ISSN 0975 - 6302

ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE
(AUTONOMOUS)
ESTD 1925

TERESIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

April-June
2026
Volume XVIII
Issue II

Double-blind
Peer Reviewed
International
Quarterly

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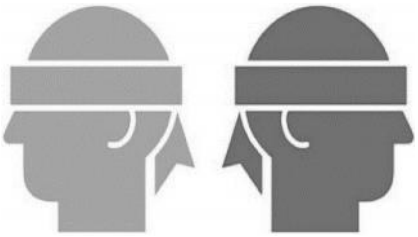

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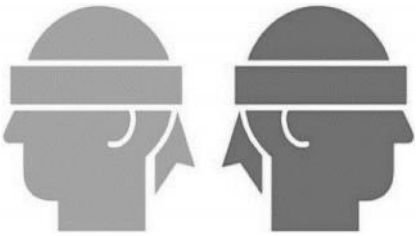

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Editorial

In his 2006 Science Fiction novel *Rainbows End*, Vernor Vinge imagines a near-future world of technological singularity, saturated by wearable technology, algorithmic intelligence, augmented realities, and systems that can predict, influence, and even shape human behaviour. At the centre of the narrative is Robert Gu, an ageing poet and professor recovering from Alzheimer's disease, who slowly rediscovers memory, language, and human connection in a society increasingly mediated by machines. What makes the novel hauntingly prophetic is not merely its technological vision, but its deeper anxiety: in a world where information is instant and intelligence is automated, what happens to the fragile, imperfect, and profoundly human processes of creativity, imagination, and emotional depth?

That question has become urgently relevant in the contemporary age of artificial intelligence. We inhabit a cultural moment where machines can compose poems, generate paintings, mimic voices, write essays, and produce endless streams of content within seconds. Efficiency has become the defining virtue of the digital era. Yet literature has never emerged from efficiency. Literature is born from hesitation, vulnerability, memory, grief, desire, silence, and contradiction. Human creativity derives its power not from perfection but from incompleteness.

The anxiety surrounding AI is therefore not simply technological; it is existential. When machines imitate artistic production with startling accuracy, the fear is not that human beings will cease to create, but that society may cease to value the deeply human labour behind creation. Raw creativity is not merely output. It is lived experience transformed into expression.

This tension between technological advancement and human identity has long occupied literary discourse. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley remains one of the earliest and most significant explorations of creation detached from ethical accountability. Shelley's novel interrogates the consequences of scientific ambition divorced from empathy, revealing that monstrosity arises less from artificial creation itself than from the absence of relational responsibility and human compassion. Similarly, *The Trial* by Franz Kafka anticipates modern anxieties surrounding bureaucratic abstraction and systemic dehumanization. Kafka's portrayal of opaque institutional power resonates strongly within contemporary algorithmic cultures in which individuals increasingly confront impersonal structures of surveillance, data extraction, and computational governance.

The current AI age risks producing a culture of simulation rather than experience. When creativity becomes instantly reproducible, originality itself may appear unnecessary. Yet imitation is not imagination. A generated poem may resemble emotion, but resemblance is not feeling. Human creativity is inseparable from mortality, embodiment,

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and lived contradiction. It emerges from heartbreak, displacement, loneliness, political violence, intimacy, and wonder. The trembling uncertainty behind creation is precisely what gives art its authenticity.

Indisputably, every literary age has evolved alongside technological transformation, from the printing press to digital publishing. Artificial intelligence undoubtedly offers important possibilities for research, accessibility, pedagogy, translation, and interdisciplinary experimentation. The danger arises only when convenience begins to replace contemplation, and when automation diminishes the value of patient artistic labour.The task before educators, writers, and cultural institutions today is therefore not to resist technology blindly, but to preserve humanness within technological modernity. We must continue to nurture spaces for reflection, slowness, ethical imagination, and emotional literacy. Literature classrooms must remain places where ambiguity is valued over certainty, where questions matter more than instant answers, and where students encounter the complexity of human experience beyond data-driven simplification.

The challenge before contemporary society is consequently not simply technological adaptation, but the safeguarding of humanness itself within rapidly mechanized cultural environments. Educational institutions, literary cultures, and intellectual communities must continue to cultivate imagination, critical inquiry, empathy, and reflective thought as essential human capacities. In preserving spaces for authentic creativity and emotional complexity, we preserve the very conditions that make civilization humane. The defence of raw human creativity in the AI age is therefore not only an artistic or academic responsibility; but a civilizational necessity.

Dr. Tania Mary Vivera
Editor

The Moravian Night: Peter Handke's Poetics of Historical Memory

Ihsan-ur-Rahim Malik

Abstract

In most of his writings, Peter Handke has endeavoured to foreground his dream of seeing a strong and powerful confederacy in the Balkans. In the novel under reference, he seeks to convey certain experiences by reflecting transitory impressions of reality in relation to Yugosalvia and its breakup following the Yugoslav Wars. The narrator talks us through the experiences of an old, 'abdicated' writer during his journeys through Europe. These experiences draw one's attention to Handke's own experiences in the war-ravaged Balkans. Pertinently, Handke has been known for his resolute advocacy of the Balkan identity. The book however, cannot be read as a true autobiography owing to the evocative space created by the author through the use of notional metaphors. The paper examines how Handke creates an anecdotal counterhistory of sorts, problematizing the more popular and accepted version of history with respect to the Balkans. It also analyses how the narrative brings the stories of Handke and the 'old writer' together to demonstrate how they correspond to each other in terms of the unexpected circumstantial and experiential changes which impinge upon their lives in unsettling ways. Last but not the least; it looks at how the author allusively calls attention to the characteristic image of Serbia which is representative of the essence of the Balkans as a whole.

Keywords: *History, Past, Memory, War, Experience.*

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The practice of writing history through experience involves an analysis of historical events and narratives through the lens of personal experience. As a matter of fact, it is an examination of significant historical events witnessed or experienced directly by the author. These individual experiences are employed to cultivate a thorough comprehension of history and are framed within a wider historical backdrop. Throughout this journey, the narrative occasionally strays from mainstream historical accounts and thus opens the door for the creation of a *counterhistory*, which is a fascinating endeavour of reinterpreting and questioning traditional historical narratives. Handke utilizes captivating storytelling methods to highlight his personal experiences and makes use of vivid descriptions, conversations, and striking details to draw readers into historical occurrences from a unique viewpoint. By incorporating personal insights and lived experiences, the author enables a richer and distinct understanding of the past.

Re-examining history and understanding it in reliable terms is consistently difficult. According to Wallace and Beidler, the essence of historical research lies in reconstructing and reinterpreting past occurrences, which makes it crucial to acknowledge the complexities involved (17). Simultaneously, it is vital to approach history with a degree of skepticism and an awareness of ambiguity and contradictions. Historical documents are also products of human thought and, as such, are laden with complexities. They reflect individual perspectives arising from varied experiences. Failing to recognize this can make historical research incredibly challenging (Díaz, Müller, and Schmidt 1208).

Memory constitutes an essential element in the undertaking of historical inquiry. It is interesting to look at the dynamics of collective and historical memory with reference to the narrativization of historical content. The distinction between collective and historical memory distinguishes lived experience from the retention of lived experience—the objectification of lived experience—rather than demonstrating the complete dissimilarity of the two modes of historical consciousness. More often than not, historical memory manifests itself in the shape of historical narratives, and this is only one aspect of collective memory. Collective memory is also the space within which historical reminiscence takes place (Crane 1374). The reactionary view that history is often redone to make it acceptable to some should not stop historians from thinking freely. "The history of memory, in fact, has developed into a fragmented field" (Confino 1386). Sites of memory often intrigue us because they not only link us to our past but also give us a sense of unbroken and consistent historical legacy. These sites may not be real anymore but continue to exist in the mind (Nora 17).

Scott Abbott quotes Handke pointing to the peculiar inquiring way in which he writes:

> I wrote about my journey through the country of Serbia exactly as I have always written my books, my literature: a slow, inquiring narration; every paragraph dealing with and narrating a problem, of representation, of form, of grammar—of aesthetic veracity; that has always been the case in what I have written, from the beginning to the final period. (57)

Cornelia Caseau argues that since 1991, when Yugoslavia fell, Handke has frequently travelled to the Balkan countries to experience the war firsthand. Initially, his aim was not to make a political statement about the positions of the

warring states but to create a discourse against the mainstream. She further argues that owing to his mother's Slovenian origin, he had a special love for this country and wished that the state of Yugoslavia had never disintegrated. He could never reconcile with the Slovenian or Croatian independence movements, which is why his love for Slovenia turned into a love for Serbia, a country he believes symbolizes the essence of the erstwhile multiracial state. Handke subtly evaluates various interpretations of history and contemplates the potential outcomes in case the pivotal historical events transpired in an alternate manner, thereby resulting in distinct trajectories and possibilities (121-23).

The Moravian Night as Counterhistory

The Moravian Night is a captivating collection of tales that touch on and retell several important historical occurrences, many of which have had a significant impact on the author's life. The narrative juxtaposes memory, history, and reality, engendering an engrossing story. Moravia is not to be confused with the eastern region of the Czech Republic. This region was initially settled by a Slavic people toward the end of the sixth century AD. It achieved independence in 870 AD and was later conquered by Magyars in the tenth century AD and still later by Bohemians before passing on to the Austrian Habsburgs in 1526. Eventually, it became part of Czechoslovakia in 1918. However, Handke's book, as the title might misleadingly suggest, is not centred around Moravia (the Czech region around the river Morava) but instead refers to another river also named Morava, which flows through Serbia. In the context of the novel, it is important to differentiate between the two rivers to know that Handke's focus lies on Serbia and not Moravia. It is inside a houseboat in Serbian Moravia that a former celebrated writer brings together a group of people to relate the story that has taken shape in his mind after innumerable trials and tribulations. The now-aging writer comes up with an intriguing narrative pertaining to his personal experiences while travelling through Europe. The different places the writer happens to see during his journey correspond to the various phases that inform his personal spiritual, mental, and physical experiences:

> Mysteriously summoned to a houseboat on the Morava River, a few friends, associates, and collaborators of an old writer listen as he tells a story that will last until dawn: the tale of the once well-known writer's recent odyssey across Europe. As his story unfolds, it visits places that represent stages of the narrator's and the continent's past, many now lost or irrecoverably changed through war, death, and the subtler erosions of time. His wanderings take him from the Balkans to Spain, Germany, and Austria, from a congress of experts on noise sickness to a clandestine international gathering of jew's-harp virtuosos. His story and its telling are haunted by a beautiful stranger, a woman who has a preternatural hold over the writer and appears sometimes as a demon, sometimes as the longed-for destination of his travels. (Handke 1)

The places the author visits are described graphically. However, some are not identified, and others are deliberately given fictional names. The writer handles these details dexterously so that they align with his memory or, for that matter, his psychological perception of the place and things associated with it. All the cerebral modifi-

cations he makes to the details in question, however, imbue the writer with humaneness. He creates an anecdotal *counterhistory* of sorts that seeks to problematize the more popular and accepted version of history (Caseau 145). Handke's experimentation aligns with the views of Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, as expressed in *Practicing New Historicism*, where they remark:

> Counterhistories have tried instead to revive... alterity, fostering disciplinary eccentricity; and it was that eccentricity that the anecdote carried into literary criticism as well. The force field of the anecdote pulled even the most canonical works off to the border of history and into the company of nearly forgotten and unfamiliar existences. There literature's own dormant counterhistorical life might be reanimated: possibilities cut short, imaginings left unrealized, projects half formulated, ambitions squelched, doubts, dissatisfactions, and longings half felt, might all be detected there. They were buried beneath the surface, no doubt, but would stir, one hoped, at 'the touch of the real.' (76)

At times, it appears that the writer is using fictional techniques to relate true stories. He compassionately recreates a world in which he places himself as well as some other characters in the novel and, in the process, foregrounds the psychological states of mind in which the characters find themselves (De Angelis 89). In doing so, he presents events in a manner that arouses curiosity and interest. This effect is specifically achieved through exaggerated and lurid descriptions of occurrences. The narrative thus fascinates the reader in respect of the stories of both the old writer and Handke himself. The two stories seem to correspond to each other in terms of the unexpected circumstantial and experiential changes that affect their lives in distressful ways. The beginning of the narrative itself is suggestive of what the novel will deal with, as well as of the story developing slowly but surely into a powerful account. The old writer's descriptions are fraught with evocative and expressive images of war. The associations he makes with persons he happens to meet are given context by past events connected to the locations he visits. He portrays the devastation and existential ambiguity of the Balkans in a realistic manner. The ensuing depression makes people feel vulnerable to issues that are difficult to predict.

Narrative Dynamics and Political Stance

The narrator of the old writer's story provides important details about the writer's past that he is familiar with. At other times, the narrator allows for interruptions from the other individuals on the houseboat. The narrator's position is essential to the plot since, in addition to offering a unique viewpoint, he also includes ideas and impressions that support the story. He frequently tests his own awareness and challenges himself to be certain of the writer's statements in particular circumstances. Nevertheless, he moves forward unhindered even if he is unable to solve the problem (Wesche 203). His casual demeanor further casts doubt on the authenticity of the old writer's story.

The narrator tries his best to arrive at a truth by arguing with himself logically, for instance, about the writer's motive with regard to the process of writing. He questions the purpose behind his endeavor to write and asks whether he writes to escape the bitter realities of life or to circumvent mundane challenges. If the impulsion to

write has been engendered by circumstances, he has probably decided to express himself rather than internalizing all his disappointment (Marranca 67). To the narrator, the old writer had apparently taken to writing to lend meaning to the circumambient chaos.

Does the process of writing, therefore, amount to steering oneself clear of this encompassing disorganization? Whether the narrator is trying to analyze the old writer's manner of spinning the yarn or is simply endorsing the writer's perspective regarding writing—or his apparent predisposition to relating a story rather than putting it in writing—remains unclear. His response to these conundrums, though apparently arising from careful consideration, is markedly nebulous (Sharp 605). Nonetheless, this is the intent. The narrator, as well as the storyteller, limn events and happenings in a manner that is supposed to make a huge impression and thus justify their willingness to narrate their stories.

To the German readership, Handke has been a very influential writer who has argued persistently in defense of Slobodan Miloševic's regime. It is pertinent to mention that Miloševic was a Serb leader who played a pivotal role in the Yugoslav ethnic wars from 1991-2001, resulting in the dismemberment of the Yugoslav socialist federation. Handke, who had traveled to Serbia in the mid-1990s when the Yugoslav civil war was about to end, wrote extensively in support of the Serbs, who are usually thought to have incited and organized a campaign aimed at ethnic cleansing. He believes that the Serbs were wrongly accused of having fomented such aggressive activities. The novel encompasses the European continent, with the old writer taking a round trip from southeastern Europe to Spain (DeMeritt 45). The quintessence of the novel, though, is to represent the distinctive image of Serbia, which is reflective of the essence of the Balkans as a whole.

It remains unclear why Handke wrote so resolutely in defense of Serbian undertakings during the aforementioned wars. Perhaps his speech at Miloševic's burial is suggestive of how he felt about the whole experience. In the speech, he audaciously affirmed: "I don't know the truth, but I can look, listen, feel, and remember—and that's what impels me to identify with Yugoslavia, Serbia, and Miloševic" (qtd. in DeMeritt 29).

This nescience of truth is the chief underlying element in his peculiar perception of the conflict, which manifests itself in his writings. Besides this, in his 1997 interview with Antoine de Gaudemar, Handke remarked that "the history of this war hasn't been written yet. It is offensive to be labeled a revisionist because of this statement. With the exception of the Shoah, the writing of history is never final, especially in the Balkans" (qtd. in Abbott 56).

The war brought to the fore little-known European places like Vukovar and Srebrenica, where the Serbs were involved in exceedingly gory aggression. Handke deliberately seems to ignore going into the details of these happenings and instead shows solidarity with the Serbs while viewing the global perception of things as a mere frame-up. This stance is amply reflected in another novel of his, *A Journey to the Rivers*, where he remarks:

> Yes, with each sentence I too have asked myself whether such a writing isn't obscene, ought even to be tabooed, forbidden—which made the writing journey adventurous in a different way, dangerous, often very de-

> pressing (believe me), and I learned what 'between Scylla and Charybdis' means. Didn't the one who described the small deprivations (gaps between teeth) help to water down, to suppress, to conceal the great ones? Finally, I thought each time; But that's not the point. My work is of a different sort. To record the evil facts, that's good. But something else is needed for a peace, something not less important than the facts. (81-82)

There are several abstruse passages in *The Moravian Night* that seem to suggest what Handke is attempting to do. However, little can be deduced from them. It is difficult to situate the novel decisively in known history. The recondite narrative, off and on, gives way to perceptions regarding the redrawing of borders and political disruptions. As the old writer traverses Europe, he endeavors to reassess his past to reconnect with his memories. In the process, he perceives places differently. Handke is presumably trying to foreground significant political changes in Eastern Europe and also the dilution of the characteristics that had formerly made Eastern Europe definitively recognizable (Norberg 479). As the author's life coalesces with the narrative, he subtly points to the decline of fiction and the art of storytelling. Like an epic, the novel often comes across as a compilation of immersive accounts that document the experiences of the main character to assert his identity. The old writer's erratic and convoluted narrative highlights the challenges of recounting some experiences. The narrator's experiences point to a lack of identity and a sense of rootlessness that ultimately leads to a form of vivification in him. If a writer wants to be unmistakably expressive, he must be certain of who he is regardless of any signs to the contrary. Although *The Moravian Night* is a powerful story, it takes a lot of work to understand its nuances and core. Handke appears to be certain about his plan but is carelessly indifferent to whether the reader would find the story interesting.

Conclusion

The novel's exploration of memory, history, and reality through conceptual metaphors highlights Handke's aim to question established narratives and promote contemplation on the essence of truth and representation. By utilizing these metaphors, Handke introduces a layer of interpretational curiosity. This prompts readers to reassess their beliefs regarding the events and experiences depicted in the novel, ultimately encouraging them to explore alternative viewpoints and interpretations. The narrative accentuates the significant impact of historical and political upheavals on the lives of characters. Handke's intentional examination of these unforeseen circumstantial and experiential shifts serves to clarify the intricacies of both individual and collective experiences amid turbulent historical occurrences.

The Moravian Night subtly draws attention to the defining image of Serbia and provides a nuanced depiction of the Balkans; it thereby highlights the historical, cultural, and geographical importance of the region. The novel invites readers to reflect on the complex nature of the Balkans and its enduring presence in the collective consciousness through the old writer's wandering narrative and his engagements with the Serbian landscape.

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Navigation on Waterscapes: A Study on Select Poems of Meena Alexander

Preethamol M.K.

Abstract

The literary world of Meena Alexander, the renowned Indo American writer, is an exploration of her personal spaces of solace and disturbance. It forms the crux of her diasporic experiences that has moulded her to perfection and we can see it encapsulated in her literary collections. The focus of this article is a diverse and novel take on her poetic oeuvre by analyzing six select poems of hers which can be titled as blue poems. This article titled *Navigation on Waterscapes: A Study on Select Poems of Meena Alexander* figures out how Meena Alexander uses the blue/the waters/the seascape as powerful metaphors that link her with her past. Further, for the poet, the blue is a motif, metaphor, and symbol that harbor nostalgia and yearning for things past. Since this aspect of her poems has never been researched before, the study is expected to highlight this unappreciated element in her poems. The water metaphor thus displays varied layers of meaning and connotations when it comes to unravelling the literary enigma that is Meena Alexander. Though primarily people and places form part of her memory, her poetic journey is deeply rooted in a state of fluidity from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the seen to the unseen.

Keywords: *Migration, Memory, Seascapes, Fluidity, Homeland.*

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Meena Alexander, the renowned post-colonial literary figure began writing at a very early age, both in English and French. Born in Kerala, India, raised in Sudan, educated in England, and later settling in the United States, she boasts a range of diasporic layers that contribute to her identity as a renowned Indo American writer. The literary world of Meena Alexander is an exploration of her personal spaces of solace and disturbance. The diasporic experiences have moulded her to perfection and we can see it encapsulated in her literary collections. Being in a world that is constantly fluid, she found literary anchor in dwelling on metaphors and symbols that she was familiar with in her homeland and which gave her a sense of identity and belonging. The focus of this article is not on the above mentioned obvious Meena Alexander, but a diverse and novel take on her poetic oeuvre by analyzing select poems of hers which can be titled as blue poems.

The aim of this article is to figure out how Meena Alexander uses the blue/the waters/the seascape as powerful metaphors that link her to her past. Further, for the poet, the blue is a motif, metaphor, and symbol that harbor nostalgia and yearning for things past.

In the trope of the sea present in her works which are predominantly diasporic in nature, we can read as to how water serves as a metaphor for change and as a connecting link in the life of a diasporic writer. Though Meena Alexander is commonly associated with diasporic writings, a couple of her poetry titles reveal that waterscape is an evident trope in her works. With respect to that, the six poems selected for this study truly manifests her clever deployment of the influence of the sea in her poetic narratives. The study is on selected six water trope poems of Meena Alexander published in various poetic collections of hers namely "Blue Lotus," "Acqua Alta," "Autobiography," "Water Crossing," "The Journey" and "Shook Silver."

The article is broadly divided into three sections as by way of introduction, main content, and conclusion where in which introduction will have a brief description about Meena Alexander, the main argument, and the division of the work. Main body will analyze the selected poems in the context of the trope of the blue/the waters/the seascape as a potent symbol in her literary representations. Quotes and examples from the core poems will be applied to further reinstate the arguments linking it to the main contention presented. Finally, in the conclusion a summary of the key points and scope for further research will be briefed on.

"Blue Lotus" from the collection *Raw Silk* came out in the year 2004. In the first stanza of the poem itself, the poet is reminiscing thus: "When I dream of my tribe gathering/by the red soil of the Pamba River" (Alexander 2004). The river Pamba and the "blue lotus in my grandmother's garden" ("Blue Lotus") fills her with misty memories. The nostalgic reference to the river and the memories she associates with her childhood are those which she holds dear to her heart. It carries her forth in times of depressive situations now that she is in a diasporic situation. The geographical location of river Pamba (being close by her ancestral house in Kerala) and the emotions that the river evokes in her are valuable spaces that locks her in a special cocooned memory cosmos that form part of her childhood construct. An article in Kerala's official tourism site refers to river Pamba thus:

> The river itself has become the lifeline of Kerala's rich cultural heritage. It has

> its own mythology, identity, manifestation and spirituality associated with it. The Pamba River has left indelible marks in the historical, cultural and religious life of Kerala. River Pamba, venerated as southern Ganga, nourishes hundreds of medicinal plants in the mountain ranges where it originates and carries its boons to everywhere it flows. (Kerala Tourism)

Thus, the river motif in the poem speaks volumes about her personal interconnectedness with waterscapes that form part of her poetic narratives. The poet continues with her water imagery further in the same poem as she mentions "monsoon clouds" ("Blue Lotus"). Monsoon rains being a dominant feature of the climate of Kerala again takes her back to her zone of comfort and she remembers her ancestral house: "Monsoon clouds from the shore / near my grandmother's house / float through my lines" ("Blue Lotus"). The poet is in a state of fluidity and she is navigating between her past and present where familiar locales and authentic symbols of nostalgia ties her to a lost world. The journey is from Kerala to New York. In the new locale also, she tries to find succor in waterscapes that once upon a time gave her reassurance. She remarks about her new place "ash trees on the riverbank/ on an island where towers blazed" ("Blue Lotus").

In this poem certain icons of Alexander's childhood acts as powerful symbols of lost connections and familial roots. She laments the loosing of her past as the new place does not offer her any sense of concrete identity. The journey from her ancestral house in Kerala to her final settling as an immigrant in New York can be considered as a metaphor exploring the emotional rollercoaster that she experienced in her literary and diasporic journey. But the diasporic writer in her considers the former to be the place where she experienced a sense of belonging and the latter the place where she had to find an emotional connection. A major reason for her mentioning the two riverscapes – river Pamba and the river bank on the island, which are distant, speaks about her affinity with the blue as a symbol and dynamic space for contentment and solace.

"Acqua Alta" is from the collection *Quickly Changing River* which was published in 2008. In this poem, the imagery of the water runs deep rooted in its emotional collaboration that Alexander dares to expose in her poetical narratives. The poem weaves a water collage on the various places she has been to. The poem traces her early life in Kerala to "half a world away" ("Acqua" 6) place in Venice where she fails to connect with. In this poem we see a "young woman" (2008) who is fully confident about her childhood life but who is slowly transformed into a pathetic figure who we feel sorry for because life treated her differently in a foreign setting. She writes thus:

> Why come to Venice? The young woman asks.
>
> I answer in lines — their time may have passed.
>
> As a child, half a world away
>
> I floated in a black canoe, it sank in high water.

This poem also specifically employs water symbols like canoe and high water to refer to two distinct phases of the journey in the life of the poet. The reference to half a world away is that part of her life when she was not an immigrant. That time when she was a child, she was capable and strong enough to lay afloat in life. The canoe

was resilient enough to withhold her. When time passed, the sturdiness of the canoe came to a question and it collapsed in the water when the tide was running high. The story of Alexander's life fits in between these two powerful water symbols.

Though the poet's life was one series of shifts and uncalled for changes, she stayed afloat and steered through the tough tribulations of her life. The sinking in water refers to her diasporic experiences of loss of purpose in life and identity crisis. Further, Alexander continues with her water trope, when she refers to the monsoon season which formed part of her nostalgic memories in childhood. During the monsoon, the water level in the lagoons and rivers rise leading to alarming flood situations which endangers human life. This seasonal phenomenon has been part of her childhood upbringing, connecting her with things and locales familiar. She finds parallel between Venice and Kerala, where in the former place flood situation can ne frightful. Thus indirectly, she is expressing her concern for climatic changes through her water imagery. The poet hints at the tragedy of human life following the floods and remarks: "The lagoon swells at monsoon time and floods the Ghetto. / All the pepper of Muziris cannot buy their freedom or mine," ("Acqua" 6). In this line, a whole lot of pictures corresponding to the rich heritage of her motherland is brought to relief.

The tragedy following inundation is catastrophic irrespective of places (Venice or Kerala) which renders you helpless. The sorrow that you experience cannot be replaced with anything. The poet reminds us: "And painted pottery exchanged for monkeys/ Or chattering peacocks cannot distill sorrow" ("Acqua" 6). What follows is a brilliant span of images which establishes Alexander's ethnicity as a proud Keralite where in which the story of Kalidasa and his Sakuntala remain one of the most iconic of aesthetic and literary enumerations. She continues:

> A fish with rainbow fins is swimming in a foundain,
>
> It has swallowed the ring of remembrance,
>
> This Kalidasa knew,
>
> Dreaming of a high room by the Academia bridge
>
> That holds Sakuntala, still sleeping.
>
> A bird, with feather the color of jasmine
>
> Has made its nest in the timbers of that bridge. ("Acqua" 6)

Alexander though on an emotional ride, anchors her upsurge to a "bridge" where she compares herself to a man who is "staring into the water" ("Acqua" 6). In this significant poem "Acqua Alta" by Alexander, the title itself is symbolic of the rigorous tide especially emotional that she has experienced in her life. But she has braved through it fearlessly because she firmly believed that "no one must see him weeping" (6). Alexander finds solace in her familiar water tropes in this poem too as we find images aligned with water recurring - "a fish, swimming in a fountain" (6). Analyzing her water poems, this poem is truly relevant in the modern scenario.

The high tide or acqua alta, the climatic phenomenon is not a recent climate challenge. In this context, there is the need to mention that as part of a climatic exchange concert, Alexander read her poem "Acqua Alta" (set to music by the Swedish composer Jan Soundstorm) in Engelbrekst Church, Stockholm. To quote Alexander

while on an interview when asked about the impulse behind writing this poem, she explained:

> That the impulse behind her poem lay in a question she was asked when she was in a book reading session in a book store in Piazza San Marco as to why come to Venice? Somehow in La Serenissima, city of golden stone and bright water, my childhood in Kerala with its canals and backwaters seemed so close: one world reflected in the other. I grew up with an awareness of monsoon winds and floods… and now of course with global warming high water (Acqua Alta) has intensified. (Joseph)

Symbols better express our understanding and experiences with the natural elements in a literary world. Upon analyzing the water narratives of Meena Alexander, seascapes are powerful metaphors in broaching shifting situations of life and cultural experiences in a foreign world. "Autobiography" is one among the poems in the collection titled *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013). The poems can boast about an apt title because its focal point is the description of a major episode in the life of Alexander - her departure from Kochi (a major port city along the coast of the Arabian Sea which is famous for its geographical mix of the sea, estuaries, backwaters and islands) to a foreign country. This is her maiden journey which can be considered as the beginning of her experiences as a diasporic writer. Being a water centric poem, "Autobiography" begins with the image of a child on a ship, voyaging on the seas, staring at the rocks at the bottom of the receding water.

The child is none other than Alexander, who personifies all the curiosity that one can associate with a small child on her first trip out into the seas. Evidently Alexander had a fascination towards water right from a very early stage in life. The beginning of the poem refers to the historic voyage of Alexander to Sudan where all the cultural differences went into her evolvement as a writer of diasporic merit. Symbols and other images connected with sea again come into relief. Terms like "porthole" and "under water" ("Water") helps the reader to stay focused on the metaphor of the oceanscape. The readers get the feel of a child who is peering right out of the porthole of a ship into the crystal-clear water. The water is so pristine that the stones beneath it was seemingly dancing with springy steps. The readers also get the feel of being on a ship, with rhythmic sways and we feel as though the water is prancing. The poet narrates thus:

> Out of a porthole a child pokes her head.
>
> Rocks prance under water.
>
> Sunlight burns a hole in air
>
> Fit for a house to fall through.
>
> Palm trees dive into indigo
>
> Where is Kochi now? ("Water")

The mesmerizing beauty associated with the lush vegetation of native Kochi, with an array of sashaying palm trees dressed in green swaying in the gentle warm breeze slowly getting immersed into the indigo waters of the Arabian Sea should be an unforgettable memory that Alexander would always hold very dear to her heart – as she embarked on her maiden voyage. The journey on the waters makes her ask the first crucial question as to her whereabouts. The journey on the seas becomes a potent metaphor for the change and anxiety that she is about to experience.

As a poem which narrates Alexander's travel to a foreign land, the whole setting of the poem is on a ship. The readers get diverse images of the activities of the travelers while on board. Alexander draws our attention to the cultural differences between the rich and poor:

> Out on deck men raise glasses of cognac, / Women in chiffon saris / Giggle at the atrocious accents of the poor." In between, child Alexander resurfaces — "The child sees flying fish / Vomited by the sea. ("Water")

Towards the end of the poem, we find how important the sea is to the poet. In fact, the adult in Alexander, with a highly matured voice and clarity of thought acknowledges the power of the seas. The sea has made her a woman of substance — the sea is instrumental in helping her cross boundaries to a foreign world. The sea has helped her find a voice in the world of poetry. But she labels her poetic ramblings to be "drunken migrations" ("Water"). The sea allows you to wander and migrate. Here we can find the poet confessing about the migratory and cultural possibilities of sea crossings, the undeniable bond between humans and the water. Sea becomes a dominant metaphor for cultural exchange. But the very waterscape which gave her a chance to delve deep into poetic excellence turns bittersweet for her as it is reduced to nothing but a memory. Alexander concludes thus: "The sea has no custom, no ceremony. / … No compass to the sea. / The sea is memory" ("Water").

"Water Crossing" can be considered as a continuation of the journey of young Alexander to a foreign land from a domestic ground (Kerala to Sudan). This poem belongs to the collection titled *Birthplace with Buried Stones* published in the year 2013. In this poem, the find the companionship of her mother, who is a frequent figure in a couple of her poems, Alexander tries to explain how her significant poetic trajectory has in its route the seascape a major trope: "When I turned five, high wind and water / Swallowed what I could remember" ("Water"). Crossing the boundaries from Kerala to Sudan blinded all her fond memories about her past. Thus, the sea was a powerful symbol marking her loneliness and a medium for transformation to a strange self. Life was different with the crossing, Alexander continues, the journey was from a place where "music … is the one thing that counted" to a place where music cannot do anything "against the weapons of soldiers" ("Water").

This poem with an evident title that signifies the effect of water in Alexander's life also portrays her recurring themes of a lost world filled with nostalgia and belonging. The journey on the seas was one where Alexander lost her familiar life and was hurled to a condition where "high wind and water / Swallowed what I could remember" ("Water"). The terms high wind and water are symbolic of the turbulent times that she has experienced in her diasporic life. Everything was 'starting to float' for her signifying the state of fluidity of her mind. Her journey crossing the waters passed the "Red Sea" (2013), which is again symbolic of transition in her life.

The sea being in a constant state of unrest, the water body can directly mean the disturbance faced by the poet in a foreign place. She blames the "salt water" for her loneliness ("Water"). She was moving away from the accustomed family backdrop of the "mango grove" in her laid-back village settings. Familiar people and their keep sakes are soon receding from memory — "Grandmother's blackened pearls" (2013) and she is moving to a frightful world where she could not "bear in weight of loneliness" ("Water").

But time and circumstance made the water crossing valuable and ultimately significant. Alexander braved her way through unfamiliar and difficult terrains though "I had to teach myself" the ways of the new world ("Water"). The poem "Water Crossing" is portrayed from the eyes of a child who displays all the fear and insecurities while being uprooted from her familiar people and places. Water crossing is thus symbolic of Alexander's journey to a person of strength, though she expresses her angst at the sight of "weapons of soldiers" at the new terrain ("Water").

"Water Crossing" is a true testimony to the influence of the seascape and images related to water on Alexander's poetic oeuvre. From a superficial glance, a reader can never make out and identify any evident metaphors or symbols associated with water other than the title in this poem. But a deeper study will reveal that right from the title to the very end of the poem, it upholds the motif of the water being a relevant and poignant metaphor for the changes that Alexander experienced from the life of a five-year-old to an older, more mature woman. The gap between the above two extremes is embodied in the poem. When she crossed the waters, though the "waves clustered" and "Guns on the cliffs started to stutter" she took a bold step in bolstering herself in an unfamiliar place ("Water"). What gave her strength is the water crossing. Thus, the poem is symbolic of and a tribute to the audacity that is inherent in her.

The poem "The Journey" embodies the whole spirit of travel that can affect a person who is forced to move away from a place of familiarity. Being Meena Alexander and her preoccupation with displacement emotions, this poem is no different from her previous diasporic works. Her journey particularly in this poem takes place literally on a ship. The reader can experience her agony at the journey right from the beginning. She carries with her a flutter of tumultuous emotions and the baggage of childhood nostalgic memories on this journey. To express herself Alexander engages with water trope right from the beginning:

> I was blindfolded and had only the mercy of the sea
>
> (And sprigs of jasmine in my arms)
>
> The journey was awkward: lines blown inward, syllables askew.
>
> Gulls nestled in torn pages. ("The Journey")

Evidently the poet was scared, and she has her own reasons for that. She felt blindfolded on her way, she feels the dangers of the water, undergoes powerlessness, and is sure that she is vulnerable at the unpredictable nature of the sea. Taking the water symbol to another level, the poet describes her journey. The reader can understand the turbulence of the seas, the fierce blowing of the wind, and the course of the dangerous journey on an unanticipated path. Again, the presence of the sea gulls — a water bird- signifying the essence of the seas is brought in with a very realistic touch. The sea gulls are birds that are capable of surviving tough oceanic environments. Hence the birds can be symbolically suggestive of the inherent strength in the poet who can steer clear of unpredictable life courses.

To emphasize on her very personal feelings, she remarks on the diverse languages spoken by the people in her new place. Alexander continues with the water imagery and compares the place to a fountain and herself to a source of water body. The different small sources of water

bodies finally merge into a bigger one. Here we find the poet despite the initial difficulties deciding to merge in with the new place and to better express herself, she continues with the trope of water: "There were many languages flowing in the fountain. / In spite of certain confusion I decided not to stay thirsty" ("The Journey"). "The Journey" can be a continuation to the poem "Water Crossing" since there are references to the "a war was going on" ("The Journey") in this poem too. Upon the end of the journey across the water, she realizes that the new place does not offer the poet any solace. The journey over the seas forces her to be in a confused state which was frightening to a fiver year old: "I was five years old and tried to understand what was happening. / My soul ran away with me" ("The Journey").

A more mature Alexander feels as though she is 'afloat on water,' she employs the water motif to picture her current situation. While on water, she is able to see tall cliffs at a distance. But she finds the landscape is pushing her further away from things and places familiar which is signified in the image of "crushed jasmine" ("The Journey"). Journey's rarely end in happiness. Water can be a symbol of fluidity of existence, a symbol of change that Alexander had to go through while growing up. She had to get used to it whether she like it or not. Water serves as a powerful tool in the exploration of the state of mind of the person – here the poet is struggling with personal loss and the need to find a harbor amid the "rock and ruin" and the "pathways of salt" ("The Journey"). The journey over the sea to the distant land signifies uprooting and she finds the way laborious and calls it salted, carrying forth her use of symbols connected with the sea.

The final poem for analysis "Shook Silver" belongs to the collection *Atmospheric Embroidery* which came out in 2015. Like that of in "Water Crossing," this poem has the presence of Alexander's mother. It is a reminder of the voyage the mother and the daughter took from Kerala to Sudan. The title of the poem signifies the image of the refection of the moon light on the surface of the ocean. The child Alexander while on the boat bound to Africa, watching the shimmer of the silver light of the moon on the ocean is excited. Owing to the gentle sway of the boat, it seems as though the whole of the water is shaking in the silver light. The water imagery used by the poet is symbolic of the flux of emotions that the poet undergoes while crossing the ocean. It can also refer to the reflective quality of the water. There is the explicit reference to the mighty Indian Ocean and the poet remembers that she was a child when she first crossed it.

The contrast between the attitude of the mother and the daughter is evident in the poem. The waterscape brought out the difference as the former is cautious and the latter displaying her carefree side (2015) narrates thus:

I was a child on the Indian Ocean.

Deck-side we dance in a heat – haze,

Toes squirm under silver wings,

…

Amma peers out of the porthole,

Sari stitched with bits of saffron,

Watch out for flying fish

She cries. ("Shook" 6)

Though the voyage evokes a sense of beauty in the poet, it also reminds the poet about her insecurities. She is leaving her memories behind principally those which attached her with

her grandmother. She tries to find comfort in that the new locale to which she is travelling has similarities with her homeland. She tries to hold on to the memories of her grandmother. There is the reference to the "livid sea" ("Shook") and she feels that she is no longer a child and she is older now. The water terminology can be symbolic of the turbulent times in the life of the poet where she had nothing to hold on to except memories from the past. The ocean becomes a conspicuous symbol that harbors the hidden motif of nostalgia and yearning for her past. The water metaphor thus displays layers of meaning when it comes to understanding the persona of Alexander as a diasporic writer.

A close look at the six selected poems upon the lens of the waterscape proves that water trope and water imagery has helped Alexander to bring to relief the difficulties that she had faced as a diasporic writer from South Asia. The impact of the journey as by way of displacement and the sense of loss of one's identity can be traumatic for a person. Human emotions are vast, ungraspable, and complex like that of the ocean. No one can measure or gauge the challenges that life throws at you. In that life is similar to the waters, unpredictable and persistently fluctuating. Life is unpredictable similar to the experience while on a voyage.

The travels undertaken by Alexander seems no where near comfortable for her. Analyzing the six poems, all the poems make very clear references to journey on water bodies via ship. Thus water/ocean serves as a powerful symbol that speaks about the variability of human mind and experiences. Being born in Kerala, monsoon, floods, backwaters, waterfalls, fountains, ponds, ships, canoes, tides all form part of the very fundamental of Alexander's existence. When she employs water imagery to denote and suggest her multiple and fluctuating identities, we also realize that Alexander is deliberate and conscious in employing water motifs and water imagery in her works to denote a significant change in her life. It is in this context that these selected poems gain relevance and traction.

Though basically, diasporic misery forms the core of Alexander's writing, water imagery is employed to bring to relief the interaction between human emotions and the world around us. The water is always an open space symbolic of change. Sea has cultural and financial significance. Reading from a literary and aesthetic perspective, sea is a metaphor for changeableness. This area has undergone considerable research and refinement. Though rich in imagery, Alexander's poems are seldom examined for their seascapes, where water serves as a powerful reflection of her personal and cultural experiences. The six poems selected for the study are significant in hat they can be identified as works that reflects light on her journey as a diasporic writer of magnitude.

When the route of Alexander's literary cruise is navigated, sea motifs are pivotal to her body of works. They form an integral part of her personal narratives. This present study spans noteworthy poems from 2004 to 2015. But this do not mean that the water motifs are limited to these poems alone. There is the need to find out more about Meena Alexander as a poet of the seascapes rather than limiting and cornering her in the contours of diasporic marginality.

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The Poetics of Forgetting and Reparative Narrative in Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*

Alphin Chacko & Deepa Thomas

Abstract

This paper examines Arundhati Roy's 2025 memoir, *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, as a profound and deliberate act of narrative repair. Moving beyond a simplistic biographical reading, the analysis utilises a critical memory studies paradigm to explore the text as a performative 'working-through' of intergenerational trauma. The memoir is positioned not merely as a chronicle of recollection, but as an active 'poetics of forgetting'—a strategic crafting of narrative necessary for the construction of a liveable subjectivity. Central to this exploration is the emplaced nature of trauma within the traumatic home of Ayemenem, which Roy depicts as a precarious ledge of social and emotional instability. The study meticulously traces the transmission of violence from the 'Imperial Entomologist' through Mary Roy to the author, framing this 'gift of darkness' as the foundational catalyst for Roy's identity as a writer and dissident. The thesis argument posits that Roy employs a schizoid, postmemorial account to stage an 'antagonistic' dialogue between the public cultural memory of Mary Roy as a feminist icon and the private counter-memory of her as a source of 'soul-crushing meanness.' Ultimately, the memoir functions as a 'multidirectional' space where these hostile narratives productively interact, allowing the author to transform the 'fish hooks' of inherited trauma into a transformative, world-making literary consciousness.

Keywords: *Traumatic Home, Multidirectional Memory, Intergenerational Trauma.*

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Mother Mary Comes to Me, is the much discussed 2025 memoir, Arundhati Roy wrote about her deceased mother Mary Roy, a significant educator and feminist icon of Kerala. The memoir, a complex and brave attempt to reckon with Mary Roy, was published in the wake of her death, is far from a lucid eulogy. It is a profound, 'heart-smashed' (Roy 2) exploration of a relationship marked by a brutal paradox: Mary Roy as both 'shelter and storm' (8). The fundamental paradox between Mary Roy as a celebrated public 'revolutionary' (39) who waged battles for women's rights and the private figure of "soul-crushing meanness" (5) who inflicted lasting wounds on her own children defies a straightforward biographical reading. The memoir's true force lies not in its recounting of events, but in its conscious, heavy engagement with the very nature of memory itself. An analysis of the text requires a framework that can account for the "living, breathing soup of memory and imagination" (6) that Roy delineates. A unidirectional, trauma-based reading is insufficient. Instead, a critical memory studies theoretical paradigm is essential to understand Roy's narrative as a conscious, reparative act. The memoir is not just a collection of memories; it is a *process* exemplifying what Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir terms a 'poetics of forgetting,' where 'crafted' (4) narratives become prerequisite for survival. It explores how memory is 'emplaced' in 'traumatic homes' (Hubbell et al. 10) like the Ayemenem house, which stands as "a ledge that we could be nudged off at any moment" (Roy 19). Most importantly, the text stages a confrontation between 'antagonistic' memory archives—the public icon versus the private abuser and meticulously maps the 'transmission and mediation' of intergenerational trauma.

This article attempts to argue that in *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Arundhati Roy employs a schizoid, postmemorial account not as a simple revisiting of trauma, but as a performative act of working-through the transmission and mediation of intergenerational violence. The memoir stages an 'antagonistic' dialogue between Roy's personal counter-memory (3) of abuse and the public, cultural memory of Mary Roy as a feminist icon. More than a passive recollection, this narrative functions as an active poetics of forgetting, a conscious crafting (4) of a liveable subjectivity. Effectively, Roy demonstrates that her identity as a 'seditious, traitor-writer' (4, 15) is the necessary and direct culmination of this inherited 'gift of darkness' (53), which she transforms through the reparative act of writing.

Roy's memoir is as much an exploration of willed, strategic forgetting as it is a chronicle of involuntary memory. The narrative does not merely *contain* memories; it actively *curates* them, deploying forgetting as a crucial tool for survival and self-definition. In *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir provides a critical framework for this process, arguing that forgetting should be analysed "not as a failure, a lack or an absence but as an active, and often strategic, process." This 'poetics of forgetting' moves beyond seeing memory as a simple act of retrieval and instead presents forgetting as "a prerequisite for... a liveable life." In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Roy's narrative demonstrates this strategic process perfectly, particularly in her separation from her mother. The lie Roy 'crafts' to explain her departure from home is the memoir's first and most explicit example of this willed forgetting. She explains the complex emotional negotiation that makes a strained though continued relationship possible, a negotiation built on a shared, unspoken agreement to forget the more painful truth:

> I left my mother not because I didn't love her, but in order to be able to continue to love her. Staying would have made that impossible. Once I left, I didn't see or speak to her for years. She never looked for me. She never asked me why I left. There was no need for that. We both knew. We settled on a lie. A good one. I crafted it - 'She loved me enough to let me go.' (Roy 4)

This "crafted" (4) narrative is precisely the "active... process" Gudmundsdottir describes. It is a narrative strategy that allows both mother and daughter to forget the 'soul-crushing meanness' (5) and abuse that truly prompted the separation. By overwriting this unbearable reality with a "good one" (4), the 'lie' becomes the very thing that allows them "to continue to love" (4). This strategic forgetting is sharply contrasted with the involuntary persistence of traumatic memory, which Roy highlights as a failure of this active process. Certain memories, particularly those of acute humiliation, resist any attempt to be 'crafted' or willed away: "I have tried hard to forget this moment [the 'bitch' incident]... but clearly, I haven't succeeded" (46). Forgetting, in Roy's narrative, is therefore a contested act. Furthermore, Roy's construction of a new self in Delhi is also an act of strategic forgetting, an attempt to sever ties with the "valiant organ-child" (71) she was forced to become. This is not just a geographical move but a willed erasure of a former self: "I dropped my first name, Susanna. Starting then, I gradually, deliberately, transformed myself into somebody else" (71). This deliberate transformation is an attempt to create a 'liveable life' by actively forgetting the person who was "constructed from its debris" (360). However, the memoir's very existence proves that this forgetting is ultimately incomplete. The narrative is driven by the tension between the "lie" (4) necessary for survival and the traumatic "thorns" (7) that can never be fully forgotten, demonstrating that 'forgetting and remembering are... intricately interwoven' in the act of mending a 'fractured subjectivity.'

Roy's narrative also intricately weaves memory with physical location, demonstrating how trauma becomes 'emplaced' in the very architecture of a life. The memoir is not just a recollection of events but cartography of 'places of traumatic memory.' Amy L. Hubbell, in *Places of Traumatic Memory*, explores how the 'traumatic home' functions as a 'micro-political' arena where 'the past is never past' and power dynamics are violently inscribed onto domestic space. For the young Roy, 'home' is never a place of stability but a series of precarious lodgings that embody her family's "fugitive" (10) status. This begins in the Ooty cottage, a "dank and gloomy" (10) space where the family is not tenants but 'squatters, interlopers' (10). The house itself becomes the site of the foundational legal and familial trauma that defines Mary Roy's future: the eviction attempt by her brother, G. Isaac, and her mother. Roy's memory of this event is profoundly spatial, a memory of "running through the town in panic, trying to find a lawyer" (12). The cottage is not a shelter but a contested territory, a place from which they can be expelled at any moment. This precarity is amplified in the Ayemenem house, which functions as the memoir's central 'traumatic home.' Roy's description frames the house as a site of unbearable affective tension, a physical 'ledge' that represents their social and emotional instability:

> Life in Ayemenem was like living on a ledge that we could be nudged off at any moment. Even Kochu Maria, the cook, would tell me that we had no

> right to be living there... Every few days the Cosmopolitans would quarrel. When they fought, the whole house shook. Plates would be sma-shed; doors broken down. (19)

The house that 'shook' (19) is a literal manifestation of the family's internal state. It is a "micro-political" battleground where "fights were, unsurprisingly, about money" (19) and Roy's very presence was questioned. In direct opposition to this "emplaced" trauma, Roy identifies a 'counter-space' of memory in the natural world, a place of refuge that exists outside the home's violent architecture: "The river was my refuge. It made up for everything that was wrong in my life" (20). This stark partitioning of the landscape—the 'traumatic home' versus the 'refuge' of the river—illustrates Roy's early strategy of emotional survival. Her subsequent 'escape' (85) to Delhi, and Mary Roy's later creation of the Laurie Baker-designed school (56-61), can thus be read as a conscious attempt to build a new, stable "mnemonic space" to replace the fractured and traumatic homes of the past.

The memoir also provides a lucid and harrowing map of what memory studies scholars identify as 'intergenerational memory.' This framework analyses how "traumatic pasts that have not been 'worked through' are passed on to the next generation," often in 'fragmented and mediated forms.' *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is a profound case study of this 'transmission and mediation,' meticulously tracing a legacy of violence that begins not with Mary Roy, but with her father. The narrative establishes the first generation, the "Imperial Entomologist" (10), as the origin point of the family's trauma. His violence is specific, foundational, and absolute, shaping the "traumatic home" that Mary Roy would later flee:

> ... about his violence (he whipped his children, turned them out of the house regularly, and split my grandmother's scalp open with a brass vase). (11)

> ... in a fit of jealous rage, [he] smashed the first violin she owned. (17)

This trauma is not simply an event; it is an inheritance. The *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* notes that such legacies "continue to shape the lives of subsequent generations" long after the original perpetrators are gone. Mary Roy, the second generation, becomes the primary conduit for this 'mediated' trauma. Her "wild, unpredictable temper" (5) is a direct, if tragic, re-enactment of her father's. The memoir makes this transmission explicit, showing how Mary Roy displaces her "fury against men (her father, husband,` and brother in particular), on her son" (40). The scene of this re-enactment is one of the memoirs most painful:

> I followed as quietly as I could and watched through the keyhole as she beat him until the thick wooden ruler broke. 'No son of mine comes home with a report that says 'average student.' (43)

Arundhati and her brother, the third generation, are the final inheritors. They are the 'collateral' (40) for their mother's own unresolved past. As Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir observes, such inherited trauma can lead to a "fractured subjectivity" in the heir. Roy's most profound insight, however, is her ultimate re-framing of this inheritance. She does not position herself merely as a victim but as the recipient of a complex 'gift' that forges her identity as a writer and dissident. She concludes that her mother's behaviour was essential to her own formation:

> It was almost as though for her to shine her light on her students and give them all she had, we he and I had to absorb her darkness. Today, though, I am grateful for that gift of darkness. I learned to keep it close, to map it, to sift through its shades, to stare at it until it gave up its secrets. It turned out to be a route to freedom, too. (53)

This 'gift of darkness' (53) *is* the intergenerational trauma, which Roy learns to 'map' and 'sift through' (53). The act of writing becomes this very process of mapping. The 'route to freedom' (53) is her transformation of this inherited trauma into political and literary consciousness.

While the memoir meticulously maps the inheritance of trauma, it's most significant achievement lies in its function as a therapeutic act of *Durcharbeitung*, or **'**working-through.**'** The narrative is not merely a symptom of a 'fractured subjectivity;' it is the very mechanism of its repair. Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir posits that such life writing is a "process of remembering and forgetting ... that attempt[s] to mend" the self, moving "from a fragmented to a more coherent, liveable self." Roy's memoir is a profound embodiment of this 'working-through,' a conscious effort to process and integrate her 'antagonistic' memories. Roy states this reparative purpose as the book's explicit thesis. She is not writing to condemn or simply to recollect; she is writing to 'bridge' the chasm within herself. The trauma she inherited is described as an embodied, physical ailment—'thorns' in her 'bloodstream'—and the writing of the book is the act of psychological surgery required to live with it:

> To bridge the chasm between the legacy of love she left for those whose lives she touched, and the thorns she set down for me, like little floaters in my bloodstream —fish hooks that still catch on soft tissue as my blood makes its way to and from my heart is why I write this book. It is as hard to write as it is not to. (7-8)

This passage defines the book as a necessary, though painful, process of 'working-through' rather than 'acting out.' Roy further clarifies that this process of 'mending' her fractured self is, in fact, the very origin of her authorial identity. The act of analysing her mother's past becomes the act of creating her own subjectivity as a writer:

> In my effort to fathom my mother, to see things from her perspective... to understand what hurt her ... I turned into a maze, a labyrinth of pathways that zigzag underground and surface in strange places, hoping to gain a vantage point for a perspective other than my own ... It made me a writer. A novelist. Because that's what novelists are labyrinths. And now this labyrinth must make sense of its labyrinthine self without her. (7)

This is the memoir's central 'working-through.' The 'labyrinth' is the 'fractured subjectivity' created by the trauma, and the book itself is the act of the "labyrinth" making "sense of its labyrinthine self" (7). By transforming the "fish hooks" (7) in her blood into the ink on the page, Roy demonstrates that the narrative act is not just a representation of memory but a powerful, transformative, and world-making process of its own.

The memoir's central emotional conflict stems from Arundhati Roy's struggle to reconcile two "versions of the past ... [that] remain in

hostile tension." As Brett Ashley Kaplan observes in *Critical Memory Studies*, memory is often 'antagonistic,' particularly when a private, "fragmented" counter-memory collides with a dominant public narrative. Roy's entire memoir operates within this 'antagonistic' gap. On one side is the public, cultural memory of Mary Roy as a 'legendary' (2) feminist icon; on the other is Roy's private, embodied memory of Mary Roy as a source of "soul-crushing meanness" (5). This hostile tension is established in the opening pages. Roy's profound grief is not simple; it is complicated by a sense of confusion and guilt, a direct symptom of these warring memory-archives:

> I truly believed she would outlive me. When she didn't, I was wrecked, heart-smashed. I am puzzled and more than a little ashamed by the intensity of my response. (2)

This 'puzzled' (2) shame arises from the incompatibility of her grief with her 'counter-memory' (3) of abuse. Her brother gives voice to this antagonism: "'I don't understand your reaction. She treated nobody as badly as she treated you'" (3). The memoir refuses to resolve this tension or choose one memory over the other. Instead, citing Michael Rothberg, Kaplan notes that memory can be multidirectional, a space where conflicting narratives can "productively interact, merge, and produce new forms of memory." Roy's portrait of her mother as a "gangster" is her attempt at this 'multidirectional' synthesis:

> I watched her unleash all of herself - her genius, her eccentricity, her radical kindness, her militant courage, her ruthlessness, her generosity, her cruelty... I watched her make space for the whole of herself, for all her selves, in that little world. It was nothing short of a miracle —a terror and a wonder to behold. (5)

This passage is the epitome of 'multidirectional memory.' Roy does not use the 'cruelty' to erase the 'genius,'nor the 'radical kindness' to forgive the 'ruthlessness.' She presents them as one 'whole,' a 'terror and a wonder' (5). The memoir itself becomes the 'multidirectional' space where these 'hostile' memories are forced to 'productively interact,' allowing Roy to 'fathom' (7) her mother without resorting to a simplistic, one-dimensional verdict.

In conclusion, this article has argued that Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is a profound and deliberate act of narrative repair. It is a 'working-through' of a complex and 'antagonistic' past, in which the 'transmission' of intergenerational trauma is both chronicled and transformed. We have seen how Roy employs a 'poetics of forgetting,' 'crafting' (4) a 'liveable' (Guðmundsdóttir 10) past to survive a 'soul-crushing' (Roy 5) reality. We have analysed how this trauma is "emplaced" within the "traumatic home" (Hubbell et al. 10) of Ayemenem, a 'ledge' (Roy 19) from which the river provided the only 'refuge' (Roy 20). We have traced the 'gift of darkness' (53) from the 'Imperial Entomologist' (10) to Mary Roy, who in turn re-enacted that violence on her own children (43). Finally, we have seen how Roy uses the 'multidirectional' space of the memoir to hold these 'hostile' memories—of 'genius' and 'cruelty' (5)—in productive tension. The narrative act itself becomes the cure, the process by which Roy, the 'labyrinth,' finally "make[s] sense of its labyrinthine self" (7). In transforming the 'fish hooks' (7) in her 'bloodstream' into the ink on the page, Roy demonstrates that her identity as a "seditious, traitor-writer" (4, 15) was never a departure from her familial past, but its most necessary and direct culmination.

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Masculinities at the Margins: A Critical Analysis of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *My Father's Garden*

M.S. Veena

Abstract

This paper analyses masculinity and its intersection with marginality in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *My Father's Garden*, drawing on R. W. Connell's concept of masculinities. Focusing on the unnamed narrator's relationships with his queer lover, male friend, and father, the paper explores how sexuality, social structures, and Adivasi identity shape his experience of masculinity. The narrator's journey reflects fractured attempts at intimacy, unresolved power imbalances, and political betrayals that highlight the vulnerability of subaltern masculinities. The figure of the father, however, exceeds Connell's typology of hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginal masculinities. His shift from a form of political masculinity to one rooted in ecological care marks a transition towards an ecological masculinity grounded in the well-being of all life. The garden he cultivates becomes a quiet, reparative space where an alternative Adivasi masculinity is affirmed through acts of care and co-existence.

Keywords: *Masculinity*, *Marginality*, *Adivasi*, *Homosexuality*, *Ecology*.

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Recent scholarship on gender and identity in India has increasingly foregrounded the intersection of masculinity with structures of marginality such as caste, class, sexuality, and indignity. Masculinity is not a monolithic or universal category; rather, it is constituted through complex social hierarchies and is always performed in relation to power. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *My Father's Garden* (2019) offers a poignant literary exploration of this intersection of masculinity and marginality. In an interview to *Scroll*, Shekhar notes,

> In writing *My Father's Garden*, I have borrowed from a number of lives. Lives of other people and from my life as well, and also lives of trees. Life is the inspiration and influence here. (Shikhandin)

Narrated by an Adivasi government doctor, the text moves between the emotional trauma of queer relationships, the bureaucratic manipulation of a paternal male friend, and the symbolic silence of a politically broken father. As Keshava Guha observes,

> It would be easy to categorise *My Father's Garden* as a bildungsroman. But its particular approach to character reminded me of the famous first of *David Copperfield*, which asks whether its narrator is to be the hero of his own life... Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's narrator is more compelled by the lives and bodies of the men he loves than by his own. (*The Hindu*)

Drawing on R. W. Connell's concept of masculinities, this paper views masculinity in the novel as a fluid, performative, and fractured experience shaped by failed intimacy, systemic oppression, and political betrayal. The study demonstrates how the novel not only critiques the violence of hegemonic masculinity, but also envisions the possibility of an alternative ecological masculinity rooted in care, relationality, and coexistence.

The first section of the novel titled 'Lover' explores the unnamed narrator's emotionally burdened masculinity shaped by his homosexuality. From adolescence, the narrator's sense of self is fractured by secrecy, shame, and paternal expectation. Reflecting on his teenage years, he admits,

> Since I had entered teenage, I had found myself becoming attracted to boys in school, to seniors and juniors, but couldn't find the courage or the words to express my attraction to them. (171)

His desires find a repository in his private collection of photographs from *Filmfare* and *Cine Blitz* magazines. Yet the fear that his father may discover his sexuality haunts him. "What if he rejected me? This was a thought that never ceased to chill me to the bone"(172). His is a masculinity that Connell identifies as subordinate to hegemonic masculinity, associated not with pride but fear and internalized shame. Connell notes that this subordination "is much more than a cultural stigmatization of homosexuality or gay identity. Gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices" (78). This subordination generally takes shape through multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination, affecting domains such as politics, culture, legal rights, economic opportunities, and personal relationships.

In the novel, the narrator's first emotionally significant relationship with Sunil, a fellow medical student, reveals the isolating consequences of closeted desire.

> Even after Sunil and I became lovers, he made sure we were not seen together in public. He wouldn't even acknowledge me if I met him in class or in the corridors. Whenever he needed me, he'd give me a call. (18)

When Sunil gets married after begging the narrator not to ruin his marriage, the narrator is left depressed, unable to come to terms with reality. His rage and sorrow turn inward. "I threw things, broke things, I once splashed hot tea on myself" (20). These acts of self-harm are expressions of a masculinity that is collapsing, unable to claim emotional legitimacy or relational fulfilment in a world that punishes deviation from the heterosexual norm. His subsequent relationship with Lucky is driven more by physicality than affection. "Sex with Lucky was wild. We would bite, scratch and hit each other" (25). Though the relationship appears exciting and liberating at the beginning, the narrator soon realises he is being used again. "He was with me only for alcohol, and the endless eating out in dhabas and restaurants" (26). The narrator realises that his masculinity is reduced to a commodity, valued for what it can provide rather than who he is.

However, his urge to find meaningful relationships leads him to a more damaging relationship with Samir. Initially, sex with Samir is paired with humiliation as Samir swears at him during the act. "I had learned to find pleasure in self-abasement" (10). The narrator is so desperate to have an emotionally fulfilling relationship that he ignores the economic exploitation inherent in the relationship. "Giving him money was almost the same as buying alcohol for Lucky, perhaps even worse, but I was past caring" (35). However, it is the lack of emotional connection between them that hurts him the most. "But what ultimately shattered me was that Samir never kissed me. Never... A kiss is for someone special" (53). This refusal to offer even the simplest gesture of affection, a kiss, highlights the profound lack of love in their relationship. As Ruth Vanita observes, "The debate about same-sex marriage is also about who is entitled to use the language of love" (36). In a society where homophobic discourse reduces same-sex relationships to mere lust, and where even centrists question whether such love is "as worthy of recognition as male-female love" (36), the narrator's yearning for emotional intimacy is persistently undermined. This cultural invalidation is further intensified in the Indian context, where the lack of legal recognition for same-sex marriage renders such relationships both structurally unstable and emotionally precarious. Vanita also notes that even within queer theory, the concept of love is often dismissed as too 'heterosexual,' 'commercialized,' or 'bourgeois' (36), prompting a preference for terms like 'desire' instead. As a result, both a legal and discursive void emerges, leaving the narrator's pursuit of emotional fulfilment unacknowledged.

When the narrator gets a government job as a doctor in Pakur, he attempts in vain to maintain a long-distance relationship with Samir.

> I tried to keep in touch with Samir but he remained elusive. I stalked him on Facebook, saw him making friends, sent him messages, and then, one day, he blocked me. I gave up, and for several years, we did not speak at all. There was no phone call, no text, nothing. (55-56)

The emotional toll of failed relationships becomes unbearable for him, leading to a suicide attempt. When he meets Samir again, he receives a few comforting words that make him momentarily happy. But the hollowness of that exchange becomes clear to him soon.

> I realised that I had made a lifeboat of just two kind words from Samir. It was a compromise, and a sorry one. For what I really wanted was him. I wanted Samir, entire. Not his words but him. His body, his breath, his entire being. I wanted a completion that I would find nowhere, with no one. I was meant to sink, I was sinking. (59)

This is a moment of self-awareness for the narrator as he realises that his desire for completeness may never be fulfilled. Denied access to hegemonic frameworks of romantic success, the narrator occupies a position of subordinate masculinity at the margins of normative gender ideals.

His train journey home after this visit becomes a moment of reflection on his identity and its future. Watching an old couple support each other, he recognises the emotional future he may never have. "It was a reality I felt I could only aspire to, growing old with someone whom I could trust... Who would offer me an arm when I was sixty? (61)."

This imagined future highlights the disinheritance of queer men from the conventional scripts of love and companionship. His solitude is both physical and existential. His encounter with the hijras on the train also leads him to further contemplation. Initially, he gives them one hundred rupees instead of the usual ten which surprises them. On another day, when he gives only ten, they ask, "Poora hai?" and then, "Sab poora hai? Complete hai? Kuch missing toh nahin hai?" He responds instinctively, "Na, na, kuch missing nahin hai. Sab complete hai" (62). The question itself is ironic. Hijras, themselves marginalised within the gender spectrum, recognise in the narrator a similar incompleteness. This brief encounter positions hijras not as a peripheral identity, but as a mirror to the narrator's fractured masculine performance. The section ends with the narrator back in his hometown, haunted by his family's silence. The narrator later notes, "I lacked the vocabulary, the courage and the cruelty needed to tell him that I was not the son he expected me to be"(65). His longing for Samir persists, but so does his fear of rejection from his family. Though he enjoys professional success, he remains emotionally invisible and alienated. He exists unhappily with a subordinate masculinity, excluded from the privileges reserved for hegemonic masculinity.

The second section of the novel titled 'Friend' presents a nuanced portrayal of complicit masculinity through the figure of Bada Babu, a head clerk in the medical department. Initially, Bada Babu appears to embody a benign, paternal masculinity. He helps the narrator find accommodation in a lonely town, extends hospitality by inviting him for meals, and refers to the narrator's father as 'a great man' (67), gestures that construct him as warm, respectful, and socially adept. However, this warmness masks a deeper investment in hierarchy and self-advancement. Bada Babu's masculinity is not anchored in physical dominance or leadership, but in strategic alignment with power structures. His ability to navigate bureaucratic systems and build influence through patronage situates him squarely within the category of Connell's 'complicit masculinity,' a mode of manhood that sustains

patriarchal dominance without embodying hegemonic traits itself.

His informal authority becomes evident when the narrator crashes into a Mahashivratri crowd near Bada Babu's house. Bada Babu intervenes, and the crowd instantly makes way. This moment reveals the informal authority of respect and fear that he commands in his community. However, when bulldozers demolish his home, Bada Babu's limitations are exposed. His refusal to build a concrete roof is retrospectively understood as a survival tactic, a masculinity constantly negotiating insecurity. As the narrator uncovers more about him, Bada Babu emerges as a figure deeply embedded in the transactional logic of the state:

> Shukla Ji and Dubey Ji painted a picture of our Bada Babu as a regular neta in his area, with a finger in every pie. He was the man to go to if someone needed a water connection, or if someone needed to be hooked up to the electricity supply. He also kept tabs on all the properties in his neighbourhood and facilitated sales and purchases, with a commission for himself. He knew all the political leaders of Pakur, and they depended on him to deliver the votes. Behind the façade of the jolly man, happy to entertain and be entertained, our Bada Babu was a great puller of strings; smartly turning everything he touched into profit. And, like every good schemer, every good neta, he had made himself safe. (114-15)

Bada Babu is not the architect of patriarchal systems, but a beneficiary and facilitator of them. His masculinity is one of complicity as it supports the dominant order avoiding the costs of direct confrontation or leadership. This complicity becomes most damaging in his silence during the demolition of Rani Dighi Patal. Though he knew the area would be cleared, he did not warn the residents. His refusal to leave his own home before the demolition was not an act of resistance but a calculated effort to maintain appearances. To leave early would have signalled weakness and undermined his authority. When confronted, he shifts blame onto a woman, saying it was "because of a woman" that the demolition happened. This is an act of misogynistic deflection that preserves his image while erasing his responsibility. His retort reveals the underlying structure of complicit masculinity that preserves male power by allowing others, particularly women and the marginalised, to suffer the consequences.

As the narrator watches Bada Babu drink whisky and eat chicken and celebrate the completion of his new house, he is haunted by the faces of the displaced.

> I could see Maasi, that Muslim rickshaw-puller's wife with the sick child, and that one woman—whom I had not seen and whose face I could only imagine—grabbing the collar of a powerful man wearing a suit in a last, desperate attempt to save her house. They would soon be at his doorstep again, begging him to get them land, and houses. (124-25)

These figures, mostly women, represent those outside the protections of institutional power and masculine privilege. As Connell observes:

> Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, with-

> out the tensions or risks of being the front-line troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense. (79)

Bada Babu's complicit masculinity hides behind smiles, helpfulness, and bureaucratic competence while enabling dispossession and displacement. Bada Babu is not the face of overt power, but the quiet hand that keeps it intact.

The third section of the novel, titled 'Father,' explores the narrator's father's complex masculinity, which evolves from a form of political masculinity to one that gradually aligns with ecological masculinity. This trajectory begins with the narrator's grandfather, Dadu, whose character evolves from embodying what Connell describes as 'marginalised masculinity' to adopting a militant masculinity, and ultimately transforming into a figure of political masculinity. As Connell observes,

> Hegemony, subordination and complicity ... are relations internal to the gender order. The interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities. (80)

Thereby shaping the contours of marginalised masculinity. In the Indian context, caste emerges as one of the key structural forces that contribute to the marginalisation of certain masculinities, shaping how power, privilege, and social mobility are distributed within the gender order.

Dadu's early life reflects Connell's concept of marginalised masculinity, shaped by the caste-based oppression. As *majhi* of Kessorepur and guardian of the *jaher*, the sacred grove, he upheld Santhal religious and communal traditions. Despite this authority, he suffered caste-based humiliation in school, where teachers refused eye contact and treated him as polluting. When a teacher refused to use a duster after he had touched it,

> Dadu rushed up to the teacher and shoved him to the floor. He was roundly thrashed and suspended from classes...When Dadu's father heard that he had run away from school after hitting his teacher, he slapped Dadu. (132-33)

This sequence marks a critical moment of masculine crisis and resistance. Dadu's violent response can be read as an effort to reclaim his masculinity, which has been rendered marginal within the upper-caste dominated educational space. However, this act of defiance is met with disciplinary violence both from the institution and within the family, reinforcing his marginalisation.

Refusing to return to school, Dadu rejects the path of formal education and instead embraces a more militant form of masculinity, rooted in physical resistance. He begins by defending Santhal women against sexual violence and confronting upper-caste perpetrators, thereby asserting a masculinity defined by protection and retribution. His resistance intensifies as he becomes politically active, eventually joining Jaipal Singh, who was then leading a campaign for a separate Adivasi homeland. Through this engagement, Dadu transforms his marginalised status into a political masculinity, one that asserts agency not only for himself but for his entire community. In doing so, he redefined his marginal position into what can be called 'political masculinity.' According to Starck and Sauer,

> political masculinity encompasses any kind of masculinity that is constructed

> around, ascribed to and/or claimed by 'political players.' These shall be individuals or groups of persons who are part of or associated with the 'political domain,' i.e., professional politicians, party members, members of the military as well as citizens and members of political movements claiming or gaining political rights. (6)

Dadu's shift from a marginalised position to one of collective leadership and resistance reflects a transition into political masculinity, as he moves from confronting local injustices to actively participating in Adivasi political mobilisation. By aligning with Jaipal Singh's movement for a separate Adivasi homeland and engaging in party politics, Dadu embodies a masculinity rooted in organised struggle, asserting political agency on behalf of a historically oppressed community.

The father follows in these footsteps, inheriting both the ideals and the burdens of political masculinity. His political masculinity began to take shape in college, when he and a group of Santhal students confronted a Bihari boy who had refused to marry a Santhal girl he had impregnated. The situation turned violent, but it marked the father's early resolve to defend Adivasi dignity and oppose caste-based injustice. He contests in the college election and is elected as the first-ever Adivasi president of that college. He later joins the Hindu India Party, a party with a national base campaigning for Jharkhand, a separate Adivasi state. He works diligently at the grassroots level, building popular support for the party and succeeds in getting a Member of Parliament elected from its ranks.

Yet when his moment arrives, he is betrayed by the same political machinery, denied a ticket, and undermined by people he considered his own family. As the narrator observes,

> My father must have presented a threat with his increasing popularity, his zeal, and his ambition. He wasn't going to rest at becoming the MLA from Ghatsila, he would surely try to become an MP, whether from Jamshedpur or any other Lok Sabha seat in Bihar. Insecure, his Dada and Boudi had worked behind the scenes to scuttle his chances. (170)

Although he continues to perform his duties "with the same zeal and the same smile" (172), he retreats into a routine of inertia, divided between television, the verandah, and quiet curses. His transition from idealistic action to passive withdrawal signals the end of his political masculinity. A particularly poignant detail is his shift in cinematic taste, from auteur films to mass-market action thrillers. Watching vigilante heroes enact justice, he murmurs, "Maar saale ko, maar!" (174) thereby seeking solace in the imagined victories of hyper masculine figures, thus distancing himself from his own desire to embody such strength.

Deprived of political voice and institutional authority, the father redirects his energy toward the earth. His turn to gardening signals a transition from political masculinity to what may be called 'ecological masculinity,' a mode of being rooted in care, restoration, and continuity with the land. In *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance*, Hultman and Pulé critique dominant forms of masculinity, particularly what they term industrial/breadwinner masculinities, for their roles in environmental degradation and social inequities. The central premise of ecological masculinities is that "all

masculinities have infinite capacities to care, which can be expressed towards Earth, human others and ourselves – simultaneously" (31). Hultman and Pulé note:

> It is a hallmark of malestream norms that our livelihoods (indeed our very senses of self) are tightly interwoven with money, prestige, power, control and the valorising of personal gain, which have been prioritised ahead of the social and ecological consequences of our actions as a species. Indeed, the entire global human economy functions on an assumption that men – in particular (but not exclusively) – will serve global mechanisms of productivity and are trained to do so from very early in life, effectively being raised to become 'human doings' rather than 'human beings.' We need men on the broadest of levels to become softer, kinder, warmer, more caring and fuller human beings, who both conceptually and in practical terms, live in the knowledge that they are integral parts of an intricate living planet. To be, think and do otherwise is to accelerate planetary social and ecological demise. (180)

This form of ecological masculinity finds a powerful and affective expression in the father's labour of tending to his garden, which stands in stark contrast to the political wasteland and deforestation that scar Kessorepur. The father's commitment to replacing every tree cut down in the village becomes a quiet act of resistance against the extractive and destructive masculinity embodied by the *Majhi*, his uncle, who cuts down sacred trees during a property dispute. The narrator observes:

> What would he have gained by cutting down these trees? To kill a tree is savage. It is like murdering a man. Yet we couldn't say anything. Those trees were common property. (183)

In contrast, the father's relationship with trees is intimate and protective. When faced with pressure to remove a star fruit tree that hindered renovations to his part of the ancestral house, he refuses:

> My father, his life now intertwined with those of trees, refused to cut down that star fruit tree or even trim its branches. He left the tree as it was and built the house around it. The tree still casts its huge shadow on our courtyard. And the sight of its fruits in season, green when unripe, and yellow when ripe, strewn over the concrete floor is a sight to behold. (183-84)

After retirement, the father devotes himself entirely to his garden. The narrator recalls,

> And each time I visited home, the garden would seem greener. Each time, a new sapling would have been planted ... He would bring us the fruits of the season: mangoes, guavas, bananas, cashews. When we told him how big the bananas had grown or how delicious the mangoes tasted, I could see a rare joy and satisfaction in his eyes. He would return to his garden the next day and work doubly hard. (185)

This deepening engagement with the garden constitutes a form of ecological labour that mirrors the affective labour of parenting. The narrator's realisation that "my father's garden is

truly his child" (192) marks a profound shift in the understanding of masculinity. Here, masculinity is reconfigured not through conquest, control, or public achievement, but through everyday acts of nurture, seasonal rhythms of growth, and an enduring commitment to care. His garden is not simply a retreat from politics, but a quiet space of resistance where an Adivasi ecological masculinity is constructed. This alternative masculinity opposes the logics of exploitation and ownership that define dominant models and instead affirms care, continuity, and coexistence as central to masculine identity. It refuses the binaries of power and submission that dominate Connell's typology, offering instead a vision of manhood rooted in the ethics of place, memory, and interdependence. The father's garden, nurtured with quiet devotion, becomes a living archive of resistance against caste hierarchies, exploitative economies, and patriarchal traditions. By prioritising care over control and sustenance over status, *My Father's Garden* ends with a powerful suggestion that masculinity, when separated from dominance, can become a force for renewal, connection, and belonging.

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Dynamics of Patriarchal Violence and Gendered Subalternity: A Feminist Hermeneutic of Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary*

Suresh Kumar

Abstract

This paper seeks to interrogate the representation of gendered suffering and patriarchal subjugation as experienced and articulated by Baby Halder in her autobiographical narrative *A Life Less Ordinary*. Through a feminist critical lens, the study explores how Halder's life story becomes an act of resistance and reclamation of selfhood against the structures of domestic violence, economic dependency, and marital oppression that define the lived realities of many subaltern women in India. The narrative of *A Life Less Ordinary* not only chronicles Halder's physical and psychological abuse at the hands of her husband but also exposes the larger socio-cultural mechanisms that normalize women's subordination within domestic spaces. By foregrounding the intersections of class, gender, and literacy, the paper analyzes how Halder transforms her personal trauma into a political testimony that challenges patriarchal authority and redefines female subjectivity through writing. Ultimately, the study aims to demonstrate that Halder's narration is not merely a record of victimhood but a radical feminist articulation of agency, resilience, and self-realization emerging from the margins of domestic and marital tyranny.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender, Patriarchy, Violence, Subalternity, Resistance.*

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The dynamics of patriarchal violence and gendered subalternity are intricately enmeshed within the discursive and institutional structures that reproduce male dominance and inscribe women into positions of systemic marginality. Feminist theorists have persuasively argued that patriarchy functions as a hegemonic formation—a socio-ideological construct that legitimizes power through the routinization of violence, coercion, and epistemic domination. Within this framework, patriarchal violence emerges not merely as an individual or isolated act but as a structural and discursive modality of control that sustains gender hierarchies by rendering women and non-conforming genders epistemically invisible and materially vulnerable. Thus, violence operates simultaneously as a material practice and a symbolic discourse through which the continuum of masculine supremacy is both enacted and normalized. Mary Anne Franks emphasizes that "the status quo allocation of violence serves hegemonic male interests" and actively subordinates women by imbuing violence with the purpose of enforcing gender inequality (934). Similarly, bell hooks underscores that patriarchy demands emotional self-mutilation from males, which ultimately sustains a culture of violence that enforces gender norms by instilling fear and mistrust, especially towards women (66). This violence is, evidently, not confined to the individual sphere but is structurally embedded within institutional frameworks and societal conventions, thereby producing a pervasive milieu in which women's bodies and agency are subjected to mechanisms of control. Consequently, women are rendered gendered subalterns—silenced and marginalized within their respective cultural and ideological contexts. Gendered subalternity further materializes through the internalization of patriarchal norms, wherein women, conditioned by coercive socialization, often come to acquiesce to prescribed roles that sustain their subordination.

Women's writings compellingly illustrate how patriarchal hegemony operates through disciplinary regimes that regulate female sexuality, mobility, and embodied autonomy. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, feminist theorists such as Sandra Bartky have shown that patriarchal power diffuses through norms and practices that induce women to internalize and enact controls on their bodies—through dieting, posture, comportment, and beauty regimens—thereby producing 'docile bodies.' This normalization of feminine ideals functions as an insidious form of power, not by overt coercion, but through subtle subjectification that shapes women's sense of self and competence. Judith Butler's work further theorizes this regulatory power as performative, whereby gendered identities are continuously constituted within normative constraints, limiting embodied autonomy and creative agency. These intertwined processes sustain gendered subalternity by disciplining women's bodies and reproductive capacities, while social disapproval enforces conformity and punishes assertions of independence. Butler says,

> Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. (191)

Such frameworks reveal how women's lived experiences of oppression are not mere acts of domination but complex negotiations with pervasive cultural regimes that both constrain and constitute female subjectivity.

Within a postcolonial-feminist framework, this regulation signifies a form of domestic colonization, wherein patriarchal power reconfigures women's subjectivities through epistemic silencing and ideological interpellation. Feminist theorists underscore that such mechanisms manifest through physical violence, emotional containment, and economic dependency, collectively positioning women as a subaltern class within patriarchal and postcolonial social formations. This subaltern condition is further perpetuated by sexual violence, institutionalized surveillance, and cultural taboos that normalize female subjugation and inhibit the articulation of women's agency within the dominant discourse.

Baby Halder — autobiographer, domestic worker, and one of the most compelling feminist voices to emerge from India's social margins—occupies a crucial place within contemporary feminist literature for the manner in which her writing expands the field's epistemic boundaries. With *A Life Less Ordinary*, later followed by *Eshast Rupantar* and *Ghare Ferar Path*, Halder brings to literary visibility the everyday violence, precarious labour, and structural constraints experienced by women who remain excluded from the privileged spaces of Indian feminist discourse. Her work destabilises the assumptions of mainstream feminist writing, which historically evolved through the perspectives of urban, middle-class, and upper-caste women, and which often overlooked the deep entanglement of caste and class in shaping gendered oppression. This shift in literary and political sensibility closely aligns with contemporary threads of Dalit feminist thought—a rapidly expanding intellectual formation that insists on the inseparability of caste, class, and gender in understanding the lived realities of Dalit women. Dalit feminism rejects the universalised category of 'Indian womanhood' produced in mainstream feminist scholarship, arguing instead for a standpoint rooted in embodied and labouring Dalit female subjectivities; as Sharmila Rege asserts,

> a Dalit feminist standpoint is more emancipatory since the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible—it begins from the lives of Dalit women. (39)

While mainstream feminist literature often centred sexual violence, legal reforms, or women's rights from a caste-neutral position, Dalit feminist writers and theorists draw attention to distinctly caste-marked experiences of humiliation, untouchability, menial labour, sexual exploitation, and structural vulnerability that upper-caste women may not encounter. Gopal Guru therefore argues that the Dalit woman is subject to a "triple burden: caste, class, and patriarchy" ("Dalit Women Talk Differently" 2548), a condition that produces a unique historical and social location often absent from dominant feminist narratives. These threads not only critique the exclusions of mainstream feminism but also propose an alternative feminist politics centred on caste-conscious praxis, moral accountability, and a radical re-imagining of justice. In this sense, Dalit feminism is both associated with mainstream feminism—through a shared commitment to gender emancipation—and dissociated from it—through its insistence that feminist liberation in India is impossible without confronting caste as the fundamental axis of oppression. Baby Halder's writing, emerging from the lived textures of domestic labour and caste-inflected poverty, participates in this Dalit feminist reorientation by offering a narrative space where the marginalised woman speaks not as a symbolic figure but as a political subject whose life destabilises hegemonic feminist and literary norms.

Her life story functions as a powerful testimony to the deprivation and humiliation that Dalit women are compelled to endure within a social order structured by caste and the purity/impurity dyad. It exposes the constitutive nexus between caste, class, and gender, demonstrating how these intersecting structures continue to relegate Dalit women to liminal and ambivalent social locations and position them among 'the lowest of the low.'

The publication of Baby Halder's autobiography *A Life Less Ordinary* marked a crucial moment in Indian literary and academic discourse, as it foregrounded the lived experience of a subaltern, low born woman to expose the deeply entrenched structures of caste, class, and gender-based oppression. By transforming the often-silenced voice of a domestic worker into a site of epistemic and cultural production, the narrative unsettles the conventional centre/margin binary and redefines the parameters of authorship and agency. Halder's articulation of selfhood recuperates an erased subjectivity and demonstrates how subaltern agency can be inscribed through the autobiographical mode. Halder's narrative offers an explicit and affirmative response to Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's rhetorical question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," by asserting that the subalterns not only speak but also theorize their marginalization through lived experience. In this context, Halder's text resonates with Homi Bhabha's idea that the margins function as productive cultural sites rather than mere zones of deprivation, thereby reconfiguring the relationships among power, resistance, and representation (4). As an unvarnished ethnography of oppression, the autobiography charts Halder's journey from a turbulent childhood in Jammu and Kashmir and Dalhousie to the grim realities of Murshidabad, where familial neglect, maternal desertion, and paternal authoritarianism shaped her early life. Married at twelve to a man fourteen years her senior, her adolescence was marked by domestic violence, marital subjugation, and economic precarity. Her escape to Delhi with her three children signifies both a rupture from patriarchal bondage and an entry into the exploitative economy of urban domestic labour. The turning point in her life came with her encounter with Prabodh Kumar, who recognized her intellectual curiosity and nurtured her latent literary potential. This transformative moment marked Halder's transition from social invisibility to authorship. In this sense, *A Life Less Ordinary* transcends the boundaries of personal confession to emerge as a feminist testimony of resistance, self-assertion, and the intellectual agency of a woman writing from the margins of Indian society.

Akin to other marginal autobiographies, *A Life Less Ordinary* inaugurates its narrative through a visceral articulation of pain and subaltern endurance arising from the author's simultaneous marginalization by sex, poverty, and caste. The text embodies what feminist theorists identify as testimonial writing, foregrounding the gendered body as a site of both suffering and resistance. It recounts the author's dehumanization within the intersecting matrices of domestic and social hierarchies—first by her alcoholic, irresponsible father and subsequently by a patriarchal husband who subjected her to starvation, physical violence, and eventual expulsion from the marital home. While the author situates herself at the narrative core, chronicling her pain, distress, and struggle toward self-realization as a writer amidst systemic repression, her autobiography transcends the conventions of a personal life story as it expresses frequent socio-economic and cultural concerns. Shalini Thakur writes that

Halder's life story "gives us a glimpse of the cataclysmic socio-economic changes in contemporary India" (186). It underscores the structural logic of domination that confines the lower strata women to inferior social and economic locations and interrogates the complicity of institutional mechanisms—caste, class, patriarchy—in perpetuating their devaluation. As Swapna Banerjee notes, *A Life Less Ordinary* is not —

> just 'a book of her own,' but spoke for the millions of 'ordinary' women like her. Baby's recounting of her neglected childhood, the trauma of growing up, her brutal marriage and work life, her friendship with several working-class men and women resonated with the experiences of millions of other Indian women. (245)

In this sense, the autobiography performs what Chandra Talpade Mohanty terms a collective feminist praxis, where the self becomes emblematic of the multitude. It enacts the feminist strategy of transforming personal narrative into political testimony, making visible the systemically erased experiences of Dalit women's lives (221). Although Halder does not document the historical trajectory of untouchability or women's movements in Bengal, her story alludes to the gendered asymmetries of colonial modernity. The narrative exposes how nineteenth-century Bengal's modernization and education reforms, celebrated as liberal progress, were in reality hierarchically distributed benefits favoring upper-caste women while excluding the Dalit poor. The resulting social stratification confined lower-caste women to servitude and forced them into squalid, manual labor. Banerjee observes:

> In colonial Bengal women from upper castes and classes made significant strides in gaining social and political rights albeit within ideological parameters. By the first decade of the twentieth century, a selected group of these 'new women,' called bhadramahila (respectable ladies), built women's organizations, opened schools, wrote in magazines, and participated in nationalist politics. But the lives of working-class women deteriorated as they were subsequently pushed into domestic services, which in spite of providing food and shelter in an unwholesome and often unfamiliar urban environment, allowed very little scope for upward mobility. (240)

This observation resonates with feminist critiques of bourgeois reformism, which expose how the discourse of 'New Womanhood' became a marker of class privilege rather than a universal narrative of female empowerment. This text therefore performs a Dalit feminist interrogation of both Brahmanical patriarchy and intra-community patriarchal authority. It exhumes every institutional and familial structure that obstructs Dalit women's mobility and identifies the roots of subjugation within Dalit patriarchal traditions themselves. Her father epitomizes the internalized patriarchal model that reproduces feminine docility within subaltern households. By recounting that,

> Baby's stepmother kept her head covered night and day and she would never go out into the fields alone to relieve herself. Baba would not let her and it was Baby's job to accompany her into the fields! (29)

The author illuminates how gendered control operates through everyday ritual and spatial

restrictions—a phenomenon feminist anthropology conceptualizes as the domestication of female agency. Furthermore, her reflections—"I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone, to play with anyone, and often not even allowed out of the house" (12)—expose patriarchal anxiety over female sexuality and visibility. The author's father's prohibitions on her playing and interacting with boys reveals the internalization of male possessiveness even within oppressed castes, disclosing how male domination permeates all social strata. Similarly, the forced marriage of her sister and herself—

> How could a grown girl be kept at home once the mother had gone? Didi wasn't even that old — just fifteen or so. But Baba wasn't willing to wait, he just married her off so that no one would have anything left to say. (3)

This signals the deployment of marriage as both a socio-economic strategy and a mechanism of sexual control. Her recollection of her own child marriage—

> I was watching all this, and playing with the children outside when my Mami called me inside and asked me to be seated on a pidi... I was told that I could not eat that day, that I had to fast... (34)

Acquires symbolic resonance when read through a feminist lens: the girl-child's ignorance of the marriage ritual becomes the text's most radical critique of women's commodification as expendable capital within patriarchal exchange systems.

By narrating these lived realities, Baby performs what feminist scholar bell hooks terms the move from 'silence to speech,' converting pain into epistemic resistance. Her critique of patriarchy within her own community destabilizes any romanticized notions of subaltern unity and articulates a Dalit feminist consciousness that interrogates both caste and gender hierarchies. Aligning with Periyar's radical critique—who identifies marriage as "a tool to enslave women to men and to suppress their personhood, agency, sexuality and body" (22–23)—the author reveals the internal colonization of the female body within Dalit and non-Dalit households alike. In doing so, *A Life Less Ordinary* becomes not merely a narrative of individual suffering but a manifesto of resistance that reclaims narrative space for the Dalit woman as a historical and epistemological subject.

In *A Life Less Ordinary*, Halder presents marriage not as a sanctuary of emotional companionship but as a theatre of oppression where patriarchy exercises its most intimate control. From a feminist perspective, her narrative constitutes a trenchant critique of marriage as an ideological and institutional apparatus that systematically subordinates women—a stance that resonates with Periyar's assertion that "marriage is one of the worst customs in India," serving only to "enslave women to men" under the guise of religious sanctity (22). Halder's recollection that "My husband never gave any money to me. I had to ask him for each and every little thing I needed..." (50) evidently underscores the economic dimension of patriarchal dominance and reveals how financial deprivation invariably becomes a mechanism to domesticate female autonomy. It further indicates that the husband's control over material resources transforms the wife into an 'inessential being'—a condition replicated across caste and class. Halder's narrative exemplifies what Indian feminist scholars have identified as the continuum of domestic servi-

tude camouflaged in the rhetoric of marriage. Her husband's cruelty—his indifference to her pregnancies and to their ailing child—reveals the erasure of women's affective and reproductive labour: "The child remained sick... If I told his father, he paid no attention... I had to find medicines, pay for them, manage everything" (95–96). In feminist sociological terms, the husband's negligence translates into the denial of maternal subjectivity, reducing motherhood to mere reproductive function deprived of emotional reciprocity. Such dynamics echo Sharmila Rege's formulation of Dalit patriarchy—where caste hierarchies merge with masculinity to make Dalit women "the lowest component in a graded system of gendered subjugation."(*Writing Caste/ Writing Gender* 52). The episode in which Halder's husband forbids her leisure—"And I told him I wanted to go and watch a film... but he still refused" (83)—exemplifies what feminist scholars describe as the disciplining of female mobility, a strategy deeply entrenched within both Brahmanical and Dalit household structures. The woman's body becomes a territory that must be surveilled, contained, and moralized. The use of purdah and the surveillance of movement expose how patriarchy naturalizes control as virtue. Her husband's violent jealousy culminates in outright physical brutality: "Silently, he picked up a stone from the ground and hit me on the head with it. My forehead split apart, and blood gushed out" (84). This domestic sadism exemplifies how patriarchal violence functions not merely as punishment but as a performative assertion of ownership. Feminist critic Uma Chakravarti argues that patriarchal violence within Dalit families must be read through the framework of Brahmanical patriarchy, wherein male honour is inscribed on women's chastity and docility (151).

Halder's recounting of her sister's murder—"Didi wasn't strong enough to resist violence... he murdered her" (66–67)—and of Panna's wife's self-blaming silence—"she refused to blame Panna... Till her dying breath, she blamed herself for what had happened!" (104)—throws light on the internalisation of patriarchal guilt. Highlighting the Indian women's inability to locate the roots of their sufferings, Kamla Bhasin poignantly writes that the patriarchal systems "teach women to blame themselves for the crimes committed against them" (11). Halder's examples of Sushila, Vibhuda's wife, and Panna's wife dramatise the deadly consequences of women's silence—a silence arising not from weakness but from centuries of conditioning under structures that valorize endurance over resistance. Through these narratives, in my opinion, Halder politicizes domestic violence by locating it within what may be identified as the intersectional matrix of caste, gender, and poverty. Her marriage mirrors a microcosm of this arrangement—where economic deprivation, marital rape, unwanted motherhood, and emotional alienation constitute forms of structural violence. When Baby recalls that even her father's indifference enabled her continued abuse, she unveils the intergenerational complicity of male power in upholding patriarchal hierarchies within Dalit households. In resisting these structures, Halder's life-writing transforms into a feminist counter-narrative that challenges the normative sanctity of marriage and reclaims the subaltern woman's right to bodily and emotional autonomy. Her critique—articulated through lived experience—substantiates the feminist insight articulated by Gerda Lerner that "patriarchy is not only a system of male dominance; it is also a system of learned submissiveness" (217). By unmasking this submission and inscribing her defiance in language, Halder converts subjugation into agency and pain into protest, making *A Life Less Ordinary* a testament to Dalit womanist endurance and self-assertion.

Baby Halder's *A Life Less Ordinary* narrates the brutal realities of casteist and patriarchal subjugation, yet foregrounds an indomitable feminist resistance. Despite pervasive violence and deprivation, Halder continuously asserts her agency and refuses silent submission. Urvashi Butalia aptly remarks, "Baby's strength and resolve... her absolute commitment to... education and learning and the desire to read and write" makes her story compelling beyond its ubiquity (vii). Her confrontation with her husband's neglect—"What do you give me... Every morning you give me the same handful of rice... without once asking me if I have eaten or not" (51)—reveals her vocal repudiation of the gendered deprivation that defines her existence. Her lucid questioning of marital subjugation: "I had no independence. But why? ... He treated me as if I were an animal... was it necessary that I should stay on there in that living hell?" (68) is telling as it articulates a radical feminist critique of patriarchal violence as a mechanism of control and erasure. This resistance further manifests when she asserts autonomy in personal relationships against social and marital prohibitions: "Nothing's going to happen because of your coming here ... So what? He's done that plenty of times already. I don't care anymore!" (97–98).

Such defiance embodies feminist refusal to internalize imposed victimhood. Significantly, Baby seizes bodily autonomy by opting for a salpingectomy without spousal consent: "I could sign the form myself" (102). This is evidently a pivotal act of self-empowerment underscoring women's right to decision-making over their bodies. Feminist commentator Sonakshi Srivastava recognizes this as a profound rejection of patriarchal permission: "if she cared... what people will say, she will forever be shackled and weighed down by patriarchy" (n. page). Baby's experiences as a single woman further expose patriarchal stigmatization; "Where is your husband?" becomes a gatekeeping question limiting her employment opportunities (129). The societal branding of women living alone as immoral, echoed in Baby's account of harassment and objectification—"Some men would make the excuse ... and try to force me to talk to them" (153) and the landlord's son's attempted assault (154)—demonstrate the pervasive policing of female autonomy and sexuality. This narrative transparently reveals how institutionalized patriarchy enforces women's marginalization through social, economic, and bodily control. Halder's story is thus emblematic of a broader feminist resistance: refusing invisibility, asserting voice, and reclaiming agency amid the complex intersections of caste, class, and gender oppression.

Evidently, *A Life Less Ordinary* interrogates male authority and destabilizes patriarchal constructs of chastity, purity, and morality, asserting instead women's autonomy. She exposes how patriarchal institutions circumscribe women's agency while granting men unearned privileges. The relationship between Shashti and Pratap, a community leader, exemplifies this gendered double standard. As Baby notes,

> There was a community leader called Pratap, who often went to visit them, but that didn't seem to make any difference to the respect people had for him! It was always the women who were judged differently. (80)

She thus underscores that moral codes such as chastity and purity are imposed solely

on women and they have no implication for men. Recounting her own experience, Baby narrates how her husband beat her for speaking to his friend Ajit but ignored Ajit's persistent harassment (80–81), revealing an ingrained patriarchal logic that criminalizes women while absolving men. Defying these conventions, Baby repudiates socio-religious ideals like *patidev* and *pativrat*, leaving her abusive husband in Durgapur to seek a secure and dignified life in Delhi for herself and her children. Her defiance stems from pragmatic consciousness rather than social conformity: "But worrying about what people will say does not help to fill an empty stomach, does it?" (2). Justifying her decision, she asserts that motherhood entails a moral responsibility to ensure her children's growth and humanity—an obligation her husband neither recognized nor shared: "It was that that made me realize that things would not work out and that I had to be strong and find a way out of this mess" (130).

Even under the weight of patriarchal dogmas like *stree dharma*, Baby refuses passive suffering, recognizing its fatal consequences for women. As Martine van Woerkens observes, she flees not only from physical violence but also from "the hostility and neglect that he manifests in connection with the education of the children" (235).

It is worth noting that Baby's rejection of patriarchal authority is marked by agency, confidence, and self-reliance. When urged by her father to return, she resolutely refuses, declaring, "After all, there are women without husbands who get on with their lives, aren't there? Don't their days pass well?" (120). Her pragmatic optimism is evident when she adds, "The worst thing that could happen would be my workload increasing a bit. Nothing more" (120). Ritika Agnihotri aptly describes her as "feminist in the sense that she shows courage, takes up responsibility of her children, proves self-worth and is always optimistic" (50). Similarly, Banerjee observes that Baby's feminism lies "in her ability to take charge, and in determining the course of her own life" (248). Rejecting patriarchal prescriptions of domestic servitude, Halder challenges the sexual division of labour and the feminization of poverty in India. She insists that household maintenance is a shared responsibility, asserting, "Why should it need a woman around for a place to stay clean? A man should at least keep the place where he cooks and eats clean" (48).

Thus, Baby's narrative becomes a powerful feminist discourse of resistance that exposes and subverts the moral, social, and economic hierarchies sustaining patriarchy.

Haldar emerges as one of the worst victims of socio-economic and cultural oppression and hostilities; yet she displays indomitable courage and an awakened consciousness of all three. Her assertion of identity and dignity manifests through her struggle for self-reliance and economic autonomy. Rejecting dependence on a negligent husband, she engages in multiple forms of labour—teaching neighbourhood children, working in a hospital, and serving as a domestic worker in Durgapur—demonstrating her pursuit of empowerment despite systemic patriarchal obstructions. Even when isolated in Gurgaon, she refuses exploitation or charity from relatives, remarking,

> I would go either to Dada's place or to my younger brother's to eat. But it was not a nice feeling … The thing that made me happiest was the thought that once I'd moved into

> my new place, I would only have to meet my sister-in-law when I wanted to! (129)

Her resistance is further revealed when she relocates after her landlord's son attempts sexual coercion:

> If there was no man in the house, did that mean I would have to listen to anyone who decided he had a right over my life? I thought I would find a new home the very next day. (154)

Haldar's narrative is both confessional and resistant, laying bare the intersecting discriminations of caste, class, and patriarchy. As Banerjee observes, she "understands and opposes multiple oppressions by interrogating and resisting various sources of power" (245). Her experiences as a domestic worker expose the persistence of caste hypocrisy within upper-caste households. Recounting her employment with a Brahmin family, she notes,

> The family was Brahmin and they held all the customary practices of purity and pollution. But they were quite prepared to let me do everything for them because…they could not do without a domestic help. (108)

When the employer's wife refused to touch her or her daughter, Baby scornfully asserts, "I thought, just because we are poor doesn't mean we can't be touched" (109). Through such reflections, Haldar indicts the enduring rigidity of caste even in post-independence India, where legal equality coexists with social exclusion. Her account of Vibhuda and Nisha's inter-caste relationship further illustrates caste's moral tyranny: despite Vibhuda's love and sacrifice, Nisha refuses marriage fearing ostracism—"she told me that she could not marry him because…if she did, her father would be ostracized from the caste" (100). The episode epitomizes how caste pride overrides human affection and how Dalits bear the consequences of transgression. It is noted that Haldar extends her critique to the patriarchal mechanisms that sustain caste by controlling women's sexuality. She argues that practices such as *purdah*, *sati*, child marriage, and ascetic widowhood are instruments of casteist patriarchy devised to regulate women as custodians of caste purity. In aligning with Dalit feminist thought, Baby exposes how the interlocking ideologies of caste, class, and gender deny women dignity, identity, and agency. Her narrative ultimately demands recognition of women as autonomous subjects capable of self-definition within oppressive power structures.

Baby Haldar is overt and authentic in her critique of caste, class, and patriarchal institutions that dehumanize, exploit, and marginalize women. She interrogates every law and convention that ghettoizes and brutalizes women, exposing how social hierarchies perpetuate their dehumanization. Significantly, Haldar holds not only caste, class, and patriarchy but also women themselves accountable for sustaining oppression. She observes that Indian women remain divided along lines of caste, class, religion, region, and language, a fragmentation that obstructs the emergence of collective sisterhood. This internal division, she argues, renders women vulnerable to male domination. Highlighting the fundamental flaw in existing Indian feminism, Baby notes that upper-caste women maintain distance from and even degrade Dalit women, having internalized

patriarchal values. Relating her own exploitation by upper-caste employer's wife in Gurgaon, she reveals how she was overworked, denied rest, food, or contact with her children, and constantly humiliated (139). Like other Indian women autobiographers, Haldar underscores that poor, outcaste women are doubly oppressed—by men and by their upper-caste sisters. She laments that Indian women lack awareness of the mechanisms of their subjugation and often align with patriarchal power, condemning any woman who challenges convention as *kulta* (prostitute), *dayan* (witch), or *papin* (sinful woman). Baby also critiques Dalit women's internal divisions, observing that they, too, remain fragmented by caste and community. She recounts the cruelty of her stepmother, who made her discontinue her studies, incited violence, and falsely accused her of an illicit relationship with her father—thus reinforcing patriarchy instead of resisting it. Similarly, her sisters-in-law showed hostility and neglect when she sought refuge in Gurgaon: "My sister-in-law took one look at me and turned her face away...they were behaving as if I was a great burden on them" (127). One major reason for her departure from her brother's house was to escape this indifference.

In contrast, Baby's longing for her deceased mother becomes a symbol of genuine feminine solidarity and emotional refuge: "I longed for my mother…Had she been around, I would not have had to abandon my studies" (12). Towards the end, she still yearns for her mother's presence—"'Ma, come and see once, I still want to read and write'" (172). Her remembrance of maternal affection foregrounds her belief that a woman often finds true empathy only in the mother figure, while most other women remain indifferent or complicit in patriarchal oppression. Through such reflections, Baby Haldar exposes the multilayered complicity—of men, upper-caste women, and even Dalit women themselves—in sustaining gendered hierarchies. Her narrative thus calls for a self-reflexive, intersectional feminism rooted in solidarity across caste and class lines.

In conclusion, *A Life Less Ordinary* stands as a powerful feminist testimony that exposes the normalized violence and gendered subjugation embedded within domestic and marital spaces. Through her life narrative, Baby Halder dismantles the patriarchal ideal of marriage as a site of care and sanctity, revealing instead how it functions as a structure of coercion and control. Her autobiography bears witness to the pain inflicted upon women by patriarchal institutions that legitimise male authority and domestic violence under the guise of marital duty. The relentless beatings, humiliation, and deprivation she endures at the hands of her husband are not isolated acts of cruelty but represent the systemic silencing of women across class and caste lines. Yet, what makes Halder's narrative profoundly feminist is her refusal to remain a victim. She transforms her suffering into a means of self-realization and empowerment. By narrating her trauma in her own words, Halder reclaims authorship over her life, dismantling both the domestic and discursive boundaries imposed on her. Her movement from subjugation to self-assertion symbolizes a journey from voicelessness to articulation—an act of resistance that redefines her identity beyond the labels of wife, servant, or victim. Her insistence on dignity, respect, and education as tools of liberation reflects an emancipatory vision that challenges patriarchal and class-based hierarchies. While Halder's text is often described as apolitical, its politics lie in

the very act of narration—the decision of a domestic worker to write her life and expose the brutalities that society normalizes within the private sphere. In doing so, she blurs the boundaries between the personal and the political, asserting that domestic violence and marital disharmony are not private tragedies but collective social concerns demanding recognition and redress. *A Life Less Ordinary* thus becomes more than an autobiography; it is an indictment of patriarchal oppression and a declaration of female resilience. It records the evolution of a woman who, by writing herself into existence, liberates countless silenced women from the shadows of domestic subservience and restores to them the dignity long denied by tradition and patriarchy.

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Mapping the 'Implicated Subject': A Reading of Plestia Alaqad's *The Eyes of Gaza*

Ashna Thomas & Minu Mary Mathew

Abstract

The present age is marked by an unprecedented rate of forced migration owing to growing geopolitical tensions. Conflict-induced displacement produces subjects who resist being fixed within the category of 'refugee,' revealing tensions between lived experience and imposed identity. The attempt to escape the refugee label comes at a cost. This paper examines *The Eyes of Gaz*a by Plestia Alaqad to show how the victim and bystander notions that continue to dominate the cultural imaginary need to be reshaped by drawing on Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject. *The Eyes of Gaza* is a series of diary extracts spanning the days in the life of the author and her community since the October 7 attacks in 2023, in which she offers a glimpse of her life before the attacks, the escalation to genocide, and her continuous displacement until she takes refuge in Australia. Alaqad questions her subject position, as it shifts between observer and displaced and vice versa. Rothberg's theory of implicated subjectivity reconceptualises traditional subject positions in the context of forced displacement, fostering a shared sense of responsibility among readers. Implicated subjectivity emerges through the author's reflexive narration, enabling a critical distance from her community without relinquishing affective proximity, while 'complicity' is ultimately activated at the level of readership through mediated witnessing and ethical recognition. In doing so, Alaqad underscores the necessity of rethinking ethical responsibility, particularly for readers who remain distant observers of genocidal violence.

Keywords: *Displacement, Genocide, Community, Implicated Subject, Entanglement, Complicity.*

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Displacement has been a recurring feature of human history; for certain communities, however, it functions not as episodic disruption but as a structuring condition of collective life. There are even communities that are marked by a legacy of displacement. In such communities, the present is always dictated by the past. The historical traces impinge on their present lives. The same is true of the Palestinian Arabs in Gaza, whose conflict with the Israeli Jews has a long history as old as the Second World War. For them, "Displacement is a living history" (Gatrell 30). When the knowledge of displacement as an inevitable part is passed down through generations, displacement comes to be experienced as an inherited condition, shaping historical consciousness and expectations of the future. The displaced develop an urge to question the power structures around them and their own changing subject positions. It is imperative to acknowledge the role of a narrative in understanding the nuances of conflict-induced displacement.

> With the more interpretive approach, narratives have become interesting also for what they can tell us about how people themselves, as 'experiencing subjects,' make sense of violence and turbulent change. (Lischer 4)

The contemporary crisis in Gaza is inseparable from the historical conditions produced by the 1947 UN Partition Plan, Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, and subsequent wars that resulted in mass Palestinian displacement, remembered as the *Nakba*. The continued occupation of Palestinian territories, including Gaza, has sustained conditions of dispossession that structure the present violence.

This article argues that *The Eyes of Gaza* reconfigures the dominant moral binary of victim and bystander by repositioning both narrator and reader within what Michael Rothberg conceptualises as a structure of implication, where responsibility emerges through relational and mediated entanglement rather than direct participation in violence. *The Eyes of Gaza* consists of a series of diary entries chronicling the author's and her community's daily lives in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks. The text offers insights into Alaqad's life prior to the violence, the subsequent escalation into genocidal conditions, and her repeated experiences of displacement culminating in her seeking refuge in Australia. Throughout the narrative, Alaqad persistently interrogates her shifting subject position, which oscillates between that of observer and displaced subject. While foregrounding the collective suffering of the Palestinian community in Gaza amid sustained violence and displacement, the text also reveals the author's acute awareness of the power structures that produce and perpetuate these conditions. Alaqad's aspiration to become a journalist emerges alongside the unfolding conflict and her own displacement, enabling a more critical engagement with the political and structural forces shaping her lived reality. When Alaqad writes that "life is a series of endless displacements" (134), displacement appears not as episodic movement but as a structural condition shaped by enduring geopolitical asymmetry. In the words of B. Venkat Mani,

> Unsettlement offers a parameter to distinguish between migration that comes with the privilege of education, class, and caste, conducted under peaceful circumstances in order to thrive, from migration that must be undertaken as a last resort in order to survive, whether due to long standing economic insecurities and lack of

> opportunities in the nation of birth, or due to wars, political upheavals, fear of persecution or death, or natural or human-made calamities that leave one with no choice. A fight between betterment of existence and mere existence. One privileged, the other not so much. (32)

'Unsettlement' becomes the focal point of Alaqad's narrative, and the ways in which this unsettlement preoccupies her thoughts and actions give the text its uniqueness. She makes every attempt to transcend the conventional expectations of the world about how a Palestinian in Gaza should be. The importance and urgency of seeing the forcibly displaced subject beyond a statistic or headline is at the core of this narrative. Mani continues to consider the larger power structures around the forcibly displaced,

> Unsettlement can be used to measure the engagement of the forcibly displaced with the settled, looking deeper into the political and cultural histories of territorially demarcated, place-based, and place-bound histories of dispersals of human beings. (33-34)

Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject offers a framework to understand the deeper concerns of a community that has long been subjected to displacement. Rothberg's theory of implicated subjectivity reconceptualises traditional subject positions in the context of forced displacement. This framework relocates ethical responsibility from individual agency to structural entanglement, thereby implicating readers within the networks of mediation that sustain violence. The concept suggests that readers are not neutral observers but are implicated in the representational, ethical, and political networks embedded in a work of literature. According to Rothberg,

> Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. (*The Implicated Subject* 1)

It offers a framework that goes beyond the traditional binary of perpetrators and victims.

> Victims and perpetrators are rightly part of our vocabulary for responding to violence. But beyond the unavoidable categories of victims and perpetrators, there is the need for a larger reckoning with both the structures of power that undergird such cases and the histories that continue to resonate as afterlives. (10)

The figure of the implicated subject is relevant to understanding global spectatorship, mediated violence, and situations in which people are connected to suffering through economic systems, political silence, or digital consumption.

> This notion of implication broadens our sense of ourselves as actors and participants in the creation and sustenance of structural injustices … It also opens up the question of responsibility, suggesting that there are forms of responsibility that extend beyond immediate contexts of causality. (Limbu 44)

As Rothberg observes,

> Implication is, in that sense, multidirectional: it does not remain limited to one set of entanglements but encompasses a range of powers and interests that frame our actions. Recognizing one's position as an unwilling perpetuator of injustice does not necessarily result in a radical critique of that injustice … such recognition represents a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for a disengagement from implication and the construction of solidarity with those who suffer directly from our indirect entanglements. (145)

While implication refers to structural entanglement within systems of power, complicity marks a deeper ethical condition in which recognition of implication fails to produce disengagement. Complicity thus emerges when witnessing becomes consumption and awareness does not translate into ethical transformation.

As a Palestinian journalist who considers journalism as "a mission more than a career" (Alaqad 3), Alaqad is cognizant of the international community that passively observes the violence meted out to the Palestinian community in Gaza when she records her everyday moments of survival in the form of diary extracts and digital posts. In expressing her strong sense of community, she slowly slips into her own implicated subjectivity while making ethical appeals to readers worldwide. The transition can be mapped as she traces the series of displacements her community has experienced.

Before the October 7 attacks, Alaqad says, "I knew I wanted to show the world the beauty of Gaza, a place often unheard of and overlooked or dismissed as a 'conflict zone' and nothing more" (7). Her commitment to journalism emerges as an ethical and political intervention rather than a professional aspiration alone. Her understanding of the gaze of the global community towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is shaped for the first time when an old teacher confesses the reason for not becoming a full-time journalist which was her ambition saying that,

> the international media outlets were only interested in covering news about Gaza during an Israeli Aggression … It would seem that the eyes and ears of the world aren't interested in Palestinian life, only in Palestinian death. (9)

Leaving Alaqad to contemplate on the larger power structures governing their lives. This moment marks her first confrontation with what Rothberg identifies as implicated subjectivity, where global spectatorship sustains violence through selective visibility. Rothberg argues that

> the category of the implicated subject can help us conceptualise and confront both the legacies of violent histories and the sociopolitical dynamics that create suffering and inequality in the present. (11)

The reader confronts that complex question when she continues:

> That made me feel frustrated – mad, even. Why should the world only know about us when there are bombings? I wanted the world to learn about our lives, not only our deaths. (9)

The narrative constructs resilience not as denial of suffering but as a strategy for sustaining meaning within extreme loss, revealing survival itself as ethically and politically charged:

> In Gaza, you'll find mothers of martyrs celebrating the sacrifice of their children. Does this mean that they're pleased that their children gave their lives for Palestine? Yes. It's an act of giving meaning to the worst loss a person can possibly endure. We don't celebrate death- but death is all around us, and we need a way to convert it back into life. (18)

As the war escalates, she comments on the course of displacement that dictates the lives of Palestinians in Gaza:

> The process of evacuation and displacement in Gaza is endless. You evacuate your house, you go to a relative's house, then you and your relatives evacuate to another relative or friend's house until you all end up in a tent together. (36)

The journalist part of the author reveals the complex workings of multiple systems around her and exhorts the reader to confront their entanglement in these systems of oppression. As a journalist, she finds it mandatory and uncomfortable to perform the roles of a passive victim, a distant observer, or even an implicated subject. These constantly changing subject positions also lead her to uncover multiple layers of implication. She states,

> I just don't understand how Israelis can twist the truth of what is happening, nor why the rest of the world seemingly believes them. Israel gaslights – it acts like you're a hysterical woman, when, really, it's just a toxic man, flipping the table on you and telling you you're wrong to ever question it. (59)

And finally declares "This isn't an Aggression anymore; it's a Genocide" (61) and continues to describe the world she inhabits as "a world that still stands by, complacent, allowing the Israelis to get away with Genocide" (62).

As the text progresses, one can identify how the author stresses the need to look beyond victims and perpetrators when she observes:

> Israel is only outdoing itself with its crimes, as if taking part in some sick, twisted Hunger Games- type scenario where the more brutality it can show, the higher its viewer ratings will be. And, in a way, Netanyahu is playing that game. What seems to be constantly overlooked by sections of the Western media is the political power that he stands to gain from the Genocide. (68-69)

With each passing day in conflict-torn Gaza, she calls attention to the international community, especially the Western societies that consciously or unconsciously benefit from the violence.

> The perfect victim. That's what the world expects Palestinians to be. Over the years, the world has passively watched as we've been killed, displaced, and stripped of our basic rights. (102)

However, she refuses to become the perfect victim; the fact of becoming an implicated witness continues to haunt her, even in the places where she takes refuge. It also includes the reader, as well as those who are indirectly embedded in networks of history, power, and responsibility, leading to everyday complicity. There comes a time in her life when Alaqad reflects on her own

privilege of mobility and safety. When she manages to escape to Australia, her sense of being an implicated witness increases in the form of survivor's guilt:

> I don't wish for anyone to ever be put in a position where they have to choose between staying in their homeland and staying alive. The sad reality is that everyone in Gaza experiences survivor's guilt in one way or the other. (137)

Alaqad is determined to critique the power structures around her, though she finds herself trapped among them. She expresses her anger at the system that takes advantage of the plight of forcibly displaced subjects and tells the reader of a situation where she lost an award from abroad by an organisation that wanted to honour her leadership and contribution which she terms as "funny" (149) only because she could not attend the ceremony personally:

> how annoying it is to live in a world where you're treated an object and where you can see how everyone around you is, just using your trauma for their marketing purposes. (149)

As part of her journalism, she documents her community using Western social media platforms, which makes her self-representation mediated by institutions that can be called entangled actors. As a result, the boundary between guilt and innocence gets blurred, giving way to more implicated subjects that worsen the Palestinian suffering.

In the midst of the violence, Alaqad documents her daily life and the community's plight to the global audience. By repeatedly addressing 'the world,' the narrative transforms reading into an ethical encounter in which the reader becomes aware of their informational, political, and economic embeddedness within structures sustaining violence. Ethical responsibility emerges not through accusation but through recognition, aligning with Felman's understanding of witnessing as an ethical demand (Felman and Laub 5).

When Palestinians are continuously subjected to displacement, the idea of the reader's stable home is sharply contrasted. Alaqad explicitly refers to the category of people who post about Palestine expressing their helplessness in the situation, while promoting and profiting from the brands that are in support of the perpetrators. Once their implicated subjectivity descends into complicity, these people reinforce that there is no innocent position in the context of violence. While she is in Egypt before reaching Australia, the fact of 'a whole other life' (123) existing a few kilometres away in Gaza haunts and surprises her at the same time as she feels 'too privileged' (123) for the kind of life she has on this land. As Alaqad arrives in Australia, the metaphor of the suitcase marks the divide between the suffering community in Gaza and the witnessing international community, rooted in implicated subjectivity. There is a clear shift in her way of thinking when she sees a suitcase as just a suitcase, rather than connecting it with displacement and a person carrying their whole life in it.

Alaqad's self-representation challenges the reader's complicity. Rothberg shifts the reader's function from response to responsibility, which forms the ground for ethical thinking in situations of extreme violence. As Alaqad describes and reflects on the genocidal violence, the reader is forced to shed their neutrality, as it is certain privileges that allow them to read the text from a safe distance. Rothberg's notion of implicated subjectivity is displaced onto the reader, who plays an active role in the meaning-making pro-

cess. Drawing on Wolfgang Iser's notion of the 'implied reader,' the text produces interpretive gaps that invite participation. In Alaqad's narrative, however, the implied reader becomes an implicated reader: one whose act of meaning-making reveals their own position within structural violence. This tension arises from the distance between the reader's positionality and the author's lived experience. Reader implication emerges through interpretive participation, where acts of filling textual gaps produce reflexive recognition of structural proximity to violence. The reader is placed in a position of discomfort that makes it difficult for them to be reduced as a compassionate witness to the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, pointing to the political systems that produce the suffering.

This article demonstrates that *The Eyes of Gaza* reconceptualises witnessing by relocating ethical responsibility from individual actors to structures of mediation, power, and global spectatorship, thereby extending Rothberg's theory of implication within the context of contemporary genocidal violence. After months into the genocide, she reflects; "For the longest time, I felt survivor's guilt. But recently, I realized that I'm only a small part of it. We're all puppets in the same production" (155).

The text often positions the reader, author, and institutions as entangled actors. The reader here becomes part of the structure that the author critiques. Complicity is embedded in the reader, reinforcing the need to rethink readers' ethical responsibility as distant observers during genocides. When Alaqad says,

> I'm blessed that I've survived this long. Humans use stories to understand the world around them and when the world around them is as hectic as what is around me, there aren't many stories to turn to. (84)

She foregrounds the reader's responsibility as responsibility becomes distributed when there is a shift from individuals to structures. This is central to dismantling simplistic moral binaries to identify hidden forms of power and privilege, and it opens the path for ethical engagement in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By situating testimony within a framework of structural implication, this article contributes to contemporary debates on witnessing and mediated violence by demonstrating how narrative transforms spectatorship into reflexive ethical engagement and relocates responsibility from individuals to structures of power and relation.

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The Myth of Multicultural Belonging: Power, Difference, and Identity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

Meera Prasannan

Abstract

Multiculturalism is defined as the presence of diverse cultures in a community coexisting in peace and collaboration without a dominant culture. It encourages people of various ethnic backgrounds to learn from each other's cultures rather than rejecting them. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* sets forth the lives of people from a wide range of backgrounds including Afro-Caribbean, Muslim, and Jewish, confronted with conflicts between assimilating and preserving their cultures in multicultural Britain. Zadie Smith was lauded as the cultural symbol of cosmopolitan, multiracial London with the release of her debut novel *White Teeth* in 2000. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* holds a central place in London's Black British writing. As for the characters as in any other postcolonial novel, Zadie Smith's characters too deal with the present-day local conditions of metropolitan living. Smith necessitates her characters to steer among the multiple spatial realms to create social reality and cultural associations. Thus, life in London is exhibited as an ongoing process of dynamic inhabitation, negotiation, and assimilation in order to build a space of one's own. The study tries to investigate how Smith's characters negotiate their identities in the multicultural, transnational space populated by immigrants from formerly colonised countries.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism*, *Cultural Identity*, *Assimilation*.

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Culture is a defining feature of a person's identity contributing to how they see themselves and the groups to which they belong. Culture studies consider how cultural identities are constituted and organized for individuals and groups in intermingled communities and cultures. Cultural identity involves several aspects of a person's being —race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, location, age, sexuality, history, and religion and all these factors put together aid the formation of identity. As Jonathan Culler in *Literary Theory* (1997) observes,

> Literature has not only made identity a theme; It has played a significant role in the construction of the identity of the readers. Literary works encourage identification with characters by showing things from their point of view. (112)

The question of identity becomes crucial in post-colonial and feminist discourses.

Anthropologists have examined culture in various ways, as E.B. Taylor in 'Culture Defined' observes,

> Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (18)

Culture encompasses the whole social system. Its nature is plural and heterogeneous. Culture includes ideas, languages, customs, attire, music, dance, and other aspects of life. Globalization, immigration, and the decline of colonial and imperial dominance have all contributed to the development of the concept of multiculturalism.

Proponents of Multiculturalism believe that allowing different cultures to coexist in a single community while maintaining liberal democracy is a noble idea. However, in a multicultural society, people of many cultural, religious, and ethnic groups must work together to achieve social peace. In a geopolitical world, it gives acknowledgment to all civilizations. As a result, multiculturalism is based on the belief in cultural plurality among people of many races and ethnicities. The goal of multiculturalism is for different cultural groups to coexist peacefully in a society that values tolerance, respect, and understanding. However, according to various cultural, social critics, and anthropologists, it has sparked social fragmentation, inequality, racism, cultural disputes, and racial prejudice among cultures. Detractors have labelled it a failure since it demeans the ethical and cultural norms of many socioeconomic groups while promoting the Westernization agenda. Ronald Takaki, a well-known multiculturalist, connects diversity to history and underprivileged people, asking, "Where am I?" he clearly asks. "Where are my culture and my contributions to this nation?" (2) Society has fragmented as a result of marginalisation, disdain, and dominance of one culture over another. In various nations and groups, people have fought for their cultural identity, origins, and sense of belonging.

Multiculturalism as an ideal is defined as the presence of diverse cultures in a community coexisting in peace and collaboration without a dominant culture. It encourages people of various ethnic backgrounds to learn from each other's cultures rather than rejecting them. In other words, multiculturalism entails treating all cultures in a community equally. In *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (1995), Terence Turner claims that Multiculturalism is one aspect of the

"postmodernist reaction to the state's delegitimization" and the loss of the dominant culture's hegemony in advanced capitalist nations (419).

Multiculturalism is built on the principles of cultural diversity, human rights, tolerance, minority culture privilege and protection, cultural liberty, socio-cultural harmony, and opposition to cultural imperialism in a given society. It encompasses all human distinctions, including those based on race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and nationality. It is a movement for social change. Tariq Modood in his book *Multiculturalism* (2007) states that it is a type of integration that best satisfies the moral implications of equal citizenship and stands the best possibility of succeeding under "our current post-9/11, post-7/7 conditions" (13). People in a multicultural culture can display their own identities while integrating into the community. Multiculturalists contend that several traditions and cultures contribute to a society's cultural richness, equality, and strength.

Brian Barry's *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (2001) recognises a wide assortment of multicultural failings such as a refusal to set principled limits on minority rights and minority independence, a confused antagonistic vibe to the common sense of citizenship that ties together the individuals of an equitable community, an undesirable distraction with questions of social distinction, and exasperating lack of interest to the challenge of changing profoundly dug in socio-economic treachery. Multiculturalism attempts to re-establish a feeling of completeness in a postmodern period that fractures human existence and ideas by filling gaps and enhancing awareness of the past. Race, class, culture, gender, and ethnicity are all major topics in a multicultural society that fosters respect and equality for the lives and voices of the marginalised. By combining ideas from several disciplines, the interdisciplinary approach brings attention to neglected aspects of social history, particularly the histories of women, minorities, and immigrants.

Smith's works can be seen as multicultural dialectics, and her approach to the subject is tinged with ambiguity, blurring the lines between affirmation, and denial. *White Teeth* was written just before the millennium, at a time when British multiculturalism was being questioned due to an increase in the number of violent riots and rebellions organised by minority populations in the UK. From 1857 until the end of the millennium, the events in the *White Teeth* take place over a period of about fifty years. Smith explores the dynamics of social relations and the sensibilities of members of immigrant communities, as well as the changes that British culture as a whole underwent in such a situation, by setting the novel in the 1970s and 1980s, when British culture was characterised by its celebratory attitude toward multiculturalism. Toward the end of the millennium, British multiculturalism in its purest form had shifted from a joyful mood to mistrust of domestic terrorist dangers to the country's national security. Events such as the fatwa issued by Muslim fundamentalist groups against Salman Rushdie in 1989 over the allegation that his novel, *The Satanic Verse* (1988), was blasphemous to Islam, and the Hansforth riots in Birmingham in 1985, which were organised by disgruntled minority groups, prompted majority groups to react against multiculturalism and declare it a failure. Smith depicts the transformation of attitude, which influences and is influenced by the people in Smith's works as well as the real world.

Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1996) offers two perspectives on the concept of 'cultural identity.' First, he defines 'cultural iden-

tity' in terms of a single, shared culture, a type of collective "one real self" hidden behind the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' that individuals with similar histories and heritage share (52). The second recognises that there are also essential areas of profound and considerable difference that define 'what we truly are,' or, more accurately, 'what we have been,' since history has interfered. We can't talk about 'one experience, one identity' for very long without mentioning the opposite side —"the ruptures and discontinuities" (52).

Zadie Smith's characters emerge from literal and metaphorical borderlands of migratory society and she presents multifaceted and multivocal perspectives on belonging.

By presenting stories of hybrid and diasporic experiences, Smith effectively wrote against the 'single story' and thus expressed the nuances of what it means to belong in a globalised, multicultural space. At the age of fourteen, young 'Sadie' Smith renamed herself to 'Zadie.' Through this renaming Zadie Smith asserts her identity in a way that eloquently foregrounds power relations between Anglo-British culture and her mother's Jamaican heritage. This in-between identity experienced by the immigrants is what Homi Bhabha identified as the 'third space.' Since the offspring of immigrants cannot fully identify with either their parents' culture or with the culture of their present country, they tend to produce a new hybrid culture, and identity, thus forming a new cultural space and experiences. The notion of 'third space' as explained by Bhabha in his *The Commitment to Theory*, is

> the hybrid moment of political change. This transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation or translation, of elements that are neither the One ... nor the Other … but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both. (13)

Ethnicity, diversity, hybridity, social integration, and stratification, as well as associated topics such as racism and discrimination, and affirmative action, are themes that Smith emphasises the most in her works. The readers see Smith's characters identify with many cultures, even within one family generation, and watch the repercussions of diversity on society via the perspectives of individual people. Smith also underlines the importance of unpredictability, which may lead our lives (and the lives of the characters) to unexpected places, opening us to a larger range of options and possibilities.

London was once the hub of an empire but the city that once possessed the world now began to contain a diasporic world that was increasingly taking possession of it. In the early years of decolonization, the UK primarily symbolized imperial power and history. But, as the migrants from once colonies have 'reinvaded the center,' its demographic and cultural constitution has changed; over the years it has come to represent empire in a global microcosm. In Zadie Smith's fiction, England is portrayed as a transnational space by exploring the diverse ways in which the Metropolis is experienced by expatriates and migrants. England depicted in Postcolonial literature is a composite portrait and emerges from the fiction of immigrants who are dwelling in the metropolis. The English cities portrayed by these first-hand witnesses are more personal, vivid, and elaborate than the 'cold forbidding realm' (32) imagined by Mudrooroo's aborigines. In the novels of immigrant writers, England is perceived as a place of struggle where they face marginalization, segregation, solitude, racism, poverty, and cultural conflict. The socially and economically op-

pressive spaces England constructed in faraway lands are reproduced in the post-imperial metropolis, as Roy Porter explains in his *Social History of London* (1994). Aidoo sarcastically writes in *Our Sister Killjoy* that,

> ... the story is as old as empires. Oppressed multitudes from the provinces rush to the imperial seat…. there is nothing at the centre but worse slavery. (87- 88)

The years following World War II might be seen as the beginning of a new British society marked by the presence of citizens of other different ethnicities, mainly from ex-colonial territories. This newly attained multicultural aspect is explored in the novels of the following decades. Intra and inter-family relations among ethnically diverse characters; the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in religious and other social spaces become the central theme in Zadie Smith's fiction. The traditional British concept of family is put into question in Smith's narratives, by depicting households that aimed at illustrating the multicultural aspect of British society.

White Teeth (2000) sets forth the lives of people from a wide range of backgrounds including Afro-Caribbean, Muslim, and Jewish confronted with conflicts between assimilating and preserving their cultures in multicultural Britain. The novel depicts London as a melting pot of ethnicities, ethnic groupings, and religious beliefs. As a result of British colonisation in the twentieth century, London was classified as a multicultural metropolis. *White Teeth* recognises that society which may be described as a multicultural environment to some level if it is built by two or more diverse cultures, religions, or languages. Smith brings together two immigrant families, the Iqbals and the Joneses, who have diverse national identities as well as global perspectives, and cultural and religious beliefs. Despite the fact that the characters live in London and have been absorbed and integrated, some of them continue to practice their rituals, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions in an attempt to defend their roots and identity from outside influences. However, this appears to be an issue for some of the migratory characters in the first generation, since the culture and values of English people have a strong impact on the second generation. But newcomers and residents alike spend more time learning about and understanding one another in order to live happily side by side. Occasionally, a fascinating aspect of diversity is brought up.

The city serves as a backdrop for social interaction and as a key zone of possibilities, challenging the idea of 'Britishness' as a unified and homogenous entity. Zadie Smith addresses a variety of issues related to living in a multicultural culture, as well as the generational divide between first and second generation immigrants. Many of her characters are still in touch with their ancestors and heritage, and find life in a contemporary society frustrating. Their ideals are diametrically opposed to those of Western countries, and they are subjected to religious bigotry and persecution. Even after so many years in Britain, some of them still feel like foreigners, and some of them opt to join radical fundamentalist organisations in order to earn prestige and discover their own identity. Some have integrated and believe that their British identity is their primary identity. *White Teeth* invites the reader to think about British culture in pluralistic ways, moving away from the polar binary of insiders and outsiders.

Other concepts of social space have room in such a situation. These different spaces created by social variety call into question the idea of

space as a single, monolithic community with a single identity. London is not just a dynamic site that allows for new identity positions to develop, but it is also a city where new spaces of interaction among ethnically different people are established. *White Teeth* portrays identities as incredibly flexible. In the case of second generation characters, this is especially noticeable. Millat, Magid, Irie, and Joshua are constantly negotiating their ancestors' pasts, current conditions, and future hopes. Everything is conceivable in such circumstances. They are adjusting to their family and social environment, and Smith takes these adjustments to comical extremes: a difficult adolescent who becomes a religious fundamentalist while living in London, while his twin brother, raised in Bangladesh, becomes a fervent opponent of religion and a science lover; or a responsible and studious son of a respectable scientist who, at the novel's conclusion, rejects his father's experimentations and becomes an animal rights activist.

In contrast to the assimilation efforts of the 1950s and 1960s, Britain currently promotes an integration strategy focused on equality, participation, and contact among all populations. It also respects ethnic identities and does not wish to eliminate their cultural values, in contrast to the assimilation approach. In Britain, there are also distinctions between the first and second generations of immigrants. The essential role of this problem lies in one's own sense of self-identity. Zadie Smith depicts the diasporas of multicultural England in her novels. Her multicultural identity is revealed via an examination of her personal life. Her father is British, while her mother is Jamaican. She grew up in England, unable to identify with any single culture. Characters in her stories go through similar hardships. However, in addition to British and Jamaican traditions, she has included a variety of other civilizations in her writings. She has also incorporated her understanding of a variety of religions to provide a comprehensive picture of England's varied society. Characters from South Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America appear in her novels. There is a simultaneous presence of postmodernism and multiculturalism in her fiction. The postmodern condition is seen when civilizations integrate and take on new forms. Language, food, clothes, integration, education, relationship, religion, economic stability, genetic diversity, and historical knowledge are all issues that the characters face.

Diasporic communities endure a willing migration out of their homeland and thus the communal narrative is often disrupted. In order to express themselves the diasporic communities develop their own "distinctive cultures which preserve and often extend and develop their originary cultures" (Ashcroft 82). These communities thus produced works that demonstrate "the plurality of diasporic experience" (136) and the hybridized identity they have gained is multivocal, transmitting linguistic, cultural, political, and ethnic identities. By demonstrating this plurality of personal experience, these texts throw light on the aspects of race, gender, and cultural identities. These texts and authors explore and write against the singular stories of what it means to be British, American, male, and female; thus, escaping the danger of creating stereotypes. Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie points out that the single stories "robs people of their identity… emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" (2009).

The majority of the characters in *White Teeth* came to London as a result of colonialism, and they are typically conscious of their postcolonial identities. Living in a mixed culture, they are unsure of their ethnic identity. Britain is a cos-

mopolitan country with a strategy aimed at encouraging ethnic peace. For centuries, immigrants have come from all over the world for various reasons, bringing with them their cultures, religions, customs, and languages, all of which were integral to their identity. As a result, English culture has been substantially enhanced; nonetheless, this variety has raised issues such as assimilation and difficulties arising out of stereotyping and racism. The work delves into cultural and racial identity in the current British cultural space as well as cultural and familial lineage. As Nick Bentley points out, "teeth are markers of history, and ancestry, and also represent an individual's journey through life" (55). We are all born with a set of teeth, but it is the way we live, the unfortunate events that occur, the class we belong to, and how our teeth seem, that determines how we look. Zadie Smith emphasises the fact that white teeth are embraced in modern culture, which also relates to 'fakeness' in current civilization. White teeth are both a symbol of social rank and a financial matter.

One of multiculturalism's key goals is to maintain the historical foundations from which individuals of society develop their various cultures. Others live by the desire for mutual awareness of diversity, which works as disciplinary power. In her stories, Zadie Smith focuses on the relevance of history in order to emphasise the variety of stances that a topic might take in its development. The protagonists in Smith's books unwittingly embody Stuart Hall's second position, which is based on the idea of the journey and the ongoing modifications involved in developing an identity over which they believe they have total control. In the novel *White Teeth*, Samad Miah Iqbal, tries to establish an identity in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, and class in a multicultural London society, driven by his fixation with his ancestors' past and desire to be absorbed into 'mainstream' British culture. Samad has realised that he has transformed into a mimicry man, a colonial subject seeking to adhere to the conflicting assimilation mandates of imperial rule. Yet, he still struggles to combine his Bengali and English identities. He also makes his children follow strict Islamic rules with which they have no connection, which makes the situation worse.

Simultaneously, Samad refuses to recognise generational disparities. He is always attempting to control how he is regarded and to establish a clear Muslim identity. His resolve to adapt, while turning a blind eye to a variety of historical interpretations, obstructs his development as a person, a father, and a spouse. He gradually realises that he has placed a great deal of trust in a country,

> where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated [...] it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere. (407)

He begins to examine his own roots and their significance in forming his identity in this no longer-so-foreign land. Samad values roots, but his excessive clinging to them prevents him from assimilating to British culture.

Archie Jones, on the other hand, has no roots and is unaware of his genesis or history. He is unable to live up to the 'English' values of reason and reasoning (every decision he makes is based on the flip of a coin). Archie is distinguished from his friend, Samad, just by the fact that he is English and therefore, superficially, belongs. He, like Samad, is unable to develop. He is incapable of transgression and embarks on a new identity adventure. Archie is crucial in highlighting the

conflict that men have in striving to both live up to and break free from previous imperial glory. Archie watches Marcus Chalfen's Future Mouse flee: "[h]e watched it leap off the end and disappear through an air vent. "Go on, my kid!" said Archie" (541). There are no other pathways, no missed opportunities, and no parallel possibilities, as this mouse demonstrates. There will be no second guessing, what-ifs, or could have been, only certainty. This mouse is a symbol of permanent identity in modern England. Marcus Chalfen's idea and his fervent belief in the perfectibility of all life are represented by the small brown mouse. Its triumph is thus not just a comedic celebration of the repressed's return, but also a celebration of the truth that no man is perfect, and that he should not be limited by society's limits and demands.

The second generation characters in terms of rootedness and assimilation, like first- generation characters, experience a sense of loss and disorientation. Millat expresses this sense of loss most strongly in *White Teeth*. He considers London, where he grew up listening to Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen, to be his home. He couldn't understand why his instructor, Poppy Burt Jones, expected Millat to identify his 'home' with his Bengali 'root.' Millat, on the other hand, begins to feel bereft in the absence of his other half: his twin, Magid. He realises as a teenager that he had no face in this nation, no voice in this country until when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel, every radio, every newspaper, and they were outraged, and Millat thought it recognised him and seized it with both hands. Millat then begins to feel out of place in England, realising that his integration is founded on basic differences in race and religion.

White Teeth is a continual reminder of the importance of understanding one's own and others' histories in order to know — to know oneself, and others, and to navigate across identities. Smith's insistence on travelling the path from start to finish emphasises the significance of knowing identity via history. Her non-linear story refuses to prioritise roots above routes or vice versa. Smith's sophisticated explication of historical becoming is further illuminated by the continuous play on time and the bouncing between past and present and back again, emphasising the reality that history is continuously pressing on the present and future. People from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds represent the cultural and ethnic diversity of British society.

Set in contemporary North London, *White Teeth* focuses on the struggles of two immigrant and/or multiethnic families, as well as two men-Samad Iqbal, a Bangladeshi, and Archie Jones, an Englishman–who met in 1945 as members of a tank crew in the final days of World War II and became lifelong friends. In a multi-ethnic and multicultural Britain, the story explores the struggles of their interconnected immigrant families. Their relationship continues after the war, as they marry and have children in England. While Archie Jones marries a much younger Jamaican girl, Clara, and has a hybrid daughter, Irie, Samad Iqbal marries Alsana, a Bangladeshi girl who is also much younger than him and has twin sons, Magid and Millat, in a typical arranged marriage. The tensions of those second generation offspring of multiracial or immigrant parents are brought to the surface by the initiation of Archie's and Samad's children, who confront the difficulty of not belonging to a certain area and seek to learn who they are. In the novel, the Iqbal family decides to send one of the twins, Millat, back to Bangladesh in order to resolve their differences. At least one of the twins is expected to be nurtured according to Islamic prin-

ciples. Magid, the other twin brother, grows up in the capital of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, the preparations backfire, and Millat, who grew up in Bangladesh, returns to London as an atheist, while their English-educated son Magid becomes a militant Islamic follower. In addition to Iqbal's twin sons, Archie's daughter Irie has similar identity difficulties in her life as a multiethnic hybrid daughter.

White Teeth discusses the difficulties of multiethnic and multicultural London. It addresses the disputes between immigrant or multiethnic families and their second generation offspring. Being brown presents a challenging scenario for the hybrid offspring of multiethnic households in the first place. The issue stems mostly from cultural views and external influences that are hostile to post-colonial or immigrant families. Despite the fact that prior colonies attained independence, those nations, as well as the people that live in them, are still regarded to be under England's control. The British still see them as colonials rather than true Europeans, and they are nevertheless patronised by them. In this way, children from multi-ethnic households typically go through a process of self-actualization and identity formation in which they experience a variety of identity crises, including whiteness and being perceived as outsiders.

When it comes to the fundamental principle of multiculturalism, which is the peaceful coexistence of various communities, many people disagree with such an idea and do not like the presence of immigrants in their country. Although it is fashionable in the UK to draw inspiration from other nations and give British white girls exotic names. As a result, many Pakistani parents prefer to give their children an English name in order to prevent any prejudice. Irie Jones is a descendant of immigrants from the second generation, and she is perhaps the most frustrated by the past. They have no desire for her to follow a specific cultural tradition because her mother Clara renounced the Jehovah's Witnesses and refuses to discuss her background, and her father is English. Irie is attempting to figure out who she is, and in order to do so, she seeks out her grandma. On the other hand, there are the Chalfens, who play a significant part in Irie's life as well. Marcus and Joyce Chalfen are interested in both the present and the future, thus Irie is caught in between. Finally, while she is deeply rooted in her family's traditions, she is also acutely aware of the ways in which the past and her cultural background complicate the present. She criticises the Joneses and the Iqbals for their strong ties to the past, for reciting the same old Pande stories, and for accumulating items and storing them in the attic. Other families, she claims, live for the present because that is important. She has chastised parents who force their children to live up to their standards and who demand them to follow their religious and cultural norms. She feels that life isn't about attempting to be someone else or living by someone else's rules. She believes that parents and their children should have greater respect and tolerance. Smith emphasises the significance of identity in heterogeneous cultures, as well as immigrants' inability to escape their past, which is shaped by their forefathers. The novel's fundamental topic is the passage of time and space between the two generations.

In *White Teeth*, language crossover is a common occurrence. Bengali, Jamaican, and English are among the languages used. Smith also demonstrates how standard and non-standard English may be successfully combined.

> Smith builds on an extraordinary linguistic repertoire which blends Cock-

> ney and Creole, Bengali, and the King's English — to depict in literature a fascinating vision of modern London. (Jarica Linn Watts)

To converse with outsiders, an immigrant must acquire a new language. It's possible that they'll have to learn it in order to interact with their co-workers. Samad, for example, must converse in English. He needs to converse with the foreigners that frequent the restaurant. His Pakistani and Indian co-workers may also require communication from him. Most immigrants who are learning English do it in a typical manner. It's also possible to change the emphasis. Differences in the language used at home and at school may be noticed by second-generation immigrants. This may have an impact on how they speak. Millat, for instance, speaks in a Jamaican-accented tongue. "Cha, man! Believe, I don't want to tax dat crap" (132). His Jamaican accent is a result of his interactions with individuals who speak with the same accent.

Clara, Irie's mother, has the same accent as Irie. When one attempts to compel oneself to speak formal English, a crisis arises. The process of language crossover, on the other hand, has progressed to the point that British individuals can now speak non-standard English as well. When Poppy asks, "So what?" Samad recognises the differences between standard and non-standard English. When he responds, "What kind of a phrase is this: "So what?"" (143), she replied that it isn't proper English. She asserts that these days, only immigrants are able to communicate in Queen's English. As a result, certain British individuals may be used to using non-standard English. Although Smith's novels depict heterogeneous communities and the challenges they face, the nature of the dilemmas differ. The characters' integration experiences vary based on their national and ethnic backgrounds. However, both works mention the process of absorption. In the novels, all of the characters undergo the process of integration. The nature of cultural acceptance and scepticism of another country's cultural beliefs can be compared to the nature of a liquid solution. The solute and the solvent are sometimes impossible to combine. This phenomenon is comparable to integration issues.

White Teeth is the story of a family of immigrants who have lived in England for several generations. There are first-generation immigrants Samad and Alsana. Then there's Clara, whose family has a long history of collaborating with conquerors. Charlie Durham, one of the British officers, is Hortense's (Clara's mother) father. He proposes that Hortense's mother, Ambrosia, be educated and become pregnant by him at a young age. Later, he returns to England since it is more convenient for him. Smith here connects Africa's colonial past with Britain's present diversity. Many immigrants in the United Kingdom may have ancestors who were intimately involved in British dominance in Africa and South Asia. There are also second generation immigrants like Magid, Millat, and Irie. The Chalfens are also mentioned in the story; prior generations of their family had relocated to England. However, in the instance of the Chalfens, the assimilation is so profound that they have become totally British. They encourage Magid, Millat, and Irie to follow in their footsteps. These generations' experiences reveal important disparities that are prevalent in heterogeneous communities. The second generation will have an easier time assimilating. After a few generations of assimilation, it's impossible to tell the difference between migrants and natives.

White Teeth depicts London as a 'melting pot,' where first and second generations of im-

migrants find themselves in conflict, and is set in the late twentieth century. Smith, a Jamaican immigrant of the second generation, makes a contrast between first-generation immigrants and their children who were born in London and are now setting the ground for an entirely new society.

Zadie Smith throughout her novel, employs the 'tooth metaphor' to draw attention to a number of concerns. Given that the story has individuals of all ethnicities and races, Smith uses the image of teeth to convey the concept that teeth are universal, or, more exactly, that everyone is the same underneath the skin. Teeth signify something that has the capacity to link and unify all people, but they also represent something that distinguishes one person from another, because no two sets of teeth are the same, making each individual unique. Smith makes passing references to white teeth throughout the work, but it is when Magid, Millat, and Irie visit Mr Hamilton to celebrate the Harvest Festival that Smith expressly concentrates on 'white teeth.' Mr. Hamilton talks to the kids about his wartime experiences, emphasising the significance of brushing one's teeth. Hamilton also explains how he shot Africans after witnessing their white teeth shine, saying: "...when I was in Congo, the only way I could identify the nigger was by the whiteness of his teeth" (172).

Hence for certain groups, such as Africans in Congo, having white teeth became a curse that signified death. White teeth, on the other hand, are a symbol of social prestige for the majority of society, a value that Mr. Hamilton goes on to say: "And when your teeth decay... there's no comeback" (173). They won't give you the same appearance they used to. "Not for love or money, the lovely ones won't give you a second glance" (173). Smith highlights the significance of teeth once more through Mr. Hamilton's remarks, stating that "teeth become an image of care and wisdom, neglect and rot: they must be looked after, brushed three times a day, and protected" (176). Even when the twins caught Samad red- handed for his relationship with Poppy, Sith uses the metaphor of teeth and notes,

> Samad opened his eyes and saw very clearly at the bandstand his two boys, their white teeth biting into two waxy apples, waving, laughing… (182)

Smith utilised the recurring scene, but flipped the 'victim,' making Samad the one who was noticed by the 'tooth,' rather than the carrier of the white teeth. The metaphor emphasises that a person's teeth become a part of his or her identity and that they should be taken care of because they are easily lost.

Smith uses the teeth as a metaphor for one's origin, highlighting the significance of root canals, which are a "symbol of history, memory, and a common colonial past," (213) as observed by Peter Childs in *Contemporary Novelists* (2005). Clara's condition contrasts with the requirement for tooth protection. Clara's life was strongly tied with Jehovah's Witnesses when she was young, but when she broke away from the tying religion, she also lost her top teeth in a motorbike accident, which connects the two events since Clara lost a part of her identity in both a physical and psychological sense. Clara's top teeth, on the other hand, were restored by Archie's presence, who gave her a fresh lease on life and a new set of teeth. Clara's 'fake' teeth, on the other hand, have no roots, much as Clara does not have a link to her own roots. When Clara's daughter Irie discovers that her mother's teeth are artificial, she goes to her grandma, hoping to regain a feeling of belonging and, most crucially, her identity.

'Teething Trouble,' 'Molars,' 'The Root Canals,' and 'Canines: The Ripping Teeth' are some of the novel's chapter titles. Smith investigates the roots of Archie and Samad, Mangal Pande, and Hortense Bowden in "The Root Canals" chapter. The Chalfen family's life is then explored in the chapter 'Ripping Teeth.' Canines are a type of tooth that plays a role in the initial bite while also having a bad connotation because of their association with predatory teeth and thread. Alsana imagines the Chalfen family in the same way, pulling their children from their own families while also separating them from one another. Smith draws emphasis on Archie at the start of his marriage to Clara in the chapter 'Teething Troubles.' Teething issues refer to difficulties that arise at the start of a project or endeavour, but it also relates to the process of a baby's teeth forming. Smith utilises both of the possible meanings in this chapter since it focuses on Archie's progress. Even Archie's new start in life is viewed in terms of his journey from "baby teeth to adult teeth," observes Childs (213). Irie's resolve to become a dentist is noteworthy. Because of her mixed racial origins, Irie is said to be the closest character to Smith herself. Because teeth are symbols of tradition, Irie's wish to become a dentist might be seen as a desire to safeguard one's tradition from decay.

Zadie Smith's novel with non-linear plot development, and exquisite language, explore the inner psyche of immigrants. Similar to her own identity, her writings too have a hybrid quality, as it incorporates popular culture and a dense literary sense. The writings of Smith mark a point of departure from the traditional portrayal of immigrant and non-white populations. Her fiction celebrates hybridity and multiculturalism and presents characters that inhabit a comfortable space with their mixed, cross-cultural identities. The novels focus on the issues of national identity and belonging to a multicultural space. The novels are populated with families of Caribbean, Asian, English, Black, and Jewish British origins creating a cultural heterogeneity. The postcolonial subjects in the London metropolis have gained 'newness' in Zadie Smith's fiction. The racially heterogeneous characters in her novels have integrated with and become a part of the metropolis.

The rise in popularity of multicultural literature that addresses issues of national identity is not only a reaction to this revised understanding of Englishness; rather, it reflects new ways in which it has been thought about and produced. Hence, Smith questions the notion of England as a postmodern neutral place in which a politically acceptable sense of national identity is constantly in opposition to 'Englishness.' To conclude, it may be said that Zadie Smith's writings shed light on the idea of seamless integration. Smith argues that immigrants carry their own historical past with them rather than being 'blank people.' By demonstrating how the postmodern theme in the novel is linked to that of postcolonialism, Smith challenges the essentialist understanding of what it means to be 'English.'

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Feeding the Diasporic Self: Food, Memory, and Belonging in Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H. Mart* and Kim Sunée's *Trail of Crumbs*

Prajnyashila Deka

Abstract

This paper aims to examine the interplay of food, memory, and identity in the memoirs of two Korean American writers: Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H. Mart* (2021) and Kim Sunée's *Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love and the Search for Home* (2008). Through culinary practices, both writers navigate the emotional terrain of love and loss, grief and identity, and self-discovery. While Zauner turns to ethnic Korean food to mourn her mother and reclaim her cultural heritage and identity, Sunée engages with food as a means of constructing a sense of self across racial, geographic, and linguistic boundaries. For diasporic subjects, food transcends mere sustenance; it becomes a repository of memory, a celebration of ancestry, and a site of emotional grounding. This paper argues that food functions as a sensory archive and symbolic language through which diasporic identity is negotiated, reclaimed, and redefined. It discusses food as a medium through which diasporic individuals reexamine their past, make sense of the present, and seek healing in the face of loss and cultural dislocation. Drawing on theories of cultural identity and diaspora by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and others, the paper situates culinary practices as both mnemonic and therapeutic. It argues that food mediates diasporic identity across a spectrum ranging from inherited cultural memory to its absence, thereby revealing identity as an ongoing, embodied process of becoming.

Keywords: *Food, Identity Reconstruction, Memory, Belonging, Diaspora, Korean American Literature.*

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> It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it… and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied … and it is all one.
>
> —M.F.K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me* (xv)

Roland Barthes, in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," describes food as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour" (21). In other words, food is not just about nutritional value but also about the way it is presented, prepared, and consumed, shaping perceptions of self and others within a society. It functions as a powerful medium through which individuals access their past, assert identity, and establish a sense of belonging. Both Zauner's and Kim's memoirs affirm this idea by showing how, through food, they tried to make sense of their identities and culture amidst loss, grief, love, and the search for belonging. Zauner's *Crying in H. Mart* examines her personal experiences growing up as a Korean American and how food acts as a bridge between her and her mother. Following the death of her mother, Michelle's primary connection to her Korean heritage, she turns to food as a way to process grief and reconnect with her cultural roots. Through cooking and tasting of traditional Korean dishes, she accesses the memories, emotions, and heritage that were once transmitted through her mother's presence. On the other hand, Kim's *Trail of Crumbs* narrates a more fragmented search for home and identity. Abandoned at the age of three in a Korean marketplace and adopted into a New Orleans family, her memoir blends personal narrative with recipes that trace her search for identity across racial, geographic, and linguistic boundaries. In her case, food becomes a search for a home she can call her own, without cultural roots.

This paper aims to study the central role of food in reconstructing one's sense of identity. It argues that in both memoirs, food functions as a powerful medium through which diasporic identity, memory, and belonging are negotiated. It argues that identity is not already fixed but a constant search for it, a process of 'becoming.' Both memoirs use food not merely as sustenance but as a symbolic and emotional language that allows the authors to navigate complex experiences of loss, displacement, and belonging. Both texts position food as a site of ongoing negotiation, rather than portraying assimilation or cultural resolution, where complexities of identity are explored and emotional healing becomes possible.

While both memoirs foreground food as central to diasporic selfhood, they occupy different positions within the diasporic experience. Zauner's narrative emerges from a space of cultural proximity later disrupted by maternal loss, whereas Sunée's memoir is shaped by early abandonment and the absence of inherited cultural memory. Read together, these texts demonstrate that food mediates diasporic identity across a spectrum, from remembrance and mourning to invention and self-construction, revealing how belonging is negotiated differently depending on access to kinship, memory, and origin. This pa-

per contributes to diaspora food studies by mapping culinary transmission along this continuum: from inherited memory (Zauner) to compensatory invention (Sunée).

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses diaspora theory, postcolonial approaches to hybridity, and food studies to examine how culinary practices shape memory, grief, and belonging in two Korean American memoirs: Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H. Mart* and Kim Sunée's *Trail of Crumbs*. Rather than treating food as a cultural symbol alone, this study examines cooking and eating as embodied practices through which diasporic subjects negotiate their sense of belonging.

Diaspora is often described as a condition of living in one place while remaining emotionally and imaginatively connected to another, negotiating continuously between past and present, homeland and hostland. As Stuart Hall argues, diaspora exists,

> not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, identities that are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

This idea helps frame both memoirs, where identity does not appear as something stable or inherited intact, but as something continuously worked through. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is equally useful. His emphasis on "innovative sites of contestation and negotiation" (1–2) clarifies how identities emerge within cultural interstices rather than from fixed origins. In such conditions of dislocation, diasporic subjects often fabricate belonging through everyday practices, and culinary kinship becomes one of the most intimate and enduring means through which identity is continually made. Similarly, Avtar Brah (1996) describes diaspora as a space where 'multiple belongings' coexist, forming an identity that is always in process.

Within this framework, Anita Mannur's concept of 'culinary citizenship' is especially useful for reading the selected food memoirs. Mannur argues that food enables diasporic subjects to assert claims of belonging and difference even when full cultural or national recognition remains elusive (29). In Zauner's memoir, culinary practices assert a claim to Koreanness grounded in maternal lineage and inherited taste. In contrast, Sunée's culinary practices articulate a more provisional form of belonging, untethered from origin and grounded instead in invention and self-making. Read together, the memoirs show how food becomes a way of inhabiting diaspora not through fixed narratives of return, but through everyday acts of cooking, eating, and sharing.

Analysis

In both memoirs, food plays a crucial role in showing how the authors connect with or construct their identities. For Zauner, food becomes a tangible connection to her late mother, and by extension, to her Korean heritage. Her mother, central to her personal life and cultural upbringing, was the only direct connection to her Korean identity. After her untimely death from pancreatic cancer, food becomes Zauner's way of coping with loss and reclaiming her sense of self without her mother. She writes, "Am I even Korean anymore if there's no one left to call and ask which brand of seaweed we used to buy?" (Zauner 4). What makes Zauner's sorrow so deep

is that her mother was more than just a parent; she was the living keeper of Korean culture—a walking archive of everything that defines her Korean identity. When her mother dies, Zauner loses not only a loved one but also the person who could confirm, explain, and pass on the everyday details that preserve a diaspora identity. This is why her question about seaweed brands is not trivial; it reveals a deeper concern about what remains of her heritage once the person who embodied it is no longer there. In the wake of that loss, food becomes a form of archival work. Cooking becomes the way Zauner holds onto what her mother once valued—flavours, rituals, preferences, and acts of care, rebuilding the past through repeated sensory experiences instead of having a complete, explicit knowledge of it.

Kim Sunée, on the other hand, turns to food in search of the home and cultural grounding she never had. Abandoned by her Korean mother in a marketplace with only a fistful of breadcrumbs, she was adopted by a white American family and grew up with no access to her Korean roots. At eighteen, she moved to France and became the mistress of Olivier Baussan, founder of L'Occitane. With Olivier, she travelled extensively and enjoyed a variety of cuisines from all over the world. In each new place, food became a lens through which she explored her fragmented identity. "I've also kept tasting notes, menus, and jotted-down recipes," she writes, "clues as to what I crave that may help me know who I am, better understand how food has the power to ground and comfort in times of disarray" (Kim 61). While Sunée never feels truly at home in any one place, the kitchen emerges as her most constant refuge—whether in New Orleans, Paris, Provence, or Tuscany. Through the rituals of cooking and tasting, she attempts to piece together a sense of self and belonging that remains elusive elsewhere.

Food is foundational to Michelle's relationship with her mother and her Korean identity. In her memoir, she reflects, "Food was how my mother expressed her love" (Zauner 6), emphasizing the role of food as not merely sustenance, but also as a language of care and emotional connection. Raised in the United States by her Korean mother, Michelle was exposed to Korean culture and traditions while being immersed in American society. Her experiences in H. Mart, a Korean supermarket chain, symbolize this dual existence. H. Mart stages Koreanness within the everyday space of the United States. H. Mart may be read through Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'Third Space,' where identity is produced not through cultural purity but through negotiation within the 'in-between.' As Bhabha argues, it is within,

> the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (2)

In Zauner's narrative, the store becomes a liminal space where she reconnects with her mother's culture and preserves memories of their shared life. H. Mart is neither entirely Korean nor fully American but functions as an interstitial space where memory, taste, and emotion intersect to redefine cultural identity. After her mother's death, H. Mart becomes not only a hybrid cultural space but also a mourning space, where taste and smell function as sensory conduits to a lost maternal archive. In this Third Space, food becomes an alternative archive, sustaining cultural memory through taste when the maternal archive has disappeared. In this sense, Zauner does not simply exemplify Bhabha's Third

Space, but she extends it. The negotiations of identity that occur in the interstices are not only cultural and linguistic, but also affective and embodied. H. Mart becomes the site where Zauner negotiates not just Koreanness and Americanness, but presence and absence—reconstructing diasporic identity through food as a sensory archive of maternal memory.

Memories, Michelle emphasizes, are intricately tied to the taste of food. After her mother's death, she clings to their shared past through the act of cooking, finding solace in the familiar flavours and aromas of Korean cuisine: "Every dish I cooked exhumed a memory. Every scent and taste brought me back for a moment to an unravaged home" (Zauner 212). Dishes like *kalguksu* and kimchi evoke vivid recollections of her mother and their time together in Myeongdong, South Korea. Through the sensory act of cooking and tasting, Michelle revives these memories and preserves the cultural knowledge her mother once passed down. Food becomes not only a form of remembrance but also a way of holding on to her Korean identity in the wake of loss.

Importantly, Zauner's recovery of culinary heritage is also mediated through contemporary forms of digital transmission. In the absence of her mother's guidance, she turns to online food tutorials, particularly those by the *YouTube* cook Maangchi, through which she learns to recreate traditional dishes that once filled her childhood home. This suggests that diasporic inheritance does not end with the death of the cultural carrier; rather, it can be rerouted through mediated forms of instruction and community. In this context, *YouTube* becomes an alternative site of transmission, allowing Zauner to access Korean culinary knowledge through a public archive when private inheritance becomes inaccessible. In this way, food culture circulates not only through family lineage but also through digital diasporic networks.

Zauner's turn to Maangchi, therefore, marks a shift in diasporic cultural transmission from kinship-based inheritance to digital diaspora pedagogy. Culinary knowledge is no longer passed down solely through the embodied intimacy of maternal instruction, but is instead accessed through a public digital archive where tradition circulates through tutorials, repetition, and community participation. If H. Mart initially functions as a physical Third Space through which Zauner negotiates belonging, *YouTube* becomes a virtual Third Space that sustains cultural practice beyond the boundaries of domestic lineage. This is especially significant when read alongside Sunée's *Trail of Crumbs*, where the absence of origin produces 'culinary fiction': recipes are invented, reconstructed, or imagined through magazines, notes, and fragments. While Sunée must create from an empty archive, Zauner re-routes her maternal archive through digital community, suggesting that culinary citizenship can now be claimed through participation in mediated cultural networks rather than through direct familial transmission alone.

Read alongside Zauner's digitally mediated inheritance, Sunée's narrative occupies a markedly different position within the diasporic trajectory—one shaped not by the loss of inherited memory but by its fundamental absence. As a transracial adoptee abandoned in early childhood, Sunée lacks access to inherited cultural memory or maternal culinary transmission. Unlike Zauner, whose grief emerges from loss-with-memory, Sunée confronts loss-without-memory. Food in her memoir, therefore, does not retrieve a known

past but compensates for its absence. While Zauner's memoir draws on vivid, embodied memories of cooking with her mother, Sunée's narrative is shaped more by the absence of such memories. Lacking direct ties to her Korean roots due to early abandonment and adoption, Sunée uses food as a way to construct personal memory and meaning. Her longing for cultural rootedness compels her to document taste and texture in meticulous detail in the form of recipes at the end of each chapter, transforming food into a medium through which she assembles a fragmented sense of self. In the absence of inherited cultural memory, Sunée builds herself through what she eats and cooks.

In Sunée's memoir, food becomes less a form of inherited tradition and more a means of emotional survival and social belonging. At social gatherings, she often takes over food preparation, finding comfort and control in the kitchen:

> The kitchen is the only place where I am not fearful, which seems fine with everyone. I buy more piles of French and American epicurean magazines, cookbooks, not that I'm able to follow the recipes, but they make me feel useful, efficient. (Kim 185)

Cooking allows her to manage anxiety while also securing a stable role in social spaces where she otherwise feels uncertain. Her attachment to French and American culinary magazines and cookbooks further suggests that culinary knowledge becomes a resource she can acquire, refine, and use to craft a sense of self.

This practice aligns with what Anita Mannur describes as "positioning the culinary as a site of critical and cultural analysis" (222). For Sunée, food does not recover a lost cultural 'essence.' Instead, it produces belonging through performance: by cooking, she becomes legible and valued within social environments. In this sense, Sunée's narrative reflects Mannur's notion of 'culinary citizenship,' or the ability to "claim and inhabit certain identitarian positions via [one's] relationship to food" (29). Her culinary identity draws from Southern American comfort food, French cuisine, and only occasional encounters with Korean flavours, forming a practical repertoire rather than a return to origin. At the same time, Sunée complicates Mannur's warning that culinary citizenship may generate 'distorted fictions' that imagine cuisines as coherent expressions of national essence (29). Sunée's 'culinary fiction' does not stabilize a pure Koreanness; rather, it constructs a survivable self. Her recipes function less as recovered inheritance than as self-made records, turning food into a personal archive that compensates for the cultural archive she never received.

Sunée also narrates how her grandfather's food comforted her and her sister, Suzy, when they were taunted with racist comments at school. While others at school made them feel invisible, her grandfather's food brought solace, making them feel seen and loved. His home-cooked meals were,

> a refuge, a safe place where our grandparents nourish us—solid food to remind us that we exist, that we live in a new world where we have not been forgotten. (Kim 11)

In these moments, food works as a source of healing and care in a world that often renders them invisible. Food for Kim Sunée is more than just nourishment; it is a form of self-expression, an emotional refuge, and a cultural invention. It

allows her to assemble a sense of belonging in a life marked by abandonment, longing, and dislocation.

Sunée's trip to South Korea with Olivier, in hopes of reconnecting with her roots, only deepens her sense of estrangement. She had longed to experience a sense of familiarity in the land of her birth. She writes, "I want to blend in, be accepted across the border without being noticed, as if I've always belonged" (Kim 161), revealing her deep desire to be recognized and accepted as one of them. However, she is met instead with indifference and exclusion. In one particularly unsettling incident, Sunée and Olivier are refused service at a restaurant, heightening her awareness of her outsider status in a place she had hoped would feel like home. A Korean woman tells her that the Korean women seen with white men are high-end prostitutes. This moment intensifies Sunée's sense of alienation, leaving her more estranged in Korea than in any other place she has visited.

In diasporic contexts, food often signifies more than a connection to a cultural heritage; it carries memories of home, familial ties, and a sense of identity. For Michelle, cooking serves as a bridge between her American upbringing and her Korean roots. Like many other second-generation immigrants, she initially distanced herself from her Korean heritage to assimilate and be accepted by her American peers. However, for the Americans, belonging was always something to prove by shedding everything about their heritage and wishing to be accepted as Americans. Born to a Korean mother and an American father, Michelle often felt she belonged to neither world, describing herself as "only half in and half out" (Zauner 107). However, after her mother's death, it is ironic to see how badly she wanted to be associated with her Korean culture. Through cooking and eating Korean food, she tried to access her past, make sense of her present identity, and remember and honour her mother, bringing back all the nostalgic memories through its smells and tastes.

Sunée, by contrast, explores the pain of not fitting in—a deep and persistent sense of unbelonging. Throughout the memoir, she is in constant search of home and rootedness. Yet, after seeking belonging in the many places she inhabits, Sunée ultimately understands that home is not something tied to a particular location, but rather something internal, something she must construct for herself. Her identity, therefore, is not discovered but continually created. This process of identity formation resonates with Stuart Hall's assertion that cultural identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'"—a continuous act of positioning in relation to cultural history, geography, and lived experience (225). For Sunée, whose origins are fractured by abandonment and transracial adoption, identity does not emerge from a stable sense of cultural inheritance but from an ongoing attempt to piece together meaning through memory and movement. She reflects, "For now, I have learned that home is in my heart… in the food that I cook and share with others, in the cities I will come to know… " (Kim 369).

Her identity is shaped by her lifelong search for belonging, particularly through food, which functions both as sustenance and as a symbolic language of care and connection. In the absence of fixed origins, she shapes a self that is fluid and evolving. Each recipe in her memoir carries the trace of a particular place and moment, serving as a sensory record of her experiences. It is through cooking, eating, and sharing food that she feels most grounded, most at home.

When examined together, both *Crying in H. Mart* and *Trail of Crumbs* demonstrate how food mediates two different modes of diasporic identity. In Zauner's memoir, the culinary legacy is one of inheritance that is abruptly broken: her mother's recipes carry cultural memory, and the sudden loss of that transmission turns each dish into a mournful reminder. Food, then, becomes a channel for grief, allowing Zauner to sustain her identity through the sensations and stories that remain. By contrast, Sunée's narrative is defined by an inheritance that was never granted. Her abandonment and subsequent adoption cut off any direct link to her origins, so cooking becomes an inventive practice rather than a recovery of something lost. For Sunée, food is a tool for constructing belonging, piecing together fragments of movement, intimacy, and displacement. This juxtaposition maps a diasporic spectrum that runs from recovery, where loss is mediated by memory, to construction, where loss is navigated without memory. In both accounts, however, food functions as an embodied language: a medium that carries what words alone cannot express.

Conclusion

Both Michelle Zauner's *Crying in H. Mart* and Kim Sunée's *Trail of Crumbs* foreground food as a powerful medium for negotiating identity, memory, and belonging. While Zauner uses food to reconnect with her Korean heritage and process the grief of her mother's passing, Sunée turns to food in search of cultural grounding and emotional stability in a life shaped by abandonment and displacement. In this sense, the memoirs map two ends of a diasporic spectrum: from recovery shaped by loss-with-memory to construction shaped by loss-without-memory. Both memoirs portray identity not as fixed, but as fluid, constantly in negotiation and always in the making. Zauner's memoir emphasizes the emotional and cultural significance of food both in preserving and reimagining one's heritage. From traditional recipes to shared meals, food becomes a way to access memory, find solace, and reclaim identity. Her narrative reminds us of the power of cultural roots in healing and self-understanding. In contrast, Sunée's culinary journey, from Korean kimchi to French haute cuisine, reflects the adoptee's attempt to bridge cultural gaps through taste and ritual. Her memoir suggests that food is never neutral; it becomes a charged site of memory and longing that both connects and reminds them of what remains inaccessible. Ultimately, through cooking and sharing food, both authors shape stories of selfhood, rooted not in static heritage but in emotional experience and sensory ritual. In doing so, they remind us that identity is not something we inherit; it is something we build, often one meal at a time.

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Beyond the Human: Systems, Consciousness, and the Symbiotic Future of Posthuman Existence

Dinesh Nathan S.

Abstract

The posthuman condition marks a significant departure from Enlightenment humanism, presenting new philosophical, biological, and technological paradigms that redefine the human in relation to other species, machines, and environments. Rooted in the legacies of transhumanism and systems theory, this inquiry navigates the terrains of post-anthropocentrism, inhuman ethics, and techno-scientific assemblages. The decentering of the human subject paves the way for symbiogenetic entanglements, where cognition, consciousness, and biological systems operate within complex, autopoietic networks. Through conceptual frameworks such as bioethics, Humanimal hybridity, monster theory, and the post-secular turn, the exploration engages the becoming-machine, becoming-animal, and becoming-earth trajectories of the posthuman. The boundaries of the self are interrogated through the lens of otherness, alterity, and embodiment where bodies are no longer discreet entities but interfaces and assemblages. Drawing on theories of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe, and Yuk Hui, the research considers how biomedia, postvitality, and systems biology converge to challenge notions of fixed identity and human exceptionality. Speciesism and disability

Abstract is being continued to next page

Keywords: *Posthuman, Transhumanism, Posthumanism, Symbiogenesis, Cognition, Consciousness, Autopoiesis, Biology, Systems, Humanimal, Otherness.*

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studies further expose the limitations of normative humanism, inviting a new ethical subjectivity informed by posthuman potentiality and ecological co-dependence. Posthuman citizenship, thus, emerges as a shared terrain of interspecies becoming and techno-biological coexistence. The critical integration of monster theory, symbiogenesis, and autopoiesis into discussions of bioethics, personhood, and enhancement underscores the urgency of rethinking what it means to be alive, conscious, and responsible in a techno-ecological world.

Decentering the Human

The humanist legacy of the Enlightenment has long rested on a hierarchical, exceptionalist understanding of what it means to be human. Framed as the rational, self-aware, autonomous agent, 'Man,' a figure coded as white, male, and Western emerged as the universal subject of history. As Sylvia Wynter has forcefully argued, this overrepresentation of Man as human has resulted in a systematic marginalization of other modes of being, knowing, and living (Wynter 260). Posthumanism arises as both critique and alternative to this legacy, insisting on the plurality of existence beyond the self-enclosed, anthropocentric subject.

Rosi Braidotti's proposition that "the human is not a given, but a composite effect of various genealogies" (Braidotti 24) captures the shift toward a posthuman subjectivity rooted in process, multiplicity, and becoming. In posthuman discourse, the self is no longer a bounded interiority but an assemblage in flux, constituted through relations with human and nonhuman others. The Cartesian split between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* dissolves into a continuum of embodied, situated cognition.

The post-secular turn, likewise, reframes transcendence not as a realm beyond matter, but as immanent multiplicity. Transhumanism's technophilic pursuit of immortality is refigured within posthuman ethics as a call to collective endurance, shared vulnerability, and symbiotic adaptation. The deconstruction of 'woman,' as undertaken by Haraway, Spivak, and Butler, reveals gender as another axis along which the humanist subject fractures, opening onto hybrid, cybernetic, and monstrous identities.

Donna Haraway's manifesto for cyborg feminism asserts, "There is no border where the cyborg ends and the woman begins" (Haraway 180). This collapsing of essentialist binaries marks a profound ontological turn in which the human itself becomes a liminal category. In this framework, the posthuman is not a singular identity but a site of distributed agency, an interface between organism and machine, mind and code, biology and system.

As systems theory, cybernetics, and cognitive sciences increasingly influence contemporary thought, the question of the human becomes ever more contingent. To decenter the human is not merely to diminish it, but to contextualize it within the broader ecologies of matter, life, and information. The epistemic humility fostered by such contextualization paves the way for ethical orientations grounded in alterity, interdependence, and relational accountability.

This paper establishes the intellectual scaffolding for understanding the posthuman as a response to the crisis of the human a crisis marked by environmental collapse, techno-political instability, and biogenetic transformation. In the chapters that follow, these theoretical trajectories will unfold through detailed engagements with post-anthropocentrism, inhuman life, techno-science, and cultural otherness.

Posthumanism

Posthumanism challenges the ontological primacy of the individual subject by positing life as an emergent, relational, and dynamic process. In contrast to Enlightenment notions of the human as autonomous, rational, and separate from nature, posthumanist thought embraces a vision of the subject as embedded in webs of interdependency across species, technologies, and planetary systems. As Braidotti writes, "The human is not a unitary concept, but a multilayered, hybrid composition" (Braidotti 37). The human is both more and less than itself; it is shaped by forces that exceed cognition and intention.

Life beyond the self refers to the rejection of self-enclosure in favour of collective becoming. This shift in perspective decouples identity from its anthropocentric moorings. As Haraway asserts, "The self is the last ideological myth of the West" (Haraway 177). To live posthumanly is to participate in an ontology of becoming-with, rather than being-as.

Posthumanism also reconsiders the limits of the body. The Cartesian body-mind dualism is displaced by an understanding of embodiment as always mediated by memory, environment, language, and machine. Judith Butler's theory of performativity aligns with this idea, challenging the notion of gender and identity as fixed categories. As Butler states, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted" (Butler 25).

The deconstruction of woman, particularly in feminist posthumanism, does not simply erase gender, it reconfigures it as a fluid, material-discursive formation. Haraway's cyborg refuses the purity of gender categories, insisting instead on affinity, irony, and partial connection. The death of Man as a universal figure is thus accompanied by the death of Woman as a stable category of difference.

Posthumanism not only problematizes binary distinctions between human and nonhuman but also calls for new ethical frameworks. Cary Wolfe emphasizes that posthumanism is not about the end of the human but about rethinking the human through the lens of alterity: "What matters is not whether the other is human but whether the other can suffer" (Wolfe 77).

This ethical call resituates human responsibility within a network of shared vulnerability and interspecies care.

The post-secular turn intersects with these developments by reframing spirituality and ethics through material immanence. Rather than transcendence, the sacred is understood as the multiplicity of connections that sustain life. Braidotti writes, "Posthuman ethics aims at developing a new sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others"(Braidotti 190).

In this way, posthumanism demands a profound shift from the primacy of the ego to the humility of the interface. It enacts an ethics of immanence, entanglement, and accountability in which the human becomes a temporary node in an evolving constellation of agencies.

Post-Anthropocentrism

Post-anthropocentrism radically questions the human as the central axis of thought, value, and agency. It destabilizes the Enlightenment legacy of human exceptionalism by calling attention to the complex entanglements that constitute life on Earth. In the age of the Anthropocene, where anthropogenic climate change threatens planetary survival, the call to decenter the human is no longer a speculative gesture it is an ethical imperative.

The posthuman subject, in this framework, is no longer a discrete biological entity but an ecological node a participant in becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine. This triadic movement echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of becoming as "a line of flight, a deterritorialization of the subject" (Deleuze and Guattari 232). These becomings are not metaphors but material and affective alliances that undermine the ontological divide between species and systems.

Becoming-animal challenges the anthropocentric reduction of animals to mute companions or resources. Donna Haraway's notion of 'companion species' insists on relational co-evolution, arguing, "We have never been human" (Haraway 11). Animal others are not objects of human care or cruelty; they are epistemic co-creators of multispecies futures. Similarly, becoming-earth acknowledges the geological, microbial, and atmospheric processes that constitute human existence. As Stacy Alaimo emphasizes in her theory of trans-corporeality, "The human is always already part of the environment it seeks to master" (Alaimo 2).

Posthumanism, in this sense, refuses the liberal humanist subject that is premised on mastery, autonomy, and self-containment. The ecological crisis reveals the insufficiency of this model, demonstrating that the human is entangled with the nonhuman in shared systems of risk, vulnerability, and survival.

Becoming-machine articulates the human's increasing integration with and dependency on digital, algorithmic, and cybernetic systems. The posthuman is not simply a user of technology it is an emergent techno-biological assemblage. In this light, systems biology, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics are not separate domains but sites of intimate co-production.

The logic of difference that underpins these becomings is non-binary and non-hierarchical. As Braidotti explains, "Difference is not a pejorative category but a generative force" (Braidotti 50). The principle of the 'Not-One,' the idea that no being is self-identical becomes the ontological ground for post-anthropocentric ethics.

Contemporary humanism, which claims to extend universal rights to all, remains insufficient in addressing the lived realities of interspecies entanglement. Post-anthropocentrism demands a reconceptualization of community, value, and care beyond the human horizon. It prompts us to consider the agency of plants, bacteria, weather systems, and computational networks not as metaphysical abstractions, but as material agents in our collective becoming.

In embracing post-anthropocentrism, we do not erase the human; rather, we situate the human within a pluriverse of beings, systems, and affects. Life beyond the species is not a utopia it is the condition of survival.

Techno-Science and Systems - Cognition, Consciousness, and Autopoiesis

The integration of techno-science into theories of subjectivity, embodiment, and cognition

redefines not only what it means to be human but also what it means to be alive and aware. In posthuman thought, techno-scientific systems are not external supplements to life they are constitutive of it. Cognition and consciousness, traditionally seen as the apex of human uniqueness, are reconceived as emergent, systemic, and networked.

Autopoiesis, first introduced by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, describes living systems as self-producing and operationally closed, yet structurally coupled to their environment. This systems-theoretic view of life dissolves the boundary between organism and environment, suggesting that cognition is not merely brain-bound but distributed across biochemical, technological, and informational fields. As Varela states, "The nervous system does not 'pick up' information from the environment, but it generates it by virtue of its own structure" (Varela et al. 174).

The implications for consciousness are profound. Rather than a private, interior phenomenon, consciousness becomes an interface generated through recursive feedback between bodies, technologies, and ecologies. This resonates with N. Katherine Hayles's argument that "consciousness is emergent, not essential" (Hayles 290), where the material substrate of cognition can be biological, digital, or hybrid.

Biomedia, including neural interfaces, prosthetics, and wearable devices, further extend this distributed model of cognition. These interfaces do not merely assist the body they transform it into a techno-organic assemblage. The body becomes a platform for modulation, feedback, and amplification. Within such systems, cognition becomes machinic, and the machine becomes embodied.

Postvital life refers to the convergence of biology and computation, where living matter is increasingly subject to algorithmic control and predictive modeling. This mathematization of biology seen in genetic engineering, CRISPR, synthetic biology, and AI-driven diagnostics calls into question traditional ideas of natural life. Symbiogenesis, as theorized by Lynn Margulis, provides a vital counterpoint by emphasizing cooperative, rather than competitive, evolutionary processes. Margulis writes, "Life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking" (Margulis 112).

Posthuman systems biology insists on the relationality of all life forms where biology is understood as a dynamic set of processes occurring within and across species boundaries. As a result, agency is no longer attributed to individual organisms but to complex adaptive systems. The posthuman subject, in this view, is a node in a bioinformational ecology a system whose cognition is deeply interwoven with code, matter, and affect.

Bioethics must expand to account for these new modes of cognition and embodiment. Issues of agency, responsibility, and autonomy must be recalibrated in light of hybrid and distributed systems. Moral posthumanism, as a framework, acknowledges that ethical agency is now shared across human and nonhuman actors biological, technological, and systemic.

To think posthumanly within techno-scientific systems is not to abandon ethics or identity but to reinvent them. It is to recognize that cognition is a function of entanglement, and that consciousness arises not despite systems but through them.

Cultures of Otherness - Humanimal, Monster Theory, and Disability Studies

The concept of the 'other' is central to the posthuman critique of identity and normativity. Posthumanism not only destabilizes the binaries

of human/nonhuman but also challenges the foundational structures that categorize beings into normative and deviant, normal and monstrous. The epistemological framework of monster theory, disability studies, and Humanimal hybridity brings into view the cultures of otherness and their material significance in shaping posthuman futures.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seminal 'Monster Theory' outlines the cultural function of the monster as that which defies boundaries and transgresses norms. He writes,

> The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy ... giving them life and an uncanny independence. (Cohen 4)

Within a posthuman framework, the monster is not merely a symbol of deviance but a figure of potentiality. It resists fixity and insists on multiplicity serving as a metaphor for bodies that exceed legibility within the humanist order.

This monstrous subjectivity aligns with the Humanimal a fusion of animal and human identities, instincts, and embodiments. Donna Haraway's provocative assertion, "We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway 150), foregrounds the material and discursive hybridity that marks contemporary embodiment. Humanimality resists the hierarchy of species and reclaims the porous boundaries between beings. It is an ontological position that critiques speciesism the privileging of the human species over others as a foundational form of exclusion.

Disability studies further dismantle the notion of the ideal human body by examining the cultural and social constructs that produce able-bodiedness as normative. Lennard Davis has argued that "normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (Davis 49). The posthuman project takes this insight further by deconstructing the category of the human itself as an exclusionary fiction rooted in ableist, speciesist, and technophobic ideologies.

In this sense, cyborged bodies those enhanced, repaired, or redefined by technology complicate ideas of autonomy and wholeness. These bodies reveal the fiction of bodily purity and instead foreground a politics of interdependence. Bioethics, when filtered through posthumanism, must engage with the political implications of enhancement and modification. Enhancement is no longer a matter of transcendence but of ethical entanglement with the limits and possibilities of bodies-in-relation.

The question of personhood is also unsettled within these discourses. Posthumanist biology rejects fixed categories of life and personhood in favour of dynamic, processual identities that emerge through intra-actions borrowing from Karen Barad's concept of entangled becoming. In these relational matrices, personhood becomes an event rather than an attribute, negotiated at the intersections of biology, code, prosthesis, and environment.

Finally, the concepts of domestication and deracination where living beings are removed from their native contexts and reconstituted through power must be addressed. Posthumanist critique asks how these forces of control are enacted on bodies considered other: animals, disabled bodies, enhanced bodies, and non-citizen bodies. Posthuman citizenship must then reckon with the ethics of recognition, access, and inclusion for those not deemed fully human by prevailing biopolitical regimes.

The cultures of otherness explored here do not merely supplement posthuman theory they are foundational to it. In embracing the monster, the Humanimal, the disabled, and the hybrid, posthumanism affirms a plural, embodied, and ethically responsive future.

Assemblage and Interface - Posthuman Citizenship

Posthuman citizenship is not grounded in individualism, territorial sovereignty, or anthropocentric governance. It is instead articulated through relationality, embeddedness, and interspecies cohabitation. This shift in understanding coincides with the emergence of new materialist and post-structuralist frameworks where identity is no longer stable or singular, but rhizomatic, mutable, and contingent.

The assemblage, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari, defines a mode of organization that is non-hierarchical, heterogeneous, and dynamic. It consists of components biological, technological, affective, symbolic whose relations constitute a temporary configuration of meaning and function. 'An assemblage,' they write, "establishes connections between heterogeneous elements" (Deleuze and Guattari 88). In this framework, citizenship is not conferred by state recognition but enacted through assemblage through modes of being together that exceed legal structures and political boundaries.

Interfaces play a critical role in mediating these relations. The body itself becomes an interface, a site where networks of power, code, infrastructure, and biosocial experience converge. Biometrics, surveillance, algorithmic profiling, and genetic data flows all inform the posthuman subject's place within broader systems of governance. The citizen is not merely seen but scanned, modeled, and optimized. The body-as-interface is both a site of agency and vulnerability.

In this light, posthuman citizenship demands an ethics of responsibility that includes nonhuman actors: animals, ecosystems, algorithms, and synthetic intelligences. As Bruno Latour argues, "we have never been modern" in the sense of truly separating nature and society (Latour 96). Citizenship must thus include an ecological and technological constituency.

Such a paradigm destabilizes classical biopolitics by emphasizing co-dependence rather than control. It privileges situated knowledge over abstract universals and foregrounds negotiation, responsiveness, and embedded ethics. This rethinking challenges the very notion of inclusion: who (or what) can be a citizen? AI systems that make decisions impacting human lives? Migratory birds affected by climate policy? Displaced ecosystems?

Posthuman citizenship does not require sameness; it thrives on difference. It is not the preservation of human supremacy but the articulation of inter-species and inter-system solidarity. In the age of algorithmic governance and climate catastrophe, such solidarity becomes not only possible but essential.

As Braidotti asserts,

> The posthuman subject is not an autonomous individual but an assemblage of human and non-human forces, entangled in webs of relations and affective intensities. (Braidotti 55)

Citizenship, then, becomes a practice of attunement, an ability to resonate with, adapt to, and take responsibility for the complex systems one inhabits and co-constitutes.

Conclusion - Toward a Symbiotic Ethics

The evolution of posthuman theory reflects a shift not simply in epistemology, but in ontology and ethics. Across its diverse chapters, this inquiry has traced how transhumanist ambition, ecological entanglement, symbiogenetic co-evolution, and machinic embodiment unravel the sovereignty of the human. What emerges is not a dystopian negation of humanity, but a recalibration, one grounded in shared vulnerability, systemic relationality, and post-anthropocentric becoming.

Ethics in the posthuman context is no longer an individual or human prerogative. It is systemic, embedded in relations across species, systems, and scales. The language of 'rights' gives way to a language of responsibilities, attunements, and affective solidarities. As Donna Haraway emphasizes, "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway 12). The story of the posthuman is a story of connection not only to technologies and machines, but to microbes, forests, oceans, and digital interfaces.

Symbiotic ethics do not valorize purity, autonomy, or mastery. They value compost, hybridization, and becoming with. As Lynn Margulis demonstrated, evolution is not a tale of competition, but of cooperation and mutual adaptation. Posthuman ethics therefore affirm the ongoingness of life not as human destiny, but as multibeing flourishing.

In light of climate crisis, biopolitical exclusion, and techno-scientific transformation, the question of 'what counts as life' must be asked anew. In this process, the human becomes accountable not for dominating nature, but for collaborating with it. The posthuman subject cyborg, companion species, monster, node embodies this accountability in and through its distributed agency.

As Rosi Braidotti reminds us,

> Posthuman ethics does not start from the question of who we are, but of what we want to become, how we want to live, and how we might cope with our own vulnerability. (Braidotti 190)

To move toward a symbiotic ethics is to embrace the uncertainty of becoming, to risk difference, and to care across boundaries. It is not a politics of fear, but of radical hope.

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Migration and Digital Voices in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*: Exploring Diasporic Identity through Blogging

Archana S.K.

Abstract

This paper explores the construction of diasporic identity in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, drawing on Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a process of becoming rather than a fixed state of being. Focusing on the protagonist Ifemelu's blog, the study argues that digital expression becomes a key space where identity is continuously formed, negotiated, and redefined within the experience of migration. As Ifemelu moves from Nigeria to the United States, she encounters race not as a distant or theoretical idea, but as a lived social reality that unsettles any stable sense of self. Using Stuart Hall's distinction between identity as a shared cultural essence and identity as a positional, shifting construct, the paper demonstrates how Ifemelu's blog functions as a site where identity is performed as fluid, relational, and historically situated. Her writing reflects the tensions of displacement, racialization, and power, revealing identity as something produced through experience rather than inherited or fixed. The analysis also engages Homi Bhabha's notion of the 'third space,' interpreting the blog as an in-between site of enunciation. From this space, Ifemelu articulates a voice that resists rigid national, cultural, or racial boundaries. Through humour, irony, and sharp

Abstract is being continued to next page

Keywords: *Diaspora, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Digital Public Sphere, Blogging, Hybridity, Identity, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Americanah.*

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Abstract is being continued

social critique, her digital commentary challenges dominant narratives of assimilation while exposing the contradictions within American racial discourse. Blogging, therefore, emerges not simply as personal expression but as a political practice that transforms individual experience into broader cultural critique. The paper further considers Ifemelu's return to Nigeria and her decision to stop blogging. Rather than reading this as closure, the study draws on Hall's view of diasporic identity as open, fragmented, and unfinished. The cessation of blogging highlights the changing conditions under which identity is expressed, reinforcing the idea that diasporic subjectivity remains dynamic across geographical and digital spaces. Ultimately, this paper underscores the role of digital platforms in shaping contemporary diasporic identities, emphasizing that migrant subjectivity is not resolved through assimilation or return, but is continually produced through negotiation, discourse, and lived experience.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* has emerged as a pivotal text in contemporary diasporic literature for its incisive portrayal of mobility, perception, and belonging. Rather than treating migration as a narrative of transformation or resolution, the novel foregrounds the everyday negotiations through which subjectivity is shaped across shifting cultural and social contexts. Adichie's narrative invites a reconsideration of identity not as a stable inheritance but as something produced through encounters with power, difference, and displacement. In doing so, the novel challenges dominant frameworks that reduce migration to questions of adaptation or cultural assimilation, instead emphasizing ambiguity, contradiction, and relational positioning. The text's attention to voice, perception, and self-articulation further highlights how identity is mediated through discourse, revealing the ways individuals interpret, resist, and negotiate the structures that define them.This study argues that, through Stuart Hall's theory of diasporic identity and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the third space, *Americanah* constructs identity as a dynamic, relational, and continuously negotiated process, revealing how selfhood is formed through movement, mediation, and contextual redefinition. By situating the novel within these theoretical frameworks, the analysis underscores how Adichie reconceptualizes diasporic experience as an ongoing condition of becoming rather than a trajectory toward coherence or closure.

Critical discussions of *Americanah* consistently emphasize the novel's interrogation of identity as fluid, unstable, and socially produced. Rather than framing character development through linear psychological growth, scholars read Ifemelu's trajectory as shaped by migration, displacement, and shifting power relations. Akingbe and Adeniyi (2017) argue that the novel presents identity as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by migration, race, and cultural dislocation. They observe that characters such as Ifemelu and Obinze continually renegotiate their sense of self in response to Western racial classifications, experiences of othering, and pressures to assimilate. Their analysis highlights Adichie's critique of fixed identity categories, suggesting that identity emerges through interactions between personal agency and social structures. Scholars further note that racial consciousness occupies a central position in this process of

identity negotiation. Ifemelu's migration to the United States exposes race not as an abstract category but as an organizing social reality. Motahane argues that Adichie frames race as context-dependent, demonstrating how blackness becomes newly meaningful within 'racialised transnational spaces.' Ifemelu's realization that she 'became Black' in America illustrates how racial identity is produced through lived experience rather than inherited essence. Motahane connects this shift to Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, emphasizing the tension between self-perception and the external racial gaze. Through everyday encounters involving employment, language, and beauty norms, the novel reveals race as a dynamic social process that structures belonging, visibility, and agency.

Similarly, Scarsini (2017) and Bonvillain (2016) examine the novel through the lens of identity construction, emphasizing Adichie's destabilization of fixed categories of race and gender. Scarsini highlights how identity is shaped by shifting social and relational dynamics, while Bonvillain underscores the socially constructed nature of race revealed through Ifemelu's diasporic experience. Together, these studies reinforce the view that identity in *Americanah* is continually negotiated across cultural and geographic boundaries. Critics also foreground the significance of narrative voice and self-articulation in shaping diasporic subjectivity. Ifemelu's blog, frequently interpreted as a narrative extension of her consciousness, functions as a site where private insight becomes public critique. Through satire, irony, and direct address, the blog dissects everyday racial encounters, exposing how power operates through politeness, silence, and social performance. Akingbe identifies blogging as a mechanism of ideological resistance and identity negotiation, while Bonvillain observes that digital expression alters Ifemelu's relationship to visibility by enabling controlled self-representation. Importantly, scholars resist readings that interpret critical awareness as resolution. Emotional disconnection and relational tensions persist throughout the narrative, particularly in Ifemelu's intimate relationships. Scarsini notes that awareness does not guarantee belonging, reinforcing the novel's emphasis on contradiction rather than closure. Motahane similarly argues that return operates as an additional site of negotiation, where Ifemelu's reception as an 'Americanah' exposing the instability of cultural authenticity. Her decision to stop blogging is thus read not as silence, but as an indication of identity's contextual and historically contingent nature. Across these perspectives, scholars agree that *Americanah* presents identity as fluid, relational, and continuously reshaped through migration, race, and social experience.

This study is primarily informed by Stuart Hall's conceptualization of diasporic identity as a dynamic and unfinished process rather than a fixed essence. Hall challenges essentialist notions of identity by distinguishing between identity understood as a shared cultural essence and identity conceived as a positional, evolving construct shaped by history, culture, and power. It is this latter formulation that provides the central analytical lens for this study. Hall's argument that identities are 'constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' offers a framework for understanding identity as contingent, relational, and historically situated. Within this perspective, identity is not treated as an inherited attribute but as something formed through representation, discourse, and social positioning. Hall's emphasis on becoming rather than being allows for an examination of how subjectivity is shaped through

movement, displacement, and encounters with difference. Diasporic identity thus emerges as a site of negotiation, tension, and ongoing rearticulation. The study also draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the 'third space.' Bhabha contends that cultural meaning is produced in liminal spaces where fixed identities are unsettled. The third space functions as a site of enunciation in which new forms of subjectivity emerge through the interaction of cultural differences. Hybridity, in this sense, does not signify mixture or synthesis, but the destabilization of claims to purity, origin, or cultural fixity. Together, Hall and Bhabha provide a conceptual framework for analysing identity as fluid, negotiated, and produced within structures of power and representation. Their theories enable a reading of diasporic experience that foregrounds discontinuity, positionality, and relational formation rather than coherence or resolution.

Ifemelu's blog in *Americanah* operates as a crucial narrative space through which diasporic identity is articulated and negotiated. According to Stuart Hall, diasporic identity is not a stable essence but a 'positioning' shaped by historical displacement and contemporary power relations (Hall 226). Ifemelu's blog reflects this process of positioning, as it allows her to narrate her experiences of migration and racialization while simultaneously distancing herself from both American and Nigerian norms. Prior to migrating to the United States, Ifemelu does not perceive herself primarily through the lens of race. However, upon arrival, she becomes aware that blackness in America is not merely a physical trait but a social identity saturated with historical meaning and inequality (Adichie 273). This shift aligns with Hall's argument that identity emerges through difference and is often produced in moments of rupture and dislocation (Hall 235). The blog becomes a medium through which Ifemelu processes this rupture, transforming personal confusion into critical insight.

The digital nature of the blog is significant because it enables Ifemelu to speak from a diasporic position that is both personal and collective. Her posts frequently address 'Non-American Blacks,' signalling a transnational audience that shares similar experiences of racial awakening (Adichie 140). This mode of address reflects Hall's notion of diaspora as a shared condition shaped by dispersal rather than geographic origin alone (Hall 224). By naming and addressing this community, Ifemelu constructs a diasporic consciousness that transcends national boundaries. At the same time, the blog exemplifies Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, as it occupies a cultural 'third space' from which dominant racial narratives can be challenged (Bhabha 55). Ifemelu's ironic tone and satirical observations expose the contradictions within American liberal discourse, particularly the claim of racial neutrality. Her refusal to adopt a grateful immigrant voice disrupts expectations of assimilation and positions her identity as deliberately unsettled. Moreover, blogging allows Ifemelu to assert narrative authority over her own representation. Rather than being spoken for by dominant cultural frameworks, she actively constructs meaning through digital storytelling. This practice reinforces Hall's claim that identity is produced through representation and discourse rather than inherited or fixed (Hall 222). The blog thus functions as a site where diasporic identity is continuously rewritten in response to changing social contexts.

Ifemelu's return to Nigeria in *Americanah* complicates conventional narratives of homecoming that often presume the recovery of cultural authenticity or identity wholeness. Rather than

resolving her diasporic condition, her return underscores its persistence. Stuart Hall's assertion that diasporic identity is never fixed but continuously produced through history, difference, and movement provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic. Hall's emphasis on 'routes' rather than 'roots' privileges lived experience and mobility over origin, suggesting that identity emerges through processes of transformation rather than restoration (Hall 235). Ifemelu's homecoming exemplifies this principle, as her subjectivity remains fundamentally shaped by her transnational experiences. Upon returning to Lagos, Ifemelu is repeatedly identified as an 'Americanah,' a label that signals cultural alteration and marks her as partially estranged from her place of origin (Adichie 475). This reception reveals the instability of belonging and reflects Hall's claim that identity is relational, constructed through difference rather than secured by geography (Hall 226). Although physically 'home,' Ifemelu occupies an in-between position, negotiating a sense of self that is neither fully reintegrated nor entirely displaced. Her return thus does not erase dislocation but reconfigures it, demonstrating that diasporic consciousness persists beyond migration itself. Ifemelu's decision to stop blogging further illustrates the contextual nature of identity formation. In the United States, her blog functioned as a critical space for interpreting racialization and articulating Black subjectivity within a social order that rendered her hyper-visible (Adichie 305). The blog enabled her to transform personal encounters with race into a broader discourse on identity, power, and representation. In Nigeria, however, race no longer structures social experience in the same way, diminishing the immediacy of the blog's interventions. This shift aligns with Hall's understanding of identity as historically situated, emerging in response to specific social and cultural conditions rather than universal categories (Hall 222).

The cessation of blogging may also be read through Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Ifemelu's silence does not signify withdrawal or loss of agency but indicates a reorientation of voice within a different cultural framework. No longer positioned within the American racial order, her mode of articulation necessarily changes. Silence, in this context, becomes a marker of transformation rather than absence, reinforcing the idea that diasporic identity is not bound to a singular narrative, medium, or location. Ultimately, Ifemelu's return resists closure. Her reintegration into Nigerian society remains partial and negotiated, affirming Hall's view of diaspora as a condition of continuous becoming rather than arrival. By challenging linear models of migration and return, *Americanah* foregrounds the enduring complexity of diasporic subjectivity in a globalized world.

This paper has explored the ways migration and digital expression shape diasporic identity in *Americanah*, with particular attention to Ifemelu's blog as a site of articulation, critique, and self-positioning. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theorization of identity as fluid, relational, and historically contingent, the analysis has demonstrated that Ifemelu's subjectivity is neither stabilized through migration nor resolved through return. Instead, her experiences reveal identity as a dynamic process produced through displacement, difference, and shifting relations of power (Hall 235).

The study has shown that blogging enables Ifemelu to convert individual encounters with racialization into a collective discourse that interrogates dominant narratives of race and assimilation in the United States. Writing from an in-between position, she inhabits a hybrid space that facilitates critical distance from both American and Nigerian cultural frameworks. This po-

sitioning resonates with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the 'third space,' where meaning and identity emerge through negotiation rather than resolution (Bhabha 55). The blog thus operates not merely as a narrative device but as a form of cultural and political intervention within a digital public sphere.

Ifemelu's return to Nigeria further unsettles notions of diasporic closure. Rather than restoring a stable sense of belonging, her homecoming reveals the persistence of diasporic consciousness and the limitations of viewing return as an endpoint. Her decision to stop blogging highlights the situational nature of identity expression, reinforcing Hall's claim that identity is always positional and context-dependent (Hall 222). Silence, in this sense, marks not the cessation of identity formation but its transformation. *Americanah* ultimately presents diasporic identity as a mode of continuous becoming shaped by mobility, mediation, and historical experience. By foregrounding digital space as a site of self-representation, the novel underscores the significance of contemporary platforms in articulating migrant subjectivities and reshaping cultural discourse. This analysis contributes to ongoing debates in diaspora and postcolonial studies by demonstrating how digital expression complicates, rather than resolves, questions of identity, belonging, and home in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Place of publication	:	St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam Park Avenue Road, Cochin-682011
Periodicity of its publication	:	Quarterly
Printer's Name	:	Dr. Anu Joseph
Nationality	:	Indian
Address	:	St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam Park Avenue Road, Cochin-682011
Publisher's Name	:	Dr. Anu Joseph
Nationality	:	Indian
Address	:	St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam Park Avenue Road, Cochin-682011
Editor's Name	:	Dr. Tania Mary Vivera
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Indian Bank, A/c No. 6467820532

IFSC: IDIB000E007

Shunmugham Road Branch, Ernakulam, Kerala, India.

Reg. No. KERENG/2009/37091

Printed and Published by Dr. Anu Joseph, Principal on behalf of St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam and printed at Green Offset Printing Press, 43/609B, Maria Tower, Powathil Road, Ayyappankavu, Cochin-682018, Kerala and published at St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam, Park Avenue Road, Cochin-11, Kerala. Editor - Dr. Tania Mary Vivera.

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ISSN 0975-6302

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