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Editorial

As I sit down to write my piece
My thoughts and words begin to increase
My pen in hand, my mind alight
I know I must get it right.

For an editorial is more than just words
It is a call to action that is heard
To inspire and ignite, to challenge and provoke,
To make a difference, not just evoke.

—Lines generated by ChatGPT on the prompt - "Create a poem about writing an editorial."

Over the past few months one of the major topics of debate has been the ethics and quandaries over the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT. Plagiarism tools would be ineffectual in detecting the authorship, with the application's capacity to generate original texts. This is a particularly relevant issue in the study of subjects such as language, where the primary objective is the technique of writing itself. From generating summaries to structuring an outline that flows logically and generating ideas and well-formed paragraphs for a term or research paper, AI is being deployed as a replacement for critical thinking and analytical writing.

However, since these tools are limited to the patterns and information included in its training data, it cannot reason beyond this data or generate new insights. Nor can it think in terms of cultural contexts. These will still require human imagination, intelligence and understanding. It falls on us to be radical in our thoughts, bold in outlook, and irreverent in our opinions. Only through subversion and change do we evolve and be truly human.

Dr. Preeti Kumar

Liberty in Self-recursive Dilemma: A Literary Study

Dr. Govind R.*

Abstract

In the progressive evolution of human societies, the concept of 'liberty' seems to have been subjected to a process of 'reification' whereof what is to be organically perceived and qualitatively assessed has come to be mechanically evaluated in terms of quantity, resulting in a compulsive containment of the term into its political denotation which is exclusively identified with rights and entitlements. Liberty, as it applies to the individual psyche, can actually be encountered in three different guises – the political, the ethical, and the spiritual. While the political dimension of liberty is determined and re-determined periodically in connection with the material conditions of human social interaction, ethical liberty is palpable in self-referential as well as comparative assessments of human actions against individual conscience on the one hand, and a set of universally validated principles of righteousness on the other. The spiritual sense of freedom is identified as detachment from the previous two guises of liberty. As it has often been represented in Western literature, these differential planes of liberty are in a 'recursive' relationship where adherence to one entails a departure from the others, or, alternatively, when they are in collusion, it means the death of the protagonist. The paper tries to trace this recursive relationship through four successive socio-literary epochs that applied different paradigms to formulate the notion of liberty: 1). Truth as liberty, 2). Madness, Disguise, and Exile as shortcuts to liberty, 3). Rebellion or Resistance as the highway to liberty, and 4). Disengagement with truth as liberty.

Keywords: *Liberty, Reification, Recursive Relations, Truth, Madness, Disguise, Resistance, and Postmodernity.*

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Along with many other transcendental notions, like truth, morality, legitimacy, value etc., which 'play' a substantial role in the formation of the human self, and have a bearing on the formalization of the social consciousness, the concept of liberty too has progressively suffered a palpable constriction consequent from the human anxiety to attain an epistemological consolidation of such otherwise immeasurably abstract categories of experience. At some indefinable point in the evolution of mankind, the individual human consciousness must have come into contact with the sublime urge to transcend the material concerns of worldly life, and launch itself on a search for the spiritual dimension of liberty, as distinct from its physical realization by way of conquering the fears and anxieties associated with the body. In the pre-State period of human social existence, characterised by free cross-territorial movements, perhaps liberty had a spontaneously spiritual reckoning, involving the realization of an optimal union of the individual consciousness with that of the cosmos, striking absolute harmony between the body and the mind, between the self and the other, between the human and the non-human. Conversely, the general psychological urge to contain the uncon-tainable and to define the indefinable, coupled with the administrative exigencies of the centres of power – religious as well as political – to create congenially circumscribed but apparently benign and objective frameworks of belief and behaviour, also resulted in a curtailment of the expansive potential for signification that inheres the term liberty. The political, economic, sociological, and even the spiritual imperatives of a world that is characterized by morbid forms of commodification and transactional relations, have ushered in a system that attaches comparatively determined quantitative values to every entity, including liberty which is an innately abstract sensibility of the human mind. And, the contractual norms and obligations that facilitated the amalgamation of nomadic communities into institutionalized societies could be presumed to have struck a diversion of focus from the philosophical to the political, in the engagement of the intellect with the notion of liberty.

Extending from the ancient urban societies to the postmodern cyber communities, one can detect a tendency to perceive and interpret liberty, often fallaciously synonymized with 'freedom' and rights, solely in relation to the body, with the individual body posited at one end and the social corpus at the other. In other words, the preoccupation with political liberty has put the human in the self-abnegating vortex of a dialectics where one is able to appraise oneself only as a nodal point in the relationship between the State and the subject. This myopic concern with the State involves the tragic negation of an alternate trajectory of self-enquiry that offers every discerning individual an opportunity to dilate one's sense of liberty, and to reach out to the infinitely more magnificent dispensation that Nature is. However, the moment of engendering the political notion of the self is also inevitably the moment of the birth of an elusive spiritual angst to define one's place in the cosmic order.

Liberty is a phenomenon that remains in unresolved dynamics across a range of structural binaries like mind-body, political-philosophical, material-spiritual, etc. But this dilatory scope of liberty turns anathematic to the world in its anxiety to exercise quantitative fixation of all notions through objective calibration. Theodor Adorno's notion of 'reification' as one of the ways in which the bourgeois society sustains its hegemony through ideological means, is perhaps applicable to liberty also. Reification as defined by Adorno, involves a process of determining the value of commodities in terms of quantity rather than

quality, which in reality is a ploy to sustain the ideological state apparatus in a capitalist order. (Edgar 1-3) If Liberty is quantitatively synonymised with 'freedom,' one can think of who is free of whom, and to what extent one is free. But questions like 'how free one is,' and 'how much free one is' may remain largely undetermined.

To be optimally conducive to the most ideal state of human contentment, both individual and social, liberty must involve the progressive, if not coeval integration of at least three palpable dimensions of freedom, namely the political, the ethical, and the spiritual. Political liberty, by its essence as an absolute characteristic of the public domain, remains to be quantitatively calibrated and consistently legitimized in competitive reference to the 'other.' Ethical liberty ideally belongs to the realm of the 'self,' but it remains *de facto,* a sense of self-righteousness, which is to be comparatively standardized against the variables posed by the 'other.' Spiritual liberty defies all kinds of social determination, abandons the preoccupation with the 'other,' and arrives at its own subjective definitions of a kind of freedom that expands the individual consciousness into the cosmic and the eternal. These three, acting in mutual complementarity, engenders a nobler sense of freedom, not only from conditions of external control and coercion, but also from forces of self-inhibitive and self-distortive instincts such as fear, desire, violence, etc. The strain between the political and the philosophical exegesis of liberty, especially in the absence of the intermediary presence of ethical liberty, results in a recursive situation where the two must coexist as well as annihilate each other in every individual. A recursive relationship is the,

> relationship between two entities of similar entity type. Here the same entity type participates more than once in a relationship type with a different role

for each instance. In other words, a relationship has always been between occurrences in two different entities. However, it is possible for the same entity to participate in the relationship. ("Google Amp")

The recursive dynamics of the mind between the two converse notions of freedom, by way of its culmination in a dilemma, that is at times capable of shaking the human psyche to its core, has demonstrated its potential to be the fountainhead of many a literary masterpiece. The poetic expression of the angst inherent in the human effort to resolve the tussle between the political, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of liberty can be traced through four defining stages vis-à-vis:

1). Truth as liberty

2). Madness, Disguise, and Exile as shortcuts to liberty

3). Rebellion or Resistance as the highway to liberty

4). Disengagement with truth as liberty

Truth as Liberty

The earliest records of man's instinctive ruminations on 'liberty' as an essential component of one's mental 'being' come from the world of religion. All religions emanating from diverse geo-cultural backgrounds share a central concern with truth as the quintessential route to liberty. The scriptural and mythological appropriation of truth as the precursor to liberty, was consolidated through the discursive institutionalization of two transcendental principles: God is the ultimate custodian of truth; and liberty, understood as the experience of unadulterated and absolute freedom, is to be the chief attraction, not of this life, but of life in the next world. The fascinating prospects of eternal freedom to be enjoyed in after-

life could also be conveniently and referentially utilized to determine the nature and extent of the freedoms to be assumed in the material transactions on earth.

In the ancient Greek world of religious wisdom, the trope of emancipation as the cumulative outcome of submission to the truth of God, through the progressive integration of political, ethical and spiritual liberty, gets more succinctly elaborated in Sophocles' *Oedipus Trilogy*. 'How free was Oedipus?' becomes a question that evokes multiple answers as it is approached from different angles. Only as it traverses through the socio-psychological terrain stretching across all the three plays, can the discerning mind gain a glimpse into the limits as well as the open horizon of Oedipus's freedom as he walks the short distance between his popularity and ignominy, and see how the discussion in the three Theban plays hovers over the recursive relation between the political and the spiritual dimensions of liberty. Sophocles himself had perhaps an evolving idea regarding the relationship between them, as is evident from the order in which the three plays were composed. In the earliest of the three, *Antigone* (442 BC), composed by Sophocles when he was fifty-four years of age, spiritual liberty, the freedom of the human spirit in its highest and purest form, to be experienced as the levitation of consciousness from all things mundane, is not a concern at all. The playwright himself being a man in his prime, and most of the characters being young men and women zestfully immersed in the material strife of life, the play is invested with a robust debate on the tragic tussle between the politics and the ethics of liberty. Sophocles does not dwell on the ethical questions related to the political choices made by the two sons of Oedipus, howsoever pertinent they are, as they are only a posthumous presence in the background. Paradoxically, Antigone's tragedy is also the disastrous consequence of her hubristic im-

pulse to reverse the order in which the human experience of freedom must ideally progress. Antigone is seized of the ethical superiority of her choice, but her ignominious personal background compels her to make a political virtue out of it: instead of championing a political liberty that elevates itself in assuming an ethical quality, she stoops down to use the higher instinct of ethical righteousness to score a petty political victory over her opponent. In her neurotic anxiety to challenge Creon politically, she disregards her ethical obligations to Ismene and Haemon. Antigone is the victim of a self-destructive mindset that feels little compunction in lending a pseudo ethical appearance to what in reality is a political hijacking of the eternal truths of life – the laws of God on earth.When ethics dissolves into politics, politics turns unethical; an undesirably recursive condition manifest in their mutual separation than integration.

The second in the trilogy, *Oedipus, The Tyrant* (429 BC), produced thirteen years later, by a poet rendered wiser by his distinguished participation in the political life of Athens, approaches the Theban legend with a greater clarity on the distinction between the political and ethical dimensions of liberty. Here the individual's approach to truth plays a key role in keeping the integration of political freedom and ethical liberty in perpetual abeyance, as the two remain in disjunctive relationship throughout, similar to the two sisters in Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx' riddle, who give birth to one another in ever-repeating turns. Prior to his arrival in Thebes, the two remained fatally separate in his consciousness. His ethical allegiance to the truth he learns from the Delphic oracle, and the desire to have freedom from guilt, drives him away from Corinth where his existence was marked by absolute political freedom. At the crossroads where the paths from Corinth, Thebes, and Delphi meet, Oedipus, however, delivers himself unwittingly

into the fearsome prospects of the prophesy, through amyopically political interpretation of freedom as a coordinate of physical prowess and the conviction of being answerable to none. The notion of spiritual liberty, taking concrete form as absolute and unquestioning submission to the will of God and the ways of Heaven, is not available even in the germinal form at this stage. The Oedipus depicted as the king of Thebes is the *spoudaios* of Aristotelian ethics, the "serious" hero who wishes to know what is "truly good" ("Nicomachean Ethics"). In this sense, the progress of the plot is simultaneously a record of the transition of the protagonist from a politically motivated search for truth into an ethical perception of truth.Oedipus's life in Thebes is seen to progress through three distinct phases of enquiry into truth, quint essentially connected to the evolving nature of his perception of freedom. It commences with the politically self-confident protagonist who, after liberating the people from the clutches of the Sphinx through the power of his 'knowledge,' assumes the throne of Thebes, and gains its queen in marriage. But this politically defined sense of liberty proves ephemeral as it comes under strain of an ethical imperative; the political legitimacy of the king is challenged by the ethical responsibility to ensure the welfare of the people. The initial path of enquiry that Oedipus embarks upon to detect the truth behind the plague is characterized by a self-deceptive exteriority, where everyone other than himself, including Creon and even Tiresias, become suspect in the eyes of Oedipus whose effort to detect the truth proceeds also from a political motive to avert the possibility of the murderous arms of the assassin of Laius rising against himself. Then, why does Tiresias, the personification of the ultimate kind of liberty that proceeds from spiritual realization charactrerised by complete absence of fear and desire, desist from telling the truth to Oedipus, an act which could set both

Oedipus and Thebes free from their mutually destructive course? The answer is that, if the seer, privy to the purpose of God not merely for Oedipus but for the whole of humanity, gave the truth to Oedipus rather than let him search it out painstakingly, it would merely lead to the political purging of Thebes, but never facilitate moral edification, either of Oedipus or of the world. Oedipus must dislodge himself from the liberty and comfort of his political sovereignty to launch himself on an agonizing path of ethical self-enquiry and detect that he is the culprit he seeks. Eviction, on the other hand, would bestow upon Oedipus an instinctive freedom for self-justification on grounds of unmerited punishment. It could even culminate in a tyrannical stance where a politically desperate Oedipus would impose himself vengefully on the people of Thebes. Denial of political rights often accords the victims an ill-conceived ethical freedom to adopt illegitimate means and unwarranted weapons of resistance against the oppressor. This self-destructive course of freedom is what is exercised later by Polyneices who aligns himself with the Argives to move in arms against his fatherland, when he is denied his right to the throne of Thebes as the elder scion of Oedipus. Conversely, in Creon, Sophocles detects the danger inherent in the enjoyment of unbridled material freedom that is not conjoined to thoughts of moral responsibility and ethical compunction. Creon who declaims that he would fain enjoy "the royal privilege than be a king" and "benefit in everything … without a care" (Sophocles 69) emerges in the full course of the Theban legend not merely a catastrophe unto himself, but a despotic threat to the moral and material wellbeing of the people of Thebes too. But when Oedipus himself moves forward, inch by inch, on a path of self-ostracism, detecting the truths related to his life, a new dawn of unadulterated ethical courage occurs in him, and it initiates him into a new phase of freedom where he

is able to forfeit his political rights, and expiation could be realized through suffering, penance, and self-purification.

Sophocles died in 406 BC, a man who had raised himself to the status of a venerable spirit through the lucidity of his benign vision, and invested with divinity by the people of Athens. In the last play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, produced in 401 B.C. by the poet's grandson, and composed presumably by Sophocles a few years earlier, the transition of Oedipus is complete. In Colonus, Oedipus forfeits those rights most dear to any man in those times: to die and be buried in his homeland. Purified from inside, he evinces a new sense of liberty that is absolute and self-contained. To the spiritually emancipated Oedipus, the truths perceived by the mind are direct commands from God, neither to be feared nor to be disowned, and not to be heeded after consultations with earthly deities. But, it is also the point of his death.

Coming down from the ancient Greek mythological wisdom to the theological vision of Christianity, the trope of separation between the three dimensions of liberty in a human being life based on differential perceptions and definitions of truth can be traced to the *New Testament*. Among the four, the "Gospel of John" stands out as the one that establishes Jesus Christ, as an idealized human figure – as the Son of God – in whom the three forms of liberty are in consonance, for the sole reason that the 'truth' that he claimed to know was materially benign, ethically reformist, and spiritually salvaging. As documented in Chapter 8 of the Gospel of John: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (*veritas vosliberabit)* ("John").

Madness, Disguise, and Exile as shortcuts to Liberty

The passage of Europe from the medieval age of darkness notorious for the exploitation of the common man by the Catholic clergy, to Enlightenment Modernity was marked by a discursive transference of truth from the religious to the social and political realms. The transcendental truths proffered as absolutes by religion came to be replaced with a new set of universally homogenized codes of belief and conduct, and a radically redefined notion of liberty, both to be internalized by the human consciousness through a strenuous process of analytical reasoning. The 'truths' prescribed by the ecclesiastical regime in the name of a Supreme Being could be received by the human mind through the passive instrumentality of abject faith, howsoever self-deceiving, without having to subject them to the test of a self-questioning rational consciousness. On the other hand, Enlightenment Modernity, by insisting on a scientific legitimation of knowledge through the scrutiny of arbitrarily organized texts of cause-effect relationship, subjected the human consciousness to compulsive and continuous restructuring, in order to accommodate incongruous truths normatively codified into competing discourses by the new centres of power. A pathological consequence of the frequent realignments of the contours of the human consciousness was that the individual came to experience tremendous psychological stress. Truth and knowledge being abstract notions, and the mind being the sole seat of these, any slight dislocation in the former would put the latter into distress. One of the palpable effects of the compulsive adherence to competing epistemological frameworks had been a dichotomization in the perception of liberty or the autonomy of the mind into the external and the internal, resulting often in a split in the human consciousness. When the

disequilibrium between the external assumption of liberty and the internal experience of autonomy crossed the threshold, it resulted in adaptive psychological behaviour, ranging from simple dilemmas to schizophrenic aberrations. The political and economic scholarship of this period lay emphasis mostly on dilations on the external dimensions of individual and collective liberty, while fictional literature thrived on explorations into the inner dynamics of the human sense of freedom.

The enquiry into the second stage of evolution in the human experience of liberty, extending from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, from the Renaissance to the *fin de siècle* could be launched with two questions, 'Was Hamlet free to pursue revenge?' and 'Is Hamlet mad?' The first one, 'Was Hamlet free to pursue revenge?' may not yield a facile answer, as the question, asked in the past tense, invests the character of Hamlet with a concrete human persona imbued with a psychological essence and a physical circumstance. It invites the critic rather too soon to take recourse to a plainly psychoanalytical route to analyse 'his problems' which eluded T.S. Eliot for lack of a sufficiently consolidated internal motive for their external objectification in the 'weird behaviour' of the prince. Hamlet, from the very beginning, was under the psychological stress of a recursive disjunction between his inner sense of ethical liberty and the provisions of the discursively codified political paradigms of liberty. Even without the ascription of the Oedipal motive, this dilemma is adequate to drive him away from the normatively fixed codes of social and individual conduct. It is normal for any human being to suspect foul play when his father dies all on a sudden, perfectly justified for a prince to feel deprived when his right to the throne as the heir of the deceased king is denied, and it may be emotionally unbearable and morally shameful for a son to see his mother enter

into conjugal relationship with her brother-in-law, not long after her erstwhile husband's death. However, Hamlet, as a man of learning as well as a soul prone to reflective thought, and as a lawful subject of the Kingdom of Denmark, faces the dilemma of not being able to assume the requisite ethical freedom either to accuse his uncle of usurpation, or his mother of marital infidelity for two reasons: first, there is a complete absence of any concrete evidence or human witness to prove, or even to suggest that his father was murdered by King Claudius, and, as he himself was away in Wittenberg, Claudius had naturally assumed the throne to avoid political uncertainty in Denmark; and secondly, with respect to his mother's marriage to King Claudius, there was no blemish to be attached to either of them, as it was politically permissible for the incumbent king to take the wife of the ousted ruler. Thus, his uncle's accession to the throne and his mother's marriage assume the weight of an internally oppressive burden that Hamlet has to bear. The political will of Hamlet to mount a revolt on King Claudius is weakened by the ethical deficiency in finding a properly founded body of reasons to seek revenge. Hence the sole means available to Hamlet in order to settle the questions of political deprivation and maternal misdemeanor is to address the uncertainty shrouding the death of his father. The psychodynamics of revenge presupposes ethical liberty which is synonymous with absolute approval from one's own conscience as well as from the public, and in the case of Hamlet, it must be attained through an unequivocal substantiation of his suspicion that his father was murdered by Claudius, through corroboration of circumstantial and material evidence; a task in which Hamlet fails miserably. None of the means at Hamlet's disposal seems adequate to win for him the ethical sanction for revenge, for they prove not merely insubstantial, but unethical too. First, it is his own premonitions regarding the untimely death of his

father, which he blurts out when he meets the ghost of King Hamlet: "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" (Shakespeare 877); but premonitions are not often trustworthy as reliable guides to action. The last straw, the play-within-the-play too fails to trap the mouse, and only manages to hold it for a while by its tail. Hamlet and perhaps Horatio too, may believe for a while that Claudius' guilt could be proved through his reactions on witnessing the action of the play, but who else would?

The mutually evasive play between political liberty and ethical liberty with respect to the theme of revenge goes on till it reaches a point where the motive is transferred from the dead king to the dying prince himself. Hamlet, who is yet tardy in proceeding on his revenge even after learning the contents of the letter he was entrusted to hand over to the King of England, needs no second thoughts to turn the poisoned tip of the rapier to Claudius when the dying Laertes reveals to him that the dual was contrived by Claudius himself to do away with him. The statement of the dying man has an infinitely greater testimonial validity than any account of the living, and Hamlet is now wholly justified, ethically and politically, to kill Claudius. But, it is once again, as in the case of Oedipus, a confluence of the two dimensions of liberty that materializes at the point of the death of the protagonist. And, finally when Hamlet fatally wounds Claudius, it is not in reflective materialization of the motif of revenge, but a prospective action engendered by circumstance of direct personal injury and the resultant spurt of righteous anger. Even as it entails the risk of sounding rhetorical, one is tempted to deflate the critical categorization of Hamlet as a revenge tragedy and ask back, 'Is there a revenge in this text?'

The second of the two questions, 'Is Hamlet mad?' asked in the simple present tense, would shift the focus from Hamlet the human being to 'Hamlet' the dramatic character, conceived by William Shakespeare in the sixteenth-century England. It warrants an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account the aesthetic as well as socio-cultural motives of the playwright in the characterization of Hamlet where Shakespeare seems to adopt a convoluted route to discuss the nature and scope of human liberty in its individual and social dimensions. It requires the critic to consider the history of Europe as a whole in its slow and painful passage from a catholic to a secular, humanist order. Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, believed to have been staged between 1592 and 1593, may, perhaps, provide a clue in this case. The self-destructive pact that Marlowe's 'Faustus' signs with Lucifer to surrender his soul to the Devil in lieu of twenty-four years of free life is outrageous to the Christian sensibility. Still, madness is a word that is meticulously kept out of the list of all human frailties discussed in the play. But, was this the case in the sixteenth-century Europe? The residual percolation of the earlier religious discourse into the early post-Renaissance humanistic social environment could not but have involved the attribution of madness in its twin guises as 'melancholy' and 'mania' to the influence of the Devil who liked 'black bile.' Pieter Spierenburg, in his review of the book, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-century Germany* (1999) written by H.C. Erik Midelfort, writes:

> The unavoidable intrusion of the devil, even in most of the learned discourses on humoral pathology (more prominent among the learned at the end than at the beginning of the period) shaped contemporary attitudes towards madness. Although contemporaries acknowledged that madness entailed diminished

responsibility for one's actions, they could not escape infusing their evaluation of the mad with moral and religious judgements. As has been noted by other scholars, a medical view of madness [also] existed in pre-industrial Europe, but its immersion in religious and moral thinking made it quite different from modern psychiatry. (128)

While Marlowe, a Cambridge graduate who was rumoured to have nurtured plans "to go to the English seminary at Rheims in northern France, presumably to prepare for ordination as a Roman Catholic priest" ("Christopher"), dogmatically subscribes to the Christian view of melancholy, mania, and witchcraft as handiwork of the devil, and makes Faustus pay for his 'folly' (which was also deemed a coefficient of the devil-induced mental aberrations), Shakespeare, equipped only with his grammar school education, moves forward to be enlightened by his Dutch contemporary Johann Weyer (1515-88), whose work Spierenburg acknowledges as "[serving] as a crucial contribution to the development of the insanity defense in criminal trials" (127). Weyer's defence, in his capacity as a practicing physician, of women practicing witchcraft by designating them as 'mentally ill' may be said to have commenced the practice of deploying insanity as an alibi in legal proceedings through the argument that madness entailed diminished responsibility for one's actions.

Hamlet, despite his scholarly and philosophical disposition, is as yet a man in the prime of his youth, who is prone to have worldly ambitions and sexual vigour. Disappointed in both – dispossessed of the throne by his uncle, rejected in love by Ophelia at the behest of her father, and peeved by his mother's conjugal union with Claudius rather too soon – he is bound to feel melancholic within the secure walls of mental sanity. The air of suspicion that shrouds the enigmatic and untimely death of the erstwhile king is one that is generally shared by many a like-minded citizen of Denmark like Horatio and Marcellus. Against this backdrop, the narrative, until three-fourth of its entire span, could be read as the story of a victim-turned-detective who, faced with a criminal who is brutal, powerful, and ever-resourceful, is so desolate and desperate as to "put an antic disposition on" to prove his case (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 878). Through the supernatural agency of the ghost, the dramatist wrests from Christian morality an ethical sanction for Hamlet to assume the defence of insanity to redress his political grievances against Claudius. William Shakespeare here attains the stupendous task of releasing 'insanity' from its theological interpretation as a pact with the Devil and transposing it to the secular realm of the human 'conscience' – a word that has a crucial and repetitive presence throughout the narrative context of *Hamlet*. Shakespeare in fact deploys the character of Claudius as a 'dramatic foil' to consolidate the transference of 'madness' from the theological to the secular, by highlighting the perennial lucidity and absolute sanity of mind with which Claudius devises one evil plan after the other to ensconce himself in power, until the moment of his unforeseen death at the hands of Hamlet. Even the play-within-the play, which has the potential to mirror to Claudius himself the diabolism inherent in his actions, and possibly to move him to repentance and atonement, manages only to alarm him superficially. Conversely, it seems to alert him on the need to safeguard the secrecy of his actions and motives. Hamlet, left with no reasonable means to launch a direct attack on the king, has nothing more than his own premonitions on the death of his father, the irreproducible words of an apparition, and his sentimental grudge against his mother and Ophelia to lean on, and these are too insufficient

for the pursuit of revenge. Shakespeare must have deemed it politically and ethically right for Hamlet to find it congenial, and free of 'conscience' to assume the guise of madness, against such a powerful, and perfectly 'sane' worshipper of evil.

Ophelia's madness, though more concretely depicted without ambiguity, and far more unsettling than that of Hamlet's feigned madness, has not received the deserving critical attention, till date in the history of Shakespearean criticism, perhaps because it was deemed irrelevant gender-wise (as Shakespeare himself provides the clue in Act III, scene 1: "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go" (887), and the category of 'great ones' even in Elizabethan England did not include women in it.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Ophelia could provide a clue to the life of contemporary women and the stifling norms imposed on their sexuality. Patriarchy, ubiquitously present in the guise of fathers and brothers, was, unlike Tennyson's "Ulysses," never tired of meting and doling 'unequal laws' unto the fairer sex, and Ophelia too has her fair share of moral chastisement from her father and her brother, freely given in the 'best interest of the woman.' In Act 1, scene 3, Ophelia expresses, albeit in a mellowed tone, her frustration and resentment at Laertes 'hypocrisy in counselling her on the subject of female chastity while he retains his freedom to transgress the same rules of virtuous conduct:

> But good my brother, / Do not as some ungracious pastors do, /Show me steep and thorny way to heaven, / Whiles like a puff'd up and reckless libertine / Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads / and recks not his own reed. (875)

Another peculiar aspect that lends credibility to this line of argument is Polonius' objection to her acceptance of tokens and gestures of love from Hamlet. Would this proscription have been enforced by the father, had King Hamlet not been murdered and the prospects of the prince succeeding him to the throne were not blurred? Hamlet has already identified Polonius as a time server, and his speech is at its contemptuous best in interaction with Polonius; but his most acerbic tongue is reserved for Ophelia whom he loves and perhaps hates too in extension of the disgust he holds for his mother. The sexual innuendo he shoots at her is characteristic of one who suspects his fiancée of transferring her affections elsewhere when he has suffered a fall in life. The invisibility that patriarchal societies enforce on the psychic distress of women who are torn between the contrastive pulls of parental authority and their own sexual affinities, turns pathological in Ophelia's case. While her father is around to take decisions for her, even if his choices for her go against her inner desires, he performs the role of a surrogate conscience to which she could shift her sense of loss and guilt in spurning Hamlet. However, in the interstices of this superficially consolidated behavioural 'order' is the germinal form of resentment and urge for revolt against the patriarchal forces that wield control over her. At some point or other Ophelia must have nurtured in her mind the wish that she be absolved of the stifling weight and light-denying shadow of the father over her own life. Hence, the unforeseen death of Polonius, and that too rumoured to be at the hands of her lover, creates in her already tortured mind the mutually contesting feelings of instantaneous wish fulfilment on the one hand, and a sudden sense of void engendered by the vacation of her father's presence in her psyche. The irresolvable tension between these attains catastrophic proportions, and hurls her into a confusion that leaves her totally disoriented.

The speeches assigned to Ophelia by Shakespeare after she falls insane are noted for their twin foci – an overtly erotic content suggestive of her unfulfilled sexual desire for Hamlet, and intense agony at the thought of her father's corpse not receiving the last rites due to it. The first is a subconscious realization of the material liberty to fulfil the desire she had for Hamlet which she had longed for in her sane life, and the second, paradoxically, a nondescript sense of guilt in wishing for her father's death herself. Her madness is thus, perhaps the culmination of the tension between the political freedom she gains with the removal, rather exorcism, of the father figure from her life on the one hand, and the ethical burden of the guilt she bears in believing herself to be complicit with Hamlet in the murder of her father by wishing for it to happen. This recursive relationship between political and ethical liberties in the context of gender relations so subtly hinted at by William Shakespeare resurfaces much later in a different terrain in the confessional poetry of Sylvia Plath who writes,

> Daddy, I have had to kill you. / You died before I had time - - -. With her father's death, Ophelia is unceremoniously hurled into an air of freedom that proves too enormous for her heart which till the other day remained cramped in her father's shoes, Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. ("Daddy")

From Hamlet's feigned madness, it isn't a long way to another more succinct form of dissembling, 'disguise' that is adopted as a means for wish fulfilment and attainment of individual freedom. The baseline here is that, by any yardstick, religious, judicial, political, and ethical, 'disguise' assumed for any reason, howsoever sublime it is, is dishonourable in individual and social conduct, as it involves deceit. However, disguise per se proceeds from an unequal tussle between powerfully orchestrated social norms and the unsympathetically stifled aspirations of the individual, and can sometimes gain the dignified guise of an organic quest on the part of the individual for the freedom to attain genuine self-expression, or to transcend the obstacles placed by society in the path to self-realisation. Disguise and Masques, as these are confronted in the world of Shakespearean dramaturgy, provide too facile a means for the playwright to grant his socially dispossessed and disengaged characters, mostly women, liberties that they would normally be denied in real life. Liberty, in its gendered discussions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had very different and much minimal meanings when compared to normal application of the same with respect to men. Shakespeare uses the device predominantly in his comedies which present sensible women opting for transvestite disguise for reasons ranging from the fundamental need to ensure physical safety, to the attainment of the liberty to choose in love and marriage, and to show to the world their real mental prowess. Here, it is the disguise of 'Rosalind' and 'Celia' in *As You Like it* that warrants a detailed analysis against the backdrop of the critical motif of liberty.

Idealism is neither misplaced nor unnatural to be encountered in a Romantic Comedy, but Shakespeare assigned Celia in *As You Like It* a secondary importance with respect to Rosalind, for diffidence about sounding too idealistic. Rosalind's disguise as a man is politically bent whereof she is able to turn the tables in her favour, through a reversal of gender roles. Shakespeare seems to have an ulterior purpose of hinting at a far more sublime kind of liberty, in permitting Celia to retain her role as a woman in her disguise. The name, 'Aliena' that she adopts for her disguise, translated into English as 'alien,' carries an aporetic coexistence of belonging and non-belonging, of bondage, and freedom. The

alien, wherever one is, is out there and not there at one and the same time, both inside and outside every time. The 'alien' has a liminal state of being in which the laws, customs and manners of the environment, howsoever ubiquitously present, fail to fasten themselves on to one's soul. The name appropriately conveys the distance she naturally maintains from the calumny and cruelty of her native environment, even while acceding to it. Even her real name 'Celia,' meaning 'blind' in Latin, suggests that she has an inner vision which is not in conformity with the vision of those around her. She has already displayed an ethical freedom over material lures, quite uncharacteristic of similar women of her age, by disapproving of her father's disinheritance of her uncle, and assuring Rosalind that

> When he (her father, Duke Frederick) dies, thou shalt be his heir: for what he hath taken away from thy father perforce, I will render thee again in affection. (Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 218-19)

Shakespeare endows Celia with a far more formidably founded ilk of liberty of the mind that Rosalind, with all her transvestite disguise, can never attain. Her mind radiates with an ethical freedom that seems to have precocious affinities for the spiritual. The buoyancy of her liberal spirit enables her to outgrow her native circumstance and identify herself with the other. She raises herself to a paradoxically sublime experience of freedom when she reassures Rosalind that she too stands banished by her father (222). Shakespeare's subtlety in purposive characterisation is in its full force in depicting Celia as one who has imbibed the value of renunciation at a tender age, in contrast to the accumulative instinct characteristic of people of her age. She remains the richest character in the play in terms of a happiness of the mind borne by a sense of liberty that hovers between the ethical and the spiritual.

The character of the banished Duke in *As You Like it* becomes an appropriate literary means to demonstrate the motif of exile/travel as a shortcut to liberty. Away from the material and political worries of statesmanship, he enjoys for a while the liberty offered by his exile into the Forest of Arden. He brings to the fore two personally experienced, but generally applicable truths. The first one is that 'culture,' as available in any human habitation, with such quintessential features as customs, manners, urbanity and "pomp," is a bane, howsoever alluring it is, as it curtails the individual freedom to pursue happiness and fulfilment. And, being away from the confines of one's culture could provide a relief, howsoever illusory or temporary it is. In any case, travel, compulsive or voluntary, became a by-route to freedom for many, especially for those caught in the turbulence of the religious clashes of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Andrew Pettegree, in his article, "Time and Space: Living in Sixteenth-century Europe" writes:

> The religious convulsions of the period, and particularly the second half of the century, saw very considerable population shifts as people fled persecution or made a preemptive bid for religious freedom. An estimated 50,000 people left the Netherlands in the wake of the collapse of the first brief experiment of religious co-existence in 1566-7, and France experienced a similar exodus after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. (5)

Religious strife in Europe in the Middle Ages which led to "legal ouster or threats leading to voluntary exile [. . .] forcing dissenters to find a new home abroad" (Monga 173) soon got mixed up with the political, economic and cultural interests of the European nations. By the eighteenth century, the intercontinental travel undertaken

by the religious dissenters in the name of a compulsive quest for freedom of faith and worship became completely assimilated into the obnoxious imperial practice of colonial expansionism, which bestowed upon itself a specious kind of pseudo-ethical legitimation in the guise of the 'White Man's Burden' to civilize the colonies. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* anticipates this transformation of religious liberty to practice faith, to the commercial liberty to exploit and subjugate the native populations in different parts of the world. Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, engrossed religiously in his study of magic (as people were magically engrossed in their respective religious faiths in those days), ousted by his own brother, (as the practitioners of different sects of Christianity did to each other) and abandoned to his fate at sea on a dilapidated vessel (pretty much like the 'Pilgrim Fathers' on the 'Mayflower' and the 'Speedwell' on their way to America), establishes absolute liberty and power on the island on which he lands, and brings its inhabitants under his control. The first and last demand that Ariel, the spirit under his command, demands is his "Liberty,"

Pro.[…] What is't thou can'st demand?

Ari. My liberty. (Shakespeare, *Tempest* 4)

Ariel is the personification of an ulterior dimension of the mind that is desirous of a freedom which transcends the terrestrial and material coordinates of existence. Caliban's demand, on the other hand is the restitution of his territorial ownership of the island which was bequeathed on him by his mother (5), and was taken away from him through deceptive means by the alien. Prospero treats Ariel, the obedient and "quaint" (5) airy spirit who was a captive on the island prior to his arrival, with greater allowance, and grants him the status of a "servant" (3) who is promised his freedom in lieu of his assistance in taking Prospero's plan to fruition. On the other

hand, Caliban the original inhabitant of the island, is addressed as "my slave" (5) by the usurper, and Prospero is ever vigilant in proscribing all hopes of freedom to him.

Critical attention on *The Tempest* has always been focused on aspects like usurpation, hegemony, exploitation, denial, and oppression, discussed against the backdrop of colonialism. But what actually makes the play, written around 1610-11 when colonialism was in the budding stage, truly remarkable is the foresight of William Shakespeare in rendering it a dramatic forestatement on the devious ways in which Britain would entrench its political and economic suzerainty over different parts of the world in the course of the next two centuries, and more importantly, on the diverse ways in which it would be questioned, resisted, and bypassed by the natives. With Ariel, Prospero seems to employ a pioneering version of the 'Doctrine of Subsidiary Alliance' by which the empire could extract services and obedience from native rulers in lieu of the protection offered to them from their native enemies. While Ariel 'enjoys' a drastically truncated kind of liberty, Caliban is a slave to Prospero, absolutely deprived of subjectivity, identity and freedom. Antonio's instigates Sebastian to murder his brother, King Alonso of Naples, based on the assumption that the crown would fall on him naturally if Alonso died without a legal heir, as both his offspring, Ferdinand, believed to have drowned at sea in the shipwreck, and Claribel, married far-away in Tunis, would not come back to claim the throne. The same convoluted logic of acquisition was callously stretched to unethical levels in the Indian subcontinent by Lord Dalhousie in formulating and implementing the 'Doctrine of Lapse' to annex independent Indian States to the English East India Company in the 1850s on grounds of lack of male heir to the incumbent ruler. The way Prospero establishes his supremacy over the two

inhabitants of the island, and gains access to its resources, clearly anticipates the diverse techniques of enticement, appeasement, cultural allurement, deprivation, suppression, and most succinctly the policy of 'divide and rule' employed by the English to establish their supremacy in India.

Rebellion or Resistance as the Highway to Liberty

Colonialism necessarily paved the way for the emergence and progressive consolidation of movements of resistance and rebellion as a means to attain political freedom from alien rule in many parts of the world. But within the dominant culture of Europe fissures had begun to appear towards the end of the nineteenth century. Discontent with the elitist and essentialist discourses of Enlightenment modernity had already been amalgamated into counter-theoretical postures like, Feminism and Marxism. Freudian Psycho analysis came up with the notion of the subconscious as a realm of repressed desires. These movements represented the aspirations of the marginalized and the oppressed for political, cultural, and sociological liberty from the normative clutch of patriarchy and aristocracy. Essentially political in nature, these counter-discourses questioned the ethical validity of the grand narratives of Humanism, but, of course, they chose to remain very much within the prevalent order. Later in the course of the twentieth century, a radically rebellious and callous mood came to characterize the routine life of the younger generation in Europe. Irreverence and non-adherence to the discursively naturalized and universalized norms received from the past came to be exhibited through conscious, routine and almost habitual flouting of traditional customs and beliefs. An intense kind of subjectivism and individualism in perception, action and expression, came to sever the human mind from its conform-

ist and didactic compulsions. The avantgarde artistic and literary movements that constituted what has come to be called 'High Modernism'were adept in building up an aura of libertinism and anarchism of sorts, and effecting a shift of concern from ethical liberty to liberty from ethics altogether. In literature, the character of 'Vera' in the short story, "The Open Window" by H.H. Munroe, (Saki) becomes an epitome of this shift from the ethical to the political. In a one-line epilogue of sorts, the writer says: "Romance at short notice was her speciality" (Munro 36). Vera churns out stories that follow an independent and ad hoc trajectory, constituting an alternate mental terrain that is perfectly valid from her own varying subjective perspectives, and often leaving those around her without a cue whether to believe her or not, for her stories can neither be ascertained as truths nor spurned as falsehoods. "The Open Window" summarises the politics inherent in the modernist notion of 'individual liberty' that extricates the human mind from all social mores, including the notion of conscience. Vera represents a radical kind of freedom that involves a deliberate suspension of the natural adherence of the human psyche to the totalizing narratives of 'reason' in order to consciously assume a liberty that is devoid of referentialcompulsions and the pains of legitimation. 'Vera' a shortened or altered form of 'veracity' is at liberty to churn out subjective half-truths at her will, and would rather remain oblivious to the impact it would have on others. The eponymous 'window' of the story utilized by Vera to concoct a parallel narrative which facilitates a lateral entry for an alternate truth, assumes a dramatic significance as a foil to the conventional centralization of the 'door' as an appropriate channel of legitimate entry. To Vera, her uncles represent the men folk of England, with their predilection for 'hunting – a metaphor for the male trade of war ridiculously oblivious of

their own condition of being trapped in the marsh of their own making. And her aunt, whom she perceives to be in the grip of a neurotic anxiety, represent the nostalgia of the women in Europe for the peace of the routine that they lost in the wake of the wars and skirmishes that beset Europe in the period. The Spaniel that comes in with Vera's uncles represents the meek, conformist, and normative notions of rational behaviour promoted by discursive authority. Conversely, the 'pariah dogs' in her cooked-up story, that drove Framton Nuttel into a cemetery when he had been in India, suggest the anarchic potential possessed by the counter-discursive sensibility that informed the radical artistic and literary sensibility of the avant-garde.

Disengagement with Truth as Liberty

Human liberty, in its social as well as individual forms, reaches a crucial stage of sublimation in what has come to be known as the postmodern epoch. Postmodernism, with its creed of anti-foundationalism, could be described as a post-theoretical stance that denies credibility to the arbitrarily homogenized and universalized notions of truth, proffered in the name of 'Reason.' In postmodernity, the distrust in the West of the metanarratives of the past surpasses its early modernist reactionary engagements that took shape as counter-narratives, to embrace a subversive mood of gay abandon. Postmodern art, architecture, literature, painting, and even science, evince a new freedom borne by a nascent faith in the contingency of truths. *Petite narratives* that proffer non-binding, heterogeneous versions of locally and temporarily validated truths, enable the postmodern writers and artists to chart the liberation of the human 'self' from fixed notions of identity and predetermined patterns of spatial and temporal orientations of thought and behaviour. This new form of liberty, which transcends routine concerns of ethics as well as poli-

tics, becomes a viable alternative to the ultimate form of spiritual liberty to be realized in the intellect rather than in the soul. It facilitates for the writer a freedom to deconstruct texts, create alternate histories, and celebrate a liberal play of meaning in language that defies textual determination.

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Reverence for Life: Biocentirc Ethics in Indira Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta*

Dr. Supriya M.*

Abstract

Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution unsettled the Biblical Story of Creation and heralded 'Biocentrism,' an environmental ethics that divested humans of their supernatural origins and cast them into the framework of natural laws. Biocentrism extends the status of moral object from human beings to all living things in nature. Biocentric ethics redefines relationship between humans and nature, which is totally at variance with how anthropocentrists perceive this relationship. When anthropocentrism with its human-centredness, argues that intrinsic value resides solely in the humans, biocentrism upholds the view that allowance would also have to be made for the non-human world of plants, animals, and land of the natural environment. The 2001 Jnanpith Award winning Assamese writer Indira Goswami's novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2006), which is a powerful critique and a campaign against the two thousand year age-old practice of animal sacrifice in the ancient Kamakhya Temple at Nilachal hills of Assam, becomes a powerful text on bioethics. The protagonist Jatadhari Chinnamasta, the ascetic of the Kamakhya temple, vehemently protests against this savage practice and proves with his blood that animals have as much a claim over this earth as human beings. The novel becomes a reaffirmation of the principle of 'reverence for life,' which holds that all life deserves equal moral consideration or has equal moral standing.

Keywords: *Anthropocentrism, Androcentrism, Biocentrism, Bioethics, and Deep Ecology.*

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The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 heralded the biocentrist views by introducing the Theory of Evolution.

Evolution's major contribution to the development of biocentric thought lay in its removal of humans from their supernatural origins and placement into the framework of natural laws. This interpretation of evolutionary theory broke down anthropocentric conventions, recasting humans as one of many species that reacted and adapted to their surrounding environment. ("Biocentrism")

The term biocentrism incorporates an environmental ethics that extends the status of moral object from human beings to all living things in nature. Biocentric ethics redefines relationship between humans and nature, in a manner totally at variance with how anthropocentrisms perceive this relationship. Robyn Eckersley in her 1992 book *Environmentalism and Political Theory* observes that:

> Anthropocentrism represents human-centredness in the sense that intrinsic value is taken to reside or at least pre-eminently in the humans, such that human interests become favoured over the interests of the non-human world. (Mellor 132)

And it is this anthropocentric view that is strongly condemned by the biocentrists:

> Human values could no longer be based on the assumption that man alone is at the centre of creation; allowance would have to be made for the welfare of all the plants, animals and land of the natural environment. (Glotfelty and Fromm 168)

This "responsiveness to the natural environment" makes environmental texts act as "carriers or agents of ecocentricity" (Buell 143), with an innate potential to be translated into "social, economic, political and individual programmes of action" (Selvamony 8). It is this great mission that is undertaken by the 2001 Jnanpith Award winning Assamese writer Indira Goswami, whose novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* (2006), becomes a powerful critique and a campaign against the two thousand year age-old practice of animal sacrifice in the ancient Kamakhya Temple at Nilachal hills of Assam. Deeply distraught at having witnessed a goat sacrifice performed for her wellbeing at the temple of Goddess Kamakhya, following an astrologer's prediction that her stars are disastrously placed, Goswami wielded her pen to denounce this savage practice. She reminisces how the spot where the red *tikka* of goat's blood was daubed on her forehead continued to remain a searing pain all through her life.

Set in the pre-independent Assam of 1920s, *The Man from Chinnamasta* tells the story of the titular character Jatadhari Chinnamata, the ascetic of the Kamakhya temple, an important Shakti peeth, situated on the hallowed site where, it was believed, Lord Siva's consort Sati's sacred *yoni* or vagina dropped, when Lord Vishnu decimated her charred body into fifty one pieces. Jatadhari, the ascetic with matted locks, was a devotee of the goddesses, and also invoked Lord Siva in his fearful form as Bhairav. The hills reverberated with his loud invocations of 'Ma Mahadevi.' Several strange myths added to the mysterious aura around him. It was rumoured that he crawled into the bellies of elephants to meditate, he had snakes entangled in his matted hair, and poisonous snakes came out of the river to crawl over the ascetic's body. Even at the height of the monsoon, it was said, he could swim easily across the Brahmaputra. With a trident in one

hand and a garland of blood red hibiscus in the other, Jatadhari strode, with his eyes flashing with some sort of divine light or like burning pyres.

The environmental philosophy of Deep Ecology postulates that 'Self' should not be understood in an individualistic and egoistic way.

> Deep Ecological sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world. (Selvamony 59)

Analysing this statement, Rayson K. Alex observes that,

> This maturity implies the ability to relate to the immediate environment, shedding several cultural assumptions and values. A person attains full maturity when he/she realises "self-in-self," where "Self" stands for organic wholeness. (59)

Goswami's Jatadhari has attained this ontological realization that all life is interrelated. He lived in close communion with nature, worshipping earth and water. He was seen rising from the mist, much like an ancient landmass arising from the water, covered by an assortment of moss, creepers, and grass-piercing look. He had meditated for long in caves, with venomous serpents nestling in his matted locks, and wild birds perching on his arms. Stories went about that the restless magpie settled down before him, to sing its melodies. The shy swallows grew boisterous in his presence. His disciples claimed that he could stand on water, and even stay under water for hours together. Jatadhari Chinnamasta drew a crowd of disciples around him, who were cured of various kinds of illnesses, for it was believed that he had miraculous healing powers – asthma patients or those reeling under acute gastric problems. But it was not just physical ailments that he cured. People lined up before him seeking his blessings and redressal for their varied grievances. Fathers of marriageable daughters, women who wanted to mend the drunkenness of their husbands, and people with several such woes rallied around him.

The aura of mystery around Jatadhari gave rise to many speculations about his past life, before his initiation as an ascetic, that he was once a brilliant scholar at the Benares Hindu University; or that he had been educated in Tanjore district of South India; or he originally belonged to the Trihut region of Bihar. When he reached the sacred abode of Goddess Kamakhya, he stood witness to a buffalo being led to be sacrificial altar. The buffalo had defecated as it was dragged to the altar. The echo of its hooves and the sight of its frightened eyes pierced into his soul, constantly tormenting him. Respectful of all creatures of nature, Jatadhari could not bear the sight of blood at the goddess' sacred abode. When he returned from the sacrificial altar, he was determined to put an end to this age-old tradition, much to the annoyance of the powerful priests and patrons of the temple who believed that animal sacrifice alone would appease the goddess and helped mankind attain deliverance. Jatadhari entrusted his ardent disciple Ratnadhar to organize a big rally against animal sacrifice with the students of the Cotton College.

Goswami gives a graphic description of the gory celebrations that unfolded in the sacrificial altar. The sacrificial beasts were dragged to the altar by rubbing chillies on their eyes and were beheaded. The bufflalo's neck would be smeared with butter so that a single strike would slice its head off. The altar piled up with goats, doves, and buffalos brought for sacrifice. Stories went about of the tantriks of the temple eating out of

human skulls, drinking the blood of the slaughtered animals, rubbing their bodies with blood instead of ashes, and smearing their foreheads with blood and vermilion. The tantriks believed that, "Ma's womb must always be filled with blood. Only then will the world survive" (Goswami 173). To corroborate their arguments, they portrayed a gruesome picture of the Goddess, as a woman clad in blood coloured robes, with four arms, and adorned with a long garland of skulls. Blood, they stated, was the only delicacy that would appease the Goddess – "Haven't you heard that Ganesha is venerated with liquor, Vishnu with clarified butter, Shiva with music, and Chandika with blood" (182).

Their pronouncements invariably ended on a note of warning to the devotees that if anyone dared to change the practice of millennia, Mother Goddess will destroy the earth and they all will rot in hell.

Paul Taylor in his essay "Respect for Nature," which is considered to be the first rigorous, philosophical defence of biocentric ethics, provides the basic tenets of ''biocentric outlook'' on life. He states that humans and all other species together constitute the members of earth's community. All these species have an inherent value, and form a system of interdependence. Humans are not inherently superior to the other species in a moral or ethical sense ("Biocentrism in Environmental"). This is where biocentrism comes in conflict with anthropocentrism, which claims that only living human beings deserve moral consideration. The conflict between the tantriks of the temple and Jatadhari is very well between anthropocentric and biocentric views respectively. What the tantrics promised the devotees was an assurance of salvation of their souls:

> Deliverance comes only when sacrifice
> is offered. Sacrifice alone will lead you

to heaven. A buffalo's blood quenches the goddess's thirst for one hundred years. And when a follower offers the blood of his own body, she is satisfied for one thousand years. (93)

The tantrics exhorted the people to offer a bit of flesh, the size of a sesame seed, from their chest, to appease the goddess and they will have all their desires fulfilled within six months. The man who was sacrificed was elevated to the status of a god.

Peter Singer, the Australian philosopher of Bioethics, holds that one ought to extend to animals the same equality of consideration that one extend to human beings. He argues that membership in the species *Homo sapiens* is the only criterion of moral importance that includes all humans and excludes all non-humans. Singer's ethics is extended from humans to nonhuman animals because the criterion for moral inclusion (sentience) is found in both humans and nonhuman animals, thus it would be arbitrary to deny it to nonhuman animals simply because they were not human. Therefore, both animals and human beings deserve the same equality of consideration ("Biocentrism"). It is this ecological wisdom that Goswami champions through Jatadhari and his disciples, who argued that it was not mentioned anywhere that Mother would reduce the earth to ashes, if she were not offered blood. Hence, they staunchly opposed the animal sacrifice in the Goddess' temple. Countering the argument of the tantriks, Jatadhari stated that the goddess could as well be propitiated by offering flowers, instead of blood: "Ma! Cast off your blood stained robes, adorn yourself in garment of flowers" (53).

Goswami makes the two camps quote profusely from scriptures and sacred texts like *Debi Bhagavat*, *Yogini Tantra*, and *Kalika Purana* to

endorse their views. Jatadhari's disciples claimed that the status of flowers was higher than that of blood:

> According to the holy books, flowers are equally acceptable to the Mother. The writings say that anyone making an offering of a thousand karabi flower and a thousand kunda flowers will have all his desires fulfilled. Also he earns the religious merit of living in the abode of the goddess. (128)

It was further assured that the devotee who offered prayers with a thousand purple lotuses earned himself the distinction of being the goddess' companion for a million centuries and can live in Rudraloka, the kingdom of Lord Siva; and also that the offering of one karabhi flower can earn the devotee the virtues of *Ashwamedha*, and secure a place in the land of the sun (129). Quoting *Yogini Tantra* which describes the rituals for Shakti worship in Kamakhya recommending flowers, Jatadhari's disciples exhorted the people, "Throw out the blood. Worship the goddess with flowers. Human souls are hidden behind a wall of petals . . . . The soul, scented with flowers, can pull a victim from the jaws of death" (129). Ratnadhar, quoted *Kalika Purana* that goddess recommended offerings of white gourd, melon, sugarcane, and alcohol, which were as dear to her as goat's blood: "Nowhere it is written that one cannot worship without spilling blood" (105). The tantrics countered their argument claiming how it has been a tradition of centuries, which they are bound to follow.

> The sacred texts very clearly state that the blood of deer satiates the almighty goddess for eight months. The blood of a black bull or a boar appeases her for twelve years. (81)

They convinced the villagers with stories of King Rudrasingha, who sacrificed twenty thousand buffaloes to propitiate the goddess to ensure victory in war. They quoted *Kalika Purana* which assured that such men attain prestige and immortality.

The concept of 'biocentric equality' in Deep Ecology affirms the equality of all things in the biosphere, because all organisms, have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger self (Selvamony 59).

If Jatadhari was fighting for this biocentric equality, the priests strongly contended that human beings alone are entitled to live in this world, and all other creatures should be subservient to man's needs. Jatadhari directed Ratnadhar to lead a protest march and undertake a signature campaign against animal sacrifice. Ratnadhar went about from house to house campaigning against the practice. He mobilized the students of the Cotton College for the signature campaign, who cast their signatures in their own blood, symbolic of the spilled blood of the animals. They were optimistic that once the memorandum was submitted to the district magistrate and to the chief priest of the temple, it would usher in a new era, when the goddess would be venerated only with flowers, and the blood sacrifice in the sacred abode would stop once and for all. Even when an attempt was made on his life, Jatadhari remained undaunted. He exhorted his disciples: "Those trying to wipe out this bloody ritual must be prepared to sacrifice their own blood" (Goswami 153). In the climax of the novel, the petition is read out to the chief priest. As the crowd waited in silence for his response, a priest in red robes challenged Jatadhari, "You have said that if it is blood that is required, devotees should offer their own . . . since you speak of blood, let us see some proof here and now" (183). The tantriks chorused:

The goddess is satiated for a thousand years with one human sacrifice. Devotees can earn the same benefit by offering their own blood. Now let the act commences. (183)

They even specified how the sacrifice should be offered. Quoting the sacred texts, they stated that when one's own blood was offered, it must be either from below the navel or from the back, or from the arms or the stomach. They exhorted Jatadhari to offer his blood, since his disciples were sickly, and the goddess would not accept their blood.

You have to cut a part of your own body and offer a lotus leaf cup filled with your blood. A razor, a machete, a sharp knife-you can use any of these. Remember, the larger the blade, the more auspicious it is. (186)

With a divine aura suffusing about his person, Jatadhari went and stood before the sacrificial altar. He drew a razor from his waistband and sliced off a piece of his own flesh from below his navel, loudly invoking 'Ma! Ma!' The disciples of Jatadhari stepped forward and with the same weapon, the youths began to cut flesh from their bodies, which continued all through the night. The sacrificial altar was drenched in the blood of young men. People stared in horror as blood flowed in the sacred abode of the goddess after midnight. With dawn, as rain came down, it carried the raw blood into the bosom of the Brahmaputra. A new dawn broke open – "In the clear light of day, no one could see a trace of blood. Not a single bloodstain remained" (186). By spilling his own blood and that of his disciples, Jatadhari had ensured that the temple premises will no longer be stained with blood. If, as the tantriks claimed, the blood of one person could appease the goddess for a thousand years, the spilled blood of all the disciples collectively has

ensured that the Goddess would remain appeased for ages, and no animal need to be slaughtered to quench the thirst of the Goddess. Jatadhari and his disciples proved with their blood the principle that all living things had the right to exist in the universe.

If biocentric ethics is the central message of the text, the story of Dorothy Brown and Bidhibala, the two women characters of the novel, brings in the interconnectedness of anthropocentric and androcentric ideologies. The ecofeminist Karen J. Warren states that if anthropocentrism is 'human-centeredness' or 'human-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of humans over nature, androcentrism is 'male-centeredness' or "male-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of men over women" (Marina 14). In an androcentric culture, men are considered the human type, while women are solely an accompaniment, a subordinate assistant, her only essential role being reproduction. Anthropocentric dualism of humanity/nature and androcentric dualism of man/woman share a common 'logic of domination' as Warren puts it. If anthropocentrism confers superiority upon humans on the grounds of some alleged quality such as possession of an immortal soul or rationality, androcentrism confers superiority upon men, on the grounds of some alleged quality such as possession of larger brain size (Garrard 23). Goswami exposes the underlying irony of situation that in Kamakhya where a female deity is worshipped as *Shakthi*, it is a totally different treatment meted out to the women, as revealed in the stories of Dorothy Brown and Bidhibala. When Dorothy Brown was away in London on a treatment for infertility, her husband Henry Brown, principal of Guwahati Cotton College, entered into a relationship with a local Khasi woman. Dorothy walked out on her husband, and sought asylum and peace of mind in Jatadhari's company. She could connect with the Jatadhari

in an unusual manner: "I shall be your shadow forever. Our relationship cannot be defined. It is a very special bond" (174). No ignominy was attributed to Henry Brown's liaison with the local girl or her consequent pregnancy. But when Brown got the news of his wife's pregnancy, for which Jatadhari was held responsible, she fell a victim to his bullet. Bidhibala, a girl of eleven, is forced into a marriage with a forty year old rich landowner, already married and with two daughters. He was planning to get remarried for the sake of a son. No one could challenge Bidhibala's father's decision to marry her off to an aged man. Bidhi-bala was even more annoyed that a calf in her house was to be sacrificed, so that her marriage will be sanctified by the goddess. The bellowing of the calf, which was craving for its mother's warmth, disturbed her. She prayed to the goddess to take her life and spare the animal, which would be sacrificed for her sake. She too felt like an animal about to be sacrificed, in getting married to a widower. Ratnadhar sympathised with the young girl whom he silently admired. "What difference was there between sacrificial animals and women"? (99). Bidhibala even defied the scriptures,

> I have no use of scriptures that recommend the killing of animals. . . . I shall offer my songs to the goddess. Songs, created from my tearful, unspoken words. I shall smash the stones weighing down my heart and offer their dust to the goddess along with flowers. (105)

At Bidhibala's request, Ratnadhar secretly released the animal for sacrifice. The girl's furious father was resolved to sacrifice any number of buffaloes. As a mark of protest against her father and the animal sacrifice, she joined a band of prostitutes. Bidhibala's decision was at once her way of protest against a patriarchy that was insensitive to a woman's feelings, and a society which had no qualms about spilling an innocent animal's blood. She starved herself to death, wailing out, "My buffalo has been sacrificed. My buffalo has been sacrificed" (154). Ratnadhar struck his head against the sacrificial altar wet with the blood of animals crying out, "Bidhibala, they made a sacrifice of you instead of the buffalo" (156). Her father refused to perform the last rites to his daughter who joined the prostitutes. Goswami portrays how anthropocentrism and patriarchy very often prove to be mutually reinforcing.

Albert Schweitzer's 'reverence for life' principle was a precursor of modern biocentric ethics, with its ethical perspective holding that all life deserves equal moral consideration or has equal moral standing. In contrast with traditional ethics, the ethics of 'reverence for life' denies any distinction between 'high and low' or 'valuable and less valuable' life forms, dismissing such categorization as arbitrary and subjective. Biocentrism views each individual species as part of the living biosphere, and the inherent value all species have to the environment ("Biocentrism"). *The Man from Chinnamasta* becomes a statement of this message. As Malashri Lall observes, "The polemics are so embedded (in the novel) that one reads for story, but takes away a message of respect for an environment of which a woman, Goddess Kamakhya, is the agent" (Lall). It takes Jatadhari Chinnamasta to prove with his blood, that the blood of animals is not to be spilled to sanctify any religious ritual or to propitiate the deities for wish fulfilment or for gratifying man's selfish interests. Indira Goswami's text *The Man from Chinnamasta* becomes a powerful text on bioethics, which loudly proclaims that non-human animals have as much a claim to earth as human beings. When Jatadhari pronounces that, Man is God's creation. Man has many things to learn from animals. Only when men and animals live in harmony will the world become a paradise (180).

He becomes the mouthpiece of Goswami about whom the noted Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam has observed, Indira Goswami is one of those rare souls who have been able to get an insight into the great powers which are working behind this universe (Pritam).

The novel stands a testimony to Goswami's statement that if her epitaph were to be written, it should read – "Here lies a humanist, the real humanist. That is the only word I want for me, nothing else" ("No Conversation").

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Geopolitics of Diasporic Youtubers as Agents of Social Change

Vidhupriya*

Abstract

This paper attempts to study how diasporic youtubers negotiate the geopolitics in, 1) Re-reading the regional popular culture and 2) Bringing in a social change patronized by cyber space. The main focus of the paper is on how the politics of the hybrid identity is used to influence the homeland viewers using youtube, a medium of popular culture. For the study select diasporic Malayali youtubers i.e. *The Mallu Analyst* (Vivek Poonthiyil and Vrinda C.P.) and *Get Roast with Gaya3* (Gayatri Babu) are interviewed, their youtube videos and viewer responses are analyzed using theories from popular culture, diaspora, and geopolitics. This study enlightens the current scenario of the Kerala public sphere in creating and re-creating narratives based on a new media-YouTube as an effective agency in punctuating new netiquettes and ethico-behaviours in the cyber space and how this process continues to organize and re-organize the Malayali psyche.

Keywords: *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, Diaspora, Social Change, Public Sphere, and Youtube.*

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The term diaspora has a Greek origin, 'dia' means over and 'speiro' means to sow. In general it means to scatter or disperse. But ethno-national diaspora is most appropriate term to the context of this paper. This is because diaspora who owe their identity back to the ethnic groups in their homeland comes under this category. But whether for a simple diaspora or for an ethno-national diaspora, the idea of 'home' and 'belonging' is always a conflicting question. Brah puts it as,

> Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin.' On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. (Cohen 10)

The Malayali diasporic youtubers identified by their Youtube channel *The Mallu Analyst* is a couple, Vrinda C. P. and Vivek Poonthiyil from Wayanad district of Kerala. Both of them did their schooling and graduation in Kerala. Vivek moved to New Zealand for doctoral research and later to Germany where both are married and settled. From there they started their first Malayalam youtube channel named *The Mallu Analyst* in February 2019. Though initially the focus was on short videos with scientific facts, they soon turned to movie analysis which attracted thousands of subscribers and garnered viewership for the channel. Their short but objective and prejudice-free analysis was a spark for the Mala-yali viewers of cinema to think beyond the boundaries imposed by mere restrictions of religion, caste, gender or ethnicity. Naturally, viewer support encouraged them to take up socially relevant topics as well.

Gayatri Babu or the host of *Get Roast with Gaya3* (started in May 2020) is a Malayali youtuber who due to her social roast videos is quite famous in Kerala. Her relevant content combined with the enthusiasm to correct the conditioned notions is an important marker of change. This is quite evident from her words, "This channel is just a train to take people stuck in 19th century and bring them to the 21st century." At present, *The Mallu Analyst* and *Get Roast with Gaya3* remains one of the few popular Youtube channels that dared to initiate a gradual but continuous change in the Malayali psyche.

Their socially relevant videos are included under the playlists 'Progressive Thoughts,' 'Web Series,' and 'Feminism.' These include videos on sex education, LGBTQ community, cyber bullies, gender equality, etc., which created an impression on viewers to think of their actions. Their comment box is a direct witness to this, where people open up about how their thinking process has been impacted. Their film analysis also enlightens how powerful the so-called 'ordinary' movies can be: the unexplored potentials of the characters often identified as 'minor,' the nuances of their dialogues and their implications for the community. Moreover, they are bold to criticize the award-winning directors for their bias and follies. They also boldly support the 'few' Malayali women actors movement for equality. Thus, their effort in helping the voiceless to speak out is another unforgettable breakthrough in the cultural history of Kerala.

Literacy and Social Behaviour

Kerala became the first state in India to become hundred percent literate as on 18 April 1991. Kerala is also the most literate state in India with a 96.2 percent literacy rate, according to National Statistical Office Survey (Soni). But the question remains about the desired behavioural change. The basic aim of any education is to bring about a set of desired behavioural modification at the

end of a period of specific instruction. The commonly accepted goal of education is the accomplishment of the overall development of personality or harmonious development of the individual. The Kerala news reports (both print and non-print media) and also the online behavioural patterns of Malayali individuals do not satisfy the impression with the high literacy rate in Kerala. As evident from their online social behaviour it's just the release of the 'id' that reflect their comments mostly.

The so-called 'progressive Malayali' is a hypocritical myth. This can be validated with numerous examples from the cyber world. Feminism is one of the most disliked terms in the Kerala context and the prime reason for this is misconception and lack of proper sex education. The majority of people believes or is made to believe that feminism means the ruling of men by women. The exact origin of this idea is yet unknown and ambiguous but the influence of patriarchal forces in the circulation of this idea cannot be missed. Of the innumerable cyber-attacks aimed at feminists that happened in Kerala, the most recent and indignant was against actors Parvathy Thirvothu and Rima Kallingal, on some major and trivial statements made by them. Invariably both of them were cyber attacked and trolled without giving them any space to get their ideas through. This is just one instance of gender equality deficiency in the Kerala cyber space. Even the right to express opinion is a privilege reserved for the male gender. Though trolling is a recent trend, the images, slangs, etc. that are used to represent the female permeates the notion of inferiority and the treatment meted out to non-entities. This sheer intolerance is also seen towards LGBT community, and other minorities of race, religion, caste, and ethnicities. Comment boxes get filled with bad words, personal attacks, and threats.

Troll, Celebrity Worship, and Moral Policing

Troll is a term of recent currency in cyber culture, it means the act of creating and posting offensive online posts and the doer is called a 'trollan' in Kerala. It comprises of picture, video, and audio trolls. Trolling can be more specifically identified as 'harmless,' critical audio-visual joke on any person. But the degree of harm can vary depending on the intention of the 'trollan' against the person being trolled. There is no doubt that trolling is an art, where it requires great pain to identify, select, and glue together the sequence in the right combination and timing to achieve the desired effect on the viewer. Yet when it crosses the mark, it has the capacity to shame individual(s) and can lead to harm, directed to the self or at others. This psychological nature of trolls is often neglected by their makers and sometimes, this is due to the fact that trolls are sponsored, and produced by groups with specific agendas. Therefore, trolls are not apolitical or time passing trivials; their dimension and potentiality must be studied scientifically.

Celebrity worship is a term that remains entangled with cyber-attacks and trolls. Most of the fan basis in Kerala has an unnatural touch; they are usually maintained and run by the celebrities themselves with a third party.

> In Malayalam film industry, the Fans Associations of the stars play a vital role in the political economy, both as common audience and as a decisive force to determine the subject position of the actors in the industry. (Kumar and Vethanayagam 40)

The finding that many of these associations are attended by unemployed youths especially men with readiness to do anything add to the confusion about the nature of such formations. The so-called fans are often seen to attack who

ever expresses their opinion against their interests whether it is the film federation or the laymen. And nowadays, after the covid constrains they also attack rapidly through the digital media.

Moral policing is another of the main online traumas in the socio-cultural scenario of Kerala. Group of nameless people with a google account (mostly fake) from somewhere can decide the happenings in the cyber world of Kerala. Nevertheless, they try to control and condition the minds and actions of its digital users. For this, strategies ranging from active persuasion to shaming and life-threats are used. These forces take care to disseminate only the dominant ideologies even when they are negated by others. It is against these massive forces with no beginning or end that the few diasporic Malayali youtubers have started to fight morally.

A careful scrutiny of the social behaviour in the online platforms resembles 'resurfacing of the repressed' as in Freudian terminology. Years of unscientific and unrefined thoughts about the various components of society, and ideas on the 'right to suppress' (marginalised) has become so much ingrained in the Malayali psyche that it has become part and parcel of their daily life. Kerala is a state with high internet penetration and internet users, and therefore all the online public discourses including trolls and the sorts have the capacity to mould public opinions and meanings. Hence, the discourses in the digital platform, and those in the socio-cultural and political context of Kerala both influence and shape each other. The consequences of such acts determines whether to over-ride or decline, the established power relations in order to establish new ones.

Youtube is one of the carriers of many popular cultures by way of videos. Hence, Youtube is also an arena of continual struggle and negotiation against the forces of deconstruction and oppression. This characteristic of continuous conflict between the ideas of the dominant culture favored by the dominant group and the new culture patronized by the resistive forces is a main feature of popular culture. Though this conflict is mostly confined to the digital world, sometime it can go out to the real world. Here, the often neglected fact is that every netizen leaves countless digital footprints each day. This negligence is also the reason why many internet users is still unable to understand the definition of cyberspace in the words of Wiliam Gipson in his *Neuromancer* (1984),

> Cyberspace is a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation . . . a graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. (Norman)

Geopolitics of Malayali Youtubers

Geopolitics is a broad term used in connection with power and international relations. The boundaries of geopolitics as a term expand with the application of the word diaspora. This is because Diasporas are now identified as an important determinant of the geopolitics of elements, the host, and the homeland. The economical and social status of the diaspora can also influence the power politics of these elements. For example, according to the news, 'Canadian PM reiterates his support for farmers' protest; brushes aside India's reproach,' here the factor that led the Canadian P. M. to speak is that Canada's major population includes people from Punjab. This is the geopolitical value of diaspora and thus it can greatly impact international relations.

This is the same influence that diasporic youtubers from Kerala are exerting on Kerala

viewers from abroad. Consciously or unconsciously they make use of their potentiality to influence the thinking and judgment patterns from foreign lands. Their 'seemingly apolitical' position is the most powerful to impact the viewers in the homeland. Hybridity and their transnational identity persuade the viewers to see them as objective and rational. The modern thinking and life style unlike the native ones add to the liking of the viewers. They start understanding the cosmopolitan outlook and its advantages. Thus, the slow, but gradual movement from microcosm to macrocosm commences. Diasporic youtubers on the other hand, also undergo the same transformation from the movement they start experiencing the host nation, its ways of life and freedom. They have the amble opportunity to critically compare and understand the difference in culture, take in what is modern and acceptable, and reform themselves. These phases takes place, in pace with the processes of assimilation and acculturation to the new culture of the host land. These 'deterritorialized' diaspora then undergo cultural convergence, or cultural differentialism based on the previously learned set of knowledge and personal beliefs. At last, they form their own new culture which is an undifferentiable amalgam of various factors, drawn from personal experiences, emotional past, and the new environment; hence they become what are popularly known as hyphenated identities with hybrid nature.

People of Kerala still follow culture and traditions that are outdated practices in the 21st century which makes life unbearable to a vast majority of the Kerala population. Just as in the case of any dominant practice these are hugely directed against the minorities. Kerala is one of the few states in India where the female-male ratio is more than the number of males (1084:1000), according to the 2011 census. But Kerala is not yet as modern and gender friendly as it appears to be. For the study, only acts of cyber-attacks are considered and some of such recent attacks including those on actor Anaswara Rajan (Mukhopadhyay), and a journalist couple and female journalist for asking inconvenient questions to the chief minister ("Kerala Police").

The existing cyber laws both in the country and those in Kerala, are limited and ineffective, together with the reluctance from the part of police force to take further action. This has led voice-artist Bhagyalekshmi to barge in to the room of an infamous Youtuber on September 26, 2020 (Jayaprakash and Bechu). This was a reaction against his misogynist and mean videos against some of the most prominent female writers and celebrities, and also against the blind police force, incapable of redressing the complaints.

Noticeably these acts are directed hugely against the female gender or LGBT communities. This is a sort of warning to them to mend their acts and life style to suit the taste and preference of some dominant forces of society, a sort of 'subjectivation.' These forces take it as their exclusive privilege to monitor and shape individuals for some cause that benefits them. This one-sided online behaviour is a mirroring of the practices in the Kerala socio-cultural order where still basic issues of discrimination and double standards prevail. From dressing and makeup to what should a person (any minority) should post on her/his social media are surveyed and monitored. According to King A, femininity "is a discipline that produces bodies and identities and operates as an effective form of social control" (Kumar and Vethanayagam 37). And this social control evolves from 'biopower' exclusively enjoyed by the male gender from the dominant sphere. As a whole the culture industry of Kerala only caters to the male fantasy or what Meena T.

Pillai rightly identifies, "a supra-structural expression of rectified capitalist patriarchy" (Kumar and Vethanayagam 39).

Kerala is a region celebrated exclusively for its tolerance, religious and otherwise. Kerala floods in 2018 and 2019 also bore witness to this secularity when Kerala stood together to face the aftermath of the floods without differences of any kind. But paradoxically enough, lately the scenario is slowly changing. One of the causes for this is the recent change in the Kerala state politics. The long repressed difference is thus rising slowly to the chaos of communal harmony. In such situation arises the question on the effectiveness of education in Kerala.

The curriculum in Kerala is a purely mark based venture where both learning-teaching process finalize with the score. More than this, how the real knowledge sinks in or how does that become practical is neglected. Only an education that enables the individual to think outside the box and to value the freedom; goes against the grain to unroot pseudo learning. Also the regional syllabus excludes the topics on proper sex education and gender equality. Thus, it's high time to replace the defective syllabus with its old objectives and methodologies to a new version made in compliance with needs of the time. Broadening the young minds at the proper stage through right education can create a responsible citizen.

Though education at evolving stages can shape individuals, the speed of learning decreases gradually; prejudices and misnotions fill the space. Here begins the role of the culture industry, specifically of Youtube channels in continuing life based knowledge. Though all the Youtube channels do not come under this specific category, it covers channels that cater to the community and social needs. *Get Roast with Gaya3* and *The Mallu Analyst* connect the reality depicted to the reality in existence. The negatives of the conditioned ideas and its time-long propagation through the percolation of movies are criticized using film and psychological theories by them.

Here the most important factor to be considered is that why a socially relevant channel likes *The Mallu Analyst* and *Get Roast with Gaya3* are widely popular, often over-riding the presence of other Malayali channels. In order to understand this one needs to understand the geo-politics of diaspora. The rooting of any diaspora in a foreign land brings changes in the perspectives and politics of the diaspora depending on the nature of their location. Diaspora transforms into a cultural hybrid, who utilizes the opportunities of the state of being in 'trishanku' or simultaneous existence in two spaces: socially, culturally, and economically. Thereby, the dispora creates their own politics due to their location of 'presence' and 'absence' which is called the geo-politics of the dispora. Francois Dumont thus rightly calls them as 'third actor' in geopolitical relations and 'the concept is also continuously changed by the development of diaspora.' According to Sheffer an ethno-national diaspora is,

> … a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries…. (Sheffer 9-10)

The Mallu Analyst and *Get Roast with Gaya3* can be conveniently identified as an ethno-national diaspora. They closely experience their host land locale and mental landscape of the homeland. Here the potential for understanding is utilized to compare, analyze and correct the system of homeland which takes place in the form of social and film review videos. Videos in this category includes especially those on 'Periods, Superstitions and Religions,' 'Racist Indian Fairness Cream,' 'Casteism in Malayalam Cinema,' 'Malayalam Movies Obsession with Virgin Heroines,' 'The Great Indian Kitchen Movie Analysis,' 'Casteism in Kerala and an Experiment,' 'Can Religion Go Together with Progressive Thoughts?,' 'Men in Patriarchal Society,' etc.

Interview with Vivek Poonthiyil and Gayatri Babu

Q) How far do you think your diasporic position has enabled you open up issues and topics seldom dealt by other Youtubers in Kerala?

Poonthiyil: Yes, it plays a huge role and we need to agree that. If we were in Kerala . . . there are many problems we have to face, the system and encountering colleagues, and others who might not accept what I convey through my videos. So this disagreement from the beginning can negatively impact our enthusiasm since we have to face them every day. Hence, this diasporic position has helped us to openly criticize without facing any issues.

Babu: To a great extend I feel safe talking openly about politics and extreme religious norms because I am not in India. And I am in a country where hate crimes are really low mainly because of the stringent laws. This actually is a big deal because I get constant threats from different sides. However, I would like to make it clear that this wasn't a reason for me to begin the social roast because I had never imagined these sides when I was beginning to speak up. It was eventually that I realized how my diasporic position has helped me this way.

Q) Do you think Kerala society needs reformation? Why?

Poonthiyil: Of course, the system as a whole is mainly patriarchal, homophobic, etc. Though laws support the oppressed minorities, as long as the system continues to neglect them, the laws remain ineffective. For example, when woman complaints in the police station about some sort of abuse but if the police officer is unable to understand her plight, what is the use of the law?

Babu: No society is perfect. But it is a problem when our people don't understand it and in turn believe that they are perfect. Caste and Religion is a major area where Kerala Society stands at a very low position. Gender issues especially in marital level is also an area where major reformation is needed. And expecting our society to accept Queer Community might be distant dream which we need to keep pursuing.

Q) Would you have done the same videos provided you were settled in Kerala? And would you continue them in the future after you are settled in Kerala? (Hint: bullies, ostracism, etc.)

Poonthiyil: May be yes, but doubtlessly it would be hard. But I do believe that since we have established an identity for our channel and the support of many, we might not be facing a ton of opposition. Beginning to produce such videos initially is always a hard task.

Babu: I would definitely do the same videos but I would honestly make myself safe while doing that. I might have to go an extra mile to make my location private, maybe even getting a

gun license for self-defense even though now it sounds exaggerated. I am a logical person hence ensuring my safety is also a priority. But I can't compromise on what I talk because that makes me who I am.

Q) Do you think that it is wholly your diaspora life that started 'the change' (social attitude) in you and encouraged you to speak up?

Poonthiyil: Diasporic life has played an important part in changing us. But, also we largely owe it to our reading, travels, interaction with people, etc. Our partnership has also helped in understanding people and developing empathy since we share the problems faced by each gender.

Babu: The spark was within me from the childhood. Raised in Army cantonment, I was courageous and wasn't quite aware of gender discrimination (or the level of it) in the outside world. But when in my teenage I moved to Kerala with my grandparents is when the avalanche of inequality was bestowed upon me (and around) like gender, caste, religion, skin colour, etc. Questioning injustice was there but I never had the courage to speak up publicly. The Diaspora life has definitely helped me to practice Feminism perfectly and in my house my husband and I are practicing gender role free family life and we also intend to show this to our kid rather than just preaching. This I believe, must have been a tad bit difficult to execute in Kerala where both our parents expect me to do all the house hold chores and parenting myself because of my gender. Then we would have to begin by hurting their feelings. So being away from them is a sigh of relief when it comes to this aspect.

Q) Based on your experience, describe the change of thinking you have noticed in your viewers (by way of responses in comment box or personal messages) as a result of your videos.

Poonthiyil: Frankly, we have experienced great change than that we expected. Most of us have experienced discriminations and other evils but in our comment box we have created an open space for them to open up and discuss freely. We have received many messages of the sort.

Babu: This is what keeps me going. Every video comment has people, mostly youngsters going on how my videos make them think differently. And, how they show it to their parents so that they also have some effect on regressive thoughts. These might be only in hundreds but as a creator means a lot to me.

Q) What is the most violent threat that you have received so far and how did you respond?

Poonthiyil: Sometimes we receive threatening messages and when we tell them that we would complaint in the cyber cell most of them say sorry. This means that if the system and laws are practiced effectively people like these can do nothing.

Babu: I have been called a sex worker who will do anything for publicity, and this was said by a celebrity on a public TV channel interview. I was asked by people around me to respond. But I chose to ignore and I don't regret it. For me sex worker is not a bad word. They should try harder to come up with hurtful abuses.

Q) Based on the usual responses of haters and cyber bullies, how do you estimate both?

Poonthiyil: There are two categories of such people; one is those teenagers who do not know the consequences of their actions either in their personal life or to the life of the victim. They are also used by some people knowing that these teenagers do not know what they are doing. The other is people who know everything and act in order to veil control and subjugate the minds of

people. They are cautious to remain scot-free and continue to target and percolate their ideologies.

Babu: I mostly get these when I speak up against casteism or issues in Malayalam cinema. It is majorly from fans/traditionalists. Haters come by in the first few seconds of the ten minute video and dislike and leave without watching. Within the first few seconds there is no way one can watch and dislike. That might be their way of expressing hatred. But the dislikes are really way lesser than the likes so I don't bother much.

Q) Have any of your family or close ones had had to face backlash due to your YouTube videos?

Poonthiyil: Not yet.

Babu: Nothing much.

Q) Have you ever faced the question of the sort, "What right do you have to speak of Kerala context (movies or social) from abroad?" If yes, how did you reply?

Poonthiyil: Yes, occasionally, but we don't think that there is any need to respond to such questions.

Babu: Yes, mostly I get it when I speak against nationalist agenda. I tell them as long as I hold Indian Passport; I have every right to speak about issues in my Country or state.

Q) Finally, do you agree that Kerala model of child upbringing (at home) and curriculum of education followed is just a mark based pseudo-learning, resulting in no desired behavioural modification?

Poonthiyil:Yes, that's why many people irrespective of their high educational background do not show an emphatic behaviour. Our educational system also does not include topics on sex education and LGBTQ, nor are any of these instructions given at home. Thus, our education and curriculum needs revision.

Babu: Absolutely. The child comes out after education as an adult baby. . . No practical sense of how to live a life, no life skills are taught, interaction with opposite gender is also restricted in many families, and they are just spoon-fed the syllabus and other than that they are not prepared to compete globally. They are not taught to think innovatively and independently. Also how to get out of social/religious indoctrination is also to be taught.

From their statements, it is clear that diasporic positions have a great role to play in affecting the regional culture from afar. Both of them are free (though not completely) from threats due to proximity. Also, it is conclusive that their gender positions impact the level and the degree of attack faced by both. Thus, the geopolitics manipulated by Malayali diasporic youtubers directly contribute both to their content of production and the phenomenon of social change which they initiate every day.

Conclusion

The gradual and perplexing social change mediated by the geopolitics of diasporic Youtubers is both, a powerful social tool and often a neglected phenomenon. This social tool is a direct byproduct of the process of liberalism and globalization. This has the potential to ultimately lead to a near level of cultural homogenization but not 'homogenization' that can be rightly called as higher rate of cultural hybrids. It is preceded by normative selection and rejection of cultural values and modes of thinking. This is yet an unexplored pattern of communication in cultural studies where both the sender and receiver remodifies and modifies respectively, as a result

of the two sided pathway. Here the most influencing factor is the availability of non-linear technology (including internet) and cultural media (here, Youtube). But, the limitation imposed upon this process of social advancement is the commercialization of the cultural media. Though it does not highly impact the current dynamics of this cultural phenomenon, it can be affected in the near future.

The said geopolitics of diaspora is not significant unless they settle in democratic nations; otherwise their power of persuasion reduces. The policies (both foreign and internal) of such democratic nations are influenced by the nature and rate of acculturation and hold their wail over the host land. This increases their geopolitics and can also contribute to transnational ties at the global and social change at the community levels. The geopolitics at the community level is the focus of the paper through which it estimates the potential at the global level. The security and safety offered by the host land together with the lack of proximity enables the diaspora to objectively understand, scrutinize, and criticize in order to change the affairs at home. They, thus, recon-figure the allotted spaces to create a 'third space' or 'liminality' which makes them powerful. Thereby, diaspora manipulate the nexus of geopolitics and technology to determine the course a nation.

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Tracing out Toxicity: Prioritising Life over Relationships

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Abstract

Contemporary discourses on family, relationships or society bring in terms such as toxicity, narcissism, stonewalling, and gas lighting among others into limelight. But these terms often fail to come out of the domain of intellectual perusals. Dr. Lillian Glass in her work on *Toxic People* attempts to delineate a toxic person. Though her work finds its essence in the western context, it dissects toxicity, thereby pinpointing its characteristics. Usually, toxicity plays its wicked game within intimate, dependent, and confiding relationships and there might be several reasons that drive a person's mental state toxic. Victims often forage the reasons for the misbehaviour of the toxic person, only to end up blaming themselves. A toxic relation is so complex that anyone who views it from outside would never comprehend what the victim is going through. Societal attitude and opinion too has a role to play in exacerbating the torment of a toxic relationship which should be comprehended placing it alongside the trauma theory. A movie dubbed *Ammu*, released of late, had taken genuine effort at candidly depicting a toxic marital relationship between Ravindranath (Ravi) and his wife Ammu. The film, which is a brainchild of director Charukesh Shekhar, could be considered as a very sincere attempt at introducing the concept of toxicity to the Indian audience or in the Indian context as such. It currently serves as a reference to those trying to comprehend the multitudinal dimensions of toxicity. Dr. Lillian Glass' *Toxic People* and Charukesh's *Ammu* are the works taken in the endeavour to discern toxicity as they tend to scrutinise the topic through western and Indian lens respectively thereby offering a varied sense of toxicity, its manifestations as well as solutions. Before the concept of toxicity finds space in our everyday discussions, there is a lot of ground work to be done. The right to life is inalienable. But it is always up to the person to decide when to actually start living it.

Keywords: *Toxicity, Gaslighting, Toxic People, Trauma, Feministic, Relationship, Life, and Society.*

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Contemporary discourses on family, relationships or society bring in terms such as toxicity, narcissism, stonewalling and gas lighting among others into limelight. A multitude of videos marking the traits that define a toxic personality abound in online platforms. Remarkably, of late, the Merriam Webster Dictionary has also made 'Gaslighting' the 'Word of the Year.' But these terms often fail to come out of the domain of intellectual perusals to find space in a normal communication among laypersons. Being confined to theory, the real life manifestations of these terms are not even recognised by those who are doomed to perpetually pocket it.

Literature Review

Dr. Lillian Glass in her work *Toxic People* delineates a toxic person as,

> anyone who has poisoned your life, who is not supportive, who is not happy to see you grow, to see you succeed, and who does not wish you well. In essence, he or she sabotages your efforts to lead a happy and productive life. (Glass 11)

Further elucidating the concept, she states:

> A toxic person is someone who seeks to destroy you. A toxic person robs you of your self-esteem and dignity and poisons the essence of who you are. He or she wears down your resistance and thus can make you mentally or physically ill. Toxic people are not life supporting. They see only the negative in you. Jealous and envious, they are not happy to see you succeed. In fact, they get hostile whenever you do well. Their insecurities and feelings of inadequacy often cause them to sabotage your efforts to lead a happy and productive life. (12)

Though write-ups and research papers on toxicity and toxic relationships are negligible in the Indian context, a movie dubbed *Ammu*, released of late, has taken genuine effort at candidly depicting a toxic marital relationship between Ravindranath (Ravi), an extremely toxic husband, naturally enacted by actor Naveen Chandra and his wife Ammu, dexterously portrayed by actress Aiswarya Lekshmi. Their married life which begins on a fine note turn for the worse once Ravi begins exhibiting his toxicity as Ammu becomes intimate to him. Ravi uses every opportunity to belittle Ammu, insult her, make her feel guilty and insecure, thereby evincing a slavish mentality towards his wife. The very first time when the physical assault she endures reaches an insufferable extreme, Ammu shows the fortitude to leave for her house, only to come back midway from the railway station. The conversation she has with a mendicant is pertinent in drawing out how a victim of toxicity by and by slips into submission. All through the talk which almost seems akin to that of a soliloquy, Ammu is predisposed to vindicate Ravi's behaviour. She reflects on each day of their life from the day of marriage and reaches the conclusion that they are in fact a happy couple, keeping apart Ravi's occasional tantrums. Hence she becomes resolved to go back to her husband and change his behavioural defects by proffering love and care to him. This episode evidently depicts the usual mental state of victims of toxicity who constantly tries to rationalise the behaviour of the perpetrator, simultaneously sticking to the relation, hoping in vain that everything would change for good. Later, this mindset of the victim is substantiated by the statement made by a police woman who works in the police station where Ravi is the Sub-inspector. His colleague oblivious of how her superior colleague treats his wife, comments that all those women complainants of domestic violence who show up in the police station have

a proclivity to rationalise their husband's mis-behaviour as they narrate the incidents, which ought to be understood by placing it in the domain of trauma theory. Ingegerd Stenport's research project titled "A Transformation of the Self*: A Study of Submissiveness, Trauma, Guilt and Shame in Julie Otsuka's When the Emperor Was Divine*" finds reflection here, though the context in which the term 'submissiveness' is placed, tend to be different. As observed by her,

> The characters in Otsuka's novel suffer from oppression on many levels and show symptoms of trauma even if they are not diagnosed as pathological. Indeed, they show temporal and spatial disorientation, submissiveness, fear, alienation, self-doubt, guilt, shame, loneliness and insecurity, which are indicators of traumatic experiences. (Stenport 4)

Representing the general psyche of Nikkei in America who were detained by the US as a retribution for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour that gave momentum to the Second World War, Ms. Stenport remarks:

> …betrayal within the social order, objectification and confinement affected the self-image of Japanese people by describing the internalization process of the "alien enemy" built up over more than three years, starting with submissive adaptation to the monotony of camp life routines, foreswearing the loyalty to Japan and the insight and acceptance of being treated as a criminal. (12)

An understanding of the acquiescent behaviour of the victims of toxicity with a concomitant reading of narratives on trauma with focus on specific responses, would help us dis-cover a common anchor that explicate both and so does Ammu's meekness.

Many a time, in the course of the movie, Ravi reassures Ammu that he loves her and his beha-viour is due to momentary anger or just because she irritates him, a classic example of how toxic people deceive the victim into trusting him/her. In the public sphere, Ravi is initially shown as altogether a respectable policeman with social commitment. He is so pleasing to Ammu's parents and even behaves so passive as to ask her permission to drink in a gathering, only to insult her later amongst his male colleagues and wives. This double-faced personality intrinsic to most perpetrators of toxicity is validated by the assertion of Mitchell Kusy and Elizabeth Hollo-way in their work T*oxic Workplace! Managing Toxic Personalities and Their Systems of Power* under the very apt head "The Two Faces of Toxic People: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." According to them:

> Generally those above them in the hierarchy meet Dr. Jekyll, peers and underlings must cope with Mr. Hyde. You can and see how this duplicity prevents leaders from seeing or even understanding what might be proble-matic in their work group or team. Anyone who mentions "difficulty" with Mr. Hyde may be labelled a complainer or worse. Because those above have no similar experience, they see Dr. Jekyll as a model employee. (Kusy and Holloway 39)

This statement also underscores how power is inextricably linked to toxicity. The authors are of the opinion that those who wield power in relation to others tend to exhibit toxic traits to those who are subordinate in power, simulta-neously appeasing those superior in power. Evaluation of this very same power relation within the four walls of a house would let us

conclude that those who are in key positions with respect to a person - father, mother or husband among others - possess chances of exhibiting toxicity which would debilitate the life of that person, since the element of dependency and intimacy are very high in these relations. But in a multi-authored research paper that was published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology General*, a divergent interpretation of the power-toxicity association is being propounded. It comments that "Narcissists tend to rise to – and abuse – positions of power, so we considered the possibility that positions of power may corrupt because they inflate narcissism" (Mead et al. 2). Though there is an undeniable interplay between power and toxicity, the former exposition seems to fit into the life of Ammu, explaining Ravi's toxic behaviour even though the latter interpretation persuades us to analyse certain moments in the movie that captures Ravi's professional life.

The toxicity reaches its extreme where Ammu is being constantly monitored by Ravi in-person or through the audio devices concealed inside their house. Ravi is infuriated to find Ammu earning for herself by passionately engaging in a bit of tailoring work and even abhors seeing her well-dressed. He callously humiliates her by decisively questioning to entice whom she had dressed so aesthetically. It is as if her dignity, privacy, rights, and liberty are all at stake. But in deviation to the real life scenario, the movie puts Ammu among people who relate with, support, and console her once she gathers the fortitude to open up. Still, she is so mentally debilitated that Ammu becomes helplessly non-reactive when Ravi traces her out at the Inspector General's office when she first venture to lodge a complaint against him with the assistance of one of his women colleagues. Ammu is quick to realise that in actuality it is not Ravi but her own fear and insecurity that prevented her from lodging the complaint. Armed with the reali-

sation that it is she herself who has to act for her cause, Ammu takes the time by the forelock to expose Ravi when she encounters a prisoner on bail at her husband's police station, who is treated so contemptuously by him, much akin to the manner in which she is dealt with. But it is this inner force to act, by being audacious enough to let go of the toxic person that many people are devoid of when entrapped in a toxic relation. As Ammu aptly puts it, the thought of 'what's next' prevents a person from putting a halt to the toxicity that engrosses them. The film also brings in the currently relevant question of bodily rights of women. While Ravi perceives Ammu as just a body ordained to gift him a child, the movie conjures up the notion that 'the decision to not have a baby doesn't make a woman detestable.' A support system that Ammu has around her is a pre requisite to reinvigorate a victim of toxicity to action. Ammu is seen to initially report the first instance of physical harassment to her mother, who trivialises it. By and by, she feels obliged to keep up the pretext of 'all is well' in front of her family and this further curtailes chances of exposing Ravi. The film, which is a brainchild of director Charukesh Shekhar, could be considered as a very sincere attempt at introducing the concept of toxicity to the Indian audience or in the Indian context as such. It currently serves as a reference to those trying to comprehend the multitudinal dimensions of toxicity, thereby initiating further studies on this particular matter.

An editorial titled "Still a Nightmare for Domestic Violence Survivors" underscores the reasons behind specific response of those victims or rather 'survivors' of domestic violence. Jointly authored by Philippa Williams, Swarna Raja-gopalan, Girija Godbole, and Ruchira Goswami, the article observes:

> When it comes to help seeking, we found two main groups of women - those who shared experiences of violence within

six months, and those who shared after five years or more. The first group of women mainly turned to their parents who, in a majority of cases, insisted on their daughter preserving the family environment which they should do by 'adjusting' to, or accommodating their husband's (and his family's) needs better. In a minority of cases, the daughter's welfare was prioritised over the well-being of 'the family' and steps were taken to help mediate or exit the relationship, and much more infrequently approach the police and lawyers. (Williams et al. 6)

It further remarks,

So ingrained are social norms about gender inequality that NFHS-5 data reports that women are more likely than men to justify a scenario in which it is acceptable for a husband to beat or hit his wife." (Williams et al. 6)

Kathryn A. Becker-Blease and Jennifer Freyd discusses Family Violence in relation to the trauma theory in "Beyond PTSD: An Evolving Relationship Between Trauma Theory and Family Violence Research" opening up possibilities for incorporation of toxicity within the domain of this theory. Contributing to this is the notion of 'domestic trauma' expostulated in Sarah Anderson's work *Readings of Trauma, Madness, and the Body.* Emma Jane Tseris views the trauma theory through the feministic lens in studying women as victims of toxicity or victims in general, thereby prompting an appraisal of systemic degradation endured by women. She remarks:

Trauma theory added to an already existing body of feminist critique of psychiatry and focused on advocating for the social context of gender inequality to be taken into account in psychiatric assessments, allowing for a more holistic understanding of women's distress. (Tseris 154)

Ms. Emma attempts to trace how the status of women as multiple marginalized beings make them increasingly susceptible to traumatic experiences, especially during an intractable situation.

Discussion and Findings

Albeit being unable to precisely pinpoint 'this and these' constitute toxicity, one can tacitly decipher its elements in a person's behaviour, after getting to know the concept of a 'toxic person.' This is what exactly Dr. Lillian's work intends - to help figure out the toxic person or rather people in one's lives, to teach one how to efficiently deal with them, to purge all the negativity injected and on top of all that, to let one know that one isn't anyhow responsible for the 'toxicity' that victimises one, which is the primary realisation a person needs to have while managing a toxic relation.

Victims often forage the reasons for the misbehaviour of the toxic person, only to end up blaming themselves, devoid of the sense that he/she has nothing to do with the pernicious mental state and behaviour of another person. Usually, toxicity plays its wicked game within intimate, dependent and confiding relationships and there might be several reasons that drive a person's mental state toxic, ranging from traumatic childhood, negative personal experiences, insecurity, and low self esteem to common human vices such as jealousy and superiority complex. These factors which kindle toxicity are complementary and are often overlapping. Toxic behaviour is also elicited by those having mental aberration, even though toxicity in itself hasn't been designated as a psychological disorder. The

phrase 'toxic mood contagion' illustrated by Dr. Lilian Glass' work underscores that an exposure to people with toxic traits can evoke the toxicity within. This is also to covertly state that every person has seeds of toxicity within them which may remain dormant if not nurtured by negative factors. There are myriad forms in which it could manifest. Constant criticisms, belittling remarks and taunts, sniding statements, and physical violence are some of the explicit characteristics. But the more gruesome attributes are those which are inconspicuous, because its genesis is in the toxic person's mind and might involve lots of mind games. For instance, the person may very often play the victim, pretending unexplained distraughtness, to leave the real sufferer confused as to what has gone wrong from his/her part or on another occasion they might brazenly lie or offer a distorted picture of an event in such a way that the victim finds it difficult to contradict openly though he/she might doubt its veracity. This would evolve into gaslighting which amounts to psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator or to a mental process by which people attribute to others what is in their own minds' which is termed as projection. Certain perpetrators find it unbearable to see their victims being happy or at ease and may have Narcissistic personality disorder which is a mental health condition characterized by a high sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy for others. An observer who analyses the perpetrator-victim dynamics would ask why isn't the victim pulling herself away from the toxic person. But this is easier said than done. First of all, it takes a lot of mental preparation and contemplations on the part of the victim to open up to someone and that alone a person who is reliable. The trail of harrowing experiences would render the victim psychologically frail, consequently creating a 'drained-out' feeling by the time they realise that it's high time to let go of such a noxious person. This hampers their inner vigour to act. The lesser they acquiesce, the more they are coerced into submissiveness by the perpetrator. In the conundrum of having to segregate the lies and the truths, right and the wrong or the voice of the conscience from the indoctrinated self, coupled with the burden of having to weave out a dignified life, the victim is sapped off their vitality to save themselves from such a relation. If in case the relationship is marital, often the existence of a child becomes a factor in pulling oneself back to continue as sitting ducks to the vagaries of the toxic partner, every time they make up their mind to jump out.

A toxic relation is so complex that anyone who views it from outside would never comprehend what the victim is going through. Hence, any attempt in making the society relate with this situation would go in vain. The person who is victimised is the only one who could comprehend the gravity of toxicity that they face. This peculiarity arises out of several reasons. Firstly, most toxic persons are watchful of whether their victims spill their guts to anyone and act so warm and courteous in public that no one would have the wildest dream of the person behaving in such awful manner. Further, as per Dr. LillIan's observation, what might be toxic to one person may not seem toxic to others. Additionally a person who is toxic to me may not behave in the same way to others. This is because, as aforementioned, toxicity becomes palpable in intimate, dependent, and confiding relationships and it's more excruciating the more you share a vehement relationship with that person.

Feministic strides in trauma theory highlight the concept of intersectionality that manifests in the life of women while deliberating on traumatic episodes dealt by them. Societal attitude and opinion that contribute in exacerbating the torment of a toxic relationship being a case in point. Once a person opens up to someone around, people tend to generalise the incidents or brush it away altogether as tiffs or silly spats. But the fact is that there arises no proper communication between the victim and the perpetrator, if not quarrels. It is for the toxic persons to occlude proper communication so as to create dilemma, anxiety, and incertitude for the victim. This is a method intrinsic to stonewalling, whereby the perpetrator stops a discussion from developing by refusing to answer questions or by talking in such a way that you prevent other people from giving their opinions. Since the onus of upholding the stability of the marital relation is entrusted with the females as per our Indian tradition, very often parents persuade their daughter or son to stick to this toxic conjugal relation fearing societal judgement and perception. They are blind to the reality that the relation is detrimental to their son or daughter and it is he/she alone who has to bear its brunt, not the society.

Though Dr. Lillian's work finds its essence in the western context, it dissects toxicity, thereby pinpointing its characteristics, though not accurately defining it. The author's omission of a befitting definition for the notion of toxicity within the societal ambit comes from the actuality that the term couldn't be defined in its exactness, which is one of the reasons why it is not easily discernible in our society. It is not only in the Indian context, but globally too, as nominal discussions are taking place on the topic of toxicity and toxic relations. Hence awareness on the same is also scant.

International organisation like the United Nations or its auxiliary agencies such as UN Women or UNDOC neither have any data on this issue nor do they try to generate cognisance of the same. In India, there is no allusion to the toxic relations either in the NCRB Crime in India Report or in the National Family Health Survey. Further, very few scholarly articles are penned on this topic due to the paucity of both primary and secondary data. Due to the hesitation on the part of the victim to open up, chances of obtaining primary information are minimal which further generates a scarcity of secondary data too.

Also, the concept of toxicity lacks a proper place within the trauma theory. The theory tends to focus on certain catastrophic events and trauma that it might induce. The only arena where toxicity could manage to cut out a space is in that part of the theory which focuses on women and their harrowing experiences. But that too gives stress to trauma ensuing from sexual and domestic violence faced by them. Further, it might only render a partial idea of toxicity, confining it to cases associated with women rather than a holistic view. Still, a novel approach to trauma theory warrants analysing it from varied angles as done in the work of Sarah Anderson or Kathryn A. Becker-Blease and Jennifer Freyd, which opens up possibilities of wider interpretation of the theory.

Before the concept of toxicity finds space in everyday discussions, there is a lot of ground work to be done. The Indian society isn't accustomed to imbibe the notion of individuality. Hence it always fails to stand by the individual. It is to be understood that breaking free from an uneasy marriage has nothing do with morality or the character of the individual rather the decision might come out of the realisation that you have the right to live your life instead of merely existing as a victim of toxicity. This applies not only to conjugal relations but to any other relationship in general. Additionally, toxicity must be tagged as a psychological aberration, contrib-

uting to behavioural disorder. The Mental Health Act must exhume this disorder into it, subsequently promoting counselling and other therapeutic remedies to treat toxic people. Moreover, victims of toxicity may have suicidal thoughts which should be addressed in the National Suicide Prevention Strategy launched of late. Above all, the very consciousness about the concept of toxicity and existence of toxic relations would help in tracing out the toxic terrors - as described by Lillian Glass - amongst the people. The right to life is inalienable. Therefore no one has the prerogative to dabble with another person's life in accordance with their whims and fancies, neither does anyone have the right to decide on how one should lead one's life. But it is always up to the person you to decide when to actually start living it. Everything else is secondary.

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Le Morte d'Man: A Posthumanist Study on *Frankenstein's Army*

Sayana Sam*

Abstract

Humanism claims that man is at the centre of everything, fully separate from robots, animals, and other nonhuman beings. However, the posthumanist ideas deconstruct and reconstruct the notion of anthropocentrism. In light of the cultural and historical circumstances, posthumanistic discourse strives to create spaces for people to reflect on what it means to be human and to critically interrogate the idea of the human. The radicalization of humanist ideas curtails the glory and power that man once enjoyed. The paper is an attempt to study the cessation of man in the phase of a war. It will focus on the evolution of different kinds of masculinity. Thus, this paper explores how the posthuman zombots obliterate the myth of man. The undermining of women and their oppressed state in the patriarchal world has not only been subtly observed in the film, but effectively inverted as the plot plays out. It thus investigates the position of women in the posthuman world. Humans are under constant flux through their interaction with tools and technology. Alongside intelligent machines, posthumanistic ideologies continue to develop.

Keywords: *Posthumanism, Zombots, Anthropocentrism, Masculinity, and Femininity.*

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Posthumanism, if it means anything at all, is just an acknowledgement that humans and humanity are constantly changing through their interaction with technology and tools. (Mahon 2)

Edwin Hutchins, David McFarland, Andy Clark, and Cary Wolfe are some of the many people who contend that humans have always used tools and technology to extend themselves, albeit none of them were trying to define posthumanism. Even though human beings used tools and technology even before the inception of humanism, we call it, post-humanism rather than pre-humanism. It is because posthumanism came up after the historical humanism. Furthermore, one cannot turn a blind eye to the interconnection between humanism and posthumanism owing to the fact that freedom, rationality, science, progress, etc., are central to both the isms. As a result, it may be more accurate to consider posthumanism as "a radicalization of humanist ideas beyond the historical specificity and constraints of humanism" (4).

According to humanism, man is at the center of all things, where he is completely distinct from machines, animals and other nonhuman entities. In the wake of Donna J. Haraway's work, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*, many accounts of posthumanism have confronted how modern techno scientific culture has radically subverted the hegemony of anthropocentrism. That is, "posthumanist theory claims to offer a new epistemology that is not anthropocentric and therefore not centred in Cartesian dualism" (Bolter 1). It curtails the glory and power that man once enjoyed. It is also instrumental in the inculcation of agency in tyrannized women.

Frankenstein's Army (2013) is a found footage horror film which is the directorial debut from Richard Raaphorst. The movie was set in the backdrop of World War II. It is about a Russian troop's mission to destroy a German sniper nest. Novikov, Sergei, Vassili, Alexi, Ivan, Sacha, and propagandist videographer Dimitri are members of the Red Army. The story takes a turn when Dimitri transmits a fake distress call and blocks their connection with the high command using a radio jammer. Without realizing this, Novikov and the others set out to help the soldiers who are trapped. Dimitri succeeds in deceiving the troop and leads them to a zombot trap, as per the direction of the Russian government. The soldiers fight with the horrific flesh and metal war machines created by Dr. Viktor Frankenstein, an unhinged descendant of the original Viktor Frankenstein. In the course of the movie, many of the characters including the members of the troop, German survivors, and the doctor die and many of them are turned into zombots. The film comes to an end with the picture of newly promoted Sancha, who killed doctor Frankenstein, standing alongside Stalin.

Mary Shelly's novel, *Frankenstein* is one of the first texts to deal with posthumanism as it presents a creature created with the aid of science and technology.

There are also many occurrences in the book that underscore the unnatural theft of female power by the male scientist, which betrays an anxiety about the role women would play in a society where they were no longer needed for reproduction: all-save one-of the female characters in the text are eliminated (144).

Shelly's novel must be born out of the fear and concern that the people of the 19th century had, regarding the over dependence of humankind on science and scientific innovations. The condition of women who lived during Shelly's time is very much evident in the novel as it points out that the women suffer from the lack of agency.

Richard Raaphorst's *Frankenstein's Army* is a realistically shot film which employs the found footage technique. The posthuman elements and the posthumanist quality of the film are quite remarkable. With the arrival of the post human zombots, the men in the film become helpless. This film helps to understand the gendered nature of language and also, the kind of masculinity prevailed during the 20th century. It tells us how hegemonic masculinity was deconstructed and reconstructed under the influence of the changing circumstances. It also tells us how the posthuman world is a better place for women. The paper is an attempt to study the death of man in the phase of a war. It examines how the posthuman zom-bots reduce the myth of man into ashes. It also studies the location of women in the posthuman world.

During the Second World War, diverse masculinities coexisted in Soviet Russia. Some of them include hegemonic, marginal, complacent, and subversive masculinity. There were masculinities linked to war, technology, science, diplomacy, etc., as well as masculinities that opposed the interest of the state. Most importantly, Stalin was the 'universal father figure' of the 'great Soviet family.' However,

> Stalinist policies removed fathers from children's lives: forced collectivization and the drive for rapid industrialization as well as political repression and the purges resulted in men's mass migration, deportation, incarceration, and death. World War II ruptured fathers' connection to their families even more, as many marched off to war and never returned. (Randall 864)

The 1920s saw the initial promotion of the 'hegemonic' masculinity of the New Soviet Man, a construct that placed an emphasis on hyper virility and commitment to advancing and preserving Soviet socialism.

The soldiers of the Russian troop in *Frankenstein's Army* perform hegemonic masculinity by dint of their language and actions. The language is gendered. The speech and tone of the 'commander' is often assertive. The men uses expletive phrases like "Fucking bastard" (43: 21), "Fuck you" (1.06.31) etc. "I'm gonna cut his balls off" (43:57) says Vassili, when he realizes that Dimitri tricked them into the zombot trap. Vassili is a short-tempered and brutal soldier who tortures both the animals and humans. He killed animals in a draconic way. He also beats and tortures the nurse Eva before leaving her to die. He backs his toxic masculinity by considering himself as a liberator. After killing the rabbits, he says "I'm liberating your rabbits from fascist oppression" (27:00). Vassili and Sergei use a German boy as bait, which results in the boy's death.

The posthuman zombots in the movie are created out of dead bodies of humans by Dr. Viktor Frankenstein. The doctor claims that "(he) can end the war by creating a new being that brings them together" (1:10 53). He uses the technique of brain grafting to create a hybrid- a combination of German and Communist psyche. He then replaces some of the body parts with machines and tools to make the zombot, a superior creation. He recollects his father's standpoint on posthumans and repeats, "men could be more efficient if they had hammers and screw drivers instead of fingers" (1:04:54).The doctor claims that the zombots are posthumans. When Dimitri addresses the zombots as automata, the infuriated doctor exclaims, "They are not machines or puppets like the toys my father made. Each one is still alive. They need to eat" (1:06:03).

Initially, the Russian soldiers were depicted as all-powerful men. The commander of the troop, Novikov, possessed control and authority over the men. His power can be equated with that of Stalin's power and authority over Soviet

Russia. However, the arrival of the zombots questions his power. The 'birth' of the very first zombot became the cause of Novikov's death. The zombot disemboweled him and made him shuffle off this mortal coil. The end of Novikov is the beginning of emasculation. From this point, the other men in the troop started shouting in delirium. Fear and hysteria, which are often associated with femininity, crept in. The zombots terrorized the men and made their weapons of power ineffective.

The new commander, Sergei, is also eventually killed and converted into a zombot. While Sergei was in command, he discovers Dimitri's betrayal and interrogates him. Dimitri reveals that he is the superior officer sent by the Russian government to capture the German doctor and make him work for the Russians. Though Dimitri takes the role of a boss for a short period, he soon gets trapped in a deep chamber where he finds himself surrounded by the zombots. Dimitri's authority is challenged when Sergei tells him, "So Dima, you want to continue your secret mission? You do it alone. I am taking my men out of this mad hole" (51:38). Even though he shouts, "I order you come back" (52:31), no one comes. From this very point, he finds himself in fear and trepidation. He records his ineptitude:

> Mama, Papa, this is my last roll of film. Do not trust what they tell you. I made a deal with the government. They promised to let you go in exchange for the doctor. I don't think that's happening anymore. I am sorry. I love you. (54:49)

He even challenges the authority of the Patriarch. He says, "Screw you Vissarionovich Stalin. Screw you! Serve the proletariat, my ass" (54:49).

Another order of masculinity seen in this movie is the complacent masculinity of Sasha.

He is portrayed in the movie as a clumsy and weak soldier. A sidekick, who often stays back and guards the gear, the other men refuse to take him to the frontline because they think that he is not efficient enough to fight an actual battle. Novikov warns Sasha, "None of your stupid games here. It could be dangerous" (18:39). However, the coming of the posthuman zombots emasculates the men while Sasha gains agency. Sasha shoots the doctor and cuts off his head. He chooses not to save Dimitri and lets him die at the hands of the zombot Sergei. At the end of the movie, we see the sidekick, Sasha, standing beside Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin.

The representation of women in this film is suggestive of their lack of agency. There are only a few female characters in the movie. In the beginning of the movie, the Russian troops attack a village. More specifically, they attack the 'women' and capture the 'hen.' The nuns in the film have no role to play except to act as dead bodies. The other female character who appears in the movie is the nurse Eva. She becomes a victim of toxic masculinity. When Vassili, one of the Russian soldiers, finds the hiding Germans, he says, "Let's just kill them. Keep the girl" (37: 50). Then he tortures her and leaves her to die. Later, when she is made into a zombot by Dr. Victor Frankenstein, she gets to enjoy the pri-vilage of working with the doctor. She is the one who works with him while the doctor was converting Sergei into a zombot. From this point, the woman, Eva, acquires agency. Doctor Viktor Frankenstein stuffs Vassili's mouth using a piece of cloth. This is symbolic of Vassili's lost agency.

The human has become archaic; the figure of "Man" has been replaced, and we "cannot go back ideologically or materially" (Haraway 81). The study points towards the relevance of the opening quote which claims that humans and humanity will undergo deconstruction and re-

construction through their interaction with tools and technology. The myth of "man" is reduced to ashes. Thus,

> Posthumanism is obsessed with not only cutting-edge tools and techniques but also future tools and technological developments, as well as with questions about how they will change us even further. (6)

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The Masculinist Manifestations of Violence and the Many Facets of the Female Body: A Reading of T.D. Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi Alias Andal Devanayaki*

Reshma Jose*

Abstract

A probe into the trajectory of the development of the human race will undoubtedly reveal the masculine nature of almost all performances of power. Even today, the very existence of the individual subject is determined in accordance with the masculine collective and its related power structures. A re-reading of the conventionally accepted historical, political, and cultural narratives from a gender sensitive point of view will unveil the masculine nature of violence characterising wars, revolutionary movements, and almost every other mechanism of power. Apart from the social and cultural role that the human body is supposed to play, its significance as the nexus of countless power operations cannot be overlooked. This paper titled "The Masculinist Manifestations of Violence and the Many Facets of the Female Body: A Reading of T. D. Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi Alias Andal Devanayaki*" is an attempt to analyse the novel focussing primarily on the treatment and representations of the female body in the context of masculine violence. By problematizing history to question the denial of voices and spaces to the marginalised and the silences in the established discourses, the novel becomes a rebellion against exploitative political ideologies. Reading the narrative with an eye on the treatment of the female body will uncover multiple facets of how marginalised bodies can be manipulated to serve specific ends according to the dominant masculine political strategies and at the same time how they can be used as a tool to challenge overpowering ideologies.

Keywords: *Body Politics, Masculinity, Gender, Marginalisation, Patriarchy, Power, Ideology, Violence, and Myth.*

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Acritical reflection on the politics of the body manifested across the historical evolution of the human race validates the argument that the body is a significant site to comprehend power relations. Apart from the social and cultural role that the human body is supposed to play, its significance as the nexus of countless power operations cannot be overlooked. The pseudo-hierarchies of binaries into which bodies are categorised like the master and the slave, the ruler and the ruled, the masculine and the feminine, the superior and the inferior, the able-bodied and the disabled, the strong and the weak, illustrate the boundaries that define and shape human bodies. As Nadia E. Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon postulate in the introduction to *Body Politics*, "The politics of the body, different from the body politic, argues that the body itself is politically inscribed and is shaped by practices of containment and control"(1). The relentless attempts to marginalise control and reorient female and queer bodies to match the ideological manifestations of patriarchal power structures can be identified throughout the grand narratives of history. In this context, the female body bearing the imprints of histories of violence, rape, and torture, becomes a site of double margi-nalisation in the hands of masculine power. This paper titled "The Masculinist Manifestations of Violence & the Many Facets of the Female Body: A Reading of T. D. Ramakrishnan's *Sugandhi Alias Andal Devanayaki*" is an attempt to analyse the novel focussing primarily on the treatment and representations of the female body in the context of masculine violence. In such a study, the mere physical meanings attributed to the human body disappears and it becomes a metaphor for power, self-assertion, domination, rebellion, resistance, and loss of identity.

A striking novel marked by the entangling of reality, fiction, myth and history, T. D. Rama-krishnan's *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki* (2014) exposes the inherent violence that characterises fascism and revolution. Translated from the original Malayalam into English by Priya K. Nair as *Sugandhi Alias Andal Devanayaki*, the work has won many accolades including the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award and the Vayalar Award. Set in the backdrop of the Sri Lankan civil war, the novel juxtaposes the personal and the mythical, revealing the con-structedness of all histories. The narratives of female experiences of subjugation, silencing, and suffering across centuries that weave the tale are connected by an invisible thread of universality. It focuses on the experiences of women and children in a nation that is torn apart by internal strife. Exploring the extensive possibilities of alternative history, the recorded history of the Eelam movement in Sri Lanka is merged with the invented myth of Devanayaki who fought against male violence using her intellect as well as her body.

Christina Lamb in her prologue to *Our Bodies, Their Battlefields: War Through the Lives of Women* voices the masculine normalisation of violence thus;

> May be you think of rape as something that has 'always happened in war,' that goes along with pillage. Ever since man has gone to war he has helped himself to the women, whether to humiliate his enemy, wreak revenge, satisfy his lust, or just because he can indeed rape is so common in war that we speak of the rape of a city to describe its wanton destruction. (3)

An enquiry into the histories of wars and revolutionary movements narrate tales of how the female body has turned into convenient sites for menfolk to wage their battles. Masculine discourses perceive women's bodies as the point of

intersection of their networks of domination and disciplining that would produce desired patterns of behaviour. The rest of the paper will attempt an examination of the novel with an eye on the treatment of the female body which will uncover multiple facets of how marginalised bodies can be manipulated to serve specific ends according to dominant political strategies and at the same time how they can be used as a tool to challenge overriding ideologies.

The plot of the novel unfolds through the eyes of Peter Jeevanandam who arrives in Sri Lanka as part of a team of international film makers on a mission to make a movie on Dr. Rajini Thiranagama. A Sri Lankan Tamil Human Rights activist, Rajini was shot dead, apparently on the orders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Peter was chosen as the script-writer because he had spent many years with the Tigers while working on a movie project which was left unfinished. Even while being part of the pre-production work of the present movie, he is in search of Sugandhi, a Tamil liberation activist whose real name was Andal Devanayaki with whom he fell in love during his previous stay in Sri Lanka. Peter's pursuit for Sugandhi leads him to a fascinating narrative on the internet about the legend of queen Devanayaki from South India whose story embodies the spirit of female resistance. Meena T. Pillai's appraisal of the novel titled "Mixing myth and memory" in the Friday Review of *The Hindu* scrutinises the narrative thus;

> The quest for the modern Tamil liberation activist Sugandhi in the contemporary landscape of Sri Lankan trauma and loss is itself fuelled by tales of the mythical Sugandhi, her archetypal ancestor from a folklorist past, creating a throbbing tension between fiction and reality. As fiction, fact and myth blur, what

emerges in the interstices are bodies that pulsate with poignant materiality and spirits that have been bent by power and violence but remain far from broken.

With the aid of myth, history and fiction, the narrative focussing primarily on the lives of these three central women characters, unfolds the nuances of female suffering and subjugation that transcend time and place.

The multi-layered narrative architecture of Ramakrishnan's story revolves around numerous characters, Devanayaki being the most fascinating among them all. The narrator unexpectedly encounters "The Story of Devanayaki" authored by a Meenakshi Rajarathinam online, though he couldn't figure out the credibility of the tale as fact or fiction. Set in Kanthalur in AD 992, the heroine of the story Devanayaki was the army general's daughter who becomes the eighth wife of the ruler of Kanthalur and later the queen of the Chola king Raja Raja, the lover of his son and turns instrumental in the downfall of Mahinda, the Sinhala king. Even when she is characterised as a woman of intellect who unlike her peers did not confine herself to dance and music but was well learned in science, politics and even the art of using weapons, Devanayaki somehow doesn't surpass the overpowering sensual and bodily orientation that the novelist attributes to her. On being ordered to be present at the king's chamber on her first visit to the royal court after completing her studies in political science, Devanayaki's response is thus described;

> But she didn't feel any happiness. She felt ashamed of herself as she realised that the king had not seen her knowledge or abilities but was merely attracted to her physical beauty. As if she was nothing more than her body. But what if the body was the only reality and

everything else was a myth? (Rama-krishnan 19)

The age-old construction of women as enmeshed in a mere bodily existence is reinforced, thereby disregarding the scope for any possible rational proficiencies of the female mind. The compulsion to accept the king's wedding proposal even without her consent and the supporting argument "He can decide which field to sow and which one to harvest" (20) metaphorizes the plight of female bodies that are treated as man's property. The centuries old practice of the king being the custodian of the key which can open the chastity belts that the queens were supposed to wear around their waists reaffirms the patriarchal belief that female bodies are repositories of male honour and dignity.

Devanayaki's shift in devotion from Lord Padmanabha to Padmasambhava is justified thus in the story;

> There isn't a lot of difference between them. For Padmanabha, the greatest pleasure is that of the soul. But Padmasambhava makes you realize that the body and the soul are one, and that the pleasure of the body is that of the mind too. (145-46)

The Buddhist monk Nissanka Vajran who imparts tantric knowledge to Devanayaki advices her,

> Your body and soul are not two entities but one. Not only that, each pore of your body yields pleasure. So the pleasure of the soul is that of the body too. The body and the universe are similar. As this universe is endless and deep, so is the human body. (160)

Her attainment of nirvana metamorphoses the body from the mere corporeal into a realm of spiritual power. Thus, the female body from a state of helplessness and marginalization is transformed into a site of gendered resistance and empowerment.

The political unrest in Sri Lanka that paves the backdrop of the novel also delineates the world of terror that the people lived in. In a conversation with the translator, Ramakrishnan says: "War, whatever kind of war it may be, is a saga of violence and the worst affected are always women and children" (252-53). Peter's reference to the government's special interest in the movie project also points to this very fact;

> The movie was an effort by the Sri Lankan government to whitewash the atrocities that had been committed in brazen violation of human rights during the civil war. (2)

All the mechanisms of masculine power staged in the story consider the female body as an object of a political strategy of power. The body is manipulated as a site invested with specific meanings that lead to the creation of desired outcomes by dominant power structures.

The description of Divine Pearl, a secret Sri Lankan military camp exposes how physical torture was the customary strategy for criminal interrogation. The modern torture chamber is thus introduced:

> It houses torture machines of international standards. There are machines to pull out nails and crush bones, cots that administer electric shocks, machines that simulate drowning, electric sticks that can be used to penetrate anuses and vaginas,

gas chambers that make you laugh or cry continually and weaken your body, whips studded with nails, chairs of thorns, and microscopic instruments used to administer shock to private parts. (3-4)

The abduction and rape of the young medical student Poomani Selvanayakam as a punishment for organising a meeting of Women against War clearly express how women's bodies end up on the receiving end of unjust institutional trial. The high-ranking military official referred to as 'Lion' in the novel personify the patriarchal illusion that "War is the dominion of men" (83) and any interference from females is a punishable offence. He believed that "the worst punishment for a woman was to be robbed of her chastity" (85) and boasts about punishing women who "were suffering from diseases like human rights or feminism" (85) for the last fifteen years. Poomani ultimately uses her own body as a trap to carry out revenge and the pervert is strangled to death, though at the expense of her own life. The archaeologist Juliet also shares a horrible experience of torture and sexual assault by the Lion who mocks her helplessness thus; "I think you see now that rape and impregnation are the best ways to enslave a woman completely" (89).

Sugandhi whose face was burned by acid and both hands chopped for rebelling against the government becomes a representative of women like Rajini who had to pay heavy prices for raising their voice against hegemonic power structures. Juliet's statement that "almost all the women activists in Sri Lanka are rape victims" (211) is like a revelation to Peter who is shocked by the depth of these tragic female experiences. The arrest of Arul and Yamuna, the two young activists, on the serious charge of attempted assassination of the President endorse the violent masculine methodology when the chief military officer orders "First rape, then question" (238). The mythical climax of Devanayaki's story hints at how she will take divine births to fight against violence and that she will "come to the rescue whenever the tears of a woman fall" (220). In that sense Rajini Thiranagama, Sugandhi and all those women who rebel against fascist power structures turn out to be nothing but reincarnations of Devanayaki. Thus,

the feminist fable of Devanayaki becomes an underlying thread that offers vital links to histories of violence against women and the archaeology of war, rape and repressive power politics across centuries. (Pillai)

As Priya K. Nair points out in the translator's note,

This very political novel provides an insight into the quest for identity that has become a mark of the contemporary world. Human beings marginalized because of gender, race, religion or politics strive for existence in a hostile world that is becoming increasingly fascist in its outlook. (246)

As the novel rightly suggests "all wars are essentially wars against women" (Ramakrishnan 72) and it's high time that the discourse is re-examined. The narrative, thus, becomes a mirror that reflects the injustice that characterises the culture of rape and physical violence used by hegemonic masculinity to inflict submission upon female bodies.

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Traversing the Domestic Space of Third World Women in Transnational Realm: Re-Inscription of Female Identity in Anita Badami's *Tell It to the Trees*

Dr. Reshmi S.*

Abstract

The women from the Third world countries tussle with social realities like gender inequality, gender-based violence, and stereotyped stratification. This kind of problematic positioning reverberates in South Asian writing which chronicles the status of women as objects and victims of male violence or patriarchal conditioning. The paper tries to theorize diaspora through Feminist frame by questioning the concept of hegemony visible in patriarchal families across borders. The study employs an intersectional approach and cross examines the interconnectivity of gender violence to unequal power relations based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, and culture. Indo-Canadian writer, Anita Rau Badami intrinsically portrays the lives of immigrant women who are circumscribed within the domestic space dictated by the male heads through her work *Tell It To The Trees*. The paper looks in detail the aspects of spousal citizenship, memory and violence hidden within the familial space with a view to analyse the instances of multiple discrimination and injustice. The work of Chandra T. Mohanty - *Feminism without Borders* critically examines the concept of intersectionality in the alliances and coalition between women throughout the world. The inclusive framework of feminism beyond the borders stands in stark opposition to the entrapment and isolation of immigrant women straddling between two cultures. Like Bell Hooks' brand of feminism, which calls forth an end to gender based inequalities, Badami also stresses the need of the women to liberate themselves from domestic space to 'woman space.'

Keywords: *Third World Women, Spousal Citizenship, Intersectionality, Borders, and Violence.*

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Gender Justice has always been a pivotal concern for the women writers with transnational consciousness. The disempowered woman in the diaspora cannot act as critical agents of civil society and they often become a failure to tackle the despoliations of global citizenship. Gayatri Spivak astutely posits in "Diasporas Old and New" that,

> The disenfranchised new or old diasporic woman cannot be called upon to inhabit this aporia of decolonization of mind. Her entire energy must be spent upon successful transplantation or insertion in to the new state often in the name of an old nation in the new. (251)

The denial of access to the basic civil rights at homeland and hostland accentuates their state of insecurity and instigates gender-based violence. Melanie Klein has suggested the possibility of connecting male violence,

> as a reactive displacement of the envy of the Anglos and the Angloclones, rather than proof that the culture of origin is necessarily more patriarchal. (215)

The positioning of women, who are on the fringes of society by the linkages of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, remain invisible and such is the dilemma of the immigrant women from Third World countries. The experience of migration triggers diverse ways of defamiliarization, disempowerment, dislocation, and the women immigrants are exposed to gender linked vulnerabilities and powerlessness. Individuals in society occupy positions of privilege and oppression based on their unique subject locations, which in turn are determined by the intersecting or interlocking axis of race, class, gender and other determinants of identity (Hill). In *Incorporating Intersectionality*, it is stated that the theoretical practice of intersectionality "focuses on the simultaneity and multiplicity of oppressions" (Murphy, et al. 2009). The majority of immigrants who arrive in Canada are women and these racialized minority group enter with an immigration status dependent on marriage. Leslye Orloff and Rachael Little state,

> Immigrant women often feel trapped in abusive relationships because of immigration laws, language barriers, social isolation and lack of financial resources. (1)

The categorization of space by the female theoreticians like Virginia Woolf's "Room of One's Own," Elaine Showalter's historical space of women's writing or Julia Kristeva's ascribing women experience more in terms of space than time, traverse beyond the metaphysical tradition that binds women. The attribution of space in the spatial social order is modelled along the codification of gender constructs wherein, men occupied the public space of the political and economic realms and women were assigned to dwell the private space of the home. Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose describe this spatial dichotomy as constituted by gender difference;

> The social construction of gender difference establishes some spaces as women's and some as men's; those meanings then serve to reconstitute the power relations of gendered identity. (3)

Noeleen Heyzer's work *Working Women in South-East Asia* clearly demarcates the positioning as;

> Women are culturally perceived as really responsible for tasks associated with the private sphere, especially for the family…It is in the public sphere that bonds of solidarity are formed with others sharing similar views of the world. (131-32)

Badami's *Tell It To The Trees* has congruence with Stuart Hall's concept of "cultural identity." Hall defines it in terms of,

> shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. (223)

Further he examines that:

> cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but positioning. Hence there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin." (226)

Exile, memory, and desire are the diversified concepts which follow a recurrent pattern in colonial, post-colonial, and diasporic age. Memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity; for it unites time, place, and generations. The patriarchal head, J. K. Dharma, instigates migration from India to Canada and his granddaughter, Varsha, seeks out information about his life;

> He didn't even leave a record of his thoughts - I know because I looked everywhere - just a few words scratched with purple ink in an empty little notebook: This is all mine. (Badami 11)

The silent space charted out by the eldest male member suppresses the women characters of the succeeding generation and is delineated further by Varsha when she imagines;

> … he could see the starry sky instead of dust, and all around him his eyes landed only on quiet mountains and giant trees

standing in silent clusters, bearing in their wooden hearts the secrets of all the creatures that live here. (11)

The father character, Vikram Dharma, mistreats his two children - Varsha and Hemant and his second wife, Suman. Varsha frequently tells "Hemant that he must only tell his secrets about the abuse he experiences to a tree in their yard" (8) and she explains that being vocal about this violence would ruin their image as the "ideal Indian family" (115). The migrant women at times become doubly marginalized victims:

> first by the violence perpetrated against them, and then by Canadian society, which often fails to provide the appropriate support and interventions that would empower these women. (Chokshi et al. 151)

The silence inherent within the Dharma family facilitates the reproduction of domestic violence even after the death of J. K. Dharma and it is frequented by the deeds of his son, Vikram. Himani Bannerji states in her seminal study *The Dark Side of the Nation*, that the host society is a potentially terrifying place of exile for women of colour for whom the immigrant struggle is compounded by the multiple or converging patriarchies of the community of male elite and the Canadian state. Akka, the grandmother, finds parallelisms between their violent behaviour and acts as a connecting link to share the hidden traumas of past with the children. Aleida Assmann lucidly states;

> written record of life and memories is a key method of making memories potentially accessible to those who do not live within spatial and temporal reach. (6)

The transmission of violence from one generation to the next facilitates intergenerational

trauma, which Marianne Hirsch connects with "post memory." To her, the concept of post memory is "a structure of inter and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is the consequence of traumatic recall" (106).

Akka suggests the cause behind male violence; "This [demon] is embroidered in to the pattern of his skin, it is coiled in his intestines" (88). The internalization of male violence and its silent acceptance has triggered negative impact on child characters, especially Varsha. Being haunted by the past memories, she becomes the victim of anger management issues, after a boy at school called her a "dirty name so [she] stuck his face in the snow and sat on his head until his legs stopped kicking and he nearly suffocated" (33). Varsha even tries to bully her younger brother Hemant and forces him to conceal such instances of violence to the adults.

The girl child, Varsha grows up in the Dharma family witnessing marital discord between her mother and father. Victimization of physical and psychological violence forced Varsha's mother to move beyond the familial and domestic space. Abandoned by her mother and silenced by her father, Varsha experiences the traumatic moments and turmoils of her life. She is prompted to erase her mother's memory;

> He told me I was to forget her absolutely. I was never to talk about her. Ever…she was an unmentionable. We've not forgiven her. Papa and me. (13)

Even a daughter feels restricted to speak or lament about her mother's absence. This sort of estrangement degraded her mother as a wicked woman, a traitor, and even as one who deserves an untimely death. The fatal loss of her mother and memories about her cannot be easily erased from the mind of a daughter, who finds expression to her suppressed emotions in the form of violence:

> But it's hard to forget. And [Helen] refused to leave me. She was everywhere in the house. I would wake up at night sometimes, sure she was sitting in a corner of my room - a loud and strong and beautiful ghost. I tried to hate her but I couldn't. I wanted to reach out and hold her tight, I wanted to rub my face against her belly, and kiss her, and feel her softness. And then I'd remember that she'd left me without a backward glance, and the rage would come rushing in. (9)

The new mother or stepmother, Suman assimilates into Dharma family after marriage with Vikram. As critic Mala Pandurang writes of the transnational South Asian woman;

> [i]t is crucial to formulate analytical tools to assess states of subjectivity at the point of departure. It is only thus that we can arrive at any conclusion about shifts of identity and dilemma of liminality that take place after arrival. (89)

The protagonist's departure and arrival are connected through the dichotomies encompassing geography, culture, and family patterns which are in stark opposition with the idealized version:

> I too imagined myself a Parvati, or a Mumtaz Mahal, a Juliet or a Laila, the object of a hero's undying love. I too wished to be borne away on horseback, in a train, or a plane… by a man who would allow me to expand beyond my boundaries. (43)

Suman's realization that the institution of marriage whether in India or Canada only en-

titled woman the status of "nobody other than the wife of a man who is my guardian" (122). Vikram utilises the possibility of finding bride through his label, PIO (Person of Indian Origin) and Suman's family venerates foreign nationals. Vikram's distancing from the ancestral land as a cultural outsider has been erased by Suman's family members despite his social impropriety.

Suman has entered the land of Canada by means of spousal sponsorship, which involves the legal application by a Canadian citizen to bring a husband or a wife from another country as his or her sole dependent. The immigrant status of a woman is co-related with marriage at least on certain occasions and these women are subjected to greater challenges of domestic violence when compared to women who are citizens. The concept of spousal sponsorship, detrimental to the welfare of immigrant women, is often perceived as a prototypical transnational act and a common aspect of the immigrant experience for many South Asian women. The pathetic realities and consequences of this migratory process is challenging for many women immigrants. Suman's sense of alienation in host society, away from the dependency of her parents and her invisibility as sponsored bride in the state of outsidership is confirmed when she says:

> So here I am stuck in a world full of borders and boundaries, unable to travel because I can't show proof of my identity to the people who guard the entryways and exits. It is not enough to ay. I am Suman, daughter of a beloved man, wife of a hated one. I still need a piece of paper with my photograph stamped by the government of a country. Without that I am nobody other than the wife of a man who is my guardian, my custodian, my prison. (121-22)

Suman's plight within the diversified framework and perspectives foregrounds the issue of domestic abuse triggered by a number of factors: "individual, institutional and structured" (Chokshi, et al. 148). Her miscarriage is caused by Vikram's abuse and she realised her confinement within Canadian borders. The landscape also circumscribes her legal and physical disassociation as husband's dependant.Connell states that "patriarchal hegemony or hegemonic masculinity has a huge impact on social hierarchy and women's activities in the global south" (846).

The process of social exclusion delimits Suman's contact with the outside world and accelerates the momentum of violence. Badami states that people in Merritt's Point are indifferent about others and they observe silence at times of violence. Mr. Wilcox, the bus driver easily accepts children's remarks that "Varsha fell down the stairs and bumped into a wall" (188) despite knowing that they have been mercilessly beaten by their father. The women and child characters easily internalize violence and indifference of the host society as normativity. The constant fear of being abandoned by the female members disrupts Varsha's mental stability. She cannot withstand Suman's absence in the family like her biological mother and hence decides to hide her passport; "I taped it behind the photograph of my dead grandfather. Suman will never dream of looking there… now she doesn't have it" (50). She even becomes responsible for the death of Anu, the tenant of the house.

The institutional power structures that regulate the lives of Third World Women by Eurocentricism necessitate the need to traverse the world governed by power through resistance. The destructive stratification of the world narrows down the scope of empowerment and this opened up the possibilities of Third World Feminism. In *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty uses

the term 'Third World' to designate "geographical location and socio-historical conjunctures" (47). The communities of women with "divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination are pervasive and systematic" (Mohanty 51). The hierarchical readings restrict Third World Women in time, space and history.

The social stratum and gender differentiation of patriarchal society enable men to overrule women in all spheres of life. The process of alienation and estrangement becomes fatal for the immigrant women whose lives are administered by the intersecting lines of race, gender and patriarchy. As Francine Pickup remarks:

> The violence to which women are subject is not random or abnormal or defined by specific circumstances alone. It is used as a weapon to punish women for stepping beyond the gendered boundaries set for them, and to instil in them the fear of even considering doing so. It is a systematic strategy to maintain women's subordination to men. (303)

Badami urges the inevitability of Third World Women to transcend the barriers in transnational space to their possible extent by dismantling the stereotypes and conventional norms. The failure of her women characters in asserting identity and subjectivity delimited their existence as immigrants. The path of resistance is the need of the hour to ensure women's safety, security and harmony.

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AI vs. Mind's Eye: The Subtle Line Dividing the Human from the Machine in *The Bicentennial Man*

Tina Jose*

Abstract

In a posthuman world that has become increasingly dependent on electronics, the idea of artificial intelligence taking over human reality has certainly crossed the imagination at some point or the other. In a Covid-based reality, the worldwide web has ensured the embankment of technology into the heart of every home as a necessary means of communication. This scenario has caused such technology to create a new world – one where the people inhabiting it needs to re-examine the idea of whether technology is actually a boon or a bane, whether technology is indeed the helping hand it is deemed to be or a curse. It is in this perspective that the movie *The Bicentennial Man* could be viewed. Based on Isaac Asimov's 1992 novel *The Positronic Man*, *The Bicentennial Man* is a 1999 American science-fiction movie starring the late Robin Williams. It revolves around a 200-year old robot who wishes to be acknowledged as human and strives to turn itself into one. In the movie it dies just before being acknowledged posthumously as human. The movie raises the question on what it means to be human versus artificial intelligence. The question also arises as to whether robots can become the equal of humans and what separates the human from artificial intelligence. This and more are questioned on the movie. It is the above aspects that this paper would like to delve into in full length: what defines the human – individual comprehension and death, together allow the robot to be considered human. This fine line that separates the two – the human and the robotic – is an issue that needs to be explored in the pages that follow.

Keywords: *AI, Human, Posthumanism, and Reality.*

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Humankind is living at a juncture where one begins to wonder about the role technology plays in our lives. In a post-Covid scenario, the world has come to accept that technology is indeed a necessary and integral part of living on earth. But this also raises the question of how far one must allow technology to invade our lives and whether the fine line that balances the real and the virtual worlds are being blurred with such hi-tech advancements.

This brings into perspective the post-human world we seem to be living in at the current moment. As per the *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia,* posthumanism is,

> a philosophical perspective of how change is enacted in the world ... A posthumanist perspective assumes agency is distributed through dynamic forces of which the human participates but does not completely intend or control. Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as: (a) physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment; (b) moved to action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and (c) possessing no attribute that is uniquely human but is instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem.

As per the *ethics* site, posthumanism is a set of ideas that have been emerging since around the 1990s, (and) challenges the notion that humans are and always will be the only agents of the moral world.

Looking at the idea of posthumanism from such perspectives, the concept of artificial intelligence (AI) at par with human intelligence comes into question. The whole notion of whether machines can equal the human brain and life comes into existence. The whole idea of artificial intelligence taking over the world and the rule of humanity may seem absurd at first, but in the post-Covid scenario where the dependence on technology became a necessity, the question of whether AI may one day actually take over our world changes from being a hypothetical question to an assured possibility in reality.

One must recall that in the Covid scenario, technology became integral to everyday functioning especially for professionals in various fields. When people were forced to work from home, away from their colleagues and offices, technology provided a solution to many a helpless soul. With the help of the Internet and additional software, offices continued to function smoothly from the privacy of people's homes. After the initial desolateness, people continued to bloom with the advent of new technology in their hands. Electronics thus became integral to human lives as they witnessed terror unfold itself in the form of a rapidly-spreading viral disease.

When governments across the world, with the help of the healthcare industry, brought the pandemic under some sort of control, technology continued to play an unabated role in people's lives. Technology continued to bloom amidst a scare of epidemic heights, and the resulting alarming picture was that of a generation entirely lost in the virtual world unaware of what to do in the real one. Thus the dependence on technology, especially mobile phones, brought into people's lives a whole new world – virtual reality – one where they could find new identities or lose themselves.

The availability of a large number of electronics helped boost the role of virtual house help as well. Alexa and robotic vacuum cleaners became everyday words as did AI. Movies like *Robocop*, *Terminator,* and *Matrix* had already brought forth the idea of an invasive technology

entering people's lives. AI has been just a step away from becoming a necessary reality, one questioning the fine line balancing the virtual and the real world.

It is in such circumstances that movies like *Bicentennial Man* come into focus. Based on Isaac Asimov's 1992 novel *The Positronic Man*, *Bicentennial Man* is a 1999 American science-fiction movie starring the late Robin Williams. It revolves around a 200-year old robot who wishes to be acknowledged as a human and strives to turn itself into one. In the movie the robot dies just before being acknowledged posthumously as human.

The robot called Andrew, the NDR 114 domestic robot, is given to the Martin family for working at their home. His skills at carving wood help him earn a lot of money, with the help of his owner who splits the funds so received. Andrew gets his freedom from the Martin family and researches human qualities in robots like himself. He believes he would like to be mortal like other humans and gains a body and even a digestive system is made possible for him through his research. He asks to be considered as human and after a long process, dies during the announcement that gives him human status. He is declared the world's oldest human at 200 years and is given all the rights of a human, albeit posthumously.

While the movie did not do too well at the box office it brought up some questions that needed to be examined. The role of AI, what separates AI from human or essentially what constitutes being human, and so on. It also raised concerns about what separates the human from AI and the future possibility of the extinction of such a dividing line. It is here that the concepts of posthumanism come into focus.

According to the *Critical Posthumanism* site, the theory of posthumanism deals with the on-going deconstruction of humanism. This in essence could refer to the rapid break down of laws and codes that separate the human from AI and question the concept of the dividing line.

Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics helps comprehend this further. The first law states that a robot may not harm a human being, or through any inaction or miscalculation, allow a human to be harmed. The second law states that they must obey the orders that are given to them by humans except when any order directly conflicts with the first law's demands. Lastly, the third law states that a robot must constantly protect its own livelihood and existence so long as it does not conflict with the first two laws (*Hisour*).

These laws have been laid down mainly for the safety and protection of humans and not AI. AI robots and the like are thus meant for a life of servitude to their masters. They are generally built to perform actions that could harm or be difficult for the human. Take for instance the first robots that went to space or the humble robotic vacuum cleaners available today in many homes – they were created to help reduce the endangering of human lives or to ensure comfort by decreasing people's daily tasks to a minimum. The uses of robots for humans at home includes, Companionship by providing company to elderly individuals, Healthcare by assisting in surgical procedures, Delivery by completing food delivery and last-mile fulfilment and Household by vacuuming and mowing the grass.

In all these and many other ways, AI provides to be a boon to society at large. They are able to manage and function in spaces meant to be harmful to the human such as in outer space or near a boiler. Their presence also helps humans cope on a daily scale such as mowing the lawn or other such mundane tasks. This leaves the human with time on the hands, free to do whatever one wishes. One sees a large number of such

instances where Andrew helps people in the movie as well, for instance doing household work at the Martins.

Being hi-tech technology, the AI machines can do arduous, repetitive tasks diligently without getting tired or bored. They are capable of servitude to their owners on account of a lack of qualities seen in humans like feeling, ageing, etc. But in the robot Andrew there is a difference that sets him apart from other machines – he possesses the human qualities of creativity, desire to learn and even a willingness to become mortal. Andrew goes on to say, as a robot I could have lived forever. But I tell you all today I would rather die a man, than live for all eternity as a machine (*Bicentennial Man* 114:20-25).

It is such kind of dialogues and actions that sets Andrew apart from other robots and blurs the defining line between the human and AI. Andrew even says, "There must be a reason that I am as I am. There must be" (106:25-42). His functioning is beyond everyday logic as he portrays human-like qualities. The son of Andrew's creator Rupert explains to him, "Imperfection is the key. Imperfections make us individuals, that's what makes us unique" (67:30-35). Thus Andrew's human-like tendencies can be seen as a result of his defects rather than as part of the evolutionary process of AI.

Andrew becomes an oddity to a society that sees robots and all machines as devoid of emotions and feelings. This is probably why Andrew explains in the movie,

> To be acknowledged for who and what I am, no more, no less. Not for acclaim, not for approval, but, the simple truth of that recognition. This has been the elemental drive of my existence, and it

must be achieved, if I am to live or die with dignity. (114:45-58)

Andrew is representative of those forms of AI that differ from the normal machine-mode. The human race is fine with the animal world displaying such qualities as emotion or decision-making. But when it is a question of AI doing the same, questions, and actions arise that discourage such instances. In the movie, it takes Andrew 200 years to officially gain recognition as an equal to the human or be declared as one. He is acknowledged posthumously as human by the World Congress to which he petitioned.

Questions thus arise – what makes one human/ what separates humans from AI? Is it possible to erase this gap? Can AI be turned human? Does mortality alone make one human? Is it indeed necessary to possess a physically degenerative body to be considered a human? These and many other questions arise in such a context.

Prof. Anderson remarks in an online lecture that any entity that has the moral right of self-determination has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. If this can be seen as defining humanity or an elaboration of what being human is, then in this sense Andrew was definitely human long before he died. In his quest for self-realization, Andrew developed a unique consciousness that was neither machine nor entirely acceptable as human. His life is far removed from both humans and machines as it forms the grey area between black and white.

Andrew, as he evolves, slowly moves from referring to himself as 'one' and begins to call himself 'I.' This is not just an indication of his growing humanness but in addition a step in the evolution of himself as a rational being. He develops into a unique being, different from all others of his kind. This indicates too that his humanity is not entirely non-existent but very much

present in the robot that he is. His metal body is converted to an android version which again allows him to pass off as human in front of the general public. The qualities, feelings, desires, and emotions he further acquires on the path of self-discovery and enlightenment help Andrew build his sense of self-worth and confidence. His buying of his own freedom, his attempts at putting together robot history, him becoming a robobiologist and even his wearing of clothes over his android body, all point to the fact that his evolution into human is to be acknowledged.

Yet that is impossible for the world to accept and hence the rejection of his first request in this vein in front of the World Congress. No other human would have been put through the same difficulties that Andrew faced primarily because he was made of metal/silicone as opposed to the rest of humanity. The rejection of his request because he isn't like them but different, is what makes him struggle to find a place in the world. The amount of legal and political drama that Andrew went through in order for the world to finally acknowledge him as human, indicates the narrow-mindedness and inability of the human race as a whole to accept the truth of his humanness that exceeds the actual human.

Writer Dave Neill points out that Andrew's character was,

> conscientious of his own innate self-awareness and had both empathetic tendencies and complex capacities to understand the significance of events and people in his life. (14)

This could be interpreted as Andrew's evolution and transformation from AI to human. Andrew's love for Portia and vice-versa, prompts him to work harder to be recognized as human, so he can live his life with her. He even has blood run through his systems to ensure he has a human death – something he cannot predict like the rest of humankind, but something assured.

Andrew's recognition as a human in the movie can be seen as the blurring of the dividing line between people in general and machines, and an awareness, if not acceptance, at some time in the future of AI joining mankind as kin. *The Bicentennial Man* makes one think about the impending possibilities of AI joining the human race as a very probable reality and delves into the actuality of the same. Robin Williams does justice to the character of Andrew in the movie, leaving an intriguing feeling in the viewer of the probability of accepting such a reality. It only remains to be seen what the future holds for humans and AI.

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Conflicting Cultures and Emerging Identities in Manju Kapur's *Home*

M. Indhushruthi* and Dr. Sreeja Balakrishnan**

Abstract

The fictional works of Manju Kapur examine the struggle between cultures. She deals with women's issues and has an intuitive understanding of women's roles in patriarchal societies. Kapur powerfully considered that tradition plays an important role in the formation of human society. Culture is the knowledge of a particular group of people, and it is expressed through anything from language to religion, cuisine, social customs, music, and visual arts. Similar to literature, culture is a complex concept that is interpreted differently by different communities. Nisha, the protagonist of the novel *Home*, is portrayed as brave, intelligent, and balanced. Her feminist sensibility had been severely destroyed by patriarchy. Manju Kapur takes the readers on a sharp and mysteriously captivating journey through three generations. It delves into the complex terrain of Indian family life and reveals many issues that run deep within the family. Nisha's marriage and later motherhood prove that a woman's liberation does not deny her biological status as a nurturer. The novels take an in-depth and satisfying look at the sense of displacement that many women experience within the traditional institution of marriage. She focuses on the marital problems that plague India's educated working middle-class wives. This displacement and suffocation within the traditional boundaries of marriage, family, and society as an entity is brought out by Kapur. Kapur is unique in revealing the elements of marital existence and how observant she is in capturing the diffused and finer factors in the relationship between women and society in general, women and men in particular. It is normally recognized that culture represents the way human life manages others and how they respond to changes. Kapur's novels analyze the domestic scenario, political issues, and the man-woman relationship in marriage.

Keywords: *Culture, Liberation, Home, Marriage, and Tradition.*

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Culture is the traits and information of a specific group of people, described by every single thing from language, religion, delicacies, social habits, music, and artwork. Like literature, culture is a challenging fact that is understood to mean particular things through diverse groups. Culture is embedded in human understanding, perception, and behaviour. Culture encompasses languages, thoughts, principles, customs, taboos, codes, establishments, tools, and techniques and includes shared values, ideals, knowledge, skills, and practices that underpin behaviour of the participants of a social institution at a specific point in time. It is creative in expression, capabilities, traditional knowledge, and resources. It is commonly acknowledged that culture embodies the manner human life deals with others and how they increase or react to changes in their environment.

Manju Kapur is one of the prominent and versatile Indian women writers. Her novel *Home* deals with second-wave feminism. She is an author who has tried to give a new air to feminism. Kapur's novels center on the domestic scenario, politics, and the man-woman relationship within the sphere of marriage. Kapur's characters occupy an essential role in her novels as socialist feminists. The characters are sensitive, self-conscious, tremendous, and creative. They rise in opposition to the traditional parental family and run far from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow-minded society.

Materials and Methods

A combination of theoretical and practical methods for advancing women's equality was referred to as socialist feminism. The relationship between the oppression of women and various forms of societal inequality, including race, class, sexual orientation, and economic injustice, was examined by socialist feminist theory. The rise of socialist feminism in the 1960s and 1970s focused on the connection between capitalism and patriarchy. The concept of socialist feminism is discussed in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and Carol Hanisch's *The Personal is Political* (1969) where concepts or ideas on women's private, household, and public roles in society first emerged.

The term socialist feminism may give the impression that socialism and feminism are inextricably linked. Socialist feminism is always compared to cultural feminism. Although there are some similarities, socialist feminism and cultural feminism are very different movements. Cultural feminism places a heavy emphasis on the distinctive qualities and achievements of the feminine gender as opposed to men. A major subject is a separation, which socialist feminism rejects. Socialist feminism aims to create an equal playing field for men and women by collaborating with them. Cultural feminism has been labelled pretentious by socialist feminists. Barbara Ehrenreich observed, "Feminism despite all-out efforts is still largely a middle-class movement and ideology" (*In These Times*).

Inequality between the sexes exists in some form in every human society. If we take a broad look at human societies throughout history and across continents, one can see that they have frequently been characterized by the following: the subjugation of women to male authority, both within the family and in the community at large; the objectification of women as a form of property; a sexist labour division in which women are limited to tasks like raising children and giving proper services to men.

The laws and customs that govern the relationships between the sexes in any culture frequently hide the reality of masculine aggression. Barbara Ehrenreich is a feminist who interpreted that the possibility of male assault stands as a constant warning to bad women, and drives good

women into complicity with male supremacy. The reward for being good is protection from random male violence and economic security.

Socialist feminism understands that the feminization of certain values like nurturing prevents female autonomy by dictating the opportunities and societal roles that women can be assigned. These opportunities are narrowed even more when race, ethnicity, disability, and economic status are added to the equation. The holistic approach recognizes women as inherently different. After all, they are survivors of varying types of social oppression and violence perpetrated by a sovereign state. The mere existence of socialist feminism showcases the diverse nature of the feminist movement. This diversity is the feminist movement. There are ongoing disagreements about what sex oppression means and where it stems from, these disagreements exhibit that not every woman faces similar conditions. This truth must be acknowledged as we strive for a better society. Socialist feminists aim to fight against sexist oppression, class, race, gender, and other aspects of identity or symbiotic issues. Barbara Ehrenreich says that socialism is not about self-described socialists being intelligent to have a strategy. Social is a concept that one can all understand.

The women in Manju Kapur's novel appear to be the representation of modern women who have long been burdened by inhibition and are now ready to end the traditional way of life of silence. In the traditional social milieu of her novels, she suggests the existence of mothers and daughters; it is the same society where marriage has appeared as the ultimate goal and destiny from which these women cannot escape. Women in Manju Kapur's community desire to be liberated from outdated societal norms and traditions, but this is never permitted.

Kapur's third novel *Home* deals with the struggle of Indian women in a male-subjugated joint family. Nisha, the protagonist, is an educated woman. She claims her womanhood courageously because she is iconoclastic and revolutionary in her approach to life. Nisha, a modern woman, rebels against the old family system, yet she never frustrates the restrictions of morality and values. *Home* also explores the complex terrain of the Indian family and reveals many problems which are deeply rooted within the family. In *Home* Kapur talks about the rise against the old traditions, the struggle for survival, and the direction of women's unending struggle to survive, to break the silence against her suppression.

The primary cause of women's subjugation is patriarchy. The first point frequently refers to the limited roles that women have in society. One of the main causes of their oppression is the domestic obligations that imprison them and limit their home liberty. Nisha in the novel emerges as an entrepreneur in Banwarilal's family. Living at Karol Bagh in Delhi, Nisha, the granddaughter of Lala Banwari Lal, daughter of Yashpal and Sona, explodes the convention of her home which fixed a woman's position in the home and establishes her identity as a business woman. Initially, her family members did not support her. As it is explained by Kapur through the character of Yashpal,

> the women of the house had never worked. Not one. And here he was sending his beloved daughter out into the world because she did now not have her home to occupy herself with. (269)

Negating the prefixed conventional roles of women within the domestic sphere through Nisha, Kapur brings forth a new concept about the chores of girls like stitching, embroidery, knitting, cooking, and so on. Society labels women as submissive, inferior, fragile, and feeble. In a similar context, Nisha is not only pressured to

simply accept the traditional roles, which can be dissimilar from her brothers but additionally pressured to make use of her skills inside the precincts of the house. Barbara Ehrenreich in socialist feminism states that in general, men are physically stronger than women, especially when contrasted to those who are pregnant or nursing a child. Men can also induce women to become pregnant. So, regardless of how different they may be from culture to culture, sexual inequity ultimately comes from the undeniable physical advantage that men have over women. They ultimately lead to violence or the fear of violence, in other words.

The women in the novel *Home,* right from childhood are trained to fast and sacrifice for their future husbands. When Nisha, Sona's daughter protests, the family is disturbed, "what kind of wife are you going to make if you can't bear to fast one day a year for your husband" (92). The tale of how a woman brought the demise of her husband because of her disregard for observing fasting and how her rigorous fasting, later on, brought him back even from death. All these kinds of tales reinforce how important it is for a woman to take care of her husband and her primary issue should be safeguarding his life**.**

Ehrenreich states that men are physically stronger than women. Kapur depicts the issue of domestic violence and dowry by introducing the character of Sunita. Her wedding is fixed with the blessing of Babaji and the family is happy about the groom, however, matters become worse when the family discovered that Sunita's husband is a drunkard and greedy man, who start to demand dowry. Sunita suffers and finally dies in a kitchen mishap leaving her child Vicky behind.The character of Sunita is an epitome of a suppressed woman who accepts trauma as her fate and can't raise her voice in opposition to the ill-treatment. She too believes in the myth of bad

karma and decides to compensate for the sins of her past lives by enduring her present miseries. Moreover, the author additionally mocks the mass that follows the so-known spiritual Gurus blindly and considers their words and choices as the highest one. Similarly, the marriage of Yashpal and Sona also takes place with the consent of Babaji, but they are unhappy because they are not blessed with a child. Sona and Yashpal visit a religious place called Chitaiseeking the blessings of Goddess Devi so that they may be blessed with a baby.

In Indian tradition, if a woman had to wait for a long period to have children, society will punish her horribly. However, Kapur brilliantly portrays the character of Rupa who is also childless but emerges as an entrepreneur who is supported by her family in her pickle business. She also performs a key role in raising and imbibing values in Nisha, unlike Sona who fails to provide motherly love to Vicky. Rupa's act of supporting her family by earning money and raising the daughter of her sister reflects the concept of motherhood. The implied message is that motherhood is not merely restricted to giving birth but is a feeling that Rupa showers on Nisha despite being infertile. Whereas, Sona's mind is bounded by an age-old concept that motherly love should be given to the biological children which is why she cannot love Vicky as her son.

As Sona, Yashpal's wife does not conceive for a long time, her mother-in-law allocates to her the responsibility of looking after Vicky. Sona feels sad to be a stepmother for Vicky. She keeps fasting for a long term for the need of a child:

> Every Tuesday she fasted. Previously she would eat fruit and drink milk once during this day, now she converted to nirjal fast. No water from sun-up to sun-down. She slept on the floor, abstained from sex, woke early in the

morning, bathed before sunshine. For her puja she collected fresh white flowers, jasmine, chameli, unfallen, untrodden, from the park outside the house. (14)

Unfortunately, it does not help her in any manner; hence Yashpal makes a plan to go to a shrine at Chetai close to Almora. They believe that the Goddess of the mountain can bless them with a child.

For socialist feminists, reproductive rights are also significant. In this story, Sona had to wait ten years before getting pregnant. Sona's infertility also becomes the sole reason for her spoiled relationship with her mother-in-law as she thinks that Sona deliberately denies motherhood, which depicts that as per the social norms, parenthood must be the next step of the married couple, and it's believed that motherhood makes a woman complete.

She gives birth to a girl child. However, the family members were hoping for a son. They believed that men should be the family's legal heirs. On seeing the girl child, the nurse says to Nisha, "She will bring great wealth to her family, be its goddess Lakshmi" (36). Here Kapur suggests that most Indian family believes that the girl child is a sign of wealth in the shape of a Goddess. The child irrespective of gender should be preferred in a family, but the reality is that the firstborn, specifically the male child, is sought after in many families a girl child is given only secondary importance.

Sona's next child is a boy and with his birth, it is considered that she has completed her responsibility for the family. The family is jubilant and believes that their son is the true heir to their business. In a patriarchal society, men keep primary power in all factors of the society such as politics, family, and so on. In many cultures and societies, the girl child is denied her rights and her primary wishes. They also face the danger of sexual abuse and exploitation and different harmful practices that negatively affect their survival, development, and capability to achieve their fullest capability. Discrimination and harmful practices in opposition to the female child vary depending upon cultural context. For example, intentional abortion of female foetuses and female infanticide are common place practices in East and South Asian countries where sons are strongly preferred. In India, such practices are reinforced by way of the perception that daughters are a financial burden to the family. Many conservatives think that women do not make contributions to their family income and also massive dowries can be anticipated by their in-laws whilst women marry. The liberty enjoyed by women is drastically less than that of men. This makes girls more prone to discrimination and neglects,

> God has rewarded you, cried the mother-in-law, clutching the day-old boy to her withered chest. At last, the name of his father and grandfather will proceed. Now the older one has a complete family I can die in peace. (48)

The novelist is a pretty champion in bringing out the truth of gender discrimination. In many joint families' women are mistreated by the family members. Kapur impartially expresses how a girl child is sexually pressured and threatened by a male. The pious attachment of the brother and sister relationship is cracked. When Vicky and Nisha are playing on the terrace, Vicky touches her in an abusive manner. Kapur explains the incident as follows: "Give me your hand he went on. 'I want to show you something.' I don't want to see. Nisha was crying" (57). But what's even scarier than the actual incident is its results. Kapur goes deep into the psyche of a victim of

child abuse. Nisha tries to block it from her thoughts, however, it promulgated, grew massive and terrifying. Nisha's mother and father are unable to discover the reason and they determine to allow the disturbed Nisha to live with her aunt, Rupa, a few homes away.

Nisha could not forget easily these horrific things done by Vicky to her. She becomes self-possessive. Her health starts deteriorating day by day. Nobody understood her real problem.Nisha starts to live in her aunt Rupa's house and she feels secure there. Premnath and Rupa take care of Nisha very cautiously.

Nisha now found herself in an atmosphere very different from the one she had lived in. As the only child she was the center of interest, concern, and attention. (67)

Nisha was growing in the lap of Rupa and Premnath. Premnath, mainly, took great interest in education of Nisha. He spends his evening time with her to give remedies for her troubles; however, Sona also becomes aware of Nisha's growth. She wishes that her daughter additionally should have learned the traditions of the family. This incident aids us to analyze the boundaries of human culture. A set of thoughts, principles, ideals, customs, and behaviour imposed on humans is constantly called culture. However, many individuals neglect to adhere to it.

Sona feels that Nisha's education has spoiled her. Hence, she must compensate for her negligence for,

Nisha needed to ground in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly. (128)

So, she narrates those conventional tales, and such tales in truth are repeated for generations to teach that a wife's duty lies in sacrificing and she has no separate life apart from that of her husband.

Kapur weaves prevalent truths about the complications of a joint family and one of these is the pull of culture against modernity. Banwari Lal, the family patriarch, is a believer in the continuity of time-honoured conventions. With the next generation, however, the culture he embodies is questioned. The cultural-based enterprise of promoting sarees is intimidated by the brand-new arrival of modern clothes like jeans, salwar kameez, and so on. Kapur focuses on social change through the third generation of Banwari Lal's family.

The family residence is reconstructed, and the antique structure paves the way for the independent floor, with a modular kitchen, chandeliers in all rooms, and bedrooms with an attached restroom. This dismantles the common area or anganas an area of interaction amongst family members. Instead, the focus is on flashy exteriors that propose a miniature palace with reflecting glass, arches, and tiles. The women of the house are fed on by this commercial model of pastiche: Yashpal's wife Sona imagines "herself a woman in a magazine ad for kitchen appliances" (172).

It is important to notice that the changes in the constructed shape of the Lal home do not promise a change within the role coordinates of the kitchen with home obligations and there is no alteration in their area within the city material, both in private or public space. The men in the third generation are formidable and now branch out into bridal clothes and are needed for those lavishly described Indian weddings. "Sona, Sushila, and Asha dressed in bridal colours

gather to perform the puja and listen to a story underlining its significance" (93).

Kapur also narrates the idea of marriage and the significant charm of women in the marriage market. Sona along with her mother visits Banwari Lal's Shop when she comes to Delhi to attend a marriage. Her mother thinks that it's essential for a woman to appear presentable whilst she reaches the age of marriage. Later, a lot of money is spent on Nisha's Jewellery and attire, during her brother's wedding ceremony hoping that the prospective groom's family can be fascinated. When women of colour were subjected to a different form of oppression depending on their race, socialist feminism opposed racism. In this novel *Home* social dichotomy is seen when Sona no longer permits Nisha to play outside as she worries that her skin might be black however whilst she argues that Raju is likewise black she replies that for males black skin is an image of Lord Krishna.

But it differs among men and women because the religious connotations say that Lord Krishna had black skin. Another social stigma is seen in the novel when Nisha enters a younger age, she is forced by her mother to do household chores and cooking which is considered a pinnacle priority of the groom's own family whilst they seek the bride and those are continually suspicious about educated daughter-in-law. Sona also compels Nisha to fast at some stage in Karva Chauth thinking that fasting is a devotion of a woman closer to God and that Nisha could be blessed with a great life partner.

Banwari Lal and his son's family trust in religious values. To lead a long life for her future husband Sona, Nisha's mother, compels her to keep 'Karva Chauth' fasting. Nisha raises the query to her Aunti, Rupa, "Why don't you do Karva Chauth, Masi?" (95). Rupa, Sona's sister, is very modern and doesn't believe in any rituals.

When Nisha is sexually abused by her cousin Vicky, she faces melancholy as a result of which her parents send her to Rupa's residence. During that time, the family is suspicious of Vicky however no action is taken wondering if it might spoil the reputation of the family in society. Moreover, one can see that no interest is given to Nisha's education and college choices. Like her father and mother, Nisha also becomes the sufferer of societal norms whilst she falls in love with Suresh, as her own family creates hurdle in their relationship and their family become the reason for their separation; Suresh is from the lower caste. The irony is, her father Yashpal who once upon a time fought with his family to marry Sona cannot recognize his daughter's true love and considers love marriage as evil.

> Nisha, dear daughter, leave all mind of this dirty low caste man, what can he come up with a command to what we can arrange for you? Marriage in to your own family so as to enable you and your kids to stay with no trouble for the relaxation of your life. (199)

In patriarchal societies, women are trained in womanhood, from the start. This is part of developing as a woman in India. Mother trains their daughters the womanly features. There are many incidents within the novel. When she involves recognizing that her daughter is lacking some feminine traits. This not only stops Nisha from going to school for that day but additionally makes her learn how to be a great wife.

Nisha enters college, there she compares herself with her other classmates. She also wants to be like them. She knows that her traditional family setup will no longer accept her modernity however nonetheless she decides to cut her hair. Kapur catches this feel of adaptability.

Result and Discussion

As marriage has been portrayed as the main goal and dream of a woman, *Home* additionally looms huge in the demanding situations a woman encounters in this cultural institution. Many elements decide the prosperity of a married woman. A bridegroom might not be suitable looking however a bride needs to be good-looking. The number of marriages that Kapur elaborately undisputedly brings forth this concept. It is Sona's beauty that permits her to get married to a wealthy family. The marriage of women like Asha, Sushila, and others shows this. While the bridegroom's party celebration goes to see Sushila, every person mentions her shortness which she has to make up with excessively heeled footwear. And Vicky being a subaltern in the own family nobody can pay much interest. Nisha born with an awful star is expected to make a good deal because she resembles a film star. So, Sona thinks of Nisha and "silently consoled herself by thinking that her daughter's resemblance to Suriya might counterbalance her bad stars in the marriage market" (150).

When her tense state of mind leads to skin disease eczema, the mother scolds her regularly to prevent scratching. She shouts: "stop it your skin will become as black as buffalo's then nobody will ever marry you" (228). This discloses the importance of beauty in the marriage market.

However, lack of beauty can be compensated with components that are cash or cloth items. This thing is communicated brilliantly through the character of Pooja Arora, Raju's wife who has a big scar on her face and neck. It is to be noted that a little disorder in her beauty is compensated with cash. Kapur satirically states, "the girl had a scar, and scars had to be paid for. Pooja was bringing quantities of cash, a car, a fridge, air-conditioning, a TV…" (253). Initially,

when Raju said "he did not like her-what was that thing on her neck and cheek," his parents and relatives quickly come to defend her saying that "it was nothing, in time he would not notice it; besides, she was an only daughter" (248).

Economic status also decides the kind of life that a woman awaits in her new home. The wife of Pyare Lal enjoys freedom and happiness in Banwari Lal's family just because her parents filled the rooms of their sons-in-law with furniture, whereas, Sona is humiliated due to her poor economic status. Similarly, brides like Seema and Rekha have their own space just because they have a sound economic status. In the case of Raju's wife Pooja, even her burns and scars go unnoticed by everyone including her husband due to her affluent status. Even more, it gives her the freedom to overpower the mother-in-law; Sona who is otherwise a terrorizing mother-in-law, especially to Asha, Vicky's wife. Asha has to suffer just because she is poor and married to Vicky, an outcast and orphan in the family. The poor background of her and her weak husband makes her feel very insecure. Hence, she troubles her husband perpetually by asking "where do you belong, tell me so I can place myself there" (102).

Yashpal, Nisha's father, is caught in the never-ending conflict for he realizes that his only daughter as an entrepreneur is far better than all the boys in the family. Despite being resourceful and extremely talented, Nisha is viewed as a liability by her father. Like every typical father, he follows the norms of society. Thus, it isn't the women but men too who are bound hand and foot to the idea of gender created by society and its aftermath.

Conclusion

Socialist feminism demonstrates the numerous ways in which women can experience race, class, sexual orientation, and education. The

women in Kapur's novels are typical of two kinds: traditional and modern. Conventional women like Sona in *Home* believe that a woman has to be trained in household work and be a perfect daughter-in-law. Whereas modern-day women like Rupa believe that women should be educated so they can be independent individuals. Only if women are allowed to go outside the four walls of the house, they can explore the world. Through the figure of Nisha, Kapur has effectively depicted a woman who defends herself, and battles for her education, choice of a life partner, and business. She battles unjust every social convention and succeeds in life.

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