

2022

A JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Conspectus

A Journal of English Studies

2022

VOLUME 16



Research Centre, Department of English
St. Thomas College (Autonomous),
Thrissur, Kerala, India



Vol. 16. 2022

CONSPECTUS

A Journal of English Studies

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A Journal of English Studies

Volume 16, 2022

An international peer-reviewed academic journal published annually by the Research Centre & PG Department of English, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Kerala, India.

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Cover Design by Arjun Anand

Production, layout and printed at Educare, Thrissur, Kerala.

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Regn. KERENGO1731/11/1/2004-TC

ISSN 0973 0990

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Through Lefebvre's Window: Research Space(s) without 'Frames' of Theory

—Kalaivani Karunakaran

Abstract: This paper addresses two important problems in literary research: a misconception that theoretical framework is imperative for a research and the inclination towards Western theoretical realms. Contextualizing these problems and drawing a parallel with Literary Spatial Studies, this paper emphasizes on the need to understand the subjectivity of research, ideas and theories. It also foregrounds the significance of native researches and how they go unnoticed due to the dominance of the Western theoretical realms. Most importantly, drawing a parallel between the realm of Literary Spatial Studies and literary research, it also foregrounds the individuality of ideas and 're'search which may not always fit into the fixed frames of theory. Thus, it foregrounds that theoretical texts are rooted in subjective ideas, rooted in one's own social, geographical, economical realms. These frames can be used as modals but not all the research works – rooted in a different geographical and social milieu – can fit into these frames.

Keywords: Space, Literary spaces, Geocriticism, Lefebvre, Kudavayil Balasubramanian, Theory.

The contemporaneous realm of research is caught within frames of theory, which undermines the natural evolution of research. This inculcates a misconception that theory is an inevitable base for research. Most importantly, the bias towards the western theorists pushes behind the native knowledge system and research, for they are not 'theorized'. Hence, there is a need to understand the interconnections between theory and research and to identify and acknowledge native knowledge system, which can disillusion the Western hegemony over theory and theory dominance over research.

In this context, this paper scrutinizes the nature and evolution of theory and research in the context of spatial literary studies, traces an analogy between Spaces and research and foregrounds the significance of research without the frames of theory. Firstly, it problematizes ‘application of theory’ in research and emphasizes how research becomes incongruous when it is forced into a theoretical framework. Secondly, it scrutinizes the significance of ‘idea’ and subjective thinking and highlights the significance of native knowledge system, which goes unnoticed under the hegemony of the western theoretical frameworks. Thirdly, it scrutinizes the significance of the evolution of Literary Spatial Studies and emphasizes how Spaces opened up avenues to foreground native ideas without necessitating the western theoretical frameworks. Finally, this article illustrates Kudavayil Balasubramanian’s temple architecture, which can be paralleled with the geocritical approach of the West. It concludes that idea and subjective thinking is the genesis of research and theory. So, it is highly essential to trace and acknowledge ideas in any form. Harnessed with the prejudiced notion of theory and the hegemony of western theoretical frameworks, research can never take up its natural course. Thus, it is essential to understand and acknowledge the original ideas and let research take on its natural course, transgress borders and form new realms of research.

The Tension between ‘Text’ and ‘Context’

“Periyammavin Sorkal” a short story by Jeyamohan is a humorous portrayal of a villager’s attempt to teach English to an old lady. His attempts to define English words with the native examples available make the story hilarious. For instance, to teach the definition of the words like ‘thanks’ and ‘gratitude’, he refers to the old lady’s pet dog. She

gets irritated as none of the qualities can be associated with *her* dog. On goes the story with several such helpless attempts and how the old lady finds the words' definitions and the tools used to define them incongruous. This may seem to be an ordinary story. However, when close-read, this is highly analogous to the way theory works in several research contexts. Theoretical writings are generally contextual – a response to the social, political and economical paradigms and their shifts in a particular geographical territory. Not all such contextualized responses can be used to define research from an entirely different milieu. Research, forced within such frames of theory, operates on another major misconception – the inclination towards the western thinking models. Such a biased notion fails to notice the native knowledge system, which leads to serious a 're'search gap.

Contextualizing this, this paper draws a parallel between Space(s) and research. The following part of the article reveals how thinking and ideas are universal, though there are no temporal or geographical interconnections between them.

Looking for the 'Frames' 'Out there': Western Hegemony and Theory

La. Sa. Ra (Lalgudi Saptarishi Ramamrutham) is a Tamil writer. In the preface to his short story collection *Janani* (2012) writes:

My dear friend,

The conventional sentence, "All the characters and incidents portrayed in this book are fictitious" is a downright lie, for no one can help referring to others. So, in any of these stories or pages or sentences or words or the suffocating silence

caught between two words, you will find out yourself. (...)

I write about you and me. It can never be otherwise. I am just a medium for these stories to reveal themselves. Once they are revealed, I turn into someone like you. I am not the reason for this book. It's *you*. (...)

From now on these stories are *yours*. (my trans.; 5-7)

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This preface where the author renounces his 'authorial powers' cannot be read just like any other preface. Instead of asserting himself as the creator of characters and bestowing 'lives' upon them, the writer acknowledges the 'source' of his writings, renounces his rights over the text and hands them over to the readers. Once the act of 'writing' is completed, he just leaves just like a performer who would leave the stage when their scene is over. Similarly, after writing, the 'role' of readers begins. In short, he hands over the text to the readers. Scrutinizing this renunciation – disclaiming any authorial powers – draws striking similarities to the phenomenal, ground-breaking piece of work – Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" (1967). Both highlight two important ideas: the significance of 'undoing' of author and the role of reader in rewriting a text. However, the way these pieces 'present' the idea needs to be scrutinized. In La. Sa. Ra's preface, it reads more like a personal note whereas "Death of the Author" reads serious and offers theoretical framework. Apart from this, it is a response to the social, literary and theoretical evolutionary phases in its contemporaneous milieu.

For instance, Barthes' very notion of 'author' itself has contextual boundaries: "The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the

Middle Ages with English Empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'"(143). Thus, the author is the product of a particular social milieu – an important phase of intellectual exploration of the very ideas of author and text. To illustrate these context-based ideas, Barthes depends on the examples from French Literature, with which he was familiar. To a reader, who is not familiar with French Literature, deciphering these references and understanding the idea behind them will be a strenuous task. That is, the textual references, which are supposed to simplify the idea, work just the opposite. However, in the case of La. Sa. Ra's preface, the idea is raw without contextual references and thus direct and clear.

Besides, the way La. Sa. Ra puts forth the idea of 'reading' – how he hands over the text to the readers – is smooth whereas Barthes' rendition of the same idea reads hostile, exercising a violence on the very notion of author: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). It is so surprising that whether Barthes was sure if his own text offers any space for reading(s) at the cost of the death of the author. Aiming to overthrow the hegemony of authorial powers, Barthes himself establishes his own authorial powers. There are no such discrepancies in La. Sa. Ra's preface. To summarize, a single idea takes up two different modes of expression – as a raw and direct idea and as context-based idea. Scrutinizing these texts reveals two important notions: ideas are not bound to any geographical or temporal segments and when ideas are legitimized as a part of a theoretical tradition, they are used as theoretical frameworks whereas when it remains just as an 'idea' it goes unnoticed. Thus, it is important to 're'search for the

native models of 'ideas' instead of looking for the western frames – out of con'text'. Thus, an idea can occur in differently unrelated realms with varied geographical, temporal and social contexts. The following part of the article continues to explore the notion of ideas and research – drawing a parallel between theoretical frameworks and Literary Spatial Studies.

To sum up, the kernel of a theoretical writing is subjective thinking and it can be said that theoretical writing is just one way of expressing this idea. For instance, Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1958). This also highlights that 'idea' need not necessarily be west-centred. In other words, a research need not necessarily stick to the western frameworks. The following part of the article foregrounds such native archetypes. Close-examining the architectural explorations of Kudavayil Balasubramanian, it traces the spatiality his research.

Reconstructing Geographies without 'Geocritical' Frames

Kudavayil Balasubramanian's archaeological explorations through the South Indian temples close-read and unravel the most interesting segments of history. Surprisingly, it is not just history i.e. time which his explorations reveal but more of Space(s). Exploring the spatiality of his archaeological explorations – which is closer to geocriticism – this part of the article foregrounds how similar research archetypes can exist in different unrelated geographical and temporal segments.

His *Rajarajecharam* (2015) is an architectural study of the Big temple of Tanjore. However, unlike other such works on the temple, *Rajarajecharam* close-examines and decodes the architectural structure with historical, social

and religious documents. An architectural study gradually turns out to be a close-reading of the architectural space and demonstrates how it yields 'meanings'. This 're'search from the entrance till the inner sanctum reintroduces the temple as a multi-layered text. This reading of Space as a text is an important aspect of the contemporaneous Literary Spatial Studies. Traces of the same can be found in the 20th century literary milieu of Paris, which reverberated the important Spatial-turn. Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (1978) is one such text, which explores a fictional Parisian apartment and gradually unravels the spatiality and simultaneity of lives. One can draw a striking parallel between these texts in the way they explore, close-examine Spaces and reveal how they are multi-layered texts.

Similarly, Kudavayil Balasubramanian's *Tanjore* (1995) explores the city's space of Tanjore through time. Close-examining the literary, religious, architectural and social documents and evidences available on Tanjore, it retraces the Tanjore of Chola period and its evolution. Beginning with the very word 'Tanjore' and close-examining inscriptions, literary and religious texts, historical references, the very geography of the Tanjore of the Chola period is reconstructed:

Kodi Vanamudayan highway and the Veera Chozha Vadavaru mark the western boundaries. Now, Kodi Vanamudayan highway is the path which runs West from the banks of Vennaru till the Northern entrance of Tanjore. This also marked the western boundaries of the land donated by those from the Thondai mandalam. Hence, it is clear that the present western Karandhai was composed of these parts of Tanjore in the olden days. Along with this

highway, the Eastern and Western boundaries of the river were also referred to as the boundaries. Thus, the river which cut across the land between these four boundaries, didn't flow from the west to east in a straight line but turned towards the south and then flew eastwards. (my trans.; 75)

These references to boundaries may not give a comprehensible picture to a reader, who is not familiar with the study. However, one can trace how these references oscillate between versions of the same space in different temporal segments – the same space in the present day and the Chola period. It is this oscillation which marks how the study reconstructs geographies and attempts to draw a picture of the space and its evolutionary phases through time. One cannot miss the striking similarities between geocriticism discussed by Robert Tally and Bertrand Westphal. They list out the elements of geocriticism which looks like a map for the geocritical explorations of a literary text: geocentered approach, interdisciplinary approach, multifocalization, polysensoriality, stratigraphic vision.

All these aim at taking up varied sources to explore a literary space. The versions of Spaces available through non-literary documents, literary texts which belong to different periods, spaces defined by different sensuous experiences are the source of a geocritical approach. It is evident that it juxtaposes several spatial perceptions and attempts to (re)construct Spaces based on them. Surprisingly, this is what Tanjore also does. Juxtaposing all the sources available on Tanjore, it tries to reconstruct the space(s). It is to be noted that none of these sources are cartographical. All the references to the boundaries, landscapes, rulers and location of the temples are

descriptive. Yet, they prove to be resourceful in the reconstruction of the space(s). The striking similarities between an archaeological study of temple and a city and geocriticism highlight the simultaneity of the emergence of ideas and also foreground the need to 're'search for native ideas. Spatial studies and research need not necessarily be centred in the French or Western realm. There are several spatial explorations without any theoretical labels. Concluding part of the article draws a parallel between Spaces and research.

Spaces: Mapping Research

The analogue of Space(s) can be used to illustrate the nature of research and its problems. Before that it is important to trace an important course of Space(s) themselves. Unlike other theoretical frameworks, Space(s), spatial studies and the 'turn' towards Space highlight a heightened sense of spatial 'consciousness'. Fundamentally, spatial research is subjective, apart from being an academic response to one's contemporaneous theoretical and intellectual realms. Edward Soja hints at this underlying subjectivity. In his *Third Space ()*, he delves into the life of Henri Lefebvre and traces the outlines of the evolution of his spatial insights.

He writes, "Without ever using the specific term, Lefebvre was probably the first to discover, describe, and insightfully explore Thirdspace as a radically different way of looking at, interpreting, and acting to change the embracing spatiality of human life" (29).

Though Lefebvre spent his life in Paris, he always associated himself with his home, Occitania, where he finds his roots. Soja illustrates how Lefebvre's "peripheral

consciousness”, which influenced and defined his spatial perception and culminated as spatial theories later on (30). He writes illustrating how his spatial theories were shaped by his own Spaces:

This was the relation between the “conceived” and “lived”, or as he would later describe it, between the “representations of Space” and the “spaces of representation.” (...) *He saw these two dialectical pairings (center-periphery, conceived-lived) as homologous, arising from the same sources, and often mapped them directly on one another in the contexts of his own personal life.* (30)

This foregrounds that spatial consciousness and perception are highly subjective. Though Lefebvre’s works do not reveal any traces of subjectivity, they are rooted in the way he perceived his spaces. Close-examining other spatial thinkers and researchers also hint at this subjectivity: every spatial insight foregrounds one’s spatial consciousness – how an individual perceives Space and its evolution.

Soja also highlights another important aspect of this subjectivity, which is one of the kernel ideas of this paper. He states that Lefebvre’s spatial theory, which were the results of his spatial practices “... often irksomely incomprehensible to those positioned more steadfastly at one or the other pole” (30). Spaces and thus spatial consciousness and perception are wide apart. Thus, Lefebvre’s spatial definitions – rooted in his subjective spatial perception – can be seen as a record of spatial consciousness theorized but this cannot be used as a ‘framework’, for spatial perception is highly individual. One cannot live and experience, following Lefebvre’s

model. Or rather one's own spatial perception tends to be volatile. Space means differently and there can be no fixed frameworks for spatial consciousness but temporary models. It is important to understand the fundamentals of Space(s) and spatial consciousness to understand the analogy between research and Spaces.

Spaces are ineliminable, simultaneous and they constantly evolve, negating fixed frames. Similarly, research is also ineliminable and finding already existing research and theoretical frames and forcing one's ideas into them may not always make up a proper research. Spaces are simultaneous and so are ideas and research. As mentioned earlier, the same can emerge in different realms irrespective of the geographical and temporal disconnectedness. Acknowledging this simultaneity also foregrounds there is no need for a fixed 'centre' (which space(s) are constantly in conflict with). As spaces are in constant evolution, they cannot be confined to a fixed frame. They are always on the move – transgressing borders. Similarly, research need not necessarily be fixed to a particular framework.

Thus, drawing an analogy between research and Space, this article concludes that there is a need to 're'view the course of research without forcing into a theoretical frame. On its natural course research finds its own frames. It also problematizes the hegemony of Western theoretical realm, which with the native ideas forced into, can make the research incongruous. It also foregrounds the significance of native intellectual realms, which go unnoticed in the peripheral spaces of the western theoretical centers. To conclude, one cannot look at one's spaces through Lefebvre's window. Similarly, research cannot be confined into incongruous theoretical frames.

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Decoding the Dark Academia: A Subcultural Analysis of Select Narratives

—Salini K.

Abstract: From Teddy Boys to Cybergoths the history of youth subcultures across the world has undergone various changes in terms of their nature of deviation, expressions, and values held. With the incorporation of technology, even into the most mundane of human activities, the way these youth subcultures communicate, organise, and participate has also changed. Widely understood as an aesthetic and lifestyle popularised by major social media and blogging platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr and TikTok, most studies related to Dark Academia primarily focus on studying it as a subculture. A phenomenon made possible due to the accessibility allowed by the time's advancements, Dark Academia is still a nostalgic longing for the bygone. By trying to recreate an ideal world where learning, particularly of the classics, is romanticized, the Dark Academia prioritizes an unrealistic view of an academy life where conversations on the marginalized are often understood to be side-lined, due to its apparently Eurocentric outlook.

This paper is an attempt to locate two of the most important literary works that belong to the Dark Academia aesthetic, that is, Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and M. L. Rio's *If We Were Villains* within the existing array of subcultural studies. This paper will also look at the cultural paradigms, styles, and symbols communicated through these novels and how these are reflected and promoted within social media platforms.

Keywords: Subculture, Dark Academia, Social media, Cultural Paradigms, Symbols.

The earliest studies on youth subcultures by the Sociology scholars at Chicago School in the 1920s and later, by the Birmingham School, focused on the delinquent nature by which a subculture differed from a parent culture. Since the primary aim of their studies was to address the issues

prevalent in the then society, most of their inferences regarding youth subcultures were rooted in the time's societal inequalities and prejudices. Albert Cohen's theory of status frustration is an example where he emphasizes the deviant adaptations as the results of frustrations that follow the youth's sense of injustice frequently related to lack of privileges that aids one's goals (Roach 502). Compared to the Chicago School studies, Birmingham School focused on reading youth subcultures through the lens of Neo-Marxism and helped to lessen the negative associations that revolved around such groups. The early examples of Punks and Emos to today's Cottagecore and E-boy/E-girl groups can all be studied within the framework of subcultural studies.

14 With the advent of social media and an abundance of post-subcultural studies, most online groups that exhibit subcultural behaviours are now generalised as neo-tribes. Considering class struggles as the leading cause of subculture formation undermines the uniqueness of individualism in the modern society, thus the argument of Muggleton, where he connects the youth identity of modern consumerist society to the individual choices (Bennet and Robards 304). The idea of neotribalism was popularised by French sociologist Michel Maffesoli. Maffesoli describes neotribes as a more fluid expression unconstrained by the institutional rigidity that is often part of organisational forms of communities, where the tribe refers to a lifestyle or a state of mind and that get expressed through form and appearances (305).

Groups formed thus, without the strict territorial identification which is a part of subcultures, particularly through online platforms, enable the participants to belong to a more fluid existence. They can belong to

multiple such tribes at a time and can exhibit characteristics that are indicative of all. While access to such platforms is still rooted in one's financial and social position, the nature of these groups is increasingly heterogeneous. Today we have various online platforms like Tumblr, TikTok, and Instagram that are favoured by youth and are important sites of self-expression. Dark Academia, initially a genre-inspired aesthetic, is now the name for a lifestyle and form of engagement. The New York Times article By Kristen Bateman describes Dark Academia as a subculture that revolves around the prominence of reading and learning in a young adult's life ('what is the TikTok').

The question of where to locate Dark Academia in the existing array of subcultural and post-subcultural studies would essentially lead us to the need for a more coherent understanding of its history. The establishment of the Dark Academia literary genre is a credit often given to Donna Tartt's 1992 novel *The Secret History*. The novel is a murder mystery centring on a group of youths attending an elite and eccentric college. Charismatic professors, a fascinating culture of reading, and an appreciation of art along with an unhealthy escape from the mundane are the major characteristics of the book. Consequently, the Dark Academia online culture also is a celebration of an idealised educational space, one normally revolving around historical universities. Although the origin of the trend itself is unclear, it has been popularly agreed that the blogging and social media platform called Tumblr founded in 2007 is where the concept got its initial followers. Later spreading to Instagram and Twitter, Dark Academia started gaining further attention when schools and colleges were shut down worldwide as part of the Covid lockdown. Essentially dark academia "captures a

kind of nostalgia for a life which is yet to be lived” (“What is the TikTok”). An idea of an alternate existence where one is an art or literature student in some old Classical educational institutions. Sometimes discussed as a subculture and lifestyle, and at other times not more than a trend or hashtag, Dark Academia is nevertheless exceedingly popular, and hence in need of proper theoretical positioning.

The 2007 work of Ken Gelder called *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practices* proposes six ways through which a subculture can be identified. He underlines how a subculture often exhibits a negative relation to work, where the idea of being at play is celebrated. The relation between a subculture and class divisions of the society are often ambivalent and unsure, while the same with territories is stronger. A subculture values certain territorial symbols like a specific street or a hood more than material properties like buildings. The traditional concept of home is not encouraged, instead a form of belonging that is increasingly non-domestic is sought and idealised. Opposed to moderations, a subculture revels in excess. The dull and predictable ordinary life is replaced by these exaggerations and it helps repel massification. (np)

Neotribes or postmodern tribes, as Maffesoli explains, is the postmodern counterpart of pre-modernity, facilitated by technological advancements. The common characteristics of a neotribe are similar to that of the etymological understanding of tribalism. They are sites of survival and solidarity, where by the very principle of sharing territories they get to create space where tastes can also be shared (Maffesoli 744). This sharing then helps convert these sites to ‘hotspots’ of play where one is given free reign over one’s tastes and passions. This structure of

an 'eternal child' further leads to understanding neotribes as a 'cult of youth' with accentuated clannish feelings, that create a community characterised by fragmentation and scattering. Where the binary between individual and society slowly disintegrates to make provisions for a space where boundaries between the self and the other is blurred. Maffesoli also talks about 'unicity', which refers to the "flexible and open coherence of heterogeneous elements" of these sites (Maffesoli 744-746).

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* takes place in the elite campus of the fictional Hampden College in Vermont, where the main characters are six studious Greek literature students. The setting has certain gothic elements to it, particularly in the descriptions of the architecture and the appearance of the main characters, who wear old-fashioned clothes normally avoided by college students. The six friends and their Greek teacher Julian prefer an isolated life. Julian is an eccentric professor who strictly demands his students to stop taking all other classes, thus cutting off their contact with the campus in general. M.L Rio's *If We Were Villains* published in 2017 shares a similar setting. The story unfolds in a fictional performing arts school called Dellecher Classical Conservatory and the seven main characters of the novel are final year theatre students obsessed with their entirely Shakespearian curriculum.

An isolated and mysterious location is an integral part of both stories. The strangely personal classroom settings with only the main characters as the students along with the somewhat dramatic way of thinking suit the sense of a secret club more than that of a normal college life. Even in *If We Were Villains*, the fourth year thespians live in an isolated dormitory called the Castle. The group keeps

secrets from others, while also hiding things from each other. Both the novels are inverted detective stories, where the murder and the identity of the victims are revealed at the beginning. The whole story then unfolds to answer the how.

The New York Times article introduces Dilara Schloz, a researcher of fashion history at the University of London, and an ardent follower of Dark Academia's subcultural aspects, and her observation of how the appearance of characters does not usually require a strict adherence to their gender. Camilla, the only girl of the group in *The Secret History* often wears androgynous vintage blazers, and Philippa, from *If We Were Villains*, is often playing male characters for their theatrical performances.

Another common theme is the obsession with the subject of interest. In *The Secret History*, the entire story revolves around classical texts. Richard Papen, begins his narration with an explanation of his Hamartia or fatal flaw, a concept introduced by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, indicating a tragic flaw of the protagonist that results in his final downfall. "Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw... exists outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does. And I think that mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque" (5). When the narrator of *If We Were Villains*, Oliver is asked by the police if their obsession with Shakespeare had anything to do with the murder, he replies, "I blame him for all of it" (251) and later he explains how for them everything was poetic.

The material within the texts they study slowly blends in to define their own story. In *The Secret History*, the first chapter itself foreshadows the end of the story. Julian's first class is about the primitive selves of human beings

and how repressing them in the name of civilization and society was a mistake that could only lead to the further strengthening of such urges. He equates beauty to terror, and with it celebrates the idea an absolute loss of control:

to throw off the chains of being for an instant...
with no more awareness of mortality than an
animal... and that to me, is the terrible seduction of
Dionysiac ritual. (44-45)

Dionysus assumes a space beyond borders, the demarcations drawn based on age, gender and thoughts are meaningless when it comes to Dionysus (Berberović³⁵). The Dionysiac rituals often are the attainment of an orgasmic pleasure, the creation of a trance-like presence caused by heavy intoxication. The novel talks about such a ritual, the consequences, and the tragic struggle to escape them.

In *If We Were Villains*, the validations for the characters' actions were all given in connection to Shakespeare and their life as actors. The way in which a Shakespearean character oscillates from one end to other of emotional extremities reflects in the behavioural patterns of the characters as well. The blurring of lines between an actor and a character and between real and imagined feelings, of how an actor feels tortured by both at the same time is the core concept of the novel and is elaborated with regards to an actor's mental space. The difficulty of having to live with "all your own thoughts and feelings tangled up with all the thoughts and feelings of a whole other person" (251) is explored along with the total inability of one to sort between the two.

The murder committed by James, who initially played only innocent characters towards the end transforms into someone who can play cruel roles, indicating how the level of darkness within character's minds are also increasing. The victim, Richard, who was one among the seven friends, who was equated to Caesar from the beginning, is too powerful and talented, just like Shakespeare's Caesar and this is later used to justify the murder. In the end, the plot of Julius Caesar, where friends betray and scheme to murder, becomes the story of the characters of the novel too.

The set of main characters in both novels exhibits strong subcultural behaviours. This can be further elaborated by applying Ken Gelder's understanding of Subcultures. The set of friends from both the novels exhibits negative relations to work or in their specific case, reality as such. The 'play' within which they engage is relevant to their subject matter alone. In *The Secret History*, we can see how each of them has a pattern of thinking heavily influenced by classic philosophic thoughts. Their constant tries to attain the pleasure of the unrestrained, frequent Bacchanals held at a country house and the final Dionysiac ritual that led to the murder of an innocent farmer, all these prove the essentiality of the role of 'play' in the life of these characters. An even more exaggerated version of this can be seen in *If We Were Villains*, where even the day to day conversations between the characters are extremely dramatic and poetical in nature, creating a Shakespearian effect. A simple 'it is getting dark' is replaced by "Tis now dead midnight" (10). And at other times the actual dialogues from the play become part of the real conversation within the novel. The way these characters are othered by the rest of the students on the campus, and by their own families is also proof of how

they are separated from the mainstream. Most students view them as either a studious group of elite students with an obsession or as icons of their field who must be viewed with respect. These forms of exaggeration and tries to constantly separate themselves from banalities are also strong signs of subcultural behaviours.

Since the earlier subcultures were the result of a rigorously divided society where class struggles defined youth experiences, most of them exhibited ambivalent relations with class. In fact, the initial intentions of the first subcultures were to deviate from the conventional ways, thus challenging the dominant ideologies. This is the reason why subcultures were initially explored as part of sociological studies regarding criminals. The novels, on the other hand, share a completely different outlook when it comes to such divisions. Except for the narrators of both the stories, all other characters come from privileged and educated elite families. The subjects of their obsession, whether it is classic literature or Shakespeare, are also of a certain elitist nature. The extremely private setting of the classrooms, the criteria for selecting students, and the way they were treated all indicated an upgradation of social status. Instead of challenging the mainstream, the ways of these characters were to separate and elevate themselves at an invisible altar. This is the reason why the narrators of the novels, Richard and Oliver, who were economically complete outsiders to such a framework, continuously felt like they did not belong. Both Richard and Oliver kept secrets about their family from their friends, pretending to be rich, but all the while tortured by the sense of inferiority this instilled.

Perhaps what makes the behaviours most subcultural is their strong association with a territory. Julian's class, held

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in his own office in an extremely private building called Lyceum, decorated with paintings and flowers, was restricted to anyone other than his six students. Described as a Platonic microcosm where everything was either vintage or extremely expensive. The dormitory of the main characters in *If We Were Villains*, the Castle again sets a similar mood. The dormitory along with a library almost belonged to the final year thespians and was filled with numerous shelves of Shakespeare's plays. A small godown for theatre properties and the dock by the lake in which the victim dies are all places frequented by the main characters. Mingling with other spaces, where different types of youth cultures combined together was regarded as a setback to their social status. None of these characters are close to their family, instead creating a sense of belonging with their chosen companions, the ones who understand their passion and way of thinking. Bonded over by a love of books, these friends find themselves tangled in levels of toxicity, sometimes love and sometimes hatred.

The characters in the novel while reflecting certain specific subcultural aspects also serve to be the model of a larger community that thrives through online media. A typical example of a Dark Academia feed on Instagram will include abandoned gothic buildings, students wearing vintage clothes engrossed in reading, Greek-style sculptures, and lots of books.

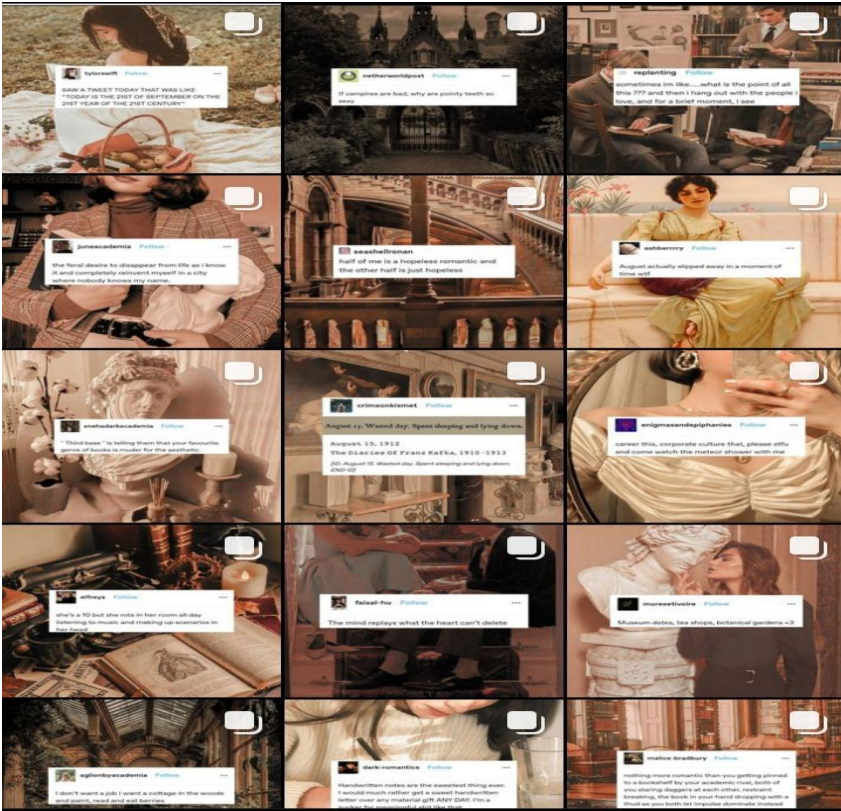


Fig. 1. whitmanstriebe. Instagram.

<https://www.instagram.com/whitmanstriebe/?hl=en>

Along with this, the abundance of style guides, offering suggestions on what to wear while being a part of Dark Academia can also be seen.



Fig. 2. deadpoetstrie. "Which one are you". *Instagram*, 24 August 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CERvSWuANgj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

An idealised and romantic mental space grounded in fictional worlds is commonly celebrated.

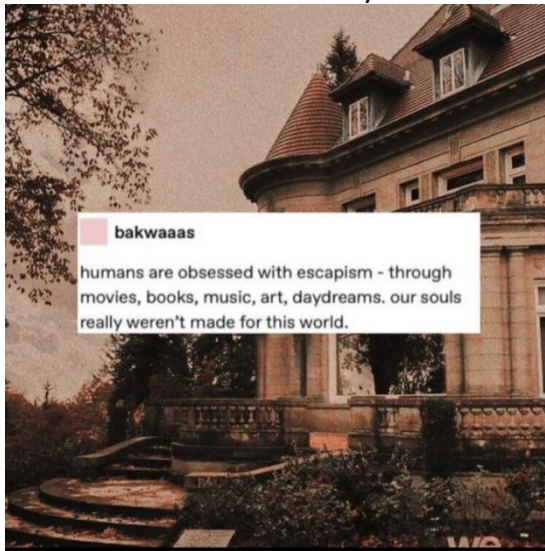


Fig. 3. whitmanstrie. "I'm the human version". *Instagram*, 11 May 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CdaE15-Lrgx/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

Suggestions on how to live the Dark Academia life are also provided.

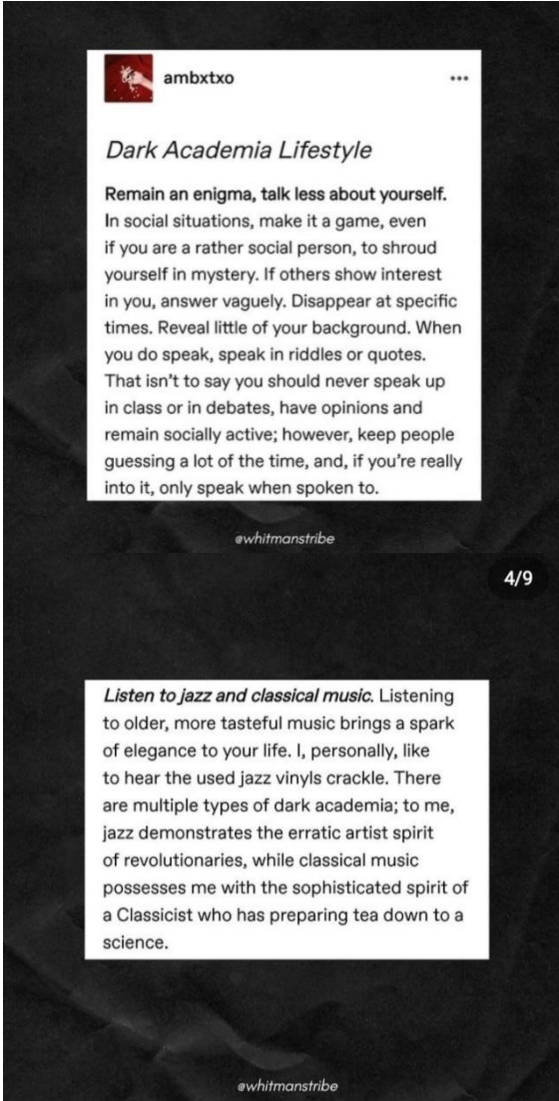


Fig. 4.whitmanstrie. "What more according to you". Instagram, 9 September 2020,<https://www.instagram.com/p/CE57xbmgJTy/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

The Dark Academia community that we see in these platforms cannot be taken as examples of subcultures even after various such comparisons primarily because of the fluidity these spaces offer. With the postmodern turn, there is negligible demarcation between the so-called high and low culture, creating a more fragmented cultural space. While the initial passion of the Dark Academia community was Western authors like Oscar Wilde and Mary Shelley, their social media existence is growing into a more global and inclusive presence. The following posts involve a combination of Indian and Dark Academia aesthetics, where two of India's most essential tradition is idealized.

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Fig. 5. whitmanstrie. "these days yearning". *Instagram*,
 10 November 2021,
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CWGa39elhxB/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Fig. 6. deadpoetstribе. "The Jewel of...". *Instagram*, 15 August

2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CD6N3SZgoKh/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Fig. 7.aesthintagee. “a guide to indian...”. *Instagram*, 2 November 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CHGCDJ0nzNw/=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

The Eurocentric attitude for which Dark Academia is often criticized is also being challenged when artists like Frida Kahlo are celebrated.

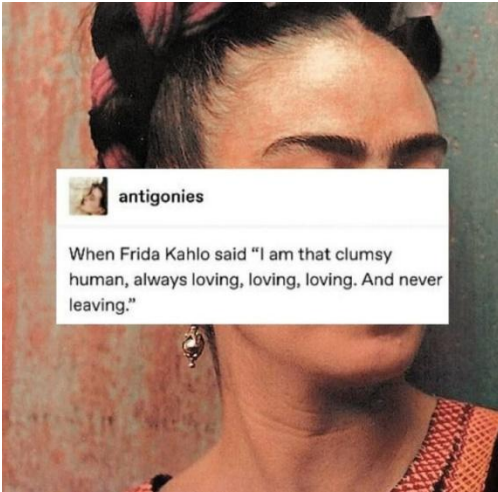


Fig. 8.whitmanstrie. "I am my own muse...", Instagram, 7 February 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CK_mZvIAKub/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

Most of the followers of Dark Academia are just people who love reading so much that, even when they are not part of esteemed art schools, are still able to create an alternate space where imagination and free play allow them to engross in an entirely different setting. This is a travel between spaces, from real to imaginary, an escapism rooted in a very real passion and interest.



Fig. 9. whitmanstrie. "Uffff summer never...". *Instagram*, 24 April 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcvV160vDr9/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

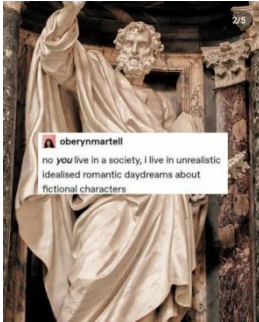


Fig. 10. whitmanstrie. "Cheers Bukowski". *Instagram*, 22 January 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CQbWpipLw_6/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

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By applying Maffesoli' ideas on neotribalism, we can say that Dark Academia is a 'cult of youth' engaging as a community characterised by fragmentation, where the boundaries between self and society, real and imaginary, are blurred. A space that exhibits 'unicity' and acts as a 'hotspot' where one is given free reign over one's tastes and passions. In the end, what we are seeing is a genre of books about a fictional subculture that was widely accepted and later modelled into a social media aesthetic and lifestyle which now is developing into a neotribe.

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Reading Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* through the lens of Mystical Realism

—Anamika Chakraborty

Abstract: *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni weaves the tale of the protagonist, Tilo, a young Indian migrating to the US. Tilo runs a spice shop in Oakland, California, disguised as a plain and elderly woman, where she meets fellow immigrants as well as Americans. As the story unravels it is found that Tilo has magical powers through which she can intercede into the life of her customers and her control over the spices enable her to heal them of their various troubles and complications. The spices talk to her, and they listen to her. Although Divakaruni's novel infuses magical elements into the real like those of Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) or Isabel Allende (*The House of the Spirits*)—all who have used magic realism in different ways in their works—Divakaruni relies more on mysticism to bring home the wondrous and the extra-ordinary into the commonplace and the ordinary.

This article aims at understanding what mystical realism is, how different it is from its more popular counterpart, magic realism, and reading *The Mistress of Spices* through the lens of mystical realism.

Keywords: Mystic realism, Immigrant, Diaspora, Communitarian, Healing.

The Mistress of Spices by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni weaves the tale of the protagonist, Tilo, a young Indian migrating to the US. Tilo runs a spice shop in Oakland, California, disguised as a plain and elderly woman, where she meets fellow immigrants as well as Americans. As the story unravels it is found that Tilo has magical powers through which she can intercede into the life of her customers and her control over the spices enable her to

heal them of their various troubles and complications. The spices talk to her, and they listen to her. Although Divakaruni's novel infuses magical elements into the real like those of Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) or Isabel Allende (*The House of the Spirits*)—all who have used magic realism in different ways in their works—Divakaruni relies more on mysticism to bring home the wondrous and the extra-ordinary into the commonplace and the ordinary. Her aim is to operate by drawing more of the internal powers of Tilo than the external powers of magic, gesturing towards a mysticism, largely personalized and oriental.

Magic, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is the “practice of attempting to produce supernatural effects or control events through the use of charms, spells or rituals”. Magic realism, as the term suggests, binds together daily events with the magical and extra-ordinary in a casual, matter-of-fact way. Magic realism has often been used in novels that deal with historical injustices or political inequalities. Though the term, magic realism, had been coined by Franz Roh, it is the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier who is credited with ushering in the technique of magic realism in the 1940s. Carpentier used the term ‘marvelous real’. This narrative technique gained popularity in Latin America in the hands of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortazar and others. Back home, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Gita Hariharan are among the more popular magic realist writers.

Magic realism is more of a narrative technique than a genre. This technique has been manipulated by Divakaruni through mysticism, more than through magic. Mysticism, explains *Webster's Dictionary* has a “spiritual reality; ...

relating to or stemming from a direct communication with God or with ultimate reality; or founded on subjective experience". Unlike magic, mysticism is founded on more of an interiority and is often believed that the outcome of human actions is closely linked to God. Divakaruni substitutes God with Tilo and her inherent belief in the power of the spices, and thus grants her the authority to use the spices on those who come to Tilo's grocery store. The rites that Tilo performs with the spices to be used on her customers are seldom a part of any tradition or culture or mythology. They are mostly advocated by Tilo herself. She hardly calls in myths, dream or fantasy to help her with her recipes of using the spices for her clients, but uses her own internalized belief-system. Through Tilo's mysticism, Divakaruni attempts to put Appadurai's words into practice: "liv[ing] in a world of many kinds of realisms...some are yet to be named" (53).

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Divakaruni weaves her narrative through Tilo's art of using the spices, that cohere with the greater power of the universe, to alleviate the troubles and sufferings that her customers go through. The spices talk to her, they listen to her; with their help she can avoid the disastrous ends that these people might otherwise experience. The problems that Divakaruni shows are mostly personal, and so the changes Tilo brings in are also not as huge as a change in history or politics, something that magic realism would. Employing mystical realism, Divakaruni works on a personal and a much smaller scale wherein she mostly addresses the psychological needs of the customers, primarily immigrants. She makes Tilo the "mistress of the spices", who manipulates the mystical power of the spices and drives her characters in the hope of a happy ending in their respective lives. Divakaruni places Tilo and her mysticism in the heart of multicultural America which

might seem to be extremely ambitious. Maybe that is the reason she resorts to orientalism, so that her readers get the framework for understanding Tilo's actions. The deeper meaning of the novel can be framed through the oriental images, and Divakaruni hopes that the readers' familiarity with the oriental markers will help them grasp the mysticism inherent in the novel.

As the novel unfurls, we come across a whole gamut of rich and complex characters, most of who come to the spice shop as customers. Tilo's narrative moves ahead with the help of these characters, where she is the pivot, the "mistress of spices" and the characters revolve around her like spokes of a wheel, taking her narrative forward. The narrative is not in an organized and linear fashion, but non-linear, and episodic, at times chaotic too. Tilo and her journey exist in different phases, that begin in India, and via an enchanted island to America. It is on that island that she encounters her mentor, First Mother, and according to her will she comes to the dilapidated spice store in Oakland. In the Oakland shop, one of her first customers is Haroun, a Muslim taxi driver from Kashmir who wants his "palm read" (27). Soft spoken Haroun is badly beaten up and slurred racially, but in the course of his journey meets Hameeda, a beautiful Pakistani girl, whose husband has left her. Issues related to migration and relocation also come to the fore in Mrs. Ahuja's case. She is another customer visiting Tilo's shop and immediately as Tilo sees her, she reads newly-married Mrs. Ahuja's predicament through her supernatural mystic powers—a battered wife whose husband vents his frustration of not being able to cope in "Amreekah" (65) by regularly abusing her physically and through marital rape. We also come across the young Bengali girl, Geeta Banerjee who is in love with a Mexican-American guy named Juan Cordero, much to

the annoyance of her parents and grandfather who are afraid because she is “marrying a white man” (92). Maybe because she locates her novel in the heart of America, the characters whom Divakaruni brings to the spice shop are those whose troubles and problems arise mostly as a result of dislocation and relocation, no matter how personal their issues might seem to be. We can see that in the case of Jagjit and his Sikh mother, who are regular visitors to the store. Jagjit faces racial humiliation in school and both are unsure and uncomfortable in this new land. Apart from these Indians, there is the African-American “dark warrior” (60), Kwesi, who teases Tilo into venturing into the unfamiliar and the unknown. Among Tilo’s other customers are the young and sexy bougainvillea girls and the westernized Indians with their brittle infective laughter. For the first time they fill Tilo with envy as they flirt with Raven in front of her. And then, finally, there is Raven, the native-American who is fully enticed by Tilo, and seduces her to fall in love with him too.

Tilo’s purpose in the novel is to ease the pain of those who come to her shop, who do not tell Tilo about the pain they are undergoing, but Tilo understands through her mystic supernatural powers. These characters are neither fully fleshed out, nor do they ever interact with each other. Despite having no connection with each other, all of them, except Raven, have one thing in common—they are all diasporic characters whose hopes, desires and pain bind them together as diasporic, marginalized entities. Through Tilo’s own internal subjective mechanism of belief she tries to alter the external reality of the characters around her. For example, she consoles an anguished Haroun by telling him that “great things will happen to you in this new land, this America” (28). Within her, she knows that she can do it because she “can make it all happen, green cards and

promotions.... I [am] Tilo, the architect of the immigrant dream” (29). In the initial pages, Tilo claims: “I am a Mistress of Spices.... I know their origins, and what their colors signify, and their smells. I can call each by their true-names given at first, when the earth split like skin and offered it up to the sky” (3).

The mystic tone of the novel emanates from Tilo’s belief that her spices contain supernatural powers, that they are endowed with the cosmic powers of the universe that gives these spices not only the power to heal but can also bring along horrific misery if they are refuted. Tilo’s narrative of the spices is intrinsically her own. Thus, in her narrative she identifies her ‘fiery’ romance with Raven to *lanka*, or “dry chilli” which is the “most potent of spices” and makes everything “most beautiful” wherever it is used, but it is also a cause of fear as “its other name is danger” (39). Tilo is certain that the cause of the 1989 San Francisco earthquake that caused havoc is a result of her enraging the *lanka*. The mystic runs side by side with the realistic, which comes from Tilo’s sense of self and her belief that she can bring about change, not only in the lives of those who come to her shop, but also to the things around her. Her agency comes from her knowledge to use the “purest of spices...for times of special need” (7). Tilo declares, “I will chant. I will administer. I will try to remove sadness and suffering (7). But she also adds: “I will deliver warning” (7). Just like the novel is balanced between the mystic and the real, Tilo too is, on the thin line that she knows separates “the potency of mysticism from the power of reality” (Rajan 219), because she is aware that life often is double-edged, with real people and their real identities extending into “virtual spaces and places” (Rajan 219). As Tilo ponders, “Sometimes I wonder if there is such a thing as reality, an objective and untouched nature of

being. Or if all that we encounter has already been changed by what we had imagined it to be. If we had dreamed it into being” (17).

Divakaruni shows Tilo to exist in both the real and mystic planes. Her spice shop is in the heart of California, a place that abounds with multicultural identities, issues of dislocation and relocation, and racial violence. The book is also a critique on the ‘new’ America, its dark alleys behind the shining façade. Divakaruni fuses myth and reality, the new and the old to weave a complex narrative replete with fact, fiction, history, superstition, reality, immorality, and morality. The book highlights the different generations of immigrants and the fundamental difference between them, e.g., the difference between the first wave of European settlers and the later downpour of unwanted, overpopulated immigrants, highlighted in Tilo’s comment: “I should understand without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave behind when they came to America” (5). On the one hand Divakaruni locates the shop with its mystic spices in the heart of the geographically real California, on the other she makes the American Indian Raven pair with Indian American Tilo, thus focussing the readers’ attention on what America represents today. Oakland and California are more than mere locations, and Raven, Tilo and others more than just characters—they have become symbols of an inclusive world despite issues and differences.

The blending of the real and mystical in *The Mistress of Spices* serves another purpose—it re-establishes the narrative of colonial expansion through spice trade. The colonial spice route becomes Tilo’s entry point into occidental America from the oriental island, Tilo becoming the postcolonial spice mistress. And in this colonised-

coloniser dichotomy, the powerless colonised is re-imagined as having unlimited agency and potency in the shape of 'the mistress of spices'. But in doing so, Divakaruni, not for once, forgets the actual condition of the immigrants strewn across America, represented by the characters visiting the spice store. Through her complex mystical narrative Divakaruni allows Tilo the fluidity to move between the belief of her subjective world and the objective reality of her Oakland settlement where her experiences relating to migration, race, gender and diaspora help her negotiate the outcome of the events that unfurl in the course of the novel. In the initial pages of the novel itself Tilo is aware of the distressed conditions of the minority communities in America, and the words Divakaruni chooses for Tilo, herself an immigrant belonging to the minority community, to describe the location of her shop speaks about this fact:

Turn the crooked corner of Esparanza where the Oakland buses hiss to a stop you will see it. Perfect-fitted between the narrow-barred door of Rosa's Weekly Hotel, still blackened from a year-ago fire, and Lee Ying's Sewing Machine and Vacuum Cleaner Repair, with the glass cracked between the R and the e. grease-smudged window. Looped letters that say SPICE BAZAAR faded into a dried-mud brown. Inside, walls veined with cobwebs where hang discoloured pictures of gods, their sad shadow eyes. (4)

The passage refers indirectly to the Indians, the Chinese and the Mexican, or in other words, the unwanted immigrants. It is interesting to see how Divakaruni uses the word "hiss" in relation to Oakland to bring home America's attitude towards these unwanted aliens

infiltrating their land. Aware of the stereotypical immigrant lives, Tilo retreats to the recesses of her spice shop and delves into her spices to bring about change. She takes refuge in the mystical power of the spices, which in turn give her the power to function in the underbelly of the 'real' America. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, America "is a land in flux", because of the continuous infiltration of unwanted immigrants. It a land "with a mythic past and epic present" (Rajan 221), a land that despite all its multiculturalism, still remains in a state of "liquid modernity" (Bauman 290).

It is Tilo's belief in the mystical power of the spices that gives her hope against the anger and violence around her. It allows her to act and behave differently from the other migrated characters that we come across in the novel. Tilo's fluidity gives her the agency not only to change herself but also the diasporic, exiled, indigenous or immigrant characters who come to her spice shop. In another way, it is also a fact that Tilo's mysticism is under constant pressure to function convincingly in a real world with real surroundings. If Tilo takes the responsibility to make the world around her a better place to live, she must be the agent of change herself, "flowing" to the territory of mysticism by accepting and adapting to the real situations. In order to "flow" towards the mystic end, ethical conduct becomes necessary, especially in the modern globalized world, but Divakaruni seems to have reworked and restructured the traditional meaning of ethics. Traditionally speaking, ethics is based on the absolute parameters of good and bad, right, and wrong, and sometimes quasi-religious conducts too come into play in order to decide between right and wrong. But Tilo's idea of ethics is different—her idea of ethics is more communitarian, which is more required in the fractured

Oakland space. Throughout the novel she defines and redefines her own version of ethics, spirituality and mysticism, sometimes faltering, but always keeping in mind the greater good. Tilo is never shown to sell away her spices for profit, or take monetary advantage while prescribing specific spices to her customers in redressing their plights. She does not commodify her spices, instead gives them away generously to the ones in need along with a silent healing prayer. And in administering her spices, Tilo transcends race, caste or language-humanity, above anything else is her ethics, is her religion. As she says,

So many people on Saturday, it seems the walls must take a deep breath just to hold them in. all those voices, Hindi Oriya Assamese Urdu Tamil English, layered one on the other like notes on a *tanpura*, all those voices asking for more than their words, asking for happiness except no one seems to know where. So I must listen to the spaces between, must weigh them in my coral-boned hands. Must whisper chants over packets and sacks even as I weigh and measure and ring up.

All who come in my store on Saturday, I love them.
(81)

A traditional frame of ethics, based on a religious right and wrong, would even rule out the possibility of Tilo's affair with Raven also, as any sexual pleasure for the spice mistress would not be accepted. But Tilo does not sacrifice or abstain herself from experiencing her own pleasures and desires in order to do good for humanity; she does not connect the two, as that, according to her, is not required. As she stands facing the mirror, getting ready for Raven, her clarity is striking:

I am dazzled by the face looking back at me, young and ageless at once, the fantasy of fantasies come to life, spice power at its fullest. Forehead flawless like a new opened *shapla* leaf, nose tipped like a *til* flower. Mouth curved like the bow of Madan, god of love, lips colour of-there are no words for this-crushed red chillies. For kisses that will burn and consume. (297)

Tilo's words of love and consuming desire do not offend, rather the reader looks at her with understanding, we look at her the way she wants him to. It is as if, the exoticness of the spices, their mystery and adventure, all get internalised into Tilo. She becomes an extension of the spices themselves—one with limitless possibility. Spices have been quintessentially associated with the exotic oriental imagination, and Tilo exudes this exoticism as she stands in front of the mirror, looking at herself. As if by talking about it so earnestly and with such truthfulness makes her desire more valid. Rather than restricting her, Tilo's mystical realism instils in her the self-assurance and confidence to break free of the taboos that restrict feminine pleasures and desires, while fulfilling her role as the agent of hope and change.

It is perhaps because Tilo understands the "precariousness, instability, vulnerability" that is the "most widespread (as well as the most painfully felt) feature of contemporary life" (Bauman 1600, that she refuses to escape to the "earthly paradise" with Raven, insisting, instead to return to earthquake-wrecked Oakland. She tells Raven that "there is no earthly paradise. Except what we can make back there, in the soot, in the rubble, in the crisped-away flesh. In the guns and needles, in the white drug-dust, the young men and women lying down to

dreams of wealth and power and waking in cells. Yes, in the hate and the fear” (336). In the early stages of the novel itself Tilo’s had declared that she “will be Tilottama, the essence of *til*, the life-giver, restorer of health and hope” (44), as she knew that “Til is the sesame seed under the sway of planet Venus...which when ground into paste with sandalwood cures diseases of heart and liver, *til* which fried in its own oil restores luster when one has lost interest in life” (44), thus giving herself agency to be “the architect of the immigrant dream” (29). She cannot leave her responsibilities midway and escape from the earthquake-stricken Oakland.

The paths Tilo employs to heal those in need explains how she mediates mysticism with reality. She gives freshly ground turmeric to the much-abused Mrs. Ahuja at first a she considers turmeric to be a “shield for heart’s sorrow, anointment for death, hope for rebirth” (14). Tilo’s heart reaches out for this newly-wed wife, who has not yet gained the courage to stop or protest the nightly rapes that the husband inflicts upon her, blurting out, “bitch. Fucking you is like fucking a corpse” (107). Later, when she changes the spice and gives Mrs. Ahuja a packet of fennel, tightly wrapped, so that it gives her “mental strength for what must be done” (109), she also inadvertently, gives a copy of *India Currents* magazine which contains the phone number of a organization that shelters abused women. Towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Ahuja, who has come into her own “Lalita” writes Tilo informing her that she did finally gather courage to call in that number and with their help, come out of the wretched marriage. She adds with confidence that, “I tell myself that I deserve dignity, I deserve happiness” (289). Mrs Ahuja’s taking the help of the phone number to come out of her trouble puts a question mark on the power of the spices and the role of

mysticism, but at the same time it gives the readers a kind of tangibility and solidity. Above everything else, through Mrs. Ahuja's case the author acknowledges the universality of harassment and violence against and the horrific reality of wife-beating and marital rape.

Tilo's heart bleeds for Jagjit who "has trouble in school because he knows only Punjabi...who has learnt his first English word, *Idiot, Idiot, Idiot ... Asshole*, his second English word" (41). Jagjit is singled out for his turban, which the school bullies pull out every day, screaming, "Talk English sonofabitch. Speak up nigger wetback asshole" (41). Jagjit's plight is the horrific mirror image reality, not only of Oakland, but that of the entire American non-whites who suffer the onslaughts of racism, where all non-whites are clubbed together as the "undifferentiated, racialized other" (210). Tilo is quick to comprehend Jagjit's quandary as she herself inhabits such a neighbourhood. So she tucks the hollow, dark cinnamon into his turban, unseen, just before he leaves the shop because cinnamon or the warm-brown *dalchini* is the "friend-maker" who will help to "find you someone who will take you by the hand, who will run with you and laugh with you and say, 'See this is America, it's not so bad'" (42). In Jagjit's case too the solution does not come easy. Use of cinnamon goes awry as Jagjit now acquires numerous friends, mostly the wrong ones. Tilo urges the spices feverishly to bring Jagjit back on track and pleads cinnamon to have a positive effect. As in the case of Mrs. Ahuja, in Jagjit's case too the real has to be administered along with the mystic, as Tilo coaxes Jagjit into learning karate from Kwesi, suggesting the curative power of sports to be greater than that of the spices. Thus, in both Mrs. Ahuja and Jagjit's case we find reality component to coexist mysticism in the mistress of spice's shop. As Tilo

gives money to Jagjit to learn karate from Kwesi, she airs her disquiet to Raven: “What if he uses it for something bad, you know, drugs, weapons, instead of taking it to Kwesi’s and enrolling”, to which Raven replies, “Trust him, trust in the universe. It’s a fifty-fifty chance, more than you and I had of ever meeting” (292). Trust thus is the foundation where Tilo’s mysticism operates, trust is the root that ultimately gives agency to Tilo.

As Tilo refuses to leave Oakland despite the ravage caused by the earthquake and go to the earthly paradise as suggested by Raven, Divakaruni allows no closure or ending to the novel. The ambivalence of the final pages is a result of Divakaruni’s efforts at trying a new mode of storytelling. The author keeps this ambivalence in Tilo’s belief over the power of the spices on the one hand, and her real-life equation with Raven and the rest of the characters on the other. Tilo must usher in change around her present surroundings, make a more communitarian place to live. Employing the tenets of mystical realism in formulating new meanings of tradition, ethics and community is a novel experiment that Divakaruni undertakes. In this age of “fractured modernity” where entire America is plagued by issues related to migration, displacement and racism, Tilo seems to say that “we are tossed by the winds of fate”, it takes us to distant, diverting directions, but it is our will that is the agent through which we become what we are and what we want to be.

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Memory as Principle of Narrative in *Coco* and *ParaNorman*

—S.Veillakshmikanth

Abstract: This paper takes up two animated films and analyses the function of ‘cultural memory’ in them. One is *Coco* by Pixar productions and the other one is *ParaNorman* by Laika productions. *Coco* talks about the importance of remembering the deceased and passing down their memories by telling their stories to the younger generation. *ParaNorman* talks about people’s fear and their treatment of people who are gifted with exceptional abilities, like talking to the dead. The words ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ are crucial when it comes to the concept of memory. One can also relate the word ‘forgiving’ to the concept of memory, as in the proverb “forgive and forget.” In memory ‘remembering’ becomes a metaphor of life and ‘forgetting’ becomes a metaphor of death. The paper shows the cultural significance of remembering and forgetting and the politics of memory, wherein a person’s life memory is consciously eradicated. It also examines the symbolic dimension of memory present in the animated films and points out the interconnectedness of memory and telling stories.

Keywords: Memory, Culture, Politics and Forgiving.

“Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist.”

– Guy de Maupassant

Many academic disciplines are concerned with memory and narrative. When it comes to the art of narration in literature, memory is crucial. It is a medium for telling a story. It is also used as a narrative principle in films. Memory is used in some films to demonstrate how an individual or a group of people remember their past and construct identities based on recollected memories. In the

visual representation of memory, the process of remembering, forgiving, and forgetting becomes significant. The visual representation of individual and collective memory is the focus of this paper. This paper examines the visual representation of individual and collective memory in the selected films, as well as the role of memory in the films.

In the epigraph of his autobiography, *Living to Tell the Tale*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez writes, "Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it" (Marquez 7). He summarises one of memory studies' fundamental precepts by focusing on the importance of remembering in the development of individuality. Memory includes more than simply recalling events from the past. It is, instead, a dynamic and flexible activity, a performance art practise facilitated by multiple methods of remembering such as locations, ritual practices, and a wide range of text-based, cinematic, as well as other visual and auditory media. Animation is one of these media.

The relationship between animation and memory is still substantially unexplored. This gap is very important for two reasons. A growing number of animated movies have explored diverse memory and forgetting scenarios, techniques, and formats. Additionally, new conceptual and analytical methodologies for studying animated film as a memory-related form of expression are provided by contemporary work in memory studies, particularly on the multinational, multifaceted, emotive, and appropriateness of past memories. Animation is a memory-preserving, memory-transmitting, and memory-mediating technology. It frequently interacts with photos, literary works, and real-time animated films, and it performs a crucial part in

the presentation of both individual and communal memories.

Reminiscence is used as a medium in animations for narrating the events and also memory is used as a concept. For example, short-term memory loss in the animated film *Finding Nemo* and the sequel film *Finding Dory*. *Inside Out*, another major animated memory film, deals with the memories of a 12-year-old girl. This paper investigates two animated films dealing with memory. They are *Coco* and *ParaNorman*.

The Context of the Selected Films

Coco (2017) is an animated film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and directed by Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina. Neil Soans in the review of the film says, "'Coco' is colourful and vibrant, blending a number of unique personalities and vivid landscapes." It tells the story of Miguel, a twelve-year-old boy who aspires to be a musician but whose family despises music because Miguel's great-great-grandfather abandoned his family to pursue music. The concept for the film is inspired by the Mexican Day of the Dead holiday.

ParaNorman (2012) is an animated film produced by Laika and directed by Sam Fell and Chris Butler. Drew Taylor, in the review of the film, says, "It's the combination of the film's visual prowess and the genuine emotional content that makes *ParaNorman* such a singularly powerful experience." The film *ParaNorman* tells the story of an eleven-year-old boy named Norman who has the gift of communicating with ghosts. He breaks a 300-year-old witch's curse on his Massachusetts town. He also realises that the little girl who is labelled as a witch is also a gifted

person like him, but the people feared her abilities and killed her. The film alludes to historical witch-hunts and witch trials in colonial North America.

A Comparative Analysis of *Coco* and *ParaNorman*

There are similarities in these two films. In both films, it is a young boy who plays the lead role. The boys are attached to their grandmothers. The films have representations of dead people talking to the boys. In the films, memory plays an important role. The boys have kindred people in their own family itself. For instance, in *Coco*, Miguel wants to be a musician, and he gets this like from his great-great-grandfather; and in *ParaNorman*, Norman has the gift of talking to ghosts, and his uncle also has the same gift, and after his uncle's death, Norman has to take up the duty of his uncle. The films are based on real-life incidents. For instance, the film *Coco* is based on the Mexican culture of celebrating the Day of the Dead, and in *ParaNorman* there is a reference to witch hunts and witch trials that happened in the history of colonial North America.

Memory of Culture

Jan Assmann coined the term 'Cultural Memory' in his essay "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." Sara B. Young translates Astrid Erll's *Memory in Culture*: "The Cultural Memory is founded on 'Myths,' stories about a common past, which offer orientation in the present and hope for the future" (34). Cultural Memory's key characteristics are 'concretion of identity' and 'retrospective construction' or 'reconstruction'. This paper examines the function of memory as well as the characteristics of Cultural Memory in selected films. *Coco*

emphasises and preserves Mexican culture's traditions and rituals. The historical story of witch hunts is suggested by *ParaNorman*, but with a different perspective.

The Role of Memory in *Coco*

In the film *Coco*, memory becomes a vehicle to carry forward the life of a dead person. There is a connection between memory and telling stories. There is also a politics of memory wherein a person's life memory is consciously eradicated. This act of forgetting takes away the life of a dead person in the land of the dead. In the film, Miguel's family tells the stories of all his family members except for the story of his great-great-grandfather. They never wanted to talk about him because he had abandoned his family in pursuit of music. It shows the cultural significance of remembering and forgetting. In order to keep the family together, they hush up the story of Miguel's great-great-grandfather. They do not even put up the photo of Miguel's great-great-grandfather, which is a deliberate act of eradicating one's memory. The only person who remembers Miguel's great-great-grandfather is Coco, who is the daughter of Miguel's great-great-grandfather. She is also slowly forgetting as she is too old to remember things. Miguel wants to be a musician, but his family asks him to pursue their family shoe business. The family thinks that music is a curse to them.

Memory manifests itself through the recall of abstract images or the viewing of concrete images from the past. In the film *Coco*, a photograph becomes a medium for the dead to live in the memories of the living. It is the cultural belief of the Mexican people that photos are the medium for the spirits to cross over. Hector states the existence of the Land of the Dead to Miguel: "This place runs on

memories. When you are well remembered, people put up your photos and you get to cross the bridge and visit the family "(*Coco* 34:16–23). The spirits cannot come to the celebration of the day of the dead if there is no photo put up by the family.

People whose photographs are not displayed become outcasts in the Land of the Dead. All of the outcasts communicate with one another as if they were a family. Hector and Miguel require a guitar, so Hector goes to see his friend, who has become like a family member to him due to his status as an outcast. "I am fading, Hector," says Hector's friend (*Coco* 42:09–10). So, after giving Hector the guitar, he demands that he sing his favourite song. "Brings back memories," his friend says after hearing Hector's song (*Coco* 3:49-51). Then Hector's friend meets his final death in the Land of the Dead. He fades away like a forgotten memory without anyone to remember him. Seeing this, Miguel tells Hector that after returning to the Land of the Living, he will remember Hector's friend. He thinks that his memory will bring Hector's friend to the Land of the Dead. Hector tells him that it will not work and says, "Our memories – they have to be passed down by those who know us in life, in the stories they tell about us. But there is no one left alive to tell his stories" (*Coco* 44:50-45:00). Only the people who were with the dead person when they were alive can keep them alive in the Land of the Dead by remembering, but Miguel knows Hector's friend only in the Land of the Dead, so he cannot help him. Hector is also in the same plight. He says, "I am being forgotten, Miguel. I don't even know if I am going to last a night "(*Coco* 51:45-48). His daughter Coco is slowly forgetting him, and also, there is no photo of him being put up in the Land of the Living.

Music revives memory in the film *Coco*. Like a photograph, music also brings back memories. In one scene, where the photograph falls down and breaks, *Coco* remembers her dead father. That is when Miguel finds out his great-great-grandfather was a musician. In another scene, after returning to the Land of the Living, Miguel asks *Coco* not to forget her father and tells her about how her father still loves her. *Coco* does not respond to Miguel, so he takes the guitar and sings "Remember Me," which was sung to her by her father. There is a sudden burst of energy in *Coco* when Miguel sings the song. She recollects her memory and shares it with Miguel and others in the family that her father used to sing to her when she was a kid. She also gives a torn piece of her father's photograph, which Miguel keeps along with the family photos. Miguel keeps the memory of his great-great-grandfather alive for generations to come. Thus, the film *Coco*, by portraying the celebration of the Day of the Dead, gives 'concretion of identity' to the Mexicans.

The Role of Memory in *ParaNorman*

In *ParaNorman*, memory is used as a weapon to make one realise one's true self. Agatha, the gifted little girl, forgets who she is and becomes a bad person in order to make the people suffer because they killed her simply because she was different. Norman, who has the gift of talking to ghosts, has to tell a story from the fairy tales book given by his uncle in order to make Agatha sleep again in her grave. The fairytales do not help him, and the book is also burnt by Agatha's power. So Norman decides to tell her own story so as to make her remember who she was. When Norman tells the story of Agatha, she cannot listen to it because it reminds her of a past life where she was a little innocent girl. She hurts Norman to make him stop telling

the story, but Norman continues to tell it. Norman wants her to recollect her memories and asks her to remember the person who cared for her. He says, "You spent so long remembering the bad things, you forgot the good ones. There must have been somebody who loved you and cared for you. You don't remember them!" (*ParaNorman* 1:17:58-18:06). He insists on that particular memory which she forgot. Her bad memories of the past given by the people who hurt her, made her vengeful. Here one can see the importance of remembering the good memories of the past. Agatha's unpleasant memories made her a bad person whereas her pleasant memories healed her. Norman uses the memory of Agatha as a weapon to pacify her and make her realize her good self again. Thus, memory serves as a therapy to Agatha.

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The film *ParaNorman* can be seen as a retelling of the witch trials from the viewpoint of Agatha. Agatha burns the book of fairy tales, which is very symbolic. It can be interpreted as the stories of people like Agatha should be told to children rather than only fairy tales, because the children who are gifted like Agatha and Norman will not feel alienated when these kinds of stories are told. The film itself begins with this very idea of telling the stories of people like Agatha, who was considered a witch by the people and killed by them. The cultural memory of gifted people like Agatha is reshaped in a positive light. Thus, the film 'reconstructs' the stories of people like Agatha and gives life to them again.

"Forgive and Forget."

The idea of forgiveness can also be related to the concept of memory. Maria Duffy in *Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting* says

that Paul Ricoeur points out that forgiveness is possible when one deals with memory. Dealing with memory, according to Ricoeur, is necessary for awareness and tolerance, which are types of peaceful coexistence and ability to heal. At the beginning of *Coco*, Hector is not forgiven for his act of abandoning his family in pursuit of music, but he should not be forgotten, as Miguel tells his great-great-grandma, "You don't have to forgive him, but we should not forget him" (*Coco* 1:14:55–58). According to the belief of the Mexican people, forgetting a person leads to that person's death even after his or her death. On the other hand, in *ParaNorman*, forgetting Agatha's unpleasant past memories gives peace to the cursed dead. There comes the question: does she forget what they have done to her?

As the proverb says, "Forgive and forget." One forgives others, but does one completely forget what others have done? That remains a question. When one says, "forget and forgive," he or she forgives, but what the other has done is always there within them as a memory. The love for others or the love for oneself makes a person forgive others despite their mistakes. In *ParaNorman*, Agatha does not forget what the people have done to her, but she wants to be herself, so she changes her mind and gives peace to the cursed people. This shows that even though someone forgives somebody, the memory cannot be forgotten completely.

In the analysis of memory in the selected films, Paul Ricoeur's narrative model is appropriate. He discusses three ways memory influences personal and social aspects of human behaviour. Three of them are pathological-therapeutic, pragmatic, and ethico-political. In other words, they can be divided into three categories: memory

and the individual, memory and community, and memory and institutions.

Memory and the Person

Working through one's memories, according to Paul Ricoeur, who was directly impacted by Sigmund Freud, leads to healing. The painful act of recalling one's memories leads to reconciliation. According to Ricoeur, "it is necessary that we retain the traces of events in order to become reconciled with the past and divest ourselves of anger and hatred"(55). In both *Coco* and *ParaNorman*, it is visible. In *Coco*, Miguel tells his great-great-grandma that she does not have to forgive her husband, but she should not forget him. Miguel's great-great-grandma's remembering her husband is a reconciliation in the film. In *ParaNorman*, Agatha's remembering leads to reconciliation with the people who wronged her.

Memory and Collective

According to Ricoeur, individuals are frightened by the sole reason that there are different people who live by standards of life that contradict their own. It is because of this threat that a community has a tendency to reject and exclude people. In *Coco*, Miguel's great-great-grandfather is excluded from the memory of the family because of his passion for music, which affected the family life. In his review of *ParaNorman*, Thomas Caldwell says, "It's a sophisticated presentation of how victimizing behaviour on a small scale is an expression of victimisation on a much larger scale, and how both are symptoms of a fear-based culture." In *ParaNorman*, the people feared the gift of Agatha and called her a witch because she was different from the rest of the people.

Memory and Societies

According to Ricoeur, a society has a responsibility to remember in order to avoid the mistakes of the past. In the film *ParaNorman*, all the dead people remember the mistake they made in the case of Agatha, who was innocent. The dead people were once a part of society, and their remembering of the past mistakes has aided the current society, which is treating Norman poorly because of his ability to communicate with the dead. In the film *Coco*, Ernesto is remembered by the fans, but no one remembers Hector, who is the man behind all of Ernesto's songs. The people realise that they were celebrating the wrong person instead of celebrating Hector, who is the real star.

In conclusion, memory becomes a means to tell stories in the selected films. *Coco* shows how people use their memories to tell their family stories so as to keep the culture and people alive even after their death. *ParaNorman* shows how reflecting on one's pleasant memories or telling one's own story to oneself can make them realise their true self. Thus, the study of *Coco* and *ParaNorman* exemplifies that memory serves as a principle of narrative in animation.

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Exploration of an Untrodden Path: Analysing Selected Short Stories by E. Santhosh Kumar

—Sayoojya C.S.

Abstract: Blindness is one among the multidimensional spectrum of disability. Although vision is just one of the senses that human beings experience, eyes are given an additional importance or a prominent position among the other sense organs. Just as the authority of phallus dominates the discussions related to gender, the discussions regarding knowledge production, consumption or any other discussions regarding human existence itself, are eye-centred. It is this fact that prompted the Farook college to entitle the work which they brought out with both the fictional and nonfictional writings of visually challenged individuals linked with their disability as, *Eye v/s I: An Anthology of The Visually Impaired*.

From myths to ancient epics, and from folk tales and parables to fictions and movies, othering of blindness is evident. That is, instead of having a realistic approach, the condition of being blind is treated just as a metaphor for several negative aspects like, evilness, ignorance, and so on. Even the much celebrated and popular cinemas have not trodden a distinct path. While advocating in full-throated ease about political correctness and other such stuff, it appears as if the mainstream society knowingly or unknowingly forgot to include disabilities into its fold. This tendency makes it easier for society to ignore the fact that impairment is a mild difference, and the crucial role in transforming it into a disability is played by the society and its practices itself.

While approaching literary works in such a context, this paper looks at how selected short stories of the Malayalam writer E. Santhosh Kumar attempts to travel by a comparatively untrodden path. Studying the characters in his short stories like 'Moonnu Andanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu' and 'Prakasadoorangal' shall be invigorating, for it opens up new perspectives regarding the condition of blindness, and the life and experience of blind individuals. The paper also attempts to explore how the writer tackles the parable of blind men describing an elephant in a different manner other than open

arguments. An unconventional representation of an independent and brave blind woman in his story 'Prakasadoorangal' is worthy of special focus.

Keywords: Disability studies, Blindness, Ocular-centrism, Othering, Stereotypes, Multiple perspectives, Inclusive approach.

Introduction

Disability studies is an academic discipline that explores the experiences of Disability or disabling conditions, its nature and effect in the context of social, ethical, political and cultural factors. It emerged out of the disability civil rights movement in the late 20th century. From about the 1970s with the widespread rise of disability activism in the United States of America and Great Britain the concepts, concerns and motives of disability studies acquired more clarity, vigour, and definition. It was such a context that prompted the entry of disability studies into the realm of literary studies that is, for the exploration and analysis of how disabilities are conceived, constructed and conveyed through literature. Similar to the progression of other prominent theories through different stages or waves, the progression of disability studies is mainly marked by three models, namely medical model, social model and critical disability studies.

The model that was in prominence prior to the 1970s' movements of disability rights activism was the medical model that preferred diagnosing physical or mental ailments and rectifying them through prescribed medicines to establish normalcy. Because disability, when viewed from the angle of medical model, was an abnormality and a deviance. From the 1970s' the social model of disability came to be popular. According to the social model of disability studies, impairments either

physical or mental are biological. Whereas disability or disabling conditions, are caused by non-inclusive and ableist social factors. Disability for them was just a difference. In due course of time, the discipline grew up to accommodate diverse modes of views and understandings. Therefore, along with the transformation from modern to postmodern scenario, disability studies also came to be interdisciplinary. Intersections of different theories became its integral part with critical disability studies. It was how the real difference in experiencing disability came to be explored and articulated.

Disability studies is an umbrella term of which all kinds of physical and mental ailments are a part. Recently even chronic ailments have also been enfolded into it. Blindness is just one among the multidimensional spectrum of disability. Although eyes and vision are just one among the five sense organs and sensations that human beings have, both of them seem to enjoy an advantageous position. Much similar to the phallocentrism that dominates gender, ocular centric is the world order, and it remains unchallenged. It is this premise that in the essay, "BLINDNESS/SIGHTEDNESS: Disability studies and the defiance of di-vision", Ben Whitburn and Rod Michalko suggests by referring to Kleege and Schillmeier that, "Locke's empirical project on blindness not only privileges visual perception, but also privileges sightedness as an authority to speak of blindness experiences" (220-21).

Analysis

Apart from the medical, social and critical disability studies models, the one which was in prominence from the ancient times onwards was the moral or religious model. It is in this model that the disability was metaphorically used

as part of parables or other such moralistic tales. The approach that has influenced most narratives of all formats is this one for the contribution for the symbolic use of disability was made by it. From such an angle, any disability, especially blindness is the reward for ill doings or sins. Blindness stands for ignorance, cruelty, and everything negative. The ancient story of 'Oedipus' to the recently released film *Kaduva* exemplifies this. It is in such a context that the voice and path of E. Santhosh Kumar becomes unique for, both his stories, 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu' and 'Prakashadoorangal' keep away from all such stereotypical images of the visually impaired. He has also successfully refrained from the usages in the language that usually refer to blind people and their experiences even for the purpose of enhancing the narrative appeal of his stories.

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In the essay, 'Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account', Georgina Kleege writes about the stereotypical image of the blind man whom she calls "the Hypothetical Blind Man" (447). The stereotypical image itself is the creation of the sighted who have never known blindness, or in other words which has sprouted out of the negligence of the real-life experience of the visually impaired people. That is why the Molyneux's problem or question was posed to a sighted world, and not to his blind wife. Moreover, a reverse question never appeared, that is, can a sighted person identify a thing that one has only seen, with the sense of touch alone? So the Molyneux problem which has come up centuries back itself speaks in volumes about the ocular centric view.

E. Santhosh Kumar is a prominent writer in Malayalam who is the recipient of numerous awards including Kerala Sahithya Akademy Award. 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye

Vivarikkunnu' is his short story which was first published on March 7, 2007 in *India Today*. The story from the very beginning attempts to paint a realistic picture of the blind men in the story. Although there is an unnamed narrator in the story, three blind men are given separate voices to share their respective likes, experiences and understandings. Not only has the author kept away from projecting a stereotypical image of the blind, he has also been successful in providing each of his characters an individuality and subjectivity of their own. The narrator even once remarked that "other than being blinds, he has not seen anything special in them from the rest of the others" (Santhosh Kumar 11).

Characterization in the story is worthy of remark for, it in no way enables one even to form a generalized opinion on the visually impaired. The three of them are given three distinct professions, tastes and understandings of elephant. That is, they are three different individuals like any others. Sekhar is a telephone operator in a company, who is a cricket lover, as well as the person who had a terrifying experience with an elephant. On the other hand, Raghuraman is employed as a music teacher, and unlike the stereotypical blind musicians, he is not the singer in the street, but the teacher who arranges for home tuitions. His love and life are of course music. Chandran in the story does an unconventional job as far as the usual familiar jobs done by the visually impaired are concerned, and his love is for elephants.

The entry of the three blind men into the vicinity of the readers is as independent and self-sufficient individuals. They were going out with white canes in their hands to the street after having locked their room safely. As the narrator of the story suggests in one part of the story,

their mode of living in a lodge, sense of better dressing, independent living in the first floor of a building without availing any external help from the sighted people etc. provide them with an identity apart from the stereotypical images of the blind as the singer on the street, popularized by celebrated films like *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum pinne njaanum*, or the beggar, as familiar for centuries even as part of the classic works like *Oedipus*.

Sekhar's comment on the bygone days of cricket commentaries that was part of radio broadcasting also points to the fact that understanding things through perceptions other than sight, especially by audios was once part of everybody's life irrespective of the ability to see, in an era where radios were the chief source of information or in a time before the televisions flooded in. Moreover Sekhar's interest for cricket and the effort that the three took to watch the match from amidst the crowd of cricket lovers emerged to be the instance in the story that asserts the normality of the blind men's being, in other words it affirms that they too are as much part of the wider society, independent, employed, and inclined towards entertainment.

The celebration of darkness or blackness that according to the sighted which surrounds the life of the visually impaired is totally absent in the story. When the narrator enters the room of the blind men, he is welcomed to an illuminated space, lighted with brighter lights to overcome the low rate of voltage available in the place. The neatness of the room along with pointing to the capability of blindmen, also turns out to be the key for accessibility in their place of living, substantiating the argument that, "All people who live with the unique manifestations of

blindness learn to live with their circumstances in very specific and diverse ways” (Whitburn and Michalko 226).

E. Santhosh Kumar is deconstructing the proverb in Malayalam which can be translated as “as the blind men have seen the elephant” through his short story ‘Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu’. Sensing the elephant through senses other than sight, that is through the auditory and tactile perceptions are explored. Sekhar’s description of the incident of the festival in which the elephant went berserk is realistic, and lack of vision never did at any point affected his narration, or failed anywhere in conveying to his audience the horror that he experienced then. That is why the narrator comments that “It was as if we too had been transplanted into his helplessness. May be we had forgotten that he was the only one stranded alone” (Santhosh Kumar 17). The earth-shaking sound that approached in slow pace but with terrifying reverberations is not minimalistic thing to be ignored as insignificant while describing a berserk or violent elephant. It is when Sekhar describes it that the incompleteness in the visual image of a running elephant gets conveyed. Moreover far from a normative or universal image of an elephant E. Santhosh Kumar successfully voices the subjectivity in experiencing things. To quote Sekhar, “For me, elephant is that gigantic movement. It is a series of episodes. None of them have an existence of its own, in isolation. The percussion instruments that suddenly fell silent, my fall, people running helter-skelter, those noises floating above the eerie silence...the whirl of the world, that passed me by as I lay forlorn”(17).

Raghuraman who is another character in the story with an entirely different subjectivity, has yet another perception

of elephants. His experience of dreaming about an elephant and at times a herd of elephants prompts the narrator to raise the usual question of, how can a blind dream? The confession of Raghuraman that he is unable to explain, points to yet another direction, that is to the inefficiency of the language to communicate the experiences of disabled people. In other words, this is the instance in the story that points its fingers towards the ableist character of the language. “The language we speak, the literature we read, the architecture we inhabit, were all designed by and for the sighted” (Kleege 447).

The questions that follow in an indirect manner underline the way in which the things which are seen are taken for granted. Or to be more precise, the unquestioned ocularcentrism that rules the world gets unraveled with Raghuraman’s questions like, what is light? and what is vision?, which the narrator, although in spite of having experienced both, failed to put into words. On the other hand, the story also suggests that a visually impaired person failing to put into words the dream he or she has seen or the image of anything on her or his mind does not mean that such things do not exist for them.

The proverb ‘as blindmen saw the elephant’ although is a metaphoric reference of partial understanding of things, projects the imagination of a sighted person on blind men’s understanding about elephant. Raghuraman’s request to describe the elephant that he has seen for him, might be for the first time in history reversing the tale. That is, the question of how sighted people see an elephant is the question raised. Their understandings of an elephant are taken for granted just because they see it. However, utter failure is the situation when asked to the narrator who is the representative of the sighted

community to put the elephant that he sees into words. Each attempt of the narrator to explain elephant along with failing him, made him aware of the limitations of the language. He began “You know that the colour of the elephant is black? Only its tusks are white” (Santhosh Kumar 19). But the image of an elephant was not complete with that. Just as the blind men in the proverb who attempted to explain elephant with familiar objects like brooms, pillars and so on, the sighted person in the story too was forced to look around at the familiar objects to explain the elephant that he had seen. It was with desperation that he turned towards the image of a bus to suggest the size of an elephant. Raghuraman’s question that followed “Is the elephant like a bus?” (18) again deferred the meaning of elephant. It is in this area of the story that Derrida is in his play. Derrida’s concept of Differance is in its vivid manifestation here. As per his suggestion, it is through the negation that the characters in the story attempt to reach the meaning of a thing called elephant. Unlike Saussure’s structuralist understandings of things in their binary opposition, the signifier of Derrida moves towards its meaning or signified not by difference, which is part of binaries, but by differance which is the postponement. That is, as in the proverb, an elephant is not a broom, or pillar, as well as, not mere black and white thing, or bus sized thing in the story.

Chandran has distinct experiences with elephants. Being a tourist guide explaining for the visitors the sculptures in the nearby traditional temple premises, he is familiar with the sculptures of elephants on the temple walls. Trumpeting of elephants taken for bath in the nearby river of his home, the mahouts visits to his home for the palm leaves to feed them, the commands given for the elephants to move about, the ring he had which was made

of the hair from the elephant's tail, and the experience of having touched the elephant once are all connected with his memories and understandings of elephant. It is his craze for elephants that prompted him to tattoo the image of elephant on to his thighs. More than the perfection of its visual image, Chandran is satisfied with the tactile effect that it provides. The celebration of subjectivity also gets manifested here. That is when the narrator feels devastated at the sight of the tattooed figure of elephant for it was distorted, and the trunk appeared for him like an erect phallus. But for Chandran it was the elephant of his own, as well as for the other two blind men in the story, it was just a tattooed elephant which could be felt by touch.

Being a story on blindness, it has emerged victorious in appealing to the senses other than vision, as they are crucial in framing the day-to-day experiences of the people with visual impairment. In the story, the blind men seem to have identified the approach of the narrator to their room. For, one among them replied to the narrator's question: how did they recognize him coming? As, by sound produced as he moved on. While this situation explores the auditory perception, one of Sekhar's comments on the temple festivals appeals to an olfactory sensation. He says: "For me, the memory of the festival is the aroma of dates" (Santhosh Kumar 18). While shaking hands in spite of smiling to each other or joining arms while acquainting for the first time, as well as the sculptural elephants on the temple walls and the tattooed elephant on his thighs were successful in generating tactile sensation.

'Prakashadoorangal', yet another story by E. Santhosh Kumar with a visually impaired protagonist came out in the Onam edition of Malayala Manorama in 2013. The

character formation, the subject matters explored in the story are all different from his previous story on blindness, that is, 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu'. Author seems to have travelled farther in his perceptions regarding blindness. Therefore, apart from contemplating on or exploring the things that are philosophical in nature as seen in 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu', 'Prakashadoorangal' boldly speaks of eyes, and even at times, about the concept of vision, not from the perspective of the sighted majority, but from that of the visually impaired woman, who is the protagonist of the story.

The sensation that the very opening section of the story offers to the reader is tactile. Instead of the enarming description of the tourist place that they are in, the author prompts Kamala to say that she has come there before and stood exactly at the same place. That is, she says, "With just a touch, I could remember everything" (Santhosh Kumar 164). The sensation of touch which everybody irrespective of the gift of vision enjoys and yet conveniently ignored while relating to the understanding of things is rightly pointed out by Kamala while remarking about Nandan becoming "lean like a thread" (Santhosh Kumar 166) when away from home even for a few days. That is, she asks, "it is when hugged that we measure, isn't it James?" (166). It is not the charming description of the flowing river that announces its presence in the background, instead with the description of the narrator about the act of Kamala listening to the same. Here the author again subverts the eye centered or the vision centered approach for the realistic perception of things, that is, although she cannot see, Kamala is well aware regarding the decreased flow of water. In the story she comes to know about it not from the narration of any

sighted person, instead with the diminished sound of water gushing, which for her was audible even from a long distance in the previous visit. Moreover, the surprise of James, in noticing the exactness of or sharpness of things even after around five long years again challenges the ocular normative approach in understanding things, for she understands and remembers things with perceptions other than vision, which for the empiricists are secondary in nature.

Unlike the previous story, the author makes Kamala to boldly speak about eyes. In spite of the word visually impaired, a term which is much popular in common place usage in Malayalam is 'kannillathavar' which can be translated as "eyeless" it is this general misconception that is challenged by Kamala's question, "what is the problem with the eyes although it cannot see, James?" (Santhosh Kumar 165). This is the question posed by visually challenged individuals to the ableist sighted society, who like James wonders about the frequent reference of the visually impaired people about eyes, vision, beauty and so on. Eyes with or without visual perception are part of every body, including that of the human. So, they are an integral part of the body, face or identity of the visually impaired too. That is why Kamala is disheartened with James' attitude of ignoring her eyes, in spite of her late husband Nandan, who loved them for its wideness. This part of the story also seems to challenge the ocular normative standards of beauty, when Kamala elaborates on the ways in which her blind eyes were loved by a man, who even attempted to enhance its beauty by applying kajal on it. It is towards the end of the story that the ableist notion of looking into Kamala's eyes creeps in when James gets terrified of the whiteness of her eyeballs, which is quite different from the so-called normalcy.

Although there are other factors that has aroused fear in him about her, the ableist notion in finding the object of terror in her eyes cannot be left unseen.

Kamala notices and is aware of everything that goes around her. Contrary to the arguments paused by the theoreticians who framed their studies from an ocularcentric approach, the absence of vision for Kamala nowhere makes her an inferior counterpart to the sighted James in formulating awareness about their respective surroundings. She is the one who is more attentive to the things going around them than James who takes for granted everything for, he sees them. That is why Kamala was able to identify the group who passed by them while seated on the stone bench as young girls even in the absence of visual perception. In such contexts the author ascends to a position enough to accommodate the theories on blindness, as part of disability studies, that sight and eyes are just one among the other four sensations and sense organs respectively.

“Only about 10-20 percent of people designated as legally blind, in countries where there is such a designation, are without any visual perception at all” (Kleege 453). It is with the sheer ignorance of this fact that the people with eyesight frame their stereotypical understanding of blindness, such as being trapped in an endless terrain of pitch-black darkness. These are the misconceptions towards which Georgina Kleege points her fingers while remarking that “the average blind person knows more about what it means to be sighted than the average sighted person knows about what it means to be blind” for a visually impaired person is born and brought up in an ocular centric society designed by and for the sighted (447). They mingle and mix more with the sighted

majority, in the process of growing up than vice-versa. These are the concerns highlighted in the story where James is surprised to know that Kamala noticed his usage of flashlight while photographing her in the daylight. For James who is sighted, blindness only means a state in which one is shut out from all kinds of visual perceptions including light. This happens because, "Expertise of people without impairments takes a heightened meaning over the experiences of those living with them" (Whitburn and Michalko 223).

Questions regarding the special abilities of the visually impaired are addressed in both the short stories. The deficiency theory, inefficiency theory and the difference theories are the mainstream theories used to explore and address the special abilities of the visually impaired. As the names suggest, deficiency theory infer that the blind lack special abilities, inefficiency theory refers to the inadequacy of the special perception by the visually challenged, and in a more democratic manner the difference theory points to the mode of difference in perceiving places by the people who are sighted and blind. The study undertaken by a group of scholars titled "Rethinking the theories of blind people's spatial abilities" suggests that the visually impaired also possess special abilities. The blind characters of both the short stories lead their respective life in alliance to this finding. In 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu' the three blind men lived on the first floor of a building without any external assistance. They are portrayed as navigating the city on their own as well as doing and going for their respective jobs independently. Similar is the case of Kamala in the story 'Prakashadoorangal'. She is also presented as an independent woman who even has the ability to read all kinds of happenings around her, including the crookedness

of James's character. She even manages to live in a city like Mangalore without disclosing the fact that she is a widow. This might be because she is able to carry on well by herself. Her assertion that she stood on the same spot years before on her visit with Nandan also suggests her ability to identify places with the help of senses other than sight.

The role played by the blind beggar in the story is a crucial one. Kamala's concept of understanding blindness as a quite normal thing acquires the fully blown stature there. As the social model of disability suggests, disabilities are caused by the non-inclusive society. So, socialisation is part of the lives of both the disabled and non-disabled, for, humans are social animals. "Despite their rhetorical adherence to the social model, blindness agencies are complicit in portraying blindness as a pitiable condition — a deeply contradictory position that visits the moral, charitable and medical conceptualisations of vision impairment simultaneously" (qtd. in Whitburn and Michalko 225-226).

The social construction of the stereotypical blind man or woman as the poor and object of pity not only results in the creation of people like James who gives beggars money, but also gives birth to the blind beggars as in the story who makes money out of the sympathy that their blindness arouses. On the other hand, in spite of her inability of hiding the identity of a visually impaired that suffocates with sympathy, the thing from which Kamala is trying to run away even by hiding her identity of a widow, even from her close friends is societal sympathy, with which there is no ultimate use. She, like Nandan, is against giving beggars money. And her argument in favour of her view is the best part of the story that takes its untrodden

path against ableism. That is, she says, “one cannot see, that is all” (Santhosh Kumar 170). “What all weaknesses that one may have, is the thing to be done for that is providing them with beggars’ money?” (170). There is no better means than these questions to normalise blindness without any kinds of superficialities. The questions also are sharp enough to pierce into the heart of ableist society, which ignores the need for accessibility and equal opportunities, while offering money to the disabled beggars who are made inferior to them by all means with a meagre amount.

Matrimonial alliances are the thresholds from which the disabled are usually shut out. The usual prejudices regarding the incapacities of the visually impaired often has led society to keep them at a considerable distance from the social institution of marriage, at least in the olden days. “Nowadays, marriage is not a big hindrance at least for the blind males;” (Akbar C 99). An indirect meaning of this quote, which he elaborates upon later on in his narrative is that it is still hard for a blind woman to have a partner to share her life. It is in this context that E. Santhosh Kumar in the year 2013 introduced his blind protagonist who was married to a sighted man, with whom she lived in Bangalore. More than everything else, what resonates throughout the story is the happiness that both Kamala and Nandan shared in the days of their togetherness. As mentioned in the story they were made for each other. It is in a social scenario which generally denies family life to blind women that E. Santhosh Kumar comes up with a story that reflects on the successful marital life as well as the conjugal bliss that a blind woman enjoyed in her life with a sighted man. So, here too the author emerges victorious in breaking yet another

stereotype about people with society that they are incapable of leading a satisfactory married life.

The narrator never forgets to project the mainstream notion about the matrimonial relation of a blind woman with a sighted man. That is, once James mentions to Kamala that the owners of the homestay in which they stayed look up on him with admiration and provide him with an aura of a hero for having given a life to blind. That is, as per the notion of the normative society, unlike the other marriages, a blind woman wedded to a sighted man is not sharing their lives, but the superior one giving a life to the inferior other. While speaking about Nandan's description of the red marking on her left breast the sex life that a blind woman enjoyed with utmost happiness and satisfaction with a sighted man is also unravelled.

Poor, innocent, naive, etc. are the adjectives that the ableist society employs while referring to people with vision impairment. It is in this context that Kamala comes up with an entirely different aura. She is in complete control of her life, mind and body and decisions. It is she who chose to go with James to keep up the promise that Nandan and she together took, that is not to be stuck on to a point if they happen to part with each other. The coldness that James experienced while touching her each time was the announcement that her feelings for him too are cold. By taking the decision not to go with James to Thala Kaveri, she made clear her displeasure in having shared bed with him, along with keeping aside experiencing a beautiful landscape to cherish along with the memories of Nandan alone. She kept on alerting herself on each phone call that Elizabeth made to James about the crookedness of James, that is why she could guess Elizabeth calls him on and on because something

crucial to her was with him. The plan that sprouted from such frequent alerts was what helped her in getting the card, on which she was caught naked, from James.

The trope she uses against James is the same thing that society gives the disabled, that is sympathy. Otherwise there was no need for her to disclose the identity of her widowhood just before asking him for the memory card to touch and feel, as she cannot see the photographs to be printed from it. In spite of creating a mess, she managed the situation by herself. Without any arguments or quarrels, when she chewed and spitted it on to the road the boldness and bravery in the characterisation of Kamala emerged full-fledged, complete, unique and unconventional.

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While referring to the film *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum pinne njaanum* in the story 'Moonnu Andhanmar Aanaye Vivarikkunnu' the author seems to be critical on popularising the stereotypical image of the blind man. The narrator of the story vividly declares that the three blind men in the story are not like the protagonist of the film, who is the stereotypical blind singer on the street. The controversial dialogue in the recently released film *Kaduva* suggesting the birth of disabled children as the result of ill doings, points to a direction that the commercial films in Malayalam are not yet out from the clutches of the archetypal approaches on disability. When viewed from such a perspective, E. Santhosh Kumar has travelled a lot. And yet he too is not free from criticisms. The cautiousness with which he so long constructed his character and narrated the story seems to have weakened towards the end of the story, 'Prakashadoorangal'. That is, one usage in the story, which might have been for the purpose of a catchy phrase in the story, turned out to be

ableist. That is, “you cannot blackmail a blind woman, for her nudity is in her mind” (Santhosh Kumar 176). The concepts of nudity and other moralities are conceived as part of socialisation by all human beings irrespective of their abled or disabled identities. And moreover, a woman like Kamala who has elaborate views, understandings and perceptions on almost everything around her as seen in the story itself can never be nude in her mind.

Conclusion

Disability studies provided the ableist world with a new lens to see things around. The light provided by the same enabled the exploration of the representation and conception of different disabilities, one among which is the studies on blindness. In an ocular centric world order, the visually impaired emerges to be the marginalized among the marginalized. The personality and independent lives that E. Santhosh Kumar provides to each of his blind characters in the stories ‘Moonnu andhanmar aanaye vivarikkunnu’ and ‘Prakashadoorangal’ are mind blowing. The ways in which they dismantle the popular stereotypes are a model for narratives in all forms to deviate from their usual path of constructing the archetypal image of “the blind man”. The blind woman in his story also emerges to be the one who is bold, brave, intelligent and independent. Therefore, with the formulation of unconventional characters who are visually impaired, E. Santhosh Kumar succeeds in deconstructing archetypal images of the blind through his short stories.

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Writing Female Body: A Critique on Draupadi

—Megha K Jayadas

Abstract: In India, from the early days, a female body is often portrayed as a site of power and dominance— a physical manifestation of gender, political and cultural worlds. Her body can simultaneously be recognised as that of a cosmic divine goddess as well as that of an all-time submissive gender or sexual entity. For example, *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic, in a way, is stacked against women. The women characters of the epic invariably get reduced to mere gender roles of a mother, sister, wife or daughter, despite being fierce and independent in their own rights. They are sometimes showcased as an extension of male characters and have very little voice in the crucial events. They lack the space for complete agency. This paper attempts to analyse the heroine Draupadi, the Pandava queen or the ‘Cursed Goddess’ of the epic, who is often used as a scapegoat in most of the pivotal moments of the narrative.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminine body, Body-politic, Gender, Sexuality, Power.

The major concern regarding a female body and the anxiety of our society to have a strict control over her sexuality is always found within the Hindu Vedic traditions. From the ancient days, the societal law had codified the nature of female bodies by representing them as just ‘natural’ which is either really conditioned or constructed socially and culturally by patriarchy. Consequently, several restrictions upon women have been constantly vindicated on the grounds of their biological nature. The fact is that what always looks as natural is indeed framed under a strict cultural construction. Therefore, the Vedic texts tend to normalise female characters as merely sympathetic or tender beings. When a character is described in such a discourse, her actual self, experiences, thoughts, struggles and so on get automatically vanished from the sphere.

Women are directly or indirectly connected with menstruation and child bearing, which naturally encircles them under a patriarchal fear. Those categories of conventions and traditions which restrict, marginalise and exclude women from the social mainstreams later became the basis for all other kinds of exclusion. Jasbir Jain in the text, *Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture, Subjectivity and Agency* points out:

The Upanishads have some rituals that go on to exclude women. The *smritis* further stress this kind of exclusion. The exclusionary rituals are related to the female body, which because of its beauty is seductive as well as vulnerable; its flow of menstrual blood and the act of giving birth are seen as impure. Other practices piled themselves on this initial exclusion, which, it is obvious, is directed not only at the body, but becomes a base for other social and mental exclusions. It is a power strategy and is contrary to the belief that there is nothing pure or impure in itself and that all life has emanated from self-division and dismemberment. (251)

The above statement elucidates the ways in which women and their sexual bodies have been casted in a negative image, which later was used to define the socio-cultural discrimination against them. Women's physical bodies are the very sites of their marginalisation. The demonization of females as sexually promiscuous are found in the *Mahabharata* as well. This promiscuous nature of women provides men to take control over their body. Women inside the Hindu Vedic spectrum, are recognized as the advocates and the guardians of family honour and *dharma*. Those texts frequently attempt to normalise the

sexual activity of a woman to preserve the 'dignity' of the family and the clan.

A significant issue to be discussed in the subjugation of female bodies in Vedic texts is that of body-politic. It has been normal to relate the concept of body-politic with masculine bodies from the earlier days as the participation in the actions connected to the body-politic was chiefly limited to men. Mentioning the western political theories of body and the emergence of the modern body politic, Moira Gatens in the book *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* points out:

Modern political theory typically conceives of political life as a state created by a contract, entered into by rational decision, and designed to ensure the protection and safety of the body and its needs. As it is a contract entered into by men only, one must surmise that it is a contract designed to secure the needs of male bodies and desires. (264)

This contract is made by the male gender according to their needs. A female body is subjected submission under a male body. The above statement by Gatens mentions about this submissiveness created by the masculine world. The male bodies are always meant to be protectors and female bodies are meant to be protected. Even though Gatens' statements are from Western political sphere, the basic notion is similar in Indian context too. The Vedic classic *Mahabharata* portrays several such instances. The epic itself starts with the story of Satyawati, where her father agrees her marriage with king Santanu on an agreement that her son must ascend the throne of Hastinapura, negating the kingship rights of Devavrata (Bhishma). Gandhari rebukes her son Duryodhana in the

royal assembly for depriving the right of throne to Yudhishtira. Kunti along with Gandhari is present at the trial segment of Kauravas and Pandavas. Dusshala appears at the battlefield to plead with Arjuna to be merciful towards her infant grandson, born of her son Suratha. But the epic hardly placed female characters in the royal forefront, court or in the battlefield as the direct decision makers of political power. It is unfortunate that even though they appear in the public spaces with assertive language, they all are structured and controlled by the patriarchal politics. Although, these female characters are verbally empowered, they lack true agency, autonomy and self-protection. Such a character is Draupadi, the Pandava queen, a female speaking subject who never obtained an equivalent or an upright position in the patriarchal privilege due to her capability to express her views. She builds her platform within the social realm through her access to confident diction that however remained to be denied by any vigorous agency. This paper attempts to discuss the character Draupadi, a strong spokesperson of the epic, in respect to the repression and subjugation she repeatedly faced upon her body and self.

Draupadi and her feminine body inside the epic *Mahabharata* is a collective male gaze entity. The most significant deliberations connecting to the further episodes of the classic text revolve around her body. The birth of princess Draupadi from the sacrificial fire of King Drupada initially positioned her physical body within a clear political framework which is going to govern the future of her entire clan. Her emergence as a beautiful full-bodied woman out of the sacrificial altar, her wedding with Pandavas, her disrobing by the Kaurava prince Dusshasana, her abduction by King Jayadratha and her molestation at the hands of Keechaka—all these episodes

stand witness to the portrayal of woman as a mere body in a male authored text.

Her marriage to Arjuna and later with other Pandavas was a matter of political subject upon her female body. The entire wedding episode becomes that of a strong political alliance. She enters the wedding hall as a mere marriage product. The hall is predominantly occupied by men. Here, Draupadi gets automatically reduced into a single-dimensional identity of a female physical body and all the assessments that surrounds her gets limited to the descriptions of her physical traits. She then eventually turns into an object of male gaze and masculine sexual desire. Draupadi's entry into the wedding hall is noticed by this process of objectification as all the male eyes gathered there turn towards her body. The entire wedding ceremony has been organised as a test where the winner can marry the princess, and this ultimately brands her physical body as the trophy to be won and possessed and later controlled by the most skilful archer.

Still it is significant to notice that Draupadi's body must be appropriated by somebody who can fulfil King Drupad's long-time desire for seeking revenge against Drona. Hence she is then drawn into a much larger game of a long term macho revenge which is to be played using her physical body as a pawn and her sexuality as bait for the anticipated contestant, Arjuna. Here, Draupadi's physical beauty is at the service of the masculine state that employs the woman's physical body as a means to attain its political intentions. When the female body develops as the instrument of advancing the zeniths of male political interests, this patriarchal investment in the physical body subjugates her without any freedom of her own.

The necessary need to establish a great ownership and control over a woman's sexuality and thereby her body, comprises of an interesting political condition which spins around the association ship between a female body and the body-politic. It is through the reproductive power of a woman that the body-politic obtains its supporters. Hence, the chastity of the woman in question develops as a concern of supreme prominence. The indispensability of females for reproduction is recognised which again underlines the statement that women were created to bear children.

What makes Draupadi's status awkward is that on one side, she is an all-time respectable woman to everyone while on the other side she is also a wife to five men, a victim of polyandry system that casts insult and disgrace upon her character, her respectability and invites the condemnable tag of the public woman. The violation towards her honour does happen here and consequently, at least for the time being, she fails her condition as a respectable woman leaving her open to the obscene advances of other men. As long as Draupadi remains inside the sphere of her private space, she remains sacred or sanctified. But, the moment she cross the threshold of a public space, or even, if she is compulsorily brought into a public space, she is humiliated to the maximum. This public spectrum of royal supremacy is always governed by the masculine powers and it strictly denies women to enter or partake in it. For this reason, Draupadi cannot enter here at her own will. Her involvement in the royal matters with the Pandavas are therefore non-voluntary and subsequently, there lies no query of any definite claim that she has come to negotiate. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in her article, "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing: Meanings for Our Times" has stated:

Both the trauma of publicity and the sanctity of privacy are for women products of the ideology of the separate spheres. In the narrative of the Mahabharata, textual scholars say, it is not so much the disrobing as the forced entry into the public space that Draupadi returns to later (in her recurrent allusions to the time), as the source of her shame. (355)

The forced entry of the royal queen into the assembly hall seems to break the separating lines concerning the private sphere of the women's quarters and the public realm of men's concerns. The political act of stripping clothes off reinvests Draupadi with a body that had been stripped of its material aspect. However, it is her very status as a feminine body which acts as the complete repository of the united Pandava honour that once again places her body surrounded by the socio-political discussions. The verbal as well as physical attack on her feminine body extends to the exposing of Pandavas to a critical, political as well as personal shame. The personal humiliation towards a female body gets described as a great slur to the collective masculine ego.

The personal slur that a woman faced was hardly ever regarded as a severe social offence. It was mainly because of the space of declaring her individual personality that was limited to a very small realm. Draupadi is considered as a drastic persona and it is by wisely co-ordinating the chances that are available to her, that she is able to portray the kind of atrocities which she felt as an individual. As her physical body is so much destined with the notion of body-politic, the political affairs of the two rival kingdoms, Hastinapur (Kauravas) and Indraprastha (Pandavas), her individual humiliation and slur gets

interpreted into a perfect act of pure political insult. It also needs to be noted that, though, her husbands are hesitant to go to war, it is Draupadi who needs her insult to be politically avenged. She feels dismayed at the ways her husbands in consultation with Krishna expected to make peace with the Kauravas and she makes an emotional plea to Krishna in favour of the Great War. Draupadi wants her revenge to be public and political. Also, Draupadi expresses her strong individual desire to bathe her long hair in the blood of Dusshasana which she kept untied until the revenge is accomplished. It was her oath to tie her hair only after the death of Dusshasana who slurred her in the royal assembly in the disrobing episode. The undertaking of such great oaths indicates the articulation of the individual and has remarkable importance in terms of the semiotics of the female body. Her vows belong to an extreme system of austerity that is going to be practiced upon her physical body. Therefore, although she is politically avenged in the battlefield, she does not allow it to become just emptied of personal content. Instead, Draupadi exactly writes her revenge upon her physical body where her body ultimately intervenes into a correct political spectrum as it were.

The male approved or a male-willed admission of a woman into a public or political domain is only permitted in her capability as a material body. It is the female body that always becomes the reminder of all the superior powers of a masculine body. For example, in the scene when she is dragged into the royal hall by her hair by Dusshasana constitutes the control of the female body by a masculine entity which creates a body-politic sense where the matters are generally administrated by men itself. A woman can come inside this space as a body but she is only supposed to enter here without her voice, for the

reason that the possession and the active execution of female voice would ultimately lead to a transgression of the body-politic code that highly demands female muteness and submissiveness as the very condition of entrance. Here the entry of Draupadi is passive for she is literally dragged to the royal hall. This disrobing episode can be compared and contrasted to the wedding episode to understand the conflict between female body and female speech. In the wedding scene, Draupadi had no right to speak and she was completely mute, whereas it was her brother Drishtadyumna who spoke. Draupadi was a mere product of female physical body. But in the gambling scene, she does not want to be recognised as a mere body anymore. She loudly speaks and asserts her autonomy to question the injustice and register her strong protest. To speak is to become something more than a mere physical body, something over which the straight control can become more challenging to establish. A physical body can be controlled and assaulted but a strong and independent voice is challenging to control or suppress. The disrobing scene pictures a woman refusing to confine herself into a male assigned status of being a mere biological or physical object and demanding a further human space by becoming vocal. At the very moment when she tries to transcend her status as a body, she lands in trouble. Duryodhana orders Dusshasana to disrobe her only after her famous speech of criticising all the assembled Kuru heroes for remaining just passive spectators to her insult.

Another trivial issue underlying behind the disrobing scene is that of Draupadi's menstruation. She, on account of her menses, is attired in a single-piece of cloth which is confined to her quarters when the gambling match which takes place at the court. This was the usual practice in

those days as the bodily phenomenon of menstruation was connected with a multitude of socio-cultural taboos and negative connotations. In this backdrop, Draupadi's entry as a menstruating woman into the assembly-hall conveys revolutionary inferences in the indicating practice of representation. First of all, menstruation here has an obvious relationship with female body and sexuality. The assembly-hall is the figurative province of phallogocentric power where the rule of the phallus controls supreme. The entry of Draupadi causes a moment of rupture inside that discourse by replacing it with the alternate indicating code of feminine mystery which is metaphorically characterised by the bleeding vagina that carries implications of fluidity as contrasting to the one-dimensionality of the erect phallus. Secondly, the bodily fluid of a woman, here, her menstrual blood, is not only perceived as a hazard because of its so called contaminating power, but it strongly becomes a political declaration of female subjugation. Elizebeth Grosz in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* points out:

What is disturbing about the viscous or the fluid is its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and the self-identical, its otherness to the notion of an entity—the very notion that governs our self-representations and understanding of the body. It is not that female sexuality is like, resembles, an inherently horrifying viscosity. Rather, it is the production of an order that renders female sexuality and corporeality marginal, indeterminate, and viscous that constitutes the sticky and the viscous with their disgusting, horrifying connotations. (364)

The phenomenon of female menstruation is directly linked with her sexuality. Female sexuality has been connected with plurality and openness by French feminists like Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. Irigaray has spoken widely about the elusiveness of female sexuality in a language that studies the phallus as the norm. In the book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray states:

She is neither one nor two. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no "proper" name. And her sexual organ, which is not one organ, is counted as none. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ (even if the passage from erection to detumescence does pose some problems): the penis. (365)

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Therefore when Draupadi enters the durbar hall in her menstruating state, although compulsorily, and challenging the dignified gathering, she can be considered as passing a moment of reversal of the central discourse both through the assertion of her physical condition and over her strong diction. The crucial question that Draupadi raises in the assembly is about the legitimacy of the men's ownership over her own body and self. The result of the dicing-match had severe penalties for the body-politic—it will lead to a redistribution of the political power.

Another significant episode is her abduction by King Jayadratha. Even though Pandavas saves her, Yudhishtira overlooks the decision to kill him as he is wedded to their sister, Dushshala. His anxiety is a perfect reflection of the patriarchal anxiety in general where the interrogation of

male honour is inscribed upon the body of the woman. Still, Draupadi keeps her revenge against Jayadratha which she avenges in the Kurukshetra battlefield. The slur that Draupadi suffers in this case is also perpetrated on her physical body and her seeming settlement to Yudhishtira's wish to release Jayadratha is put to severe interrogations in the feminist re-tellings. She also took revenge against Keechaka who tried to molest her.

The women characters in the epic are characterised as individuals which are in permanent suppression to the body-politic. Whether it is Satyawati's strategy to protect position for the royal throne of Hastinapura from her daughters-in-law through the system of *niyoga* (levirate) or Kunti's helplessness to openly admit Karna as her elder son—all these activities are connected to their subservience of the female self to the body-politic. Neither does Draupadi appear to have much control over her body as far as her connection with her husbands is concerned. Draupadi's special preference towards Arjuna is a sad reminder of her lack of any actual control over her own desire. Draupadi is insistently sexualized and characterised as an object of desire because of her body. But the reason why she could at least voice a challenge to the body-politic is because she is equipped with an amazing intellect, a feature that sets her above the rest of the Kaurava wives and makes her an exemplary woman of her own generation.

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Female Fortitude, Resistance and Survival in Shashi Deshpande: An Analysis

—Kajal Sutradhar

Abstract: That women's bodies are the subject of physical assault and rape can be traced back to the age of *Mahabharata*, when menstruating Draupadi is dragged into the assembly of the Kauravas and the helpless woman's prayer for justice is nullified by the so-called elders in the Sabha. From then onwards, the writers point out violence against women, whether it is based on caste or gender. In our society, men's notion of superiority leads them to assault or rape women without any hesitation. Rape is offensive violence, and marital rape is equally oppressive and humiliating. In my paper, I would like to concentrate on the theme of marital rape as found in Shashi Deshpande's short story *Intrusion* where a newly-married girl falls prey to her husband's lust on the very first night. The stranger jumps over the body of his wife, and the teenage girl has to surrender to his lust. The story depicts the socially and culturally assigned role of a husband in the Indian subcontinent, where the stranger man and woman meet, and often the first night becomes a nightmare for the girl. I would also like to throw light on Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where the heroine Saru is raped every night by her husband Manu who cannot tolerate the socially superior status of his doctor-wife. The nights become his chance to play with the body of his wife and thus establish his male supremacy. Both in the novel and short story, the writer has realistically revealed the issue of marital rape and unnumbered women of the Indian subcontinent are silent victims of this problem under the name of the institution of marriage. Here, resistance is not only defiance and outward protest. It is a protest against the 'man's reality that men's sexual desire is natural and implicit. Thus, both 'male desire' remains unproblematically. It is the woman who is to be dead or disappeared from the text for her body's transaction and humiliation. So, it is the women who have to adjust to aggression and violence. We can recollect the story of Belinda in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of The Lock* in which Belinda is taught by the poet at the end of the third canto of the poem that even the imperial towers of Troy are subject to decay, so she should take

the cutting of her hair easily. Shashi Deshpande's central character Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* chooses a life of her own, and she rejects to meet her husband when he tries to negotiate. So, her novels and short stories become the alternative voice of Resistance – 'a reverse discourse' in the language of Michael Foucault.

Keywords: Rape, Resistance, Marriage, Female fortitude, Survival, Violence.

Over the last decades, post-colonial women writers have begun to represent issues in their writings emphasizing the assertion of female will and agency. These women writers are claiming for autonomous space for women and their representation of women always try to subvert the tradition that attempted to give a stereotypical description of the women characters. Writers like Shashi Deshpande have addressed the so far forbidden subjects like marital rape in her short story *Intrusion* and noted novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in which the women characters are subject to the repeated rape of their husbands. In our Indian society, marriage often gives liberty to enjoy the female body paying no heed to either their permission onto their will. So, the female body becomes the main site of violence and their docility and volatility often make them subject to the violent lust of the male. Rape is a form of systematic violence against women with a vulgar display of male power which assumes women to be vulnerable and subservient.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande reveals the dynamics of power games by highlighting the cultural constructs where femininity is subservient and masculinity is unquestionably aggressive. In the novel, the central character Saru is raped by her husband every night. Her husband Manu cannot tolerate the superior position of her wife who is a qualified doctor with a good name and

roaring practice. That socially established woman becomes traumatized, defeated, and helpless when she has to surrender herself to aggressive male lust. In chapter six entitled *Speaking Pain-Resisting Rape*, Usha Bande in her *Writing Resistance* has discussed the issues of pain and rape of women. Here, the writer has shown a comparative study of *The Binding Vines* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the two rape narratives of which speak of the pain of Indian women under the veneer of the institution of marriage.

The novel starts with the narration of Saru's terrible experience with Manu who violently thrusts himself on her. The novelist describes how the hands of her husband have become the body. The body forcefully penetrated her body. The attempt to utter the words of protest was nullified, and this person at night is just opposite to the smiling person in clear daylight. At the beginning of the novel, the bizarre portrayal of marital rape is quite challenging, and Deshpande has done it quite boldly.

The violence of Manu traumatizes Sarita. It was that Manohar with whom she fell in love during her days in college and married him to get a happy conjugal life. They also spent a happy martial life with full physical intimacy. The recent sadism of Manu is beyond her comprehension and endurance. Saru is truly alone as her past is bitter. In her home, there was always discrimination between her and her younger brother, Dhruv. Her mother gave priority to her boy-child, and it is very pathetic that Saru is blamed for the untimely death of her brother Dhruv during their childhood. We find in the novel that one afternoon, when the elder sister and brother went for playing in a nearby playground, Dhruv drowned in the pond. That was the most unfortunate and cursed incident in the novel as it

leads to the eventual intense agony of Saru's mother who never forgive her daughter. The hatred was so intense that even when Saru went to see her mother on her deathbed, she declined to meet her by saying that she has no daughter at all. So, her marriage with Manu was an attempt to bring change in her life-the desire to be loved. Here again, happiness is a far-fetched dream. Although her husband is a professor, the superior economic and social status of the wife becomes the object of jealousy. For the outside world, they are the ideal couple, just like the T.V. ads. But there is an underlying tension that haunts Saru. In a society which is culturally conditioned, the superior status of a wife is beyond botheration. In our society, *pati param guru* – is supreme, and the wife is always subservient. When Saru decides to give up her practice, Manu clearly says that it is impossible to live so luxuriously depending only on his income solely. The novelist reveals in the novel that Saru not only earns butter but also bread for her family. In an interview with Saru, the interviewer asked the same question to Manu. Manu's male ego got hurt when we find in the novel on the same night Manohar attacked her like an animal with his hands, teeth, and whole body. After this incident, their relationship never becomes normal.

The novel begins with the description of the marital rape of Manu. In the very beginning, Saru is describing the 'monstrous onslaught' that needs no hammer or pincer but the hands and teeth of Manu are enough to make Saru surrender to the invasion of her husband. Such is the ravishing sexual assault described at the very beginning of the novel that the wife realizes that her mind has deserted her bruised body making it insensate. In chapter four of the novel, the novelist has described how the love-marriage of Manu and Saru becomes unbalanced day by

day. New patients used to come to Saru whose fame as a doctor grows. She becomes familiar as a lady doctor with dignity and importance. The growing familiarity, smiles, and greetings were all for Saru and there was nothing for Manu who was ignored. The esteem with which Saru was surrounded made her inches taller and, perhaps, the same thing made Manu inches shorter. People knew her as a lady doctor, and he was her husband. This was the root of the problem which resulted in the repeated monstrous attacks on Saru and such is the destructiveness of this marital rape that made their relationship unbalanced, unequal, and impossible.

Sexual politics plays a vital role in the novel. As there is no way to assert control over the socially superior wife, violence and aggression are the only means to show the supremacy of the husband. In this respect, noted critic Usha Bande has pointed out the male political dominance of Western culture, and she has enunciated her logic through the analysis of Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics*, and it can be equally applied to the Indian patriarchal hegemony. Bande's quotes from Millet's *Sexual Politics*, the world's best-selling Ph.D. thesis and the words of Millet are quite relevant to our discussion. In the phallogocentric world, whatever is negative and whatever is defeated are always equated with the female side. Even in sexual relationships, there is a history of dominance and subordination. Here again, males rule females. Millet calls this 'interior colonization' and this subservience and subordination of women constitute the fundamental power politics in the patriarchal society.

It is noteworthy that although Manohar cannot tolerate the superior social status of his wife, he welcomes Saru's earnings for a better and more comfortable life. Saru told

that she would leave practice because she was very tired. Manu's immediate reply was: "And how will we live?". He continued that it is impossible to live only on her salary. They will not be able to live so luxuriously without Saru's earnings. Manu talks normally with his wife about their children and his students. When night comes, he becomes a sadist invader on his wife. Manu takes his wife to Ooty to give her solace, and he is really worried about the dark circles under her eyes. Manu is unaware of the fact that it is his repeated savage and monstrous attacks on her body that make her panic-stricken. In chapter eight of Part Two of the novel, the writer describes how self-realization comes to Saru. She realizes that it is her own life. She will no longer remain the puppet in the hands of her husband. That unbearable darkness will never come again in her life. Rather, darkness holds no terrors for her. She has overcome all her fear.

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Manu represents the male-dominated society, which teaches that a wife should always be subservient to her husband. In our society, marriage is a gateway to receiving the liberty to enjoy the female body and the concept of marital rape is often unknown to them. However, in the last two decades, writers and activists have attempted to break the taboos and make people aware of horrifying domestic violence and gender discrimination. Women writers like Shashi Deshpande have made an extraordinary effort to reveal cultural and epistemic violence that affects women and there is also an attempt to break the silence imposed on victims by a biased structural society in this perspective, the recent landmark verdict of the Supreme Court on 29.9.2022 is quite relevant. A bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandra cud recognizes a husband's act of sexual assault or forced intercourse committed on his wife as 'rape'. The honourable Justice announces that gender-

based abuses are permeated Indian society in every rift. Many women have to bear the burden of unwanted pregnancy for a forceful physical relationship. Here, the institution of marriage acts as a license to get uninterrupted rights over the female body without the least scope to know whether the woman has consented or not. (Source: The Hindu, 29.9.2022)

Shashi Deshpande has addressed this private violence in her *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and by her authentic description of the torturous relationship between Saru and Manu, the writer has tried to dismantle the dichotomous relationship between the private and public worlds. Usha Bande's analysis seems very relevant in this context, as she says:

Significantly, Shashi Deshpande develops a unique view of the unconscious in which she rewrites a crucial aspect of psychoanalytic theory, revealing what the Neo-Freudians like Karen Horney called the specific cultural and social aspects that bear upon the psyche. Written with acute psychological insight, the novel re-contextualizes the problem of women's devaluation. Saru, the spirited girl who revolted once again the patriarchal power structure by challenging her mother, is now unable, as a married woman, to accept her situation and explore her 'self'. (Bande 277)

Finally, self-introspection leads Saru to her final decision. Although she blames herself for the untimely death of her brother and the death of her mother in a deserted position, she decides that her life is her own and she will take the decision on her own. Her father told her repeatedly to meet her husband, but Saru realizes that it is

her life and she will be the decision maker of it. The fearful burden of marriage will no longer haunt her. The final words of Saru at the end of the novel are quite interesting, as she resolves to face Manu and resist his authority. She says to her father that if Manu arrives, tell him to wait. She will return soon. The novel ends here. She has got her voice to offer resistance to patriarchy by challenging her mother and her husband, who are the agents of this system.

A similar case of marital rape is depicted in another short story by Deshpande entitled *Intrusion*. "The Intrusion", the title story of Shashi Deshpande's collection of short stories entitled "The Intrusion and Other Stories" deals with a newly married woman, whose sense of worth is dishonored by the appalling treatment by her husband, whom she thinks as an intruder. The subject matter of this short story is marital rape. The short story *Intrusion* is all about a newly married couple who went on honeymoon in an isolated house on a hillock near a village. The husband knows that marriage is the gateway to getting authority over his wife's body, and there is no need to know whether the girl is ready or not. The newly married girl is not prepared. Rather, she opts for her husband's friendship. The girl says in the story that she wished to talk with her husband the whole night so that in the morning they can smile like old friends.

Here lies the hypocrisy of our society, which teaches a girl that she should protect her virginity from other men. At the same time, she should give up all her privacy to a stranger, as he is her husband. The girl in the story *Intrusion* refused to yield to the stranger-the intrusion on her privacy was hindered. When the girl fails to build a friendship with her husband, she regrets her

alliance with this unknown man. She pines for the fact that none has asked her before the marriage, as if she is taken for granted. She feels humiliated when her husband forces himself on her. It is not the physical pain she feels, but the emotional pain. The description of the marital rape towards the end of the story reminds us of the same violent and aggressive attitude of Manu in *the Dark Holds No Terrors*. The conflict between duty to the family and personal fulfillment will always resolve itself through self-sacrifice and submission to the patterns of society.

Instead of giving any authorial commentary, Deshpande just depicted the harsh realities of the institution called marriage. She prefers to act like a camera, recording emotions and situations with realism and sensitivity. The picture shows the fact that tradition is deeply ingrained in society, and for those women who have a mind of their own and a clear perception of the disadvantages of their position, one way to come to terms with the surrounding reality is the acceptance of loneliness as a factual part of their existence.

All the situations depicted in Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors and Intrusion* are embedded within the Indian cultural perspective. By representing such female protagonists, the writer has shown strong resistance to male cultural norms. There is a taboo to discuss all these private experiences, and Deshpande has done a great deed by breaking this silence in her novel and making the readers aware of the underneath darkness of our society. More than the law of court, we need this awareness to subvert the age-old notions of phallogocentric culture. Through her writings, Deshpande has created an alternative voice – a new language which depicts women's struggle. This articulation of feminist epistemology adds a

multiplicity of interpretations of feminist discourses, which are enough to befuddle normative boundaries that can challenge male supremacy at every point.

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Climate Change: Margaret Atwood and the Anthropocene

—Baburaj M. P.

Abstract: Climate Change poetry has been recognized as a subgenre of ecopoetry or green poetry. Since the publication of her epoch-making work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* in 1972, Margaret Atwood has been constantly warning mankind that its survival depends on its relationship with the environment and other living species. She clamours for a radical shift in the attitude of human beings about their position on the planet. Atwood's anxiety over the human predicament on account of climate change is not just an emotionally effusive reaction but deeply rooted in scientific convictions. Indeed her poetry preceded the term ecocriticism. The continuous violation of natural order and its inevitable repercussions on ecology have been recurring themes in her poetry. This paper seeks to examine the prophetic insights and responses of a representative of the Anthropocene in the wake of several environmental catastrophes.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Climate change, Anthropocene, Ecopoetry, Environment.

Climate Change poetry can be considered a subgenre of ecopoetry. It emphasises the global predicament of environmental degradation and the consequent climate change as a pressing global issue. This study seeks to explore Canadian poet Margaret Atwood's prophetic insights and responses to the present unstable climatic condition as a representative of the Anthropocene with special reference to her climate change poems. The versatility of Atwood extends as a poet, critic, novelist, short story writer, social activist and so on. Environment and environmental issues are dominant themes in Atwood's poetry and fiction. Her six months stay, every year in her childhood, in the northern Ontario wilderness where her father worked as an entomologist has considerably

influenced her moulding into a literary person having deep concerns over ecology. She has been a staunch critic of the anthropocentric attitude of human beings in her literary endeavours and she holds a biocentric stand as an eco poet and activist. Man's survival on this planet is dependent on the existence of other species too. Quite before climate change had begun to register in the cultural imagination, certain poetic expressions of climatic concerns were visible in the poetry of Margaret Atwood. Though many scholars have studied her poetry from postmodern, feminist, and dystopian points of view, recesses of her environmental imagination and concerns over the mounting global heat and climatic issues have not been explored in her poetry. This paper discusses the presence of these aspects and Atwoodian premonitions and suggestions for the imminent catastrophe.

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Ecocriticism is a diverse and evolving discipline which considers life in a broad context of the human and non-human world as is reflected in the literary texts. A global leader in the field of ecocriticism, Scott Slovic opines that no single worldview is sufficient to define ecocriticism. "It is being redefined daily by the actual practice of thousands of literary scholars around the world"(Ecocriticism Containing Multitudes 160-61). However, one of the widely accepted definitions of Cheryl Glotfelty that appeared in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) will suffice to define the term meaningfully. According to her, "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". Ecocritics all over the world have undertaken different environmental issues from time to time and brought them to public attention through various forms of literary practices. Eco poetry is a literary genre of poetry which has its chief focus on ecology and allied issues like climate change etc. In the last few years, climate change has emerged as a serious matter of discussion in literary debates all over the world and

consequently, a corresponding number of poetic compositions have been made on the topic. Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra in their essay titled, “ Climate Change in Literature and literary Criticism” remark “ Any literary study of climate change by definition engages with or sits within the critical category of ecocriticism or environmental criticism”. No longer is this a marginal topic of study; instead, it is a serious worldwide political issue questioning the survival of the biosphere. In this global context, climate change takes different shapes in literary manifestations.

In her 1966 collection *The Circle Game*, Atwood included her jeremiads poem “The Spring in the Igloo” in which the poet hints at the effects of mounting heat and its consequences in the polar region. The poem happens in the Arctic North and its worsening climatic condition resulting from global warming is poetically expressed in the poem. Here, the poet presents two characters, the Eskimo persona and her companion who manage to survive the severity of the arctic weather. The opening stanza of the poem remarks that it is springtime after the long sunless wintry days. The inhabitants of the igloo were unaware of the presence of the sun as they had been safe under their frozen house. But they began to sense the presence of the sun when it started to melt the icy walls of the igloo. “The sun had been burning for a long time/ before we saw it, and we saw it / only then because/ it seared itself through the roof”(CG- 46). The poet uses the pronoun ‘We’, throughout the poem to denote the issue that applies to all of us. They spent their time under safe roofs never expecting a meltdown of the house and they even thought that they were living in the centre of a vast night.

Igloo is a natural habitat; it does not harm the harmony of the natural order like that of the innumerable human creations on earth. For the speaker of the poem, the igloo is a substitute for

the warmth of the sun. While the poem proceeds, the poem takes a different turn with a different tone. The change that came about to the earth is due to the misdeeds and miscalculations of human beings. The soaring heat and unstable climate have made the planet an unsuitable place for living. The poet says, “...and so we are drifting/ into a tepid ocean/ on a shrinking piece of winter” (CG 4-6). The unfortunate inhabitants are drifting into an ocean of lukewarm water as the mounting heat of the planet has shortened the winter season and increased the global warming rate. The sudden loss of ice mass has made the survival of the two companions uncertain and impossible to a great extent. They are quite sure of the fact that these uncertainties and disasters were all brought about by their fellow humans who exploit nature in the name of development and social welfare. The two mates lived in the glaciers with the ice between them and disaster. Ice is what delayed their death till time. They will be embraced by the disaster once the ice is melted. Through this poem, Atwood is conveying a burning environmental issue. The melting down of the Arctic Ocean will result in the mounting of the water levels in the oceans and other water bodies.

The global population continues to grow and human beings are facing the unprecedented disruption of natural resources as a consequence of climate change and related threats. The continuous warning of nature to humans about their fake infallibility and thoughtless exploitation of natural resources is falling on deaf ears. Atwood’s poem, “After the Flood, We” (CG 4-5), is futuristic and takes a different stance where the future is restricted to the nonhuman people of nature. Nonhuman creatures are found to flourish very well while human life is annihilated from the face of the planet. The two characters, I and you are the only humans living to witness the obliteration of their race. The speaker and her companion have no other way out. They are fated to witness the eradication of their race

and experience life in the margins where they once lived their life in the centre stage of affairs. The speaker persona walks in search of safe elevated ground and there she sees the trees sunk in the water and the tree tops as islands. Atwood's talent for picturing a scene in all its intensity and gravity is evident in these lines. Here the poet is discharging her function of cautioning human beings about an imminent tragedy that is being incurred by their misdeeds and miscalculations.

There is no panic situation portrayed in the poem, "After the Flood, We" (CG 4-5). Everything happens in its natural order. The sky, the land and the sea become one and the water has conquered the planet and the creatures on it in its grip. The two human mates presume that the creatures are enjoying their freedom in a world devoid of human interruptions. Eradication of a race or an ecosystem does not imply the extinction of life and it is efficiently justified by the presence of fish swimming among sunken trees like birds in a forest. "fish must be swimming/ down in the forest beneath us,/ like birds, from tree to tree/ and a mile away/ the city, wide and silent, is lying lost, far undersea" (CG 4). The city which once might have been a busy one is lying deserted and sunk in water. Life on earth will flourish and continue despite the obliteration of certain species. Here we feel that nature is taking a conscious choice to end the human race by curbing the disastrous human interventions and saving the rest of the persons of nature from their unscrupulous actions. The fifth stanza of the poem reveals that the companion of the speaker persona is walking leisurely, praising the morning unaware of the flood and the after-effects. Here, Atwood is portraying the human predicament through the companion persona. Humans never understand their inferiority in comparison with nature and its powers. Atwood links the past and present with the future. Human beings are still capable of making choices though not much time is left to them. They should give up their selfish

plans and destructive approaches to provide posterity with a better and harmonious tomorrow. Atwood's "After the Flood, We" is a premonition for humanity to refresh and reorganize its policies and orientations.

Atwood's poem "Frogless" deals with the repercussions of climate change in the ecosystem in general and the frog population in special. It is a fact that every creature has some unique duty to accomplish here for the healthy sustenance of the ecosystem. In the poem "Frogless", Atwood enumerates several creatures dying due to the change in the weather. The poet is portraying a sick landscape where every creature is falling victim to severe and unusual changes in climatic conditions. The trees have become sore and snow has begun searing the roots. Creatures are all suffering from the hazard that has occurred in the environment. The stream water is no longer cool and natural, instead, it has turned warm, driving the inhabitants away from their natural habitat. It is not that difficult for the contemporaries to imagine and visualize these scenes of the poem since they experience the same in this era of the Anthropocene. Atwood is trying to convince short-sighted human beings about the gravity of the threat that is awaiting them. "Here comes an eel with a dead eye/ grown from its cheek./ Would you cook it?/ You would if"(Eating Fire 324). Poet happens to see an eel with a dead eye. The creatures are losing their organs and they are left sick; they are moving slowly into mass death and gradual extinction. Whether they agree or not, human beings are no exception to this disastrous situation of mass death and extinction.

The fourth stanza of the poem "Frogless" illustrates a problem that man now faces. He doesn't have many options for food as he has spoiled the quality of the flora and fauna that fed him over time. Humans eat sick creatures to give birth to sick offsprings. Atwood depicts this situation: "The people eat sick

fish/ because there are no others./ Then they get born wrong” (Eating Fire 324). In this era of consumerism, man’s focus is on quantity, not quality. He, out of his selfish motives, runs behind fresh opportunities to aggrandize wealth and material comforts without respecting his life, health and the right of posterity to live on this planet as he and his ancestors lived. Towards the end, the poem acquires a more serious tone. Atwood writes, “This is not sport, sir/ This is not good weather./ This is not blue and green”(Eating Fire 324). Here the poet is talking to her contemporaries. Since the ecosystem has been irreparably damaged to a great extent, it is high time to stop the violence of human beings against it. Wherever you go, you have no escape. This ecosystem is interconnected and mutually dependent. Thus, Atwood ends the poem with a note of hope and warning; if you and your children want to survive on this planet, be judicious and empathetic in your plans and actions.

“Bear Lament” is another poem dealing with the theme of climate change and its after-effects. The life of polar bears, the planet’s biggest carnivores, is at particular risk from global warming which melts the Arctic sea ice. Polar bears are the top predators in the food web of the Arctic people and they have an extremely important role in the healthy balance of their ecosystem. So it is our responsibility to protect these animals from extinction by regulating the temperature of the planet from not going up. The poem warns human beings that the life of these poor creatures is in their hands. Seals are the main diet of these bears. As the ice is melting due to the rising environmental temperature, they are not able to hunt their prey by moving through the surface of the ice. They are forced to move to the shore without storing an adequate amount of fat deposit in their body to exist away from their natural habitat. The bear in the poem is growing thinner and it is getting weak due to the lack of appropriate food to maintain

its life. Warming Arctic has turned into an inappropriate place for polar bears and seals which are their natural prey.

Polar bears can walk and swim long distances searching for their food without getting tired. The remarkable sense of smell of these bears helps them hunt the seals under the thick ice and over long distances. Climate change and global warming have made these predators' life miserable and uncertain. A place without rightful food is compared to a barren field where nothing is grown for feeding others. Human beings do not understand the far-reaching consequences of their self-centred actions and they are least bothered about their responsibility in leading their fellow animals into such plights. The rhetorical questions of the poet in the last stanza, " Oh bear, what now?/ And will the ground/ still hold? And now/ much longer? " (The Door 57-58) are poignant and thought-provoking. Everybody knows that the ground will not hold long and that polar bears will move to extinction if humans do not take strict steps to curb the factors contributing to climate change.

The climate-related poem "Weather" by Margaret Atwood occurs in her 2007 poetry collection *The Door* which appeared nine years after her 1998 collection, *Eating Fire*. In this poem, the poet shares her concern over the change in the cycle of natural seasons and the resultant issues. Earlier, people used to be alert to the changes in the weather, but now they are indifferent to the changes in nature. Human beings out of their selfishness and greed exploit nature indiscriminately. The emission of greenhouse gases has made this planet an inappropriate place for living. Once human beings had a time when everything was fine and in order. They are still living in this belief that they are safe under an umbrella. Human beings out of their overconfidence and miscalculations lived a careless life leaving their focus on peripheral issues. Poet likens the weather to a ferocious animal like a snake or a panther or a

thug. According to the poet, the weather has turned untameable and violent these days. Man is meticulously thinking about the possible solutions to tackle the issue to retrieve the lost peace and order. He yearns to go back to the old days when the weather was predictable and favourable to the inhabitants of the planet. When the weather was predictable and under control, it was not this visible and didn't have this monstrous figure and features. The question "Who let it out?" should make mankind remorseful.

Man is responsible for the present plight of climate and its consequences. In this era of the Anthropocene, man is astounded at the predicament that he brought about. "Is it our fault?" is a question emanating from the bottom of his heart out of his agony and guilt consciousness. Man often forgets about the enormous power of nature. The aftermath of the actions of a section of humanity will have effects on the entire planet. As man denies the fact that nature has its laws and order, the innocent and the meek often fall prey to his ill deeds. The poet once again asserts the enormous power of nature in the last stanza by employing certain thought-provoking questions with a tone of mysticism. "It's blind and deaf and stupendous,/ and has no mind of its own./ Or does it? What if it does?/ Suppose you were to pray to it,/what would you say?/" (The Door 54). No way other than praying to God is left to man because the human ill-deeds have such a far-reaching result and they have irreversibly destructed nature and its resources.

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Margaret Atwood's latest collection, *Dearly* has more climate change poems and she attempts to present the issue at gross levels. In her earlier collections, she was concentrating more on the issue of climate change from the point of disastrous impact, whereas in the present collection Atwood is more specific about the cause and the indifferent human attitudes.

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“Aflame” is a climate change poem that appears in the third part of the collection. Atwood opens the poem abruptly by stating the present global predicament: “The world’s burning up. It always did.” (Dearly 52-53). The poet presents a series of perspectives like an autumn forest, childhood memories of roasting marshmallows around the fire, prehistoric jungles converted to coal and oil, myths of jinn, seals of the apocalypse, runes of the Norse, Faustian vibes, etc. These are all strung together as in a thread of human sin and innocence. This poem illustrates man’s irresponsible interventions and the resultant disasters. The epics which acted as the slow fuse were all ignored, and as a result, humans began to fail in handling difficult situations. Man ignored the warnings from nature. “All, all are coming true/ because we opened the lead seals,/ ignored the warning runes,/ and let the stories out”(Dearly 52-53). Humans ignore the warning letters from nature that manifest in different forms like floods, droughts, tsunamis, heat waves, etc. In this era of the Anthropocene, the planet has gone excessively damaged and irreversibly ruined. The innocent nonhuman members of the planet also become fated to receive punishment for the sins of man.

The fourth section of the collection, *Dearly* is replete with more climate-related poems. “Oh, Children” is a perfect example of Climate Change poetry. The poet poses a series of questions to children who are destined to live on this insecure and damned planet. Man has made here an inappropriate place for peaceful living through his greed and ignorance. Every species has a niche in its ecosystem that helps keep the system healthy. Unfortunately, as a result of mounting heat and climate change, several species are on the verge of extinction. Here the poet is anxious about the future of the children who may have to live in an environment having lost its biodiversity and natural resources. How many birds and animals will survive the rising heat of the planet? The speaker

of the poem asks, "Oh children, will you grow up in a world without birds?" (Dearly 97). According to the speaker, life will exist here at a minimum because this planet has grown into a disaster-prone place. There will be waves, breezes, storms and cyclones, stones and ripples because they don't need much life to exist here like the life-pulsating organisms. Poet continues: "There will be sunsets, as long as there is dust. / There will be dust" (Dearly 97). Considering the present state of pollution and the amount of dust produced by factories, the speaker is sure about the presence of dust in the future environment. A life without songs and trees is what awaits the child. The poet is portraying a more gruesome picture here to bring his idea home. The child will have to escape from here to some cave with an oxygen cylinder to maintain his life. He may even lose the spark of life from his eyes because what awaits him is such a world where just existence will be a miserable exercise. "Will your eyes blank out like the eggwhite eyes/ of sunless fish?/ In there, what will you wish for?" (Dearly 97).

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Towards the end of the poem, "Oh, Children", Atwood becomes more specific in using more gross examples of creatures in the victim's position in the Anthropocene. Her usual concern over the melting of the glaciers due to global warming is referred to here. " Oh children, will you grow up in a world without ice?/ Without mice, without lichens?" Mice population decreases due to climate change. Atwood's scientific temper is very much evident in these poems along with her inimitable poetic craft and ecological awareness. In the penultimate line, she mentions lichens which are a keystone species in many ecosystems. They act as food sources and habitats for many animals like deer, birds, and rodents. Besides, they act as a protective cover for trees from extreme rain, wind, and snow. Presenting the predicament of these animals, plants, and trees in a time of climate crisis, Atwood puts her final question by intensifying the gravity of the

situation. "Oh children, will you grow up?" (Dearly 97). Though the question has a pessimistic undertone, it is sympathetic too. In this era of the Anthropocene, one cannot help thinking in this line because contemporary life experiences provide him with ample testimony to substantiate the anxiety of the poet in the last line.

Since the end of the last ice age, climatologists have been warning humankind to be judicious in the exploitation of natural resources to reinstate a stable climatic condition for the planet. Despite this clamour for a shift of human position from the dominant to the democratic, they do not seem to have made any alteration in their attitude. In the poetic expression of these issues unlike several of her contemporaries, Margaret Atwood has unique and scientific views. Analyses of all the poems above reveal one thing, there have been great efforts and scientific contemplations on the part of the poet in the matter of the referred environmental issues.

Atwood's ecocritical poems are not a mere glorification and exaltation of nature and natural objects. Instead, she firmly asserts her politics, poetics, and scientific convictions in a straightforward, at times sarcastic, way. Atwood's climate change poems are exhortations to the contemporary generation to be generous, judicious, and empathetic in their outlook. This raises the question of their survival too. It will be evocative to conclude the paper with the words of Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Wangari Maathai. She writes, "I saw human communities restored along with nature. This is not a mystical phenomenon; it is a fact of human existence. Human beings cannot thrive in a place where the natural environment has been degraded"(VII-IX).

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Deviant Motherhood and Matrophobia: A Post-feminist Reading of Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should*

—Sijo Varghese C.

Abstract: Four generations of women discuss the intricacies related to motherhood in Charlotte Keatley's play *My Mother Said I Never Should*. All four women were being advised by their mothers not to get married and have children. Unfortunately, the first three generations of women fall victim to the biological need and have children of their own. All eyes are set on Rosie who represents the fourth generation and she surprises everyone with her incredible act. In the post-feminist era, motherhood is no more a coveted achievement instead a hindrance to progress. Women are in search of alternatives to substitute motherhood and the duty is entrusted to someone else. A deviant attitude is noted among women with regard to motherhood and they are afraid to become mothers.

Keywords: Matrophobia, Motherhood, Deviant, Sacrifice, and Surrogacy.

Charlotte Keatley's play *My Mother Said I Never Should* breaks the shackles of traditional motherhood. The concept of motherhood is being glorified in all holy books and it is a unique experience in the life of a woman. The sufferings and the pain that a woman undergoes during the process of childbirth has no parallel in the history of the world. All mothers should be respected for their contribution to the society. Child rearing is a difficult process as it involves a lot of time and energy. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf puts it as,

First there are nine months before the baby is born. Then the baby is born. Then there are three or four months spent in feeding the baby. After the

baby is fed there are certainly five years spent in playing with the baby. You cannot, it seems, let children run about the streets. People who have seen them running wild in Russia say that the sight is not a pleasant one. People say, too, that human nature takes its shape in the years between one and five. (13)

Motherhood is glorified only when the woman gives birth after the marriage. The society has attached certain stigmas with respect to illegitimate children. Motherhood is a biological process and it can't function as per the policies of the Government. Age is fixed for marriage in most of the countries so as to equip the man and woman to shoulder the responsibilities. Parents are scared when their unmarried daughters become pregnant as they are not in a position to manage both their studies and life. The whole affair of marriage and the process of looking after children force women to exclude themselves from the sphere of academic circle. A woman has to sacrifice number of things for becoming a mother. Adrienne Rich in her *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, sums up the great struggles of women for thriving to be successful as,

A generation of politically active women had shaped much of the climate and hopes of the 19970s, working for quality low-cost childcare, for woman and child-centred birth instead of medicalized labour and obstetrical high tech, for equal pay for equal work, for the legalization of free and safe elective abortion, for the prevention of sterilization abuse, for the rights of lesbian mothers to custody of their children, for the recognition of rape, including marital rape, as an act of violence, for the recognition of sexual harassment in

the work place as sex discrimination, for affirmative action, for an overall health-care system responsive to women, for changes in the masculine bias of the social sciences and the humanities, and for much else. Yet all these have been at best partial victories, having to be won over and over in the courts and before the public conscience. (xii –xiii)

Motherhood is indispensable for human existence. The process of childbirth is the prerogative right of women. From time immemorial, women were confined to the four walls of their homes for looking after their children. Men usually go out and provide provisions for the livelihood of the family. The patriarchal society did not respect the individuality of women, instead women were being treated as sex objects for family reproduction. In this process, women were completely sidelined from political, academic and cultural activities. The extra social pressure on women to look after children increased day by day and they were completely isolated from the main-stream society.

Science and technology contributed for the welfare of women in two different ways: contraceptives and legal abortions have helped women a lot in coming out from the clutches of tyranny and subordination associated with motherhood. The use of contraceptives has paved way for women's autonomy and the feminist movement has driven women out into the forefront of academic circle. Women wanted to excel in their own spheres of activity and the legalized abortion and contraceptives supported them. Church was against the use of contraceptives as they uphold the dictum that 'children are the gifts of God'. The removal of unwanted pregnancy also helped women to strive towards building a career in their lives. A woman

should have the right to decide whether she wanted to have children or not. It should never be forced upon anyone. The present world is witnessing the rapid changes with the contribution of women in the field of arts, sports and politics.

The present generation of women has struggled to revive themselves from the stampede of patriarchal dominance. Adrienne Rich in her *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, brings out various misconceptions about motherhood as,

Patriarchy has told the woman in labor that her suffering was purposive – was the purpose of her existence; that the new life she was bringing forth (especially if male) was of value and that her own value depended on bringing it forth. As the means of reproduction without which cities and colonies could not expand, without which a family would die out and its prosperity pass into the hands of strangers, she has found herself at the center of purposes, not hers, which she has often incorporated and made into her own. The woman in labor might perceive herself as bringing forth a new soldier to fight for the tribe or nation-state, a new head of the rising yeoman or bourgeois family, a new priest or rabbi for her fathers' faith, or a new mother to take up the renewal of life. (159)

Deviant motherhood and matrophobia are the two prominent themes found in Charlotte Keatley's play *My Mother Said I Never Should*. The sanctity associated with motherhood is being deviated from the normal one to customized entity. Women are in search of alternatives after having realized the fact that motherhood hinders the

progress of their career. Deviant motherhood is resulted when women adopt different techniques to look after their children. The attitude of women to nurture their children by entrusting them in someone's hand for building up their career is being referred to as deviant motherhood. It should be encouraged to a certain extent, as women do not lose their career for bringing up their children. Matrophobia is different from deviant motherhood and it denotes that a woman is afraid of becoming a mother. A woman has the right to abstain herself from becoming a mother and one should be physically and mentally fit to give birth to a child. Adrienne Rich in her *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, says,

Matrophobia as the poet Lynn Sukenick has termed it is the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother...* Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (235 – 236)

The title of the play *My Mother Said I Never Should* is taken from the nursery song written by Lynn Barnard as:

My mother said, I never should
 Play with the gypsies in the wood.
 If I did, she would say;
 Naughty girl to disobey!

The opening line of the song is gender sensitive as it is directed to a girl. The title also indicates the warnings given by a mother to a child. Four generations of women are being represented in the play. The opening scene of the play is the wasteground in which the four generations of women become children. In the wasteground scene, the four women forget about their age and play like children. Four generations of women perform the pivotal role of interchanging themselves to both women and children. Doris Partington was born in 1900 and she was the eldest of the four. She is aged five in the child scenes. Margaret Bradley was the daughter of Doris and she was born in 1931. She is aged nine in all the child scenes. Jackie Metcalfe was the daughter of Margaret and she was born in 1952. In the wasteground scenes, Jackie appears with the age of a nine year old. Rosie Metcalfe was the daughter of Jackie but she was looked after by Margaret, who told her that Jackie was her sister. Rosie was aged eight in all child scenes. Charlotte Keatley comments about the significance of the child scenes as, "The child scenes give all four women the chance to escape time altogether; there is no envy, there is no perception of one person being mother to another either further back or forward in time. I wanted to explore how mothers and daughters could share common experiences if not divided by time and age" (xxxiii).

In the opening scene, Jackie suggests "let's kill our Mummy" and she goes on to add that "I've got a penknife. I've been keeping it for something special"(5-6). The attitude of the children towards their mother is being highlighted. Among the four children, Jackie seems to be the oldest and takes decision for the others. Margaret is also nine in the child scenes but she is passive and submissive to the rest. Margaret is afraid of blood and the

duty of killing the Mummy is assigned to Jackie. As all the children show their aggression to kill their Mummy, Margaret takes a wiser decision by stating that she will never marry in her life and will not have babies. Such a decision will help Margaret to live longer in her life as her own babies will not cultivate the feeling of revenge against their Mummy. The themes of matrophobia and hatred towards mother are being introduced in the opening scene itself. All the children wish to kill their mummy and at the same time prefer to remain single without getting married and free from children. Doris was a teacher and she knew the importance of job in one's life and to thrive in a married life both husband and wife should work. Margaret had the courage to disclose to her mother Doris that she was in love with Ken, an American ex-pilot. Margaret had the conviction that a wife should also go for work and support the family and she says, "I'm going to learn to type! Ken says it will be helpful if we need a second income. Typing's far more useful than all those stupid school certificates. I'll get a proper job" (30).

At the age of nineteen, Jackie gives birth to a child Rosie. Jackie had a relationship with a person who was already married and was serving as a lecturer in one of the institutions. They do not accuse each other, instead, Jackie voluntarily takes up the responsibility of bringing up Rosie. Margaret is totally upset by the new development with regard to Jackie; first of all Jackie gives birth at a very early stage in her life without proper marriage and secondly, Jackie's entire career is sacrificed for raising the child and so she won't be able to concentrate on her studies. Margaret provides a solution to the present problem of Jackie and to how her daughter Rosie is to be brought up without troubling her mother. Rosie will be told that Margaret is her mother and Jackie is her elder sister. This

secret shall not be disclosed until the sixteenth birthday of Rosie. Jackie was happy with the decision taken by Margaret and she welcomes it as, "I'll go back! Yes I will, finish the degree, I won't fail both things! Only think about her at night, her cheek against mine, soft and furry, like an apricot" (27).

Rosie derives acute positive pleasure in being with a successful elder sister Jackie and she speaks to her classmates about her wonderful sister. Rosie does not know at her young age that Jackie is her real mother, and Margaret is her grandmother. Rosie starts cultivating a kind of hatred towards Margaret as she is a strict disciplinarian. Rosie's complete admiration for her successful, learned, unmarried sister Jackie goes beyond words on one side and her complete dissatisfaction with her mother Margaret on the other hand. Hatred towards mother and matrophobia are being reflected in the character of Rosie. It is evident that Rosie is not interested to get married in the future and as a result she stops playing with her doll Suky. Rosie is in the process of unlearning what she has already learned about motherhood. Doll is a gendered toy usually given to girls. It's the first step by the society to kindle the early spark of motherhood. Whenever the child plays with the doll, the child feels that she is the mother nurturing the child by way of providing food and clothing. Rosie realizes the fact that it is a tough job to become a mother. This self-realization encourages Rosie to bury her doll Suky on her eighth birthday. As the rest of the members of Rosie's family are busy in the preparation of her birthday, Rosie is engaged with digging a hole in the garden for burying Suky. Though it appears to be insignificant for the rest of the members of Rosie's family, her action of discarding the doll from her life debunks the traditional notions of

motherhood. Rosie realizes that the world is trying to prepare every girl child to accept the values associated with motherhood and that the doll is an archetypal symbol. The deliberate attempt on her side to bury the doll was to put an end to the traditional burden attached to women. It's an attempt to liberate women from the clutches of familial ties and Rosie says:

It's my birthday today and it's all gone wrong already. I'm going to bury you, Suky. Eight is too old for dolls. I want a Sex Pistols tee shirt. Some hope. Unless Jackie brings me one! I'd have buried you ages and ages ago, Suky, if you hadn't been Mum's. I couldn't care less now if Mum sees me doing this. (Digs in the tub) Suky. Stupid name. Even cutting your hair off it won't go punk. I bet Mum cuddled you and stuff, didn't she? Well I only hug people when I want to, not when it's visitors. When I want to I can hug harder than anyone. In the World. I'm saving it. I was going to give you away to the Toy Collection at school, d'you know that? Mummies give their babies away sometimes. They do. (Slowly lays the doll in the hole.) Shut up crying. There, see, I'm putting you in this urn. People get buried in urns. (Covering the doll over with earth). (38 – 39)

Rosie is highly ambitious and wants to conquer the highest realms and achieve personal glory like her elder sister Jackie. Rosie believes that Jackie is a self-made woman. One of the reasons for the highest achievement of Jackie is her present position of being single even at the age of twenty seven. Rosie's admiration for Jackie is summed up as, "She never cries. No one else at school has a sister who's a grown-up, I might easily run away with Jackie and live with her. Then you'd be sorry, Suky. So would Mum" (39).

Rosie's fondness for Jackie is due to her hatred towards her mother Margaret. Rosie does not know the fact that Jackie is her biological mother and Margaret has extended support to her daughter Jackie to complete her education. It was also promised that the secret will not be revealed until Rosie celebrates her sixteenth birthday. In this scenario, a deviant attitude to motherhood is being exposed to the public. Margaret takes up the responsibility of bringing up Rosie without troubling the studies of Jackie. It's obvious that Jackie gives birth to Rosie at the age of nineteen and it is too early for her to manage the new born baby and her studies. Rosie never speaks about Margaret to her classmates; instead she praises her elder sister Jackie without knowing the fact that she is her biological mother. Margaret, in fact does a great sacrifice in bringing up Rosie for the welfare of her daughter Jackie. As a token of gratitude, Jackie offers a cheque to Margaret for raising Rosie with the remarks, "new bikes are expensive" (43). Margaret tears up the cheque in retaliation for having equated motherhood with labour. Deviant attitude to motherhood is depicted by Jackie when she does not take up the responsibility of bringing up Rosie and neglects her duty as a responsible mother. Jackie deviates from the traditional concept of motherhood and considers it as a profession rather than a mission. Jackie could persevere in her career as an artist at the expense of sacrificing her own child to be brought up by her mother.

Rosie had mixed feelings when she realized that Jackie was her real mother and Margaret was her grandmother. Rosie at point blank asked two tormenting questions to Jackie for having forsaken her at a young age: "You wanted your own life more than you wanted mine! If you were really my Mum you wouldn't have been able to give me away!"

(83). Jackie couldn't help herself and broke into tears how she suffered during those times of trials and tribulations. For the first time in her life, Jackie gives the whereabouts of Rosie's father as:

Graham ... your Father. He couldn't be there the day you were born, he had to be in Liverpool. He was married. He loved me, he loved you, you must believe that! He said he'd leave his wife, but I knew he wouldn't; there were two children, the youngest was only four, ... we'd agreed, separate lives, I wanted to bring you up. He sent money. I took you to Lyme Park one day, I saw them together, across the lake, he was buying them ice creams, his wife was taking photo. I think they live in Leeds now... It was a very cold winter after you were born. There were power cuts. I couldn't keep the room warm; there were no lights in the tower blocks...I kept waking in the night to feed you...Then I went back to art school. Sandra and Hugh thought I was inhuman. I remember the books that came out that winter – how to succeed as a single working mother. (83 – 84)

Jackie is struck by remorse for snatching away the happy childhood from her daughter. On the one hand Jackie couldn't give what her daughter expected from the mother during her childhood but on the other she could become a successful artist. Charlotte Keatley's play *My Mother Said I Never Should* can be analyzed from a post feminist perspective. The play has a number of similarities with Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. In this play the major character Marlene could become the Managing Director of Top Girls Employment Agency only when she left her own child Angie and she was brought up by her sister Joyce. Marlene's daughter Angie hates Joyce and she has great

admiration for her aunt as she occupies top most position in the society. In order to climb the ladder of success, one has to sacrifice many things including family. Men have been doing the same from time immemorial and the secret of their success is exposure to the world. Women also realized the fact that pregnancy, childbirth and feeding hinder the progress of their personal growth and they are being sidelined from the mainstream society. Feminist movements and exposure to the literary world changed the attitude of women in the society.

The traditional norms associated within motherhood were being perceived from the viewpoint of patriarchal ideology and there was no space for women to move according to their choice. Women were confined to their own closed premises and all their efforts culminated in looking after children. Even in modern times, the contribution made by women in nurturing the family is praiseworthy. A deviance is noted in motherhood and the duty of bringing up the child is being entrusted upon someone else. It has become very common that women celebrities are not interested to give birth to children and surrogacy is practiced for the sake of convenience. Surrogacy is legally valid and it helps many women to have their own babies. It has now become a fashion for many women without any medical issues, to go for surrogacy and they do not experience the process of pregnancy and childbirth. It is one of the attitudinal changes that have taken place with regard to motherhood. Motherhood is always on the state of flux and change in the attitude is always a sign of progress. The play *My Mother Said I Never Should* is conceived from the post-feminist perspective as it focuses on the attitude of women in the society. The characters in the play prefer to evade from responsibilities just like men in order to achieve personal glory and stability in their career. It is an

early step towards attaining freedom without responsibilities. The whole process of becoming a mother pesters women in the society and a deviance is noted from the traditional concept of motherhood.

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The Erasure of Indigenous Culture and Identity: Analysis of the Narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass

—Anu Paul

Abstract: Examining the narratives of former slaves makes evident the extremity of the institution of slavery, as it created physical, cultural, moral, ethical and economical dilemmas. Any institution is defined best by people who are directly affected by it and slavery is documented in all its dimensions in the narratives. Throughout slavery there can be traced a condescending attitude from the masters towards the language, culture and religious practices of their slaves. Slave narratives can be considered as the voice of a generation silenced for ages and it signifies the fact that even adversities of such magnitude as slavery couldn't dampen the spirit of former slaves. Many of them acquired education and played significant roles during emancipation by penning narratives and delivering speeches. Slavery couldn't be captured realistically by any of the genres conceived by white authors because it was the first-hand experience of the Africans. Former slaves in their narratives often portrayed how slavery obliterated their culture. These moving narratives were capable of convincing the readers of the necessity of abolishing the system of human bondage. Thus, slave narratives presented before the world the voice of a community which was silenced for ages.

Keywords: Slavery, Slave Narratives, Culture, Identity.

The Transatlantic slave trade, which took place between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had a devastating impact on the native cultures of the enslaved people. Enslaved Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands, families, communities and were transported to the Americas. One of the primary methods of oppression used by slave owners

was the obliteration of native culture. Enslaved people were often forced to adopt the language, religion and cultural practices of their enslavers. They were punished for speaking their native languages and were given new names, forced to wear clothing that was foreign to them, and even separated from family members who spoke the same language. Erasure of native cultures was done intentionally to facilitate the process of enslavement and there can be traced a condescending attitude from the masters towards the language, culture and religious practices of their slaves. As Charles T. Davis and Gates state in their introduction to *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), "Slavery acted to erase the memories of an old culture...vestiges of the African past remained – in song, dance, tales told in slave quarters, work done by hands"(xii). Many Christian masters interpreted the native culture and religion of Africans as barbaric which ought to be tamed and domesticated by converting them into Christianity.

Analysis of the narratives of Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* and Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself*, one can find direct references to the culture and oral tradition of native Africans. Slavery played a significant role in introducing the culture and religion of whites to the Africans who assimilated the new tradition accommodating it to suit their own beliefs and practices. Conversion to Christianity and acquirement of education were the two milestones that led Africans forward towards emancipation. Frederick Douglass often quoted from the Bible during his famous speeches to validate the point that Christianity, a humanitarian religion, would never support a barbaric institution like

slavery. It is significant to analyse narratives by former slaves to capture the essence of the institution of slavery in order to understand how after slavery blacks found it essential to revive and stick on to their native culture. Slavery couldn't be captured realistically by any of the genres conceived by white authors because it was the first-hand experience of the Africans. Some scholars consider that slave authors' imitation of the literature written by whites was similar to what some postcolonial critics have called 'mimicry', of the colonisers.

A pioneering postcolonial theorist and activist, who wrote in the 1960s, Frantz Fanon, analysed the psychological effects of colonialism on both the coloniser and the colonised. Frantz Fanon has identified three phases of evolution in the culture of colonised people. One can trace the characteristics of the third phase in the African American writings of slavery. He names the three phases as the assimilationist, the cultural nationalist, and the nationalist ones. He explains this concept in his famous work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The first phase contains inspiration largely derived from European culture. While the first phase vividly portrays the assimilation of western culture, the second phase brings forth the memories of the native culture. Overcoming these two intensely emotional phases the third phase dawns, and to quote Fanon,

Instead of letting the people's lethargy prevail, he turns into a galvanizer of the people. Combat literature, a revolutionary literature, national literature emerges. During this phase a great many men and women who previously would never have thought of writing, now....feel the need to proclaim their nation, to portray their

people, and become the spokesperson of a new reality in action. (162)

Afro-American slave narratives mainly reveal the characteristics allotted to the third, that is, the nationalist phase. Slave narratives combine the conventions of many existing genres and yet maintain their unique features. They started valuing their way of life and culture and tried to assert their own identity. Slaves acquired literacy during slavery and their narratives became the initial works in African American Literature. Mere imitation was discarded by ex-slave writers and they introduced their own voice, the voice of the black men and women. Authoring their own books gave them the confidence to handle their own future and it later helped in placing themselves as free citizens after emancipation.

Narratives in general, according to Ide Corley, created a “disruption of Western modes of thinking, of binary distinctions between epistemological categories such as black and white, or civilization and savagery” (139). Pamphlets, testimonies, narratives, newspapers, religious sermons and secular lectures played a vital role in spreading abolitionist messages. Mastery over written word enabled the slaves to record their experiences and to communicate them to a largely literate audience. Slave narratives played an important role in the struggle for abolition of slavery by gaining the support of empathetic white readers. Africans who escaped slavery found themselves in a confusing situation because they were generations apart from their native land. Living long years in slavery they had lost their native culture and religion and it was almost impossible to return to Africa. The necessity to assimilate themselves into

American society was a major hurdle they had to face. Thus by writing their narratives they tried to create a new social situation where free blacks would be seen as a part of America.

White masters often justified slavery arguing that blacks were uncultured brutes and needed taming to live as a civilised human being. This patronising attitude was always a hindrance to the empowerment of the blacks before and after emancipation. The abolitionist movement required blacks to challenge the subhuman status assigned to Africans by individuals such as David Hume whose pseudo-scientific arguments regarded Africans as a 'separate species', more animal than human (Salih 15). Similarly, apologists such as Gordon Turnbull claimed that African slavery was one of the "necessary links [...] [in] the chain of causes and events" (34). In his narrative *Oludah Equiano* combats these notions by providing evidence of the African's intellectual capacity and position of the African within a Christian framework. Equiano's application of Christianity's guiding principle, 'love thy neighbour as thyself' (Matthew 19:19) challenges the slave trade's concept of the African slave as a 'piece of property' (Walvin 17). Thus he uses the white man's Bible for asserting freedom by making the readers aware of Whiteman's hypocrisy in keeping blacks as slaves and following a Christian faith simultaneously. Thus, the blacks resorted to a religion which was originally alien to Africans to advocate the cause of emancipation.

Geraldine Murphy in the article "*Oludah Equiano, Accidental Tourist*" positions Equiano's narrative "within and against the terms of the dominant culture" (553). Equiano triggered a sort of "reverse acculturation", in

which the oppressed learn the literary culture of their oppressors to further their own ends (Leask 9). In this process what aided Equiano was his acquisition of literacy. His first encounter with a book is described in his story and it is evident how curious and enthusiastic he is in gaining access to books. He relates in his narrative, "I had often seen my master and Dick [Richard Baker] employed in reading; and I had great curiosity to talk to books, as I thought they did; ... I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ear to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent" (69).

Blacks, once upon a time, lived in a society where oral culture was more significant and the transition to another culture where reading and writing were considered as empowerment was a difficult one. Their status as slaves and the denial of education didn't help them to attain literacy. So Equiano's journey towards literacy and his narrative unravel how blacks acquired literacy and used it for attaining their freedom. As Henry Louis Gates confirms: "... by affirming himself as a writing subject, Equiano suggests that he too possesses those qualities of 'reason' and 'humanity' which enlightenment liked to preserve as purely white" (Plasa 16). Religion is often a recurring theme in slave narratives since the major guiding force in the slave's journey towards freedom is his faith in God. According to Mary Beth Norton, slaves "... adopted Christianity, yet adapted it to their African practices. In Christianity, they found hope for and faith in a better future, because many slaves believed that God would end their plight. They thought it was a religion of justice, support and resistance" (253).

In Equiano's work he beautifully describes the culture and customs of his race, which inhabited the beautiful valley of Essaka, which belonged to the province of Eboe. According to him theirs was a race in which every transaction was done by chiefs or elders and "... the manners and government of a people who have little commerce with other countries are generally very simple" (3). His father was a chief, 'Embrenche', a position that brought with it great respect and grandeur. They settled disputes and punished crimes. They used to practice "... cutting the skin across at the top of the forehead, and drawing it down to eyebrows" (3). Adultery was a serious crime and the husband had the right to punish wife if found guilty of the same with either slavery or death. He also recollects how often parents found brides for their sons and dowry was paid as cattle and household goods. To quote him, "... parents of the bridegroom present gifts to those of the bride, whose property she is looked upon before marriage; but after it she is esteemed the sole property of her husband" (3).

The Africans too have their religious beliefs and Equiano recollects that there was "... one Creator of all things, and that he lives in the sun ... he governs events especially our deaths or captivity" (7). They never believed in eternity but held that some spirits didn't transmigrate, but protected them from the spirits of their foes. Before eating they always leave a small portion of meat and drink, "... on the ground for them and often make oblations of the blood of beasts or fowls at their grave" (8). He remembers how some of the customs of his tribe were similar to that of the Jews: "... we practiced circumcision like the Jews, and made

offerings and feasts ... the same manner as they did ... we had many purifications and washings; indeed almost as many and used on the same occasions as Jews” (9). They had priests and magicians who calculated time and foretold events to come. These priests and magicians functioned as their doctors and “... practiced bleeding by cupping, and were very successful in healing wounds and expelling poisons” (10). They believed in omens and he narrates an incident of a snake “... passing between” his “legs without touching” him which was considered by his people as a good omen (11). The picture of the community he draws reveals that it had a unique culture and people coexisted without harming nature and worshipping natural elements.

Equiano also describes how in their tribe every event like triumph in a battle or any other public rejoicing was celebrated with public dancing, music and song. They used many musical instruments, “... particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles guitar, and another much like a sticakado [a musical instrument similar to a xylophone]” (4). They lived a humble life and even their clothes were simple like, “...a long piece of calico, or muslin, wrapped loosely around the body....dyed blue” (4). According to him they were unacquainted with strong beverages and their principal beverage was palm wine. In his tribe each master of the house had a large square piece of ground surrounded by a fence and it enclosed the houses of his family and servants. Everyone was engaged in agriculture and there were no beggars in their community. The significant role of literacy can be traced in the quotes which he uses from a range of sources like the Bible, Antony Benezet and John Milton in order to challenge apologist ideology. His writing published in 1789, can be included

in the first wave of abolitionist movement that focused on dismantling the slave trade.

Frederick Douglass in his *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself* explains about how he perceived the songs sung by slaves and according to him, "... mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of the whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do" (36). He refutes the argument of pro-slavery activists, who said that the songs of slaves were evidence to their contentment and happiness. According to Douglass, "Slaves sing when they are most unhappy ... crying for joy, and singing for joy, was similarly uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery" (36). He recalls his life with Master Thomas Auld, who resorted to religious dictates for justifying the institution of slavery. Auld used to quote scriptures while punishing slaves: "I have seen him tie up a lame young woman, and whip her with a heavy cow skin upon her naked shoulders, causing the warm red blood drip and in justification of the bloody deed quote this passage of scripture- 'He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.'" (60).

Douglass has attached an appendix to his narrative to explain his stance on Christianity because he felt the readers would perceive that he abhorred the religion of slave holders. He comments, "What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slave holding religion of this land ... for between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference" (93). Frederick Douglass also stresses on the importance of

education and firmly believes that knowledge is the only way to freedom and points out how even their birth year was hidden from the slaves. He contends that the male slaves found themselves alienated from their own family because they couldn't protect their wives or children. It is a long journey from slavery to freedom for himself and his fellow men. As Waldo Martin remarks,

First, he, like the American Nation itself and its most enduring folk heroes rose above seemingly overwhelming odds to achieve historical distinction. Second, he represents a model self-made man: an exemplary black version of uncommon achievement primarily through the agency of resolute will and hard toil aided by moral law and divine providence. Not only did he succeed, but he did so in terms signifying mythic greatness: the uniquely gifted individual rising above anonymity and adversity to renowned and good fortune largely through the force of superlative character and indefatigable effort. (253)

With remarkable clarity he portrays the harsh realities of slave plantations not merely to bring home his readers to its serenity but to make them empathise with the slaves. Douglass in his autobiography states how the slave owners impregnated female slaves and he makes the readers think about the fate of such children born to a master from his slave. He describes how slavery corrupted all those who participated in it and how the wives of the masters tortured the female slaves and their husband's children in the slaves. By presenting before the readers a whipping scene of Aunt Hester and the effect of this scene upon his young self, he exposes the deep

vileness of slavery. He feels ashamed of being a man as he cannot rescue his aunt. Douglass's Narrative mentions the writers' status as 'slave' in their title. By doing so, abolitionists primarily sought to stress the fact that these accounts were the literary undertakings of slaves who were supposed to be illiterate. Moreover, as these narratives were advertised as being first-hand testimonies of slavery, the author's enslaved status aroused the public's curiosity.

In both the narratives, to stress the authenticity of the events represented there, are prefaces which provide the reader with a plethora of information related to the circumstances in which the manuscripts were prepared. In William L. Garrison's preface to Douglass' narrative he mentions that Douglass writes, "... in his own style, and according to the best of his ability, rather than to employ someone else. It is, therefore, entirely his own production" (viii). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remain one of the most remarkable periods in history, as masses of people from various sectors of the public were drawn together for the common humanitarian purpose of abolishing a trade that confined their fellowmen to a state of misery and subhuman status. The abolitionist movement highlights the potential of literacy to empower people to influence politics. Studying slave narratives of this period is a fruitful exercise which inspires us to reflect on the humanitarian issues that persist in our contemporary world and to consider the influential role of literacy in the circulation of ideas.

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