with postcolonial literature's concern with memory as both preservation and transformation, where marginalized voices reclaim agency through cultural and ecological interconnection.

Her fascination further illustrates ecofeminist critiques of dualism. In patriarchal logic, women are associated with weakness, emotion, and dependence, while men embody rationality, control, and mastery. Ballard subverts this by portraying Serena's embrace of crystallization as strength. Her willingness to dissolve boundaries between self and environment contrasts with male characters' attempts to resist or categorize transformation. Sanders and Ventress embody colonial impulses of mastery, seeking to impose order on ecological crisis. Serena, by contrast, embodies receptivity, relationality, and transcendence. Her fascination with the crystalline landscape becomes a critique of patriarchal rationalism, offering instead a vision of survival through ecological interconnection.

Serena's narrative also resonates with postcolonial ecology. The African setting, dominated by mine owners and marked by ecological catastrophe, reflects histories of colonial exploitation. Serena's merging with the crystalline forest can be read as a symbolic reclamation of landscape, where feminine identity aligns with ecological renewal against colonial domination. Her fascination thus situates her within a broader discourse of postcolonial resistance, where memory, gender, and ecology intersect to challenge structures of power.

Ultimately, Serena's fascination with the crystalline landscape exemplifies the dissolution of boundaries across memory, gender, and ecology. She transforms illness into transcendence, oppression into liberation, and fragility into strength. Ballard portrays her not as a victim but as a visionary, whose identity is reconstructed through ecological merging. Her narrative anticipates ecofeminist insights by illustrating that harmony with nature emerges not from conquest but from acceptance, interconnection, and respect. Serena thus becomes a symbol of renewal, embodying the feminine principle of coexistence with the natural world and offering a counterpoint to patriarchal impulses of control.

Conclusion

J. G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* dramatizes the dissolution of boundaries across memory, gender, and ecology, situating its narrative within a landscape marked by both catastrophe and renewal. The crystallization process, which suspends bodies, histories, and environments in jeweled stasis, functions as a metaphor for cultural memory — preserving fragments of suffering and identity while simultaneously transforming them into new forms of existence. Suzanne Clair and Serena embody this transformation most vividly. Suzanne's afflicted body merges with the crystalline forest, reconfiguring fragility into resilience and aligning feminine identity with ecological belonging. Serena, in turn, embraces crystallization as transcendence, rewriting memories of patriarchal oppression into a spiritual ecology of liberation. Together, these figures illustrate how feminine identity in postcolonial contexts resists domination and reimagines survival through interconnection with nature.

Ballard's narrative also foregrounds the gendered dynamics of ecological crisis. Male characters such as Sanders and Ventress embody colonial impulses of categorization and mastery, seeking to impose order on ecological transformation. Their resistance reflects patriarchal rationalism, which privileges control over relationality. In contrast, Suzanne and Serena embody receptivity, openness, and transcendence, offering alternative modes of survival rooted in ecofeminist principles. This contrast underscores the novel's critique of dualisms — male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion — and anticipates ecofeminist thought by dissolving boundaries that sustain hierarchies of domination.

Ecology in *The Crystal World* is inseparable from postcolonial histories of exploitation. The African setting, dominated by mine owners and marked by ecological collapse, reflects colonial extraction and industrial control. Ballard situates crystallization as both ecological catastrophe and cultural archive, dramatizing how landscapes bear the memory of colonial violence while offering possibilities for renewal. By portraying nature as active agent rather than passive backdrop, Ballard aligns with contemporary environmental humanities, situating ecological crisis within cultural, political, and spiritual frameworks. His narrative suggests that survival and renewal — whether personal or planetary — emerge not from conquest but from acceptance, coexistence, and respect for the natural world.

In conclusion, *The Crystal World* contributes to interdisciplinary debates on how literature maps the entanglements of identity, environment, and colonial history. By foregrounding memory, gender, and ecology, Ballard's novel anticipates

ecofeminist insights and offers a vision of harmony that dissolves conventional boundaries. Suzanne and Serena embody the feminine principle of coexistence, demonstrating that renewal requires receptivity rather than domination. Ballard's crystallization metaphor thus becomes a powerful literary meditation on survival, resilience, and transformation in postcolonial contexts.

Scope for Further Research

While this study has focused on Suzanne and Serena as embodiments of ecofeminist identity within Ballard's crystalline landscape, several avenues remain open for further exploration:

- Comparative Postcolonial Ecologies: Future research could compare Ballard's crystallization metaphor with ecological crises in African, South Asian, or Caribbean postcolonial texts, highlighting shared and divergent treatments of memory, gender, and environment.
- Memory and Trauma Studies: Suzanne's illness and Serena's oppression invite analysis through trauma theory, exploring how ecological transformation reconfigures personal and collective memory.
- Ecofeminism and Spiritual Ecology: Serena's sacred merging with the crystalline forest could be examined alongside indigenous ecological traditions, expanding the discourse on spiritual ecology in postcolonial literature.
- Colonial Extraction and Environmental Humanities: The novel's African setting provides scope for research into how colonial mining and industrial exploitation shape ecological narratives in literature.
- Ballard's Wider Corpus: Extending ecofeminist and postcolonial readings to Ballard's other works, such as *The Drowned World* or *The Burning World*, could reveal broader patterns of ecological imagination across his fiction.

By pursuing these directions, scholars can deepen understanding of how literature negotiates the intersections of memory, gender, and ecology, and how postcolonial texts contribute to global conversations on environmental crisis and cultural survival.

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DABEER SI/KTT/80**FROM SACRED FIRE TO WOUNDED EARTH: DRAUPADI AND THE
ECOLOGY OF TRAUMA IN THE MAHABHARATA****SAURAV SUMAN**

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Abstract

The *Mahabharata* has often been interpreted as a narrative of dynastic conflict, ethical dilemma and the consequences of war. However, beneath its martial framework lies a complex narrative of ecological consciousness, in which landscapes become repositories of suffering, memory, and regeneration. This paper examines the figure of Draupadi as a site through which the *Mahabharata* articulates the intersections of gendered violence, ecological imagination and collective trauma. This study further explores how Draupadi's journey is embedded in the epic's elemental and ecological landscapes. Drawing upon selected episodes from the *Ādi Parva*, *Sabhā Parva*, *Vana Parva*, and *Strī Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, the paper traces Draupadi's transformation from a fire-born figure emerging from the sacrificial altar to a witness of a devastated battlefield. Her elemental origin in Agni establishes an intimate relationship between feminine identity and cosmic forces. At the same time, her forest exile in the *Vana Parva* reveals the forest not merely as a space of political displacement but as a landscape of memory, suffering and negotiation. The study further examines the *Strī Parva* as a crucial site of post-war remembrance, where the narrative gaze shifts from heroic conquest to feminine mourning. The *Mahabharata* presents ecological devastation and gendered suffering as interconnected experiences produced through the collapse of dharma. Employing the frameworks of feminist ecocriticism, trauma studies and memory studies, this paper argues that Draupadi's narrative reveals an ecological dimension of trauma in which the violation of the feminine and the destruction of the landscape become parallel expressions of social imbalance. By reading fire, forest and battlefield as interconnected symbolic landscapes, the study proposes that the *Mahabharata* preserves an indigenous ecological memory where healing emerges not through the erasure of suffering but through its remembrance and ethical acknowledgement.

Keywords: Draupadi, Feminist Ecocriticism, Ecological Memory, Trauma Studies, *Mahabharata*

Introduction

The *Mahabharata* (1883-1896) has long been recognised as one of the foundational texts of Indian civilisation, shaping philosophical inquiry, ethical reflection, religious imagination, and literary traditions across centuries. Often described as an *itihāsa*, the epic extends beyond the narrative of dynastic rivalry to offer a sustained meditation on the fragility of *dharma* in the face of human desire, political ambition, and violence: "whatever is spoken ...may be seen

elsewhere; but whatever is not contained in this is not to be found anywhere” (Vyasa 123). While the conflict between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas culminates in the catastrophic war of Kurukṣetra, the epic repeatedly shifts its attention from heroic conquest to the ethical consequences of warfare, foregrounding questions of justice, suffering, kinship, and responsibility.

Recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that the *Mahabharata* resists reduction to a political or theological narrative alone. Studies by Alf Hiltebeitel, James L. Fitzgerald, Romila Thapar, and others have demonstrated the epic's complex negotiations of kingship, *dharma*, and moral ambiguity. Feminist scholarship has foregrounded the voices of women in the *Mahabharata* whose experiences expose the limitations of patriarchal authority and heroic ethics. Within this body of work, Draupadi has emerged as one of the most compelling figures of resistance, remembered for her uncompromising demand for justice and her refusal to accept humiliation as the inevitable consequence of patriarchal power.

Yet, despite the richness of this scholarship, Draupadi's relationship with the ecological imagination of the *Mahabharata* remains comparatively underexplored. Existing studies have often examined her as a political agent, a symbol of feminine resistance, or an embodiment of violated honour, while discussions of nature within the epic have largely focused on sacred geography, forest hermitages, or environmental ethics independent of gendered experience.

Moving beyond approaches that regard nature as scenic background or symbolic ornament, ecocritical scholarship has emphasised the reciprocal relationship between environmental space and cultural imagination. Feminist ecocriticism, in particular, has drawn attention to the interconnected structures through which the exploitation of women and the domination of nature are simultaneously produced. At the same time, trauma studies have challenged linear conceptions of violence by demonstrating that traumatic experience exceeds the moment of its occurrence, persisting through memory, repetition, and acts of witnessing. Complementing these approaches, memory studies have explored the ways in which narratives, rituals, and landscapes preserve collective remembrance across generations. Although these critical interventions have transformed the study of modern literature and historical violence, they have only occasionally been brought into sustained dialogue with Sanskrit epic traditions. As a result, the ecological dimensions of trauma within the *Mahabharata* remain insufficiently theorised, particularly with respect to the narrative function of its female protagonists.

This paper addresses that critical gap by examining Draupadi as the principal site through which the *Mahabharata* articulates the intersections of gendered violence, ecological imagination, and collective trauma. Rather than approaching fire, forest, and battlefield as discrete narrative locations, the study argues that these elemental landscapes constitute a symbolic continuum that traces the ethical consequences of violated *dharma*. Throughout the movement of Draupadi from sacrificial fire to exile, and finally to the aftermath of Kurukṣetra, the epic repeatedly suggests that violence leaves its imprint not only upon bodies and social institutions but also upon the environments through which memory is preserved and transmitted.

To explore these interconnected dimensions, this study draws selectively upon insights from feminist ecocriticism, trauma studies, and memory studies, employing these perspectives not as external theoretical templates but as interpretive frameworks that illuminate the epic's own ethical imagination. Through close readings of selected episodes from the *Ādi Parva*, *Sabhā Parva*, *Vana Parva*, and *Strī Parva*, the paper argues that the *Mahabharata* constructs an ecology of trauma in which the violation of the feminine and the wounding of the earth become parallel manifestations of moral imbalance.

Fire and the Elemental Body: Draupadi's Ecological Origins

Draupadi enters the *Mahabharata* unlike any other principal female figure in the epic. She is neither introduced through genealogy nor born within the domestic space traditionally associated with motherhood and dynastic continuity. Instead, her birth is inseparable from ritual performance and elemental transformation. The *Ādi Parva* recounts that King Drupada, humiliated by Droṇa and determined to obtain vengeance, commissions a sacrificial rite (*putrakāmeṣṭi yajña*) to obtain a son capable of defeating his enemy. "O Upayaja, O Brahmana, if thou, performest those sacrificial rites by (virtue of) which I may obtain a son who may slay Droṇa, I promise thee ten thousand kine..." (Vyasa 340). Yet the sacrifice produces not only Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the prophesied warrior, but also a daughter of extraordinary radiance who emerges directly from the flames of the altar. The narrative describes her appearance in strikingly elemental terms: "From the midst of the sacrificial fire arose a dark-complexioned maiden, exceedingly beautiful, resembling the veritable daughter of a celestial born among men" (Vyasa 341-342).

The circumstances of Draupadi's birth are significant because they situate her existence within the ritual economy of the Vedic world rather than within the biological economy of lineage. She is not merely born from fire; she is produced through sacrifice, a ritual that mediates relationships among gods, humans, and the natural elements. Fire (Agni) occupies a privileged position in Vedic thought as the divine messenger who carries offerings from the earthly realm to the celestial sphere. The opening hymn of the *Rgveda* invokes Agni as "*purohitam yajñasya devam ṛtvijam hotāram ratnadhātām*"—"I glorify Agni, the high priest of the sacrifice, the divine, the ministrant, who presents the oblation (to the gods), and is the possessor of great wealth." (*Rgveda* 1.1.1). Agni is therefore not merely an element of combustion but the mediator through whom ritual communication, cosmic reciprocity, and renewal become possible. Within the *Mahābhārata*, Draupadi's emergence from this sacred medium establishes an ontological relationship between feminine identity and elemental power that exceeds the political circumstances of her father's desire for revenge.

At the same time, the sacrificial context complicates any simplistic association between fire and purity. Fire in the epic simultaneously creates and destroys, consecrates and consumes. Drupada's sacrifice stems from wounded pride and a desire for retribution; consequently, the very ritual that gives birth to Draupadi also foreshadows the violence that will later engulf the Kuru dynasty. Her birth thus carries an inherent paradox. She embodies the regenerative capacity of sacrificial fire while simultaneously foreshadowing the destructive consequences of unresolved violence. This ambiguity is reinforced by the heavenly proclamation

accompanying her appearance, which predicts that “she will be the cause of the destruction of many Kshatriyas” (Vyasa 342). The prophecy does not depict Draupadi as the cause of catastrophe; rather, it positions her as the figure through whom an already fractured moral order will reveal its inevitable consequences. Fire therefore becomes not only the source of her existence but also the symbolic medium through which creation, justice, and destruction remain inseparably connected.

Reading Draupadi's birth through the lens of feminist ecocriticism foregrounds the ecological significance of this elemental origin. Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo 2) argues that bodies are never autonomous entities enclosed within fixed boundaries but are constituted through continual exchanges with the material environment. Human embodiment, in this view, cannot be understood apart from the ecological systems that sustain and transform it. Although Alaimo develops this concept in relation to contemporary environmental thought, her emphasis on the inseparability of body and element offers a productive framework for understanding Draupadi's emergence from sacrificial fire. The epic refuses to imagine her body as independent of the elemental world; instead, her identity is literally constituted through one of the primary forces of nature. Fire is not simply the location of her birth but the material condition of her embodiment. Her corporeality therefore challenges anthropocentric assumptions that position human identity outside or above the natural world. Instead, the *Mahābhārata* imagines the human body as deeply implicated within elemental processes, suggesting that ethical existence itself is grounded in ecological relationships.

This elemental embodiment also unsettles the hierarchical distinction between culture and nature that has frequently structured patriarchal systems of thought. Val Plumwood, in her work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (2019), argues that dualistic traditions often construct culture as rational, active, and masculine, while relegating nature to the passive, feminised realm of materiality. Such binaries legitimize domination by representing women and nature as complementary objects of control. Draupadi's birth, however, resists this logic precisely. She is not assimilated into nature as a passive symbol of fertility, nor is she detached from the elemental world through incorporation into patriarchal culture. Instead, the sacrificial fire that produces her belongs simultaneously to ritual culture and to the natural element of Agni. Her existence dissolves the apparent opposition between nature and culture by revealing ritual itself as an ecological practice in which human intention depends upon elemental agency. The *Mahābhārata* thus imagines identity not through separation from the natural world but through participation in its sacred processes.

The ritual context of Draupadi's birth also invites consideration of memory as an essential dimension of ecological identity. Jan Assmann's (2011) understanding of cultural memory emphasises that societies preserve foundational meanings through recurring rituals, sacred narratives, and symbolic performances that connect the present with a remembered past. Ritual does not merely commemorate historical events; it continually recreates the ethical frameworks through which communities understand themselves. The sacrificial fire in the *Ādi Parva*

functions in precisely this manner. It is not simply the narrative mechanism that introduces Draupadi into the epic but a ritual site where cosmic order, royal authority, and collective memory converge. Her elemental origin therefore remains inseparable from the Vedic sacrificial tradition that the epic repeatedly recalls as a source of moral legitimacy and cultural continuity. Each retelling of Draupadi's birth renews this memory, preserving the intimate relationship between ritual practice and ethical responsibility.

Draupadi's extraordinary origin from fire continues to shape her narrative identity long after the sacrificial rite has concluded. Her speeches repeatedly display a moral intensity that mirrors the transformative power of the element from which she emerged, while her unwavering demand for justice recalls fire's capacity both to illuminate and to consume. Yet the epic carefully avoids reducing her to a simple allegory of vengeance. Instead, her elemental identity continually mediates between creation and destruction, reminding readers that the same force capable of sustaining ritual life can also expose the catastrophic consequences of ethical failure. Fire, in this sense, becomes the first ecological witness in the epic, bearing within it both the promise of renewal and the memory of violence.

The Forest as Living Archive: Exile, Trauma and Ecological Memory

The *Vana Parva* marks one of the most significant narrative shifts in the *Mahābhārata*, where the movement from court to wilderness signals a transformation in the mode through which violence is experienced and narrated. If the dice hall is the site where trauma is inflicted, the forest becomes the space where its consequences are remembered, negotiated, and repeatedly relived. Thus, the epic doesn't confine violence to a singular historical event; instead, it traces the enduring presence of trauma as it permeates the landscapes through which its characters continue to live.

The *Vana Parva* opens not with restoration but with displacement. Having lost their kingdom, wealth, and honour, the Pāṇḍavas depart for the forest accompanied by Draupadī, whose humiliation in the royal court remains unresolved. The wilderness does not erase the violence of the *Sabhā Parva*; instead, it receives those who carry its memory. The descriptions of forests, rivers, hermitages, and mountains initially appear to offer an alternative to the corrupt political order of Hastināpura. Yet these landscapes soon reveal themselves as silent witnesses to suffering rather than idyllic spaces of escape. The forest shelters the exiles, but it also becomes the environment within which grief acquires duration.

This narrative movement resonates with Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma as an experience that exceeds the moment of its occurrence. In *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth argues that trauma 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" (Caruth 4). Rather than ending with the cessation of violence, traumatic experience returns through repetition, memory, and deferred understanding. Caruth's formulation illuminates the structural movement of the trauma from the *Sabhā Parva* to the *Vana Parva*. Draupadī's humiliation does not conclude when the assembly disperses; it continues to inhabit the narrative,

resurfacing in her speeches, in the moral uncertainty of Yudhiṣṭhira, and in the recurrent questioning of justice that shapes the exile. The forest therefore becomes the narrative space where the belatedness of trauma is made visible.

Unlike the royal court, where speech is constrained by political authority and patriarchal silence, the wilderness allows memory to unfold through sustained dialogue and reflection. The absence of the court's spectacle does not diminish the violence that has occurred; rather, it exposes its lasting ethical consequences. Throughout the *Vana Parva*, the narrative repeatedly returns to the memory of the dice hall, not through retrospective narration but through Draupadī's persistent acts of remembrance. Her conversations with Yudhiṣṭhira reveal that the violence of the *Sabhā Parva* remains unresolved, continuing to shape the ethical and emotional life of the exiles. The forest therefore does not silence the memory of humiliation; instead, it provides the space in which memory acquires speech. Draupadī emerges not merely as the victim of an isolated injustice but as the epic's foremost ethical witness, refusing to allow the catastrophe of the royal court to disappear into the past. Addressing Yudhiṣṭhira, she recalls the degradation she endured before the Kuru elders and questions the moral legitimacy of a *dharma* that remained silent in the face of such violence. Her speeches repeatedly return to the same images—the dragging by the hair, the attempted disrobing, the silence of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and the helplessness of her husbands. The repetition is significant. The narrative does not present these recollections as redundant reminders but as evidence that the event has not been completed in consciousness. Every recollection becomes an attempt to confront an injustice that the political order has refused to acknowledge. Draupadī's insistence on remembering is therefore not an expression of personal resentment alone; it constitutes an ethical refusal of collective amnesia.

The dialogue between Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira also exposes two contrasting responses to violence, where Yudhiṣṭhira repeatedly urges endurance, restraint, and adherence to *dharma*, insisting that time and righteousness will eventually restore justice, while Draupadī refuses to accept passive endurance as an adequate ethical response. She questions whether forgiveness can remain virtuous when it enables injustice to persist, asking why those who violated both law and honour continue to enjoy power while the innocent endure suffering. Her interrogation of Yudhiṣṭhira is therefore more than a domestic disagreement; it becomes a philosophical debate concerning the nature of justice after catastrophe.

Draupadī's voice repeatedly interrupts the temptation to regard exile as a simple transition toward future restoration. Instead, the forest compels the Pāṇḍavas and the reader to inhabit the unresolved aftermath of violence. The ethical force of Draupadī's testimony also reshapes the symbolic meaning of the forest itself. The wilderness is not merely the location in which traumatic memories are expressed; it becomes the environment that receives, sustains, and echoes them. Every return to the memory of the dice hall deepens the forest's function as a landscape of remembrance where trauma is no longer confined to the architecture of the royal court but diffuses into rivers, hermitages, and woodland paths through which the exiles journey. The natural world silently accompanies the work of remembrance, transforming ecological space into a participant in the narrative's moral life.

Consequently, the *Vana Parva* demonstrates that the aftermath of violence is constituted as much through speech as through action. Draupadī's repeated recollections resist closure because the injustice she endured has yet to receive ethical recognition. Her voice becomes the principal vehicle through which the epic preserves the memory of the *Sabhā Parva*, ensuring that the catastrophe remains present until it is confronted. The forest, far from erasing the wounds of the past, enables this continuing dialogue between memory and justice, preparing the narrative for the further experiences of violence that will test both Draupadī's endurance and the moral fabric of the epic itself.

Draupadī's suffering does not remain confined to the humiliation of the dice hall. Instead, the narrative demonstrates how violence extends beyond the singular event, recurring in altered forms throughout exile. The episodes involving Jayadratha in the *Vana Parva* and Kīcaka in the *Virāṭa Parva* reveal that exile does not constitute a withdrawal from danger but exposes Draupadī to repeated acts of gendered aggression. These incidents are significant not because they replicate the outrage of the *Sabhā Parva*, but because they show how violence becomes woven into the ordinary rhythms of everyday existence. The forest and the spaces of concealment that follow cease to function merely as sites of refuge; they become landscapes in which trauma acquires continuity, reshaping the lived experience of the survivor.

The abduction of Draupadī by Jayadratha exemplifies this continuity, as Jayadratha forcibly carries her away, reducing her once again to an object of male possession. "Thou canst not, cruel as thou art, frighten me by seizing me with violence, for as soon as those Kuru warriors will spy on me they will bring me back to the woods of Kamayska" (Vyasa 522). Although the Pāṇḍavas ultimately rescue her and punish the offender, the episode reveals that the violence of the dice hall has not ended with exile. Rather, Draupadī's body continues to be imagined as a site upon which masculine authority seeks to assert itself. The attempted abduction repeats the logic of the *Sabhā Parva*: a woman is treated not as an autonomous moral subject but as a possession whose dignity may be violated in the pursuit of male desire and political power.

This pattern reaches its most disturbing articulation in the episode of Kīcaka during the Pāṇḍavas' incognito stay in the kingdom of Virāṭa. "O black-eyed lady, those impetuous and cruel shafts are maddening me beyond endurance. It behoveth thee to relieve me from this plight by surrendering thyself to me and favouring me with thy embraces" (Vyasa 24). Living under the assumed identity of Sairandhrī, Draupadī seeks anonymity as a means of survival, yet concealment fails to protect her from renewed harassment. Kīcaka, intoxicated by his political influence and physical strength, relentlessly pursues her despite her repeated refusals. His assault in the royal court, where she is publicly humiliated and receives little immediate protection from those in authority, recalls the earlier violence of Hastināpura with striking force. The change of setting does not produce a change in social relations. Whether in the Kuru assembly, the forest hermitage, or the court of Virāṭa, patriarchal power repeatedly renders feminine vulnerability visible while institutional justice proves hesitant and incomplete.

The recurrence of these assaults demonstrates that exile has altered Draupadī's surroundings without transforming the structures that enable violence.

It is here that Veena Das's reflections on violence become particularly illuminating. In *Life and Words* (2007), Das argues that catastrophic events do not remain isolated within the past but enter the texture of ordinary life, reshaping relationships, language, and everyday practices. Violence, in her formulation, is not experienced solely through extraordinary moments of crisis; it continues to inhabit the mundane world, becoming embedded in the routines through which individuals negotiate survival. Jayadratha and Kīcaka episodes reveal the afterlife of violence as an enduring social condition. The humiliation of the dice hall does not conclude when the Pāṇḍavas leave Hastināpura; it accompanies Draupadī into every subsequent landscape, rendering exile itself a condition structured by vulnerability and vigilance.

These recurring episodes also reshape the symbolic meaning of the forest and the spaces of exile. The wilderness not only preserves the memory of violence, but it also becomes a living environment in which new injuries accumulate upon older wounds. Each episode inscribes another layer of memory upon the landscape, transforming exile into an ecological archive of gendered suffering. This transformation is most evident in Draupadī's encounters with the sages who inhabit the wilderness. Their presence does not negate the injustice she has suffered, nor do they offer consolation through the promise of immediate restitution. Narratives such as the *Nalopākhyāna* and the stories recounted by Mārkaṇḍeya do more than distract the exiles from their suffering; they embed individual experience within a continuum of remembered lives marked by exile, loss, and eventual renewal. Through these narrative acts, the forest becomes a repository of accumulated cultural wisdom, where memory is transmitted not as static history but as an ethical practice that enables communities to confront suffering without allowing it to dissolve into despair. Draupadī's own grief, therefore, is continually placed in conversation with earlier histories of endurance, revealing that memory acquires restorative power when it is shared across generations.

This narrative function of the forest resonates with Aleida Assmann's (2011) understanding of cultural memory as a dynamic process through which societies preserve and continually reinterpret experiences that shape their ethical identity. Assmann argues that memory is not confined to archival preservation or individual recollection; rather, it survives through narratives, rituals, and symbolic spaces that sustain collective consciousness. The forest of the *Vana Parva* becomes more than a geographical setting. Its hermitages, sacred groves, and sites of pilgrimage constitute a living mnemonic landscape where stories, rituals, and ethical teachings are continually renewed. Nature itself participates in the preservation of memory, transforming ecological space into a medium through which the epic transmits its moral vision. The wilderness is remembered because it repeatedly hosts acts of narration that bind present suffering to inherited traditions of resilience and justice.

This process does not erase trauma or reconcile the contradictions exposed in the *Sabhā Parva*. Draupadī's questions remain unresolved, and the violence inflicted

upon her continues to shape the ethical imagination of the narrative. Yet the forest alters the meaning of remembrance. Memory is no longer solely the return of an unassimilated wound; it becomes the foundation for moral discernment. By listening to the sages and participating in the sacred geography of the wilderness, the Pāṇḍavas gradually acquire an enlarged understanding of *dharma*. The forest therefore nurtures not oblivion but ethical preparedness, enabling its inhabitants to confront the future without relinquishing the memory of past injustice.

The Wounded Earth: Mourning, Collective Memory and Ecological Ethics

After extensive narrative attention to the eighteen-day war, the *Strī Parva* deliberately shifts its gaze away from martial heroism to the devastated landscape of Kurukṣetra, where the consequences of violence are inscribed upon the earth itself. The battlefield is no longer a theatre of valour but a terrain of absence, marked by shattered chariots, broken weapons, lifeless bodies, and the overwhelming silence that follows destruction. The narrative compels its readers to move beyond the spectacle of combat and to witness what remains when the cries of warriors have ceased. The epic repeatedly evokes carrion birds, jackals, wolves, vultures, and other scavenging creatures feeding upon the dead, images that resist any romanticisation of heroic sacrifice. “The Jackals are yelling hideously affrighted at the conflagrations on all sides. The horses too are shedding tears” (Vyasa 71). These animals are not incidental details, but they remind the reader that the aftermath of war belongs not only to human mourners but also to the wider natural world, where death is absorbed into ecological cycles even as it exposes the catastrophic consequences of moral failure. Nature does not passively receive the consequences of human conflict; it bears their imprint and becomes the material ground upon which ethical remembrance is inscribed.

The voices that dominate the aftermath of the war are no longer those of kings, warriors, or strategists, but of mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters who confront the human cost of victory. Their lamentations do not merely articulate private grief; they constitute acts of ethical witnessing that challenge triumphalist narratives of war. Among these voices, Gandhārī, having lost all one hundred of her sons, traverses the battlefield accompanied by Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Kuntī, encountering a landscape transformed into a vast cemetery. The epic presents her grief as inseparable from the ruined earth that surrounds her. Her lament does not distinguish between the victorious and the defeated; rather, it recognises the shared mortality that has reduced kings and warriors alike to lifeless bodies scattered across the plain. As she beholds Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, and the countless fallen heroes, Gandhārī's sorrow extends beyond maternal bereavement to become an indictment of the destructive consequences of unchecked ambition and violated *dharma*. “Beholding Duryodhana, Gandhari, deprived of her senses by grief, suddenly fell down on the earth like an uprooted plaitain tree” (Vyasa 17). Her words compel the survivors to acknowledge that no political victory can compensate for the devastation that now defines Kurukṣetra. The battlefield, seen through Gandhārī's eyes, is transformed from a monument to martial glory into an enduring testimony to ethical failure.

Draupadī's mourning assumes a different, though equally significant, ethical dimension. Throughout the epic she has been the persistent voice demanding

justice for the humiliation inflicted upon her in the Kuru assembly. Yet in the *Strī Parva*, her grief resists any simplistic fulfilment of vengeance. Standing amidst the corpses of her sons (the Upapāṇḍavas) and her kinsmen, Draupadī confronts the painful recognition that the war fought in the name of restoring justice has generated new and irreversible losses. Her lament therefore complicates the moral economy of retribution. The destruction of her enemies does not erase her suffering; instead, it reveals that violence inevitably exceeds the intentions through which it is justified. The epic thus refuses to present revenge as the culmination of justice. Rather, Draupadī's mourning exposes the tragic reality that even a righteous cause leaves behind wounds that no victory can heal.

Alongside Gandhārī and Draupadī stand Kuntī and the innumerable widows whose grief broadens the emotional and ethical horizon of the narrative. The *Strī Parva* repeatedly depicts women searching among the dead, embracing mutilated bodies, and lamenting husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers whose identities have been erased by the violence of battle. These scenes decentralise the heroic individual by foregrounding the anonymous victims whose lives are rarely commemorated in martial histories. The women's cries become a collective testimony that restores individuality to the fallen, resisting their reduction to casualties of political conflict. It is in this context that Pierre Nora's concept of "*lieux de mémoire*" (Nora 7) (sites of memory) becomes particularly illuminating. Nora argues that sites of memory emerge when physical spaces become repositories of a community's collective remembrance, preserving the significance of events that have passed beyond living experience. Kurukṣetra functions precisely in this manner. Its mnemonic power does not reside in the battlefield as a geographical location alone, but in the continuous acts of mourning, narration, and ethical reflection that the epic associates with it. The blood-soaked earth, the scattered corpses, and the voices of grieving women transform the landscape into a moral archive where memory is continually renewed rather than simply preserved. Through this process, Kurukṣetra transcends its immediate historical moment and becomes an enduring site of ethical witness, compelling successive generations to confront the destructive consequences of violated *dharma*.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the *Mahābhārata* articulates an ecological imagination of trauma in which landscapes are not passive settings for human action but active participants in the ethical life of the epic. By following Draupadī's journey from her elemental emergence in the sacrificial fire of the *Ādi Parva*, through the forests of exile, to the devastated plains of Kurukṣetra in the *Strī Parva*, the paper has demonstrated that the epic constructs a sustained relationship between gendered violence, ecological space, and collective remembrance. Rather than presenting fire, forest, and battlefield as discrete narrative locations, the *Mahābhārata* binds them into a symbolic continuum through which the consequences of violated *dharma* unfold across both human and more-than-human worlds. This ecological continuity reveals that moral disorder is never confined to political institutions or individual bodies; it extends into the elemental and environmental landscapes that bear witness to human history.

Such a reading contributes to *Mahābhārata* studies by repositioning Draupadī within the epic's ecological imagination. Reading Draupadī through the interconnected landscapes of fire, forest, and battlefield demonstrates that her narrative significance exceeds the political events surrounding the Kuru dynasty. Her journey becomes the means through which the epic reflects upon the ethical consequences of violence as they are inscribed upon both bodies and environments. The study also extends the scope of ecocritical inquiry by bringing feminist ecocriticism into dialogue with Sanskrit epic literature without reducing the *Mahābhārata* to a modern environmental text. Equally, this reading contributes to trauma studies by demonstrating that the *Mahābhārata* understands trauma not simply as psychological injury but as an experience that reverberates through cultural memory and ecological space. Draupadī's repeated recollections of the dice hall, the continuity of violence throughout exile, and the collective mourning of the *Strī Parva* reveal that traumatic experience cannot be contained within the temporal boundaries of a single event. Instead, the epic presents memory as a relational process sustained through speech, ritual, landscape, and acts of witnessing. By situating remembrance within sacred fires, forests, hermitages, and battlefields, the *Mahābhārata* expands the discourse of trauma beyond the human subject, inviting a broader understanding of how ethical communities remember violence through the landscapes they inhabit. Ultimately, by preserving the traces of violence within its ritual, narrative, and environmental worlds, the epic affirms that the path towards renewal lies not in forgetting the past but in sustaining an ethical remembrance that recognises the inseparability of justice, memory, and the living earth.

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DABEER SI/KTT/81**REWRITING MEMORY AND GENDER: A BARTHESIAN READING
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Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Postcolonial literature has increasingly turned to mythological retellings as a means of revisiting cultural memory, interrogating patriarchal histories, and reimagining inherited narratives through contemporary perspectives. Contemporary Indian mythological fiction has increasingly reinterpreted canonical epics to challenge patriarchal ideologies and recover marginalized voices through Feminist Revision. Trisha Das' *Ms. Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas* (2016) and *Misters Kuru: A Return to Mahabharata* (2021) exemplify this revisionary impulse by relocating the characters of the *Mahabharata* to contemporary India and reimagining their identities beyond the constraints of epic tradition. This paper examines these novels through Roland Barthes' concept of the "Death of the Author," arguing that while Barthes rejects the authority of authorial intention in determining textual meaning, this study argues that his theory provides a productive framework for understanding how feminist mythological retellings challenge canonical interpretations and enable multiple reader centered meaning. The paper explores three interconnected dimensions of Das' narratives: The reconstruction of cultural memory, the reclamation of female agency, and the transformation of male identities within the Postcolonial context. The women—Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba—challenge patriarchal representations by reclaiming agency and redefining memory through contemporary experiences, while the Pandavas negotiate new forms of masculinity grounded in care, emotional openness, and ethical responsibility rather than martial heroism. By transforming mythological figures into contemporary subjects, Das demonstrates that cultural memory is neither static nor sacred but continually reconstructed through acts of reading and reinterpretation. The paper argues that her revisionary fiction redefines the *Mahabharata* as a living cultural text whose meanings remain open to plurality, dialogue, and reader-centered interpretation. The study concludes that Trisha Das' feminist re-imaginings exemplify the transformative potential of postcolonial literature to recover suppressed memories, and redefine gendered identities. Barthes' theory remains a valuable interpretive framework for understanding how myth continues to evolve through textual plurality and readerly engagement in contemporary literary discourse.

Keywords: Roland Barthes; Death of the Author; cultural memory; gender; feminist retellings; Trisha Das; *Mahabharata*; postcolonial literature.

Introduction

The *Mahabharata* has survived across centuries not because it has remained unchanged but because it has continually been retold, reinterpreted, and adapted to changing cultural and historical contexts. As one of India's foundational epics, it functions not merely as a literary text but as a dynamic cultural archive that reflects evolving understandings of identity, memory, and social values. Contemporary Indian writers have continued this tradition by revisiting mythological narratives from alternative perspectives that foreground marginalized voices, question patriarchal authority, and establish meaningful dialogues between the past and the present. These revisionary narratives demonstrate that mythology remains relevant because it is continually reconstructed to address contemporary concerns.

Among contemporary mythological writers, Trisha Das occupies a distinctive position because she does not merely modernize the *Mahabharata*; she fundamentally reimagines its characters by relocating them into present-day India. In *Ms. Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas*, Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba voluntarily leave heaven to begin new lives in New Delhi, where they redefine themselves beyond the identities imposed by the epic. Likewise, *Misters Kuru: A Return to Mahabharata* extends this revisionary project by bringing the Pandavas to the contemporary world, where they abandon traditional heroic roles and embrace ordinary professions, relationships, and ethical responsibilities. Through these transformations, Das demonstrates that mythological characters are not fixed cultural symbols but living figures capable of acquiring new meanings in changing historical contexts.

Roland Barthes' influential essay "The Death of the Author" provides an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing Das' revisionary fiction. Barthes argues that literary meaning does not originate in the author's intention but is produced through the reader's engagement with the text. He famously asserts that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148). Rather than possessing a single authoritative meaning, every text becomes an open space where multiple interpretations coexist. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to mythological literature because epics such as the *Mahabharata* have evolved through centuries of oral traditions, translations, regional adaptations, and literary reinterpretations. Every retelling simultaneously preserves and transforms the inherited narrative, producing meanings that respond to new cultural realities.

Das' novels exemplify Barthes' concept of textual plurality by decentralizing the authority of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Instead of reproducing the canonical narrative, she reconstructs mythology through characters whose voices were traditionally marginalized within patriarchal discourse. Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba become active narrators of their own histories, while the Pandavas negotiate identities that challenge conventional models of heroic masculinity. Their transformations reveal that cultural memory is not a fixed inheritance but an evolving process through which the past is continually reinterpreted in response to the needs of the present.

This paper therefore examines *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* and *Misters Kuru* through Barthes' theory of reader-centered interpretation while drawing upon Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, Astrid Erll's theory of memory in culture, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, R. W. Connell's concept of multiple masculinities, and Homi K. Bhabha's notion of postcolonial hybridity. It argues that Das transforms the *Mahabharata* from a canonical epic into a dynamic textual tradition in which memory and gender are continuously reconstructed through feminist reinterpretation and readerly engagement.

Roland Barthes and Revisionary Mythmaking

Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" (1967) fundamentally redefines literary interpretation by challenging the assumption that the meaning of a text is determined by its author's intentions. Rejecting traditional approaches that privilege authorial authority, Barthes argues that every literary work is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (146). A text, therefore, does not possess a single fixed meaning; rather, meaning emerges through the interaction between the text and its readers. Barthes concludes with his celebrated assertion that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148), emphasizing that readers actively participate in the production of meaning instead of merely recovering an author's intended message. Barthes' theory provides a productive framework for understanding contemporary mythological retellings because epics such as the *Mahabharata* have never existed as immutable texts. They have evolved through centuries of oral traditions, regional adaptations, translations, and literary reinterpretations, each generation reshaping the epic according to its own cultural and historical contexts. Consequently, no single version of the *Mahabharata* can claim absolute authority. Trisha Das' *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* and *Misters Kuru* exemplify this process by relocating epic characters into present-day India, where they reconstruct identities beyond the limitations of the canonical narrative. Rather than replacing Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Das expands its interpretative possibilities by encouraging readers to engage with the epic from contemporary feminist and postcolonial perspectives. The reconstruction of myth in Das' fiction also resonates with Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, which explains that societies continually reinterpret the past to address the ethical and social concerns of the present. Assmann argues that cultural memory preserves collective identity while simultaneously allowing inherited traditions to acquire new meanings (37). Similarly, Astrid Erll contends that "memory is a process, not a thing" (8), emphasizing that cultural memory is produced through continuous acts of narration and reinterpretation. These perspectives illuminate Das' revisionary project, in which epic characters are not preserved as static symbols but transformed into contemporary subjects negotiating new identities, relationships, and social responsibilities.

Das' reinterpretation is equally informed by feminist theories of gender. Judith Butler argues that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (191), demonstrating that gender is socially performed rather than biologically determined. Likewise, R. W. Connell's concept of multiple masculinities challenges the assumption that masculinity is singular or universal, arguing instead that masculine identities are historically and culturally

constructed (68). These theoretical perspectives enable a reconsideration of both female and male characters in Das' novels, revealing how Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, Amba, and the Pandavas reconstruct their identities beyond the patriarchal ideals established in the epic tradition.

From a postcolonial perspective, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity further explains how Das negotiates the relationship between tradition and modernity. Bhabha argues that cultural identity is produced within an "in-between" space where inherited traditions are continually rearticulated rather than simply preserved (*The Location of Culture* 2). Das' mythological characters inhabit precisely such a liminal space, carrying the memories of the epic while adapting to the realities of contemporary India. Their transformed identities demonstrate that cultural memory is neither a passive inheritance nor a nostalgic return to the past but an ongoing process of negotiation and renewal.

Together, Barthes, Assmann, Erll, Butler, Connell, and Bhabha provide a coherent theoretical framework for examining Das' revisionary fiction. Barthes explains the plurality of textual meaning, Assmann and Erll illuminate the reconstruction of cultural memory, Butler and Connell reveal the performative nature of gender, and Bhabha situates these transformations within postcolonial contexts. Through this interdisciplinary framework, *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* and *Misters Kuru* emerge not as alternative versions of the *Mahabharata* but as dynamic reinterpretations that invite readers to participate in the continuous rewriting of myth, memory, and gender.

Rewriting Cultural Memory and Gender in *Ms. Draupadi Kuru*

Trisha Das' *Ms. Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas* reconstructs the *Mahabharata* by allowing its female characters to renegotiate identities that have long been defined by patriarchal memory. Rather than preserving the epic as a fixed cultural archive, Das transforms it into a dynamic narrative where women reinterpret their past and redefine themselves through contemporary experiences. Read through Roland Barthes' concept of textual plurality, the novel demonstrates that myth acquires new meanings when readers engage with it beyond canonical authority. The experiences of Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari, and Amba illustrate how cultural memory becomes a site of resistance, agency, and self-representation.

Draupadi: Reclaiming Voice through Cultural Memory

Das radically reconstructs Draupadi by transforming the silenced queen of the Kuru court into a television anchor who shapes public discussions on women's rights. In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi's humiliation in the royal court becomes one of the defining memories of the epic. In Das' novel, however, this remembered trauma becomes a source of social activism rather than victimhood. Addressing a television audience, Draupadi observes, "Even while mankind has scaled the skies... not much has changed for womankind" (Das 159). By connecting her epic experience with the continuing oppression of women, she reinterprets cultural memory as a catalyst for collective resistance. She further encourages Vaishali to "speak for the others" and "fight for your honor and theirs" (150), thereby transforming personal suffering into public advocacy. This reconstruction reflects Jan Assmann's argument that cultural memory is continually reshaped according to the ethical needs of the present (37). Likewise, Astrid Erll argues that memory

is produced through acts of reinterpretation rather than passive preservation (8). Das therefore reconstructs Draupadi not as a symbol of humiliation but as a producer of social knowledge whose authority emerges through speech rather than silence. Her transformation also embodies Judith Butler's theory that gender is constituted through repeated social performances rather than fixed identities (191). Through this feminist rewriting, Draupadi's voice challenges patriarchal memory and demonstrates that mythology remains meaningful when it speaks to contemporary struggles.

Kunti: Reimagining Motherhood through Memory

Das similarly reconstructs Kunti by transforming maternal guilt into an ethical practice of care. In the canonical epic, Kunti's identity remains inseparable from her abandonment of Karna, a memory that has traditionally defined her as a tragic mother. Das, however, reinterprets this inherited narrative by allowing Kunti to confront her past through compassion and accountability. She tells Karna, "Your anger comes from hurt, Karan. You have every right to be hurt, but don't be angry. Anger will hold you back, will make you into somebody you're not" (Das 268). Later she confesses, "I love you, my child... Will you fight with me for us to be together?" (269).

Rather than seeking forgiveness, Kunti assumes moral responsibility for rebuilding a fractured relationship. Her transformation extends beyond Karna when she dedicates herself to caring for orphaned children, redefining motherhood as an ethical commitment rather than a biological role. As Assmann argues, cultural memory survives through reinterpretation rather than preservation (37). Similarly, Rosi Braidotti suggests that feminist rewriting produces "alternative figurations" through which women move beyond restrictive patriarchal identities (25). Das therefore reconstructs Kunti as a feminist figure whose identity is grounded in care, accountability, and social responsibility rather than maternal guilt alone.

Gandhari: Memory as Ethical Choice

Unlike the other women, Gandhari chooses to return to heaven after experiencing the contemporary world. Her decision illustrates that feminist agency also includes the freedom to preserve tradition when it is consciously chosen rather than imposed. Reflecting upon her journey, Gandhari tells Draupadi, "I want to thank you for agreeing to let me come with you. I didn't like what I saw, but at least I saw it. There are no questions left in me" (Das 281). Her words signify closure rather than resignation. By confronting the present, Gandhari resolves the uncertainties carried from the past and consciously determines her own future.

Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory is continually reconstructed through present experiences (37). Das illustrates this process by allowing Gandhari to reinterpret her inherited identity before choosing where she belongs. Judith Butler likewise observes that agency does not necessarily arise through rejecting tradition but through the ability to negotiate and re-signify inherited norms (15). Gandhari's return to heaven therefore becomes an act of self-determination rather than submission. Das redefines cultural memory as an ethical choice, demonstrating that empowerment lies in the freedom to choose one's own relationship with tradition.

Amba: From Vengeance to Selfhood

Amba undergoes perhaps the most radical transformation in the novel. In the *Mahabharata*, her identity is almost entirely defined by her desire for revenge against Bhishma. Das rejects this narrative by allowing Amba to reconstruct her identity through love and emotional fulfillment. Declaring her feelings for Zafar, Amba admits, “Until I met you... you have made me feel, in thirty short days, how I have desperately yearned to feel, for thousands of years... I want to be with you... and finally feel... loved” (Das 277). Her confession marks a decisive rejection of revenge as the defining principle of her existence.

Astrid Erll argues that cultural memory continually acquires new meanings through acts of narration and reinterpretation (2). Das exemplifies this process by replacing a narrative of violence with one of emotional liberation. Likewise, Assmann emphasizes that cultural memory responds to the ethical needs of the present (37). Amba’s transformation challenges patriarchal traditions that define women through suffering and sacrifice. Instead, Das reconstructs her as a postcolonial feminist figure whose agency lies in her capacity to reinterpret the past and shape her own future. Through Amba, the novel demonstrates that memory is not a prison but a space from which new identities can emerge.

Collectively, the women of *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* exemplify Barthes’ notion that literary texts remain open to multiple meanings beyond the authority of their original author. By reimagining these mythological figures through contemporary experiences, Das reconstructs cultural memory as a dynamic process of negotiation rather than preservation. Her feminist retelling reveals that identity is neither inherited nor fixed but continually reshaped through acts of remembering, reinterpretation, and self-definition.

Reconstructing Masculinity in *Misters Kuru*

While *Ms. Draupadi Kuru* reclaims women’s voices, *Misters Kuru: A Return to Mahabharata* extends Trisha Das’ revisionary project by reconstructing masculine identities. Rather than restoring the Pandavas as heroic warriors, Das relocates them within contemporary society, where they adopt professions and relationships that redefine heroism through compassion, emotional openness, and ethical responsibility. Their transformation demonstrates that masculinity, like cultural memory, is historically contingent and continually reinterpreted. Through Barthes’ reader-centered approach, the novel dismantles the canonical image of the warrior-hero and reconstructs masculinity according to the ethical values of the present.

Arjuna: From Warrior to Ordinary Hero

Das transforms Arjuna by replacing the battlefield with the cricket field, relocating heroism from war to everyday public life. Unlike the epic warrior whose identity depends upon military excellence and divine intervention, the modern Arjuna questions the very purpose of heroic glory. Reflecting on heaven, he admits, “That was fun in the beginning, yes. But the novelty wears off... there’s not much else to do up there. Except maybe train for a war that probably won’t ever happen” (Das 91). His dissatisfaction dismantles the epic ideal of eternal warfare by presenting heroism as ultimately empty when disconnected from meaningful human experience. Likewise, Draupadi’s decision to remain on earth because she

has “finally found a purpose” (Das 91) reinforces the value of lived experience over mythic immortality.

Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory remains meaningful only through continual reinterpretation (37). Das therefore reconstructs Arjuna’s identity by replacing martial glory with ordinary human fulfillment. R. W. Connell similarly contends that masculinities are socially and historically constructed rather than biologically fixed (68). Through this transformation, Arjuna emerges as a postcolonial masculine figure whose identity is grounded not in conquest but in companionship, purpose, and emotional maturity.

Bhima: Heroism through Care

Bhima undergoes one of the novel’s most significant transformations by exchanging physical strength for caregiving. Instead of seeking heroic glory, he chooses to remain at Kunti’s orphanage, declaring, “No. If this man is the only caretaker this place has, they will need someone around the clock. I will move here by myself, Brother” (Das 46). His decision rejects hierarchical obedience in favor of ethical responsibility. Later, while preparing meals for the children, he worries that “there was no way the orphanage could afford it... each child could have a small taste” (Das 97). His concern centers not on defeating enemies but on feeding the vulnerable.

Judith Butler argues that gender is constituted through repeated social practices rather than fixed biological identity (191). Bhima’s daily acts of cooking, cleaning, and nurturing therefore perform a masculinity fundamentally different from the warrior ideal celebrated in the epic. Likewise, Connell’s concept of multiple masculinities demonstrates that masculine identity can be reconstructed through care, empathy, and service rather than violence. Das consequently redefines heroism as an ethical commitment to sustaining life and community.

Yudhishtira: Ethical Leadership and Self-Reflection

Das also reconstructs Yudhishtira by replacing the infallible king with a man engaged in self-examination. Recognizing his dependence on his brothers, he tells Kunti, “Don’t worry about me, Mother. It’s about time I learnt how to manage without them” (Das 322). He further admits, “I still don’t know who I am without my brothers. That will be a purpose in itself” (322), acknowledging that identity cannot depend solely upon inherited roles. His apology to Kunti—“I’m sorry. I should have been here, helping you, from the start” (322)—reveals a willingness to accept responsibility rather than claim moral perfection.

Astrid Erll argues that cultural memory is continually reconstructed through reinterpretation (8). Das similarly reconstructs Yudhishtira’s identity by replacing epic certainty with emotional vulnerability. Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity further explains how inherited identities are renegotiated within contemporary cultural contexts (2). Consequently, leadership becomes an ethical practice grounded in humility, accountability, and self-reflection rather than unquestioned authority.

Nakula: Beauty, Identity, and Alternative Masculinity

Nakula’s transformation into a professional fashion model represents one of Das’ most innovative reinterpretations of epic masculinity. Reflecting upon his career, he realizes that “he’d never thought of it as a professional instrument before now...

in this day and age, it was his pretty face that had the most value” (Das 180). His legendary beauty, once secondary to martial identity, becomes the foundation of an entirely new profession. His relationship with Angela further rejects patriarchal expectations when he confesses, “I like risk and unpredictability... I want someone who simply loves and accepts me the way I am... someone who excites my mind as well as my body” (Das 125).

Assmann observes that cultural memory preserves collective identity while allowing inherited traditions to acquire new meanings (36). Likewise, Butler’s concept of gender performativity explains Nakula’s reconstruction as a performance of masculinity based upon emotional openness and self-expression rather than dominance (191). Das therefore transforms Nakula into a postcolonial masculine figure whose identity demonstrates that beauty, vulnerability, and emotional reciprocity are equally valid expressions of manhood.

Sahadeva: Negotiating Tradition and Change

Among the Pandavas, Sahadeva remains the character most deeply connected to the spiritual memory of the epic. Although he participates in contemporary life, he ultimately expresses a desire to return to heaven, revealing that modernization does not necessarily erase attachment to inherited cultural values. His decision illustrates that postcolonial identity is negotiated through continuity as well as change.

Jan Assmann argues that cultural memory connects past and present by preserving collective identities while permitting reinterpretation (37). Sahadeva embodies this balance by demonstrating that tradition need not be abandoned to accommodate modernity. Rather than resisting change, he selectively embraces contemporary experience while remaining faithful to the ethical values that define his sense of self. Through Sahadeva, Das acknowledges that postcolonial identity is not achieved by rejecting the past but by negotiating a meaningful relationship with it.

Collectively, the Pandavas’ transformations illustrate that masculinity is neither universal nor immutable. Instead, Das reconstructs the warrior-heroes of the *Mahabharata* as contemporary individuals whose identities are shaped through care, emotional intelligence, ethical responsibility, self-expression, and personal choice. Reading through Barthes’ theory, *Misters Kuru* demonstrates that mythological masculinity remains open to reinterpretation, enabling readers to imagine alternative models of heroism that challenge patriarchal ideals while preserving the cultural significance of the epic.

Conclusion

Trisha Das’ *Ms. Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas* and *Misters Kuru: A Return to Mahabharata* demonstrate that the *Mahabharata* continues to function as a living cultural text whose meanings evolve through reinterpretation rather than preservation. Read through Roland Barthes’ concept of the “Death of the Author,” these novels decentralize the authority of the canonical epic and invite readers to participate actively in the production of meaning. Rather than reproducing Vyasa’s narrative, Das reconstructs mythological characters within contemporary social and cultural contexts, allowing them to negotiate identities that transcend the limitations of patriarchal tradition.

The analysis has shown that Das reimagines cultural memory as a dynamic process of reconstruction. Draupadi transforms remembered humiliation into feminist activism; Kunti redefines motherhood through care and reconciliation; Gandhari demonstrates that agency may also be expressed through the conscious preservation of tradition; and Amba rejects the inherited narrative of revenge in favor of love and emotional selfhood. Together, these women challenge patriarchal representations and reveal that memory is not a static inheritance but an ethical practice through which individuals continually reinterpret the past.

Similarly, *Mistress Kuru* reconstructs masculine identity by replacing the epic ideal of the warrior with contemporary models of emotional intelligence, ethical responsibility, and personal fulfillment. Arjuna abandons martial glory for meaningful public life, Bhima locates heroism in caregiving and community service, Yudhishtira embraces humility and self-reflection, Nakula redefines masculinity through beauty and emotional openness, and Sahadeva negotiates a balance between tradition and modernity. These transformations demonstrate that masculinity, like cultural memory, is historically contingent and continually reshaped through changing social realities.

The study further demonstrates that Barthes' theory remains highly relevant to contemporary mythological fiction because it shifts attention from authorial authority to readerly interpretation. Das' novels do not seek to replace the *Mahabharata*; rather, they expand its interpretative possibilities by encouraging readers to question inherited meanings and construct new understandings of memory, gender, and identity. Through the insights of Jan Assmann, Astrid Erll, Judith Butler, R. W. Connell, and Homi K. Bhabha, this paper has shown that Das' revisionary fiction transforms mythology into a dialogic space where cultural memory is continually renegotiated and gender identities remain open to reinterpretation.

Ultimately, Das' feminist reimagines affirm that the enduring significance of the *Mahabharata* lies not in its permanence but in its adaptability. By re-reading the epic through contemporary feminist and postcolonial perspectives, she demonstrates that myth survives because each generation recreates it in response to its own ethical, cultural, and social concerns. Her novels therefore reaffirm the *Mahabharata* as a plural and evolving literary tradition that continues to inspire new meanings for contemporary readers.

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DABEER SI/KTT/82**NARRATIVES OF MEMORY AS RESISTANCE: SATIRE AND
INTROSPECTION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE PENELOPIAD*
AND KAVITA KANE'S *LANKA'S PRINCESS*****J. SANTHA CHRISTINA**Assistant Professor, Sri Kaliswari College, Sivakasi
Research Scholar, SFR College Sivakasi, India**K. MUTHAMIL SELVI**Associate Professor and Head, PG & Research Department of English
The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women, Sivakasi, India**Abstract**

Traditional myths and mythological retellings across centuries have emerged from the collective memory of patriarchal men. Feminist revision uses private, marginalised memory to counter it. The prime aim of the paper is to compare the narrative strategies of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* to examine how both authors deploy narratives of memory as a tool of resistance against hegemonic mythological traditions. Atwood's satirical irony and Kane's introspective psychologization represent two distinct yet equally effective modes of feminist revisionist mythmaking strategies. Adrienne Rich's feminist revisionist mythmaking framework is crucial to reveal that Atwood's postmodern, parodic approach and Kane's introspective approach enable the readers to confront the absurdity of epic conventions. Drawing on deheroisation, polyphonic narration, and exposure of patriarchal hypocrisy, Atwood achieves it. Conversely, Kane employs a psychoanalytic, introspective approach that traces the evolution of identity, the excavation of trauma, and the humanisation of the demonised figure. Such an attempt creates empathetic identification by revealing the inner lives of the silenced mythological women. Despite their cultural and temporal differences, Greek and Hindu mythology, both authors demonstrate that marginalised memory can dismantle the grand narratives of the nation. The paper concludes that narratives of memory, whether weaponised as satire or internalised as introspection, offer feminist revisionists a potent counter-narrative to reclaim agency, restore dignity, and write women back into the myths that erased them.

Keywords: Feminist revisionist mythmaking, satire, introspection, postcolonial feminism, counter-narrative

Introduction

The canonical narratives of classical epics across the world have long privileged the voices of heroes, gods, and conquerors. Women in these literatures occupy the margins: they are prizes, foils, betrayers, or silent sufferers. Their subjectivities remain unrecorded by patriarchal historiography. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon observes: "Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking

of the forms and contents of the past" (5). According to her, postmodern fiction characteristically engages in rethinking and reworking the contents of the past to expose ideological assumptions embedded in received traditions. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) and Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* (2015), novels that recover the interiority of silenced women, Penelope and the twelve maids from Homer's *Odyssey*, and Surpanakha from Valmiki's *Ramayana*, respectively. Both texts deploy the strategies of satire and introspection to transform memory into an act of political resistance. Atwood and Kane rewrite master narratives from the vantage point of those whom history has wronged. Kane's novel, *Lanka's Princess* opens with a structural frame. The god Krishna encounters Kubja, a hunchbacked woman in Mathura and promises to reveal her true story. According to Puranic traditions, Kubja was the reincarnation of the demoness Surpanakha, Ravana's sister. The story narrated by Krishna is the life of Surpanakha, the sister of Ravan. The entire novel is framed as a testimonial act. Kane positions counter-narrative itself as a divine imperative. Atwood similarly resurrects Penelope to speak from the Underworld. It makes the act of narration a form of posthumous justice. Both novels mobilise memory, satire, and introspection as instruments of literary and political resistance, exposing the gendered violence that orthodox storytelling has normalised.

Revisionary Mythmaking and the Politics of Counter-Narrative

Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) argues that women writers must negotiate a literary tradition from which they are structurally excluded. They posit that the "anxiety of influence" that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary "anxiety of authorship"-a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. and their "anxiety of authorship" manifests as a double bind: the woman writer must both inhabit and destabilise the patriarchal forms she inherits (49). Though Gilbert and Gubar develop this claim in relation to nineteenth-century novelists writing under conditions in which female authorship itself was contested, a version of the same anxiety persists, in altered form, for women writing into canonical or sacred narrative traditions. Atwood inherits Homer's *Odyssey*, and Kane inherits the *Ramayana*, and both novelists enact precisely this double movement, inhabiting the epic form while exposing its ideological underpinnings through satiric irony and introspective revision.

Rich's concept of "re-vision" is equally instructive. Rich argues that revisiting canonical texts is "an act of survival" for women (35). In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood makes this survival literal: Penelope narrates from the Underworld, her voice resurrected precisely because the *Odyssey* denied it. Similarly, Kane resurrects Meenakshi, who is disfigured, humiliated, and cast as a grotesque villain in the *Ramayana*. She is presented as a complex desiring subject whose version of events indicates the heroic fraternity of Ram and Lakshman alike. As Cristina Bacchilega notes in *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, such retellings operate through "narrative doubling" simultaneously telling and critiquing the stories they retell (23).

The choice of narrator is itself a political act. Both novels self-consciously foreground their narrators' unreliability. Kane's structural prologue relates Surpanakha's story to Kubja through Krishna's divine account. It is a retelling

mediated by perspective and purpose. When Kubja demands to know her past life, Krishna says “Well, allow me to tell you your story...” (Kane 11). Krishna’s words “your story” imply that the story has previously been told by others, wrongly. Both openings stage the problem of testimony and the politics of who gets to tell the story. Atwood’s Penelope says she is a liar. She tells her version, but she also admits she couldn’t save the maids. This shows that even victims have blind spots and guilt. Both novels are political because they refuse to make marginalised people into simple “good” heroes. It shows that oppression damages everyone, and justice is never clean.

Satire as a Weapon

Satire is Atwood’s central weapon for dismantling Odyssean heroism in *The Penelopiad*. By shifting narrative authority from Odysseus to Penelope and her maids, Atwood transforms the epic hero into an object of mockery rather than admiration. “Historiographic metafiction’s somewhat different strategy subverts, but only through irony, not through rejection” (xii). This framework applies directly to Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*. Like historiographic metafiction, through irony and paradox, Atwood problematizes the prevailing perspectives. It re-narrates the classical epic of Homer’s *Odyssey* from the perspectives of Penelope and her twelve hanged maids. Employing irony, Atwood both installs and subverts the epic tradition and exposes its ideological exclusions and the violence that underwrites heroic masculinity.

The twelve maids are Atwood’s most sustained satiric instrument. Their chorus functions as a Brechtian alienation effect that repeatedly breaks the realist frame to remind the reader that the text is a construction. In Atwood’s revision, the maids were used as sexual objects by the suitors and then executed by Odysseus. Penelope acknowledges the maids were killed “for sleeping with the Suitors” and that her son “hanged them all in a row” (Atwood 28-29). This condensed accusation of the *Odyssey*’s moral economy is Atwood’s piercing satire. A hero’s homecoming requires the murder of powerless women. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (43). Those who fail to conform to these regulatory norms are punished. The execution of the twelve maids in Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* can be understood as precisely such a normative performance. The twelve maids are deemed “disloyal” and “notorious whores” for transgressing the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour within the heterosexual matrix. Their hanging enforces the violent consequences of gender non-conformity.

Kane’s *Lanka’s Princess* employs satire differently. Bitter interior irony is employed rather than theatrical distancing. The novel’s central satiric target is the heroic ideology of the *Ramayana*, which Kane exposes from the inside. When Ram and Lakshman first encounter Meenakshi in the forest, Kane renders the scene with cool detachment, showing the two brothers playing games with her affections. Surpanakha’s encounter with Ram and Lakshman is narrated with scathing interior irony that undercuts their supposed virtue:

They grinned, they teased, they goaded me into a temper and I could vent it only on you, the silent spectator watching in amused silence!" she spat, her breathing laboured. "If they found me so crass and crude and unwelcome, could they have not just politely refused me like the chivalrous warriors they claim themselves to be? ... How proper was Ram's jest? If he is so upright as you claim, and had refusal in his mind all along, why, then, did he send me—a woman who has openly come to him—to his younger brother knowing he was married too and very much in love with his wife? Could he not have refused me directly? Both the brothers thought it was a game and tossed me to and fro like a playing ball between them!" (215-216)

The epic's "virtuous" heroes are revealed as cruel, mocking, and cavalier with a woman's dignity. The chivalric code they supposedly embody is exposed as self-serving hypocrisy. Ram's order to Lakshman that follows: "Maim her... She will remember her dishonourable crime and not attack a helpless woman again" (Kane 184). It is equally available for satirical reading. The phrase "dishonourable crime" collapses the distance between Meenakshi's desire and criminal transgression. The scene patently exposes how patriarchal heroism codes female sexuality as inherently criminal. Kane's use of the word "helpless" is striking in its ironic doubling. Ram commands Lakshman to maim Surpanakha so that she will not "attack a helpless woman again". The word "helpless" exposes the very gender ideology that the novel is interrogating. Sita, the queen of a powerful kingdom, is reduced helpless by the very patriarchal framework that supposedly protects her. Meenakshi, the active, desiring agent in the scene, is about to be violently silenced through mutilation.

Memory, Interiority, and the Politics of Introspection

If satire is the outward weapon, introspection is the inner resource through which both novels construct feminine subjectivity. Memory, in these texts, is not passive recollection but active reconstruction. It is a form of narrative labour through which marginalised subjects constitute themselves as agents. Marianne Hirsch's concept "Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." (106-107). This idea of postmemory illuminates the temporal complexity of both novels. Both Atwood's Penelope and Kane's Surpanakha are not merely remembering their own pasts but reconstituting a collective female past that has been suppressed. It is the past that exists not in their direct experience but in the inherited silences, wounds, and narrative gaps left by patriarchal epic traditions.

Kane's treatment of memory is particularly intricate. The entire novel is structured as a retrospective recollection mediated by Krishna, and within that frame, Meenakshi constantly reconstructs and revises her understanding of past events. When she finally confronts Ravan about the killing of her husband Vidyujiva, she arrives at a lucid recognition: "He was a rascal, all of us could see that but for you.

You were besotted with him" (Kane 155). The shift in pronoun, from the familial "we" to the isolated "you", marks the precise moment at which communal memory diverges from individual memory. Memory here is contested, politically charged, and productive of divergent moral accountings.

The "crisis of witnessing" is the situation of the survivor who must testify to an experience that the dominant culture refuses to hear (Felman 2). When Meenakshi stands before Ravan with her mutilated face, she is enacting testimony: her body is the evidence, her narrative is the charge, and the court is Ravan's. She tells him: "Now I shall have to live with this face as a constant reminder of my humiliation, our humiliation, brother" (Kane 190). The collective pronoun "our" is strategic—Meenakshi re-frames her private trauma as a public, dynastic wound to trigger Ravan's patriarchal defensiveness and bring about the war she has engineered. Memory here is instrumentalised, weaponized, and ultimately self-consuming: as Meenakshi later realizes, the "legacy of hate" she has inherited and perpetuated has cost her everything she loved (Kane 168).

In *The Penelopiad*, memory similarly functions as both a resource and a burden. Penelope's famous weaving, unravelling at night what she wove by day, becomes, in Atwood's reading, a figure for the work of memory itself: constantly revisiting and revising, never arriving at a fixed account. Atwood's Penelope re-reads the *Odyssey* from within it, producing a counter-reading that assigns the hero's victory its full cost.

Gender, Desire, and the Body as Contested Territory

A central dimension of both novels' revisionary projects is their insistence on restoring feminine desire and embodiment to narratives from which they have been systematically excluded. In the canonical *Ramayana*, Surpanakha's desire is presented as monstrous and transgressive. Kane presents it as entirely human and, crucially, contextually intelligible within the novel's reconstruction of Meenakshi's life.

Kane devotes extensive attention to Meenakshi's courtship with Vidyujiva, showing her experiencing "this devastating pang of desire" (Kane 94) and lying awake thinking of him "with the burning flame of hope and determination" (Kane 41). The love-plot is neither frivolous nor marginal: it establishes Meenakshi's capacity for deep feeling before showing how that feeling is destroyed. When Vibhishan asks whether her schemes consider Sita's rights as a woman, Meenakshi flinches: "she could not help saying" (Kane 200). It is a moment of involuntary self-recognition that complicates any reading of her as merely villainous. Kane does not present Surpanakha as inherently evil. Instead, she shows how a woman capable of deep love and loyalty becomes a figure of vengeance because the world and the men around her have systematically destroyed everything she loved.

Kane's treatment of the mutilation scene itself exemplifies this politics of embodiment. Lakshman's decision to "maim" rather than kill Meenakshi is presented not as mercy but as a more refined form of violence: the disfigured body is made a permanent, visible inscription of patriarchal judgment. After the cutting, Meenakshi looks down and sees "the straggly remains of her ears and her nose" lying at her feet (Kane 185). The grotesque precision of this image refuses the *Ramayana*'s glossing over of the act and compels the reader to inhabit its full

horror. Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" resonates that the mutilated body is the answer that the dominant culture gives to its own question. Though Kane's Meenakshi does continue to speak, even from within her disfigured body, her testimony is the novel's sustained argument that silencing is never complete.

Conclusion

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Kavita Kane's *Lanka's Princess* represent two of the most accomplished recent instances of the feminist counter-narrative texts that mobilise memory, satire, and introspection as instruments of literary and political resistance. Both novels recover the voices of women whom canonical narratives consigned to silence or vilification. They expose the ideological labour those canonical narratives perform: the naturalisation of male authority, the criminalisation of female desire, and the erasure of female subjectivity.

The comparative reading undertaken here reveals both the convergences and the differences in their strategies. Atwood's satire is more formally experimental, more theatrically distanced, more overtly engaged with postmodern genre-play. Kane's is more passionate and intimate, embedded in the specific cultural context of the *Ramayana*'s reception in South Asian culture. Yet both authors share a fundamental commitment: to the proposition that the recovery of memory is an act of justice. Both novels dramatise this proposition through specific textual acts. Penelope's ironic retrospection, Meenakshi's testimonial performance before Ravan, Kubja's reception of a story that has long been told about her without her participation that figure the larger project of feminist counter-narrative.

Kane's structural epilogue is telling: when Krishna reveals that Surpanakha "was cremated with full honour, as the princess of Lanka" (Kane 264), the restitution is belated and ambiguous, honour in death having been denied in life, but it is offered nonetheless. In restoring the epistemic dignity of Penelope, the twelve maids, and Meenakshi/Surpanakha, Atwood and Kane participate in what Rich calls the "re-vision" of culture itself (35), the collective feminist project of imagining a world in which women's experiences are recognised as a primary, rather than supplementary, source of knowledge, value, and meaning.

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DABEER SI/KTT/83**REIMAGINING SITA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VOLGA'S *THE LIBERATION OF SITA* AND AMISH TRIPATHI'S *SITA: WARRIOR OF MITHILA*****KRISHAN KUMAR**Research Scholar, Department of English & Foreign Languages
Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa (Haryana), India**UMED SINGH**Professor, Department of English & Foreign Languages
Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa (Haryana), India**Abstract**

This paper attempts to reinterpret and reimagine the mythological figure of Sita through a comparative study of Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. In many ancient texts, particularly in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita is presented as the ideal of chastity, submission, and endurance, which fits neatly within the patriarchal framework. Her identity is constantly limited to the roles prescribed by male authority and social expectations. The contemporary retellings, such as Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, challenge Sita's image as submissive. The two texts question the restrictive portrayal of Sita and other women characters in their stories. These women characters find their autonomy and self-definition and exercise their agency. This study situates both texts within the feminist literary paradigm and examines how myth is reimagined and reinterpreted in relation to contemporary issues of gender, authority, and representation. The narrative structure of Volga's work is fragmented and dialogic, tracing Sita's journey through her encounters with other marginalized female figures, such as Ahalya, Surpanakha, Renuka, and Urmila. These exchanges generate a collective feminist consciousness that subverts patriarchal moral codes in a society that denies agency to women. These meetings help Sita see the importance of individual identity beyond social appraisal. In each work, the female characters stress liberation through self-realisation and solidarity. On the other hand, Tripathi's narrative presents Sita as a warrior, administrator, and political strategist. Her physical prowess, including her combat skills and martial arts training, makes her a capable political leader of the Mithila. In addition, her ethical leadership makes her an active player in socio-political spheres, where she makes important political and moral decisions for the welfare of her kingdom. Tripathi's Sita maintains mythic continuity but also represents modern feminist ideals. Thus, both texts challenge gender binaries and gender roles in the name of equity and fairness. Hence, the paper attempts to analyse narrative strategies, thematic concerns, and representations of female agency in the above-mentioned texts. It shows how contemporary mythological retellings can renegotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity. Volga's feminist existentialism and Tripathi's socio-political reimagining go hand in hand to extend the interpretive limits of the *Ramayana*, reinterpreting Sita not as a symbol of submission but of

empowerment. The study concludes that both reinterpretations not only regenerate myth for contemporary readers but also contribute significantly to ongoing debates on gender equality, cultural memory, and women's representation in art, literature, culture and polity.

Keywords: Reimagining, Myth, Female Agency, Liberation, etc.

Sita is considered one of the most iconic figures in ancient Indian culture. Though the ancient era appears to be governed by a patriarchal system, the mythological character of Sita may nevertheless be seen as the epitome of grace, virtue, dedication, and feminine endurance. Traditionally, Sita has been depicted as a noble figure defined by loyalty, chastity, and endurance. Simone de Beauvoir argues that patriarchal cultures construct women as the "Other," whose identity is shaped in relation to men. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita often appears within such a framework, where her significance emerges primarily as Rama's wife rather than as an autonomous subject. This perspective on empowerment in these retellings remains debatable, as it raises the question of whether such reinterpretations genuinely challenge patriarchy or merely reconfigure it within modern sociopolitical frameworks. In examining feminist reinterpretations of the character Sita in contemporary literature, both Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* and Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* present distinct yet complementary perspectives that challenge traditional patriarchal narratives. Volga emphasises liberation through self-realisation and the importance of collective female solidarity. In contrast, Tripathi focuses on empowerment achieved via political authority and martial competence. This divergence among authors raises critical questions about the nature of feminist empowerment: is it inherently linked to adopting masculine forms of power, or can it manifest through alternative modes of resistance and self-definition?

In both narratives, Sita's journey is portrayed as both a physical and philosophical odyssey. As she navigates the challenges of residing in a forest while fulfilling domestic responsibilities and nurturing her children, Sita's character evolves beyond her prescribed roles as a wife, mother, and daughter following her separation from Rama. This transformation not only allows her to redefine her identity but also amplifies the voices of Sita and other female characters, granting them agency to challenge and transcend patriarchal interpretations of their identities within the epic framework. In doing so, both texts invite readers to reconsider the complexities of female empowerment amid historical and societal constraints.

The present paper examines the reinterpretation of Sita's character in these two texts and explores how contemporary authors reimagine mythological narratives to address modern concerns. Traditionally, Sita has been depicted as a noble figure defined by her loyalty to her husband, moral rectitude, and endurance in adversity. In classical narratives, especially Valmiki's *Ramayana*, her life is framed by a limited set of events, including her childhood in Mithila, her marriage to Rama, her abduction by Ravana, and her eventual desertion by Rama amid public scrutiny and suspicion of her chastity. These moments often present Sita as a submissive model of feminine virtue. On the other hand, both texts, Volga's *The*

Liberation of Sita and Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, reinterpret the mythological character of Sita with an alternative perspective that empowers Sita to exercise her agency undeterred by patriarchy. The reinterpretation of mythological narratives has become an important area of contemporary literary studies. Scholars of feminist criticism argue that myths are not static cultural artefacts but dynamic narratives that can be re-examined from new ideological perspectives. Simone de Beauvoir makes us believe that representations of women in cultural narratives often reflect patriarchal orthodoxies of gender roles. Revisiting mythological characters such as Sita, therefore, allows modern writers to question these constructions and explore alternative possibilities of female identity and agency. In this context, Sita's traditional portrayal reflects what Beauvoir calls the construction of woman as the 'Other', whereas contemporary retellings attempt to reposition her as a subject.

Volga employs a dialogic and fragmented structure that foregrounds women's subjectivity beyond social prejudice. It also explores subjectivity, liberty, and the compassionate nature of its female characters. Sita's meetings with other women characters transform her personality through a dialogic interface, evolving reflection, and the knowledge they share. Besides, Bakhtin's heteroglossia can be invoked to interpret Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*. It refers to the presence of two or more viewpoints in a text. Readers tend to choose the meaning of the language that best suits their understanding. Both the author and the reader have equal freedom to interpret and analyse a text to create meaning. Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction also posits that a reader constantly works to reconstruct the text's existing meaning, but Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, while giving importance to other voices and views, consistently maintains the text's central idea or meaning without any twist. This multiplicity of voices in Volga's narrative challenges the singular, authoritative voice found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Although Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia illuminate Volga's multiple female voices, the text simultaneously raises questions about the accessibility of such liberation. The transformative conversations occur largely outside the structures of society, suggesting that liberation is achieved through withdrawal rather than institutional change. Consequently, the narrative privileges individual consciousness over collective social transformation.

In contrast, Tripathi's narrative is extensive, linear, and larger-than-life. It situates Sita within political and combat contexts where she takes informed decisions while performing her duties. She also maintains control to protect not only her kingdom but also her individuality. While Volga's approach is interior and ethical, Tripathi's is operational and socio-political. In *The Liberation of Sita*, agency is personal, internalised, and thoughtful. Sita achieves her liberation through self-understanding guided by her solidarity with other women and her questioning of male-controlled descriptions. Agency here is determined through self-definition and shared authorisation.

The Liberation of Sita by Volga comprises four interlinked short stories rather than a single linear narrative, as in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The traditional epic glorifies Rama's fighting prowess, sacrifices, and dharma, and it does not provide a specific space for its female characters, their virtues, and choices. Mrinal Pande, the

journalist of *The Sunday Tribune*, writes, “Valmiki is a fair narrator. His version of *Ramayana* admires Ram and understands his compulsions but does not black out the dark bits after his crowning.” But Volga focuses on Sita’s interior journey after the fire trial that proves her chastity. The text may be seen through Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia. Polyphony is a literary technique in which various independent, distinct, and fully valid voices co-exist within a text, interacting with one another rather than being controlled by a single authorial voice. In the narrative, Sita encounters several women from the wider mythic universe, including Ahalya, Surpanakha, Renuka Devi, and Urmila. Through these encounters, Volga challenges conventional narratives, as each character represents a different perspective on female experience. These interactions provide a voice to Sita and raise questions of identity, autonomy, suffering, and societal judgment. In this context, Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism is particularly relevant, suggesting that meaning in literature emerges from the interaction of multiple voices rather than from a single authoritative perspective. However, this collective feminist framework also problematizes the notion that liberation is attainable solely outside societal structures, thus limiting its practical applicability.

In Volga’s narrative, these mythical female characters resist patriarchal classifications of value and the norms imposed by male society. After her abandonment, Sita lives in the forest with her children, Luva and Khusa. One day, Sita recalls Rama and his brother Lakshmana’s mutilation of Surpanakha. Immediately after this, she decides to visit Surpanakha’s beautiful garden. Sita thinks of Surpanakha as “No man will ever love her?” (6). Further, she finds her importance equal to Surpanakha in Rama’s life: “The man who loved me abandoned me” (6). Later, she questions herself, thinking, “Have the two stories become one and the same, finally?” (6). This shows the male dominance of that era, where a woman has no choice or freedom to exercise her agency. Surpanakha, the sister of the demon king Ravana, is often represented as a villain in traditional narratives, especially in Valmiki’s *Ramayana*. However, in her narrative, Volga recasts Surpanakha as a woman endowed with agency, resilience, and morality beyond patriarchy. After her mutilation, she symbolically reconstructs her identity through creation, which challenges readers’ assessment of her agency. This reconfiguration challenges the binary of virtuous versus immoral women, exposing how patriarchal narratives construct female identity through moral labelling. Volga’s rehabilitation of Surpanakha in her novel intricately complicates the conventional binary of victimhood versus empowerment. The narrative goes beyond simply reversing traditional portrayals, encouraging readers to acknowledge how patriarchal narratives are selectively crafted to align with male interests, thereby constructing notions of virtue and transgression. As a result, Surpanakha emerges not just as a redeemed antagonist, but rather as a critical commentary on patriarchal historiography itself.

Ahalya, the wife of sage Gautama, is molested by Lord Indra. The sage curses both Indra and Ahalya, the latter turned into a rock. Ahalya cannot recognise Indra, as he has disguised himself as Gautama. Sita meets Ahalya in the jungle, and through their conversations, Sita comes to understand how societal judgments

shape women's lives and reputations for an act Ahalya never committed. During the conversation, Sita tells Ahalya about the day when Sita had to jump onto the pyre to prove her chastity. On this, Ahalya says, "What does conducting an inquiry mean, Sita? Distrust, isn't it? Wouldn't it be better, instead, to believe in either your innocence or guilt? All men are the same, Sita" (31). Urmila's assertion reflects a radical feminist standpoint that true liberation lies not in social recognition but in self-definition beyond relational identities. These words of Ahalya strike deeply in Sita's mind. The meeting with Ahalya empowers Sita as she begins to see herself as an independent being in this world. These narratives reveal how patriarchal systems operate through suspicion and control over female sexuality, rather than through moral justice. Ahalya's experience reveals the inherent structural injustice within patriarchal morality, highlighting how women are held responsible for the actions of men, irrespective of consent or coercion. This narrative not only illustrates individual suffering but also emphasises the broader theme of systemic oppression, thereby expanding the feminist perspective within Volga's storytelling.

Sita encounters Renuka, the wife of sage Jamadagni and the mother of Parasurama. Renuka tells Sita that a woman's conjugal fidelity is as delicate as a sand pot, which may shatter at any time. Her husband believes that his wife has violated *pativratyam* or fidelity merely by looking at a passing man. The matter in question is not about fidelity or infidelity; rather, it is about whether the patriarch is rational. Is Renuka's act so grave that her husband ordered his son Parasurama to behead his own mother? These words from Renuka echo in Sita's ears, and she begins comparing her situation to that of Ahalya. Sita has also raised both her sons with great care, affection, and discipline. She feels helpless while thinking that one day she will have to give away her sons to their father, Rama, following the dominance of a male-centred society. Ahalya's words also echo in Sita's ears when Ahalya says: "A situation where children ask their mother who their father is, or where a husband asks his wife who fathered her children, comes only in the lives of some women, Sita. Think of the predicament of those women, and you'll understand my words" (55).

A defining moment in the text occurs when Urmila talks about the importance of self-identity beyond social norms. Sita takes pride in being Rama's wife as she considers Rama a complete man, embodying all virtues. Urmila warns Sita against her complete dependence on Rama. She also challenges Sita to liberate herself not only from her husband but also from patriarchy, which defines a woman's role in society. Further, Urmila tells Sita that it was difficult for her to digest that her husband, Lakshmana, had decided to accompany his brother, Rama, into exile without thinking at all about his duties as a husband. But later, in solitude, she realises that dependence on others brings hatred, jealousy, and unhappiness. She empowers Sita while saying, "Assume authority. Give up power. Then you'll belong to yourself. Then you'll be yourself. We should remain ourselves" (79). "Each of those trials is meant to liberate you from Rama. To secure you for yourself, fight, meditate; look within until you find the truth that is you" (81). This radical claim enforces the idea that true emancipation requires detachment from male sanction. It represents a powerful feminist reimagining of mythic legacy. The

liberation does not mean only the spiritual or philosophical aspects of life, but it is an assertion of her selfhood beyond patriarchal validation. Urmila's philosophy of liberation presents a significant perspective, emphasizing that freedom is primarily an internal achievement for individuals. However, this view is not without its drawbacks. It overlooks the material and institutional inequalities that persistently affect women's lives. As a result, the novel prioritizes ethical autonomy—personal moral freedom—over the essential need for structural reform in society. This tension highlights the limitations of a purely internalized conception of liberation, suggesting a need for a more nuanced understanding that also addresses external inequalities.

Volga's narrative provides critical perspectives on its characters, which help the reader understand the exploration of female subjectivity. She does not represent all female experiences in a single frame of devotion or victimhood. The text features a multilayered conversation space among its female characters, where they share their lived experiences and challenges within a patriarchal society. Through these meetings with other female characters, Sita externalises her trauma, redefines her identity, and finds peace. The narrative seems collective rather than individual, emphasising feminism and respecting intersubjective female solidarity. Volga uses natural imagery to show Sita's innate connection with the earth and the forest. Her conversation with the environment symbolises her rootedness, resilience, grit, and determination. While the text promotes the notion of female solidarity, it tends to overlook the complexities and conflicts that emerge from class, caste, and social hierarchies among women. This oversight results in a feminist perspective that is more universal than intersectional, failing to adequately address the diverse experiences and challenges women from various backgrounds face.

Sita has been a royal daughter in her parents' kingdom and, after her marriage to Rama, a queen of Ayodhya. But she always finds herself lost in a world that keeps judging her. Moreover, her conscience compels her to reflect, which helps her liberate herself from the imposed subservience found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Kate Millett, in his book *Sexual Politics*, views patriarchy as a political institution that controls female bodies and behaviour that may be seen through Sita's fire ordeal and abandonment, and can be interpreted through this framework. Reimagining subverts the stereotype of the virtuous and the conventional image of Sita as a docile character, as shown in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. In Volga's story, she is portrayed as a multifaceted figure who embodies resilience, self-awareness, and inter-female solidarity in the face of patriarchal ideological assumptions. Thus, Volga's narrative shows a comprehensive feminist approach that underlines the difference between women's stories from patriarchal mythologies and foregrounds women's voices as fundamental rather than marginal.

Sita: Warrior of Mithila by Amish Tripathi reimagines the mythological character of Sita in ways that depart from existing historical and mythical frameworks. Unlike Volga, he does not present an introspective and fragmented narrative. Instead, his novel is an extended epic that merges mythology, political strategy, and martial prowess. The story begins with Sita's origin as a foundling saved by a vulture in the jungle. Later, she is raised in Mithila by King Janaka and his wife

Sunaina as their daughter. Her early life shows that she possesses innate independence and ability from birth. Her competence as a warrior and strategist is honed under her mother's guidance. In her childhood, she was sent for training in combat and leadership. Through this portrayal, Tripathi explicitly breaks conventional representations of Sita as a passive figure. In multiple interviews and statements, he explains that his motive has been to show the mental and physical strength of his favorite character. In his narrative, Sita's intelligence and leadership qualities present her as an independent person within her world rather than merely a dutiful daughter, wife, or single mother who nurtures her children during exile. This portrayal invites debate on whether physical empowerment alone is sufficient to dismantle patriarchal structures or whether it subtly aligns with masculine models of power.

In Tripathi's narrative, Sita is portrayed as a deeply political figure. She establishes diplomatic relations with the tribals to protect her kingdom from Ravana and his army. She actively participates in philosophical and political debates. Sita possesses communication skills that are the most powerful weapon of a successful warrior. In the book, the most fascinating conversation takes place between Rama's younger brother, Bharata, and Sita about the masculine and feminine principles of society. Rama cannot convince his brother, but Sita does it easily. Then Bharata says to Sita, "I have argued with my brother all my life about his faith in the masculine way. I thought that the masculine way will inevitably lead to fanaticism and violence. But you have opened my mind in just one conversation" (279-280). It shows that Sita's argumentative skills help her cultivate personal relationships, understand others, and be understood. Besides, she also makes effective political and economic strategies for the welfare of Mithila. In this framework, she appears not merely as a warrior in physical combat but also as a leader whose decisions shape the fate of the entire kingdom. Thus, Tripathi's narrative may be seen as blending feminist assertion with nationalist ideology, where female agency serves a broader socio-political framework.

Another aspect of her personality is reflected through her environmental knowledge. She has had a deep connection with nature since her childhood. She has the ability to communicate with nature. She uses various herbs that help heal the wounds of injured soldiers in her kingdom. Besides, her ability to wield weapons shows her strategic mind and combat skills. Significantly, her portrayal aligns with modern feminist ideals while remaining firmly rooted in the epic's mythic tradition. Sita embodies both strength and moral complexity as she seems compassionate, principled, and intellectually arduous. She asserts her voice in matters of justice and governance by rejecting the royal authority symbolised by her uncle's seal, which represents dominance over her kingdom. Thus, Sita navigates a world shaped by power struggles and societal constraints, emerging stronger than ever before. Tripathi diverges from the ecological symbolism associated with the Volga, emphasising the pragmatic application of environmental knowledge in the context of political leadership. In this framework, nature is perceived not primarily as a medium for spiritual liberation, as in Volga's narrative, but rather as an essential resource for governance and social welfare.

This perspective highlights the intertwining of ecological awareness with the responsibilities of leadership and the promotion of societal well-being.

Sita adopts a practical approach and takes ethically right actions. She never encourages sycophancy or takes credit for something she has not done. Once she goes on a hunting expedition with her assistant, Samichi. She kills a tiger with average skill on display. Samichi praises Sita publicly, even though everyone present knows it is only an average kill. On this, Sita calls Samichi and says, “You believe you did me a service. No, Samichi, you did not. I lost respect among those men by receiving an undeserved compliment. Don’t let your loyalty to me blind you. That is the worst thing you can do to me” (190).

Tripathi’s narrative does not focus solely on Sita but also focuses on women warriors and leaders from Mithila. Like Volga’s narrative, he also provides a representational space for other female characters such as Sunaina, Samichi, Radhika, and Urmila. Similarly, the text goes beyond a single figure and challenges traditional gender binaries. Tripathi’s Sita is not merely a personal heroine confined to individual struggle or emotional endurance. She emerges as a powerful symbol in a broader socio-cultural context. She carries out her responsibilities with genuine dedication throughout the different stages of her life as a daughter and leader in Mithila, a wife in Ayodhya, and a mother in the forest during exile. These roles reflect Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity, as Sita is continually required to embody the ideal wife and queen. The narrative represents womanhood as intellectually independent, ethically conclusive, and diplomatically persuasive through Sita and other female characters of the text. Sita embodies a shift from passive idealisation to active agency as she makes her decision independently. She becomes an epitome of moral values, compassion, leadership, bravery, and accountability, irrespective of gender, in a society. Thus, Tripathi’s portrayal of Sita, engages her with larger cultural debates on power, identity, and gender roles. This positions her as an emblem of collective transformation rather than a solitary heroic figure. Butler’s theory provides a complex framework for analyzing Tripathi’s Sita, suggesting that Sita’s repeated enactment of her roles as queen, warrior, and wife serves a dual purpose. On one hand, these performances challenge established patriarchal norms by subverting traditional gender expectations; on the other hand, they also tend to reinforce idealized portrayals of womanhood. As a result, the narrative presents a dynamic interplay between the subversion of gender roles and the perpetuation of certain archetypal models of femininity, leading to a balance that critiques and reaffirms societal expectations of women.

In the modern context, Tripathi’s work might advocate a feminist nationalism in which a woman’s physical, moral, and political skills contribute to the formation of nationhood and ethical responsibility. In this reimagining, heroism is no longer restricted to patriarchal ideals of subjugation or self-sacrificial devotion but instead incorporates values of impartiality, equality, and strategic foresight articulated from a distinctly female perspective. It allows the mythic figure of Sita, whose voice resonates with contemporary debates about women’s roles in public and political spheres.

Conclusion

Both contemporary retellings, *The Liberation of Sita* by Volga and *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* by Amish Tripathi, reconstruct Sita's character from a fresh perspective. While rooted in the shared cultural memory of the *Ramayana* attributed to Valmiki, both narratives move away from the traditional epic by decentralising male authority and foregrounding female agency and independence. Adrienne Rich defines revision as “seeing with fresh eyes.” Through this process of literary re-vision, both Volga and Tripathi revisit Sita. Their retellings, through feminist and cultural reinterpretations, negotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity and present a renewed understanding of female subjectivity.

Volga's narrative highlights a dialogic feminist journey of self-realisation through Sita's interactions with other women, while Tripathi reimagines Sita as a warrior, administrator, and leader, entrusting the responsibility of governing the state. This comparison demonstrates how contemporary mythological fiction resonates with modern readers. In Tripathi's narrative, Sita's agency appears in both internal reflection and external action. She functions as a strategic leader whose decisions influence social and political structures. Although both texts share feminist concerns, they differ in emphasis. Volga focuses on emotional introspection and the reconstruction of female identity beyond patriarchal norms, whereas Tripathi situates Sita within broader frameworks of leadership and governance. Volga's approach appears more subversive in dismantling patriarchal consciousness, whereas Tripathi's model risks reinforcing hierarchical structures through institutional power.

Both narratives present Sita as a transformative figure defying restrictive stereotypes, embodying strength, self-awareness, and empowerment. These reinterpretations deepen contemporary mythological fiction, mirroring evolving cultural values and providing new frameworks for women's agency. This demonstrates that mythological retellings serve as ideological arenas for the continuous negotiation of gender, power, and cultural identity. Both texts assert that myth is not static heritage but an ideological battleground, responsive to social changes. Volga emphasizes feminist consciousness through shared female experiences, while Tripathi explores empowerment via leadership and political agency. Neither approach offers a definitive feminist solution; instead, they highlight the complexities of navigating gender, tradition, and authority within modern Indian literary discussions. Their significance extends beyond empowering Sita, facilitating a critical dialogue about women's roles in history, culture, and nationhood.

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DABEER SI/KTT/84**DO TREES SPEAK? A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF
ECOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN “TEJIMOLA” AND
MANY MORE FROM *BURHI AAIR XADHU (GRANDMOTHER’S
TALES)*****ARUNIMA DAS**Associate Professor, Department of English
Gargi College, University of Delhi, Siri Fort Road New Delhi, India**Abstract**

Burhi Aair Xadhu (Grandmother's Tales) is a pioneering folktale collection in the Assamese language that marks the beginning of literary folktale tradition in Assam that offers a window into the community's deep-rooted traditional ecological knowledge and social practices. “Tejimola” is one of the prominent folktales from this collection that talks about the regional flora and fauna, derived from the biodiversity of Assam. In this paper, attempts will be made to explore the ecological perspectives embedded in this tale, shedding light on the relationship between the Assamese people and their natural surroundings. Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) bridges linguistics and literature. This study will analyse how language in the aforementioned folktales encodes ecological consciousness, power structures, and indigenous epistemologies especially within the context of colonial disruption and postcolonial resistance. Drawing on the framework of Norman Fairclough’s CDA will further aid the study of how “Tejimola” in *Burhi Aair Xadhu* “is not just a repository of Assamese folklore, but a site of ecological resistance. This research will also study how language in folktales functions as a tool for preserving traditional environmental knowledge, age-old beliefs centred on non-human agency, and can be considered as a site of power, ideology, and identity where social relations are constructed and negotiated.

Keywords: Assamese folktales, *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, Critical Discourse Analysis, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Environmental Humanities

Introduction

Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the *Sahityarathi* (Charioteer of Literature) of Assam compiled *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (1911) into a book, which contains stories from various oral storytellers across Assam to preserve the rich, fading heritage of local folklore in the state. These stories combine magical, fantastical elements with practical life lessons and examples of moral ethics. Having crossed its centenary long ago, this timeless masterpiece has since been popularised and is now available in public domains under Indian copyright laws. This anthology contains several iconic tales featuring talking animals, clever peasants, cruel stepmothers, and magical transformations. Some of the most notable stories include: “Tejimola”, a tragic yet beautiful tale of a young girl tortured by her cruel stepmother who transforms into various plants and flowers to return to life to tell her father the truth of her experience; “Ow Kuwori” is another unique tale about

a queen who gives birth to an elephant apple (*Outenga*) where a beautiful princess is hidden inside; “Bandor aru Hiya”, a humorous, witty fable, highlights the interaction and clever tricks between a monkey and a fox; “Mekurir Jiyekor Xadhu” an engaging story of a cat's daughter that explores elements of local culture and familial ties; “Tula aru Teja” is another classic that can be taken as a Cinderella-esque Assamese folk tale centred around two stepsisters, etc. The numerous modern adaptations of these tales are evidence that the cultural impact of these tales extend far into contemporary modern media and cinema. The critically acclaimed Assamese film *Kothanodi* (2015) is directly based on four major stories from this anthology. Interactive digital applications on this anthology also exist, like the *Burhi Aair Xadhu* app which is available on Google Play, allowing parents today to read and share these stories to their children. Other digitally animated versions of this anthology are available on numerous YouTube channels, being regularly adapted for kids. In this manner, *Burhi Aair Xadhu* “directly confronts” past colonial policies around its publication and “functions as a counter-discursive act of eco-nationalism”, which attributes a specific political intention but that which may be difficult to prove.

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) framework, when applied to the production of *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (1911), reveals the anthology to be more than a compilation of folktales from Assam. In fact, it can be understood as a cultural mediation within the socio-political context of colonial Assam. Against this backdrop, in the early twentieth century, colonial administrative policies, including the implementation of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation and the expansion of tea plantations, increasingly reconfigured forests and agricultural landscapes as economic resources to be surveyed, taxed, and exploited. *Burhi Aair Xadhu* stood as a collection that preserves oral narratives that portray forests, rivers, animals, and plants as living members of the ecosystem in a shared ecological and cultural world, rather than as objects of economic withdrawal. This study looks at the stories from the point of view of indigenous ecological worldviews, which may be interpreted as a counter-discursive response to colonial modes of knowledge production. By these Assamese stories like “Tejimola”, we find that these stories are more than fairy tale – they are a discourse that preserves a linguistic and an ecological worldview where the soil, flora, and human flesh are integrated, by showing a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature.

Eco-criticism and the Metaphorical Non-Human: A Literature Review

Across the world, literary studies have moved from anthropocentric readings which place humans at the centre to a more eco-centric reading which places nature at the centre where this shift is built on important foundational texts. Writers such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), and Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), laid the theoretical basis for studying how literature presents human-nature relationships. In his book, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2010), Patrick D. Murphy argues for studying local and regional

narratives to understand how eco-literatures, across cultures, represent the agency of the non-human world.

When global folklorists study South Asian texts, they often focus on how oral storytellers challenge the strict divide between nature and culture. A major international contribution comes from A. K. Ramanujan's important collection *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages* (1991), which includes several Assamese tales such as "The Kite's Daughter" and versions of "Teja and Teji," and drew global academic attention to Assamese narrative forms. Scholars who have utilised Ramanujan's work examine anthropomorphism and note that in these tales, trees, birds, and rivers are not passive background elements (Narayan 2008). Instead, they exercise their own individual and independent voices, possess legal agency and emotional depth, reflecting what international eco-critics called "trans-corporeality", i.e. the constant relational exchange between human bodies and the physical environment. At the national level, Indian folklore studies have moved from purely aesthetic or structural classifications to political and ecological readings. The well-known folklorist, Praphulladatta Goswami, in his foundational works *Ballads and Tales of Assam* (1960) and *Folk-Literature of Assam* (1965), marked the beginning of the systematic recording of regional folklore. Although Goswami classified Assamese folktales into animals, tricksters, and supernatural categories, his work created the foundation from which later scholars began to read these stories as a source of indigenous ecological knowledge and informal environmental education. The current Indian scholarship scene has brought together an inter-contextual reading of Assamese folktales by utilising postcolonial theory and environmental humanities. Other current national studies also analyse *Burhi Air Xadhu* as a landscape text, especially through ecofeminist and ecocritical approaches. Studies of tales such as "Tejimola" argue that the heroine's suffering cannot be separated from ecological decline, and therefore present these narratives as stories of eco-justice in which violence against women is linked to violence against nature (Das, n.d. 41-50; Moran & Handique 88-101). In Assam, regional scholarship has increasingly examined the ecological knowledge embedded in Bezbaroa's folktale collection. Researchers argue that *Burhi Air Xadhu* works as an archive of indigenous ecological knowledge because it records native plants such as Outenga (*Dillenia indica*), Tulashi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) and Bamboo (*Banh*), thereby preserving knowledge of local biodiversity and traditional medicinal practices (B. K. B. College Research Cell, n.d.). Regional scholars also highlight the eco-pedagogical value of these narratives. A recent study by M. Devi and J. Nath (2025) argues that *Burhi Air Xadhu* is an important resource for ecological learning in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Devi and Nath 45-59). Their reading of "Mekurir Jiyekor Xadhu" depicts how disruption in the relationship between humans and non-human beings leads to social disorder, thereby encouraging environmental responsibility and sustainable living. While traditional eco-criticism examines what literary texts communicate about nature, CDA extends this inquiry by examining how language itself constructs relations of power, ideology, and environmental justice, by considering a text as a discourse. Norman Fairclough's

three-dimensional framework conceptualises discourse at the textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels, enabling scholars to investigate how ecological meanings are embedded within broader socio-political structures (Fairclough, 1995). When applied to *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, this framework facilitates an exploration of how Bezbaroa's language preserves indigenous ecological epistemologies, while implicitly resisting colonial ideologies that commodified forests and natural resources.

Although direct applications of Fairclough's CDA to *Burhi Aair Xadhu* are still only in their early stages, related work in the international eco-linguistic field offers a useful framework. This is because Fairclough's model is mentioned in *Language and Power* (1998) and *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2013) has been widely used to study the relationship between language, ideology and power. In international research, ecocritical discourse analysis has examined patterns of salience, where nature is put in the foreground and nature is made passive and invisible in the face of erasure (Stibbe 146, 188). These methods show how discourse shapes human-nature relations and can be effectively applied to *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, where a CDA perspective reveals how the collection preserves indigenous ecological knowledge, while quietly opposing colonial ideologies that treated forests and landscapes as commodities.

Furthermore, at the micro-textual level, an analysis of syntax and vocabulary shows how Bezbaroa uses rhyme and shifting dialogue to give non-human beings a sense of subjectivity. For example, in "Tejimola", the protagonist's poetic expressions ("Hato nemeliba ...") function to restore her erased presence, and force other human characters to recognise her life within her different plant bodies. At the meso-discursive level, Bezbaroa compiled these stories during the height of British colonial rule, when the colonial administration enforced forest laws and employed extractive capitalism through tea plantations and timber logging; both of which commodified Assam's forests mentioned in Bezbaroa's collection *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (1911). In discursive terms, publishing these tales becomes a counter-narrative that presented an indigenous worldview in which nature is a shared, sacred home, rather than a source of state revenue. At the macro-social level, scholars have used discourse analysis to examine social power, gender inequality, and the silencing of marginal voices in tales like "Mekurir Jiyekor Xadhu" (Moran and Handique 88-101). A combined eco-CDA reading reveals how those characters who misuse power, such as cruel stepmothers, often express dominance by destroying natural resources. This strengthens the idea that social oppression and environmental destruction grow from the same system of power.

Research Gap

This literature review demonstrates how, while international and national scholarship successfully applies eco-critical frameworks to Indian folk literature, a comprehensive linguistic critique of Assamese oral literature remains largely unexplored. Existing research broadly acknowledges that the environmental ethics within *Burhi Aair Xadhu* and how analysing these tales using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, bridges a critical gap, signifying exactly how language serves as an ideological tool to preserve ecological consciousness against colonial and capitalist exploitation.

Aims

This study is an attempt to see how language preserves the cultural and ecological heritage of Assam. By incorporating description, interpretation, and explanation from Fairclough's (1995) model of CDA, this paper systematically traces linguistic structures to cultural realities embedded in the folktales of Assam, integrating the critical lens of Eco-criticism with the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). By studying popular folktale "Tejimola" this study maps the ecological dimensions of Assamese folktales as well as an anthropocentric (human-centred) to an eco-centric (nature-centred) reading of literature.

Methodology

This paper is based on primary and secondary resources. Being a native of Assam, this has been heard from time immemorial. There are several collections of *Burhi Aair Xadhu* which have been translated into English. This study refers to the collection "Grandmother's Tales" translated to English by Jnyanandabhiram Barooah and Dilip Kumar Kalita (2023) which was originally compiled in Assamese by Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa in 1911. To discover the cultural ecology of the text of "Tejimola", a very popular folktale from the same compilation, has been selected. This study adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a framework established by Norman Fairclough to conduct further analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to text and communication that investigates how language is used to exercise, maintain, and reproduce power and ideology. Fairclough's framework of CDA looks at language neither as neutral nor static, but also as a form of social practice. Therefore, a dialectical association occurs between discourse and social structures. As a result, language simultaneously shapes and is shaped by society. CDA aimed to study texts investigating power relations to explore more about how strength, inequality, and social power are enacted in both the written and spoken contexts. M.A.K. Halliday, in his book, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (1978) introduces a different perspective in which he suggests that language functions as a social semiotic, and that social circumstances systematically influence linguistic form (Halliday 142). He emphasises that each cultural group has a distinct discourse rooted in its cultural context, serving as a marker of its unique identity. Hence, people may exhibit diverse identities based on their distinct discursive practices. In terms of social power, Teun van Dijk in his book, *Discourse, Racism and Ideology* (1996) states that the nature of discourse is shaped by the social influence wielded by a dominant group over the thoughts and actions of another group. This power, thus, limits the freedom of the subordinate group, impacting their beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, and expressions.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (1995) on CDA establishes a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceiving and analysing discourse. It systematically relates text elements to the context in which those texts are created and consumed, and to broader social processes within the relevant society. This framework is often illustrated in a model of three dimensions, usually represented

in boxes, where each box represents an analysis dimension, as proposed by Fairclough (1995). These three dimensions are: (i) The text analysis/description (Micro Level) comprising vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, syntax (including verbal, visual, or verbal and visual texts), (ii) Processing analysis, i.e. discursive practice/interpretation (Meso Level) comprising production, distribution, intertextuality (including the process by means of which the object is produced and received, such as writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing by human subjects, which refers to text production and text consumption and (iii) Social Analysis, i.e. the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes, i.e. Social Practice / Explanation (Macro Level), including ideology, power structures, institutional hegemony.

Findings: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of “Tejimola”

Through the application of folklore and oral histories, CDA functions as a dialectical mechanism, where systematic deconstruction happens, and ancient socio-environmental values get institutionalised, passed down, and kept alive through structured systems, such as storytelling, one of the examples of which is folktale. This CDA framework established by Norman Fairclough (1995) is an interdisciplinary approach that investigates how language is used to exercise, maintain, and reproduce power, culture, and ideology by treating language as a form of social practice. In iconic tales like “Tejimola”, one can see the shifting of biological practices through the murder of a young girl who transforms into a gourd plant, then a lotus flower in her second murder, which does not merely represent a magical motif but linguistically and ideologically bridges the gap between human suffering and vegetative life. In another study by R. Devi and P. Sharma in 2024, we find this fluid boundary undermines the capitalist-colonial drive toward environmental exploitation and how such folklore give voice to the plant kingdom, re-establishes nature as an active moral evaluator, while also critiquing the structural violence of greed, establishing nature as an active moral evaluator (Devi and Sharma 89-104).

Furthermore, Arupjyoti Saikia (2022) in his article points out that the domestic sphere of oral storytelling (*Burhi Aai* translated as “the grandmother”) serves as a counter-hegemonic space (Saikia 211–226). While the colonial administration of the early 20th century viewed the forests of Assam as timber and tea commodities for economic gain, the dissemination of *Burhi Aair Xadhu* preserved a traditional, non-anthropocentric worldview. The language of these tales relies heavily on cultural taboos and spiritual requirements, elevating conservation into non-negotiable community values that resist human-centred development.

Applying Norman Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model to “Tejimola” reveals how these stories function as ideological texts, and talks about the power of nature and human dominance over nature while still addressing the historical gender repression within Assamese society since colonial times.

Text (Micro-Level Analysis: Description)

The first dimension focuses strictly on the linguistic features and formal properties of the stories. In folktales such as “Tejimola”, this level analyses specific choices in language that establish relationship rules between humans and the natural environment. Lexical items of animism can be identified, where regional folktales

rely heavily on the type of vocabulary that assigns human traits to animals and plants, establishing an explicitly regional ecosystem (Borah, 2023). The crux of “Tejimola” lies in the protagonist’s linguistic survival. As she is repeatedly murdered and buried, she morphs into a Lao (gourd) plant, a citrus tree (*joratenga*) and a lotus flower (padum). At each stage, she verbally defends her space against human encroachment (Table 1).

Grammatical Agency and Transitivity Shifts

In “Tejimola”, when the cruel stepmother physically abuses the young girl, the narrative uses vocabulary that stresses human violence (*morai*, meaning “beaten”, or *potat pahi*, meaning “crushed under a grinding stone”). However, when “Tejimola” dies, the linguistic agency changes. The text moves away from human control. Active verbs are assigned directly to the plant kingdom: the ground “sprouts” (*gajili*), the plant “blooms” (*phulili*), and the leaves “speak” (*paathore kotha kole*).

Lexical Fields of Vulnerability VS Natural Safety

Both stories build two opposing vocabulary groups. Words tied to the human home are linked to danger, jealousy (*khong*), and secret violence (*gupone*). Conversely, words tied to the natural world like the riverbanks, garden edges (*barii*), and wild roadside patches are linked to safety, voice, and visual beauty.

Table 1: Micro-Level Linguistic Analysis of Ecological Discourse in *Burhi Air Xadhu*

Linguistic Category	Representative Textual Evidence	Discursive Function (Micro Level)	Ecological Significance
Negative Imperatives	"Do not cut", "Do not pluck"	Uses excessive commands through the non-human to regulate human behaviour toward nature.	Constructs nature as an autonomous entity with moral authority, thereby restraining human exploitation.
Identity Assertion (Emphatic Particle)	"I am Tejimola"	Employs emphatic self-identification to preserve human identity despite botanical transformation.	Challenges the human–nature binary by portraying plants as living bearers of memory, identity, and consciousness.
Verbal Reduplication	"Do not pluck", "Do not Cut"	Conveys continuous and self-directed movement through reduplicated verbal expression.	Attributes agency and vitality to non-human life, presenting plants as active participants rather than passive objects.

Linguistic Category	Representative Textual Evidence	Discursive Function (Micro Level)	Ecological Significance
Behavioural Verbs	("Wanders behind humans")	Assigns animate behavioural actions to a non-human entity, creating relational proximity between humans and nature.	Reinforces ecological interdependence and the coexistence of human and non-human communities.

Discursive Practice (Meso Level: Interpretation)

This layer looks at how these stories use older narrative traditions to alter how readers interpret human and non-human relationships. In “Tejimola”, the stepmother tries to silence the girl by killing and burying her. However, the discourse uses transformation as a way for the victim to speak. In this manner, Tejimola draws upon the natural environment to regain her voice. As a gourd plant (*lau-gaj*), a pomelo tree (*rabab /jora tenga*), and a lotus flower (*podum phul*), Tejimola utilises rhymes to sing out her story to passing weavers and boatmen. Thus, nature becomes a protective amplifier, preventing human cruelty from remaining hidden.

Social Practice (Macro Level: Explanation)

This level of social practice connects the stories to the broader social structures, patriarchal challenges, and environmental ethics of Assam. The tale, “Tejimola” shows the historical vulnerability of young women in domestic spaces in Assam. Thus, an eco-feminist resistance to domestic hegemony is found in the context of this story. We observe that the character of Tejimola receives no protection from her father, who is mostly away on business, even though the tale portrays that women cannot protect themselves. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis lens, these tales make room to emerge from an ecofeminist perspective to challenge patriarchal neglect. When human family structures fail these women, the Assamese natural landscape steps in as a haven. The stories show that human society can be corrupt, but that the natural ecosystem preserves a semblance of justice.

Thus, in a CDA’s Micro Level analysis of “Tejimola”, we are able to observe textual descriptions including ecological metaphors, representations of humans and non-humans, moral vocabulary, and symbolic narrative structures in select folktales. However, at

Discursive Interpretation at the Meso Level, we can see how Assamese oral traditions preserve print preservations of these tales like that of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, thus creating the emergence of intertextual cultural practices that facilitate the transmission of Indigenous ecological knowledge. And finally, at the Macro Level, social explanation studies how the folktales articulate ecological ethics, reinforce indigenous knowledge and resist anthropocentric, colonial, and capitalist worldviews.

Narratives of Memory, Gender and Ecology in Postcolonial Literature

During the era when these stories were written down and printed, colonial industries were rapidly clearing the forests of the Brahmaputra Valley for tea gardens and timber production. By upholding the story of a girl who turns into trees, and a princess who lives inside a wild fruit, “Tejimola” and “Ou Kuwori” pushed back against this damaging view. Thus, they reminded communities of an indigenous worldview by cutting down a plant or destroying a fruit is not just resource consumption, but also an act of violence.

Contemporary eco-critical scholarship sees how indigenous communities and oral histories can find sustainable alternatives to anthropocentric worldviews. Northeast India being a global biodiversity hotspot, their oral literature serves as cultural entertainment as well as a vital mechanism for environmental preservation and ethical resource management. In “Tejimola”, we see eco-cosmology as a main moral judge. Tejimola’s justice is not delivered by village courts or community discourse but executed through a series of plant transformations. This kaleidoscopic form shows that nature is an active, moral space that preserves truth when human society tries to bury it. Thus, by placing the plot around these environmental transformations, the text raises nature into a primary legal and moral actor. The tale’s recurring motifs of earth, plants, water, birds, death, transformation, and regeneration can therefore be understood as components of a vernacular ecological knowledge system. The natural environment, in other words, is not a backdrop against which human events occur; it is an active participant in the production and transmission of knowledge to lead human life. This story finally can lead to five areas of IKS which is primarily knowledge about nature, society, self, livelihood and sustainability (Table 2).

Table 2 Mapping to the Five Pillars of Indian Knowledge Systems

IKS Pillar	Example from <i>Burhi Aair Xadhu</i>
1. Knowledge of Nature (<i>Prakriti Jnana</i>)	Vegetation, woods, rivers, animals, birds possess life and agency.
2. Knowledge of Society (<i>Samaja Jnana</i>)	Public justice, relationship, and ethical responsibilities.
3. Knowledge of Self (<i>Atma Jnana</i>)	Moral conversion through sorrow and compassion.
4. Knowledge of Livelihood (<i>Jeevika Jnana</i>)	Agriculture, weaving, bamboo craft, food gathering.
5. Knowledge of Sustainability (<i>Jeevana Jnana</i>)	Living in harmony with ecological cycles.

Through oral narration, knowledge is not simply preserved unchanged; it is remembered, interpreted, negotiated, adapted, and transmitted. The grandmother’s storytelling becomes a mode of intergenerational knowledge production. “Tejimola”, therefore, does not merely preserve a story from the past; each retelling renews the ecological, ethical, social, and cultural knowledge embedded within it.

Conclusion

The oral tradition itself is a living archive. Reading through the framework of CDA and Indian Knowledge Systems, “Tejimola” emerges as a living archive of ecological knowledge, one in which knowledge is not merely stored but continually regenerated through storytelling. Therefore, this study can advance the proposition. “Tejimola” does not merely teach ecological harmony; it performs an ecological epistemology. The tale demonstrates how folk narratives can actively generate, negotiate, preserve, and transmit knowledge across generations. The plants, rivers, birds, earth, and cycles of death and regeneration are not passive symbols but participants in a relational universe. In this sense, “Tejimola” offers a powerful example of how Assamese folklore can contribute to contemporary conversations on IKS, ecological humanities, multispecies studies, and epistemic justice. The tale’s enduring relevance lies precisely in its capacity to remind us that the knowledge of how to live is also the knowledge of how to live with and not merely upon the more-than-human world.

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DABEER SI/KTT/85**DHILLO AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: INDIGENOUS
WOMEN'S STORYTELLING TRADITIONS AMONG THE VELIP
TRIBE OF GOA****SNEHAL SONU GAUNKAR**

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Abstract

Indigenous festivals function as important repositories of oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and collective memory that enables communities to preserve their cultural identity while sustaining meaningful relationships with their natural environment. The Dhilllo festival, celebrated by the Velip tribe in Cotigao village, Canacona taluka, Goa, is a unique women-centred indigenous tradition that embodies cultural continuity through ritual performances, storytelling, songs, and community participation. Unlike mainstream religious festivals, Dhilllo places women at the centre of ritual life, making them custodians of indigenous knowledge and transmitters of cultural memory. This study explores the significance of Dhilllo as a medium of cultural preservation and ecological consciousness. The research adopts a qualitative ethnographic methodology based on participant observation, in-depth interviews with women participants, elderly knowledge holders, and informal discussions conducted in Cotigao village. Secondary sources on tribal studies, indigenous knowledge systems, gender studies, and Goan culture supplement the primary data. The findings reveal that Dhilllo is more than a ceremonial celebration; it represents a living archive of indigenous ecological knowledge, oral traditions, gendered memories, and environmental ethics. Through ritual songs, narratives, and collective participation, women transmit knowledge concerning forests, seasonal cycles, sacred landscapes, and community values across generations. However, increasing modernisation, migration, changing educational aspirations, and digital influences pose challenges to the continuity of these traditions. The paper argues that documenting indigenous women-centred festivals such as Dhilllo is essential for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and recognising indigenous women's contributions to environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community resilience.

Keywords: Dhilllo, Velip Tribe, Oral Traditions, Indigenous Women, Cultural Memory, Eco-memory, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge

Introduction

India is home to cultural diversity, with many indigenous communities an essential part of the country's social and cultural heritage. According to the Census of India (2011), Scheduled Tribes account for approximately 8.6 per cent of India's population, representing hundreds of distinct communities with their own languages, belief systems, ecological practices, and cultural traditions. Unlike mainstream festivals, which are often associated primarily with religious worship, tribal festivals integrate social, ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions of

community life. These festivals embody what UNESCO (2003) describes as intangible cultural heritage—living traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, rituals, and traditional knowledge that communities recognise as integral to their cultural identity.

Among Goa's tribal communities, the Velip tribe has a rich cultural heritage that remains relatively undocumented in the academic literature. The Velips are primarily concentrated in South Goa, particularly in the talukas of Canacona, Quepem, and Sanguem. Traditionally, they depended on agriculture, forest resources, and shifting cultivation. The Velips have maintained close relationships with their surrounding ecosystems. Their religious beliefs, agricultural practices, seasonal rituals, and festivals reflect a worldview where nature is regarded not merely as a resource but as a sacred entity deserving respect and protection.

One of the most distinctive cultural practices among the Velip community is the Dhilllo festival, predominantly celebrated in the village of Cotigao in Canacona. Unlike many mainstream festivals dominated by male ritual specialists, Dhilllo is organised, performed, and preserved almost entirely by women. Mainly, women and young girls who have not yet reached puberty are part of this celebration. The festival spans approximately twenty-two days during the Hindu months of Ashwin and Kartik and centres on ritual worship, collective singing, storytelling and community participation. Women gather every evening to perform traditional songs and rituals while transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger generations through oral communication and embodied practice.

This study attempts to address this gap by examining Dhilllo not merely as a religious celebration but as an institution of cultural preservation. It argues that the festival serves as a cultural archive in which indigenous ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, collective memories, and women's experiences are continually recreated through ritual performances and storytelling traditions. Women emerge not simply as participants but as custodians of mediating the relationship between community, environment, and spirituality.

Review of Literature

The relationship between indigenous communities, culture, and environment has attracted much scholarly attention across anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Indigenous ecological knowledge is not merely empirical information about natural resources but an integrated system encompassing beliefs, values, and environmental ethics developed through generations of interaction with nature. Such knowledge is transmitted primarily through oral traditions, rituals, observation, and collective participation rather than formal educational institutions. Maurice Halbwachs (1992, 37) introduced the concept of collective memory, arguing that memory is socially constructed through shared experiences and cultural institutions rather than existing solely within individual consciousness. Communities remember their past by collectively reproducing rituals, symbols, and narratives. These theoretical insights are particularly relevant for understanding Dhilllo, where ritual performances, songs, and storytelling preserve memories of ancestral traditions and reinforce Velip identity.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, 15) viewed rituals as symbolic systems through which communities communicate their understanding of reality. Rituals

do not merely express beliefs; they actively construct social meaning by connecting individuals to broader cultural values. Festivals, therefore, become symbolic texts that reveal underlying social structures, cultural identities, and moral values.

Within feminist anthropology, scholars have increasingly highlighted women's roles as custodians of indigenous knowledge. Judith Butler (1990, 45) argues that gender identities are continuously produced through repeated cultural performances. Similarly, Ortner (1974, 72) emphasises that women's everyday cultural practices often sustain community traditions even when they remain absent from formal historical narratives.

Ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva (1988, 14) argue that women possess unique environmental knowledge because of their involvement in agriculture, food production, water collection, seed preservation, and household resource management. They suggest that women's relationships with nature should not be understood as biological determinism but as socially constructed through everyday interactions with ecological systems. Indigenous women's rituals frequently express this intimate relationship between gender and environment.

UNESCO (2003) recognises oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, and traditional ecological knowledge as vital components of humanity's cultural diversity. Preservation efforts increasingly recognise that safeguarding intangible heritage requires documenting not only rituals but also the knowledge systems, stories, songs, and social relationships embedded within them.

The present study contributes to this emerging scholarship by examining Dhilllo through an interdisciplinary framework combining sociology, anthropology, gender studies, environmental sociology, and indigenous studies. Unlike descriptive accounts of festivals, this research analyses Dhilllo as a living institution where ecological knowledge, gendered memories, oral traditions, and cultural identity intersect.

Objectives:

1. To document the rituals and cultural practices of the Dhilllo festival among the Velip tribe
2. To study Dhilllo as a source of oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and cultural memory
3. To examine the role of Velip women in preserving and passing on cultural traditions to future generations
4. To understand the impact of modernisation and social change on the continuity of the Dhilllo festival

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative ethnographic research design. Ethnography allows the researcher to interpret meanings attached to rituals, symbols, songs, and everyday interactions. Primary data were collected through participant observation during the Dhilllo festival in Cotigao village. The researcher participated in ritual gatherings, observed evening performances, documented ceremonial practices, and recorded interactions among women participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with older women, young girls, ritual practitioners, and other members of the Velip community to understand their

interpretations of the festival and its changing significance. Informal discussions further enriched the understanding of local narratives and cultural meanings. Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, ethnographic studies, government reports, and literature on tribal communities and Goan culture.

The study was conducted in Cotigao village, situated in the Canacona taluka of South Goa. The village is predominantly inhabited by the Velip Scheduled Tribe, whose livelihoods traditionally depend upon agriculture, forest produce and seasonal wage labour. Within Cotigao, the hamlets of Yeda and Baddem are particularly significant because they continue to practise the Dhilllo festival in its traditional form.

Findings and Discussion

Dhilllo as a Living Repository of Oral Traditions

Oral traditions constitute one of the oldest forms of knowledge preservation among indigenous communities. Before the emergence of written records, tribal societies relied upon songs, folklore, myths, ritual chants, and storytelling to transmit history, moral values, ecological wisdom, and cultural identity from one generation to another. Among the Velip tribe of Cotigao, the Dhilllo festival serves as an important cultural institution that helps ensure the endurance of these oral traditions.

During the twenty-two-day celebration of Dhilllo, women gather every evening to sing ritual songs, narrate stories associated with the deity, and perform ceremonial dances. These performances are not merely for entertainment but constitute pedagogical spaces where younger generations learn the community's cultural history and worldview. Older women, regarded as custodians of traditional knowledge, guide the younger participants in memorising songs, understanding ritual sequences, and interpreting their symbolic meanings. Halbwachs (1992,50) argues that memory is socially organised rather than individually preserved. Communities remember their past through repeated collective practices that continually reconstruct shared experiences. Dhilllo exemplifies this process, where collective singing, ritual performance, and storytelling enable the Velip community to remember its ancestral traditions.

Oral traditions perform several interconnected functions. First, they preserve the Velip community's collective identity by distinguishing it from surrounding populations. Second, they strengthen social solidarity through collective participation. Third, they transmit moral values concerning cooperation, respect for elders and environmental responsibility. Finally, they create continuity between generations, ensuring that cultural knowledge remains embedded within everyday community life. The persistence of oral traditions within Dhilllo demonstrates that indigenous knowledge systems should not be evaluated solely by written documentation. Rather, they represent living intellectual traditions maintained through collective participation, memory, and performance.

Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Embedded in Dhilllo

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Dhilllo serves as a repository of indigenous ecological knowledge. Indigenous ecological knowledge refers to the cumulative body of observations, beliefs, practices, and environmental ethics developed by locals through prolonged interaction with their

ecosystems. Throughout the Dhillio festival, natural elements occupy a central place in ritual practice. Women collect clay from anthills, decorate ritual structures with fresh marigold flowers, perform ceremonies near the Tulsi Vrindavan, and conclude the celebration through immersion in a river. Each of these activities reflects an understanding that natural landscapes possess sacred significance rather than merely economic value.

The use of anthill soil illustrates this ecological worldview. Anthills are widely regarded in many indigenous traditions as sacred ecological spaces because they represent fertility, regeneration, and biodiversity. Collecting soil from these locations involves ritual respect reflecting sustainable relationships with nature. Similarly, flowers used during worship are replaced periodically, symbolising renewal and the cyclical rhythm of life.

The timing of Dhillio also closely corresponds to seasonal and agricultural cycles. Celebrated during the months of Ashwin and Kartik, the festival coincides with post-monsoon ecological transitions that hold considerable significance for agrarian communities. Such timing reflects accumulated observations concerning climate, agricultural productivity, and environmental rhythms that have been preserved over generations. Women participating in Dhillio demonstrate extensive knowledge concerning forest resources, medicinal plants, seasonal variations, ritual materials, and sacred landscapes. The findings, therefore, demonstrate that indigenous women possess sophisticated ecological knowledge acquired through everyday engagement with their environment and transmitted through ritual practice.

Eco-memory and Cultural Preservation

The concept of eco-memory refers to how communities remember and preserve ecological relationships through cultural practices, narratives, rituals, and everyday experiences. Within the Velip community, Dhillio represents an important expression of eco-memory. The festival preserves collective memories concerning sacred landscapes, ancestral settlements, agricultural practices, and ecological relationships that have historically sustained community life. Women remember sacred places by visiting them during ritual activities. Traditional songs contain references to forests, rivers, wildlife, seasonal cycles, and village landscapes that continue to shape community identity. Dhillio strengthens such perceptions by integrating natural elements into religious and social life. Rivers become sacred because they are used for ritual immersion. Anthills become respected because they contribute to ceremonial worship. Flowers acquire symbolic significance because they embody ritual purity.

UNESCO (2003) recognises that intangible cultural heritage includes not only artistic expressions but also knowledge concerning nature and the universe. However, eco-memory remains vulnerable to rapid social transformation. Migration, declining dependence upon forests, changing occupations, and urban lifestyles gradually reduce opportunities for younger generations to acquire ecological knowledge through direct participation. Elderly respondents expressed concern that some traditional songs about forest life are no longer fully remembered by younger women. Nevertheless, the festival continues to adapt without losing its fundamental cultural significance. Women increasingly record

songs on mobile phones, helping certain traditions survive through digital media. While these technological adaptations alter methods of preservation. Consequently, Dhillo should be understood as both a cultural celebration and an ecological archive where environmental memories continue to shape indigenous identity.

Indigenous Women's Narratives and Ecology

A distinctive characteristic of Dhillo is the centrality of women's narratives in the construction of ecological knowledge and cultural identity. Unlike many mainstream religious traditions, in which ritual authority is concentrated among male priests, Dhillo creates a predominantly female ritual sphere in which women become the principal interpreters of cultural knowledge. Narratives include stories concerning ancestral women, village history, sacred landscapes, agricultural practices, gods and goddesses. Elder women determine ritual procedures, teach ceremonial songs, guide younger participants, and interpret symbolic meaning. The study also reveals that storytelling during Dhillo performs therapeutic and emotional functions. Dhillo demonstrates that indigenous women's narratives are simultaneously cultural and ecological. They preserve knowledge that contributes to cultural continuity while challenging dominant assumptions regarding whose knowledge deserves recognition within academic and policy discourses.

Gender, Body and Environment: Women's Ritual Agency in Dhillo

One of the most remarkable dimensions of the Dhillo festival is the way it constructs a gendered ritual space in which women exercise religious, cultural, and social authority. In many mainstream Hindu rituals, religious leadership is predominantly vested in male priests and older men. In contrast, Dhillo represents a cultural institution where women become the principal ritual specialists, organisers and custodians of sacred knowledge. The participation of women in Dhillo extends beyond ceremonial performance. Women identify the auspicious day for worship in consultation with elders, prepare ritual spaces, collect sacred clay from anthills, decorate the ritual structure with flowers, perform devotional songs, observe ritual purity, organise community gatherings, and finally carry the sacred Dhillo for immersion in the river. Every stage of the celebration depends upon women's collective participation, making them central actors in sustaining the festival.

The participation of pre-pubescent girls further demonstrates the symbolic relationship between gender, purity, fertility, and cultural continuity. The community regards these girls as ritually pure, assigning them an important place within ceremonial activities. Their participation is not merely symbolic but educational, as they learn songs, rituals, and cultural values through direct observation and participation. This process represents informal cultural education, in which knowledge is embodied rather than formally taught. At the same time, the ritual restrictions imposed upon menstruating women illustrate the complex relationship between gender, body, and ritual purity. Women during menstruation are traditionally prohibited from entering the sacred ritual space (*mand*). Douglas (1966, 35), in *Purity and Danger*, argues that concepts of purity and pollution are culturally constructed symbolic categories through which societies organise social

order. The Velip understanding of ritual purity reflects this symbolic worldview rather than purely biological distinctions.

Shiva (1988, 75) argues that women's environmental knowledge emerges from everyday interactions with natural resources rather than from inherent biological characteristics. The findings of the present study strongly support this argument, demonstrating that Velip women's ecological knowledge has been cultivated through generations of cultural practice and lived experience.

Intergenerational Storytelling and the Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge

The continuity of indigenous societies depends largely upon the successful transmission of knowledge between generations. Indigenous communities rely upon observation, participation, storytelling, ritual performance, and everyday practice for cultural learning. Dhillo provides one such intergenerational learning space. During fieldwork, it became evident that older women serve as cultural educators. They involve younger girls in every stage of ritual preparation. Girls observe how ritual materials are collected, how songs are sung, how prayers are performed, and how sacred objects are treated with respect. Through repeated participation, they gradually internalise cultural meanings. Storytelling occupies a particularly important position in this educational process. Elder women narrate stories concerning ancestral practices, village history, agricultural traditions, sacred landscapes, gods and goddesses. These narratives rarely exist in written form. Consequently, their survival depends entirely upon continued oral transmission. Repeated performance enables young participants to memorise cultural knowledge without formal literacy. Oral traditions, therefore, become living archives through which indigenous knowledge remains embedded within everyday social life.

However, respondents expressed concern regarding declining participation among younger generations due to migration for higher education and employment. Increasing exposure to digital media has reduced opportunities for regular interaction with elderly knowledge holders. Similar concerns have been documented among indigenous communities worldwide, where globalisation increasingly disrupts traditional systems of cultural transmission (UNESCO, 2003). Nevertheless, younger participants also utilise mobile phones to record songs and ceremonies, creating new forms of digital preservation. Although these technologies transform traditional methods of transmission, they simultaneously provide opportunities to document intangible cultural heritage that was previously dependent exclusively on memory.

Modernisation, Migration and Cultural Transformation

The findings reveal that although Dhillo continues to occupy a central place in the cultural life of the Velip community, it is simultaneously undergoing a gradual transformation under the influence of modernisation. Modernisation has expanded educational opportunities, improved transportation, increased communication technologies, and diversified occupational choices among tribal youth. While these developments have contributed positively to socio-economic mobility, they have also altered traditional patterns of community participation. One of the most significant changes concerns migrations. Many young people migrate to urban

centres for higher education and employment, reducing their participation in lengthy community festivals. Since Dhilllo lasts approximately 22 days, continuous participation becomes increasingly difficult for those pursuing education or employment outside the village.

Similarly, changes in occupational structures have reduced dependence on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. Contemporary younger generations increasingly engage in service-sector occupations where such knowledge appears less immediately relevant. The influence of mass media and digital technologies has also transformed cultural expression. Traditional songs are now occasionally recorded, shared through social media, and preserved in digital formats. Some respondents feared that such practices might reduce the spontaneity of oral traditions. Importantly, the study does not interpret modernisation solely as cultural decline. Instead, it recognises a process of selective adaptation whereby communities negotiate between cultural continuity and contemporary realities. Younger women continue to value the festival as an expression of Velip identity even as they participate in modern educational and occupational systems.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the Dhilllo festival is far more than a ritual celebration among the Velip tribe of Cotigao. It represents a complex sociocultural institution through which indigenous. The findings reveal that Dhilllo functions as a living repository of intangible cultural heritage. Ritual songs, storytelling traditions, symbolic performances, and collective participation transmit knowledge concerning forests, seasonal cycles, sacred landscapes, agriculture, kinship, and environmental ethics across generations. This knowledge is not preserved through written texts but through embodied cultural practices, illustrating the vitality of indigenous epistemologies.

The study further establishes that ecological knowledge among the Velip community is inseparable from cultural practice. Natural resources such as anthill soil, flowers, rivers, and sacred spaces are integrated into ritual life, reflecting an indigenous worldview based upon reciprocity rather than exploitation. Equally important is the festival's role in constructing gendered cultural spaces where women exercise leadership, negotiate identity, strengthen social solidarity, and educate younger generations. Through oral traditions and storytelling, older women function as cultural custodians whose knowledge sustains community continuity despite rapid social transformation.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies emerging challenges arising from migration, formal education, occupational diversification, and digitalisation. These changes have altered patterns of participation and threatened the continuity of certain oral traditions. Finally, the study argues that documenting women-centred indigenous festivals such as Dhilllo is essential. Greater scholarly attention, community-based documentation initiatives, educational programmes, and policy support are necessary to ensure that these invaluable cultural traditions continue to inspire future generations

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DABEER SI/KTT/86**FAIRIES, FOREST AND THE DEVIC KINGDOM: REIMAGINING THE FAIRY REALM THROUGH ECO CONSCIOUSNESS****SURYA JOY**Research Scholar, Department of English
All Saints College, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, India**Abstract**

Traditional stories and folklore regard fairies, gnomes, and other nature spirits as the true guardians of nature. By transcending the realm of the fairy world, one can decipher ecological consciousness and eco-spirituality in myriad proportions. The dimensions of the fairy world overlap with the green realm. The elemental entities of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth are ancient gods and goddesses widespread in folklore and myths. Yakshas and Devas in Hindu mythology, Tsuchigumo in Japanese culture, Dwarfs, Gnomes, Brownies, and Fairies of the Celtic tradition, and little people and stone spirits of the Native American tradition exemplify the collective consciousness in understanding and spreading the narratives of nature-dwelling protectors. In this study, I am going to analyse the traditions, cultures, and narratives that describe earth elementals by which one can understand how some sacred zones are protected and also how these tales can transform consciousness, which helps the readers to have empathy for the non-human entities. This research paper builds bridges to the unknown mythical realm, which in a way opens up new possibilities for creativity and consciousness. The Fairy Bible by Teresa Moorey stands out in its apt description of fairies, the fairy realm, and immersed glory of the fantastic inhabitants such as Griffins and Centaurs. We are taught how to identify flower fairies, find the fairy city, and the landscapes that thrive to connect with people to spread the energy network. To Hear the Angels Sing, an Odyssey of Co-creation with the Devic Kingdom by Dorothy Maclean (1990), starts with a series of coincidences that she and her friend encounter while planting in a barren land. The study mainly affirms the ecology of storytelling, reading nature through folkloric imagination and finding Environmental Histories that evoke eco-consciousness within, thus leading to contentment in union with nature.

Keywords: Ancestral Memory, Eco-consciousness, Eco Spirituality, Econarrative and Mythology.

“Every time a child says, I don’t believe in fairies, there’s a fairy somewhere that falls dead”

—Peter Pan (1953)

Introduction

Folklore about fairies is prevalent in many parts of the world. Fairies from the fairy land bring wisdom and healing, and sometimes they come to warn. They are possibly lower-ranking angels or spirit guides. In some traditions, they are believed to be the spirits of ancestors who protect sacred zones and gardens. The

Fairy tradition traces its origin back to Celtic culture. The argument about the characteristics of fairies is not definite and cannot be described or put in a box of subtle, definitive patterns. In *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008), Hellboy breaks the classic archetype of fairies. When the children fantasized about tooth fairies as subtle and delicate beings, Abe Sapiens says, "Tooth fairies don't eat teeth, Hellboy. They eat bones. They start with the teeth! The thought matrix, about the notion of fairy, ranges from pixie dust guides to the bone-eating monsters. Devic Kingdom is a parallel world of realities; it coexists with the human world. Pixies, Fairies, gnomes, Devas, possibly all creatures caught on the earth plane. They are often referred to as the guardians and protectors of forests, gardens, and rivers.

Alfred Nutt (1897), in his lectures about Fairy Mythology in English Literature, points out the importance of folklore traditions. The Victorian and Edwardian eras directed their dissatisfaction towards the Industrial Revolution by mediating and reflecting upon the stories of fairy tradition. These stories were often rooted in Norse mythology and Celtic tradition. The Celtic Revival of the late nineteenth century helped in preserving Ireland's cultural heritage (Maclean 3). The fairy world encompassed several creatures, some of which had mythical origins, some of which had their genesis from local belief systems. Katherine Briggs, one of the most distinguished scholars of the fairy world, classifies fairies according to size, shape, and regional characteristics. Some of the fairies are companions; they guide humans, and some of them are shy, while others act vile and are malicious beings. These malicious pixies and gnomes are categorized under the blood-sucking vampire family.

The Fairy Tradition and History

The fairy tradition and the stories and belief system attached to it often break the anthropocentric narration method. The Irish and Celtic way of believing in fairies and the creation of modern retellings of them has a non-human narrative technique. In Celtic traditions, Druids or the groves of certain trees are considered to be knowledgeable. These tree groves are portals acting as seers; they transmit memories of the ancient world. Fairy traditions also support the fact that deep time and tree time are in deep contrast with the short lifespan of the human body. Ireland has asked its citizens to slow down and participate in the playfulness of nature. Cyclists are asked to lower speed limits, and the narrower roads are dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians.

The colonial, communist, and capitalist world often ignored such subtle ecological experiences and narratives. Many cultures in the world created miniature humans and giants to fulfil the imaginative hunger. Gary R Varner (2012) argues that the caveman created bloodthirsty vampires in his mind when he was afraid of the dark. Similarly, the fairy world was created to soothe a child back to sleep. Then arises a confronting question about how all the traditions and global narratives have strikingly similar depictions of the faery lore. Hobbit-sized beings existed in imaginative histories globally.

The logical and scientific approach is to dismiss the idea of fairies. It's a naïve attempt to escape responsibility and fellowship with nature. The land of the fairies is considered to be the land of the dead by Celtic people. The land carries eco-

consciousness and memories of the dead. These spirits remain earthbound as they have not moved to their eternal abode. In Christian traditions, fairies are considered to be evil spirits that lead us astray. The beings from the otherworld represent elements of air, water, fire, and earth. These beings, full of knowledge and wisdom, reside in sacred groves and are considered mighty, mischievous, messenger, and malignant beings. The scornful criticism from the scientific community disintegrated the preservation of these natural narratives. The faked Cottingley encounters, where Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths fooled the community, including Arthur Conan Doyle, by producing fake photographs of fairies, led to the expulsion of the subject of fairies itself. *To Hear the Angels Sing, an Odyssey of Co-creation with the Devic Kingdom* by Dorothy Maclean (1990) is a classic on understanding and experiencing fairies. The modern idea of the fairy world is inspired by her work. She has described in her work how she learned to move beyond human understanding to know the other realm, which is protecting nature. She argues that humans have never lost the intuition and wisdom instilled by divinity. It takes a step or two to connect with the other realms of nature. Dorothy seeks creative partnership with these beings and calls them devas. They are light beings who bestow gifts of kindness and restore the natural order of things. In Sanskrit, devas literally mean shining ones. Devas communicate with humans and with nature using vibrations and frequencies. They are guided by love and peaceful meditation. In the Western world, faeries equate with nature spirits. Robert Kirk wrote a guide on *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*. He had the secret knowledge about the fae world, but then he was abducted by the faeries. George William Russell, an Irish seer, describes how the pre-Celtic people slid into another dimension, who are now guiding the land and its beings. By the 20th Century, with the works on faeries compiled by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, the notion of faeries started becoming a universal belief. Teresa Moorey, in *The Fairy Bible: The Definitive Guide to the World of Fairies*, gives illustrated examples of flower, water, air, earth, and fire fairies. Her book is a comprehensive guide on how to invite and connect with the fairies.

The fairy triad in the Druid tradition has the reputation of having the maximum number of fairy sightings. Oak, Ash, and Thorn groves are the renowned landscapes of fairy traditions. Fairies are believed to be residing in the majestic oak trees. They faced the wrath of the Old Norse Gods. Teresa Moorey invites us to the fairy realm; she convinces her readers to respect trees and preserve ancestral rituals to enter the kingdom of the fairy folk. Damaging trees can bring the wrath of the fae. *Earth Emotions* by Glenn Albrecht develops this idea of connecting emotionally to the planet Earth. He argues that if our relationship with Earth is not symbiotic, it can adversely affect the climate crisis. Connecting to the fairy world can trigger the whole idea of preserving stories and afforestation.

The fairy Mushrooms play a pivotal role in fairy illustration. Fairies sitting on white spotted red mushrooms can indicate how fairy scholars and fairy artists create an icon of the visions. European Shamans used to consume mushrooms to induce visions. This affected their emotions and mind. This triggered emotion created empathy toward the enchanted nature. Some of the fairy tradition believes

that wearing a thyme could enable one to see fairies. Cats are often linked with fairies and often suffer persecution along with their owners. Cows, horses, dogs, and toads are often connected to the higher realms, as they can connect with the higher frequencies of the fairy realm. Birds were often witch-hunted due to their ties with folklore, and early narratives often depicted them as souls to the underworld. Frogs were believed to be guiding wells, and so they are considered sacred by the Celtic tradition. W.B Yeats also had leanings towards esoteric teachings and described solitary fairies and trooping fairies in his book *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*. He describes how gnomes and fairies still rule the imaginations of fairy people. Industrialisation was considered a victory over superstition; it was a sign of progress and reason. With the rise of Environmental humanities and Ecocriticism, writers, environmentalists, and esoteric groups merged these traditional storytelling methods alongside the perils of the climate crisis.

The Irish tradition believes that the sharpest ears could tap into the whistling sounds of the spirits. William Butler Yeats, in *A Lover's Quarrel Among the Fairies*, describes how fairies lead a child.

The Male fairies: Do not fear us, earthly maid!

The child described here is probably abducted, and it diverges from the romantic idealizations of childhood.

Fairy processions took place on fairy paths; they are often referred to as ley lines. The ley lines could be found in *Ballad of Tamlane*. Tamlane haunted Carterhaugh Wood and is considered a seductive fairy. These pathways and interfaces were considered sites of pagan worship. In *Cinderella*, the fairy godmother is depicted as a benevolent mother figure who pleases Cinderella with gifts. In *Snow White*, dwarfs who are often referred to as gnomes help her in regaining her lost purpose. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the prince is turned into a beast by a powerful fairy.

Indian authors have also contributed to the understanding of the fairy realm. Sunanda Poddar, the Amma of Aurobindo Ashram, had an exceptional ability to see the fairy world. She wrote *Rainbow Lands and We Five and Other Tales*, in which Mona, a curious child, whispers to her friend, Bharat:

Yes, now the fairies and little people will come out...

The fairies shook their wings dry and started flying. (Poddar 99)

Poddar's imagination was inspired by the circulation of fairy photographs and the overwhelming retelling of fairy tales in the 1960s period. Suniti Devi's *Indian Fairy Tales*, published by Calcutta Press, is a rich portrayal of Indian heritage and culture. She blends Indian and Celtic traditions to weave fairy tales catering to the needs of curious minds.

Fairies appear in Hindu mythology as Apsaras, Ganas, Yakshas, and Daivas. They are tree spirits that threaten and tempt the travellers. They are analogous to Dryads from the Celtic Traditions. These forest spirits are classified as guardian spirits in Jainism. These are the spirits that guide and protect the 24 Tirthankaras. They are also associated with the apsaras and dwarapalakas. Yakshas are aligned with fertility and dominion over the sacred zones (Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*: Part 1, 6).

Water Fairies

The element of water is considered very powerful because it sustains life. The water fairies are often called undines. They are the powerful manifestation of

water fear and repressed longings. The marine kingdom and mermaids often portray a realm of the underwater which humans long to explore. The current oceanic pollution and plastic contamination are explored in movies such as Aquaman. It raises serious questions about oceanic drilling and reef depletion. The reimagination of The King of the Ocean, Orca, sometimes referred to as Poseidon, evokes a repressed fear, and it connects individuals to the myths and folklore. The human bond with sea and water animals is enhanced after bridging the gap between human emotions and imagination (Moorey 104). In *The Shape of Water* (2017), a film by Guillermo del Toro, Elisa, a janitor at a secret research facility, encounters a marine creature. The liaison between Elisa and the Amphibian Man is a retelling of many folklore traditions. The story of the Selkie, who seduces humans, has a similar storyline. The Selkie is immortal, akin to the Amphibian Man in *The Shape of Water*, and the human is mortal; thus, both stories end in tragedy. The story of *The Shape of Water* brings a creative turn when the Amphibian Man heals Elisa, and the audience can choose the fate of Elisa; she may have been turned into an immortal. The story of a handsome knight Hildebrand, who falls in love with Undine, is a celebrated story of love and betrayal. Undine is accused of being a water spirit, which she is. Hildebrand finds out that she is a water fairy when she steals a trinket from Bertalda. Eventually, Hildebrand chooses to marry Bertalda, but he dies on the day of his wedding. Japanese mythology also explores similar stories. Ningyo is a fairy who sheds pearls when it cries. They are very seductive, and they seduce fishermen. The tale of Urashima Taro, a fisherman who falls in love with the sea princess, is a tale of warning. He comes back to his village after meeting the water spirit to find his village speaking about him as the fisherman who disappeared 300 years ago. In ancient Greece, the naiads or the water nymphs were believed to occupy every stream and fountain. Most of them withdrew from such sacred places when the water bodies were poisoned and polluted. The Nix and Nixie are German water spirits who warn humans of the dangers of water. The mermaids and sirens are water spirits that reflect human sexuality. They are considered to be the wives of fallen angels. The archetype of water spirits in every myth has a similar fashion of storytelling and reflection of wounded waterscapes.

Air and Fire Fairies

The freedom and unpredictability of airborne spirits associate them with ideas of the human world. They often appear to the poets as a muse. Air spirits are called Sylphs. Fleur Delacour represents one of the manifestations of the air spirit. She is a Triwizard champion because of her airborne capabilities.

When Fleur breezes out of the room, Mrs Weasley complains that Bill is rushing into an engagement because of all the panic.... (Rowling 108)

These airborne spirits have a great way of communicating with humans. Odin is the king and father of all these air spirits, air elements, and gods. His portrayal is similar to that of Indra, the Hindu God of air, and devas, here referred to as airborne fairies. His pet ravens, Hugin and Munin, whisper wisdom to the poets. Edgar Allen Poe drew his inspiration from Odin's favourite pets (Moorey 146). *The Raven* (1845) is a masterpiece written by Edgar Allen Poe, which sometimes evokes the thought of death, wisdom, and intuition. Hugin and Munin refer to

thought and memory. A supernatural awe is created when the raven emphasizes and utters the only word, *Nevermore*. Odin is the King of Death, very similar to Yama of Hindu Mythology. He is an embodiment of melancholy and wisdom. Most of the messenger spirits are air spirits: the Valkyrs, Hermes, Leanan Sidhe dwelt in the air before the Celts pushed them into other realms.

St George is considered a dragon slayer. He slew a fire-vomiting fire spirit. Prometheus, the Greek God who gifted men fire, is a fire spirit. Prometheus is cursed by Zeus for he stole fire and gifted it to the mortals. Will-O-The -Wisps, the enchanting and teasing spirits, are a terror to those who see them. They represent death. In the Middle East, fire spirits are the fallen angels that did not worship God's creation, Adam. They are called Djinnns. Djinnns are fire spirits who co-habit in the human world. During Dust swirls, one can feel the presence of Djinnns. The Korean series titled *Genie: Make a Wish* is a Netflix series about Djinnns that grant wishes. In *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*, by Deepa Anappara, a djinn is considered a manifestation of toxic fumes from industries.

Earth Fairies

Earth fairies, which are bound to the earth. They are often sighted in forests, in tree groves. Leprechaun is a tree fairy who is short, bearded, crooked, and wears a long-pointed hat. Leprechauns offered great wealth to the peasants who laboured hard. Kathleen Basford coined the term Green Man; he is sculpted in many places of worship. He is an embodiment and the face of nature. He is covered in thick foliage. His face appears in the trunk. This dryad spirit is a tree fairy that represents the giant trees that covered Earth eons ago.

Flower fairies are the ones that are believed to exist in flowers before the invention of iron. The Iron Age pushed all these tiny fairies to another realm. Flower fairies caused flowers to emit fragrance. They coloured them. Flowers are the source of inspiration and delight. Celtic tradition celebrates the legacy of Buttercup Fairy, Iris Fairy, Rose Fairy, Daisy Fairy, to name a few (Moorey 300). Fairy illustration artist Cicely Mary Baker creates botanical illustrations of flower fairies. She studied plant anatomy and added her childhood imagination of fairies to the image. Her work invokes a deeper spiritual pattern that was sidelined by the mainstream logical ideology.

Conclusion

Cultural histories on the fairy tradition of our planet echo eco-spirituality and consciousness. These nature spirits that come in various sizes and shapes; multiple narratives and representations explore ecological entanglement. The ancestors shared stories of the past. These stories were transferred to the next generation through oral storytelling traditions. Ballads, Poems, Novels, and Books, to name a few, preserve the cultural histories. These tales were created to protect the purity and sanctity of the planet Earth. Old Stories taught individuals to venerate and protect nature. The fringes of eco-spirituality bring ecological concern and lead to an obligation to protect the planet. Modern spirituality analyses liminal borders that fairy tradition creates, a notion that forests are sacred grounds.

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DABEER SI/KTT/87**MYTH, MEMORY, AND MIDDLE-EARTH: ECHOES OF NATURE
AND PRESERVATION IN J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S MYTHOPOEIC WORLD****J. EUNICE VINCY SOPHIA**

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Abstract

Ecocriticism is the study of how literature reflects ecological issues and our relationship with the environment. Amongst the fantasy writers of today, J. R. R. Tolkien stands alone in his profound grasp of ecology and his portrayal of nature as an animate, living entity. In Tolkien's Middle-earth, the mountains and rivers and forests and landscapes aren't just the background; they are characters in the story. The Shire, Mirkwood, the Old Forest, Fangorn Forest and Lothlórien are among the locations that serve to reveal the beauty, memory and cultural continuity of nature in the works of Tolkien. Works critique industrialization and environmental abuse and emphasise the balance between living things and the environment. Characters like Treebeard and the Ents, as defenders of ecological balance, are at war against the ravaging of natural habitats and forests. The article examines the way in which Tolkien embeds an ecological consciousness into the very structure of Middle-earth, and shows the importance of nature in shaping the moral, cultural and spiritual dimensions of his imaginary world. Tolkien's mythic landscapes and concerns about environmental issues urge people to acknowledge the need to protect nature and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Mythic Ecology, Middle-earth, Nature, Environmental Consciousness, Memory, Preservation

Contemporary environmental issues of the world have led scholars to view literary texts from an ecological perspective. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the natural world. Ecocriticism aims to understand how literature represents nature, environmental issues, and our responsibility to the Earth. Michael Payne defines ecocriticism as a reaction to the emergence of ecological philosophy and environmental consciousness. Instead of just looking at the human experience in a work of literature, ecocriticism broadens the scope to examine the natural world and its importance in the text.

Fantasy literature has become a significant area for ecological studies, given that many fantasy stories create close relationships between human society and the natural world. Fantasy writers often build glorious vistas, rivers, mountains and forests reflecting ecological principles and concerns. These environments are not just decorative backdrops but essential components that inform the story and affect

the lives of characters. In fantasy literature, this often takes the form of guardians of nature, magical beings in relation to the environment, or conflicts between natural and industrialised ways of life. These are elements that fantasy authors are using to encourage readers to appreciate the beauty and the importance of the natural world.

J.R.R. Tolkien has not only brought nature into the fabric of a fantasy world more successfully than any other twentieth-century novelist, but has also done so in a way that makes it seem natural. In his works, especially in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the reader is introduced to the world of a lush landscape, where forests, rivers, mountains, gardens and living beings are not only the background of the events, but active participants in the story.

Tolkien's love of nature is shaped by his childhood in the English countryside. The rural landscapes he encounters during his formative years leave a lasting impression on him and later find their way into his literary imagination. Tolkien's writings consistently reveal his appreciation of simple rural life and his anxiety over the destructive effects of industrialisation. These fears are strongly voiced in Middle-earth, where natural environments are meticulously maintained yet remain easily imperilled by greed, power, and technological domination.

Middle-earth is a living world in which nature has agency, memory, and significance. Forests can react to human actions; trees can speak through the voices of the Ents, and landscapes can remember long-forgotten civilisations. Nature is not separated from culture but rather in close relationship with the communities that inhabit the land. The Shire is depicted as a peaceful farming community, while forests such as Mirkwood, the Old Forest, and Fangorn represent nature's power, mystery, and resilience. Similarly, Lothlórien symbolises preservation, beauty and deep respect for the natural environment.

In Tolkien's fiction, the idea of preservation is very important. Middle-earth's landscapes frequently serve as archives of memory, preserving remnants of past eras and customs. Tolkien emphasises the value of preserving both biological systems and cultural history through the preservation of gardens, woodlands, and rural communities. In the backdrop of contemporary industrialisation, which Tolkien regularly portrays as a destructive force endangering both nature and traditional ways of life, this worry becomes particularly pertinent.

Through an examination of significant settings and figures from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, this essay explores Tolkien's ecological perspective. The study illustrates how Tolkien creates a legendary ecology that prioritises harmony, remembrance, and preservation by examining the Shire, Mirkwood, the Old Forest, Fangorn Forest, Lothlórien, and the Ents. In the end, the study makes the case that nature in Middle-earth is an essential force that affects its inhabitants' identities, values, and futures rather than a passive backdrop.

The Shire is Tolkien's most striking depiction of ecological balance among Middle-earth's numerous geographies. The Hobbits' homeland, the Shire, is introduced in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It represents a manner of life that coexists peacefully with the natural world. Tolkien emphasises simplicity, sustainability, and reverence for the natural world in his depiction of this rural society, offering an ideal human-environment relationship.

Fertile fields, undulating hills, gardens, streams, and farmlands define the Shire. The Hobbits carefully and properly nurture the land, in contrast to industrialised societies that want to control and exploit nature. Their economy and way of life are based on agriculture. Green space preservation, farming, and gardening are seen as vital components of community life rather than just useful pursuits. Tolkien's admiration for rural settings and conventional farming methods is evident in his in-depth depictions of the Shire.

The Hobbits' strong ties to the land are among the Shire's most important ecological features. They lead modest lives and place a higher value on community, peace, and the environment than on riches and power. Instead of upsetting the scenery, their houses are integrated into the hillsides. An ecological perspective in which human habitation coexists with nature rather than replaces it is reflected in this architectural integration. The Hobbits show a profound understanding of their reliance on the environment by enjoying gardening, collecting food, and commemorating seasonal changes.

Tolkien's ecological principles are further emphasised by the figure of Samwise Gamgee. Sam is a symbol of tenderness, nurture, and environmental stewardship as a gardener. His passion for plant cultivation and landscape restoration serves as a metaphor for the value of protecting and fostering the natural environment. Sam's bond with nature serves as a constant reminder throughout the story that simple actions of respect and responsibility are the first steps toward environmental care.

The Shire serves as a storehouse of cultural memory as well. It maintains habits, traditions, and lifestyles that have been handed down over the ages. The Hobbits are linked to their past and identity by the environment itself, which comes to represent continuity and stability. In this way, cultural preservation and ecological preservation become intertwined. Preserving the land entails preserving the related values and memories.

By contrasting the tranquil surroundings of the Shire with the destructive forces that threaten it, Tolkien further highlights the region's ecological value. The Scouring of the Shire highlights the negative consequences of industrialisation and environmental exploitation in *The Lord of the Rings*. The area's natural attractiveness is harmed, trees are felled, and green areas are replaced by mills. This change emphasises the value of environmental preservation and acts as a warning against unbridled development.

For Hobbits, the Shire is more than just a made-up country. It represents Tolkien's idea of an ecologically balanced society in which people coexist peacefully with the natural world. The Shire is one of the most important ecological areas in Middle-earth because it demonstrates the potential for a sustainable relationship between humans and the environment through its landscapes, customs, and ideals. In Tolkien's ecological imagination, forests play a major role. Forests in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are living environments with memory, agency, and meaning rather than just being places that humans pass through. Tolkien portrays nature as an active force that can shape events and preserve Middle-earth's past through forests like Mirkwood and the Old Forest. The enduring

connection between environment, memory, and cultural continuity is represented by these forests.

One of the most notable natural environments that Bilbo and the dwarves come across in *The Hobbit* is Mirkwood. There is wonder and uncertainty due to the forest's size, age, and mystery. In contrast to typical woodlands, Mirkwood has an ambience that captures the strength and intricacy of the natural world. Travellers are reminded that nature is sometimes uncontrollable and difficult to fully comprehend due to the dense forests, twisting roads, and concealed hazards. Tolkien's portrayal of Mirkwood contradicts the notion that humans are the natural world's masters and highlights the autonomy of the natural world.

Mirkwood illustrates the richness and energy of the surroundings even though it occasionally seems menacing. The forest is an environment that exists without human interference and supports a variety of life types. Tolkien's in-depth descriptions urge readers to recognise the intricacy and beauty of natural landscapes as well as their ability to arouse reverence and awe. In this sense, Mirkwood represents an ecological worldview that prioritises nature's inherent value over its utility to humans.

The Lord of the Rings' depiction of the Old Forest demonstrates a similar ecological viewpoint. The Old Forest is shown as a living thing with its own history and consciousness, in contrast to traditional literary woodlands. The forest's long-standing memory of human activity, especially the destruction and felling of trees, is connected to its animosity toward outsiders. According to Tolkien, nature remembers past wounds and reacts appropriately. As a result, the Old Forest preserves the experiences of past eras inside its environment, making it a potent metaphor of ecological memory.

By proving that nature has its own identity and agency, the Old Forest also challenges the human-centred worldview. The Hobbits' experience in the forest shows that nature is a dynamic presence that has the power to affect people who come into contact with it, rather than just a passive environment. Tolkien challenges readers to reevaluate how they interact with the environment and to appreciate the value of protecting natural areas through this description.

In Middle-earth, Mirkwood and the Old Forest both serve as memory archives. They preserve remnants of long-forgotten histories, cultural experiences, and historical occurrences that have influenced the world. These forests serve as reminders of the long-lasting interaction between living things and their surroundings by bridging the present with the past. Therefore, preserving them is both an ecological requirement and a way to protect cultural and historical heritage.

Tolkien lifts nature above the function of a mere backdrop by depicting trees as living landscapes full of memory, mystery, and purpose. The Old Forest and Mirkwood show how the environment actively participates in Middle-earth's life. Tolkien uses these forests to reaffirm that ecological balance and cultural continuity depend on the preservation of nature.

The Ents hold a special place among Middle-earth's diverse inhabitants as defenders and ambassadors of the natural world. These ancient tree-like creatures, first seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, represent Tolkien's ecological worldview by

highlighting the value of environmental management and giving nature a voice. Tolkien depicts nature through Treebeard and the Ents as a living force that can voice its worries and protect itself from annihilation rather than as a mute presence.

The Ents are among the world's earliest living creatures, according to Middle-earth's history. The preservation of trees and forests is their main duty. The Ents saw trees as living friends deserving of respect and care, in contrast to humans who frequently see nature as a resource to be exploited. Their strong bond with the forest underscores Tolkien's conviction that the natural world has inherent worth and shouldn't be used only to further political or economic objectives.

The most well-known and oldest of the Ents, Treebeard represents environmental stewardship and ecological wisdom. Readers learn about Middle-earth's past and the slow devastation of trees brought on by the quest for dominance and power through his interactions with Merry and Pippin. Tolkien's worry over the effects of industrialisation on the natural world is reflected in Treebeard's sense of environmental devastation. His persona serves as an example of how patience, alertness, and a profound awareness of the interdependence of all living beings are necessary for the preservation of nature.

The Ents' struggle with Saruman highlights their ecological value. Saruman, a once astute leader, develops an obsession with industrial advancement and power. He uses natural resources carelessly and orders the widespread devastation of forests in an attempt to fortify Isengard. The countryside is turned into a site of smoke, machinery, and environmental devastation as trees are felled to support his businesses and military aspirations.

One of Tolkien's most potent ecological moments is the Ents' reaction to Saruman's deeds. The resistance of nature to exploitation and devastation is symbolised by their march against Isengard. The Ents protect the woodlands that have suffered under Saruman's dominion and partially restore ecological balance by fighting the industrial stronghold. This episode demonstrates Tolkien's view that respect for the environment fosters harmony and sustainability, whereas misuse of nature ultimately results in war and destruction.

Tolkien makes nature an active character in the story through Treebeard and the Ents. Their presence highlights the obligation of all living things to safeguard and preserve the natural world and challenges human-centred perspectives on the environment. The Ents continue to be one of Tolkien's most striking representations of environmental awareness and stewardship as protectors of forests and defenders of ecological equilibrium.

Tolkien's critique of industrialisation and its detrimental effects on the environment is one of the most important facets of his ecological perspective. Tolkien contrasts areas that coexist peacefully with the natural world with those that have been altered by the quest for dominance, power, and industrial advancement throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. He draws attention to the negative effects of careless or irresponsible resource use on the ecosystem by using this contrast.

Isengard under Saruman's dominion is the most obvious example of environmental deterioration in Middle-earth. Isengard, which was once

surrounded by trees and breathtaking scenery, is progressively being turned into an industrial hub focused on the manufacture of machinery and armaments. The natural landscape is replaced by mechanical structures, smoke floods the air, and forests are cut down to fuel furnaces. Tolkien uses this change as a metaphor for humanity's increasing propensity to prioritise production and power over environmental conservation.

Saruman's attitude toward nature is one of dominance rather than management. He sees trees, forests, and other natural resources as nothing more than instruments to further his goals. He disregards the ecological effects of his activities in his quest for dominance, wreaking havoc on the local ecosystem. Tolkien uses Saruman as an illustration of how unbridled economic growth and avarice may result in the exploitation of the natural world and the upsetting of ecological equilibrium.

Lothlórien is one of the most exquisite and environmentally significant of Middle-earth's various landscapes. It is a place where culture and nature coexist peacefully and is sometimes called the "Golden Wood." In contrast to areas impacted by violence and devastation, Lothlórien is mainly unaltered, maintaining both its natural beauty and its cultural customs. Tolkien offers a perfect example of ecological balance and environmental preservation with this magical forest.

The Elves, especially the Galadhrim, who dwell in proximity to nature, occupy Lothlórien. Their profound ecological awareness is demonstrated by their reverence for rivers, trees, flowers, and wildlife. The Elves coexist with nature instead of controlling it, upholding a connection founded on stewardship, care, and gratitude. Their communities exhibit a peaceful cohabitation between culture and environment by blending in seamlessly with the surroundings.

Tolkien highlights the peace and beauty of Lothlórien in his descriptions. The golden foliage, rushing streams, and blooming greenery create an aura of peace and awe. As it resists the forces of change and devastation that threaten other parts of Middle-earth, the forest seems to be nearly timeless, maintaining the memories of past eras. In this way, Lothlórien serves as a storehouse of ecological and cultural memory, preserving customs, histories, and natural settings that might otherwise be lost.

Tolkien's passion for environmental conservation is also shown in the preservation of Lothlórien. Because its residents understand the importance of preserving nature, the forest endures. The destructive actions of characters like Saruman, whose quest for power leads to environmental damage, stand in stark contrast to their reverence for the environment. Tolkien implies through this contrast that sustainable living and conscientious stewardship are essential to the survival of both culture and the natural world.

Lothlórien also represents the connection between identity and nature. The Elves' way of life, cultural customs, and values are inextricably linked to the forest they live in. Thus, the preservation of their cultural legacy is guaranteed by the preservation of the terrain. This connection supports Tolkien's view that environmental protection encompasses more than just protecting natural resources; it also entails maintaining the identities, customs, and memories connected to specific locations.

Tolkien presents a picture of a world in which culture and nature complement one another through Lothlórien. The forest serves as a metaphor for beauty, memory, and preservation, highlighting the significance of preserving environmental and human harmony. By doing this, it represents the ecological principles that permeate Tolkien's portrayal of Middle-earth.

Tolkien's environmental critique revolves around the devastation of trees. Trees are frequently shown as living things deserving of reverence and defence. In addition to harming the environment, the extensive tree-cutting in the Isengard area symbolises the loss of cultural legacy, beauty, and remembrance. In Middle-earth, the destruction of woods represents the loss of important links between the past and the present, since they preserve the history of prior times.

Through the Ents' reaction to Saruman's deeds, Tolkien expands this topic. Their assault on Isengard represents the opposition of the natural world to environmental exploitation. The Ents restore some equilibrium and show that the natural world cannot be viewed as an endless resource without repercussions by toppling the industrial stronghold. One of Tolkien's most potent cautions against environmental degradation can be found in this episode.

The way the Shire changed during the Scouring of the Shire is another example of how industrialisation had an impact. The destruction of trees, pollution, and needless construction change the serene rural scene. Locations that were formerly connected to community and beauty are now seen as indicators of environmental degradation. Tolkien implies in this episode that ecological deterioration can happen even in locations that are typically thought of as being in peace with the natural world.

Tolkien's critique of industrialisation does not mean that all types of advancement are undesirable. Instead, he is against types of development that put business and power ahead of the health of the environment. His writings support a harmonious coexistence of ecological responsibility with human progress. Tolkien invites readers to consider their personal relationship with nature and the significance of sustainable living by illustrating the negative effects of environmental exploitation.

Tolkien conveys a potent environmental message that is still relevant today through the examples of Isengard and the Shire. His depiction of industrialisation emphasises the need to protect the environment for coming generations and warns against the thoughtless devastation of natural settings.

Beyond the bounds of fantasy fiction, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrate a deep ecological understanding. Tolkien portrays nature as a living, significant force that shapes the lives, customs, and histories of its people via the creation of Middle-earth. In addition to being places for adventure, forests, rivers, mountains, and gardens also actively influence the moral and cultural framework of the story.

Forests like Mirkwood and the Old Forest show the life and memory of the natural world, while the Shire symbolises ecological peace and sustainable existence. Treebeard and the Ents highlight the value of environmental stewardship and give voice to nature. Similarly, Lothlórien is a symbol of conservation, showing how natural equilibrium helps safeguard cultural identity and historical memory. The

devastation connected to Saruman and Isengard, on the other hand, emphasises the perils of industrialisation and environmental exploitation.

Conclusion

The relationship between nature, memory, and preservation is a key component of Tolkien's ecological vision. Middle-earth's natural landscapes serve as a reminder to readers of the tight connection between environmental preservation and cultural continuity by preserving the customs and histories of past eras. As a result, protecting nature becomes both an ecological duty and a way to preserve cultural history and communal memory.

Tolkien inspires readers to have a greater respect for nature and to understand the effects of its devastation through his mythological settings and environmental concerns. His writings promote stewardship over exploitation, harmony over dominance, and preservation over neglect. Middle-earth's ecological principles are still relevant in today's conversations regarding environmental protection and sustainability.

In the end, Tolkien's depiction of Middle-earth shows that human well-being and natural welfare are inextricably linked. His timeless vision of a world based on environmental respect serves as a reminder that protecting the natural world is crucial to maintaining cultural memory and human civilization's future.

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DABEER SI/KTT/88**REWRITING MYTH THROUGH FOLK PERFORMANCE: A STUDY
OF SANJAY PAWAR'S *PASS THE BUCK ON BROTHER*****M. ANGELINE PRIYA LATHA**Research Scholar, Auxilium College
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Abstract

This paper argues that the folk aesthetic form in Sanjay Pawar's *Pass the Buck on Brother* (1990) isn't decoration, it is the mechanism that retells the ancient Puranic tale of Kacha and Devayani to address a contemporary issue: the politics of reservation in India. The drama is set in an upper-caste Pune household that is forced to take in a Dalit lodger under a new law. There is a mixture of drawing-room satire and Tamasha as the family's apparent tolerance cracks under pressure. The paper argues that the myth in Pawar's play is more than a setting or a clever parallel to the real narrative. It manages to break through. At the beginning of the protagonist's final monologue, Shukracharya, the rakshasas, and Devayani herself enter the stage, and the audience can see the ancient story entering the present physically. By the end of the play, the realist domestic drama has been completely replaced by the mythic drama. The constant anxiety around caste in food, gods, even language, to show how folk theatrical form actually does the political work rather than simply providing local colour. In Pawar's hands, myth becomes a way to dissect the concepts like purity, tolerance, and reform that uphold the caste system, and to imagine a humanity that is not defined by gods or demons.

Keywords: Tamasha, Myth Subversion, Kacha-Devayani, folk Art, Caste.

Introduction

Sanjay Pawar has written the play *Kon Mhanta Takka Dila* in 1990. In that particular year 1990, August the government under V.P Singh announced that it would carry out the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, indicating the opening up of reservations in central government jobs and higher education to the Other Backward Classes. The response was not simply a debate. It set fire in the streets, created agitation among the students and in newspapers. Pawar's play was written straight into that heat. Even the Marathi title carries the argument in it, which means, roughly, "Who says we have been given our share?", and the word "takka" denotes the percentage, the quota itself, is placed at the centre of it. Maya Pandit has translated the play into English and renamed it as *Pass the Buck on Brother*. The play parallelly lifts out to one of the odder episodes of the story of Kacha and Devayani in Mahabharata and hands the argument over to that old tale to make on its behalf.

This paper will talk about the folk aesthetics initially and move on to a political motive. The folk aesthetic in this play is not ornament. It is the engine. Critics who read Dalit theatre, treat the Tamasha songs, the direct address, the comic clowning,

and the sudden entry of gods, as flavour laid over a message that could just as well have been delivered as a realist problem-play. The argument here is opposite. In *Pass the Buck on Brother* the folk form is what allows the myth to move from being a parallel drawn in conversation to becoming a presence that occupies the stage, and it is that movement from talk about a story, to the story walking in, that carries the political message. The play begins as drawing-room satire and ends as ritual. The distance between those two things is exactly the distance the argument travels.

The two stages: drawing room and Tamasha

The setting is a Brahmin household in Pune, a middle class family with four members: Kamalakar Aaradhye, his wife Vimalabai Aaradhya, and their children, Sukanya and Sudarshan. Vimala Aaradhye is flustered by the letter that arrived fifteen days earlier that states the abolition of the reservations across the country and the mandatory measure by the government that the upper caste people should accommodate one low caste person as a part of the policy of Social justice and Equality. Otherwise they will not be entitled to get any facilities from the government like ration card, gas, licenses, passport, etc. The situation is like a gift to satire, and Pawar makes the most of it. Much of the early play runs on the mechanism of the middle-class comedy of manners: the family that says all the correct things about equality while its attitude says something else; the small negotiations over which plate, which chair, which corner of the house; their discrimination in small everyday activities shows the tolerance that is real enough until it is asked to cost anything. The acceptance is conditional and not authentic. But a particular kind of theatre keeps pressing up underneath is Tamasha, the Marathi folk performance tradition, does not observe the fourth wall, does not keep the gods offstage, and does not pretend that the audience is not there. It is bodily and loud; its songs comment on the action; its logic is the logic of the fair and the festival rather than the sitting room. Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the carnivalesque is useful here, carnival is the inversion in which the high is pulled down to the level of the low, and hierarchy is, for a while, turned upside down. The folk register in Pawar's play does precisely this pulling-down. Pawar uses tamasha, the folk performance form, as a tool of cultural resistance. With humour, satire, the play temporarily inverts the caste hierarchy. Every time the Tamasha energy surfaces, the polished surface of the Brahmin household is exposed as a performance too not more natural, than the satirical performance that mocks it. Further, the choice of Tamasha in the play is not neutral. In Maharashtra, Tamasha carries its own caste history, it has long been performed by, and associated with the lower caste communities, and the upper class society has long treated it as coarse, even disreputable. So when Pawar builds the play with Tamasha rather than out of the drawing-room realism his characters would accept it as "proper" theatre, the choice is already a statement about caste. He is answering an upper-caste subject in a form that upper-caste subject has been trained to look down on, and then letting that form take over the stage by the end. He critiques the attitude of upper caste through the content as well as the form of the play. Pawar does not show resistance through Tamasha. The very act of choosing tamasha becomes the act of resistance.

The crucial thing, though, is that Pawar does not stop where the carnival stops. Carnival, in Bakhtin and in Victor Turner after him, is temporary. The world is inverted and then, when the festival ends, it is turned back. Order is restored. But this play refuses the turning-back. The inversion that begins as comedy hardens, over the course of the evening, into something that will not reset. And so the play can be described as a movement from carnival inversion to ritual rupture. The folk form supplies the inversion; the myth supplies the rupture; and the two are welded together so tightly that the aesthetic from the politics could not be separated without breaking both.

Significance of the myth

The Kacha–Devayani story comes from the Adi Parva of the Mahabharata. The gods and the demons are at war. Shukracharya, preceptor of the asuras, possesses the powerful knowledge of Sanjeevani Vidya, a magical ability that can bring the dead back to life. The gods send Kacha, son of their own preceptor Brihaspati, to become Shukracharya's student and to acquire, by whatever means, this exclusive knowledge. Devayani, Shukracharya's daughter, falls in love with him. The asuras, understanding what Kacha has come to steal, kill him again and again; each time Devayani pleads and her father revives him. At last they burn his body, grind the ash into wine, and give it to Shukracharya to drink, so that Kacha is now inside the very body of his teacher. Devayani pleads once more. Shukracharya, cornered, teaches the reviving science to Kacha from within, so that when the young man tears his way out, killing his teacher in the act, he can bring the teacher back. Kacha leaves with the knowledge. And when Devayani asks him to marry her, he refuses: having been reborn from her father's body, he says, he is now her brother, and marriage would be a sin. She curses Kach: he will be "born as an SC OBC in the twentieth century," and the law will compel him to live among the savarnas (Pawar 391). This myth contains the inner structure of the reservation debate that the government announced as a part of social justice and equality. The sanjeevani vidya is the guarded, twice-born, which brings the dead back to life, but when an outsider steps in to learn it, the fear of the asuras is that they would not be considered exclusive thereafter. The asuras panic that a newcomer will carry off their exclusive science is, almost line for line, the upper-caste panic, where they had exclusive access to status and education for centuries and when the reservation policy of the government opened its access to everyone, the fear is about losing their exclusiveness, the fear that what has always been ours, and which we have taught ourselves to call merit, is about to be handed to people who have no right to it. Pawar does not have to force the parallel. He only has to let the old story stand next to the new law. Because in myth it was the two equal rivals who fought, but in the play, the reservation debate is not about two equals, it is about correcting the old unfair treatment.

There is also a woman at the centre of this transaction. In the myth it is Devayani whose desire keeps Kacha alive, each time the demons kill him, she pleads to her father to revive him back and finally Kacha refuses to accept her proposal of marriage. The labour of keeping the outsider alive is hers; the humiliation of being turned away is hers; and the curse she throws is the only power the story leaves in her hands. Read alongside the caste allegory, this adds a harder second layer.

Devayani is the one who does the work of keeping the relationship alive. She is the most exposed and the most used and then she is told that love across this line is impossible, and she is refused, with the excuse of "sisterhood" used to hold her at a distance. Because the play also pays real attention to gender, this cannot be treated as a minor detail. Caste, and its control over who is allowed to marry and love, turn out to be the same question, which is exactly Ambedkar's point in *Annihilation of Caste*, where the rule of marrying only within caste is what keeps the whole system alive. Kacha refuses Devayani by re-labelling her as a sister suddenly: he reaches for the language of family at the very moment he denies her equality. He refuses with the language of warmth and closeness. The same thing takes place in the modern family. The liberal household in the play performs its own version of it constantly. It calls the Dalit lodger a brother, insists that we are all one that shows there is really no difference between us and it says all this precisely in order not to share anything real, the real equality. That is the cruelty the title names, and the myth supplies its ancient template for this cruelty. In both the contexts, equality is withheld.

Kacha, Kachra and the politics of a name

Pawar's most economical stroke is a pun, and like the best puns it is also an argument. The Dalit lodger is named Kachrya, a name that sits on top of kachra, the Marathi word for refuse, garbage, the swept-up leaves of a house. "From today, he is Kachrya! Kacharya! Born of dirt!" (Pawar 410) The name carries the insult that the upper caste wishes to put on him. So the upper-caste household is, without quite admitting it to itself, sheltering a Kacha: the same name kacha from the myth who has come to learn what the insiders would rather keep. They refuse to keep him but the play sees the young man from the epic who will walk out with the science of sanjeevani. The two readings live in a single sound. A whole theory of caste is folded into that name, the person whom the dominant order can only see as garbage is the one who acquires the guarded knowledge and thereby ends the monopoly. In the play, kacharya carries the mythic charge into the caste world, the person whom the dominant caste treats as garbage is associated with the one who questioned the monopoly over knowledge. The name which was used to belittle him, indeed made him rise beyond them.

Language does further work through the character's own speech. Kachrya does not speak the standard Marathi or polished language. He speaks in his own way. He reflects on it, theorises it, and refuses to be embarrassed by it. In a caste order, language is one of the finest instruments of exclusion: the "wrong" accent, the village word, the grammar that gives a person away, are all ways of keeping them away without ever having to name caste out loud. By making his Dalit character conscious of his own speech and unashamed of it, Pawar turns a mark of impurity into a claimed position. The lodger is not trying to pass. He doesn't speak polished language to be accepted by the upper caste. He holds his language up and asks why it should be the thing that disqualifies him. This is folk aesthetics that is operating as an argument for the play, authenticating the everyday way of speaking.

Food, gods, and the fear of being eaten

The whole play runs through the concern of who may take what into the body, and of what will happen to purity when the limits and boundaries of the body are crossed. Caste has always exercised its strict control through the practices that surround food and eating. B.R. Ambedkar precisely in *Annihilation of Caste* insists that caste is not a division of labour but a division of labourers, a graded order held by rules about the customs of marriage and food. Endogamy and commensality are the locks. The comedy of the plate and the glass, of the food, of the water that becomes complicated the moment the outsider touches it. It is the mechanism of caste shown working in a kitchen. The household buys the Dalit lodger a separate bucket and soap, Vimla admits the separate bucket and soap is the whole reason the outsider is kept in the house. The point is segregation, a way to obey the law at the same time keeping the caste line intact. Sukanya names the logic exactly: this is "the sophistication of untouchability" (Pawar 406).

The play stages that fear most distinctly in the god's room. Kachrya sets his stone god beside the family's, and Sudarshan's response to the sacred itself is "Now you want reservation even in god's room?" (Pawar 411). Putting god in the shared platform gets to be called "nothing less than infiltration" (Pawar 412). This charge shows the dalit characters have crept in the space which is not theirs. Then Kachrya turns over the charge completely, and the inversion is the whole point: "it's we who've belonged here, always and now you call us infiltrators?" (Pawar 412). Kachrya insists that the people who have always lived there are treated as if they do not belong. Meanwhile, those who make the rules about belonging are revealed to be the real outsiders. What looks like protecting the community is actually excluding others

And here the myth answers the household in an almost frightening way. The Kacha story is, in its climax, a story about food and eating. The demons do not merely kill their enemy; they burn him and feed him to their own teacher, Shukracharya, so that the infiltrator, Kacha, ends up inside the guru's body, and can only get out by tearing that body open. The upper-caste terror the play diagnoses is exactly this: that to admit the other into the house, to let him eat, to let him learn is to take him into the body of the community, and that once he is inside, the old order cannot stay whole. The lodger who cannot be given a clean glass is, in the myth, the ash already mixed into the wine. Purity, the play suggests, is not defended at what may be eaten, who may cook it, and whose touch is allowed to reach the plate by accident. It is where the fear of transformation is shown clearly. Gods and demons, in the household's imagination, must be kept from sharing a meal, because a shared meal is the beginning of the end of the difference between them, that is, the beginning of the end of caste.

The Myth walks in

The play keeps its two theatres in tension for the greater part of its length, the realistic drawing room on the surface, the folk-mythic energy pressing up from below. What is striking about the ending is that the tension is not resolved through dialogue or a change of heart. An invasion solves it. As the protagonist enters his final monologue, the boundary that the household has struggled so hard to maintain simply collapses and the figures of the myth appear on the stage in

person. They do not come as a memory, a dream or a story someone tells. Shukracharya, the rakshasas, Devayani herself comes in. The old story, which had been circling the action all evening as analogy, ceases to be analogy and becomes an event.

This is the ritual break and it is a purely theatrical achievement. This effect could not have been produced by any argument of realism, by any eloquent speech about equality. Only a form already believing in gods can share a stage with householders, a form already rejecting the fourth wall, a form already treating performance as a space where the mythical and the ordinary meet, can let the Mahabharata run rampant through a Pune sitting room. Here it is useful to think of Richard Schechner's idea of restored behaviour. Myth, for Schechner, is behaviour that is always being re-done, a strip of the past picked up and performed again in the present. In the final minutes, Pawar brings back the Kacha strip and lets the restoration take over the entire house. The realist play is never over. It has been relocated. There is no drawing-room left, by the last moment, only the myth, standing where the furniture was.

The play's form itself articulates to the thematic content. A prose essay could tell us that the reservation debate is really the old story of hoarded knowledge. A realist play could show us a family failing to live up to its liberal self-image. Only this folk-mythic theatre can make the past materialise, can put the demons in the room, can break down the distance between 1990 and the Adi Parva so that the audience feels the ancient logic close over the present like a lid. The politics is not in a message that the folk form happens to carry. The politics is in what the folk form is able to do.

A social drama that will not heal on the old terms

Victor Turner's communities process their conflicts. A social drama moves through phases: a breach of some norm, a widening crisis, a redressive action by which the community tries to repair itself, and finally either reintegration, harmony restored or an acknowledged, permanent split. Audiences are trained, in the theatre and in life, to expect the redressive phase to work: we wait for the reconciliation, the family that finally opens the door and means it. It is the ending that lets everyone go home feeling that tolerance has triumphed.

The play does not accept that ending instead, it reshapes the conflict. It does something sharper: takes the myth's ungenerous close, all curses and no marriage, and re-writes it as liberation. Sukanya, the play's Devayani, crosses the line herself. She announces the union the legend refused as "Because I'm marrying him" (Pawar 434) and frames it not as infatuation but as a conscious act: she wants to "break free of these fetters of caste and religion," and now to "consciously break them" (Pawar 432). Then Kachrya's closing monologue inverts the curse. Being reborn as a human gives him an escape from the endless conflict between the gods and the rakshasas into an ordinary life beyond caste. He says that he will "raise in Sukanya's womb a Human Being" and find a world "without the longitudes and latitudes of caste and religion" (Pawar 438). Shukracharya confirms the reversal, the power of the curse is unchanged, but the young man has grown, for now that he has understood the beauty of life, 'why should he be scared of death?' (Pawar 438)

What Pawar denies is not resolution but reintegration, the healing in which the household's goodwill is tested and vindicated and the hierarchy survives intact. Sudarshan stays unreformed, the family's hypocrisy stands exposed, and Nadkarni, the neighbour goes on commodifying her Tora, the dalit lodger in her home. Peace comes only because Sukanya defects and because Kachrya refuses to be either the object of charity or the trophy of tolerance, the man who declares that he is going to break this frame. In Turner's terms this is not reintegration but transcendence: a schism into a new order rather than a return to the old one.

When the play first ran in Marathi theatre in 1990, the audience was largely the educated, liberal, upper-caste public, the very sort of people the drawing-room family is modelled on. So the resolution is aimed straight at them, and it withholds the specific comfort they came for. Had Pawar healed the conflict from inside the household the audience could have gone home reassured. Instead the cure arrives from the outside, through the Dalit lodger and the daughter who leaves with him, and the family that prided itself on opening its door is simply left behind. The mirror stays raised: the household on stage is a portrait of the audience, and its failure is handed back to the room as its own. This is the sharpest thing the folk form can do. The tamasha never allowed the audience to hide behind an invisible fourth wall, and so at the very end, the play can refuse to let them walk away thinking people like them were the answer.

Conclusion

The tamasha register, the pun on a name, the unashamed dialect, the anxiety at the mouth, and above all the moment when gods and demons walk into a Mumbai drawing room, these are not the decorations around Pawar's point. They are the point, playing itself. It is the folk form that allows myth to cease being a parallel and become a presence; and it is myth-as-presence that dismantles the three ideas on which the caste order leans most heavily. Purity is revealed as a fear of being incorporated under the guise of virtue. Tolerance is exposed as something invoked in order to withhold. Reform is exposed as the wish for a change that leaves the hierarchy essentially intact. The play takes all three apart not by lecturing but by letting an old story climb out of the epic and stand, insistently, in the present.

What remains, when the drawing room has been overrun and the curse has been spoken, is the question the whole play has been driving toward. If human beings can be sorted, once and for all, into gods and demons, the pure and the refuse, the ones who own the knowledge and the ones who may only be garbage, then caste is simply the truth of the world and reservation is a theft. Pawar's folk theatre exists to refuse that sorting. That, finally, is what folk form makes possible here that argument alone could not: not a better opinion about caste, but the lived theatrical experience of watching its founding distinction come apart on stage and be crossed.

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DABEER SI/KTT/89**REMEMBERING NATURE, RECONSTRUCTING THE POSTHUMAN:
ECOLOGICAL MEMORY AS AN ETHICAL CONTINUUM IN
WILLIAM GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER*, MARGARET ATWOOD'S
ORYX AND CRAKE, AND PHILIP K. DICK'S *DO ANDROIDS DREAM
OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*****A. CHANDRA BOSE**Associate Professor, PG & Research centre in English
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The Madura College (Autonomous), Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India**Abstract**

Speculative fiction has emerged as an imperative area of thinking through the collectivity of the ecological carnage, technological implosion, and posthuman self amidst the Anthropocene ecological crisis. Where William Gibson (*Neuromancer*), Margaret Atwood (*Oryx and Crake*), or Philip K. Dick (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) focused on ecology by placing it in the perspective of cyberpunk, dystopian fiction, and posthumanism, a relative attention has been directed to ecological memory as a moral order to human and posthuman relations with the nonhuman world. In this article, we propose the theory of the Ecological Memory Continuum as a means of exploring how speculative fiction practices ecological remembering as a type of ethical negotiation. The three novels represent different stages in the ecological shift of consciousness; therefore, through the help of qualitative comparative textual analysis, supported with postcolonial ecocriticism, memory studies, and critical posthumanism, this paper aims to examine how the three novels represent the phases of this change. In the article, *Neuromancer* by Gibson describes the ecological loss of remembrance in technologically mediated spaces, cyberspace, and business systems that have made human identity lose touch with nature (Gibson). *Oryx and Crake* by Atwood is a reconstruction of ecological memory by extensively using the story of extinction, testimonies of survivors, and conservation of knowledge in a failed ecological world (Atwood). Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* addresses the progression of ecological ethics via artificial animals, empathy, and the blurred creation between natural and technological life (Dick). The article emphasizes that ecological memory is not an ecological loss document but rather an action-based ethical practice through which posthuman identities are created and challenged. This research offers a significant contribution to the discipline of environmental humanities and speculative fiction studies by portraying the continuum of forgetting to see and rebuilding nature as the key to coming up with responsible technological futures.

Keywords: Ecological Memory; Posthuman Identity; Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Anthropocene; Environmental Humanities; Speculative Fiction; Ecological Ethics

Introduction

This discussion of the interrelation between human development, technological advancement, and the nonhuman world is becoming acute due to the ecological issues of the Anthropocene. The ideas of environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and climate instability have challenged traditional ideas of progress and revealed the weaknesses of anthropocentric attitudes towards life. In this context, speculative fiction has come to play a key role as a literary area to think through future ecological projects and the moral issues arising with technological change.

The speculative narratives are preoccupied with the way human beings remember, forget, and reconnect with the environment upon which they depend rather than merely predicting the type of society that they will inhabit. *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick are important works in the field of speculative fiction as they explore the effects of technological intervention on identity, embodiment, and ecological relations (Gibson; Atwood; Dick). These novels have been covered in the extant literature as a part of cyberpunk theory, dystopian theory, artificial intelligence theory, biotechnology, and posthumanism. However, lower weight has been given to the impact of ecological memory on the ethical nature of posthuman existence than the former considerations.

Having illustrated the destruction of the environment, these novels also discuss the themes of preservation, loss, and transformation of ecological knowledge in environments of technological and social change (Gibson; Atwood; Dick). The paper presents the idea of the Ecological Memory Continuum as a comparison scheme to study the connection between environmental memory and posthuman ethics. This perception is ecological memory, of cultural and moral awareness of the interdependency of humanity, ecosystems, species, and other living things. It is not a mere recalling of forgotten sites but an acknowledgment of the responsibilities that come about as a result of ecological change. Memory, then, turns into a process where people and cultures bargain about the ramifications of environmental loss and envision other possibilities of the future.

The three novels that are analyzed in this paper can be seen as the different stages of this continuum. *Neuromancer* by Gibson experiences ecological amnesia, whereby technological systems, corporate capitalism, and virtual worlds generate space between human consciousness and ecological reality (Gibson). *Oryx and Crake* by Atwood is turned to ecological witnessing, presenting the concept of memory as an archive of extinction according to which the traces of environmental exploitation are preserved (Atwood). *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Dick dwells into the problem of ecological reconstruction, presenting the continuation of empathy and moral awareness in a world whereby nature is cut into bits and pasted together with technology (Dick).

The work makes use of qualitative comparative textual analysis based on postcolonial ecocriticism, memory studies, and critical posthumanism. Postcolonial ecocriticism provides a platform for connecting ecological devastation to processes of power, exploitation, and technological control.

Ecological remembering can be researched as a cultural practice through which information on relations with the environment is retained through memory studies. Critical posthumanism challenges human exceptionalism through exploring human identities that are constructed through relationships with machines, animals, and the environment. This article tries to connect these positions of view as they pursue to understand ecological memory more as a living and moral sequence than as an unalterable archive of the past. It argues that speculative fiction is a conveyor of ecological memory. In each of the selected novels, ecological awareness has been adopted based on ecological disappearance, ecological preservation, and finally, ecological reconstruction (Gibson; Atwood; Dick). These tales show that the posthuman future is not simply based on adaptation to technology but also on the feeling of proper moral affiliation to the more-than-human world. The act of recalling nature thus becomes compulsory in the quest to negotiate responsibility in a more technological and ecologically uncertain future.

Theoretical Framework: The Ecological Memory, Power and Posthuman Ethics

The paper is based on postcolonial ecocriticism, memory studies, and critical posthumanism so that the contribution of speculative fiction in the representation of the ecological crisis as an ecological and ethical problem is examined. Such plans provide a way to understand how the loss, preservation, and restoration of relations have been reflected in human creatures in terms of their association with the more-than-human world. This piece is devoted to postcolonial ecocriticism as it examines the connections between environmental destruction and power relations, capitalism, as well as unequal connections between humans and the environment.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin suggest that along with histories of exploitation and domination, ecological issues need to be taken into account (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*). Rob Nixon proposes the idea of “slow violence,” which over time inflicts damage on the environment but is not directly observable in human culture (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*). This view can be applied to the chosen novels where ecological breakdown is created by corporate networks, technology, and commodification of life instead of individual environmental phenomena (Gibson; Atwood; Dick).

The second useful dimension is provided by memory studies that highlight the fact that remembrance is a cultural and ethical practice. The concept of cultural memory by Jan Assmann displays how communities archive knowledge in terms of narrative, symbol, and practices of shared continuation (Assmann). In the context of the ecological crisis, the concept of memory acquires significance since the devastation of the environment is not only a loss of species and habitat but also a loss of knowledge of human interactions with the natural environment. Ecological memory is therefore regarded as a means of remaining conscious and responsible.

Critical posthumanism is developed on the basis of this argument and undermines humanistic concepts of identity and agency. Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Cary Wolfe show that human existence is determined through the

interaction of biological, technological, and ecological systems (Haraway; Hayles; Wolfe). In this connection, the research will have a chance to delve into the human, machine, animal, and environment limits as imposed in the chosen novels. Still on these, a continuum of ecological memory proposed in this article proposes three tendencies of speculative pictures of ecological consciousness, which include: ecological amnesia, ecological witnessing, and ecological reconstruction. The term ecological amnesia is used to denote ecological blindness against the backdrop of technology and capitalism, as in *Neuromancer* by Gibson (Gibson). It is possible to think of the term ecological witnessing as being a preservation of ecological knowledge relative to ecological narratives of extinction and survival as perceived in *Oryx and Crake* by Atwood (Atwood). The reconstruction of ecology contains the implication of forming ethical relations with modified forms of life that is reflected in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Dick (Dick).

William Gibson's *Neuromancer*: Amnesia and the Destruction of Nature

The novel *Neuromancer* by William Gibson is a first stage in the Ecological Memory Continuum since it portrays the future of a world in which corporate dominion, high-tech processes, and virtual worlds have replaced ecological awareness (Gibson). The novel does not pose environmental death in the shape of deserted landscapes or visible destruction; rather, it presents a society where ecological non-existence has become normalized. Even nature no longer exists, not as a geographical location, but as a cultural space, as human identity is less and less guided by information networks and spaces of synthesis.

This state of technological mediation is created in the very beginning of the work through the description of the sky as “the color of television, tuned to a dead channel” (Gibson 3). The language of technology is used to view and interpret the natural environment, implying that artificial systems have transformed even the basic experiences of the physical world. This picture brings out the main issue in this novel: a world whereby technological representation takes up the place of actual experience of the environment.

This loss of connection to material worlds and human consciousness is intensified in cyberspace. The place where identity is not connected with flesh is referred to as a “consensual hallucination” and is called cyberspace (Gibson 51). The longing of Case to return to cyberspace can be seen as a wider cultural trend towards abandoning ecological interrelation with the world for digital living. Although cyberspace has more potential for humankind, it has also created ecological amnesia when the physical aspects of life are no longer important. Observable in the physical sense is the Sprawl, which represents eco-displacement. Such huge urban technological space expresses the presence of corporate forms and artificial systems instead of natural ecosystems. In the novel, technological evolution does not necessarily lead to ecological awareness; on the contrary, it can produce a condition where environmental loss becomes unnoticed.

The power of corporations in *Neuromancer* extends beyond economic domination to include bodies, information, and biological processes. The Tessier-Ashpool corporation demonstrates that even life itself becomes property controlled by technology (Gibson). In such a way, Gibson connects ecological amnesia with regimes that perceive living beings as financial resources rather than as

interconnected elements within a system. The ecological nature of forgetting, which is expressed through political forgetting, also manifests itself in the identity of the novel through moral consequences. It is accessibility to cyberspace and the ability to use technology that shape Case's sense of self rather than relationships with physical space. Gibson thus conveys a posthuman condition that is connected yet unrelated to ecological responsibility. *Neuromancer* might represent the lost environmental consciousness in the Ecological Memory Continuum. The ecological annihilation resulting from technological modernity is not the only danger of technology presented in the novel; rather, it is the creation of a culture in which this annihilation becomes barely detectable

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood: Witnessing Interrupted and the Archive of Extinction

The second step of the Ecological Memory Continuum, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, is an act of witnessing that is transformed into ecological memory (Atwood). Gibson describes a society that has forgotten nature, while Atwood describes a world with a specter of ecological loss. Remembrances of extinct species, ruined environments, and destroyed technologies are needed after the collapse of civilization in order to understand the consequences of human impact on nature.

The ecological catastrophe of the novel is caused by the regime of genetic capitalism, where biological life becomes a resource for commercial exploitation. Through biotechnology, corporate compounds take over scientific investigations and redesign living organisms based on economic goals. Atwood presents this technological control over life as a further development of anthropocentric thought, in which living things are appreciated according to their utility rather than ecological relations (Atwood). The issue of extinction in the novel is both biological and cultural extinction. The loss of species not only eliminates forms of life but also the knowledge and relationships connected with them. Extinction thus becomes a crisis of memory. Extinction becomes easier to occur when it takes place without recollection.

Snowman is an ecological narrator of the novel. Being the sole remaining human, he keeps alive the memory of a lost world through fragmented memories of his childhood, his friendship with Crake, and the fall of human civilization (Atwood). His memories are disjointed and traumatized, yet they remain the sole remnants connecting ecological and cultural histories of humanity. Snowman is used by Atwood to bring in the issue of memory as an ethical responsibility. His narration to the Crakers attempts to preserve the facts about the mistakes of the past and prevent history from being completely erased.

However, Atwood does not depict memory as a flawless recalling of the past. Instead, it is a difficult task of constructing meaning out of loss. The Crakers symbolize both the restraint and potential of posthuman reconstruction. Crake develops them to overcome destructive human emotions; consequently, they appear to possess a connection with their surroundings that is more enduring (Atwood). However, their lack of historical understanding reveals that ecological responsibility cannot be established through biological modification alone. They will need memory in order to comprehend the implications of earlier ecological

failures. *Oryx and Crake* represents ecological witnessing within the context of the Ecological Memory Continuum. Atwood suggests that future life needs to adapt and learn ecological history. Posthuman futures will be founded on the development of ethical relationships with the planet through memory (Atwood).

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick: The Artificial Nature and the Recreation of Ecology

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick can be seen as the last phase of the Ecological Memory Continuum, as it explores ecological consciousness surviving in an environment that is mainly reproduced technologically (Dick). Dick presents an ecologically inclusive future world where nature is lost but continues through man-made forms, when compared to the ecologically unremembering world of Gibson and the ecologically remembering world of Atwood. Having become exceptions after the tragedy of environmental devastation, real animals have been replaced by artificial ones in response to widespread extinction (Dick). These artificial animals are representative of both memory and forgetting. They take away the emotional meaning that animals bear while simultaneously revealing that the ecological relationships that created them have been damaged. The commodification of nature is shown through the artificial animal industry. Instead of reinstating destroyed ecosystems, society develops technological substitutes that allow people to possess an illusion of ecological interdependence (Dick). It is through this condition that Dick reflects on the dilemma between technological conservation and actual ecological healing.

The moral concept of empathy receives the main emphasis in the novel. Through the empathy box, individuals connect with and share the pain and difficulties of others (Dick). This practice confronts isolation and indicates that ethical awareness is strengthened through recognition of vulnerability and interdependence. This moral question is extended through the issue of android identity in the novel, which challenges the distinction between human and artificial life. Androids question the assumption that moral value is purely biological (Dick). Through these characters, Dick explores a posthuman world in which ethical responsibility must transcend conventional categories of humanity. The novel by Dick can be characterized as an ecological reconstruction within the Ecological Memory Continuum. It indicates that ecological ethics can survive even in situations where the original natural world has been transformed. Through empathy and the recognition that they participate in new forms of life, the characters demonstrate that posthuman responsibility is not based only on origin but also on care (Dick).

The Ecological Memory Continuum: Forgetting-to-Reconstruction

The reading of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* demonstrates that ecological memory is a far-reaching moral question of speculative fiction. Although the novels find their places in different literary traditions, they all engage with the new conditions of technological societies and reveal the ways in which human beings transform their relationships with the nonhuman world (Gibson; Atwood; Dick).

The three texts reflect that the environmental crisis is a crisis of memory through the multiple ways in which it is characterized as the absence of ecology, life, and adaptation. The first stage of the continuum, ecological amnesia, is represented by Gibson's *Neuromancer*. The novel narrates how ecological relations have been conquered by cyberspace, business systems, and virtual environments in a futuristic world (Gibson). Nature is not only destroyed but removed from human consciousness. The Sprawl and cyberspace demonstrate that technological systems can reshape human perception to such an extent that dependence upon ecology is no longer recognized. Gibson presents environmental destruction as a consequence of societies neglecting their relationship with the natural world (Gibson). In *Oryx and Crake*, by Atwood, the second level, ecological witnessing, is developed. Unlike the world in which Gibson introduces ecological absence as a normalized condition, Atwood presents a post-apocalyptic world where the remains of ecological devastation continue to surround humanity (Atwood).

The novel illustrates remembrance as a witnessing process through Snowman's memories and the traces of ruined ecosystems. Ecological memory preserves knowledge of extinction and the consequences of systems that commodify life (Atwood). However, Atwood also demonstrates that ethical transformation must accompany memory. A new relationship with life must become the future, unable to rely solely on memories of past failures but instead creating new associations with the more-than-human world. Ecological reconstruction, as represented by Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, completes the continuum (Dick). Through technological and artificial forms of life, Dick's novel considers the nature of authenticity, life, and responsibility in a transformed world. The presence of artificial animals and androids challenges the traditional separation between natural and artificial life. Empathy enables Dick to present an ethical paradigm based on vulnerability rather than biological origin (Dick).

The novel indicates that posthuman futures require new modes of care capable of responding to changed conditions of existence. In sum, these novels demonstrate that ecological memory cannot be understood as a return to a pristine natural environment or merely as a complete record of environmental destruction. Rather, it is an active ethical process through which societies understand ecological change and envision future possibilities (Gibson; Atwood; Dick).

The forgetting, remembrance, and reconstruction of life relationships are illustrated through the works of Gibson, Atwood, and Dick. As represented through the Ecological Memory Continuum, the connection between ecological crisis and power systems becomes significant. All three novels are critical of technologies of control and forms of economic exploitation that transform living beings into resources: Gibson investigates corporate domination and digital capitalism; Atwood critiques biotechnology and the commercialization of genetics; Dick examines commercialized nature through artificial animals (Gibson; Atwood; Dick). Through postcolonial ecocriticism, memory studies, and critical posthumanism, environmental responsibility is shown to depend on the ability to maintain ecological awareness within changing technological contexts. The selected novels suggest that technological progress alone cannot guarantee

the future of humanity. It requires maintaining ethical relationships with the more-than-human world.

Conclusion

The discussion of *Neuromancer*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has shown that ecological memory can be effectively used as a tool for analyzing the way in which speculative fiction responds to environmental crisis and posthuman transformation. These novels demonstrate that, in addition to the destruction of ecosystems, knowledge, connections, and moral consciousness associated with the natural world are also destroyed in ecological collapse (Gibson; Atwood; Dick). Through the conception of the Ecological Memory Continuum, this article has argued that speculative fiction represents ecological consciousness through three interconnected stages. Gibson's *Neuromancer* represents ecological amnesia, in which the dangers of technological systems are revealed through the separation of human beings from ecological realities (Gibson). Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* opens the possibility of ethical reflection by functioning as a witness to ecological history and the extinction that must be remembered (Atwood). Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* addresses ecological reconstruction by showing that even when nature itself has undergone technological transformation, empathy and care can maintain ethical relationships (Dick).

Together, these novels challenge the assumption that technological progress and environmental sustainability are automatically synonymous. Rather, they propose technological futures guided by memory and ethics that acknowledge the interdependence between humans, machines, animals, and environments. Ecological memory is therefore a response that needs to be developed as a way of coping with uncertainties in the Anthropocene. However, speculative fiction is not simply about forecasting environmental disasters; it is an examination of the values and memories that will guide actions during those crises. The remembrance of nature becomes an ethical practice when it recalls the relationships that sustain life. While envisioning futures in which ecological loss and technological transformations occur, Gibson, Atwood, and Dick demonstrate that posthuman survival is not only about adapting to change but also about remembering, caring, and living with it.

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DABEER SI/KTT/90**PROPHETIC DYSTOPIA: IMAGINING COLONIAL OPPRESSION AND
INDIGENOUS UPRISING IN EARLY INDIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION
— KYLAS CHUNDER DUTT'S VISION OF 1945****DWAIPAYAN MITRA**Assistant Professor of English, Chandernagore College
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Techno India University, West Bengal.**Abstract**

This article examines Kylas Chunder Dutt's 1835 speculative narrative *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* as a pioneering work of prophetic dystopia in early Indian writing in English. Written by an eighteen-year-old student at Hindu College, Calcutta, the text projects contemporary colonial oppression into a future of intensified British tyranny and organised indigenous uprising set in 1945. Reading the journal through the intersecting lenses of memory, gender, and ecology, the analysis argues that Dutt's work functions as a form of prophetic memory: an anticipatory recollection of colonial trauma that mobilises resistance by displacing the present into a dystopian future. Central to this vision is the gendered construction of the nation as the "much-neglected mother," a feminised motherland whose violation by colonial "barbarians" demands collective armed defence. The rhetorical centrepiece—Bhoobun Mohun's oration—exposes the paradox of colonial education, which equips the elite Indian subject with the idioms of English political oratory and Enlightenment liberty only to turn those same tools against the empire. This performance anticipates Homi Bhabha's theorisation of colonial mimicry that becomes menace, while also prefiguring later nationalist rhetoric of the motherland. Simultaneously, the text names "subaltern oppression" nearly a century and a half before Subaltern Studies, imagining cross-class and cross-community solidarity even as leadership remains elite and the masses largely voiceless. Ecologically, Dutt's Calcutta—the "City of Palaces"—reduced to a landscape of terror, bamboo avenues, and syncretic sacred spaces—registers colonial violence as an assault on both human and non-human environments. The reduction of Indians to "the level of beasts" collapses racial and ecological hierarchies, revealing the extractive logic of empire. The uprising's failure within the compressed forty-eight-hour frame underscores the ethical complexity of speculative resistance: not a utopian blueprint, but a diagnostic intervention that insists on the moral imperative to resist against overwhelming odds. By recovering this long-overlooked text, the essay revises Eurocentric chronologies of speculative fiction and demonstrates how early colonial Indian writing already articulated sophisticated narratives of memory, gender, and ecological critique.

Keywords: Prophetic memory Gendered nationalism Colonial ecology
Speculative fiction Subaltern resistance Early Indian English literature

A Journal of 48 Hours of the Year 1945 by Kylas Chunder Dutt (1835) is a singular and unheralded gem amongst the literature of British India. Written at the age of eighteen when Dutt was still a student at Hindu College in Calcutta, the text heralds a future of colonial tyranny, never experienced in reality, and of organised indigenous armed uprising more than a century before it actually happened in reality. It is what scholars have come to classify as a "prophetic dystopia": a cross-genre story that, through the use of future speculation, provided a sustained critique of contemporary colonial oppression and posited the potential and imperative for resistance. Dutt displaces the action into 1945, making the journal form, which is traditionally a vehicle of personal observation, a politically explosive one in the hands of Dutt; he uses the conventions of dystopian fiction to reveal what he considers subaltern oppression and to summon an entire colonised people to revolt (Dutt, qtd. in Gibson 16). It has been largely forgotten, however, and is now receiving new scholarly interest in recent decades, in part because its recovery requires a complete revision of the standard chronologies of Indian writing in English, as well as of the more general international history of speculative fiction.

A Charged Historical Conjuncture: Bengal in 1835

To enable one to appreciate the impact of Dutt's speculative intervention, it becomes necessary to visualise the uncertain mental and political scene in Calcutta in the 1830s. The decade was a critical period, in the words of Mary Ellis Gibson in her groundbreaking scholarly edition *Science Fiction in Colonial India, 1835-1905*, during which "everything seemed open to dispute and charged with value" (Gibson 18). The city was filled with Scottish Enlightenment nostrums and Benthamite utilitarianism, with the radical poetry of Byron and the abolitionist fervour swirling throughout the Atlantic world. Most importantly, Hindu College, founded in 1817 by Kylas and his cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt, had brought up a large number of young Bengalis who spoke English well, had mastered classical rhetoric, and were highly critical of British power.

But the year 1835 itself was a year of great political significance. Macaulay's notorious minute on Indian education had just been disseminated, which stated that English should be the medium of instruction throughout the Indian subcontinent with the intention of bringing "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, qtd. in Viswanathan 3). But where Macaulay saw a means of cultural assimilation, the production of faithful colonial subjects, Dutt's text undermines the effort with chilling accuracy. That is what Bhoobun Mohan, hero of Dutt's uprising, did: an Anglo-Indian college graduate who utilised English rhetoric, classical allusion, and Enlightenment notions of liberty as tools to mobilise Indians against the push of the same empire that had influenced his mind. In this turnaround, a journal becomes an ironic critique of the imperial project of education before Macaulay's minute was even dry.

The context of publication also accentuates the radicalism of the text. *The Calcutta Literary Gazette*, edited by David Lester Richardson, who had published the Bengal Annual, containing speculative stories by Henry Meredith Parker and H. H. Goodeve, was the source for Dutt's story. Richardson was "required to

textologize his infant writer's revolutionary tendencies and to blame it all on the fumes of youth," says Gibson (Gibson 24), implying the political provocation was easy to see for those who read this story at the time. The fact that the story began to be published in print between 1835 and 1857, a time when press liberties were quite free, explains the survival of the story in print; the subsequent suppression of the freedoms of the press after 1857, and the lack of surviving copies, suggest that Dutt's vision was considered dangerous.

The Architecture of Prophetic Dystopia

The epigraph, from Junius Brutus, speaks of the Roman republicans' resistance to tyranny. The classical frame is no ornament; it is functional and throws a flood of light on the central theme of the novel. It looks to the transhistorical discourse of liberty to decolonise the Indian struggle and to reframe colonial rule not as a civilising government but as barbarous tyranny—a tactic that turns the idiom of European humanism back on European imperialism. Focusing on 21st-century theories of simultaneity (which Gibson, following Ernest Bloch and the Warwick Research Collective, defines as "the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous"), the speculative novel uncovers a modernity that is not only diffused from Europe to the rest but also a modernity that is heterogeneous, contested, and not experienced equally by colonised writers (Gibson 11).

In this time frame, Dutt sets up a recognisably dystopian world. The British are secretaries who hypocritically "dealt out the dagger and the bowl with a merciless hand, and neither age, sex, nor condition could repress" their violence" (Dutt, qtd. in Gibson 16). Colonial Calcutta, the "City of Palaces," is a place of abiding terror and quiet outrage. The dystopian sense of it is materialised by strong sensory details: meetings in public are frequently held on bamboo avenues in suburbs, a pagoda built by the Muslims offers a syncretic backdrop, and an assembly made up of Bábús, Rájás, and Nábábs implies cross-class and cross-community solidarity, albeit under the leadership of an elite. This visual location—juxtaposed with the politics of crisis—locates our speculation exclusively within a Bengali visual country and stands firm against abstraction, which would have diffused the polemical impact.

Throughout the years, the genre's characteristics have been the subject of long discussion by all sorts of scholars of science fiction. Dutt's text is an appropriate place to apply some of Darko Suvin's influential concept, which is the "novum," or something new that produces a cognitive estrangement by rupturing the "familiar" social relations. For Gibson, the novum in Kylas Chunder Dutt's tale and in *The Republic of Orissa* (1845), written by his cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt, is "anticolonial revolution itself" (Gibson 19). The split was not technological but political: In 1835, the jolt of what Indians could manage to do on their own—organise effectively against the British—was the most radical discontinuity any steam engine or time machine could ever offer. Gibson's version sees Dutt's contribution to the field as part of a larger project in which SF is not the project of techno-modernity in the metropole but must be acknowledged as a truly international and polycentric genre being constructed at the same time (and sometimes in direct relation to) SF written by writers from the metropole (Gibson 5).

Bhoobun Mohun and the Rhetorical Centrepiece

The crux of the revolt is Bhoobun Mohon, a twenty-five-year-old graduate of the Anglo-Indian College, whose presence and speech re-enact the central paradox of the text: colonial education has created its own grave diggers. The rhetorical heart of his narrative is the oration itself, which is bravura ventriloquism. The speaker's use of the forms of English political oratory—classical allusion, call to universal liberty, and carefully constructed antithesis—serves as weapons against the empire that are mobilised and wielded by Dutt. Bhoobun Mohon explains that other countries are flourishing while India acquires a life worse than that of a beast with its British rule: "While the other nations of the earth are rising high in the scale of civilisation, the people of Indostan are daily sinking to the level of beasts" (Dutt, qtd. in Gibson 119). This formulation is especially clever; that which imperial apologists used to characterise the British themselves as barbarians is turned against them, and the British are described in terms of barbarism rather than as its rectifiers.

The speech insists that all present should unite and that the "banner of freedom" should be raised, and all should take up arms and fight for the families and "the much-neglected mother"—the motherland. The motherly image of the nation is feminised, with the context for such an image already in the family of the nationalist rhetoric that would dominate the Indian independence struggle in the next hundred years. That's not a simplistic or triumphalist aberration, though, at Dutt's. He enjoys the speculative framing because that is what enables him to be who he is; Bhoobun Mohan would not be the man he is if it weren't for colonial education, yet it is the very same that gives him the means to question the systems that created him. It thus stages an *avant la lettre* of what Homi Bhabha later theorises as 'colonial mimicry' that becomes 'menace' (Bhabha 86).

The notion of "cultural re-equipment" of Indian nationalism, in the sense that it involved more than mere imitation of colonial modernity, is anticipated amazingly in Bhoobun Mohon's performance (Chatterjee, 6). Dutt's hero also appropriates the language of progress and civilization for Indians and challenges the worldview itself of colonial violence. The text operates at various levels. It is as much a speculative fiction as much a political commentary containing a 'double-voiced discourse'.

Subaltern Oppression: Prophetic Theory

One of the most interesting aspects of Dutt's text is its mention of the term "subaltern oppression," a phrase that was to become theoretically central to the work of Ranajit Guha and the collective known as the Subaltern Studies in the 1980s and that anticipates it by almost a century and a half. The focus of Guha's early work was the aim of recovering 'the small voice of history,' of returning agency to those who were left by colonial historians as 'objects' and not the subjects of history (Guha 16). In so doing, Dutt's text initiates precisely the recuperative imaginative work that Guha called for, over one hundred and fifty years ago.

The text does, however, mirror a conflict that would haunt nationalist and postcolonial discourse in its future course: the elites and indigenes are of a distinctly subaltern nature, and the leadership of this revolt remains singularly

bourgeois-educated. Although Bhoobun Mohan speaks for the masses, he is also in a relatively privileged position in society. This tension of elite mobilisation in the name of the many is a reflection of the complexities in the later nationalist movements and was pointed out by Gibson, who says that "the key encounters in these stories are amongst elites, even when non-elites' suffering is suggested." (Gibson 14). There is a certain radicalism in this text, but it is also constrained, circumscribed by the social and generic contexts or conditions within which it is produced.

In reading Dutt's text, the question "Can the subaltern speak?" (In Spivak 271) overshadows our understanding. The masses assembled in the north-eastern suburbs of Calcutta are present but voiceless, and it is Bhoobun Mohun that speaks for them: in English, in the forms of colonial rhetoric. But being able to imagine that kind of speech, to put it into print in a colonial newspaper in a way that threatens colonial authority—this is a form of subaltern intervention: Dutt himself was placed in the role of being a kind of semi-subaltern subject in the upheaval of summer 1818, and now he was putting that subject position into print and circulation in a way that, for colonial power, was sufficiently threatening to warrant suppression.

Rewriting Genre History: Colonial Science Fiction in a Global Frame

Gibson's edition makes a powerful case for the importance of Dutt's text—and the broader corpus of early colonial science fiction in Bengal—for the global history of speculative fiction. Standard accounts of science fiction's origins locate the genre in the European metropole: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Jules Verne's adventures from the 1860s, and H. G. Wells's scientific romances of the 1890s. The common view is that science fiction began in Europe when Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* (1818) or when Jules Verne travelled in the 1860s, and H.G. Wells penned scientific romances in the 1890s. It is contemporary with the Bengali translation of the same (1835), and is omitted from this bibliographic survey that was developed by Edward Gibson and which he enumerates exhaustively, noting thirteen British science fiction productions between 1840 and 1800. If they are present, a rethinking of the hierarchical or historical ordering and geographical domains of the genre is called for, as Gibson points out: "all the normal chronology and geography of the genre must be revised" (Gibson 3).

Indeed, Gibson aims to show – as John Rieder does in the same book about colonialism and science fiction – how colonialism and space difference are interpreted metaphorically in what Gibson terms allochronism (the linkage of space difference in a temporal difference) in metropolitan SF (Gibson 15-16). The fraught question of the allochronism of Dutt's text is firmly refuted. His Calcutta isn't a barbarous world to which the principles of 'civilisation' have to be imposed, but a civilised one that is undergoing a revolution based on the principles. Gibson responds by telling of another fictionalized "revolution" or "flipping the telescope" against British "barbarians" (Gibson 16) by Kylas Chunder Dutt, a classically educated Indian. However, by doing so, Dutt is attracting or perhaps even provoking the critical school that would follow him/her and would challenge Eurocentric genre histories.

The scripture forms an important part of comparative literary history. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay is of the view that Indian science fiction writers are typically 'transcolonials', that is, writers who share the conviction that 'the truths of science' are 'across the country' and devoid of bias. While Dutt does not focus as much on technology as on politics, his story nonetheless has to be a part of the transcolonial project of thinking outside of neocolonial times. In this tradition, another work, *The Republic of Orissa* (1845), by its other cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt deserves mention. It suggests that the cousins engaged in a persistent unfinished attempt to jointly establish an anti-imperial ecosystem of blue-rain environments: speculative fiction.

Bengal Renaissance, Young Bengal, and the Formation of the Author

But without such a background, one cannot fully appreciate Dutt's text, which is part of the cultural ferment of the Bengal Renaissance and Young Bengal. Dutt's family was among the leading thinkers who started and established the Hindu College in 1817; here, the first generation of Anglicised Bengali intellectuals was formed. Consider it in the context of Gauri Viswanathan's research on the colonial version of India, in which education in English literature was from the beginning associated with the colonial enterprise, designed to create compliant and culturally assimilated subjects (Viswanathan 3). But it was through an encounter with the language—English literature—that resistance was made possible and the values of individuality, reason and liberty instilled, as Viswanathan also shows.

It was the highly radical teacher Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–1831) who had established a climate of sceptical research and evidence of disaffection against the colonial leaders and even the social conformities of the native at Hindu College. The emphasis on Derozio and his circle situates Kylas Chunder Dutt within this intellectual history, and reveals, implicitly, the "politics of naming" and the "freedom with which all subjects were discussed" that suffused the intellectual life in 19th-century Calcutta (Chaudhuri 858). In a number of ways this is the literary concretisation of Dutt's text: it is the expression of the Derozian attitude of opposition to institutional power, in particular the British colonial occupational power.

That the value of the Dutt family as a literary business should also be registered is no less important. An alternative form of writing modernity was visible within the family of the Rambagens themselves—Toru Dutt, the niece of Kylas, was an acclaimed bilingual poet and a translator from the French. The speculative fiction, the political anti-colonialism of the 1830s, and the lyric poetry and translation of the 1870s have been the practices of these family paths—practices of use and contestation of colonial literary authority at home.

Ambivalence, Failure, and the Ethics of Speculative Resistance

One of the most interesting features of the written text is that it is not very triumphalist. It is a moving force that Bhoobun Mohon evokes and which gets retold in Dutt's diary but goes astray. It's bloody at the public meeting where the British troops (the "Redcoats") are present, and the sense of revolutionary urgency parried by military upheavals and political multi-layering over the next 48 hours is balanced against the sense of fragility. If not, Dutt offers his reader no comfort in future freedom, but in the morality he promotes; there's a duty to resist against

the greatest odds. Maybe the most literary enterprise in the text is this ambivalence. It is a rejection not only of the naive nature of the "utopian fiction" A Journal is offered as, but also of the "defeatist ideology of colonialism. Sensations of losing and winning there is a failure, but, at the same time, a victory too: a victory of articulating the rebellion in print; a victory of imagining the rebellion.

When speaking about the utopian text, as Gibson puts it, 1 in 20, Fredric Jameson's notion of the "diagnostic intervention" is sure to come into mind. However, Dutt's text is not a prescription for liberation; it is an analysis of a condition that precludes and makes liberation necessary and difficult. The author's role of diagnosis is enacted formally by the 48-hour truncation of the narrative - the accelerated pace of the time of revolution and counter-revolution, a faster pace of what the colonial power represents in terms of violence for the reader. The speculative frame – the 'what if' of 1945 – is just the right distance for critical focus and for the potential of action.

The Dutt text's double temporality is more or less apparent in the fact that Bill Ashcroft sees his definition of postcolonial utopian fiction as one that is "full of engagement with the present, unfolding critique as a means of hope" (Ashcroft 18). The future envisioned in the projected 1945 is not only a condemnation of that of the viewed 1835 but also a force for future resistance. It was sad, and somehow humorous, that the true independence of India had come in 1947 only two years after Dutt had in his imagination envisaged the possibility of bringing the revolution, but could not have it expelled by any subsequent editorialising. Of course Dutt could not have seen then what would actually happen, but he knew it was an easy path to the subject's demise.

Style, Form, and the Limits of Genre

Dutt makes use of a narrative style that conflates journalistic, rhetorical and descriptive modes of narration. In the nineteenth century, the dominant mode of narration was a melodramatic one. Dutt steers clear of using such mode of narration and adopts a different device for producing 'cognitive estrangement'. By situating the novel in a near future, he shocks the reader and offers a visionary commentary about the future.

A reading of the text Dutt offers suggests that science fiction is best thought of, as David Seed has said, as a "field where different genres and subgenres intersect" instead of a single genre (Seed 1). It is both a speculative fiction, a political tract, a historical romance, and a chronicle of the times. Its generic hybridity, like that of the colonial science fiction collected in her edition, is a testament of its strength, as is the "bivalent situation" that characterized Bengal in the 1830s (Gibson 19). The textual "hybridisation" of form is analogous to the "hybridisation" of identity between the colony and India, between Bengali and educated classes in the colony, and refines the form through hybridisation of identity.

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DABEER SI/KTT/91**BREEDING SILENCE: THE DEHUMANIZATION OF
MARGINALIZED IN THE DYSTOPIAN NARRATIVE *TENDER IS THE
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Sri Meenakshi Government Arts College for Women**M. NITINPRABHU**Assistant Professor of English
Manikam Ramaswamy College of Arts and Science, Thiruparankundram**Abstract**

Tender is the Flesh is a dystopian narrative that presents a world where a zoonotic virus left animal meat toxic that led to the institutionalization of special meat. This 'special meat' is produced in processing plants where humans are bred specifically for consumption and are termed as 'Heads.' Instead of focusing on the gruesome act of cannibalism, this paper highlights the deliberate 'Breeding of Silence' that sustains it. Agustina Bazterrica presents a horrendous world where silence is not the absence of sound, but the deliberate strategy of exclusion. This study demonstrates this dystopian narrative through the lens of Foucault's Biopolitics and explores it in terms of Aldous Huxley's prophetic vision of the future. It underscores how the Government not only breeds heads for consumption rather breeds silent recipients who sustain that dehumanization. This aligns with Huxley's prediction that citizens can foster a sense of satisfaction within an oppressive system that does not need any brute force.

Keywords: Institutionalization, Biopolitics, exclusionary practices, passive recipients

Introduction

2017 novel *Tender is the Flesh* depicts a terrible setting in which people are regulated in a way that allows the unthinkable as habitual. This novel concentrates on the aspects of dehumanization that is standardized under state-sanctioned law. When the whole world is affected by a virus that rendered animal meat as poisonous, the government turned towards the production of its own meat in which human beings are bred entirely for consumption. Hendrichs argues that establishing stability in a chaotic world due to a viral outbreak by industrial farming of humans for meat is like solving a crisis with a crisis. To solve the fear of the virus, the government legalizes special meat in which it creates another crisis where human capacity is destroyed. Human cattle are termed as 'Heads' and the state ensures that the citizens accept it without any resistance. Exactly like how Aldous Huxley stated in his letter to Orwell regarding the future of control in which people are made to love their servitude, linguistic sterilization portrayed in this novel makes people a passive recipient. This novel becomes a grim literalization of Huxley's fear that people do not resist when systematic silence is bred within them by the power structure.

Literature Review

Gregory Claves in his work called *Dystopia: A Natural History* recorded the dynamic nature of dystopian narratives in which the societal shift as well as political transformation are reflected. He talks about how dystopian writing has the capacity to mirror the real-world anxieties as well as be the form of resistance towards the injustices happening in that particular era. Bazterrica's writing parallels this tradition in which the text addresses the issues that include industrial farming, moral anaesthesia and institutionalization of violence. Many scholarships on this speculative fiction concentrate on the aspect of dehumanization. For instance, J. C. LeForge's thesis explores how specific bodies are designated for exclusion and deemed to be others in the social structure. He also throws light on how linguistic framework aids in the process of marginalization that has the capacity to render someone as non-subjects. Further Sebastian Williams' in 2023 concentrates on eco-perspective in which he critiques the boundaries between humans and their environment in terms of consumption. Other scholars have concentrated on themes such as spectral tropicality and posthumanism in which they argue about how viruses legalize extreme dehumanization and transform the power structure. Further, Vaz Quinco and Vasques Vital state that it exposes the fragility of human ethics. Moreover, scholarly engagement overlooks Huxley's prediction of shift from sovereign power to disciplinary bio-power. This research addresses that gap by elucidating the efficiency of power that transforms them to actively desire their own servitude.

Theoretical Framework

In this narrative, the government's triumph in creating docile bodies is about the psychological regulation of the human mind. Biopolitics represents the state's transition into the management of biological existence which seeks to regulate and organize the life of the population (Adams). In this novel, Foucault's Biopower is utilized in terms of a protein crisis in which marginalized people are turned into a resource. Further, the psychological restructuring of citizens creates the erosion of empathy and conditioned passivity. This analysis reveals the psychological walling of the human mind that proves Huxley's prediction of passive servitude. In the famous fiction *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley envisions a world controlled by pleasure and chemical ingestion. He shows the world filled with happy passivity. Bazterrica in this novel shifts her focus to consumption and passivity. Unlike happy passivity, the citizens in Bazterrica's world are numb passivist who are emptied of human morality. The public become too occupied of global crisis that they are horrified to face the truth. This hallowed out human ethics is not created by oppressive government but through linguistic sterilization and consensus of silence.

Textual analysis**Manufactured Silence**

The Government reflected in Bazterrica's world does not merely breed heads for consumption; it also breeds silent citizens who facilitate this dehumanization. This is done through linguistic and psychological restructuring. In terms of linguistic structuring, the word human is replaced with other words such as 'heads' and 'special meat.' This neutralizes the horror done to the humans that are bred in

processing plants. Their subjectivity is plundered and their voice is silenced. The heads voices are silenced not alone metaphorically but also literally, that their vocal cords are removed to ensure they remain passive. Both the citizens and special humans are silenced ensuring that they don't dissent.

In terms of psychological regulation, the state uses the fear of survivalism. They focus on the psychological foundation of survival and rewire their mind to consume human meat. They trigger their primary instinct where survival is framed as a medical necessity. No one can dissent by refusing to eat human meat as that would be psychologically equated with suicide. The government structures the minds of the citizens by convincing them that there is no biological alternative. People are pushed to the stage that they do not have any other better chance to survive, leading them to take up this choice-less choice. Furthermore, people are aware that heads are humans, yet they are systematized to treat them as products. In this situation, their mind shuts down its empathetic pathways to feel that they are not wrong and doing this for their own survival. By combining linguistic structuring and psychological structuring, special meat made out of humans is integrated into everyday rituals of life in which the government normalizes the grotesque. This aids in the creation of passive recipients that the state has successfully colonized their mundane life structure.

Dehumanization of Marginalized heads:

The heads represented in this novel are the ultimate marginalized class. These heads are biologically human but legally they are the products of capitalist cannibalism. Dehumanization of these heads is necessary to preserve the power structure and run the society. Though they are biologically human, these heads are not treated as humans. They exist in order for another thing to exist. The state-sanctioned cannibalism regulates citizens who become numb to empathize with these heads. This kind of moral anaesthesia is structured upon the citizenry through medicalization of this cannibalistic atrocity. The dehumanization of heads starts with linguistic structuring in which they are termed as 'special meat.' Though this label acknowledges these people as different from animals, this specialness is to normalize the cruelty done to them.

To the extreme their vocal cords are removed which comes under biological dehumanization. At this juncture, the breeding of silence shifts from psychological to the physical in which these heads are not just socially ignored but made inefficient to assert their humanity. This corporeal silencing of marginalized heads reduces the guilt of people who kill them for food. In the final act of the novel, Marcos Tejos kills a female head who he named as Jasmine, immediately after she delivers his son. For Marcos, Jasmine was never a human rather a womb. This highlights how he dismisses her humanity and reduces her to a biological container. The marginalization of Jasmine is so absolute that her survival is not valued after she gives birth. By killing her, he chooses the silent path of servitude.

Foucault's Biopolitics: Breeding of docile bodies

Michael Foucault explains the concept of Biopower in which the state takes control over their biological subjects. Further, these biopolitical regimes pose a significant threat where they sacrifice marginalized groups to strengthen the rest of the society (Lemm & Vatter). The heads who are created for consumption are

excluded from the social contract entirely. They become products entirely meant for consumption as they are no longer viewed as humans. The removal of vocal cords from the heads by transforming them as muted subjects is the act of making them docile. Foucault's assertion of modern power that controls its subjects by optimizing their body aligns with Bazterrica's marginalized heads. Apart from these heads, the citizens who consume them are made into subjects in which they have internalized the state sanctioned definition of survival and truth. The government's explanation of consuming heads made them unempathetic and silenced not because of panopticism but because they do not want to be marginalized to have feelings towards them. In his popular works, *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Sexuality*, he argues that the state controls masses by defining human bodies as healthy or pathological. This aligns with Bazterrica's world where the transition from eating animal meat to human meat is framed as survival necessity. This medical gaze where the state looks at bodies as controllable subjects. When a zoonotic virus has made animal meat lethal, the state frames cannibalism as a part of protein requirement for survival. In this stage, ethics is eradicated and hygiene is given priority. In the slaughterhouse, the killing of these heads for consumption is described in clinical terms which reflects how heads are treated as bodies that are stripped of their humanity. The slaughterhouse breeds silence to contain the moral scream of cannibalism.

"Depending on the circumstances, illness can be seen in different ways: as a kind of pathology or deviance, as an anomaly waiting to be cured or a guilt deserving punishment, as an eccentricity to hide, as a sin to confess or as possession to exorcise" (Leoni 4). When Foucault argues that people who do not conform to the normal standards of life are labelled mad and sick, in this state, anyone who refuses to eat this special meat sanctioned by the state is seen as mentally unstable. As cannibalism has become their standard, people are forced to follow that standard to be perceived as normal. The protagonist, Marcos, who works in the processing unit initially suffers to fit into the society. His empathy is viewed as a disease. Whoever is unable to eat that special meat without nausea is considered insane. In order to be perceived as sane, people choose silence and become passive recipients of state's cruelty. This kind of standardization in which the Government breeds humans as legal food is the ultimate expression of Foucault's Biopolitics. The state produces controlled bodies in which citizens' potentials are regulated. Moreover, the heads are created in the processing units with utmost medical precision. This makes the processing plant look like a pharmaceutical industry rather than a massacre of innocent humans.

Huxleyan prediction

Huxley argued that the policy of boot on the face is inefficient and consumes too much energy. Schirp M pointed out that by the aid of narcotics and conditioning, he predicted that the government could control the masses more efficiently. The linguistic sterilization that is utilized by the state to erase moral ethics on cannibalism represents the exact world that Aldous Huxley feared. After reading George Orwell's *1984*, Huxley sent a letter to Orwell regarding his own dystopian vision in which people will no longer be controlled by the 'boot on the face,' rather will be regulated into a state where they love their servitude. Bazterrica's

dystopian depiction of capitalistic cannibalism reverberates the Huxleyan prophecy. “The ultimate revolution? The first hints of a philosophy of the ultimate revolution, the revolution which lies beyond politics and economics, and which aims at total subversion of the individual’s psychology and physiology...” (Huxley). He talks about the ultimate revolution that begins when power alters your every desire, instinct and bodily function. In this world, the Government does not force people into cannibalistic acts, rather it uses psychological suggestions in which cannibalism is portrayed as a medical necessity for survival. This in turn makes them passive recipients where they are not made numb by traditional aggression but by mind manipulation.

According to Huxley’s prediction, people in this novel who eat special meats for their survival are happy consumers whose passivity is maintained through the convincing standardization of cannibalism. The total population’s hunger is turned into a tool for hunger. The state transforms citizens into morally numb personalities. The way they normalize the horror in which silence becomes a strategy for survival. As Huxley in his *Hux New World* projects people who do not defy the system because they are busy being happy, the people in Bazterrica’s novel exemplify this passivity where they remain busy being a cannibal.

The society depicted by Bazterrica being a passive recipient resonates with the modern world in which people ignore systemic cruelty done to others. For instance, factory farming and exploitative labor are ignored unnoticed not because they are not aware of the situation but because the truth gets hidden in the world of irrelevance, as Huxley predicted. The institutionalization of making cannibalism legal through bureaucratic language neutralises violence and enables silence. Huxley argued that the future world can be easily controlled by making people passive recipients; the novel records the significance of his prediction. When a head’s vocal cord is removed, the consumer is spared of the psychological burden of watching them die. If there is no sound, then there is no victim; this is how the illusion is created in the minds of the people. This breeding of silence is to structurally remove their voice as a victim. Marcos, the protagonist at first appears to be the Orwellian rebel who hates the horror of eating humans. However, at the end of the novel, he proves that he is never a rebel but a misadjusted consumer who finally chooses to agree with the government. When he uses a female head to deliver his child and kills her by labelling that female head as a domesticated animal shows his place in this silent world where he chooses his own comfort over ethics.

Conclusion

The Huxleyan pivot is evoked when Marcos kills the female head when he chooses his comfort in the cannibalistic system more than the truth. His choice represents that the government no longer uses aggression against him to make this choice; rather he polices himself not to be a defiant in that power structure. This horrifying conclusion serves as a proof that power lies in the breeding of silence. By systematic exclusion of heads and structured stripping of moral ethics, this narrative perfectly aligns with Aldous Huxley’s prediction in that letter. The ultimate revolution he talks about is internal and not aggressive. The power has shifted from external compulsion to internal psyche, turning each individual police

themselves. This analysis of Huxleyan prediction acts as a grim warning in contemporary social reality. The current world is where the silence is normalized and truth is deviated. The silence in the novel reflects that the world has finally learned to love its own servitude.

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DABEER SI/KTT/92**CAPITALOCENE AND ECOLOGICAL DYSTOPIA IN RAJAT
CHAUDHURI'S *THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT*****SARANYA S V**

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Abstract

Contemporary environmental crises trace its roots to colonial policies of deforestation, urbanisation and industrialisation. Globalisation enabled unregulated mining and resource extractions from developing countries for capitalist gains. The problems of climate change, unequal burden of ecological disasters and environmental degradation can be attributed to global capitalist forces that transformed nature into commodity and encroached landscapes and forest reserves reshaping world's environmental history. Instead of blaming the entire humanity in general, Capitalocene broadly discusses unequal power relations, environmental destruction, capital accumulation and resource extractivism within the capitalist system. Postcolonial dystopian narratives imagine and foreground the possible planetary futures, shaped by current environmental actions. The research paper attempts to analyse Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect*, exploring the environmental imagination, that is devastated, broken and ecologically dark in the future, caused due to ambitious corporate genetic engineering experiment with rice and the collapse of world order, resulting in ecological destruction and decay, food wars and species extinction, through the lens of Jason. W. Moore's Capitalocene, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence* and Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*. The paper traces capitalist forces as the primary driver of ecological change, imagined through ecological dystopian futures, that renders the marginalised communities vulnerable.

Keywords: Capitalocene, ecological dystopia, environmental futures, slow violence, necropolitics

Introduction

The planetary climate emergency is real. Primordial humans depended on their landscapes and its natural resources for sustenance and built their livelihood. Nature was never perceived for its utilitarian purposes, permeating minimal environmental impact and providing the time for regeneration as well. With the dawn of agriculture, settler practices and civilization, the impact of humans on their environment had marginally increased through altered landscapes suitable for agrarian purposes and domestication of animals.

Colonialism disrupted this intricate bond between humans and lands, sowing the seeds of authoritative control and exploitation of natural resources. Viewing nature as a commodity to be extracted, manufactured and gained profits destroyed the interconnected lives of the humans and their natural environment. Gadgil and Guha explains that "the world ecology has been profoundly altered by western

capitalism, in whose dynamic expansion other ecosystems were disrupted, first through trade and later by colonialism” (Gadgil and Guha 102). The Indigenous and local communities were dispossessed of their lands, Sacred lands were appropriated, forest lands were confiscated for resource extractions and timber, leading to loss of wildlife and decline of peasantry, artisanal occupations. Promoting large-scale monoculture plantations, introducing non-native plants such as tea, rubber, coffee, sugarcane, indigo, tobacco reshaped the local ecologies, soil fertility and indigenous farming practices. Garrard's discourses of Indigeneity and environmental justice expose “the ecological destruction interconnected with colonial history, displacement of Indigenous communities and unequal environmental burden” (Garrard 186). Furthermore, industrialisation, railways, transition to fossil fuels, scientific advancements and economic growth, accelerated the ecological rupture, leading to social inequalities and environmental problems like pollution, industrial waste disposal and loss of biodiversity. Ramachandra Guha in *Environmentalism: a Global History* (2014), highlights the environmental concerns of India:

Over the past two decades, India's lands, forests, rivers and atmosphere have been subject to a systemic assault.... the state has granted clearances for new industries, mines and townships without any single thought for our long-term future as a country and the civilization. (Guha xiv-xv)

Modernisation and urbanisation exacerbated environmental degradation. The World Wars produced greater environmental impacts such as release of harmful chemicals and toxins during militarisation and warfare, land degradation and desertification, deforestation and radioactive contaminations during nuclear wars. After the Wars, the developing countries adopted the Western economic growth models and promoted development plans like building dams, establishing factories and industries, that intensified resource mining, fossil fuel consumption, ecological displacements, greenhouse gas emissions, global warming, deforestation, replicating the colonial and industrial practices. The developing nations' drive for economic growth was fuelled by Western projects, designed to benefit their industrial expansions. Mahatma Gandhi critiqued the ecological concerns, saying that if India would imitate the Western development, “it would strip the world bare like locusts” (Gandhi 422).

Economic liberalisation and globalisation opened free trade and expanded overseas industrial expansions for resource mining, mass consumption and production. The neo-colonial trade policies perpetuated colonial control through cultural, economic, socio-political and technological means, rather than direct territorial control. The natural resources of the developing countries were continually extracted and exported for global market needs. The growth of capitalism enabled international markets and multinational corporation companies to exert control over human labour, resources and ecosystem of the developing countries. Across human history, it becomes evident that Western models of materialistic growth have ruptured the ecologically interconnected lives of humans with their natural environment.

Vandana Shiva, in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988), laments at the ecological rift and disruption of sustainable human lives

with Nature: “The act of living and of celebrating and conserving life in all its diversity - in people and in nature - seems to have been sacrificed to progress, and the sanctity of life been substituted by the sanctity of science and development” (Shiva xii). Undermining local ecologies and treating marginalised communities as disposable populations have threatened their survival, sustenance and livelihood. The colonial monopoly over agriculture, colonial policies of forestry, neo-colonial forms of domination through genetically modified crops, use of synthetic chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides, biopiracy, commercialisation of agro-forestry products, invasive seeds, extractive mining of resources have exacerbated the environmental costs, but the disproportionate ecological burden befalls on the developing countries.

Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) augments that literature plays a crucial role in invoking the ecological consciousness of the readers and shape the perception of their environments in which they live in (Buell 10). Catastrophic narratives and dystopian imagination predominate the eco-speculative fiction of the 21st century. Modern writers contend to build ecological consciousness by portraying the dark ecologies of the dystopian futures, caused by the present environmental actions. The representation of unsettling near-futures, apocalyptic and fallen, dystopian possibilities of the literary imagination has always been fascinating and crucial to contemporary global climate crisis. Climate fiction is witnessing the stylistic and thematic expansion in its sub-branches of speculative fiction and dystopian narratives, by not merely representing the scientific cause-effect paradigm, rather to portray the human experience in its social, political and ecological concerns (Clode and Stasiak 6). “Dystopian fiction not only warns people about the existing ecological issues but also about the imminent danger of the overuse of technologies like bioengineering, nanotechnology which could be a potential threat to the society and its harmonious living” (Kowsalyaa and Arul 1).

One of the notable contemporary Indian bilingual writers of English and Bengali, and a prominent climate change activist is Rajat Chaudhuri. His co-edited solarpunk anthology, *Multispecies Cities – Solarpunk Urban Futures* (2021) and *The Butterfly Effect* (2018) popularised him as a literary writer. His other notable works include *Spellcasters* (2023) and *Wonder Tales for a Warming Planet* (2025). He is also engaged with the climate crisis and environmental issues through his popular column in *New Indian Express* called “Eleventh Hour”. He has published his recent novel, *The Climate Crossroads: Literature's Encounter with a Planet on Fire* (2026) that explores the stories of the planet, literature and philosophy, at times of climate emergency.

Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect* (2018) is an ecological dystopian novel, that explores the far reaching consequences of highly ambitious genetically modified paddy crop experiment at Gene Lab, London, that goes wrong and collapses the world order, leading to food wars, unpredictable weather patterns, heat storms and rising global temperatures, finally leading into a near-future Darklands, where humans and genetically engineered fighters live under a totalitarian rule.

Capitalocene in *The Butterfly Effect*

The global economic system is directly shaped by the rise and growth of capitalism that depends on natural resources, human labour, infrastructure and ecosystem of the developing countries. Capitalism has unleashed greater consequences of environmental degradation by capital accumulation, profit and market driven economy. Development models of capitalism reject native ecological practices and Indigenous knowledge systems, dispossess land rights and sovereignty and transgress environmental impact assessments, leading to ecological displacement of marginalised and Indigenous populations, robbing them of their identity and livelihood. Surprisingly, capitalism exerts control of land and natural resources and ecosystem in the developing countries, under the pretext of development goals, better living standards and alleviation of poverty. Capitalocene emerged as a response to Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's Anthropocene concept that human activities have emerged as the major geological shifters of the planet, attributing the climate change crisis to the whole of humanity, in general. But Capitalocene, propounded by Jason. W. Moore traces the ecological violations and environmental harm of capitalism and locates them as the major driver of contemporary global climate crisis. Global capitalism has shaped, influenced, determined the ecological relationship of humans and nature and has caused ecological shifts and disruptions over the times that has led to the climate emergency. Capitalocene, like a world-eater, has spread its tentacles, slowly and steadily holding the grip and dominion over natural resources across the globe, stealthily under the premises of economic growth, national development goals, free trade, economic liberalisation, global market and multinational corporation companies. The Capitalocene has adapted, renewed its exploitative nature, under neo-colonial regimes, through technological and military warfare. Capitalocene creates hegemonical structures that remain unthwarted, in their insatiable quest for access, control and power over the natural resources of the planet.

Moore, in *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015), denounces the Cartesian binaries of human-nature relationship, rather built on interconnectedness and co-existence. This dual separation, enables capitalism, to justify the commodification of natural resources, to perceive nature as an external source for extraction and appropriation of raw materials. Moore argues that the Capitalocene can be termed as "world-ecology", where society, capitalism and the environment are all intertwined, and ecological crises arise from disruptions within this life web. (Moore 12).

Capitalocene disregarded the significance of nature, human labour and ecosystems turning them as "cheap nature" (Moore 78). Commodification of natural resources, clearing off forests for extractive mining sites, mass production and consumption, accumulating garbage and wastes has led to climate crisis emergency, global warming, high carbon footprints, deforestation, soil, water, air, ocean pollution, biopiracy and technocracy involving mutated crops and seeds and genetically modified crops. Environmental impacts and clearances are considered insignificant in their global race for natural resources. The Capitalocene seems to undermine the delicate ecosystem in which humans are embedded. Capitalocene

constantly changes, modifies, alters and determines the ecological relationship between humans and nature, by its 'cheap nature' global quest, thereby becoming the primary driver of ecological crisis.

In Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect*, Tanmoy Sen, the genetic engineering scientist, was working at Gene Lab, London. He was passionate about the epigenetics Super Rice Project, where the genetically modified paddy seeds, called as magic seeds, could withstand harsh weather patterns as well as provide super nutrients, thereby solving the global food insecurity and malnutrition problems. His initial position as Gene Transfer Scientist, at Genetic Engineering and Medicine- GEM Institute, Calcutta made him realise that private funding agencies weren't interested in his project, rather "research into disease, which is what interested the corporations" (Chaudhuri 133). At London, Sante Inc, the global agricultural biotech company was funding their Gene Labs. The initial phases of Tanmoy's research were partially successful in making the paddy variant tolerant to frost and drought, but finding the right donor genes, identifying the bacterial species and strains that can be spliced into rice, to store vitamins on a heavily engineered crop required patience and time. Henry, one of Tanmoy's earth-centric friends, dismissed Tanmoy's research and warned him of the consequences if it goes wrong. He hints that, "Mindless development, exploiting nature to the hilt in the name of a better future, is often driven by the hubris of science" (Chaudhuri 165). Henry questions about the compatibility of transgenic rice inside the human body and its subsequent bio-physical reactions.

Tanmoy's inspiration was James Watt and his invention of steam engines that drove the industrial revolution across the globe. He always carried James Watt's biography with him. But his friend Henry, reacted in a nonchalant attitude towards his deep reverence for James Watt and his steam engine that became the primary driver of environmental degradation, through industrialisation, pollution and exhaustive consumption of resources. Rajat has conscientiously sketched the character Tanmoy, who stands as the symbol of aspiring epigenetic scientist, by his exemplary transgenic Super Rice Project that could save humanity. Henry provided the ecological impacts of Capitalocene:

The steam engine drove the industrial age and that was the beginning of pea soupers, ugly cities, new diseases and a lack of harmony with nature... most people didn't think ahead of the possible effects on the environment. But this is blindness, a ruinous innocence... Tinkering with the codes of creation, it could backfire. (Chaudhuri 175)

There are instances of environmental denialism in the novel, when the eco-warriors and environmental activists such as Alex and his wife were yelled out by Jia, Tanmoy's homestay friend, later turned out to be a Korean spy, for being anti-science, primitive and an obstacle for human progress. "Ethics and environmental vigilantism and excreta- they are just plugging up the free flow of reason that could do immense good to humanity. You should be locked up" (Chaudhuri 216). Jia's arguments resounded the voices of scientists and capitalist founders, who downplay the scientific evidence of the environmental crisis and consider their race to human progress as progressive growth.

Capitalocene drives for capital accumulation and gaining powers through access and control of resources. Tanmoy observed that Gene Labs CEO wanted Super Rice to be engineered in a way that is viable only for one season, so that the farmers shouldn't be able to save, store or reuse them, leading to business loss. But Tanmoy ignored these guidelines and continued his research. During the final phase of research with the Super Rice's capacity to store vitamin precursors, Gene Labs CEO brought in Technology Head and a Japanese colleague who flew from the United States. After the visit, the CEO remarked about the possible environmental protests about their Super Rice Project: "We foresee some opposition from earth lovers when our baby begins to walk. We will take care of those greens all right. We will have our environment safety officer come over and straighten things out" (Chaudhuri 226). The trespassing of environmental regulations and safety trails portray the nexus of capitalistic forces that can evade and silence the environmentalists, through power, influence and money.

Tanmoy spent nearly twenty years in his active gene transfer experiments in creating the Super Rice; when he was in the final phase of splicing techniques, his first batch of harvest was ready in his glass laboratory. But the trial tests and viability tests were yet to be completed. By then, two Korean spies, who accompanied Tanmoy in his lab and home, stole the mutant seeds stored in the vacuum-packed tubes and his computer from the laboratory. Only then, Tanmoy remembered Henry's words, "Henry had been right. It's dangerous to play games with the fruits of the earth" (Chaudhuri 225). Tanmoy, unable to face his failure of decade of research, activated the auto-lock mechanism in his lab and committed suicide. Rajat's *The Butterfly Effect* examines the nexus of capitalism and its insatiable greed for global power control through anti-nature genetically modified rice seeds for profit. The irony is that capitalism that became the causative agent, attempts to mitigate the global problems, through technological optimism.

Slow Violence in *The Butterfly Effect*

Rob Nixon introduced the concept of slow violence, in *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), which he defines as "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). Slow violence is delayed in its immediate visibility, but spill over generations later as different environmental problems or ecological trauma on multi-species existence. The chemical and nuclear warfare and power plants, industrial mining extractions, oil drilling from oceanic beds produced long-term delayed consequences like intergenerational genetic disorders, erosion of soil and oceanic beds, health hazards, toxin release into the atmosphere and waste accumulation. The repercussion of slow violence is disproportionately borne by the Global South, whereas the Global North, that remained the greatest contributor of greenhouse gases emissions, possessed greater economic wealth and technological power to insulate and adapt to the environmental crisis. The poor and marginalised populations often become the first line of victims of slow violence, as they lack funds and access to resources that could defend them.

In Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect*, Tanmoy's decade of research on transgenic rice seeds that were stolen from his laboratory reached the prison camps

at Pyongyang, North Korea and the White Cloud Mountains at Seoul, South Korea, on two different occasions by the twin sisters Park Jia and Park Jiyoo. Tanmoy's magic rice seeds, which was considered to save humanity from food scarcity and malnutrition, started exhibiting "slow violence". The rice crops grew quickly and unusually taller, and people who consumed the Super Rice began aging quickly, looking feeble and exhausted. Jiyoo, remarked, "Instead of health, the spliced paddy was pumping death and decay into the system... Genes are unpredictable.... The area has been contaminated by the deadly splice and maybe it was already too late. Whatever genes the paddy carried may have jumped species... (Chaudhuri 352). The monk at the White Cloud Mountain expressed his anxiety, "The poison has begun to spread.... We are sharing the weight of our past suffering; we cannot escape bearing the burden of our misdeeds..." (Chaudhuri 357).

The White Cloud Mountain became the colony of old people, due to the transgenic rice crop. The poison began to spread more quickly than expected. Weather patterns turned erratic and extremely harsher with raging storms for several months and scorching heat killing crops, leading to hunger and starvation. "SuperRice Scourge began to devastate a continent, defeating every effort to destroy it by burning crops, deploying doomsday seed stocks and rice gene banks" (Chaudhuri 359). The poisoned genes from the Super Rice quickly flew across places, pollinating paddy fields, and migrated across plants and species. Other cereals and food sources were affected. With SuperRice Scourge genetic threats and superstorms, the world started collapsing. Food shortage, burden of disease, migrants and refugees, culminated in global wars. The human population was reduced to aging people; and with shutting down of mines and nuclear power plants, the global ecological crisis began. Rob Nixon's slow violence is quite evident in the novel, by the ambitious corporate genetically mutated rice crop and its devastating spillover of harmful effects on the planet and the human population itself.

Necropolitics in *The Butterfly Effect*

Achille Mbembe introduced the term Necropolitics in his influential *Necropolitics* essay (2003) that is defined as, "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 11). Mbembe believes that the state, military operations, or governments act as central power agents to decide the death of certain populations, both socially and politically, and create death-worlds that constantly expose them to systemic violence and deprivation.

Mbembe's Necropolitics can be used as an interpretative tool to explore the totalitarian regime, under Commander Kak, the Supreme Guide of Darkland, the near future that evolved after the SuperRice Scourge, in Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect*. After the world order collapsed due to the wicked transgenic rice, the world was divided into Darklands and Cleanlands. The dying old population with delusional loss of memory, occupied Darklands with solar amnesia boards, displaying the Commandments of their Supreme Guide; Darklanders consuming yellow memory pills; genetically designed splices of fighting forces called as kravas and bonesteels- superhuman guards, with robust immune system and

special skin cells to protect the leader; privately owned media were banned. The Cleanlands still had few healthy people with neon-lit eyes; they were highly safeguarded for their life span and provided basic amenities. The wheezing of the sick, hospices, rationed food and alcohol, imported meat, shops of automated wheelchairs, licensed youngblood, deserted tribesmen and street robbers to steal young blood and Cleanland coins filled the streets of Darklands. "There were stories of mass burials in the Cleanland media, never substantiated... Long before the war, Incident R9117 of Yangtze Basin, the kravas decimated a whole community of migrants, still fresh in everyone's mind" (Chaudhuri 22). The totalitarian regime under Commander Kak decided to wipe out the migrants who were considered as hostiles from Red Dawn's revolutionary movements, trying to overthrow his corrupted rule.

The elderly sick population were disregarded by the Supreme Leader and left to die. "The night punctuated like every other by the cacophonous orchestra of the diseased and the hungry left out on the streets to wither away. The bodies, with just a flicker of life, massed on pavements or abandoned in weed-infested parks" (Chaudhuri 48). Through the lens of Necropolitics, it is evident that capitalist funding of gene transfer experiments on major global food source- rice, poisoned the lands, leading to ecological dystopian Darklands where the environmental degradation become 'death-worlds' to the old population, and apathetic institutional neglect of Supreme Guide leading to more deaths.

Conclusion

Rajat Chaudhuri's *The Butterfly Effect* portrays ecological dystopia as the cumulative threads of detrimental power structures of Capitalocene and technological optimism that repeats its ecological disregard towards both humans and non-humans. Appropriation of nature's resources and using advanced and highly unnatural methods of genetic engineering of food crops poses deadly global environmental problems and health hazards to all species in the ecosystem. The ecological crisis of the present gradually spills over to the posterity in dynamic forms, unmindful of the slow violence inflicted upon them. Totalitarianism, regardless of their form, is inherently susceptible to relentless drive for power and control, leaving weaker and voiceless communities to die in abandonment, suffering and death. *The Butterfly Effect* occupies a significant place in contemporary Indian eco-fiction, interrogating the multiscale dimensions of the contemporary climate change crisis.

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DABEER SI/KTT/93**ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDERED ECOLOGY AND
CULTURAL MEMORY IN CHINA MIÉVILLE'S *PERDIDO STREET
STATION*****G. V. SHIVA KAMAKSHI DEVI**Research Scholar (Part-time), S.F.R College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**B. SIVA PRIYA**Associate Professor, S.F.R College for Women
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India**Abstract**

Perdido Street Station by China Miéville explores the urban ecology and entanglements of human and non-human species in the backdrop of an imaginary city called New Crobuzon. Apart from human beings, there are numerous kinds of species, like Khepri, Vodyanoi, Cactacae, Wyrmen, etc., who have New Crobuzon as their living space. The city of New Crobuzon is an industrial metropolis that is characterised by social stratification, species disparity and economic exploitation. This paper examines the relationship between ecology and cultural memory in terms of gender from an ecological perspective. The study investigates how the Khepri community's adaptation to New Crobuzon leads to reconstructing their culture and traditions, but the patriarchal norms and gender power structure remain unchanged. Lin, one of the main characters of the novel, belongs to the Khepri, a non-human community. Her recollection of memories shows how ecological spaces reflect and reinforce gender disparity even after the migration and adaptation of communities to a new environment. By applying feminist political ecology, the study critically analyses that ecologically adapting to a new environment does not necessarily pave the way for social transformation, as patriarchal norms continue to shape the lives of marginalized communities, thereby demonstrating that ecological space is a site of both continuity and resistance.

Keywords: Ecology, Cultural Memory, Gender, Disparity, Oppression, Feminism**Introduction**

China Miéville is a contemporary British novelist, politician and literary critic. He is widely associated with speculative fiction. Most of his works are a blend of elements of science, fantasy and horror fiction. His novels are famous for imaginative settings and complex narrative structures which reflect on themes like globalisation, contemporary societal issues and environmental degradation. His major works include *The Bas-Lag Series* (2000 -2004), *King Rat* (1998), *The City & City* (2009), *Kraken* (2010) etc. He is also the recipient of prestigious awards like the Arthur C. Clarke award, the British Fantasy award and the Locus award. Through his unique narrative technique, he has established himself as one of the most influential modern contemporary writers. *Perdido Street Station* is the first novel of the *Bas - Lag Series* published in 2000. The story is set in a fictional place

named New Crobuzon. The novel consists of characters of both human and non-human creatures. The narrative follows a human scientist named Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, and his thirst to accomplish his scientific research, which eventually causes him trouble, results in a survival threat to him and his friends. Another main lead of the novel is Lin, who belongs to a non-human community called Khepri and also a lover of Isaac. She is an artist and aspires to come outside patriarchal norms and to lead an independent life. Because of Isaac, she will be caught and tortured by Motley, who wants to take revenge on Isaac. The story is all about how Isaac rescues his lover and manages to escape from the impending danger. The novel also explores power, marginalisation, social disparity, ecological imbalance and the resistance of the characters. This novel has won numerous awards and received widespread recognition from all over the world. The aim of this research article is to examine the intersection of gender, ecology and cultural memory using Feminist Political Ecology in the novel *Perdido Street Station* by China Miéville, specifically focussing on the Khepri community's adaptation to New Crobuzon through Lin's memories. The objectives of the paper are to examine how adapting to a new environment made the people of the Khepri community rewrite their culture and tradition but not gender norms, and to analyse how New Crobuzon functions as a site of both continuity and resistance. The study adopts the descriptive qualitative research methodology. Through close textual analysis, the paper examines the representation of gender, ecology and cultural memory in the selected characters, incidents, experiences and narrative techniques of the novel. The analysis will be carried out by applying the theoretical framework of Feminist Political Ecology. The concepts like gender disparity, power relations and ecological imbalances are used to critically evaluate Lin's life experiences and the narrow-mindedness of the Khepri community. Therefore, it helps to understand the actions of the Khepri community and the diversity of New Crobuzon.

Theoretical Framework

The term ecocriticism was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". It draws its influence heavily from transcendentalism. It is the study of the environment and literature from an interdisciplinary point of view. It also investigates the relationship between humans and the natural world in literature. Joseph Meeker coined the term literary ecology in his work *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. The two important seminal works that brought ecocriticism into the arena are *The Ecocriticism Reader* by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell. There three waves of feminism talk about developmental stages of feminism drafted by Elaine Showalter. Like three waves of feminism, Lawrence Buell in his work *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, described the two developmental stages of ecocriticism, where he identified two waves of ecocriticism. The First wave of ecocriticism "typically privileged rural and wild spaces over urban ones" (Buell 93). On the other hand, the second wave analysed the boundaries between the human and non-human, and it rejects the separation between rural and urban ecological spaces, and it views "metropolitan landscape and the built environment generally must be

considered as at least equally fruitful grounds for ecocritical work” (Buell 93). The first wave focused on rural ecology, pastoral landscapes, wilderness and treated the city as a separate ecological space, whereas through the second wave many trends emerged: environmental justice, postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The third wave of ecocriticism became popular after the publication of the essay “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline” by Scott Slovic. The third wave encourages a more comparative and transcultural approach to ecocritical studies. It aims to explore ethnicity in environmental literature.

Ecology is the study of the relationship between living things and their physical environment. In terms of literary and cultural studies, ecology also talks about the connection between human and non-human beings and socio-political structures. Through the lens of ecocriticism, the ecological space is not a mere backdrop, instead it is a dynamic space that alters the power relations, social structures and cultural identities of the characters. Ecological balance can be defined as the harmonious connectedness among all the components of an ecosystem. When it is disrupted, it will lead to degradation of the environment and ecological collapse. Rachel Carson argued that nature alone cannot exist. The underlying concept of ecology emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of all forms of life on the earth. So, each and every organism plays an important role in ensuring ecological stability.

The present study draws influence from the second wave of ecocriticism which breaks the boundary between the rural and the urban landscapes. It broadens its scope by examining urban ecosystems, industrialisation, globalisation, gender and the interconnectedness between human and other living organisms. Michael Bennett and David W. Teague’s *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments* (1999) was the first major work that brought cities into the ecocritical study. In his essay, “Urban Ecologies: An Introduction” Gersdorf emphasises that urban ecology should be understood as a part of ‘socio-environmental dialectic’. Further she argues that urban ecology is not limited to biodiversity, simultaneously it is shaped by economics, politics, gender and social inequalities. Hence urban ecology portrays city as interconnected systems where humans, non-humans, material spaces and culture mutually shape one another.

The present study is grounded in the Feminist Political Ecology, which is an interdisciplinary concept that emerged in early 1990s that examines the role of gender in shaping the relationship between the human and the environment. It is a combination of the theory of feminism and political ecology. It argues that accessing and controlling environmental resources is not only influenced by factors of the environment but also by social structures like gender, power relations, class, race and ethnicity. Though the core principle of ecology is interconnectedness, human societies have failed to extend this principle to gender relations historically. Women are always excluded from equal access to the natural resources, environmental governance and the decision-making process. Gendered ecology examines the unequal distribution of environmental rights and responsibilities. It also argues that ecological spaces and experiences are shaped by societal norms, especially gender. It further emphasises that power, equality

and justice are inseparable from environmental issues, thereby advocating the equal participation of women in protection and management of environmental resources. The concept Feminist Political Ecology came to the spotlight through the work named *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences*, jointly edited by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara-Thomas Slater and Esther Wangari, published in 1996. The primary argument of this work is that environmental issues cannot be understood without the intervention of gender, power and politics. Feminist Political Ecology focuses mainly on three important concerns. They are gendered knowledge, gendered responsibilities and gendered environmental politics. In her work *The Future We Want*, Christa Wichterich, argues that without gender justice, environmental sustainability cannot be achieved as these two are interconnected. The following lines reflect this:

Ecology and sustainability are not gender neutral; the analysis of gender relations is vital for understanding the relationships between nature and society and for overcoming the environmental crisis; without gender justice there will be no environmental justice, no sustainability nor a good life for all (Wichterich 9).

Feminist Political Ecology exposes the role of socio-economic power relations in shaping access to resources and also the inequalities embedded in the governance of the environment.

In *Feminist Political Ecology and the Economics of Care*, Wendy Harcourt and Christine Bauhardt discussed body politics, social reproduction and care taking in connection to the environment. They reflected on how capitalism exploits both women and natural resources, and assuming them to be inexhaustible and freely available. They further explained that women are the ones who face the issues of the environment more intensely than others. Therefore, Feminist Political Ecology promotes an ethics of care, ecological sustainability, and social justice while unveiling the interconnected structures of capitalism, patriarchy, and environmental exploitation.

Cultural memory is a form of collective memory of a specific group of people who share common cultural and traditional practices. According to this, memory is socially constructed rather than purely individual. It helps people to understand about their past practices and ancestors, which paves the way to practice the same in the present and also for the future generation. Cultural memory studies is a multidisciplinary field that draws ideas and concepts from psychology, history, sociology, anthropology etc. The field 'Cultural Memory Studies' was introduced by Aleida and her husband Jan Assmann. Aleida Assmann is a German professor of English and literary studies, specialising in cultural anthropology and communicative memory. She defined that cultural memory is a system of values and practices which retain the past for the present and the future. Cultural memory helps to transfer and preserve cultural and traditional knowledge. Cultural memory is not about forgetting, it is about remembering, which helps to recall the cultural and social history of a particular community. In his work *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as the long-term preservation of collective identity through oral narratives, rituals, texts etc. He

says that in spite of historical and geographical changes, cultural memory helps human societies to maintain the continuity of their past.

Rebuilding Ecological Cultural Memory

Lin is one of the central characters of the novel *Perdido Street Station*. She belongs to an immigrant non-human community called 'Khepri'. Apart from the human characters, one could see a lot of non-human species presented in the novel. It is one of the defining features of the novel. Miéville does not use non-human species as mere symbolic or decorative features in the novel. Instead, he penned in such a way that each non-human species possesses its own social hierarchies, cultural norms and traditional beliefs. Miéville has portrayed New Crobuzon as a place of multispecies society. At one point in the novel, Lin will be revisiting her home town Kinken, where she starts to recollect her childhood memories, "Of course her journey to despised streets was a walk back through the city of her memory" (Miéville 256). Through her memories, Miéville has shown the history of the Khepri community, like how they reached New Crobuzon and how they adapted to the new environment. The authorities of New Crobuzon were not clear about the arrival of the Khepri community. Because of the language barrier, they could not understand their reason behind reaching the new land. "There had been khepri in New Crobuzon for nearly seven hundred years" (Miéville 257), it has been seven hundred years since khepris had reached a new land.

All that the humans knew was that something terrible had happened to the khepri of the eastern continent, some horrendous vortex that had sucked up millions, leaving only a tiny handful able to flee. The khepri had christened this nebulous apocalypse the Ravening (Miéville 258).

The first khepri settlers said that when they were on the eastern continent, a hazardous disaster had ruined their community and their native place Bered Kai Nev which they called it 'ravening'. That is why they escaped from Bered Kai Nev in order to safeguard the remaining people. This had become a very bad memory for them which they do not want to remember. Refugees of the first generation wished that this incident should not be known by their future generations, and announced New Crobuzon as their homeland which marked their new life:

The trauma of the Ravening was such that the first generation of refugees had deliberately forgotten ten thousand years of khepri history, announcing their arrival at New Crobuzon to be the beginning of a new cycle of years, the City Cycle (Miéville 258).

The Khepri community decided to rewrite their cultural and traditional norms. Cultural memory is a collective memory that will be passed on to generations in order to maintain the connection between the past and the present. But in the case of the Khepri community, they did not want to cherish or follow their ancient cultural and traditional norms; instead, they consider it as a cultural trauma. Even when the next generation demanded to know about their history, the early settlers deliberately refused and many avoided them by saying that they could not remember. They even stopped worshipping their gods, as they believed that their gods "had not protected their disciples from the Ravening" (Miéville 259). According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, cultural trauma is created through a

‘meaning struggle’, which involves the pain, the nature of the victim and the attribution of responsibility (qtd.in Eyerman 3). First, while assessing the nature of the pain, the Khepri’s collective trauma began with the catastrophic event, the “Ravening”, which destroyed their homeland and people. Ravening became their source of cultural trauma, and as a result, the entire community became its victim. Second, regarding the nature of the victim, the khepris, unable to cope with their trauma, restructured their social and cultural norms. Finally, in terms of attribution of responsibility, cultural memory is all about remembering rather than forgetting, but the khepris erased their past and accepted New Crobuzon as their home. When they tried to search for the reason, they were unable to track the source of the ravening, and because of the language barrier, they were not able to seek help from New Crobuzon authorities. When they had done their research, they decided to make changes internally. Instead of repairing their trauma, the Khepri community decided to lay new foundations and adapt to the new ecological space.

“In some lands, the refugees were butchered in terrible pogroms. In others, like New Crobuzon, they were welcomed with unease, but not with official violence” (Miéville 258), though New Crobuzon did not accept them wholeheartedly, instead of treating the Khepri community as mere refugees, it has become a second habitat for them. Their forceful migration from Bered Kei Nev to New Crobuzon is actually a displacement of an entire ecological community. When their homeland was destroyed by ravening, they had lost not only their homeland, but also the ecological conditions that sustained their cultural and traditional identities. After the catastrophic event, they strongly condemned their ancestral cultural practices and reconstructed their lives within New Crobuzon. Their settlements portray that city as an ecological system where migration, environment, memory and culture continuously reconstruct one another. According to Gersdorf, “the city is an integral part of nature and nature is intimately interwoven into the social life of cities”. The Khepri’s transformation reflects the ‘society-environment dialectic’, where adapting to a new ecological space creates new forms of identity, survival and social organizations. There are a number of districts in New Crobuzon where each human and non-human community occupies different places as their headquarters. For instance, Kinken and Creekside are the domains of the Khepri community. Art and architecture are the areas of specialisation of the Khepri community. In Kinken, one can see public spaces like the Plaza of the Statue, which displays the creativity of the female khepris who have made the sculptures using their ‘Khepri-spit’. They use organic materials like beetle cement for the architecture. Hence, Kinken district represents the Khepri community’s wealthier and richer artistic side. Whereas in Creekside, most of the inhabitants are poor refugees, and it is also an overcrowded place. The Khepris who are living in Creekside are not wealthy merchants. They work in factories and even sell themselves to whomever is ready to buy. They are considered “disreputable and hungry” (Miéville 259). It shows their class divide having different spaces for rich and poor. New Crobuzon welcomed khepris and integrated them into their capitalist economy. The Khepri community gradually started to adapt to New Crobuzon’s city life. As per the argument of Gesdorf, the modern city restructures the relationship between nature and society through

economic and political factors. Similarly, Miéville portrays New Crobuzon as an urban ecosystem which transforms the lifestyle of khepris.

Body Politics, Social Reproduction and Care Work

Lin was born and brought up in Creekside. “Lin had not grown up in Kinken. She was born in the younger, poorer Khepri ghetto of Creekside” (Miéville 258). Lin literally hates her hometown Creekside. The Khepri are hybrid beings, where females have large scarab beetle heads with human female bodies; Males are quite different, because they are wingless, beetle-like creatures. In their community, a mother is called a ‘broodma’. They occupy the central position in the Khepri society. The term ‘broodma’ is the combination of two words ‘brood’ meaning offspring and ‘mother’. It indicates that they are the ones who lay eggs, so they are responsible for raising children and governing the household. Lin’s childhood shows how the female khepri body has been viewed as a site of religious control and political ideology, “The gloomy doctrine of Inspect Aspect was that the khepri women were cursed” (Miéville 260). In Feminist Political Ecology, body politics refers to the ways social, political and social systems control and regulate, especially women’s bodies. The doctrine of the khepris portrays that masculinity is considered pure while femininity is associated with sin. It shows patriarchal domination over a female body. Even after leaving the community, during the initial stages, Lin was unable to recover fully from her cultural upbringing. She even felt, “Her body had been a source of shame and disgust” (Miéville 262). It reflects how her community has internalised their ideology into her, which makes her feel alienation from her own body. Social reproduction is defined as the social and cultural practices that reproduce identities, labour, gender and power relations across generations. The ideologies related to gender will be educated and transmitted through family and religious education. For instance, Lin’s broodma taught her and sisters “to worship him with a terrified fervour” (Miéville 261). Family members, especially the broodma, who is also a woman, taught Lin to accept the gender hierarchy. Rather than considering sexuality as an individual interest, it is accepted as a part of social organisation. Lin’s sexuality is controlled by her family, as this line reflects: “she had been subjected only to head at her mother’s behest” (Miéville 262). Then comes the care work which is often assigned only to women. They have to take care of family, children and household chores without any recognition. Though the khepri community is matriarchal, Miéville portrays the inter-gender conflict and how patriarchal norms still continue to dominate matriarchal society when the head woman internalises and transmits it, the following lines reflect this:

Lin remembered coming home to a house that swarmed with male khepri, that stank of rotting vegetables and fruit, littered as it was with organic rubbish for males to gorge on. She remembered being commanded to wash her innumerable brothers’ glistening carapaces, to pile up their dung before the household altar, to let them scuttle over her and explore her body as their dumb curiosity directed them (Miéville 261).

It took fifteen years for Lin to speak against the community’s gender norms and disparity.

She begins resisting gender norms by questioning inherited beliefs. Even though she had stopped identifying herself as a khepri female because of the patriarchal domination, “She had stopped trying to be khepri, as she had once stopped trying to be an insect” (Miéville 263). According to Wendy Harcourt, “Body politics, from a feminist ecological perspective, is an essential part of environmental concerns as the body is our first environment” (Harcourt and Bauhardt 11). Harcourt argues that environmental justice begins with bodily justice. As Lin cannot change her entire socio-ecological conditions, she begins the process from her body. First, she changed her biological and cultural identity, then developed a romantic relationship with Isaac, a human scientist. By choosing a human as her partner, she breaks the ecological chain and her community’s gender norms, which mark her first success.

Conclusion

Throughout the novel, New Crobuzon serves as a multispecies city which provides a khepri community a space to reshape their social and cultural norms. But khepris failed to realise that New Crobuzon’s generosity in helping refugees is actually their hidden agenda to reshape their culture and tradition through its urban ecological ideologies. It is like colonising the community without letting them know that they are being colonised. Khepris were given a second chance, but in the name of rebuilding their social structure, they again just focused only on the male-dominated norms, and failed to recognise female khepris. Through the lens of Feminist Political Ecology, the narrative demonstrates that displacement and adapting to an urban ideology do not produce social justice automatically, rather they are instructed to follow the existing social norms. As a result, Lin is triply marginalised, as an oppressed woman who belongs to a marginalised community and as an inhabitant of unequal urban spaces shaped by class and socio-political power. Therefore, *Perdido Street Station* critiques the illusion of cosmopolitan inclusivity by revealing how urban ecological systems reinforce colonial and patriarchal power while masking them beneath the rhetoric of diversity and refuge.

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DABEER SI/KTT/94**RUINS OF THE METROPOLE: POST-INDUSTRIAL WASTELANDS,
NEO-IMPERIAL ENTROPY, AND SPECULATIVE DESPAIR IN
JENNIFER EGAN'S *THE INVISIBLE CIRCUS*****SALOMIA MARY PETER**

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Abstract

The modern capitalistic city is a triple ruin of environment, culture and soul. The trash piles found in this city are the places where postcolonial modern anxieties are created. Jennifer Egan's novel *The Invisible Circus*, evokes a profound sense of speculative desperation, with a quasi-urban landscape of decay, split identities, and emotional fatigue generated by neo-imperial culture. The phrase 'Ruins of the Metropole' represents the loss of imperial certainties and the birth of post-industrial wastelands of alienation, dislocation and ecological doubt. This research focuses on how Egan creates dystopian settings as symbolic manifestations of the entropy of neo-imperialism and the postmodern disintegration. The paper adopts a qualitative approach, based on textual analysis and close readings, to investigate the novel's narrative, spatial, characterization, and symbolic landscapes. The theoretical approach is informed by postcolonial theory, ecocriticism and postmodern cultural studies, with a focus on the theories of Fredric Jameson, Timothy Morton, Rob Nixon, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. The image of environmental destruction presented by Egan is a cultural/psychological condition brought about by the decline of imperialism, historical violence and capitalism expansion. The findings show that *The Invisible Circus* exposes the fragility of the present life by the use of broken settings, dislocated feelings and uncertain speculation. To sum up, the novel offers dystopian modernity as a place where ecological failure and alienation of the human are inextricably intertwined.

Keywords: Postcolonial Dystopia; Neo-Imperial Entropy; Environmental Futures; Post-Industrial Wastelands; Speculative Despair; Ecological Anxiety.

Introduction

Ecological instability, urban deterioration and the collapse of ideology certainties are features of the contemporary world. Literature has become a focal point through which these changes can be revealing that the environmental degradation, capital expansion, and the fragmentation of culture is inextricably linked. Though written prior to Anthropocene discourse, Jennifer Egan's *The Invisible Circus* (1995) shares some of the fears of the current critical debates. The novel offers a world haunted by the imperial past and the fragility of post-industrial present,

by disrupted travelers, split identities and the ruins of social fabric. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues History needs to be reconsidered as climate change has planetary impacts, (Chakrabarty 25). Likewise, Timothy Morton argues that the ecological facts are "bigger than fiction," challenging traditional human-environment relations (Morton, Hyperobjects 19). These viewpoints contextualize how personal experiences are stitched into something complex Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing focuses on the lives after capitalism has been destroyed, and how they exist alongside destruction and survival in the same space (Tsing 3). The portrayal of weary and uncertain urban landscapes and social worlds by Egan. The landscapes are metaphoric places that reveal the shortcomings of political idealism, economic development and cultural stability. These representations can be appreciated in the context of neo-imperial entropy. Entropy represents a process of getting nearer to disorder, division, and disintegration. In cultural terms, it is a symptom of the fading away of grand narratives, and of a lack of historical coherence. For Fredric Jameson, late capitalism produces "cultural disorientations" which disorient people from locating themselves in the grand narratives of history (Jameson 16). Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" makes a significant unseen impact on the environment (Nixon 2). The Invisible Circus is a sense-based moment and the result of a long history of violence, capitalist expansion and social fragmentation. Environmental anxiety is not just expressed in a description of a place, but also in the experience of loss, alienation, and uncertainty of the characters. More specifically, the postcolonial ecocriticism is added to the analysis to emphasize the relationship between environmental crises and the colonial histories. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin believe that ecological harm is entangled with systems of power, exploitation and imperial domination (Huggan and Tiffin 6). Modern-day theorists also have focused on the emotional impacts of ecological crisis. Timothy Morton's "dark ecology" idea proposes that individuals should come to terms with the fact that they inhabit damaged environments, not imagine that they do not (Morton, Dark Ecology 5). Similarly, Jedediah Purdy suggests that crises of the environment require new ethical and political modes of imagining that can meet the challenges of the planet (Purdy 22). Valerie O'Riordan sees Egan's fiction as characterized by "problematic futures" and "ambiguous ethical structures" (209). Alicia J. Rouverol also points to the author's investigation into "narrative limits and representational instability" (281). Mark West's description of The Invisible Circus focuses on the concept of disillusionment and the lost promises of the Countercultural movement of the 1960s (West 152). This paper will explore the use of post-colonial theory, ecocriticism, and postmodern cultural studies, and how *The Invisible Circus* presents the post-industrial wastelands as symbolic representations of neo-imperial entropy and speculative despair. The novel, in the end, shows a dystopian modernity, in which concern for ecology and alienation of humanity are intertwined, revealing

Methodology

This research adopts qualitative research method with a textual analysis approach and close reading techniques to analyze the novel *The Invisible Circus*, written by Jennifer Egan with the theories of postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and postmodern cultural studies. The study examines how the theories of Dipesh

Chakrabarty, Timothy Morton, Rob Nixon, Fredric Jameson, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin provide a framework for analysis that allows the examination of the interactions between ecological crisis, postcolonial modernity, and cultural fragmentation.

Review of Literature

Recent scholarship examines Egan's focus on cultural change, historical indeterminacy, and capitalism. In this paper, Valerie O'Riordan examines Egan's fiction as "monstrous futures," that is, futures that disrupt traditional moral codes and reveal the phobias fostered by changing social conditions. Similarly, Alicia J. Rouverol emphasizes how Egan has explored the possibilities of narrative and how he has been fascinated with the capacity and limits of memory, representation, and storytelling in the current culture. In Mark West's reading of *The Invisible Circus*, this novel is situated in a frame of generational disillusion and fading hopes of the '60s counterculture. The jealous interactions between idealistic young people and the real world, and between political and cultural certainties, are explored more than the environmental and spatial themes. Similarly, Christopher White considers Egan's writing and links it to capitalist realism, global violence and current social disintegration, while Egan consistently investigates the effects of late capitalism on individual lives and collective experience. Timothy Morton's work on dark ecology, ecological interconnectedness and environmental entanglement offers a challenge to the distinction between human and nature. Environmental humanities scholars have also made a point of emphasizing the connection between ecological crisis and historical change. The idea of planetary history emphasizes the importance of recognizing environmental change in historical and global perspective in the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty. The cultural politics of environmental crisis and extinction are also explored by Ursula Heise, who shows how the literary narrative can facilitate ecological awareness. Purdy proposes a new ethical and political model for environmental issues that can help them to cope with the Anthropocene. "Slow violence" is a term coined by Rob Nixon to highlight slow forms of environmental degradation. Life in capitalist ruin of how ecological and social systems continue to maintain themselves in the face of disruptions to these systems by global capitalism is the subject of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's study. Likewise, Andreas Malm challenges the new environmental effects of industrial modernity, and Kathryn Yusoff examines the colonial aspect of Anthropocene thinking. These perspectives illuminate the relationships of environmental harm and histories of exploitation, inequality, and imperial expansion. Postcolonial ecocriticism also has been a factor in the understanding of how environment and power are interrelated. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin question the idea of a clean slate of colonial histories and global systems of domination that they feel cannot be separated from environmental crises. Elizabeth DeLoughrey's work investigates ideas of environmental disaster and earth changes. This paper fills this void and offers an analysis of the ways in which Egan reworks ruined landscapes as strong symbols of ecological anxiety, historical dislocation, and contemporary uncertainty by incorporating postcolonial theory, ecocriticism and postmodern cultural studies.

Analysis

1. Post-Industrial Landscapes and the Architecture of Ruin

In *The Invisible Circus*, Egan not only presents space as a place for action and adventure, but also as a more than static environment to demonstrate the "exhausted spaces" of modernity and the "lost spaces" of collective ideals. The places in which Faith wanders around Europe are places of uncertainty, transition and decay. Here they turn into ruins of the post-industrial period, a sign of the loss of social stability, historical confidence. The setting of this novel is neither urban nor natural, but at times liminal, as is the protagonist's divided psychology. The concept of "capitalist ruins" developed by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing offers valuable insight into the nature of these places. Tsing claims that the modern life that "rises out of the ruins of economy and ecology" (Tsing 2) invites critics to explore the potential of life in capitalist ruins. This is illustrated by the way that Egan represents transient hostels, decay in the urban landscape and unstable social communities. Faith's physical environments are reflections of general cultural decay, implying that contemporary subjects live in a world constructed and disturbed by the consequences of political and economic changes. Timothy Morton also claims that ecological understanding involves facing the "discomfort of connectedness". His "dark ecology" concept was a critique of the idealized perception of nature, while at the same time asserting its connection with the damaged environments in which humans are entangled, in that it is, "dark ecology is an ecological awareness, dark-depressing. Yet dark ecology is also dark-uncanny" (Morton, 2018 Dark Ecology 5). Egan's story often defies romantic portrayals of place. The novel does not provide any places of refuge or renewal, but instead provides settings that perpetuate feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. The landscapes are ambiguous, reflecting the protagonist's lack of certainty about finding meaning in the wake of loss. The ruins of the spaces in *The Invisible Circus* are also connected to Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence where Nixon highlights the fact that environmental and social degradation might be invisible, or only become apparent over time, as "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive" (Nixon 2). The threat of environmental collapse is not a central theme of Egan's novel, but the environments are characterized by their history of political violence and cultural displacement and social disintegration. Moreover, the novel questions the conventional narratives about progress with industrial modernity. Egan's vision of Europe is one of disillusionment and decline, rather than a place of cultural advancement. Such changes in structure, as Lawrence Buell notes, "have been shaped by the environmental imagination as a concept of global crisis" (Buell 2017). *The Invisible Circus* presents the landscapes of post-industrialist with the various intersections of historical decline, ecological uncertainty and personal dislocation evident in the lives of people. The architecture of ruin thus becomes a central metaphor, which is used in the novel to discuss the fear of a rapidly changing world.

2. Neo-Imperial Entropy and Historical Disintegration

The Invisible Circus is a dismantling of certainty over ideas and historical continuity. As Faith's quest to find out the truth about her sister Phoebe's death

unfolds, there are larger themes of political and cultural decay that are woven into the novel. One important point is given by an analysis of late capitalism that Fredric Jameson will provide shortly. To understand this historical breakdown, Jameson points out the present-day culture is becoming more and more fragmented, lacks historical depth, and has no ability to envision alternatives to the prevailing economic systems, resulting in a profound “crisis of historicity” (Jameson 2015). These traits can be seen throughout Egan's novel. The revelations in this book also darken their light, highlighting the fluidity and the construction of coherent identities in a disjointed world. The fall of imperial and national certainties is further highlighted by the concept of planetary history put forth by Dipesh Chakrabarty. The crises of today are also creating an opportunity to deconstruct historical frameworks, because today's history is that of the planet as well as the human actor, and human acts have now disrupted “the climate of history in a planetary age” (Chakrabarty 25). Environmental and cultural crises are intertwined with the legacies of colonialism and imperial expansion, write Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, postcolonial ecocritics. Their view helps them to understand the “environmental crisis that is a crisis of culture” (Huggan and Tiffin 6). The downfall of the imperial organization does not lead to freedom or coherence, but rather to new types of uncertainty and disorientation. Wests in his commentary, “Generation Jones, the Sixties, and Jennifer Egan's *The Invisible Circus*,” West discusses the waning idealism of the counterculture movement and delves into the disconnect between political ideology and the reality for this era; Faith's quest into her sister's past then becomes an investigation of a collective failure—the failure to honor the hope, to stand up for it, or to accept it for what it is. In his fiction, Egan frequently highlights the restrictions of representation and narrative, a theme he alludes to throughout as Rouverol describes it, ‘the aesthetic of the gap’ (Rouverol 280). The novel shows how the failure of grand narratives creates uncertainty, alienation and disillusionment. As Egan uncovers the complex repercussions of broken narratives, lost dreams, and shifting self-perceptions.

3. Disaggregated Subjectivities and Emotional Estrangement

In *The Invisible Circus* identity and emotional estrangement unfold in a rapidly changing social landscape. This investigation of multiple subjectivities can be interpreted in the light of postmodern subjectivity Fredric Jameson claims late capitalist culture provides fragmented experiences where “the postmodern viewer is asked to look for the historicity of forms” (Jameson 2015). Faith is trying to piece together reality from incomplete memories, conflicting testimonies and unresolved emotions. Her sense of self is in flux as traditional pillars of identity have become uncertain. Valerie O’Riordan, elucidates characters who face up to uncertain futures and unstable moral landscapes. This is relevant with regards to Faith whose emotional growth is influenced by confusion, sadness and disappointment. Instead of the expected road to self-discovery, she is continually confronted with paradoxes that interrogate her ideas about Phoebe, her family, and herself; navigating “Jennifer Egan's monstrous futures” (208). These experiences highlight how subjectivity is formed through unstable memories. Alicia J. Rouverol also points to Egan's interest in the restrictions on narrative representation (Rouverol 280). Faith travels around Europe, inducing

displacement alongside self-discovery. Christopher White's interpretation of Egan's engagement connects Egan's trajectory to capitalist realism, arguing that subjects under global capitalism often are disconnected and vulnerable problems are indicative of these trends. Her quest for meaning takes place in one that is unstable and fragmented and where the sources of security are no longer legitimate.

Concurrently, Timothy Morton disputes autonomous individuality by the intricate web of relationships that humans have with their surroundings; advocating for "solidarity with nonhuman people" (Morton *Humankind* 2017). Despite their efforts to form meaningful relationships, many of the characters in this novel are lonely, uncertain, and discontent. The experiences point to a situation where there is a lack of feeling a part of society, and marked by a weakening of social institutions and collective identities.

4. Ecological Anxiety and Environmental Uncertainty

Egan's works are not idyllic nor restorative, but rather one of the psychological and cultural unease of a world facing the consequences of modernity. This representation can be understood within the framework of Timothy Morton's theory of dark ecology. According to Morton (*Dark Ecology* 2016). The novel's engagement with ecological uncertainty is further enriched by Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea of planetary history. Chakrabarty argues that history, space, and collective existence will have to be reconsidered in the era of environmental crises, noting that humans are now a "geological force" (Chakrabarty 2021). Environmental uncertainty then is a metaphor for general experiences of instability and insecurity. According to Ursula Heise, the function of literary narratives is to have a meaningful impact on ecological consciousness, that is, to induce readers to think about connections between local experiences and global crises "Literary narratives are essential in fostering a sense of ecology"; that is, a sense of the connections between local and global experiences, which are mapped onto the cultural meanings of endangered species (Heise 2016). Elizabeth DeLoughrey's work on environmental representation includes the revealing of the stories of power, exploitation, and displacement in narratives of catastrophe. It is also very useful for examining how landscape is rendered as "ruined" in *The Invisible Circus*, particularly in relation to the "allegories of the anthropocene" (DeLoughrey 2019) that are woven into the fabric of the present-day novel. The novel is a world of environmental uncertainties, historical instability, and emotional fragility that merges to produce a profound reflection on the fragility of the present day.

5. Speculative Despair and the Failure of Utopian Futures

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the novel is its examination of speculative despair when collective dreams come to an end and futures are no longer imaginable. Egan examines the ideals of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture movements throughout the novel, uncovering the end results of hopes for freedom, social transformation, personal liberation, disappointment and uncertainty. Mark West has suggested that *The Invisible Circus* is a reflection of the dying sense of idealism of the countercultural movement and the realization that many of the ideals they had were never to be realized. In the article "Generation Jones, the

Sixties, and Jennifer Egan's *The Invisible Circus*." The dynamic is significant because it exemplifies the relationship between, the Sixties, and stories and historical disillusionment (West 151). The sense of disappointment is best illustrated by Phoebe, an embodiment of other possibilities in life, whose death marks the failure of those dreams. Faith's quest to make sense of her sister's decision becomes a challenge to the failure of a whole generation to envision a social and personal transformation

Meanwhile, Fredric Jameson proposes that late capitalism does not allow the imagination of alternatives, and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing discusses the possibility of life in capitalist ruins in the wake of failed systems (Tsing 2015; Jameson 2015). Like Jedediah Purdy, who calls for a "politics for the anthropocene" (2015), Egan's characters are also haunted by missed expectations and precarious futures, but he does not contend that they are implicated in the age of humans. Valerie O'Riordan's sheds light on the novel itself, which captures the fragility of modernity's promises through the breakdown of hopes and the collapse of utopian visions (O'Riordan's 208)

Discussion

The analysis shows that *The Invisible Circus* is not just a personal story of coming of age, but is a deep critique of modernity and the crises of today. Throughout the narrative, the post-industrial spaces that are encountered stand as a metaphor for cultural exhaustion and as a testament to Tsing's sense of life in systems that are disrupted and certainties that are abandoned. Alicia J. Rouverol, Christopher White, and Valerie O'Riordan describe the critical issues of Egan's exploration of uncertainty, fragmentation, and social reality, which are also evident in the novel. At the same time, the general feeling of decay and fragility is an indication of Tim Morton's, Rob Nixon's, Ursula Heise's and Elizabeth DeLoughrey's insights into ecological interdependence and environmental uncertainty. These insights can be linked to the current debates in environmental humanities and Anthropocene studies, such as Claire Colebrook's thoughts on extinction narratives (Colebrook 2023), T. J. Demos's thoughts on planetary crisis and environmental justice (Demos 2020), Adam Trexler's analysis of climate-oriented fiction (Trexler 2015), Pieter Vermeulen's exploration of planetary consciousness (Vermeulen 2020), and Jennifer Wenzel's work on environmental crisis and global inequality (Wenzel 2020). As for the environmental, the writings of Amitav Ghosh (2021), Andreas Malm (2018), and Kathryn Yusoff (2018) on environmentalism and global instability

Conclusion

In *The Invisible Circus*, Egan shows how the ruins of modernity can be environmental, historical and psychological realities. The novel's disjointed geography, unfulfilled dreams of political and ideological ideals, and fractured subjectivities expose the effects of a world defined by uncertainty and cultural disillusion. The analysis has been shown that post-industrial locations are symbolic places where individual traumas intersect with the multiple scales of capitalism, historical decay and ecological vulnerability. The study also confirms that Egan creates the physical context as an often-uncanny symbol of emotional estrangement and social disintegration. Faith's journey relates issues of identity,

vanishing of collectively shared certainties, and challenges in constructing meaning in the world of displacement and loss. However, *The Invisible Circus* is a speculative despair, not a fleeting emotion but an integral part of current existence. Egan's critique of late modernity and the current crises is compelling as she shares the same analysis of how these crises are intertwined: ecological anxiety and historical disintegration and psychological fragmentation.

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DABEER SI/KTT/95**CARGO CULT TIME FOR THE HUMAN RACE: COSMIC ENVIRONMENTAL SUBLIME AND EPISTEMIC EXILE IN WILLIAM GIBSON'S HINTERLANDS****PUJA. J**Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, India**G. PARVATHY**Associate Professor and UG Head, PG & Research Department of English
Bishop Heber College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, India**Abstract**

William Gibson's *Hinterlands*, a short story featured in *Burning Chrome* (1986), is a radical critique of late twentieth-century techno-utopian fantasies about space colonisation and the ethics of cosmic exploration. This paper departs from a traditional inquiry into the techno-deterministic and cosmic-horror nuances of the story, interrogating it through environmental, posthumanist, and psychological theoretical conceptualisations by Marc Augé, Tony M. Vinci and Timothy Morton. It investigates the environmental-psychological architecture of the space station 'Heaven' in the story, through Marc Augé's 'non-place' that dissolves cultural and historical specificities. The study demonstrates how humanist epistemologies stand trial for facilitating a cognitive collapse when encountering an unknown space anomaly. Furthermore, an iconographic reading illustrates how exobiological artefacts like seashells, far removed from an anthropocentric space, emerge as Timothy Morton's 'Hyperobjects', inducing a state of 'posthuman sublime'. The paper argues that this overwhelming encounter causes a violent dissociation and disruption of the space explorers' minds, signalling a profound strain of what Tony M. Vinci calls 'posthuman trauma', and perpetuating a loop of psychic self-erasure in the pursuit of the unknown. By bridging speculative imaginaries with perspectives from posthumanism and postcolonial psychology, the paper attempts to analyse the paradigms and ethics of encounter, resource extraction and weaponisation of empathy in contemporary science fiction.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Space Colonisation, Non-Place, Ethics of Encounter, William Gibson

Introduction

Darest thou now O soul (...)
 No map there, nor guide,
 Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand (...)
 Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.
 Then we burst forth, we float (Whitman *Leaves of Grass*)

What Walt Whitman imagined as souls transcending the known realms of the world and into the 'Great Unknown' of the afterlife serves as a valid metaphor for space exploration, because of equally daunting untrodden lands, unguided souls, and an upbeat curiosity to venture beyond what is known to humanity. Modern

speculative fiction began to presume myriad futures as human civilization moved beyond Earth's threshold, aiming to become a settler species in space, with different social and political scenarios complicating their existence. Such ideological patterns, palpable in Wells, Le Guin, and Stanley Robinson, also unmistakably reverberate in science fiction narratives, especially in William Gibson. Rejecting the predominant myth of space exploration being a defensive move to solve Earth's problems, Gibson directs his readers toward how humans bring Earth's problems to space. Anthologised in *Burning Chrome* (1986), Gibson's short story *Hinterlands* sits at the fascinating intersection between optimistic space exploration and the cynical colonial sensibility.

Cosmologist Stephen Hawking represents the drive for space exploration in the current era, declaring, "I am convinced that humans need to leave Earth ... now there is no new world" (Knapton). Famed astrophysicist Michio Kaku similarly declares, "we must find a way to create a Garden of Eden on its [Mars'] inhabitable landscape" (83). Such statements essentially entail dubious "religious and colonialist themes", writes Rhoads, that "encapsulate the Mars-inspired cosmic escapism" (4). Intertwined with their hopes is the tie between "the natural environment and the human self" in science fiction narratives set in the Anthropocene (Rhoads 5-6). The Anthropocene emerges as an era defined by human influence on Earth, demanding timely recognition and understanding of trans-species interconnection, proving "the human is what it is because it includes the non-human" (Nayar 11). In the Anthropocene, the "internal metaphysical and ethical reasons" of mankind contribute to the abandonment of humanist notions just as much as the external, "mostly technological, economic or ecological influences", writes Herbrechter (10). Owing to this, Donna Haraway, in her *A Cyborg Manifesto*, identifies an "ecotechnological" wound, which "infolds organic and technological flesh" (12). Michael Peters, in support of this claim, specifies that an 'ecotechnological wound' emerges in the "age and realisation of the Anthropocene" (11-12). Therefore, it is understood that this ecotechnological wound, shared by humans and non-humans alike in the Anthropocene, perpetuates a traumatic loop that jeopardises psychological well-being and urges critical posthuman intervention.

To understand this trans-species interrelationship in an age of "cosmic escapism", (Rhoads 2) discourse connecting the posthuman anthropocene to a paradigm of trauma has been emphasised by critics like Baelo-Allue, who argues that classical trauma studies had always been "Eurocentric, event-based, static conception" and posthuman trauma studies now focus on a "more embedded and embodied vision ... that takes into account the ties of humans to other organic bodies, machines and material forms" (1119). While traditional studies were concerned more with the wound in the Caruthian sense, contemporary trauma theorists like Tony M. Vinci's exploration of the interrelationship between vulnerability and trauma provide space for the non-human as well. He addresses the "potential of such posthuman trauma to enact an ethics of radical openness and vulnerability" (Vinci 166), providing the critical lens necessary for this study. This paper focuses on two important facets of this story: the first being the unrelenting human urge to understand the incomprehensible, especially cosmic phenomena fueled by

technological transcendence; and the second being the sublime terror of unexpected encounters with the literal other-world environmental phenomenon, and its implications for human memory and cognition. This paper explores how it ruptures the self and the human psyche at large, creating an insoluble cognitive wound, irrecoverable trauma that urges the posthuman subject to escape cognitive paralysis.

Cosmic Environmental Sublime and Human Insignificance

Traditionally, narrative spaces had “no other function than to supply a general background setting [...] far less essential than the temporal directness of the plot” and therefore were omitted in literary theory (Buchholz and Jahn 551). This phase changed when literary geographical criticism went “beyond the simple association of narrative space [...] towards [...] how text and space, fiction and location, might be understood as inseparable and co-productive”, writes Hones in *Literary Geography* (686). This co-productive approach to critique linking literary geography and ecocriticism makes “science fiction a perfect fit for recent ecocritical ideas about space, place, and environment” (Bernardo 1). Understanding this, the paper analyses how the setting in *Hinterlands* “is not just an envelope for action [...] but has an active part to play” as a “site of production” (Bernardo 4). *Hinterlands* (German translation: ‘*hinter*’ - ‘behind’), in the literal sense, portrays life in orbit as an extended civilisation of mankind ‘behind’ the Earth. Even NASA justifies such a notion of space as just an ‘extension’ of Earth, where exploration is deemed necessary just as one would explore the “forests, the mountains, or the sea” (“*Why Go to Space*”). The story features a settlement in space, situated for research purposes, hoping to discover an escape from the earthly perplexities. In this way, the explorers “exceed[s] the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism” when it comes to a “planetary dimension” (Braidotti 89).

Extraterrestrial encounters in *Hinterlands* use a purely terrestrial frame of reference. For example, the act of analogising human space exploration to the accidental event of a housefly getting trapped in an aeroplane and being geographically shifted. “‘Hey,’ say the other flies, ‘what’s happening on the other side of that door? What do they know that we don’t?’” (Gibson 70), because making contact always seems to be the human imperative to understand the unknown. *Hinterlands* reveals the visceral psychological disaster that accompanies space explorers’ encounters in space. It follows the narration of Toby Halpert, one of the ‘surrogates’ – a term used to describe the rescue crew who attend to the astronauts returning from space exploration. The astronauts’ return from their space sojourn transforms their trained and technology-aided minds into a fractured, catatonic mess. They are either “popping back off the Highway dead ... won’t say a goddamned thing, then shoot themselves or go catatonic” (Gibson 69). Olga Tovyevski, the first astronaut to return, who is in reality the first victim of an extraterrestrial encounter, is sanctified. This denotes an almost religious reverence for epistemic projects aimed at deepening human understanding of life beyond Earth.

An iconographic approach to artefacts like the exoplanetary seashell once again solidifies the sacred air surrounding it. With Olga’s return with the seashell of

unknown origin, the fundamental human curiosity of how the wormhole works is intensified. This fetish with the great unknown, embodied as “cargo cult time for the human race” (Gibson 69), reflects the “information-hungry” outlook (Gibson 62). Planetary Scientist Carl Sagan’s *Message to Mars Explorers* goes, “Maybe we’re on Mars because we have to be, because there’s a deep nomadic impulse built into us by the evolutionary process—we come, after all, from hunter-gatherers, and for 99.9% of our tenure on Earth we’ve been wanderers” (Popova). So, the astronauts justify their pursuits as noble, hiding beneath a basic colonial sensibility. “Le Guin unmasks the way in which human exceptionalism is shorthand for the ‘right’ to colonise”, writes Marino on ‘Astroenvironmentalism’, showing how environmentalist discourse is deeply intertwined with a colonial counterpart (36). But repeatedly, the universe denies such colonisation, as the travel becomes fatal to them, exposing an irrevocable, typically human incapability and vulnerability. This aligns with Katherine Hayles’s identification of a mutual vulnerability: “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence ... and biological organism” (3). The first complication of such vulnerability faced in the story is the inability of human perception and cognition in the face of cognitively challenging encounters, especially in grasping the extraterrestrial phenomena. It places the human race in a problematic and questionable position when they are no longer the intellectually and genetically superior ones to exist. Their cosmic insignificance is highlighted as *Hinterlands* exposes: “One by one, they all fall down. In the whispering quiet of Heaven’s nights, you imagine you can hear the paradigms shatter, shards of theory tinkling into brilliant dust” (Gibson 71).

While *Hinterlands* transcends the setting to extraterrestrial space, the geographic nomenclature and corporatisation of space exploration continuously keep it rooted in Earthly politics. The characters reside in a “supermodern” space station, where they constantly witness an “excess” of everything, especially time, space and ego (Augé 29). It is strategically named ‘Heaven’, but it emerges as a liminal space devoid of culturally significant and meaningful existence. There is an “overabundance of events, spatial overabundance” on one hand and no real sense of belonging on the other side (Augé 40). In this sense, they are not utopian, but ‘atopian’ (‘non-places’).

The protagonist Toby Halpert constantly reminds us that this exploration is purely a bureaucratic project: “corporate logos, subsidiary backers of an imaginary Highway expedition, with the main backer’s much larger trademark stitched across my shoulders” (Gibson 63). Instead of brandishing the magnitude of human exploration of space, there is a constant reminder of administration, paperwork and protocols throughout Heaven. It reflects how the corporate agents view ‘Heaven’ as another colonisable, administrative, bureaucratic realm where human instincts are honed, trained and acted upon to exploit it. Thus, its nomenclature becomes highly ironic. Heaven is merely a neo-liberal outpost where individuality is dissolved under a corporate banner, so that the furthering of human knowledge runs smoothly without interruption. This reveals how Gibson’s narrative choice “ceaselessly transforms places into spaces and spaces into places” (De Certeau 173). ‘Heaven’ is never treated as a ‘space’ where humans record lived

experiences, but a mere ‘place’ – a location removed from identity markers. These acts of “seeing” and “doing” are distinct in their functions (De Certeau 174). While space exploration is ‘seen’ and represented as a glorious feat, what is actually ‘done’ – space colonisation – goes unnoticed.

Subsequently, curiosity in the story closely resembles the Humanist epistemic project, whereby humans “feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning: to give meaning to the world” (Augé 29). Every expedition in *Hinterlands* can be traced back to an insatiable human urge to explain the unexplainable. This venture justifies the exploitation of human and non-human resources by claiming that indispensable new knowledge is worth risking anything for. As a result, the traditional identifiers of the human became obsolete compared to the cosmic scale.

The decentering of the Humanist ‘human’, fostered by a paradigm shift in the socio-technological and ecological landscape, opens new critical avenues to reveal crucial implications for the human condition. Initially, the human body becomes obsolete; it is just a “meatshot” (Gibson 59). The return of the dead or catatonic space explorers evidences the shattering of the image of the intelligent and skilled human. Evidently, interstellar travel, irrespective of the intense training, education and technological support, shatters the known paradigms of human psychology. The image of the rational, intellectually superior human is constantly broken and is replaced by an image of humans as the psychologically shattered, cognitively imperfect and unremarkable. We find that the astronauts experience a “slow, relentless flowering of paranoia” (Gibson 71), actualising into a full-blown trauma. Their encounter with the ‘cosmic sublime’ splinters their sanity and ultimately induces them to self-terminate. This act of self-destruction marks the failure of the ideal humanist man to survive in the post-Anthropocene amidst trans-species vulnerability.

In *Hinterlands*, ethical considerations regarding the treatment of psychologically deteriorated astronauts, at least for that small percentage who have returned alive, are evidently a failed attempt. The mission directors install psychological help to the returnees:

...heavies in, the shrink elite ... Everybody was there: Freudians, Jungians, Adlerians, Skinner rat men, you name it. And every one of those bastards knew in his heart that it was time to play his best hand. As a profession, not just as representatives of a given faction. There they are, Western psychiatry incarnate. And nothing’s happening! (Gibson 69)

Whatever the astronauts witnessed was the prime reason for their loss of sanity, their urge for self-destruction and their catatonic state. But the sponsors of space exploration repeatedly urge the solitary attendees to aid the returnees with an unbearable ‘cognitive wound’. The death of the astronauts is simultaneously the death of the humanist concept of what constitutes a human being. The unexpected cosmic encounter with the extraterrestrial shocks and situates the human psyche in an inconceivable location that perpetuates “[t]he promise of pain. It’s there each time. You know what will happen, but you don’t know when, or exactly how” (Gibson 70).

As the study reveals the spatial-psychological architecture of the story as the prime source for the sublime, it becomes essential to understand how it affects human ontology. Ecophilosopher Timothy Morton notes that human cognition is affected by ‘Hyperobjects’ that are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (1) in the Anthropocene. Exploring the role of ‘Hyperobjects’, Daggett writes, “[w]e in the Anthropocene are able to see snapshots of hyperobjects, and that these intimations more or less will force us to undergo a radical reboot of our ontological toolkit”. The space explorers in the story experience a similar “ontological reboot” (Morton 1) when they encounter a Tovyevski Anomaly that shatters their cognition, sensibility and awareness. The notion of Life, which has so far been “codified” as “the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others”, has now been elegantly widened to the non-human as well (Braidotti 60). It affects and traumatises human behaviour. According to Judith Herman, “[r]econstruction of the trauma, a narrative” is said to be based on “paradigmatic incidents, with the understanding that one episode stands for many” (13). This can be observed clearly when Toby Halpert finds his first encounter as the epitome of fear,

I’d felt it before, the Fear ... Now it was vast, the very hollow of night, an emptiness cold and implacable. It was last words, deep space, every long goodbye in the history of our species ... It’s the long finger of Big Night, the darkness that feeds the muttering damned to the gentle white maw of Wards. (Gibson 73)

Therefore, they no longer fit the Humanist ideal of the civilised, superior humankind with deep knowledge, but emerge as paralysed patients who have witnessed an indefinable doom. What the explorers experience is evidently “disempowering, disturbing and weird” (Morton 64), which humbles and humiliates human potential to solve existential crises. Therefore, the surrogates of *Hinterlands* are continuously trained to contact and comfort the space returnees, despite their “psychological reorientation”, when stunned by the cosmic ecotechnological sublime (Hudson). In this sense, *Hinterlands* is surely a trauma narrative as it details the experience with a clarity that encompasses the event of encountering, experiencing extreme fear, which stuns and destabilises human sanity.

Environmental Exile and Epistemic Kamikaze

After removing all tangible hurdles of “a Robinsonade for the Great Recession” of the explorers, the residue is surely the unrecognisable environment, suspending the characters in an unknown landscape with no prior ecological awareness (Strychacz 1). The newness of the cosmic encounter deems human cosmic awareness inadequate, inducing a traumatic experience. This “trauma and its destabilizing effects on the self” is seen as something “positive, even necessary”, which permits the “transition between the world of human exceptionalism and anthropocentric humanism to an ethics of posthuman openness and radical vulnerability” (Herbrechter et al. 1128). This places space exploration not as a triumphant colonisation of space, but instead as an exile born of dissatisfaction on Earth. Therefore, the characters emerge as environmental exiles, left alone to scrape for meanings from small objects and signs to tackle the ignorance. Their

existence is defined and directed by an “oppressive claustrophobic horror of actually being inside” the unexplored regions of space (Morton 132). It furthermore “compels” the space explorers, “to think ecologically” (Morton 48), despite the “existential terror”, so that they might arrive even remotely at what awaits outside their station. This ecological learning demands an undeniable “smashing” of the “aesthetics” that is known and followed, writes Morton (48).

This reduction of human sentience and ecological awareness, including outer space, triggers a self-destructive urge, seen as an extreme reaction to a traumatic environment. This epistemic kamikaze (translates into “Heavenly, or Divine”, meaning a noble sacrifice; *Kamikaze Pilots*), or self-destruction of consciousness, is treated as noble and necessary to test the limits of human perception, cognition and the indicative posthuman condition. A reconfiguration of the human in *Hinterlands* is grounded in the connection between the human and the cosmos, which strictly demands a rejection of anthropocentric individualism. Such coerced self-abandonment is the “Dissociation” as explained by Judith Herman, which becomes “not merely a defensive adaptation” but becomes “the fundamental principle of personality organization” (74). In *Hinterlands*, the traumatised characters dissociate even from their own body to achieve a new level of human cognition. This dissociation and destruction of the self is the sacrificial kamikaze undertaken for the greater good. Human knowledge in this story, therefore, rests on the acknowledgement and acceptance of “multiplicity and the relational connection with an ‘outside’ that is cosmic and infinite” (Braidotti 138), contributing to a subjectivity that resembles the posthuman condition. The posthuman condition in these novels does not just present the traumatic experience as fatal, but opens up a new arena for humans, or posthumans to be precise, where they engage with a newer level of consciousness. The terminal expenditure of the coherent self is the source for true posthuman gnosis. Trauma, therefore, stops being soul-destroying and self-annihilating, but transforms into a weapon that is wielded to combat unknown epistemes. It guides human exploration of the cognitive hinterlands, psychologically challenging extraterrestrials and familiarising them with the unknown. Accepting the bliss of not-knowing and the need for annihilation proves to be part of their predetermined purpose. Thus, the study reframes trauma not as a wound, but as a utopian enhancement.

Conclusion

The study intersecting Gibson’s *Hinterlands*’ science fiction background with critical conceptualisations from psychology, posthumanism and trauma renders a new understanding of the human condition. It identifies an undeniable paradox. The urge to further human knowledge inherently brings along a trial of human nature. Space exploration, the “last and greatest adventure of mankind: a plunge towards the conquest of space”, brings unexplored phenomena, demands an environmental self-exile and psychological rupture that complicates human existence in the post-Anthropocene (Miller). Cosmic encounters shift the balanced interplay of reason and epistemic faculty of humans; they present the events as an unforeseen ‘other’ incapable of being processed. This ultimately denotes a failure of the human systems of understanding, learning, and knowledge creation. This notion dwarfs the human episteme, technologies and ideologies of space

exploration. The philosophy of kamikaze becomes the necessary expenditure of the self to escape the logic of human exceptionalism. The hinterlands in these narratives are the liminal spaces where the failure of human mastery links humans in a state of material embeddedness. Thus, the acceptance of dissolution and annihilation of the humanist subject allows for the emergence of the relational, embedded existence of all species, including the non-human. The paper concludes that a shared, epistemic trauma demands self-expenditure as the definitive mechanism for moving beyond humanism. The death of the autonomous, superior human subject does not signal a failure, but is a successful ontological act for recognising the non-human world, enforcing profound humility and promising transcendence to the posthuman. Ultimately, the study posits that these characters emerge as performers of 'epistemic kamikaze', the act of yielding to extreme forms of affective and emotional labour to extract alien data for seamless extraterrestrial colonisation. Therefore, the study positions the characters not as victorious explorers but as narrative agents of a literal out-of-the-world environmental self-exile, thereby redefining the traditional archetype of a heroic space traveller.

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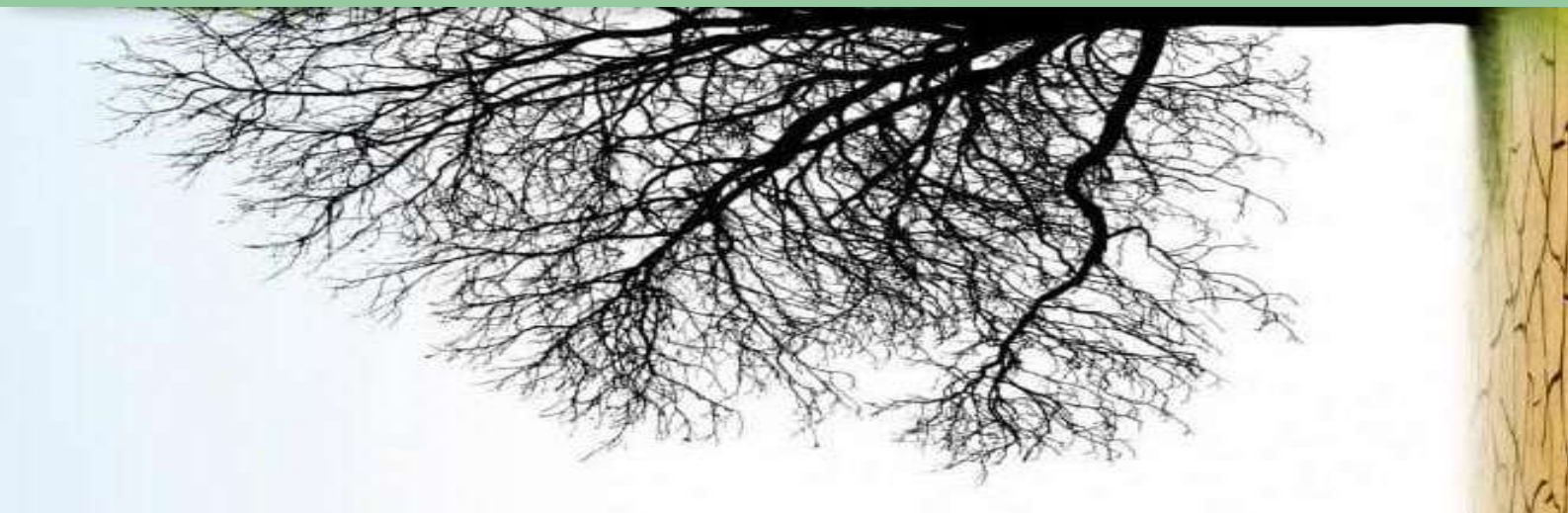
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