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*Language is a fragile protest but it represents the only salvation possible / because there is nothing more to do. - Atwood*

## Editorial



We, the millennials might have never envisaged a world ridden by a pandemic. The pandemic made us all guilty of being human and we were forced to reflect on the metaphor of human malignancy.

Literature has always engaged with this reality and has prophetically warned us about fanaticism that is political, religious, and moral. The tragedy that now unfolds is immediate, real, and of epic proportions. The Russia-Ukraine war has caused a disruption that will inadvertently alter the geo-political alliances that will get reflected in stories of the millennial authors. To live outside the pandemic or war has become an impossibility not only for ordinary people but also for celebrated writers, historians, philosophers, sociologists, and filmmakers. Literature and history face the threat of being pedalled by power politics but there will always be a counterbalance in the form of brave hearts who subvert the rough coordinates.

Amid the disharmony of the world and the complexities of the modern ruptured soul, can literature become the “beauty that will save the world” as prophesied by Dostoevsky? Language inscribes in itself a world of knowledge that verge upon the visionary or madness and sometimes they are no longer what we assume. They wander off on their own, lying between the sleepy pages or raising revolutions between the lines, thus becoming in a way, the prosaic pulse of the world. There is always a search for truth and an attempt to capture the exact essence of things.

Life and literature have had journey of reflective evolution. The ideas of yesterday’s dystopian fiction are now the realities of today’s postmodern, post human, post truth world. In the light of the recent world conflicts, the contributors of *TJES* have critically looked at the real, unfettered, freedom of the individual. The articles in this edition problematise racial discrimination and identity, the body as a battleground of various ideologies, cultural transition and identity, multiculturalism, the ecological politics of spaces and the invisibilisation of queer desire in Malayalam cinema.

As Joe Woodward wrote, “as long as there has been war, there have been writers trying to understand it.” When things fall apart, and wars or pandemics become a global fixture, it requires critical thought, public review and serious debate. When our minds are raging about the terrible despair, and are trying to stitch together a viable future for our race, these academic lines of enquiry become a gateway between the present and the future possible.

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# Salman Rushdie's Tryst with Freedom of Speech: A Reading of *Joseph Anton*

Dr. Prakash Chandra Pradhan\*

## Abstract

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* earned a *fatwa*, a death sentence by the Islamic ruler of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, for its author after its publication in 1988 because the Islamic community thought that Rushdie had intentionally hurt the sentiment of the Islamic community for a good selling of his book. After the *fatwa*, his free movement was restricted to a considerable degree, and he was forced to live underground for nine years. He also took a secret name as Joseph Anton, deriving that name from the names of two famous writers, namely Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. The book titled *Joseph Anton* is a memoir where Rushdie has recorded his traumatic experiences of that period due to the loss of his free movements in a free world. This paper also highlights Rushdie's concerns about the attack on freedom of expression and speech with reference to the memoir of *Joseph Anton*.

**Keywords:** *Fatwa, Memoir, Suppression, Freedom of Speech, and Trauma.*

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Salman Rushdie is a controversial novelist. Most of his novels have stirred imagination of the readers either in positive or negative perspective. His novel *The Satanic Verses* earned him a *fatwa*, a death sentence by the Iranian Muslim ruler Ayatollah Khomeini because he thought that "Satanic Verses were verses that were Satanic, and he was their satanic author, 'Satan Rushdy,' the horned creature on the placards carried by demonstrators down the streets of a faraway city, the hanged man with protruding red tongue in the crude cartoons they bore. Hang Satan Rushdy" (JA 2012: 5). This was Khomeini's assessment of Salman Rushdie in 1989. A BBC journalist informed Rushdie about his crime against Islam, the Prophet and the Quran on 14 February 1989, the Valentine's Day. The ultimatum issued by Khomeini resulted in restrictions on his free movements in England. He had therefore to live underground, moving from one house to the other in the presence of the armed police. The police asked him to specify a nick name by which he would be called, and Rushdie suggested that he should be called 'Joseph Anton' by combining the first names of the two great writers, namely Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. He lived underground for a long period of nine years under the threat of murder. Rushdie has recorded his predicament and loss of freedom of speech in his memoir, *Joseph Anton*. This memoir describes the grim realities of Rushdie's sufferings and miseries due to loss of freedom and his struggle for support of the middle class intellectuals, various governments, intelligence chiefs, publishers, journalists and his fellow writers. He also narrates the whole perspective of regaining freedom after nine years of exile.

### I

Thinking about the safety of his son who was staying with his mother Clarissa, he left USA and

came to London to see his son. That evening after returning home alone, he heard the news on the radio that there had been a 'Rushdie riot' outside the US cultural centre in Islamabad, Pakistan:

The demonstration carried signs saying RUSHDIE, YOU ARE DEAD. Now the danger had been greatly multiplied by the Iranian edict. The Ayatollah Khomeini was not just a powerful cleric. He was a head of a state ordering the murder of the citizen of another state, over whom he had no jurisdiction and he had assassins at his service and they had been used before against enemies of the Iranian Revolution, including enemies living outside Iran. (JA 15)

Globalisation has made it easier for the assassins to access their target as a result of which, it has been too much problematic for a person to live even in an extra-territorial land in England far from the land of the ruler who has sponsored terrorism on behalf of his state. Voltaire's exile for seven years in England away from France had been quite safe after he had offended the Chevalier de Rohan, an aristocrat. In contrast, Rushdie's life had been endangered even in England because of the fact that the Iranian assassins might try to kill him anytime. That is why the armed police were guarding Rushdie's house from a distance.

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in June in 1947 after which the British left India. He was deeply disturbed by his failures. He speculated over the issue of his migration and questioned himself about the loss of his roots. He could not understand why his parents left India for Pakistan that resulted in the loss of his home in Mumbai. He therefore writes:

Pakistan was the great mistake of his parents, the blunder that had deprived him of his home. It was easy for him to see Pakistan itself as a historical blunder too, a country insufficiently imagined, conceived of the misguided notion that a religion could bind together peoples (Punjabi, Sindhi, Bengali, Baloch, Pathan) whom geography and history had long kept apart, born as a misshapen bird, 'two Wings without a body, sundered by the land mass of its greatest foe, joined by nothing but God,' whose East Wing had subsequently fallen off. What was the sound of one Wing flapping? The answer to this version of the famous Zenkoan was undoubtedly 'Pakistan.' (JA 60)

In his search for identity, Rushdie understands that he has been a migrant. He therefore lives in a place away from his original place. Migration has destroyed all his roots and traditions. He therefore deeply regrets:

The rooted self flourished in a place it knew well among people who knew it well, following customs and traditions with which it and its community were familiar, and speaking its own language among others who did the same. Of these four roots place, community, culture and language, he had lost three. His beloved Bombay was no longer available to him; in their old age his parents had sold his childhood home without discussion mysteriously decamped to Karachi, Pakistan. They did not enjoy living in Karachi; why would they? (JA 53)

Rushdie was really disturbed by this kind of move by his parents. He was not told about the secret of his migration. To him, his parents were perhaps guided by some kind of business strategy rather than by religious necessity. Anyway,

it was a kind of mystery for him. He was however seriously disturbed by thinking of this loss. It made him nostalgic for Mumbai, his place of birth.

Madhu Jain, the journalist of *India Today* published the first article 'An Unequivocal Attack on *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie considers the article to be one of the inaccurate descriptions about the book. The last sentence in the article suggests a kind of negativity: "*The Satanic Verses* is bound to trigger an avalanche of protests ..." (JA 112). After reading the article, the Indian Parliamentarian, an Islamic conservative Syed Shahabuddin, responded to it by writing an open letter titled "You Did This with Satanic Forethought, Mr Rushdie." Rushdie reflects on the attack of the book in his autobiographical fiction, *Joseph Anton*:

The most powerful way to attack a book is to demonise its author, to turn him into a creature of base motives and evil intentions. The 'Satan Rushdy' who would afterwards be paraded down the world's streets by angry demonstrators, hanged in effigy with a red tongue hanging out and wearing a crude dinner jacket, was being created; born in India, as the real Rushdie had been. Here was the first proposition of the assault: that anyone who wrote a book with the word 'satanic' in the incipient Age of Information (or disinformation), it became true by repetition. Tell a lie about a man once and many people will not believe you. Tell it a million times and it is the man himself who will no longer be believed. (JA 112)

The journalist Khushwant Singh called for a ban in the *Illustrated Weekly* of India to avoid the trouble. He was the first writer to join the censorship lobby. Another opposition M.P., Mr.

Khurshid Alan Khan joined with Shahabuddin against Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. The real book was not read by the people who attacked the book because they were told that the book refers to the Prophet and his companions as 'scums and bums.' They were also told: "Rushdie calls the wives of the Prophet whores" (JA 114). But actually, Rushdie describes the whores in a brothel in his imaginary Jahilia who take on the names of the Prophet's wives to arouse their clients. He however describes clearly that the wives are living chastely in the harem. Another charge against the book was that Rushdie has used the word 'fuck' too many times.

Actually, the book is an artistic piece and Rushdie as a writer has the freedom of speech to express his ideas in artistic manner. He regrets that "the language of literature would be drowned beneath the cacophony of other discourses, political, religious, sociological, post-colonial, and the subject of quality of serious artistic intent, would come to seem almost frivolous. The book about migration and transformation that he had written was vanishing and being replaced by one that scarcely existed." (JA 114)." A serious allegation against Rushdie is that he wrote the book to make a fortune: "He did it for money. He did it for fame. The Jews made him do it. Nobody would have bought his unreadable book if he hadn't vilified Islam" (JA 115). This kind of attack denied the book its ordinary life of a novel. Rushdie has certainly been misunderstood although his book has also affected the sentiments of the Muslims. The book is an intellectual inquiry into the impact of migration on individual identity. It makes a philosophical inquiry into the migrant experience in the second half of the twentieth century if migration has destroyed the identities of the migrants. The second important philosophical investigation in the book is if there has been split in the self of the migrants due to loss of their homeland as well as faith. In reference to *The Satanic Verses* Andrew Teverson comments:

*The Satanic Verses* is a blasphemous text on many levels. It offends against the sacred orthodoxies of religious creeds; it also commits several acts of what Sara Suleri identifies as 'cultural heresy' – 'acts of historical or cultural severance' that constitute 'blasphemies' against established secular perspectives. (155)

Rushdie argues that it is essential to subject the Qur'an to the ideological systems of historicity for Islam to "move beyond tradition" and "bring the core concepts of Islam into modern age" (The Times 19). Referring to this argument of Rushdie, Teverson holds the view: "*The Verses* returns the Qur'an to the historical conditions of its making, in order to show that it reflects a historically contingent set of ideological belief systems that ought to be open to critique as ideological system" (157). Sara Suleri considers that the novel "is, from a cultural point of view, a meticulous religious attentiveness...[that enables] Rushdie to extend – with urgency and fidelity – his engagement with both cultural self-definition and Islamic historiography" (191). Suleri therefore thinks that Rushdie's blasphemy aimed at revision and renewal of the Islamic cultural tradition. In the novel, we find that Gibreel Farisha sings in its beginning, "To be born again... first you have to die" (SV 3). This song is quite relevant to the experience of the migrant. Despite the novel dealing with migrant issues, it has however seriously hurt the Islamic community. Rushdie therefore had to pay a great price for this offence. He was forced to live in exile.

According to Rushdie, the author was transformed in to a mean person by the world. "There was something surreally comical about this metamorphosis of a novel about angelic and satanic metamorphoses into a devil-version of itself..." (JA 115). Despite the fact that the novel *The Satanic Verses* was shortlisted for Booker Prize along with novels by Peter Carey, Bruce Chatwin, Ma-

rina Warner, David Lodge and Penelope Fitzgerald, Syed Shahabuddin, the Indian M.P. demanded its ban in India as it was a 'blasphemous' book. It was ridiculous to think about his demand when he had not read the book though he judge the book negatively: "I do not have to wade through a filthy drain to know what filth is" (JA 116). The book was finally banned in India on 6 October 1988. Rushdie was informed by his friend Salman Haider, the Deputy high commissioner of India in London. Even the large majority of the British public voted for an apology by Rushdie for writing an 'offensive book.' Without being examined by any properly authorised body, Rajiv Gandhi Govt. banned the book in 1988 to get the support of the Muslim voters in the next general election to be held in November 1988. Of course it was proved to be a misconception of the Congress party to concede to the demand by the opposition MPs. Rushdie's anguish is that India believed in freedom of expression in 1988 although book banning is a general trend in Pakistan. Of course after 1988, there were many attacks on artistic freedom of the eminent artists such as Maqbool Fida Hussain, the novelist Rohinton Mistry and the film-maker Deepa Mehta. Rushdie therefore reflects on the liberal viewpoint of Nehru who had written in 1929: "It is a dangerous power in the hands of a government; the right to determine what shall be read and what shall not. In India, the power is likely to be misused" (JA 117). Unfortunately Nehru's words proved to be a critique of India itself.

Rushdie had been proud of India as a free society although Pakistan, China and Burma, the surrounding societies were unfree. Except during emergency rule during 1975-1977, intellectual freedom and respect had always been present. He wrote with seriousness presuming that he might be taken seriously. He thought that he had the right to choose his subject. The Indian re-

sponse to his novel *Midnight's Children* was a great source of inspiration for him. However, "the embargo on the importation of *The Satanic Verses* was a painful blow" (JA 118). The government clarified that the banning order had been issued to prevent the misuse and distortion of certain susceptible passages. Rushdie was not convinced and wrote a letter to the Prime Minister: "This is no way, Mr. Gandhi for a free society to behave" (JA 118). The Indian press called the ban "a philistine decision" and an example of "thought control" (JA 118). Rushdie was very rude when he pointed out: "You won present, Mr. Prime Minister, but centuries belong to art" (JA 119). After a wide circulation of this letter on 9 October 1988, threat calls were received at the offices of Viking, and the scheduled reading at Cambridge was cancelled. Rushdie lost the Booker Award to Peter Carey in 1988 in a hurried decision. Rushdie's visit to South Africa to deliver the keynote address at Johannesburg, organised by the anti-apartheid newspaper, *Weekly Mail*. The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) was cancelled because the majority of the Muslims were against Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. The South African Govt. also banned the book considering it "a work thinly disguised as a piece of literature." Its language was foul for which it was "disgusting not only to Muslims but to any reader who holds clear values of decency and culture" (JA 121). The UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs used the same language in their letters to "Brothers of Islam" on 28 October 1988. Though he had well-wishers like J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer in South Africa, Rushdie was finally to cancel the visit, and agreed to speak to the *Weekly Mail* conference by telephone link from London: "His voice went to South Africa, his ideas were heard in a Johannesburg hall he couldn't see but he stayed at home. It wasn't satisfying but it felt better than nothing" (JA 123).

The grand sheikh of al-Azhar, God el-Haq Ali Gad el-Haq, a hard-line conservative priest based at the al-Azhar University in Cairo called on the British Muslims on 22 November 1988 to initiate action against the author of *The Satanic Verses* as the book contains the likes and figments of imagination. He also wanted action from the forty-six member organisation of the Islamic conference. Worldwide, there were threats to his life from the conservative Muslims and their organisations. Even in England, there were many adversaries. The latest technology contributed significantly to spread the hate message. Faxes, telexes and single page documents with bullet points were circulated through mosques and other religious organisations from country to country. It is an irony that modern information technology was used against modernity:

... the modern was being turned against itself by the medieval, in the service of a world view that disliked modernity itself – rational, reasonable, innovative, secular, sceptical, challenging, creative, modernity, the antithesis of mystical, static, intolerant, stultifying faith. (JA 131)

Rushdie comments how the turn of events in the contemporary times was creation of history itself to destroy the forward progress of people through time:

The rising tide of Islamic radicalism was described by its own ideologues as a 'revolt against history.' History, the forward progress of peoples through time, was itself the enemy, more than any mere infidels or blasphemers. But the new, which was history's supposedly despised creation, could be employed to revive the power of the old. (JA 131)

The book was burnt in many countries including England. Many Muslim organisations organised

rallies and protests. To check the violence, there were police firing, and some valuable lives were lost. It was really a very critical situation. The only consolation was that the book was received well in America.

## II

*The Satanic Verses* was published in America on 22 February 1989. *New York Times* was paid by Association of American publishers to publish a full page advertisement about the freedom of publishing, writing and reading of books:

Free people publish books. Free people sell books. Free people buy books. Free people read books. In the spirit of America's commitment to free expression we inform the public that this book will be available to readers at bookshops and libraries throughout the country. (JA150)

However, there was the threat for publishers and translators. Yet, the world of the book had to be defended because the fatwa was against democracy. Despite the threats, some publishers were bold enough to publish the book in France, Germany and Italy. Rushdie was however disturbed by thinking about the crisis: "He thought often that the crisis was like an intense light shining down on everyone's choices and deeds, creating a world without shadows, a stark unequivocal place of right and action, good and bad choices, yes and no, strength and weakness" (JA 150-151).

It is however disheartening that the author of the book had to hide behind a kitchen worktop to avoid being seen while so much was happening throughout the world in relation to him. Rushdie's free movements were completely restricted. He was asked by the police to be known by a different name rather than his name Salman Rushdie during that threat period of eleven years.

Thinking of different writers, he finally decided to put the first names of Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov side by side. His name had therefore been Joseph Anton for that dangerous period in order to save himself from the possible attack from the Muslim fundamentalists. One important aspect in his life during that critical period was that writers from different places were giving him more support. He was sent messages from Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise from America about how people supported him by wearing badges, "I am Salman Rushdie." Peter Mayer was a very courageous publisher and a committed man who along with his daughter received threats for their association with the publication of *The Satanic Verses* as a paperback edition: "How we responded to the controversy over *The Satanic Verses* would affect the future of free enquiry, without which there would be no publishing as we knew it but also, by extension, no civil society, as we knew it" (JA 201). Mayer received the letters written in blood, but he would not relent. Evacuations of office buildings, bomb scares and vilifications could not prevent him from his mission: "It would come to be remembered as one of the great chapters in the history of publishing, one of the grand principled defences of liberty" (JA202). Mayer would be remembered as the hero of his team.

Translations of the novel were being published across Europe. Rushdie was however to lead an underground life. He had neither freedom nor privacy. Without security he was not allowed to live. It was a very miserable and distressed life. There were also two divorces from his wives, Clarissa and Marianne in the meanwhile. His son, Zafar, had lost much due to such developments in his father's life. Of course, he had worldwide support from true intellectuals, writers and publishers. The fanatic Muslims were however de-

termined to kill Rushdie. It was therefore a very critical moment in his life to recover from it:

He was fighting against the view that people could be killed for their ideas, and against the ability of any religion to place a limiting point on thought. But he needed, now, to be clear of what he was fighting for freedom of speech, freedom of the imagination, freedom from fear, and the beautiful, ancient art of which he was privileged to be a practitioner. Also scepticism, irreverence, doubt, satire, comedy and unholy glee. (JA 285)

He knew that his fighting might cost his life, and he was also prepared for that. He was rather worried that other family members, publishers and supporters would have threats to their lives. It was painful for Rushdie when Zafar called him, "Dad, when will we have a permanent place to live?" During this crisis his beloved Elizabeth's support and courage was commendable. She did not bother about the threat of the assassin squad. The Japanese translator of the book was stabbed to death, and the Italian translator was wounded in a knife attack. Many exiled opponents of the Iranian regime were assassinated in France and Switzerland. All these happened due to State sponsored terrorism under the Iranian ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini. If the Western countries did not jointly go against Iran, it would be difficult for the world to protect democracy and freedom of speech.

Rushdie reflected on the experiences of writers who fought for their dignity. Relying on American support, he decided to come out of his hiding. He resumes his journey in Columbia, and then in Washington using his own identity. He believed that there was more dignity in being a combatant than a victim. He was determined that there should not be any compromise. He would fight back for his art. Dostoevsky, Genet Rabelais

and many others were inspiring him at his hour of crisis. He decided not to be demoralised:

Compromise destroyed the compromiser and did not placate the uncompromising foe. You did not become a blackbird by painting your wings black, but like an oil-slicked gull you lost the power of flight. The greatest danger of the growing menace was that good men would commit intellectual suicide and call it peace. Good men would give in to fear and call it respect. (JA 341)

Rushdie decided to put an end to his hiding, and was determined to fight: "The arrival of the new was not always linked to progress. Men found new ways of opposing one another, too, new ways of unmaking their best achievements and sliding back towards that primal zone; and men's darkest innovations as much as their brightest ones, confused their fellow men" (JA 344).

Contemplating too much during his hiding, he arrived at a conclusion that religion is not a race, but an idea. The strength of an idea depends on resilience. Resistance to a serious writing through violence is a terrorist act. Even though *The Satanic Verses* offended many, the attack on its author, publisher, translator and booksellers became even more offensive. The world leaders should have to defend the art and freedom of expression. The intellectual world should not think that the fanatical cancer of attack by dogmatic Muslims would explode into the wider world beyond Islam. In case that new dogmatic Islam was able to silence the intellectuals, then the intellectual battle would be lost. He decided to lead the battle from the front, entering the world of politics openly rather than from the secret doors. It would be a very difficult fight undoubtedly, because he had to regain a freer private and professional life. He therefore would not accept the dark newness of an absolute ruler in the name of a totalising ideology and God: "Most of this dark

newness was innovations that came into being in the name of a totalising ideology, an absolute ruler, an unarguable dogma, or a god" (JA 344).

### III

He started the campaign from Scandinavia because the Nordic people believed in the highest principles of freedom. He travelled different countries for his struggle for freedom. The British Govt. opposed to his idea of travelling. Rushdie was however determined to fight his battle. He was invited to Stockholm to receive the Kurt Tucholsky Prize awarded to the writers' resisting persecution, and address the Swedish Academy. Addressing the audience while receiving the Award, Rushdie commented on the grand narratives in the art:

We should all be free to take the grand narratives to task, to argue with them, satirise them, and insist that they change to reflect the changing times. We should speak of them reverently, irreverently, passionately, caustically or however we chose. That was right as members of an open society. In fact; one could say that our ability to retell and remake the story of our culture was the best proof that our societies were indeed free. In a free society the argument over the grand narratives never ceased. It was the argument that mattered. The argument was freedom. But in a closed society those who possessed political or ideological power invariably tried to shutdown these debates. (JA 361)

Any individual who defies the dictates of the state on the grand narrative, he must face the consequences. That is why an individual cannot question the existing views on religion, culture, nation and tradition in a closed society. Rushdie was therefore in danger as he raised certain questions

in relation to Islamic religion. His views were well appreciated by the Academy. By this time he was thinking of living with Elizabeth in America so that he could have some kind of freedom for two or three years while fighting for the cause.

Certain incidents of 1993 were significant in Rushdie's life. He arranged a meeting with the Prime Minister, John Major of England, to condemn the Iranian fatwa on him. Iran reacted to this angrily. The Turkish writer Aziz Nesin published some of the extracts from *The Satanic Verses* in his leftist newspaper *Aydinlik* for which he was seriously attacked. The bigots were attacking the secular forces. Rushdie went to attend a secularist conference in the town of Sivas in Antolia where he was terribly attacked. As a result many people were killed. It therefore drew the attention of the press of the world, and *The Satanic Verses* was no more an isolated incident, "but part of a global Islamic assault on free thinkers" (JA 390). However, the Iranian Majlis and press had a great support for the murderers. In 1993, Rushdie received the award Booker of Bookers for his book *Midnight's Children*, the best book to win the prize in its first 25 years. He could manage to fly to Paris this year in spite of the duplicity of the British Foreign office. Despite making campaigns to justify the stand, he was also demoralised by thinking about his diminishing position. He thought how he had changed his name from Salman Rushdie to Joseph Anton, and further he had been degraded to an empty man by lobbying. He therefore wanted to stay at home and devote time to his writing. He was so much depressed that he thought about his death by which he would not have fought for his personal freedom. He also thought of the meaning and importance of life. He was determined to fight his case in the world for the sake of his freedom and art. He then had resolved to be guided by his own judgements and convictions rather than by the security people, politicians or priests: "To

move towards a rebirth or at least a renewal. To reborn as himself, into his own life: that was the goal" (JA 416). Contemplating between life and death, he took shelter of Egyptian philosophy on death which is a quest for a journey towards rebirth. Finally, he decided to move back from the book of the dead towards the bright book of life. He also suggested Elizabeth that they should have a baby, which could be "a finer affirmation of life, of the power of life over death, the power of his will to defeat the forces arrayed against him" (JA 416). The new born baby would make its own rules emphasising its needs in the world.

The European Union demanded from Iran to declare a formal guarantee for non-implementation of the fatwa. In response to this, the Iranian Government declared on Teheran radio that the Government had never said that it would implement the fatwa. Such a declaration amounted to only half guarantee. Rushdie had already lost the valuable life of 7 years of his forties, and his son Zafar's childhood was wasted. In course of time, it seemed that the story of fatwa had been over. Rushdie was also in many places for the promotion of his new book; *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). Rushdie was called by his friend from India, Vijay Shankar Dass that the new foreign minister would allow him to visit India. His *The Moor's Last Sigh* was awarded the European Aristeion Prize for Literature. Elizabeth also conceived, and gave birth to Milan in 1997. After the child grew up a little the couple along with Milan travelled to their annual weeks of summer freedom on a British airline by direct flight rather than any via route.

#### IV

Life always moved forward very slowly. He was informed by the police that his home would no more be guarded by the special Branch from 1 January 1998. Troubles also started in his married life with Elizabeth: "Trouble in a marriage is

like monsoon water accumulating on a flat roof. You don't realise it's up there, but it gets heavier and heavier, until one day, with a great crush, the whole roof falls in on your head" (JA 524). By this time (1997), there were proposals for his *Midnight's Children* to be converted to films in India and Sri Lanka; however the opposition from Muslim MPs spoiled the proposals. Of course, President Kumartunga apologised to Rushdie by writing a letter mentioning the political reason for which the film couldn't be produced. She lost one of her eyes in an attempt for her assassination in 1999. The Indian attempt for the production of film was materialised in 2011. Ofcourse, Deepa Mehta Conveyed to Rushdie in Toronto about the production in 2008 when he was on promotion of his book *The Enchantress of Florence*.

CNN broke the story that President Khatami of Iran had declared that the fatwa was over. Robin Cook, the British Foreign Secretary informed him that they would not get the guarantee although the fatwa would not be formally revoked. The Iranian Government would not carry on the hard line activities of supplying the weapons to the assailants. It was however found that the Iranian newspapers declared the fatwa to continue. After the security cover was withdrawn, it would be easier to kill Rushdie. He decided to go to America to campaign for his liberty, but Elizabeth opposed it as she wanted to give birth to more children to glorify her motherhood. Despite her resistance Rushdie decided to go back to America. His mother at 82 advised her son to write a good book.

President Khatami visited Rome, and strongly criticised Europe for supporting Rushdie who insulted the sanctities of over one billion Muslims. Khatami was not a moderate man as conceived by the British Government. He was a man of double standard. Rushdie was therefore disillusioned, and thought that there would not be

any change in his status even in the beginning of new millennium: "In early August 1999, the millenarian illusion that would overwhelm him and change his life itself to him in female form on ,of all places, Liberty Island. It was laughable, really, that he met her under the statue of Liberty" (JA 577). In America, he had met Padmalakshmi Vaidyanthan, "another woman with a missing parent" (JA 578). Rushdie's relationship with Padma destroyed his own family as per the accusation made by Elizabeth. Clarissa, his former wife would die of cancer. Rushdie would have serious misunderstanding with Padma and break off in 2007 after 3 years of their married life. He thought of having a new life in a new world with a new woman. It seemed that he was very cruel to destroy his own happiness. Though he would not marry Elizabeth again, they were friends, not lovers any more. Rushdie along with Zafar would go to India on invitation to attend a book function. He was very happy, and thought that it was a great victory for him to reclaim his homeland. Despite Elizabeth's accusations that Rushdie had ruined the lives of the people who loved him including Elizabeth. Milan would come to Rushdie to live with him. Rushdie believed that Milan would be open-hearted and composed in the end. But before the end, there would be middle: "Mr. Joseph Anton, international publisher of American origin, passed away un-mourned on the day that Salman Rushdie, novelist of Indian origin, surfaced from his long underground years and took up part-time residence in Pembridge Mews, Notting Hill. Mr Rushdie celebrated the moment, even if nobody else did" (JA 610). On 27 March 2002 after 13 years (1989-2002) of withdrawal of police security in Britain, he was given a party by the police to celebrate the occasion of withdrawal of police force in his life. The party was arranged at Halcyon Hotel. The special Branch Party officer Rob Canolly, who attended the party, told him:

I've got something for you.

'What's it?' he asked Rob.

'It's the bullet,' Rob said, and so it was. The bullet that poor Mike Merrill had accidentally fired inside the Bishop's Avenue house while cleaning his gun.

'That was a close one,' Rob said. 'I thought you might like it a souvenir.' (JA 632)

After the party, "Rushdie walked out of the Halcyon Hotel on to Holland Park Avenue" (JA 633).

## V

Rushdie's trauma during the underground life has certainly dampened his spirit to a large extent. However, he struggled hard, and came out of the trauma to engage himself in his mission of writings to express his ideas and viewpoints in his new works. The *fatwa* has not been able to take away Rushdie's engagement with global socio-cultural ethos and oppositions to certain obsolete elements in the socio-cultural ideological systems for their renewal and modern relevance. Rushdie takes complex cultural position in his fictional texts generates healthy debates in the contemporary political, social, intellectual and religious circles. Rushdie's intersectionality of position in these multiple spheres can bring certain reformative measures in reference to the issues of migration, globalization, cultural systems and religiosity. Freedom of speech is an

important right of an individual to articulate his ideas and opinions without fear of retaliation or censorship. However, the individuals and writers should also consider not hurting the sentiments of others in the name freedom of artistic expression. Free speech has to be protected to regenerate the globe from its stagnation.

### Abbreviation(s)

JA: *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*

SV: *The Satanic Verses*

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# Cultural Transition and Identity Issues as Part of Colonial Narrative in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

Dr. Mamta Kerketta\*

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine Cultural transition and Identity issues in colonial experience with special reference to Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing*. Political and cultural domination is an inherent and inescapable part of colonial narratives. The dilemma and ambivalence ensuing out of cultural shifts due to colonialism is of significant concern of *Homegoing*. This research paper aims at exploring how culture adopts and adapts itself to shifts due to colonialism thus transforming it into biculturalism and paving way for neo-African culture. This theme of cultural transition and identity crisis has been one of the major themes of many African female writers. Yaa Gyasi's first novel *Homegoing* focuses on how culture undergoes Metamorphosis under colonial domination through generations at the expense of brutal, painful and then eventually healing and reconciliatory experiences of the colonial. This paper focuses on how the colonized cope up with this dilemma of change as they undergo myriad feelings of apprehension doubts but find new ways to heal and rediscover their cultural identity again. This paper also makes an attempt to understand the identity of the colonized African communities with special reference to *Homegoing* due to dislocation, displacement. This study explores a wide range of colonial and postcolonial discourses like identity politics, politics of language and postcolonial world.

**Keywords:** *Colonization, Identity Politics, Cultural Transition, Language, Neo-Africanism, and Biculturalism.*

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The word 'Culture' derives from a French term which in turn derives from the Latin 'Colere' which means to tend to the earth and grow, cultivate and nurture. 'Cultural' thus is the society's way of life and incorporates the values, beliefs, language, customs and traditions. Culture is the carrier of our values and knowledge system through art and literature which in turn defines our identity and our existence by instilling self-esteem and growth both at the personal level and at the community level. As generations progress it carries forward our living heritage – our traditions, customs and practices – and add to the legacy of our forefathers that are part of the identity and cultural life that we share. In a traditional society, a strong sense of community and social unity is the important element which provides the individual with a sense of identity. Obiechina, a Nigerian Critic attests this view:

Traditional life in pre-colonial Africa subsisted on the collective solidarity of people who shared common customs and beliefs and an identical world view, were linked by blood or marriage ties and were, by the close-knit nature of their social relationships, deeply involved in one another's personnel lives. We find that the value which sustains the society is collective responsibility, the responsibility of the group for the lives and well-being of the members... There is tremendous respect for customs and traditions. The group and its interest always take precedence over the individual and his self-interest. (1975, 2)

The members of the community use different methods for social unity but also attest to the fact that to survive and grow through ages and generations, culture is forced to adopt an adaptive mechanism. It cannot keep its shape intact

through generational leaps and onslaught of various factors like political and economical. In due course of time, new cultural traits are added, and old ones are lost therefore it can be averred that it is constantly in a state of flux. This is a natural state but what if this situational flux is forced upon? What are the consequences of this? What shape culture takes up and the undercurrents running into it and what are the community experiences – both emotional and physical when the members of the community undergo this kind of coercive domination of superimposition culture in colonial contexts. Thus a kind of political and cultural domination is an inherent and inescapable part of colonial narratives. This thematic concern of portraying and exploring this dilemma and the ambivalence ensuring out of cultural shifts due to colonialism is one of the predominant concerns of many African writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neal Hurston.

This research paper aims at exploring how culture (African) adopts and adapts itself to shifts due to superimposition of cultures thus metamorphosing itself into biculturalism, New African Culture, thus redefining and rediscovering itself with special reference to Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* and also how this transition reshapes their sense of identity.

The theme of cultural transition and the identity crisis have been major themes of many authors in contemporary fiction. This theme is of particular interest to African American female writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Yaa Gyasi, Chinamanda Ngozi Adiechi. These writers have prominently used the colonial and post-colonial historical background of the African-American community who had to suffer from the dilemma of identity crisis as they were denied the sense of belonging due to colonial racist history. Most of these protagonists face this ambivalence.

Yaa Gyasi's first novel *Homegoing* focuses on how culture adopts and adapts itself and undergoes metamorphosis under colonial domination through generations at the expense of bitter, brutal, painful and healing and reconciliatory experiences of the community members. This paper focuses on how the colonized cope up with this dilemma of change as they undergo myriad feelings of apprehension doubts but find new ways to heal and rediscover their cultural identity again. This paper will make an attempt to understand the identity of the colonized, African communities with special reference to Yaa Gyasi's Novel *Homegoing* due to dislocation and displacement. This study explores a wide range of colonial and post-colonial discourses like identity politics, the politics of language and post-colonial world (memory).

Yaa Gyasi is a Ghanian-American novelist and her debut *Homegoing* published in 2016, won her, at the age of 26, the National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award for best first book. *Homegoing* portrays a widescreen view of the colonial history through a multigenerational saga in which two branches of a family, separated by slavery and time undergo struggle, fear and loss and emerge resilient. The novelist, through the fourteen chapters, each chapter exploring one character of the descendants of Effia and Esi the two sisters shows, how cultural heritage is the crux of individual identity. Gyasi in this novel places each character in a grappling situation where they face the dilemma and struggle to choose between the culture of their parents and the society around them. As all the characters are the descendants of Effia and Esi, they all have an intertwined history and a shared foundation.

Toni Morrison emphatically explains this cultural dilemma:

For larger and larger numbers of black people, this sense of loss has grown, and

deeper the conviction that something valuable is slipping away from us, the more necessary it has become to find some way to hold on to the useful past without blocking off the possibilities of the future. (Morrison, *Rediscovering Black History* 42)

Contesting the notion of 'nothing to nowhere' Gyasi 2016 (27) Gyasi places her characters in different contesting cultural contexts to figure out and find their identity.

Invading forces on African culture and Identity:

*Homegoing* presents itself to explore a wide range of colonial and post-colonial discourses like identity politics, the politics of language and post-colonial world (memory).

There were many elements that served as invading forces on African culture and identity. The Chief among them were the politics of language, the role of Christianity and superimposition of European Culture with the concept of being superior. The novel presents an interesting exploration of how African culture keeps its soul alive, redefines and rediscovers itself by studying the many cultural contexts and when the characters grapple between the two branches of a single family tree. The quest for 'home' the sense of belonging, the quest for cultural identity pervades the whole novel. This dilemma as poignantly voiced out by Marjorie, (the 6th descendant of Effia.)

She wanted to tell Mrs. Pinkston that she could feel herself being pulled away too, almost akata, too long gone from Ghana to be Ghanian. (Gyasi 273)

On being asked to read a poem about what it means to be an African American, she replies strongly that she is not an African American and refers to this Twi work 'akata,' for people who

were too long gone from the mother continent to continue calling it a home.

a. The politics of language – The chief aim of the British colonizers was not only to colonize but usurp the indigenous Ghanian culture by using different means. The two main ways in which they colonised was by using power and by killing language. In the context of colonialism and post-colonialism language has often become a site for both colonization and resistance. Robert Philipson in his article “Realities and Myths of Linguistic Imperialism” has explored the significance of language for colonial adventure and has provided three main points for the maintenance of linguistic hierarchy (a) stigmatization (b) glorification and (c) rationalization. He says that a dominant language is projected as language of God, reason, logic, human logic. Belonging to superior ethno national group and is a language of progress, modernity and national unity. The chief aim of the colonizers was cultural sovereignty and the most effective way to attain this is the way of language. Ngugiwa Thiong’o in his essay “Decolonizing the mind” discusses the relationship between languages and society.

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive over selves and our place in the world..... Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (Thiong’o 16)

Ngugi provides two aspects of the same process:

...the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their

art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized. (Thiong’o 16)

Since culture is a product of the history of the people, the colonized is then exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. “He (the colonized) was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself.” (Thiong’o 16) Ngugi further explains the predicament of the colonized:-

Since culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that the world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition.... (the colonized) see the world as seen in the literature of his language of adoption. (Thiong’o 16)

He suffers from alienation, “that is of being oneself from outside oneself as if one was another self....

The location of this great mirror of imagination was necessarily Europe and its history and culture and the rest of the universe was seen from that centre. (Thiong’o 18)

Language imposition is poignantly portrayed in the characters like Ness, Sam and Esi who were forced to speak English instead of Twi. Ness, the daughter of Esi, had to suffer forced, brutal language imposition which robbed her of her

family's heritage and her Ghanian identity. In Mississippi Esi had spoken to her in Twi until their master caught her.

He'd given Esi five lashes for every Twi word Ness spoke, and when Ness, seeing her battered mother, had become too scared to speak, he gave Esi five lashes for each minute of Ness's silence. Before the lashes, her mother had called her Maame, after her own mother, but the maste had whipped Esi for that too, whipped her until she cried out. My goodness! (Gyasi's 71)

Forcing Esi and Ness to speak English over Twi is a sheer violence to assert the so called supremacy of English over Twi and ruthless snatching away of Ness's Ghanian identity. It is evident had Ness had been ribbed of her heritage. In this way language then becomes a colonized tool: Ngugi enlightens:

But its (Colonialism) most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. (Thiong'o 16)

Many Characters like Ness are clueless about their native place. When Tim Tam asks Ness, where she comes from she does not respond. Tim Tam had clearly meant about the plantation where she had worked in the past. Thus the history of enslavement replaces her nativity and culture. Later on, Ness and Sam met a woman named Aku at their church. Ness began singing a Twi tune, a woman turned and whispered something in Twi. Ness could not understand her but Aku began to speak to her and told her that she had come from Asanteland and had been kept in the castle just like Ness's mother, Esi. Ness was unable to understand Aku's words, though

she had been singing the same language, just moments before. This symbolizes Ness's drifting further and further away from her heritage. But when her son 'Kojó' grows up and was taken away to America this heritage will be lost completely "Thus language and literature (of the colonizers) were taking us further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds." (Thiong'o 12). "Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world." (Thiong'o 16)

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture (Thiong'o 16)

Recurrent, storytelling using myth and nature to model behavior or to explain how certain things have come to be was important part of African culture which has been portrayed in the novel. Tansi's story about spider is one more instance. But as the story progresses through generations, the descendants find it difficult to comprehend and relate to it as they are drifting far and far away from their native place. Quey for instance could relate only little to the lineage of storytelling and customs. Here is the excerpt.

In the trees, two vibrant birds sang loudly a discordant song. "Do you hear that?" ... "When one bird stops, the other one starts. Each time their song gets louder, shriller. Why do you think that is? (Gyasi 52)

Fiffi says that what you cannot hear is the third bird, the female bird, who listens to the two birds until they have finished speaking, and then speaks up and chooses a mate. Quey sighs, and comments that there had been no birds like this in London. Quey's response again emphasizes that he cannot relate to that lineage of storytelling and to those customs.

Later in the novel, this issue of language politics takes the shape of a kind of culture elitism and stereotype. Marjorie who represents the sixth generation of Effia, upon meeting Aka her grandmother, speaks to her in Twi which is just the opposite she does in America at home. Her parents speak Twi and she answers in English because her teacher had instructed them to do so. This instruction by the teacher demonstrates a kind of cultural elitism and stereotype. The teacher assumes that because Marjorie is from another country and speaks another language at home, she does not know English.

This episode can be compared to what which happened five generations earlier with Esi and Ness who were brutally forced to speak English over Twi to assert the supremacy of English over Twi and thus robbing them of their African identity. Thus there is persistent violent onslaught on indigenous languages by colonizers through generations. Time changes but this imposition of Queen's English continued with the sole aim to disposses people of their identity.

But when one is free to use one's language entire personality shifts and shapes one's identity which is true to one's self. Yaw's house girl, Esther who helps him reconcile with his mother Akua and eventually marry, presents another interesting instance how language affects one's entire personality. Esther interrupts Yaw's work tentatively, saying "excuse me" in English. As soon as Yaw tells her she can speak Twi, she relaxes and smiles brightly, asking him ten questions in a row about how he wants his house kept what he wants for dinner, without taking a breath. Like Effia and James Collins' interactions at the beginning of the novel, language actually alters how Yaw views Esther. When she is free to use the language she feels most comfortable in, her entire personality shifts thus Noam Chomsky clearly sums up the broader perspective a language has in relation to culture:

A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language.

- b. Identity Politics: Thus when a nation loses its language it loses a sense of identity and feels lost. The natives are forced to accept another identity i.e. of language and culture of the oppressors to feel complete and prove its existence.

Edward Said believes that Europe presented a homogeneous Orient 'Other' to form a more cohesive European identity. This serves two goals.

- (a) Give legitimacy to western expansionism and imperialism in the sight of western nations and their choosers.
- (b) Satisfying natives to accept that western culture is an introducer of universal culture, acceptance of such culture is beneficial for them. For eg. It saves them from remaining behind and superstitious situations and makes them take part in the most advanced civilization in the world.

Said following Foucault's belief says that knowledge and power are inseparable. The West's claim to knowledge of the East, gave the 'West' to power to control. This concept is essential to understanding of colonialism and therefore recognizing post colonialism. (Said 34)

All these happen as a result of the imposition of a universal language in a landscape of native languages and cultures. Therefore native show a tendency of (other infatuation) and choose to be obliterated in the other to reach perfection.

Said argued that the Occident could not exist without the Orient and vice-versa. In other words they are mutually constitutive. Notably, the con-

text of the 'East; that is the Orient was created by the 'West' suppressing the ability of the 'Orient' to express themselves. Western depictions of the 'Orient' construct an inferior world, a place of backwardness, irrationality, areal wildness. This allowed the 'West' to identify themselves as the opposite of these characteristics: as a superior world that was progressive, rational and civil. (Said 112)

A study of Gyasi's *Homegoing* as performing discourse, it can be averred that the colonialists attempted to create the 'ruling domains as positive, ideal and full of wisdom and the colonized as sentimental, unwise, foolish and vain. This perception of superiority of European culture is portrayed through many motifs and symbols in *Homegoing*.

One of the prominent ways was the relationship between names and identity. Names have a significant recurrence throughout the novel. For characters like Ness, Jo, H and Willie, their names symbolize their attachment or distance from their culture and help to define their identity. This means that for Ethe, to be called by a different name represents a taking away of her own identity. Jo and Anna's son H's placeholder name is symbolic of his loss of his family and his heritage. Esi named her daughter Ness because during her lashings she uttered 'My goodness!' the only English word that came to her mind and thought that word was divine what saved her and her daughter's life. So she named her Ness, the root being 'goodness.'

The only time when Mr. Mathison calls Kojo by his full name demonstrates acknowledgement and honour to his culture and heritage which can just be contrasted when earlier 'The Devil' would not let Esi name her daughter Maame.

The evolution of some words like obroni illustrates how culture can be influenced by previ-

ous generations sometimes without the descendants being aware of their impact.

"A child who didn't go to the missionary school had called the Missionary 'Obroni...." To her, the word had only ever meant 'Whiteman.' She hadn't understood why the Missionary had gotten upset...."

Later we come to know:-

"It did not began as Obroni. It began as two words. Abroni"

"Wicked man?" Akua said.

The fetish man nodded. "Among the Akun he is wicked man, the one who harms. Among the Ewe of the Southeast his name is Cunning Dog, the one who feigns niceness and then bites you." (Gyasi 180)

Christianity served as an extension of colonisation. The imposition of Christianity served as a tool to disposes people of their heritage, culture and implanting the idea, that it led one to a "superior world that was progressive, rational and civil." Thus James Collins uses the phrases 'not Christian' to mean 'not good,' implying that his religion is superior and Effia's 'Voodoo' and 'black magic' is evil. This happened when Adwoa gave Effia the root for fertility.

Effia's wedding serves as an early example in the novel of how Christianity is used us a means of colonization.

There was a Chapel on the ground level, and she and James Collins were married by a clergyman who had asked Effia to repeat words she didn't mean in a language she didn't understand. (Gyasi 16)

It is worth noting that only one generation later when Esi's daughter Ness while awaiting punishment in a plantation in Alabama Ness has been

so distanced from her heritage by having to give up her ancestor's religion in favour of Christianity as she prays for herself and her son, Kojo using Christian vocabulary.

Akua's chapter explores the impact of Christianity in colonial context. The colonizers used Christianity to instill negative attitudes towards the natives own culture as happened with Akua. She tries to fight these attitudes throughout her youth. The Missionary, in whose guardianship she grew would take a switch and point it at her saying.

"You are a sinner and a heathen..."

"But she (her mother Akena) was a sinner and a heathen, like you." (Gyasi 183)

The Missionary's actions show the way in which Christianity is being used as an extension of colonization. Often he uses ecclesiastical vocabulary like sins, repentance but most of his language has social overtones and demonstrates his prejudicial belief that the British have come to save the 'heathens.' The extremity of this mindset reached to a point when in an attempt to get Abena to adopt his culture, the Missionary kills her instead. He burnt her body thus disregarding her culture and raising her daughter in a religion that led to her death.

Abena's and Akua's fate reflect the deadly consequences of colonization. Later Jo and MaAku were kicked out of the church for African witchcraft, on the day of his, own wedding. Later on Jo felt 'shame' to which Ma Aku angrily said that the people in the church had simply chosen 'the White mans' God.'

It is observed that as generations progressed Christianity which was ruthlessly forced on natives in Africa which severed their links with their heritage, offered them a hope in America, as a part of African-American culture. "Willie joined the choir at church. She had been wanting

to do it said the first day she heard them sing..." Thus in America the Church served as a more hopeful place and a part of African-American culture. Thus bereft of any native heritage and identity they try to forge a new cultural identity through church, music and arts as part of novel African-American culture.

A culture shift begins to appear here, an endeavor to reinvent, to redefine and rediscover culture. As traditional Ghanian and European culture differ fundamentally in philosophy and social structure, this antithesis, novel post-colonial contexts bereft of any heritage began to reinvent itself. They are not seeking simply to revive pre-colonial African traditionalism but to create a neo-African culture, according to John.

On the contrary, African intelligence wants to integrate into modern life only what seems valuable from the past. The goal is neither the traditional African nor the black European but the modern African. This means that a tradition seen rationally, whose values are made explicit and renewed, must assimilate those European elements which modern times demand and in this process the European elements are so transformed and adapted that a modern, viable 'African' culture arises out of the whole. It is a question, therefore, of genuine renaissances, which does not remain a merely formal renewal and limitation of the past, but permits something new to emerge. This something new is already at hand. We call it neo-African culture. (John 16)

Esi's descendants due to dislocation forge a new kind of cultural heritage because so much has been taken away from them due to slavery. Like Effia's family, Esi's family in America also had to hear the burden of the legacy of colonialism

when Esi was shipped to America. Unlike Effia's family which held on to African culture, Esi's descendants, instead of trying to hold on with their native culture, they were unwillingly forced to create a new kind of cultural heritage because so much of it had been taken away due to slavery. When Esi was sent away in a slave ship to Alabama, a series of heartbreaking episodes begins, when children were ripped away from their parents, and lose any connection to their heritage. The loss of the black stone by Esi which her mother had given her, Ness's loss of her mother's language all symbolize the loss of connection to their heritage. There was a complete loss of the family history when Ness's own child Kojo, was sent away by another woman. Back in the plantation 'Hell' as she called it she prayed:

With the bend, she said, "Lord forgive me my sins." With the pluck she said, "Deliver us from evil." And with the lift, she said "And protect my son, wherever he may be." (Gyasi 87)

Kojo's son, known only as H, becomes even more removed from his culture, as Kojo's wife is kidnapped and re-enslaved when she is pregnant with H, and he never knows his father. Gyasi poignantly echoes these vacuums:

He would never truly know who his people were, and who their people were before them, and if there were stories to be heard about where he had come from, he would never hear them. (Gyasi 87)

At this juncture, a great transition occurs when H's daughter Willie moves to Harlem Robert her husband and Willie while staying with Joe in New York realize how being connected to a family and a community allows people to thrive. They get support that allowed them to move to Harlem. Willie here searches for a job along with Robert. Notably she is the first female character

to want to escape the traditional role. But a struggle for identity and acceptance in society, it the cause of Roberts' dilemma. Roberts' second marriage to white ends his dilemma, for which he had to give up a large portion of his identity in order to be accepted.

The end of Willie's chapter shows how people are forming new forms of culture through poetry, music and art. "This culture is created less from a shared African heritage and more by a shared heritage of being left with 'Nothing to nowhere' and robbed of their heritage the black community empowered themselves by creating their own sense of African-American culture identity. Willie steps forward and sings in the church.

... and the whole choir, turned to book at her, she stepped forward, trembling still, and she sang. (Gyasi 221)

John Huizinga a Dutch historian and one of the founders of modern cultural history rightly say.

"It we are to preserve culture we must continue to create it."

This cultural transition is also poignantly portrayed in Toni Morrison's Novel Jazz. She vividly showcases the role of Jazz music in the neo-African cultural context – i.e. it strengthens the identity and heals the past wounds of their ancestors ....it was a remedy for the lack of recognition of black talent and caliber. Gyasi semantically links the past slavery of the black to the frustration and objection of the present.

According to cultural perspective in colonial context provides two types of subordinated cultures:

First, ...the subordinated culture that in addition to its limited and besieged is fascinated with eminent culture and had have a natural approach in opposed to it and weather had changed its face and

hold another face that is not its noble birth face or had been forgotten totally during the time.

Second type of subordinated or limited culture is a limited but energetic vivid and susceptible to indicate familiar with mysterious invader culture that choose a creative approach to encountering and permanently resort to “producing cultural auditorium” and lingual productions in order to continue its permanence and existence. This culture creating “an order of passages and claims” and mental – cultural productions make an active discourse that the knowledge area depended on it settled in reciprocity with vast area of domineering discourse.” (Shakib 120)

Shakib emphasizes on lingual reciprocities that organized itself in the form of mental cultural production “Language then becomes a powerful tool in this creating new discourse of mental-cultural production. Therefore the colonized through lingual reciprocity expressive new ways to release of inferiority complex. (Shakib 120)

As Esi’s descendants face dislocation, they try to search for nativity, i.e. in Homi Bhabha’s terms space and place. Their ‘place is America but find their ‘space in a kind of biculturalism. They confront a lack of heritage and forge a new culture of its own. Patrick Manning remarks on the significance of this amalgamation:

A century ago European and African cultures faced each other in conflict and contradiction. White were distinct from black, and the powerful were distinct from the weak. Europeans and Africans differed in language religion, ..... European conquerors and many Africans as well, could see only two alternatives

before them either Africans would retain their old ways but remain permanently weak and under the thumb of Europe, or Africans would give up their old ways and as simulate to the ways of Europe.

In fact, neither alternative took place. Out of the conflict there emerged new cultural synthesis. Both European and African traditions have bent and accommodated to the pressures of the other.” (Manning 18)

This can be understood in Marcus, who is Willie’s grandson is deeply rooted in US. This cultural transition is also seen when the church which has served as extension of colonization and racist ideas, in America the church serves us a much more hopeful place and a part of an evolving African-American culture. When Marcus and Marjorie reunite at the end, it symbolizes a ray of hope for reconciliation of losses and sufferings which the generations underwent and were disposed of their cultural identities. Along with this Gyasi indicates a hope for future union between African and African-American heritage.

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# From Falcon to Black Captain America: Deconstructed Centres of Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Vidhupriya\*

## Abstract

The climax scene of *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) shocked the audience of MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) and the citizens of U.S. alike. The scene depicted the much acknowledged and renounced White Captain America handing over his shield to his sidekick Sam Wilson or Falcon, a Black man who was never given any due importance in the earlier movies. This passage of the symbol of power and honor from a visible and patronized figure to an invisible one provoked the issues of racism that was long repressed in the MCU. This unsolved question is adequately addressed and reasoned in *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2021) series released recently. The undeciphered elements of the Black question and how the racial deconstruction occurs is dealt in this paper using critical race theory in tandem with the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S.

**Keywords:** *Black Lives Matter, Critical Race Theory, and Racism.*

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**T**he comic's hero Captain America is more than a mere character, it is the American symbol of its traditional values and beliefs, even when some of it is almost unacceptable to half of the inhabitants of America. The character is modeled after the much cherished American Dream and the image of America as super power of the world, just like the hero made from the super soldier serum invented to fight the Nazis in the Second World War. Captain American is the most powerful and influencing figure of all the near ninety characters in the MCU and controls the flow of the whole narrative. This domination shadowing the rest with different racial and ethnic origins in the visual representation is just a reflection of the realities. The politics of such supremacy besides commercial benefits in the form of usable products adds to ideological penetration or white affiliation subconsciously. This is a question that many keen observers and the subjects of such acts might have pondered over.

The Black question is aged more than 500 years; even after the Civil Rights Movement it is true that many of the rights just remain in the paper. This injustice and agitation against it is suppressed in many minds in the U.S. Evidently, the climax scene of *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) was a reflection of it; at the same time, it infuriated and perplexed many. It inaugurated in the launch of the series *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* even in the covid times. It is uncommon for MCU or DC's Black or ethnically different heroes for that matter to have black story representation. The series consists of six episodes that brush through the relevant scenes to visualize the transit of Sam Wilson from Falcon to Captain America.

The anti-Black feelings in the social scenarios of U.S. force Sam to think that it will never fit him in the eyes of the white people. This makes Sam to respond that it seems to be someone else's,

when Steve hands him the shield. This conflict leads to rejection of the shield back to the museum and Sam says, "Symbols are nothing without the women and men that give them meaning" ("*Falcon and the Winter Soldier 01*" 00: 09: 23-00: 13: 23). Shield held within the white hands of the blue eyed blonde Steve Rogers gave him agency to build allegiance and dignity but if Sam substitutes him, he will not even get a space to project his concerns. This threatens Sam and the only other solution available being rejection of Black identity.

Black is not truly allowed to be black if one wants to succeed. Instead, one must find 'less Black' ways of existence to pass in white society, such as code switching. This idea is supported by the fact that all representations of Blackness follow the unspoken agreement that Black hero cannot take any attention away from their white hero and their origin story must be intriguing and compelling. (Wilson 17)

This happens with Sam, he is always just an archetype of a hero, not the hero. His position comes to play only with the death of Steve Rogers, the White Captain American who passes on his legacy for the purgation of his guilt.

Though just like the movies, this series too tries to white wash Steve Rogers, it also throws light on the issues unspoken by him. His silence on the issues of racism, Civil Rights Movement, and the experimented and tortured Blacks about whom he seems to be blind. But, in choosing his heir Steve seems to know all but remained silent in protecting his own name and white privilege. This stands as an understatement throughout the series. But, this simple act cannot undo the injustice meted out to the Blacks and this creates dramatic dilemma for Sam. It is presented in the form of 'why did you give it back?' resonated throughout the series. Some characters like Sharon call it

as Sam's 'hypocrisy,' though others never vocalize such a word. Though it is hypocrisy for the white characters, for Sam, it is something that Bucky (Winter Soldier) or Steve Rogers will never understand. For him, it is the sin of "... a Black man represent a country that does not represent him" ("Marvel Studios Assembled: Falcon and the Winter Soldier" 00: 24: 41). Black experience and burden the racialized people are forced to subject is an impossible 'think out of the box' question to the whites. This Bucky realizes only towards the end of the series.

Bucky or the Winter Soldier was also a sidekick of Steve but, a white. His character, like the many white privileged characters of MCU, has an agency and status that marks him distinct throughout the movies. Unlike him, Sam is an obedient, loyal and unacknowledged assistant of Steve without any serums or super powers except for the electronic wings. Sam is a strong character who firmly believes in himself, his routes and history, nevertheless he is optimistic in a harmonious co-existence. His beliefs are tested by the character of Isaih Bradley who says that they will never let Black man be Captain America and no self-respecting Black man will ever take up the task. Such a dilemma is brought to crisis and conclusion by the foil of Sam, John Walker.

John Walker is a special ops vet, testing off the charts in speed, endurance and intelligence, and also the winner of three medals of honor from the state. This, together with his white race makes him eligible for the shield in the 'colourblind' eyes of the government. The authorities will not even care to inform Sam about the replacement. This is because to them, as Senator says in the press meet, "We need a person who embodies America's greatest values. We need someone who can be a symbol for all of us." ("Falcon and the Winter Soldier 01" 00: 15: 45). And, clearly this someone can never be a Black

man, it is further exemplified when the Senator thanks Sam on returning the shield, by saying that it was the right decision. It is a direct instance of institutionalized racism that percolates the American society. There are also scenes that capture the micro aggression meted out to the Blacks, when the Black kid calls Sam 'Black Falcon,' though he corrects him as just Falcon, the boy continues that his father asked him to call so. Sam is an example for intersectionality, where his ancestor's acculturation has made him more than his race; he is many things which the white society cannot see. Another instance is when the police intercept Sam for shouting at Bucky on road just because he is a Black and moreover, the police do not recognize him as an avenger immediately. This implies invisibility of his efforts among the white community, just like what Lemar, the Black sidekick of John Walker faces.

The shield as a powerful symbol has an ironic connotation, besides the general meaning of defense. It is a shade that covers and masks people behind it; shield attracts attention on its carrier while the rest of the fighters, their narratives and struggles are artfully covered from sight. This is what happens to the story of persecution of Isaih, due to his race he is prevented from being the Captain America and thus Steve becomes Captain. Isaih's Black live is a fetish for the whites, he is just a body to be experimented and tried for thirty long years. Thus, they prevent his story from circulation and plan to kill him, luckily he escapes though becomes frightened of the outside world. At last, it is upon the shoulders of Sam of the same race to find recognition for Isaih, because the whites are blind to his sacrifices.

The success of Sam in winning back the shield from John rests not with the state but with himself. He is the one who willingly puts it down and he is the one who wins it back from the arrogant John, though he is reluctant. John in many

ways lacks the quality to become Captain America; his essential character is that of a soldier who acts in tune with the commands often retracting to aggression and unreasonable acts. Sam is different to John but alike to Steve in many ways. He thinks before the act and tries to minimize the casualties and further development. But, John essentially thinks with his body and publicly kills one associate of the anti-hero with the shield. Thus, the shield is taken back by Sam. After Isaih's rejection of the shield, Sam understands what it can mean to his people; after all they are called 'his brothers (whites) keeper.' For they build the country, bled for it and now they are not turning their back on.

The series mocks at the nuanced relations of order present throughout, the John-Lemar combo offers no change to the Steve-Sam combo, and it only furthers the thought that Blacks are reserved as sidekicks for White heroes. It reinforces the social relations of race, ideologies of inferiority and in a way, master-slave dynamics. Though implied subtly, the social constructs and white power dynamics are overlooked at times. The narrative though seems to present the Black dilemma is formed by the white-centric force.

With the recent racial deaths in America, of which George Floyd and Breonna Taylor's are famous, the Black Lives Matter movement came in to the focus (Rahman). This is not a political or centralized movement but an on-going reaction against police brutality since 2013 (*Wikipedia*). But, the police aggression and innocent deaths continue as a direct consequence of new racism experienced by the people of different race, nationalities and ethnicities. Though all the whites are not against equality, half of them still find it hard to accommodate Blacks as their fellow humans. Such acts from the most scientifically advanced and developed nation of the world is the most astonishing. In Afro pessimism theory, Anti-

Blackness is called as 'the afterlife of chattel slavery' (Wilson 18). Fortunately, with the ascent of Biden government much of this attitude has diminished as visible from the outside, especially as he said his administration is the most diverse, starting with the vice president (Business Standard). The ban imposed on critical race theory to be taught in schools is the most recent reaction against Blacks that is ongoing (Bufkin).

These issues are all dealt nuanced in the series, where the subaltern position of Sam initiates to change with his taking up of the shield to protect people irrespective of their racial origin. It is evident with his interactions with Karli Morgenthau, the leader of the Flag Smashers, a radical group who fights for the rights of the dislocated people. Sam understands their trauma but he rejects their manner of action through violence putting lives at stake. Karli and her people as a foil to the entire Black community in America endure the subjugation and live in the hopes of a better tomorrow.

The complicated and conflicting legacy of the sword draws to a conclusion of the sort with Sam taking it. But, this act does not make him a nationalist symbol or an heir to Steve, but a bridge between two races that strives to co-live in harmony, according to Sam. This anticipates the creation of multiple realities through multiple narratives so that the Black reality is at least not pitted against the white. Therefore, the words- 'Reset, Restore, Rebuild' as the slogan of the Global Repatriation Council for the dislocated in the series creates meaning not just for the dislocated but also for the people for America for a better future.

Anthony Mackie (who played Sam Wilson): *My truth has changed and evolved so much. As far as me being a father, as far as being a man, and as far as being an American. And a lot of that has come out of this role and this series. So, it's been humbling in a*

real sense, but also inspiring to think that my sons will be able to turn on the TV and see, a Black Captain America ("Marvel Studio Assembled: The Making of the Winter Soldier" 00: 23: 59-00: 24-59).

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# Multiculturalism as a National Ideology in Ishmael Reed's *The Flight to Canada*

Dr. Jyothy C.R.\*

## Abstract

Ishmael Reed contributed to the tradition of the African American novel with his multicultural and global writing style known as Neo-Hoodooism, which evolved from “ancient Afro-American oral literature.” Reed attempts to develop a multicultural aesthetic rooted in African American tradition in opposition to Western metaphysics and Western rationalism’s ideological assumptions through his concept of Neo-Hoodooism. Ishmael Reed uses the history of slavery in the United States to define his vision of race and American nationalism in his novel *Flight to Canada*. The novel reflects the contemporary plight of African Americans, Native Americans, Jews, and other minorities in America, implying that slavery affects everyone, not just blacks. Reed also cautions against the global expansion of race-based nationalism. It envisages a return to the South, with a national consciousness grounded in the local. Since this vision is achieved through transcendence, switching from post-national possibilities to cultural nationalism via domestic multiculturalism reinforces the racially dubious notion of the U.S. as a sublime nation. Multiculturalism as a National Ideology in Ishmael Reed’s *The Flight to Canada* is a scholarly article that provides a thorough analysis of his most famous book. The article discusses many aspects of multiculturalism.

**Keywords:** *Neo-Hoodooism, Multiculturalism, Transcendence, Metaphysics, Rationalism, Dubious, Sublime, and Retreat.*

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Ishmael Reed is one of America's most gifted writers and an outspoken proponent of black postmodern literature. His literary style is notable for its parody and criticism, which establishes new myths and challenges formal literary conventions. His works have earned him a place alongside William Gass, Clarence Major, Thomas Pynchon, Amiri Baraka, and other twentieth-century innovators who have expanded the parameters of American literature. Ishmael Reed developed the Neo-Hoodoo aesthetic, which is rooted in African American history and culture, in 1969. The term "Hoodoo" is synonymous with Voodoo, a derivative of Haitian Vodou, synthesizing African religious beliefs and practices with Catholicism. Reed uses Neo Hoodoo to deconstruct and debase Western civilization's cultural hegemony, believing that the worldview is rooted in African-American antiquity and culture. As Robert Elliot Fox puts it, "Neo-Hoodoo is not in the manner of Blake or Yeats, a private symbology, but one employing folk roots: an aesthetic drawn, as it were, from the public domain though shaped and instigated by the individual artist" (Fox 9).

Reed's Multiculturalism is based on a sound and informed critique of the white monoculture environment he grew up in. With his "Neo-Hoodoo" aesthetics, Reed intended not so much to undermine an established school as it was to provide a platform for previously marginalized, collaborated with, or otherwise silenced multicultural voices. In novels such as *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974), and *Flight to Canada* (1975), he accepted his aesthetics openly and polemically. His multicultural anthology, *19 Necromancers from Now*, was published in 1976, and he founded the Before Columbus Foundation, a multi-ethnic publication which aimed at sensitizing people to other cultures. In 1978 Reed said, "I think the problem in America is assimilation. I think the problem is the melting pot (Tod 167). As opposed to an established pattern or reality, multiculturalism is seen as an ongoing process of personal growth and development that seeks to include a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. He believes that "learning about the Natives" is the pinnacle of multiculturalism because it allows you to discover your cultural roots, affirming that they are all 'far cousins.' Reed poses:

They are more limited and ethnic. We had to become multicultural, and I think this will be a significant factor in determining who finally survives in this country. It is like evolution- if you have incorporated other perspectives and allowed their vision to embrace different ways of looking at the world has a better chance of surviving (Dick and Singh 256).

By choosing his protagonist Raven Quickskill, Reed crosses cultural boundaries; he describes Shrovetide in New Orleans; 'Raven' has been adapted from the raven myth of Tlingit Indians of Alaska Folklore of the North Northwest Coast. Raven is a substantial figure transforming the earth in the North Northwest Coast's folklore. Stories say how Raven created the ground, released the people from a cockle shell, and set fire. Raven stole the light to illuminate the earth. Raven is presented as tricky, often egoistic, hungry, and uncomfortable. He cleverly deceives others in his never-ending search for food transforms the world. The enslaver's commentary on literacy is critical as Quickskill escapes to Canada through his literary trickery and hoodoo artistry. He achieves his freedom by writing a poem, *Flight to Canada*, which gives him money for the actual flight. This poem, as summarised by the enslaver's overseer, further establishes Quickskill's identity as a trickster: "The poem says that he

Reed's Multiculturalism is based on a sound and informed critique of the white monoculture environment he grew up in. With his "Neo-Hoodoo" aesthetics, Reed intended not so much to undermine an established school as it was to provide a platform for previously marginalized, collaborated with, or otherwise silenced multicultural voices. In novels such as *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974), and *Flight to Canada* (1975), he accepted his aesthetics openly and polemically. His multicultural anthology, *19 Necromancers from Now*, was published in 1976, and he founded the Before Columbus Foundation, a multi-ethnic publication which aimed at sensitizing people to other cultures. In 1978 Reed said, "I think the problem in America is assimilation. I think the problem is the melting pot (Tod 167). As opposed to an established pattern or reality, multiculturalism is seen as an ongoing process of personal growth and development that seeks to include a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. He believes that "learning about the Natives" is the pinnacle of multiculturalism because it allows you to discover your cultural roots, affirming that they are all 'far cousins.' Reed poses:

has come back here to the plantation a lot and that he has drunk up all your wine and that he tricked your wife into giving him the combination to your safe" (Reed 52). Quickskill provides ample evidence that the wit his name connotes and that Quickskill possesses a power of hoodoo that comes and goes as freely as smoke with its mystical theme of magic appearance and disappearance. Quickskill, like the tricksters who preceded him, often uses both wit and hoodoo influence to subvert a tyrannical white institution.

Ishmael Reed establishes a correlation between a black American writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his counterpart of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the protagonist. To develop this parallel, Reed creates a 19<sup>th</sup>-century theme, complots it, and overlaps it with a ridiculous, repressive, and sarcastic format in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel commentary on African Americans, Natives, Jewish Americans, and other minority groups in America. Through Raven Quickskill's character, Reed shows how African American writers and other American writers can borrow from another tradition. Raven's adventures include many of his romantic sanctuary, Canada, full of unforgettable black and white scenes. Raven's misadventures and encounters between the half-worlds of fugitives, slave captors, and freebooters are ironic and indigenous. When Raven finally reaches Canada – his long-awaited dream's ultimate destination, the ecstasy of its passengers is untold. He says:

They looked transformed, and a new light sparkled in their eyes, losing their tongues, crying and laughing and praising, fell on the ground and kissed it, kissed each other, crying, blessed de Lord! Blessed de Lord! Oh, oh-oh, oh! Before I die, I have got free! (Reed 178)

Canada means different things for different persons in the novel, where each character has a specific view of Canada. Canada is "nada" to the

slaves of Reed's novel who stay on the grounds of the nefarious Arthur Swille, which means "nothing" in Spanish. Cato, the Graffado supervisor, not willing to see himself as the "white slave," is reluctant to admit Canada's reality. For the sadistic Mammy Barracuda, 'it is more barbarous in Toronto than darkest Africa, a place where they come from and prays hard every night for a man like Swille to deliver them from such a place. Yankee Jack, a vicious pirate, has his ideas and experience with Canada; he tries to dissuade Raven and QuawQuaw from going there by saying that Canada's people have mean habits, which are very discriminatory, like any other country.

Arthur Swille knows that Canada exists and is part of his plantation. Swille offered a job to Abraham Lincoln and said, "I need a man like you up in my Canadian mills. You can be a big man up there. We treat Canadians like coons" (Reed 37). Carpenter, an enslaved person who is a free-standing enslaved person, is knocked up in Canada and learns the hard way that Canada forms a part of Swille's world. He shares with Raven Quickskill, the protagonist, his personal "research" on Canada at a pace dominated by American interests. The two other fugitive slaves, Stray Leech field and "40s," escaping from the plantation of Arthur Swilly in Virginia like Raven Quickskill, are equally pessimistic in Canada as a place of freedom. In Robin's thoughts, Raven's fellow slave in Canada, the difference between Raven's dream of liberation and the reality of repression arises. Finally, Raven admits that he got into Canada because of his writing; "freedom was his writing. His writing was his Hoo Doo. Others had their way of HooDoo, but he was his writing. It fascinated him; it possessed him; his typewriter was his drum he danced to" (Reed 100).

Through the novel, Reed present Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who play sig-

nificant role in the emancipation of the enslaved people. Since the U.S. does not reverse itself as a nation, Canada is the place of the post-national desire. The novel builds on the ambiguities surrounding the relationship of Abraham Lincoln to nation and race. There was a view that Lincoln did not contemplate black-and-white social equality. The novel shows Lincoln as a player, a mask wearer, and further reveals him as a weath-ercock eager to satisfy all his constituencies, ac-cording to whom the nation is less based on Re-publican principles than on cooperation between various national union elements. Though Lincoln represents the desire to preserve national unity in the country without slavery, it is ironic to note that he signifies a white establishment.

The novel also ridicules the feminism of Stoke. The violent reaction of Mammy Barracuda to the newly-caught feminist desires of Mrs. Swille may suggest her fear of a new order in which she may lose the little poker she has managed to get under slavery. Like any other national union, unity between North and South white women can only lead to a different subjugation. Thus, Mammy Barracuda gives an insight into the potential racial thinking. Quickskill's poem *Flight to Canada* does not indicate a post-national act. The run-away slaves fleeing to Canada represent leaving an oppressive country and joining one with no slavery in the books. The novel is particularly pleased to underline the primitive medieval culture of the South. It creates a threat between its aristocratic instincts, gothic nature, reverence for Camelot, sickly femininity, and immorality. When Quickskill flees north, he supposedly enters the real, modern national space.

In keeping up with the modern fabrication of the world through images, QuickSkill seems to have ended up in a world in which he always be-longed, with his sensible approach. When he walks the streets of Virginia, he realizes that he

has no place in this country. His present mobility is not a freedom of movement but a symptom of errant diaspora:

He kept walking against the shop win-dows, sliding around the corner. He was a fugitive. He was what you would call a spare fugitive: he did not have all the hundreds of wigs, the makeup, the quick changes busy fugitives had to go through; he was a fugitive, but there was no way he could identify himself (76).

QuawQuaw and Quickskill's movement in its explanation of the novel indicates a new con-ceptualization of national identity or replenish-ment outside the country. While danger is a natu-ral part of the journey and an essential feature of a fleeting slave narrative as a genre, Beck's theory parallels through a risk dwelling. Narrow think-ing and its related modes of inequality are impli-cated in the book. Before he passes away, Quickskill gives an anti-slavery lecture at Buffalo, NY, where he discovers that "some of the people in the audience wanted more fire" and that the black people are outrageous. He elaborates on the position of the enslaved people: Not only were the people enslaved by others, but they of-ten, in subtle ways, enslaved each other. As soon as he and QuawQuaw had entered the tavern, two female slave help had begun to let out their ignorant slave cackle, giving them signifying looks (144).

The author perfectly depicts how slavery has taken a different turn and wonders whether there is no end to slavery. Enslaved people have started to judge each other. They are condemned to serve another master as soon as he got rid of one and wonder whether this was some game, some fickle punishment for sins committed in former lives. The situation has become so grave that slaves held each other in bondage, and often instances of hostility to each other are apparent. The novel

also communicates the author's resentment towards the Black Nationalist Movement's narrow-minded ideologies and anticipates the risk of developing a monolithic pattern of thought, similar to what has produced racism. When Quickskill and QuawQuaw take their baggage and leave the country, they are, in turn, leaving behind all forms of narrow nationalism. Again, this is an escape from Yankee Jack, QuawQuaw's husband, who is the ultimate oppressor, the invisible hand behind the press's perceived freedom. Quickskill clarifies: "At least we fugues know we are enslaved people, constantly hunted, but you enslave everybody. Making saps of them all. You, the man behind a distribution network, remain invisible while your underlings become the fall guys" (146).

In the process of obfuscation not dissimilar from the nation's workings, Yankee Jack had carried QuawQuaw away from her village when she was fourteen, sent her to the best schools, and made her white. She is in "white spell" now "she does not feel any sense of the culture of her people" (147). While burying her brother in the Metropolitan Museum, he uses it as an ashtray of her father's skull. Yankee Jack and her yacht reflect the kind of whitewashing and social structures, leading to a lack of identity" (149) leaps from the ship while the men battle in a campaign, underlining that she may be the most insecure character. When you stop looking at it, "QuawQuaw is swimming, moving away from the ship, in the treacherous rapids of the Niagara River" (151). While Quickstill was sitting on a terrace at Niagra

Falls, he could have a piece of first-hand information on how this heavenly place was enjoyed by "people of all races, classes, descriptions seemed to be and could only gasp in dismay, the terrifying rapids below" (156).

He soon discovers that QuawQuaw is going backward with a flag in her hand. While QuawQuaw steps back, her eyes are still fixed on leaving the country. In depicting Quaw Quaw's revolution in Canada, the author unveils its ethnic basis and projects a potential revision of the world beyond nationalism. Ultimately, Reed withdraws his postmodern vision into a national ideology, in which Multiculturalism highlights a nation's optimism without bigotry.

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# Lesbian In/visibility: Analyzing Female same-sex desire in Malayalam Cinema

Roshni Prabhakaran\*

## Abstract

Malayalam cinema has social realism in its crux from the very beginning. It has progressed over the years to represent the marginalized and the voiceless. The visibility of queer in Malayalam cinema has increased in recent years and this mobility has influenced representational strategies in the popular medium. There have been films that mark the presence of transgender and gay identities in the mainstream like 'Mumbai Police' (2013), 'Njan Marykutty' (2018) and 'Moothon' (2019). But even when there is better visibility of gay and transgender characters on the screen, there is a nullification of lesbian representations in the mainstream. The history of lesbian narratives of Malayalam cinema is limited to 'Deshadanakili Karayarilla' (1986), 'Sancharam' (2004) and 'Randu Penkuttikal' (1978). This paper tries to understand the striking demarcation between gay and lesbian narratives and focuses on the reasons for the absence of lesbian narratives in Malayalam cinema. Malayalam cinema has always celebrated male bonding and disregarded female friendships in its progression. This paper tries to critically look at the trajectory of female friendships portrayed in Malayalam cinema and understand its nuances in the narrative. This is a theoretical and historical approach towards queer cinema studies, where case studies of nine different movies released at different points of time is selected.

**Keywords:** *Lesbian, Representation, Identity, Narrative, Gay, Malayalam, and Mainstream.*

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Cinema is an art form that is subjected to serious study as its appeal to the masses is immense. Cinema around the globe causes serious concerns to the critics as it has the power to manipulate the organizations of power around us. Feminists and film critics are concerned about how they can manipulate visual pleasure. Notions of pleasure, spectatorship and gender identity are serious concerns and the works like Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* have created an understanding of the all-encompassing power of popular cinema. Cinema being allegorical represents its women on screen not as individuals but as types. It celebrates certain types and rejects certain others. Reel characters are always moulded and defined by hegemonic social structures. As Jim Collins rightly says, "Popular film is the dominant/hegemonic ideology writ in celluloid" (90).

Malayalam cinema being highly entrenched in social reality etches prevailing ideologies. As Meena T. Pillai in her *Becoming Women* says, "the site of this inscription, the woman as sight, spectacle and stereotype, is completely written over in the process of this apparent 'crystallization of culture' (8). Popular Malayalam cinema, with its blatant level of stereotyping, attempts to shape aesthetic pleasure across the decades, creating a myth of authenticity in representation.

'To understand Kerala and its many contradictions, there are two reliable barometers — politics and films, both fierce passions of the average Malayali. If popular cinema is at all a peek into a public conscience, such films and their depiction of women offer a curious reading of contemporary Kerala society — its anxieties and aspirations, what it professes to be and what it can't hide.' (Najib)

Kerala is a land of many communities, many castes and religious associations with equally

diverse forms of marriage and kinship relations. Every societal aspect and theme has been experimented on the screen. As deviant sexualities enter the public discourse, it becomes the central perspective through which the narrative unfolds in cinema as well. Right from the initial days, there were fewer attempts to portray the LGBTQ community in the popular Malayalam cinema, who silently live amidst literate Kerala society. Malayalam cinema has always been unapologetically bitter about homosexual practices and considered them deviant and the other. It can be said that the queer sensations of Kerala society are apparently "closeted in the rationale of heterosexual narratives" (Sedgwick 916).

A notable representation of queerness in mainstream Malayalam movies happened only after the 1980s. Until then explicit depiction of homosexuality was unfamiliar in Malayalam cinema. The only accepted notion was to portray a flamboyant effeminate character for comedy. Even when, there is a greater acceptance of homosexuality in the modern era, hijras are portrayed in the same tone. The movies like *Soothradharan* (2001), *Chandupottu* (2005), etc. tried to portray the transvestites as instruments to provoke fun and laughter. *Chandupottu* assumes its significance by centering on a caricatured queer person as the protagonist. The film problematizes the process of gendering and retains a sexual ambivalence around a cross-dressed male.

One age-old method to hint at queerness and to make it a comic intervention is to include cross-dressing. The crossdressers were as old to Malayalam cinema as in the age of Adoor Bhasi in many films like *Cochin Express* (1967), *Kalli Chellamma* (1969), *Taxi Car* (1972), and *Ara Kallan Mukkal Kallan* (1974). This was later carried on by many actors including the lead heroes. We would be reminded of Prem Nazir in *Kannappanunni* (1977), Jayasurya, Innocent, and Kunchako

Bobban in *Kilukkam Kilukilukkam* (2006), Mukesh in *Cheriyā Lokavum Valiya Manushyarum* (1990), Jayaram in *Naranathe Thampurān* (2001), Dileep in *Mayamohini* (2012), Meera Jaasmin in *Rasathanthram* (2006), Annie in *Ammayane Sathyam* (1993), Manju Warriar in *Daya* (1998) and Mohanlal in *Ayal Kadha Ezhuthukayane* (1998), who had all been reliable tools to produce humour. The effeminate men provoke laughter and masculinity is associated with aggressiveness.

In Malayalam cinema, homoeroticism is indicated through male intimacies. This, in turn, is defined through a remarkably overt physicality, often contrasted with a near absence of male desire for women. Male bonding has always been an important theme in Malayalam cinema from its earliest days and it has so far been read as a heterosexist narrative that turns a blind eye towards the complex articulation of physical intimacies and desires they regularly appropriate. The deep chords of 'friendship' or male-male attachment remind us of male-female bonding to such an extent that it resonates with the narratives of heterosexual marriages. The movies like *Harikrishnans* (1998), *One man show* (2001), *Manichitrathazhu* (1993), *Salt and Pepper* (2011), *Araam Thampurān* (1997), *Thenmavin Komabathe* (1994), *Beautiful* (2011), *Urumi* (2011), *Mumbai Police* (2013), *In Harihar Nagar* (1990), *Ramji Rao Speaking* (1989), *Friends* (1999) and *Nadodikaattu* (1987) shows the homosociality in the male characters. The narrative endings of such films may seem a reinstatement of conventional values and a taming of the hero and the heroine within the heterosexual matrix.

### Literature Review

It is very difficult to find ample research materials on female same sex love in Malayalam cinema as it is an under researched area. Muhammed Rafi N.V. in his book '*Kanyakayude*

*Durnadappukal'* tries to analyze the patriarchy, desire and lesbianism in Malayalam films. '*The issue of lesbianism in Contemporary Indian films: a comparative study of Transnational, Bollywood and Regional films*' is a dissertation by Gurpreet Kaur where she talks about the movie '*Sancharram*' extensively and the article by Navaneetha M. on "*Deshadanakilikal Pranjathum Saancharram Parayathirunathum*" is also an commentary on the film. Dr. Prajitha P. and Aleena K. Noble in their paper '*How lesbian love is viewed in Malayalam cinema*' discuss the unorthodox patterns in the movie '*Sancharram*.' Sony Jalrajan Raaj's '*On the Margins of Heterosexuality*' is a study about the discursive practices that normalizes heterosexuality in Malayalam cinema. T. Muraleedharan in his articles "*Shifting Paradigms: Gender and Sexuality Debates in Kerala*" and "*Women Friendships in Malayalam Cinema*" remarks about the prevalent sexual practices in the state and the undertones of female same sex love in Malayalam Cinema. '*Discourse of Queer Identity: An Analysis of Queer Self in selected Malayalam movies*' by Nayeem P. tries to look critically at earlier lesbian narratives in *Randu Penkuttikal*, *Deshadanakili Karayarilla* and *Sancharram*. M. Sathian's "*Malayalam Film and Gender Politics*" and Ruth Vanitha's "*Queering India*" throws more light on the gender narratives in Indian culture and films.

### Methodology

Mainstream cinema has always appropriated male bonding and male queer relations in its patriarchal framework. The lack of interest of the mainstream when it comes to the narrative of female relationships is rather apparent. This paper is looking at the popular films that broke the stereotype in their representations. But these movies either end tragically or the narrative conforms to the traditional heterosexual marriage. A study of nine different movies is carried out in an attempt to look at the trajectory of change that

is experimented in the narrative of Malayalam cinema.

### Analysis

'*Mohiniyattam*' (1976) by Sreekumaran Thampi was perhaps the earliest film to pursue the friendship and political solidarity of three women as its central narrative concern. It is a significant text in the Malayalam film genre that celebrated the friendship of Mohini, a middle-class woman who is dependent on her sister, Anasuya, a sex worker and Nirmala, a village girl. Mohini runs away from home due to the sexual passes her brother-in-law makes and Nirmala is seduced and abandoned by a city-bred lover. The three women constitute an alternate family and start living together. Soon Nirmala, who is pregnant, dies in childbirth entrusting the child to Mohini. Anasuya leaves as her presence would contaminate the environment in which the child grows. The film moves on to explore Mohini's life as an unwed single mother.

The earliest depiction of lesbian love occurred in a 1978 movie directed by Mohan. The film '*Randu Penkuttikal*' (1978) depicts two high school girl students Kokila and Girija. Kokila expresses her desire for Girija, who in turn is fond of a young photographer with whom she had a brief physical relationship. An overly jealous Kokila tries to spread rumours about Girija to make men stay away from her. However, in the end, the two girls compromise and decide to conform to a heterosexual life. This film was wrong in its depiction in multiple ways – it gives assault as a reason for someone turning towards same-sex love, and it also has the possessive woman 'mend her ways' when she finally agrees to marry a man – her assaulter!

The next significant attempt was by filmmaker Padmarajan in his film '*Deshadanakili Karayarilla*' (1986) which negotiates the multifaceted ques-

tion of women and gender identity. The film picturizes the account of two schoolgirls, Nimmy and Sally running away when they are on a school trip. They are portrayed as troublemakers who disguise themselves as travelling students and live in a youth hostel. They are befriended by Harishankar towards whom Nimmy develops love and confides their secret. Sally despises him but doesn't want to be an obstacle before her friend. Harishankar tries to get the girls back to school, but things go awry when Nimmy finds out he is the fiancé of their teacher Devika. Sally makes her mind to leave the place while Nimmy decides to stay. They share an intimate goodbye. Sally comes back immediately to find Nimmy is about to commit suicide. Harishankar, Devika and the school management try to bring back the girls but fails miserably.

The movie is considered the first Indian film that explored womance. A womance is a close but asexual, non-romantic bond among two or more women. '*Deshadanakili Karayarilla*' was a movie with lesbian undertones. Shari is portrayed with a queer angle in the movie. She is tomboyish and has cropped hair. She is jealous of Nimmy's affection towards Harishankar. The suicide rate is highest among queer people due to the lack of acceptance and here they both commit suicide. She talks about a 'safe heaven.' Like other queer people, they are abandoned by family and keep running away from the world.

In her path-breaking study, Lillian Faderman suggests that romantic friendships were celebrated until the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Anglo European cultures. She contends that women were often innocent of the sexual implications of their exclusive and passionate bonds with one another, having internalized the view that women were sexually passionless (71). Following Foucault, Faderman locates great transformation in public perception of same-sex intimacy in the late 19<sup>th</sup>

century and beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when such relationships were defined as perverse and deviant (Marcus 198).

Ligy Pulpally's film '*Sancharam*' (2004) was triggered off by an email about the suicide of a young lesbian in Kerala. Kiran and Delilah are childhood friends and realize their love for each other when they grow up. Their classmate Rajan is smitten by Delilah and he, in turn, asks Kiran to write love letters for him. Kiran readily accepts to do so as it will also enable her to express her love for Delilah without being ostracized by their family. Delilah soon finds out the truth about the letters and confesses her love for Kiran as well. Kiran and Delilah engage in a romantic relationship despite the societal taboo on homosexuality. Rajan soon finds out about Kiran and Delilah and reports the same to Delilah's mother who forces her for another marriage. Delilah agrees to get married and tells Kiran that it is over between them when Kiran tries to persuade her to run away. The concluding scene shows an apprehensive Delilah, in her wedding gown, running out of the church screaming for Kiran, while Kiran visits a cliff where she had visited once with Delilah and holds herself back from jumping from the cliff. It is a sensual and beautiful tale of forbidden love that is often compared to Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996). However *Fire* clearly states the failure of heterosexual marriages as a reason for the lesbian relationship, *Sancharam* neatly celebrates two lesbian lovers and their romantic relationship.

Malayalam cinema hasn't witnessed explicit lesbian relationships after *Sancharam* other than fleeting hints in the films like *Rithu*, *Buddy*, etc. The closest ally becomes the movies that celebrate female friendships, which again are a rarity when compared to the movies like *Friends*, *In Harihar Nagar*, *Ramji Rao Speaking*, *Nadodikaatu* and *Premam* where male friendships are celebrated and awed at.

Mohan's '*Shalini Ente Kootukari*' (1980) represents a phase when the middle class cinema in Malayalam was appropriated by the hegemonic discourses. The film talks about the friendship of Shalini and Ammu, two upper caste college girls. Shalini is a brooding artistic young woman who conceals her angst behind a façade of pranks. Her emotional anchor is her brother Prabha who is educated and unemployed, a recurring archetype of Kerala in the 1970s. Shalini is brave, witty and modern with a considerable sense of freedom. Modest and passive Ammu who is in love with Prabha functions as Shalini's other. Shalini later dies of Brain cancer, again a trope that recurs in several female-centred films.

Cultural historians identify the 1970s as a period of radical politics in Kerala. The liberal attitudes brought in by the intellectual and political developments and springing of the existential movement characterize the literary scenario in Kerala. Despite the remarkable increase in the participation of women in the public sphere, radical narratives took a little attempt to engage with gender hierarchies.

Later films in Malayalam like *Ennu Swantham Janakikutty* (1998) and *Pranayavarnangal* (1998) was noteworthy for their novelty of representation. The 'unconventional' woman, who cannot be contained in the shackles of patriarchy, is allowed to live happily. *Pranayavarnangal* is a narrative of friendship between two college girls, Maya and Arathi. While Maya is tomboyish and an extrovert, Arathi is a brooding introvert with poetic sensibilities. Arathi develops a crush on Vinayachandran and Maya writes letters to Arathi ostensibly as Vinayachandran to bring her out of her shell. Vinayachandran is in love with Maya and makes a formal proposal. They get engaged and Arathi endures a nervous breakdown. Vinayachandran intervenes and clears the misapprehension and confusion created between

the friends. The parameters of othering in early movies, reappear in this movie when friendship seems to be feasible between two unequal females – one unconventional woman capable to break shackles of patriarchy and the other, lonely and sensitive who confirms the traditions.

*Ennu Swantham Janakikutty* is a remarkable film that shifts between fantasy and reality. The movie is about a close friendship between Janakikutty, an introvert and the youngest member of a Nair family and a yakshi whom she accidentally encounters. Whether yakshi is real or a figment of the imagination is left ambiguous. Yakshi comes into her life when Bhaskaran on whom she had a crush on falls in love with her cousin. Yakshi becomes inseparable from Janakikutty and everybody suspects her of being insane. The film ends with Bhaskaran coming back to Janakikutty's life and the yakshi bidding farewell.

Janakikutty like Arathi finds nature comforting and supernatural exciting. Janakikutty is fascinated by the stories told by her great aunt. Janakikutty and Arathi are proper female stereotypes and Maya and Yakshi are liberated women who could trespass patriarchy. They also seem to have shades of phallic, as explained by Barbara Creed in her idea of 'the monstrous feminine.' The phallic attribute of Yakshi is her fangs and of Maya is the sword she carries as a female oracle as hallucinated by Arathi. They both have phallic associations, at least in the imagination of their friends. Furthermore, both films imply ambiguous links between women's friendship and insanity.

*Notebook*, a film by Rosshan Andrews in 2006, celebrates the friendship of three teenage girls, Pooja, Sreedevi and Sarah. Sreedevi is from a semi rural patriarchal house and is dependent on her friends for everything. Pooja is serious and practical while Sarah is bold and smart. Sreedevi falls in love with Suraj and finds her pregnant after a

romantic meeting between the two during the school picnic. Pooja and Sarah desperately make arrangements to get the pregnancy terminated and Sreedevi dies during the procedure. Pooja manages to evade punishment by the school authorities and Sarah gets thrown out. Pooja later suffers a nervous breakdown and Sarah completes her education at a prestigious institution. Sarah goes to meet Pooja and the two girls revive their friendship.

Notable 2015 film *Rani Padmini* has a striking queer subtext. It is a road movie that subverts dominant conventions. The journey becomes the perfect motif for self discovery for the two protagonists Rani and Padmini. When one is in it for discovering her identity, the other one is a refugee fleeing from her anger and financial crisis. The two women share moments of adventure and the shades of their past life bring them together. The queer subtext is carefully placed in the margins and heterosexuality takes over in the guise of marital bliss and homosexual desire is considered deviant social behaviour. (Raj 48)

## Results

Such recurring patterns are found in films that centre on female friendships. The characters are defined through a process of othering. The narrative resolution involves the reestablishment of the patriarchal norms. Mohini, who rejects heterosexual marriage eventually, fits in as the 'virgin mother.' Yakshi realizes that she needs to move out when her friend gets involved in a heterosexual relationship. Refusal of this pattern leads to total distress and annihilation as in the cases of Sally and Nimmy. Female friendships remain temporary episodes in the way of a heterosexual bond.

The invisibility of the lesbian spectator needs to be addressed at this point, where dominant modes of seeing and representation "depend on

the relegation to the margins (as other) of those paradigms which might insist on seeing differently" (Thornham 118). Conceiving lesbian desire unproblematically has not been possible in Indian cinema, let alone in Malayalam where "sexual hierarchy in cinema simply cannot account for lesbian desire either as a representation or as spectator position" (Thornham 118). Later theoretical challenges still tend to affirm heterosexual norms and binaries of male/female as a basis for cinematic identification. Here, it is worthwhile pointing out that due to inadequate academic intervention around issues of spectatorship in India; the lesbian spectator has been excluded in theory as well as representation.

### Conclusion

Dominant cinematic codes are used in these movies concerning voyeurism and viewing, and the representation of lesbianism is always entangled within these dominant conventions. The Malayalam film negotiates the tensions between generally homophobic Indian societies, western constructs of homosexuality which are portrayed in the transnational and Bollywood films, and a more positive portrayal of lesbians in India.

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# Writing the Body: Identity, Objectification and Gaze in Surayya Banu's *Dupe*

Keerthi Sivan\*

## Abstract

The human body is a battleground of various ideologies, cultural symbols, taboos, etc. The second wave feminism and its motto "The Personal is Political" prompted people, especially women to look into their bodies and gain authority over it. But even today, body is often associated with the ideas of purity/impurity, reality/appearance, etc. Theoreticians and scholars are of the opinion that the body is socially constructed and colonized. In such a context, this paper is a re-reading of an autobiography of a body double actor who consider herself a failure. Surayya Banu, the dupe actor of soft-core actors during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century South Indian movies lives a detached life today. Arun Ezhuthachan transcribes the life story of the woman in the work titled *Dupe*. This very short book describes the whole journey undertaken by Surayya to live a life that she dreamt of, but ended up becoming nothing. On the first reading, the book gives a glimpse in to the other side of the unsuccessful people of the ever celebrated film industry. The second deeper reading provides us insights into the unexplored politics of body, the issues of gaze, identity formation, the burden of an identity, objectification of the body, etc.

**Keywords:** *Body, Identity, Subjectivity, Dupe, Male gaze, Sexuality, and Discourse.*

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**B**ody is not just something that we see. It is a text upon which many words are imprinted to convey a set of denotative and connotative meanings that can be [mis]read in a number of ways. The continuous surveillance, auditing and scrutiny over the bodies makes them a heated topic of discussion. Over the period of years, it has gained the status of a discourse. The cultural, social, political, religious meanings associated with the body is trying to limit the wide opportunities/possibilities that can facilitate the free movement of the body.

The patriarchal society has a tendency to control and regulate the bodies by social disciplining; be it of any gender. The way an individual use his/her body is also a matter of significance. When the body becomes subject, it is associated with a form of power that can transcend boundaries. The society has fixed some normative boundaries to make every human body appear the same. Those that transgress these limitations of the bodily identity, the ones who doesn't fit into the mainstream stereotypical categories are marked as 'the Other' and any attempts by these people to create a space of their own gives them the label of 'outlaws.'

The body is always a medium to communicate the cultural symbols/taboo, the religious signs, geographical/historical connections etc. Even the tattoos imprinted on the skin conveys the identity of a human being. It is quite amazing how the body becomes a spectacle for the viewers; an object to be looked at, gain the pleasure and satisfy oneself. In a capitalistic, consumerist world, body is reduced to a lower status by mere objectification.

Surayya Banu's life writing titled *Dupe* is an exploration into the subtle nuances of the body and its scopes. On the very outer level, the transcriber Arun Ezhuthachan writes about the mis-

eries, tortures and abuses that a woman like Banu had to undergo throughout her personal and professional life. Pramod K. Nayar writes,

The emphasis on bodies and therefore writing as transgressive is part of a political project where overturning of norms and conventions of writing is a step in overturning the social and cultural structures that limit the woman (144).

Surayya Banu was a body double actress for the actors like Shakila, Mariya etc. during the sensational movie era of South India happened in the nineties. The work subtitled as *An Autobiography of an Extra Actor – who dreamt of becoming an actor, but ended up as the body of soft-core actors* is a kind of confessional writing in which the reader gets a glance into the life of the narrator. The as-told-to-narrative or as-told-to-memoir is a travel through Surayya's life; her childhood, entry into the film industry, the life she lead as a dupe for mainstream actors, the exploitations of her body by the men in the industry, leaving the job and her final resort as a school teacher. She recollects the major events, meet-ups, twists and turns that had made her life, she says, "a failure" (8).

The very truth that the soft-core actors of the South Indian movies of the 90's had a body dupe is in itself a shocking one. The audience were deceived to believe what they saw on-screen was the reality. But in fact what screened was a distorted truth. Even today the dupe actors are very common when it comes to an action sequence or a highly dangerous task. But this fact regarding early mentioned actors was deliberately cut off from reaching the public. Surayya Banu dedicates the work *Dupe* to all those actors who went unnoticed like her.

From the very beginning of the book itself it is clear that the subjectivity/identity of the narra-

tor is one that is shackled by the body that acts as a tool. Looking back to women's history, subjectivity is all about how a woman lived and saw herself. Keeping it in mind, Surayya expresses her unrevealed or unpopular identity in the *Dupe* as,

I'm Surayya Banu, one who has acted in almost fifty movies. If you ask me why I have to introduce myself, it is because I never showed my face in any of the movies I acted. So it would be better to address me as a dupe rather than an actor.  
(7)

Identity can be expressed in various ways. For Surayya, it was her body. There are a number of women who creates their identity by shattering the norms of the male dominated world and breaking away from it. Surayya Banu's identity evolved and existed only within the borders of the patriarchal world. Her identity formulation, consciousness and the resultant subjectivity was something that evolved out of her body. But the same body that created all these was exploited by other people in her latter life and she had to conceal and replace it with another new identity. The one who was a body double dropped the job and went in search of many other works. Today, she is working as a teacher in a school at Tamil Nadu. She has completely disguised her early identity with something new. The narrator is a victim of double marginalization; first, being a woman and secondly, being an extra actor. She says that actors like Shakeela were afraid of their image in their latter part of the career which was part of their identity. This is the reason that they had to depend on body double actors.

The narrator feels strong disgust on the fact that the body made a spectacle, both on-screen and off-screen. Here the text becomes a space where

body experiences are discussed and interpreted. Just like a photograph can tell a story, language has the descriptive potential to convert the actions that has happened behind and in front of the camera. Central to the construction of the body as spectacle are issues of looking and viewing. This problems pertains with female and queer bodies even in discourses like science and medicine.

Laura Mulvey's concept of male gaze finds a number of reiterations in this work. Surayya Banu says that the movies acted by her have got only commercial purpose: to entertain the male audience with sexual gratification. The camera, she says, linger over her curves and assigns the audience a perspective of a heterosexual man. The women are displayed as erotic objects for characters within the film and the spectators watching the movie. The gaze of the camera and the spectator are identifiable. But for a woman like her, the camera records her own body which is viewed by the men on the shooting sets. But when it comes to a movie projected in the theatre, the only thing that is shown is her body with edited, re-joined faces of other actors. Thus she is reduced into a mere body to satisfy 'his' needs. The body, then becomes a text inscribed with the desires of the men. (Mulvey 14)

The narrator tells few incidents where she was asked to perform in ways that could appease the sexual appetite of men. She adds that while slim women were given lead roles, soft-core movies went in search of fat women. Female actors were often selected for this based on even the thickness of legs. She narrates how the bodies of the actors were made look fairer with the usage of cosmetics. Surayya has dedicated a whole chapter titled "Curiosities of the Spectator" analyzing the mind of the audience, male viewers in particular. People came to the shooting sets just

to see the recording of these scenes and gain a sort of visual pleasure. There were people who waited for the cars of these actors to pass by so that they can have a glimpse of them. She adds that many men had approached actors like her by taking advantages of this scopophilic pleasures. Through all these ways, men gains a hierarchical power over women. Mulvey also states that the female gaze is same as that of the male gaze. When this happens, a woman welcoming an objectified gaze reinforces the power of the gaze/male to reduce a recipient to an object. Thus Surayya and other similar actors were caught up in this inescapable world.

Post feminism celebrates sexuality and women's body. Catherine Hakeem in her book *Erotic Capital* says that people should use their sexual capital in order to get ahead in the society. Though men too have erotic capital, she says, women undoubtedly have an advantage over men. She says it is a combination of beauty, style, social skills and charm that can be learned (Hakim 499). This kind of beliefs are very common in the film industry and this could have triggered actors like Banu to expose their bodies. Surayya Banu speaks about women who are ready to use this capital in order to get a space of their own in the industry. But contradictory to Hakeem's positivity emphasized on this theory, Surayya finds herself engulfed in the objectification directed towards her. Though she used her capital, she was never able to lead a successful life.

In her last chapter, she talks about the discrimination that she and her fellow beings had to face because they were all women. She criticizes the position of women in the society which forbids her from watching the adult certified movies in the theatre. Saji K.S. and Subin Varghese writes,

For Foucault, bodies are subject to the regulatory power of discourse by which

they become 'subjects' for themselves and others. Foucault provides us with useful tools for understanding the way the social order constitute and reproduce that order. (117)

Various disciplinary technologies are used to create a group of 'docile bodies' so that they can be subjected and transformed. Banu has gone through all such practices and she was forced to live a disciplined manner in her early life. But this was met with another disciplinary strategy to fit within the boundaries of movie industry by practices of control. Strict codes of exhibitionism were thrust upon them.

The cultural ideologies have even silenced many groups of people from speaking their stories. For a long time, majority of women were not free enough to speak about their body, sexuality and so on. In this sense, Surayya Banu has succeeded in opening up her personal life and the struggles she had to face. The work *Dupe* is an act of resistance that shows the aesthetics of identity. Thus Surayya Banu's body provided her with a subjectivity that was [mis]represented in the society.

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# Parallel Territories: Aesthetic Encoding and Ecological Revolutions in Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*

Parvathy Salil\*

## Abstract

Moving beyond the dichotomy between internal and external criticisms of a literary text, Pascale Casanova in "Literature as a World" discusses a hypothetical "mediating space [that] exists between literature and the world: a parallel territory...[w]here, struggles of all sorts – political, social, national, gender, ethnic – come to be refracted, diluted, deformed or transformed according to a literary logic, and in literary forms" (193). Integrating nuances of Casanova's discussion of the parallel territories of literature and the world, and Michael Niblett's discussion on how "world literature, understood as the literature of the capitalist world-system, registers the transformations in world ecology that have been both cause and consequence of the transition to, and subsequent reorganizations of, the capitalist world-economy (16), I endeavour to foreground the ecological disruptions in the village of Ayemenem near Kumarakom in Kerala in consequence to its capitalistic transformation as exposed in Chapter 5 of Arundhati Roy's novel, *God of Small Things*, entitled "God's own country." Central to my reading of the text is Niblett's critique of the destruction of local ecosystems in consequence of the colonial integration of peripheral regions into the world-system; and their transformation into capitalistic economies and his discussion of textual discontinuities such as the use of (Michael Lowy's concept) of irrealism in narration and imagery as literary strategies to "register" and expose such environmental disruptions through the global reach offered by the English language (16).

**Keywords:** *World Literature, Parallel Territories, Textual Discontinuities, Literature of the Capitalist World-System, and World Ecology.*

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## World Literature and World-Ecology

In "Literature as a World," Casanova accentuates the dichotomy between dominant Europe and the dominated (non-West/Other) in order to underscore the inequalities and exploitation of the regions and the people of Third world countries. Highlighting, in particular, the struggles of writers "for symbolic capital while fighting the inherent inequities engendered by the centre-periphery polarization" (192). Casanova emphasises the potential of the "world of letters" to enable writers from Third world countries – "who can see more clearly than others" – to articulate and expose the oppressive manifestations of Europe's violence and domination including the exploitation of their indigenous resources and the simultaneous deprivation of indigenous resources to the native population for accumulation of capital.

By emphasizing that "each writer's position [is]... a double one, twice defined: each writer is situated once according to the position he or she occupies in a national space, and then once again according to the place that this occupies within the world space" (200), she challenges the characteristic "astigmatism" of (the predominantly Eurocentric) international literary debates that obscure formal and other textual innovations of the national literature in the Third World by overlooking "the biographical and national 'screen' (as in the case of Kafka) in pursuit of marginalising them. In this way, Casanova foregrounds "the violence of transnational political and literary power relations as they impact upon the writer" (199).

At this juncture, "to demonstrate, in both structural and historical terms, how many variables, conflicts or forms of soft violence have remained undetected and unexplained due to the invisibility of this world structure" (199), she proposes

the notion of the "world literary space" that mediates between historical, political, and economic contexts and the aesthetic autonomy of the text "as a means to" restore the coherence of the global structure within which texts appear ... only to return to the texts themselves" (192).

Along similar lines, (adapting Jameson's idea) Michael Niblett's essay attempts to "grasp the generic discontinuities in peripheral literary works as mediating also the disruption caused to local socio-ecologies and nutrient cycles by integration into a capitalist world-ecology" (21). This endeavour inevitably "re-establish[es] the lost bond between literature, history and the world" (Casanova 193), thereby answering in affirmative to Casanova's first question with regards to the possibility of re-linking these three distinct worlds. All the same, it is important to note that the focus on generic discontinuities in the narrative to decipher ecological implications of capitalism does not interfere with the aesthetic autonomy of the text, and hence, retains "a full sense of the irreducible singularity of literary texts" (193) and its independent literary world. Casanova's final question as to whether exploration of the territory of World literature would enable one to revive the bond between literature, history, and the world could be answered positively by citing one of Niblett's discussions of *The Last English Plantation* by the Guyanese writer, Janice Shinebourne.

While this novel set in the 1950s embodies nuances of social realism, the autonomy of the literary text is sustained by the novel's irrealist portrayal of the character's (June's) lived experience of the social realities of that period. Additionally, the colonial transportation of large amounts of bauxite from Guyana in huge ships to Europe is at once a literary and historical reality. At this juncture, the very dichotomy between the literary (fictional) and historical backgrounds is

problematized by Niblett's use of Sylvia Winter's argument earlier in his essay: "history in the plantation context is 'fiction' - 'a fiction written, dominated, controlled by forces external to itself' (Winter Niblett 22). The protagonist's (June's) ruminations on the "absurd nature of an existence dominated by external powers and her speculations as to whether Guyana was but a British prison camp, according to Niblett, is suggestive of "an illusory unreal reality" (24) employed by the writer to challenge interventions to perpetuate the colonial modernity and its consequent environmental implications.

**Aesthetic Encoding and Ecological Revolutions: A reading of "God's own Country" (Chapter 5) in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

For literary production from those [peripheral] areas subject to imperialist intrusion and forcible integration into the world-system, there will be a structural tendency towards not just registering a particular ecological regime, but also marking in explicit fashion - albeit not necessarily at the level of content, but perhaps at the level of imagery, style, or form - the disjunctions and ruptures, the breaks and rifts, engendered by ecological revolutions (Niblett 20).

Through the non-linear narrative which jumps back and forth between fragments of the protagonist, Rahel's childhood memories, and the ecological, political, familial, and cultural changes that she observes twenty-three years later as she visits Ayemenem, Arundhati Roy also traces the large-scale destruction of the fertile and lush Meenachal river. Consider the opening line of the fifth chapter of the novel titled "God's own Country": "Years later when Rachel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed" (131). With the use of the gothic metaphor of a "ghastly skull's smile" (131), this sentence encapsulates the bizarre state

and lifelessness of the river once lush, green, and fertile with fish and other living beings. The river described as greeting the protagonist (Rahel) with a "ghastly skull's smile" also exemplifies an element of irrealist narrative employed in the novel.

According to Michael Lowy, irrealism includes "elements of fantasy, the oneiric, and the surreal... [and is] founded on 'a logic of the imagination, of the marvellous, of the mystery or the dream" (Niblett 194). It is also important to note that, as Lowy writes, "irrealism... does not oppose realism. It describes the absence of realism rather than an opposition to it" (Niblett 21). The "holes" and "limp hand" are crucial irreal elements. They hint at the destruction of its river system through large-scale extraction of soil and construction activities in the river carried out on the Meenachal river along with other developmental and tourism activities. As "ideal-types in the Weberian sense," irreal elements are "epistemological constructions; in contradistinction to empirical literary texts, which tend to be an "impure" combination of both realism and irrealism" (195). Within Roy's novel, they underscore ecological exploitation under the capitalist regime.

Subsequently, in the opening section of the non-linear narrative of the chapter, Roy contrasts the transformations of the river and the protagonist, Rahel Ipe as she returns to her native place, Ayemenem near Kumarakom in Kerala after twenty-three years — "it [the Meenachal river] had shrunk. And she [Rahel] had grown" (130). This juxtaposition is crucial as it underscores the destruction of a major river due to what the ecofeminist, Vandana Shiva calls anthropocentric "maldevelopment" (5). According to Shiva, "maldevelopment militates against equality in diversity and superimposes the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures, and genders" (Shiva 4).

While Niblett writes that “there are many texts for which this registration of the world-ecology will occur only at the level of the ‘political unconscious;’ but there are others for which it will be a critically conscious act, one involving the deliberate elaboration of a distinctive set of aesthetic forms” (20). Although a work of fiction, Roy’s narrative accurately captures the deterioration of even the minor elements of Ayemenem and its environment against the backdrop of neo-colonial interventions and developmental activities. For example, at the very beginning of the chapter, pointing at the saltwater barrage built for regulating saltwater that flows from the backwaters to the Arabian Sea, Roy critiques the increasing anthropocentric constructions that obstruct the river system and thereby cause serious damage (Roy 130). Also emphasises the ‘fractured’ state of the river as signified by the use of the irreal imagery of the “limp hand raised from a hospital bed.”

Roy’s frequent use of irreal narrative and imagery, often with extensive use of poetic devices such as alliteration adds to the narrative discontinuities that mirror disruptions in the ecosystem (Niblett 21). While exposing the development-induced reduction of the size of the river to “no more than a swollen drain” (130), even during the monsoon season in June when it rains continuously, she foregrounds the contamination of the river with the discharge of untreated discharge from factories. The use of poetic embellishments to articulate the destruction of the river often seems to be a deliberate attempt to mock the hypocrisy of progress and its concomitant and grave repercussions on the ecosystem as in the case of the sentence: “a thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequinned with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish” (130).

Simultaneously and against this background, Roy juxtaposes the luxuries offered to tourists visit-

ing the Heritage Hotel — which was the ‘History House’ in her childhood memories. Upon returning to Ayemanam after twenty-three years, she notices that the old colonial bungalow has been converted into a five-star hotel chain, which she calls “the Heart of Darkness” in the novel. She discusses how tourists from the city of Kochi were ferried across the backwaters on a speedboat.

Despite the fictional facade of the novel, Roy points out how the “rainbow film of gasoline” left on the waters deteriorated the water quality. Moreover, she mocks the scenic view from the hotel which concealed the fact that “the water was thick and toxic” (131). The pungent stench of the polluted water made it a “smelly paradise” (131), which was marketed and sold as God’s Own Country. Meanwhile, the poor natives bathed and drank from the polluted river — with the smell of shit “hovering over Ayemenem like a hat” (131). Roy thus challenges the colonial modernity in which “other people’s poverty was merely a matter of getting used to” (131).

The tourists are described to be warned against swimming in the river with ‘No Swimming’ signs displayed in stylish calligraphy. This assumes significance in comparison with no warnings and alternatives for the native population due to their absence of purchasing power, and thus strongly emerges as a critique of the capitalist modernity where even basic environmental and human rights and safety becomes a luxury for those with capital. At this juncture, Roy’s depiction of the tall wall built by the hotel owner, Kari Saipu to hide the slum from the hotel’s view and to prevent the slum-dwellers from encroaching reinforces the Marxist dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots. It is also of utmost significance to note from Roy’s descriptions of the polluted river and major causes and sources of contamination including discharge of hazardous efflu-

ents by factories, the plight of the poor natives who depend on the contaminated water of the river to bathe and wash clothes and pots. In this way, Roy hints at the ecological implications of industrialisation and its impact on the native population as they are left to depend on polluted resources.

Thus, as Niblett writes, “to grasp capitalism as world-ecology is to grasp the way in which the production of nature under capital becomes fundamentally world-historical, with the connections between local socio-ecologies increasingly determined by the vectors of the market” (17). Roy’s vivid descriptions of the changes made to the environment and the historical buildings in Ayemenem to attract tourists underscores such capitalistic transformations. For example, ancestral homes and old wooden houses surrounding the History House were bought from old families, while artificial canals and bridges were constructed on the river. Through her protagonist’s visit to Kumarakom after twenty-three years, Roy’s novel also highlights other major transformations to ecology and economy. Her protagonist, Rachel observes that the natives of Kumarakom “now...had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river,” is of utmost significance (130). Most importantly, it hints at how agricultural production in Kerala transformed from cultivation for subsistence to cultivation for commercial profit.

In addition to this, the “truncated Kathakali performances” performed for tourists underscore how longer classical art forms were commercialised and shortened to cater to the “short-attention span” of tourists. The narrative also juxtaposes a few stories from the epics commonly performed by Kathakali artists and disinterested tourists’ indulging in other pursuits:

While Kunti revealed a secret to Kama on the riverbank, courting couples rubbed suntan oil on each other. While fathers played sublimated sexual games with their nubile teenage daughters, Poothana suckled young Krishna at her poisoned breast (133).

In Roy’s novel, Rachel ultimately realises that River Meenachal has lost its old powers to evoke fear and to change lives and that it was in the present nothing but a “slow, slushing green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea.” Furthermore, through vivid descriptions of the disappearance of its steep mud banks and the appearance of shanty hutments made of mud walls, she also presents the problem of overpopulation and the consequent over-exploitation of resources. Thus, Roy’s narrative demonstrates Niblett’s argument that “rising socio- ecological exhaustion and rising capitalization are two sides of the same coin... [and that] capitalist regimes of accumulation periodically exhaust the gamut of socio-ecological conditions - the ‘very webs of life’- that originally sustained them (Moore Niblett 18).

In conclusion, “God’s own country,” that is Chapter 5 of Arundhati Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things*, with its use of unreal narrative and images, and vivid descriptions of the destruction of the Meenachal river with the increasing profit-oriented, developmental and tourism activities demonstrate a “critical consciousness” (Niblett 21). This consciousness exposes both major and minor environmental repercussions caused as a result of the increasing exploitation of the resources of Ayemenem, as well as the deprivation of resources and their negative impacts on the local community. At the same time, Roy’s text is aesthetically autonomous despite its aesthetic codifications of the ecological revolution (Niblett 17). In conclusion, her text exemplifies Casanova’s notion of the “parallel territory.”

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# The Shifting Portrayal of Motherhood in Indian Film: A Case Study of Renuka Sahane's *Tribhanga*

Anindita Sarkar\*

## Abstract

A mother has always been a construct of others' gaze; she is reified as the epitome of self-effacement and altruism. Since its inception, Indian media has fixated the image of the mother as one who is overly sentimental and melodramatic. Indian films have glorified mothers without actually empowering them, which Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak considers as benevolent sexism, orchestrated by society. Indian media for a long time has been charged with the symbolic annihilation of mothers. The contours of motherhood outlined in Indian Films ranging from *Dewar* to *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum*, has been fashioned under the pressures of phallogocentric society and the inevitability of institutional repression. The cultural emphasis on motherhood in Indian films is understandable because Indian culture places greater value on accommodation and compromise as opposed to confrontation and categorical choice. However, in recent times, Bollywood has distanced itself from the clichéd prototype of a mother whose entire existence revolves around the purpose of being a mother. The film *Tribhanga* challenges the romantic idealization of a mother portraying three generations of women intertwined in a dysfunctional relationship. Using this film, I wish to demystify certain gender-specific stereotypes and dynamics of creation. This film goes far beyond the typical portrayal of the mother as a benevolent goddess; rather it acknowledges a female artist's unique sensibility. The film also helps us understand the beautiful yet complex relationship between a mother and daughter.

**Keywords:** *Mother, Dysfunctional Relationship, Stereotypes, Female Filmmakers, and Unique Sensibility.*

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“The cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story” – Adrienne Rich (Rich 225)

The film *Tribhanga* is Renuka Shahane’s widely lauded directorial venture in the pantheon of essential mother-daughter relationship movies, not because it portrays the essential altruistic relationship between them, but because it’s a rare film that fully acknowledges the complexity behind the mother-daughter relationship. The film posits how a mother’s best intention for her child can be muddled and maliciously disrupted by the lack of communication. *Tribhanga* represents three generations of women, Tanvi Azmi is Nayan, an iconoclastic acclaimed writer, mother of Anuradha (enacted by Kajol) a Bollywood dancer-actor with eccentricities of her own, and her daughter Masha (played by Mithila Palkar) a woman who is willing to compromise on anything to have a ‘normal’ family which she has been deprived of. It is the brain-stroke of Nayan that puts her into a coma and forces the estranged family to reconcile, in the presence of Milan, the Hindi speaking biographer of Nayan. The narrative progresses by revealing anecdotes of the past, dichotomously structured.

The film swiftly sweeps between moments of tenderness and love, undercut by moments of passive-aggressive hostility. Shahane’s chronicle entails a story of attachment that portrays the mother and daughter struggling to navigate their boundaries at a time when the mother’s desire for subjectivity and a daughter’s fear of abandonment are particularly at war with one another. Movies ranging from *Veer Zaara* to *Ram-Leela* have portrayed disrupted female mother-daughter relationships, but the mothers in these films have served as the embodiment of oppressive patterns of behaviour and harbingers of patriarchal notions. As a consequence, neither of the female

characters have managed to emphasize or understand each other completely. *Tribhanga* distances itself from the typically clichéd melodrama of mother-daughter bonding and stresses the struggle and separation. Both Nayan and Anu raise doubts upon the concept of a ‘perfect’ mother/woman, challenging the one-dimensional image of the all-sacrificing mother. Nayan and Anu are female characters who remain ‘human’ with all their ‘unnatural cravings.’ Through this film, motherhood in its myriad shades is brought out from the peripheries and treated with reverence, thereby studying women as individuals and not typecast reductions.

Nayan is a devoted writer, who could rarely spare time for her toddlers. She chooses to escape the oppressive stranglehold of her mother-in-law and raise her children single-handedly away from her husband’s home. Her relationship with Anu was already acerbic due to her nonchalance and coldness towards her; however, it takes an ugly turn when Nayan marries a photographer Vikram who turns out to be the lecherous molester of her daughter. Nayan who remains oblivious to these events occurring under her nose becomes the victim of Anu’s wrath who dubs her as a selfish woman devoid of warmth and affection. Although it is the lack of communication that plays the catalyst in severing the mother-daughter ties, it would be erroneous to deem Nayan as a bad mother. It has been stated that the good mother ideal is a non-flexible image and although it may sometimes appear that this image celebrates the power of maternal, it is crucial to note how it also yokes the woman who mothers with impossible pressures, working to eradicate her complex subject-in-processes by absorbing her into a hegemonic and reified category of a mother.” It is for the sake of emotional fulfillment that Nayan devoted much of her time to writing. Moreover, being the sole breadwinner of her family she had to fend for her children

through her work. The good/bad mother dichotomy is assiduously built by society to incarcerate women to the exemplary role of a devoted wife and mother. A good mother is eulogised for being sacrificial and self-effacing while a woman who wishes not to have her own identity superseded by the role of a mother is dubbed as bad. It is Anu's interpellated mind which freezes her natural impulses for her mother. It is her patriarchal upbringing that makes Anu balk at the bold decision of her mother in giving precedence to her female desire which was never subsumed by her maternal instincts.

Anu couldn't comprehend the misery and desperation behind her mother's maverick choices. Nayan was trapped in a dysfunctional relationship with Vinayak, Anu's father who failed to appreciate both her art and artistic isolation. It is important to note that Nayan's marriage with Vinayak couldn't withstand the ravages of time because Vinayak unlike Nayan wasn't an artist. Nayan's creative temperament was acknowledged by Vikram a photographer himself. "Due to his mad obsession, I began seeing myself from a different perspective. I fell in love with myself..." Nayan laments. She confesses never experiencing passion with Vinayak. Even Nayan's relationship in the autumn years of her life with the painter Bhaskar Raina reveals that her infatuation with the men in her life is not sexual rather emotional or psychological. Motherhood could not compensate for the emotional void of Nayan's life; neither had it evoked in her a sense of selfless love that the society demanded.

After being molested in her own home Anu couldn't raise a voice against her perpetrator because of her scarred relationship with her mother. Psychologist Hendrika Freud has noted that "women often interpret their detachment as a form of aggression that might harm the mother. Thus they tend to conceal their anger and turn it

against themselves in the form of feelings of guilt, or masochism" (Freud 117). Anu could not muster up the courage to speak to her mother about the violation committed on her body; rather she chose to slit her vein in a sadomasochistic manner. However, Nayan again becomes the victim of Anu's outburst of senseless rage during Anu's obnoxious fight with her live-in partner Dmitri. Nayan who had been busy at a literary event was apprised of the fight by the house owner of Anu's rented apartment Dandekar and Dmitri himself. Thereafter Nayan barged into Anu's apartment inquiring about the ruckus caused and oblivious to the fact that it was Dmitri who had kicked and abused the eight months pregnant Anu. Anu who had been quietly listening to the conversation between the maid and her mother indignantly rushed in and accused her mother with a litany of abuses. "You don't care about me, you don't care about anyone. You are a sick woman," cried Anu. When reprimanded by her maid for her recalcitrant behaviour with her birth giver she impulsively replied, "Is this how a mother is supposed to be?"

After this incident, Anu severed all her ties with her mother and began to address her with her maiden name 'Nayan.' Anu's denial of the bond with her mother is the manifestation of her anger for not receiving the nurture and love that she expected from her mother. Nayan who loved Anu dearly couldn't muster up the courage to apologize to her daughter and convince her to mend their frayed relationship. Nayan regretfully confides to her biographer Milan, "I became Nayan instead of mom. Both my kids disowned me as a mother."

Nayan's subjectivity is shaped and constructed at the cost of Anu's discourse of neglect. Anu's unbridled hate for her mother is evident even after witnessing her mother in a state of coma. When Robindro, her brother tries to placate her

and asks her to forgive their heedless mother, Anu reminds him of the atrocities that Nayan had committed by depriving them of legitimate paternal affection, a secure home and a conventional family. She even holds Nayan culpable for the travail that they have faced due to her sudden brain stroke. Shahane has adroitly created mothers with heedless traits; however, there is neither covert nor explicit censure for their unconcern. Anu's daughterly devotion for Nayan had dissipated quite early in life, but it would be wrong to attest that her love for her mother has completely eroded. When Milan, Nayan's biographer senselessly confesses that Nayan never wanted the "body burning ritual after her death," Anu indignantly lashes out at him saying, "first of all, let me tell you, it is not burn, it is cremate. Secondly, she's not dead yet." Anu's instincts are again miraculously softened when she helps the nurse in performing the act of sponging unconscious Nayan. For the first time, she fondly holds Nayan's hand and calls her 'Mom.'

The relationship between Nayan and Anu is one of total separation which is equally detrimental as a symbolic illusion the relationship that exists between Anu and her daughter Masha. In total separation, the daughter detaches herself from her mother yet continues to need her throughout her life as a model and counsellor. Throughout the film, we see Anu seeking the validation and love of her mother despite their unamicable relationship. Symbiotic illusion is a disorder comprising of mutual dependency that impedes the normal maturation process and leaves no room for independence. It has been documented by Hendrika Freud that mothers who had a dysfunctional relationship with their own mothers tend to be overprotective towards their children. Anu's discordant relationship with her own mother made her overtly possessive towards Masha. Anu unlike her mother never gambled with her private space, she never allowed her boyfriends to

enter her house in the presence of Masha. To protect her child, Anu ferociously beat up Dimitri when he kicked her while she was pregnant. Anu even goes to the extent of interfering in the familial matters of Masha after her marriage.

In her book *Electra vs Oedipus*, Hendrika Freud has noted that parenthood doesn't only consist of conscious interaction with children, but there are also messages unconsciously transmitted. The 'repetitive compulsion,' i.e, patterns repeating themselves in successive generations often makes a woman repeat the actions of her own mother with every phase of life, the "mother whom they do not want to resemble, of whom they are afraid, with whom they do not want to identify, on whom they do not want to be dependent again" (Freud 117). At the hospital, Anu and Masha's brief moment of mutual understanding is affected when Anu learns that Masha has committed a gender determination test at the behest of her in laws. Anu a woman who refuses to be straitjacketed patronizes her daughter for the mindless act. Masha who had hitherto maintained her demure pours out her long-stifled accusations against her mother. Masha recalls how she had masochistically concealed the discrimination that she faced in school due to the iconoclastic attitude of her single mother. In a bout of disgust and sudden effusion of wrath, Masha accuses how Anu could never realize that her daughter was being heckled and tortured by the filthy sneers and glares of society. After pouring out her grudge Masha boasts that atleast she will be able to provide her child with a 'normal' family and a father that she was deprived of. Inadvertently, to her horror Anu experiences a strong identification with her mother. For the first time in her life Anu could comprehend the complex maternal psychology of her own mother.

Masha's adverse experiences during her childhood and adolescence had coloured her view of

a 'family.' Masha always yearned for a socially labelled 'normal' family. Her craving was so profound that she marries into an orthodox household and even goes to the extent of performing a gender determination test to satiate her in-laws. Immediately after Masha's impulsive and unexpected outburst, Anu realizes her mistake and apologizes to her, something that Nayan could never do. Throughout the film Nayan and Anu are portrayed in constant opposition. However, it is Anu herself who acknowledges that they both have similar strong personalities beyond their façade. When Anu and Masha reconcile after their heated conflict, Anu confides, "whether it's your grandma or me, we have made some fucked up choices, I know. But they were all our choices. Nobody imposed their choices on us." Despite their confrontations, Anu and Nayan both can be read as a celebration of female independence and self-definition. The female characters in this film recognize that each woman growing into a hostile world "need a very profound kind of loving" (Rich 110).

The film achieves a certain degree of closure as a result of the construction and the editing; both the opening and ending delve into the relationship of Nayan, Anu and Masha. However, it is not a closed ending, since Nayan couldn't intently communicate with Anu in person; it is only through a letter that she discovers after Nayan's death, the true intentions of her mother. Even, Anu's sincere words of forgiveness to her mother remain unheard by the unconscious Nayan who eventually slips to death. It is through the series of introspective shots at the end that implies that though there is a physical distance between them, there is emotional proximity.

Shahane's wry humour both entertains and demystifies notions of gender stereotypes. By employing sensitive issues such as molestation and the ability to be candid about it, Shahane dis-

mantles the taboos associated with women's bodies. The Bechdel test is an efficient means used to examine the adequacy of the representation of women in movies and other media. The most pertinent question that the test usually asks is whether the women characters in the film talk about something other than a man? An assessment of *Tribhanga* using the Bechdel methodology reveals that the conversation between the pivotal characters in the film doesn't involve traditional stereotypical dialogic content. Shahane has excelled in obfuscating the male-centric discussion in the film by providing preponderance to Anu's reason for severing her ties with her mother, while Robindro's reason for not maintaining an amicable relationship with his mother stems from his unfaltering love for his sister Anu. Shahane's acute authorial intelligence of using vignettes from the past helps create mother-daughter interplay, emphasizing that the mother-daughter relationship is not always altruistic but at times filtered messily through envy and resentment.

Shahane has portrayed mothers with their raw emotions of selfishness, nonchalance and narcissism without being critical about them. When we probe into the reason behind their dissentious attitude with a deep, penetrative insight, we realize that each one of them is the victim of societal, marital, or emotional repression. *Tribhanga* tries to dismantle the parochial ideas associated with motherhood and posit that motherhood is not the supreme fulfillment for every woman and that not every woman's fulfillment of a biological urge to procreate is followed by an impulse to nurture.

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# Marriage as a 'tool': A Reading of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet*

Dr. Meena Sharma\*

## Abstract

The gendered notions of identity prevalent during Shakespeare's time rendered women weak, unstable, and frail in terms of their morals and physical and intellectual attributes. Relationships and roles within the family and society were based on notions of masculinity and femininity for men and women alike. Much of Shakespeare's work depicts the stereotypical roles and construction of gender during the time. In his plays, women appear in varied roles but are ultimately made to subscribe to the patriarchal order. This paper will focus on the importance of the father in the family, especially his role concerning the marriage of the daughter. It will analyse the characters of Portia in *Merchant of Venice* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and attempt to establish how the fathers control the life and choices of the daughters and marriage works as a 'tool' for this purpose. The paper also argues that Portia obeys her father and meets a 'happy end,' but Juliet, who tries to assert her agency, faces tragic consequences. For this, the paper would take recourse to the understanding of gender relations during Shakespeare's time and examine how his plays, while reflecting the contemporary attitudes towards gender, also attempts to destabilise and interrogate the normative gender roles.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Family, Father, Daughter, and Marriage.*

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The roles of men and women in Early Modern England, both within the family and society, were based on gendered notions of identity prevalent during the time. Discourses of law, religion, medicine and physiology helped promote the idea of masculinity and femininity, charting gender-specific identities and roles creating an ideology that posited women as weak and frail and men as next to the angels. Thus the father in Shakespeare's time enjoyed considerable power over his family, which was also made explicit in the speeches of James I: "Kings are also compared to fathers of families; for a king is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people." The authority and position of the father, especially concerning daughters, plays a crucial role in the plays of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays reflect much of the contemporary popular attitudes of the time; women characters in his plays usually occupy the margins, and if powerful, they are 'demonised' or seen as 'unchaste.' It can be said that in his plays, Shakespeare depicts varieties of womanhood which can help us understand how gender played out in reality during his time.

Gendered notions of identity, which rendered women weaker than men, had a significant effect on the education, marriage of daughters, marital relationships the lives of widows. Against this backdrop, this paper will attempt to understand the position of women with specific reference to the institution of marriage as depicted in Shakespeare's plays. It would argue that though Shakespeare's plays appear to endorse gender-specific roles, it also destabilises and interrogates the normative, stereotypical gender roles and attributes, which allows for some independent movement on the part of the women. However, one observes that at the end of the plays, gender hierarchy and order is restored, and women submit or are made to submit to the patriarchal authority.

## Discussion

It was very common back in Elizabethan England to compel women into marriages to receive power, legacy, dowry or land in exchange. Considerations other than love and liking were instrumental in determining marriage partners, and fathers played a significant role in determining the children's marriage, particularly of the daughters. It may be mentioned here that even though the Queen herself was an unmarried woman, the roles of women in society were extremely restricted. The construction of female characters in Shakespeare's plays reflects the Elizabethan image of women in general. For all that, Shakespeare supports the English Renaissance stereotypes of genders, their roles and responsibilities in society; at the same time, he also puts their representations into question, challenges, and revises them.

Therefore, any exploration of women's roles in Shakespeare's plays also necessitates questions on the issues related to marriage. It can be said that marriage in Shakespeare's plays is a crucial dramatic action and a focus for tension and also reconciliation between the sexes. According to Carol Thomas Neely, "Movements towards marriage constitute the subject of the comedies; disrupted marriages are prominent in many of the tragedies; the establishment or re-establishment of marriage in one or two generations is the symbol of harmony in the late romances" (1). Lisa Hopkins also refers to the "pervading obsession with marriage" (36) as an important aspect of in Shakespearean comedies.

It can be said that marriage is the social context that centrally defines the female characters in Shakespeare's plays; with the few exceptions, their conflict, crisis and character development occur in connection with wooing, wedding and

marriage. Their roles and status are determined by their place in the paradigm of marriage – maiden / wife / widow-which likewise governed the lives of Renaissance women. The introduction to a Jacobean women's legal handbook starkly notes the inevitability and restrictiveness of this paradigm for women: "All of them are understood either married or to be married and their desires are subjects to their husbands." Even exceptional historical women like Queen Elizabeth or extraordinary characters do not escape definition in terms of the marriage paradigm. Elizabeth made strategic use of the conventional role she eschewed, manipulating her marriageability to gain political advantage and presenting herself as the wife to England and mother to her people. Even Cleopatra creates for herself a symbolic marriage to Antony at the end of the play. Thus, a balanced evaluation of the powers and limits of the roles of women in Shakespeare's plays should also involve an examination of these women in the context of marriage. Marriage is the locus of sexual anxiety in the plays of Shakespeare because it was the focus of multiple pressures in a culture in which Shakespeare lived and worked.

This paper discusses the characters of Portia in *Merchant of Venice* and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. The characters would be examined to understand the father-daughter relationship and how marriage functioned as an apparatus to control women. An examination of Shakespeare's plays reveals that some of the women characters in Shakespeare challenge dominant fathers and, thereby, a powerful patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy takes different forms and is portrayed with varying degrees of emphasis in Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's England, a daughter was considered a father's property, and the father had the right to pass her on to the man he thought would best serve his need. In this context, the rebellion

of a daughter and her refusal to conform to her father's wishes has serious consequences in the Shakespearean text.

In *Merchant of Venice*, Portia is a wealthy and powerful heiress, but she does not pose a threat to the patriarchal world. Her wealth and power are in the hands of the two men in her life: her father, who controls her even from the grave and Bassanio, to whom her wealth is transferred after marriage. Portia is allowed to control the movements of the play, but she is only a medium through which wealth is circulated and redistributed to Venice's Christian males. Thus Portia's wealth goes to Bassanio, Antonio's is magically restored through her agency, and Shylock's is given over to the state through a law unearthed by Portia/ Balthazar. Portia is thus the bearer of fortune for Bassanio, Antonio and Lorenzo. Lorenzo says she drops manna upon the males of Venice: "Fair ladies you drop manna in the way of starved people" (5.1.294-95). Moreover, Bassanio sees her as a lady "richly left" (1.1.160).

Portia is powerful, but she is her father's property: even from the grave, he has the legal and moral right to decide the most intimate concerns of her life. Furthermore, when married, she is expected to transfer control of her life and living from her father's hands to the man who marries her. Portia's father has tried to ensure that his daughter and his rich estate will continue to prosper after his death. Portia's father takes the care of his estate totally out of his daughter's hands, completely disregarding her intelligence and common sense. Portia cannot even veto her father's choice of a husband, a right increasingly accepted in Elizabethan times. Certainly, with both her parents dead and apparently of capable of managing the estate well; Portia could expect to have some influence over her marriage.

Portia first appears in act 1, scene 2. when we see her struggling to balance her needs as an individual against the demands of the patriarchal society in which she lives. This struggle makes her “weary of this great world” (1.2.1). She knows she should conform to her father’s will, but she also desperately wants to control her choice of a husband. Nerissa sees Portia’s miseries in the same ‘abundance’ as her good fortune. The conflict in Portia’s mind is apparent when she says to Nerissa:

O me, the word ‘chooses’! I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa that I cannot choose one nor refuse none? (1.3.19-20)

Despite Portia’s scruples and determination to live by the rules, her discussion with Nerissa in act 1 admits the possibility of rebellion against her father’s authority. However, Nerissa has complete faith in Portia’s virtuous father because “holy men at their death have good inspirations”(1.2.25).

Thus, though Portia chafes against this patriarchal control, she eventually accepts it, partly out of trust and duty and partly because she finds that it ultimately works to her advantage. When Nerissa announces that at least some undesirable suitors have been driven away by Portia’s father’s demands, the will, seems to have worked for her. This success makes her more willing to accept the demands of the patriarchal authority and submit both her possessions and her person to her husband. She resolves, “If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my, father’s will” (1.2.104-6).

The casket scene in act 3, when Bassanio comes as a suitor to try his luck, sensitively reveals

Portia’s conflict between independence and submission. Portia is caught between her desire to give Bassanio clues about how to choose and her reluctance to betray her father’s will: “I could teach you How to choose right, but then I am forsworn” (3.2.10-12). She is also torn between her desire for Bassanio and her anxiety about submitting herself to him.

One half of me is yours, the other half yours -

Mine own, I would say: but if mine then yours,

And so all yours. (3.2.16-18)

When Bassanio, fortunately for him and Portia, chooses the right casket, Portia then declares her submission to him thus:

She is not bred so dull but she can learn;

Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit

Commits itself to yours to be directed

As from her lord, her governor, her king.

Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours

Is now converted. But now I was the lord

Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,

Queen o’er myself; and even now, but now,

This house, these servants, and this same myself

Are yours, my lord. (3.2.161-172)

The ring that she gives Bassanio is a symbol of her trust in him and in the institution of marriage in the patriarchal world. It is also a representation of Portia's acceptance of the Elizabethan marriage codes, which were characterised by women's subjugation, loss of legal rights, and their status as goods or chattel. Portia conforms to the demands of her society and places her entire life and living not only into her husband's hands but also to Antonio. She tells Lorenzo, "this Antonio, Being the bosom lover of my lord, Must needs be like my lord." Even her ambitions are defined within the ambit of male desire and must be as per acceptable social conventions. She outlines the contours of excellence but seasons them with patriarchal qualifications. A man could not have put it better if he was writing a wish list on behalf of his wife. Portia's self-fashioning as an ideal Venetian girl is as much remarkable for its wit as for its safe boundaries:

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,

Such as I am: though for myself alone

I would not be ambitious in my wish,

To wish myself much better; yet for you

I would be trebled twenty times myself;

A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times

More rich;

That only to stand high in your account

I might in virtue, beauties, livings, friends,

Exceed account. (3.2.151-57)

This is a classic portrayal of a dream woman, beautiful, intelligent, and submissive at the same time. To ensure that a woman does not look better than her husband, "the full sum of [woman]/ Is sum of something, which, to term in gross,/ Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised" (3.2.160-61). The play is on the sexual experience of the girl, as yet uninitiated, but the accent is on "she is not yet so old, ... she may learn." It is necessary to look at these lines by Portia as a pointed navigation of early modern society through male sexual fantasies regarding future brides. The ideal bride must be innocent and yet interested, docile in the public place, and yet sufficiently interested in serving her husband in any manner he wishes. Once Portia confirms her submission to her husband, she is allowed to exercise her independence.

Interestingly, in the trial scene at the Venetian court, Portia confronts a man over a matter which was thought to be outside a women's sphere: the juridical system. She not only fights a case for Antonio but also wins it. Portia is able to break the constraints of gender and exercise her verbal acumen and also show her abilities as a lawyer through her cross-dressing. Disguised as a man, she is accepted and admired for her perceptive logic and presence of mind. It must be noted, however, that this same woman was not even permitted to exercise her mind in choosing a husband. Moreover, she has already shown her faith in the institution of marriage. Her transgressive act is validated by the play's resolution where she becomes a pliable wife. Moreover, the cross-dressing at court is still within the woman's part as it is meant to serve the husband insofar as his financial and homosocial needs are concerned.

From Portia's perspective and that of the Venetians, she manages to hold sway over Shylock, the despised "Other." Portia, therefore, sides with the Venetian male Christian world in her inter-

pretation of the law. It is a political necessity, and she has to play her part to retain whatever control she can have over her property as well as her husband. In other words, she is allowed to fight a battle in a public place as long as she unequivocally expresses her loyalty to her owners. To the extent that she is willing to publicise her loyalty to the homosocial ideology of the Venetian Christian male, she is safe and free to do as she pleases. Her wit and wisdom are already circumscribed by institutional and ideological apparatuses. She does not question her father's authority to direct her marriage, and her submission to her father's 'wisdom' is seen to work favourably for her.

*Romeo and Juliet* present a different picture of the workings of patriarchy. This play depicts the rebellion of thirteen-year-old Juliet against her materialistic father, who, within the tradition of the times, sees himself as an absolute lord over his family. Juliet, Capulet's daughter, defies her father by secretly marrying Romeo, the son of Montague, her family's great enemy. Capulet arranges his daughter's marriage with Paris, a young nobleman of Verona, but Juliet does not comply with her father's wishes. With the help of Friar Lawrence, she succeeds in avoiding the marriage; but a daughter who defies her father cannot go unpunished. The order in the play is restored only by the death of the two lovers at the end, leading to a reconciliation of the two families. Juliet's choice of a husband without her father's influence proves a catalyst, though a bitter one, for the changes necessary to revitalise society. According to Coppelia Kahn, "The feud is an extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive" (84).

As depicted in the play, the culture of Verona is perfectly integrated into the patriarchal system. It is a culture where the male code of honour and

blood feuds are given high value. In this culture, women, as Mercutio says, are only sexual objects to "raise the spirits of men." The patriarchal culture of Verona can also be seen in the difference in treatment between sons and daughters. Romeo's parents feel totally unconcerned about his marrying and are never in open conflict with him. Juliet's parents, on the other hand, assert their right to determine her husband from the moment the play begins. Standing as the voice of despotic patriarchy, Capulet has always regarded his daughter's marriage as a topic of significant importance. His concern has always been to find a suitable match for his daughter. Convinced of his absolute power and right over his daughter, he expects complete submission and obedience to his decisions. Thus when the Count of Paris expresses his desire to marry Juliet, Capulet at first feels that Juliet is still very young and a "stranger" in the world because:

She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;

Let two more summers wither in their pride

Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.  
(1.2.9-11)

But within a couple of days, he fixes Juliet's marriage with Paris without even bothering to ask her. Capulet considers his daughter as property, to trade or not to trade, as the "market" demands. However, Juliet has already rebelled against her father by secretly marrying Romeo, the son of her family's greatest enemy. Lady Capulet's words as she discloses the news/order from her father to Juliet shows that marriage was, in fact, a gift which a father could give, according to his choice, to a daughter at the time he thinks is most appropriate:

Well, well, thou hast a careful father,  
child;

One who, to put thee from thy heaviness,

Hath sorted out a sudden day of joy

That thou expect'st not, nor I look'd not  
for. (3.4.107-110)

Indeed Juliet had never expected such a gift. The timing of the confrontation is particularly cruel. Juliet has just consummated her marriage and bade her young husband a wrenching farewell. Romeo is making his way out of the Capulet orchard even as her parents enter her room. But, Juliet never ventures to reveal the true situation to her father. When Juliet staunchly disobeys and refuses to marry Paris and asks for some more time, her father thinks her to be the most ungrateful daughter because:

How! Will she none? Doth she not give  
us thanks?

Is she not proud? Doth she not count  
her bles'd,

Unworthy as she is, that we have  
wrought

So worthy a gentleman to be her bride-  
groom?(3.4.142-145)

Juliet dare not tell her father that her marriage is not possible because she is already married and, Capulet rages against her, threatens her, and berates Juliet. It shows the scalding force of a father's rage—wave after wave of insults, threats, and curses. The quarrel escalates to the point that Capulet issues Juliet a stark ultimatum:

Graze where you will, you shall not  
house with me:

Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.

Thursday is near; lay hand on heart,  
advise:

An you be mine, I'll give you to my  
friend;

An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die i'  
the streets, (3.4.189-193)

In the marriage mart, a daughter is like a commodity who has to agree to be sold to the bidder her father chooses. Juliet's rebellion is thus felt like a direct attack on his patriarchal authority. His understanding of gender roles is so fixed in his mind that any hope of compassion from him is inconceivable. The humiliating words he uses to describe his daughter ("green-sickness carrion," "baggage," "disobedient wretch," [3.5.155; 159]) shows that he treats women as inferior beings. It is best exemplified in the character of his wife, Lady Capulet, who also feels no empathy for her daughter.

Lady Capulet has learnt to submit to her husband's will and does not seem to have a mind of her own. Her fear of the male is manifested when she turns away from reporting Juliet's unwillingness to marry her husband: "Here comes your father; tell him so yourself, / And see how he will take it at your hands" (3.5.124-125). As she has accepted the constraints of her role as a woman, she is incapable of hearing or identifying with Juliet and makes it clear that she is blameless in Juliet's defiance of authority. As she fully supports the patriarchal authority of her husband, she naturally rejects her daughter: "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word / Do as thou wilt, for I am done with thee" (3.5.202-203). Lady Capulet is seen to have internalised her submissive position in the family. In this context,

Juliet's rebellion and growth into womanhood are thus seen in her refusal to remain an easily manipulated girl under her father's thumb. The Nurse, who first appears, avant-garde in her thoughts about marriage and the legitimacy for a woman to choose her husband, also changes her mind and asks Juliet to forget Romeo and yield to her father's demands.

Isolated by the events, Juliet approaches Friar Lawrence for help; but she finds herself forced to yield to gender constraints when the Friar counsels her to pretend submission to her parent's demands to marry Paris. Nevertheless, this is merely a trick because the Friar gives her a "distilled liquor" (3.4) which makes her swoon and appear dead on the day of her marriage to Paris. Though she is able to escape marriage by this trick, the news of her death spreads to Romeo, who is banished on charges of murder. Romeo kills Paris and poisons himself. When Juliet wakes up from her swoon and finds Romeo dead, she stabs herself to death. Her suicide represents the culmination of her defiance to the patriarchal authority, as Capulet says at the end of the play, "poor sacrifices of our enmity" (5.3.303).

In Shakespeare's England, the home was the foundation of social order, and marriage was an effective means of preservation of lineage and the succession of the property. From this perspective, the most significant cause of the tragedy of the young lovers in the play rests not on their "star-crossed fate as the chorus states in the prologue, but upon the way they bring destruction upon themselves by violating the norms of society in which they lived; a society, which demanded strict filial obedience and loyalty to the traditional friendships and enemies of lineage. This society was patriarchal, a system where a father was worshipped like a God. The play

seems to suggest that the tragic death of a rebellious daughter like Juliet is destined by "work of heaven" (5.3.261). As Friar Lawrence says, "A great power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents" (5.3.155).

### Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that in both these plays, Shakespeare concentrates on the perversity of the father's claim to direct their daughters in marriage. The Elizabethans were well attuned to a father's claims of legal and emotional interest in the daughter's marriage. The thwarting of the father's expectations brings forth imprecations and diatribes of surpassing bitterness for the daughters, as seen in the case of Juliet. Conversely, when the daughter obeys and respects her father's choice/decision, the result is rewarding, as seen in the case of marriage. According to Charles Frye, "the concomitant absence of any son's" makes these play a ground for the father-daughter conflict. The father's concern of economic and emotional security and of political control and generational extension of line helps to dictate the father's interest in the choice of his daughter's marriage partner. As Frye says: "when the daughter chooses radically against the father's will, she effectively shuts him off from patriarchal domination of the son-in-law and consequent son like an extension of his powers and values." (*The Woman's Part* 298)

However, the father-daughter conflict is not restricted to issues of marriage alone. It is more an assertion of patriarchal will and power over the daughter(s) that is at stake. As discussed in this chapter, the characters of Portia and Juliet and the father-daughter relationship depict the father as an all-powerful figure with complete authority and the right to determine whom their daughters will wed. Submission to the father's author-

ity and wise judgements allows Portia some space and movement, while Juliet's refusal to obey her father results in tragic consequences. As stated in the "Homily on the State of Matrimony," marriage served "to avoid sin and offence and to increase the kingdom of God," and thus it was an important institution of the time. Shakespeare's plays portray different 'models' of the institution of marriage. His plays can be further studied to explore different dimensions of gender relations, many of which resemble the contemporary issues of marriage and marital relationships.

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# Racial Discrimination and Identity Crisis in Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home*

Dr. Kavita Arya\*

## Abstract

*Flying Home* (1944) is one of the most appreciated short stories of Ralph Ellison, a famous American novelist and story teller of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The story is set during the World War-II and deals with the life-long ambition and aspiration of a black American young man to defy racism prevalent in the US and prove his ability and efficiency in piloting an airplane like his white counterparts. But while on a test flight in an Advanced Trainer, he was flying high in the sky around the white world, he gets excited and maneuvers the plane to prove himself. But his maneuver takes a dangerous turn and, as he tries to control the airplane, a buzzard hits the windscreen of his airplane which crash-lands in the field of a white man. He crashes in a farmland in rural Alabama and breaks his ankle. An old black sharecropper and his son save him and take him to the hospital. This paper examines the social injustice of racial discrimination as seen from the eyes of the young black pilot and protagonist who suffers from inner conflict because of his loathing for his own folks and his desire of endorsement from the white men and struggles to resolve this conflict.

**Keywords:** *Racism, Discrimination, Buzzard, Alienation, Isolation, White-World, Black- Society, and White-Supremacy.*

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**F**lying Home, was first published in *Cross Section* in 1944, a year before Ellison started writing his first novel and masterpiece *Invisible Man* (1952), while he was serving in the merchant marine. It is Ellison's longest short story and not only the last story but also the story to be used in the title of the collection of Ellison's short stories *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1998). It is the story of a young Afro-American Air Force trainee pilot named Todd, whose long cherished ambition of becoming a pilot crashes along with his plane when he flies into a buzzard on a training flight. As he accidentally crash-lands on a field, he is found by an old sharecropper, Jefferson who along with his son, Teddy, tries to solve his problem and in the process, the injured pilot is confronted to all kinds of reaction and racism.

The story is set in the time of the *World War-II*, a time when African-Americans did not enjoy the same rights as whites. Todd has worked hard all his life to earn a chance to prove that African-American could fly a combat plane the same way as any white militant. Todd is the first ever black candidate to be accepted into the Air Force. He is a black pilot, a Northerner, who belongs to a group of black World War-II pilots who trained at the famed Tuskegee Institute but were only reluctantly deployed for combat missions. So, when he is on a routine flight in an Advanced Trainer Aircraft, it is hit by a bird and brought down to earth. When he awakes from the crash, he discovers that his ankle was broken and he was unable to walk. The place-rural Alabama-where he has crashed his plane is also important because it was associated with the long history of his ancestors who had toiled under slavery in the plantations of the whites.

In fact, during his first test flight in Flight Training School in Macon County, Alabama, Todd feels so over-excited and nervous that he crashes the

plane on a nearby farm. In the height of his excitement and eagerness to prove himself, he went too fast, stalling the plane which made him lose control, and before he could regain it, he hit a bird that broke the windshield and led to his crash. It was a buzzard which had hit the windshield of the plane and caused the crash to happen. Todd says, "The buzzard knocked me back to a hundred years" (126). The pre-crash events, has been described as follows "But he had been flying too high and too fast. He had climbed steeply away in exultation. Too steeply, he thought. And one of the first rules you learn is that if the angle of thrust is too steep the plane goes into a spin. And then, instead of pulling out of it and going into dive you let a buzzard panic you. A lousy buzzard" (129)! Jefferson, the black sharecropper who rushes to rescue Todd mentions that in folklores buzzards feed on the dead horses and eat nothing that is alive and informs that they were in plenty in that area, and they were called "Jimcrows" i.e. anti-black.

Todd has fallen from the cockpit and is trying to stand up. But he lies in pain with his fractured ankle. Jefferson, and his son, Teddy, rush to save the disoriented pilot. But in the hot and blinding sun, Todd could not make out whether they were black or white. "For a moment an old fear of being touched by white hands seized him" (123). But the language used by Jefferson "You hurt bad?" brings the comfort that they are Negroes. He tells Jefferson that he has hurt his ankle. As Jefferson quickly bends and removes his shoes, he feels relief. Jefferson wants to get him to a doctor, but Todd wants to get the plane back to the field before his officers were displeased. But he could not because he was not even able to stand up. Jefferson advises him against making any movement lest it should get worse and lead to the cutting off his foot. He offers to take him to the nearby town on his ox but the thought of riding an ox fills Todd with disgust:

Thoughts of himself riding an ox through the town, past streets full of white faces, down the concrete runways of the airfield, made swift images of humiliation in his mind (125).

Todd has crashed in the farm land of Dabney Graves, a white land owner Jefferson works for. Graves is not very fond of black individuals. Jefferson asks his son to get Mr. Graves while he helps Todd off the plane. Todd has a broken ankle but he feels no pain in his mind as he despairs over his mistake that will cost not only his career as a pilot but also many Afro-Americans jobs and respect. Todd is convinced that his incompetence will be the basis of characterization for all Afro-Americans who wish to join the Air Force. He will never get another chance to fly. Todd's apprehension that the crash had spoilt his career as a pilot may be indirectly associated with the real life incidents in the life of Ralph Ellison. Ellison was admitted to the Tuskegee Institute, the prestigious all black university in Alabama, in 1933 because it needed a trumpet player like him in its orchestra. But later he found that even that all black university was no less class conscious than white institutions generally were. Ellison had to go to New York City in the summer of 1936 and settle at YMCA on 135<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, then "the cultural capital of Black America" to earn expenses for his senior year at Tuskegee, but he could never return to his studies at Tuskegee and never become a professional musician.

Todd is aware that American Army Air Force had already been quite discriminatory in respect of the aspiring black pilots and his failure would provide it further teeth to reject the black aspirants. Neeta Lalwani, in her scholarly article on *Flying Home* puts it in the following words:

It is noteworthy that Ellison has taken the content of his story from an historical event during World War-II when Judge

William H. Hastie who served as a civilian aide to Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, resigned in 1943 in protest over what he called "the reactionary policies and discriminatory practices of the Army Air Force. Judge Haste commented, "The simple fact is that the air command does not want Negro pilots flying in and out of various fields, eating, sleeping and mingling with other personnel, as a service pilot must do in carrying out his mission (116).

Susan L. Blake also refers to the former military practice in the US Armed Forces of withholding from blacks the opportunity to fly airplanes and observes:

The protagonist in the story is a student at the Negro Air School in Tuskegee, established during World War-II in response to complaints about discrimination against blacks in pilot training. The story about the school was that it trained black men to fly but never graduated them to combat. Todd, the flier in this story, who feels he acquires dignity from his airplane and the appreciation of his white officers and shame from his relationship with ignorant black men, has run into a buzzard and crashed in a white man's field (83).

Todd himself, when his mind drifts off from the crash site, recalls such discrimination mentioned in a letter, he had received from his girlfriend back home. His girl-friend had warned him against his need for approval from the whites as it clouded his judgment. His girl-friend, whom he wanted to impress with his skills of flying, had referred to in her last letter:

Todd, I don't need the papers to tell me you had the intelligence to fly. And I have always known you to be as brave as anyone else.

The papers annoy me. Don't you be contented to prove over and over again that you're brave or skillful just because you are black, Todd. I think they keep beating that dead horse because they don't want to say why you boys are not yet fighting. I'm really disappointed, Todd. Anyone with brain can learn to fly, but then what. What about using it, and who will you see it for? I wish, dear, you'd write about this. I sometimes think they're playing a trick on us. It's very humiliating... (125).

Perhaps he had tried to associate his achievement with the achievement of his race which his girlfriend could not understand and appreciate but Todd knew that his white trainers never assigned his mistakes as the mistakes of an individual but as the mistake of his whole race. He reflects,

What does she know of humiliation? She's never been down South. *Now* the humiliation would come. When you must have them judge you, knowing that they never accept your mistakes as your own but hold it against your whole race-that was humiliation (125).

For Todd, the situation was all the more humiliating as he could never be simply himself in the presence of this old black ignorant man, Jefferson. So, to escape the humiliation of riding an ox to town, Todd tells Jefferson that he had orders not to leave the ship. Instead of identifying himself with black Jefferson and his son, Todd identifies himself with the flying machine:

I am naked without it....only dignity I have (126).

For him, the airplane was not a machine but a suit of clothes and it signified his dignity. He wanted to get into the airplane and fly back. Neeta Lalwani refers to "Looking Glass Theory"

of Charles Horton Coole and applies it to explain Todd's illusion that he could prove himself by flying in the sky around the white world:

The idea is that a person looks himself through the notion of the people who surround him. In other sense the surrounding people act as a mirror. For Todd, wings are the certificates to prove him before the eyes of the white (117).

Todd reflects,

Now for him, any appreciation lay with his white officers (126-127).

Todd trusts his ability and efficiency and not his black identity. He believes that if he flies plane successfully, he would be elevated in the white world. So he does not want to identify himself racially with Jefferson as a part of the black community. Referring to his wife's letter, he has already said,

Yes, and humiliation was when could never be simply yourself; when you were always a part of this black ignorant man (125).

When Jefferson asks him why he wants to fly, Todd replies to himself,

Because it makes me less like you (128), and then speaks aloud to Jefferson, It's as good a way to fight and die as I know (128).

Todd feels inferior in being a part of the black community where they are treated akin to pre-historic man.

Meanwhile, Jefferson has been waiting for Mr. Graves, the owner of the field, to arrive on the spot and take care of things. The airplane couched in the field "like the abandoned shell of a locust" (126). Todd wishes to get into the airplane and fly back. Jefferson might assign his flying back to his being afraid of white officer. So, he wants to

share his feelings with Jefferson but he knows that black people like Jefferson could not understand and appreciate his position and so, he feels cut off from them "by age, by understanding, by sensibility, by technology and by his need to measure himself against the mirror of other men's apprehension" (126).

Seeing Jefferson looking admiringly at the airplane, he recounts,

Such old men often came to the field to watch the pilots with childish eyes. At first it had made him proud; they had been a meaningful part of a new experience. But soon he realized they did not understand his accomplishments and they came to shame and embarrass him, like the distasteful praise of an idiot.... They were pleased simply that he was a Negro who could fly, and that was not enough... Now for him any real appreciation lay with his white officers and with them he could never be sure. Between ignorant black men and condescending whites, his course of flight seemed mapped by the nature of things away from all needed and natural landmarks (126-127).

As Jefferson comes to know from Todd that the crashed airplane was an Advanced Trainer aircraft which could fly over 200 miles an hour, he is curious to see that from the inside. Todd allows him to go inside but warns him not to touch anything. He feels irritated and angry at his remarks that Todd must be scared coming down and his confession of his own fear while seeing him coming down:

Caint tell you how it felt to see somebody what look like me in an airplane! (128)

Away from the white who patronized with a sense of superiority and the black who praised without understanding, he looks for the real un-

derstanding and appreciation of his manhood and skill from the enemy. For Todd this crash landing on a routine flight almost certainly means he will never get another chance to fly and, in his mind, will become the common Blackman he considers Jefferson to be, the worst fate he can imagine for himself. Jefferson tells him, "By the way, the white folks round here don't like to see you boys there in the sky" and asks "They ever bother you?" (130)

Todd replies in the negative and affirms that no one bothered the black pilots. However, he poses almost the same question to himself regarding the incomprehensible attitude of the white to the black trainee pilots, "Why did they make them so disgusting and yet teach them to fly so well?" (130)

Torn between the lack of appreciation from his own folks and the indifference of the white folks he lacked self-confidence as a pilot and that might have been an indirect cause of the crash.

Jefferson could see that Todd was hurting not just in his ankle but also in his mind. So, he tries to distract Todd with a meaningless story. He himself poses as a black angel in heaven in another self-created story in which the black angel is cast out of heaven for shining too brightly. Despite Todd's hostility, Jefferson distracts injured Todd by telling him story about his dying, going to heaven, and flying around so fast as to cause "a storm and a couple of lynching down here in Macon County" (132). In his story within-a-story, Jefferson is stripped of his wings for flying too fast and is sent down to earth with a parachute and a map of Alabama. Todd, seeing that this story has been twisted to mirror his own situation, feels offended by the story and snaps, "Why do you laugh at me this way?" (133) - which, in fact, the old man is not doing. But Todd presumes Jefferson to be the stereotype of a poor, unedu-

cated Afro-American who is making fun of his situation. He feels intense humiliation and tries to reach the old man and assault him but he falls screaming, "Can I help it because they won't let us actually fly? May be we are a bunch of buzzards feeding on a dead horse, but we can hope to be eagles, can't we? Can't we?" (133).

He wants to strangle Jefferson but he has no strength left. So, he tells Jefferson to go and tell his story to the white folks. Jefferson tries to pacify him saying that he did not want to hurt his feelings. Todd calms down and apologizes to Jefferson but he could not continue the conversation as he loses consciousness.

In his subconscious state, Todd remembers his young-self, a young boy who was so excited with planes and dreamed of nothing else than to fly one. Initially, he took the plane to be a fascinating toy owned by rich little white boys and hoped that someday he would own such a toy. Each flying bird that he watched in the sky became soaring plane for him. He became a nuisance to everyone with his questions about airplanes. He wanted a plane more than he would want anything else. When he asked his mother to buy an airplane for him, she thought him to be crazy. He even mistook a drone for an airplane. Once he fell and hurt himself while trying to grab a drone. He had fever for several hours but on the advice of the doctor, he was kept in bed for a week and he constantly saw the plane in his sleep. A feverish dream into which he drifts reveals not only the depth of his life-long desire to fly but also the power of his grandmother's admonition. He remembers the opening lines of James Weldon Johnson's "Prodigal Son" in God's Trombones, recited by his grandmother as a warning to him when he was a child:

Young man, young man

Your arms are too short

To box with God. (137)

To Todd, becoming a pilot means taking a position higher than the majority white culture wanted to allow black men of his time to occupy; it is the equivalent of boxing with God in his mind to improve his position not only in respect to other men but also in respect to God as in the myth of Icarus. To have failed as a pilot means not only to have made a mistake but also to have let his entire race down, something he cannot allow to happen. A few minutes later, he wakes up and finds the genuinely concerned Jefferson asking him if a plane was searching for him. He sees a small black shape above a distant field, soaring through a wave of heat and feels guilty for judging the old man. The two have a brief conversation about the oppression of their race. Jefferson tells Todd about Mr. Graves who lends money to the black people and kills those who fail to repay the loan. He is known for killing five such debtors. Jefferson is also one of his debtors. But he is a funny fellow. "He's all the time making jokes. He can be mean as hell, then he's liable to turn right around and back the coloured against the white folks" (139). But Jefferson hates him more than anything else "Cause just as soon as he gits tired helping a man he don't care what happens to him. He just leaves him stone-cold. And then the other white folks are double hard on anybody he done helped. For him it's just a joke. He doesn't give a hilla beans for anybody-but hisself..." (139). So, Jefferson stays out of his way. Todd has apprehensions that he would have to come by Mr. Graves and other white folks and then he loses consciousness again.

In his subconscious state, he is going mysteriously with his mother through empty streets. He sees airplane flying high but his mother does not allow him to stop and watch the airplane because she was in a hurry. The plane was dropping some cards and a woman was running and snatching

card and reading it and screaming. The cards carried the message "Niggers Stay from the Polls" (140). This message is also found in Ellison's last and posthumously published novel *Juneteenth* (1999) in which Bliss, the Senator, who was shot at while denouncing the unruly Negroes in the Senate and was then lying in a hospital bed, hallucinates and sees written across the sky: "Niggers Stay Away from The Polls" (1999: 330).

When Todd regains his consciousness again, he finds three figures moving cross the field- Mr. Graves and two white nursing staff in hospital uniforms. The white owner of the field is deeply racist and he has brought two nursing staff from a psychiatric hospital because he is sure that a black man has to become crazy if he flies. The black witnesses are just trying to help the poor fallen pilot without getting any antagonism from the white owner, which is not exactly easy. Mr. Graves makes fun of Todd and comments that the black boy could not have got up so high without going crazy:

"The niggish brain ain't built right for high altitudes..." (141).

But one of the others said, "The boy is ain't crazy Mister Graves... He needs a doctor, not us" (141). Todd gets irritated and snaps at him and places his own life in danger. Mr. Graves has brought a straightjacket meant for his cousin and the three white people try to put it on injured Todd. Todd who feels that all the unnamed horror and obscenities that he had ever imagined stands materialized before him, pushes Mr. Graves away which prompts Mr. Graves to kick his chest. In fact, Mr. Grave's foot was aimed at his head but it landed on his chest. Jefferson saves him by intervening and telling Mr. Graves that the Army had instructed Todd never to abandon his ship. But Mr. Graves dismisses the plea saying, "Niggush, army or no, you gittin' off my land! That airplane can stay 'cause it was paid for by

taxpayers' money. But you gittin' off. An' dead or alive. It doesn't make any difference to me" (142).

"However, Graves's temper is assuaged, and he orders Jefferson and Teddy" to take this here black eagle over to that nigguh airfield and leave him" (142).

Todd is taken to safety in a stretcher. "He saw the white men walking ahead as Jefferson and the boy carried him along in silence. Then they were pausing, and he felt a hand wiping his face, then he was moving again. And it was as though he had been lifted out of his isolation, back into the world of men. A new current of communication flowed between the man and boy and himself. They moved him gently" (142). As Todd lies on the ground, he realizes that the two people he had first despised are his only friends.

The final image of Todd is watching a buzzard, "the dark bird glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold" (142). This image suggests that though Todd will never fly again, his spirit will rise up like phoenix from the ashes of his defeat, a victory made possible by the current of good will he can now allow himself to feel for Jefferson. Todd will begin to learn to love himself. Commenting on this final image in the story, John F. Callahan observes, "A new current of communication [that] flowed between the man and boy and himself' enables Todd to transfigure a buzzard-one of the 'jimcrows' he'd feared, identified with, and flown into on a training flight-into an emblem of flight and freedom. In the story's last words he 'saw the dark bird glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold,' perhaps a prophetic image, inspired by Lionel Hampton's high-velocity signature jazz's tune, 'Flying Home' of Ellison's triumphant soaring in *Invisible Man*" (1996: xxxii). This story is all about hope for future generations of African-Americans. It is really a two-character story: a Tuskegee

Airman and a sharecropper, representing the hopelessness of the past and the hope that one no matter how slowly it creeps, the future will be better. This sets up the central bird metaphor of the story:

May be we are a bunch of buzzards feeding on a dead horse, but we can hope to be eagles, can't we? (133).

This story shows the societal fears the blacks had as they experienced continued institutional racism. Todd, the protagonist, wanted to learn to fly so that he could rise above reductionist labels placed on him. But when his trainer aircraft crashes in a farmland in Alabama, he is caught between the possibility of casual redneck murder in the person of a plantation owner, who assumes murder is his birthright, and the shame of abiding black acquiescence, in the person of a grandfather who is sharper than the airman initially wants to admit. He feels humiliated only because of fears that his failure may help perpetuate the "stupid ignorant" black stereo type which condescending and racist white used. According to Gary Giddings, "It is a frightening story, edgily confined to the wounded pilot's vision, and Ellison's conclusion is surprising, unsentimental and moving" (13). The story focuses on Todd, Jefferson and Teddy who through their speeches and actions, in course of helping Todd out of trouble, expose the racism prevalent in the American society, particularly in the South America. The story captures the wonderful and lively banter between Todd and Jefferson while showing how the racism of the real world touches and affects their life.

John F. Callahan compares the situation of Todd, the central character in the story, with that of Stephen Dedalus, a student in the role of the protagonist and anti-hero in James Joyce's semi-autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Young Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and also with that Simon

Dedalus in the role of a father in Joyce's next novel *Ulysses* (1922). He writes, "In *Flying Home*, just when Ellison's northern protagonist believes, with a nod to Joyce' Stephen Dedalus, that he has learned to use his wiles to escape the limitations of race, language, and geography, circumstances force him to confront the strange 'old country' of the South. A literary descendant of Icarus, Todd, one of the black eagles from the Negro air school at Tuskegee, flies too close to the sun and falls to earth in rural Alabama. There, unlike his mythological forebear, he is saved by Jefferson, whose folktales and actions enable Todd to recognize where he is and who he is, and to come back to life by following the old black peasant and his son out of a labyrinthine Alabama valley. Laughter, which Todd earlier associates with humiliation, erupts at the story's climax, and taking advantage of the chaos, old Jefferson comes to the rescue and bears him away from danger" (xxxix). According to Susan L. Blake, "The mythic context subtly changes the meaning of the themes embodied in the folk foundation of *Flying Home*. It transforms acceptance of blackness as identity into acceptance of blackness as limitation. It substitutes the white culture's definition of blackness for the self-definition of folklore" (85).

Ralph Ellison, in his short stories, deals with the problem of racial relations and of race definitions with tact and humour that make some of his stories extremely funny. In *Flying Home* also we find such situations that bring racism to the fore or that reveal the trials and tribulations a black man has to go through to get adapted to the racist society of America. Jefferson's words while narrating his folktale, "I accidentally knocked the tip off a some stars and they tell me I caused a storm and a coupla of lynchings down here in Mecon Country" (132), may be an indirect reference to the public lynching of a nigger in the very first story in this collection titled "A Party at the Dawn" in which the narrator of the story, hears the roaring sound of an airplane coming closer and could see

through the clouds and fog an airplane with “a red and green light on her wings” (5). The story paves the way for Ellison’s debut novel and masterpiece *Invisible Man* (1952) which explores the theme of a person’s search for his own identity and a place in society, as seen from the perspective of the first person narrator, an unmarried African-American man, first in the deep South and then in the New York City of the 1930s. Ellison believed that blacks had created their own traditions, rituals and a history that formed a cohesive and complex culture that was the source of a full sense of identity. Susan L. Blake observes in this context: “The theme of *Invisible Man* is similar to that of *Flying Home*. The novel presents itself as an epic statement of the need for black self-definition. The protagonist of the novel, characterized as a representative black man on an identity quest, finds himself only when he gives up his white masters’ definition of reality and adopts that asserted by the black folk tradition. Ironically, however, the definition of reality that Ellison attributes to the folk tradition is the very one maintained by the whites” (85).

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# "Historiopoetics: The Frame of Narration in Easterine Kire's *Mari*"

Ramesh Sharma\*

## Abstract

North-East India has seldom got enough attention from modern narration to explore its intellectual potentialities in spite of its rich intellectual tradition since the days of the epic *Mahabharata*. Conflicts are the new orders of the world today, yet understanding of them in this region is something different, that it has often been seen as if a stellar catastrophe, a security threat, hitting hard to every other human possibilities. However this is only a telescopic view from its defective lenses. The conflict thus (mis)understood one dimensional which is rather a politics of (mis)narration; the other side has always been eclipsed. I contend to say that the same supposed conflict has been understood by some potential writers as coming into new consciousness, new possibilities, and an enabling phenomenon, in which Easterine Kire is quite vocal. In Kire's fiction *Mari*, as this paper wants to maintain, she has been able to demonstrate that the intellectual fecundity of the region, representatively Nagaland, can be tapped only through a different type of narration, consciously termed here as historiopetics, in which both the conflicting history and interpretations sustain in a dynamic of relationship often embedded in each other.

**Keywords:** *Technical Terms: History, Narration, Conflict, and Representation.*

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What happens in the modern history is a rupture in its faithful exploration and representation of the North-East India as it has been often labeled as “conflict” zone, a no-go zone. Stigmatized as such that even the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, North East Division, has to jump to the conclusion that the “... historical factors such as language/ethnicity, tribal rivalry, migration, control over local resources ... have resulted in a fragile security situation in the North Eastern States. This has resulted in violence and diverse demands by various Indian Insurgent Groups” (www.mha.gov.in, accessed date 30-0-2020). The observation has its own rationality and must have come from the quite long experience in the region and yet to regard it in totality will be a hasty generalization. What is evidenced in the observation is that the entire region is given a threat identity, which can not be justified. The term “fragile security” as a representative term provides the point that this paper tries to confront, deviate from and explore other peculiarities of the region. I contend to say this representatively misleading image is gradually evaporating in the recent times with the emergence of some of the vocal intellectuals who have an inbuilt narrative technique in their representation of the region that can delineate other enabling possibilities.

A moral discomfiture from the narrative of “conflict” rendering has already been felt. As Prajana Parimita Ray contends, “Given the cultural plurality of Northeast India, it would be an act of interpretive fallacy if the critics and scholars view the literature from this region only through the narrow prism of terror or violence” (Ray 57). Similarly, showing discontentment to the narrative of conflict, Shiva Prasad Sharma, in reference to Nagaland, points to other imperatives to understand the region. He writes, “Nagaland ... does not have a pleasant temporal framework to re-

late. Its present as well as past is fraught with deep scars of conflict ... Yet, in the midst of violence, there is a thriving diversity of people with diverse cultural .... Nagaland apart from being a space marred by conflict is also a storehouse of life stories. It is a tapestry where myth, legends, stories conglomerate with lived realities of a people” (Sharma 10801).

Historically, the North East India has its own contribution in intellectual tradition, for instance making of the greatest world epics, *Mahabharata* for instance, that recounts the rise and fall of the Kuru dynasty. Chitrangadha and Hidimma, two of the characters in the epic from the region, have played their role in the fabric of the epic. In other words, this being an example, the North East has been potentially linked to one of the greatest of the intellectual traditions since ancient times. The region also has an intellectual history beside the subject matter of the modern history to be understood and accepted and the same has been reflecting as a legacy in some of the writings that emerge from the region. Reading a text from the region in the line of the intellectual tradition, *Mahabharata* for instance, as this writing does, tends to suggest an odd combination given the dimension of the subject matter they cover; the latter covers the entire Indian sub-continent but the former Nagaland and its bitter experience with the invaders-Japanese and British is a novel and the other one is an epic. However, the oddity being an instance we can see how the small text like *Mari* by Easterine Kire can initiate and testify, like the latter, a big narrative of the region.

Easterine Kire and other being Mamang Dai, Mitra Phukan and Temsula Ao have been constantly trying to rethink the epistemologically of the region making the “tapestry” the area of aesthetic experience and aligning it with the rich intellectual tradition. Their writings do not make

the narrative of conflict and insecurity as the arrival. Rather they accept them in as much as the beginning and through them spiral into the yet unfolded centres of rich intellectual resources. However, in this paper I will limit my argument in terms of Easterine Kire, as an example, because with the achieved content of the text, through the themes of conflict and insecurity, she has clearly penetrated the literary dimension to rejuvenate the fecund narrative of the region drawing from the tapestry-local history, myth and spirituality which otherwise is a rare phenomenon in the representation of the region. In terms of the use of the subject matter, as this essay contends, *Mari* aligns itself into the tradition of the epic and hence it is potentially seminal in building a historical perspective for the region. It can be seen that in *Mari* history and literature intersect with each other and in this historicization of the text and textualization of the history, the history of the region *only* as a grand-narrative collapses, suggests its inadequacy and underlines an imperative to understand it as a metaphor. At the same time the fiction ceases to be only a fantasy; it is not purely poetic rather but is also equally raw and naked. In other words, the identity of the region that the fiction covers is neither totally historic nor poetics. It should emerge, as can be elaborated next, from a technique of narration, representation, which can be framed as historiopoetics.

But then, how does the historiopoetics work? The historiopoetics does not totally reject the claim of the linear history, nor the literary. Although it is aware of their inadequacy in representation, it uses both. In it sometimes history and poetry operate distinctively as much as they can so as not to dilute their identity. But only if they fail in representation, they draw from the other. This has been brilliantly demonstrated by *Mari*. About the technique of narration in *Mari* Kire says "I wrote it in my head" at first before penning it

down. What she wrote in her head is something that goes beyond both the poetic and historical dimensions. In one of my recent interactions with the writer in reference to a web-talk programme organized by the Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Don Bosco University, Kire thus summarizes her focus which is imperative: "It's important for younger generations to read their own local history and have a sense of pride in who their ancestors were so that they will not have to accept stereotypes about their culture, their history, their identities." Kire is underlining an imperative history that can be generated through writing, as in *Mari* and other texts from her, in which the generation can have a "sense of pride." Why the writer feels the necessity of this imperative once again reminds us of the generalized stigma, a "stereotype" triggered by the modern history that pathetically eclipsed the intellectual potentiality of the region for the generation which compelled it to believe in the stereotype promoting it even through the statutory agencies.

The situation certainly strikes every thinking individual who is aware of the cerebral potentiality of the region behind the stigma but only a few like Easterine Kire dares to confront the stigma rendering it no more than inadequate. What predominantly figures in Kire's *Mari* is the textuality of history and historicity of text, the history also becomes a fiction and the fiction transgressing its fantastic border more resourceful and alive. Apparently the Anglo-Japanese war 1944 at Kohima is the history that goes into the fabric of the fiction unfolding a series of pages of memory as the resource unlike only the factual evidence the linear history generally considers. Kire writes in her notes to *Mari* how the text unfolds:

I started writing *Mari* when I was about sixteen. I wrote it in my head during my summer holidays with *Mari* in northern Assam, listening to

her tell this story and badgering her to tell it again and again. I always knew I would write it down one day. I finally wrote it in 2003, with the help of Mari and a diary she had kept during the war years... I must have read the diary a hundred times and still I cry a little at certain parts (Author's note to *Mari*).

It was the diary then handed over to her by Khrielievü Mari O'Leary, the eldest sister of her mother and the oral stories that she narrated to Kire speak between the lines in the fiction. In other words, the nature and function of the memory in *Mari* is very significant. The undiluted 1944 war, the linear history, the real war between Japanese and English and its ramification in the Nagas which otherwise is not their war becomes alive in the fiction though through the agency of memory. Until this point, the history operates under its own capacity.

But for Kire the war in reference is not simply a historical incident; it has a cosmic dimension and for its representation, since the linear history has its limitation, she has to take a refuge in poetics. In the same note to *Mari* she thus adds "I was left with the impression that the war, for us, was almost equivalent to the big bang, the beginning of all life." On the other hand, the text of *Mari* is incomplete without the timeline, those facts of the 1944 in which the Japanese army clashed with the British which unfortunately made the local, the Nagas, refugees in their own land which was an unprecedented experience, a cosmic tragedy for the locals. In other words history and fiction often look for each other in Kire and in this communication the fiction of *Mari* flowers. The impact of the war goes beyond the apparent aftermath of any such catastrophic war and extends up to human psychology which is evidenced by the diary that Kire refers to in her note from which she primarily draws the resource of the fiction. In this sense the fiction is also inter-

textuality between the two memories before it flows into its actual stream. This drawing from memory, making memory as the primary archive of the resource (nevertheless, Kire has also claimed in the talk in reference she verifies the anecdotes from factual references) is something that distinguishes Kire from the other writers in the region which further senses another unique tradition of the region towards which I will shift in a while. But what the diary unfolds to impregnate the fiction with a structural significance needs an attention here first.

The structure of the content that flows from the memory informs us that *Mari* is apparently a story of a 17 years young Naga girl engulfed by the catastrophic battle. According to a reviewer Lois A Gomez, in the text "A young Naga woman sees her world collapse when her foreigner fiancée dies during the battle of Kohima and embraces her life and circumstances...Kire narrates in *Mari* (2010) her aunt's life, love and passion. The novella is a literary souvenir of the once little town that became the grave of the Japanese imperial dreams" (Gomez 1). The war forced people to disperse leaving their home behind in which the family of Mari is not an exception. In this sense the story of Mari is also representative. Mari and her younger sisters are separated and she has to take care of her younger sisters. As the war continues, she has to move from one hideout, the cattle shed, to other to escape the onslaught of the Japanese soldiers. Tired and hungry they are forced to feed on herbs in the forest.

Throughout this ordeal of life, Mari is haunted by the memory of her British fiancé Vic, a soldier, who was shot by a Japanese sniper in the battle of Kohima. Mari and her sister's return to Kohima a day before the Japanese are defeated to find the total destruction of their village by shelling from artillery. They can see only three

wooden pillars of their house standing. The Deputy Commissioner suggests clearing of the debris to give the village a new form but the villagers do not like the idea as it might destroy the traditional boundaries of their clans which might further spiral into community fights. The administration eventually concedes and the villagers are given timbers and material to rebuild their houses in their own way. They clear the debris and grieve and mourn for their slaughtered kins. However, more grieving is discouraged as they think that it will anger the spirits, their ancestors, which is a belief in Angami communities to salvage life after a catastrophe. As the spring returns, symbolically the nature rebuilds itself and the village with green grass, leaves and flowers. Eventually Mari goes to Chandigarh to be trained as nurse. Thus the fiction begins with a catastrophe and ends with nature rejuvenating it.

To recall the unique tradition that I referred to we need to re-capture three reverberations from the story. The structure of the story reverberates with three significances in general: 1) it carries the tragedy of Mari, the end of her unrequited love story, "a tale of romance in times of war" as a review claims in "Hindustan Times" dated Jan 01, 2011 claims; 2) it concedes to and gratifies the sentiments of the villagers, their community feeling to avoid clashes and their local spirituality; and 3) it eventually returns to nature which is both symbolic as rejuvenation and a part of the life of Angami people. The first can be read as an emotional story, a catastrophe of the war, which however is a common theme in every fiction. But throughout her odyssey it is the memory of Vic, the memory in working drives her between the edges of her situation and reality. Thus the tragic history of Mari gets reinforced through the agency of the memory.

With the gratification of the sentiments of the villagers and nature, the fiction enters into another level of the local history. And this history

confronts the linear history, the war, with its humane, binding and enabling nature. By local history I mean local belief, myth, folktales, spirituality, community feelings and nature association that culminate the narrative, which mark a distinct identity of the Angami community in particular and other tribal communities in general which get roll on to the generation through memory. Thus when Kire says "I wrote [*Mari*] in my head" she is also co-relating the technique of her narration to the tradition of the local history. The form of the history in *Mari* varies whereas the pattern of the tradition remains the same. In this sense; the text in its aesthetic actively vocals the local.

With the local history, the text of *Mari* gains significance from three points of view. Firstly, symbolically it gains momentum in appearing more as a natural tree, sprouting as a single aesthetic sapling and gradually wearing multiple branches and leaves of local histories, more is the growth firm is the grounding, more it embraces the fathomless sky the more local earth it holds and makes it stronger, gradually translating a part into whole enabling each other. In simple terms the text of *Mari* is a tree itself, it gradually translates into the nature, life and part of the local history. Secondly, the local spirituality and community sense that the text echoes are not different things of life in *Mari*, rather they are life itself. Fear for spirit and clan boundaries reverberate with a general concern- the community well being, an ethos of the tribal community. The local history in its real essence endorses peace, anything even though enchanting which negotiates the essence and if it is within the capacity of the community is virtually rejected. This is the reason why the Angami people rejected the offer of the Deputy Commissioner. Further, they fear that more mourning will infuriate their ancestors that may invoke their wrath for their community; they fear that breaking the clan boundaries may

disturb community balance and plunge it into war.

Thirdly, both the sentiments have a deep community concern, its safety, well being and unity for existence. This sense triggered by the text can confront some of the dominating western literary perspectives in vogue today. The message of the text becomes apparent. It tends to give a Marxist like message at first. But if this perspective is endorsed, the text of *Mari* once again will confront it as it does not substantiate it from a class struggle point of view in the tribal clans. The tribal community in fact does have class category as Marx claims in the European context. Significantly then, the community sense that *Mari* triggers from the history can be a priori to what Marx claims, 'a local model that can become a counter perspective to the colonial. If promoted, it can become a significant tool of enquiry in research which will be more binding, uniting and enabling unlike the Marxist model which begins and ends with division. Marx is more informed by slavery since early Greek and Roman ages that translated into Feudalism in terms of serfs and feudal lords in the Medieval Age and bourgeois and proletariats in the latest. Whereas a perspective that a text like *Mari* triggers has a very different context that cannot even dream of salve tradition, therefore it will be unique.

In continuation, the sense of unity the text explores that binds the tribal community into one whole and its practical possibility can hit back the claim of the poststructuralist thinking, particularly Derridean. Beginning linguistically and gradually ending with philosophy, echoing the view of Marx, Derrida hijacks the discourse theory in Michel Foucault which considers knowledge as contingencies. According to Perry Anderson, as quoted by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," "With Derrida, the self-cancellation of structuralism latent in the

recourse to music or madness in Levi-Strauss or Foucault is consummated. With no commitment to exploration of social realities at all, Derrida had little compunction in undoing the constructions of these two, convicting them both of a 'nostalgia of origins'" (Spivak 87). Anderson thus concludes that Derrida does not recognize social realities, does not recognize language as discourse, and rather considers the origin as nostalgia.

This denial of origin in fact becomes the crux of the poststructuralist perspective which prevails over the higher academia. Denial of the origin implies fragmentation. In this sense, I would like to argue that the Derridean thought is much informed by the post-war fragmented psychology that considers the fragmentation, the rootlessness as the reality which in fact is the extension of the post-war catastrophe, the destruction, into human psychology. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the poststructuralist thought functions more as a whitewash to war crime than a reality. A context in which *Mari* like text springs neither has the war context (the war in the text is imposed upon, a foreign assault), nor the slavery, therefore any literary perspective deduced from it pertaining to the dominating perspective in reference will be local and thus unique. The originary sense of the Angami community, the community oriented perspective, therefore, is also a befitting reply to the tenets in the perspectives as in reference and by exploring and promoting them, Kire has tendered a very commendable service to the epistemological origin of the North East India that the generation must know.

*Mari* like texts will have a huge scope which has already been demonstrated by its success in reception across the globe. Tradition has shown that every literary production grounded on local history has taken epic dimension. Local history breathes the life of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in

terms of the fall of Troy; the *Aeneid* recounts the origin of the history of the Roman Empire in terms of Aeneid; the *Paradise Lost* and the *Paradise Regain* reframe the divine history of the origin and the fall of human beings; the *Mahabharata* encompasses the history of the rise and fall of the Kuru Dynasty and the *Ramayana* the kingdom of Lanka.

The history that goes into the fabrics of the epic is contextual. *Mari* is not an epic but it senses its attributes in terms of the orality of the local history of the Angami Nagas, its fall from the offence of the war and rejuvenation in terms of the text and thus tends to become an epic for them. Artillery shelling of the village to its debris during the war and its renovation by the villagers is a symbolic fall and rise of the village. In this sense, it carries the attention of the readers beyond the stigma of the "conflict" zone and aligns itself with the great intellectual potentiality of the region that had contributed in part, for instance, in the formation of one of the greatest epics *Mahabharata*, unfortunately silenced long by the stigma triggered by the modern history. In Kire, seen from this angle, the history revives not simply with the materiality of the evidence, rather the evidence takes a metaphorical bent and spirals into the yet unfolded pages of the memory and thus changes its narration. It is this *historiopetics*, that is to say a frame that intertwines both the techniques of history and art, (re)generates both

the history and the literature in their essence in Kire.

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# Critique of Eurocentric Feminist Knowledge Production

Bibhu Thapaliya\*

## Abstract

The epistemic approaches taken by many scholars in Europe have often deployed the analytical lenses that clearly create the dichotomy of the “progressive” West and “regressive” rest through the trope of developed Vs least developed. Similarly, women of the least developed nations- the “others” are presented in their discursive analysis in a monolithic fashion. Various postcolonial critiques have critically analyzed such a tendency as the colonial approach of the west-centered knowledge production process. Simultaneously, there are multiple ways scholars in Western academia have questioned the hegemonic approach and resisted the overarching application of Eurocentric conceptual frameworks on the “developing” subjects. This article, through a review of the literature, illustrates i.) the critiques of Eurocentric feminist knowledge production in its attempt to problematize it, and; ii) the ways they have resisted such tendencies through postcolonial thinking.

**Keywords:** *Eurocentric, Feminist, Knowledge-Production, Critique, and Resistance.*

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**T**his essay discusses the critiques of Eurocentric feminist knowledge production to argue that the Europe has intrinsic and colonial relationship with the “others.” The relationship is intrinsic because of the Europe’s hegemonic feminist ideologies and conceptualisations that travel all over the world affecting women in every part of it; it is equally colonial because it claims to be in a mission to save these women from oppressive forces in their countries and uses those ideological tools in doing so. The “others” in this essay are these women of different parts of the world including European academia who are affected by Eurocentric feminist ideological tools, approaches, and processes.

In my essay, I discuss different critiques of Eurocentric feminist knowledge production provided by postcolonial theorists. In the beginning, I problematise knowledge production by illustrating how different critiques explain hegemonic feminist knowledge production in the Western academia as reinforcing monolithic categorization of the women. I draw on Said, Spivak and Lugones critiques of imperialist tendency in Western academic knowledge production and analyse its effects. In the second part, I illustrate how women within and outside the Western academia have resisted the Eurocentrism.

### **Problematizing Eurocentric Feminist Knowledge Production**

In his much-acclaimed book “Orientalism”(1978), Edward Said critically analyses the Eurocentric academic approach in constructing the “Orient.” According to him, the way Europe produces knowledge of the East is a mere generalization of its diverse socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts; the word “Orient” itself is in fact coined by the Western academia to mark racialized differences that ultimately benefits the West (Said 1-8).

In this sense, the “Orient” and the “Oriental” cannot be viewed as a descriptive category to explain culture of the East. Rather, they are colonial approaches that demarcate West and East through cultural distinctions wherein the West is superior, and East is inferior in their respective civilizations. The Western knowledge production system has continuously reinforced this ideology through research in the East. The feminist theoretical frameworks that the West uses in studying the orient adopt presumptuous approaches that are bound to come up with the findings that are orientalist in nature.

In one instance of Department for International Development (DFID)’s scoping study on modern slavery (2019) carried out in Nepal, I was assisting the research project which was conceptually framed by the DFID.<sup>1</sup> The DFID (5) had categorised commercial sexual exploitation as one of the forms of modern slavery and rendered “women and girls from poor and rural households” the status of victim. The study even went to the extent of declaring, “a person does not need to be aware that they are in a state of modern slavery to be considered a victim” (3). Hence, the scoping study, which informs DFID’s projects on gender relations in Nepal will consequently erase gendered differences among heterogenous Nepali community.

Eventually, such tendencies of knowledge production create the picture where the West emerges as the superior nation state- only which can save the East. Said (6-7) asserts that this motivates scholars, as knowledge producing authorities to foster the belief that they are more qualified to understand the East than the people of the East. This informs, consciously or unconsciously, development discourses like Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) which define women as helplessly trapped in Third World patriarchy (Stanley 158).

The Eurocentric feminist knowledge production thus emerges subjecting the Eastern people's differential status to be viewed, analysed, discussed, and eventually politicised in monolithic and blinkered way, assigning them the position of developing countries. This helps the West to be considered developed, construct its own frameworks and indices of "development," and further uses these tools to advance its Eurocentric imperialist agendas.

In order to explain why West's knowledge production of non-Western contexts rarely comes from its unbiased and neutral positionality, Said borrows from Freudian concept of projection to explain that Europe's own underexplored problems are projected on then on-Westerns.

Indeed, how much of a Western scholarship is engaged with the discussion on the Europe's oppression of sexual minorities, and how European women's home-based "unpaid care work" is a problem there, too, probably, as much as it is shown to be the case in *every* household in the East? Similarly, how often do the (re)production of hegemonic masculinities shaping inequalities for the European women get discussed in the scholarly articles? How often is the word patriarchy as the overarching analytical tool used to explain their status? Why does the intimate-partner violence in the West become "domestic violence" in the rest? There are stories of familial violence occurring in the Western families reported and published every now and then in news portals, but they are not discussed by the Western scholarship in the realm of "domestic violence" and patriarchal oppression of women. Instead, their unequal status is only discussed in terms of their wage difference with male counterparts - that portrays them as economically active women who face inequalities in workplace, not elsewhere because their family is civilised, that their family do not stop them from working, unlike in the developing countries.

The questions above were not posed to assert that the European society is as patriarchal, as complexity ridden as the East. In fact, the objective is to problematise the hegemonic use of the terms like "toxic masculinities" and patriarchy in the major body of Western feminist scholarship that explain gender relations in the non-Western contexts. It is to problematise the ways the diversities of the 'other' societies, its inherently underlying socio-cultural and political differences are erased to establish homogeneity in its identity-to further colonial agendas.

Further on Eurocentric feminist knowledge production, Gayatri Spivak, in her essay "Can Subaltern Speak?" (1988) argues that knowledge production is never neutral as it is the projection of the producer's interest; the Western academic thoughts are produced to support its capitalist interests. For instance, abolition of Sati system is often understood as "white men saving brown women from brown men" as it has been portrayed in Western scholarship. But, for Spivak, more nuanced analysis accounts for the knowledge production that is aware of the cultural differences; exploration of women's agency in their choice to commit Sati; and examination of colonial approaches in perpetuating gendered differences. Without such analysis, she asserts, knowledge serves as a mere commodity- extracted from the "others" in its raw disposition, processed, and disseminated in hegemonic vocabulary for consumption of the Western academia. In its attempt to engage in critical discourse about the "others," the West situates itself in the centre, because only then its supremacy can be made visible by presenting the "socially degraded" view of the "others" as "backward" societies. A dignified presence of the "others" is nowhere in the discursive analysis other than in the position of a subaltern "saved" by the West.

Mohanty (1984) argues that women are imagined in the Western feminist discourse as the coherent group who can be fitted in any structure of kinship, law and other social relations as rigid categories. Likewise, these structures (family, kinship) are subjects of judgement by the Western feminism- as developing, developed or underdeveloped. Placing of women in these structures turns them into third world women, oppressed and trapped in these structures. The oppressed third world women has additional quality, she asserts- "third world difference." The third world difference is marked by paternalistic attitude of their society in dealing with them. Placed as a homogenous monolithic category in different supposedly rigid structures of power, women's identities are automatically imagined as uneducated, domestic, and "sometimes revolutionary" (352) as they fight too, but even as rebellion they are viewed as homogenous units. The third world difference is created as they are juxtaposed with the women in the West, again imagined in completely different power-structures of the West (353).

The argument fits in the Nepali context where women have multiple identities based on their caste, sexuality, religion, class, and ethnicity. However, almost every research comes with the theoretical framework that assumes that all Nepali women are the victims of poverty and patriarchy (Tamang 2009). Likewise, the Western hegemonic masculinities framework as the ultimate problems creating troubles for women as causing violence against them have long-informed Nepali feminist movement. There are multiple forms of masculinities in Nepal that interact with different structures and change their forms with changing structures. There is no standard form of hegemonic masculinity: masculinities displayed in a *Brahmin* (Hindu- idealises monogamy) family can be very different than that of a *Sherpa* (Tibetan Buddhist- practices polyan-

dry) family. However, the application of the only one framework compartmentalises women into single dimension of "oppressed" victims. Even more dangerous is the fact that monolithic framework is used across socio-political arenas with pressing gendered inequalities, be it in education, employment, or domestic sphere.

On such hegemonic feminism, Lugones (2010) asserts that it is the product of colonial imposition. She states that the cultivation of the dichotomous binary of the powerful oppressive men and vulnerable women dates back to the times of colonisation. Then, roles and power-positions were assigned by the powerful to the powerless. Hence, the African (historically enslaved) were categorised into wild, uncivilised, and barbaric races (743). Even though the class factored in the classification of groups and individuals in certain power-positions, there were hierarchical relations within the class also. For instance, upper-class bourgeois European women were subordinated as they were viewed merely as bodies reproducing "supreme" race, and they were mostly domesticated by their husbands (Ibid.) Men held the roles of breadwinner and were placed in political and administrative roles (Ibid.) Thus, the historically carved hierarchical roles, positions, and gendered and sexual normative expectations continue to shape the prejudices in Western feminism against the socio-economically and geopolitically subordinated subjects till the present day. The Eurocentrism demonstrated by the Western feminist discourse is largely underpinned by this historical subjugation of the "others" that still views Black people as historically enslaved Black only (without other identities) and women all over the world as a fixed category. In imagining so, Europe's own treatment of women as reproductive bodies in the past has a significant role to play. As discussed above in Said's critique of Western knowledge production as an act of self-defence, the colonial past is repressed and pro-

jected on the “others.” However, the studies on the “others” have constantly challenged within the explorative Western scholarship the dichotomy created by dominant Western scholarship.

For example, the widely reinforced notion in the Western scholarship that power relations are shaped and underpinned by biological sexes and patriarchy - has been challenged by the findings that situate other factor like seniority of age in the hierarchies of power. Harris (2018) in her study concludes that precolonial sub-Saharan cultures had senior women in the better power positions in the family than the younger males; hence, it does not make sense to interpret their power relations through the simplistic binary analysis of masculine domination over the femininity.

The above critiques and illustrations problematise Eurocentric feminist knowledge production. Racist feminist academic discourses not only create the binary of progressive west and barbaric “others,” it, unconsciously or consciously fuels powerful racialized discourses in other areas of feminist practice and invites resistance.

### **Resisting Eurocentric Knowledge Production**

Abu-Lughod (2002) in her article illustrates an incident of being invited to a reception sponsored by the French Ambassador, where Muslim women were described as the veil-wearing subjects wherein veil is a tool of oppression. Abu-Lughod problematizes the use of racialized trope of clothing and act of reducing all Muslim women into masked subjects with no power or sense of agency. The Western portrayal of Burqa, through media and feminist scholarship, as the sign of women’s enslaved status is violation of Muslim women’s understanding of burqa and their freedom of choice to wear/discard it. Abu-Lughod (786) asserts that humans are raised in specific

social and historical contexts where they develop their own perception of personal sense of power and ways of exercising that power. In this sense, the title of her essay “do Muslim women need saving?” itself is a resistance to accept the Muslim women’s taken-for-granted oppressed and victim position.

Similar resistance is shown by the Muslim feminist ethnographers in explaining that the veil has symbolic meanings for different Muslim communities in the world. For some, it is the symbol of modesty, and for some, it could be sanctity, and for some, protection (Abu-Lughod 2002, 785). Ethnographer Saba Mahmood (2001), as cited by Abu-Lughod (786) shows in her study that it could be means to connect with their God.

In “Under Western Eyes,” transnational feminist Mohanty (1984) examines Western feminism that treats women as homogenous non-Western women and points out the need to decolonise imperialist intent in doing so. She illustrates (344) the example of Maria Mies’s (1981) study of the lace makers of Narsapur, India. The study is about the household industry run by the housewives where they produce lace doilies and sell in the international and domestic market. The use of intersectionality is very careful and locally positioned to analyse the socio-cultural, sexual, and economic power relations affecting home-based entrepreneur women in Narsapur. The women are not explained as the victims of production-process that favours men, but rather the individuals with agency to resist and destabilise the barrier sat various junctures in the study.

Another form of resistance of Eurocentrism is shown by Lorde (1979) by writing against the Western hegemony within academic spaces. Lorde (1979, 98) points out the absolute lack of space for a queer feminist of colour in academic discourse, and dismissal of the voice of marginalised. The powerful line, “For the master’s tools

will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those Women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (99) shows the strong resistance to be at the receiving side of the exclusionary racialized academic discourses.

By introducing "intersectionality" to define the plural identities of Black women, Kimberle Crenshaw within the Western academia, resisted monolithic framing of the positionality of the Black women. Crenshaw (1991) asserts that recognizing multiple socio-political identities (race, class, gender) of Black women will help in understanding violence against them. The concept of intersectionality has been widely used by the feminists; however, the use of this tool for further stabilizing hegemonic power structures as a colonial approach inspired by Eurocentrism in many local contexts (where caste, class, ethnicity are treated as pre-given category) is also a pervasive problem.

### Conclusion

The critiques of the Eurocentrism in feminist knowledge production shows that the feminist knowledge production in the West is characterized by its tendency to imagine its "others" in ways that reinforces colonial imposition and solidifies the binary of powerful men and always-oppressed women, also defining women as the fixed categories of poor, rural, hence vulnerable (as shown in Nepal's example).

The Western theoretical frameworks that are conceptualized and implemented among the "others" are explained by the postcolonial theorists as the colonial imposition that allows them to mark prominence as supreme nation states. However, the West itself is not homogenous and is in

fact composed of "others" that continuously challenge its hegemony and remind it of the essence of its existence- where different race, ethnic communities, and people of colour informs and shapes power relations within different institutions, academia being one. The essay illustrated resistances from the academic community, mainly the feminist scholars of colour who are walking on margins of the Western academia.

Mohanty concludes, "without the over determined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular and privileged) first world. Without the "third world woman," the particular self-presentation of Western women mentioned above would be problematic. I am suggesting then that the one enables and sustains the other." She suggests departing from the politics of third world difference and actually building the lens to analyse the differences among the "others" so that they can represent themselves and do not have to be falsely represented in the Western feminist discourse.

Lorde (1979) suggests that the failure to recognise and acknowledge difference in the feminist academia is detrimental to feminist solidarity. Within difference lies the power (4) and indeed, it is the way Western feminism can challenge Eurocentrism. Bringing in inclusive voices, "replacing divide and conquer with define and empower" (4) will truly challenge the underlying patriarchy in Eurocentrism.

Abu-Lughod (2002) suggests that instead of adopting colonial feminist approach, understanding, and exploring the agency, voice, and positionalities of the "others" help in creating better world for women.

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup>I acknowledge my complicity in participating in something that today I consider problematic.

However, as a research assistant, working for an organisation, I did not have power to resist the hegemonic framework as I was] was not involved in the process of framing contextual research and interview questions.

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St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam publishes *Teresian Journal of English Studies (TJES)*. It is a double-blind peer reviewed international journal. It is published as a quarterly. It is designed for the academic and research community all over the world interested in English Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies. The journal expects cooperation from academicians and researchers in the subject areas. The journal looks for papers conceptually sound at once methodologically rigorous. The journal format is reader friendly. The academia and the researchers will have an easy access to the website of the journal.

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