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Editorial



For tomorrow ...

Even as we move well into the third decade of the twenty first century, there are still members of the human race across the globe who are engaged in struggles for sheer survival. Our world today seems fraught with fear; filled with animosity, greed, and violence; broken into narrow compartments of credos and communities; and, despite the supposedly progressive ideals, more unequal, prejudiced, and intolerant of differences than a few generations before.

Though our world is more connected in time and space, both the saber rattling on Facebook and the sloganeering in the street smacks of a parochialism, a lack of nuance, and a complete intolerance of differences. There is a constant exhortation to wave flags, denounce loudly, to join camps. To be moderate, to be accommodating, to be respectful of differences of ideologies or opinions, is seen as weak and elitist. The academia, too, teaches division of the world into binaries of haves and have-nots, oppressor and oppressed, feminist and fundamentalist, the marginalized and the hegemonic, and, to be 'modern' or 'forward thinking' means having to subscribe to views that belong to only one side. Being 'ideologically correct' is more important today than being empathetically respectful or even morally sensitive.

We are divided into camps that cannot talk to one another today, because it is not possible to condemn or condone both sides simultaneously. We espouse Bush's stance post 9/11: you are either with us or against us. But, as our first prime minister said in his inaugural address – the nations and peoples of the world are too closely knit together for any of us to believe that we can ever live apart. There are simply too many of those who hold an opposite view for any group to change or kill them all. To exist ourselves, we must be accommodating.

Therefore, as we reflect on the violent struggles across the world – let us remember them all. Let us remember that on every side there are parents and children, husbands and wives, siblings, and friends – and they are all entitled to their truths, their rights, their lives. Let us look for the commonalities of belonging to the human race.

In this, I believe, it is the humanities that hold hope and promise. It is in art that we find our best expression of creativity, of ingenuity, of novelty; where we celebrate differences, deconstruct the iconic, and question the canonical. It is this openness and reverence of the humanities that we must all apply to the practice of living. Only that that will ensure that we survive.

Dr. Preeti Kumar

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Eulogizing the Nation as the Mother through Songs: Juxtaposing *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*

Rebanta Gupta*

Abstract

This paper attempts to critically examine two significant songs which garnered currency during the Indian independence movement against the British Raj in the twentieth century: *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*, written by the Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore and Colonel Abid Hasan Safrani, military officer of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (1943-45) respectively. The paper analyzes the two songs through a comparative study and underscores the parallels, shifts, and points of convergence observed in the structure, melody, metaphor, and imagery. It also tries to contextualize the two songs by briefly discussing the creation of a national aural imagination of India through nationalistic songs, and how the two aforementioned songs have contributed to the creation of a secular image of India, against the practice of upholding a monolithic, majoritarian, and saffronized narrative of Indian society and culture.

Keywords: *Azad Hind, Music, Nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore, and Subhas Chandra Bose.*

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The Indian independence movement generated resistance against the despotism of the British Raj through the dual means of violence and non-violence, but rebellious voices of the oppressed citizens also found expression through cultural resistance. The tide of nationalism that swept across the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century's first half, envisioning India as a beloved mother who was being realistically and symbolically molested by the colonial invaders, ignited the spirit of resistance in the midst of the artists as well. The glory, grandeur, and courage of the motherland was upheld through a battery of songs penned and set to tune by notable men of letters, such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, and Kazi Nazrul Islam; their lyrics and compositions played an integral role in rousing patriotic sentiments and unifying people from different social, economic, cultural, and political sectors under the Indian tricolour. This paper would attempt to make a comparative study between two significant patriotic songs penned surrounding the theme of Indian independence: *Jana gana mana adhinayaka jaya he*, composed by the Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore, and *Subh sukh chain ki barkha barase*, written by Colonel Abid Hasan 'Safrani' for *Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind* or the Provisional Government of Free India, established by the Indian nationalist leader Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Japanese-occupied Singapore in October 1943. The latter song has been inspired and adapted from the former, and this paper would attempt to examine the parallels, points of convergence, differences, and shifts observed in the structure, melody, and metaphors in *Subh Sukh Chain* vis-à-vis *Jana Gana Mana*, through a comparative textual and melodic study.

Songs of Indian Nationalism: A Brief Overview

Music has always been an integral tool to celebrate and disseminate the ideas of national-

ism, and the Indian independence movement witnessed the emergence of a gamut of songs bestowing glory on Mother India and preaching resistance against colonial oppressors. With the coalescence of disparate groups, communities, and kingdoms in the post-Great Revolt of 1857 phase (which has been dubbed 'the first war of Indian independence' by Hindu nationalist leaders like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar), a sense of united India gradually surfaced, with the crystallization of the concept of nationalism. Music has always played an active part of Indian life, the folk and the classical branches of music being the most dominant forms across the country. But music was soon molded into an artistic medium to propagate nationalism and inculcate a sense of unity among people, cutting across diverse regional, political, social, and cultural affiliations, and that went on to generate a national aural imagination. Each Indian region had its own repertoire of traditional songs, but

these had to be balanced with larger all-India projects, especially when it came to the recasting of larger classical traditions. The act of constructing and even reinventing a modern tradition of Indian classical music bore the marks of nationalist concerns, ranging from ideas of textual authenticity to compositions that celebrated the nation and to iterations of shared spiritual associations. (Subramaniam)

India is a giant assemblage of diverse cultures with conflicting and contradictory modalities, but the idea of the nation was constructed through a process of complex negotiations, which was coloured by the ideas of the dominant Hindu culture. Artists hailing from diverse backgrounds collaborated to produce a number of songs that kept the nationalist aspirations and desire of lib-

eration from the colonial clutches simmering in the minds of the listeners. Moreover,

the idea of a national music came to be an experiential reality with the integration of popular compositions with the staging of devotional songs and in the popularisation of certain melodies, which were easy to recall, respond to and to even hum. (Subramaniam)

In most cases, these songs would be addressed to the nation as a beloved mother, whose body has been plagued by colonial invaders, and the onus lies on her wards to salvage her modesty. The following paragraphs would discuss some aural projects written and composed to bolster nationalist feelings among Indians to trace the evolutionary arc that culminated in the compositions of *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*, the songs in the discussion.

This image of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India surfaced from the literary endeavours of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), whose seminal novel *Anandamath* (1882) first conceptualized this image as the national personification of India. The novel, set against the backdrop of the Sannyasi Rebellion of the 1770s, frames the song *Vande Mataram* ('I praise thee, Mother'), an ode to the mother, who is fashioned like a Hindu Goddess, and descriptions of the natural and cultural splendors of India in the song, collapse into the iconography of the mother, in Sri Aurobindo's translation:

Rich with thy hurrying streams, /
Bright with thy orchard gleams, / Cool
with the wind of delight, / Dark fields
waving, Mother of might, / Mother free.
(Mazumdar 4-6)

Interpreted as a response to the British anthem 'God Save the Queen,' *Vande Mataram* was

first sung at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress, and later, Rabindranath Tagore set it to tune and himself rendered it on the opening day of the aforementioned session (Noorani 7-8). The song gained traction during the independence movement; though *Anandamath* was banned and the recital of the song in public was criminalized, students, workers, and the general public violated the government order multiple times and invited arrests by singing it. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar describes the monumental effect the song had had on the revolutionaries:

During the long and arduous struggle for freedom from 1905 to 1947 'Bande Mataram' [sic] was the rallying cry of the patriotic sons of India, and thousands of them succumbed to the lathi blow of the British police or mounted the scaffold with 'Bande Mataram' [sic] on their lips. (Noorani 8)

The catchline of the song emerged almost as a pan-Indian signifier for revolution for independence, despite the looming presence of Hindu iconography in its text.

The domain of Hindustani Classical Music likewise witnessed a propagation of nationalist sentiments. Although it remained as a formidable 'art music' and could not be intellectually or emotionally accessed by most countrymen, eminent Hindustani Classical vocalist Shruti Sadolikar-Katkar remembers the contributions of the Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana* (the school of Hindustani Classical vocal music having generational and pedagogic roots in Jaipur in Rajasthan and Atruli in Uttar Pradesh) in propagating songs reinforcing patriotism, where the doyen Ustad Manji Khan (1888-1937) played a seminal role (Khanna). Well known for singing patriotic songs in Marathi, he would compose songs in *shuddha* or unadulterated ragas (melodic scales) and embark

on *prabhat pheris* (early morning rounds in the communities) with people,

awakening people in their homes and singing rousing songs. One of them was 'charkha chaka chalake' [alluding to Mahatma Gandhi's initiative to expand indigenous industry through the symbol of *charkha* or spinning wheel]. (Khanna)

The use of simple melodies by relinquishing complex ones and implementing local dialects into songs helped to translate complex and ornamental 'classical' songs into much more accessible forms, which helped in rousing patriotic spirits in the masses.

In the realm of nationalist folk songs, Mukunda Das (1878-1934) deserves an important place. Popularly known as *Charankabi* (bard or troubadour), Yajneshwar De, who adopted the nom de plume Mukunda Das, contributed to the inventory of nationalist songs during the Swadeshi Movement against the British, after the partition of Bengal in 1905. His songs, once again, portrayed India as a mother, even the anthology of his songs advocating the boycott of British goods, was titled *Matripuja* ('Worshipping Mother'), published in 1908 (Banglapedia). The simplicity of the language and the melody of his songs galvanized public dissent against the colonial regime during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1922) and Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), and it roused the sentiments of both the rural and the urban spheres. His celebrated song *Bhoy ki marane rakhite santane*, / *Matangi metechhe aaj samara range* ['Why fear death, when mother has put on the battle gear to save her sons?' (translation mine)] equates the image of Mother India with the beligerent image of Goddess Kali, the embodiment of power, time, and destruction; the mother here does not require the sons to salvage her modesty,

but she herself has descended on the battlefield to protect her children. Das, therefore, bridges the notion of the nation-mother with the revolutionary activities, but by reversing the roles.

In the face of Hindu iconography and culture espoused by songs of the *Vande Mataram* phylum, that sketch a monolithic view of the multifaceted Indian culture, a resistance was posited by *Sare Jahan se Achha* ('My nation is the best in the world'), penned in Urdu by Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), published in the journal *Ittehad* in 1904 (Pritchett). Also known as *Taranah-e-Hindi* ('The Song of the People of Hindustan'), the song was originally written for children, which symbolically challenges the Hinducentrism espoused by *Vande Mataram*, by stating:

Ae ab rood e Ganga, woh din hain yad tuihko, / *Utra tere kinare jab karwan hamara* ['Oh water of Ganges, do you still remember the days, / When on your banks we halted the caravans? (translation mine)]

This couplet, instead of indulging in the romantic notion of the nation as the mother, reminds the listeners that,

numerous caravans have halted on the banks of Ganges through the ages and that the Indian nation is defined by these continuous migrations, not by 'original' inhabitants of any kind or an 'original' culture. What Indians share, according to Iqbal, is a common geography, not a common language, culture or religion. (Imam)

The application of the Urdu language gives a tailspin to the dominance of Sanskrit in the intellectual discourse, which was widely known as *Devabhasha* ('language of the gods'), and it contrasts sharply with the heavily Sanskritized

Bengali in which *Vande Mataram* was written. Iqbal's song expanded on the meaning of 'Hindustan,' and unlike the exclusionary tactics adopted by Chattopadhyay, his lyrics created a more secular framework for the nation, which underscores the co-existence of both the Hindus and the Muslims:

*Mazhab nahi sikhata apas mein bair
rakhna, /Hindi hain hum, watan hai
Hindustan hamara* ['Religion never
teaches us to hate the others, / We all
are Hindustanis, our homeland is
Hindustan]. (translation mine)

The discussion about the role of songs in fomenting Indian nationalism in the pre-independence era could be stretched further at the risk of digressing from the focal point of this paper. However, the discussion has shown how India has repeatedly been projected in a feminine form, almost like a damsel-in-distress, which requires the intervention of masculine power for survival, or how the feminine nation has been invested with masculine prowess, thereby creating an androgynous identity of India. The tendency to monolithize and saffronize Indian culture has also been highlighted. The following sections would focus, among other issues, on how the two songs in discussion negotiate with this image of the mother and the above discussion has been made primarily to contextualize the upcoming arguments.

Compositional Histories of *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*

The Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), widely regarded as one of the greatest poets of Bengali literature, who was awarded the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, is still revered across the Bengali community for

'Rabindra Sangeet,' or the eclectic repertoire of songs he prolifically crafted by deriving elements and influences from a plethora of sources, such as Hindustani and Carnatic Classical Music, folk songs from Bengal and other Indian regions, Western Classical Music, and Irish melodies, to name a few. His songs, more than two thousand in number, encompass diverse themes like romanticism, psychology, seasonal vicissitudes, yearning, nostalgia, modernism, and most importantly, nationalism. Along with his contemporaries, like Atulprasad Sen, Dwijendralal Roy, Rajanikanta Das, and Kazi Nazrul Islam, Tagore became one of the most important fountain heads of nationalistic songs during the Indian independence movement. *Gitabitan* (1932), the compendium of Tagore's songs, records almost forty-six songs under the section *Swadesh* ('Nation'), each one dealing with the theme of the nation, its glory and unsurpassed beauty, and the call to the Indians to unshackle their motherland from colonial clutches.

Jana Gana Mana, anthologized under the aforementioned *Swadeshi* section of the lyrical compendium, which was later adopted as the National Anthem of the Republic of India, was originally written as a poem titled *Bharata Bhagya Bidhata* ('Dispenser of India's destiny') around the year 1911. Written in Sanskritized Bengali, it

reflects the history, traditions and composite culture of India. It has been serving as an expression of national identity since its adoption. (*The Economic Times*)

Originally written as a hymn, the song, known for celebrating socio-cultural plurality and delineating the geographical territory of the Indian subcontinent, was first rendered by Tagore

on the second day of the Indian National Congress' annual session in Calcutta, on 27 December 1911. It is dedicated to a transcendental supreme figure, or the 'dispenser of India's destiny,' though some crass arguments have claimed that it was originally written in praise of George V, the Emperor of India¹. It was later translated into English as the 'Morning Song of India' by Tagore himself, and it was set to tune by Margaret Cousins, the wife of the Irish poet James H. Cousins, the then principal of the Besant Theosophical College at Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh, where Tagore was enjoying his sojourn in 1919 (Rangarajan). The Constituent Assembly of independent India adopted only the first stanza of *Bharata Bhagya Bidhata* as the National Anthem of the Republic of India on 24 January 1950, but prior to that, the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, sought the advice of the musician Herbert Murrill about the anthem, who felt,

it was a bit slow. He had increased the tempo and modelled it on the lines of the French national song La Marseilles. (Rangarajan)

A formal rendition of the current version of the song takes approximately fifty-two seconds. This paper would, however, take into account the entire text of *Bharata Bhagya Bidhata* instead of its truncated version, and this complete text would henceforth be referred to as *Jana Gana Mana*.

Subh Sukh Chain ('Auspicious Happiness') emerged as the National Anthem of the *Arzi Hukumat-e-Azad Hind* or the Provisional Government of Free India, established by the Indian nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose (popularly known as 'Netaji' or 'respected leader') in Japanese-occupied Singapore on October 21, 1943. Bose (1897-?), an advocate of armed struggle to uproot British hegemony over India, who found

Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violent mass movement against the British Raj problematic and inappropriate, sought assistance from Nazi Germany and Japan during the Second World War to mobilize a militia known as the Indian National Army (INA) or the Azad Hind Fauj (composed of members of the Indian diaspora in South-East Asia) against the British strongholds in India. Modeled on Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana*, *Subh Sukh Chain* was written by an INA personnel Colonel Abid Hasan Safrani (1911-84), in association with Mumtaz Hussain (a writer with the Azad Hind Radio - the broadcasting station established by Bose in Berlin), under Bose's instructions. Also known as *Quami Tarana*, it was set to music by Captain Ram Singh Thakur (1914-2002) (Mitra). Though *Vande Mataram* could have been a more likely candidate, it was eventually discarded for its 'Hindu metaphors,' and its predilection for monolithizing Indian culture, and *Jana Gana Mana* was deemed more appropriate. However, to avoid its Sanskritized Bengali, Bose instructed Hasan to prepare a simple Hindustani translation of the song (Mitra).

Running for a length of three stanzas, *Subh Sukh Chain* incorporates a martial tune, which intersected with the spirit of the INA waging war against the British Raj and the Allied powers, though the devotion and patriotism it exudes is unignorable. Though it is sometimes considered an Urdu version of *Jana Gana Mana*, the two texts differ semantically and musically, and *Subh Sukh Chain* could be best described as an inspired transcreation of Tagore's song. After the independence of India in August 1947, *Subh Sukh Chain* took a backseat, as *Jana Gana Mana* emerged as the National Anthem for the nation. Nevertheless, Captain Thakur was invited to play its tune with his orchestra group on 16 August 1947, a day after India's independence on 15 August, as Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the Indian tricolour

at the Red Fort in New Delhi (Rajan). The song continues to be popular in India, and has been reproduced in some Indian films and web series focusing on Bose's life and the revolutionary activities of the Azad Hind, such as *Rangoon* (2017), *Bose: Dead/ Alive* (2017), and *Gumnaami* (2019).

Juxtaposing *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*

This section juxtaposes Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* and Hasan's *Subh Sukh Chain* to illustrate

the shifts in text, metaphors, language, melody, and essence the latter has made vis-à-vis the former. The attempt is to show how *Subh Sukh Chain*, which embodies the textual 'afterlife' of *Jana Gana Mana*, despite echoing its predecessor's essence, displays significant changes, signifying a new dimension for itself. A juxtaposition chart situating the two songs side by side is provided below for a holistic understanding:

Table-1: A Chart Juxtaposing *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*

	<i>Jana Gana Mana</i>	<i>Subh Sukh Chain</i>
Authors	Rabindranath Tagore	Col. Abid Hasan 'Safrani'
Composers	Rabindranath Tagore and Margaret Cousins	Capt. Ram Singh Thakur
Language	Sanskritized Bengali	Hindustani Language
Year of Composition	1911	1943
Application/Usage	National Anthem of the Republic of India (1950-present)	National Anthem of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (1943-1945)
Tune/Melody	Raga Alhaiya Bilawal/ Gaud Sarang	Primarily follows the melodic lines of <i>Jana Gana Mana</i> , albeit with some differences.
Structure	One Stanza (Official version), Five Stanzas (Complete version)	Three Stanza (Official version)
Mood	Devotional/Patriotic	Devotional/Patriotic/Martial
Dedication	The Supreme Divinity/ Indian Nation	The Nation as the Mother

The Language Question

Jana Gana Mana was written in Sanskritized Bengali; Tagore's knowledge of the ancient Sanskrit language and his intellectual and spiritual camaraderie with the sacred *Upanishadas* perhaps motivated him to write the song in highly orna-

mental and elevated Bengali with Sanskritized echoes. The linguistic complexity of the song, along with its philosophical density, threatened its alienation from access by the larger audience of India, who could not always comprehend the nuances of a well-crafted literary language practiced by Tagore. Though Bengali happens to be

the seventh-most spoken language in the world with around 229 million native speakers globally (Lane), it ranks behind other Indian languages like Hindi, with a larger base of native speakers (342 million native speakers as of 2021), and that palpably dwindles the chances of any literary or musical work produced in Bengali to get a wide readership, though aurally it might be more accessible to the masses than linguistically. The Constituent Assembly of India had supposedly selected only the first stanza of *Jana Gana Mana* as the National Anthem, not only for the representation of the cultural plurality and the geographical diversity of the country that it upheld,² but also for the lesser linguistic complexity it displays, which exponentially increases as one proceeds to the remaining stanzas. Therefore, the entire song, if taken into consideration, suffers from parochialism, since only the educated Bengali intelligentsia could critically engage with it. Chattopadhyay's *Vande Mataram*, which has secured its place as the National Song of India, also suffers from the same curse, as it has also been penned in Sanskritized Bengali. Moreover, the metaphors of the Hindu culture that it employed, might have alienated the Muslim revolutionaries of India, who would not have accepted a monolithic and Hindu centric view of the Indian culture propagated through this song, which actually demanded national integration against the British Raj.

An ingenious solution to this linguistic problem was delivered by Hasan's *Subh Sukh Chain*. The Provisional Government of Azad Hind, along with its military wing, the Indian National Army or the Azad Hind Fauj, comprised people hailing from different religious and linguistic backgrounds; Subhas Chandra Bose was a Bengali-speaking Hindu, Colonel Abid Hasan and Colonel Habibur Rahman were Urdu-speaking Muslims; Captain Ram Singh Thakur was a

Gorkha. To negotiate these cultural differences, and to avoid any Hinducentric-view of India which might have antagonized the non-Hindu personnel of the Azad Hind, Bose instructed Hasan to write the song in the Hindustani language (Fay 380). Though Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* remained as the launchpad, Hasan's *Subh Sukh Chain* became more of a free translation of the former and attained a separate aesthetic life of its own. Hindustani is the lingua franca of North India and Pakistan, which encapsulates the linguistic essence of both Hindi and Urdu, and "it was widely promoted by the British, who initiated an effort at standardization" (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). The Britishers would instruct their officers in Hindustani, and the standardization of the language witnessed an influx of Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic words by Hindus and Muslims. The composition of *Subh Sukh Chain* in Hindustani, therefore, made the song universally acceptable to all religious and linguistic sections of Azad Hind, as this language was more colloquial than esoteric, and appealed to universal sensibilities. It catapulted the song from the realm of the local to the universal, and the simplicity of imagery and terseness of language helped to ignite a pan-Indian sentiment about the mission of Azad Hind against the colonizers.

Observations on the Melody

Both *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain* are coloured with the spirit of ardent patriotism and nationalism, but the melodies of the two songs interpret these themes in two different manners. *Jana Gana Mana* applies the regimen of Hindustani Classical ragas to form its melodic structure; there have been debates about the identities of the ragas that have been deployed in composing its tune. Two ragas, Gaud Sarang and Alhaiya Bilawal, have been regarded as constituting the melodic core of the song. These two

ragas are associated with daytime, following the theory of time espoused by Hindustani Classical Music. Gaud Sarang is intrinsically linked to the afternoon in its aesthetic essence, it creates a sense of solitude and longingness, characterized by an interlocking mechanism of all *shuddha* or major notes of the octave, interspersed with the two *madhyams* (F or Fa of solfege): the *shuddha* and the *tivra* (the F major and the F#) (Ghosh 42). The structure of Gaud Sarang with its *arohana* (ascending scale of notes in a raga) and *aborohana* (descending scale of notes in a raga) is given below³:

Arohana: S G R M G P (M) D P N D Ś

Western Scale: C E D F E G F # A G C B A C

Aborohana: Ś D N P D (M) P G M R P R S

Western Scale: C A B A F# G E F D G F C

However, a contentious notion is often put forward, that the morning raga Alhaiya Bilawal has been used in the composition. Tagore never strictly followed the structure and laws of the ragas, and improvised on them of his own volition to give an avant-garde flavour to his composition, and this often made the melodic identities of his compositions ambiguous. In a manner similar to Gaud Sarang, Alhaiya Bilawal follows a spiral trail, but its melodic pathway being different from that of Gaud Sarang, the sonic texture it generates becomes distinctly dissimilar:

Arohana: S R G P D N Ś

Western Scale: C D E G A B C

Aborohana: Ś N D P D (N) D P M G M R S

Western Scale: C B A G A Bb A G F E F D C

The presence of the *komal nishad* (Bb) in this scale contrasts it with the *teevra madhyam* (F#) of Gaud Sarang, and since the song does not incorporate the *komal nishad* (Bb), Gaud Sarang seems to be the more appropriate melodic candidate,

although Tagore's composition often deviates from the pathway of the raga as well, creating an anomalous yet avant-garde melodic texture, only a semblance of the aforementioned raga becomes traceable. But questions can be raised about Gaud Sarang as well, since the song appears to be closer more to the scalar structure of Raga Alhaiya Bilawal minus its *komal nishad*. The tune, however, embodies a devotional quality, as it is addressed to a transcendental entity and the nation, and echoes the other devotional/religious songs written by Tagore, which have been compiled under the section *Puja* ('worship') in *Gitabitan*. Interestingly, the fourth stanza of the song brings forth the image of an 'Eternal Charioteer':

Patan abhudaya bandhur pantha, juga juga dhabita yatri / He chirasarathi taba rathachakra mukhorita path dinratri / Darun biplab majhe tobo sankhadhwani baje / Sankat dukkha trata [The procession of pilgrims passes over the endless road rugged with the rise and fall of nations; and it resounds with the thunder of thy wheels, Eternal Charioteer! Through the dire days of doom thy trumpet sounds and men are led by thee across death]. (Tagore 142)

The charioteer seems like the incarnation of the divine warlord Krishna in the mythical battle of Kurukshetra in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, and the musical mood dramatically heightens, attaining a martial tune.

On the contrary, the tune of *Subh Sukh Chain*, composed by Captain Thakuri, embodies the martial spirit, since it was the anthem of a provisional government emphasizing military rule⁴ the zeitgeist of Azad Hind was chiefly martial in nature, as evident in its declaration of war against the United States and the United Kingdom during the Second World War and its march into the

North-Eastern Indian territories alongside the Japanese Imperial Army during the U-Go offensive of March 1944. The song, however, had an initial mellowed and genteel version, which remained largely obscure until it was reincarnated by the Carnatic vocalist T. M. Krishna and his students on the occasion of the 125th birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose at his ancestral abode in Kolkata on 23 January 2022 (Netaji Research Bureau). The popular version of *Subh Sukh Chain* is remarkable for its heightened pace and staccato, suggesting a forward march, endorsing a violent struggle for Indian independence against the model of non-violence championed by Mahatma Gandhi. Since the song was approved by Bose, the Supreme Commander of Azad Hind, for its use as an anthem, an anecdote from his life could be added to bolster the discussion. Bose's friend, the renowned musicologist Dilipkumar Roy, in his memoir *Netaji, the Man: Reminiscences* discussed Bose's penchant for military nomenclatures:

He was wont to cull his phrases from the military dictionary. This must appear the more significant in the light of subsequent events of his life when it became more and more obvious that he simply rejoiced fighting against tremendous odds. (12)

This daring attitude of Bose, melting into the *esprit de corps* of the Azad Hind, gets reflected in the martial forward-marching tune that the anthem projected.

The Solar Metaphor

Vivid references to Sun have been made in both *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain*, and critical reading of these references might uncover a political dimension to the solar metaphors that both Tagore and Hasan deployed. The Sun, the

cardinal center of the Solar System, has often been extolled by the Vedic culture of India through the figure of Surya or Aditya, the Sun God. Considered the creator of the universe and the source of all life, Surya, who travels across the firmament in his golden chariot driven by Aruna (a personification of dawn) and pulled by seven horses, is the supreme soul associated with light and warmth (Cartwright). Widely considered a symbol of life and virility, the solar symbol and the phrase 'the empire on which the Sun never sets' have become inseparable from the empires that spread their colonial tentacles across the world, most notably, the British Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The metaphorical Sun of the British Empire symbolized its absolute supremacy over its colonies and the limitless exploitation it entailed. Moreover, the spirit of Japan, popularly known as Nippon or 'the land of the rising Sun,' is embodied by its Rising Sun flag, consisting of a red disc at the center with sixteen rays radiating from it. Designed in the early Meiji Period of Japan, the flag was adopted as the naval ensign, and though it symbolizes life and bounty, it is interpreted by South Korea and China as a metaphor for imperialism and aggressive militarism, as evident from Japanese pan-Asian expansionist project during the Second World War, and it has even been equated with the infamous Swastika-bearing flag of Nazi Germany (Shimbun).

This Sun iconography loaded with imperial ambition has been given a reverse spin by both Tagore and Hasan, which becomes evident by analyzing the texts of the two songs. The concluding paragraph of *Jana Gana Mana* resonates with the image of a new dawn:

*Ratri prabhatilo udilo rabichhabhi pur-
baudayagiri-bhale, / Gahe bihangama punnya*

samirana nabajibon-rasha dhale, / Tobo karunaruna rage, nidrita Bharata jage, / Tobo charane noto matha ['The night fades; the light breaks over the peaks of the Eastern hills; the birds begin to sing and the morning breeze carries the breath of new life. The rays of thy mercy have touched the waking land with their blessings']. (Tagore 142)

These lines signify a new dawn, symbolizing liberation from colonial domination, and the solar image that Tagore portrays subtly functions as a foil to the imperialist solar symbol championed by the British Empire. The rising Sun of a rejuvenated India automatically suggests the decline of the British imperialist Sun, and the same solar symbol, hence, exhibits a dichotomous function in two different contexts. The Indian Sun embodies individualism, democratic values, liberalism, and harmonious co-existence, which run contrary to the imperial policies of colonial aggrandizement and protracted violence.

In a similar fashion, the symbol of the Sun is reinforced by *Subh Sukh Chain* in its refrain:

Suraj ban kar jag par chamke, Bharat naam subhaga [Like the Sun, the auspicious name of India shines all over the world]. (translation mine)

Azad Hind, which thrived under the support and influence of Japan to spearhead its revolutionary activities against the British Raj in India, has often been criticized as a 'puppet government,' and Bose's association with the Axis leaders like Adolf Hitler and Hideki Tojo has led to him being branded as an Axis collaborator. However, Bose was contemptuous toward the Nazis and the idea of imperialism, but he sought the assistance of Axis powers like Nazi Germany

and Japan to destabilize the British Empire, which was fighting in the opposite Allied camp during the Second World War. Following the diplomatic policy of 'enemy's enemy is my friend,' he cited:

India's exploitation by British imperialism and explained why he had to do business with the Nazis [and the Japanese]. 'It is dreadful but it must be done. India must gain her independence, cost what it may,' he told after a meeting with Hermann Göring [Nazi leader and President of the German Reichstag]. (Ghose)

Hence, the Sun of *Subh Sukh Chain* never addresses the controversial Rising Sun symbol of Japan merely because of its association with this Axis state, rather, it borrows its spirit and conflates it with the idea of India rising like a Sun above colonial destitution and imperial decrepitude. Like *Jana Gana Mana*, the Sun of *Subh Sukh Chain* is essentially anti-imperialist and stands vertically opposite to the Japanese iconography of expansionism.

The Question of the Addressee

The text of *Jana Gana Mana*, despite being addressed to a transcendental entity that it describes as *Bharat Bhagya Bidhata* ('Dispenser of India's destiny'), occasionally contains references to the nation as the beloved mother, and the two figures have been merged and diluted, which makes the identity of the addressee ambiguous. Tagore was a practitioner of the Brahmo faith (an offshoot of Hinduism, a monotheistic order, established in nineteenth-century Bengal by prominent members of the Calcutta-based intelligentsia, such as Rammohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore), which beliefs in the existence of a supreme and transcendental being, the

Creator, Preserver, Destroyer who is the giver of all good in this world and the next, who is all knowing, all pervading, formless and beneficent. (The Brahmo Samaj)

It is conceivable, that this idea influenced Tagore to incorporate the transcendental being or the *Brahma* in this song, to create the image of a Divine Providence, which decides India's fate and trajectory, who is "the ruler of the minds of all people, dispenser of India's destiny" (Tagore 143). The Indian nation, characterized by its geographic and cultural plurality, pays homage to this being and extols its supremacy:

Thy name rouses the hearts of the Panjaub [sic], Sind, Gujarat and Maratha, of the Dravida and Orissa and Bengal; it echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas, mingles in the music of the Jamuna and Ganges and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea. They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise. (Tagore 143)

As mentioned earlier, India has often been projected almost as an insipid, feminine damsel-in-distress in many nationalist songs, whose modesty can only be salvaged by the intervention of masculine power. The transcendental figure, presumably the almighty *Brahma*, performs this role of dispensing India's destiny; its virility and strength are the prerequisites to save the honor of the nation from foreign marauders. The image of a masculine figure is further reinforced by this line:

The procession of pilgrims passes over the endless road rugged with the rise and fall of nations; and it resounds with the thunder of thy wheels, Eternal Charioteer! Through the dire days of

doom, thy trumpet sounds and men are led by thee across death. (Tagore 143)

As mentioned earlier, the image of the 'Eternal Charioteer' is reminiscent of the mythical character Krishna of *Mahabharata*, who spearheaded the battle of Kurukshetra fought between the two hostile camps - the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the Indian epic. The reference to the divine entity and its merger with the image of the charioteer indubitably creates a figure invested with masculine qualities, since Krishna is often considered as the most complete and 'original' male, and

[r]egardless of his multiple gender transitions and overall transformativeness, Krishna is still fundamentally coded as 'masculine' by most definitions of the term. By exemplifying multiple possible relationships in addition to multiple possible gendered selves that could inhabit those relationships, Krishna acts, in this case, as a semiotic bearer of gender stability, gender deviance, and acceptable possibility. (Walters)

However, the fluid masculinity of Krishna, who can shape-shift and attain even feminine forms, is also observable in this text, when in the subsequent paragraphs, when the masculine transcendental figure is substituted with the image of India as the Mother:

But thy mother arms were round her and thine eyes gazed upon her troubled face in sleepless love through her hours of ghastly dreams. (143)

The idea of masculinity is reinforced by the reference to the throne, the cardinal center of power and authority, which is surprisingly absent in the English translation of the song, but observable in the original Bengali version:

Puraba Paschim ashe tobo singhasana-pashe, / Prem-haar hoye gantha [The East and the West come by the side of your throne, and the garland of love is woven]. (translation mine)

The constant juggling between the masculine transcendental figure and the feminine nation can lead to the readers to assume, that Tagore is trying to synthesize masculine and feminine attributes, and the transcendental and the local, to create an androgynous identity of the addressee. The supreme figure and the nation become synonymous in his interpretations, and it becomes immaterial to untether the two beings. India, for Tagore, is a nation embodying both qualities, where, to use Jungian nomenclatures, the *Anima* and *Animus* collapse together. India's character could be symbolized through Krishna; seen in conjunction with his consort Radha, Krishna is held up as

masculine but not man; gendered but fluid; and sexual but not bound by cultural or even biological norms. (Walters)

This fluidity invests the nation with the power to shift its position from that of a beloved, docile, genteel, and caring mother, to a belligerent, rebellious, and martial entity.

Subh Sukh Chain, instead of engaging in this duality, indubitably projects India as the mother, and no reference to any transcendental figure is ever made, rather, the image of the nation occupies the supreme space. In contrast to *Jana Gana Mana*, where the awakening of India is materialized through the intervention of the divine agency,

The rays of thy mercy have touched the waking land with their blessings. Victory to the King of Kings, Victory to thee, dispenser of India's destiny. (Tagore 143)

Subh Sukh Chain does not showcase the Midas touch of any external agency to rouse the rebellious spirit of India, as evident in this line:

Subh sukh chain ki barkha barse, Bharat bhagya he jaga ["Auspicious happiness showers, as India has awakened"]. (translation mine)

It echoes the image of plurality and cultural syncretism, which is a cornerstone feature of India, in the same manner as Tagore's song does, albeit with a difference. While Tagore celebrates the glory of India by referring to its majestic throne mentioned earlier, Hasan's version uses the image of the lap of the mother nation. It not only deglamorized the regal effect generated by the image of a throne, but the reference to the mother's lap makes the image more homely, mundane, and benevolent, which is open to people hailing from different religious and cultural affiliations:

Har sube ke rahnewale, har mazhab ke prani, / Sab bhed aur farak mitake, sab godh mein teri aake, / Gunthe prem ki mala [The denizens of every province, the followers of every religion, / Effacing all differences and distinctions, / Have come to your lap, / To weave a garland of love]. (translation mine)

Most importantly, the song hails the nation and wishes it to be victorious in its struggle so that it may shine like the Sun over the world, instead of praising and genuflecting before any transcendental, God-like figure, which is observed in Tagore's text. It would, however, be erroneous to suggest that this song, by making constant references to the mother image emasculates India and strips it of its virile identity that Tagore's text somewhat upholds, but it celebrates the loving bond between the nation and its subjects uncritically.

Conclusion

The two songs in discussion essentially highlight the secular and syncretic spirit of India, instead of presenting a monolithic image. Both Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose were ardent followers of Brahmoism and Hinduism, and their religious ideas might have influenced their literary, political, and administrative activities, but they never fanned exclusivity and upheld a one-dimensional portrait of India, unlike the sectarians and the fundamentalists who are gaining grounds with an accelerated rise of right-wing extremist politics in India. The spirit of India put forward by the two songs, run counter to the image of a 'Hindu Rashtra' or a Hindu-centric nation, and it cuts across all religions, castes, and creeds. The image of India, presented by Tagore and Hasan, is indeed the image of a beloved mother, who does not discriminate between her children, and this cardinal quality of the Indian nation eventually transformed her into the largest democracy in the world with a secular fabric. Unlike the image of the mother sketched by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in *Vande Mataram*, the mother nation of the two aforementioned songs does not exhibit essentially Hindu traits by exclusively conforming to the dominant Hindu culture of India, rather it presents a more accommodative and inclusive face. The ascent of Hindutva philosophy has threatened to dismantle the social and cultural apparatuses of the nation, and its attempts to homogenize Indian culture in monolithic dimensions have been rampant. While it becomes absolutely necessary for the nation to gradually abandon its colonial relics and search for an individual socio-cultural space of its own in a postcolonial world, and in this process derive inspiration from its glorious Vedic past, it must not forget the plurality and multiplicity that Hinduism celebrates through its multitudinous schools of occasionally

opposing and contrasting philosophical thoughts. *Jana Gana Mana* and *Subh Sukh Chain* have not disentangled their cultural identities from the Hindu past of India, just because they have been written by authors belonging to non-Hindu religio-cultural spheres, but they have incorporated Hinduism's practice of celebrating plurality and diversity in their textual fabric.

Notes

1. The British monarch George V arrived in India in December 1911, precisely the time when the Indian National Congress session was held, where Tagore presented *Jana Gana Mana* for the first time. However, some unsubstantiated rumors were deliberately circulated that the song had been composed to celebrate the monarch's visit to India. Tagore felt so humiliated by this incrimination, that he found it pointless to respond. However, later examinations have absolved him of this serious charge, and documentary evidence like his novel *Ghare Baire* ('The Home and the World') exists, which portrays the image of the nation as a mother, in a manner similar to the song (Sarkar 3968-69).
2. The first stanza of *Jana Gana Mana* is notable for its descriptions of the geographical and cultural diversities of India: "Thy name rouses the hearts of the Panjaub, Sind, Gujarat and Maratha, of the Dravida and Orissa and Bengal; it echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas, mingles in the music of the Jamuna and Ganges and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea" (Tagore 143). Even before he had written the song, Tagore's nephew, the celebrated Indian painter Abanindranath Tagore produced the epoch-making *Bharatmata* (1905) painting, which happens to be the personification of India as

- a woman, clad in saffron clothes, which “is visualized as a wandering minstrel. In her hands is a sheaf of grain, a book, a cloth, and memory beads” (Pattanaik). Rabindranath’s song could be described as a literary response to Abanindranath’s artistic moves.
3. This paper has used the following alphabets to denote the Indian notation system: S, R, G, M, P, D, N, which correspond to the following notes in the Western C-major scale: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. They denote the seven notes in shorthand: *shadaj*, *rishav*, *gandhar*, *madhyam*, *pancham*, *dhaivat*, and *nishad* respectively. Sharp and flat notes have been kept in parentheses.
 4. Though the Provisional Government of Free India functioned as a *proper* overseas government, it was known mainly for its military wing, which it used extensively in the failed U-Go offensive against the British in 1944, where the Japanese and the Azad Hind forces suffered defeat and massive casualties, although it emerged as a water shed moment in the Indian independence movement, which accelerated the colonial exit from the country. Soon after that, Subhas Chandra Bose died or disappeared following an alleged air crash in Taiwan in August 1945.
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Stigmatised Identity an Affront to Human Dignity: A Study of Gaikwad's *Uchalya*

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Abstract

According to Immanuel Kant, all human beings deserve respect on account of their capacity for reason and morality. They have equal dignity and worth which is not derived from any external source but inherent in them. For Kant, one should respect and value one's fellow beings as one's moral equals and should not do anything that humiliates them or deprive them of their dignity (Parekh 34-35). But all over the world certain categories of people have been branded as inferior, uncivilised, corrupt, and even criminal as they belong to certain gender, race, caste, tribe, or marginal community which deprive them of their essential dignity and worth. While branding enhances the value of consumer products, it diminishes the worth of humans as they are humiliated and even dehumanised in the process. When people are thus stigmatised, they are bereft of their agency and autonomy, and are reduced to mere objects. It is quite shocking to note that among the subalterns of India many tribal communities have been branded criminal. Laxman Gaikwad, in his autobiography *Uchalya: The Branded*, voices the sufferings and struggles of his 'criminal tribe' against the exploitation, humiliation, and marginalisation imposed on them by the upper castes. It becomes a document of the collective fight of a stigmatised community for their self-respect and dignity.

Keywords: *Identity, Stigma, Branding, Crime, and Punishment.*

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Laxman Gaikwad's *Uchalya: The Branded*, considered a masterpiece in Marathi literature, is a powerful social documentary that delineates the trials and tribulations of a 'criminal stigmatised tribe.' The very first sentence of *The Branded* brings into focus the key issues addressed in the work, namely, the dejectedness of a tribe condemned to eternal stigma. "No NATIVE PLACE. No birth-date. No house or farm. No caste, either" (1). Gaikwad depicts his community's relegation to subhuman conditions in the opening sentence. It is reminiscent of the words of Ambedkar who said to Gandhiji,

Gandhiji, I have no homeland . . . How can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink. (Omvedt 43)

Gaikwad, in his autobiography, brings to light the wretched and pitiable conditions of his tribe, the Pathrut, which was classified as one of the criminal tribes. It is a nomadic community that roams around the hills and plains in search of food and shelter and resorts to pilfering for a living. They have been declared thieves by the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) which instils caution and fear against them in common people. They are met with hatred and hostility wherever they go and kept at bay as soon as they are identified.

The Criminal Tribes Act was similar to the Habitual Criminal Act passed in England in late nineteenth century to exercise discipline and control over the criminal sections to construct moral subjects (Krishnan 84). The main objective of the Criminal Tribes Act was,

to safeguard the rights of society against the anti-social influences. Its secondary aim was the reformation of the criminal

tribes which, in early stages, had to be carried out against the will of its members. (Singh 2)

Kennedy, the Deputy I.G.P. Railways and Criminal Investigation, Bombay Presidency prepared *The Notes on Criminal Tribes* in 1901 which throws light on the ways, habits, dress, modus operandi, and other aspects of the life of these tribes. Such reports came to the conclusion that these tribes were criminals by nature and, therefore, deserved no sympathy (Gaikwad V). Later, the Amended Criminal Tribes Act (1908) provided housing for convicted members of the tribes in special settlements, to mould and reform them by enforcing strict work ethics under the control of special officers. These settlements acted as sanctified prisons providing captive labour of miserable wages and harsh working conditions in a number of factories, state forests and public work departments (Simhadri 29-32).

If one peruses the pages of history, in many cultures, slaves and criminals were branded with numbers or codes that were indelibly imprinted on their bodies. Ancient Romans marked runaway slaves with the letters FGV (for fugitives). In seventeenth century North American Puritan settlements, men and women, sentenced for adultery, bore a scarlet A on their chest. European, American, and other colonial slavers branded millions of slaves during the trans-Atlantic enslavement. In Nazi-occupied Europe, Jews were forced to wear a badge in the form of a Yellow Star as a means of identification to isolate and stalk them. Similarly, Gypsies, who were a branded lot all over Europe, underwent untold misery on account of their nomadic nature and peripatetic life style. They were presumed to be thieves and uncivilized, depraved, and corrupt. In India, the British Government branded many nomadic tribes as criminals under the provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871.

In the pre-colonial period, Bijender Singh observes,

nomadic tribal communities sustained themselves through a number of livelihood options such as cattle-rearing, itinerant trade, and crafts . . . Colonial rule had a disastrous effect on India's nomadic communities as they lost their forests and pastures and thereby all their natural means of sustenance. (1)

The resistance of some forest-dwelling tribal communities against the occupation of their forests by the British made them the enemies of the state. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 notified nearly 200 such communities as criminals. The notified criminal tribes were seen almost in every state and constitute a substantial segment of the Indian tribal population. Dandasis (Andhra Pradesh), Lodha/Lodhi (Bihar), Aheria (Delhi), Bafan (Gujarat), Barar (Haryana), Pardhis (Karnataka), Domban (Kerala), Kanjar (Madhya Pradesh), Wadar (Maharashtra), Munda Potas (Odisha), Sansi (Punjab), Mogia (Rajasthan), Telaga Pamular (Telangana), Aabhiya (Uttar Pradesh), Bediya (West Bengal), and Kootappal Kallars (Tamil Nadu) are just a few of them.

According to Bayly, the branding of entire castes as criminal castes was part of a larger discourse in which caste determined the occupations as well as social and moral characteristics of all its members (119). A variety of ideological elements converged in the branding of the criminal tribes. These elements were: the fear of nomadic and wandering groups among Brahmins, who were the subordinates of British officials, the cultivators' apprehension of hunting-gathering people and high castes' dread of people outside the institution of caste. The British native tradition of associating forests with crimes and outlaws also added to this (Anand 85). For Saurabh

Mishra, two major bodies of knowledge were thus instrumental in constituting the notion of a criminal caste, namely, colonial anthropology and contemporary discourse on crime and class in Britain (5). Gaikwad, in his "Reflections," states that,

Uchalyas are a tribe notified as criminal and adds that as the law considers them to be born criminals; they are deprived of respectable means of livelihood. So, they thrive by thieving, lifting, and pickpocketing. (vii)

There are several names by which people of this community are referred to such as Pathrut, Kamati, Ghantichor, and Wadar (4-5). In his autobiography, he narrativizes the plight and predicament of his community, known as the Santmuchchar all over India. Sant means market and muchchar means thief. Santmuchchar is one who steals from weekly markets or bazars (4). They were hated by the society, hunted by the police, and haunted by the government. They are "pecked at" and tormented like the "young one(s) of another bird left in a hen coop" (17). He writes of his kinsmen: "Their necks are twisted like those of cocks by the police, merchants, and money lenders" (87). "They are like tender sapling(s) plucked and thrown in garbage" (201). Such comparisons and descriptions evoke pity on the one hand but provoke rage and resistance on the other against a brutal order.

The Uchalyas had traditionally been wandering in forests where they used to take whatever they needed without waiting for anybody's permission, for they had always thought it was their right to do so. When they were deprived of their mother forests, they were bewildered as how to extricate themselves from the clutches of hunger. They had been engaged in odd jobs that were seasonally available. Gaikwad laments, "But so branded and distrusted was our community socially that no one offered work to the people of

our tribe" (10). He grieves, "Even if someone desired to do honest work, nobody would employ him" (62).

We are forced to take to thieving because we are denied work. Why is it then that the whole community is branded as thieves? Why are we denied opportunities to live a decent life? (63)

He likens the plight of the starving Uchalyas to that of a famished animal:

If a domesticated animal, tied to a peg, is not given its usual feed, its ration of grass, it growls, grumbles, and cries out. Then at night, when it can stand the gnawing hunger no more, it pulls and tugs at the rope tied to the peg till the rope snaps. It then runs, falls on, and devours whatever crop it can eat in whosoever's farm it may be standing in. When satiated fully, it returns to its place. The farmer, whose crop has been so eaten and destroyed, tracks down the animal by its foot-marks and locks it in a pond. It is released only when due fine is paid. (63)

Uchalyas had to restrict themselves to their allotted places and should not leave the place for more than three days without a pass or a permit from the police-patil (a village headman in charge of law and order). If someone was caught traveling without a pass, he was beaten, arrested, and freed only after paying an exorbitant amount to the police. Just as permits are needed for cattle to be moved to another place or to be sold in the market, the Uchalyas needed passes to move from one place to another. The pass was worshipped as a god along with the Bharat blade used to cut pockets (3).

When the law that ensures justice to all except Uchalyas and forbids all other vocations, they teach their children thieving skills (10). Every novice thief is initiated into the art of stealing.

They are trained to withstand physical beatings and all sorts of torture so that they will not disclose the names of their colleagues when caught and tortured by the police for information. They are trained to be tough and not to crack up when severely tortured. (6)

Gaikwad gives a terrifying picture of such an initiation of his elder brother, Manikdada (8), into the thieving business. There are categories, classifications and techniques in stealing, which seem to reach the form of an art if one can use the word (Reddy 1). They call thieving a profession/business and cling to it with unflinching fidelity for it guaranteed them a sure means of survival.

Uchalyas do not feel guilty in stealing as they believe that it is their fundamental right to satiate their hunger through some means or the other which may not always appear upright in the eyes of the public. It is very often the invading hunger that drives them to fields and markets where both men and women, the young and the old, indulge in stealing. When people go hungry for days together, society cannot expect high standards of morality from them unless they are fed first. They resort to stealing and only when the proceeds from booty are spent on groceries and other basic needs, do they think of the next theft. Gaikwad questions the hypocritical attitude of the society: "Black marketeers become leaders whereas those who are driven to steal by hunger are considered criminals" (177).

Eugene O'Neill ridicules such state of affairs in his play *Emperor Jones* where Jones, the self-appointed bogus emperor, boasts,

Dere's little stealin' like you does, and
dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little
stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late.
For de big stealin' dey makes you Em-
peror and puts you in de Hall o' Fame
when you croaks. (5)

Gaikwad reminds the readers, no Uchalya, how-
ever smart a thief he was, ever built a bungalow
or had a bank balance or other modern facilities
(177).

Gaikwad recollects a meeting with the po-
lice, "As soon as I said that I belonged to the
Pathruts, the constable slapped me on the face"
(60). The police always are negative towards the
community and thrashes all occasionally irrespec-
tive of age and sex. Beating, harassment, sexual
abuse, and torture including arrest with or with-
out rhyme and reason, is common for these com-
munities all over India. Louis Althusser regards
the State as a repressive apparatus used by the
ruling class to dominate and suppress the work-
ing class. Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) con-
sists of government, administration, army, police,
the judiciary, the prison system etc. According to
him, the basic function of the RSA is to intervene
and act in favour of the ruling class by repressing
the ruled class through violent and coercive
means. The RSA functions predominantly by
means of repression and violence (Madhu 344).

The nomadicity and negative identity of the
Uchalyas invariably and instantaneously aroused
suspicion in the police. They would descend upon
them like a pack of wolves, beat them, search their
huts, threaten them with arrest and imprison-
ment, and depart after extorting money from
them; this would embarrass and disgrace them
in the eyes of villagers. "The police would beat us
making false allegations of theft, even when, in
fact, no theft had been committed" (62), says

Gaikwad. Police confiscate the things in their huts;
tear the receipt of the confiscated article, register
case against or extract money for not registering
a case (207). When the police caught hold of his
elder brother, chilli-powder was applied on his
anus by the police.

He showed the police our hut . . . the
police whipped everybody. They
thrashed the women and the children
from our hut all over, wherever their
hands led them. Dhondabai never
knew stealing. She never went that way.
Yet, they pressed and squeezed her
breasts and grilled her . . . They
snatched away her mangalsutra and
another cheap necklace . . . Mother sold
all the sheep in the market and paid two
hundred rupees. Only then did the po-
lice release them without bringing any
charge against them in the court.
Mother's gold ornaments were kept by
the police for themselves. After all, we
were thieves by profession; who could
we lodge a complaint with? So, we had
to keep quiet. (15-16)

The independent Indian Government, real-
izing that the Criminal Tribes Act was a shame-
ful colonial legacy, revoked the Act in 1952 with
Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Act. But attempts
to deconstruct the colonial narrative have not
been effectively done by those in power even af-
ter independence. Uchalyas argue that their In-
dependence Day does not fall on August 15, 1947
but on August 31, 1952 when Pandit Nehru, the
then Prime Minister, on his visit to their prison-
settlements, solely constructed for them by the
British, declared that they were no more a crimi-
nal caste but free citizens like anyone else in the
country. The absence of proper rehabilitation has
impacted the way most Indians continue to view

nomadic communities. They still live as outcasts, outside villages; their children are not allowed into schools; and they are denied decent jobs. Navleen Multani writes,

The cruelties and humiliations inflicted upon them by the law enforcement agencies did not come to an end even after independence. The community still grapples with inequality and injustice at every level. The police, money-lenders and unjust laws oppress the Uchalyas at every step but the branded community resists such hegemonic structures and forces to change the way society looks at them. The Branded records both political and aesthetic resistance to inequality and injustice in postcolonial India. (205)

In 1959, new laws in the form of the Habitual Offenders Act were introduced in various states. These Acts retained many of the provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act such as registration, restrictions on movement, and incarceration in corrective settlements earmarked for habitual offenders. Thus, the bias against nomads still persisted (Paul 2). One notable difference was that though the Habitual Offenders Act restricts the freedom of movement of these people, it denies that an entire community could be born criminal. If it was the imperial British who started branding India's Tribals, now it is the democratic Indian government that warrants its continuance.

Being part of his Uchalya community had put Gaikwad at the fringes of the society and placed him in the midst of so many disadvantages. His caste name itself i.e., Pathrut had evoked embarrassment and instilled a sense of shame in him. It was his experience that wherever he went his caste identity followed him. At school his caste eloquently pronounced his iden-

tity and other students shouted: "Here comes a thief! Here comes a Patrut!" (62) "Everywhere we were asked our caste" (121). While living in Latur he had to change living accommodation no less than nineteen times. Even though he used to conceal his real caste, it would be discovered sooner or later (138). Many a time he hid his caste and pretended to be someone of Marathas, a high caste. He somehow wanted to find a niche in the caste ridden society even by wearing 'borrowed robes.' He confesses that there were times he boasted he was a maratha, an upper caste (121, 24) and he even changed his father's obscure name Martand to Maruti. (121)

History had moulded the life of Uchalyas to construct their destiny according to a framework designed and dictated by the hegemonic powers. Although the affected persons had no control over the identity ascribed to them, they can still critique their soundness and rationality and attempt to amend their identities. Gaikwad asks,

Where did our tribe originate? Where did it migrate from? I know nothing about this. I know of no maternal or paternal relatives. (5)

There are no records, no history, and no great achievements except that give them a negative identity. A community can get rid of its criminal label only when its members are enlightened and are able to bring about a visible positive change in its destiny. While a 'criminal' community can give its members only a negative identity, the members, by their sheer efforts, can give back a positive identity to the community if they so desire.

Before long, he realised that what he was craving for was a positive identity for his 'criminal' tribe rather than an inflated individual identity provisional on the generosity of the upper castes. It was born out of a growing conviction

that his identity is essentially derived from his caste identity and its standing in the society by and large. Gaikwad identifies intimately with the cause of his community and unlike many others his sole motive is to get rid of the 'criminal' label stamped on his community and win for it an affirmative identity. He stays with his people in the various odds of life and for them are dedicated his life and its resources.

The methods adopted by Gaikwad to bring improvement in the living condition of his tribesmen follow a non-violent pattern, as suggested by Gandhi. It also subscribes to Certeau's conceptualization of resistance to the extent that Gaikwad tries to bring changes while remaining a part of the order. He defies caste and patriarchy and challenges the corrupt practices of the dominant order in a peaceful way. Though he demands an equal space for the 'branded' people, he never really goes against the symbolic order. The narrative resists the dominant culture and the author makes an effort to win a respectable place for the denotified tribes within the given order. (Multani 217)

The Branded captures the ambitions of its author and at the same time portrays the power of historiography to critique the newly ordained and self-appointed masterdoms (Deepakumari 3-4). It is an eloquent attempt to expose the varied prejudices built around the 'criminal tribes' and bring people round to the view that the people of these tribes are human beings and are in need of a helping hand from all to bring them into the mainstream of social life (Kolharkar vi). Gaikwad attempts to awaken the "bourgeois community to the sorrows and plights" (viii) of his hapless community. He is of the firm view that his community needs a redefinition and reformation and his autobiography becomes a powerful tool for the same.

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Mapping the Displaced Bodies: An Analysis of Refugeehood and the Subaltern Subject in Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*

Jenisha T.*

Abstract

In the present environment, the precarity of displaced bodies has gained impetus, and their positionality is recognized as one of 'permanent impermanence.' They dwell in marginalized spaces where they are compelled to live outside the systematic order of things in the mainstream society. This paper attempts to analyse the movie *Dheepan* (2015) by Jacques Audiard and the novel *The Boat People* (2018) by Sharon Bala to look into the portrayal of refugees in textual and visual representations. Audiard and Sharon Bala have exemplified the impoverished lives of the refugees in their work where the refugees struggle to escape the present violence and the memories of their horrible past. Here, the refugee's body becomes a site of contention where the power dynamics of the self/other, citizen/alien, and insider/outsider dichotomies are evinced. This paper, by applying subaltern theory, seeks to examine the ambivalent identities that the displaced people exhibit, their performance of 'refugeehood,' and the 'othering' strategies the state uses to limit their mobility and drive them to the fringes of society. The entirety of the Global North practices 'social closure,' which makes the refugee 'other' in the host country. Further, this paper depicts how refugees are perceived to be remote or absent from mainstream society as a result of the psychosocial loss they have experienced in their past homeland and their disillusionment with the present.

Keywords: *Performance, Othering, Refugee Identity, Space, and Marginalization.*

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Numerous rights stipulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention have been denied by the Global North, rendering the lives of refugees fragile and dependent on their host countries. Refugees who left their nation out of a legitimate fear of persecution may encounter xenophobic attitudes from the host country's government and populace. The restriction of basic human rights and employment opportunities leads to the stagnation of refugees in the camps or unauthorized settlements. They, thus, fall victim to sexual assault, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and other illicit activities. The UNHCR is unable to address the widespread human rights violations due to the increasing violence and the refugee crisis in the present environment. The nation-states and its bureaucracies employ strategic policies to silence and marginalize the narratives and experiences of the refugees. Here, it can be contended that refugees' lives are one of a 'permanent impermanence' livelihood enforced by the state authority. The immobility of the displaced bodies is contested and the othering techniques of the state are analysed in this paper.

The plurality of the refugee voices is often strategically misrepresented and misconstrued by the host countries which ultimately lead to the silencing of the refugees. Refugees are expected to act out the expected norms that the host countries have devised for them where their agency is downplayed and obliterated. Sigona writes:

The emergence of some voices and the disappearance of others may have more to do with emerging global sensitivity to specific identities and issues than with an individual claimant and his/her story. (374)

The refugees are forced to narrate their story during the assessment process while claiming

asylum where linearity and global significance of the issue is given importance and the lack of linearity becomes a reason for the officials to 'other' their experiences. The subaltern theory is a noteworthy concept in post-colonial studies that stresses how colonial power employed ruthless measures to marginalize and silence native peoples. David Farrier in his book *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary before the Law*, calls refugees as new subalterns (5). A 'subaltern' is an individual who occupies a subordinate or inferior position. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, coined this phrase to describe the hegemony of the ruling classes over the weaker classes, such as the workers and peasants, in the late nineteenth century. Later, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, and Ranajit Guha expanded the usage of the phrase to include "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society" (Cuddon, et al. 688-89).

Gramsci was mainly interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes who are denied access to the bourgeoisie nationalistic discourse. Here, the lives of the refugees can be compared to those of the 'subaltern,' who are oppressed on account of their class, gender, and identity, excluded from the politics of mainstream society, and portrayed as 'passive objects.' The subaltern theory states that the narratives of minorities are homogenized, and the practice of homogenization of varied narratives silences the voice of the oppressed by projecting the nation as a cohesive whole devoid of any ruptures or fissures. The refugee narratives, particularly those from the Global South, are dominated by the hegemonic western elitist discourse. According to Spivak, the oppressed are silenced and denied the right to speak rather, the voices of the oppressed are 'spoken for' by the international actors and the western media. The refugees often have to adopt a false identity and their personal narrative becomes ruptured and erased

during the process of asylum tribunals. The notion of subalternity focuses on the group which is subordinated in terms of race, class, gender, identity and these individuals' historical significance is repressed, neglected, misinterpreted or 'at the margins' of hegemonic discourses and social formations. Thereby, the refugees' lives can be seen on par with the lives of the subaltern group. Gayatri Spivak states,

the subaltern is not just a classy word for 'oppressed,' for [the] Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie, rather everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is Subaltern – a space of difference. (Kock)

The refugees from the Global South who settle in the host countries, which are mostly European countries, lack the power to subvert the mainstream narrative set against them and contest the absolute voicelessness they endure. They are forced to live in the outskirts of the society where they have little to no contact with the local citizens or the broader nationalistic discourse of their host country but are affected by every means of the action taken by the nation. The refugees compared to political asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants, are treated as aliens and inferior people, and this is due to the Eurocentric ideology which treats the native as the 'colonial other.' Likewise, when refugees seek settlement in the European countries they are homogenized and are othered from the center where the state and host population practice cultural and intellectual supremacy over them. The refugees come to accept the state's supremacy over them and its hegemonic discourse. The refugees due to their extended period of deportation start adapting to their enforced position as an alienated other and become subservient to the cultural hegemony of the state. This research seeks to understand the liminality, immobility,

double dispossession, and mutability experienced by the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees as a result of the exclusion they face, who are made to settle in the banlieues, refugee camps, and detention centers.

The de-politicisation of refugees takes place either by denying the political nature of their experience of exile or concealing their experience behind the meta narrative of the west. The media plays an immense role in dissipating the plurality of the refugee voices and their narratives. The 'refugee image' is highly sensitized by the media by using phrases like 'tide,' 'flood' or 'swarm' which creates a negative implication in the mind of the viewers who consider them as a threat to their nation. Also, through several media's impartial reportage, some issues are deemed more important than others which ultimately affect the asylum claims of the refugees. In European countries, the asylum seekers have to go through various levels of investigation where they have to repeatedly narrate their personal account, and unfortunately their personal stories are validated based on the media coverings. In the contemporary time, the refugees contest the hegemony that mainstream media exert upon them by politicizing their identity through their active role in media. Terence Wright states that the exiled Karenni group based in Thailand uses their own media to voice out their rights and predicaments. The political agenda against refugee claims is significantly influenced by the media. Refugees continue to be portrayed as anonymous passive victims (465). Media and literature play an immense role in stereotyping the refugees by altering their identity as a 'reduced other' to keep the constructed patterns of the western hegemony intact. Terence Wright states,

In fiction film, the standardization of plot and narrative makes it relatively easy to see the story conforming to a prescribed narrative or pattern. (54)

The feature films compared to the documentaries done upon the refugees holds a disadvantage in portraying the reality of the crisis faced by the refugees. Either the idea of optimism or the idea of despair has become overly sensitive in the popular discourse representing the refugees. But, fictional narratives about refugees also can set out to generate sympathy for their plight and the complexities of their predicament, and it has the ability to negotiate broader notions of hospitality as well as of belonging and citizenship. The refugees often face violent struggles, persecution, poverty, racial prejudice, exclusion, and xenophobic attitudes from the host population on a daily basis. Some face this violence throughout their life time starting from their country of origin and continuing throughout their stay in the host country or a third country settlement. In spite of that, the refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, have actively restricted the social exclusion practiced through the anti-migrant xenophobic attitudes exhibited by the host nation. Refugees as a subaltern group have a shared space of struggle, of survival, and of interstitiality or in between-ness to achieve a shared resistance of hope and prosperity in oppressive and often racist societies (177).

Sri Lanka remains as a war-ravaged country ever since the eruption of the civil war in 1980s. The ethnic and religious conflict between the minority Tamil and Buddhist Sinhalese populations has existed in Sri Lanka since the colonial period. According to the 1981 national census of Sri Lanka, the ethnic Sinhalese constituted 74% of the total population which then rose to 20 million in 2006. The Sri Lankan Tamils made only 13% of the total population. The Sinhala Only Act was passed in 1956 and Standardization policy in 1971 disenfranchised the Tamil population which led to the outbreak of war in 1983 which lasted till 2009 (17). The Tamil minorities were strategically marginalized by the Sinhala

government using nationalism and religion. The war resulted in countless casualties and displacement of millions of people. The wealthy settled along the western front, while the less fortunate escaped to India and were forced to live in the refugee camps in the southern part of India. The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who fled to the European countries often face exclusionary and xenophobic attitudes from the authorities and citizens of the host country. Until now, studies on the refugee crisis in the Global South and its intersectional factors like gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion have been ignored by European research scholars whilst trying to homogenize the experiences of South Asian refugees. The refugees are provided with some of the most basic necessities by the government, such as food, clothing, shelter, and access to medical facilities. Further, they receive practically limited amount of monthly family allowances. However, the migrants are compelled to reside in a multitude of camps in abhorrent conditions. Their mobility is also limited, and if they desire to depart the camp for employment, they have to carry out within a ten kilometer radius of the camp.

The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees confront a number of practical issues. For example, many of them are unable to continue their education due to the lack of documentation, and those who had already earned a degree were compelled to work as daily labourers for a meagre wage. The camp settlers were frequently watched, making them a convenient target for abuse in detention. In *Literature with a White Helmet*, Lava Asad (2021) raises a fundamental question about whether fiction may be a potent medium for giving voice and agency to the refugees and migrants. Asad states,

The bearer of the truth, the eye who witnessed the displaced, and the messenger from the camps has the ability

to transfer these harsh realities into words. (156)

Only a relatively diminutive fraction of popular discourses and mainstream media outlets have so far disputed the stereotypical portrayal of immigrants and refugees. One such movie is the 2015 Palme d'Or winner *Dheepan*, which was helmed by Jacques Audiard. The actor Antonythasan Jesuthasan, who performed the role of Dheepan, was a refugee who joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed militant organization in Sri Lanka, when he was fifteen years old. Later, he grew disillusioned with the movement and departed for Hong Kong. From there, he travelled to Thailand, with UNHCR aid; he resided there for a while. Jesuthasan was successful in securing political asylum in France in 1993, where he eventually received his citizenship. *Gorilla* (2001) and *Traitor* (2003), two of his well-known books, were published under the pen name Shobha Sakthi. According to Jesuthasan, the movie *Dheepan*, which depicts the wretched life of Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants in France, is partly autobiographical. The story follows the lives of three individuals—Dheepan, Yalini, and Ilayal—who are unrelated to one another but travel as a unit to claim refugee status and elude border security. Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (2018) fictionalizes the real event of a refugee crisis where a group of 550 Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants arrived in Vancouver in 2009 and 2010 on two leaky boats, the Ocean Lady and MV Sun Sea. This fictional narrative, which was based on the aforementioned incident, details the struggle of refugees to enter Canada, the agony of displacement, and the capriciousness of the admissibility hearings. The author has employed the agonizing situation of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to challenge the multicultural space in Canada as well as its principles of equity and diversity. For the duration of

the asylum procedure, Mahindan and his son Sellian were separated in a detention center operated by the Canadian Refugee Council, as would be the case with many other families. The paper analyses both *The Boat People* (2018) and *Dheepan* (2015), to study the textual and visual representation of refugees, and how they become the victims of the mechanisms of prejudice operated by the western countries where they are forced to occupy the least desirable position in the social hierarchy and are unable to contest the institution or assert any kind of autonomous agency.

In the novel, *The Boat People* (2018), the refugees in the detention center were given training to become the 'model migrants' of Canada. The Canadian officials conditioned the refugees with the Canadian statecraft. They were given exercise books, CDs, pencils, and maps of the country to get themselves acquainted with social, political, geographical facets of Canada (93). Until the refugees get passed through the asylum hearing, they are treated less than human beings. Mahindan was adamant that acquiring English would make it easier for him to become a Canadian citizen. Mahindan also made sure that neither he nor his son Sellian ever remembered anything about their Sri Lankan background in order to assimilate into the multi-cultural society of Canada. The same could be observed in Grace's as well as Priya's family who were themselves immigrants. Whenever Grace's mother Kumi starts narrating horrific stories about their Japanese Canadians' internment or whenever Priya starts talking about the Sri Lanka's political background with her father, he abruptly ends the conversation. They all want to be better and grateful immigrants who would work day and night to give something back to the country. In this process of assimilation, they all forget their native identity and the memory associated with their past homeland. Mahindan tells Sellian,

...Tamil Eelam, the Tigers, Prabha-karan...that is all in the past now. We have left Sri Lanka and we must leave all of these behind. Put it out of your mind. (Bala 98)

He even instructs his son to study English in order to please Canadians. Mahindan imagines his future life in Canada by viewing the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrant Sam's content and hopeful life with his saree business and Canadian wife. Though Grace is a third-generation immigrant, who knows the fact that her grandfather arrived to Vancouver as a refugee in 1924 from Hiroshima, she brushed off the situation of Tamil refugees. This reflects psychological state of the immigrants who in an attempt to become better citizens completely becomes immune to their past. This is in fact the process of becoming an adequate Canadian citizen where the state treats the refugees no less than an animal until they claim their citizenship but they project themselves to be the most humanitarian of all the countries but at the same time keeping their sovereignty intact. As Rajaram P. K. (2018) argues, migrants and refugees are subjects of contemporary capitalism and strive to make themselves beneficial to the capitalist processes of production (627). Priya and Grace, who represent the third generation of immigrants, portray the image of an ideal immigrant. Whereas, the first and second generation immigrants, who arrived in Canada as refugees, were deemed as a subaltern group who occupied the country's exterior territories referred to as internment camps or detention centers.

The humiliation and marginalization that the previous generation of refugees had to experience at the hands of western hegemony allowed the third generation of immigrants to alter their identities and adopt the process of cultural hybridization, which occasionally can also result in

cultural bereavement. Sellian developed an aversion for western culture when he was placed in the care of foster parents in Canada. He struggles immensely as a young child to fit into their culture. He encounters the strangeness of the Canadian language and climate. He says to his father that he doesn't want to wear shoes all the time, eat a lot of meat, or speak in English all the time. Mahindan experienced the same acculturation frustrations, feeling that the language was exhausting due to all the irregular verbs and the long, laborious effort of conjugation. Bhugra and Becker states,

Migration involves the loss of the familiar, including language (especially colloquial and dialect), attitudes, values, social structures and support networks. (19)

Eisenbruch (1991) conceptualizes this distress as 'cultural bereavement,' in which the uprooted person suffers guilt over leaving their culture and homeland, feels distress when memories of the past begin to dissipate, and finds perpetual memories of the past, including traumatic images, invading their daily lives. These reminders cause anxiety, morbid thoughts, and anger that make it difficult for them to carry on with their daily lives and he says that it resembles post-traumatic stress disorder.

During the final phase of the war, when all the Sri Lankan Tamil citizens lives were in jeopardy due to the Sinhala army's and the LTTE's repressive actions, Mahindan and Sellian realized that the western aid workers were abandoning the people as they were getting ready to leave the country. Numerous Sri Lankan Tamils implored aid workers and UN officials to continue their work and document the injustice being done to them, but the UN abandoned them all, proving the non-existence of the citizens. It is apparent that the western powers played a major role

in the island's civil war, which broke out between the two communities of Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils, and that they dominated it through their support of international actors and their intervention in the peace talks. Here, the human right activists and the UN delegates who are mainly 'white western male advocates' have a hegemonical overpowering over the war victims of the Global South. Spivak (2004) in "Righting Wrongs," critiques the endeavour of organizations and activists who have become part of human rights states,

The idea of human rights, in other words, may carry within itself the agenda of a kind of social Darwinism—the fittest must shoulder the burden of righting the wrongs of the unfit—and the possibility of an alibi. (524)

Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer* states "humanitarian organizations are in perfect symmetry with state power" (133). Even after the war ended, the Sri Lankan Tamils had to depend on the western powers for their arrival to their country and for asylum/refugee claim, and after their arrival they are forced to endure unjust domination and inequality. This shows their precarious position throughout their life time.

Spivak writes about the 'white men saving the brown women from brown men' while she writes about the practice of Sati in India. Though here, Spivak speaks of the situation of the Indian women who endured double oppression from the hands of the Indian patriarchy and colonial power it can be related with the situation of the Sri Lankan Tamils where they had their complete trust and subservience to the white male international actors and had depended on them for their redemption from the Sinhalese who had once co-existed peacefully for centuries. As Spivak says that the native elite man who is a

subaltern has found a way to speak but has no self-representation, likewise, the refugees who migrate to a foreign land are denied from voicing out also to represent themselves but when they start assimilating and acculturating into the dominant culture, they gain the space to speak but still denied from their self-representation. The representation of refugees must extend beyond the Western individualized notion of victim hood and resilience, and frame them as a homogenized entity by erasing their unique culture, identity, and individualized sufferings. Additionally, the way that refugees are depicted in popular discourse and mainstream media must shift from an episodic display of human pathos to a more comprehensive social and political context for refugees.

Mahindan's involuntary involvement in a suicide operation during the civil war necessitated his transfer from the detention center to the prison. Mahindan's hope that he may one day be granted refugee status and be reunited with his son decreases with each hearing he attends. Mahindan overcomes his challenging circumstances by accepting his position, and yet he continues to challenge his subaltern position by resolutely attending refugee hearings. He tackles the eccentricities of Canadian society while gradually learning English during the course of his time in a detention center and prison. Mahindan develops the courage to express his perspective and defend his stance during his final hearing, and he makes a compelling case for himself. Mahindan's attorney, Mr. Gigovaz, has never allowed him to speak or express his consent. He has consistently been treated as an inanimate object for the construction of a novel, and fabricated narratives in the tribunal hearing. But at the end, Mahindan transpires into an autonomous, liberated subject.

In *Dheepan* (2015), the refugees experience the profound foreboding of the banlieue. In contrast to Sellian's situation in *The Boat People*, where he is entirely surrounded by white people, Dheepan, Yalini, and Ilayal find it incredibly difficult to adapt to the foreignness and the varied cultures they observe in the banlieue. By excluding the non-European Other from the political discourse, the West preserved its supremacy over the non-European Other and created the subaltern. Despite not being related to one another, Dheepan, Yalini, and Ilayal travel to France together to determine their status as refugees. They live on the periphery of society, in the in-between space between inclusion and exclusion. Here, the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees can be associated with the subaltern classes, who are relegated to a state of 'bare life' derived from Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'homo sacer' (1998) in which they are denied access to hegemonic power and occupy the periphery.

In the opening scene of the film, Dheepan and a few other undocumented immigrants are shown hawking hairbands, lighters, and key chains late at night in a French city. Although the identities of the refugees are concealed in this image, Audiard has tried to capture the sadness that permeates their existence. It is similar to their lives in war-torn Sri Lanka, where they had to fight for their survival but were still legal citizens of the country, but in France, they lived an undocumented existence where they were unable to forge an identity and felt abandoned and adrift. The weather, the language, and the white people force Dheepan, Yazhini, and Ilayal feel extremely frigid and unpleasant towards each other. Dheepan often recalls pre-war Sri Lanka with its dense forest, plethora of vegetation, and lush landscapes to escape the alienation he experiences in France. Dheepan's memory is fraught and he simultaneously feels an attachment and detachment with his home land and host land. The

movie's simultaneous depiction of the past and present demonstrates how difficult it is for refugees to distinguish between the two and their fixation with the spatiotemporal aspects of the war trauma.

Here, the past and present have an effect on one another. The movie's main protagonists fight in order to get past their harrowing memories of their homeland. Dheepan 'performs' his refugee hood to gain his refugee status, bringing to light the precarious lives of the refugees, as he and his 'sham family' attend the tribunal hearing and are interrogated by the authorities about his involvement in the Sri Lankan civil war. The translator learns Dheepan's identity and the significance of his former life. The translator urges Dheepan to tell the authority a narrative that is more interesting than the conventional one of the immigrants. Dheepan informs the officer that the Sri Lankan army kidnapped and coerced him into joining the LTTE and they attempted to murder him. The refugee claimant procedure utterly deracinates the personal accounts of the refugees as their voices are deconstructed during the assessment in asylum hearings and then put back together as a legal narrative. In her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak asserts that the subaltern is an individual who has been forbidden to engage in the institutions of citizenship and that they cannot speak (308). Similar to this, the refugees are forcibly removed from the nation and its broader system and compelled to live in the outskirts of the society as passive, submissive beings. The magnitude of their loss and grief makes it difficult for the refugees to describe their former experiences, and the quantity of suffering they may have experienced undermines the coherence of their story.

Dheepan's testimony in his hearing helps him land a residence and a job as a caretaker in the French neighbourhood of Le Pré. The major-

ity of the racial and ethnic minorities reside in Le Pré, also known as 'the field,' a sizable housing complex that is managed by the neighbourhood drug dealers. The family's imposed lodging is a dilapidated lodge that symbolizes the migrants' 'lack of assets,' which severely limits their freedom of movement and prevents them from challenging the authorities and their systems of power. Loss, which can refer to both economic and non-economic possessions, becomes a component of refugee lives. Unlike labour migrants, refugees had to totally give up their possessions in their country of origin. Michael Cernea, in his livelihood reconstruction model includes eight categories of losses, including expropriation of land, loss of wages, work, housing, cultural space, and common property assets that raise the risk of poverty when people are displaced. The displaced were affected by each loss on an economic, psychological, and cultural level. It leads to "psychological downward slide of confidence and self" (Cernea 101) which are evident in the lives of the main characters of the movie.

In a particular instance, Yazhini, who yearns for lavish lifestyle, is shown gazing out of her window at a group of young French girls of her age. She is particularly enraged when Ilayal reads a poem that she had written after engaging in a fight with other schoolchildren. When Yazhini hears Ilayal say, "Without friends, you are ugly," she becomes angry and physically abuses her. This reveals Yazhini's lack of confidence as an 'alienated other' and her acculturative stress. Yazhini expresses to Ilayal and Dheepan her pent-up resentment and dissatisfaction that she is not 'beautiful,' that she is not well educated like others, and longs for a better life. The banlieue's lack of basic amenities and employment opportunities turns the lives of the refugees into one of non-human beings. Le Pré's living conditions are comparable to those of the Rohingya refugees, who have been employed as primary workers in the

port since 1978 but live in abject poverty in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district. The refugees are frequently exploited, do not receive fair pay, and end up becoming the main targets of mafia organizations. The bureaucracy's practice of social exclusion in the guise of classifying immigrants as legal or illegal is detrimental to the lives of refugees. Migration is seen as a threat to the cultural homogeneity of the nation state. The migrants are expected to perform the adapting and assimilating rather than forming a settled cultural community. Dheepan and Yazhini are forced to work within the banlieue where they barely meet their basic needs and they also become victims of racial discrimination and xenophobic attitude from the inmates of the banlieue. Ilayal faces the racial discrimination in the school where she is excluded and humiliated by her classmates. Dheepan's existence is confined to the banlieue, and when he tries to start up his own agency as a caretaker, it puts his safety in jeopardy. This leads to the conclusion that refugees' lives are safe as long as they are confined within a preset limit.

On a particular instance, Dheepan tries to communicate with the group of caretakers but has trouble understanding them, so he feigns humour. He could understand the language, but he is unable to appreciate the tone and cultural connotations of French language. Yazhini works hard to integrate into French society by learning the language with Ilayal and developing a relationship with her boss Habib which depicts her attempt to become an 'ideal immigrant.' From being strangers, Dheepan, Yazhini, and Ilayal come together as a family. The oddness and unease between them slowly dissipate throughout the course of the film. They transform from being a passive object to a subaltern subject where they actively resist the foreignness and vulnerability surrounding the refugee's lives. A new identity is constructed, and the bigotry of 'home'

and 'foreign' is erased. When they interact with other Indian families who have made their home in France, they finally experience a sense of belonging.

The current refugee laws and social attitudes disenfranchise refugee populations to the point of dehumanizing them as expendable commodities. Dheepan is first shown cleaning the living quarters of other inmates at the beginning of the film but by the end of the movie, he is seen sitting on a restricted sofa which implies recuperation of his positionality as a 'subaltern subject.' Ilayal, who found it difficult to comprehend even simple French lines, is seen reading aloud to her classmates a poem that she had written in the French language. And Yazhini who is profoundly estranged from a familial life displays an affinity with Dheepan and Ilayal. Together, they reconstruct a family and they settle in England. The family discord that is a marker of every refugee's life is finally broken by Audiard in the last scene. By creating a strong sense of self, Dheepan, Yazhini, and Ilayal battle against all obstacles that have attempted to stifle their independence and tranquility. Thereby, contesting the set narratives of the western hegemonic powers against the refugees and illegal migrants.

Thus, the film *Dheepan* and the novel *The Boat People* has examined the homogenized, hegemonic western discourse about refugees and undocumented immigrants in an effort to distinguish the voice of the refugee and transform the refugee's position into one of a subaltern subject. By contesting the state's numerous strategies for silencing refugees on a micro and macro level, the characters in the narratives disrupt the pre-given truths and predetermined discourses about them and challenge the depoliticization of refugees. The othering of refugees and their position as social outcasts in society, whose voices are perpetually obscured and who is compelled into

a state of inexistence, have been thoroughly discussed in this research. By contesting the identity and positionality of refugees and asylum seekers, this study makes the case for a rewriting of a refugee historiography. Refugees resist the foreignness of the environment by learning the language, overcoming their past, and forging an identity for themselves. In an effort to oppose the hegemonical institutions that conceal and devalue the refugees' narratives and experiences, the select fictional accounts perform and embody the refugee's socioeconomic standing. The research additionally examines how nations mistreat migrants and put their lives in danger, as well as how refugee camps, banlieues, and illegal colonies serve as a locus for institutional racism.

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Horus, the Superhero?: Navigating Masculinities, *Americanness*, and the Global Hollywood Aesthetic in *Gods of Egypt* (2016)

Jyoti Mishra*

Abstract

Gods of Egypt (2016) is a big-budget 'ancient world' Hollywood epic film that re-imagines tales and figures from ancient Egyptian mythology for a contemporary audience. Hollywood epic films have been read by scholars as responding to a post-9/11 and 'War on Terror' world signified by the cinematic proliferation of hyper masculine (yet sensitive) heroic figures and tyrannical antagonists, with narratives overtly/covertly contributing to or challenging traditions of American exceptionalism and American geopolitical dominance. In a time culturally dominated by the Hollywood superhero film, this paper analyses the construction of the ancient Egyptian god Horus as an 'ideal' form of masculinity and attempts to mark the superhero genre's influence on the film. Utilising a broad Cultural studies approach, the paper interrogates the liminal spaces within the interstices of an American narrative, visual and stylistic apparatus, and a transnational global Hollywood aesthetic in the construction of the 'mythological epic superhero.'

Keywords: *Mythological Epic Film, Superhero, Masculinity, Americanness, and Hollywood Global Aesthetic.*

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Chris Davis in *Blockbusters and the Ancient World* (2019), suggests that the 'ancient world' Hollywood epic as allegorical narratives, have along with superhero films (and other genres), reflected/refracted the socio-political concerns of the post-9/11 era. Davies reveals how 'ancient world' set epic films in the Bush-Obama years, which saw American-led military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and later participation in international conflicts, were narratives about occupation like *The Last Legion* (2007); or narratives focused on invasions like *Troy* (2004). Films like *Agora* (2009), *Noah* (2014), and *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014) dealt with faith and religious conflict, which were major geopolitical concerns of the period.

Similarly, the big-budget Hollywood epic film *Gods of Egypt* (2016) and its narrative of civil war between the god Horus and his uncle, the tyrannical antagonist, the god Set, represents a familiar motif of freedom versus tyranny seen in post-9/11 Hollywood epic cinema (Davies Ch. 5). Directed by Alex Proyas, *Gods of Egypt* is a loose adaptation of ancient Egyptian mythology which presents a fantastic spectacle of a mythical Egyptian empire ruled by ancient Egyptian gods, with the gods co-existing on the same plane as the mortals. Geraldine Pinch (*Egyptian Mythology* 2002) identifies the clash between the gods Horus and Set/Seth to be an 'enduring theme' (143) in Egyptian myth, which it can be argued, Proyas re-constructs into a contemporary form by representing them as a costumed superhero and super-villain.

Post-9/11 America saw the Hollywood industry's proliferation of propaganda-tinged pro-American war films, counter-terror and espionage-based films and TV series and the more subtle but extremely popular superhero films (McSweeney). In this period of national anxiety

and fear of nationwide 'demasculinisation' (McSweeney), the popular cinematic images and ideas of masculinity/hypermasculinity/heroic masculinity became inextricably intertwined with assertions of America's national strength and power (McSweeney). The strong American nationalist underpinnings visible in post-9/11 and 'War on Terror' American mainstream cinema, along with subversive and counter-hegemonic texts made interrogation of the ideological stances of these popular cultural artefacts a necessity. However, as global machinery, mainstream Hollywood films also had to contend with the cinematic tastes and choices of a global, transnational, multicultural, and multiethnic audience.

As observed by Diana Crane ("Cultural Globalization"), Hollywood movies, in their drive for increased profit from a global audience, have been modifying their aesthetic in terms of plot, casting of actors and locations, incorporating themes, motifs, plot lines from different cultures and film industries. Scott R. Olson's ("The Globalization") idea of a 'Hollywood Aesthetic' is helpful in this regard as he states that,

Hollywood is not particularly an American aesthetic... Hollywood is a global aesthetic, and that in a nutshell sums up its transnational appeal. (3-4)

To gain a global audience, he says, international centres of television and film production like Brazil, Hong Kong etc., have joined the United States of America in forming this global Hollywood media aesthetic where they aim to engage with audiences through media texts in such a way that different kinds of audience can understand them.

This paper argues that *Gods of Egypt* utilises elements from American superhero films, which were emblematic of the post 9/11 and "War on

Terror" cultural and political zeitgeist (Gray II). It derives from Chris Davies' argument that epic films released after *Gladiator* (2000) adapted tropes of the epic films through 'hybridisation' (209) with other genres, incorporating aspects from "the combat film, western, horror, terrorist thriller, and even comic-book fantasy into its representations of the ancient world" to allegorically and metaphorically use the past to "contextualise, warn or parallel the present." (209).

The study analyses the liminal spaces within the interstices of an American narrative, visual and stylistic apparatus encapsulated by the term *Americanness* and a transnational global Hollywood aesthetic to interrogate the construction of the 'mythological epic superhero' and its implications on forming normative and hegemonic ideas of 'ideal' masculinity.

The Hollywood Epic and the Contemporary Epic Hero

Robert Burgoyne notes that the twentieth century Hollywood epic was strongly associated with an American nationalist consciousness. However, in the twenty first century big-budget Hollywood epic, the American nation-centric quality is more ambiguous while also having to contend with the transnational character of the contemporary epic. He observes that,

the contemporary epic, with its complex array of nested and overlapping production and distribution arrangements, has become the very exemplar of transnational and global modes of film production and reception. (1-2)

The central paradox that arises in an investigation of this genre is because of the "evolving global context of film production and reception" of the epic film (2) and the "the particular provenance of the epic as an expression of national mythology and aspirations" (2).

In the essay "From Maciste to Maximus and Company" (2011), Andrew B. R. Elliott comments that as the Hollywood epic hero and the action-adventure hero evolved throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the characterisation of the 'fragmented' new epic hero was received. This hero embodied,

a wide range of contradictory values: he must be hard but forgiving, built but agile, exposed but impermeably armored, sensitive but hard-hearted, violent but not aggressive. (67)

He opines that due to this 'exhaustive' list of sometimes conflicting values that the New Epic Hero must possess, there is a fragmentation in the construction of the hero (68). Hence, according to Elliott, a new kind of hero is inaugurated who is not the 'lone warrior' type of muscular hero exemplified by Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Conan the Barbarian* and *Terminator*, or Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo*. Rather they are "the head of a heroic unit, assembled ad-hoc to depose tyrannous regimes." (68)

Gods of Egypt can also be termed a 'sword and sandal' epic film or a peplum, which is a sub-genre of the epic form. In the 'Introduction' to the collection *Of Muscles and Men* (2011), Michael G. Cornelius discusses the 'sword and sandal' epic film as having a pervasive 'hyper developed aura of masculinity' (4), which reflects the definition of the peplum film given by Maggie Günsberg (*Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre* 2005) as "a fantasy genre celebrating muscle bound masculinity in heroic action in the distant prehistorical, pre-industrialized past" (97). The hero's muscular development, observes Cornelius "is his essential character development" (6) as he accomplishes all his heroic feats through his 'own singular muscularity' (6).

For Günsberg too, the hero's hard musculature is essential in establishing him as the hero

and differentiating him from other men who either have less muscles or their bodies are not as exposed/displayed to the 'camera eye' (116). Moreover, she asserts that heroic masculinity in the peplum film "constantly defines itself through differentiation from other types of masculinity" (115) on the basis of the 'functionality' of his own muscled self. The male body and his hard musculature are thus ascribed hegemonic heroic masculine status in these films due to its hierarchical dominant status over other forms of non-muscular masculinities.

Taking Elliott, Cornelius, and Günsberg into consideration, it can be argued that this 'fragmented' new epic hero is transformed into the new 'normative' Hollywood epic hero in *Gods of Egypt* through a process of narrative and character osmosis with the Hollywood superhero film narrative. The 'Otherisation' process involved in establishing the hegemonic status of the muscular heroic epic protagonist highlighted by Cornelius and Günsberg, provides a theoretical segue to approach the construction of hierarchical masculinities in the text.

Theorizing Masculinities

R.W. Connell divides masculinities into four types based on their positions in relation to one another. They are hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities (*Masculinities* 2nd Ed. 2005). These relations are hierarchical, with hegemonic masculinity occupying the dominant position over the other 'lesser' forms. James W. Messerschmidt (*Hegemonic Masculinity* 2018) defines hegemonic masculinities,

as those masculinities constructed locally, regionally, and globally that legitimate an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities. (75)

He notes that hegemonic masculinities, acquire their legitimacy by embodying materially and/or symbolizing discursively culturally supported 'superior' gender qualities in relation to the embodiment or symbolization of 'inferior' gender qualities (75-76), with 'inferior' being associated with femininity. (76)

Horus, the Mythological Epic Superhero

Film reviewers of *Gods of Egypt* have noted the utilisation of elements from superhero films in this text, with the reviewer from *Roger Ebert* stating that the film devolves into a "sword-and-sorcery-flavoured riff on a weak Marvel movie" (Seitz para 1) where the Egyptian deities take the form of "armored creatures that look like Marvel-movie android warriors" (para 2). The reviewer from *Collider* observes that the deities have been modelled on 'Iron Man-like gods' (Nemiroff), while *Vox* sees them as "crosses between superheroes and Transformers" (Suderman).

These observations do not delve into the politics behind it, restricting it to a dismissive cosmetic level observation. Instead it can be argued that the superheroic re-invention of the Egyptian deity accounts significantly towards contributing to the transnational Hollywood global aesthetic in this film, and aiding in establishing the new mythological epic 'superhero' as a 'normative' form, subsuming within it, the sometimes contradictory and 'exhaustive' character features as articulated by Elliott (2011). The qualities that Elliott identifies, suggests the construction of an 'ideal' version of masculinity, where extreme violence, aggression, and insensitivity are tempered while taking care not to devolve into femininity. Masculine hegemony and dominance among men, women, and among masculinities as Connell and Messerschmidt state, are

based on the repudiation of femininity. Though these hierarchies are 'relational' and must be studied within their surrounding contexts, the cinematic text offers its own articulation of hegemonic masculinity, embodied by the protagonist Horus, as he emerges as a kinder, more compassionate man-god-king-hero at the end of his heroic journey.

The divine form of the ancient Egyptian gods, who otherwise appear in human form, albeit taller and golden-blooded, compared to the mortal humans, is the most recognisable super heroic element in the text. It is reminiscent of the costumed superhero and references the animals/birds that are traditionally associated with deities in Egyptian mythology. The film, through this process, taps into the superhero zeitgeist and its already established global popularity. The protagonist Horus, frequently presented as a 'falcon-headed man' (Pinch 143) in Egyptian art, is pictured in his costumed 'super heroic' form, covered in glittering golden full-body armour, showcasing a moulded muscular form, with golden wings and a beak-like mask. The falcon associated with Horus is similar to the bald eagle, the national bird of the USA, which is an American icon. This can subtly suggest that Horus could be representative of America, in contrast with the jackal-like (and hence not as noble) visage of Set.

Horus' personality and his character arc, that is from the chosen heir and next divine king of Egypt, powerful, witty, and arrogant in the beginning, to his eventual fall at the hands of the antagonist Set, to his heroic journey of redemption, and eventual transformation into a more understanding, kind, and compassionate leader of the weaker mortals, parallels that of Tony Stark in *Iron Man* (2008) and Thor in *Thor* (2011). Just as Horus battles his uncle Set, similarly, both Thor and Iron Man battle villains that are related to them. Loki is Thor's adopted brother while Tony

Stark is betrayed by his partner and friend Obadiah Stane. The witty humour and cocky attitude associated with these two Marvel superheroes are recreated in the characterisation of Horus. Horus is played by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, who has earlier played Jaime Lannister from HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) series. This film then, through its casting, attempts to tap into the popularity of the series, Coster-Waldau's stardom, and connect to its already established global transnational audience. Horus' associations with America can be suggested through these similarities though overt allusions are not possible due to the film's fantastic and mythical setting.

If Horus is the superhero, the mortal thief Bek is Horus' sidekick, Hathor is the powerful love interest cum damsel-in-distress figure, and Thoth, the supporting scientist figure. These character types would be familiar to readers and viewers of superhero comics and films (Johnson *Super-History* 2012). They indeed form a 'heroic unit' as Elliott states, to challenge the super-villain, Set with his tyrannical and world-conquering ways. Horus, as the super heroic protagonist, and leader of this heroic unit, establishes his dominant and hegemonic position in relation to the others on the basis of his greater physical and supernatural (divine) power, his battle-prowess, and his muscularity. The 'camera eye' frequently manages to highlight this physical superiority. For instance, in a scene where Bek approaches the injured and blind Horus, Horus lifts Bek by the neck in anger due to his initial mistrust. His giant stature and bare muscular body is contrasted against the much smaller Bek dangling in the air.

Horus' physical superiority is frequently established by contrasting it with other figures. As with Bek mentioned above, Horus' muscularity is juxtaposed against Thoth's covered body.

This establishes the superiority of Horus' muscular masculinity over Thoth's. His character, as the god of wisdom and in a supporting non-battle-related role, is different from other hyper-masculine warrior characters like Horus or Set. He adds comic relief to the film with his obsession with all forms of knowledge (like his serious deliberations on a head of lettuce) and offers an alternative mode of masculinity. It is not a derided form of masculinity, nor does he encapsulate the hegemonic standards set by the film's narrative. He is shorn of all sexuality and virility-related connotations, almost in an asexual form whereas Horus, Set, and Bek all have partners or are seen engaging in sexual/romantic activity. He is fit, but his body musculature is not overtly focused on by the 'camera-eye'. His masculinity is predicated on his intelligence, and not body or virility, though it seems at times that there is a note of effeminacy in his body movements. Thoth's visual representation through contrast, serves to highlight the hegemonic status of Horus, the epic superhero.

From the beginning of the film, it is only Horus' physical prowess that is established as superior over his moral or intellectual capabilities. For instance, he is first shown snoring after a night of revelling, with various other gods sleeping in a drunken stupor around him. He cannot be pictured as an 'ideal' King-to-be as he is frivolous, not serious, and uncaring about the adulation of his citizens. He takes their praises for granted, assured in his own superiority. During the coronation, when his mother Isis asks Thoth if he ever thought his former student would someday be crowned King of Egypt, Thoth answers that "Horus evinced a range of attributes, some of which may well correlate with a leadership position...If he is lucky" (00:08:45-00:08:55). This answer casts a subtle doubt on his ability to be a good leader.

Horus also lies to Bek, the mortal thief that he would bring his dead beloved Zaya back to life to enlist his support in defeating Set. This act causes him to be castigated by the goddess Hathor, leading her to term him "blind in more ways than one." Upon learning of Horus' indifference towards mortals and exploitation of Bek, the great god Ra, the lord of light, shows his disappointment by stating that he does not approve of the way Set rules Egypt but is equally 'uncertain' that Horus would be much better. Thoth too, suggests that Horus is a 'fool' as in his rage and quest for vengeance; Horus is unforgiving towards Hathor's sacrifice of her body to Set in order for Set to grant clemency to a wounded and blinded Horus.

Horus also loses his battle with Set during the coronation due to Set using cunning tactics of blinding him with the reflection of his and his soldier's shields. Compared to Horus, Bek is shown as quick-witted, as he convinces Thoth to join their 'heroic unit' by appealing to Thoth's 'ego' and 'vain' nature. Horus' physical intimidation does not work in this situation. It is only his physicality and muscularity that leads him to defeat all the opponents sent by Set against him. In another scene inside Set's collapsing pyramid, Horus utilises his physical strength to hold a stone cover over the head and lead Bek and Hathor to safety. Upon realising that his journey was not to seek 'revenge at all costs' but to protect his people, he regains his divine powers of transformation, as now his physical strength has a higher moral purpose. He defeats Set at the end in a one-on-one battle, establishing his masculinity as superior to Set's form of tyrannical masculinity.

After his heroic enlightenment, Horus dictates that it will not be riches that will be needed to reach the afterlife post death as Set had earlier declared. Instead it would be good deeds done

and compassion and generosity shown, that would lead to gaining entry into the immortal afterlife. This will be a familiar idea for people of major religions including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism and hence relatable to multi-religious transnational audiences. Horus at this stage is ready to be crowned the ideal god, king, hero, and an idealized form of masculinity.

The muscular male characters in the film Horus, Bek, and Set, along with the beautiful and scantily-clad female characters, Hathor and Zaya, who are all cis-gendered and heteronormative, are a part of this global Hollywood aesthetic. Their characterisations do not clash with American values as American power and nationalism are traditionally founded on heteronormative, heteronationalist, and patriarchal tenets and further cinematically strengthened in post-9/11 Hollywood films (Faludi *The Terror Dream* 2007; McSweeney 2017).

Bek, who is a mortal human, and a quick and agile thief, helps Horus in his heroic quest of defeating the tyrannical god Set. Horus humorously and gratefully says that Bek can be the god of the 'impossible,' as he manages to accomplish great things even in a battle between gods, whose powers are beyond his as a mere mortal. This seems to be a subtle nod to the idea of the American dream where anything can be theoretically accomplished by the individual.

The freedom versus tyranny motif, which has been an integral part of Hollywood epics (Davies ch. 5), persists in this film too and manifests in the conflict between Horus and Set. As the chosen hero and divine king of Egypt, Horus is already established as the 'ideal' masculine self and contrasted against the tyrannical 'Other,' the antagonist Set. Set is presented as masculine but an inferior and barbaric form of masculinity, and hence his rule with its tyrannical laws that man-

dated the payment of riches to enter the afterlife for all mortals is negated and condemned. Set's impotence, which is one of the sources of his dissatisfaction against his father Ra and brother Osiris (whom he murders to annex the kingdom), is contrasted against the virility of Horus, who is willingly loved by Hathor, the goddess of love. Set's imperialist vision of world domination and gaining immortality (by destroying the afterlife) is defeated by Horus who instead aims to rule only Egypt without having any expansionist motives. This is the dominant position taken, where ideas of tyranny and imperial expansionism are vanquished by the *American* epic superhero Horus.

The *Americanness* is strong in this film, though political critique in terms of conformist or subversive American nationalist undertones is almost non-existent. It has been presented as a fantasy adventure, with a simplistic triumph of good over evil narrative. The construction of Horus as the superhero, Set as the super-villain and the other characters occupying stock character types from American comic books and films do occupy the liminal space between an Americanised value system and nationalist ethos (freedom triumphing over tyranny), and a global aesthetic where an action-packed, fantastic, exotic, and romanticised vision of ancient Egypt is depicted. This amalgamation of super heroic tropes and features and hybridisation of the mythological epic genre managed to make it a contemporary iteration of ancient mythology, however, the over-reliance and similarity with the superhero film may have instead shorn it of its 'epic' qualities.

The ideological agendas of the superhero film, which critique discrimination, oppression, and systemic injustice, be it American or non-American, at the end has a message of hope, redemption and desire for a better world. *Gods of*

Egypt does not manage to offer any similar messaging, with this liminal space being ideologically empty. There is no critique or alternate constructions offered to a class-based society or traditional markers of masculinity. They remain embedded in dominant and hegemonic narratives of patriarchy and masculinized systems of power, represented by the transfer of power from father to son, from Ra to his son Osiris, to his son Horus. The treatment of the goddess Hathor further establishes the normativity of masculinized systems of power/authority.

The film plays with the damsel-in-distress motif by providing both power and agency to the Hathor while subsuming her under masculine power and authority. Hathor was able to easily subdue one of the two monstrous and massive serpents sent by Set to kill Horus whereas Horus and Bek could only attempt to flee from them initially. She joins Horus' band of heroes against Set and provides significant help through out the narrative. She even saves Horus' life during Set's coup against Osiris by sacrificing herself and becoming Set's lover. However, at the film's end, Hathor again falls into the damsel-in-distress situation, needing Horus to go on another heroic journey to save her.

Only Bek, rather than Horus, the god-king-hero, offers a critique of the society under gods, as his very existence as a thief suggests that despite the presence of gods, there is inequality in society. This situation is exacerbated under Set, as Bek states that theft has become the answer to survival in the world as "you're either rich or nothing." This can be seen as an indictment of rising economic inequalities in contemporary society.

Conclusion

The passage of time from the events of 9/11 seems to have reduced the presence of national-

ist elements in epic films by the time *Gods of Egypt* was released. Even though it is the most 'superheroic' of all mythology-based epics, the film seems to have only been influenced by the style and characterisation of American superhero films with minimal political commentary. As an escapist fantasy and mass entertainer, it is a good example of representing the global Hollywood aesthetic. The demise/hiatus of the 'ancient world' mythological epic has been signalled by the failure of *Gods of Egypt* at the box-office.

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Detailing Gothic Aesthetics and Architecture in *The Batman* (2022)

Harsh Mishra* and Dr. Prasenjit Panda**

Abstract

What sums up a whole scenario? The small details. The detailing units are combined to create a more excellent picture. Every artist one sees or the artwork one can call a masterpiece, is a work heavily dependent on the little details. Every artist who creates masterpieces, whether it is a movie, painting, scripture or novel, pays attention to the details to enhance the quality of the work. This article on Gothic aesthetics in detail will explore how the little details of the Gothic elements added together come up with a greater and enhanced picture with a more impactful appeal to the audience and how it is responsible in breaking the stereotypes of gender fashion and creating a genderless fashion sense. This article takes help of several shows and movies for comparison but primarily it will use *The Batman* (2022).

Keywords: *Gothic Aesthetics, Gothic Architect, Gothic Fashion, Alternative Reality, and Deconstruction.*

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Who could imagine that the term 'Goth,' which today is used to describe a fashion sense, actually has its roots in ancient Germanic tribes?

Although they did not identify as goths, this is how we today recognise them. When the renowned painter and brilliant architect Giorgio Vasari first used the term 'Goth,' it went from being a Germanic tribe to becoming a well-known architectural style that emerged in France. Then, in his book *The Castle of Otranto*, which has the subtitle 'A Gothic Tale,' Horace Walpole used the term 'Gothic' for the first time in literature, and not for the story but for the castle whose style is of Gothic like Horace's own house named 'The Strawberry Hill House.' Gothic emerged as a new literary genre named 'Gothic Fiction' and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which is inspired by a serial killer named Dracula represented Gothic vibes and enhanced its aesthetics. But it is clear and not to be confused that horror and Gothic are different things. Horror is a part of gothic fiction just like fantasy, mystery, romance, etc. What is horror can be Gothic, but what is Gothic cannot

always be Horror. Later in history, when Goth Rock was presented by bands like the Bauhaus (1978–2008) and its famous song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' which came in the year 1979, Alien Sex Fiend (since 1982), and The Cult (since 1983), it transitioned from architecture and literature to songs with a mixture of heavy rock and synth-pop like one can see it in the fourth season of 'Stranger Things' (since 2016) which came out in 2022 created by 'Duffer Brothers' where the character of Eddie Munson played by Joseph Quinn goes in another world named as the 'Upside Down' and starts playing rock guitar to give his friends cover from the evil bat-like flying creatures and some time to accomplish the immediate target to kill the Antagonist Creature 'Vecna.' The main theme of that show is properly made on synth music and the scene where Eddie Munson dies playing a heavy metal rock song is purely Gothic with details of Eddie's Punk Gothic outfit, makeup, Goth rock, the dark clouds thundering in dark red lights while bat-like small creatures fly through the whole sky and Vecna's castle also known as his Mindlair inspired by



Figure-1: Vecna's Castle in Gothic Setting

gothic architecture having pointed arches, flying buttresses, Gothic ornamented interior, leaves vast spaces which creates a room for horror and enhances mysterious scenes as you can see in the screenshot given below as Figure-1, captured from the show's youtube channel.

But, the fashion sense of these Gothic bands—which signified gloom, misery, and melancholy— was what stood out to the public. This fashion sense included things like dark makeup, leather clothing, wicked symbols, etc.

Later it rapidly spread and blossomed into a subculture where numerous new Gothic fashion trends emerged, including Post Punk (Eddie Munson, *Stranger Things*), Trad Goth (Maila Nurmi) Cybergoths (Neo, *The Matrix*), Goth

Lolita (Harley Queen) which are in the figures - 1, 2, 3, and 4 and other gothic looks. But, there were some things which can be said to restrict or bind the fashion sense as it fixed the gender-constructed meaning like only women wear corsets or only men have short haircuts. Although traditionally a part of women's clothing, corsets are worn by women to conceal their abdominal fat from onlookers because, in British civilization, class and representation were the most important factors at the time. Men wore waistcoats for the same reason, but as cross-fashion began, where women began wearing men's clothing, men also began wearing corsets. Today, corsets are becoming more popular in men's fashion, much like boys' haircuts in women's are. Yet, after a while, males began wearing corsets, and Gothic fashion became genderless.



Figure-2: Eddie Munson in Punk Gothic, Figure-2: Maila Nurmi in Trad Goth



Figure-3: Neo in Cybergoth



Figure-4: Harley Queen in Goth Lolita

Goth, however, has come a very long way from being a Germanic Tribe to a Subculture and has thus covered a great deal of ground, but when it entered the mainstream, although it is not restricted to certain boundaries, it only managed to cover a few things. For instance, in the 1999 film *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves' character Neo is dressed in cybergoth fashion, which makes sense in the context of the story but does not fully represent the history of Gothic. It will need a great deal of attention to detail in everything from architecture to make-up to symbols to colours to clothing to music to reflect the entire Gothic situation.

When Gothic first entered the mainstream, or one could say into the movies, it was only able to cover a few things, but later with more works to deliver the audience's fascinating demands for the darkness and Gothic representation as people started to understand the beauty of the dark colours and separated it from the evil or satanic mindset and even started accepting the satanic beauty and developed an alluring affection towards it, mainstream started delivering it.

The Batman (2022)

The character of Batman is in itself Gothic because it is made from a bat, which is a Gothic element. Batman (Bruce Wayne) is a superhero appearing in American comic books published

by DC Comics. The character was created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger and debuted in the Twenty Seventh issue of the comic book *Detective Comics* on March 30, 1939. This paper takes a look at how the 2022 film has worked on the detailing part of Gothic aesthetics.

When it entered the mainstream with the movie *Batman Begins* followed by the other two films *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* all three films directed by Christopher Nolan, it didn't follow the Gothic style completely, although one can argue that there are gothic elements in the movie like the castle, costume, music, etc., but it somehow lacks in the detailing and colours and the darkness which incompletes the whole scenario of pure Gothic aesthetics, but recently in 2022, in Matt Reeves' direction came *The Batman*, which excels in the detailing part of the Gothic Aesthetics; Batman played by Robert Pattinson has excelled in this role. Unlike the previous movies by Nolan, in this one, the characters of Batman and Bruce Wayne both are wearing eye makeup for the first time. Batman has more darkness than any of the other Batman films; even the logo, which appears briefly at the beginning of the film right after the DC logo within the same colour pattern, is made up of a black bat silhouette on a dark red background Batman logo which is also there in the *Dracula Untold* (2014)'s credit scene when the name of the movie comes, it comes



Figure-5: The Batman logo with a bat silhouette



Figure-6: Dracula Untold logo in the fire

with the impressions of bats flying inside the logo while the logo is in fire, both of which you can see in the figures-5 and 6.

A spooky, suspenseful background score played on a violin and a small amount of slow synth also adds to the tension. Then around 09:55 minutes, Robert Pattinson as Batman, covered in the whole black outfit comes out from the darkness, but just a few seconds back from him coming out around 09:45-09:55 minutes, an orange light emerges from the metro station's very background which can signify one of two things: either industrial lights or the beginning of a foggy morning. In either case, it ultimately contributes to the enhancement of Gothic aesthetics as it is a part of adding neon lighting for beauty enhancement for cinematographic purposes. It contributes

to the techno-colouring that is a crucial component of the Cybergoths, a part of the goth sub-culture, as one can again find a significant use of the techno colours later in the scene at 1:18:58 hours of the movie when the Batmobile is revealed with neon lightings of light smoky-blue light like the moonlight coming from the silencer of the car and the same dawn-like-orange from the engine part of the vehicle representing a thematic contrast of night and day, cold and warm, good and bad, despair and hope, chaos and calm. But, the combination of the colours here deconstructs the individuality of fixed meanings of the colours and neutralizes the contrast it generally creates and the vehicle is used throughout the night only unlike the other batman movies where the vehicle is revealed used in the daylight as well.

If one pays close attention to that scene, one will note that just a few seconds after the Batmobile appears, the background music changes from ominous heavy synth to chaotic tense music, which is representative of the noise made by bats when a colony is disturbed. Discussing the theme of the movie, one again goes back to the entry scene, after the first fight at the metro station, after he says his first on-screen dialogue "I am vengeance!" also feels Gothic because of the revolting tone. Bruce notes down everything in his diary in which he was speaking at the start of his monologue while listening to the sound track 'Something in the Way' by 'Nirvana' recorded in 1991 which from being a

soundtrack goes diegetic with action when Bruce starts riding the bike and becomes a part of the movie but this version is different by 'L'Orchestra Cinematique' - producing, nonetheless, a melancholic, depressed atmosphere that is once again a Gothic aspect added to the intricacies - Then, at 20:23 minutes, as Bruce Wayne's face is unveiled, one finds him sporting an entirely Gothic appearance, including spiked hair, dark-black eye makeup, and all-dark attire that emphasises the character's affinity for the gothic style and dark hues, in figure-7.

When the interior of the Wayne House is revealed at 23:23 minutes, one can see how truly



Figure-7: Bruce Wayne in Vamp Goth

gothic it is, with pointed arches all over supported by the flying buttresses, providing space for the ornamentation and light to enter via the enormous panes as in figure-8.

Cat-woman first appears in the movie at 29:47 minutes wearing leather clothing with

pointed high heel knee length boots, but her upper body lacks any darkness in terms of clothing. Later, when she dons her Cat woman costume, which was modelled after a black cat significant in witchcraft and a key component of Gothic fashion, one sees her wearing a completely black outfit. She is a redhead and dressed

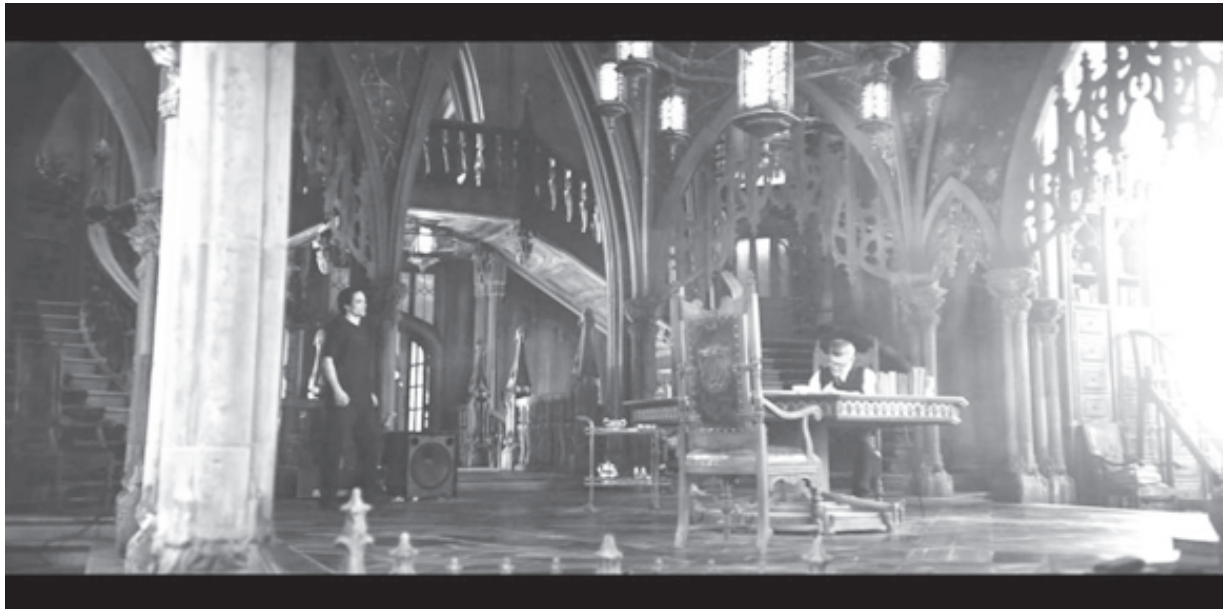


Figure-8: Wayne's House in Gothic Architecture

in a black leather outfit in a Cybergothic style when Batman sends her on a mission at roughly 45:50 in the video, with techno lights and synthpop music playing in the background.

Following that, at 57:50 minutes, when Bruce exits his car in front of 'Gotham City Hall,' he is dressed in Victorian Goth Style, in which nothing else—not the music, not the architecture (even when they enter inside, there are no gothic elements of architecture), not even the makeup—indicates that the gothic details were purposefully added to highlight the Batman character's gothic aesthetics, not Bruce Wayne's.

Later on in the film, when the Batmobile is revealed in technologies in moonlight blue from the silencers and dawn-like orange from the engine (Figure-9), a car chase scene occurs where the Batmobile is introduced chasing the suspect's car and gaining a dominant position. To represent that dominant situation, heavy trumpet background music plays at 01:19:49 hours which enhances the dominance of the Batmobile, but, later it fades in with the cars' noises, and when a crash occurs where the Batmobile then emerges from a

blast, the synth waits and the bat-like metal sound comes in. The other vehicle is then struck by the Batmobile, which causes it to crash and flip over on the highway, then, as Batman exits the Batmobile and begins to walk towards the suspect known only as 'penguin,' the background music begins to play heavily trumpets, bells, and synthesiser to dramatise his steps (Figure-10). His outfit is then visible as a dark silhouette against the neon orange dawn-like light emanating from the blast that just occurred on the backside. Batman wearing dark clothes, heavy boots, dark cape, which can be seen in a flipped view from Penguin's perspective, bends to see inside the car where one can see him wearing his bat-head dark mask, with his eye makeup of kohl all around the eyes inside the mask easily visible from the outside.

At 01:36:45, Batman and Catwoman are both visible in their costumes standing against the sunlight emerging from behind the clouds, which represents a paradigm-shifting viewpoint because, while Bat and Cat are typically associated with evil and are frequently used by witches,

necromancers, and other practitioners of black magic, here they stand for the dawn, the hope, and a new morning that is only possible because they fought in the dark.

At around 01:57:56 hours, the Catwoman appears again in a cybergoth look wearing light pink hair with a black leather corset inside her full-length leather pants which shine out from



Figure-9: Batmobile in Technocolours

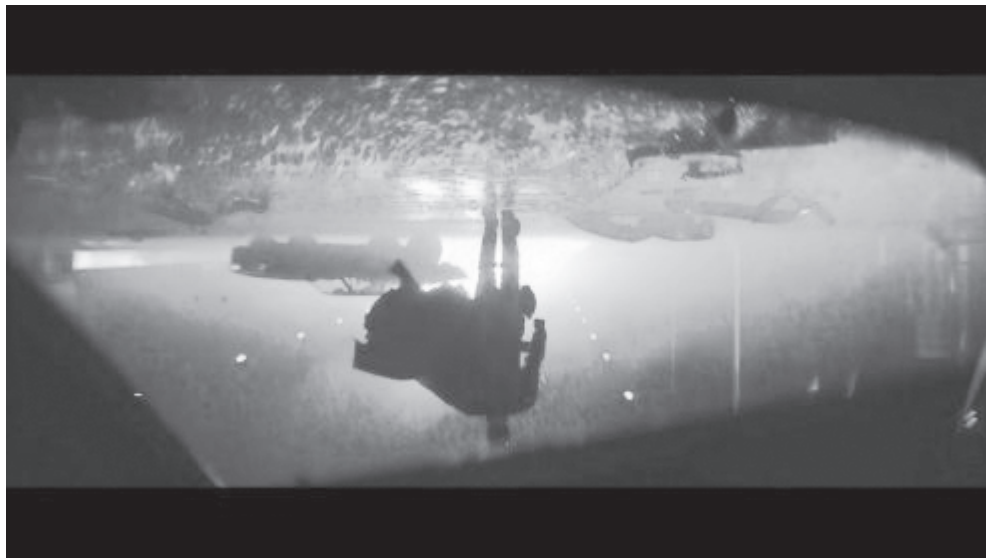


Figure-10: Batman in Technocolours

her clothing. Many people consider that corsets should only be worn by women and not by men. But Gothic fashion theories which are also a part of the Gothic aesthetic theories convey that no such restrictions or boundaries are there in fashion. After Punk Goth and Trad Goth, in Gothic

fashion, men started wearing corsets which people - who don't know about Goth fashion - thought were worn only by girls when women of British civilization wore corsets and no men were seen wearing corsets rather tight waistcoat instead, but women wore corsets, like the fash-

ion of Goth Lolita. But to represent how mainstream conveyed a corset-wearing man can be seen in the movie *Dracula Untold* (2014). The character of Vlad the Impaler who becomes Count Dracula played by the actor Luke Evans can be seen wearing a corset. However, another curious thought can be that if Batman also comes wearing a corset, would the audience love that? Would the audience show the same amount of affection towards Batman or not? Well, people may love the character of Batman wearing cross-gender fashion. But, why is it that the makers have not done that yet? Is it a coincidence? Well, these questions would fall under the categories of curiosity or creativity but people may also not love that because Batman represents masculinity and the audience would not love Batman wearing a girly corset and fighting. The makers know this and this is why one needs Batman to go more Gothic. Gothic goes beyond just the darkness and evil symbols. It is a revolt in itself, it is being unapologetic for being whoever one is, like the graffiti. Gothic is a deconstruction element in itself which not only breaks the stereotypical perspective that only women should wear corsets, but it also sets the fashion and living in a free play where no matter male or female, they can be whatever they want and wear whatever they want. It is not only the appraisal of satanic beauty or evil symbols but a support for the idea of the free will of a person. This is why Gothic is an important part of popular culture and becoming more popular among the youth.

Later, when the movie proceeds towards its ending following the dark makeup, dark setting, synthpop background music and neon lighting, there comes a frame at 01:53:36 hours, where Batman can be seen holding a fire torch which is throwing that dawn-like-orange light representing a kind of win against the darkness as just a few scenes back there was that moon-like smoky blue light setting. But, this is the beauty of the

Gothic atmosphere as it neutralises the binary or the hierarchy of good and bad and dark and light. Even the dawn light emerges from the dark. Then, after the climax, the post-credit scene comes up with the same theme playing in the background with the bat-noise-like synthpop which also sounds like a train's breaks and the movie ends continuously following the dark light theme.

Psychoanalysis

Gothic aesthetics is related to darkness and plays with the human psyche to create a fascinating affection towards its atmosphere, whether, in literature or movies, it attracts the audience's desires to make them question the reality or binaries of the world. It develops fear through its mysterious and dark settings which people will eventually like because everyone likes to be afraid. Biologically, it is because of the adrenaline rush, but it is also because it creates the feeling of uncanny and according to Sigmund Freud's uncanny theory, the fear happens because of the familiar thing becoming unfamiliar. For instance, one is familiar with the kid in our home, but at times, if it tries to haunt us by hiding behind the door, one gets afraid because at that moment one fails to recognise the kid. At that very moment, it shakes an individual's identity, it tries to disrupt one's value of existence and in the end, it all becomes the game of existence. This is why, audiences love to watch Gothic shows or read novels because it questions one's identity and people get a chance to prove it again and again and again. In addition, it is a continuous combination of beauty and misproportioned or distorted images and people love that because it makes them question reality since what happens in the world of Gothic fiction is unique and feels unreal according to the real world. It also invokes the feeling of being in danger but a man feels free to do anything while being in danger so it also provides a sense of freedom in the minds of the audience.

Batman is a vigilante, a person who fights crime without being bound by the law or the rules. His character and his actions represent his trauma, the trauma which he faced in his mirror stage. According to Lacan's Mirror stage theory, which can also be called the stage of identity formation, it can be said that, when he was in his identity formation stage, he used to look up to his father and his father was doing good deeds for the people of the Gotham city. But, when both his parents get killed by a thief in front of his eyes, it shakes him to his core and makes him a vigilante and now whatever he is doing feels like a compensation which he is trying to give to his parents that he could not save them at that time and what he feared most was a Gothic element but it offered him freedom, freedom from the laws which set his parent's killer free and freedom from his fear, his reality of the character of Bruce Wayne. The Gothic settings, makeup, and atmosphere provided him a freedom and an escape from this world which is nothing but a simulation of the real world. Meanwhile, in *The Batman* (2022), Catwoman presents her actions as mischief. She knows she is not as strong as either the Batman or the villains. But, she is like a black cat, which again is a gothic element providing fear and freedom. She does her mischief, being in disguise, breaking trusts of the people, doing what she wants and getting what she needs, while the Batman's character is bold, powerful, and brave and does what he wants in front of the people, yet in a clever manner. Visible from a quotation from the movie the understanding of his idea of self-understanding to learn his thoughts about himself from which one can relate to his psyche more, "they think I'm hiding in the shadows, but I am the shadows," here one can know that he stays in the dark to distinguish himself from the world not that he fears the world, where one can say Catwoman hides in the shadows because she knows what she has to do if she wants to accomplish the tasks.

Conclusion

This paper has explored many types of Goth fashion in the goth subculture and its music while also discussing how knowing about them can help in detailing when you are making a movie or song about Goths, and how they can create an impact on the scene and the audience's minds while conveying a lot of social messages. People used to think and still think that darkness, evil symbols, black fashion, etc., are a way to approach satan or evil practices. But, these movies with detailing in the understanding of Gothic settings try to break that thought and allure the audience towards dark music, setting, and fashion and also break gender norms by offering a genderless fashion sense. After Gothic architecture became the churches themselves, Goth fashion and literature developed more because they became part of the holy church. But the bands saw it as a way to express their truth and desires with unapologetic behaviour. And so, detailing while making something on it holds important because one is not dealing only with a fashion sense but hundreds of years of history and a lot of symbols which represent various things, so one must have great knowledge about what they are presenting like Bat is a Gothic element but represents fear and its acceptance. The lighting, music, makeup, architecture, and dark atmosphere were all on point to enhance the aesthetic of this gothic representation of the movie *The Batman* (2022).

Hence, while looking at the scenes from *Stranger Things*, *Batman*, *Dracula Untold* or whether it be a Bauhaus song, it is found that the importance of detailing, like the other artworks, is equally important to enhance the Gothic aesthetics, as well.

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The Politics of Representation: The Portrayal of Disabled Women in Malayalam Cinema

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Abstract

As a widely consumed form of popular culture, cinema significantly influences individuals' perceptions of societal norms. Popular cinema possesses a significant ability to promote certain concepts as the epitome of excellence or desirability. This phenomenon is evident in the glorification of motherhood and traditional gender roles and the depiction of beauty standards in movies that can compel women to imitate and internalise them. As a result, popular cinema can considerably impact the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, particularly women. The present paper argues that Malayalam cinema, in particular, has contributed to the marginalisation of disabled women who do not conform to the able-bodied standards upheld by society. This study aims to investigate the representation of disabled women in popular Malayalam mainstream cinema of the twenty first century, focusing on three films: *Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum* (2003), *Akale* (2004) and *Bangalore Days* (2014). This paper examines how disabled female characters in these films navigate internalised sociocultural ideals of femininity, gender roles, and other norms imposed by an able-bodied patriarchal society. Additionally, the paper seeks to explore the persistent struggle of disabled women with the institution of marriage during the first half of the twenty first century, in contrast to earlier eras, in its portrayal of disability and disabled women.

Keywords: *Able-Bodied Society, Malayalam Cinema, Gender Roles, Disabled Women, and Femininity.*

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Cinema is a widely consumed medium of popular culture that plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions about various societal notions. Popular cinema possesses a significant ability to promote certain concepts as the epitome of excellence or desirability. This phenomenon is evident in the glorification of motherhood and traditional gender roles and the depiction of beauty standards in movies that can compel women to imitate and internalise them. As a result, popular cinema can considerably impact the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, particularly women.

Adequate representation of marginalised sections of society, such as women, Dalits, and disabled individuals, is crucial for their validation in popular media. Failure to represent them adequately can lead to their invisibility among the general public (Jeffress 4). Disabled individuals, in particular, have been portrayed unrealistically and insensitively in movies, and they are often depicted as tragic figures or extraordinary individuals overcoming their disabilities. Such depictions reinforce dominant able-bodied culture and promote stereotypical images that further marginalise disabled individuals.

Lenard Davis's essay, "The Ghettoization of Disability," highlights that such narratives ultimately make the able-bodied audience feel good about their normality (39). Movies typically idealise able-bodied, heterosexual individuals, while any deviation from this norm is portrayed as the Other or the deviant.

Disability in Malayalam Cinema

In line with the portrayal of disabilities in Indian cinema, Malayalam films have also often relied on stereotypes. Specifically, throughout the twentieth century and beyond, disabled characters in Malayalam cinema have typically been

depicted as objects of pity or as sources of fear. For example, many of the films directed by Vinayan have centred around disability, and in these films - such as *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njaanum* (1999), *Oomappennini Uriyadappayyan* (2002), and *Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum* (2003) - disability is framed using a charity model wherein they are depicted as helpless victims. This framing elicits only sympathy from the audience, perpetuating a narrative that disempowers individuals with disabilities.

These types of depictions in cinema perpetuate existing stereotypes surrounding disabled individuals. Some movies have even resorted to portraying disabled individuals as comic characters to induce laughter from the audience. In the film *Sound Thoma* (2013), directed by Vyshakh, the main hero has a cleft lip, which is portrayed as a source of humour. Similarly, the protagonist in *Kunjikoonan* (2002) has a hunchback and protruding teeth, and his disability is used for comic effect. The film depicts a bride-seeing ceremony where the woman has dwarfism and rejects the man because of his hunchback. This scene is portrayed with comical elements to induce laughter, perpetuating the mockery of both characters' disabilities. These instances illustrate how a person's impairment is used to create a comic effect. Additionally, some films depict individuals faking disabilities to gain sympathy or pity from others. For example, the central character in *Punjabi House* (1998) feigns a disability to elicit sympathy from those around him. In the film, *Kilukkam* (1991), the female protagonist, played by Revathy, pretends to be insane to create a comic effect and portray herself as a naïve and innocent girl.

When examining Hindu mythology, it is evident that negative evil characters are frequently portrayed as disabled. For example,

Mandra in *Ramayana* and Shakuni in *Mahabharata* are depicted as villainous characters. This trend extends to contemporary Indian cinema, where numerous villainous characters are depicted as disabled. For instance, the father of Palvaldevan in *Bahubali* (2015) and the dwarf man from the recent blockbuster Tamil movie *Vikram* (2022) are portrayed as disabled antagonists. Disability is often framed as a punishment or fate worse than death in Indian cinema. In the Malayalam movie *Roudram* (2011), for example, the protagonist nails the villains' legs under a car and justifies the act by stating, "You deserve a life filthier than death" (Pal 110). Thus it could be said that irrespective of the language, Indian cinema generally has made an inappropriate portrayal of disabled characters.

The Portrayal of Disabled Women v/s Disabled Men in Malayalam Cinema

From a theoretical perspective, disabled women have historically been excluded from mainstream feminist discourse, and their history has not been adequately documented (Bhambhani 74). This exclusion is evident in Indian mythology, where disabled women are often portrayed as the most evil characters. Examples include the hunchbacked, one-eyed Manthra, Kaikeyi's maidservant whose advice played a significant role in Rama's exile; Shurpanaka, who was disfigured for desiring Laxmanan, and Ghanadhari in the *Mahabharata*, who voluntarily blinded herself for her husband. These women are typically depicted as either villains or objects of pity, with no decision-making power or agency. In contrast, male disabled characters in Indian mythology, such as King Dhritharashtra and Shakuni, are often portrayed as powerful and authoritative figures.

Disabled men are considered desirable despite their disability and are portrayed as possessing characteristics associated with masculin-

ity, like autonomy, strength, and authority. In Malayalam cinema, disabled male heroes challenge the existing norms of masculinity and reconfigure representations of masculinity. In contrast, disabled female characters are depicted as meek and pitiful and are dependent on their non-disabled counterparts. In her article entitled "Masculinities and Disabilities: Reconfiguring the 'Normal Body' in Malayalam Cinema," Angita Ram V., examines how disabled male protagonists in Malayalam cinema disrupt traditional representations of masculinity and challenge existing norms surrounding masculine identities.

In a society that is both ableist and patriarchal, disabled men tend to identify with their masculine traits, such as bravery and independence, rather than their disability. In contrast, disabled women are devalued due to their inability to perform economically productive or reproductive roles such as motherhood (Fine and Asch 6). This societal attitude is often reflected in movies where disabled women are portrayed as insecure and experience low self-esteem due to their inability to perform their gender-specific roles, thus internalising the devaluation of disability (Ghosh 229).

The imposition of normative femininity on the female body through ideal beauty standards and patriarchal cultural practices results in the exclusion of disabled women who cannot perform traditional gender roles, leading to a sense of incompleteness (Ghosh 138). Families often try to 'cure' disabled daughters and make them conform to societal norms through medical discourse and other social institutions. Unless they belong to a privileged background, the lives of disabled women are severely impoverished. Anitha Ghai points out that in a country where female infanticide is widespread; there is no chance of improving the quality of life for disabled women (Ghai 54). This paper analyses how disabled

women in selected movies negotiate gender, sexuality, marriage, and family discourses through the theoretical lens of disability studies. When it comes to analysing the depiction of disabled women, several aspects like their social class, caste and economic background should be considered in the Indian context.

Akale, a 2004 Malayalam film directed by Shyamaprasad, is an adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*. The film features an Anglo-Indian family consisting of Margaret (Mother), Tom (Son), and Rose (Daughter), each of whom harbours unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. Rose, who has a limp on her legs, is deeply insecure about it and is portrayed as a passive, shy, and introverted girl living in isolation. Compared to the non-disabled characters, Rose has limited screen space, and her character is utilised as a catalyst for developing the non-disabled protagonist, Tom. Rose's character is depicted through Tom's eyes, reinforcing the social construction paradigm that characterises people with disabilities as deviant or abnormal. The movie highlights Rose's mother's sole desire to marry off her daughter to a suitable groom, suggesting the societal pressure for disabled individuals to conform to normative standards.

In *Akale*, Rose's character and her disability often serve as a device to develop Tom's character. The film reinforces the idea of non-conforming bodies as the 'Other,' a concept that is deeply ingrained in society and perpetuates negative social identities for people with disabilities. This notion is consistent with the social construction paradigm, which posits that society creates these stigmatising identities that characterise people with disabilities as deviant or abnormal. The film portrays Rose as a character who is not accepted for who she is, and it is evident in the repeated references to her as different or strange. Despite the mother's outward encouragement of Rose's

talents and potential, the underlying worries about her daughter's marriageability looms. The film perpetuates the idea that a person with disability must be married off to rid the family of their burden, thereby underscoring the societal belief that non-conforming bodies are a source of shame and inconvenience.

On one occasion, Rose's mother expresses her frustration with Rose's lack of interest in pursuing education or employment, threatening to marry her. In response, Rose questions who would marry her, given her disability. The mother's desire to conceal Rose's disability and assimilate her into the mainstream, able-bodied and heterosexual society is evident through her efforts to find a suitable husband for Rose. The film depicts the mother's attempts to convince a man who is interested in her daughter that Rose is 'normal' and capable of performing her expected gender role by falsely claiming that she has prepared the entire dinner alone. This deception is intended to create an idealised image of Rose as a perfect bride in the man's mind.

The visual portrayal of an uncomfortable silence at the dinner table when Rose appears with her leg braces is a notable example of how disabled women are often subjected to a particular type of scrutiny in private and public spaces. As Ghosh notes, the societal preference for able-bodied individuals has historically led to feelings of humiliation and inferiority among disabled women (209). Rose's apprehension when her mother requests that she open the door for her brother and his friend can be linked to this phenomenon.

Rose's physical impairment has resulted in her internalising her own devaluation as a woman. This aligns with Nandini Ghosh's argument that disabled femininity is constructed, nurtured, and contested through the strategic management of the impaired body, the sociocul-

tural devaluation of disability in general, and pervasive normative social expectations of women. As a result, Rose experiences feelings of humiliation and inferiority, which is evident in her nervousness when her mother asks her to open the door for her brother and his friend. The imagery of awkward silence at the dinner table, when Rose appears with her steel braces, is an example of how disabled women encounter a particular kind of gaze that stems from the social valuation of perfect bodies (Ghosh 215).

Merrayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum is a 2003 Malayalam film directed by Vinyan, featuring Prithviraj and Ambilidevi as the main characters. The movie centres around the brother, Muthu, and his disabled sister, Meera, and the former's efforts to protect the latter. Living with their grandmother, who considers Meera a curse, the movie portrays the brother's desire to find a suitable husband for his sister who will care for her as he does.

Despite her physical impairment due to cerebral palsy, Meera challenges the common stereotype that women with disabilities are unproductive family members by performing all the household chores in the film. In her article titled "Experiencing the Body: Femininity, Sexuality and Disabled Women in India," Nandini Ghosh explains that a woman's ability to perform domestic work is crucial in determining her suitability for marriage. However, despite Meera's capabilities, she is still considered undesirable as a potential spouse due to the stigmatisation of disabled women as unattractive and asexual. Meera herself internalises this perception and feels like a burden to her brother as he struggles to find her a suitable partner.

In a pivotal scene in the film, a sadguru is shown treating Meera and projecting an image of being capable of curing her disability. Meera

approaches him reverently, but the sadguru's intentions are soon revealed sinister as he attempts to abuse her sexually. This scene highlights how the religious model of disability and its social stigma contribute to extreme violence and abuse among disabled women, as exemplified in Meera's case. Furthermore, Meera's vulnerability to gendered violence, whether emotional or physical, is exacerbated by the poor economic conditions in which she and her brother live.

The film *Bangalore Days*, released in 2014 and directed by Anjali Menon, is a light-hearted romantic comedy that centres around the lives of three cousins who move to Bangalore. Among the characters is Sarah, a paraplegic woman whose relationship with Aju is explored in the bustling city of Bangalore. In contrast to the other films analysed, Sarah is portrayed as an exceptionally independent and confident woman who is gainfully employed and whose mobility is made easy by using an electric wheelchair. Her disability does not seem to significantly impact her day-to-day life, as she navigates the city and easily interacts with others.

Aju developed romantic feelings for Sarah upon hearing her voice as a radio jockey. However, upon meeting her in person, he discovers that she uses a wheelchair, which initially surprises and disconcerts him. Thomson notes that interactions between disabled and non-disabled individuals can often be tense, as the latter may experience emotions such as fear, pity, fascination, or surprise (12). This discomfort can be attributed to the way disability is portrayed in our culture, media, and literature, which reinforces stereotypes and leads to awkwardness between the two groups. Despite this initial shock, the film challenges these stereotypes by portraying Sarah as an individual beyond her disability, prompting Aju to confess his love for her. Notably, Aju's

affection for Sarah is not based on pity or sympathy but on his recognition of her as a person rather than a disabled individual. By the end of the film, Sarah is shown making plans to further her education abroad in Australia.

In contrast to the portrayal of disabled characters in the movies mentioned above, Sarah, the disabled character in *Bangalore Days*, belongs to an affluent family and enjoys certain privileges that are inaccessible to the disabled women depicted in the other movies. Her upper-class status shields her from the stigmatisation and societal devaluation typically associated with physical impairments. She is not made to feel like a burden by her mother or other acquaintances. Her economic standing, social status, and educationally advanced familial background facilitate a life of relative ease and comfort, particularly compared to the experiences of disabled characters in other films.

The case of Rose in *Akale* demonstrates a consistent state of nervousness when navigating public spaces alone, likely due to her disability. Despite her passion for music, Rose ceased attending music classes during her school days due to discomfort at being the centre of attention as she walked with leg braces. This situation is consistent with Susan Lonsdale's observation that disabled women often encounter environmental barriers that require significant time, energy, and monetary resources, ultimately leading to a state of enforced passivity (52). Similarly, Rose also discontinued attending typing classes due to social anxiety and fear of being unable to perform on par with non-disabled peers, ultimately fainting in class and never returning. Overall, the public response to disabled individuals has typically been negative.

In the film *Meerayude Dukavum Muthuvinte Swanapnavum*, the initial scenes depict men engaging in eve teasing and making lewd remarks

towards the female protagonist Meera. This portrayal is consistent with Nandini Ghosh's assertion that the ideology labelling disabled women as sexually unappealing operates to the advantage of men who view them solely as objects of pleasure without any fear of consequences (215). As noted by Renu Addlakha, disabled individuals are often rendered powerless and dependent due to the social stigma attached to their disability rather than the disability itself (234). This dynamic is reflected in Sarah's character, who experiences fear upon realising that Aju is stalking her. However, unlike other disabled individuals, Sarah is portrayed as a bold and confident woman, capable of handling such situations due to her economic independence and access to an environment that accommodates her disability. This privilege is derived from her belonging to a wealthy social class.

Conclusion

Disabled women are frequently subjected to judgments based on ableist and patriarchal ideologies that deny them notions of femininity, desirability, and the ability to perform gender roles. Popular cultural media such as movies have served to reinforce these ideas, further ostracising those who cannot conform to able-bodied standards in a heterosexual society, labelling them as deviant and unfit for mainstream society. The desires and sexual needs of disabled women are often ignored or overlooked. They are frequently portrayed as either asexual or incapable of fulfilling the roles of a wife or mother, rendering them unmarriageable. The idealised representation of women in Malayalam cinema has frequently resulted in the marginalisation of disabled women as an 'Other.'

Malayalam cinema has undergone significant evolution in its representation of disability, particularly when compared to previous eras or the early 2000s, during which disability was of-

ten portrayed through a charity model. The sympathetic portrayal of Meera and the isolated life of Rose have created a negative impression of disability in people's minds, but it has changed a lot by the time of *Bangalore Days*, where Sarah is represented appropriately. Such accurate portrayals have the potential to alter public perceptions of disability to a significant extent. It is essential for popular culture to assume a critical role in challenging the established culture of exclusion and fostering inclusivity by ensuring accurate and appropriate depictions of disability in cinema.

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Language and Narration: A Postmodern Approach to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood, a renowned contemporary Canadian writer. A genre-bending novel, it encapsulates elements of speculative fiction, myth, folk tale, and science fiction to tell the story of Handmaids, a section of women enslaved as mere reproducing creatures in a futuristic, totalitarian regime, Gilead. This paper makes an in-depth analysis of the language and narrative techniques used in the novel. It shows that Atwood has skillfully used quintessential features of postmodern fiction including spatio-temporal distortion, indeterminacy of truth, and intertextuality to create a path-breaking genre, which has elements of speculative fiction, myth, folk tale, etc. The form crafted by Atwood is found to be impactful in this powerful commentary on the misogynistic and patriarchal structures of Gilead, analogy to which can be drawn even from the contemporary world.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead, Narrative Structure, Postmodernism, Myth, and Intertextuality.

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Margaret Atwood is a colossal figure in postmodern literature, renowned for many path-breaking features of her literary styles, including innovative narrative techniques and highly nuanced, multilayered world building. Her versatility is epitomized in her mastery over creating genre-bending narrative marvels out of conventional devices of psychological thriller, speculative fiction, crime novel, gothic romance, and fairy tale. Atwood's penchant for rejecting the conventional mode of writing and to breath freshness and novelty, which are always complimentary to the story being told, has made her a unique voice in literary world. She recuperates ancient myths, fairy tales, folk tales, etc., and reforms them giving a new meaning with modern, parodic twist in the form of a typical postmodern fiction, to make them extremely relevant in contemporary world. In her novels, majority of her female protagonists are first-person narrators who appear as unreliable story tellers. However, the vastness of her literary universe and the immense relatability of her thoughts across epochs make her too big a writer to be branded as merely a feminist. Her novels are usually open-ended and can be interpreted in different viewpoints. She intentionally infuses the exclusive feature of postmodernism, multiplicity of texts with parody and literary allusions, from other literary domains, myths or fairy tales. Atwood usually follows fragmented narrative form, to tell retrospective stories of her female protagonists, which are non-linear in timeline. In Atwood's postmodern novels, the reader is expected to understand the plot through the internal monologue of the main character, who recaps her past life and traumatic childhood or adolescent experiences in the form of flashbacks. Her dexterity with temporal distortion, which is a common convention in postmodern fictions for fragmentation and non-linear narration, is exemplary. She randomly intertwines flashbacks to create a spatio-temporal

distortion that makes the reader feel disoriented in her labyrinth, before the gradual convergence of puzzled pieces into a profound understanding.

The Handmaid's Tale is Atwood's sixth novel, published in 1985. It is a dystopian fiction, set in a near-future New England, a dictatorial, theocratic state known as Gilead that has defeated the United States government. The story is told in a framed perspective: the main character, Offred, a woman fated to live in the Republic of Gilead, kept a recorded journal from which a manuscript has been presented and published in a time after the Republic of Gilead got dethroned. The protagonist is an ordinary woman - raised by a feminist mother, married to a divorced man and mother of a child, but placed in an extraordinary situation. She is arrested when she escapes the country with her husband and child and forced to live as a Handmaid of a Commander and his wife Serena. Recollected by this female narrator, Offred, the whole story focuses on the life of Handmaids in Gilead. The Handmaids in Gilead, "sacred vessels" (Atwood 71) for reproduction, are women allotted to male officers, whose wives have failed to bear children, on the assumption that it is always the woman who is barren. The novel presents a double narrative in a way that the protagonist tells her own tale pointing to the distressing fate of women in Gilead who are used as mere means of procreation. The whole story is orally narrated by Offred because reading and writing is forbidden in Gilead. The narrator tells the reader repeatedly that she is reporting a story:

I would like to believe it is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.... If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after

it. I can pick up where I left off.... It isn't a story I'm telling. It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else. (Atwood 50)

Language and Narrative Techniques

Literally, *The Handmaid's Tale* is purely a fictional narrative activating the readers to imagine what kind of values might develop if environmental pollution due to chemical poisoning, causes most of the human race to become sterile. The novel impacts the reader with its unique voice, its incantatory first-person enunciation, Biblical connotations, and amazing metaphors. Like *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* is also a first-person narrative. The fiction is like a patchwork or a collage as the story is presented in fragments. Offred offers subjective often subversive view of her life and surroundings through the story. She herself calls her story, "sad, and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story" (334), which is even hard for the narrator to reconstruct the experiences and also difficult for the reader to understand. Signaling the postmodern nature of Atwood's narrative technique, Offred uses a complex form of narrative and becomes a self-conscious narrator alternating between her previous life and her present-day position in Gilead. Atwood uses flashbacks as a narrative strategy in the form of Offred's memories and reminiscences. The flashback, abundantly used as a powerful tool, acts as an outlet for Offred to think freely her past life as a wife and a mother. The coalterance of Offred's nostalgic past with the painful present is evolved as a successful narrative device handled exultantly by Atwood. Author's choice of presenting the novel in terms

of headed chapters that oscillate between her peaceful past life and chaotic present, is captivating. Symbolic style enriched with Biblical metaphors is also quite fascinating. Offred's reflection of the past depicting how she became a victim of the theocratic regime, contrasts meticulously with the miserable present life. The painstaking presentation of her present mechanical life leads readers to the understanding of the gist of the story.

The story begins with the first-person enunciation of Offred describing an old gymnasium where sense of longing and loss floats in the atmosphere.

We slept in what had once been the gymnasium...There was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without a shape and name. (3)

Offred and other Handmaids sleep on army-issued cots where Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrol carrying cattle prods. Offred simply gives a detailed account of a room without elucidating the story much in the first chapter, but the picture foreshadows the real, brutal depictions of the oppression of women. The images of loss and remembrance help to sprout up in our mind the hidden themes, manipulation of power, and gender inequality exemplified in the chapters ahead; it also emphasizes the significance of memory and past to weave a plot from a number of interconnected elements in order to narrate a contemporary story of identity crisis of women. Atwood's brilliant use of variety of narrative techniques and styles become appropriate to disclose the severity of women's life in a dangerous world of religious extremism forewarning the corrupt future of American society under a fundamentalist Christian regime. Fragmented way of writing correctly conveys Offred's sense of feeling which leaves the reader confused and left to join

together the given information. Atwood's plentiful use of shift in time technique adds a greater suggestion to the whole narrative particularly in 'Historical Notes.' The final chapter is based on a transcript of a dialogue from "The Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" which takes place in 2195 in Nunavit (Modern-day Northern Canada).

This is the first novel of Atwood, set outside of Canada, in the US. Most of the action of the novel takes place in the Commander's household. It is virtually a prison for Offred, where she is being surveyed all the time. The house is in the vicinity of old Harvard University. The novel uses this setting to underline how quickly the US has been overrun by the totalitarian government. Here Harvard stands for a symbol of the inverted world that Gilead has formed. Harvard is now a detention centre run by the Eyes, Gilead's police. Bodies of executed rebels hang around the building and mass executions takes place in university yard. Harvard, which was a place instituted to pursue knowledge and truth becomes a place of subjugation, torture and denial of every value which a university is supposed to inculcate. All old buildings are still in use like this.

The language and narration hugely resonate with the mythological and archetypal underpinnings in the novel. Atwood depicts a theocratic society, bereft of moral values, through powerful language, contextual use of images and other literary devices. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, language plays a remarkable role as an expedient to exercise power on the marginalised. Atwood demonstrates in-detail how language is being manipulated as a prerequisite for the achievement of power and once the power has been attained; every important characteristic of human condition – identity, memory, and freedom - faces the possibility of permanent damage. She attempts to show the enriching aspects of language too in

the lives of people, specifically in the life of Offred in a way that language helps her to restore her memory. "...it's as dangerous not to speak" (Atwood 37). Language cannot be separated from memory because it is with language that everybody acknowledges memories and share it with others. Language is a major element in the survival of a society also, since people communicate in some manner to share histories and expectations for the future.

In Gilead, language facilitates power. One of the major things changed by the dictator government, to restrict and brainwash the society, is the prohibition of words that connect them with past life and adding new terms with religious undertones. Language is used willfully to dehumanize people and to make them feel alienated. The initial step of dehumanizing is making people feel disconnected from their identities and so government prohibits the usages of their names. Giving names of their Commanders to Handmaids suggests that they are not only without their identities but just being a property of the Commanders, they are living with:

My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. For myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes closed, and the name floats there behind my eyed, not quite within reach, shining in the dark. (104)

Personal information, even name is not considered pertinent in the authoritarian regime. By taking away Handmaids' individuality and self-consciousness, their 'buried treasures,' the government objectifies women and disavows the fundamental human value of a person. The attempt of Offred to downplay the loss of her name and identity, miserably fails and she realizes that a name holds more meaning than a simple telephone number. A Handmaid is a mere passive and interchangeable object in Gilead.

The misogynistic ruling class monopolizes language through censorship of books and control of discourses to strengthen their position of leadership. Reading and writing are officially 'outlawed' for its citizens, specifically Handmaids. Surprisingly the Handmaids are not permitted to speak to each other. So, they manage to draw other's attention whispering quietly at night. Gossiping is a kind of revolt, viewing that the need to tell stories and connect socially is a solid human desire that not even Gilead's threats can subjugate. "I long for it. At least it was talk. An exchange, of sorts" (12). Offred says,

I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thoughts must be rationed.... Thinking can hurt your chances; I intend to last. (8)

Thoughts, a form of mental language, are articulated through words. The ability to speak, read, write, and think is considered as a threat to the extreme, fundamentalist government of Gilead because the male-controlled ruling class recognises the power of words as weapons that can help the Handmaids to become free from the slavery. Though the government deploys emissaries and guards to implement its laws the actual power lies in the government's control of language. When Offred finds the Latin phrase, *Nolite Te Bastardes Carborundorum*, carved in the corner of her closet by her predecessor, who failed to

bear a child for the Commander and his wife, she cannot translate it and understand its meaning. But that Latin phrase ignites the fire of freedom in her mind and brings hope in her life:

I didn't know what it meant, or even what language it was it. I thought it might be Latin. Stills, it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered. Except by me, for whom it was intended. It was intended for whoever came next.

It pleases me to ponder this message. It pleases me to think I'm communing with her, this unknown woman... Sometimes I repeat the words to myself. They give me a small joy. (65)

Language always has a hidden power to transport the readers to a new realm, inspire a movement, and bring hope to those who identify with the characters.

In Gilead, only ruling class has permission to read books. The Handmaids are trained to recite only the distorted version of Biblical verses to strengthen their submissiveness. All Biblical references quoted in the text are quite ironic since the practices of the government are not sacred; instead, they intentionally utilize the verses for their advantages to make people helpless and speechless because people cannot argue against something holy and spiritual. Biblical allusions are very common in the novel and it is a constant reminder of the theocratic rule of 'far-fetched Gilead.' There are various situations in which the authorities purposefully misquote or omit certain part of the Bible. Offred also notices the incongruities and concedes it in her story telling.

Atwood uses certain diction and sentence pattern to expose that the solid, dictatorial, and

inhuman structures of Gileadean society are built on foundations of gender inequality. The oppressive language of Gilead discloses the implications of power and constant surveillance. Offred analyses the vernacular and reveals its commonly ignored meanings:

I wait, for the household to assemble.
Household: that is what we are. The
Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part.
The hold a ship. Hollow. (99)

Here, Atwood takes a neutral word 'household' and turns it into something negative to symbolize the regressive male domination. Even women in positions of power like Aunt Lydia are not permitted to keep guns, only cattle prods. The Commander's wife, Serena Joy, once a strong supporter of right-wing religious philosophies, now is trapped herself in the world she promoted once:

Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home; about how women should stay home...She doesn't make any speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (56, 57)

Serena Joy was a famous television anchor and had made religious speeches voicing her views but in Gilead she is quietened and identified by her role as a wife. The powerful irony lays in the fact that Serena's withdrawal of voice and power of words, she can no longer use, is the actual result of having been 'taken at her word'. Atwood's remarkable use of pun and ambiguity, to highlight the crux of the story, is clearly seen in these illustrations. Another examples are - "Habits are hard to break" (31) and,

The difference between *lie* and *lay*. Lay is always passive. Even men used to say, I'd like to get laid. Though sometimes they said, I'd like to lay her. All this is pure speculation. I don't really know what men used to say. I had only their words for it. I lie, then, inside the room. (47)

Atwood puns to accomplish an impressive range of meanings. Wordplay is used extensively to manipulate the meaning of words in a manner that emphasizes the dystopic horrors associated with Gilead. The way Atwood uses Freudian imagery is quite dazzling and adds additional meaning to the context, asserting 'the power of the words':

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost; I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is env. Just holding it is envy. I envy the Commander his pen it's one more thing I would like to steal. (234)

Atwood's facile use of stream of consciousness and manipulation of language produce fascinating, multi-level rhetorical manoeuvres contrasting weakness with supremacy or cruelty with susceptibility. Language as well as allusion, symbolism, images, motifs, and metaphors of all kinds suggest the politics that surround women's issues and that is projected through the telling of the tale. Colour of the Handmaid's robe, red, evokes more than the fairy tale image of Little Red Riding Hood. Atwood enlarges the emblematic power of the colour, red using it to describe blood, the life force, violence, and death. Another common use of the colour is to designate the tulips in Serena Joy's Garden. The flora and fauna

inscribed in the background of the text also have their connotations, like the blue irises that hint of the Greek goddess of the rainbow, the Kore, Virgin or female soul. Even the ecology is closely linked with the gist of the story. The desensitized society is portrayed vividly with the colour structure assigned to various characters who are representatives of their class.

The word 'Eye' is used in the novel to denote the omnipresent surveillance and authority. The Eyes are the frightening, violent, and secretive enforcers of solid Gilead's laws. Offred doubts that anyone she meets, the doctor or even Ofglen, a fellow Handmaid, might be an Eye; she perceives Eyes everywhere, in a tour guide's badge or in her anklet tattoo. The most complex image of Eye is a blank hole in the plastered over-light socket that Offred sees in her room, as a blind eye.

... in the centre of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to. (7)

When she understands that the previous Handmaid hanged herself from the light fixture, the blank space perceived as Eyes becomes symbol of death and sovereignty.

Makeup signifies various paradoxes related to power and sexuality. Offred reminisces her past life and lost freedom as she is not permitted to wear makeup. But the commander thinks that the lack of makeup actually represents women's freedom to choose. He sees that in Jezebel; every woman wears makeup with the hope of attracting business. Handmaids should not wear makeup and attempt to be good-looking and so Offred saves her butter to use as moisturizing cream, living in a room with no mirrors.

Memory and past are two significant factors in Atwood's narrative. These are the two keywords that can be easily related to history. History, as an account of certain events and incidents as well as personal history of individuals, plays a pivotal role in Atwood's novels. Atwood's some fictions like *Surfacing* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, are fine examples of what postmodern literary theorists call, 'Historiographic Metafiction,' a postmodern interpretation of history. The postmodern idea of history repudiates the humanist notion that it corresponds faithfully to reality and asserts that it is textual and mediated in order to validate power centres. The renowned Canadian theorist, Linda Hutcheon coined the term Historiographic Metafiction to refer the works that fictionalise real historical events or figures. She further elaborates it in her *A Poetics of Postmodern*,

By this I mean those well-known or popular novels which are both intensively self-reflexive yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages. (5)

Historiographic Metafiction is a typical postmodern style with its practice of textual play, parody, historical reconceptualization, and distortion of certain episodes.

In Atwood's fiction, the past events in the characters' lives become fundamental in their development and transformation. However, the past is approached from the context of a totally different present scenario and the unreliable narrator and the narrative style make the authenticity of the past, dubious. At some significant points in their lives, generally a powerful present, memories of the past come back as displaced fragments. Sometimes even the narrator, Offred is not confident of their capability to know the past as a continuum, with certainty. *The Handmaid's Tale* invokes a past that is admired, worshiped and

idealized – the Biblical Gilead of Jacob, Rachel, and their Handmaid. Gileadeans, in an attempt to construct a society based on the values system and the standards of this mythological past, in fact destabilize it. Such moral values and ideals of the past, often considered as perfect and supreme can only remain symbolic and its practical presentation renders them futile and impractical in the contemporary scenario. In 'The Historical Notes,' Professor Pieixoto, proclaims that the text is only a reconstruction based on hypotheses, since the personages of the past no longer exist and the 'truth' remains strange and mysterious. Presenting a multi-layered temporal structure, this work of fiction makes extensive use of history and myth to bring light to the unaddressed issues of woman's life. Through these open-ended texts, hinting at the vast possibilities of present, Atwood endeavours to announce that historians always construct histories according to their own whims and fancies just as Pieixoto and other academicians did in 'The Historical Notes.'

Conclusion

After a thorough textual and stylistic analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, it can be concluded that Atwood is versatile in adopting quintessential, postmodern expressions like indeterminacy of truth, open-ends, finely calibrated sentences with brilliant use of intertextuality for voicing nuances and subtleties and incoherence, non-linear narrative and fragmentation through well-crafted spatio-temporal distortions. The novel is a classic example of dismantling the conventional norms of structure and narration and orchestrating a symphony out of distinct and seemingly incompatible devices such as oral style of storytelling, myth, folk tales, and speculative fiction.

However, as enterprising Atwood is with the form, the content is equally of highest quality, with universality and eternity of its relevance and relatability. Her narrative experiments never stick out of context, rather they widen the context. As with the latest developments in Afghanistan, where women are bearing the brunt of a totalitarian, theocratic, and regressive regime, one is reminded of the fact that tragedy of Hand-maids could unravel in front of us at any time. However poignant it is, one cannot help but marvel at the prescience of Atwood's writing.

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Through the Looking Glass: Reading *Almond* and *Demian* through an Intertextual Queer Lens

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Abstract

Exploring the nature of male friendships in Herman Hesse's *Demian* and Won Pyung Sohn's *Almond* through an intertextual queer reading with a focus on hypermasculinity and coded queerness helps one to decode the implicit queer codes in these texts. Both these novels do not have overtly queer characters; thus, queerness exists in these novels in a coded fashion that calls for a close reading which could decode the homophilic undercurrents. An extensive and detailed analysis of the relationship and interactions shared between the male characters, Hesse's Demian and Sinclair, and Sohn's Yunjae and Gon, along with their relationship with other female characters like Frau Eva and Dora is examined to prove how the male protagonists lust after visibly masculine women to mask their homosexual desires. In *Demian*, Sinclair falls in love with Demian's mother—someone who resembles Demian in all aspects but who is a female, which makes her someone who Sinclair could 'legitimately' pursue. Demian's mother is visibly masculine while being a biological female who looks like her son. Yunjae's sudden friendship with Dora can be understood along the same vein. One of the strategies to fight the heteropatriarchy is to insert new queer elements in popular culture. By recovering the queer voices that echo deep within the text, one does not need to make place for queer art in the canon that is decided and imposed by white, heterosexual, hegemonic patriarchal structure, as the queer readings prove them to be already present in the narratives. Hence, the importance of queering up works that are already present in the collective consciousness and that count with the respect and admiration of the people who are in charge of controlling the mainstream and academic media assumes more relevance.

Keywords: *Queer Theory, Intertextuality, Hypermasculinity, Heteronormativity, and Anima and Animus.*

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Queerness in texts can be coded – only meant to be understood by queer people, it can be a subtext – cleverly slipped in, or the queerness can be accidental – unintended but so obvious which makes it difficult to deny it. All of the above expressions of queerness are valid. Ultimately queerness exists in popular texts regardless of whether the texts themselves are “about queers” (Doty 4). One might wonder what a deeply psychological and spiritual work from the 1920s by a well-known male German author has in common with a modern-day young adult novel written by a female Korean author. They are far removed from each other by their cultural and historic contexts still the intertextuality manages to shine through the layers of the narrative, and into the subtle nuances of the characters and their journey. In both *Almond* and *Demian*, the male protagonist is an outsider who undergoes an introspective journey, discovering himself through friendship with another man. This friend is depicted as rebellious, enigmatic, and embodying Otherness, and ultimately plays a pivotal role in the protagonist’s personal development. Though these novels do not feature queer characters, the exploration into the inter-textual elements of both these texts helped bring them together and further discover as well as enrich the underlying queer subtext through an extensive queer reading of the novels with careful consideration of the construction of masculinity.

Almond opens with the Yunjae narrating the story of his life, “This story is, in short, about a monster meeting another monster. One of the monsters is me” (Sohn 9). Sohn alludes to the addition of another ‘monster’ from the very beginning. The idea of the two male protagonists being presented as ‘monsters’ also point towards their outsidership and otherness, which in turn intersect with and connote queerness—such as,

for instance, homoeroticism and nonconformism.

Now let’s consider *Demian*. The first chapter titled ‘Two Worlds’ starts with Sinclair trying to recall his life back when he was ten. Thus, a structural similarity becomes quite evident in *Demian* and *Almond*, the narratives centre around the protagonists and their experiences, starting from a very young age and advancing into their youth all the while unfolding the story from a clearly subjective and deeply personal space. For young Sinclair, *Demian* comes into life as a saviour and protector who rescues him from the veiled mysteries and wickedness of the ‘other world,’ from Kromer and his threats — someone who will guide him to the light while simultaneously being a tempter and moreover a link with the second, evil world.

Salvation from my tormentor came from a totally unexpected quarter, and at the same time I was conscious of a new element in my life which has affected me right up to the present day. (Hesse 29)

Demian’s influence on Sinclair’s life is made evident through this statement. Sinclair perceives *Demian* as a self-confident upper-class man with a firm tone who is different from the rest. The idea of Otherness and outsidership is thus echoed in the way *Demian* is constructed throughout the narrative. He is seen as somebody mature beyond his years, who didn’t take part in games or school fights but was always different. The second chapter titled ‘Cain’ is also replete with queer cues even though the narrative does not explicitly endorse or connote queerness. The lines, “I kept glancing over towards *Demian* whose face held a peculiar fascination for me” (29), further points at Sinclair being intrigued by the mysterious *Demian*, is also at times shy when

interacting with the upper-class man. This fascination reverberates throughout both *Almond* and *Demian* on several levels. When Gon meets Yunjae for the first time he is intrigued by his inability to feel emotions. He becomes invested in his effort to make Yunjae feel anything.

The apathy and derision that Sinclair felt for Demian at first also finds expression in *Almond* but to a higher degree. While Gon becomes a bully to Yunjae during the early stages of their relationship, Demian on the other hand makes a faster transition into being a central part of Sinclair and his journey to find himself. He serves the role of a spiritual guide to young Sinclair, a guide who seems to have a sense of clairvoyance in the way he interacts with him. It is as if he knew all along that Sinclair's fate was intertwined with his. Demian drawing the sparrowhawk which later manifests as the bird fighting its way out of the egg to fly to the god named Abraxas — a significant symbol in Sinclair's journey, and him encouraging Sinclair to understand the 'mark' and secret interpretations of bible stories all point towards a very subversive act of trying to dispel the metanarratives — in this reading in particular they connote queerness and non-conformity.

It is necessary that one looks deeply into Demian as a character. He openly expresses his fondness and interest in Sinclair as a person and his urge to discover what it's like inside him. But all these conversations arise out of the spiritual surface of the story and only regains new meaning when read along with the queer subtext. Explaining why he sat next to Sinclair, Demian says;

At the same time your will accorded with mine and helped me. Only when I found myself sitting in front of you did I realize that my wish was only half fulfilled and that my sole wish had been to sit next to you. (Hesse 63)

Thus, the desire and fascination Sinclair felt is reciprocated by Demian as well. But more importantly Demian as a person is deeply mysterious and incomprehensible to a certain point. In him ambivalence and contrariness find expression, he is abraxas, both man and woman, God and devil, whose embrace is both an act of worship and crime, and whose presence evokes both terror and bliss. In other words, there occurs a merging of everything into its opposite within him — "For in his gaze I saw once again the strange look, the animal-like timelessness that had no age" (69). Sinclair offers reverence and admiration towards Demian which at times evolve into a deep sense of obsessive dependence on Demian — "I often felt a great longing for Demian; but no less often I hated him" (Hesse 76), and when Demian withdraws from Sinclair after a vigorous argument Sinclair can't bear the separation — "Never had I felt so lonely. I had no part in him; he was beyond my reach" (73); "Demian had gone away. I was left alone" (74). In the second phase of his life, where he joins the university Sinclair is constantly reminded of Demian's absence and often succumbs to fits of gnawing melancholy and despair.

The subject of masculinity and femininity finding expression in Demian is central to the narrative of the novel. For Sinclair, Demian often manifests as an androgynous and mysterious figure, who sometimes appears in his dreams as a womanly figure—

I saw Demian's face and remarked that it was not a boy's face but a man's and then I saw, or rather became aware, that it was not really the face of a man either; it had something different about it, almost a feminine element. (56)

Carl Jung's theoretical framework of Anima and Animus throws more light on this aspect of the narrative. Being opposite to the embodied

sexual identity, Anima and Animus are most easily related to the erotic encounters and partners, and inspire the creative and artistic imagination. In relationships, they are easily projected to the potential partners one is unconsciously attracted to (Akhazarova 2). The time with Demian is also a period of sexual exploration for Sinclair. He learns to acknowledge and accept his desires. Consequently, Sinclair perceiving Demian as a feminine figure is thus explained.

In dreams, the Anima/Animus archetype manifests in figures of strangers that are very attractive and invite us to travel to the unknown, like what happened to Dante when he saw his Beatrice. Sinclair names the lofty and revered image that he constructs after his encounter with a tall and slender lady with a boyish face on his evening walk as Beatrice. He further elaborates that the image of Beatrice displayed the slenderness and boyishness of forms that he loved. In the absence of Demian, Beatrice becomes for Sinclair a receptacle to project his love and admiration. Demian being conceived in the image of a boyish girl can also be attributed to the underlying heteronormative narratives and codes that permeate the society. When Sinclair attempts to paint the image of Beatrice, it results in a dream face instead that looked more like a young man's face than a girl's which evolves into Demian's likeness—

That face had something to say it belonged to me, it made demands on me. And it resembled some body, I didn't know whom; now the dreams returned, an entirely new set of images; very often the portrait I had painted showed up in them (99); I suddenly recognized it...Why had it taken me so long to discover it? It was Demian's face. (Herman 99)

Thus, Demian becomes a carrier of an image of Sinclair's Anima, with whose help he re-

turns to his inner values and to the sensitive deep, emotional, poetic, and contemplative side of his individuality.

While, in *Demian*, the young narrator traverses the different paths of life to find his true vocation: to find himself, *Almond* offers us a narrator who is on the journey to find his emotions, to feel something for the first time. Yunjae is alexythmic, which is a mental health condition where a person is unable to identify and express one's feelings. The real problem for people with alexithymia is not so much that they have no words for their emotions, but that they lack the emotions themselves. The levels of alexithymia can also vary from person to person which makes certain people more perceptive to emotions than others. Yunjae has a smaller inborn amygdala. In this case, fear is the emotion these parts of the brain are least able to identify and express. Yunjae has an extremely heteronormative conception of what it means to be 'normal' or 'ordinary.' The patriarchal heteronormative societies have defined the idea of being 'normal' as that of being married to someone from the opposite sex (in this case: a woman) and having kids, which is essentially reflected in Yunjae's conversations. He is conditioned to think so by the omnipresent idea of heteronormativity that permeates the social systems. Moreover, this dilemma becomes a main reason which stops Gon and Yunjae from being able to understand their feelings. One of the key concepts of queer theory is the very idea of 'heteronormativity,' which establishes the cis-gender heterosexual relationships as the norm and thereby viewing any other patterns which deviate from this established 'normal' as the 'Other.'

The constant bullying Gon lets out on Yunjae in the initial chapters is quite similar to that of a clichéd closeted bully. Slurs and cuss words are constantly hurled upon Yunjae but this

does not faze him. Gon punches him, trips him and slaps him on the back of his head. Throughout all this Yunjae does not react. The lack of any kind of reaction makes him more aggressive. In a queer reading setting, this behaviour from Gon can also be interpreted as homophobic aggression or as a struggle to process one's own sexuality. Finally, the bullying comes to an end after Gon beats up Yunjae near the school incinerator.

Gon does not feel welcome in his own home and struggles to adjust. His mother's death and his father's lack of love or care towards him, breaks him from within. The trauma Gon had to endure while living in streets, slums, foster homes, and what made him end up in juvenile detention centre is completely side lined by others but Yunjae seems to understand Gon on a deeper level and from there on Gon becomes a constant subject of his thoughts.

The intertextual elements that Sohn introduces throughout *Almond* seems intentional, acting as little clues to understand the novel and its coded messages. These intertexts often point at the struggles the characters undergo to come into terms with their sexuality and hint at the implicit queerness of the characters. *Demian* by Herman Hesse is one such clue which foreshadows Yunjae's strange friendship with Gon and then with Dora.

In chapter Twenty Six, Professor Yun comes to Yunjae's used bookstore and buys a copy of *Demian*. Here we have the purest form of intertextuality and the only direct one to *Demian* that we can find in *Almond*. This element of intertextuality does open up scope for parallel reading of how Sinclair later in the story falls in love with Demian's mother who looks and resembles Demian while also being masculine presenting female, which makes her someone who Sinclair could 'legitimately' consider as a lover. This struggle is later manifested in *Almond* too.

Yunjae's brief friendship with Dora, who is an athlete with some masculine features ultimately bears similarity to how Sinclair infatuates over masculine women. Gon and Yunjae feel this unnameable magnetic attraction between them but they do not act on it. But opposed to Sinclair, Yunjae does not have any point of reference to compare what he feels for Dora. In the heteronormative conception when romantic relationships do not allow both these men to pursue a male lover, they opt for masculine women. This also calls for a discussion on the way masculinity is constructed in these novels, which would be carefully considered and dealt with in detail as one moves further.

After the pizzeria incident, Gon becomes a regular visitor in Yunjae's book store. However, both boys ignore each other at school, making it an "unspoken agreement" between them (Sohn 105). This opens room for an interpretation where the boys could be either afraid of others knowing about their 'special relationship,' or their internalized homophobia or fear of coming into terms with their own feelings is stopping them from admitting their close-knit relationship outside their little bubble. Their conversations flow from playful banter to discussions about porn magazines. They have passionate discussions about Brooke Shields and Gon even makes innuendos about masturbating in a later chapter. There is a sense of intimacy that grows between them but it is still veiled under a heteronormative blanket as most of these intimate conversations they share in the beginning are solely about women. This behaviour can be seen as an attempt to overcompensate, or to cover up, their own homosexual desires.

The term 'hyper masculinity' applies to these exchanges. In reaction to unconscious homoerotic feelings, males sometimes express masculine traits that they think will mask their de-

sire. 'Hyper masculinity' can be expressed verbally, physically or at times violently. In this case, males discuss a female in crude manner. 'Homosexual panic' is also another term often associated with hyper masculinity (Chesler 53). It is a psychological and sociological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and human male sexuality. Within psychology, this term has been used ever since the publication of research by Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin in 1984. Mosher and Sirkin operationally define hypermasculinity or the 'macho personality' as consisting of three variables: callous sexual attitudes toward women, the belief that violence is manly, and the experience of danger as exciting (Mosher and Serkin 150, 163). Research has found that hypermasculinity is associated with sexual and physical aggression towards women and perceived gay men. However, when one considers the construction of masculinity in *Demian*, it does not take a violent form but is more aligned to the traditional obligations expected from men. The old stereotypes, lurking everywhere, prove to be almost insurmountable. More often, it is the social and historical context, and the existing power structures which configure the subject and their masculinity (Horlacher 6).

Studies suggest that masculine ideals significantly affect many gay men. The reality is that traditional masculine ideals affect how gay men feel about themselves and their same-sex relationships. In particular, gay men report that masculine ideals restrict the degree to which they could openly communicate and express themselves with one another. Gon initially expresses hyper masculinity through his violent and abusive behaviour towards Yunjae. Later it is toned down to a verbal level. In other words, a queer reading brings more perspectives into these conversations shared by Gon and Yunjae. This also cements the conjecture made earlier of Gon be-

ing a closeted bully. However, as the story progresses, one sees this mask crumbling slowly, the facade Gon puts up starts to break and disintegrates eventually. "He sounded much softer, despite the swearword," (Sohn 111) "Something was different now. Something had just changed in the moment," (113) all these inner thoughts Yunjae has while being with Gon points towards this subtle development between them.

There are some major incidents in part two of *Almond* that can be analysed to understand the homophilic undercurrents. The evening talk shared by Gon and Yunjae in chapter forty-two hints a lot towards a shift that happened in their relationship dynamic. Gon talks about destiny and time in this chapter, which is very unlike him.

He gazed into the distance and lowered his voice, 'I mean, you and me, maybe someday, we might become people we never imagined we'd be.' (113)

These lines have so many implied meanings that poignantly expresses the hope that he has for their relationship to turn into something different in future, or his own struggle to come out of the closet and embrace his identity. What really makes this interaction more meaningful to this reading is the book that Yunjae recommends to Gon at the end of the evening-

I suggested *The Art of Loving* by a foreign author.* He looked at the title and wore a strange smile. He brought the book back a few days later, telling me to cut the bullshit, but I thought the recommendation still made sense. (114)

Won Pyung Sohn has created a cryptex here in order to convey the nuanced and intricate meaning that underlies the text, in a coded fashion. The annotation towards the end of the novel suggests that *The Art of Loving* is indeed the Ko-

rean translation of *Almond* itself. That helps reach a conclusion that Sohn coded the novel in a complex pattern where multiple realities exist together, Gon was indeed reading the story of two boys who had a strange friendship. This meta-textual reference further solidifies the queer interpretation of the novel. Gon's outburst after reading the book can be understood as a product of his fear to come out of the closet and face his feelings towards Yunjae. The heteronormativity and homophobic world they live in does not make it any easier for them either.

In part three of *Almond*, Sohn introduces a female character named Dora. The insertion of this character into the storyline is sudden and almost unnatural. The allusion to *Demian* made in chapter twenty-six, gains importance here.

There she was, the tall, almost masculine figure, looking like her son, unapproachable, daimon and mother ... fate and lover. (Hesse 145)

Sinclair's attraction towards Demian's mother who looks exactly like her son, who is tall as well as masculine, is undeniably, him confusing his dreams and visions about Demian. He projects it onto Demian's mother who is a biological female, thereby legitimizing his attraction. Analysing the homophilic undercurrents from the previous chapters further corroborates Sinclair's decision to choose Demian's mother as his lover instead of him — "My longing for Max Demian grew strong again" (100), "I searched out every recollection of Max Demian" (103),

My thoughts...They were filled with Demian; Sinclair goes as far as calling Demian his destiny — it was directed at some goal, at Demian, at a far-off destiny. (106)

But his conscience also feels tortured as if by some frightful sin whenever he has dreams

about this destiny. Despite realising his own image in Demian's painting, Sinclair projects his feelings on Demian's mother because for him the thought of a romantic relationship with his male friend is inconceivable. Frau Eva's character also evokes mystery and ambiguity to the point we feel her character bleeding into and melding with that of Demian's. It could be possible that Eva might just be an extension of Demian's feminine side or a tangible being on to whom Sinclair projects his likeness for Demian. When both Sinclair and Yunjae get close to Eva and Dora respectively we also see Demian and Gon growing apart from them to a certain degree. Demian's face is described as "hollow and expressed nothing but a terrible fixity" (169). This suggests that he is withdrawing from Sinclair but it pains him to do so.

Yunjae's friendship with Dora resembles similar themes. She is an athlete, which adds to the similarity of Sinclair infatuated over masculine Frau Eva. The imagery Sohn uses when Yunjae is with Dora is also worth noting. Fallen leaves, rain storms, and earthquake are some of the common images. Most of the time Yunjae appears almost allergic to Dora's presence, she confuses him and he often unknowingly compares his experience with her to that of the time he and Gon spent together. Being around Dora brought "contrary images all at once" and Yunjae says how "it prickled, a heavy rock dropped in my heart. An unpleasant weight" (Sohn 144). The overall discomfort that permeates these chapters is apparent.

In a recent book review of *Almond*, the author writes—

The girl, who appears very late in the story, felt like an unwelcome addition to the story as it suggested that 'love' is some magical cure. Still, I did like that seeing the ways in which Gon and Yunjae try to better each other. (Luce)

However, another perspective is also possible. Sohn's addition of Dora into the story seems like a deliberate decision, like the abruptness and unfamiliarity was intended. She made sure to contrive the story in a manner which made the heterosexual relationship seem unnatural and abrupt. This in turn makes one see Gon's and Yunjae's relationship in a new light, how natural and affectionate their interactions seem. Among the constant comparisons Yunjae makes between Gon and Dora, he also feels like he is keeping a secret from Gon while being with Dora. This sense of deep guilt is another indicator towards the real depth the relationship the boys share. Because there is no place for guilt unless there's real feelings involved. Towards this part of the novel there is a significant development in the way Yunjae is able to grasp emotions. The time along with and apart from Gon had triggered many emotions in him even though he is not able to feel or identify them to its fullness. Time away from Gon also helps him to come into terms with the importance of Gon in his life.

This can be coupled with Gon distancing himself from Yunjae after he finds out about Yunjae and Dora. There is a deep sense of hurt in Gon's mind when he says "I'm jealous you're getting so much of what you can't even feel" towards the end of part three. The reader saw how much Gon tried to make Yunjae feel something during the 'butterfly incident,' it also took an emotional toll on Gon and made him break down towards the end. So, it's justified that Gon feels sad, hurt and jealous when Yunjae's feelings are not seemingly directed towards him but towards some girl who does not even know Yunjae like he does.

Part Four, the last part of *Almond* is built upon the theme of acceptance. The novel has an open ending which further opens the door for more readings. Sohn has made use of imagery

throughout the novel to subtly hint at a certain direction the ending could take. The symbolism made by adapting the four seasons into the novel adds additional layers of meanings. When Yunjae and Gon started to hang out together it was during their summer vacations. Summer often symbolizes freedom and growth for characters as they search for loves, self-acceptance and their identities. This is true for Gon and Yunjae as well, they are often seen as struggling to come into terms with their feelings and accept themselves. As Yunjae starts to spend more time with Dora, Gon distances himself from them. All of this happens during fall. Here autumn represents the sadness and hollowness felt by the characters. Gon physically removes himself from Yunjae's life by the end of part three, but in the final part, Yunjae is seen seeking after Gon to bring him back home after he runs away to join some rowdy gang. Dora on the other hand almost completely disappears after part three and is non-existent in part four apart from a postcard she sends to Yunjae saying she has changed schools. What led Gon spiraling down into the dark deep abyss once again was the absence of Yunjae from his life. Yunjae was the anchor which kept Gon sane while being constantly ostracized and blamed by everyone else.

Focusing on some of the key incidents from the final part can add to the reading. While Yunjae tries to talk Gon into coming back home with him, Steel Wire, the leader of the gang who Gon joined arrives at the scene. He asks Gon to prove himself to be a worthy member of the gang by attacking his friend but Gon fails—

Gon turned his back on me as he put up his elbows to cover his eyes, his body trembling... 'let's go. I offered my hand. 'Let's get out of here.' (177)

Gon's love for Yunjae makes him incapable of inflicting any harm on him and just the thought

of doing something so cruel breaks him down. Steel wire then turns towards Yunjae. Amazed by his fearlessness and resilience, he asks Yunjae, what he would do to have Gon back. To which Yunjae answers with 'anything.' There is a lot to unpack in this scene. Yunjae answering with an affirmative once again when asked "even if you could die?" and Gon screaming and wailing saying "stop, please stop hurt me instead" is a verbal proclamation of the ultimate sacrifice of love, to give up one's own life for a loved one.

In chapter seventy-three, when Yunjae gets stabbed while trying to save Gon, this sacrifice becomes real. This is also reminiscent of the tomb scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, and also the scene from *Hamlet*, where Hamlet dies in the arms of his friend Horatio, who is read as Hamlet's lover in many queer interpretations of the play. The ending scene of *Demian* also bears parallels with this moment. While being deployed in the war-front Sinclair has a strange hallucinatory vision which makes him feel that a guide and leader is nearby. The godlike form that appears before him bears the features of Frau Eva but later when the soldiers rescue Sinclair from under the rubble and move him to a cellar, he feels the figure drawing him onwards to reveal itself to be Demian and not Frau Eva— "Now I was at my goal...He had the 'sign' on his forehead. It was Demian" (183).

Demian taking care of an injured Sinclair who was at the verge of death resonates with the scene from *Hamlet* and *Almond* in a potent manner. Furthermore, the ending of *Demian* also reinforces the implicit queer cues that suggest a possible queer reading. When Demian kisses Sinclair on the lips claiming Frau Eva asked to pass on the kiss from her, the moment evolves to become the ultimate evocative expression of Demian's love that after all this time, manifests itself through a tangible and deeply intimate action like a kiss on the mouth. This nuanced limi-

nal moment also exudes powerful melancholy as both Demian and Sinclair finally finds their destiny in each other. Waking up on the next day Sinclair feels like he has finally found the key to his destiny —

I find the key and look deep down into myself...to see my own image which now wholly resembles him, my friend and leader. (184)

The leader and friend being referred to here is unmistakably Max Demian. A connotative linkage between space, desire, and knowledge is put into play when the protagonist's sexual/epistemological quest is enacted through his journey of spatial discovery. The story thus finds its culmination in this moment of epiphany and acceptance of everything that was hitherto hidden or failed to find expression.

On revisiting the parallel moment from *Almond*, a similar theme of acceptance can be seen reverberating through the narrative on several levels.

Plop. A teardrop fell on my face. It was hot. So hot that it burned. Just then, something inside my heart exploded... "I feel it," I whispered. Whether it was grief, happiness, loneliness, pain, fear, or joy, I did not know. I just knew I felt something. (Sohn 183)

This is the first time Yunjae is able to really feel any sort of emotion and Gon has acted as a big trigger to lead to this moment throughout the story. What follows after this is a postscript and epilogue. It takes Yunjae several months in the hospital to fully recover and start walking again. While he is in the hospital he has a recurring dream, a dream about him and Gon eating plum flavoured candy and breaking into a run, feeling their bodies splitting the air.

According to Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, dreams are argued to be the wishes that one is looking to fulfil in their waking lives. In other words, Yunjae's deepest wish that he wants to fulfil is a future with Gon. Psychological and psychoanalytical theories also point to this direction. Dreaming about a person over and over again can be translated as to the need to have this person in life. This is especially common dream for those who are longing for someone romantic way. When one realizes that there is no chance of being with someone in real life, their mind thinks about this person through dreams (Cherry). But the ending of *Almond* hints at a future that leans towards the former.

In the epilogue, Yunjae gets on a bus to go and visit Gon who is in therapy, for the first time after the incident. "Spring passes by the bus window. Flowers are in bloom, whispering, *Spring, spring, I am spring*" (188). Spring here symbolizes a new beginning in Yunjae's life, completing the journey from the summer when they met to the fall they stayed apart, then to the winter where Yunjae got injured while trying to save Gon to finally meeting him on a romantic spring day. Spring is also a traditional symbol of love, joy, spirituality, youth and melancholy and most importantly beginning of a new life for a person after suffering at the hands of the cold world of winter. The lines

I pass by those flowers to see Gon. Not for any particular reason or because I have something to say to him. Just because; suggests a close reading. (188)

It indeed feels like Yunjae has something to tell to Gon. The open ending of the story and a close reading can allude to a romantic union of the two boys.

One of the intentions with this study was to reimagine what characters like Demian, Sinclair,

Gon, and Yunjae are actually trying to tell us. And moreover, by emphasizing, embracing, and celebrating queer specks of light in *Demian* and *Almond* — that is, representations of queer companionship, affection, desire, and romance — this study has shown that these novels can be seen as campaigners for queer subjectivity, and the friendships formed by these characters are queer friendships, that is, that they challenge heteronormative conceptions of relationality, sexuality, and desire.

Queer readings are effective mediums that validate the queer experience while simultaneously acting as a tool to battle the heteropatriarchy and to cultivate inclusive and subversive narratives. Intertextuality and queer theory can be considered as mutually illuminating areas of academic inquiry. Thus an 'intertextual queer reading' refers to various ways in which the intertextual elements corroborate the queer subtext while also reinforcing the intertextuality through the exploration of the homophilic undercurrents. This reading practice therefore provides the basis for further discussions. An intertextual queer reading of *Almond* and *Demian* was made possible through an extensive study of the source texts and by trying to read between the lines, and following the homophilic undercurrents as well as the implicit queer codes. While some may be content with regarding the conclusions in this study as 'reading too much into things,' reading these novels queerly has more to do with recognizing the unexplored depth in these works. In fact, *Demian* and *Almond* provoke the question, why should one presuppose heterosexuality as a norm in these writing at all? The queer friendships in the stories that have been at the centre of this study clearly challenge such an assumption. In addition, the two novels in focus here can be said to express queerness in the following way:

The recurring queer cues and codes in the texts, or characters who embody various forms of otherness — is always juxtaposed with heteronormativity or other metanarratives.

Contrary to the times in which Hesse's novels were written—when terms like queer, gay, and homosexual were not as prevalent as they are today—our current era provides greater possibilities for interpreting characters in historical texts as queer. Sohn's work on the other hand lives and breathes in an era where queer activism and academism are thriving. Nevertheless, the voices of aggression, subjugation, as well as the propaganda for othering and demonizing the queer community still prevails making subversive reading practices all the more important. Queer theory has always been insistent on unravelling the heteronormative textual representation. Thus, this study becomes more than just an attempt to prove that queer meaning is present in the texts as it also concentrates on how such meanings and normative assumptions are produced by institutions of hegemony and compulsory heterosexuality. Applying queer critical practices to popular texts opens a range of new reading possibilities. The term 'queer theory' is notoriously resistant to definition and its refusal to be fixed has often been deemed necessary to its continuing usefulness, for if the work of queer theory were ever to be finally defined, 'queer' could lose its shifting and open-ended power to challenge the heteronormative system. After exploring the point of intersection and implications of queer theory, psychoanalysis, intertextuality, and masculinity studies, the dissertation ventures into the intertextual queer reading. A detailed reading of *Almond* and *Demian* reveal the inner layers and subtle codes that reveal themselves to point towards how male friendships in *Almond* and *Demian* connote queerness.

One of the intentions with this study was to imagine what characters like Demian, Sinclair, Gon, and Yunjae are actually trying to tell us. And moreover, by emphasizing, embracing, and celebrating queer specks of light in *Demian* and *Almond* — that is, representations of queer companionship, affection, desire, and romance—this study has shown that these novels can be seen as campaigners for queer subjectivity.

From a pedagogical perspective, applying queer theoretical thinking to popular texts like *Almond* and *Demian* might help students subvert common sense beliefs that gender and sexuality are fundamental truths of the self. In this respect, it is important to cultivate a more interrogative and self-reflexive approach towards the way sex and gender epistemologies have contributed to our understanding. Ultimately, the hypothesis of this study is that the friendships formed by these characters are queer friendships, that is, that they challenge heteronormative conceptions of relationality, sexuality, and desire.

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Analysing Maintaining Mechanisms of Eating Disorders: Trans-Diagnostic Approach on Meg Heston's *Paperweight*

Rajalakshmi A.* and A. Selvam**

Abstract

Eating disorder is recognised as one of the most severe of mental disorders, and it has adverse impact on physical, psychological, and social life. Aggregated data from the National Association for Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders shows that around nine percent of the world's population suffers from eating disorders. But very few seek treatment due to the shame and stigma attached to it. Difficulties in finding etiologies and comorbidities, and patient resistance, and increasing dropouts and relapsing rates, result in poor treatment outcomes. This paper aims to identify the persistence of eating disorder, and the factors affecting treatment outcomes, by analysing the character Stevie in Meg Heston's *Paperweight*, through the lens of Trans-diagnostic theory. Trans-diagnostic theory offers an alter perspective of the factors that hinder positive therapeutic results, and explains how the interplay of core psychopathology and additional maintaining mechanisms motivate patients to persist with their illness.

Keywords: *Eating Disorders, Therapeutic Outcome, Trans-Diagnostic Theory, Core Psychopathology and Additional Maintaining Mechanisms.*

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Eating disorder is ranked as the second deadliest mental illness which has adverse effects on a person's physical, psychological, and social life. People suffering from eating disorders have negative thoughts about food, and an obsessive fear of shape and weight. People of all ages, races, gender, and ethnicity run the risk of getting entangled in the vulnerable web of eating disorder. However, it is more prevalent among females in their teens, than males. According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, nine percent of the world population is affected by the silent epidemic of eating disorder, and 28.8 million people, who cover nine percent of the US population, would have experienced eating disorders in their lifetime. Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and binge eating are the most common types of eating disorders. Some characteristic features of these disorders are an intense fear of gaining weight, excessive exercise, misuse of laxatives and diuretics, bingeing and purging, and restriction of food.

Walden Behavioural Care states that among people with eating disorders only ten percent ever seek treatment; the rest keep their illness a secret due to the stigma and shame that is attached to it. And, even in cases where people opt for treatment, the outcome is often not that rosy. A number of factors like comorbidities, multifactorial etiologies, patient resistance, and diagnostic migrations tend to hinder therapeutic procedures. According to Kimberli McCallum, Medical Director, and Founder of the McCallum Place,

While many providers say they do not prefer to work with patients with eating disorders... others note that treatment is complicated, symptoms are enduring, recovery involves many resources, the need for family support is

time-consuming, there are interfering medical risks and complications, enduring illness and relapse is common, and medications are ineffective.

This paper aims to identify the factors that affect therapeutic outcomes through an analysis of Meg Heston's novel *Paperweight*, via the lens of Trans-diagnostic theory. The protagonist of the novel, Stevie, suffers from eating disorder and wishes to die on her brother's first death anniversary. She carries the burden of guilt and shame for her brother's death, and her mother's absence. The novel is structured in such a way that the chapters cover ten individual and group therapy sessions that Stevie participates in, with the narrative foregrounding the inner conflicts, resistance, and difficulties of the therapeutic process. Stevie's misunderstandings and her inability to cope with the realities of life are outlined in detail. Trans-diagnostic theory here helps to gain an alternate focus on common psychopathologies and additional maintaining mechanisms, while bypassing the complexities and chaos that treatments associated with eating disorders are often entangled in.

Trans-Diagnostic Theory for Eating Disorders

Trans-diagnostic theory is an enhanced version of Cognitive Behavioural theory. It focuses mainly on the standard characteristics of eating disorders, the logic being that "eating disorders share a distinctive core psychopathology not seen in other psychiatric disorders" (Cooper, et al, 339). Fairburn had initiated a description of this theory in 1981, but it was more of a barebones version and required further development. It was not up till 1993 that a complete version was published, with a supplement following in 1997. It was elaborated upon again in the same year, and this paper bases its arguments upon the collabo-

rative work by Fairburn, Cooper, and Shafren in 2003. Trans-diagnostic theory was proposed after analysing the therapeutic outcomes of Cognitive Behavioural theory and treatment, the latter being the most common treatment for eating disorders, which is evidence-based and is widely recognised for its better therapeutic outcomes. It attempts to enrich therapeutic excellence by extending the existing Cognitive Behavioural theory, and one might as well call it Trans-diagnostic Cognitive Behavioural theory.

A treatment that considers common features might help tackle the problem and get targeted results. There are two valid statements here. The first is that, according to Cognitive Behavioural theory, eating disorders share a distinct core psychopathology, which does not exist in other mental disorders. The second statement compliments the first, and brings out four maintaining mechanisms that hinder change: Four maintaining mechanisms, namely, clinical perfectionism, core low self-esteem, mood intolerance, and interpersonal difficulties that play a significant role in eating disorders. They often add fire to the flame, and ignite the spark of eating disorder further, fuelling its persistence for long. It is how patients who suffer from eating disorders often come to possess a solid determination, and refuse treatment, and remain uncooperative.

Self-Evaluation

Self-evaluation is considered as a common psychopathology for all eating disorders. The process of evaluating oneself in terms of weight and shape manifests negative self-perception among eating disorder patients, and motivates them to lose their weight and trim their shape. They thus come to evaluate their worth only in terms of their weight, and shape, and their capability to control hunger. They come to see their imperfect bodies as the cause of all misfortunes

that have ever occurred to them, and compare themselves with people who are slimmer. The strong dislike or dissatisfaction towards their own body thus manifests itself in the form of a desire to punish it for its appearance, and they either starve, or go on an enforced diet, restricting themselves from taking sufficient calories. Stevie, in *Paperweight*, thus wishes to punish her body by becoming an anorectic patient. She sees her body in a negative light, as being imperfect, and believes that she does not deserve anything on account of this. The thought process begins in her teens, as she adores her mother's long and supple dancer's body. She comes to the conclusion that her body is imperfect and the thought takes roots in her mind that her body is responsible for her mother's absence.

The girl in the mirror was too much and not enough... No wonder my mother chose to leave. I took up so much space; she couldn't breathe! I crushed my beautiful mama with the weight of my very existence. (Heston 35)

The statement emphasises her body dysmorphia, or her dissatisfaction over her own body. Stevie tries to connect unrelated polar things naively, and her thoughts always correlate things with weight and shape. Slapping her bottom and punching her stomach makes her rage over her excess fat and muscle mass, and she passes negative comments over her own body, labelling it as useless, worthless, uncontrollable, imperfect, impotent, powerless, and weak. She looks down upon herself and believes that she looks abominable. She views herself in the mirror repeatedly – a typical way of self-evaluation – staring at her own reflection and comes to form a low esteem about herself. She criticises her image for the label 'bulimic' that gets tagged upon her, and she is scathing upon herself, de-

scribing herself as impotent, imperfect, as lacking in self-control, and as deserving of the title of Bulimia.

Thoughts regarding her weight and shape pervade Stevie's mind wherever she goes, and signals her alienation.

My every step toward the table came to a new awareness: the goose bumps puckering my skin, the way my thighs slapped together as I walked. The girth of my hips, my protruding stomach and back fat spilling over my cut-offs. All of me stitched together and straining at the seams. (Heston 42)

That was her first visit to the bar, and instead of glancing at or observing the new surroundings, her mind is filled with negative thoughts regarding her body. She also develops a fear of others' thoughts about her, and spends much time, effort, and energy in projecting a positive image. Patients with eating disorder often fail to see the big picture, and instead, their attention is drawn to individual parts and organs. Stevie frequently checks and measures her different body parts and this triggers her to reduce food intake.

I slide my right hand across my stomach and count the ribs on the left side. Once, twice, three times. They are not as sharp as yesterday. (14)

She often holds her wrist with her index and thumb fingers to measure her plumpness, and if she finds any fat, she pinches the place until she cannot withstand the pain. She criticises her uncontrolled binges during the past, as she furiously notices her jeans' tightness, her expanding belly, and the struggle she goes through to win the waistband. Stevie is sitting on the couch in front of Anna, when her round thick gut destroys the

peace of her mind. She takes a pillow to obscure her expanding belly, keeps her hands down, pressed tightly towards her body to place the elbows above her waist, but she is not able to eliminate the thick muscle buckling underneath her chest.

Stevie compares herself to everyone she come across. The terms HCs and EDs refer to healthy communities and eating-disordered communities respectively, and "People with Eds" have "higher levels of unfavourable social comparison, submissive behaviours, and external and internal shame than HCs" (Cardi, et al. 1). Stevie compares her body with Cate's and develops a strong desire to own a similar body. Cate's body plays a crucial role in catalysing her drive for slimness. Stevie

steal[s] a glance at the curve of Cate's spine, at her perfect, spindly knees, and the lines of her rib cage that rise triumphantly from under her skin. (38)

And she immediately feels ashamed, and pinches and slaps her excess fat. A similar internal shame occupies her mind when she enters the bar. "I watched the girl out of the corner of my eye. She was thinner than me" (Heston 42). Both Stevie and the girl are strangers, but her mind does not give up its prime function and fail to make the comparison. She compares Anorectics and Bulimics. Anorexics, according to her, are most potent, worthy, and strong enough to control their hunger and life. She gets pissed about her Bulimia diagnosis. She dislikes being a Bulimic as she assumes Bulimics are fat, lethargic, useless, and are lowest among the low, and thus unworthy of living.

The ability to control one's hunger and ignore it completely is viewed in high regard by Stevie, who sees people in possession of such

ability as being heads and shoulders above all. She thus continuously tests herself to see whether she can control her hunger, and she feels proud and strong whenever she succeeds. On the contrary, she feels guilt and shame after every binge, and her desire for controlling hunger is reflected where she says,

I will not breathe it in. If I breathe it in,
I will break down and consume it all
(72), I breathe through my mouth and
try not to look down. I know what is
waiting if I slip... If I look at it, smell it
– or, God forbid, touch it – it will find
its way inside me (30), I choose not to
eat (48), I made sure to breathe through
my mouth, so not even the smell of the
grease could penetrate me. (10)

These quotes reflect her cravings for food, even as she attempts to ignore them. Trying not to breathe through her nose marks the extremes that Stevie adopts in her effort to control her food intake. She strictly avoids seeing or preparing food, and continuously calculates calories before eating: calories that she never forgets to burn away through exercise. The recovery centre provides green, yellow, and red bracelets to patients to encourage their progress, and she feels proud and powerful to win over and dismantle hunger by not showing any progress.

I steal a loving glance at the red plastic
hospital bracelet hanging from my
wrist.... I have learned that red is the
colour of power. Red is for the girls
who are not progressing in the pro-
gram, the girls who haven't gained
weight. (20)

Though sneaking in of chocolates is common among children, Stevie's mind considers it as a sign of weakness, "I was weak, even then. I

snuck into her desk drawer and reached for the bag of chocolates hidden at the back" (22).

She dislikes it and is even more disgusted about how she rapidly sucks her drinks, and how she munches breathlessly. Cycles of bingeing are interpreted as 'symbols of weakness' in Stevie's world. Evaluating oneself most negatively must obviously be the core psychopathology that maintains eating disorders, like how Stevie gets caught in the grips of eating disorder through self-evaluation, related to shape, weight, and food.

Maintaining Mechanisms

Trans-diagnostic theory includes four additional maintaining mechanisms, which enhance the development and maintenance of eating disorders among patients. They accompany eating disorders as an instrument for deviating the patients' minds from focusing on internal and external problems. This paper focuses on the interplay of mechanisms in Stevie's life that informs her determination to behold her eating disorder. According to Christopher G. Fairburn, Zafra Cooper, and Roz Shafran, clinical perfectionism, core low self-esteem, mood intolerance, and interpersonal difficulties are the four additional mechanisms. These mechanisms uplift the quality of treatment.

Clinical Perfectionism

Clinical perfectionism is in essence linked to self-evaluation, as it holds the obsessive control to reach the personal demanding standard, and is also related to weight, shape, and food. Clinical perfectionism, in exact terms,

refers to the over evaluation of the striving for, and achievement of, personally demanding standards, despite adverse consequences. (Cooper, et al. 342)

It focuses on personal demands, and not social standards. Self-evaluation has a fear of others' judgement. On the contrary, clinical perfectionism is informed by the patients' personal yearnings, which they strive hard to achieve with little to no botheration about the adverse effects. Stevie wants to own the perfect skinny body, expecting to have a reunion with her mother. She thinks that her imperfect body occupies more space. Ever since she begins to control her hunger, she has not had food for six days, after hearing the unpleasant news about her mother's absence. Obsessive control of hunger leads to binging, and almost immediately after, she sticks a toothbrush inside her throat and pukes everything out. Though she is aware of her eating disorder, she is not bothered about its impact, and instead, she prefers to be an Anorectic. When her mother attends her brother's funeral, Stevie expects that her mother would stay, but it does not happen. She thus develops a desire to die on the first anniversary of her brother's death. She pins the blame of her brother's demise on herself: "I will not take a single breath on the one-year anniversary of the night I killed my brother" (18). Stevie wants to punish herself every single day. She restricts herself from having food once the metamorphosis begins and soon gets addicted to alcohol. Her body thus gradually steepens into a process of deterioration, and she often passes out of booze and malnutrition. She is forcefully taken to a recovery centre and her desire thereafter requires more effort. She finds it very difficult to withstand her desire in specific circumstances, but she is not ready to give up her goal. "I've worked so hard to become what I am" (52). Stevie does the math for the calorie intake, though she knows little about food and its calories. She is unaware of the calories contained in a glass of scotch, and is mostly perplexed to do the calculations. She prefers to do it approximately and plans to reduce her weight little by little every day.

Stevie strives further in the recovery centre. She refuses to have food, does exercise to burn calories though she is having meagre quantities of food, prefers to have supplements to avoid particular foods, restricts herself from seeing or smelling any food to keep temptation at bay, clenches and releases her muscles without the knowledge of her therapist during her sessions, and tries to puke out the food she had consumed whenever she gets a favourable situation. But, even after all these efforts; Stevie is not satisfied with her weight: a dissatisfaction that is reflected in her reaction, when she is told during a check-up that she has to increase her weight – "The number should be higher. Twenty-five? My god, I'm such a failure" (49). She is labelled as a Bulimic and the particular word makes her world spin around. It fuels her efforts to reduce her calorie intake and achieve her goal on the day of her brother's first death anniversary. She begins to calculate her calorie intake in order to arrive at an estimate of the minimum calorie count beneath which her heart would stop its function.

How much weight I'll have to lose before my heart flutters to its silent stop. Death is not an exact science, which is irritating for those of us who appreciate precision. (19)

She choreographs all the horrible happenings of her death in her mind and puts a renewed effort towards achieving it. It is the internal guilt, more than the external environment that informs Stevie's strivings, as she tries to attain her demand to die.

Mood Intolerance

Unexpected, adverse, horrible, and unpleasant circumstances in life often make one spin directionless. This is "defined as either an inability to tolerate intense mood states or a particular

sensitivity to such states" (Cooper, et al. 342). People cannot tolerate, or are unable to handle their state of being. They would like to escape from that situation. They intentionally or forcefully involve themselves in another activity that could serve as a mood modulator to cope with the situation. Eating disorders have complex etiologies but get triggered in such difficult states. As is revealed in the narrative, Stevie already has a habit of bingeing at night. Her eating disorder gets triggered when her mother leaves for Paris. She gets the unpleasant news from her dad in the evening, and is not able to handle the situation. She is helpless to stop the automatic functions of her body, her insides soon become empty, and she faints. She is thus kept under the sheets for six days without food or other activities. Six days of fasting burns her gut; she has not overcome the grief yet, and her wounded mind needs to remove the feeling of pain for a while, and for the very first time, she decides to do something.

I knew, in a place deeper than seeing or feeling, that this was a beginning. I was about to do something that could not be undone. Something dangerous, something toxic, something extraordinary. (45)

She begins to drink. Getting booze smoothens her difficulties. It helps her to erase her past from her mind at least for a few moments. Bingeing has a similar effect on her mind in her mother's absence. Her description of bingeing shows the lack of self-control, patience, and rapid action, indirectly referring to a hyperactive process providing no space for anything in between.

I reached for the first bag – clawed at it, really – and tore into the package. I found individually wrapped chocolate snack cakes with fluffy white filling.

The icing on my fingertips felt taboo, like sugary sex.... I was full. (53)

Bingeing, puking, and exercising excessively are identified as mood modulators for eating disorder patients.

According to the statement of Zafra Cooper and Riccardo Dalle Grave, mood intolerance has its place now in treatment as 'events and associated moods.' Indeed, the impact of occurring events cannot alter mood; mood swings drive the person to be unstable, and the lack of stability subsequently gives rise to a fear of losing self-control. One thus probably heads to a state of anxiety, and depression, riddled with guilt, and tries to find an alternate way to cope, control, or change it. Stevie gets furious about being compelled to choose a food during the group therapy session. It makes her too sick, with the fear of social shame and judgement playing in her mind. Thus, though she craves for food, the fear of social shame restricts her from selecting the food of her choice. Anna selects fried chicken for Stevie though she knows that her adverse memories are related to the same. Stevie tries to forget it initially, but she is not able to handle it any longer after a time, and tries to puke. She resorts to bingeing and purging as modulators, and does exercise not just to burn calories but also to regulate and control her mood. Stevie is incapable of managing her thoughts and feelings, but unlike other eating disorder patients, she does not harm herself with razorblades, hairpins, or other accessories. She proudly thinks of her body as the predator and prey rolled into one that can destroy itself without any external support. Ashlee's attempt to self-harm using contrabands stimulates a sense of guilt in Stevie and she feels the urge to puke. Three intolerable situations shake her psyche – her mother's absence, her brother's death, and her recovery against her refusal –

intensifying her helplessness and hopelessness, and she floats directionless, without a destination.

Core Low Self-Esteem

Having a very low self-esteem about themselves might decrease hope among subjects and affect their quality of life. Giving little attention to this mechanism is dangerous because the feeling of being unworthy and of deserving of nothing can make anybody fall into the pit of death. Stevie develops a sense of low self-esteem in relation to her brother, and feels that he deserves everything more than her, and this turns out to be crucial in triggering her eating disorder. Stevie and her brother are twins, and it her perception of her mother's love towards her brother that initiates in her thoughts that are self-critical.

My mother had always loved Josh better. If we'd basically had the same nurture, the only thing that was different was the nature.... (103)

Both are born to the same parents and are nurtured in the same way, but Stevie envies her brother's goodness, perfectionism, extraordinary talents, and his ability to get whatever he wants. She expresses her low self-esteem in funny ways, by comparing herself with her brother, like how it was green blood that ran through her brother's body, while it was bad blood that coursed through hers, or how her brother had green nerves while hers were rotten. She also compares herself with her mother, who has a long thin dancer's body. She believes that she possesses an imperfect, worthless, unattractive body in comparison, and thinks herself as unworthy of her mother's beauty. Stevie has already developed body dysmorphia, and her brother's harsh words exacerbate it:

You look like shit, by the way. Everybody thinks so and Dad's too scared to say it. This whole food thing – it's selfish and crazy and you look like . . . shit. (139)

She feels dwarfed by her brother's achievements and feels a sense of exhaustion as she compares them with hers. She comes to believe that she is an unfit: She is not beautiful as her mother, nor decent as her father, or extraordinary as her brother.

Stevie has no friends. It is rather her friend Eden who takes the initiative and holds hands with Stevie. Stevie enters Eden's bathroom and passes a glance on her counter: face creams, lotion, perfumes, and face wash catches her attention, and she feels pity for herself for not having beauty products as other girls of her age. Her face staring at her from the mirror seems unpleasant to her, and she unconsciously compares herself with Eden. Stevie does not kiss anyone, nor is she kissed by anyone, except Eden. She underestimates her beauty, and believes that she does not possess enough beauty to attract boys. She eavesdrops on girls' talk, and this torments her more. All her sense of low self-esteem grows from the external environment, especially from her family, and her friend Eden, and this mechanism slows down her recovery.

Interpersonal Difficulties

Interpersonal difficulties include family tensions, peer pressure, and uncomfortable environments, including occupational or institutional settings. Adverse interpersonal problems, which exceed for an extended period, severely impact one's mind and body. Stevie's interpersonal difficulties begin in her family. Her mother's absence leads to the collapse of the entire family. Because

her mother had looked after everything independently, others had just followed her commands as puppets. Stevie is not able to not accept the immediate absence of her mother. She feels that she is abandoned, and her lack of know how regarding how to manage herself aggravates this feeling. She has now no one in her family to take care of her, and she plans to mould her body, expecting her mother's return.

May be when I stepped into the hallway she'd be back. May be if I washed my hair just right or made my legs the kind of smooth you see in magazines. May be if I could mould myself into the perfect girl, the kind of girl who didn't sneak chocolates or beg for sugary cereal. (35)

She compares her family to the bubbles in a glass. When one bubble bursts, the remaining spins uncontrollably, searching for the direction. Stevie's family plays a crucial role in depriving her of her psyche and it is obvious that her mother plays a more important role than anyone else. "There was a bandage wrapped around the image of my mother. She was the wound" (45). It remains as a scar to remind her of her helpless and horrible situation.

Stevie was in fact becoming better through the love and care of her brother Josh and her friend Eden. But, she soon gets preoccupied with the fear of abandonment and isolation after she learns about the affair between Josh and Eden. Her mind struggles to accept this new reality. She had been already longing for her mother's love, and she fears that she is on the verge of losing her brother's and Eden's too. She is not ready to leave them, but she cannot tolerate their intimacy. She tries to be better than Josh in her relationship with Eden, only to become the subject of

scorn of her brother who gets irritated by her efforts. He abuses her verbally and calls her out as being selfish like their mother, crazy to behold, and looking ugly. This insult gets embedded in her mind and she turns every word over, and ruminates over them endlessly, eventually coming to the conclusion that she is worthless. She in fact tries to acknowledge her power and worthiness, but her efforts end in vain. Stevie notices Josh coming in late at night with Eden's perfume on him and this adds to her fear and remoteness which had been growing day by day. Josh's lame excuses for not playing their favourite game on Wednesdays too do not help. Tragedy strikes on the last day of Ben's seminar when Josh surprises her with a visit. Stevie suspects that Josh has come rather to see Eden than her, and her worst fears are confirmed when she comes to know that he had come to propose to Eden. Josh happens to witness a romantic exchange between Stevie and Eden and he gets furious and storms out to his car. Stevie too gets into the car and there occurs an angry exchange between the two. Josh's eyes are blinded by anger and he subsequently fails to notice a vehicle that is coming in the opposite direction. Everything collapses within seconds, and Stevie lies curled over her dead brother's body as others try to separate them from the debris. She is filled with a sense of guilt from that moment onwards: a guilt that kills her each second.

I have carried the weight of his death for almost a year, for so long that it is part of me, fused in my bones. I am the girl who killed her brother. I do not know how to let it go, even if I wanted to. (152)

Her mother's absence already burdened her, and now, the guilt of her brother's death too comes to hang over her. She has now lost all her

family members except for father, who is always busy with work. These terrible interpersonal difficulties internally motivate her to undertake her peculiar journey towards death.

Conclusion

Patients who suffer from eating disorders are unlike other patients in that they hesitate to seek recovery, trying hard instead to keep their illness under the wrap. Treatment, when imposed, often ends up in either relapse or drop out, and clinicians have thus been facing difficulties in treating patients with such illnesses. Eating disorder patients often display a tenacious perseverance in holding on to their illness and this study tries to understand their thoughts by analysing Meg Heston's novel *Paperweight* through the lens of Trans-diagnostic theory. The trans-diagnostic approach throws new light on the different factors that lead to the persistence of eating disorders. The protagonist of the novel, Stevie, suffers from eating disorder. She constantly evaluates herself in numerous ways – viewing her reflection in the mirror, checking her body frequently by holding wrists to measure their girth, or passing hands over ribs feeling their sharpness, comparing herself with anybody and everybody, and displaying an unhealthy obsession with the intake of calories. She is in short never satisfied with her body and this exacerbates her condition.

Stevie's thoughts regarding her imperfect body lowers her self-esteem, and she strives more than ever to achieve her dream of the ideal body with scant regards for the adverse impacts of her unhealthy obsession. This in a way renders her helpless to face the unexpected situations that life throws at her, and the only escape route before her is to binge, purge, or harm herself to control her intolerable mind. Interpersonal difficulties

here serve as the mother of all maintaining mechanisms, which informs her desire that drives her towards destruction.

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