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# Contents

- 1      Verboten Acts and Questionable Freedom:  
Mining Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* to Reveal the  
Ignored Particulars of the Female Iranian  
Diaspora  
Vani P. Nair
- 11     Hush! My Baby to Sleep: A Psychological Reading  
of Select Indian Lullabies  
Anto Thomas Chakramakkil
- 40     Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space in Barbara  
Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*  
Sameera K. I. & Sanil Raj J.
- 50     The Theme of Suffering in Oscar Wilde's Fairy  
Tales and *De Profundis*  
Antony K. D.
- 57     Author is Alive: Beat Sensibility and Post-War  
American Poetry  
Syam Sudhakar
- 73     Marking Invisible on Silver Screen: Finding Dalit  
Aesthetics in Malayalam Films  
Soya Joseph
- 81     Concrete Poetry: An Exploration in Spatial Syntax  
Sanil Raj J.

96 Representation of (Dis)ability in Bollywood  
Cinema: Imagined Bodies and Irregular Desires

Chitra P. M.

105 Climate Change Consciousness and Scepticism in  
Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*

Syama Mohan

112 Physio-Psycho-Spiritual Impact of Media on  
Humanity

Rakesh Jose

127 The Responsibility to See: Reading Margaret  
Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me" in the  
Light of Levinasian Ethics

Betsy Paul C.

136 Woman and Hair: Unveiling the Semiotics of the  
Feminine Hair

Divya Krishna

## **Verboten Acts and Questionable Freedom: Mining Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* to Reveal the Ignored Particulars of the Female Iranian Diaspora**

Vani P. Nair

Any commentary on the Iranian diaspora in the United States cannot but begin with the American intervention in their socio-political landscape. Azadeh Moaveni does the same, kicking off her storyline by mentioning en passant about the Islamic Revolution of 1979, that saw tenacious efforts from the supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini in ousting the regime of the unpopular and uninvolved potentate, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, his subsequent removal by the people of Iran and the implosion of several US policies directed at this region as a natural corollary. She mentions how the money from the oil was spent by Shah for indiscriminate acquisition of arms and ammunitions from the US, while ignoring the vast swaths of indigent Iranian populace, thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor. The author notes how conflicting loyalties tore families apart, with one of her own uncles going to the penitentiary for working hand in glove with the venal monarchy, while another championed the nationalist uprising and stayed back in Iran, when others, including her own parents, left for the foreign lands. Theodore Adorno, in his work *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (1951),



which he had written while living in exile in the United States during the Second World War, states that the phenomenon of leaving behind the birth land for a foreign nation is inherently mutilating in nature. Having been born in the US, Moaveni was spared of this pain to some extent as a child; however, when she sojourned in Iran it hit her hard.

“Being exiled from their home country has granted a fundamental opportunity for the women writers to look back and comprehend their splintered diasporic identity....” (Zalipour 411), and while reminiscing about her childhood, the author writes how her Maman (mother) had an uncompromising sense of justice, and went about helping the needy women of her community. Her mother was politically aware, and tried to make a genuine contribution to her community in the foreign soil by expressing her solidarity with them. She also took exception to the American interference in Latin America, or the remorseless transgressions committed against the Palestinians. Transformation of Iran from a powerful ally to a much dreaded enemy of the US, especially after the “Hostage Crisis”, brought this immigrant group under the shadow of suspicion. Even then, they continued raising their voice for all that they stood for, using the borrowed freedom from their host country. Several young women, including the author’s mother, had begun to utilise the privileges afforded by the new land to go out in the public, and to point out how they had been shortchanged in their own country by the American administration.

The immigrant situation had made women like Maman to stand up for their roots and to fight for their home land. However in the process, they did simultaneously, yet unconsciously, stand up against several of their own cultural gremlins, that had previously

shackled them into the bounds of their dwelling. Despite being separated from her husband, Maman led a perfectly normal life in California, taking care of her girl and thus forging a living for herself and her family, in a strange land that was at war with their own soil. This is what makes the Iranian immigrant situation in the US a bit trickier than in the case of other non-native groups. The new lands offered these women possibilities that they might not have had the opportunity to experience back in their own country, making them a bit conflicted about their loyalty. Moaveni writes how she came across photographs of her mother sporting a short skirt and an elaborate beehive, flashing placards which read “Palestine is ours”. Conceiving the occurrence of a similar scene in Iran was next to impossible. Yet, Maman housed a deep sense of alienation from her immediate society, and ceaselessly tried to marinate her bolshie teenager in their ethnicity by informing the ‘selective acculturation’.

But, despite the sworn allegiance to their native land, women are shown to be way more inclusive and welcoming of new additions to their way of life and habits. For instance, even while making sure that her daughter did not gain access to publications that were pro establishment by suspending their subscriptions, Maman had taken interest in Hinduism, frequenting an ashram in Oakland, participating in *satsang*, among “dippy” truth-seeking peaceniks. This exposes an internal conflict that goes unaddressed in most cases due to it being overshadowed by the larger question of identity crisis for most part. It reveals a need for assimilation without the guilt of cultural betrayal weighing the person down especially at a time when their homeland was at odds with their host country. “Homi Bhabha argues about the hybridity and impurity of cultures. Hybridity refers to the

fact that cultures are always in contact with one another which eventually leads to cultural mixedness” (Ghandeharion 492), proving that retaining any sort of cultural purity was just a pipe dream. Also, “assimilation is a second-generation immigrant’s natural, reactionary response to being caught between conflicting familial and societal surroundings” (Magboulegh 202).

Female narratives are also equally revealing of their community’s foibles, since they are unencumbered by the male ego that quite often filters truth in their stories to conveniently get past the bitter realities of their failure to successfully blend in, or upgrade their status. This is partly because men are traditionally considered to be the head of the family, and if they fail to make it big, it points to the inefficiency and incompetence of their lot, while the women are barely held responsible, thus leaving them free to make observations that might otherwise have a demeaning effect on the menfolk. Thus, Moaveni makes observations about a certain section of their expatriate fellows, who had aced the transition with amazing ease and had managed to recreate their opulent lifestyle, that they had to unwillingly let go of while coming to America. She attributes their success to the requisite forethought and wise investments, where her own family lacked the required financial savvy. The inability to restrain extravagant splurges and the mandatory European trips also did them little good when it came to pecuniary matters.

The two women who had a significant presence in Moaveni’s life were her Maman and Khaleh Farzi, her mother’s younger sister. While her mother welcomed the revolution, even though it meant leaving behind a comfortable existence that bordered on luxury in Iran and being a single mom for a three year old, Khaleh Farzi

found it difficult to digest the sharp vicissitudes of their fortune, that made her work as a Woolworth's waitress. A third female figure was her grandmother, who taught her their religion, familiarising her with the verses of their holy book, the Koran. She was also the one who opened the author's eyes to an innocuous yet very potent weapon to keep their culture, at least one of its dimensions, pristine, that is, through gastronomical purity. She was an amazing cook who never let anything but the native Iranian dishes to be prepared in her kitchen.

The author mentions how she was forced into leading a double life due to her Maman's inability to completely pick one side. There was a part of her, especially in school, that wanted to melt into the adopted culture by developing an intentional "ethnic ambiguity" in the minds of her peers and outsiders. At the same time, there was the little girl who associated her own country with beautiful gardens, fresh fruits, opulence, magic and ethnic purity, the source of her original identity, which offered an irresistible lure. However, her mother ceaselessly tried to prevent her from compartmentalising her life, without acknowledging the fact that the two cultures were as immiscible as oil and water. Maman valued and wanted to experience both the "Iranian values and the American freedom".

But Maman was not without reservations about her Iranian heritage. She was a convenient feminist in the sense that she was a rebel who questioned the patriarchal Iranian norms which attributed respect and acceptability to a woman based on her marriage alone, and denounced divorce by all means. At the same time, she was also upset with her daughter's interest in the singer Madonna, whom she called a "prostitute" for the unapologetic and ostentatious display of her sexuality. Further, she believed

in gender equality, and considered it only normal that men and women be given the same rights to practice whatever the other was allowed to do with their lives. However, premarital sex was an altogether a different matter, and when indulged in, women were according to her more at fault than men. The reason why she chose to forgive that practice among men was befitting the mindset of a typical Iranian hillbilly. She said, “They can’t help themselves” (24). As for women, they were meant to develop a natural toleration for sexual depravity.

With mounting restrictions suffocating her, Moaveni developed ingenious methods to skirt around her mother and do as she pleased. At times these episodes would really begin to get to her, and she would voice protests, pointing out her mother’s hypocritical beliefs and even hurl at her caustic “jingoistic clichés”, carefully designed so as to hit her where it hurt the most. However, this move turned out to be counterproductive, as Maman was convinced more than ever that her daughter had been corrupted by the spoilt American teenagers with whom she consorted on a daily basis, and she as a person did not mean what she said.

As the author grew up into a young adult, her intuitive understanding of the peculiar position of the Iranian diaspora community began to make more sense to her. She realised how they would forever be forced to live in the shadow of doubt and suspicion, following the Hostage Crisis, when fifty two American citizens were held hostage in their Embassy in Iran for four hundred and forty four days between 1979 and 1981. One way of coping with this repressive legacy was to make deliberate efforts at erasing all traces of their ethnicity and to embrace the ways of the new land without any resistance, and by making themselves inevitable in their workplace. Thus, to be made acceptable, they had to not only succeed in life, but

endeavour to become overachievers, while constantly being discreet about Iranian lineage.

At the University of California, Moaveni was forced into reconsidering her conceptions about their community, and the urge that she had previously felt to meld into the dominant culture. The relative seclusion of the Iranian enclave, and the lack of real interaction with the wider community had created many misunderstandings in the minds of their previous generation. In the college, emphasising one's ethnicity was considered to be the hip thing, and there was a slow and steady unlearning of the myriad ways she had come up with to mask her identity. The conflict that Moaveni experienced between the two irreconcilable halves belonging to two different cultures, she realised, did not exist in actuality, and was simply a legacy of her insecure immigrant elders.

Embracing her culture, she realised, was also a dispassionate study of the historical roots of her country, and was much more than merely imbibing the twisted sense of tradition that her mother and the other elders in the family were constantly trying to impose on her. In short, she realised that the alienation from her roots that she once craved for once, as a teenager in a desperate attempt at amalgamating her dual identity, was a by product of its use to hinder and shackle her mind and body by her family, effectuated by a visceral fear of being rejected by their own community, more than anything else.

During her brief sojourn in Iran, she had multiple occasions when she felt the penny drop and realised some things about herself that later on gave her a better perspective about the ever muddled questions of belonging

and estrangement. Moaveni found a bosom friend in Celine, who was a loyal companion, with whom she nattered away for hours, resisting the linguistic barrier with her modest vocabulary. But, she stumbled repeatedly when it came to expressing her abstract thoughts, especially if they had something to do with her constitutive elements. These thoughts, she realised, were important exactly because they evaded translation into Farzi, and said a lot about what really has contributed into the making of the real person in her, thus pointing out to which side the pendulum swung the most between her dual identities. It also bears testimony to the fact that migrants like Moaveni never actually got to share the collective consciousness of the Iranians who never left their land.

In Iran she was also faced with an irrational suppression of female sexuality both by the families and by the moral police, who took it upon themselves to reform the “unruly” youth. Hence, Moaveni equates the “brief fashion spring” that descended on the monochromatic raiment of the Iranian populace to a “silent coup”. She also began to appreciate the openness of the western culture where women were not prescribed dress codes, and were further given full freedom to celebrate and embrace their femininity. The attempts, she noticed, to make the youngsters toe the line had actually proved counterproductive. “Made neurotic by the innate oppressiveness of restriction, Iranians were preoccupied with sex in the manner of dieters constantly thinking about food” (55). Even the clerics found loopholes in their religious laws to indulge in transgressive acts by resorting to *sigheh*, or “temporary marriages”, the duration of which could be as less as fifteen minutes. The political and social conservatism that shrouded the dominant ideology of Iran

for some inconceivable reason held a fear and distrust of female sexuality.

The sense of alienation that she experienced back in America did not leave her even after coming back to Iran. This was not only because of her expatriate status, but also because the real Iran she met was a far cry from what she had created in her mind from the romanticised and unrealistic stories of her relatives in the US, and what she herself had dreamt up in her head. Thus, one can surmise that the source of estrangement was the variance between the ideal and the real, something that was constantly tugging at each other within her, and did not have a lot to do with the nature of the territory she occupied, though it did affect its intensity. Also, she had come to accept her “identity as an inner condition” (83), to which the individual concerned had as much to contribute as other external factors.

With other popular narratives, it is difficult to look past the stereotypical or homogenising representation of the Iranian women, to lift their veils and peer into their eyes, to see the dark interstices of their culture that has been getting stifled under the fundamentalist regimes. Female exilic literature is, more often than not, a sustained interrogation of both the homeland and the receiving society, and thus offers scope for a rectified approach to the concepts of cultural assimilation involved in the identity constructions of both the genders. Downplaying the female experiences can distort the representation of diasporic life, since they act as the guardians and transmitters of their traditions and customs from generation to generation. Moaveni shows how

migration can be liberating and bring about more egalitarianism in the family, and can open avenues for women to strengthen their agency, to negotiate many



critical matters, to create new opportunities for themselves and even recreate alternative cultural practices. (Pande 8)

Also, transnational migration creates for women a better understanding about the flaws and foibles in one's own customs and practices, by being exposed to alternative perspectives afforded by a different set of conventions.

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# **Hush! My Baby to Sleep: A Psychological Reading of Select Indian Lullabies**

Anto Thomas Chakramakkil

Lullabies are generally defined as songs that are sung to assist infants to ease the process of sleep. The beginning of all music and poetic expressions can, perhaps, be traced to lullabies, and it is true in the life of every individual born into this world; it is also true of the history of mankind. Lullabies are the beginning of linguistic activity for children; it is the first music heard by babies; it is the first expressions of poetry every infant listens to. In the ancient times, mothers used to rock their babies with epic poems and hymns. In many cultures, pregnant women listen to lullabies. This implies that human beings are acquainted with the rhythm of rocking and lullabies even before their birth. Perhaps, we may say that lullabies repeat the rhythmic movement of the heartbeat pulsating in the womb (Trainor 2000, 31). Then, lullabies are the first literary and musical activities and they do have a biological background. It is, however, a fact that not much study is undertaken on lullabies and the most important and obvious reason for this dismissive attitude in critical thinking is because lullaby is a genre associated with women, children, and the oral tradition. Lullabies essentially portray feminine perspectives. They

are the suppressed expressions of the weaker section of the society, the anonymous women folk of every culture.

There are pragmatic functions for singing lullabies to children. Lullabies are sung to lull the child to sleep. They are musical songs that are essential for building up emotional bonding and also are useful for building confidence. Trehub & Trainor (1998) affirm that lullabies are necessary for the cognitive development of children. They assist the child's motor development and are capable of promoting good listening skills. Lullabies help children to acquire speech and language skills as well as initiate children to literature from early childhood onwards. Earliest lullabies in any language may comprise of wordless humming. In Italian it may be a repetition of sounds like *ninni nanno*; in English it may be just humming *lulla lulla lulla lullaby bye*. In Indian languages too we can notice similar repetition of sounds. In Malayalam, for example, the prototype of lullabies is the repetition of sounds *rararo... rariraro*. Every lullaby is a development from these simple repetitive sounds to words and phrases to caress the child. Words used in most of the languages reassure the child, and they comfort and caress with endearing terms for addressing the child. These words, phrases and pithy statements often reflect the mother's feelings. These persuasive texts, then, is lyrical and are the first instances of poetry in a child's life.

Essentially, lullabies are universal examples of instances of negotiating the child to a world of promises (Vries 169). The most common of these negotiations is optimistic as well as pragmatic in nature and are songs sung for humoring the child with the promises of delicious food. They are subjunctive conditions in linguistic and grammatical structures. Lullabies of this type are universal and structurally convey the same message like, 'if you go to

sleep, you'll get good food'. But if we critically analyze the semantic reception of the child audience, it is a cruel fact that infants do not understand a bit of these words of negotiations. If the child audiences do not follow the language of promises, why are they still sung? Are not the lullabies, then, reflecting the mothers' intentions and desires? Sometimes, these desires are obvious in expressions as they relate to the wellbeing of the child and to the future marriage of the girl-child or her concerns for the boy-child. Singing such optimistic lullabies of promises to ease the child to sleep is common in many Indian languages too. But that does not mean that optimistic promises are the only subject matter of lullabies. Some lullabies aren't optimistic at all, and as for example, the eighteen dark and disturbing lullabies from around the world, which affirms that scaring children to sleep is a global phenomenon (Bologna).

As the child is unwilling to go to sleep, many lullabies are not happy promises negotiating children to sleep but comprise of fearful threats to frighten them to fall asleep. Many of these songs refer to real and imaginary dangers that threaten the life of the child. One arch enemy of fragile infants is death itself. In ancient agrarian oral cultures, mothers are aware of this great danger. Famines, war, attack of enemies, demons lurking in the darkness, and so on are some of the possible threats referred to in lullabies. It is, however, a point to note that the music and melody of these lullabies are soothing and do not suggest the possibilities of dangers. While the words threaten, the tone and melody comforts the child listener. Then, they are not really intended to threaten the child; they seem to have functions beyond that of apparently frightening the infants. According to Maria Warner (2007), spelling out threats and dangers in lullabies suggest the magical

function of language: just by naming the evil forces we make these supernatural creatures harmless. Lullabies, then, function as abracadabra – magical words that miraculously exorcise evil of this earth and those of supernatural world. Some cultures, besides, believe that endearing terms addressing a child to praise its beauty may make the supernatural creatures jealous. They also believe in the superstition that human jealousy can provoke some ill fate to the child. If the child is addressed as ugly, the evil forces lurking behind would lose interest in the baby.

Songs sung to infants are delightful whether they contain cheerful or mournful words and what matters is the gentle musical tone, the familiar voice making repetitive lulling sounds that lead the babies to the comforts of the miraculous world of falling asleep. When we sing lullabies we bring meaning through the tone of voice, the rise and fall of our breath and the intention to soothe both the singer and the infant. When the voice is infused with heartfelt care and love, the effect is deep and long lasting, and it is as effective for adults as for young children who cannot comprehend the words uttered. Then, it is primarily the sounds and rhythms that appear to identify a song as a lullaby in any language. These lullabies that have been passed on from generation to generation give the members of a particular cultural / linguistic group a sense of belonging to a particular group, and more importantly to a particular linguistic culture. Lullabies are cultural transmitters to posterity. Though we may not understand the words at all, lullabies can evoke in the listener a sense of peaceful belonging regardless of cultural or linguistic background.

The lullaby is a song that ideally induces a feeling of calmth, and it is not merely melody that is responsible for this state of tranquility. Of course the music is significant;

but the words of the lullaby are equally important too. Then, we may say that the combination of words, melody and vocal lulling sounds make up the whole experience. While a voice singing a melody is capable of inducing the state of sleepiness, the meaning of what is being conveyed through words, in conjunction with the essence of lulling the baby brings about a perfect union that results in a state of calm for the infant. It culminates in the sound sleep by the time the lullabies are sung. A female voice singing a familiar song is a double delight to the child normally. It is interesting to note what the content of these lullabies are. Often lullabies have a simple story to narrate and this narration is almost invariably about the child itself and it usually takes the form of a prediction about the future of the child. If it is not an optimistic tale that projects the ideal future for the child, it might be also a sorrowful tale of what is likely to happen to the child in future in the troublesome times. Some lullabies are a mixture of these two elements and it blends hopes and fears. A very simple optimistic story is narrated, for example, in the following Assamese lullaby:

Amaare moina subo ae  
Barite bogori rubo ae  
Barire bogori poki soribo  
Amaare moinaai butoli khabo.

Our baby will sleep  
He will plant a plum tree  
When the plums will ripe  
Our baby will eat those plums. (Mamalisa.com)

Some of these songs for young ones are a combination of the happy and sad aspects of life as it is evident from the following translation of a Lotha Naga lullaby:

My little one, why are you crying so much?

Is it because you want a drink of 'Rice Beer'?  
I will give you well-kept 'Rice Beer' to drink.  
Do not cry so!  
Oh! My little one  
Oh! My child.  
Why are you crying so much?  
Even if you cry like this;  
Your father, who has become a young brave among the  
dead;  
Cannot come back and take you in his arms.  
Oh! Do not cry so much. (Mills 34)

16 For Trainor (2000), lullabies, above all, help the child in identity formation. They are sung not only to help the child form its linguistic identity but also to perceive other aspects of identity construction, to form early concepts regarding the self and the Other. It is interesting to analyze how the maternal lullaby experience lends itself to the identification of the 'out-group'. This identity formation is essentially a way of helping the child to distinguish self from other familiar and simple objects it can identify. Distinguishing the self from other objects through sounds seems to be the major function of lullabies. But lullabies are also aids to distinguish the self from possible enemies. The child's fears are invoked. We can then find a deep interconnection between lullabies and the emotions of fear. Many lullabies are threatening the child in one way or another. Lullabies also help the child to form national identity.

Maria Warner (2007) quotes the psychoanalytic theorist Kaja Silverman to argue that lullabies sung to children help in identity formation as these songs can be related to the beginnings of subjectivity. Mothers who speak and sing with infants, then, are 'acoustic mirrors' according to Kaja Silverman. Exposing these ideas of Kaja Silverman further, Maria Warner comments:

She [Kaja Silverman] proposes superseding Jacques Lacan's mirror phase, in which infants learn their individual separateness from their mother by seeing their difference in a mirror. Instead, she argues for substituting the experience of hearing another voice, which responds, echoes and initiates new sounds in the duet played when language begins to form in children's mouths and brains and they start acquiring speech, expressiveness and thought. (200)

Warner also accepts the arguments of the French musicologist Michel Chion who states that the phonocentric images precede logocentric images and the mother plays a crucial role in helping infants distinguish the self from others as well as from non-living objects with the help of her voice much before the child learns written signs (200). Lullaby singers and story tellers have a major function to help infants in detaching the self from the other living and nonliving objects. The construction of the Other is a process that takes place in early infancy and the lullabies play a key role in naming the enemy. It is an interesting subject of study to analyze how this works in lullabies for children. Perhaps, as Maria Warner suggests, human beings have borrowed the structure of this concept from the behavior of monkeys. Warner observes that when a stranger / enemy intrude into the territory of some species of monkey families, the monkey mother confuses the intruder indirectly. Instead of directing signals of danger at the real enemy intruding, the female monkey pretends the presence of another imagined enemy and raises alarms against this feigned enemy. Warner considers it as a decoy technique that parallel the nature of lullabies that human beings sing to their young ones (223). While there are several real enemies that obstruct the smooth living of newborns like illness, famine, premature death, etc. the attention is diverted not to the real enemy, but at a



devil-like bogeyman, an imagined enemy. The child requires genuine protection from real enemies; but many a warning is against the imagined enemy. Indian lullabies are also often instances of projecting violent themes directed against the enemy, real or imaginary.

Children are often threatened in lullabies in some cultures (Warner 1998). Many a time the threatening is about an imagined creature, frightening the child that the bogeyman will come and get it. This 'scare tactic' has often been used to gain control over children often by frightening the child to believe that the imaginary monster in the cradle song is real. Sometimes lullabies threaten children and may directly or indirectly frighten them saying that the bogeyman hiding will appear to take them away if they are disobedient or naughty and do not sleep in time. The imagined bogeyman varies from region to region and the form of the bogeyman varies in different countries of the world. A bogeyman is a monstrous imaginary figure children often believe is real. The bogeyman has no specific appearance. It is said that the bogeyman takes the shape and form of a child's worst fear in order to feed on them. Oftentimes, parents use this fear as a way to control their misbehaving children by telling them made-up stories about the bogeyman. In some cultures the caretakers threaten children by singing to them frightening lullabies about imagined enemies.

In certain Indian cultures like that of Kerala there may not be any historical association in naming the imagined enemy to the child. The 'kokaye' or 'kokachi' that appears in dialogues with young children is a typical imaginary bogeyman that comes to take away children. Young boys and girls are frightened by references heard about this imaginary creature and the adult finds a vicarious pleasure in frightening them to sleep. But the Borgis appearing in

lullabies in Bengal may appear similarly as an imagined enemy to the present infants; yet a little historical analysis will show how the real enemy is frozen in lullabies to picture an imagined enemy to the present young generation. This imagined enemy that appears in the popular Bengali lullaby that frightens Bengali Khokas (young boys) has a strong realistic context in the past. The lullaby has always fertilized the emotions of fear in young children:

Khoka ghumalo para juralo  
 Borgi elo deshe  
 Bulbuli-te dhan kheyechhe  
 khajna debo kishe  
 Dhan phuralo pan phuralo  
 Khajnar upay ki  
 Aar kota din shobur koro  
 Roshun bunechi

The Child sleeps, Everywhere is calm and serene,  
 But the Tax-collectors have returned.  
 The Nightingales have ate all the crops. Alas!  
 How can we pay our taxes?  
 No wheat, No leaves,  
 O What will we do?  
 Please wait a few more days O Tax-collectors,  
 The seeds of Garlic we have just planted. (Art and Sleep)

According to Sen (1996), the key to understand the psychological exploration of the fears of the singer transferred to the child listener lies in the word Borgi. Who are the borgis referred to in this lullaby? We need to read the history of Bengal to have a better understanding of the psychological dimensions of the lullaby. Frequent Maratha raids to Bengal scourged the ordinary people in 18th century. These military onslaughts were a sequel to

Maratha rivalry with the Mughals. Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughals, had started operations for the annexation of the entire Deccan and his ever-extending warfare affected the Marathas. His attempt to win the Maratha chiefs by granting favors of offices proved a failure. Many Maratha chiefs built their fortunes by plundering the Mughal ruled districts. The name Borgi by which these Maratha raiders are known in Bengal is a corruption of the term bargirl, the lowest clans of Maratha common soldiers whose arms and horses were supplied by the state, as contrasted with soldiers who owned their own horses and equipment. These Maratha borgis ravaged the Bengali countryside and brought untold miseries to the people. The repeated Maratha raids in the 1750s proved disastrous for Bengal. The untold miseries of the people were so severe that the incident had to be recorded in memory somewhere. The people's feeble resistance against this violence is recorded in this popular lullaby. The repeated failure of crops added to the miseries of people. The burning of villages by Maratha raiders struck terror in the minds of the people, which in turn led to large-scale migration to the districts east of the Ganges, where the density of population increased, causing various further economic problems. The real enemy, as the lullaby suggests, is famine and imminent death. This real traumatic experience of the past is condensed into this lullaby that invites infants' generation after generation to join in the collective unconscious of these fearful experiences that constitute the cultural heritage of Bengal.

For other typical Indian examples of frightening the child by lurking into the lullabies' images of threatening enemies, let us consider a lullaby of the Rabhas tribe in North East India. The Rabhas are one of the indigenous tribes of Assam. They are also found in Meghalaya, West

Bengal and a few in Bangladesh. Linguistically the Rabhas belong to Tibeto-Burman sub-family with the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Rongdani dialect is the standard Rabha language. It has no script and use Assamese script now. Earlier, English alphabets were used to represent the sounds. There is a Rabha lullaby that threatens the child by the imminent attack of a tiger that'll soon eat up the child. The enemy in this case is not an imagined enemy but a real one for the Rabhas. But the lullaby is sung to frighten the child with the presence of a cruel enemy creeping around it and may devour it, and probably the condition to avoid the attack of the enemy is to sleep. The child is intimidated to sleep. The lullaby reads:

Khape toa kringe toa  
Katha rasa ana  
Lago lago ribaeta  
Masa maru sana.

Don't weep, don't weep  
Oh, my dearest, listen to me  
The tiger is coming and roaring  
And will soon eat up you. (Basumatary 17-18)

The child is intimidated to silence. If it cries and makes noise, the tiger will prowl roaring and will devour the child. The fear of the enemy is strongly instigated in this lullaby right from the beginning of childhood. The lullaby also implies that if the child sleeps calmly without making any disturbances, there is safety for everyone at home. This sort of a direct intimidation against the child is rather rare in Indian lullabies. While the child is normally promised many an attractive gifts to facilitate sleep and the personification of sleep itself is cajoled to bring the grace of sleep unto the infants, Indian lullabies seldom intimidate the child directly.

But, according to Tagore who has systematically studied Bengali lullabies, there are aspects of psychoanalysis as Indian lullabies are products of the mental state and can be subjected to dream analysis as these compositions are intimately connected with the innate history and culture of the people (Sen 4). One of the primary questions that we need to ask while making a psychological study of lullabies is to inquire into the function of lullabies in our culture. Lullabies are not just sleep-inducing songs for us. They are sung by mothers, grandmothers, nursemaids or elder siblings throughout the day. They may be recited to soothe the crying child, to encourage the child to eat well, to lull them to sleep, and to coax, cajole, and console them in myriad other occasions especially when the child feels anxious or afraid. It is sung at any time when the occasion demands to soothe the child, the peaceful afternoons, the stressful evenings, the busy mornings and every act of performing a lullaby generates deep emotions ranging from happy musings on the baby to the general melancholy and sadness of Indian women and their associated social conditions and are sung not only to console and soothe the listening child but to offer a cathartic effect to the singing woman as well. Then, these songs can be psychoanalytic as they furnish a convenient window to the inner thoughts of their composers and we can as well analyze the psycho-cultural effect of these folk-poetic compositions upon the young listeners (Castro 2013).

An exploration into the psychological aspects of Indian lullabies would reveal the relevance of lullabies in the lives of their composers and the significance they have for the narrative community. We should not relegate lullabies as songs for children because they also express the social concerns and fears of adult females. There is a community

experience in the composition process of lullabies and these lullabies are vehicles for unburdening community anxiety. Applying the psychoanalytic method to a study of lullabies resembles the western psychoanalytic approach of interpreting Fairy Tales. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976) initiated this western fashion and various later studies on Fairy Tales of Europe like those of critics such as Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar have created significant creative impact even in our contemporary times. The efforts of Maria Warner to link western lullabies with psychoanalysis have an echo of the western fashion for linking Freud with Fairy Tales. One noteworthy aspect of western studies on Fairy Tales that borrow inspiration from Freudian analysis is to interpret that uncomfortable social problems are suppressed and as a result surface in folklore in various disguises. Maria Warner (1998) links this psychoanalytic methodology with lullabies as she explores the reasons for violence, fear, anxiety, thematic focus on identity, etc. in western lullabies and she interrogates why these lullabies are essentially melancholic in spirit. Such a study may be significant to the western context but at the same time it cannot be considered universal. Applying Freudian psychoanalysis may be all the more irrelevant to certain non-Western cultures such as the Indian culture. Tagore's different analytical approach to the study of lullabies in Bengal thus provides us with relevant clues for a better understanding of the oral composition process in general, and explains why Freud's theories often prove inadequate for the understanding of our lullabies. Psychoanalytic studies may argue that western society suppressed uncomfortable social problems and these problems surface in folktales in various disguises. Indian lullabies, however, do not subvert unpleasant memories. As in the Bengali lullaby on Borgis, the fear and sorrow is

laid out in the open and there is an obsessive celebration of it.

The innermost thoughts and anxieties of women crystallize into lullabies. What were the major worries of Indian women other than the question of finding suitable partners for their daughters? Child marriage and miseries of young women who are subjugated by the dominating upper caste bridegroom is reflected in the next lullaby that finally offers a tinge of punishment to the man who has dominated the social structure.

Brishti pade taapur tupur, nadi elo baan  
Shibuthakurer biye holo, teen kanye daan  
Ek kanye mnaadhen baaden, ek kanye khan  
Ek kanye na khey baaper baadi jaan.

The rain falls tip tap, the river gets flooded  
Shivuthakur weds on such a day,  
Three maidens are given away.  
The first maiden cooks and cleans,  
The second one just feeds,  
The third one returns to her parents without eating  
anything. (Sen 10-11)

The disastrous, heartrending end of Shivuthakur's married life was portrayed in these lines and the unfortunate Shivuthakur definitely could not take his third bride's desertion in a blissful spirit.

In another lullaby, the Bengali mother expresses her anxieties in a disordered and nonsensical rhyme. The associated pain in communication through this sincere expression of feeling reveals the anxiety of a common mother even as the nonsense thrives:

Jamunabati saraswati kal jamunar biye  
Jamuna jaben chuachurbadi kajitala diye.  
Kkajiphul kudote peye gelum mala

Hat-jhumjhum pa-jhumjhum sitaramer khela  
 Nachoto sitaram kankal benkiye  
 Alochal debo tapal bhorie.  
 Alochal khete khete gala holo kath  
 Hethay to jal nei, tripurnir ghat  
 Tripurnir ghate duto mach bhesche  
 Ekti nilen guruthakur, ekti nilen ke?  
 Tar bonke biye kori odphul de.  
 Odphul kudote hoye gelo bela.  
 Tar bonke biye kori thik duksur bela

Jamunabati Saraswati, tomorrow is her wedding,  
 Jamuna will travel to her groom's through Kajitala.  
 While picking kaji flowers, I found a garland,  
 Tinkling bells on hands and feet, it's Sitaram's game.  
 Dance dear Sitaram, bend your hips,  
 I'll feed you a tapal full of rice.  
 The throat got parched while eating the rice,  
 There is no water here, go to Tripurni's ghat.  
 Two fish swim near the banks of Tripurni,  
 Guruthakur took one of them, someone else took the  
 other,  
 I marry his sister with oarflowers.  
 The day wore on while we picked oarflowers,  
 I marry his sister at high noon. (Sen 8)

There is absolutely no relationship between the respective thoughts in this rhyme. It is just a representation of a series of pictures. Thoughts freely come and go but even in this disordered rhyme the subject that dominates is the weird possibilities of marriage. The lullaby presents a world of dreams, and according to Tagore, "[this] world of dreams is far more real to a fanciful and imaginative child than the real world is to an adult. That is why, while we adults sometimes reject truths as improbable, children easily accept the impossible as true" (Sen 10). Lullabies, we may say give an early training to help children achieve this



ideal state of fanciful imagination even before acquiring linguistic capabilities of concrete expression. There is a strong concern over the subject of marriage in the famous Bengali lullaby that we have already referred before. It is possible that some fragments of some forgotten history survive in these lullabies. Marriages, troubles after marriage, troubles arising in married relationships, form the anxieties of a community that get crystallized into their lullabies. Here is another example from Bengal:

E paar ganga, o paar ganga  
 Madhyakhane car  
 Tari madhye boste aache Shiv Sadagar  
 Shiv gelo shuashuabadi, boste dilo pnide,  
 Jalpan korte dilo shalidhaaner cnide,  
 Shalidhaner cnide noy re  
 Binnidhaaer khoi  
 Mota mota sabri kala, kagmari doi.

Ganga on this side, Ganga on the other,  
 A piece of land lies in between,  
 Shiv Sadagar remains seated in the middle.  
 He went to his in-law's house,  
 They gave him a seat to sit,  
 Offered him a snack of shalirice chira [rice flakes].  
 It was not shalirice chira silly,  
 It was only binnirice khoi [puffed rice]  
 Along with some big delicious bananas  
 And curd from Kagmari. (Sen 11-12)

Lullaby is a part of defining the universe around the child. A few spare lines portray an entire way of life. Apparently trivial details evoke images that instantly touch our hearts. Such trivial detail is not found in high or low adult literature. They would either look out of place or will have changed their emotional content. A pure celebration of the trivial portrayal of real life anxieties is essential to some

lullabies. Sometimes the nonsense dominating a children's rhyme is a psychological indication of the attitude of the linguistic community. The song captures the innocent, delightful, and charming mood of children listening to this fancy. The eccentricity of the portrait of actions in the rhyme is presenting the happy vision of life that the linguistic community proposes for the young ones despite the hardships of life.

A psychological study of lullabies reveals not only the somber moral rules operating in them but also open up the inscrutable philosophical observations a linguistic community nurtures for its posterity (Lvoie 2011). They must be considered as vehicles of social awareness and modern education. For example, let us analyze the psychological implications of the famous Bengali lullaby that invites the moon into the civilized company. It is interesting to note how the Bengali mother / caretaker who sings and enjoys imparting this lullaby to the young ones try to tempt the moon with simple objects of bribery. The lullaby goes thus:

Ay ay chandmama, ti diye ja  
Chander kapale chand, ti diye ja.  
Mach dutle mudo debo,  
Dhan bhanle knudo debo,  
Dudh khabar bati debo,  
Chander kapale chand ti diye ja.

Come, come, Uncle Moon, come adorn,  
Come, dear, and adorn the forehead of my darling baby.  
I will save you the fish head when I prepare the fish,  
I will save you some grains when I husk the paddy,  
I will save you some milk from our black cow,  
I will save you a bowl to drink from,  
Come, dear Moon, and adorn my darling. (Sen 23-24)

The moon in the lullaby appears to be a homely moon from a Bengali cottage. It may be stated that it is the famous Uncle Moon that appears all over Indian culture to soothe the babies in the evening. Often Indian mothers feed their young children in the evening by distracting them to look at the moon playing hide and seek as the children are shown the moon through the leaves of a bamboo or a tree and the young ones are delighted at this glimpse of Uncle Moon. The moon is the intimate relative or an Uncle for all Indian children including the Bengalis. It is this familiarity that psychologically allures the singer to tempt the moon with the familiar objects of pleasure that a child or a childlike adult considers as highly valuable gifts. Fish head is the most delicious food item for the Bengalis. The milk from the black cow is believed to be the most nourishing drink. These delicacies are offered in the cultural context to allure the moon to soothe the anxieties of the child at night as it fears darkness itself and unnamed terrors imagined to be waiting in dark. Similar songs that allure Uncle Moon exists in many Indian languages as lullabies to soothe their children and many a lullaby tempt Uncle Moon with the fragrance and honey of flowers and the songs of nightingales, or with rarer things like sweet dreams, the bliss of love, the longing of the heart or the innocence of the new brides. If we analyze psychologically, it is perceived that these lullaby makers do not tempt the moon with empty promises. Imaginatively, they do not find it impossible in the world of nonsense that the moon might come down to earth and join in the child's play. The promises are not impossibilities. All that is promised are possible and affordable for the woman who sings to share it with the intimate guest.

Indian lullabies are deep expressions of psychological wounds as well. The society felt deeply wounded by

customs such as child marriage and practices of giving dowry to the bride. Lullabies are also often suppressed expressions of anxiety and tension over giving the daughters away in the social custom of marriage. The apprehensions of the young daughters being persecuted in the households of the in-laws cater to the psychological expressions in songs even at the very birth of the child. As daughters leave the comforts of one's own families, the society looks at them with feelings of tenderness. The very birth of a girl child anticipates these tender emotions and they flow out as lullabies to soothe the singer who suffers these anxieties as an adult and there is some alleviation of this pain as the song is expressed and the emotions are shared with the listener be it an incomprehensible audience of a child listener. The sweet but sad instances of giving away the daughter to her in-laws during the marriage ceremony in ordinary households is lent an objectivity of a detached observer as these songs are realized in performance. Lullabies such as the above examples are befitting topics for the psychological explorations into the social history of Indian families that are expressed in trivial lines. The girl child who listens to the lullaby will also have to accept the reality of leaving the home one day. It is natural. But this unhappiness that is awaited is not intended to be a permanent one. This is a cyclical process and this consolation is a psychological cure for the singer more than a solace for the listener who does not understand a bit of what is uttered.

A greater worry for any mother as she looks at her new born girl child is the fear that her daughter may later become a bride to a worthless groom. In certain Indian cultures the best way to get rid of this fear is to sing lullabies about it to the girl-child. The pain of the possible

fate is relieved when the song psychologically cures the anxieties of the future.

Although intended for children, the rhyme also expresses the social concerns and fears of adult females. The rhymes have relevance in the lives of the adult female singers of these rhymes and for the narrative linguistic community. Lullabies, then, are vehicles for unburdening community anxiety. Psychologically, a lullaby may also portray a wish to shun all the negative qualities that the child should shun from in future to grow up to be an ideal person. We may glean this wish fulfillment as also a process of introspection. The child is asked not to be like the people in the community that possess certain negative characteristics. Therefore, a lullaby may also prove as a cultural indicator that speaks indirectly about the characteristics of the people of a particular linguistic community as the following lullaby the author has collected in a survey project on Indian lullabies forewarns the young child not to oversleep and be indolent as the Baduga community of South India does:

Enna Muthuna Maathi neenu negathu  
 Unnavu besalu hudara rina mogathu  
 Enna maathi maathi neenu negathu  
 Thooriro (4)  
 Sokku nethu maadi pokiri aaga beda  
 Egaya maathu neeyu kiviga bookapeda  
 Lokana kedalava leka aaka beda (2)  
 Enna maathi maathi neenu negathu  
 Thooriro (4)  
 Enna Muthuna . . .  
 Unnavu besalu . . .  
 Orugi orugi nanga bithigi  
 Buruthae aathu baduge baathi  
 Kurathu.

You are my first born,  
The moon glows in your face  
Sleep well, my son.  
Thooriro (4).  
Don't you wear stylish clothes  
And turn into a rouge.  
Do not pay heed to what others say.  
Do not believe that this is the world (2)  
Sleep well, my son.  
Thooriro (4)  
You are . . .  
The moon . . .  
Do not over sleep and get  
Pampered like our Baduga Community. (Chakramakkil  
132)

While we examine the psychological implications of Indian lullabies, it is insufficient to just consider the negative images of identity in the society as we have done so far. Definitely, Indian lullabies also project a positive sense of identity to the young ones. Lullabies are not merely melancholic expressions about the fears, threats and anxieties of human existence; they are joyous celebrations of a life that identifies the child with nature. The child is looked upon sometimes as a bird and at other times as the moon, a precious gem, or even a flower garden. Let us consider for example the Bengali lullaby that equates the child's face as the moon:

Dhan ke niye ban ke jabo  
Sekhane khabo ki?  
Nirale basiya chander mukh nirakhi.

I will go away with my beloved to the forest,  
What should I eat there?  
I will sit at peace and admire the pretty face of my  
moon. (Sen 31)

The child requires constant reassurance that it is well protected; but we need to reconsider whether it is the singer who needs psychological assurance and reiterates the same. The pleasant images and dreams the singer sings for the child is not just mere good wishes for the child but the dream wish that the child will get all amenities for a stable life in future.

In another Bengali lullaby, we find the positive image built up more carefully:

Chand kotha pabo bacha jadumani?  
Matir chand noy gade debo  
Gacher chand noy pede debo  
Tor matan chand kothay pabo?  
Tui chander shiromani  
Ghumo re amar khokamani.

32

Where shall I find the moon, my darling?  
I cannot make one as it is not made of clay.  
I cannot pick it like a fruit from the tree,  
Where am I to find a moon like you?  
You are the king of the moon,  
Go to sleep, dear son, go to sleep. (Sen 32)

It is this sense of inculcating positive identity in children that directs mothers and caretakers to sing lullabies full of caressing and endearing terms. Love erases the boundaries of identifications psychologically. In this state of irrational love there is no difference between the child, the flowers, the birds and the moon. In this state of joyous lullabies the mother can personify sleep. Lullabies then can be an invocation to Sleep to alight on the child's eyes. There are many Indian lullabies that personify sleep to celebrate the joy of love. Let us extract one more example, a Bengali lullaby, where sleep is objectified as a commodity that can

be bought and bid at the beck and call of the mother who commands sleep to come upon her child:

Hater ghum ghater ghum pathe pathe phere  
Car kada diye kinlem ghum manir cokhe ay re.

Sleep wanders through streets and markets  
I bought you for four pennies, come sit on the eyes of  
my precious darling. (Sen 33)

The psychological process of inculcating positive identity for the child in Indian lullabies finally culminates in the identification of the child as god. This is an exalted status impossible in western Christian tradition for it is blasphemous in that culture to picture the child as god. This is a rare portrayal of identification but very common in almost all Indian lullaby traditions.

The child is here equated with Sri Krishna. Thus, the child attains the foremost exalted status in Indian lullabies. In many such Indian rhymes addressed to children we find little distinction between human children and Sri Krishna or Sri Rama the divine children. Many of these rhymes slip from addressing a human child to addressing the divine child quite unconsciously. Indian childhood is immersed in Indian mythology even from the time of listening to lullabies. One of the most famous Oriya lullabies sung to young ones portray how Yashoda the mother of Sri Krishna tricks and lulls Lord Krishna to sleep even when he is busy with his balya lila (childish mischief):

Nanda Raja nkar tiki puati  
Hasa hasa dise tara muhanti  
Bapa deithile nama Govinda – Ta lagi ma'nka  
Bhari ananda Dine noithila  
Punein rati – Ulyin asuthila  
Janha mamuti Disuthila  
Rupa thali bhalia – Ta



Kirane hasuthila dinian  
 Govinda ku ma' kole suai  
 Geeta gauthile chanda  
 Dekhai Chanda lagi pua  
 Kala ajhata – Kahila,  
 Chanda, ma'de jhata  
 Jete bujhaile na bujhe pua  
 Jhara jhara bahe akhiru  
 Luha Tahun eka upaya  
 Ma'ta kale – Aina gotie  
 Puaku dele Aina bhitare  
 Disila chanda – Taku dekhi  
 Pua bhari ananda Mata  
 Kole khali nuhen Kanhai –  
 Chandra, Surya asi padanti soi

The chubby little son of the King Nanda  
 His father had named him Govinda  
 He who seems to smile all the while  
 Whose mother's love is divine  
 It was a full moon night –  
 With uncle moon rising so bright  
 It looked like a round silver tray –  
 And earth was glorified by its ray  
 In Mother's lap, Govinda lay –  
 She showed him the moon while singing her song  
 For the moon, the son persisted –  
 Asking His mother to get the moon at once  
 Whatsoever was done for the stubborn son –  
 Tears kept flowing from His eyes like rain  
 Then, the mother did a trick –  
 She got a mirror for Him  
 In the mirror, He found the moon –  
 His joy knew no bound  
 In the mother's lap, not just little Krishna –  
 But the sun and the moon get a sound sleep as well.  
 (Chakramakkil 138)

This lullaby is one of the best glorifications that any lullaby can get, for it pictures the power and potential of lullaby poignantly. And, by implication, lullaby is capable of calming the Almighty and the most superb handiworks of the divine such as the sun and the moon are calmed by the lullaby.

Singing lullabies to calming and soothing children to sleep have a ritualistic implication in the Indian context. Rituals establish a sort of psychological balance, which is essential in our culture both for the child listener and the adult singer. These lullabies are expressions of the tension between the consciousness of reality and an idealization of a fantasy that considers a paradise like existence of no worries. The perfect condition of happiness should be there; but unfortunately things in real world are in another way. These lullabies have a sly power and they are the voices of the weak female that acknowledges and accepts the reality; it is a presentation of human power and a simultaneous recognition of human limitation. In fact, the child should be initiated to such a world of duality: the ideal and the real. Indian lullabies are perfect examples of chants that focus upon the meaning of this binary in human existence. The following lullaby of Sarojini Naidu is a perfect example:

From groves of spice,  
O'er field or rice,  
Athwart the lotus stream,  
I bring [for] you,  
Aglint with dew,  
A [little lovely] dream.

Sweet, shut your eyes.  
The wild fireflies  
Dance through the fairy neem;  
From poppy-bole

Fro you I stole  
A [little lovely] dream.

Dear eyes, good-night,  
In golden light,  
The stars around you gleam;  
On you I press,  
With soft caress,  
A [little lovely] dream. (Cradle Song)

36

The mother who is pictured to sing this literary lullaby describes the various places from where she gathered the song that is descending gradually upon the eyelids of her child. From the gardens of spice, which is filled with a strong and pleasant aroma of natural spicy herbs, the baby's mother starts gathering the most beautiful words to fill in the lyrics of the song for the lullaby. Her imagination leaves the spicy gardens and flies over the dark green fields of rice and paddy. From the rice fields across the fresh streams where plenty of lotuses grows, glowing and glistening with dew she weaves and brings a lovely dream of fantasy for her baby. She then tells her baby to shut its eyes and see the wild fire-flies whose tails emit a greenish light at night. The child is exhorted to imagine that these flies are dancing their flights around the fairy neem – a sacred Indian tree. The mother had stolen a lovely dream from the poppy bole; the stem of the poppy plant which has a sleep-inducing effect, and it may sooth the child to sleep. The mother bids child good night in the golden light of the late evening produced by the clear starry skies. The stars from the sky look down upon the baby in its cradle. Finally, the mother wishes the child a little lovely dream.

To conclude, lullabies assist children in their identity construction (Trainor 1996). While lullabies function to sooth and make at ease the disturbed child, they function

as tools for the construction of social identity and help to establish early powerful connections and distinctions between the self and the other. They are aids to establish early emotional connections and can be linked to be the primary source of security in infancy and at night they are extremely powerful. They are part of defining the universe in relationship with the child. Sometimes lullabies can also be examples of helping the child to identify the enemy. It is a process of naming the enemy. Explicitly naming the enemy as in the Bengali lullaby that identifies the enemy as the Borgi may not be very common in Indian examples; however, by linking national identity to Mother / Infant dyad, national lullabies by themselves have the role of defining the political enemy. While lullabies help the child to identify emerging psychic shapes of infancy, they are powerful tools to define and identify the self, the other, the universe and suggest what danger is and how to attain safety. In this context excessive usage of religious lullabies in India have a meaning and a purpose. Developments in neuropsychology now explore how emotions in lullabies act as a memory trigger. Definitely, emotions are intensity modulators and lullabies are highly emotional both for the listener, and definitely for the singer. Research in Developmental Neurobiology shows why emotion and relationship of lullaby singer matter, and thus the study of lullabies have a great interdisciplinary relevance today.

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## **Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior***

Sameera K. I. & Sanil Raj J.

Ecofeminism as a social, political and academic movement focuses on the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature as being interconnected. It is a theory formulated by the French feminist Francois d'Eaubonne in the 1970s. It asserts the fundamental interconnectedness of all life. Ecofeminists argue that any attempt to liberate women will not be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. The exploitation and the degradation of nature is related to the subordination and the suppression of women. Ecofeminism compares the human's effort to control nature to men's effort to suppress women, rich's effort to suppress the poor and the white's effort to suppress the black. All these efforts result in struggles and the dominance of the subordinate class takes place as a result of that.

Women, the keepers of family sanctity and the doers of family work, are particularly aware of ecologically destructive events. This heightened awareness nominates women as the vanguard speakers of environmental malaise, and perhaps also as the vanguard of the forthcoming ecological revolution to clean up the earth. Women's concerns about the environment derive from their experiences of particular problems experienced in private.

The environment becomes an important issue when it impinges on the security of the personal sphere, the home, the family. The personal, for women, is political. Politics, for women, are significantly expressed in private actions (Sandilands xi).

Ecofeminism puts forth the idea that life in nature is maintained through cooperation, mutual care and love. It is an activist and academic movement, and its primary aim is to address and eliminate all forms of domination while recognizing and embracing the interdependence and connection humans have with the earth.

Exquisite with biological and ecological details, *Flight Behavior* reflects an illuminating portrait of humanity's interconnectedness with the environment, persuading the reader to realize that man is not a discrete entity disconnected from nature, but rather a small integral part of an interdependent system. The novel exhibits the pernicious impact of humanity's belief that the environment exists absolutely for providing for man, and argues that our every choice and act affects the entire ecosystem that sustains us. They demand that the humans should possess a gentle and intimate relationship with the environment to understand themselves and their relationship with others.

Barbara Kingsolver is sometimes labelled as an ecofeminist, as her primary characters are often women who discover their strength in conjunction with a closer relationship to nature (Demarr 21). The ecofeminist aspect of the novel is revealed well through the character of the chief protagonist, Dellarobia Turnbow. Dellarobia is a young mother of two children, who got married at an early age of seventeen. She belongs to a lower class family suffering poverty most of the times. She has little



knowledge about the metropolitan culture and has got little chances for visiting a country side except the one that she lives. She was never been able to acquire a good educational background nor got any chances for conversing with highly educated personalities. She has got exposure only to the ways of the rural community that she belongs. Even if she is less educated or illiterate about the external world, she is a keen observer of nature and keeps a renewed wonder and appreciation for the nature around her. Dellarobia's life undergoes a complete transformation while she starts to travel through the Appalachian Mountains above her home. There she encounters the fascinating ways of nature and expresses wonder at the terrible beauty of nature. A complete reformation takes place in her life while she becomes aware of the aftereffects of climate change that is taking place in her surroundings.

Dellarobia's encounter with the millions of monarch butterflies, who had to cede their home place and nesting grounds because of the impending natural calamities, adds to her transformation. At first, the view of these beautiful monarchs hanging on tree leaves or branches creates an admiration in Dellarobia. Later, she comes to the realization that their appearance is caused by disruptions in their usual migratory route and she considers it as an ominous sign of impending ecological disaster. She was quite able to relate the incident with the recent environmental disaster of landslide and flood which occurred in Mexico which is the habitat of these butterflies. Dellarobia comes to the conclusion that "when you clear-cut a mountain it can cause a landslide" (234). The incident succeeds in making her aware of the current trends in the environment.

Dellarobia is very much distressed about her present life. She is a farmer's wife, who spends most of the time in the farm nurturing it. She got married at the age of seventeen and was given the inescapable household responsibilities at an early age. She rarely gets a chance to visit any place except her household surroundings. The only time that she could get acquainted with a new surrounding is when she goes outside for visiting a doctor or while going for shopping. She is very much curious about the world outside and longs to visit various places. Once she climbs the Appalachian Mountain above her home, a sudden revelation comes to her that the world is not the one that she is observing through the narrow windows of her farm house. She really marvels at the beauty of her surroundings and she thanks the hills for providing her a different angle for viewing the nature. While looking from the top of the hill, she experiences the realities about various objects. She is alone in the hill top with a calm atmosphere. She left her children with her mother-in-law and feels a little bit relaxed from the hectic schedule of a house wife. While reaching the pasture, she leans against the fence to get some oxygen. The fresh air in the area rejuvenates her gives her a refreshed feeling. She observes the sky while lying there and she does not find anything interesting about the sky. It is all dull like the all day and frowns at the sky for being so gloomy. Whereas, she feels great admiration for the pasture pond as it is reflecting the light in a more glittering way than the November sky. She finds the sheep moving towards the pond with great admiration and she makes a resemblance with herself and the sheep. Like her, the sheep also have settled for the second best.

Dellarobia tries to establish similarities between her and a fallen tree that she finds in the forest. She considers

the tree as majestic and denotes the tree as 'the corpse of the fallen monster'. The tree appears very strong and with all its mightly even in its death bed. The tree is not cut or fallen in a wind. She makes a comparison with herself and the tree that despite a lot of toughness experienced through the whole life; both of them have survived long battling the difficulties and finally have chosen to escape from their fixed position in life. Like Dellarobia who has sacrificed ten plus years of her married life for accomplishing the needs of others, the tree has survived long there nurturing the ground and providing a kind of shelter and shade for others. Finally, both of them have decided to stand independently and caring their own needs and desires.

We can find a close connection between the butterflies and Dellarobia. Both the butterflies and Dellarobia are compelled to live in an atmosphere that is not at all fit for their survival. She struggles a lot in managing the household works, to cop up with her bitter mother-in law and looking after the children. She rarely gets a chance for exploring her abilities or utilizing her creativity. She always felt like a fish out of water. She had an inner thirst for acquiring knowledge. The vision of the butterflies opens up the window of learning in front of her and she leaves her husband's home in search of the new light of knowledge.

Other birth related issues in the novel reflects the obscure yet alarming future of the monarchs. Dellarobia has a tormenting experience with Hester's birthing lambs as she comes to accept the miscarriage of her and Cub's own child. The emphasis on animals and their reproductive successes in this novel creates a significant ecofeminist avenue to seek. The animals' reproductive successes and sometimes, even their present location mirror the levels of denial or acceptance of climate

change, especially in the main character Dellarobia. The parallels between humans and nonhumans are important to notice because they critique the future of our common reproductive success in the face of climate change. Critiquing anthropocentrism, this novel shows that if humans continue denying their exploitive environmental practices, they will compromise their own potential for successful future generations.

Being an unlucky woman who got married at a very young age Dellarobia Turnbow sacrifices all her dreams and ambitions in life. Her husband Cub is a total failure in making her experience the bliss of living. Cub was totally ignorant about her needs and rarely made any attempt to understand her needs. He was a gentle man who is very soft in heart and loves a peaceful life.

Cub moved in slow motion. His gentleness was merely the stuff he was made of, like the fiber content of a garment, she knew this. Something a wife should bear without complaint. But it made him seem dumb as a cow and it made her mad. (9)

She makes company with a telephone mechanic named Jimmy and she flirts with him in order to make a temporary escape from her disappointed life. She climbs up the mountain with an intention to meet him in order to have a momentary solace for her.

The environmental consciousness in Dellarobia helps her to be a strong woman by acquiring self confidence. The environmental lover in Dellarobia attracts Dr. Byron, an entomologist who comes to the mountain for studying the migration of the Monarch butterflies. Dellarobia is entrusted with a new job as an assistant to Dr. Byron in his research. On the course of the research she learns a lot of things about nature and the entire universe and it helps

her to achieve self confidence and makes her more self-conscious. She plays an important role in saving the Monarch butterflies by shipping them to a more convenient ambience for their survival. The participation in the research enlarges her vision on the environment and makes her more responsible towards protecting the entire universe. The interaction with the nature and natural beings has helped her in exploring the new realms of knowledge and strengthen her character as an environmentally conscious woman who has greater belief in her abilities.

The novel pictures the inculcation of environmental consciousness in the protagonist Dellarobia. It traces the growing environmental awareness in Dellarobia and how it helped her to turn to an independent woman. She takes great initiatives in solving the impending natural calamities that has taken over her native place. She participated in contemporary environmental protection and preservation act. Her life undergoes a complete transformation through her understanding of the environment. She transforms to an ambitious and independent woman and she acquires a self realization regarding her abilities. Being married at the age of seventeen, she had sacrificed a large part of her life serving her husband and doing household works. She decides to fly away from that environment of criticizing in-laws, illiterate neighbours and her commanding husband. She realised she didn't want to live with her husband anymore. For her "being a stay-at-home mom was the loneliest kind of lonely, in which she was always and never by herself" (81). She decides to live with her two children in the urbane town in Cleary. Eventually she applies for college study and Dr. Byron also helped her to get a job to work in a lab. She realises that "Educated people had powers"

(172) and fascinated about “young urban people with advanced degrees. They could find for themselves” (73). She desires to earn money to continue her college besides her lab work. Dellarobia’s journey from a distracted, unhappy farm life to become an environment conscious person illustrates the theme of self-consciousness towards natural environment. Her status as a house wife is transferred to a scientist and her accidental encounter with the million misguided monarch butterflies set her in a flight to freedom. As the butterflies take flight at the end of the novel, she also at last free to choose her way of life with plans for attending college and earning money to become financially independent. Like the monarch butterflies flying away to begin a new life at the end of the novel, Dellarobia too faces a new beginning, transformed by their visit

The sky was too bright and the ground so unreliable, she couldn’t look up for very long. Instead her eyes held steady on the fire bursts of wings reflected across the water, a merging of flame and flood. Above the lake of the world, flanked by White Mountains, they flew out to a new earth. (432)

As we receive so much from nature, protection of nature is the responsibility of each individual on earth. The earth and its processes are inherently related to the functioning of human beings on earth. To reclaim one’s place in the natural world, one must understand one’s vital role in the ecosystem. At the end she comes to know about the real problem of the world is lack of proper respect or concern towards natural surroundings. She consciously chose to face the challenges and stood by her decision to continue further studies and continue her lab work. Thus her environmental consciousness brings a positive change in her life. Dellarobia’s personal development creates a self-

identity within her which freed her from the clutches of the patriarchal system in society.

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# **The Theme of Suffering in Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales and *De Profundis***

Antony K. D.

Having studied Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales in detail, one can understand that Oscar's Fairy Tales have a close relationship with his own life. The agony his characters undergo reflects his own struggle and sufferings. Wilde has converted his physical and mental sufferings into a spiritual experience. He has transformed the spiritual experience infusing into art. He wrote about his prison experience in *De Profundis*:

The plank bed, that loathsome food, the hard ropes shredded into oakum till one's finger-tips grow dull with pain, the menial offices with which each day begins and finishes, the harsh orders that routine seems to necessitate, the dreadful dresses that makes sorrow grotesque to look at, the silence, the solitude, the shame—each and all of these things I have to transform into a spiritual experience. (Wilde 1020)

By converting his sufferings into a 'spiritual experience', he acknowledged suffering as an integral part of human life and experiences. This understanding of suffering as an integral part of human life helped him to see the various aspects of human suffering in his fellow beings with sympathy. To sympathize with a suffering person is not an easy thing because sympathy is an outcome of one's own suffering and the identification of it in others. In this

regard Wilde had tremendous capacity to suffer and to sympathize with people who are suffering. This capacity to suffer and sympathize is very much reflected in his fairy tales.

One can see the character of the Dwarf in Oscar Wilde. Like the Dwarf in “The Birthday of the Infanta” he was enjoying his own ugliness. Others also enjoyed Wilde’s ugliness, ugliness which came out of his notorious life. When he realized that he had become ugly, he was not able to tolerate the pain. His mind even meditated on committing suicide, but in vain. His wife after visiting him in jail on 21st September 1895, found him in ‘most painful and humiliating condition’. She said:

It was indeed awful, more so than I had any conception it could be. I could not see him and I could not touch him. I scarcely spoke . . . when I go again . . . try to get a room to see him in and touch him again. He has been mad these last three years . . . . So he (Alfred) had better keep away and be satisfied with having married a fine life. (Hyde 304)

His wife and his friends were aware of the fact that Wilde was not suffering for his sins. But he was suffering for his friend Douglas. Wilde’s wife Constance resembles the Infanta in “The Birthday of the Infanta”. She can do hardly anything to save his life. She can only feel for him. Wilde’s suffering reached its climax, when he was made to “stand on the platform at Clapham Junction on 20th November 1895 in convict dress and handcuffed for the world to look at” (Hyde 306). People surrounded him and laughed at him. One man from the crowd shouted “My God that’s Oscar Wilde” and spat on his face. This is the most painful experience Oscar Wilde experienced in his life. Later he confessed that he used to “weep every day the same hour and for the same space of time” (Hyde 307).

From this, one can understand that he suffered like Christ and underwent the same kind of humiliating experience. In spite of his humiliation and tragic suffering he was able to gather himself and realize his own self. Mr. Ward wrote about Wilde's self-realization pointedly:

How brilliant and radiant he could be! How playful and charming! How his moods varied and how he reveled in inconsistency! The whim of the moment was his acknowledged dictator. One can see now, reading his character by the light of his later life (his sufferings) the beginning of those tendencies which led to his destruction. There was the love of pose, the desire for self-realization the egotism, but they seemed foibles rather than faults, and his frank regret or laugh at his own expense robbed them of blame and took away offence. (qtd. in Hyde 18)

52

From his prison experience he emerged as an elevated person leaving fully realized his own self, like that of the Young King in "The Young King" who came out of the Cathedral with heavenly light and appearance. Thus self-realization becomes an outcome of all sufferings. One can see the same kind of self-realization in the Fisherman in "The Fisherman and his Soul". Like Wilde, the Fisherman goes in search of pleasure leaving his Mermaid. He left his Mermaid because he was tempted by his soul. The soul told him that, "The world has many fairer maidens than she (the Mermaid) is. There are the dancing-girls of Samaris who dance in the manner of all kinds of birds and beasts" (545). He goes out in search of the dancing girls. He gets disappointed. He was disappointed because, he was not able to find real pleasure away from his Mermaid whom he loved more than his own soul. Then he comes back in search of his Mermaid. But, he could only find her dead body. In her death he

realizes the real love she had for him. This brings in him the greater realization of real love.

Another interesting aspect of Oscar Wilde's life is his capacity to identify suffering in others even when he is undergoing the utmost suffering in his life. This is evident from his appeal to Warder Martin while he was in Reading Prison. He scribbled the following message to Martin which proves his kindness of heart and humanity:

Please find out for me the name of A.2.11. Also the names of the children who are in for the rabbits, and the amount of the fine. Can I pay this and get them out? If so, I will get them out tomorrow. Please dear friend do this for me, I must get them out. Think what a thing for me it would be to be able to help these three little children I would be delighted beyond words: If I can do this by paying the fine tell the children they are to be released tomorrow by a friend, and ask them to be happy and not tell anyone. (qtd. in Hyde 315)

In this regard he resembles the Happy Prince. Like the Happy Prince he tried to get the help of the warder because he is in prison. He cannot move out and do whatever he wants to do. He is in need of an agent. The same way the Happy Prince asks the little swallow to be his active agent in helping the people who suffer. The pleasing tone of Wilde and the Happy Prince is one and the same. The Happy Prince asks the swallow: "swallow, swallow, little swallow will you not stay with me one night longer?" Wilde, by helping others, tried to lessen his own burden. He is able to find the suffering of others more intense than his own suffering. He feels that his life is a precious thing. But he is able to understand that love for others is more precious than his own life. Therefore he decides to give his life for the love of his friend Alfred Douglas.

Oscar Wilde's self-sacrificing nature is reflected in the tale of "The Nightingale and the Rose". The nightingale sacrifices its own life for the student. The nightingale finds that his life is less precious when compared to the love of the student. Therefore it decides to sacrifice its own life for the love of the student. Similarly in "The Devoted Friend", Hans suffers for his friendship with Miller. Hans could have easily neglected his friendship and saved his life. But he is not doing it because he finds pleasure in suffering for his friend. Therefore he takes pains to help Miller in every possible way and at last gives his own life. Hans proves that, there is no more pleasure in the world than that of sacrificing one's own life for a friend. Thus Hans becomes the image of Christ who suffered for others.

In "The Remarkable Rocket", one can find the expression of Oscar Wilde's artistic personality. As an artist he is supposed to amuse the people. In spite of amusing them, he frightens them by living a degrading life. The Rocket also deviates its course of life thinking that it will attract the attention of the people, but it fails. The failure to attract the admiration of people brings in Oscar Wilde great disappointment. He tries in vain to recover from it, but he cannot. As a result he plunges into the mire of human life in order to experience nostalgia. He achieved his purpose. But he lost his identity, self-respect, wife and children. Out of all these losses he gained nothing but the realization of his own self. He was able to understand that his life was a life of suffering. His characters in *The Fairy Tales* suffer for others.

"The Star Child" tells us how a man can destroy the happiness of his own life. The Star-Child tries to find pleasure in hurting others. It loses all sympathy and invites hatred from others. When the child realizes this, his pride is replaced by humility. The conversion takes place in the

child only when it realizes its own self or identity. Through this Wilde tries to prove that realization of one's own self will make people feel humble. Moreover such realization out of one's own suffering will help one to identify with the suffering of others.

Through "The Selfish-Giant" Oscar Wilde proves that breaking the shell of one's own selfishness will help man find salvation in life. As long as the human life is surrounded by the wall of selfishness, salvation will never enter a person. The only condition for salvation is to lose one's own self and in the process of losing it one can gain himself. This is the lesson Wilde learnt from the life of Jesus Christ. In order to achieve selflessness one should be able to suffer for others. Suffering for others will bring out the love in human life. This is clearly portrayed in the conversation between the Child and the Selfish Giant. Having seen the wounds in the hands of the Child, the Giant asked the Child:

'Who hath dared to wound thee?' For on the palms of the Child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

'Who hath dared to wound thee?' Cried the Giant; 'tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him.'

'Nay!' answered the Child: 'but these are the wounds of love.' (Wilde 285)

Of course, Wilde has understood that the suffering he underwent in his life is the sharing of the pain of others. The wounds he got in his body and spirit are like the wounds of Christ who suffered for the love of humanity. Therefore, Wilde found pleasure in suffering for others. One can see the reflection of this suffering in his Fairy Tales. In Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* Mercury calls Prometheus an 'Awful Sufferer!' (Perkins 988). The same

title could be attributed to Wilde and his protagonists in his *Fairy Tales*. A further study of Wilde's other works and a closer scrutiny of his *Fairy Tales* would reveal that he and his main characters shared the solemn oath of Prometheus, "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (Perkins 987).

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# **Author is Alive: Beat Sensibility and Post-War American Poetry**

Syam Sudhakar

The Beat Generation, with its dynamic forms of artistic expressions and ingenious lifestyle, was sufficiently powerful to challenge many traditional White American societies and establishments by standing up against many conservative social organisations. During the period of high modernism, the technique of 'Close Reading' was practised in literary criticism by considering the text as a separate entity. This practice literally established the lack of connections between the actual lives of writers and their texts in literary critique. New Critics who analysed the works of Modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound often separated the personal, literary and political as different realms and did not acknowledge the political in the personal. But for the Beats, the personal life and the political stance of the writer were enigmatically intertwined and it resulted in evincing the autobiographical content as central to the Beat imagination. The paper analyses the connection between the personal life and ideologies of the Beat writers in contrast to their literature, especially poetry, to establish that the idea of 'personal is political' abounds in Beat literature, since the creative worlds and the personal lives of most of the Beat writers were enmeshed and overt in their writing.



Even though Beat writers were exceptional in their sense of brotherhood and friendship, the pantheon of the Beat movement includes many more writers than the canonical giants such as Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso. Other writers who had a Beat sensibility were considered as Beats and included in this study to avoid the narrowing down of representation. Though the wind of this generation originated from a high academic environment, especially from the chambers of Columbia University, they were later considered an anti-academic group, as most were expelled from the university. Of an epicureanistic and ecstatic nature, this 'bohemian' group often engaged in spontaneous creativity. The academy could not comprehend their intellectual craziness, purposeful chaos, sexual experimentation and their use of drugs.

It is noteworthy that formalist critics, Louis Simpson and Donald Hall—two strict academicians—were classmates of some of the members of the Beat Generation at Columbia. These strict formalist critics and the Beats together attended lectures given by University professors such as Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren. The only difference was that the Beats—Allen Ginsberg, Lucien Carr and others—often engaged in arguments with these academicians and finally moved away from the universities' conservative notions of art. Their focus was on real life experiences instead of 'intellectualising' and 'theorising'. Their writings always focussed on issues related to their personal lifestyle and were thus highly subjective. This celebration of subjectivity in literature was against formalist notions.

The Beats used the academic spaces, not to follow the conventional lectures of the academics, but to enjoy discussion of their writing by student groups. It was the

Columbia University that provided a space to discover the similar taste of a few Beat members, such as David Kammerer, Lucien Carr, Allen Ginsburg, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Edie Parker and others. It can be said that the seed of the Beat generation was watered by the friendship that developed when they were at the University.

The Beats had already begun to experiment with drugs, homosexuality, new forms of literature and crime, when they were enrolled at the University. William Burroughs, a Harvard graduate who was a little older than the others, also joined the younger group comprising Ginsberg, Kerouac and others. Burroughs introduced Herbert Huncke, who was always associated with the Times Square underworld, to this group. The group can be identified not just as a group of students who experimented with literature but a gang of people who stood for different tastes and lifestyles. But the dedication and care and respect that they showed each other even during times of problems, shows that the Beats were bound by a sense of personal relationship rather than mere ideological bonds. The Kammerer stabbing incident is a good example of this. In August 1944, David Kammerer was stabbed and killed by Lucien Carr for his unwanted sexual advances. William Burroughs advised Carr to surrender and claim self-defence against unwanted homosexual advances. Kerouac also helped him to dispose of the knife. Later, Burroughs and Kerouac were also arrested along with Carr, as material witnesses. But Burroughs was bailed out by his father and Kerouac was bailed out by his girlfriend Edie Parker. This incident shows the Beats' recklessness and readiness to help a fellow Beat in trouble. The incident was later recorded in *The Town and the City* and *The Vanity of Deluoz* written by Kerouac, serving as typical

examples of an autobiographical mode of narration in the writings of the Beats. This incident along with the arrest of Ginsberg, Huncke, Vicki Russell and Little Jack Melody for crashing a stolen car as a part of underworld activities, was often discussed by the critics as evidence of their connection to the world of crime. Through such activities and anti-social performances, these young people were experimenting with an alternative lifestyle and setting precedence for a subculture.

Their criminal tendencies such as stealing, and the use of drugs, contributed much to enhance the popular notion regarding their criminal nature. In his poem "Writ on the eve of my 32nd Birthday," Gregory Corso humorously states, "8 years now and haven't stole a thing! / I stopped stealing! / But I still lie at times" (32). The narrator says he stopped the habit of stealing, and with the very next statement that he lied at times, he unsettles the earlier statement that he stopped stealing.

The Beats' anti-social behaviour was not just a deliberate attempt to retaliate against society's conformism, it came from within, or rather can be perceived as an organic form of resistance that took place as an involuntary response towards their contemporary situation. It is noteworthy that most of the Beat writers are associated with madness – not metaphorical madness but genuine madness. Ginsberg cited madness and escaped being penalised for crashing a stolen car and other underworld activities. The Columbia University Professor, Lionel Trilling, who sympathised with the young student poet, suggested the idea and spoke on behalf of him in court. Instead of being sent to jail, Ginsberg was sent to a psychiatric institute. It was there that Ginsberg first met Carl Solomon, to whom he later dedicated his famous poem "Howl." Carl, who was a fan of Antonin Artaud, was

arguably madder than Ginsberg. Ginsberg says in Part III of “Howl,” “Carl Solomon! I’m with you in Rockland / where you’re madder than I am” (*Selected Poems* 55). Ginsberg continues, “fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to cross in the void” (56). For the Beats, madness itself is a holy pilgrimage of the soul to find its eternal truth and its own normality other than the normality sanctioned and imposed by the society. The metaphor of Moloch in “Howl” stands for the authoritarianism of the United States and warns the fellow ‘visionary angels’ of the possibility of an atomic onslaught by the autocratic brains on the heart of humankind. Thus, Ginsberg suggests that the Beats are those who are sane, not the world outside who think that the atomic attack is just a part of the war. His poem “Kaddish,” dedicated to his mother Naomi Ginsberg, also deals with mental illness. The poet’s memories about his insane mother and her fantasies are also portrayed in an exotic and dreamy language. He writes, “No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the Beings in the Dream, trapped in its disappearance, / singing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces of phantom, worshipping each other . . .” (*Selected Poems* 93). The poet continues, “. . . like a tree, broken, or flower-fed to the ground – but mad, with its petals, coloured, thinking great universe, shaken, cut in the head, leaf stript, hid in an egg crate hospital, cloth wrapped, sore-freaked in the moon brain, Naughtless” (95). Ginsberg’s associations with the mental hospital began when he was a child and “Kaddish” is a fine example of such experiences, both in its imagery and language. Ginsberg’s hallucinations of William Blake can be cited as instances for his madness. During his childhood, Ginsberg had an hallucination of William Blake’s voice. Fascinated, he experimented with drugs in an attempt to recapture and re-enact hallucinations. In

“Sunflower Sutra” he confesses, “I rushed up enchanted – it was my first sunflower, memories of Blake – my vision – Harlem / and Hells of Eastern rivers . . .” (*Selected Poems* 60). The incident shows the Beats’ quest for an alternative space, through madness, to stretch their wings for a transcendental existence. Ken Kesey also explores the dark spaces of the mental asylum in his novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Randle P. McMurphy, a character in the novel, like Ginsberg in real life, goes to the mental hospital to escape jail. There he meets a nurse who with her authoritarian ways controls the patients. Later, the reader realises that the nurse, who is supposed to be the caretaker of the patients, is also mentally ill herself. The microcosmic space of the mental ward and the nurse suggests the macrocosmic space outside – the United States and its authoritarianism. That McMurphy is the victim here suggests that it is the individual who is crushed between war and capitalism. Many Beat figures were victimised in mental asylums, including McMurphy. Elise Cowen, a lover of Ginsberg; Natalie Jackson, Neal Cassady’s lover; Charlie Parker, Lew Welch and Richard Brautigan. William Lawlor, in his article “Mental Illness,” points out that Ugo Cerletti, in 1938, began to popularise electric shock therapy to mental patients, which was “reasonably simple and not unduly expensive.” Lawlor was of the opinion that this treatment was “inappropriate,” but it was used widely, often without a medical second opinion. He also discussed the dangers of using this method to ‘deal’ with problematic patients (228).

The experiences of Kerouac during World War II in the US Navy were interesting. When the naval psychiatrist asked him to introduce himself, Kerouac answered, “I’m only old Samuel Johnson” (qtd. in Russell 13). The psychiatrist suspected his sexuality and ‘diagnosed’ him to

be schizophrenic. Kerouac, in *On the Road*, romanticises madness, stating; “the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders” (8). For Kerouac, the Beats shared a common ‘madness’ which was against the nature of the society, yet they were happy to be in this mad space. In “A Poem for the Insane,” John Wieners says:

Melancholy carries  
a red sky and our dreams  
our blue boats  
no one bust or  
blow out to sea. (211)

Wieners’ depiction of the difficulty of a mad mind articulating its ideas can then suddenly capture in a few words multiple meanings, which rescue the confusion with arresting clarity: “We ride them / and Tingel – Tangel / in the afternoon” (211).

The Beats’ homosexual tendencies were considered as an offshoot of madness by mainstream society. In ‘straight’ society, anything that contradicted preconceived traditional notions of normalcy was considered as madness. Homosexuality was a crime in the United States during the ’40s and the ’50s, when the Beats emerged, playing out their alternative sexual practices. Since the practice of alternative sexuality was against the law, the Beats who broke such laws were considered criminals.

Homosexuality is a major issue that the Beats focussed on in their literature. In fact, stealing and other such petty crimes were ‘accepted’ by the society as crimes; but homosexuality was taboo. It was not just against the

heteronormative social beliefs but was a threat to conventional religious ideologies in the United States, primarily Christianity. Thus, society raged against homosexuals. Because of antagonism, most people with homosexual identities practised their love secretly. Kerouac, in his novel *On the Road*, suggests a homosexual attraction between Ginsberg (the character Carlo Marx) and Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty) (7). However, the author avoids any obvious mention of their homosexual behaviour, probably attempting to evade antagonism. In this context, Ginsberg's writings can be considered brave, as he openly acknowledges his sexual leaning and writes about it. Poems like "Punk Rock Your My Big Cry Baby" are appropriate examples:

Fuck me in the ass! Suck me! Come in my ears!  
 I want those pink Abdominal belly buttons!  
 Promise you will murder me in the gutter with  
     Orgasms!  
 I'll buy a ticket to your nightclub, I wanna get bursted!  
 50 years old I wanna Go! With whips & chains &  
     leather!  
 Spank me! Kiss me in the eye! Suck me all over. (31)

The theme, images and the language of the poem are presented in such a way not just to shock traditional readers of poetry; it also establishes the possibility of a spontaneous gay space and language. It is to be noted that one of the major reasons for the ban on "Howl," by the American Civil Court immediately after its publication in 1956, was its explicit mention of homosexuality. Lines like "Who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screaming with joy" (*Selected Poems* 51) were looked down on with contempt and considered obscene. There was a hue and cry from the moralists who

called for a ban on the book. Later, the Court was persuaded against the ban.

The society was rigid during this post-war period and secret police forces were appointed to arrest homosexuals. Gregory Corso's poem "Second Night in N.Y.C. after 3 years" is interesting as it talks about a conversation between a Beat and a young policeman of America. The Beat figure talks to the cop about his criminal tendencies and prison life, while the policeman listens to all the 'interesting' stories with curiosity and a smile. The poem closes with embarrassment on the policeman's face as the Beat's face "Absolved it all, kiss me" (34). On a broader level, the poem talks about the attitude of the mainstream 'liberal bourgeois' who pretend they can comprehend the 'madness' of the Bohemians. The poem is a linguistic blow to those who read and enjoy gossip about the Beats, but would be embarrassed when introduced to the reality of such experiences. In other words, through such works, the Beats attempted to strip mainstream community of its hypocrisy. Gay literature has been one such attempt.

The mention of experimenting with different forms of sexuality makes the Beats different from writers of earlier generations. Through such sexual practices, the Beats questioned the heteronormative notions of white masculinity. They were dismantling and at the same time creating new forms of masculinities by their frequent interrogation of the traditional European white male concepts. The mainstream notions about the white gentlemen were challenged by their public and private displays/performances with new notions of the gendered body. William Burroughs, in his *Queer*, talks about the "pride in being a homosexual by feeling intellectually and ethically superior to the mainstream people who follow the conventional order of the society" (15).



It could be argued that Burroughs is the one Beat writer who has made an extensive representation of the city and its underground life in literature. In 1960, he confessed in "Deposition: Testimony concerning a sickness," to having "junk in many forms: morphine, heroine, Dilaudid, Eukodal, Tantopon, Diocodid, Diosane, opium, Denerol, Dolophine, Palfium" (200). Burroughs continues "there are Peyote Cults and Banisteriopsis Cults, Hashish Cults and Mushroom Cults – 'the Sacred Mushroom of Mexico enabled a man to see God'" (201). Later in 1991, Burroughs pointed out in "Afterthoughts on a Deposition," that the anti-drug campaigning that spread all over the world is a "deadly threat to the personal freedoms" (212). Even after more than thirty years, Burroughs' attitude towards drugs did not change and he considered the use of drugs as a way to proclaim liberation from the existing society.

Writing about the use of drugs did not commence during the time of the Beats; it has a long tradition. Charles Baudelaire, wrote about the experience of intoxications of hashish; Thomas De Quincey, Antonin Artaud and Jean Cocteau could open creative windows of words through the use of opium; Aldous Huxley experimented with the effects of peyote on the mind; Gordon Wasson and Daniel Breslaw used Mushroom, the natural hallucinogen. In a similar vein, a sequence of post-war American and European writers/musicians found LSD to be a creative catalyst. Within this long tradition of 'drug writings', the voice of the Beats is heard distinctly because for them the use of drugs was not just a quest for an aesthetic unity or a psychological liberation, but a performance that frequently interrogated governmental rules and regulations, and thereby provided an aura of political resistance during the post-war era. There might

not have been an explicit propaganda for drugs in the Beat writings, but the celebration of drug usage through poems and prose acted as a resistance and an indirect way of telling the political/religious institutions that it was they who ‘spoiled’ the minds of youth. For instance, Ginsberg writes:

Peyote is not God—but is a powerful force—can see, if everybody on, how they would organize their lives once every year, communicating with each other—what spiritual violence that day—what secrets revealed—family secrets, not big mystical riddles. (Ebin 305)

Ginsberg claimed mystical riddles were “easy to see” by simply staring outwards into the “obvious infinity of the self,” as if everyone would understand what he meant by that.

While contextualising Ginsberg’s writings in the post-war era, the reader can identify that the writer is not just romanticising the use of drugs, but advocating it by describing the practical uses of drugs. Hence, it is different from other writers such as Baudelaire who preached, “Here, then, is happiness . . . Happiness, with all its intoxications, follies and puerilities” (Ebin 20). Thus, for the Beats, writing about dope was as important as using it because writing was a tool they used as a political response to the authority.

Extensive academic research has been undertaken on the Beats’ works, not just focusing on the junky lifestyle of the Beats, but their innovations and quests to experiment with new forms of languages as well. William Burroughs’ ‘cut-up’ method of writing, the ‘Spontaneous Prose’ of Jack Kerouac and ‘The First Thought Best Thought’ by Allen Ginsberg contributed to the establishment of a new Beat diction in the American canon. It is widely known that

Kerouac came up with the idea of spontaneous prose from the long letters of Neal Cassady, which he found to be a direct flow of words from the mind. For spontaneous style, Kerouac was also obliged to the improvisation techniques developed in Jazz music. The city life of the Beats helped them to become familiar with the very mood and tunes of Blues and Jazz. The popularity of Jazz music helped create a jazz sensibility which later blended into American popular cultural spaces. Due to the constriction of city lifestyle, Beat literature, influenced by jazz sensibility, was not just justifiable but became worthy of appreciation. The jazzy language that Kerouac employed in *The Subterranean* (1958) is worth mentioning. The novel which problematises homosexuality and the Oedipal complex, as well as portraying ethnic culture, is a prime example of his spontaneous prose style. Kerouac in his “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” states that writing is an “undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret ideas-words, blowing on subject of image” (671). Kerouac repeats his ideas of spontaneity in his “Belief and Technique for Modern Prose” suggesting that a writer should be submissive and open, write from the depths of the mind, ignore the inhibitions of grammar and syntax, and composing should be wild, queer and crazy, etc (228-230). The Beats found the traditional forms of writing unsatisfactory and realised a need to overthrow inadequate forms to seek new forms that would suit their beliefs and ideologies.

For the Beatniks, the traditional ‘gravitational force’ of writing should be overthrown by the speed of the mind in the process of writing. Kerouac wove the metaphor of a spacecraft intricately just as John Donne employed his metaphysical image of the compass. ‘The First Thought Best Thought’ of Ginsberg is a parallel idea which

celebrates spontaneity in writing. Spontaneity is relevant only to the first draft and it should not be taken that the writer may not re-work the first draft as it is known that both Kerouac and Ginsberg have modified their seminal works *On the Road* and “Howl” several times. The breath control that Ginsberg exercised while reading can also be considered as a spontaneous form of literature, because for the Beats, literature was not just what was written on the paper but performed as well. Ginsberg claimed in his “Notes for *Howl and Other Poems*” that the “whole first section [was] typed out madly in one afternoon” (222) with a number of “wild phrasing, meaningless images for the beauty of abstract poetry of mind running along with awkward combinations” (222).

The spontaneous writing of the Beats can be located as a response to the existing literary fashion during that time. It is to be noted that literary criticism in the first half of the Twentieth century focussed much on form and diction. Critics like I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, William K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren and T. S. Eliot with their formalistic approach tried to seek the organic unity of words by dissecting the verbal meanings. Their focus was on the text rather than on the context. Through their close reading, these New Critics tried to locate the “tension,” “ambiguity,” “paradox,” and “irony” in the literary text and were inhibited to break the existing structure or form, as they did not want the reader to fall into any “fallacy.” Their scientific approach towards literature emphasised their idea that a poem should be primarily a poem and not assume any other non-literary purpose. The Beat writers with their loosely packed words and ‘cut up’ style questioned the existing form of writing. Some believed in

the bardic nature of the poet. By recovering the oral tradition of poetry, the Beats managed to pour out their emotions frantically. Their works were very subjective and always read/heard in contexts – thereby giving political, social, cultural messages and responses. The Beats were against objectivity in literature. In his poem, “Populist Manifesto,” Ferlinghetti calls out;

Poets, come out of your closets,  
Open your windows, open your doors  
You have been holded-up too long  
in your closed world.  
Come down, come down . . . (1-5)

The poet felt that this was not a time for an artist to hide “above, beyond, behind the scenes” as if he didn’t care, “paring his fingernails, / refining himself out of existence” (1-5). Ferlinghetti echoes the 19th century French poets such as Baudelaire in advocating the removal of the poet’s divine aura. The doors and windows of his room should be open so that his vision will be clear to absorb real life experiences, the experiences of the common man. Poets like Ferlinghetti oppose the elite stand of a writer, which Modernisms attempt to establish. Likewise, the manner in which Gregory Corso dedicates his poem “After Reading “In the Clearing”” to Robert Frost in a tongue-in-cheek manner can also be located under this light. Corso addresses Frost, the icon of American-Modernist poetry, “Old Bard.” The poem mocks Frost’s stand in political and literary scenarios. Corso says “. . . you are old old you are Rome / the wisdom of time – and no crow / maketh your snowy head its home” (30). Corso closes the poem by saying “You undoubtedly think unwell of us / But we are your natural children” (31).

Robert Frost did not sympathise with the Beats. The omission of the Beat writers from many anthologies such as

*New Poets of England and America* was primarily due to the uncontrolled flow of words and the unacademic style of the Beats. This style of writing marked the difference between the Beats and the existing modern writers. In other words, unlike the Modernist writings, the connection between the personal life and political stance is evident in Beat writing, as their creativity supported their political stand.

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# **Marking Invisible on Silver Screen: Finding Dalit Aesthetics in Malayalam Films**

Soya Joseph

## **Introduction**

“In order to understand today’s world we need cinema, literally” — Žilavoj Žizek

**R**epresentation of subaltern or marginalized groups have for long remained a problematic arena in visual culture. These groups are denied the privilege of self representation and are burdened to bear the images and ideologies, which the mainstream imposes on them. Subaltern representation in visual culture, notably cinema provides the most striking instance of cultural politics of representation in which discourse constructs its subject. Cinema is regarded as a socio-cultural construct which creates and propagates social meanings. We have been writing for a long time. Over time we have understood how to write about caste. Dalits and Adivasis face various kinds of discrimination in various places, and we are more or less able to write about it. But we are still not able to talk about caste in media like cinema.

As an aesthetic and social medium, mainstream Malayalam cinema is guilty of addressing the emotional lives and aspirations of only the middle class. Although caste is by and large a grotesque socio-political reality in



Kerala, it is often under-represented and disowned in canonical Malayalam literature as well as Malayalam filmic narratives. This denial of Dalit lives in their entirety and subtlety is indicative of the narrow concerns of Malayalam cinema. The representational absence of Dalit lives perpetuates the symbolic/structural violence against Dalits. Malayalam cinema, with its historical legacy of eight decades, lamentably repeats the mainstream Bollywood formula and thus remains faithful to the ideological inheritance and desideratum of the dominant castes.

### **Dalit as a Subject**

Films were specifically made to cater to the tastes and sensitivities of the upper middle class audiences, who have the capacity to spend three times more than the average filmgoer. The films seem to be duty-bound to protect the hegemony of the dominant religion. In Malayalam films, the lead characters are almost always either from a middle class Nair family, or Syrian Christian. If you talk of complexion, the hero and heroine are fair and it is the trouble-makers who are dark. The thugs are dark-skinned, with some odd features – usually a Muslim or a Dalit.

In films of people like Adoor Gopalakrishnan – he follows the style similar to what MT did in Malayalam literature. Most of his films are about the crisis of the Nair self. Still not many Dalits are entering Malayalam cinema field. Even in the discussions around cinema, we usually avoid talking about how caste works in the cinema industry. Most of the discussions on caste move around more simple issues like absence of Dalits in Malayalam cinema: as camera-persons, as directors – on the technical side. That is indeed an issue. At the same time caste works in the entire discourse of cinema, and we need to

understand the complex ways in which it operates. We need to develop that culture of 'seeing caste' also. It is different from reading caste that we have already developed to some extent. We haven't been able to develop that culture of a Dalit cinema.

If we look on to Malayalam film industry, one of the films that dealt with the Dalit issues were *Ezhu Rathrikal* by Ramu Kariat in 1978, in which the Dalits became the mere instruments to idolize the hero. They always are poor victims who offer the protagonist to show his heroism. Malayalam silver screen's most punctual history stands observer to this mistreatment established on caste politics in *Vigathakumaran* first Malayalam dialect film. *Vigathakumaran* and its female hero endured the closed-minded harsh treatment dispensed by rank based social foundations.

In no time, at least from *Marthanda Varma* (1933) onwards, Malayalam cinema discursively and visually privileged Nair/ Syrian Christian registers to the extent that the affluent class/caste systematically mirrored themselves on screen and made Kerala mirror them in their food, dress, looks, and artistic and intellectual pursuits. In spite of the casteist film culture, there were some attempts in the early 1980s to address issues of Dalit life, caste discrimination and Dalit violence. The films of T V Chandran and P. A. Backer, for instance, delegitimised stereotypes about Dalits in a limited way. Backer's *Sree Narayana Guru* (1986), immersed in liberal and leftist sentiments laid bare the casteist fabric of Kerala society and the tragic predicament of the Dalits, while Lenin Rajendran's *Meenamasathile Sooryan* (1986) discussed subaltern issues through the leftist prism. P. N. Menon's film *Malamukalile Daivam* dwelt on the life of an indigenous tribal community in the context of emerging

modernity. The mainstream films produced after the 1990s reproduced the Dalit body, occupation, and names in socially demeaning ways—for instance, as a villain (Vinayakan in *Big B*), as a comedian (Salim Kumar in *Thenkasipattanam*), as a blind man (Kalabhavan Mani in *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njaanum*), or as a thief (Chemban Vinod in *Tamaar Padaar*). These movies are guilty of subordinating subaltern histories and world views to the concerns of megastars and their feudal episteme. Post-millennial Malayalam cinema (also known as new generation films) is no different, showing a preferential bias for white skin, manliness, suave aristocracy and feudal nostalgia.

The unbending nature and rootedness of the framework penetrating Kerala society removed even those movie producers focused on social equity through their films scrutinizing class dominance and financial inequalities. The undecided position of political talks regarding the matter of standing segregation made it an unsafe territory for movie producers. *Ara Nazhika Neram* (Sethumadhavan, 1970), *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (Bhaskaran, 1956), *Asuravithu* (Vincent, 1968) and *Murappennu* (Vincent, 1965), *Aalkuttathil Thaniye* (Sasi, 1984) and *Thinkalazhcha Nalla Divasom* (Padmarajan, 1985), G. Aravindan's *Oridathu* (1987), *Elipathayam*, (Gopalakrishnan, 1981), *Vidheyan* (1994), *Mala Mukalile Daivom* (P.N Menon, 1983), *Chithariyavar* (The Scattered, 2004) directed by Lalji George, are some of the main films that dealt with Dalit issues. Currently in 2016 *Kammatipadam* directed by Rajeev Ravi was really appreciable. The actor Vinayakan, who acted in *Kammatipadam* got The Kerala State Best Actor Award in the awards announced on 2017, which shows the change in the society.

## Dalit as Characters

Truly speaking, almost all Indian movies portray Adivasis as ‘minimally dressed’ people assembled for group dances with sexual implications, Malayalam movies are no exception to this. Take for instance the movie *Chithram* directed by Priyadarshan; the song “kadumeenadumellamkaakum” sung by Mohanlal, is an anti-Adivasi song hijacking all the political aspects of tribal cultures and ties them to the established feudal Hindu family circumstances. The language throughout the entire film itself demonstrates anti-adivasi politics. Maniyanpilla Raju, is portrayed as being ‘stupid’, giving us an insight into Priyadarshan’s tunneled vision of the adivasis. And the negativity of Dalit body language of Sreenivasan in this movie is another example of the same narrow vision. It is interesting to see how much “savarna” and anti-Adivasi language is used in the films like “Photographer”, “Bamboo boys” etc., which are among the recent movies involving Adivasi characters. The savarna directors’ bias and mindless presentation of Adivasis/Dalits is evident in every frame.

## Dalit Actors

In Malayalam films, the lead characters are almost always either from a middle class Nair family, or Syrian Christian. If you talk of complexion, the hero and heroine are fair and it is the trouble-makers who are dark. The thugs are dark-skinned, with some odd features – usually a Muslim or a Dalit. Malayalam commercial cinema has always been dominated by Hindu upper caste and Muslim superstars like Prem Nazir, Jayan, Soman, Sukumaran, Mammooty, Mohanlal, Jayaram, Dileep and new generation actors like Prithviraj, Dulquer and Nivin Pauly. The only Dalit actor,

who to a certain extent made it to the top was the late Kalabhavan Mani.

Beyond the cinema story, the first movie *Vigathakumaran* has to tell a story of a Dalit woman who acted in the movie as a leading character role. Her name was P. K. Rosy and there are a lot of controversies already taken place in the cinema intellectual world of Kerala and beyond. P. K. Rosy was the first Malayalam actress, and she was the first victim of upper class hierarchy from the cinema industry, may be in the whole scenery of cinema. Whatever, P. K. Rosy was a Dalit Christian and she was assigned to act as a Nair lady (upper class) role in the film *Vigathakumaran*. This act made anger among the upper class people of Kerala. What happened to P. K. Rosy was pathetic; an angry mob let fire to her hut and made her to flee from the area where she lived. The reason was that 'a Dalit acted as Nair lady'. This initial tragic incident was the first indication that explains how Dalits are welcomed to films? What is their space in cinema?

### Little Deviations: *Kammattipadam* and *Papilio Budha*

*Kammattipadam* is a raw, raging and realistic movie. The characters are dark and deep. The director Rajiv Ravi has dismantled all conventional concepts of Malayali aesthetics by capturing the unadulterated beauty of black skin through characters who portrayed the lives of Dalits. The opening lines of my paper is from a sound track in 'Kammattipaadam' which carry along with it the mood of the movie and director Rajiv Ravi's emphasised dissent against institutional elimination of marginalised societies, especially Dalit communities, from the corporate motivated agendas in the name of development. John P. Varkey's songs instilled the mood of a community's

anguish and agony, especially the title song ‘Puzhu Pulikal’ song.

Cherian’s *Papilio Buddha* archives the lives of Dalits in the Western Ghats and traverses through the experiences of an educated Dalit youth named Shankaran. The film is an intensely political and iconoclastic film which provides a bleak vision of how the contemporary nation state and dominant political class/discourse have collectively betrayed the lower castes in Kerala. At another level, the film critiques new forms of inclusivity, which echo the earlier mechanisms of oppression even as they provide a vision for liberation. At a socio-political level, *Papilio Buddha* expresses the hindrances as well as advances of Dalit struggles and their quest for a fully-formed Dalit consciousness. Intriguingly, the movie is not only sceptical about the traditional rhetoric of Gandhism but also undertakes to throw light on the ills of Gandhism from a Dalit perspective. If Gandhism is depicted as limited, then left-centred politics are represented as ideologically deficient vis-à-vis Dalit issues. How does the film represent alternative political ontologies, however? It does so by assembling and employing distinctive images and sources of Ambedkar, Ayyankali and Buddha as shorthand for maturing Dalit views. In deploying these personages and their histories, the film creates a political language, an ideological point of view, and a reliable alternative for the Dalits.

## Conclusion

Mainstream historiography never perceived Dalit as subjects worthy of attention. Dalit lives were a presence marked by their absence. Their struggles, their resistances, their emotional and social agonies were less important

than plant life. They were not even seen as a people with a history.

Portrayal of subalternity is relentlessly risky with inquiries of genuineness of portrayal testing the craftsman in the event that he is a non-Dalit. It works in different ways –firstly, few Dalits come into the technical side of Malayalam film industry. The political accuracy of the entire exercise raises questions and Dalit commentators regularly react brutally to the visual portrayal of Dalit concealment. Thus, the portrayal of Dalit issues in cinema has been minimal and limited, if not altogether absent.

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# **Concrete Poetry: An Exploration in Spatial Syntax**

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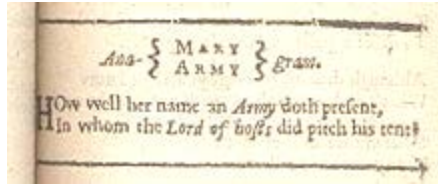
Concrete Poets are the second generation of Visual Poets who emerged in America in the second half of the 20th century and they hugely stressed the visual element of the poem. In the late 1950s, Concrete Poetry or Shape Poetry attained worldwide attention in the field of arts and literature, as for these poems visual elements were as important as the main text. The typographical arrangements of words are taken into consideration to convey the intended effect along with the syntax, diction, rhythmic patterns etc. Visual Poetry was hardly acknowledged in the academic circles, but eminent poets such as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Ezra Pound and John Hollander experimented with this poetic genre. Concrete poetry as such has not developed much in America like the contemporary poetic movements, but there are some stray voices and their relevance cannot be under estimated.

American Concrete poets find themselves in isolated positions with the new movement and their close affinity with e. e. cummings and Ezra Pound laid foundation for this movement. The influence of e. e. cummings is felt throughout American poetry and he is noted for his original style and choice of words. The influence of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams in American poetry is



quite significant especially in the development of Charles Olson's theory of "Projective Verse." Although Projective Verse and Concrete Poetry have close affinities to one another, they have their own differences as far as the syntactical and grammatical structures are concerned.

An early example of Concrete Poetry is a poem by George Herbert (1593-1633) in which typography plays a prominent role.



"How well her name an Army doth present,  
In whom the Lord of hosts did pitch his tent!"

"Anagram" from the 1633 edition of George Herbert's  
The Temple.

The poem is a mere comment of the poet on the title and thus the original meaning of the poem is conveyed typographically. Similarly, his poem "Easter Wings" was published in 1633 on two adjacent pages (one stanza per page), sidelong, so that the lines would remind us of the birds soaring up with widely spread wings. It is a typical Christian symbol which calls to mind the divine nature of Christ's Resurrection.

Lord, who createst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
And fill with feardfulness and shame  
Thou didst so punish mine,  
That I became  
Most thine.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel this day thy victorie:  
For, if I limp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

One among the earlier pioneers of Concrete Poetry, Augusto de Campos has created a Web site of old and new poems of this genre along with a manifesto. According to him, the words in concrete poetry are not just vehicles to convey thoughts and ideas, but they are part of the poem. Their usage is so unique that their presence in the poem is mandatory for the very existence of the poem. The manifesto says:

Concrete poetry begins by assuming a total responsibility before language: accepting the premise of the historical idiom as the indispensable nucleus of communication, it refuses to absorb words as mere indifferent vehicles, without life, without personality without history — taboo-tombs in which convention insists on burying the idea.  
(<http://www.ubu.com/papers/solt/us.html>)

Although a few isolated poets have been making concrete poems for some time, it would be an overstatement to speak of a concrete poetry movement in the United States. The American concrete poet finds himself in the strange position of being associated with a new formal movement whose origins are foreign and many of whose foundation stones were laid by e. e. cummings and Ezra Pound. Actually the impetus towards concretization has been strong in American poetry since Whitman began to make his long catalogues to name the objects in his New World, leaving the rose for Gertrude Stein. The prominent American concrete poets include John Grandits, Aram Saroyan, Jonathan Williams, Ronald Johnson, Mary Ellen Solt, and Emmett Williams. Mary Ellen Solt and Emmett Williams edited two major anthologies in concrete poetry in the USA – *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968) and *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967).

John Grandits is a contemporary American poet whose hilarious view of the world is expressed through a series of concrete poems where words, concepts, ideas and creative art get mixed in a particular way resulting in pictures and certain patterns that they constitute fine poetry. A genuine reader ought to turn the poems in various ways to have a clear understanding of the text but fun is guaranteed. In addition to being a poet, he is a typographer, art director, designer, and writer. He has composed cartoon pictures, written articles for magazines, humour pieces, and stories for both children and adults. His poems turned to be totally hilarious only when he became 55 years old. Before that he was associated with numerous children's publishing endeavours related to cricket, Click Magazines, Crown Books for Children and Random House. He also published Films and Video News magazine. Though he has designed corporate logos, he was always a vehement critic of corporatism. Along with it, he also designed books, book jackets and covers, brochures, advertisements, periodicals, record jackets, posters and poems. One among his objectives is to compose a perfect concrete poem with illegible fond so that its reading and comprehension is ambiguous.

His collection of poems *technically, IT'S NOT MY FAULT* (2004) is catching and interesting from the very beginning. He breaks all our notions of poetry, and he experiments with all the possibilities of concrete poetry. The poems appear more as visuals than mere verses and the visual quality add meaning to the poems. The pictorial descriptions are inseparable from their meanings. The poet violates all our concepts on poetry as the titular poem appears in the cover page and a casual reader may wonder whether it is a mere inscription. The collection also lacks pagination. The poem begins with bigger fond size and

when it progresses, the font size gets reduced and the readers get illusory as they think they are looking down at something from a higher elevation. On the right bottom, the name ‘Concrete Poems’ is written as if it is a concrete block.

The poem opens in utter confusion as a typical children’s narrative. The poet tries to justify something, and in the mean while he accuses the listener as somebody gone out of mind. “I know, I know. You’re really mad.” The tone of the speaker becomes very confident from the second line onwards, he says, “See, I was reading about Galileo, a / guy who made all these great discoveries and / did cool experiments.” Then the poem narrates the story of Galileo and his experiment. After that the poet talks about his interest in science and he narrates something that happened in his life and the kind of experiment he has undertaken to verify how far Galileo is correct. Ultimately, everything went out of hand, but the poet has the rare satisfaction that he has done something worthwhile, and the poem ends with the title that justifies his action:

... Oh, yeah, and I also learned  
not to drop concrete blocks out of the attic window. But  
in  
my opinion, the experiment was totally worth doing.  
There was just a slight mix-up, one tiny detail that went  
wrong, so even though the car has a concrete block  
sticking out of the roof, technically,  
IT’S NOT MY FAULT

The first poem of the collection is entitled “My Stupid Day” and it depicts the monotonous life of a child in a very humorous manner. This is a typical concrete poem in the shape of a wall clock and the circular inscriptions in a circular form, forms the content of the poem. The poet has exploited the possibilities of computer graphics to the

maximum and a form, other than that, might not have been considered as a poem at all. It is a pictorial description of a child's day from the time it wakes up until it goes to bed at night. The child is so fed up with the monotony of school life and the pity is that the child does not have any escape from it. The poem is cyclical in shape and it reveals that all dull activities will recur and the child is trapped in its fate. The title is "My Stupid Day" and it is not at all a single days' affair. The circular pattern transforms the child's plight as something eternal and universal as it is the fate of all such children.

The poet's irony and humour is at the maximum in the poem "The Thank-You Letter." It is a reply to the poet's aunt Hildegard for the wonderful gift she has sent to 11 year old Robert on his birth day. What add humour to the poem are the footnotes given at the end. The draft of the letter is neatly typed and it is given within a beautiful frame and at the end of certain words is given the numbers which mean that they carry footnotes. The title itself is sarcastic with an explanation to the word "Letter". The poem is in the form of a 'thanks giving letter' and it thanks Robert's aunt for the wonderful gift she has presented him on his birthday. Without the foot notes, the poem lacks any splendid thoughts and it seems to be the innocent jottings of an ordinary little boy.

The letter begins with extending the little child's warmest gratitude for the amazing gifts and the words "thank you" and "gifts" are given foot notes. For thank you, the child shows his embarrassment and it exposes the lack of vision on the part of the aunt. The foot notes clearly says that the aunt is totally unaware of the interests and tastes of a 11 year old and for the "gift", Robert is under utter confusion since he has experienced the trivial nature of the presents that she has send him on his earlier birthday. The

child continues to say that when he got the “package”, he grabbed it “immediately.” The poet comments that as nobody saw his act of receiving the “package” he could hide it under a hose in the garage. The gift as such was totally “awesome” and the notes for this word are very interesting. The expresses his disgust when he says, “In the history of sweaters, there has never been an uglier waste of yarn” and these words clearly reveal the kind of droopiness the poet felt while receiving the gift.

The second stanza gives some information about the additional gift that was send along with the parcel and it was the poster to decorate the child’s “room” and the comment is that being an 11 year old, he has enough knowledge about the way to decorate his room. The notes numbered 14 states that he is least interested in the present poster and what he needs is “a picture of an old guy with an accordion.” The concluding paragraph has “thanks” repeated thrice and for the first “thanks” the child says it is “for trying to embarrass me in front of my friends” and the for the second “thanks,” he says it is “for the lectures from my parents” and for the last “thanks” he says “for making me waste an hour of my life writing this stupid thank-you letter.” For the final courteous leave taking, he says “Your 11-year old nephew” and the message is clear, “I’m 11!!! Get it?!?” This is a typical concrete poem as the poet makes use of the possibilities of modern technology and the humour arises from the typography of his writing.

The poem “What Are You Thinking About, Robert?” is an ideal concrete poem and it is a reflection of what goes in the mind of little Robert. The title is an enquiry and the answer is mere “nothing.” But the pictorial representation in the poem reads the child’s mind. Charles Olson’s projective theory says that a poem is “energy construct” and “energy discharge” (Olson 16) and the poet is obliged

to transfer this energy all the way to the reader and in this process, the use of figures of speech is a distraction. Gaining “energy” from Olson’s theories, Grandits has formulated this poem and the ideas presented here cannot be explained in a meaningful manner than any other means. It seems the head of the boy is burning and it shows the intimate thoughts of the speaker. The fumes are rising high and each fume has a thought to convey. The lines appear to be the hairs standing on their own and the first line is in the form of a question, “Got up late. No time for breakfast. Forgot my lunch. Only had 45 cents. Man, am I hungry?” The lines move in a stream of consciousness manner with a medley of thoughts. The narrator continues, “My gym clothes weren’t THAT bad. It’s only been six weeks. You could still tell what color they were.” It is followed by a series of activities that the child is supposed to do and the poem concludes by saying, “I don’t care HOW hungry I am. I hate cucumbers, and I’m not eating them.” He is like any other child, who normally is unwilling to share what all thoughts that pass through his mind. So, for the question, “What Are You thinking About, Robert?” he just answers “Nothin’.”

John Granbdits’ humour is at its best in the poem, “Mom, says, No New Pets!” The title is like a statement and a question is asked, “Why not?” The last line is an answer to this enquiry and the message is clear. For mom’s restrictions, normally the readers will have the impression that mom doesn’t enjoy the company of pets or at least, she hates them. We rather imagine the mother as a rude person who lacks genuine concern for her children. But the answer is so impressive, as the back yard is totally filled with the tombs of pet animals. Presently, the grave yard is full and there isn’t any land left for burying another pet. Once we read that the backyard is full, everyone will be

under the impression that the backyard is the place where the family keeps the pets. The answer comes with a difference and the pictorial representation is self sufficient to convey the thoughts in a meaningful manner.

The collection *technically, IT'S NOT MY FAULT* ends with "A Note to the Author" and it acts as an epilogue to the poems. The graphic descriptions are very important and the poem is entitled "The Little House." Here the poet attempts a comparison between poetic creations to construction of a house. On the left hand side of the page, the poet gives certain instructions and the typography shows that these are in the form of a picture of a house. It says that building a poem is similar to the building of a house. The poem continues with an explanation by the author. He says, "You start with some bricks / a pile of words. They're all mixed up./ there is no order. / They keep tumbling all over each other." On the right hand side is the picture of a house and on it is inscribed the details regarding how to make a house. The inscriptions are in the form of concrete poetry with verses and graphic designs. Initially, the poet gives a description of the details of the items of construction materials to make a house. It is followed by a picture of two rows of bricks with certain instructions in them. The poet reminds us not to forget a leave some space for doors and windows. Finally, when the construction is over, the poet asks whether if we look out of the house, the world seems different. All the poems in this collection show a slower grammatical and syntactical movement and in due course they gain more propulsive movement.

Other 20th century American poets noted for their explorations of the possibilities of Concrete Poetry in contemporary verse include George Starbuck, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and May Swenson. Starbuck is noted for his use



of intelligent rhymes, humorous asides, and for the mingling of the romantic themes to the contemporary scene of cynicism. He has developed his own style of formalism called "SLABS" (Standard Length And Breadth Sonnets) and the best example is his poem *Bone Thoughts* which was published with half of its pages blank. Although he lacked acceptance in the main stream literature during his life time, he gained fame with the publication of two volumes of poems: *Poems Selected from Five Decades* and *Visible Ink*. His poem "Sonnet in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree" is an ideal one commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ. The poet considers Christmas as a glorious day in the midst of all tribulations. The visual imagery very well brings in the spirit of Christmas and the title does not need any introduction. The way the infant lies in his cradle along with cattle in the manger is vividly portrayed. Virgin Mary is presented as a girl who is totally exhausted. The stars in the sky appear to be great fireworks in the poet's eye.

\*

O  
fury-  
bedecked!  
O glitter-torn!  
Let the wild wind erect  
bonbonbonanzas; junipers affect  
frostyfreeze turbans; iciclestuff adorn  
all cuckolded creation in a madcap crown of horn!  
It's a new day; no scapegrace of a sect  
tidying up the ashtrays playing Daughter-in-Law Elect;  
bells! bibelots! popsicle cigars! shatter the glassware! a son born  
now  
now  
while ox and ass and infant lie  
together as poor creatures will  
and tears of her exertion still

cling in the spent girl's eye  
and a great firework in the sky  
drifts to the western hill.

(Starbuck 56)

Starbuck's other best-known poems include "Tuolomne," "On an Urban Battlefield," and "Sonnet With a Different Letter At the End of Every Line."

A few Native American writers also have composed concrete poetry though they don't often stick on to the concrete poets' group identity. Prominent among them is Lorna Dee Cervantes, and she is an award-winning Chicana, Native American (Chumash), feminist, activist poet, and is considered as one of the major Chicana poets of the past 40 years. Her collections of poetry include, *Emplumada*, *From the Cables of Genocide*, *Drive: The First Quartet* and *Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems* and they are held in high regard and have gripped several nominations and awards. Cervantes regularly gives poetry readings, workshops and guest lectures across the US and she was part of the Librotraficate Movement. Her poem "Valentine" is a pictorial representation of her lost love and the barrenness of her art. It begins with a description of cherry plums and butterflies and finally it gets transformed into a means of self-inquiry. The poem is in the form of a half heart and it symbolises the loss of half a portion of the poet's love.

Cherry plums suck a week's soak,  
overnight they explode into the scenery of before  
your touch. The curtains open on the end of our past.  
Pink trumpets on the vines bare to the hummingbirds.  
Butterflies unclasp from the purse of their couplings, they  
light and open on the doubled hands of eucalyptus fronds.  
They sip from the pistils for seven generations that bear  
them through another tongue as the first year of our

punishing mathematic begins clicking the calendar  
forward. They land like seasoned rocks on the  
decks of the cliffs. They take another turn  
on the spiral of life where the blossoms  
blush & pale in a day of dirty dawn  
where the ghost of you webs  
your limbs through branches  
of cherry plum. Rare bird,  
extinct color, you stay in  
my dreams in x-ray. In  
rerun, the bone of you  
stripping sweethearts  
folds and layers the  
shedding petals of  
my grief into a  
decayed holo-  
gram — my  
for ever  
empty  
art.

(Cervantes 35)

May Swenson was an American poet and playwright and many critics consider her as one of the most important and original poets of the 20th century. Being a lesbian, she was somewhat spurned by her family for religious reasons. Much of her later poetry works were devoted to children (e.g. the collection *Iconographs*, 1970). She has her poetry publications in *Antaeus*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Carleton Miscellany*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Saturday Review*, *Parnassus* and *Poetry*. Her poems are so fascinating and the poem “Question” was also published in Stephenie Meyer's book *The Host*. She is noted for creating images from the lines of her poem. For instance, the poem “The Lowering” is a memorial for Robert Kennedy and the lines of this poem are arranged in

such a way that they resemble a folded flag. Her poem “Women” is a venture into the intricacies of man woman relationship. The structure of the poem is in a zigzag manner and the opposite entities reveal in what way a woman can be supportive to man. The poem ends with a positive note revealing that “Women / should be / pedestals / to men.”

Women	Or they
should be	should be
pedestals	little horses
moving	those wooden
pedestals	sweet
moving	oldfashioned
to the	painted
motions	rocking
of men	horses
the gladdest things in the toyroom	
The	feelingly
pegs	and then
of their	unfeelingly
ears	To be
so familiar	joyfully
and dear	ridden
to the trusting	rockingly
fists	ridden until
To be chafed	the restored

egos dismount and the legs stride away

Immobile	willing
sweetlipped	to be set
sturdy	into motion
and smiling	Women
women	should be
should always	pedestals

be waiting

to men

(Swenson 45)

Many critics find close resemblances between Concrete Poetry and Charles Olson's theory of Projective Verse. Projective theory differs from concrete poetry extensively in that it keeps the line and its syntactical grammatical structures and because it is fundamentally expressionistic, personal, and concerned with speech—with articulating a series of related perceptions. It follows the method of "field composition" as opposed to filling in pre-conceived traditional patterns. It is called "open" verse as the poet "can go by no track other than the one the poem underhand declares, for itself." (Olson 16) He is restricted by no formal rules except those which arise from the necessities of his perceptions, thoughts and feelings in relation to the breath, which controls the line. The concrete poem is also said to be "open," but that means open to the formal possibilities inherent in particular linguistic materials. The concrete poet focuses upon the object he is making rather than upon the psychical or personal reasons which have compelled him to make it. But the concrete poet sees a need for moving farther away from grammar and syntax to a collection of words with spatial syntax, or to the ideogram than does Olson, who stays with the line. Also the concrete poet has discovered greater possibilities in the space presented by the page. Concrete Poetry was sidelined in the second half of the 20th century due to the over emphasis of Language Poetry.

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# **Representation of (Dis)ability in Bollywood Cinema: Imagined Bodies and Irregular Desires**

Chitra P. M.

The manner in which people allocate meaning to disability and bodily difference plays a crucial part in moulding the spatial structuring of social life and vice versa. There is always this tendency to exclude them and this exclusion reaffirms the divergence between self and Other which is an innately spatial scheme in which this ostracism aids to explicate the identity of individuals as well as the community's. In many of the communities, disabled individual's inability to partake and perform equally in the social life is considered as a consequence of individual failing. The 'medical model of disability' gives more importance to the physiological nature of disability and the importance of fixing up the individuals who are disabled. The 'Social model of disability' treats the disability as a kind of social oppression rather than personal tragedy and their inability to join and contribute fully in the community life due to personal or social obstructions.

Social activities and theorists, recently, has paid much attention to the manner in which cultural representations assisting the material production of disability and a critical examination of the disabled bodies and an inquisition into the 'able body' as a cultural form, revealed the networks

that influence the society's attitude and treatment of disabled people. This concept of disabled and able body analysis has its base in the feminist theory, particularly the popular notions of the female body and the norms of physical beauty. Iris Marion Young in her seminal work *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) uses the terminology 'cultural imperialism' denoting certain norms that are taken as universal and those who are subjected to cultural imperialism are "rendered invisible as subjects, as persons with their own perspective and group-specific experience and interests. At the same time, they are marked out, frozen in to a being marked Other, deviant in relation to the dominant norm" (58). The disabled people are obliterated as those incapable of representing themselves as well as culturally marked as the other.

Popular cultural representation of disability often acts as a metaphor for something evil, social disorder, moral degeneracy and fear of dependency and till the dawn of the 21st century, disability was absent or distorted in almost all major cultural representations. Jennie Morris in *Pride against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability* (1990) explains "it is fear and denial of the frailty, vulnerability, morality and arbitrariness of human experience that deters us from confronting such realities. Fear and denial prompt the isolation of those who are disabled, ill or old as 'other' as 'not like us'". Majority of the presiding cultural representations of disability articulate less about disability and concentrates upon its opposite what is 'good' and 'normal' in physical, sexual, moral, social terms.

The marginalization of disabled people varies according to the cultural norms which are historically and geographically bound and these representations are applicable to time and space contexts. Cultural



constructions of (dis)ability holds significance to not only to those who one disabled but equally for those who face the challenge and struggle to meet up to the pre-determined criterion of physical attractiveness, beauty and bodily performances. Harlman Hahn opines that the apprehensions about disability and death “are reflected in both the propensity to shun those with unattractive bodily attributes and the extraordinary stress that modern society devotes to its quest for supernormal standards of bodily perfection” (42). Thus, the cultural structuring of the able body and its opposite, the disabled body, eliminate the heterogeneous aspect of the bodily structure and function. The social pressure upon the older and disabled women to achieve the acceptable appearance leads to illness and impairment and upon men to be the ideal heterosexual masculine prompts them to attain fitness and strength.

98

The moral implication connected with cultural construction of an able-body resulted in the popularity and availability of plastic surgeries that created a notion to consider the body as increasingly pliable and the various advertisements from fitness and centres and gyms promoting the feeling and looking great partly considered the health aspect and highlighted the parameter of an able body. There prevails this tendency to portray the disabled people as dangerous, unproductive, dependent or pitiful but disabled people have generated an alternative approach in dealing with the mental and the physical difference. The creation of a ‘crip culture’, just like queer culture, puts forward a substitute to the representations of disabled bodies and minds in the dominant discourse. Crip culture has tried to work against the elimination of disabled people from past onwards and challenging the popular representations of disability that involves attempts to reclaim geographies. The reclaiming of the ‘place’ of

disability made many theorists to explore the spaces created by disabled people for themselves through various vocations like political activism, creativities and so on.

Cinema and society being mutually reflective, they influence each other both constructively as well on in precarious manner. Even though the activities of a society mould the techniques of film making, a community reflects the values of its movies in numerous ways. As far as movies dealing with disability in concerned

Disability in film has become a metaphor for the message that the non-disabled writer wishes to get across in the same way that beauty is used. In doing this, movie makers draw on the prejudice, ignorance and fear that generally exist towards disabled people... the more disability is used as a metaphor for evil or just to induce a sense of unease, the more the cultural stereotype is confirmed. (Morris 91)

The popular trend in the movie business till 1960s and 1970s was to isolate disabled character but the modern criterion of bringing such people to the mainstream activities along with normal people has prompted the film makers too to portray disabled character in a different light. The tendency to depict them as dependent is very much there in the Hollywood movies and even with the passage of time and the introduction of latest science and technology innovations in the film arena, much to the regret, the movies has just moved from one stereotype to another.

Indian cinema often criticised and ridiculed for the stereotypical representation of violence, love, emotion and melodrama has incorporated themes of social significance too. Bollywood has dealt with the differently abled people and their experience either as part of the plot or as the main subject of the movie. Hindi film makers has

frequently portrayed disabilities between the two extremes of human behavioural traits with sympathy, awe, humour and pity on one end and coping-up, muddled emotions, aspirations and discernment on the other side . Beginning with the early era of the establishment of the Bombay talkies, disability has always sparked the interest in the Bollywood movie makers with punishment, comedy, heroism and object of pity and dependency as the punch line.

According to Longmore (2013) there exists three major prejudices against disabled people namely; disability as a punishment for evil; they are resentful of their fate; and disabled people hate non-disabled people to the point of death. The 1936 movie *Jeevan Naiya* (Niranjan Pal) will be the initial movie that dealt with disability as a punishment for a range of sins committed by the male protagonist. Whether *Kasam* (1988) or *Aadmi* (1968) or *Jalte Badan* (1973) all these movies treated the curse of disability as a punishment for the grievous errors on the part of the characters. The year 1971 saw Gulzar's *Koshish* which was an attempt to work compassion for those who are disabled and incapability of those afflicted physically to lead a life independently without any dependence.

Being famous for the disconnectedness from reality, certain Bollywood movies have used disability as a comic punch. Movies like *Tom, Dick and Harry* (2006), *Pyare Mohan* (2006) has used the theme of disability as a comic interlude for the audience and not intermingling disability with that of sympathy. Yet another treatment of disability is that of pity and dependence and the movies like *Barfi* (2010) *Guzaarish* (2010), *Khamoshi* (1996) etc. exemplifies the fact. All these movies' central characters are objects of pity and dependent upon others due to their

short coming. Bollywood has even gone to the extent of making their disabled heroes as superheroes by stretching their imagination and fantasies. The 1998 thriller, *Dushman* is all about the blind Sanjay Dutt fighting against the villain using his sixth sense capabilities and one other such movie is Arjun Rampal starrer *Aankhen* (2002). Even though in these movies they are portrayed in the positive light, there depictions are fake and sometimes may drain out whatever sympathy and concern the society holds for such people.

The year 2014 saw the releasing of an entirely different kind of movie with the title *Margarita with a Straw* whose central character is a woman bound to a wheel chair due to cerebral palsy. Directed by Shonali Bose, this movie stars Kalki Koechlin as an Indian teenager with the name Laila and her dislocation to America for her undergraduate education which becomes her journey of self-discovery. More than arousing pity and sympathy, Laila epitomises determination, self-confidence and steadfastness. In a nutshell *Margarita with a Straw* deals with the sexuality of the disabled Laila who easily pushes her disability to the margins in her quest for love and appreciation. Supported by her affluent family and caring friends, Laila is somebody who gets a normal treatment from her college friends and even though she moves about on a wheel chair, nobody is bothered at all. May be the director wanted the Society to acknowledge and accept disabled people as ordinary, normal people only.

*Margarita with a Straw* is about Laila's journey to self-revelation and the radical portrayal of her sexual-orientation. She didn't allow her disability to come in her way and whether it's about her education or love, she handled everything with dignity and poise. Being the lyricist for her college music band, Laila had this

infatuation towards the lead singer, Niam, and at the same time having an affair with her boyfriend who too is bound to a wheel chair. There is a widespread uneasiness and misunderstanding in acknowledging and accepting the sexual desires and urges of people, especially women, with disability. There happens the tendency to marginalise or 'Otherise' their body with the pre-consumption that they do not meet the demands of normative expression and conduct. So, when she expresses her inner love for the singer, he recoils and she feels dejected but moving to United States for a semester at New York University with her mother helps Laila to come to terms with her sexual orientation. She feels love for her fellow classmate Jared who helps her in typing and simultaneously she falls for a blind girl, Khanum, who has Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. Only after relocating to America could Laila realise the fact that she is bi-sexual and even though her mother couldn't sink it that easily, she comes into terms with her daughter. The death of her mother made Laila alone with no one around to take care of her and the movie ends with Laila going on a date with herself with a drink in her hand.

Like any other young woman in her teen years, Laila too experiences the hormonal flush and she too finds friendship with her 'normal' friends as a getaway from getting pitied or specially treated. She too enjoys and looks forward to physical intimacy and feels exactly the same way as a teenager should. Her mother, played by Revathy, has been the anchor in her life by bringing normality into her life and encouraged her to think and act like a teenager. It was her mother who stood rock hard while she gets the invitation from the New York University. Being dejected and rejected from her lover, Laila considers this relocation to abroad as a breath of fresh air for her bruised soul. Being disabled physically won't change the way a person thinks

and feels inside and when Laila faces the break-up, she too like a teenager loses hold of herself.

New York proved all welcoming for a wheel chair bound person with their local transport facilities catering to their special needs and Laila starts exploring the creative aspect of herself in a novel way. It is there that she meets Jared who has accepted to help her in typing. She started having feelings for him and at the same time met a blind activist, Khanum, who mesmerises Laila with her fierce personality and not bending in front of her blindness. Even though the fact of her being a bi-sexual derails her for a moment, she easily comes into terms with it. She comes out as a winner in making her mother too find it normal. Expanding the canvas of his sexual self-discovery, Laila at last finds peace with herself and with the world around her. It is a moving, delightful rite-of-passage story of a (dis)abled young woman who learns to embrace the life to its entirety.

103

*Margarita with a Straw* has successfully demolished the predominant conception of physical disability as limiting a person from achieving heights in one's life. A disabled person, and that too a woman, has always been portrayed the stereotypical way with life bound with shackles and achieving nothing spectacular or amazing. Laila brings the ray of hope to pursue and re-orient oneself towards a better future where self-revelation enlightening a rather bleak life ahead. Never losing hope over the failure and hiccups that life challenges you with, Laila strode ahead visualising better prospects for herself. Compared to the numerous Bollywood movies dealing with disability in various ways, this particular movie stays fresh and path-breaking for the years to come.

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# **Climate Change Consciousness and Scepticism in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour***

Syama Mohan

**F**light Behaviour published in 2012 by the American novelist Barbara Kingsolver deals with climate change and the scepticism, denial and the politics associated with this phenomenon. The book discusses its central theme with a depiction of the migration of monarch butterflies to the mountains in Eastern Tennessee. Dellarobia Turnbow, one of the protagonists and a resident of the fictional Feathertown discovers 'a fleck of orange wobbling' on her way up the mountain behind her home. Initially, she mistakes it as a flame in the valley as she thinks that "The flames now appeared to lift from individual treetops in showers of orange sparks, exploding the way a pine log does in a campfire when it is poked. The sparks spiralled upward in swirls like funnel clouds. Twisters of brightness against the grey sky". Her increased consternation leads to awe when it is revealed that the orange mystery was a swarm of migrating butterflies. The miraculous sight in the Turnbow property garnered the attention of the media and public. Religious beliefs described the sudden appearance of butterflies as a signal of God while scientific knowledge explained it as a cause of anthropogenic activities that resulted in an altered migratory path of the flame-coloured



monarch butterflies. Change in climate made the butterflies fly north to Tennessee. An article published in a newspaper about the butterflies attracted more people to witness or to interpret the phenomena. It has also compelled scientists and environmentalist to look in for the ecological reasons behind the phenomena. Monarch butterflies usually found their home in the sunny hillsides of Mexico during winter. Logging and landslides, has disrupted the ecosystem inhabited by the butterflies. Josephina, a little girl originally from Mexico paid her a visit to see the monarch butterflies. Dellarobia learns from the little girl that a terrible landslide had taken away not only the butterflies' habitat. It has also taken away the lives of people and has washed away mountains, schools, highways etc. Kingsolver successfully sets the premise of a climate fiction when the story progresses with the pouring in of visitors- nature enthusiasts, media persons, young researchers and scientists.

The New York Times bestseller gained sudden popularity again in 2015 when the Obama Administration allotted \$3.2 million for the conservation programme of monarch butterflies that went through an alarming decline because of its habitat destruction. The initiative compelled many to read it along with the fictional instances in *Flight Behaviour*. Ovid Byron is another important protagonist in the novel. He is an African American Scientist who flew from Mexico to study about the migrating butterflies found in the Turnbow property. The entomologist is tall, exotic and Harvard educated. Many readers pointed out the eerie similarities Ovid Byron and Obama shares, even in their initials, when inverted. When asked about this resemblance, Kingsolver said to the New Yorker, "she had completely constructed the character of Ovid' before the likeness struck her. 'But, I

decided that would be fortuitous.” Literature serves as a medium to spread culture and knowledge. In Kingsolver’s novel, readers are presented with the repercussions of climate change at a local level that calls for a global climate consciousness. The climate change is evident not only with the migration of the butterflies but also in the sufferings of the farmers in Featherstone who had to face large losses in crops due to extreme weather. The dramatic ending of the novel which shows the Turnbow family house being washed away in the floods also reflects the huge possibility of disasters and destructions unchecked human activities done to the nature can bring in.

The genre Climate Fiction, usually speculative in nature brings in stories of life- places disrupted by a change in the ecology. Readers are introduced to the fears and features of a probable climate change scenario. They are forced to think of the parochial and international impact of anthropogenic activities through stories and scenes unravelled in the fiction. Cheryll Glotfelty in the introduction to her work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* says, “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. “. This can be read along with the assumption that climate fictions can contribute to a deeper and wider climate consciousness. The constructed power of human species over the rest of the life forms have had resulted in the depletion and disruptions of the natural settings. The same power, when channelled positively for

the construction of a better or stable ecology would result in the solution to several climate concerns.

*Flight Behaviour* gives a message to the depleting planet by spreading climate consciousness. The novel is reflective of the world we live in. ‘Fiction cultivates empathy for a theoretical stranger by putting you inside his head, allowing you to experience life from his point of view’, says Barbara Kingsolver. Readers of her story empathize with her fictional characters and scenario as climate change issues are a probable reality. Picturesque description of beautiful scenes and proper character development of protagonists hooks the reader to the novel and Kingsolver successfully achieves it. With the overexploitation of natural resources, depleting forest covers, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions, planet earth is becoming the dystopian world in climate fictions. Religious fundamentalists in the novel believe the Turnbow “family has received a special grace “and even educated reporters from far away towns came to interview “not actual Dellarobia, but the one who had a vision”.

There are many instances of climate change description in the novel. The year’s Christmas was not white for the Turnbow family. It was raining heavily and the groundwater level everywhere increased. Kingsolver also talks about how ‘every disaster proved useful for someone’. The flooding caused as a result of heavy rains was good for Dellarobia’s husband’s gravel business

Ovid Byron being a scientist knows the possible dangers the migrated butterflies will have to endure in Tennessee in the extreme weather conditions. They won’t survive under minus four-degree centigrade and the chances are really high that the temperature drops to that

point in the coming days. The importance of trees and forests is explained through Ovid's words, "The forest might shield them to some extent, where the canopy is closed large trees are protective, the trunks create a thermal environment like big water bottles. That's why you see them covering the trunks. Maybe it's why they ended up in that stand of old conifers for their roosting site when they went off track. These firs are similar to the Mexican oyamel, in terms of chemistry. We have no ideas of the cues involved. But to protect them from the kind of winter they will have her that forest is far from adequate". Dellarobia realized the 'hidden treachery' behind the butterflies going astray. The beauty and benevolence the mountain had gained carry a story of destruction and disaster. The butterflies in her property contain most of the migratory population that exists. "In terms of genetic viability, reproductive viability what we have here is the whole lot", tells Dr Byron. He tells the phenomena is due to the breakdown of continental ecosystem. Climate change has disrupted the system. There are many incidents in the story where the readers are fed with information/knowledge. Dr Byron, tells to Dellarobia about greenhouse gases, explaining it in simple language so that any laymen could get a grasp of what are the effects of greenhouse gases and how they are produced. It has affected the thermal stability of the planet. he explains to her that it has lead to serious climate change problems. Hurricanes reaching a hundred miles inland, wind speeds we've never seen. Deserts on fire. In New Mexico, we are seeing the inferno. Texas is worse. Australia is unimaginably worse—a lot of the continent is in permanent drought. Farms abandoned forever."

For news reporters, the butterflies are a mere topic for prime time reels. They didn't care about people's privacy

or news ethics. Dellarobia's personal confessions with the reporter were aired on national television without her consent and her image was morphed to look like the naked 'Venus'. Kingsolver takes a dig at the unethical media reporting whose sole purpose is to get high rating rather than delivering quality news. The reporters won't talk about the topic to Dr Byron in order to cater to the needs of the sponsors and audience. They want news of a butterfly Venus which people agree to or are interested to listen to. Fact checks and information from an authentic source is not aired as it would mess with the story they want to project. The public is duped by these" bunch of liars".

Barbara Kingsolver's novel deals with what people think about climate change and how religious ideas can interfere in understanding the science behind different phenomena. When Dellarobia tries to tell her husband Cub that Climate change has messed up a lot of things, he replies, "Weather is the Lord's business". When Cub was to cut down some trees, it invited protests from people but he was adamant to log the forest. Religious belief has saved the trees when the church asked Cub to not cut down the "Lord's trees," as the pastor called it. The novel is enriched with scientific knowledge. The author was conscious in making the language simple for people from different strata of the society would benefit from it.

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# **Physio-Psycho-Spiritual Impact of Media on Humanity**

Rakesh Jose

In the present scenario the influence of the media over the entire aspects of human life is tremendous. The word 'media' is of Latin origin. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines media as the main ways that large numbers of people receive information and entertainment, that is, television, radio and the newspapers. Some regard media as constructors or shapers of society. Some others focus on the way media reflects or mirrors society. According to this view media reflects back to us events, behaviours, identities, social relations or values that predominantly exist in the society. Again some others consider media as not reflection but representation of society. Stuart Hall explains: "representation is a very different notion from reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, structuring and shaping" (Hodkinson 5). Whether the medium constructs, shapes, mirrors, reflects, or represents it has a great influence over the physical, mental and spiritual realm of human beings. In the Preface of the book *The Media in Your Life* we read: "People's perception of media content influences the way they understand the world and react to other people. As a result, media content can have a powerful impact on individuals" (Folkerts and Lacy xxiii). According to Marshall McLuhan media content "is like the juicy piece

of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind” (19). As like any other phenomenon the media have both positive and negative impact on humanity.

## **Physical Impact**

### **Positive Physical Impact**

#### **1. Reduced Physical Labour**

With the help of modern telecommunication devices we can convey messages and information to any part of the world within fraction of seconds. In ancient days it was of great time consuming and labour involving. “In the beginning, communication was linked to transportation because information could travel only as fast as a horse and rider. Information traveled along trade routes along with other commodities.” (Folkerts and Lacy 10) The link between communication and transportation was broken with Samuel Morse’s introduction of telegraph in 1844. Advent of radio broke the second link between transportation and communication. Communication by the means of the computer began in the 1960s. The internet has brought a revolutionary change in the field of information and communication which has fully reduced the manual labour involved in it.

#### **2. Information about Healthcare**

The media give importance in providing information regarding physical health of persons. Print media as well as electronic media take various measures to provide useful health tips to the people. We can have a good knowledge about human anatomy and physiology with the help of media. We can also get information regarding rare and nutritious food items and healthy habits. Olivia Hurley in the essay, “Sport and Health Cyberpsychology” says:



The Internet can, however, provide positive sources of support for various properly diagnosed conditions, such as online support groups for individuals suffering from or recovering from various forms of cancers, chronic, incurable, progressive or terminal diseases, such as inflammatory bowel disease, coeliac disease, such as Huntington's disease. (Connolly et al. 174-5)

### **3. Reporting Sports Events**

The media promote people's interest in sports and games. The media make people understand the importance of physical exercises in their lives. Broadcasting sports news is a major function of all the media. Some television channels are totally for that purpose. Many people watch matches broadcasted through the media. It can be a local, national or international match. It may be of cricket, football, basketball or any event. Major sports events such as Olympics and World Cups are brought to our homes and rooms by the media. By broadcasting such sports events the media can generate in us keen interest for sports and games as well as kindle in us sportsman spirit, which in turn can promote our physical health.

### **4. Availability of Medicines and Treatments**

Media often provide classes on medication. With the help of media we can get information about the latest researches in the medical field. Major inventions and innovations are known to us, which can be adopted for our physical health. Media can provide information regarding the availability of rare medicines and new treatments. Media also provide awareness programmes regarding donation of blood, eyes, organs etc. Olivia Hurley writes:

Due to the popularity of computer game-playing, especially among the computer-native generation, researchers have also begun to examine the effectiveness

of using computer games and mobile devices, such as mobile phones, as therapeutic tools for treating mental health disorders in children and young adults”. (Connolly et al. 174)

## 5. Warning about Health Hazards

Media are the major sources through which we get information regarding epidemics and the preventive measures to be adopted. Media also take the task of warning the people about anti-social practices which can deteriorate their physical health. Media sometimes provide statistical reports concerning alcohol consumption so that we can understand the range of alcoholism prevalent among people. Such reports can stir social activists to take some measures to make people realize the wastage of their money and damage of their health due to alcoholism. Media also campaign against drug addiction, smoking etc.

### Negative Physical Impact

#### 1. Inseparable Union with Body

The media devices have become parts of our body. In other words our physical body is always in touch with some electronic gadgets. We cannot imagine a day without using mobile phones. You are compelled to carry the phone along with you wherever you go. You cannot avoid it any way. McLuhan in his essay “The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis” writes:

Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body.... Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology (or his variously extended body) is perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology.” (49-51)

## 2. Obesity

Today our children are more interested to watch movies or play video games than to go out for some games. Lack of outdoor games can have an adverse effect on their health. The major one is obesity. Obesity can increase the risk of heart disease. Lack of physical exercises can badly affect the structure and function of human body.

## 3. Radiation

Electromagnetic radiations from electronic devices such as mobile phones are becoming a major problem of our times. Most of us are not aware of the harmful effects of mobile radiations. In the recent days researches are going on in order to find out the ways and the range of intensity of mobile radiations on human body.

## 4. Impairing Biological Clock

Our body has a regular time schedule regarding the time to be active and asleep. This normal rhythm of the biological clock is impaired by over using of electronic and cyber media. Nowadays many people have a tendency to sleep late and wake late. Many spend their valuable time for sleep, engaging in social media. They do not get sufficient sleeping hours. This can surely affect their bodily functions.

## 5. Eye Problems

While using visual media many people do not take precautions for a healthy watching. Proper distance between the eyes and the visuals should be maintained. Prolonged watching can damage our eyes. Some conscious breaks should be given while we gaze at television screen or computer screen.

## **Mental Impact**

### **Positive Mental Impact**

#### **1. Colourful Visuals**

The media have the power to entertain us through various ways. They have intense power to stimulate our senses. The major way is through colourful visuals. What is seen cannot be easily decoded from our mind. So the videos have an everlasting impact on human psyche. So good videos can entertain and motivate our mind. They can easily provide a positive impact on a person's psyche which in turn reflects in his personality.

#### **2. Soothing Songs**

When a person is isolated or bored songs can provide some comfort for him. Individual can rely upon the electronic media for his favourite music. Listening to music can soothe him and the media become a place of solace for him.

#### **3. Comics for Relaxing**

In the modern world human beings are always suffering from stress and strain. Human beings are filled with unwanted anxieties and worries which even prevent them from laughing properly. Some programmes broadcasted through the media have the capacity to make people laugh. Cartoons and comics have a significant role in making our life pleasant. These programmes can make people relaxed and happy. This will surely increase their mental health and also provide the confidence and strength to face the problems in their lives.

#### **4. Fantastic Films**

The influence of films broadcasted through the media is far reaching. The films can influence not merely the

mental aspect but the entire aspects of human life. The films not only entertain human mind but also fill it with new ideas and experiences. Films are effective enough to capture human minds. They can easily transform not a single person but a big society or a nation itself.

## 5. Easy Learning

Learning is a cognitive activity of our mind. It comes under the cognitive domain according to Bloom's Taxonomy. The print media were the sources of learning in the earlier times. With the coming of the electronic media a revolution is in fact created in the field of learning. Learning became easy due to 'e-learning' or electronic learning. The term e-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes including computer based learning, web based learning, visual classroom and digital collaboration. However the term e-learning is becoming widely accepted as a substitute for online learning and web based learning. The media also help learners in attaining knowledge and understanding by providing satisfactory learning aids. "The use of technology in the classroom is recognized as a fundamental learning tool which stimulates the language, cognitive and social development of young children" (Connolly et al. 225).

## Negative Mental Impact

### 1. Addiction

Talking about the psychological effect of the media addiction is a major problem. Reading and enjoying newspapers has become a routine of the people. If there is a day without newspaper some people may feel a little discomfort. More than the print media, the addiction is manifested with regard to electronic media. Some people are addicted to certain programmes broadcasted through the media. Some waste their time watching serials,

enjoying movies, playing video games or chatting with friends. Like alcohol de-addiction, some treatment or therapy is necessary for some people for the recovery from this pathetic plight.

## **2. Increasing Criminality**

The media share a significant role in enhancing the criminality of the people. The crimes and violent scenes depicted through the media have an eminent power to generate and grow the criminal tendency hidden within each and every individual. Repeated reading, hearing and watching of news regarding crimes can cause mental strain and mental frustration.

## **3. Decreasing Creativity**

Over use of the media devices can badly affect the affective domain of our brain. Affective domain is the area of mental processes such as imagination, creativity etc. Pictures and videos can mar the creative ability of human mind. Some people hear the same news and watch the same visuals many times, which can adversely affect their creativity. Paul Hodkinson writes: "...photographs, it is argued, reduce complexity of issues to particular observable fragments and encourage emotional, voyeuristic captivation. Worse still, this inherent superficiality is hidden by veneer of realness and proximity as photographs entice us into the mistaken feeling that we have fully understood the situation being depicted." (24)

## **4. Cyber Bullying**

Cyber bullying is a problem which can adversely affect the mental health of a person. With the development of cyberspace this becomes a common problem and many become victims of cyber bullying. It is the teasing of a person through cyber media. It can be through e-mail, face

book, whatsapp etc. Fake news and animated visuals are circulated through cyber media. People who become victims of this evil can fall into despair and even commit suicide. Based on a study of almost 2,000 middle-school students in the US, Irene Connolly says that “the cyber victims reported similar effects of anger and sadness, but also being frustrated and even scared following a cyberbullying episode.” (Connolly et al. 231)

## 5. Cyberchondriasis

‘Cyberchondriasis’ came from the word hypochondriasis. The term ‘cyberchondriasis’ refers to the condition where individual misinterpret common symptoms of often minor illness as sources, life threatening signs of disease, having researched their symptoms on the internet. Olivia Hurley examines, “Some individuals may also resort to self-medicating by purchasing, for example, unregulated drugs/medication online. This behaviour may be very dangerous, even life-threatening, as there is no medical expert, such as a doctor or healthcare professional, overseeing such drug-taking behaviour. (Connolly et al. 174)

## Spiritual Impact

### Positive Spiritual Impact

#### 1. Moral Awareness

The media promote moral awareness among people which in turn enhance the spirituality of the people. Both print media and electronic media are engaged in this activity. Most of the newspapers have supplementary pages in which a major portion is covered by didactic stories, anecdotes, poems and inspirational and thought provoking articles which provide moral lessons for the people.

Electronic media also broadcast certain programmes through which they provide value education for the masses.

## **2. Enhancing Piety and Devotion**

In earlier days it was only print media which tried to enhance piety and devotion of the people. But today the situation has changed. Now the latest electronic medium is even there to promote piety and devotion of the people. Many T.V. channels are exclusively for religious programmes. Therefore if a person did not visit the religious institution also he can come in touch with the ceremonies conducted there. With the help of the media lakhs of people sitting in their homes or offices could participate in many prayer programmes. With the help of cyber media many such programmes have achieved international participation.

## **3. Propagation of Good News**

The media are the major ways through which good news reach the people. Print and electronic media play a significant role in propagating good news. Most of the religious groups rely upon media to disseminate their ideas and doctrines. Media can reach every nook and corner of the world. In the earlier days religious doctrines were propagated through speeches. Time and distance were barriers in this regard. But now with the help of electronic and cyber media it got momentum. In the case of Christianity, the media help the missionaries in the process of evangelization of the masses.

## **4. Human Concern**

Another major role of the media is arousing the conscience of people, which is a major step in the spiritual progress. Friars and nuns in their religious orders have to



spend a few minutes, at least two times a day for the examination of their conscience. A spiritual man should be also a social man who knows the major problems and sufferings of the society. Consciousness - raising is a divine duty done by the media, making people aware of important social and political issues. When a calamity or disaster happens in any part of the world, it is immediately known to us through the media. Then not only material and human resources flow to that particular region but also a huge amount of spiritual aid flows to that region through the heartfelt prayers of millions. This is possible only with the help of the media.

### **5. Encouraging Welfare Activities**

The media take our attention towards the poor and the needy. You may not come to know the sufferings of many without the media. The media not only portray the sufferings of the people, they also stimulate and inspire us to do something to mitigate the pain of the humanity. The media also introduce before us certain programmes and organizations through which we can help the needy. By advertising such programmes the media encourage all kind of welfare activities. Overall development of the humanity is the major concern of any man of spirituality.

### **Negative Spiritual Impact**

#### **1. Portrayal of Bad Habits**

Unfortunately sometimes same bad habits are depicted through the media. It may be through some advertisements, films, serials, mobile messages etc. Knowingly or unknowingly certain bad habits or anti-social practices such as consumption of alcohol, usage of drugs, smoking etc. are portrayed in the media. They have a wide range of negative impact and corrupt the souls of many, especially that of children. Children are easily influenced

by such scenes and have an everlasting impact on their spiritual life.

## **2. Pornography**

This is a major threat of our generation which is also contributed by the media. Electronic and cyber media enable the wide spreading of this evil. Day by day thousands of people become addicted to this social menace. If once a person got involved in this sin, it is difficult for that person to get rid of it. He will have a strong craving for forbidden pleasures, which will deteriorate his body, mind and soul. Eternal damnation is the ultimate end of such persons. Vulgar scenes pictured through the media can corrupt the souls of many, especially children, which may later lead them to pornography.

## **3. Promotion of Consumerism and Materialism**

The media often highlight the material culture. They promote the ideas favouring consumerism and materialism. They give the notion that possessing a lot of unnecessary things is very essential for the fulfilment of life. So they compel or persuade people to buy many things which are of not much use. Piling up of materialistic possessions is in sharp contrast with the renunciation and the simplicity which spirituality advocates. A spiritual person is not bothered about the things of this world but of the spiritual world. The media often create a hindrance for the humanity to transcend above this world and always grab our attention towards the daily trifles of this world.

## **4. Spiritual Antipathy**

Spiritual antipathy is a problem found in the majority of the people, especially the youth of this modern generation. The media have a role in creating this antipathy. Earlier in our houses there was a specific time for prayer and all the

members of the family participated in this prayer service with utmost earnest and fervour. But today due to the influence of the programmes broadcasted through the media, the traditional prayer time is adjusted, reduced or even fully avoided. Due to the excess use of media devices the children and the youth have lost their concentration ability. Lack of concentration irritates them during the time of prayer as well as study. Without concentration meditation and contemplation are impossible. So they do not aspire to reach the higher levels of prayer and spirituality.

### 5. Denial of Silence and Solitude

Silence and solitude is the fertile soil where spirituality sprouts. The media have crept into the silent hours and the silent spaces of humanity. Not only in our personal and family life, even in religious communities, the mandatory silence, is highly broken due to the encroaching influence of the media. This impact of the media can degrade the spirituality of the entire human race.

### Conclusion

From the objective analysis of the pros and cons of the media we could clearly understand the wide range of their impact over the human body, mind and soul. We could also understand that the media in themselves are not a threat to humanity, but the imprudent use of them by human beings, become a great threat to humanity. 'Media literacy' is a thing to be promoted among human beings. It is not about the knowledge regarding the use of the media device but about the precautions to be adopted physically, mentally and spiritually while using media devices. "‘Literate consumers’ learn how media messages are constructed, how they are used to manipulate, and how they affect societal development" (Folkerts and Lacy 8).

Now websites on media literacy resources are numerous. Elementary and secondary curricula should include segments on media literacy. Media literacy may enable the people to use their discerning power and to some extent prevent the negative impact of the media over the human race. McLuhan in his famous essay "The Medium is the Message" quotes a sentence from the speech of Pope Pius XII:

It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of modern society and the stability of its inner life depend in large part on the maintenance of an equilibrium between the strength of the techniques of communication and the capacity of the individual's own reaction." (22)

Based on the sentence McLuhan further comments: "Failure in this respect has for centuries been typical and total for mankind. Subliminal and docile acceptance of media impact has made often prisons without walls for their human users" (22). Therefore, at present, human beings need a great physical, mental and spiritual strength and stability, to discard the negative impact and imbibe the positive impact for the overall development of humanity. Otherwise the media will lead to the total degradation and deterioration of the entire human race.

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# **The Responsibility to See: Reading Margaret Atwood's "This is a Photograph of Me" in the Light of Levinasian Ethics**

Betsy Paul C.

In his influential 1961 work on ethics *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Emmanuel Levinas, the European philosopher with a Lithuanian Jewish background, describes ethics as “the spiritual optics” (78). Ethics thus becomes primarily an opening up of one’s eyes, an ability to see outside oneself, see the exteriority, and, according to Levinas, to be responsible for it. This ability to encounter the other, to have as Levinas would call a “face-to-face” (39) relationship, is according to him the ethical responsibility of the human subject. Such a relationship, “the relation between the same and the other...is language” (39). It is desire, goodness and conversation that help us reach out to the other who is out of our comprehensive cognition. Language and dialogue being the most important aspects of literary texts, a study of literary texts based on Levinas’ ideas may render useful examples in ethical praxis.

This paper is an attempt to read the Canadian writer, environmental activist, and winner of the prestigious Man Booker Prize (twice) Margaret Atwood’s much anthologized poem “This is a Photograph of Me” (TPM

henceforth) in the light of Levinas' insights concerning the encountering of the Other.

Levinas, as Shlomo Malka famously and most appropriately described him, is considered as the philosopher of the "Other" (Katz and Trout 27). In his analysis of Levinas' philosophy, Michael Morgan considers the role of Levinas as unlike any other contemporary Western philosopher. According to him, Levinas is distinctive in the role that he "gives to the ethical in our understanding of human existence and also the way in which he accounts for the force and content of the ethical" (8).

Levinas had, through his works, questioned the prevalent concept of the Other in Western philosophy. He claimed that ethics should be the first philosophy and the ethical responsibility to the other, according to him, was the primary function of the self. In a relationship with the other, for Levinas, the other has priority.

One core idea in Levinas' philosophy deals with transcendence. Levinas' concept of transcendence is indebted to those of his teachers, the philosophers, Husserl and Heidegger. But Levinas gives a depth to the idea of transcendence by attributing it to the other person, with exteriority. For him, thus, transcendence is exteriority, "in the sense of what lies outside but eludes my comprehensive knowledge: the other person" (49).

TPM is the opening poem in Atwood's 1964 collection of poetry, *The Circle Game*. The poem has hence generated multiple layers of meaning, and has been interpreted through the lens of postcolonial theories, gender theories and on the basis of its explications on subjectivity.

TPM is introduced to us with an innocent statement, the titular line stating “this is a photograph of me”. But as the poem progresses we find out that the face and the body of the “me”, the protagonist, is not to be seen in the visualized scenario. The described scene itself is spatially, temporally, and artistically multilayered.

The artistic layers are obvious. A poem, that is, an artistic medium, deals with a photograph, another artistic medium. The photo itself is of a scenic view with sights in the background and signficatory details in the forefront. The ambiguity continues as the narrator starts describing the details of the photo from its left hand corner, like reading a piece of paper, deciphering meanings from the coded format of language. The refraction of the supposedly real is further complicated by the blurry images in the old photograph.

The spatial layers too are quite prominently delineated. The poetic space is within the frame of the photograph that is alluded to in the beginning. The photograph, as mentioned earlier too, is itself blurred and smeared. Once the eyes learn to focus on the narrow limits of the photo, details emerge, each detail multilayered in its meaning.

But then, meaning is yet to be found elsewhere. After a description of what strikes the eye at first, attention is called upon to a lake. But the focus does not stop there since we are told that some low hills are seen beyond the lake.

Then, suddenly looming out of a parenthetical addendum, further information is offered, like an afterthought, for the reader to take or leave. The personae, when, thus finally revealed, is to be (un)seen beneath the lake in which s/he was drowned the day before the photograph was taken. The poet, though acknowledging



the distortions of refractory vision, allows for a perceptive enlightenment, a participatory experience, if one was ready to invest in enough time: “if you look long enough/eventually/you will be able to see me”.

The temporal layers too stretch farther and nearer in a sort of a play on lights. The opening line gives the impression of a present time conversation, though at the same time, the reader is well aware that it is the present time of the poem. The poem itself is a creative piece which ought to have been written in a concretely past moment for the reader to read in his/her present moment of reading. The poem starts with a past time reference, “it was taken sometime ago.” The “smeared print, blurred lines and grey flecks” though harbingering images of loss, still, in a photo, give us the nostalgic pleasure of a romantically remembered past. This romantic nostalgia is accentuated further as we are made to scan the picture, to go deeper, to identify the gentle slope, the small frame house, and, the branch of a slightly ambiguous tree. The lake and the low hills in the background (as contrasted to the sea on the high mountains we expect on a larger canvas) too help to fix and localize the picture as part of the memory of a singular self, a self with a unique face. The past gets further deepened with the second part of the poem as an event which took place at a farther moment in the past is alluded to. With that, the time of the photo as such is fixated, “the photograph was taken/the day after I drowned.” Then the reader is shifted back to the present where s/he is invoked to perform an action in the future.

A reading of TPM in the Light of Levinas’ concepts can yield interesting insights as the poem aspires to a horizon of ethics similar to that propounded by Levinas. The other person for Levinas is the pivotal focus of human responsibility. In the “primary” ethics that he propounds,

“a new framework of transcendence as human responsibility” which “involves an extensive exploration of the face-to-face relationship with the people” (Bergo) leading to questions of social existence and justice is advocated. The poem too reminds the reader of such a responsibility of the subject towards exteriority.

The poem, with its deceptively simple title and short form, in closer reading, defies singular and confining interpretations. The subject of the poem is not an obvious protagonist whose face is open for analysis. The subject is the second person, the “you” who is asked to perform certain actions for a certain purpose that is not immediately revealed. The poem begins with what appears to be a common drawing room social conversation, a showing of a photograph, with its accompanying, small talk contextual reference. What seems like a casual description follows, “...you see in the right hand corner / a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree / (balsam or spruce).”

131

The setting brings forth a view of a supposedly self-sufficient individual subject capable of making sagacious decisions objectively analyzing available data. The subject can make conjectures in a comparatively ambiguous scenario and the way in which the understandings are made can determine the consequent incidents. Levinas too presupposes such a subject, along with philosophers like Husserl and Heidegger, a subject self-sufficient in his/her “everyday activities and perception” because s/he was “a being that inhabits overlapping worlds” in which his/her agency is largely decisive for him/her (Bergo).

But this subject transforms its predilections as it encounters the other, “the face of the other”. According to Levinas, “naked and defenseless”, the face signifies, with or without words, “do not kill me”. It opposes a passive

resistance to our desire for mastery wherein our freedom asserts its sovereignty (84).

In the poem, the subject does not encounter the face till the poem reaches the second half. The poetic description of the photographic scenery scans from left to right, from the particular tree and frame house to the vast expanse of the background, from below to above, without the introduction of the expected face. And, then, when finally the face is encountered it is encountered as an absence, a dissolution, and a dissipation of refracted identity through space, time and conception. We are introduced to the shocking awareness that the face which was supposed to entreat “do not kill me” has been killed long back. “The photograph was taken/ the day after I drowned,” the face states nonchalantly. “I am in the lake, in the center / of the picture, just under the surface”.

In his introduction to *Totality and Infinity*, John Wild describes Levinas’ new way of dealing with the other where “instead of referring to the panoramic sense of vision as its model for understanding, it refers to language where there is always room for the diversity of dialogue” (16). Thus, the poem’s reference to the panoramic view of scenic beauty within the photograph acts as a first step to the understanding of the other, which is to be cancelled out to reach towards the second level, the level of language, the speech of the other through the voice embedded within the poetic space. Then, the poetic technique of introducing the photo first seems to have an ethical significance. The photo offers the panoramic vision of an autonomous subject, but the poem itself, embodied in language, becomes the pathway leading to dialogue and a reach towards the exteriority of the other.

The subjective time in the poem becomes a frozen time ruptured from history. And, the subject of the poem, the listener of the narrative, is now bound to be a witness to a wrong done in the historical expanse of time. Just as Levinas envisions “an alternate history in which it is possible to bear witness to the wrongs undergone by persons,” in the poem a historical wrong unfolds before the reader. According to Levinas, “history is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgement is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history” (52).

The listener/reader in the poem thus functions as the subject as a witness. A serious wrongdoing has happened. But even the very fact is not known with no evidence remaining. The only evidence is the photograph taken one day after the event when every mark of the action is obliterated. Yet, language remains. Conversation remains. If one looks long enough, if one listens carefully enough, if one is open to the naked face of the other meanings will emerge.

And since, according to Levinasian ethics, the primary responsibility of the subject is towards the Other, the reader is then interrupted by this encounter. The reader is urged to invest his or her freedom in this understanding. The reader then has to become a participant in transcendence. Here, transcendence is an extension of selfhood. The subjecthood of the reader becomes an extension of the lake, the hills and the balsam or spruce, all of these engulfing the pain of the person who is drowned, at the same time remaining distinct from that pain.

By this, the reader is also invoked into an affective realm, an emotional realm of intersubjectivity. The

emotions are not the subject's limited emotions but are invoked by the unpredictable quality of the Other's face. The unpredictability is further accentuated by the refraction of water, the passage of time, the dimness of the photograph, and the cryptic narration of the narrator.

At the same time, all these refractions and ambiguities do serve a purpose. They are used to make the reader/subject realize that the Other is always already unattainable.

Though the Other is unattainable and inaccessible to intellectual cognition, the face-to-face encounter with the Other opens up possibilities of emotional expansion. The reader has to "look long enough/eventually/ you will be able to see me", and thus, has to invest time and effort because of the ethical responsibility entailed.

The ethical responsibility here is to face the other, an other who is capable of calling the subject's experience into question. It is a search for truth. According to Levinas, truth is sought "in the other" by an autonomous subject "who lacks nothing" (62). Search for truth emanates from a desire for the other, even when there is no lack in oneself. And, that is why ethics is the spiritual optics.

The challenge of ethics then becomes the challenge to be capable of the unique hard-to-get vision. And, when the reader/listener is able to "see," that capacity comes along with an expansion of the reader's subjectivity with the infinity of the Other's positionality. Because, according to Levinas, the prime objective of the subject's life is the Other and the preservation of the Other's face. Even if that is an already drowned face. By confronting with such a face and its demands alone is the reader supposed to fulfil his/her ethical responsibility to the Other. And, that ethical responsibility will further not have a completeness in

fulfilment, it will be a continuous process throughout the experience of existing.

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# **Woman and Hair: Unveiling the Semiotics of the Feminine Hair**

Divya Krishna

**T**he silence of the half of humanity has been the centre of feminist discussions for more than half a century. The woman's body came into discussion and the writing of the body was emphasized. Language, art and culture were studied in order to delve into the depths of female symbolism. But a very important aspect has not been given justifiable importance – the woman's "hair". Some recent feminist journalism speaks of the pubic hair and the hair of the armpits and the social stigma related to it, but the age old story about the long dark tresses is not much spoken about.

For the woman her hair is an adornment, it is her pride, it is also a symbol of her seductiveness; her fertility, her vengeance is also hidden in her long curls and it is the self same hair that becomes an instrument of torture to her. Science tells us that there is not much difference in the biological make up of the man and the woman when it comes to the hair. Hormonal differences causes baldness in men. From pre-history up to the present the hairstyles of men and women all over the world have changed. In many countries men grew their hair long unlike now. The hair of women has been more or less the same then and now.

Hair is an important symbol in constructing identity; it is one of the primary ways we tell others who we are and by

which others evaluate us. In being a truly malleable aspect of the human body its countless ways for different presentation mean that it is 'uniquely suited for conveying symbolic meanings.' Discourses on hair have always been present in culture. This fascination with hair relates to the fact that 'it was the only female body part – excepting the face – on constant display.' However, the abundant descriptions of hair are not just appertaining to aesthetic characterization, but could portray the social and moral position of the woman.

A woman's long hair, after all, is the insignia of her femininity. More than that, it is a symbol of her sexuality, and the longer, thicker and more wanton the tresses, the more passionate the heart beneath them is assumed to be. The 'fallen woman' is an ideological construct that acts as a direct opposite to the chaste and feminine 'angel in the house'; the term could cover any woman that did not fit the rigorous moral standards of domestic normality.

Looking at Victorian England, one can see strict social and moral codes dictated rules on how hair should be worn. Women were expected to wear their hair bound after marriage and keep it covered at church, for visits, and in formal situations. If chaste, covered hair was considered to be the epitome of genteel womanhood, then free flowing, loose hair was considered to be unchaste and a characteristic of a morally depraved woman. So were the rules in almost all cultures across the world. Chinese hairstyles varied depending on the age of the woman and her marital status and the reason for their hair being extremely long was because it was considered disrespectful to cut hair because it was inherited from their parents. Girls would usually wear their hair long and braided as for unmarried women. For married women this is reversed as



their hair is tied up, with the odd loose curl to show that she is already married.

Several myths all around the globe have to hair at its centre. The Seleucid queen Berenice II of Egypt, wife of the King Ptolemy III Euergetes, sacrificed her long hair to the goddess Aphrodite, asking her for her husband returned safely and successful from his war against Syria. He could do it, but Berenice's hair, which was left at the temple, was stolen by a priest, upset because the offering was made to a Greek deity. Konon, the court astronomer, was called to fix the incident, and he announced that Aphrodite had accepted the offering with pleasure and she placed the hair in the sky, forming a cluster of stars that now shines in the Galactic North Pole.

In the Norse mythology, common to Scandinavians, Germans and Saxons, Sif was the wife of Thor, the thunder god. She had a beautiful long hair, that fell past her feet, and it color was like the wheat fields gleaming in the sunlight. Some day while she was sleeping, the trickster god Loki, god of thieves and adventurers, cut it off, running away with the hair. While she was crying out in anger, her husband Thor stormed, threatening with the worst punishments to the author of that incident. Loki, fearing the vengeance of Thor, travelled to Asgard and to Smifhelm, home of the dwarves, for help. They weaved threads of golden hair longer than before, with its locks wrought out of authentic precious gold. Loki came back at the next day with the new hair and the gods' fury was appeased.

Samson was a Judge of the ancient Israelites, a character of the Hebrew Talmud, the Jewish Bible. His story is narrated in the Christian Bible in Book of Judges, 13-16. Delilah his wife discovers that his secret resides in

the length of his hair. Then, she, while Samson sleeps, cut his hair and delivers it to the Philistines, who enslave him and make him blind stabbing out his eyes with their swords. Nevertheless, Samson recovers his long hair and his strength, and in a moment in which all the Philistines were assembled in their temple, with the help of God, he leans against two pillars, pulling them and destroying the whole temple, killing all.

Rapunzel is yet another strong myth that involves the hair. It is a Brothers Grimm fairy tale published in Germany in 1812. A young couple who want to have a child is living next to the garden of an enchantress, the Dame Gothel, who has *rapunzel* plants (*campanula rapunculus*) growing in her garden. When the woman becomes pregnant, she starts to have strong whims of rapunzels. The husband goes to the garden to grab some plants and he is caught by the witch, who threatens him with a punishment. He begs for mercy, and she accepts to forgive him, provided that his first child will be surrendered to her at birth. When the girl was born, she was given to Gothel, who named her Rapunzel, and shut her away in a high tower, with neither stairs, nor door, one only room and only one window. At her 12 years of age, she hears the witch singing: "*Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair, so that I may climb the golden stair*". Then she drops down the hair to the Dame Gothel, so she can climb up the hair to the girl's room. One day, a prince, walking by the garden, finds the hair, climbs up by it and asks Rapunzel to marry him. The witch discovers the visits of the prince, cuts short the girl's hair and, when the prince comes back to meet Rapunzel, she throws him out from the balcony, falling in the garden and getting blind as a consequence of the accident. For months he's wandering looking for Rapunzel, until one day he hears her voice

singing close to a lake. Then under the influence of her tears, he recovers his sight and she recovers her beautiful long hair again. The prince takes Rapunzel to his kingdom, marrying her.

Another interesting implication given to the hair can be seen in the beliefs of an American tribe. For the Native American tribe of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona, the hair has a profound signification: they believe that thoughts originated in the head emerge along with the hair, and they are into it; new thoughts are close to the scalp and the old ones at the end of the longest strands. The longer are the hairs, more thoughts they have thoughts.

We often see our hair as a reflection of our identity because it is both personal and public. Many women feel that a bad hair day equals a bad day: when a woman's hair is too fine, too frizzy, too dry, turning grey or falling out, her self-esteem is seriously affected. This deep personal relationship between hair and self-esteem is evident throughout history, philosophy and even religion. These are just a few of the things hair has symbolized for women throughout time:

Lady Godiva's naked ride through the streets has made her a heroine to the common people of Coventry. The image of Lady Godiva riding a horse with her body covered with only her long hair has become a symbol of civic freedom and beauty. In the 1950s, female communists and soldiers in China favored a short bob cut just below the ears. This simple hairstyle was named the "Liberation Hairdo" because it is a symbol of women taking control over their own lives. Women continue to use their hairdo to express themselves.

Hair and beauty is a multibillion-dollar industry, and the average woman spends approximately \$50,000 on her hair over her lifetime and almost two hours a week washing and styling her hair. This is not just because many of us believe that appearances are important, but also because our hair represents our personality, thoughts and beliefs. For centuries, women have been able to play different roles by changing different hairstyles, and from their stories, we can see that hair contributes greatly to women's self-esteem, actions and motives.

One also knows how religions has always controlled man and woman, to be specific the woman more. Islam and Christianity and other organized religions demand women to cover their heads. The Epistle of St. Paul to Corinthians has a detailed list of do and don'ts when it comes to the hair (1 Corinthians Chapter 11). It's no wonder women feel like their hair is a "crowning glory," as this phrase dates back to Biblical times. According to 1 Corinthians 11: 15, "but for a woman, if her hair is abundant, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. The negative implication of a woman with a bare head is apparent in today's society. It says that women should cover their heads at time of prayer or prophesy, if they don't they would be considered as shaven heads which is extremely derogatory for a woman. Christ is the head of man, so covering his head is a disgrace; whereas man is the head of the woman and if it is not covered it is a disgrace. The hair of a woman is not for public display. A man growing his hair is also seen as dishonour and this definitely seems to jar with the accepted appearance of Jesus Christ. Christianity also suggests that nuns wear their veil all the time. This seems to be an attempt to cut them off from the worldly life. A story in the Bible that points at the grail theory is the act of Mary Magdalene wiping the

feet of Jesus with her hair. The hair of a woman that only supposed to be revealed to members of her family and that which was a powerful sexual symbol if openly displayed is used to clean the feet of the Lord.

Islam advises women to cover the body modestly. Their hair cannot be shown to any man who could be a potent partner in marriage. Hijab is a veil that covers the head and chest, which is particularly worn by a Muslim woman beyond the age of puberty in the presence of adult males outside of their immediate family. It can further refer to any head, face, or body covering worn by Muslim women that conforms to a certain standard of modesty. Hijab can also be used to refer to the seclusion of women from men in the public sphere, or it may embody a metaphysical dimension – *Al-hijab* refers to "the veil which separates man or the world from God".

Hair is a powerful metaphor in Hindu mythology. Krishna has curly hair. Balarama has straight silky hair. Shiva has thick matted hair. The Goddesses – Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga – have loose unbound hair. Hair has long been used in India to convey a message. Unbound unruly hair represents wild nature. Well oiled and combed hair represents culture. That is why the wild Kali's hair is unbound while the domestic Gauri's hair is well bound and in her temples devotees make offerings of gajra, a string of flowers to tie up the hair. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi's unbound hair represents her fury. In the Ramayana, the last jewel of Sita is the hairpin that she gives Hanuman to convey to Ram that her honor, and his reputation, stands in a precarious position. Shiva's dreadlocks represent the potent power of his mind that enables him to catch and bind the unruly and wild river-goddess Ganga. Shaving the head is associated with asceticism. Buddhist monks shaved their heads. Jain

monks plucked their hair from the roots; to survive the pain is to convey that one is willing to suffer the challenges offered by monasticism. Brahmins shaved their head but left a tuft in the end, an indicator that they were not monks but very much part of worldly life. This Brahmin tuft is tied up to show control; Chanakya of legend famously untied this tuft to display his rage and tied it only when the Nanda dynasty of Magadha had been brought to its knees. In India among the Brahmins it is a ritual to shave the heads of widows. This is done as sign to show the world that they are no more going to lead a life of worldly pleasures. The hair of a woman which is her adornment and a strong sign of her sexuality and fertility is thus removed leaving her no choices for opting a new life. The head is shaved to display bereavement as well as devotion. Hair is also power for women. Draupadi decides to leave her hair untied until she gets justice. Draupadi was dragged by the hair into the royal court by Dussasana and insulted in front of many including her husbands. Though rescued by Krishna from being disrobed her insult stands. Draupadi takes the fierce vow to not tie her hair until it is bathed in the blood of Dussasana. Her thirst for his blood is quenched by Bhim. Here the moment she decides to leave her hair untied she becomes the epitome of female rebellion. Why does the hair become so important to a woman? Why does it become so much ingrained into her identity?

Plaiting or braiding the hair is a must in most of the schools which came in as a part of the convent education. This reflects physical and mental control of the authorities on girls at an age that plays a pivotal role in their development.

The western concept of the vampire finds an eastern counterpart in the Indian Yakshi. The description of the

Yakshi is one a voluptuous temptress who drinks life blood out of a man. She is said to have long hair that even covers her feet left untied. It is also said that the hair helps to cover the vacuum space behind her. The concept of a woman who is a temptress and who falls out the precincts of womanhood has the description of open hair. Sexuality is inextricably woven into the concept of the female hair. In the legends of Kerala one also comes across the story of Palattu Koman who was hidden from his enemies by his lover under her long tresses.

During rituals like “sarpampattu” and playful dances like “thumbithullal” women shake their heads with their hair lose in a hysteric manner. Hysteria has always been associated with women. In Thumbi thullal, usually six to seven women in their traditional attire sit in the form of a circle and the lead performer (who’ll be called as Thumbi which means dragon fly in Malayalam) sits in the middle of the circle. Holding a bunch of thumba flowers the lead performer will sing a melodious fast paced song and other performers sitting around her will also join after some time. They clap their hands and sway to the melody as the song progresses. Gradually the tempo of the song increases and the lead performer will brush the floor with her hair like some possessed person. When it comes to the end of the song, speed gradually decreases and singing fades away. Similar in style is the spectacular ritual performance, Sarpam Thullal which is done to appease the snake gods and thereby to bring prosperity to the family. A colourful Kalam (drawing on the ground using colour powder) is drawn in the courtyard of the house. Two girls are made to sit in front of the Kalam and songs are sung with the accompaniment of Pulluvankkudam, Pulluvan Veena and Ila Thalam. As the songs progress, the girls get captivated by the rhythm and atmosphere and begin to make serpent-

like movements. The final stages of the trancelike dance are a violent frenzy of rhythmic fervour in the climax of which the girls erase the Kalam with flower bunches and their loose hair. Similarly the Yami women of the ethnic minority Gaoshan, of Taiwan, dance shaking their heads and swinging their hair while singing and swaying themselves. They don't stop until their hair touches the ground. Their dance is a sign of primitive strength, optimism and courage. A comparable mode of dance is in the middle east were Muslim women who are usually supposed to have their hair covered wear it open and sway to both sides in a standing posture.

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ചുറ്റുപിണഞ്ഞൊരു മണിനാഗം  
ചന്ദനലതയിലഭോമുഖശയനം  
ചന്ദമൊടിങ്ങനെ ചെയ്യുമ്പോളു്,

145

These lines from Changampuzha's poem Manaswini is an oft repeated image of the tresses of a woman being compared to snakes. Medusa was one of the three sisters known as the Gorgons. The other two sisters were Sthenno and Euryale. Medusa was the only mortal out of the three.

She was originally a golden-haired and very beautiful maiden, who, as a priestess of Athena, was devoted to a life of celibacy; but, being wooed by Poseidon, whom she loved in return, she forgot her vows, and became united to him in marriage. For this offence she was punished by the goddess in a most terrible manner. Each wavy lock of the beautiful hair which had so charmed her husband, was changed into a venomous snake; her once gentle, love-inspiring eyes now became blood-shot, furious orbs, which



excited fear and disgust in the mind of the beholder; whilst her former roseate hue and milk-white skin assumed a loathsome greenish tinge. The snake haired lover in Changampuzha is an enchantress, since snakes are not negative images in India and are related to sexuality; whereas the image of Medusa is one that repels everyone.

Looking at history one would come across several happenings that redefined the feminine hair. French women who befriended the Nazis, through coerced, forced, or voluntary relationships, were singled out for shameful retribution following the liberation of France having her head shaved by French civilians to publicly mark her. This episode in French history continues to provoke shame and unease and as a result has never been subject of a thorough examination. Throughout France, from 1943 to the beginning of 1946, about 20000 women of all ages and all professions who were accused of having collaborated with the occupying Germans had their heads shaved. Just as the identity of those who carried this task out varied so too did the form it took. All of them carried out this violent deed either behind closed doors, inside the walls of a prison or the home of the women so punished, or in a public square. If, in the last instance, it was men who wielded the scissors and the clippers, the population as a whole – men, women and children – were present at the event, which was both a spectacle and a demonstration of the punishment to be meted out to traitors.

The imposition of punishment with distinct sexist overtone, characterized by branding or marking, has overshadowed its use for all acts of collaboration. After the war up to the present, photographs of the women with shaven heads have become the only evidence of practice about which those who carried it out have remained silent – attention has been directed at the victims and at the act

itself, leaving both what preceded and followed it (collaboration, accusation, arrest, judgment, condemnation) neglected.

Also, most widows today are not forced to undergo the rituals that marked the renunciation of a woman's sexuality amongst the Brahmanical upper castes. The Brahmanical tradition especially after 700 AD saw women as "sites of conflict between a demoniac *stri-svabhava* – their innate nature, which is lustful – and their *stridharma*, a woman's duty. There was no greater delight and no more destructive urge for women than sex," writes Uma Chakravarti in *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*. Early marriage was the only way to channelize her lustful sexual energies. "Through marriage and wifely devotion, the biological woman - a wild, untamed and disorderly entity – can be converted into a 'cultured' woman, a social entity who has vanquished all the demoniac force within her." With her husband dead, a widow's riotous passion is the cause of moral panic. She must therefore be completely neutered, desexed. The Laws of Manu laid down that she must give up ornamentation, observe fasts, shave her head, emaciate the body, eat only one meal a day, and sleep on the floor. She must not eat 'hot' foods or betel nut which heats up the body. The orange *haldi* applied on her before marriage to heat it up for intercourse and the bloodred *kumkum* and *sindoor* that marked her out as a sexually potent female were to be substituted by the ash of the funeral pyre. And after the 14th century, her hair – the site of all sin and pollution – was to be shaved off. If a widow did not shave her head, it was believed, every drop of water which fell upon her hair would pollute her husband's soul as many times as the number of hairs upon her head. Widows in India may no longer be required to shave their

hair off. But the mindset that sees a woman's identity only vis-à-vis the males around her has not really changed.

Recently Japanese and Western media have feasted on the strange report of a Japanese female pop star shaving the hair off her head as an act of contrition after she violated her band's rules by spending the night with her boyfriend. Minami Minegishi, a member of popular all-girl group AKB48, even appeared on a video to offer a tearful apology, begging to be brought back into the band. Minegishi, only 20 years old, was observing a traditional Japanese practice of making amends for violating society's rules and breaching honor.

However, the shaving of heads – either voluntarily as a form of apology or as a punishment by the outside society – has a long and notorious history in many parts of the world, particularly in South Asia. In Pakistan, women often face the humiliation of having their hair shorn and paraded naked in public for a variety of offenses.

The Express Tribune reported that a 60-year-old woman named Seema Bibi in the town of Kot Marth in Punjab suffered this indignity for converting to Christianity from Islam by 27 fellow villagers. Although her attackers were arrested by police, Seema and her family soon fled the village in fear for their lives. In Mumtazabad, Pakistan, a man named Muhammad Akram beat up one of his wives (and shaved her head) for disrespecting his other, newer wife, Masooma, in front of 50 witnesses at a wedding reception. "I was humiliated and beaten, because I was not happy about his second marriage," the abused spouse named Kalsoom told the Tribune. "How can someone expect me to celebrate such an occasion? ... I was scared that if I refused him permission he would kill me and my children. He had threatened to do so several times, so I

said I wouldn't oppose the second marriage." One witness to the violence stated: "Everyone just stayed silent and looked on. Then [the husband] shaved her head and eyebrows and painted her face black. He kicked her out of the house with her three children." In yet another similar case, in Faisalabad, Pakistan, a man shaved his wife's head for allegedly "disrespecting" his parents. "I was frustrated and angry, so I removed her hair. I cannot tolerate disrespect toward my parents, no matter who does it," the husband named Shehzad told police. The couple had only been married for a few months. The bride, Saadia, claimed her husband and in-laws had physically abused her and threw her out of their house. The shaving of women's heads as a manifestation of society's rage at perceived wrongdoing is not unknown in the West either. In fact, such practices in Europe date back to the early Middle Ages as a "mark of shame," frequently as punishment for committing adultery.

149

Despite the fact that women are expected to remove their hair elsewhere on an ongoing basis, for a woman to remove the hair on her head is deemed a clear sign of psychiatric illness. In the small town of Huanglou, near Guilin, the role of women and their hair takes on a different but no less important role. For Yao women, the rituals surrounding their hair have transcended their original purpose (to symbolise their fertility and marital status) and instead become the principle way the town earns money in a 21st century economy. A girl's hair is never cut until she comes of age (at around 18.) At that point, it's lopped off in one go and kept somewhere safe. As she bears children, she changes her hairstyle and threads together the hair of her childhood with her current growing locks. By the time she reaches the matriarchal

stage of life, her hair reaches down to the floor, a shimmering, threaded collection of gloss.

Arizona State University sociologist Rose Weitz says "Hair is huge," who has just published a major sociological examination of this popular subject, *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us about Women's Lives*. The book is based on historical research, observations at hair salons, interviews with 74 girls and women and a variety of focus groups. Weitz's study examines hair's relationship to sexuality, age, race, social class, health, power, and religion, among other things. "Our hair is one of the first things others notice about us and one of the primary ways we declare our identity to them." According to Weitz, hair can play this role for three basic reasons. "It is personal, growing directly out of our bodies," she said. "It is public, on view for all to see. And it is malleable, allowing us to change it more or less at whim. As a result, it's not surprising that we use our hair to project our identity and that others see our hair as a reflection of our identity. "There is a wealth of research data that says that attractive people, but especially attractive women, get better grades in school, more dates, more marriage proposals, higher salaries, better job offers, and so on."

Most women feel like a prisoner to their hair. Whether it is body shape, skin color, or clothing choices, society has laid out a very clear and stringent rulebook regarding what beauty looks like for females. And this rulebook of beauty ideals is shared with us at a very young age. After all, shouldn't little girls learn first and foremost that they are prized for their beauty above all else?

Jasmine, Ariel, Pocahontas, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel. What do all of these Disney princesses have in common? Long, silky, beautiful hair. And we all know that

girls are supposed to want to be princesses, and that boys want to marry them. But the conditioning doesn't stop there. Women are expected to be as feminine as beauty pageant queens, and also as sexy as video vixens. And in both cases, long hair has always been perceived as the pinnacle of a woman's femininity and sex appeal.

A woman who cuts her hair is cutting herself off of her own femininity and from being seen as sexual. And what good is a woman, in the eyes of society, if she isn't feminine and sexual – if she isn't built for the gratification of the male gaze? Children of all genders have been forced uniform images of what women should look like. And when the media only shows one form of beauty, it limits our thoughts and views on beauty. As women, we've been conditioned to think we are less “womanly” without long hair. And because men have been conditioned to think that femininity is associated with long hair, a woman with short hair is a direct threat to femininity – and that is a threat to masculinity. And the patriarchy hates that. So it's no wonder so many women fear cutting their hair! There are “negative” connotations associated to a woman stepping outside the beauty standard and cutting her hair short. It makes them look boyish and thus will repel the attraction of males.

Gender is a social construct. And it's complicated. Think about it: Romance novel covers glorify men with long hair. Johnny Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is hailed as overwhelmingly attractive. And plenty of male rock stars have long hair. And none of them are thought of as feminine. So can't the opposite be true as well? People also think that women with short hairs are Lesbians. Being a lesbian is only thought of as negative in our society because it challenges hegemonic masculinity. The idea that a woman can be happy with another woman is

threatening to male dominance and power. Many assume that short-haired women are crazy. For women who dare to break the mold and cut their lovely tresses, society likes to depict them as insane. Miley Cyrus came under the same scrutiny when she decided to cut her (admittedly perfectly aumbred) Hannah Montana locks. Emma Watson, Anne Hathaway, Vannessa Hudgens, Rhianna, and Beyonce have been either called crazy or their hair has been described as “crazy short.” Because in a world where there is an immense pressure for women to look, act, and feel a certain way, when any woman decides to do something for herself and herself only, it is crazy.

Women today are told to be afraid of our legs and feel guilty for eating on the way to work, to hate our vaginas and our skin colour at the same time, and are even made to deal with anti-abortion protests outside of clinics because the men with power choose to regulate women’s bodies. Women have voices. Women have bodies too, and body hair is fast becoming our war paint. “Armpits4August” believe that we should be deeply concerned that we live in society where hair on adult women is seen as shocking and disgusting, to say nothing of the pressure this places on women to uphold this idealised image of beauty, and the time and money it takes to maintain this illusion. Over the past year there has been a resurgence in body-hair activism and discussion within the feminist community. From the appearance of Those Pesky Dames – a video-blogging collective – on Cherry Healey’s ‘How to Get a Life’ on BBC3, to Emer O’Toole’s spot on This Morning, to the Armpits4August campaign launched over the summer which encouraged women to stop shaving in order to raise money and awareness for Polycystic Ovary Syndrome charity Verity, the image of the

hairy-legged, bushy-pitted feminist has returned unapologetically.

However, it is still the case that whenever an unshaven woman 'dares' to show her body hair in public, she is met with a barrage of criticism regarding her appearance. Amidst these hysterical cries which denounce body hair on women as dirty, unhygienic, 'unnatural' or 'unfeminine', there are two recurring themes, both of which centre around the notion of 'free choice': firstly, the claim that a woman is free to stop shaving her arms/legs/pubic area so long as she 'accepts' the fact that no man will ever find her sexually attractive again; secondly, the statement made by some women who say 'but I choose to continue shaving as it just looks and feels better!'

Secondly, many women 'choose' to continue removing their body hair, but to what extent can this be considered a free choice within a patriarchal, capitalist society? When every single media image we see of women is hairless and shaved, waxed or photo-shopped to perfection? When hairy women are derided both online and offline for the state of their body? When waxing salons offer their services to pre-teens, and firms such as Gillette spend millions of pounds every year on marketing? Body hair removal did not become a widespread practice in modern Europe until the 1920s, when hemlines rose and sleeveless dresses came into fashion. Razor manufacturers at the time saw this as an opportunity to create a new market, and soon started putting out adverts to stimulate demand for hair-removal products. Patriarchy and capitalism worked (and continue to work) together in order to foster insecurities in women and thus encourage them to buy more products. And because the idealised image of a hairless woman is impossible to maintain, women are encouraged not only to perpetually spend money on depilatory practices but also



to participate in a never-ending, time-consuming cycle of hair removal.

Analyzing the history of the feminine hair and how it transformed through ages and civilizations; how rules about the hair became different for men and women and how biology itself is altered by culture brings us to the fact that the patriarchal society has moulded woman into what it has wanted her to be through the tool of the hair. Feminists of the day using the caliban's method uses the self same hair to give their reply to centuries of suppression. The hair that was a symbol of her fertility, purity, sexuality, faith in god, prestige, love, oppression torture and what not becomes the symbol of her resistance and attack.

154

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