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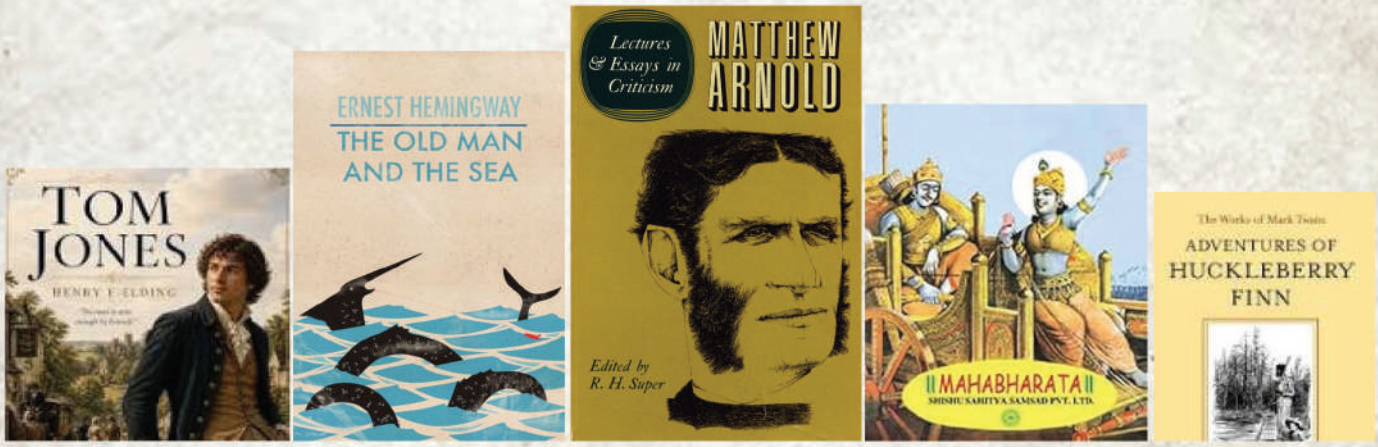

Revisiting Classics, Revitalizing Meaning : Reading Classics through Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Chief Editor

Dr. Dipak Jyoti Baruah

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ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING SUBMISSIONS FOR NOVEMBER, 2026 'MISCELLANY' ISSUE (Vol. XV-II)

Drishti:the Sight invites research papers for its November, 2026 special 'Miscellany' issue (Vol. XV-II). There will be no specific or common focus area for writing articles. Authors may send articles on a topic in any of the areas of English Literature, Assamese Literature, Folklore, Culture.

Authors are requested to read the **Call for Papers** on our website for the modalities to be followed by them for their write ups.

Please submit your write ups through the submission window on our website (www.drishtithesight.com). The submission window will remain open during the period of July, 12-July,22 (2026).

Editorial

SOCIETY, VALUES AND LITERATURE IN THE TECHNOCRATIC AGE

People today are seldom naturally garrulous in communal gatherings; they rarely open up to one another, as though an isolationist dynamic were quietly at work. The information age is deeply intertwined with global capitalism. We live today in a highly digitized society;the spaces of our lives seem increasingly appropriated by this digital and AI-driven age. Our life is one of rigid schedules. No wonder then that the physical world no longer attracts or educates us as it once did. While it foregrounds the potentials of knowledge work and meritocracy, it often turns away from emotional values. Humanity thus finds itself in an extraordinary existential condition. The question arises: is contemporary literature adequately equipped to engage with these singular circumstances?

Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine (2017) by Gail Honeyman may be read as a testament to the emotional fragmentation and social alienation characteristic of our time. Similarly, Michel Houellebecq's *Annihilation* (2022) offers insight into the new existential conditions to which individuals are exposed in a technocratic world. Significantly, both these novels also uphold in their own ways the power of love and interconnected relationships. The nature of solitude and alienation in these works differs substantially from the existential crises depicted in the novels of Camus, and it cannot be fully captured by conventional portrayals of urban alienation. Rather, this is a solitude shaped by a hyperlinked age—one that thrives within a society struggling to cope with the singularities of its own transformation.

Literature, among its many functions, brings emerging realities to the attention of philosophers; it must therefore undertake an incisive exploration of this condition. Diagnosis, however, cannot remain confined to the externally observable realities alone. If the fragmentation of social structures leads to alienation or even social paranoia, literature can illuminate the inner dimensions of these phenomena, thereby heightening readers' sensibilities.

Our capacity for socio-emotional resilience appears to be one of the greatest casualties of this postmodern condition. Literature must not only represent this reality but also persist in experimentation-seeking to understand these maladies and to imagine possible futures shaped by them. This is a crucial moment for humanity; consequently, the use of parody, pastiche, and allusion must be guided by renewed purpose. Intertextual elements should foreground the irony of our time in its fullest intensity.

As the space of the individual mind undergoes transformation, so too does the public sphere. In this age of globalization, we confront three dominant forces: displacement, isolation, and dehumanization. Literature offers visions into our evolving selves, making visible what might otherwise remain obscure. At times, it also embodies our emotional responses to the conditions imposed upon us.

Derek Thompson has rightly observed in an article published in *The Atlantic* (February 2025): "although technology does not have values of its own, its adoption can create values." -It is precisely this creation of values, based on human experience, that literature must urgently strive to articulate. #

CALL FOR PAPERS

Scholarly, unpublished papers are invited on any issue relating to the focus area (may be seen on our website). Only accepted papers will be published after thoroughly reviewed by our experts.

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- Authors are requested to follow the latest version of MLA (9th Edition) handbook in preparing articles.
- The title of article – bold and centered.
- Length of the article – should not exceed 2500 words.
- The contributors are requested not to mention their names anywhere in the article except in the front page. page.

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- A manuscript containing typographical, grammatical and punctuation errors will be summarily rejected and shall not be sent to reviewers for the blind peer-review process.
- All references mentioned in the "Works cited" list are cited in the text, and vice versa. Incomplete "in-text" citations and "Works cited" will lead to rejection of the submission.
- The submission should adhere to the style recommended by the MLA Handbook (9th Edition). Failure to comply with the style may cause rejection of the submission.
- Author (s) must ensure that the submission has been duly checked for plagiarism by the plagiarism checker DRILLBIT/URKUND/TURNITIN. It must conform to the permissible limit of 10% similarities, as mentioned in the UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2018. A submission without the plagiarism report shall be rejected.
- A declaration mentioning the submission to be original, free from plagiarised content, not submitted elsewhere for publication, and adherence to the publication policy of the journal should be submitted with the manuscript in a separate file.
- The submission will have a preliminary peer-screening for its strength for sending for blind peer-reviews.
- Submission window on our website will be opened for paper submission for a stipulated period, the dates for which will be notified on our website : www.drishtithesight.com.

Classic Revisited, Race Rewritten: A Post-Black Reading of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* through Percival Everett's *James*

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Abstract
Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in the year 1884, has long been considered a foundational and classic text of American literature. The novel is widely celebrated for its innovation in vernacular experimentation and for addressing the question of the nation's racial conscience. Ernest Hemingway's remark that "All modern American Literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*… All American writing comes from that" explains why the text is treated as a classic. Regarded as foundational within the American literary canon, the novel has functioned as a touchstone for discussions on race, identity, freedom and slavery.This study re-examines *Huckleberry Finn* using the theoretical framework of Post-Blackness, a theory which challenges traditional and monolithic constructions of Black identity and embraces multiplicity in understanding what it means to be Black in contemporary African American cultural expression. Attempting a comparative reading of Twain's canonical text alongside Percival Everett's *James*, published in the year 2024, this study demonstrates how Everett destabilizes the dominant racial representation of the classic through a reimagining of Black subjectivity in the post-Civil Rights era. The novel is a radical rewriting of Twain's classic, shifting the narrative authority to Jim, the enslaved boy of Miss Watson in *Huckleberry Finn*, who is now renamed as James. The study raises a central question: how does Everett's rewriting of Twain's classic challenge the racial authority embedded in the canonical narrative? Through a Post-Black analysis, this study highlights how contemporary African American literature both inherits and transforms the traditional narrative of Blackness to generate new meanings of Black identity.

Keywords: African-American, Classic, Post-Black, Race, White.

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) occupies a central place in the American literary canon and history and is positioned as a "classic" for its enduring aesthetic, linguistic and cultural impact. Matthew Arnold's conception that a classic work possesses "high truth and seriousness", aesthetic excellence and lasting moral significance remains foundational to understanding why Twain's novel continues to be studied across generations. Its classic and canonical status is supported by another major writer of American Literature, Ernest Hemingway who states that "All modern American Literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*…All American writing comes from that" (15). This study revisits Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) through Percival Everett's contemporary reimagining *James* (2024) to examine how canonical representations of race are rewritten through the lens of Post-Black theory. The intertextual engagement between the two texts reflects the concept of dialogism proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, where literary works enter into a dialogic relationship with earlier texts, generating new meanings through reinterpretation. Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative textual analysis of Everett's *James* as a contemporary literary response to Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Through the interpretive framework of Post-Black theory, the study focuses on narrative voice, language, and racial subjectivity.

The very qualities that have ensured *Huckleberry Finn* its classic status also make it a site of racial tension. Its depiction of the character Jim, who is Miss Watson's runaway slave, its use of racial slurs like "big nigger" (Twain 5), and its construction of Black subjectivity through a white boy's consciousness reveals a narrative structure that privileges white authority. Percival Everett's *James* directly questions these qualities by re-narrating the events of *Huckleberry Finn* through Jim's perspective. Everett transforms the silent, stereotypical, marginalized character of enslaved Jim into a self-reflexive narrator who has linguistic, intellectual and political depth. This act of radical rewriting foregrounds concerns regarding voice, and agency, positioning *James* both as a critique and expansion of the classic. Emerging from the cultural climate of the post-Civil Rights era, Post-Black theory emphasizes hybridity, multiplicity and artistic experimentation, challenging the idea that Black art must conform to specific political or representational expectations. This theory explains how *James* simultaneously acknowledges the historical racial trauma present in Twain's text and re-envisions Black identity beyond the narrow constraints of the classic, as Bakhtin argues: "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent…" (293).

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim's character is constantly mediated through Huck's perspective. His presence is often interpreted as an indebted figure who expresses emotional excess and moral constancy instead of intellectual depth: his grief over separation from his family, his repeated expression of loyalty towards Huck and his forgiving nature towards Huck's acts of cruelty in the form of tricks such as the rattlesnake skin episode—all these humanize Jim but his identity remains constrained by his enslaved status. Post-Black intervention permits the reimagining of Jim in *James* as a self-authoring subject who exists independently of white perception. It transforms the racial site of the classic text into a space where a Black character achieves narrative freedom. The narrative pattern of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* exposes the situation where black characters are burdened with symbolic representation and are denied complex subjectivity. Jim's consciousness in *James* is rendered through interior monologues and is acutely aware of the racialized system governing his life. Scenes that appear familiar from Twain's classic like the Mississippi raft river scene, Huck and Tom pranking Jim in Miss Watson's Yard scene, the hairball magic scene etc., are re-experienced through Jim's perspective. His outward appearance is repeatedly accompanied by his inward critique showing who he is and what he pretends to be. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the hat prank scene is a comic folklore that reinforces the racialized notions of black superstitions. Huck's narrative about the hat prank was that "Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the state… rode him down to New Orleans" (Twain 6). But Everett's *James* relocates the narrative authority to Jim who performs his fake storytelling: "we all laughed as we heard the white boys hightail it out of there" (16). This shift in the narrative authority in *James* dismantles the scene's original power hierarchy present in *Huckleberry Finn* and agrees with Derek C. Murray's argument that Post-Blackness is the detachment from the demand to explain Blackness to white audiences: "the hegemony of hetero-patriarchal expressions of blackness that, in their essentialist logics and racial nostalgia, relegate African-American identity to a series of limiting scripts"(3). The abandonment of performing race impacts white supremacist ideology and the very idea of "Post-Black" theory reinforces them: "For one thing, the "post-" implies that there was once or is a stabilizing essence of Blackness, something that can be clearly defined and qualified, and thus we have to move past in order to progress" (Shavers 85). *James* portrays an awareness of white surveillance, where Jim consciously performs the role expected of him by white society. His ghost stories, superstitions, and exaggerated fear of witches are performances designed for white consumption. This self-conscious ostentatiousness situates *James* firmly within Post-Black irony: he is never subsumed by the stereotype he performs but remains critically detached from it.

Touré's idea that "Throwing off the burden of representation can give an artist the space to discover who they really are apart from the dictates of the community and the past and the confining strictures of worrying about the white gaze" (Touré 30), represents a substance that isconspicuously absent in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Percival Everett's *James*, Jim gets tired of pretending his "slave diction" and confesses to Huck that he can read and write. In Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim isconstructed under what Touré would call the "burden of representation". As one of the most visible Black figures in a canonical white-authored text, Jim is required to stand in for Blackness as imagined for a white readership. His performance of being an illiterate function as a reassuring stereotype: it keeps him legible within the dominant racial ideology of the nineteenth century and prevents him from appearing intellectually equal or superior to white characters. Jim's voice, limited to dialect and emotional expressiveness, is precisely adjusted to remain non-threatening to the white gaze. By contrast, Everett's Jim in *James* explicitly throws off this "burden of representation". When Jim confesses to Huck that he can read and write, he is rejecting the role that history and white literary tradition have imposed upon him. Jim's literacy exposes illiteracy not as an inherent condition but as a strategic performance, adopted for survival under slavery. This aligns with Post-Blackness as it "presents Blackness not as an assault weapon – there's more to Blackness than bludgeoning people with memories of past atrocities and injustices or the discussion of how difficult it is to be Black and deal with whites" (Touré 48). In *James*, Jim's confession creates a private space of Black interiority, where intelligence, irony, and philosophical reflection can exist without explanation or apology. This is precisely what Touré identifies as Post-Black freedom. The absence of this confession in *Huckleberry Finn* thus becomes deeply telling.Twain's Jim is denied the freedom to exist beyond communal dictates and racial expectations, whereas Everett's Jim claims that freedom by narrating himself anew: "*With my pencil, I wrote myself into being. I wrote myself* to here" (Everett 93). In doing so, *James* exemplifies Touré'sargument that throwing off representational burden opens space for self-definition and the recovery of a silenced Black intellectual tradition.

Language becomes an important differentiator that indicates Post-Black theorisation. According to Crawford, "black post-blackness" is "a new way of thinking about radical black aesthetics as a constant push to what is unimaginable and a constant holding on to the radicalness of black life in an antiblack world" (ix). In *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim's dialect is consistent across contexts, signifying that speech becomes an essential marker of racial difference. Everett revises this inference by presenting language as a performance. Jim and all other slaves in *James* modulate their language with "slave filter" (51) according to their surroundings. By revealing Jim's conscious manipulation of speech, Everett reframes Jim's dialect in Twain's novel as a survival mechanism rather than a naturalistic trait. The "slave dialect" is a technique of survival and mobility inside violent racial regimes. Jim explains that "I caught sight of Albert giving me the warning sign that white folks were close… my change in diction alerted the rest to the white boys' presence. So, my performance for the boys became a frame for my story. My story became less of a tale as the real game became the display for the boys" (Everett 15). Through this Everett literalizes the Post-Black emphasis of an artist's refusal to be reduced to a single representative voice. Everett's most explicit theorisation of Post-Black consciousness appears in the scene where Jim instructs enslaved children in linguistic survival: "Safe movement through the world depended on mastery of language, fluency" (21). Naming the practice of "signifying"*James* reframes what has often been understood as instinctive or folkloric into a form of critical literacy. The children learn not merely how to speak, but how to manage perception, how to allow white authority figures to "name the trouble" (Everett 22) while retaining interpretive control. In Post-Black terms, this moment rejects authenticity as a moral demand and instead affirms adaptability, irony, and misdirection as legitimate modes of Black self-preservation and communication: "The ability to

maneuver within white society—and how high you can rise within white power structures—is often tied to your ability to modulate. Black success requires Black multi-linguality—the ability to know how and when to move among the different languages of Blackness. . . There are many ways to be Black in all Black people" (Touré 11).

In *Huckleberry Finn*, freedom is often framed as a moral abstraction- Huck's liberation from racist ideology. The river operates as a symbolic space where white conscience is tested. The novel's episodic humiliations of Jim, particularly the final Silas Phelps Farm episode, further reveal the limits of Twain's racial imagination. Jim's prolonged captivity for the sake of Tom Sawyer's amusement has often been excused as satire. However, a Post-Black reading resists such justification, emphasizing instead how Black suffering is rendered expendable in the service of white boyhood fantasy. Everett deliberately omits the Silas Phelps farm episode in *James.* His refusal to restage this episode therefore constitutes a Post-Black rejection of what Murray identifies as the "a desire to question constructions of African-American identity that negate forms of difference" (2). By omitting the Phelps farm episode, Everett constructs an alternative ending to disengage Jim from the temporal delay and theatrical cruelty that define Twain's conclusion. Jim's pain is narratively subordinated to the restoration of white social order and youthful innocence in *Huckleberry Finn*. In contrast, *James* foregrounds the material realities of enslavement: bodily risks, familial separation, and the constant threat of death. Here, Jim's primary motivation is not moral instruction but survival and reunification with his family. Everett demonstrates that moral growth narratives centred on white protagonists can obscure the concrete stakes of Black life under slavery. Freedomin *James* is not a metaphor but a precarious, embodied pursuit which Jim achieves at the end by stating that he is not "Nigger Jim" but "James… Just James" (303): "Every attempt to move beyond blackness should remind us that blackness has always been beyond" (Crawford 227).

In conclusion, Percival Everett's *James* does not simply revise *Huckleberry Finn* from a marginalized perspective but offers a Post-Black reconfiguration of its racial and narrative foundations. *James* engages the canon not as a corrective supplement but as an act of Post-Black re-narration. Everett mirrors scenes, settings, and character relationships from *Huckleberry Finn*, yet each repetition introduces difference: shifting narrative authority, reconfiguring language, and redistributing moral agency. By revisiting *Huckleberry Finn* through a Post-Black lens, this study demonstrates how *James* exemplifies a contemporary mode of African American fiction that rewrites the classic to narrate Black freedom beyond the constraints of canonical inheritance. Post-Black theory allows this process to be read not as an attack on the classic but as a refusal to accept its representational limits in which the classic is not merely revised but fundamentally reimagined.

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Counter-Conduct as Resistance: A Reading of Sophocle's *Antigone*

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Abstract

Resistance, for a longer period, was considered as either an individual or a collective action that was explicit, overt, and perceptible. But the growth of resistance studies foregrounded the notion of 'everyday resistance' to signal how resistance has evolved to denote a spectrum of activities ranging from collective revolutionary protests to subtle individual acts of unrecognisable disobedience. The paper considers the practice of counter-conduct as a form of resistance and looks into Sophocle's tragic play *Antigone* through this lens. It identifies the power of Creon, the King, as biopolitical and Antigone's counter-conducts as directed against this power. It reads the burial of Polynices' body as a political expression of dissent. And briefly examines how body is used as a tool to exert both power and resistance to power. Antigone is studied as a parrhesiastes whose free speech and moral grounds facilitated the performance of her counter-conducts. By situating Antigone's actions within the everyday technologies of power, the paper implies that the play anticipates modern forms of political resistance that function through disobedience, care, and ethics.This ability to transcend the immediate contexts in which it was written and to be able to fit in to newer ones is what ascribes the text its 'classic' label.

Keywords: Resistance, *Antigone*, Counter-conducts, Biopolitics, *Parrhesia*

Written around 442 BCE and set in Thebes, *Antigone* is a classic Greek tragedy that remains the second-oldest surviving play of Sophocles. One of the frequently read, widely staged and adapted, heavily theorised and researched plays, *Antigone* epitomises the enduring glory of the Western canonical literature. It is still recommended as a core text in many universities. The religious, moral, ethical, legal, or even humanitarian concerns the play raises have repercussions in the current times. The authoritarian ruler, the protesting citizen, the subjects in fear, the political crisis, and the human versus divine–the play confronts contemporary chaos. This provides the rationale for selecting the primary text–its unwavering timelessness and universality. A text "that has never finished saying what it has to say" (Calvino qtd. in The Biblioraptor), *Antigone* urges its readers to return to it in different times, in different contexts.

The plot discusses the title character Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, who defies the laws enacted by Creon, her uncle and the new King of Thebes. Antigone's disobedience stems from the way Creon dealt withthe death of her brothers Eteocles and Polynices. When Eteoclesreceived honour for his death and a proper burial (since he fought for the nation), Polynices is despised for challenging the system, and his dead body is ordered to be remained unburied as a punishment. Driven by kinship and morality, Antigone buries her brother's body. This forms the core conflicts in the story. She proudly confesses her deed, is convicted, and imprisoned. However, Antigone commits suicide in the prison.

Doubtless, the play features Antigone's burial of the body as a resistance to the powerful Creon and his unflinching stubbornness in law enforcement. Although the burial was stirred by her love and obligation to pay funeral rites to the corpse, it acquires a political significance in that it becomes a case of public dissent. Condemning Creon's governance as autocratic and hence undemocratic, Antigone's action appears to suggest a replacement of the existing legal system with something that is more humane. The play, hence, qualifies itself to be a fertile ground for a study of the notion of resistance. Death, burial, suicide, imprisonment–an episode of activities that are centred around human body could be discerned in the play. Therefore, the paper takes the burial as an act of biopolitical resistance through counter-conducts performed by Antigone against the sovereign power of Creon. It is interesting to find how a classic text that was written centuries ago laid the grounds for the study ofphenomena that are quite modern. In the present, when biopolitical governance and everyday resistance are the norms, *Antigone* validates why it is a classic and why it should remain a classic.

The concept of biopolitics was introduced by Rudolf Kjellen in 1920. But the body of academic research done on the topic owes a great deal to the theoretical foundations of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. *Society Must Be Defended*, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and *The Courage of Truth*– Foucault's reflections on the term are scattered in form. As a technique of governance, biopolitics controls unproductive or threatening population groups by enhancing and fostering "the life of a certain part of the population through disallowing the life of another" (Selmeczi qtd. in Seppälä 88), separating between "what must live and what must die" (Foucault qtd. in Seppälä 88).Foucault finds how the Sovereign and even modern governments politicise body to govern their subjects. He traces the evolution of power to argue that the Sovereign's choice of individual bodies to publicly display power has given way to the modern State's preference for an entire population to exercise biopower. He elucidates the concept of biopower vis-à-vis biopolitics as "a technology of power that seeks to control and manage the problem of the population through the apparatus of security" (Foucault qtd. in Sahoo 293).

Body becomes a site of biopolitical contestation in *Antigone*. It becomes a political problem "that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem" (Foucault 245). The whole play revolves around a body which perhaps has gained more attention once its life is lost. That is, the biopolitical exclusion is what orchestrates the conflict in the story. Here, Creon skilfully utilises Polynices'–an individual's– body to efficiently govern the entire population in the name of securing the peace and the order of his territory. When Creon publicly condemns Polynices as a rebel or a traitor who took sword against his own native city, who took the blood of his blood, and sold his people into slavery (Sophocles 167-69), he was declaring Polynices as a potential threat to the nation's security. And the denial of proper burial to him was, thus, launched as a resistance to ward off national threats and safeguard the lives of the citizens. It is this biopolitical scheme to sustain power that is being resisted by Antigone.

If for Creon body is a weapon to exert his sovereign power, for Antigone it is a source of her resistance to the said power. Both lay claims on another's body to make their own respective political statements. Body, thus, emerges as an interesting force for both power and resistance to power. Punishments and rewards are meted out to subjects in the play by situating them in a political economy of body. The body of Eteocles, who fought for the country, is rewarded by giving it military honours and a soldier's funeral, whereas that of Polynices is left for the carrion birds to feed on. A divide between bodies that are worthy of being buried, mourned, or remembered and bodies that are notis instituted in this economy to generate docile and desirable bodies. Antigone's resistance through burial is an effort to reject this division and reduction of her brother's body to bare life. She, in fact, says, "there are honors due all the dead" (413).

Primarily, it is interesting to note how Antigone gets to resist Creon despite his rule being authoritarian and undemocratic. She is free to voice her objection

and denounce his commands. It implies how resistance ensues from points of freedom. By freedom, Foucault means "a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available" (qtd. in Edkins and Pin-Fat 5). Similarly, power is an action upon other actions that can be exercised only upon free subjects who can choose to act. Freedom thus becomes the precondition for power to come into play, and where there are no chances of resistance or freedom to resist, power ceases to exist. Slaves in chains are not in a relationship of power but in a relationship of violence where power acts upon others and not upon their actions.

Agamben takes the instance of concentration camps, where sovereign power meets bare life that cannot resist. As stated, in the absence of freedom to resist, power disintegrates. Therefore, resistance requires a revival of relations of power or life of power, which would be a "life of potentialities and possibilities, a life in the field of power relations, resistance, and freedom: in other words, a political life" (Edkins and Pin-Fat 13).When Antigone buries Polynices' body, she declares herself a free individual who chose to act. By burying the corpse, Antigone was reinstating his body in a political economy of power and nullifying its bare existence. This is a counter-conduct performed by the protagonist that equals a biopolitical move to include the excluded.

Simple and subtle, counter-conducts are "struggles against the processes implemented for conducting others" (Foucault qtd. in Lilja 420). By doing things differently, counter-conducts alter the relations of power. Foucault notes how asceticism, scripture, and mysticism were all counter-conducts that existed in the Middle Ages. Antigone's disobedience of Creon's order in itself is an act of counter-conduct. Further, when she says, "That final Justice That rules the world below makes no such laws" (Sophocles 358-59), her words imply a justification of the disobedience and an exhortation to the common public to defy being conducted by their King. The tug of war between human law and divine justice in the play corresponds to biopolitical power and resistance to biopolitical power. Antigone's attempt to subvert the rationality of Creon's penal techniques by replacing them with the unquestionable authority of the Divine is nothing other than a counter-narrative. By establishing the Divine as the Sovereign and His laws as the ultimate, the protagonist engages in a counter-conduct.

Interestingly, the way Antigone engages in *parrhesia* is yet another tactic of counter-conduct in the play. The biopolitical divide between who has the right to speak and who does not fuels resistance here. As is evident, the play is an explicit encounter between democratic and authoritarian values. And resistance is directed against the undemocratic principles of Creon. Paradoxically, the play urges a restoration of democratic ideals while going undemocratic by thwarting the legal measures of the ruler. When Antigone asks, "Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you" (400), it suggests a breach of the subjects' right to speech. Restoring this right, thereby turning governance in Thebes democratic, could be the tactic adopted by the protagonist to resist.

Foucault regards *parrhesia* as a fundamental guiding principle of democracy when he defines democracy as "a dynamic and agonistic structure of parresia" (Foucault qtd. in Dyrberg 276).It amounts to devising a conduct that exercises free speech and criticism in resistance to the sabotage of individual/ collective voices. However, what entitles Antigone to free speech is nothing but her gendered subalternity. To explain, parrhesia comes from below. For a woman like Antigone, whose political expression was destined to be unheard, speaking truth to power was nothing short of a triumphant resistance.Besides, Foucault refers to the parrhesiastic game that presupposes the parrhesiastes as an individual with the necessary moral qualities to comprehend truth and to convey it to others. The proof of truth in *parrhesia* is the courage exhibited by the speaker when he/she risks their personal life for the sake of truth. And this risk comes from the unequal relation between the speaker and the one he/ she addresses. For Antigone, her familial ties with Polyneices are what attribute a moral quality to her. She asks Ismene to prove if the latter is "[a] true sister, or a traitor to [her] family" (27). She asserts that she will bury her brother, whom she loves (55), and that it

is a holy crime (56). She is portrayed as a character who upholds her morality despite death threats. This is why her counter-conduct and final suicide earn respect from the public. The transformation that Creon undergoes provides validity to her moral claims.

Antigone's acceptance of imprisonment and fatal decision to take her life lay bare her ability to act for herself and her being excluded as a bare life. The assumption of bare life underlines her resistance to the deprivation of existence.Imprisonment is a punishment that serves to deprive one's body and mind of their pleasures, and decelerate death. Antigone's suicide accelerated her death, which, once again, is a means of counter-conduct. Moreover, her plea to Ismene not to lessen her death by sharing it (439) glorifies her act as something that could be emulated. Foucault details this in his *Discipline and Punish* when he vividly discusses how the convict turns a martyr by appropriating death. By being moral, by being a parrhesiastes, and by venerating her death, Antigone displays a biopolitical resistance that is at once strong and subtle.

Conclusion

The paper was an attempt to deliver how Antigone's defiance could be counted as instances of counter-conduct. Her resistance was strong, powerful, and consistent, yet not physical, violent, or chaotic. It opens avenues for an understanding of how a regulation of everyday conduct could culminate in productive ends. Burial, *parrhesia*, morality – these are what Antigone weaponised to destabilise the biopolitical agency of the ruling order. By reclaiming a relation of power over the bare life of her brother's body, and by embracing a bare life through suicide, Antigone calls attention to the micro-practices of resistance.

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Understanding Eco-ability Through Herman Melville's Lens on *Moby Dick*

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between disability, animal advocacy, and ecology through an explanatory analysis of Herman Melville's masterpiece, *Moby-Dick* (1851). By engaging with the theoretical framework of Eco-ability, this study provides an approach for rethinking the relationship between the human and non-human worlds in the Anthropocene. Ecoability as a concept was developed to challenge the perspectives that dominate the disabled bodies, which are the same perspectives that dominate the non-humans and exploit the environment. Published in October 1851 in London as *Moby Dick* and in NewYork as *The Whale,* the novel was based largely on Melville's own experiences as a whaleman. Although the first edition was a failure, later in the 20th Century *Moby Dick* took the prime position among the readers. This study illuminates the question of how Melville positioned this novel into contemporary debates on ecological justice, disability, and the future of human-nonhuman relationships. *Moby Dick* stands as a futuristic novel that rewards its readers with the pleasure of rereading, offering multiple allegorical meanings and symbols that come on board upon repeated engagement.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Disability, Bodies, Justice, Ecology,

In the toxic Anthropocene era, the implications of vulnerable representation for situated bodies and landscapes demand a different level of understanding of environmental crises and disability. The vast, expanding interdisciplinary field of ecorriticism, therefore, needs to rethink the position of human/ posthuman in the nature-culture spectrum, while maintaining the inclusive cultural differences that provide significant value for the "emancipation of every other form of otherness" (Iovino, 54). Similarly, the field of disability studies that largely focuses on the ready-made environments for the disabled bodies, does not merely know about the negative impact of a toxic environment that can lead to chronic illness, genetic mutation, etc. Eco crip theory is thus an attempt to combine these two disciplines of ecocriticsm and disability by challenging "the anthropocentric focus of disability studies, attempting to enrich it by attending to multispecies perspectives and ecological systems" (Dilipkumar and Rangarajan 42). This study examines the relationship between disability, animal advocacy, and ecology through an explanatory analysis of Herman Melville's masterpiece, *Moby-Dick* (1851).

The story of *Moby Dick* is narrated by a young American called Ishmael, who decides to go on a voyage abroad in one of the whaling ships. Ishmael's decision was mainly because of two reasons, one was that the sea fascinates him, and the second was that he wanted to escape from the depression which was weighing him down. In order to start the journey, he went to New Bedford, the whaling port of the United States, and eventually he became a member of the crew on board a whaling ship named 'Pequod'. The captain of the ship, in one of his previous voyages, lost a leg which had been bitten off by a large white whale known as 'Moby Dick'. Captain Ahab, a 'queer man', refuses to accept his misfortune as an accident and regards the loss of his leg as evidence of the malice of some supernatural power. Ahab thinks 'Moby Dick' is

the prime agent to challenge him and deprive him of his limbs. Hence, he directs the crew of the ship to search for Moby Dick throughout the whaling grounds of the Pacific Ocean. The story is narrated using Ishmael's first-person singular narration. As a narrator, he describes not only the tragic adventure of Ahab but also his own experience as a newcomer to the field of Whaling. Melville's own experience on sea with the whale-ships 'Acushnet', 'Charles' and 'Henry' gave him a good stead in writing this novel. Through Ishmael, Melville described the whaling industry, kinds of whales and the process used in extracting oil from the sperm whales. Making it a classic read, *Moby Dick,* tells a gripping story with a large number of dramatic and exciting events, situations and episodes. Published in 1851, the novel makes the reader feel like they are moving backward- fast. An utterly postmodern novel written in the 19th Century, it rewards its readers with endless interpretations, allegories and symbols. "Moby-Dick" is not a novel. It's barely a book at all. It's more an act of transference, of ideas and evocations hung around the vast and unknowable shape of the whale, an extended musing on the strange meeting of human history and natural history. It is, above all, a sui-generis creation, one that came into the world as an unnatural, immaculate conception" (Hoare, 1)

Eco-ability emerged as the direct descendant of Eco-crip theory. Developed primarily through the work of Anthony J. Nocella II, Ecoability theory is an interdisciplinary framework that examines the interconnected systems of oppression affecting disabled beings (both human and non-human animals) and the natural environment. Ecoability argues that ableism, speciesism, and environmental destruction stem from the same underlying logic of domination that privileges certain ways of being while devaluing others. Captain Ahab of the whale ship 'Pequod' not only stands as a monomaniacal villain, but also as an archetypal representation of the very theme that eco-ability seeks to dismantle. Ahab symbolises abelism, speciesism and ecological dominance. His sole motive to search and kill Moby Dick displays the interconnected pathologies of oppressions that define the toxic anthropogenic world order. Ahab seeks to dominate nature and to impose his will on the world, whether it be the crew who must carry out his order instantly or the great whale that is essentially indifferent to him. While the narrator of the story, Ishmael, is all rumination, the chief protagonist, Ahab, is a personification of sheer willpower. Both these men have different categories of thinking processes, where Ishamael thinks as a bystander, where he identifies his own state with man's utter unimportance in nature. On the contrary, Ahab is actively in search of the white whale assert man's supremacy over nature. "Further, nature, nonhuman animals, and people with disabilities have been institutionalised, tortured, and murdered not because they have committed a crime or for profit but for being recognised as different and as a commodity" (Nocella II 145). Ahab thus boldly announces himself in the novel as a sovereign individual in the spiritual sense. He believes himself to be equal in importance, if not in strength of mind and body, to any other sovereign individual in the universe, despite ignoring the fact that he is a prisoner of his human form and human limitations.

The greatest strength of Ahab is his internalised abelism. His amputated leg is not a 'normalised thing' but a 'cursed' insult, a personal attack from nature that he pathologises. Ahab wishes to wreak his hatred upon the white whale. It is no blasphemy on his part to harbour such a wish, as he tells another crew member called Starbuck, but he would even strike the sun if it were to insult him. Ahab cannot eventually accept his disability as a 'valid'way of being. Instead, he becomes a monster himself by designing a prosthesis from the bones of another murdered whale, a grotesque symbol of using the oppressed to show his oppression. His identity became consumed by the medical model of disability that looks for the cure, and that cure comes from the whale's dead body, which becomes the corrective ointment for his broken body. This mirrors ecoability's critique to "respects differences while challenging the concepts of equality, sameness, and normalcy" (Nocella II 143).

David T. Mitchell and Susan Snyder argue that ''Ahab's isolated experience as the sole physically disabled denizen of the Pequod...marks him as an unusual specimen among the multicultural human brood that occupies the ship''(135). Ahab is not only the character with a physical or mental impairment in the entire novel, but Ahab is the single individual who responds to his differences with enraged narcissism. He critically symbolises ecological tyranny as his pride continues undiminished. He rejected the scientific instrument known as the quadrant and ignored the threat of storms and lightning, claiming that lightning was his 'fiery father'. He even ignores the Prophecy of his ally, Fedallah, in which he seems to have implicit faith. When Fedallah says that Ahab can be killed only by hemp, he replies that, in that case, he would never die because hemp kills only criminals who are hanged on the gallows. The chase for the white whale lasted for three days. Ahab could have learnt a lesson from his experience of the first two days and could have abandoned the chase, but he learns no lesson at all. He transformed the entire purpose of the voyage into a personal, metaphysical war against nature. He manipulates the crew members and destroys the entire ship's ecosystem in the service of his vendetta. Because of Ahab, *Moby Dick* is an example of inexorable ecocide. He is driven by the desperate urge to master his defective body, fused with the mastery of the whale and the uncontrollable sea itself.

Moby Dick, the white whale, is a non-normative being. "It is as significant and manifold as nature herself and, of course, that is the point. Like nature, the whale is paradoxically benign and malevolent, nourishing and destructive. It is massive, brutal, monolithic, but at the same time protean, erotically beautiful and infinitely variable" (Rao, 102). His albinism marked him as a 'different' creature in the human eye. His humongous body is scarred and disabled by human weapons, yet he is hyperable, possessing immense strength and agency. In Eco-ability terms, Moby Dick is a critical cripple. His body symbolises the violence of anthropocentrism while his action resists it. Many deaths were known to have been caused by this white whale. Among the whale ships encountered by Pequod, there is one which reports that its chief mate has been killed by this whale, while another reports that five of its men have been killed by the same whale. Eventually, of course, the white whale sinks the Pequod, killing all the men aboard, besides causing the death of those who had been chasing it on their boats. Moby Dick advocates as a sovereign body that fights back, destroying the human/animal, able/disabled hierarchy. Tom Siebers argues that, "for the acknowledgement of material bodies whose limits are not reducible to political allegory and of subjectivities for whom pain is neither condemned as regulatory nor celebrated as resistant."(qtd. in Otter 12). For Ahab, the whale is the incarnation of all the malicious agencies which are believed to be responsible for human suffering. However, Moby Dick symbolises the mystery of the universe, a quest for an oppressor like Ahab to reassert his mastery over this agential, disabled body.

In stark contrast, the novel offers the seed of an eco-ability ethic in Ishmael's survival. He is saved not by able-bodied triumph, but by embracing radical interdependence and crip kinship. He floats on a coffin-turned-lifebuoy, an artefact of his friend Queequeg, becoming passive flotsam in the very ocean Ahab sought to conquer. Ishmael, floating on the coffin, turns him into an ecological survivor, the one who lives because he embraced, rather than sought to dominate, the disabled, the animal, the other, and the uncaring, generative sea itself. His salvation suggests that the alternative to Ahab's destructive pathology is not able-bodied 'normalcy,' but a recognition of shared vulnerability, a relinquishing of domination, and a commitment to care-based coexistence with all beings, human, animal, and environmental. Ishmael constantly relates the whaling operation to human nature and human character so that the whale and whaling become for him a metaphor for the human experience of life. Hustis argues that, "As he contemplates the variable experience of lived embodiment, Ishmael, like Melville himself, examines the stories that disability can tell us

about what was, what is, and what might have been."(55)

Ecoability combines the concept of shared vulnerability, interdependency and "respect for difference within a community; and this includes all life, sentient and nonsentient." (Nocella II 141) This can be well exemplified in Romesh Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge* (2002) and *Suncatcher* (2019), where human characters are seen not only creating healthy relationships with the animals, but animals and their broader ecological networks, by respecting the differences within the human community, help to cultivate relations among humans in the very disturbed and divided social conditions. Through an Ecoability lens, *Moby Dick* is a catastrophic parable about the result of ableist, speciesist, and extractivist logic. The Pequod is not a ship of 'able' men hunting a 'disabled' whale, but a complex ecosystem of vulnerable beings, all destroyed by the pathological drive to enforce a hierarchical, utilitarian order upon a world that is fundamentally interdependent and agential. By showing how systems of oppression are interconnected, eco-ability theory not only adds to our understanding but also fundamentally transforms how we approach social and environmental change, insisting on an ethic of comprehensive care that recognises the intrinsic value of all beings and systems in their diverse ways of existing. Indra Sinha's in *Animal's People* (2007) similarly creates a space for conversation where disability and ecology can be brought together to understand that disability, as a metaphor, doesn't stand for a disabled nation. The novel discusses the subaltern sufferer 'Animal', who bears the sole burden of industrial capitalism.

Moby Dick locates Ecoability within the interstices of the holistic ecology, thereby strengthening the discipline of disability by combining it with animal advocacy. For Ishamel, the process of whaling is an 'overwhelming one', but for Ahab, it is actually his obsession. He certainly loses his mental balance in thinking that the white whale has attacked him and deliberately and maliciously beaten off his leg; and this idea takes such a complete possession of his mind that he determines to hunt down that monster. He firmly believes that he would be able to kill the white whale. He begins to think of the white whale as his antagonist. In eco-ability terms, Ahab enacts the ultimate speciesist violence, the erasure of the animal's intrinsic worth and subjectivity, viewing it solely as an obstacle to his own psychological wholeness.Thus, the novel suggests the awareness of shared vulnerability and a practice of radical, life-sustaining interdependence with all beings.

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Food, Taste, and Class in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones:* A Bourdieu-informed Reading

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Abstract

Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* has long been recognised as a foundational text of the English novel tradition, yet its sustained engagement with alimentary imagery as a vehicle for class analysis remains relatively underexplored. This article attempts to examine how gustatory preferences, eating practices, and culinary metaphors in the novel may be read as markers of social position and instruments of symbolic differentiation. To this end, the study draws primarily on Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, employing his concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and the opposition between the 'taste of necessity' and the 'taste of luxury' as its central analytical framework. These are supplemented by Norbert Elias's theory of the civilising process, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, and Roland Barthes's semiotic approach to food as a system of communication. Through close textual analysis of key episodes, including the metafictional 'Bill of Fare,' the carnivalesque dinner at Upton, and the contrasting alimentary dispositions of Squire Western, Tom Jones, and Blifil, the article suggests that Fielding's novel anticipates aspects of Bourdieuian sociology by encoding class distinctions through alimentary practices. The analysis indicates that food in the novel functions not merely as incidental realism but as a potentially sophisticated mechanism for registering social mobility, taste hierarchies, and the reproduction of class difference.

Keywords: gastrocriticism, Bourdieu, cultural capital, eighteenth-century novel, food studies

The Classic and Its Alimentary Imagination

Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* occupies an unassailable position within the canon of English literature, its status as a classic deriving from multiple criteria that align with Matthew Arnold's prescriptions of "high truth and seriousness," (Arnold) aesthetic innovation, and enduring moral significance. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's celebrated pronouncement that *Tom Jones* possesses one of the "three most perfect plots ever planned," alongside Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1: 451), established a critical estimation that subsequent centuries have substantially upheld. W. Somerset Maugham's inclusion of the work in his 1948 enumeration of the ten greatest novels further consolidated its canonical standing (18). The novel's immediate commercial triumph, with four editions published in its first year alone, testified to a rare conjunction of popular appeal and literary achievement.

Beyond these external validations, the novel's intrinsic qualities demand attention: Fielding's self-conscious positioning as "the founder of a new province of writing," his generic innovation in crafting what he termed a "comic epic-poem in prose," and the introductory chapters that constitute, as Ian Watt observes, "the first extended body of work in English attempting to define and explain the novel as a literary genre" (239). The panoramic social vision of the novel, encompassing landed gentry, servants, innkeepers, and London sophisticates, offers what Watt characterises as "realism of assessment," (233) engaging a

comprehensive range of subjects with intelligence and judicious evaluation of human experience.

This article proposes that one dimension of *Tom Jones*'s enduring significance has received insufficient critical attention: its sophisticated deployment of alimentary imagery as a mechanism for encoding and interrogating class distinctions. Fielding's novel, it can be argued, anticipates by more than two centuries the insights that Pierre Bourdieu would systematise in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, demonstrating how gustatory preferences and eating practices function as markers of social position and instruments of symbolic violence. The emerging discipline of gastrocriticism, which Ronald Tobin defines as a multidisciplinary approach examining the rhetoric, symbols, and social contexts of food in literary texts, provides methodological tools for excavating the ideological work performed by Fielding's culinary imagination (622). As Gitanjali Shahani observes in *Food and Literature*, alimentary representations function as "subject, form, landscape, polemic, and aesthetic statement," serving as "cultural marker[s] of complex and oft-conflicting desires, affiliations, and identities" (3). When we attend to what characters eat, how they eat, and with whom they dine, we discover a systematic grammar of class encoded within the novel's apparently incidental details, revealing Fielding as a proto-sociologist of taste whose observations prefigure contemporary theoretical formulations.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, text-based analytical approach grounded in gastrocriticism and Bourdieuian sociological theory. The primary method is close reading of *Tom Jones*, with particular attention to episodes involving food consumption, culinary metaphor, and dining as social practice. The gastrocritical method, as theorised by Ronald Tobin, examines the rhetoric, symbols, and social contexts of food in literary texts (622), treating alimentary detail not as incidental description but as a semiotic system encoding social meaning. This approach is combined with Bourdieu's sociological framework from *Distinction*, specifically his concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and the opposition between the taste of necessity and the taste of luxury, to interpret how food practices in the novel register, reproduce, and occasionally subvert class hierarchies.

The theoretical apparatus is further enriched by three complementary frameworks. Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process* provides historical depth regarding the evolution of dining norms. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, drawn from *Rabelais and His World*, offers tools for interpreting comic and transgressive treatments of bodily appetite. Roland Barthes's semiotic approach to food as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" (21) enables reading meals as sign-systems that encode character, morality, and social position. The analysis proceeds through four key textual sites: the metafictional 'Bill of Fare' in the novel's opening chapter, the Upton inn sequence, the characterisation of Squire Western, and the alimentary contrast between Tom and Blifil.

Bourdieu and Beyond: Theoretical Framework

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* provides the primary theoretical lens for this analysis, offering concepts that illuminate *Tom Jones* with remarkable precision. Bourdieu's central argument that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" establishes the fundamental principle that aesthetic and gustatory preferences are not natural expressions of individual sensibility but socially constructed dispositions that both reflect and reproduce class hierarchies (6). His distinction between the 'taste of necessity' characteristic of working classes whose basic bodily needs favour heavier, more economical foods, and the 'taste of luxury' characteristic of dominant classes who possess distance from material constraint, maps suggestively onto *Tom Jones*'s contrast between rustic English abundance and metropolitan refinement (Bourdieu 177).

As Bourdieu elaborates, "[t]he antithesis between quantity and quality, substance and form, corresponds to the opposition—linked to different distances from necessity—between the taste of

necessity, which favours the most 'filling' and most economical foods, and the taste of liberty—or luxury—which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating etc.)" (177). This formulation resonates with Fielding's proto-sociological observation in the novel's opening chapter, where the narrator distinguishes between the food of "the Nobleman and the Porter" not by the raw material consumed but by "the seasoning, the dressing, the garnishing, and the setting forth" (31). Both may dine upon the same ox or calf, yet cultural labour transforms identical substances into class-marked commodities, anticipating Bourdieu's insight that distinction operates through how consumption is performed. Bourdieu's concept of habitus, defined as "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body" internalised through socialisation, illuminates how characters embody their class positions through alimentary behaviour (170).

Complementary theoretical frameworks enrich this Bourdieuian reading. Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process* provides historical depth, tracing how post-medieval European standards regarding eating were transformed by "increasing thresholds of shame and repugnance" (89). Stephen Mennell's *All Manners of Food* applies Eliasian theory specifically to culinary culture, exploring "the influential difference between 'court' and 'country' food" (134). Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World* provides tools for interpreting Fielding's comic treatment of bodily appetite, arguing that the carnivalesque "subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humour and chaos" while celebrating the material body in its appetitive exuberance (10). Roland Barthes's semiotic approach completes our framework by establishing that food constitutes "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" wherein food "sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes information; it signifies" (21). This perspective enables us to read meals in *Tom Jones* as communication systems encoding character, morality, and social position.

The Author as Restaurateur

Fielding's novel opens with an extended alimentary metaphor establishing the relationship between author and reader in explicitly commercial and gustatory terms, declaring that "[a]n Author ought to consider himself, not as a Gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary Treat, but rather as one who keeps a publick Ordinary, at which all Persons are welcome for their Money" (30). This positioning of the author as restaurateur, the novel as feast, and the reader as paying customer accomplishes several ideological operations. It acknowledges the commercial nature of the emerging literary marketplace while elevating the author's craft to culinary art. It democratises access to literature through the metaphor of the public ordinary while maintaining hierarchies of taste. And it frames reading itself as a form of consumption subject to the same class dynamics that govern eating.

The narrator's subsequent elaboration anticipates Bourdieuian analysis with striking precision: "Where then lies the Difference between the Food of the Nobleman and the Porter, if both were at Dinner on the same Ox or Calf, but in the seasoning, the dressing, the garnishing, and the setting forth. Hence the one provokes and incites the most languid Appetite, and the other turns and palls that which is the sharpest and keenest" (31). This passage encapsulates the central insight of Bourdieu's *Distinction*, that class difference operates not through access to fundamentally different resources but through cultural labour that transforms raw materials into markers of distinction. The narrator, by presenting each book with a 'Bill of Fare,' both parodies the pretensions of elaborate French menus and participates in the very economy of distinction he mocks. This alimentary framing connects to what Henry Power identifies as a broader phenomenon in which "literature becomes just another consumable product" and "a shared vocabulary is emerging, which works equally for poetry and food" (142).

The metafictional register of Fielding's culinary conceit extends beyond ornamentation to structure the reader's experience of the narrative. John Guillory's argument that novels by Richardson and Fielding functioned as "instruments of middle-class distinction and cultural aspiration" receives confirmation through

attention to how the 'Bill of Fare' positions readers as consumers exercising taste (85). The narrator's ironic self-presentation as keeper of a public ordinary acknowledges the novel's status as commodity while asserting the distinction of his particular culinary style. Bourdieu's observation that taste functions as "a social weapon" capable of "excluding outsiders" and "reminding those without access to cultural and educational capital that they are outsiders" illuminates how the narrator's ironic address to readers enacts the very processes of distinction the novel represents (56). The reader who appreciates the mock-heroic register demonstrates cultural capital; the reader who misses the irony reveals its absence.

Carnivalesque Consumption and Embodied Habitus

The famous scene at the inn at Upton, where Tom dines with Mrs. Waters before their sexual encounter, represents the novel's most sustained meditation on the relationship between alimentary and erotic appetites. Fielding deploys mock-epic language to present seduction as military campaign while insisting on the priority of food consumption over sexual conquest. Fielding writes: "First, from two lovely blue Eyes, whose bright Orbs flashed Lightning at their Discharge, flew forth two pointed Ogles. But happily for our Heroe, hit only a vast Piece of Beef which he was then conveying into his Plate, and harmless spent their Force" (462). The comic deflection of erotic 'ammunition' onto "a vast Piece of Beef" asserts the claims of bodily appetite against romantic convention. The narrator's observation that "as Love frequently preserves from the Attacks of Hunger, so may Hunger possibly, in some Cases, defend us against Love" inverts conventional hierarchies placing material appetite before spiritual passion (463). This inversion participates in what Bakhtin identifies as carnivalesque degradation that temporarily suspends established rankings.

The Upton inn functions as what Bourdieu would term a 'field,' a social space where different forms of capital are exchanged and contested. Unlike the country estates where "class hierarchies are rigid and fixed," the inn permits permeability between social positions, with characters moving freely "between the kitchen (for poor people) and rooms upstairs (for rich people)" ("Tom Jones: Analysis of Setting"). Money, rather than birth, becomes the operative form of capital, enabling social mixing that propriety would forbid elsewhere. Mrs. Waters's appetitive agency merits particular attention, as Fielding notes that "she could feast heartily at the table of love, without reflecting that some other already had been, or hereafter might be, feasted with the same repast" (475). The metaphor positions the woman as active consumer rather than passive object of consumption, inverting conventional gender dynamics through the carnivalesque license that the inn's liminal space permits.

Squire Western represents the embodied habitus of the rural gentry in its most unreflective form, his daily routine centring on physical activity and consumption: "hunting or some violent outdoor exercise; after his two o'clock dinner he passed the time in deep potations with some boon companion and when he went to bed, he was generally so drunk that he could not see" (Fielding 287). Western's alimentary habits express what Bourdieu calls "popular aesthetic" (60), a rejection of formal refinement in favour of abundant, straightforward consumption, with his interests confined to "the field, the stable, or the dog-kennel" (Fielding 288). The contrast between Western and his sister, who represents London court culture and its more refined habitus, encodes the tension between rural and urban, traditional and modern, necessity and luxury. Yet Fielding's satirical treatment of both positions suggests the arbitrary nature of all taste hierarchies.

Tom himself occupies an intermediate position in the alimentary economy of the novel. His hearty appetite signals fundamental health, vitality, and moral soundness, distinguishing him from the calculating restraint of Blifil, whose controlled consumption indexes his hypocritical nature. The novel's trajectory can be understood as a process of civilisation in Elias's sense, wherein Tom must learn to discipline his impulses without losing the generous vitality that distinguishes him from Blifil's cold calculation. The denouement, which reveals Tom as Allworthy's legitimate nephew, resolves the tension between natural merit and social

position. Yet this resolution depends upon hereditary legitimation rather than achieved distinction, suggesting the persistence of aristocratic forms of capital even as bourgeois market relations emerge.

Conclusion

Reading *Tom Jones* through the theoretical frameworks provided by Bourdieu, Elias, Bakhtin, and Barthes reveals dimensions of the novel's achievement that purely formalist or historical approaches may overlook. This gastrocritical analysis yields three principal findings.

First, Fielding's alimentary imagery constitutes not incidental realism but a systematic semiotic code through which class distinctions are encoded, performed, and contested. The metafictional 'Bill of Fare' establishes reading itself as an act of gustatory consumption governed by hierarchies of taste. The Upton inn scenes deploy carnivalesque degradation to expose the arbitrariness of social rankings. The contrasting alimentary habitus of Western, Tom, and Blifil maps a spectrum from unreflective rural consumption to calculating metropolitan restraint. In each case, food practices function as what Barthes terms a "system of communication" (21), encoding character, morality, and social position.

Second, the novel simultaneously critiques rigid class hierarchies through satire of pretension while ultimately reinstating them through Tom's revealed aristocratic birth. Food scenes expose the arbitrary, culturally constructed nature of taste, Fielding shows that the nobleman and the porter dine upon the same ox, differentiated only by "the seasoning, the dressing, the garnishing, and the setting forth" (31), yet the plot structure naturalises class difference. This tension between critical exposure and structural conservatism is itself a significant finding, positioning Fielding as a proto-sociologist who perceives the mechanisms of distinction while remaining embedded within the social order those mechanisms sustain.

Third, this analysis addresses the gap that James Spence identifies in Bourdieuian scholarship, noting that Bourdieu's "history sketched . . . reaches a significant degree of detail only in his studies of the French literary field in the nineteenth century" (12). By extending Bourdieuian analysis backward into the moment of the English novel's emergence, this study demonstrates the applicability of concepts such as habitus, cultural capital, and symbolic violence to eighteenth-century literary production. Fielding's attention to how characters eat, what they eat, and with whom they dine constitutes a sophisticated analysis of social reproduction through cultural practice.

The implications of this reading extend beyond *Tom Jones* itself. Gastrocritical approaches remain underutilised in eighteenth-century studies, and the Bourdieuian framework applied here could productively illuminate food practices in works by Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, and Frances Burney. As the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food* observes, "food has long served as a cultural marker of complex and oft-conflicting desires, affiliations, and identities" (Coghlan 4). *Tom Jones* demonstrates this truth with a precision that contemporary gastrocriticism is only beginning to appreciate, confirming that the classic is precisely the text that continues to yield new significance when approached with new questions.

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Fractured Selves and Dissociated Lives: Unearthing Trauma and Posthuman Subjectivity in Select Dystopian Fiction

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Abstract

This paper aims to offer an interdisciplinary analysis of four canonical dystopian novels—Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)—through the combined theoretical lenses of posthumanism and trauma studies. While posthumanist theory interrogates the destabilization of the Enlightenment humanist subject under conditions of biopolitics, technological mediation, and systemic power, trauma studies foreground the psychic, affective, and narrative consequences of such destabilization. This paper proposes that, by integrating these frameworks, dystopian fiction portrays trauma as a central element in the formation of posthuman subjects through experience, thereby facilitating a reevaluation of these texts not merely as cautionary tales against authoritarianism but as profound critiques of the human condition under modern regimes of power. In doing so, it demonstrates why these novels continue to function as dystopian classics: they do not simply predict oppressive futures, but expose the structural violence embedded within the very categories through which humanity has been defined.

Keywords : dissociation, dystopian fiction, embodiment, posthumanism, trauma studies

Dystopian fiction has historically held a prominent position within twentiethand twenty-first-century literary scholarship, serving as a distinctive genre that critically examines the intricate relations hipamong power dynamics, subjectivity, and social structures. Originating as a response to perceived deficiencies in Enlightenment rationalism, liberal humanist ideals, and technological advancements, dystopian narratives envisage futures in which systems designed to enhance human well-being inadvertently engender new modalities of domination and marginalization. In contrast to utopian narratives, which depict idealized societies founded on harmony and rationality, dystopian texts present a markedly darker vision of the future—one characterized by bleakness and despair. These works critically examine how ostensibly progressive paradigms, such as scientific advancement, state planning, social efficiency, and ideological hegemony, may, when taken to extremes, engender systems of systemic oppression. Among the vast body of dystopian writing, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* have attained canonical status, not only because of their enduring cultural influence but because each articulates a distinct yet interconnected critique of modernity's governing logics.

These four novels are widely regarded as classics of dystopian fiction for several reasons. First, each emerges from a historically specific moment, such as interwar industrialization, post-war totalitarianism, Cold War media culture, and late-twentieth-century religious fundamentalism—while simultaneously transcending its immediate context to address structural forms of power that remain legible across time. Secondly, they collectively map the dominant mechanisms through which dystopian control operates: biotechnological engineering in *Brave New World*, surveillance and epistemic coercion in *1984*, cultural

erasure and media saturation in *Fahrenheit 451*, and reproductive regulation and gendered theocracy in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Together, these texts form a genealogy of dystopian imagination that unearths the evolution of power from overt repression to more insidious forms of normalization, pleasure, and internalized discipline.

Traditional conceptualizations of classical dystopian literature have predominantly oriented towards a rigorous critique of totalitarian regimes, technological hegemony, and the suppression of individual freedoms. However, contemporary theoretical approaches reveal that these texts encompass more nuanced implications. From a posthumanist perspective, particularly one informed by Rosi Braidotti's feminist materialism, the task of literary criticism is no longer to recover an essential human subject occluded by modernity, but to interrogate how the category of the human itself has been historically produced, normalized, and weaponized. Posthumanism does not simply respond to technological change; it marks a profound epistemological shift in how subjectivity, agency, and embodiment are theorized within the humanities. Braidotti insists that the Enlightenment humanist subject was never universal but functioned as a "normative convention," privileging a specific figure of "Man" while rendering others marginal, disposable, or invisible. As she argues in *The Posthuman*, "The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about 'human nature' (26), which shows that humanism is not a neutral description of the human but a regulatory framework that governs who counts as fully human. This insight is foundational for reading dystopian literature, which repeatedly portrays the collapse of this regulatory fiction under conditions of extreme political and technological pressure.

A central intervention of posthuman theory lies in its rejection of subjectivity as a fixed essence. Drawing on Deleuzian philosophy, Braidotti conceptualizes the subject as an assemblage, a contingent constellation that is made up of biological, technological, affective, and political forces. She contends that the posthuman subject is "a transversal inter-connection or an 'assemblage' of human and non-human actors," (Braidotti 45) embedded and embodied, materially grounded and socially mediated. This understanding is particularly significant when analyzing *1984*. Winston Smith's subjectivity is not destroyed because it was never fully autonomous; rather, it is revealed to be structurally vulnerable. The Party's power lies not in erasing an essential self but in reorganizing the assemblage that constitutes Winston's being: his memories, bodily reflexes, linguistic capacities, and emotional attachments. From a Braidottian perspective, Winston's eventual submission is not merely ideological defeat but ontological reconfiguration. His famous betrayal of loving Big Brother marks the point at which subjectivity is fully absorbed into the state's political assemblage.

Braidotti's work is deeply engaged with the concept of biopolitics, particularly the ways in which contemporary systems of power operate directly on life itself. In *The Posthuman*, she argues that the conditions of advanced capitalism reshape the status of living beings within global technological and economic networks. She writes:

> Advanced capitalism and its biogenetic technologies engender a perverse form of the posthuman. At its core, there is a radical disruption of the human–animal interaction, but all living species are caught in the spinning machine of the global economy. The genetic code of living matter – 'Life itself'– is the main capital. (Braidotti7)

This formulation suggests that biological existence is increasingly incorporated into economic and technological systems of value production. Life, understood as genetic and biological material, becomes a central resource within contemporary biopolitical regimes. As a result, bodies are no longer treated merely as social or political subjects but as sites of biological productivity that can be optimized, managed, and regulated within broader structures of global capitalism.In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the World State represents a fully realized biopolitical regime in which human life is engineered, stratified, and administered at the molecular level. The Hatchery exemplifies what Rosi Braidotti describes as the biopolitical capture of *zoç,* or biological life itself.

Moreover, in the novel, Huxley portrays a society in which individuals are no longer born into the world but manufactured for it and calibrated in advance to occupy predetermined social functions. Human life is treated as a technical process governed by scientific management and state planning. Soma, promiscuity, and psychological conditioning ensure that subjects remain aligned with the system that exploits them. In this sense, Aldous Huxley's dystopian society anticipates what RosiBraidotti describes as contemporary biopolitical regimes, in which power increasingly functions through the modulation of affects, habits, and desires rather than through overt repression alone. Drawing on the concept of biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault, Braidotti argues that modern systems of governance manage life processes themselves, shaping embodied subjectivity through social, technological, and affective mechanisms

While Katherine Hayles provides the foundational vocabulary for understanding informational subjectivity, Braidotti extends this analysis by situating technology within a broader materialist framework. She resists technological determinism, emphasizing the co-evolution of humans and machines instead. The posthuman condition emerges not because machines replace humans, but because agency becomes distributed across complex networks. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag's interaction with the Mechanical Hound exemplifies this distributed agency. The Hound is not merely a tool but an autonomous node within a larger system of surveillance and enforcement. From a posthuman perspective, the threat it poses lies precisely in its lack of emotion, memory, or moral hesitation—qualities traditionally associated with human agency. Braidotti argues that such figures force us to reconsider ethical responsibility in a posthuman world. If agency is no longer exclusively human, then accountability must be reconceptualized. Bradbury's novel dramatizes this dilemma by showing how technological systems enable violence without identifiable perpetrators, diffusing responsibility across networks.

Braidotti's posthumanism is explicitly feminist, attentive to how bodies marked by gender, race, and sexuality are disproportionately subjected to biopolitical control. This makes *The Handmaid's Tale* particularly resonant in this context. Offred's body is not merely oppressed; it is reduced to its functionality as a biological entity, stripped of its narrative, history, and futurity. Here, Sylvia Wynter's critique of "Man" as a genre of the human intersects powerfully with Braidotti's feminist materialism. Offred exists outside the category of the fully human because she is denied agency, voice, and autonomy. Her enforced reproductive role exemplifies what Rosi Braidotti identifies as the biopolitical regulation of life, where biological capacity becomes the primary criterion of value.Moreover, it is important to note that Offred's narrative voice resists total capture. From a posthuman feminist perspective, storytelling itself becomes a minor form of resistance, a reassertion of relational, embodied subjectivity against a system that seeks to render bodies mute.

Coming back to the discussion on trauma theory, in *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley imagines a society designed to eliminate trauma by eradicating pain, grief, and emotional depth. At first glance, the World State appears antithetical to trauma: there is no war, no visible repression, and no overt suffering. Yet this enforced happiness constitutes a profound form of psychic violence. Trauma, as Judith Herman notes in *Trauma and Recovery*, is produced not only by violence but also by the systematic denial of emotional response. The World State institutionalizes this denial through soma, hypnopaedia, and perpetual distraction, creating subjects who are incapable of mourning or ethical reflection. In Huxley's World State, trauma is pre-emptively neutralized through pleasure, yet this very neutralization produces a deeper psychic injury. Early in the novel, Mustapha Mond articulates the World State's governing logic: "Stability. The primal and the ultimate need" (Huxley14). Stability here can be read as a biopolitical imperative that justifies the elimination of emotional depth. Trauma theory, as articulated by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, reminds us that psychic integration depends upon the ability to experience and process affective disturbance; by outlawing disturbance itself, the World State produces subjects incapable of emotional endurance.

In *1984*, Orwell presents trauma as an explicit strategy of governance, rooted in surveillance, epistemic instability, and bodily violation. Winston's existence is shaped by the omnipresent telescreen: "There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork" (Orwell 4). This uncertainty generates anticipatory trauma, where fear is not tied to an event but to its perpetual possibility. Trauma here is chronic, internalized, and inescapable.Trauma theory emphasizes that trauma disrupts narration; Orwell radicalizes this by depicting a system that eliminates the linguistic capacity for testimony itself. Winston's diary, where he writes "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free" (Orwell 28),represents a desperate attempt to stabilize identity through writing. Yet the absence of a listener renders this testimony incomplete, reinforcing trauma's isolating effects.The erasure of historical continuity intensifies this condition. Winston's realization that "nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (Orwell 67) exposes the illusion of interior sovereignty under posthuman control. Even this interior space is ultimately invaded. O'Brien's assertion that reality exists only in the human mindand nowhere else constitutes epistemic violence, destroying Winston's capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood. Room 101 marks the culmination of this trauma. Winston's cry: "Do it to Julia!" (Orwell 289) represents the collapse of relational bonds essential to trauma recovery. His final admission, where he states that "He loved Big Brother" (Orwell 300),signals the total absorption of subjectivity into the system that inflicted the trauma. Orwell offers no working-through, only the annihilation of memory, desire, and testimony.

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* situates trauma within the structures of gender, reproduction, and enforced ritual. The Ceremony exemplifies normalized sexual trauma: "One detaches oneself. One describes" (148). This dissociative narration aligns with trauma theory's account of psychic splitting under conditions of sustained coercion. Trauma is not spectacular but routinized, embedded in the rhythms of everyday life.Offred's fragmented narrative reflects the instability of traumatic memory. She repeatedly acknowledges the unreliability of her account: "It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was" (Atwood 112). This hesitation resists closure and coherence, embodying Cathy Caruth's claim that trauma remains partially inaccessible to conscious recall (Caruth 44). Yet narration itself becomes a survival strategy. Offred insists, "I tell, therefore you are" (Atwood 66), emphasizing the relational dimension of testimony even in the absence of a guaranteed listener.Waiting functions as a key traumatic structure in the novel. Offred's life is organized around reproductive time—cycles, delays, suspensions—producing a future that never arrives. "We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print" (Atwood 89), she observes, highlighting how invisibility compounds trauma. The loss of her name intensifies this erasure: "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now" (Atwood 79). Naming, central to identity formation, is denied, producing linguistic trauma alongside bodily violation.The "Historical Notes" complicate the ethics of trauma representation. Offred's testimony is reframed as an academic artifact, prompting uncomfortable questions about the consumption of suffering. Atwood refuses redemptive closure, suggesting instead that survival lies in the fragile persistence of narrative rather than recovery or justice.

Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* explores trauma as a consequence of accelerated time and cognitive overload. Montag's opening line, "It was a pleasure to burn" (Bradbury 2), signals a society in which violence has been aestheticized and emotional response has been numbed. Trauma manifests here as dissociation, a condition reinforced by constant media stimulation and the eradication of silence.Clarisse's questions disrupt this numbness: "Are you happy?" (Bradbury 16). The simplicity of the question exposes Montag's suppressed affect, illustrating trauma theory's emphasis on belated recognition. Clarisse's attentiveness to sensory detail, such as rain, leaves, and conversation, contrasts sharply with the speed-driven environment, suggesting that reflection itself has become dangerous.Mildred's overdose exemplifies normalized trauma. The

technicians treat her unconscious body mechanically, remarking that they encounter such cases routinely. "We get these cases nine or ten a night" (Bradbury 41), one observes, revealing how psychic distress has been rendered banal. Trauma becomes invisible precisely because it is ubiquitous, managed through technology rather than care.The Mechanical Hound represents posthuman enforcement stripped of moral agency. Its reliance on chemical traces reduces identity to data, producing anticipatory fear and algorithmic violence. Montag's eventual memorization of books offers a fragile alternative: memory embodied in vulnerable human bodies. "We're book burners, too" (Bradbury 55), Granger admits, underscoring the paradox of survival through partial preservation. Bradbury frames trauma not as something to be healed, but as something to be carried forward through imperfect remembrance.

This study has sought to revisit the four classical dystopian texts by situating them at the intersection of posthumanism and trauma studies. Rather than approaching these texts solely as speculative critiques of authoritarian politics or technological excess, the paper has argued that they illustrate a more profound interrogation of subjectivity itself, one in which trauma emerges as the affective and psychic condition of posthuman governance. Across these narratives, power no longer operates merely through prohibition or overt violence but through the regulation of life, memory, desire, and affect, rendering trauma structural, continuous, and often unrepresentable.By reading these novels through posthumanist theory, particularly the work of Rosi Braidotti, the paper has demonstrated that dystopian regimes do not simply "dehumanize" individuals; rather, they reorganize the category of the human by redistributing agency across biotechnological systems, surveillance infrastructures, and ideological apparatuses. Trauma theory further illuminates how such regimes fracture narrative coherence, foreclose mourning, and destabilize the conditions necessary for psychic integration. Winston Smith's epistemic collapse, Offred's dissociative testimony, Montag's belated awakening, and John the Savage's catastrophic refusal collectively reveal how trauma functions not as an exceptional rupture but as a normalized mode of existence within dystopian modernity.

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Mountaineering as a Capitalist Venture: Reading Jon Krakaeur's *Into Thin Air* in the light of Late Capitalism

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Abstract

The paper attempts to read the American Mountaineer and journalist Jon Krakauer's 1997 memoir *Into Thin Air*: *A Personal Account of the Everest Disaster* detailing his first hand experience of 1996 Mount Everest disaster in the theoretical light of late capitalism. The book is a significant work in the history of mountaineering and mountain literature. It becomes a classic in its own right as it is a tale of the universal theme of human tragedy and endurance. The paper tries to expose how the commercial mountaineering enterprises operate within late capitalism by manufacturing desire, aestheticizing risk and circulating hyperreal representations that obscure danger. It analyses how adventure agencies accumulate wealth by selling stimulated safety and symbolic achievement while systematically deprioritizing human life and ethical responsibility. Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle', 'Manufactured Desire', John Kenneth Galbraith's 'Dependence Effect', Thorstein Veblen's 'Conspicuous Consumption', etc. are the theoretical concepts that are employed in the study.

Keywords: Manufactured desire, Late capitalism, conspicuous consumption, Everest disaster

The term late capitalism was popularized by Ernest Mandel through his work *Late Capitalism* (1972), and it predominantly marks the contemporary stage of capitalism, characterised by globalization, financialization, commodification of culture, digital technology, and the resultant accumulation of large-scale wealth through technological innovations. The commodification of nearly everything is a crucial aspect of late capitalism, in which not only goods but also time, emotion, care, data, and identity become commodities.With the advent of technological mediation, digital platforms increasingly structure work, consumption, and social relations. Surveillance, algorithmic control, and data extraction have become so pervasive that they now permeate the very fabric of everyday life. Late capitalism extends it's sway over anything and everything including mountaineering feats and it prompts Jon Krakaeur, an American writer and mountaineer, to state that "Everest was no longer merely a mountain but a commodity as well"(76) in his memoir *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Everest Disaster*. It details his summit of Mount Everest in1996 when a blizzard took the lives of many clients and the year is marked one of the deadliest in the history of mountaineering. The ascent was the aftermath of the assignment he got from the editor of *Outside* magazine to write an article on the commercialisation of the mountain. He has extended the article into a book to escape from the constraints of column inches of the magazine and thus a landmark non fiction in mountaineering literature was born.

The paper attempts to throw light on the manifold ways in which late capitalism has turned a geographical structure from an aesthetic wonder to a commodity that can be purchased. The mountaineering expeditions have become money- making businesses with the advent of commercial agencies that 'guide' accents of the Summit. High-altitude guiding has become a career option with scope for earning money. The flocking throngs at Mount Everest affect the environmental equilibrium, aesthetics of the mountain landscape and the safety of the people attempting it.

Mountaineering becomes nearly impossible in unfavorable weather conditions and in altitudes beyond

twenty five thousand feet due to low atmospheric pressure and limited oxygen supply. Climbers can't hurry and can move only at a snail's pace. But the clients who have paid a huge amount to be taken to the top of the mountain refrain from quitting even if weather conditions turn adverse. On the other hand, guides also want their clients to summit the peak as it will affect their good will and profile. Jon Krakaeur attributes the 1996 Mount Everest disaster partly to the rivalry between the two competing agencies- New Zealander Rob Hall's Adventure Consultants and the American Scott Fischer's Mountain Madness. Since it was Fischer's first expedition as a guide, he had to be successful. Krakaeur notes: "He was exceedingly motivated to get clients to the summit, especially a celebrity client like Sandy Hill Pitman" (273). Hall too was under pressure as he was not able to take clients to the top in 1995 and if it repeats in 1996, he would be at a loss. So Krakaeur believes that both the goddess guides have failed to turn their clients at the proper time before the weather became fatal. In guided expeditions, clients are not left to make important decisions independently as the guide intervenes and instructs each step to the client.

Ultimately, this commodification of human experiences under late capitalism intensifies inequality and precarity.Drawing from Althusser, media acts as an 'Ideological State Apparatus' that shapes individuals' beliefs and behaviours, making them accept industrial culture as natural and normal.Following Guy Debord, late capitalism becomes a 'Society of the Spectacle' in which social relations are mediated through images, reality is replaced by representation, and suffering, crisis, and resistance are aestheticized and consumed. Debord posits that "in late capitalist societies, the consumer attempts to acquire an image, rather than the product itself" (Raine).He observes that direct engagement with reality has been displaced, as lived experience is now filtered through a continuous circulation of constructed images (Raine). Advertisers frequently entice travellers through carefully curated representations of historic sites and adventurous experiences, encouraging consumers to fashion themselves as cultured, daring, and worldly subjects. Within this framework, capitalism commodifies identity itself, offering purchasable personas that promise distinction and excitement. The outcome is what Debord conceptualizes as the spectacle is a circulation of images drawn from others' journeys that substitute representation for reality. Consequently, even the traveller's own encounter with a destination becomes mediated rather than lived, as their perception of place is shaped and regulated by the operational logics of the tourism industry.The urge to conquer Mount Everest is generated and is infiltrated into the psyche of the people. Krakaeur notes: "Once Everest was determined to be the highest summit on earth, it was only a matter of time before people decided that Everest needed to be climbed" (14). More than the man's natural instinct to know and conquer, the promoters of adventure and mountaineering pose Mount Everest as the paramount challenge to be undertaken and achieved in order to prove one's physical prowess and mental valour.

The first ascent of Mount Everest, in 1953 by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, was received with awe and jubilation. Sir Edmund Hillary became a sudden sensation as the media extolled his achievement. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. His photo appeared in "postage stamps, comic strips, books, movies, magazine covers" (19), thus transforming a beekeeper into a celebrity. A collective sense of pride and a feeling of patriotism was consciously created in making him the national hero. As years passed by , some of the alpine cognoscenti started to "denigrate Everest as a "slag heap"- a peak lacking sufficient technical challenges or aesthetic appeal to be a worthy objective for a"serious" climber"(21). The media has the power to portray certain feats as worthy to be achieved and certain other feats as unworthy of attainment. It becomes conspicuous that the 'greatness' of the mountain is merely something that is attributed by those in power to reap personal benefits. What media extols will definitely have an influence in the younger generation. Jon Krakaeur himself was moved by the portrayals of mountaineering heroes and he notes it down: "...accounts of the 1963 epic on Everest resonated loud and long in my preadolescent

imagination"(20). Scott Fischer, head guide in Mountain Madness, was also enthralled by a television program on mountaineering when he was a school boy which led him to enroll in an Outward Bound- style wilderness course

Under late capitalism, risk itself becomes a selleable commodity where Everest is marketed not as a danger, but as a "controlled adventure". Here risk is aestheticized while safety is downplayed. Mountaineering under capitalist agencies transforms mortal risk into a purchasable experience, where danger is romanticised while responsibility is disowned. Adventure agencies operate within a logic where risk itself becomes a spectacle. Dangerous activities are visually framed as thrilling, heroic, and transformative along with media representations erasing material risks (death, injury, environmental danger). Safety failures are concealed behind curated images of success and excitement. The spectacle does not show reality, but replaces it with an attractive representation, allowing agencies to profit while responsibility is displaced.Agencies cultivate demand by repeatedly circulating images of triumph, heroism, and self-transcendence, while systematically suppressing representations of danger, failure, and death. Everest is transformed from a lethal, unpredictable terrain into a controlled commodity, marketed as a purchasable experience rather than a mortal risk. This process exemplifies what Debord describes as the spectacle, where representation replaces lived reality, allowing profit to be generated through images rather than accountability.Within this framework, safety becomes secondary to profit accumulation. Agencies prioritize client volume, summit success rates, and brand reputation over ethical responsibility, often pushing climbers beyond physical limits and ignoring weather warnings.Mount Everest demarcates the Nepal- Tibet border and thus offers two pathways or access points to the base of Mount Everest- Tibetan border on the northern side and the Nepal border on the southern side. The Tibetan government opened its borders for foreign climbers in 1921 and it took twenty eight years more for the Nepal government to open its borders. As fee for climbing permits is a means for the governments to improve their national treasuries and unlimited access to the mountain can fetch more income, both governments favoured money the safety of the climber and environment conservation. Thus the chances of calamities rocketed in parallel to the income received. The detrimental effect of the increased influx of climbers on the mountain has a toll on the environment as the mountain becomes a garbage dumping place. The governments revised the climbing fees from time to time understanding that people are ready to spend on attaining the climbing permit. Jon Krakaeur feels that Nepal and China "have a vested interest in issuing as many expensive climbing permits as the market will support, and both are unlikely to enact any policies that significantly limit their revenues"(274). From 1988 onwards, the expeditions led by various adventure agencies began to charge over $2,000 from those teams that followed the routes devised by them. Central to this argument, is the concept of 'Manufactured Desire' conceptualized as "socially constructed wants, actively produced and disseminated through intricate systems of marketing, media, and cultural narratives, which shape individual perceptions of needs and desires, often leading to unsustainable consumption patterns and potentially undermining genuine well-being and societal equity" ("Manufactured Desires"). Manufactured Desires are interpreted as "longings for products, services, or lifestyles that not organically arising from an individual's core needs or intrinsic values, but rather are induced and amplified by external forces, particularly marketing, media, and cultural trends" (Ibid).They consist of add-ons and enhancements that claim to improve life by making it appear more fulfilling, exciting, or complete, largely through material acquisition and external affirmation. People are not called to Everest organically rather the advertising wing of the agency induce a desire to attempt mountaineering in the mindset of individuals by constructing Everest as a personal destiny, a life milestone. They convert status anxiety into motivation. The Canadian-American economist John Kenneth Galbraith introduced the concept of the "Dependence Effect" in his book, *The Affluent Society* (1958) where he argues that "as we are moving from

an age of poverty to an age of affluence, there is no urgent wants in the society. Instead of that, as resources are abundant, consumer demand is now created by the efforts from producers such as advertising and salesmanship" ("Economic Contributions of John Kenneth Galbraith"). The coming up of companies providing adventure services have changed the scenario altogether. Rob Hall and Gary Ball's Adventure Consultants was launched in the view that "untapped market of dreamers existed with ample cash but insufficient experience to climb the world's great mountains on their own"(33). A number of employment opportunities do accompany mountaineering expeditions as each adventure agency competes with each other to provide maximum comfort and support. Base camp manager, doctors to provide emergency care, porters, guides, cooks, helpers, etc. are employed in assisted guiding expeditions. Jon Krakaeur quotes the instance of Dick Bass who had no prior experience in climbing or physical training. He was taken to the summit by a young climber named David Breashears. The fifty five year old man from the U.S state of Texas was able to get to the top of the highest peak in the world because he could afford the services of an adventure agency. Denman, an inexperienced Canadian climber, attempted Mount Everest with the help of two Sherpas-Ang Dawa and Tenzing Norgay. Pete Schoening booked the services of Scott Fischer not because he wanted a guide "but to avoid the mammoth hassle of arranging for a permit, oxygen, tentage, provisions, Sherpa support, and other logistical details"(92).

Sherpas are hired by the adventure agencies for money as "load bearers and camp helpers"(44). Sherpas are mountain people who live in high altitudes and their economy, with the advent of adventure agencies, have become "irrevocably tied to the seasonal influx of trekkers and climbers"(45). Competition exists among Sherpas too to the staff positions in expeditions as these jobs have an attractive pay and they enjoy stardom in their community.

In the epoch of late capitalism, desire is produced and induced rather than natural.At this juncture, the theory of 'Conspicuous Consumption' gains prominence. Introduced by economist Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, it examines "the waysin which individuals use consumption to signal social status" (Zimmer).This theory suggests that "people engage in conspicuous consumption, a practice of buying and using luxury goods as a means of exhibiting wealth and social status" (Zimmer). Veblen argues that this behavior is shaped less by necessity than by the desire to gain social acknowledgment and stand apart from others. He contends that that consumption practices play a significant role in shaping individual identity and self-worth.Adventure agencies do not merely respond to pre-existing desires; rather, they actively construct mountaineering as a life goal, personal destiny, and marker of achievement, thereby converting existential longing and status anxiety into market demand.Adventure agencies do thrive on marketing and marketing plays a pivotal role in labelling and prioritising feats and persons. Jon Krakaeur pinpoints a poster of Rob Hall that he came across in Kathmandu. The poster "commemorated his rather impressive feat of ascending all three peaks during two months in 1994"(31) and was "intended to drum up business for Hall's guiding company, Adventure Consultants"(31). The Geruda Hotel where Krakaeur booked a room also had "signed photographs of famous alpinists who'd slept there over the years"(31). Publicity was sought by Rob Hall and other guides so that they could receive funding from corporates who would sponsor the entire expedition which would otherwise be so expensive. About his guide Rob Hall, Krakaeur writes: "the more attention he got from the news media, the easier it would be to coax corporations to open their checkbooks"(32). To receive sponsorship continuously, "a climber has to keep upping the ante"(33) which means new climbs need to be riskier and more momentous.

Outside magazine booked the services of the reputed New Zealander Rob Hall for Jon Krakaeur by paying the climbing fees, airfare to Nepal and by sanctioning leave from work in order to have physical training sessions. Rob Hall admits Jon Krakaeur in his team for only $10,000 in the hope of getting valuable ad space in the *Outside* magazine which "targetted an upscale,

adventurous, physically active audience"(66). Jon Krakaeur quotes Hall's statement: "It's an American audience. Probably eighty or ninety percent of the potential market for guided expeditions to Everest and the other Seven Summits is in the United States"(67). Rob Hall feels that Scott Fischer's Mountain Madness has a greater advantage over his Adventure Consultants as Scott Fischer is an American and that he has to concentrate on advertising. The South African Mount Everest expedition team was sponsored by the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*.

Media and technology exercise pervasive control over individuals, often leading them to overlook underlying truths and material realities.Jon Krakaeur opines that "guiding Everest is a very loosely regulated business...ill equipped to assess qualifications of guides or clients" Simulated or hyperreal constructs exert a strong fascination over public perception and thought. Under the combined influence of hyperreality and consumerism, images and signs no longer disclose truth; instead, they reshape and manipulate reality, producing pure simulacra.Within this framework, *Into Thin Air* exposes how commercial mountaineering operates within late capitalism by manufacturing desire, aestheticizing risk, and circulating hyperreal representations that obscure danger. Adventure agencies accumulate wealth by selling simulated safety and symbolic achievement while systematically deprioritizing human life and ethical responsibility.

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Theological Discourse and Disciplined Bodies: A Foucauldian Reading of Atwood's Modern Classics

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Abstract

The present scholarly article argues that Margaret Atwood's novels, namely, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019), can be widely regarded as modern classics for their sustained critique of religion as a mechanism of authoritarian power and gendered control. The study analyses how the religious ideology within the theocratic regime of Gilead sanctions state authority, disciplines the female body, and normalises patriarchal oppression. Through its application of Michel Foucault's theories of power, discourse and surveillance, the study examines religion as an institutionalised knowledge that regulates women's corporeality and restricts female agency. The research positions the novels within an intersecting context of American Puritanism, the rise of the Religious Right in 1980s America, and present-day discussions of bodily rights. The examination uncovers the subtle ties between religion and women's bodies in Atwood's dystopias. Thus, the scholarly analysis establishes that Atwood's moral and socio-political criticism, having historical and cultural backgrounds, provides the essential conditions and impetus for the emergence of these novels as modern classics of the contemporary period.

Keywords: modern classics, religion, power, female body, discourse.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel, *The Testaments* (2019), are widely regarded as modern classics of the contemporary period, as they present compelling and timeless critiques of societal control, gender oppression and religious extremism. Far from speculative imaginations, both novels are rooted in historical and political realities, reflecting Atwood's avowal that every atrocity depicted has areal-world precedent. *The Handmaid's Tale* was shaped by the rise of the Religious Right in the 1980s, as well as Puritan theocratic traditions and Nicolae Ceau'escu's restrictive reproductive policies in Romania, all of which have been discussed in this scholarly article. Whereas, 10 years later, *The Testaments* responds to contemporary political unrest, drawing inspiration from the 2016 U.S. election and the #MeToo movement. Collectively, the novels are often labelled as "eerily prescient", reflecting real societal trends and projecting them to petrifying conclusions. Their cultural impact extends beyond literature: the red-handmaid costume has become a cultural "touchstone" of feminist resistance, affirming Atwood's enduring influence on modern political discourse and debates surrounding gender, autonomy and authoritarian power.

Scholarly investigation has underlined the moral and political depth of Atwood's dystopian fiction. Slawomir KuŸnicki argues that Atwood's work demonstrates "a deeply ethical way of perceiving and rewriting the contemporary world", requiring investigation that foregrounds historical, contextual and political dimensions (KuŸnicki 10). Building on this critical framework, the present research paper contends that *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* can be categorized as modern classics due to their prolonged involvement with religious ideology and its role in validating power structures. In particular, the study focuses on Atwood's representation of religion as a

mechanism through which power is exercised, institutionalised and normalised within the fictional theocracy of Gilead. A central objective is to analyse how religious practices and doctrines are employed to discipline, survey and commodify the female body as represented in the novels, reducing women to reproductive vessels within a rigidly patriarchal system. Consequently, this investigation will employ Michel Foucault's theory of power, particularly in connection with the discourse surrounding religion, as its theoretical framework.

Numerous characteristics of Gilead are recognizable to readers familiar with dystopian literature: the absence of freedom, pervasive surveillance, regimented routines, the thwarted escape attempt (by Offred's companion Moira) and an underground faction known as the Mayday Resistance Movement. However, the historical trajectories that give rise to Gilead are adequately plausible. In addition, Atwood's projected future is innovative and not inherently implausible.She affirms:

> I cut things out and put them in a box...In case someone said, 'How did you make this up?'...I didn't make it up. This is the proof — everything in these boxes. There's so much of it. 'Ayatollah Khomeini's slaughterhouse. The jails of Iran.'…and the religious right taking power in the US [Under Ronald Reagan's Campaign of 1980s]. (Atwood)

Additionally, according to Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, Atwood's inspiration for *The Handmaid's Tale* embraced the actions of Nicolai Ceausescu's, particularly, his fixation on increasing Romania's birth rate leading to bans on abortion and birth control. Thus, resulting in state surveillance of pregnant women and their reproductive lives. This is similarly manifested in the both the narratives where women are strictly confined to their biological functions by a totalitarian state that exerts control over female reproductive system.

Furthermore, Atwood is sceptic about religion and finds it noteworthy mainly in cultural and historical terms. In her interview with Geoff Hancock quoted by Kuzìnicki in his book, *Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Fiction: Fire Is Being Eaten*, Atwood states, "I can't say the established religions have a terribly good track record. Most of them have quite a history of doing people in - not to mention their attitude towards women" (Atwood quoted in Kuznicki 15).

Moreover, when engaging in discourse regarding religion, Atwood predominantly contemplates Christianity, particularly within the context of North America. In both the novels, the dystopian society of Gilead is a theocracy, meaning that the government and religion are intertwined. The regime in the novel, uses a twisted form of Christianity to justify its laws and regulations, and to control women.

Furthermore, Atwood intricately weaves Biblical allusions alongside the theme of religious oppression in boththe texts under investigation. Additionally, concerning religion, Atwood provides a critical perspective into the diverse power relations that seem to be inscribed within every belief system, particularly in relation to the discourse surrounding religion.This paper will analyse concepts such as discourse (specifically in relation to religion) and state surveillance.

The study seeks to employ the discourse of religion as a mechanism of paramount power specifically in two of the novels chosen for this study. For example, this assertion is corroborated by the contention that the conceptualized republic of Gilead, epitomizes a totalitarian patriarchal theocracy, akin to Puritanical New England, which governs its citizens with a set of rigid rules that reinforces fundamentally Christian lifestyles. This signifies that the discourse of religion is propagated as the preeminent form of knowledge, residing within the purview of the state, and those citizens who diverge from this orthodoxy are subjected to public executions as a form of retribution.

Foucault, who articulated a critique centred on the premise that religious knowledge and practices are intrinsically linked to the body, elucidates the potency of linguistic constructs and religious narratives in the governance of individuals. In Foucault's analysis, the regulation of the female body is intrinsically an exercise in the modulation of female agency (Inger 12). In *The Testaments*, Atwood critically examines the convergence

of religion and its ramifications for women's corporeal existence and sexual autonomy within the dystopian setting of Gilead. The study contends that the oppressive circumstances encountered by women are not solely a manifestation of male nature but rather arise from a rigid ideological framework that confers authority upon men while subjecting women to intricate moral dilemmas. Consequently, this paper investigates the mechanisms through which Gilead's employment of fear and religious dogma shape's female identity, elucidating how such constructs restrain individuality and enforce adherence to prescribed gender roles. By scrutinizing Agnes's perspective on her sexuality, the narrative unveils how the regime utilizes fear and religious dogma as a tool to suppress female sexual expression, epitomized by the harrowing account of "The Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces". Agnes reflects upon this episode as profoundly disturbing, indicating that it has left a "deep impression" on her and that it "may help to explain why some of us from that time and place acted as we did" (*TT* 79). Ultimately, at the conclusion of this tale, the concubine is cast out by the man who claims her, subsequently subjected to brutal rape and murder, to which Aunt Vidala contends that she warranted such a fate, asserting that "the man in charge should be honoured by women" and that "If not, this was the result. God always made the punishment fit the crime" (*TT* 80). This account, elucidated by Aunt Vidala, functions as an application of religious doctrine to illustrate a harrowing depiction of the objectification of women and the brutal consequences of violating patriarchal conventions (Bordoloi 46).

The depictions rendered by Atwood in both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* should not be interpreted mere speculation. The resulting situation of the religious right attaining dominance in the United States, as illustrated by the totalitarian regime of "Gilead" depicted in the novels, that holds conservative views on women, was informed by actual historical occurrences.

Within both *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood addresses the Puritan's conservative views on women where women are reduced to vessels for childbirth while being deprived of autonomy and educational opportunities beyond their prescribed roles as "Wives" and mothers. Furthermore, Atwood articulates that the Puritans employed dystopian strategies of "capturing," "ousting," and "silencing...especially women dissidents" (Dodson 66), who opposed the patriarchal collective vision, which is re-examined by Atwood in both narratives through the themes of containment and the commodification of women's bodies, as exemplified in *The Handmaid's Tale*. For instance, Offred, the central character of the narrative, maintains that she "avoid[s] looking down at" her "body," as she is disinclined to behold "something that determines" her "so completely" (*HT* 100). Prior to the establishment of Gilead, Offred possessed a divergent perception of her body. Nevertheless, under the current regime, she perceives herself as a "vehicle" (*HT* 207) solely for procreation. This engenders an aversion towards her body, as it constrains her autonomy. Consequently, she refrains from looking at it. This paradigm of defining women exclusively through their bodies effectively obliterates their identities, rendering their sole identification to be their reproductive capacity. Thus, Offred characterizes herself and her fellow Handmaids as "two-legged wombs," "sacred vessels," or "ambulatory chalices" (*HT* 209). Furthermore, Gilead's philosophy of confining women to their biological functions is similarly illustrated in *The Testaments*. This is manifested when Agnes refers to herself and her peers as "precious flowers" (17) owing to their reproductive potential.

As previously articulated, aside from the Puritanical characteristics present in both the texts under study, they also reveal important connections to the American Conservatism of the 1980s, during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the United States. Adherents of religious conservatism frequently contend that the USembodies the essence of a Christian nation, advocating for legislative measures that impose Christian ethical standards. They instituted limitations or outright prohibitions on abortion, as illustrated by the totalitarian theocracy of "Gilead", wherein figures such as Commander Judd reproach Aunt Lydia regarding abortion[section XI of *The Testaments*, titled "Sackcloth", Commander Judd cautions Aunt Lydia that abortion in Gilead is "now punishable by death"]

(167), reflecting historical contexts characterized by restrictions or total prohibitions on abortion.

Moreover, social conservatives exhibit their most pronounced influence in the Southern region and in recent years, have played a pivotal role in the political alliances associated with George W. Bush and Donald Trump. The narratives presented in the novels draw parallels to the ramifications of the alterations ensuing from the election of Donald Trump in 2016, particularly concerning the restrictions imposed on legal abortion across 19 states in the United States as their contextual framework. Therefore, the author's portrayal of a menacing patriarchy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* bears significant relevance to contemporary societal discourse. Subsequent to Trump's electoral victory in 2016, the emblems associated with Gilead have emerged as prevalent symbols at global demonstrations opposing misogyny. Consequently, Atwood's fictional dystopia, Gilead, along with its distinctive world and lexicon, appears increasingly plausible in the context of national politics, especially throughout Trump's administration. One can observe specific linguistic and iconographic elements that resonate politically in states such as Ohio and Texas, particularly evidenced during the Anti-Abortion Protests of 2017.

In conclusion, this analysis has aspired to uncover the subtle ties between religion and the illustration of women's corporeal forms in the dystopian narratives crafted by Margaret Atwood, particularly within *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. The study posits that Atwood's critique of power dynamics and gender-based violence, as facilitated through an analysis of both the historical and cultural contexts of these texts, particularly- the religious frameworks, provided the essential conditions and impetus for the emergence of these narratives as modern classics of contemporary period.

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The Resilience of Traditional Beliefs and Communal Identity in Achebe's Trilogy

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Abstract

Because of their persistent engagement with indigenous belief systems and their reaction to colonial misrepresentation, Chinua Achebe's novels hold a prominent place in African literary studies. This article examines how traditional beliefs are portrayed in a few of Achebe's novels, including *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The study looks at how Achebe depicts Igbo cosmology, ritual practices, moral values, and communal institutions using postcolonial theory, cultural nationalism, and anthropological criticism. It contends that Achebe portrays tradition as a dynamic system facing historical change rather than as an idealised past or a regressive force. The article highlights important conclusions about the persistence, disintegration, and evolution of traditional beliefs under colonial pressure and discusses current critical reactions to Achebe's writings.Lastly, it explains why *Things Fall Apart's* narrative balance, cultural authenticity, and universal relevance have made it a classic in world literature.

Keywords: Things Fall Apart, Igbo culture, traditional beliefs, postcolonial fiction, Chinua Achebe.

Introduction

One of the most important writers in African literature, Chinua Achebe, is well known for having redefined how Africa and Africans are portrayed in English-language fiction. By telling tales based on indigenous worldviews, Achebe aimed to restore African dignity in opposition to a long history of colonial narratives that depicted Africa as historically and culturally inadequate. His books question the "single story" of Africa that colonial discourse propagated, substituting intricate portrayals of social structure, moral standards, and belief systems (Achebe, *Home and Exile* 32).

Achebe's depiction of traditional beliefs, particularly those of the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria, is essential to his literary endeavour. These ideas influence social interactions, govern moral behaviour, and offer justifications for human misery, achievement, and failure. Achebe reconstructs a worldview that colonial ideology had systematically marginalised through rituals, festivals, proverbs, ancestral worship, and religious authority. But rather than being nostalgic, his portrayal of tradition is characterised by balance. Achebe presents traditional society as a living system rather than a romanticised past, acknowledging its limitations and internal contradictions.

Achebe's discussion of traditional beliefs in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Arrow of God* (1964)is revisited in this article. When read as a whole, these books show how traditional belief systems changed from pre-colonial stability to colonial disruption and postcolonial disillusionment. The article illustrates how Achebe's nuanced treatment of tradition continues to influence conversations about identity, cultural memory, and modernity by placing his fiction within pertinent theoretical frameworks and current critical debates. The article also explains why *Things Fall Apart* is still regarded as a classic work of literature.

Theoretical Frame of Reference

Cultural nationalism, literary anthropology, and postcolonial theory serve as the main foundations for the examination of traditional beliefs in Achebe's novels.

Postcolonial theory highlights how literature can reclaim indigenous perspectives and challenge imperial epistemologies. Achebe's fiction is a prime example of what Edward Said refers to as a counter-narrative, which is a purposeful rewriting of colonial representations that gives colonised peoples their historical and cultural agency back (Said 93).

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity—the appropriation and reshaping of colonial languages to convey indigenous realities—is exemplified by Achebe's use of English infused with Igbo idioms, proverbs, and speech patterns (Bhabha 58). Thus, traditional beliefs serve as both cultural content and a narrative technique for decolonising literary form in Achebe's novels.

This study is further informed by cultural nationalism. In the late colonial and early postcolonial eras, nationalist attempts to reconstruct African identity are consistent with Achebe's recovery of myths, rituals, and communal values. But Achebe's vision is still self-reflexive, in contrast to essentialist forms of nationalism. Instead of portraying tradition as an immutable essence, he shows it as historically situated and subject to criticism.

Lastly, Achebe's meticulous portrayal of rituals, festivals, and social institutions can be examined through the lens of literary anthropology. His books avoid the objectifying gaze of colonial anthropology, even though they frequently resemble ethnographic narratives. Rather, Achebe reveals how belief systems function in daily life and moral decision-making by incorporating cultural practices into character-driven narratives.

Traditional Beliefs in Achebe's Select Novels

Things Fall Apart

Traditional Igbo beliefs serve as the moral and spiritual cornerstone of Umuofia society in *Things Fall Apart*.However, recent critics argue that Igbo traditions cannot be seen as a purely unified force because they also contain elements that contribute to overall social tension and individual tragedy. For instance, the uncompromising insistence on individual achievement, status, and material success within the Igbo society and culture has been interpreted as a catalyst behind Okonkwo's downfall, suggesting that these values may undermine, rather than uphold, the social morality (Nyeenenwa77). Thus, after reading the novel, we can conclude that Igbo traditions can be criticised for bringing up detrimental practices such as gender inequality and ritual violence within the community. The marginalisation of women in the society under discussion and their "perceived degrading roles" in both religious and social structures suggest that these traditions may strengthen inequality rather than universal moral cohesion (Nduka and Ozioma283). Additionally, more recent analyses come up with the idea that Igbo belief systems are not static or widely accepted but are subject to both internal and external pressures. Some scholars argue that the disintegration of the Umuofian society could be due to internal cultural weaknesses, alongside colonial influence, thereby questioning the rigidity of these beliefs as a foundational cornerstone (Chinweuba and Ezeugwu8).Thus, contemporary criticism suggests that while traditional Igbo beliefs do shape the moral and spiritual life of Umuofia, at the same time, they are presented as a complex, evolving system, even contradictory, which can generate disunity among its community rather than serve as an entirely stable foundation.

The traditional beliefs and practices of African people are mostly oral rather than scriptural and are passed down from one generation to another through folk tales, songs, festivals, and include beliefs in spirits and higher and lower gods.They believe that ancestors maintain a spiritual connection with their living relatives. These ancestral spirits are generally good and benevolent. Negative actions taken by them are to cause minor illnesses, thereby giving a warning to their people that they have gone down the wrong path. The traditional Igbo religion includes the belief in a creator god, Chukwu, an earth goddess, Ani, and other such deities and spirits who have been worshipped. This is clearly evident in the novel *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo had a small house, the 'medicine house' or shrine, as they would call it. He would keep all the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. These images would be worshipped with sacrifices of different objects such as kola nut, food and palm-wine. Accordingly, they believe that these

ancestors would protect them from any harm that might come to their family.

The African people were also very superstitious, as is evident from the statement which states that, "When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs, he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die" (14). This could be attributed to their sense of ignorance and lack of education. They also believed that if any man died during the Week of Peace, he was not buried but cast into the Evil Forest to die an ignominious death. A similar fate follows in the case of twins born in the household of the Igbos, whereas it is not so in the case of the Yorubas. The Yorubas consider them a blessing to the family. They are looked upon as having special powers, like healing the sick, warding off danger, bringing financial prosperity and predicting the future.

Achebe also stresses the concept of personal god or *chi* that mediates the relationship between individual effort and fate. According to him, Okonkwo's tragic destiny is the result of his unwillingness to adhere to the changing times and misinterpretation of traditional values. His excessive fear of being considered a coward by the community led him to kill Ikemefuna, who once even called him his father. Thus, traditional beliefs in the novel are presented as logical and meaningful, yet vulnerable when rigidly administered.

No Longer at Ease

In the novel *No Longer at Ease*, the focus shifts to a post-colonial, urban setting, exploring how traditional values persist in spite of a modern worldview within the Igbo society. Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Okonkwo, represents a modern, educated generation yet deeply rooted in its cultural practices.In the novel, the erosion of traditional belief systems, combined with the inadequacy of colonial values, produces a sense of alienation and ethical confusion. Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist, embodies the psychological conflict between inherited tradition and Western modernity. His internal conflict reflects the turmoil between individual aspirations and collective identity (Achebe 57). Obi's moral decline as a result of his taking a bribe is not merely his personal failing but a reflection of the pressures from conflicting values.The age-old traditional beliefs took a back stage with the coming of the colonial power, thereby erasing their rich rural traditional practices. Achebe thus portrays this cultural dislocation as the main cause of Obi's moral failure. Tradition, in this novel, is not obsolete but insufficiently integrated into modern life. Achebe thus suggests that traditional communal ties continue to shape and reshape behaviour, even when individuals attempt to distance themselves from them.

Arrow of God

In the last of the trilogy, *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu plays the role of a spiritual leader among his community. Being the chief priest of Ulu, he symbolises the authority of traditional belief systems among them. It is through Ezeulu that Achebe shows that the conflict between tradition and colonial rule is not simple, but complicated and involves adaptation on both sides.His authority depends on his role as the negotiator between the deity and the community. Religion is thus associated deeply with political power and social order dictated by the priest. The chief priest's inability to declare the beginning of the New Yam Festival led to communal suffering and ultimately to the erosion of traditional authority. He holds such a position that even under extreme colonial pressures, he was not ready to lay down his religious obligations towards his people. As a result, there was a growing resentment in terms of his religious superiority.His eventual isolation reveals the dangers of excessive rigidity within a society which accommodates a changing environment (Achebe 210). This culminates in the conversion of the people to a newfound religion, Christianity. According to the Christians, these idol worshippers are not following the true God and that the real God is none other than Isu (meaning Jesus Christ) brought by the colonisers.The community's gradual conversion toward Christianity does not indicate a complete rejection of tradition but rather a strategic adaptation to new socio-political realities. These changes illustrate that community identity is not static but dynamic and needs to adapt according to the changes in society.Simon Gikandi argues that Achebe's fiction resists both colonial stereotypes and romantic nationalism by presenting tradition as historically contingent and internally

contested (Gikandi 45).In all these novels, Achebe neither idealises nor dismisses tradition; instead, he reveals its ethical depth alongside its limitations.

Findings

Traditional beliefs in Achebe's novels function as systems of meaning that sustain moral order and communal identity. Achebe presents tradition as dynamic rather than static, capable of adaptation according to changing times.The erosion of tradition without cultural synthesis results in moral and psychological dislocation. Colonialism accelerates the transformation of traditional beliefs but does not solely cause their collapse. Achebe's balanced portrayal avoids both colonial denigration and uncritical cultural nostalgia.

Things Fall Apart is considered a classic of world literature for many reasons. Historically, it was among the first African novels written in English from an African perspective, thereby challenging Eurocentric views. Thematically, its exploration of tradition, change, patriarchy, and communal responsibility possesses universal resonance.

Aesthetically, Achebe's fusion of oral storytelling techniques with the realist novel form creates a distinctive narrative voice. The use of proverbs, folktales, and communal dialogue enriches the text, making it more locally specific while at the same time grounding it in Igbo culture. Moreover, the novel's moral balance—its refusal to romanticise either traditional society or colonial modernity—gives it an enduring credibility.Finally, the novel's global reception, translation into numerous languages around the globe, and its importance in academic curricula affirm its universal status.

Conclusion

Through *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and*Arrow of God*, Achebe demonstrates that the crisis of tradition is a complex human dilemma involving power, identity, and moral responsibility. Revisiting traditional beliefs in Chinua Achebe's select novels reveals a literary vision marked by balance, depth, and ethical seriousness. Achebe neither glorifies the past nor rejects it; instead, he presents tradition as a living system shaped by human choice and historical change. Achebe's enduring significance lies in his ability to tell African stories with honesty and critical insight from an indigenous mindset. By restoring traditional beliefs to narrative centrality, he not only challenges colonial misrepresentation but acts as an eye opener for the readers of his own countrymen and of the global audience. It is this nuanced engagement with tradition that secures Achebe's place as a classic writer to be remembered for centuries in world literature.

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The Problem of Genre: Reassessing *Frankenstein* as Science Fiction

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Abstract

This paper attempts to revisit *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley through the lens of contemporary science fiction theory. Its conceptual framework rests on Suvin's cognitive estrangement, Csicseray-Ronay Jr.'s "seven beauties" etc, among other touchstones of the genre. The paper argues that while the text shapes the quintessence of the genre, it is also a multi-layered narrative that resists watertight categorization. More than a scientist, Frankenstein with his deeply flawed persona, is essentially a very human figure. He is a tormented, romantic hero who is punished for being bedazzled by the prospect of controlling nature, serving simultaneously as a reminder and a moral reflection to anyone who dares to aspire like him.It is this complexity of character and narrative that makes the text stand apart from conventional stereotypes and foregrounds its relevance to the nuances of contemporary science fiction and popular culture.

Keywords: science fiction, classic, genre theory, reinterpretation

Introduction

Published first in 1818, Mary Shelley's text is perhaps one that has today become a cultural icon. In movies, fiction, music and art, the deformed creature and its ambitious creator has been variously depicted, perceived and critiqued,marking it as a classic not only of English literature but also science fiction and popular culture.One example in this regard is Guillermo del Toro's 2025 adaptation of the text into cinema which illuminates the character of Elizabeth and adds to the plethora of interpretations the text has undergone throughout the ages.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has all along seen varied critical responses. The work is variously labelled as horror, Gothic fiction, gothic horror, science fiction and proto-science fiction. Critics like Brian Aldiss call Shelley "the first science fiction writer" (Aldiss and Wingrove29) in his *Trillion Year Spree*, Asimov considers her as his direct literary ancestor in the science fiction tradition whereas Carl Freedman agrees with their arguments on her literary superiority, recognizing the text as "the ur-text" (Freedman 253) of the genre. Critics, while acknowledging the importance of the text, however, also express ambivalence regarding the tag of 'science fiction' given to it. David Ketterer argues for the non-application of the term 'science-fiction' to Shelley's text due to the antedated nature of the term. The term indeed came to be popular in the 1920s as an extension of Gernsback's scientifiction. The same applies to the term 'scientist' which was not coined during that time. While many argue for its being a text which is "much else besides"(Aldiss and Wingrove 65) the paper argues that the multi-layered text's importance lies precisely in its resistance to simple categorization. It attempts to revisit the text with respect to the term 'science fiction' (SF)with a view to examine whether it resists, conforms or expands the term. In this regard, it will also make an attempt to revisit the stereotype of the 'mad scientist' Victor Frankenstein vis-à-vis his popular image and his character formation and development.

Science Fiction and the Genre: Expectations and Reality

The earliest attempts to define the genre can be traced back to Hugo Gernsback's definition of what he called as "scientifiction"- "a charming vision intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" (Attebery 33) in more of the Jules Verne and Edgar Allan Poe type of story which has elaborate techno-science and an (often male) inventor/scientist. Darko Suvin in 1979 defined science fiction in terms of a "fictional novum" (Suvin 63)- something completely new that sets apart the story from ordinary reality. According to him, SF is "a literature of cognitive estrangement"(Suvin 4)in the sense that it should be a fictional tale which is situated in a world that is estranged from the present reality andthat estrangement should be one that is explained logically. As such, for Suvin, "the hypothesis from which SF takes off is not a scientific but a fictional one; it is the estranging device" (Banerjee 3). This estrangement acts as a formal framework which allows the detached eye to focus on the tale's cognitive aspect – "where the critical gaze is always fixed on the fundamental realities lying underneath the estranged surface" (Banerjee 3). On the other hand, there is also the creation of a new social order, which is distinctly different from the present reality and critically examines the narrative, social and ideological ramifications of the scientific thesis.

Istvan Csicseray-Ronay Jr. speaks of SF: "SF thus involves two forms of hesitation: a historical-logical one (how plausible is the conceivable novum?) and an ethical one (how good/bad/ altogether alien are the transformations that would issue from the novum?)" (Csicseray-Ronay 3)He includes future histories as one of the "seven beauties" of good SF and the Gothic as one of the mediums conducive to the genre's development. The science in Wells's stories lends plausibility to the narrative while focusing on the human ramifications of the story. Most of these texts featured "the tough, taciturn engineer who uses reason and practical know-how to solve seemingly insurmountable problems" (Attebery 38) and rarely expressed any affective inspirations or reactions. Typical science fiction tropes are builton the principles of 'hard SF' elements often placing emotion and feeling on the horizon, far away from logic and rationality- a belief that traditionalists of science have reiterated ever since the Enlightenment. Only recently has SF included a multilayered examination of its protagonists as human participants who err, feel, live. Margaret Atwood in her *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011) talks about belonging to an ever-changing genre whose blurry boundaries make SF from different times take on different meanings.As such, the "elusive creature, 'real SF'" (Aldiss and Wingrove 32) is a slippery categorization that has become a hybrid entity today with critics also using 'speculative fiction' as a marker for the kind of imagination that SF deals with.

Science fiction or Speculation?-the Text

Having its inception in a dream, narrated through an unreliable narrator, the text is clearly set within a scientific premise. In *Frankenstein,* the author seems to be convinced of contemporary science's prowess. In the preface itself, she makes it clear that even as she does not accord "the remotest degree of serious faith to such an imagination; yet, in assuming it as the basis of a work of fancy, I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors" (Shelley 4). In having Frankenstein read 'ancient' alchemists like Agrippa, Paracelsus and then marking them out as nonsense, the author speaks to the reader to adopt the "modern system of science"(Shelley 21) as its powers were "real and practical" (Shelley 21). These ancient preachers "promised impossibilities, and performed nothing" (Shelley 27). The text was written during the Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid scientific and technological advancement, with the author admitting the "miracles" that modern science performed-"They penetrate into the recesses of nature and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates,and the nature of the air we breathe" (Shelley 27). In order to bring about progress, she seems sure that the ancient system had to make way for the new science- the "genius" (Shelley 21) of natural philosophy. Shelley makes Victor go to the University of Ingolstadt, renowned then as a center of science and draws from ideas of Enlightenment

rationalism and contemporary scientific debates about life and animation (galvanism).

However, the novel is elusive about the actual scientific process involved in the creation of the 'creature' and the methods involved in its 'animation'. We are told that after long nights of research, he "collected the instruments of life" (Shelley 34)and infused a "spark of being"(Shelley 34) into it. Later, when Walton, along with the readers are curious to know about the process of creation, Victor refuses to reveal his process, citing ethical concerns- "Are you mad, my friend?" … Peace, peace! learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own" (Shelley 148). From an early SF perspective, the absence is glaring; more so because the narrative focuses on the repercussions of misled science rather than detailing it. The 'cognition' of the estranging device in the storyi.e- the creature lacks logical foothold. As such, the science remains private and skeptical, raising questions about its legitimacy. It does not produce a new social order or possible future; does not contribute to any world-building but rather works towards a cautionary tale aligning more with the Romantic and Gothic traditions.Rather than creating a critical distance, the novel creates emotional connection and highlights trauma, deviating from Suvin's model. The creature is not a robot without feelings but a being gifted with emotions, language and empathy which elicits an emotional reaction from the audience as opposed to an analytical detachment. The story, as such, undoubtedly has elements of the author's contemporary science but the highlight is on what comes after the experiment, making it a comment on the nature and use of science.

Victor Frankenstein has passed down in popular imagination and culture as the most famous example of the 'mad scientist' stereotype- the likes of Dr. Moreau who remains isolated in the laboratory experimenting and creating. Victor, in a mix of scientific curiosity and the lure of forbidden knowledge claims in his hubris that the "new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's" (Shelley 31). The author admits the lucrative nature of scientific pursuits- "None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the enticements of science" (Shelley 29). These enticements drive him into sleepless nights and social isolation, struck by the promise of dazzling results and everlasting fame. From his very childhood, he admits that he "ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge" (Shelley 25) a common dream for many men at the time, even Robert Walton. This desire, if not a Faustian one evolves into an all-consuming ambition and becomes the cause of his downfall. He is the modern Prometheus who succeeds in bringing the fire necessary for reanimation of life "but could not conceive of the horrifying actions of the figure after it would be animated by him" (Navle 193).

Frankenstein is, however, at once an "over-reacher and victim" (Aldiss and Wingrove 64), who embodies the modern condition which had lost its anchoring in religious faith yet remained skeptical of the emerging science's claims.He is seized by a "fatal passion" (Shelley 38) after the creature's creation and throughout the text, he is borne along a journey of regret, guilt and torture- "Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch" (Shelley 48); "I bore a hell within me" (Shelley 57); "I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe" (Shelley 59). Throughout the text, his inner turmoil is described in a language which can, as he himself claims, be called the ravings of a madman. These ravings stem from a guilt-ridden conscience. These highlight the affective motivations behind the creation and illustrate how Victor is in fact a sensitive, flawed human who is chased by his own demons.

Conclusion

Frankenstein can be considered as a parable of emotional abandonment, trauma and ethical responsibility. The extensive description of the Swiss landscapes and its effect on the psyche of the characters all point towards a Romantic emphasis on nature and a turn to inner, sensitive world. Extensive monologues, sublime nature and an overall feeling of dread and horror align it further to the Gothic model. Frankenstein becomes the tormented, Romantic hero

who is punished for being captivated by the prospect of controlling nature and simultaneously serves as a cautionary reminder on the dangers of unchecked ambition. The late-Enlightenment Positivist outlooks transformed into a rejection of technology which dismissed the scientist as hero even as they espoused Enlightenment rationalism. The mad scientist became a standard nineteenth century archetype, featuring in many texts before and after Shelley such as E.T.A Hoffman's *The Sandman* (1816), Balzac's *The Centenarian*(1822),Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr.Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and so on.As such, Shelley's text becomes an intersection of the "individual and his society, as well as the encroachment of science on that society, and mankind's dual nature, whose inherited ape curiosity has brought him both success and misery" (Aldiss and Wingrove 64). Shelley's text becomes one of the earliest examples of social science fiction, incorporating the influence and repercussions of science on society rather than an excessive emphasis on techno-science. While the text explores themes like ethical responsibility, abandonment, trauma, filial relationships etc, these ultimately enrich its central engagement with scientific speculation and hence enable the text to shape the boundaries of a genre that it simultaneously resists. The endurance of *Frankenstein* lies precisely in this hybridity, making it relevant to shifting interpretations of science fiction, modernity and the human condition.

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From Kleos to Corporeality: Re-reading Masculinity in Homer's *Iliad*

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Abstract

This paper re-reads heroic masculinity in Homer's *Iliad* through contemporary critical frameworks of embodiment theory and performance. It shows that heroism is not a pre given essence but is continuously shaped and formulated through social recognition and acknowledgement. Specifically, the paper would argue that heroism in the context of *Iliad* is not a quality that is intrinsic and driven by physical prowess but it is a construct based on recognition and validation by peers, enemies and the Gods.Through a close reading of some episodes in the epic such as the rage of Achilles, the deaths of Patroclus and Hector, the confrontation between Achilles and Hector and the meeting of Priam and Achilles, the study underscores a vision of masculinity that rests on notions which are often overlooked in traditional readings. It reconstitutes the Homeric hero as vulnerable- both physically and emotionally, thereby showing that the vulnerability of the Homeric hero is not a deviation from heroism but a component of it. In making a reading of the *Iliad* through a contemporary lens, the study encourages intersection of classical literature, embodiment theory and identity theories and is an attempt to open more avenues of understanding a milieu of the past. Homer's *Iliad* is not just a historical artifact but is open to multiple re-readings, re-interpretations and re-mediations which make it a classic.

Keywords: Iliad, Masculinity, Corporeality, Kleos, Homeric hero

Introduction

Homer's *Iliad* is a foundational text of the Western literary canon and its significance as a classic lies not in its antiquity but in its re-readings and re-interpretations in the contemporary times. Supposedly set in the times of the Trojan War, Homer's epic is a classic in the sense that it resists closure and sustains new ethical, political and social dimensions. It transcends time and culture through these reinterpretations, remediation and rereading. This paper shall attempt to look into Homeric masculinity not as purely invulnerable or dominant but as a social construct, a sense of heroism molded and recognized by divine interference, one that becomes an identity marker through actions and through performance. The paper shall problematize and interrogate the notions of heroism through contemporary theoretical frameworks of embodiment as established by Elaine Scarry and gender theory through the lens of Judith Butler with special reference to performativity.

Elaine Scarry in her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*(1985) argues how physical pain, the wounded body renders language and meaning-making redundant. According to Scarry heroic identity is dependent on authoritative voices or speeches to a great extent. However, extreme physical pain resists linguistic representation and "actively destroy[ing] language and reverting the sufferer to a pre-linguistic state (4)." This is where the distinction between the body and the 'object' collapses and the heroic body is reduced to a 'thing', reducing the sufferer to what is described as raw corporeality.

Gender for Butler is conceptualized through performances- that are recognized and re-iterated. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler mentions that identity is not a preexisting essence but is established through repeated acts of performance. Applying this framework while reading the *Iliad,* the paper shall look into how the notions of heroism are not a preexisting essence but are established through martial prowess, strong speeches, control and pursuit of 'Kleos' (glory). This demands that for the constitution of the masculinity of the Homeric hero, he should be continuously in performance among his peers, audience and the Gods.

Although the Homeric hero initially establishes his identity through his courage, valour and physical strength, the paper shall look into how wounded, grieving, emotionally vulnerable male bodies destabilize or rather reconstitute the notion of the 'Homeric hero'.In contrast to the traditionally notions of heroism that were grounded in physical prowess, the paper proposes that masculinity in *Iliad* is established through recognition and hence it requires the hero to repeatedly perform his heroism within a network of peers, enemies and also the divine order.

Social construction of Heroic identity

The opening sentence of the first book of the *Iliad* introduces us to a major Homeric hero- Achilles. Achilles is introduced not through his courage but through his rage which stems from the conflict over the war prize. The war prize which is symbolic of the honour of the Homeric hero here is exemplified through two women characters- Chryseis and Briseis. Achilles is ordered by his commander Agememnon to surrender his war prize Briseis to Agememnon as he had to surrender Chryseis. This surrender of the war prize is a blow to his honour and this leads to further conflict at the personal and collective levels in the epic.The war prizes were also testimony to the time that the person invested in the war and hence were symbolically significant.They became public markers of the warrior's courage and identity and hence losing the war prize meant a blow to his social standing. Perhaps this is the reason of the severity of Achilles rage. When Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles, it is not merely the loss of a concubine, it is an attack on Achilles' social identity and status among his peers. Achilles feels betrayed by a system that has failed him and this prompts his withdrawal. This behaviour should be understood within the cultural context of the era, where warriors fought not just for triumph but for kleos (glory) and time (honour). Heroes fought to gain recognition and for establishing their honour. The leaders were supposed to divide the spoils of the war judiciously. Without honour, Achilles' finds no purpose in supporting Agamemnon's cause.This episode illustrates that heroic identity is dependent not merely on individual achievement but on public validation. Without recognition from others, even the greatest warrior experiences a crisis of identity. Thus, masculinity is shown to be contingent upon acknowledgement rather than an inherent personal attribute.

Heroism as performance

Achilles decision to withdraw from fighting the war can be read in the Butlerian context of performativity. Judith Butler in the *Gender Trouble* (1990) mentions about gender identity established through performance: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33).Achilles withdrawal from the war should not be read as an act of defiance but it arises out of the necessity of the hero to enact and negotiate his masculinity. It is a strategy of re-performance of masculinity by Achilles.Through his refusal, Achilles disrupts the social script of heroism**.** Achilles reiterates that it is not withdrawal but the assertion of a selfhood that is based on honour. His withdrawal symbolises not a loss of masculinity as one might assume but an alternate re-articulation of it because it leads to consequences which are both personal and collective. Achilles' decision is also influenced by his mother Thetis who happens to be a goddess. Thetis wanted that he should abstain from the war and lead a peaceful life because she was aware that he had a short span of life. Hence, we find that in the *Iliad* Gods play a significant role not just as metaphorical authorities but through their presence and act as active agents of reinforcing the masculinity of the human heroes. The interference of the gods enable

in propelling the heroic masculinity to the desired ends. It is through recognition that Achilles' masculinity is established in the first book of the epic. Achilles' martial excellence is inseparable from divine favour as noticed through the characters of Thetis and Athena. When Achilles raises his sword against Agememnon, Athena intervenes:"Just as in anguish of suspense he stay'd, While half unsheathed appear'd the glittering blade, Minerva swift descended from above…, Behind she stood, and by the golden hair Achilles seized; to him alone confess'd; A sable cloud conceal'd her from the rest." (Lines 56- 61). It is Athena who redirects Achilles' rage and he abstains from immediate violence to temporary withdrawal thereby establishing another significant aspect of the Homeric hero-restraint; a restraint that is established through performance. Masculinity here is not independent or autonomous but is achieved through divine interference and governance.

In Book 9 of the *Iliad* for the first time we can notice an internal conflict- the internal conflict of Achilles. This internal conflict arises out of Achilles expectations of what should be the role of a Homeric hero.Achilles' ultimate decision to fight for Kleos is essential for the continuation of hero's journey and withstanding the supreme ordeal to find. Achilles is enraged and decides not to fight in the war. But then, one must remember that he is a Homeric hero and being a Homeric hero, he is more aimed at kleos rather than peace. Achilles decides to go back to the war later in Book 9 at the behest of Patroclus when he notices that Patroclus is sad about the plight of the Acheans in the war and is of the opinion that they should help the Acheans. Although he had promised his mother that he would refrain from fighting, however, being a Homeric hero, Achilles' pursuit of kleos continues. Here, kleos is not just about the glory of fighting the war but it is about the time that one invests in the war and the recognition that comes along with it. It is also about the choice of the right moment for death. In the epic one can note that both Achilles and Hector are sure about their impending death but they are eager to fight the war because that is a means of achieving kleos.Patroclus' death is an excuse that takes Achilles back to the war. Hence, it is remarkable that Achilles being a Homeric hero, his complete withdrawal from the war is impossible. This decision is a result of both societal expectations and also what goes into the making of a Homeric hero.

Heroic Body and Raw Corporeality

The traditional notions of the vulnerable hero are undone through multiple references to the wounded male body. The epic is replete with descriptions of the war- there are mentions about warrior's fury, rage, slaughter and piercing weapons. It is through the descriptions of the wounded bodies that a shift observed from heroic masculinity to the vulnerability of the human body which is termed as 'raw corporeality'. The duel between Hector and Achilles is described in Book 22. Achilles rejoins the war to revenge upon the death of his dear friend Patroclus. He chases Hector outside the walls of the city to kill him and avenge the death of Patroclus. In this duel are portrayed two vulnerable human bodies- Hector's body symbolizing escape, fatigue and surrender while Achilles' body symbolizes a kind of kinetic energy that pierces and penetrates. Inspite of all forebodings, Hector confronts Achilles for the pursuit of kleos. He is sure that his death at the hands of Achilles would give him the kleos that he had been striving for his entire life. He begs to Achilles to give him a decent burial- one deserved by a warrior who died fighting:

"Then Hector, fainting at the approach of death: "By thy own soul! by those who gave thee breath! By all the sacred prevalence of prayer; Ah, leave me not for Grecian dogs to tear! The common rites of sepulture bestow, To soothe a father's and a mother's woe: Let their large gifts procure an urn at least, And Hector's ashes in his country rest."(Lines 425-430)

Achilles engages in a cruel deed in dishonouring Hector's body in a brutal manner. The narrator tells us:

> Burn on through death, and animate my shade. Meanwhile, ye sons of Greece, in triumph bring The corpse of Hector, and your paeans sing. Be this the song, slow-moving toward the shore, "Hector is dead, and Ilion is no more." Then his fell soul a thought of vengeance bred; (Unworthy of himself, and of the dead;) The nervous ancles bored, his feet he bound With

thongs inserted through the double wound; These fix'd up high behind the rolling wain, His graceful head was trail'd along the plain Proud on his car the insulting victor stood, And bore aloft his arms, distilling blood. He smites the steeds; the rapid chariot flies; The sudden clouds of circling dust arise. Nowlost is all that formidable air; The face divine, and long-descending hair, Purple the ground, and streak the sable sand; Deform'd, dishonour'd, in his native land, Given to the rage of an insulting throng, And, in his parents' sight, now dragg'd along! (Lines 450-470)

Hector's parents are aghast by witnessing such dishonour to the dead body of their warrior son. After his death Hector is reduced from a hero to a thing. The moment Hector's body is tied to the chariot by Achilles and dragged along, Hector becomes a material residue. In reducing Hector's body to an object, honour is stripped of meaning and a crucial shift takes place from heroism to vulnerability. Scarry, in her work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) mentions: "In torture, the world of the torturer is amplified by his acts, while the world of the prisoner is abolished; the prisoner's pain becomes the unmaking of his world, and the human voice is reduced to a state prior to language" (35). The episode of Hector's death can be re-read in terms of Scarry's notion of raw corporeality in how the heroism of Hector is reduced to raw corporeality after his death. His body which symbolized masculinity is reduced to an object. In his surrender to Achilles, Hector is in extreme pain and this physical pain robes him of his discursive ability. Through this episode, we can see how discursive ability is rendered futile through wounded bodies. Infact, pain dismantles the discursive authority on which heroic masculinity depends. This shows that the framework of masculinity in which it is constructed is fragile and collapses**.**

Reconstituting masculinity: Grief and Emotional vulnerability

The epic also effeminizes heroic grief thereby interrogating the nuances of what defines heroic masculinity. Homer frames male grief traditionally associated with femininity. Patroclus' distress at the plight of the Acheans in the Trojan War is likened to that of a small girl, Achilles' mourning is likened to parental sorrow. Priam is transformed to a humble father after the death of Hector. He is not bent on avenging for the death of his son, rather he sheds the stoic containment of a king and approaches Achilles as a father pleading to ransom the dead body of his son. Priam pleads to Achilles: "Think of thy father's age, and pity mine! In me that father's reverend image trace, Those silver hairs, that venerable face; His trembling limbs, his helpless person, see! In all my equal, but in misery" (Line 501).In assuming this approach, Priam pleads to Achilles' humanity and not to his pride. Achilles weeps remembering Patroclus while Priam weeps remembering Hector. The encounter between Priam and Achilles is significant in redefining heroic masculinity by shifting the focus from domination to empathy. Masculinity here is constituted through mutual recognition of suffering, suggesting that emotional vulnerability is not antithetical to heroism but integral to it.

Conclusion

Hence, a re-reading of Homer's *Iliad* through contemporary critical frameworks offers a complex idea of the heroic masculinity. Contrary to the traditional notions of heroic identity which rests on physical prowess, courage, martial acumen, this paper shows how the heroic masculinity is framed by relation, acknowledgement and performance. Achilles' refusal to fight the war, his approach for the assistance of his mother Thetis, the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus, Hector's confrontation with Achilles and his death, the lamentations of Achilles, the shared grief of Achilles and Priam portray a heroic masculinity that defies the traditional notions. Heroic masculinity in the *Iliad* is shaped through acts of recognition, sustained through repeated performances, and continually negotiated within social and divine frameworks.It is a masculinity that is self interrogating, one that is based on moderation and the necessity to acknowledge shared human vulnerability and accountability. In reading the *Iliad* through a contemporary lens, the study encourages intersection of classical literature, embodiment theory and identity theories and is an

attempt to open more avenues of understanding a milieu of the past.

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Traversing Gender Fluidity and Liminality: A Rereading of Shikhandi from the *Mahabharata*

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Abstract

The *Mahabharata* is one of the significant epics of South Asia with a rich tapestry of layered narratives, each illuminating economic, cultural, and sociopolitical aspects of society. Rereading epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* or retellings of mythology in contemporary Indian English narrative has emerged as a genre of study because of its wider appeal to its literary, cultural, and philosophical extent. The epics are revisited, retold, and reread over and over because revisiting myths and legends helps the readers to rethink their assumptions and at the same time reclaim indigenous cultures.The epic rewriting genre has made it easier for writers to conduct microstudies in which they return and reinterpret specific episodes or characters in a way that reintegrates historical myths into contemporary issues.Writers like Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane, Anand Neelkantan,and positively many others have tried to provide alternative viewpoints by reframing the ancient stories and making them contemporary. This paper attempts a rereading of one of the enthralling figures, Shikhandi, from the *Mahabharata*, who disturbs the binary understanding of gender. The paper will try to modulate Shikhandi through the lens of gender fluidity and liminality, which is a cultural necessity in this era of deconstruction.

Keywords : Gender fluidity, Non-binary, Liminal, Performativity, Mahabharata.

Introduction

The revival of old tales by writers who attempt to reinterpret and incorporate myth into contemporary issues is not a recent phenomenon.The epics are repeatedly read, retold, and revisited because doing so encourages readers to reconsider their preconceptions while also reclaiming indigenous traditions. Epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* offer a rich tapestry of layered narratives that have always steered the Indian culture and society. Furthermore, because they have adapted to the contemporary awareness, the epics have withstood the fractures of movements like colonialism that have upset the sociocultural, economic, political, and psychological milieu. The *Mahabharata's* endurance to this day is further enhanced by the fact that it is available and accepted in a variety of cultures. This grand narrative has a mass appeal that encouraged micro-studies focusing on specific characters or events that will help in assessing and exploring some undermined issues that would aid in the holistic understanding of the *Mahabharata*. In recent years, Indian classical texts have been reread persistently by authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Palace of Illusion,* Devdutt Pattanaik's *Shikhandi: And other Tales They Don't Tell You*, Kavita Kane in *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*, Anand Neekantan in *Asura: The Tale of the Vanquished*, Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel, and* Pratibha Ray in *Yajnaseni: The story of Draupadi,* to name a few. In addition to that, Mangaire writes the story of Amba and her transformation to Shikhandi in her play *Frozen Fire.* One of the goals that motivates these writers to reconsider the epics is to highlight certain ideals and principles that are present in the original work in order to make them compatible with

the current social structure. They do this by focusing on specific characters or circumstances and revealing them from a variety of modern perspectives, such as feminist theories or gender studies.

In recent years, gender studies have gained interest with the growing inquiry into gender inequality, women's lived experiences, sexuality, masculinity, and its interaction with class, race, and other social systems. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black, in their edited book *Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata*, have stated that the issue of gender is as relevant as the issue of *dharma* and *varna* in the *Mahabharata* (10). Since the *Mahabharata* is considered a cultural narrative, retellings of the epics have the possibility of making some elementary shifts in the cultural paradigm.Also, women form an integral part of that culture and society; therefore, gender invariably becomes an important area of examination. The *Mahabharata* plays a crucial role in the construction and shaping of gendered roles and identities in the Indian consciousness (11). There are a handful of studies and research that engage in critical dialogue to explore the issue of gender in the Mahabharata. Broadbeck and Black further add:

> The epic not only frames discussions of gender in terms of the social roles of men, women, and the other gendered identities, but also in terms of the artistic employment of symbols, tropes, and metaphors that may or may not have any direct connections to males and females and pre-existing masculinities and femininities outside the text (11).

Following Michel Foucault's work on the history of sexuality, many scholars of gender studies have questioned the biological categorisation of sex, considering 'sex' and 'gender' to be social and cultural constructs. Another seminal figure in the field of gender studies is Judith Butler, who has approached gender through nuanced dimensions like poststructuralism and postmodernism. One such approach is her idea of 'performativity,' which is a key term in her explanation of how gender is a cultural construct and other gender discourses. Gender, according to Butler, is produced through a "stylised repetition of acts" and thus, is not a stable identity (Butler 179).Accordingly, gendered identities are insubstantial, fragile, unstable,conditional, and liminal.Liminality is an essential component of non-heteronormative individuals. Arnold van Gennep has defined the liminal space as the oscillating period where individuals move back and forth from one state to another (41). The liminal realm beyond the boundary, however, has a transforming and creative potential that aids in identity construction and the creation of new meaning despite its unsettling character (Turner 61). Because of its interstitial character and capacity for change, liminality denotes a brief detachment from a normative social system. This liminality can be found in the epic too in terms of gender-fluid characters. This paper attempts to study one such liminal character through the lens of gender discourses.

Content

Epics play an important role in the formation of cultural paradigms (Sharma 292). The *Mahabharata* also flesh out prescriptive gendered norms for women and men. The ideal woman is defined to be *pativrata* (one for whom loyalty to her husband is the highest service). Such gendered norms are played out in characters. Gandhari, who blindfolded herself after marrying Dhrtarastra and declared that she did not want to enjoy anything that her husband had been denied, is a prime example of a *pativrata*. In the case of man, masculinity is characterised in terms of virility. The ability to procreate is something strongly associated with masculinity. The paradigm of procreation alone is not enough; in order to achieve a high social status, a man needs to father a son.A woman is deemed nearly barren if she gives birth to a daughter and not a son. However, the *Mahabharata* also portrays characters who challenge and subvert these normative gendered codes. In terms of masculinity, the *Mahabharata* presents many male characters who contradict the idealised male model, like they lack the virility to procreate. Characters like Pandu or Vichitravirya unsettle the socially accepted fixed ideas about how genders are supposed to behave, look, or live. On the other hand, in the portrayal of femininity, characters like Draupadi, Yajnavalkya, Sulabha, Gargi, Renuka, Rambha, Ahalya, and many others were silenced

because they raised questions that could disrupt the "power matrix that monitors the relationship between genders" (Sinha and Bhattacharya 170). For instance, Sulabha impairs the fixed gendered role through her witty deliberation on justice and equality with King Janaka. Sinha and Bhattacharya, in their paper "Questioning the Lexicon of Silence,"write, "In a world where females were denied a voice, Sulabha's assertion of hers was in sharp contrast to the gendered role-play expected of a female" (174). These characters 'performed acts' that challenged the strict, fixed, or binary understanding of gender by implying how man and masculinity are applicable to female bodies and femininity to male bodies.

Moving beyond the defective masculinity and femininity, the *Mahabharata* also weaves into its narrative the idea of gender fluidity by introducing the idea of transsexualism. Gender fluidity in contemporary gender studies discourse is a term that describes gender identity that shifts over time for individuals whose sense of identity is not fixed to any gender. In the *Mahabharata*, we have characters like Shikhandi who destabilises the conventional notion of gender. The *Mahabharata* offers diverse characters, and Shikhandi undoubtedly is an enthralling figure that needs an analysis through the lens of gender studies discourses. The tale of Shikhandi, who ultimately leads to Bhishma's demise, is told in numerous ways. Shikhandi, once born as Princess Amba, was the eldest daughter of the king of Kashi. During the *swayamvara,* Bhishma abducted Amba and her sisters, Ambika and Ambalika,for his half-brother Vischitravirya. But Amba had feelings for Salva, the king of Saubala. When she expressed her love for another prince, Vichitravirya refused to marry her, and Satyavati allowed her to go back to Salva. However, Salva declined to wed her since he was unable to defeat Bhisma.At that moment, Amba was devastated. She returns to Bhishma and begs him to wed her. But Bhisma was bound by the vow of celibacy and refused to marry her. Infuriated, Amba confronted Bhishma and cursed him, saying that she will be the cause of his destruction. Amba performed austere rituals for twelve years. Eventually she was blessed with a rebirth in a form that was of ambiguous gender, a form that dismantled gender fixities. She was born female but raised as a male warrior, which invariably offered her a trespass to any gendered spaces. When Shikhandi appears in front of Bhishma during the battle, he lowers his weapon because he remembers that Shikhandi was originally a woman, and it was Bhishma's moral absoluteness to not attack any woman that gave an opportunity to the Pandavas to defeat the greatest warrior.

The character of Shikhandi best exemplifies Judith Butler's idea of unstable gender. According to Butler, gender is performative and therefore unstable. Gender performs according to sets of cultural expectations and is constantly changing (45). Every subject operates according to some codes that are naturalised. Naturalisation is a very important process for any code to become hegemonic. Naturalisation is a process that involves acceptance, admission, and legitimacy of the codes without question, opposition, hesitation, or dispute. According to Butler, the heterosexual dominant hegemonic gender code has been produced through concealment and naturalization that makes the other gendered identities marginalised. However, Shikhandi, through her gender bending, subverted the dominant hypermasculinity. The changing gender identity of Shikhandi can be, therefore, understood through this contemporary theoretical framework. Judith Butler, in her book Gender *Trouble,* also delineates how a person becomes intelligible only by conforming with a 'recognisable standard of gender intelligibility" (20). When Shikhandi was reborn with an ambiguous gender, the mother, being terrified of being doomed, misreported the gender of the child as a boy. Accordingly, Shikhandi was trained in warfare, and when the time came, Draupada arranged Shikhandi's marriage to the princess of Dasharna. Later on, when the marriage was not consummated, the non-binary gender identity of Shikhandi came out. This act of assigning a dominant hegemonic gender to a differently gendered child can be interpreted as the act of making a subject intelligible because any "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered being who fails to conform to the gendered norms would challenge the very notion of "the persons" (23). The revelation

of Shikhandi's ambiguous gender posits her in a liminal space—between intelligible and unintelligible, between the internal person and the external environment.At one point, Shikhandi exchanges sex with Sthunakarna, a yaksha, to become a fully formed man physically. However, the conflict continued even after Shikhandi completely turned male because the inmost consciousness consistently reminded her of the past life as Amba. What Homi K. Bhabha has referred to as 'ambivalence' or the 'third space' is analogous to the in-between position that Shikhandi occupied as a transgender person, oscillating between the two binary states of gender. The persistent oscillation between performing one normative gender (male) and personally experiencing a non-normative gender has twisted her identity and inflicted trauma to the point of making her suicidal. The plight can be best understood from a scene from *The Palace of Illusion* where Shikhandi tells Draupadi:

> Have you heard the fable of the donkey that wrapped himself in a lion's hide so the other animals would fear him? Or of the wolf that hid under sheepskin so he could mingle undetected with his prey? I feel both sometimes. A fake—or a hidden menace (Divakaruni 46).

But the liminal space, as elucidated by Turner, is also a transformation process and a space of regeneration, a space that "designates a temporary suspension from normative social structure" (Xu 2). In the *Mahabharata*, we see how the regenerative liminal space legitimised the claim of the third sex and voiced the marginalised gender. Shikhandi's gender transformation aided in terminating Bhishma's absolute power by the Pandavas, which finally helped in reestablishing cosmic order. Gender fluidity is not seen as something causing chaos but as instrumental in changing the course of events. Apart from Shikhandi, the *Mahabharata* is imbued with gender-fluid stories. Characters like Krishna and Arjun also became symbols of gender fluidity and aided in resolving many epic conflicts.

Conclusions

Invoking figures like Shikhandi not only reveals the existence of fluid genders in ancient stories but also encourages a nuanced understanding of gender in contemporary times, where the queered gender has become unintelligible. The ancient story exhibits some sort of freedom in association with non-conforming gender identities compared to the rigidity that the following ages have experienced, mainly during colonial endeavours that highly influenced the patriarchal ideology of gender. Thus, a rereading of Shikhandi's gender transformation is also a decolonial gesture where gender fluidity and non-binary come to the forefront and are acknowledged. Such rereading of ancient stories through a contemporary theoretical framework helps build an association with the modern audience for whom terms like "identity," "gender," and so forth have acquired varied connotations. In epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, we find a celebration of forces that exceeds binary understanding. The liminal existence of Shikhandi not only underscores the unstable gender identity but also the existence of other ambiguous forces like moral contradictions. Continuous engagement with the epics, therefore, is of utmost importance to probe ambiguities, liminalities,and fluidity embedded in them.

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The Politics of Interpretation: Hermeneutics, Necropolitics, and the Enduring Structures of *The Iliad*

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Abstract

In the contemporary landscape of global geopolitics, where states are dominated by more powerful actors and bodies are captured, regulated, and inscribed through warfare, the ancient city of Troy emerges as a striking precursor to modern forms of conflict. *The Iliad* has been revisited and reinterpreted across centuries, continually engaging successive generations through its recurring patterns of violence, power, and domination that resonate across both ancient and modern contexts. Drawing on debates surrounding canon formation, institutional authority, and historical conditioning, this study approaches *The Iliad* as a paradigmatic case through which to rethink the function of the "classic" in contemporary critical discourse. *The Iliad* is a classic because it continually generates new meanings across changing historical contexts. The epic endures by inviting rereading rather than closure, enabling each generation to rethink its representations of war, power, honour, and human suffering. Read through frameworks such as biopolitics and necropolitics, its relevance lies not in timeless moral universals but in its capacity for renewed critical interrogation.

Keywords : classic; biopolitics; necropolitics; historical conditioning; rereading

A classic is a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers.

— Italo Calvino (*Why Read the Classics?* 5)

In his reflections on the nature of classical literature, Italo Calvino repeatedly emphasises that classics do not endure because they offer fixed meanings, but because they remain capable of renewed significance across time. According to him, "classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed" (Calvino 5). A classic, in this sense, is not defined only by stability or respect, but by its ability to speak differently in new historical moments. What lasts is not a fixed meaning, but an ongoing conversation between the text, the reader, and the changing world.

This understanding of the classic foregrounds a crucial tension: canonical authority both enables and constrains meaning. On the one hand, institutions help texts survive over time; on the other, they can fix interpretations and shield texts from critical questioning. The classic thus survives not as a monument to the past but as a site of continual negotiation, where earlier meanings coexist uneasily with new pressures brought by the present. Seen from this perspective, Homer's *The Iliad* exemplifies the classical condition described by Italo Calvino. The epic has accumulated layers of interpretation over centuries that privilege heroic grandeur and martial excellence.Despite being a text crafted around 2,700 years ago, and studied continuously across time, *The Iliad* never fails to invite renewed critical attention because it transcends age and historical context. Every society is shaped by human minds that often operate in similar ways, corrupt, power-hungry, and wealth-driven. Therefore, The *Iliad* stands the test of time as a timeless classic that can neither be overlooked nor rendered outdated. Homer's genius lies

in his remarkable foresight, as he anticipated humanity's most enduring traits, which continue to persist even as civilizations perish and are rebuilt across centuries.

The status of the "classic" has often been defended through its capacity to function as a standard of excellence that is a benchmark against which literary value may be measured. In "The Study of Poetry" (1880), Matthew Arnold articulates this logic through his well-known "touchstone" method, proposing that brief passages from canonical works can serve as reliable criteria for judging poetic quality. Arnold thus argues, "But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence" (162).Classics acquire authority through institutional repetition rather than intrinsic permanence; their centrality is sustained by educational and critical systems that naturalise their value over time. This process is further illuminated by Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of aesthetic judgment as cultural capital. Taste, for Bourdieu, is not innate but produced through education and social conditioning, enabling dominant groups to convert aesthetic authority into symbolic power. As he observes, "Culture also has its titles of nobility—awarded by the educational system—and its pedigrees, measured by seniority in admission to the nobility" (xxv).

When applied to *The Iliad*, this benchmark logic becomes especially revealing. Long upheld as a model of epic excellence, the poem has often been read through heroic grandeur and martial virtue, a canonisation that filters its meanings by privileging certain values while silencing others. Yet *The Iliad* endures not because it remains unchanged, but because it invites rereading that unsettles inherited interpretations. The epic opens not with unity but with rupture, as Achilles' rage, rather than heroism that drives the narrative, "hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls of heroes" (1.3–4).

Andromache's address to Hector, "You are my father, my honoured mother, my brother,/and you are my strong young husband" (6.429–30)reframes war from the perspective of civilian precarity, revealing futures destroyed before they can be lived. Such moments unsettle the authority of heroic necessity by foregrounding the social and gendered costs of violence. The relevance of *The Iliad* as a timeless classic thus lies not in its mere preservation but in the continuous questioning it invites across historical moments. War in the poem is often elevated as a defining human condition, yet the narrative persistently exposes its historically situated mechanisms. Violence operates through an honour-based economy in which individual status determines collective fate. Likewise, love and duty are structured through kinship, possession, and patriarchal authority rather than sentiment alone, revealing how social relations are governed by power even in moments of apparent intimacy.

The revitalisation of a classic depends on rereading that preserves historical specificity rather than replacing it with contemporary ethical judgment. Anachronism occurs when ancient texts are interpreted through present-day moral values, reducing historically meaningful actions to ethical errors and flattening the complexity of the past. Productive rereading, by contrast, allows historically situated meanings to encounter the present without being displaced by it. As Hans-Georg Gadamer observes, "Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" (306).

In *The Iliad*, this distinction becomes especially visible in scenes where violence and obligation intersect. When Hector prepares to face Achilles, he frames his choice not in moral absolutes but in terms of social duty: "I would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing robes" (22.105–06). Heroism here is not an abstract virtue but a historically conditioned response to communal expectation and honour. To condemn such action solely through modern ethical frameworks risks erasing the social pressures that render it intelligible.

The concept of the "state" has long generated debate and sustained conflict, driven by an unending impulse to expand territorial and political boundaries. The spectacle of war is not confined to moments of direct combat; rather, it is continuously performed and displayed. In *The Iliad*, warfare is repeatedly staged

before armies, gods, and poets, while armour, shields, and bodies are rendered in intense visual detail. This anticipates what Guy Debord later terms the society of the spectacle, in which power sustains itself by transforming violence into something watchable and memorable. As Debord argues, "reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real" (3). Duels such as those between Paris and Menelaus or Hector and Ajax function less as strategic military engagements than as ritualised performances observed by entire communities. Warriors announce their lineage before striking, transforming killing into an act meant to be witnessed and remembered rather than merely executed. In the modern age, the media's constant circulation and repetition of war, arrests, and trials similarly contribute to the production of spectacle, blurring the boundary between lived events and their mediated representation. As a result, reality itself is increasingly consumed in curated, spectacular form.

Michel Foucault's concept of biopower offers a productive theoretical lens for revisiting a text so deeply rooted in historical violence and warfare. Biopower designates a form of power that emerged in modern Western societies from the eighteenth century onward, when human beings came to be understood politically not merely as juridical individuals but as a biological species whose life processes could be managed, regulated, and optimised. Biopower operates through a complex network of institutions, governmental practices, and apparatuses through which power is exercised over populations. As Foucault writes:

> Power is not founded on itself or generated by itself. Or we could say, more simply, that there are not first of all relations of production and then, in addition, alongside or on top of these relations, mechanisms of power that modify or disturb them, or make them more consistent, coherent, or stable. There are not family type relationships and then, over and above them, mechanisms of power; there are not sexual relationships with, in addition, mechanisms of power alongside or above them. Mechanisms of power are an intrinsic part of all these relations and, in a circular way, are both their effect and cause. (17)

Life is no longer just something people live; it becomes something the state observes, measures, and regulates, thereby turning it into a political object of control.Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis in Book 1 is a biopolitical illustration of the idea that power lies in the control and ownership of bodies. He takes Briseis away to establish authority over Achilles, where Briseis functions as a symbol of honour, dominance, and sovereign command:

> Even as Phoibos Apollo is taking away my Chryseis. I shall convey her back in my own ship, with my own followers; but I shall take the fair-cheeked Briseis, your prize (Homer 1.182-85)

Power often writes upon the bodies of women during the times of battles and massacres. From a feminist theoretical perspective, war intensifies patriarchy by legitimising control over women's bodies. Cynthia Enloe suggests that in a warfield, rival men try to discredit each other by associating their opponents with femininity, since doing so symbolically strips them of qualities considered "manly." In *The Iliad*, Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis is not motivated by desire but by wounded pride; her body becomes a substitute for lost honour. Thus, Briseis's suffering illustrates how women absorb the consequences of male rivalry without having any role in its cause. She asserts, "If international commentators do find masculinity interesting, it is typically when they try to make sense of "great men"—Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, Mao Zedong, Nelson Mandela—not when they seek to understand the actions of male factory owners, male midlevel officials, male banana workers, or male tourists" (32).

Achilles' treatment of Hector's body after killing him violates the ritual right a corpse is believed to deserve, i.e. a burial. Hector's body thus becomes a political weapon in Achilles' hands, used to intimidate Troy and assert Greek dominance. Before his death, Hector pleads for burial: "Give my body to be taken home again, so that the Trojans and the wives of the Trojans may give me in death my rite of burning" (22.342–43). In Homeric society, the denial of burial is worse than death itself, as it condemns the soul to restless wandering. Yet Achilles, blinded by rage, defies religious and social law, declaring, "I wish only that my

spirit and fury would drive me / to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things that / you have done to me" (22.346–48). In Foucauldian biopolitical terms, Achilles controls not only Hector's death but also the value of his life, determining whether his body is granted dignity, burial, and remembrance. Power thus extends beyond life into death, governing meaning itself. Building on Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe argues that modern sovereignty is defined less by the right to govern than by the right to kill. As Mbembe notes, "sovereign right to kill (*droit de glaive*) and the mechanisms of biopower are inscribed in the way all modern states function; indeed, they can be seen as constitutive elements of state power in modernity" (17), culminating in necropolitics, where discipline, life management, and exposure to death operate simultaneously.

In this sense, a human being becomes a true subject only by accepting death: an idea that is directly observable in *The Iliad*. Warriors in the epic acquire meaning not through survival but through their willingness to risk death; life gains value only when it is placed in danger. Achilles and Hector are heroic not because they live, but because they knowingly step into death. Hector embodies this logic most clearly. He is fully aware that if he confronts Achilles, his death is inevitable, yet he chooses to stand outside the walls of Troy. This conscious decision transforms him into a historical subject. Hector's death is thus voluntary in the philosophical sense: he accepts death knowingly and, in doing so, enters history and meaning.Achilles is fully conscious of his fate, yet he chooses vengeance over survival, accepting death in exchange for glory. Read through Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, Achilles also emerges as a figure who governs the death of others: by denying Hector burial, he decides not only who dies but whose body is excluded from dignity and remembrance. The battlefield in *The Iliad* thus functions as a necropolitical space where life and death are politically managed, bound to honour, power, and enmity rather than natural fate.

Classics do not endure as passive inheritances transmitted intact across time; they persist as contested formations in which cultural memory and ideological power intersect. To call a text "classical" is not merely to acknowledge its longevity, but to recognise the historical processes through which it has been selected, preserved, and repeatedly re-authorised. *The Iliad* exemplifies this tension between collective memory and ideological artefact. As a foundational narrative of war, the poem has shaped cultural imaginaries of heroism, sacrifice, and honour, often serving as a legitimising reference for martial ideals. The endurance of *The Iliad* as a classic lies not merely in its status as a benchmark of excellence, as Matthew Arnold suggests, but in its capacity to sustain critical tension across time. The epic remains relevant because it continues to illuminate modern concerns surrounding war, state power, spectacle, and the ethics of remembrance.

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The Female Body as a Site of Control and Redemption in *Ahalya's Awakening*

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Abstract

This article explores Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* as a key narrative of feminist mythic rewriting that reframes the female body as a symbol of redemption and control. It focuses on three main areas as narrative settings where patriarchal authority is both upheld and contested: the body, punishment, and redemption. Drawing on the theoretical ideas of Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, and Michel Foucault, the article demonstrates how the female body functions as a political and cultural construct shaped by power, discipline, and gender norms. Further, it shows how Kane's rewriting transforms the concept of redemption from heavenly grace and male affirmation to self-awareness and embodied subjectivity by arguing how the narrative presents a critical intervention into the gendered politics of myth, body, and agency, in addition to being a revisionist myth.

Keywords: myth, patriarchy, female body, redemption, feminist rewriting

Introduction

Within the cultural context of Indian civilisation, the female body in mythical discourse is a complex and dynamic site that encompasses issues of identity, agency, morality, and power. A text is deemed a classic in literary studies not only because of its durability or popularity but also because of its capacity to consistently produce new interpretations, critical discussions, and cultural significance across time. *Ahalya's Awakening* by Kavita Kane may be considered a modern masterpiece of Indian mythological fiction since it radically alters a core cultural narrative by giving a silent female character from the *Ramayana* voice, agency, and moral complexity. Kane creates a book that not only revisits myth but also challenges its ideological underpinnings by reinterpreting the story of Ahalyathrough a feminist and postcolonial lens, making the novel an essential component of contemporary literary discourse on gender, power, and justice. The authority of conventional epic discourse is called into question by this transition from male-centred storytelling to female self-narration, which also opens new avenues for understanding cultural history. A literary classic is characterised by repeated readings and reinterpretations, which are made possible by a narrative technique that guarantees the novel's continued critical productivity.

For the deployment of argument, the article relies on the Foucauldian concept of power, feminist theory, as well as the ideas associated with the revisioning of myth.

This article is based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Susan Bordo's concept of the body as a cultural text, and Michel Foucault's idea of the body as a site of disciplinary authority. Understanding how Ahalya's body is governed by patriarchal moral standards is made easier by Foucault's explanation of how power functions through punishment, discipline, and surveillance. How Ahalya's body becomes a symbolic location where concepts of purity, honour, and sin are imposed is examined using Susan Bordo's theory of the body as a medium of culture.Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and re-signification is used to explain Ahalya's reclaiming agency regarding

the imposed meaning upon her body. Further, to demonstrate how memory and corporeal experience become means of resistance, the article makes use of Adrienne Rich's concept of the politics of location and Julia Kristeva's concept of inner voice to debate how revisioning myth turns the female body from a site of patriarchal control into a source of resistance and self-defined redemption by combining the above theoretical stances.

Discussion

Throughout history, the Indian mythical tradition has served as a potent conceptual framework that governs social behaviour, particularly with regard to gender. In epics and Puranic stories, women are hardly ever given control over their bodies or passions. They are always placed in the moral dichotomies of virtue and transgression, purity and filth. The female body becomes a symbolic bearer where male authority, honour, ancestry, and spirituality converge in this setting. The portrayal of female characters like Sita, Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, and Ahalya in the *Ramayana*, one of India's most beloved epics, illustrates this patriarchal structure. Ahalya holds a particularly troublesome position among them since her body is used as the medium of moral judgement and divine punishment.

In the classic *Ramayana*, Ahalya is turned into stone until Rama redeems her after her husband Gautama curses her for reportedly having an affair with Indra. In addition to silencing her voice, this story turns her life into a moral instruction on female chastity. By restoring Ahalya's subjectivity and revealing how her body was unfairly regulated under a male-dominated moral framework, Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* exposes this patriarchal myth. By questioning how myths have been used to normalise violence against women in the name of divine justice, Kane's rewriting becomes a postcolonial feminist act.

According to M. H. Abrams, myth is "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group and which served to explain why the world is as it is and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives" (Abrams23) According to this concept, myth is a social tool that controls behaviour rather than just a story. Myths have traditionally imposed stringent restrictions on women's bodies in patriarchal countries by linking them to honour, shame, and moral purity. This idea is reinforced by the myth of Ahalya, which implies that a woman's value is determined by her sexual purity and submission to male authority.

By rewriting Ahalya's story through her own consciousness, Kane undermines this idea in *Ahalya's Awakening*. Rather than being depicted as sinful, Ahalya's body becomes a victim of patriarchal abuse and male deceit. In the conventional myth, she is not permitted to describe her personal experience, but Kane provides her with the voice to challenge the injustice she has been subjected to. Ahalya considers how her body was viewed as an extension of her husband's honour and austere reputation rather than as her own. This is consistent with Michel Foucault's idea that the body exists in a political domain where power directly affects it, as "power relations have an immediate hold upon it" and shape it into a "docile" and regulated subject (Foucault 25, 138).

In Kane's book, marriage functions as a method of physical monitoring. Gautama has disciplinary rather than emotional control over Ahalya. He expects that her body will represent restraint, submission, and purity. Her attractiveness and youth are seen as challenges to his spiritual authority. According to Ahalya, she was thought of as "a prize he had earned through penance, a proof of his spiritual greatness rather than a companion with a will of her own"(Kane 34). This illustrates the transformation of the female body from a lived experience to a symbol. Susan Bordo emphasises that social and ideological factors, rather than biology alone, influence women's bodies by arguing that "the body is not a purely biological entity but a medium of culture." (Bordo 33) Ahalya's body becomes a text that society uses to express its anxieties over female sexuality.

The incident involving Indra's deceit highlights the way in which women are held accountable for male transgressions. When Indra approaches Ahalya while posing as Gautama, it is Ahalya who suffers the

consequences. This illustrates the patriarchal reasoning that, despite being tricked or mistreated, women must uphold moral order. Kane reframes this incident as a breach of Ahalya's physical sovereignty rather than as adultery. Therefore, rather than being an act of divine justice, her punishment turns into a patriarchal act of violence.One of the novel's most potent metaphors is the curse of petrification. The total erasure of female agency is symbolised by being transformed into stone. Ahalya's body is hushed, rendered immobile, and cut off from society. But Kane turns this curse into a place for introspection and remembrance.

Ahalya is still conscious, thinking, remembering, and asking questions even when she is in stone form. Feminist trauma theory, which sees the body as a storehouse of repressed suffering and past injustice, is consistent with this. Ahalya's terrified body turns into a place of silent resistance where her memories won't go away.In order to free Ahalya's body from patriarchal control, narrative is essential. The claim made by Roland Berthe "Narrative is simply there like life itself: it is international, transhistorical, and transcultural" (Barthes 79) relevant here, as Kane reuses an ancient myth to tell a new feminist story.

Kane challenges the conventional masculine authority over mythological storytelling by letting Ahalya describe her own experience.Ahalya's memories of her pain and awakening are consistent with Hayden White's theory that narratives arrange memory into meaningful sequences. According to Hayden White's explanation in *The Content of the Form*, events only take on significance when they are organised through narrative. Narrative structure is what gives recalled events clarity, causality, and moral importance; memory by itself does not generate history. According to White, a story turns unprocessed memory into a coherent sequence that enables communities to make sense of the past. White asserts, "Events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like" (White 84).

Her narrative turns into a refutation of the official fiction.Kane also reinterprets the moment of Ahalya's purported redemption by Rama. According to the conventional story, Ahalya's humanity is restored by Rama's touch. But Kane wonders if a male figure's redemption actually restores dignity. Ahalya understands that self-awareness, rather than divine approval, is the source of true awakening. Since Ahalya reclaims her body from the meanings forced upon it, Judith Butler's idea of agency through re-signification of the body is appropriate in this situation. According to Judith Butler's theory in *Gender Trouble*, gender and the body are socially produced via repeated conventions and practices rather than being inherent or fixed. She contends that people might exercise agency by upending the existing gendered order by re-signifying or subverting the meanings imposed upon their bodies. As Butler clarifies, "The political is inscribed on the body, and norms of gender are maintained through repeated performances; yet these performances can be rearticulated, re-signified, and resisted" (Butler 179). Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic form of expression is reflected in the lyrical and reflective language of *Ahalya's Awakening*. The inflexible symbolic hierarchy of patriarchal myth is upset by Ahalya's inner voice, which is full of feeling, memory, and physical awareness.

The severe kind of physical punishment meted out to women is further dramatised by the curse of petrification. Not only is turning Ahalya into stone as punishment, but it also symbolises the destruction of her humanity and sexuality. By suspending Ahalya in a state between being and nonexistence, petrification fulfils the patriarchal myth's requirement that a woman who is thought to have violated sexual rules be removed from social life. However, Kane turns this suspension into a contemplative area. Ahalya's immobile figure serves as a potent metaphor for the state of women who are suppressed and constrained by strict moral standards. Her consciousness is active even in this immobilised position, indicating that female subjectivity cannot be completely eradicated by patriarchal domination.

Feminist thinker Adrienne Rich's concept of "the politics of location," in which women's experiences of their bodies become locations of struggle against

oppressive regimes, is consistent with this approach. Rich argues that feminist consciousness must begin from "the geography closest in - the body," (Rich 210) because patriarchal authority is primarily expressed and opposed on women's bodies. Despite being cursed, Ahalya's body still contains memories, rage, and self-awareness. Her pain increases her awareness of the injustice done to her rather than erasing her identity. Kane thus portrays suffering as a stimulus for critical knowledge rather than as a moral retribution.

Furthermore, recovering mythological women from centuries of symbolic violence is a larger feminist endeavour that Kane's retelling contributes to. In the past, myths have served as societal guidelines that teach women how to act and what their bodies represent. Kane reveals how these scripts are ideological and gendered rather than sacred or unchangeable by reworking Ahalya's story. The female body is now an active location of meaning-creation rather than a passive object of moral instruction, making the novel an act of narrative justice.

Conclusion

Kavita Kane's *Ahalya's Awakening* reinterprets myth as a cultural narrative influenced by power, gender, and ideology rather than as a set religious tale. By associating the female body with purity, guilt, punishment, and redemption, the narrative demonstrates how patriarchal mythology dominates the female body, apart from asserting that Ahalya's body is a political and cultural location where gender norms and power are enforced. In fact, Ahalya's voice and subjectivity are restored by Kane's rewriting; it portrays her as a consciousbeing whose body becomes a site of memory, pain, and self-realization rather than a symbol of sin. To conclude, it can be asserted that the novel redefines redemption as self-awareness instead of divine forgiveness. While Ahalya's waking signifies the regaining of agency and identity,her petrification reflects the silencing of women under patriarchy. Thus, Kane reclaims the empowered female body in *Ahalyas's Awakening*; a site of knowledge, agency, and self-definition, by transforming myth into a site of resistance.

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The Cultural Imagination of a Region: A Critical Re-reading of *Sonpahi* and *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*

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Abstract

This paper, through a comparative reading of Suniti Chatterji's speech, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, and Bishnu Prasad Rava's *Sonpahi*,attempts to trace the ways in which the question of the people and their relation to the question of territorialised ethnicity was sought to be addressed in post-independent Assam. Building on the notion that a classic is contingent upon the social and cultural milieu from which the text emerges, and is shaped by its ideological moorings, this paper reads Chatterji's work as a classic within the dominant Assamese-speaking bourgeoisie sphere, and Rava's work as a classic in within the progressive milieu of the region. We argue that reading these classics as discursive practises would enable us to map the manner in which their dissimilar political outlooks have shaped these works. Rava's political project necessitated fostering solidarity among a heterogeneous populace and therefore moved away from the ideas of linguistic essentialisation and assimilationism, which were dear to Chatterji's conceptualisation of the region. Rava's approach, therefore, moved away from the question of territoriality and, by extension, the normative ideas of the region and the nation, which were foundational to Chatterji's historiography.

Keywords : Counter-canon, ethnicity, identity, progressive literature.

Introduction :

The Classic and the Canon Terry Eagleton argues that the Arnoldian notion of "the classic" is a means of acculturation (22–23). The dissemination of the "classic," then, becomes the means through which the dominant ideology filters down. The literary classic, therefore, becomes closely associated with the pedagogical practices.[1] The text functions as a classic only under circumstances conducive to it, rather than on the basis of its inherent literariness alone.[2] Guillory, taking into account these shifts towards the notion of the classic, argues that the shift away from the word "classic" to "canon" opens up the very notion of the classic to critique (6). This is not to suggest that the words classic and canon are interchangeable. Rather, the shift to the canon is premised on the idea that, unlike the implicit universalism inherent in the notion of the "classic," the "canon" foregrounds its constructedness, enabling us to appreciate the underlying elements that have shaped it.

Drawing on the idea that the classic's status is contingent on social alignments, this paper engages with two dissimilar texts to explore the different ways in which the question of regional identity was addressed. These texts include the eminent linguist Suniti Chatterji's lecture series at Gauhati University, which was later published as *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India* (1954), and the Communist artist-activist Bishnu Prasad Rava's collection of short stories, *Sonpahi*(1956). The divergence in Chatterji and Rava's approaches to the question of the Assamese language is indicative of the Assam-based Left's attempt to develop the idea of a community that, while accounting for ethnic peculiarities, is not tethered to any essentialist markers of identity. Chatterji, in his speech, provides an overview of the Assamese language's evolution to tease out the reciprocal influence

that "Indian civilisation" has had on this language and vice versa, and offers a template through which the Assamese-speaking bourgeoisie could relate itself to the dominant Indian bourgeoisie. Rava's stories, on the other hand, useAssamese as it is spoken by the people to foreground the convoluted ethnic relationships and histories that people in a multiethnic region like Assam share. Rava too gave speeches on history; his "Asamiya Kristir Chomu Abhas" ("A Brief Introduction to the Culture of Assam") is a landmark exposition of Assam's ethnic and cultural landscape that goes beyond the Aryan-centric imagination. *Sonpahi,* on the other hand*,* could be read as a landmark in Rava's oeuvre because it brings together the development of his political and aesthetic sensibilities.[3] If Chatterji's work could be viewed as a classic because it espoused the hegemonic perspective, Rava's collection could be read as a classic within the counter-hegemonic tradition. By the 1950s, the project of nation-building, especially in the frontier, necessitated the imagining of social and cultural arrangements that conformed to the State's determined administrative cartographies. Such attempts were made throughout the period of colonial rule and the national movement, and they consolidated and accelerated in the years following India's independence. Ideas of history and civilisation were key not only in validating and reinforcing such ideas, but also in shaping the relationship between the nation and its constituent regions/states. For the Left (especially within the Popular Front), providing a counter-narrative to such ideas of a civilisation was key to reimagining the relationship among the people, while at the same time drawing attention to the class relationships which such conceptions engender.

It has been argued that the project of creating encyclopaedias of Indian languages originated as an exercise in nation-building, most notably under the auspices of PEN India and later the Sahitya Akademi (Zecchini 182-188). The purpose of these histories is to demonstrate the commonality and continuity between these different literary traditions, mirroring the idea of India as a federation of (linguistic) states. The literary canon of the vernacular(s) thus formed would then reinforce these connections and relationships shared within and between communities. It, however, comes at the cost of erasing minor literary traditions within the dominant one, as the emphasis is on internal homogeneity.

While it may seem like a generalisation, such modernising exercises could also be seen as a means to push for and reinforce existing social domination; it has been argued that such a linguistic arrangement mirrors the template for alignment between the national and local bourgeoisie. Furthermore, Assam, as a frontier state, meant that nation-building was coupled with the anxiety of demarcating the region, making such integration doubly important. For the Left, then, in the absence of state power, taking on these institutions and pushing a different imagination/conceptualisation through popular cultural mobilisation was a prerequisite to unite the people.

What makes these texts suitable for comparative reading is that Chatterji's speeches embody the dominant perspective on the region's cultural history, while Rava's collection indicates an emergent perspective. Chatterji's exposition, while far from being a novel one, provided a bird's-eyeview of the developments of historiography of this region, which sought to place itself within the larger nation.[4] Likewise, Rava's short stories embody a stage of development of his aesthetic sensibility. For this, we build on the idea that classics, rather than being a signifier of a text's intrinsic "value" alone, engender a certain worldview, or an ideology.

Methodology

A comparative reading of these texts, not as works in themselves, but rather as representative of particular discourses, is a prerequisite to untangle the particular positions they sought to signify and reinforce. For this purpose, we build on Locke's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which holds that "power relations produced by discourse are maintained and/or challenged through texts…" (38). Discourse, the argument follows, legitimises the dominant social structure's exercise of power by naturalising the hegemonic worldview(32). In other words, discourse, in this context, could be read as a realisation of the Gramscian "common sense," through which hegemony manifests itself.[5] It is precisely these underlying, naturalised assumptions that shape literary work, and it is these that CDA seeks to address. In this paper,

through a close reading of Chatterji's lectures and Rava's stories, we can work backwards to trace how the dominant histories of Assamese society are sought to be reinforced and supplanted, respectively. Grounding these texts in this manner then allows us to grasp the social functions that underpin the distinct ideological systems that inform their works.

Chatterji's Lecture

This cartography-centred imagination, with its emphasis on regional homogeneity, and the "modern" institutions that authorise these histories, comes alive in Chatterji's talk. The fact that these talks were held in memory of his student, Banikanta Kakati, whose doctoral research traced the origins of the Assamese language, and that it was held at the fledgling Gauhati University, merely adds to the significance of this talk. He draws from the works of colonial ethnographers and scholars, such as Edward Gait and his contemporaries, including Birinchi Kumar Barooah and Banikanta Kakati. Right from the ancient era, Chatterji only considers those moments worthy where the Tibeto-Burman speaking King(s) of ancient Assam adopted the religious and linguistic practices of the mainland (most notably the Hinduisation of the Varman dynasty and the use of a variant of Magadhi Prakrit), or the correspondence of these rulers with the rulers of mainland as instances of assimilation and Indianisation. In other words, for Chatterji, the gradual Hinduisation and Indianisation of these dynasties entailed a weaning away from what he had earlier described as their "Mongoloid kinship" (24). In the same vein, he considered the ascent of the Ahom dynasty and their victory over the Bodo rulers, with their distinctive language and script, religion and ascribing tradition, as a major "evenment" that stymied this gradual Indianisation (Chatterji, 36).

He, of course, appreciates the formative role the later Ahom rulers played in inculcating the Hindu faith, reaching out to rulers from the mainland, and patronising craftspeople and artisans from the mainland. Being a diligent scholar, Chatterji could not have overlooked the influence of the East on the popular traditions of the Assam valley. Instead, he considered, for example, the Sanskritization of names from "tribal words" to be a sign of the gradual assimilation, a craftsmanship that clearly had lineages in the East as it added to the mainland, and most importantly, explained the presence of a large section of non-Aryanised populace as incomplete Indianisation. Chatterji's theory on the pre-modern development of the Assamese language (and culture) necessarily needs to avoid any reference to mercantile relationships. Therefore, he cites the relationship between the mainland and Assam as characterised by a connection on the "intellectual and spiritual" planes (Chatterji, 61). Therefore, when it came to intraregional relationships among the ruling dynasties, he considered only those between Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. As an aside, it is worth noting that by this time, the Communists had made significant headway in charting an alternative history of inter-ethnic relationships in the region, of which he seemed cognizant and which could have been helpful in placing Assamese culture in a different light. Likewise, in his third lecture, Chatterji emphasises the assimilationist tendencies of the Assamese literary renaissance from the 1890s to the 1930s (79–83). The Assamese language, as developed by Chatterji, is then synonymous with the standardised language, with its associated status of hierarchy and civilisational baggage.

Situating *Sonpahi*

While the writings and speeches of Rava (and his younger comrades, such as Bhabananda Dutta and Amalendu Guha) could be read as a repudiation of this dominant view of history, their interventions did not carry the same weight as Chatterji's work. Rava's short story collection *Sonpahi*, on the other hand, could be considered a landmark in so far as the progressive Assamese short story is concerned, where the flat characters that marked agitprop literature in Assamese for almost two decades gave way to sophisticated characterisation. In the introduction to his *Sonpahi*, Rava bemoans the fact that he lost a lot of his research on the different ethnicities of the region during his lengthy incarceration. Hence, this collection is a mere testimony to the lived, everyday realities of the "people." Accordingly, these stories are "intended for the common people and written in a language that is accessible to all"(Rava, 14-15).[6] As a Communist, this is Rava's clarion against the hierarchization of language. If for Chatterjiit was the adoption of an Assamese that is codified and Sanskritized that makes it a worthy Indian language, for Rava, it is precisely

the Assamese language's malleability that makes it worthy of such a project, where it can represent the people.

Of the four stories, the first is a translation and adaptation of Jack Belden's "Gold Flower's Story." Rava's skill here lay in localising, to the extent possible, the expressions and imagery evoked in the story. In fact, there is a continuity in the semi-pastoral landscape evoked in this story and the later stories. The same lineages of the East from which the Assamese had to remove themselves in order to become Assamese in Chatterji's teleology became a means for Rava's people to connect to the wider world (China being both an immediate neighbour and a metonym for the promise of revolution). Unlike Chatterji's anxiety over the frontier, for Rava, the resolution lay in looking at the frontier as a gateway to multiple regions. The other stories follow "Hiyar Pung" ("Spring of the Heart"), "Mamir Haar" ("Aunt's Chain"), and "Kuri Bosor Jail" ("Twenty Years in Jail"). "Spring of the Heart" follows a young agrarian Bodo family who face a series of setbacks inflicted by the proliferation of mercantile capitalism and the effects of World War II, which eventually lead them to lose their homestead and complete their process of proletarianization. The bonds of kinship of a closely knit society do not come to their rescue. On the contrary, this becomes one of the means through which such economic violence is perpetuated. "Aunt's Chain" and "Twenty Years in Jail," on the other hand, narrate the stories of a tribal peasant and an indentured labourer, respectively, who commit crimes in the spur of the moment, driven to absolute hopelessness by their economic circumstances. Unlike the typical socialist realist stories (or even Rava's own plays), the denouement is not accompanied by a moment of triumph or awakening. But neither are they mere melodramatic tales. Instead, the overwhelming force of Capital that forces human action is on display.

Two Kinds of People

While these characters are portrayed as bearers of their respective cultures, living a certain way of life or speaking a certain language, this is an important characteristic, but it is only incidental to their being. Instead, it is their interaction with the forces of production that shapes them, despite their cultural baggage. Only "Spring" was originally written in Bodo and later translated into Assamese; the other two stories were composed in Assamese. As a keen observer, Rava incorporated the local dialects and inflexions of the language, and yet it is the translatability of these expressions that stands out. The fact that this collection is in Assamese then merely signifies a logistical convenience (Assamese as the link language) rather than regional exclusivity. True, these characters are a part of the larger Assamese community, but even that does not really shape the totality of their existence. In this collection, Rava sparingly uses the words *xorbohara*(proletariat) or *krishak*(peasant) and instead builds these characters as embodiments of the *raiz*(people). The people thus imagined share a common condition despite linguistic and cultural distinctiveness that may manifest differently. Contrary to the widely held precept,[7] Rava's turn towards the people did not necessitate the abandoning of the Communist movement's emphasis on the worker; instead, it was the realisation that only with such an overarching category of the (larger Assamese) people imagined from the bottom could one build networks of solidarity, since the working class is fragmented. On the other hand, the Assamese in Chatterji's exposition remained contingent on their adoption of a strictly defined language. Such an ossified idea of belonging limits the relationships people can share and makes no allowances for their lived, material conditions. Paradoxically, it is the rigidity of Chatterji's approach, compared to Rava's definition of the Assamese people as a mere working category, that threatens the very viability of the "Assamese people" as a category, as rebellion of the "assimilated" people (mainly of the Bodos) by the end of that very decade would demonstrate.

Conclusion

The question of the Assamese-speaking bourgeoisie and its status vis-à-vis the national bourgeoisie is among the most frequently explored in the study of Assamese socio-cultural life. In this paper, then, we have merely tried to push the needle a little further to see how historiography could be appropriated towards such ends. In post-Independent Assam, negotiating the idea of the community within the confines of the cartographic reason ofthe state was of paramount importance for the populace. Chatterji attempts to tackle this by tracing a continuous lineage

that hinges on a gradual progression of graded assimilation within the region. On the other hand, Rava's attempt to imagine this region as a polycentric space then helps sidestep the bourgeoisie imagination, which necessitates an assimilationist social outlook within the region, and thereby affects the consolidation of the working class in the region.

Notes

1 For the relationship between the pedagogical function of the Classic and the emergence of nationalism, see for example Renee Balibar's work on 19th century France(126-46).

2 We borrow the idea that what is classified as "literature" is only situational from Williams(45–54).

3 For the significance of *Sonpahi*, see for example the works of Prachee Dewri (142–60). Manjeet Barua traces the divergence in *Sonpahi* with the dominant ways of conceiving the community (136–50).

4 Arupjyoti Saikia reads Chatterji's lecture as a general tendency of the historiography of that period, which tried to buttress Assam's historical relationship with the larger nation(ch.6).

5 Kate Crehan argues that Gramsci's conceptualisation of "common sense" offers "a way of thinking about the textures of everyday life that encompasses its givenness…" (58).

6 Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

7 The shift from worker to people has been seen as a turn towards populism, for example by Denning (124–25).

8 See, for example, (Guha and Das, 59-66; Gohain, 11-26).

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Subaltern Inferno: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Reading of *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

Victorian narratives of female selfhood emerged within a cultural climate marked by imperial expansion, racial hierarchy, and an increasingly instrumental view of the natural world. Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) has traditionally been read within this context as a powerful affirmation of moral autonomy and emotional integrity, with critical attention centering on Jane's interior growth and ethical independence. Such readings, however, tend to abstract individual freedom from the historical structures—colonial, racial, and ecological—that quietly sustain it.In context, the present paper contends that *Jane Eyre* (1847) constructs its vision of female emancipation through strategic pauses. Bringing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorization of subalternity into conversation with ecofeminist critiques advanced by Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, and Val Plumwood, the paper attempts to reread Bertha Mason as a structurally acute figure whose confinement enables both Jane's moral resolution and the novel's human-centered logic of mastery. By placing the text within nineteenth-century imperial economies and examining its position within canonical traditions, the paper demonstrates how gendered freedom in *Jane Eyre* (1847) remains entangled with racialized and ecological forms of domination. Rather than dismissing Bronte's novel, the study approaches its contradictions as historically revealing, arguing for a more critically responsible mode of reading that acknowledges both its ethical aspirations and its imperial limits.

Keywords: female selfhood, imperialism,racial hierarchy,subalternity, ecofeminism, female agency

Introduction:

> The reason/nature story has been the master story of Western culture. It is a story which has spoken mainly of conquest and control, of capture and use, of destruction and incorporation. This story is now a disabling story. Unless we can change it, some of those now young may know what it is to live amid the ruins of a civilization on a ruined planet. The power to direct, cast and script this ruling drama has been in the hands of only a tiny minority of the human race and of human cultures (Plumwood 196).

Recent Victorian scholarship has repeatedly prompted against reading first-person Bildungsromane as transparent records of ethical progress. As Nancy Armstrong argues, domestic fiction often universalizes bourgeois interiority while quietly normalizing social hierarchies that make such interiority legible in the first place. She comments, "The writing I call domestic fiction is gender-inflicted writing. Unlike the work of earlier women of letters, it comes to us as women's writing. In designating certain forms of writing as feminine, it designates other writing as masculine" (Armstrong 569). Within this critical tradition, *Jane Eyre* (1847) functions not merely as an expression of personal conscience but as a cultural and socio-technological interplay that trains readers to recognize certain lives as morally comprehensible and others as narratively expendable. This perspective allows Jane's moral voice to be understood not as innocent authenticity but as a historically authorized mode of speech.

Moreover, the novel's intense contemplation on self-discipline, restraint, and moral feeling reflects what

Michel Foucault identifies as modern forms of subject formation, where power operates less through overt coercion than through internalized norms. Foucault states, "My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 777). Jane's ethical independence is, thus, inseparable from regulatory structures that reward certain forms of selfhood while disqualifying others. This also leads to understanding why Bertha Mason cannot appear as a moral subject within the same narrative economy.

Few Victorian novels have enjoyed the institutional affection granted to *Jane Eyre*. Its endurance rests largely on Jane's insistence on dignity, moral autonomy, and emotional equality, most famously articulated in her declaration that she is "a free human being with an independent will" (Bronte 386). Such instances continue to resonate because they speak to experiences of constraint familiar to many readers. Yet the very familiarity of these passages has encouraged a reading practice that isolates Jane's struggle from the social and imperial conditions that make it intelligible.

The paper begins from the premise that *Jane Eyre* (1847) is not merely a personal narrative of self-realization but a text deeply embedded in the structures of British imperial modernity. The novel emerges at a time when slavery had been legally abolished but its economic consequences continued to shape English wealth, property, and domestic comfort. Bertha Mason's confinement in Thornfield Hall is inseparable from this context. Her Creole background, her displacement, and her silencing are not narrative accidents; they are the conditions that allow Jane's moral journey to proceed without confronting empire directly.

By engaging postcolonial and ecofeminist theory, the paper addresses three interrelated questions: whose freedom is imagined in *Jane Eyre*, at what cost, and through what exclusions? Rather than treating the novel as ideologically coherent, the analysis traces its tensions, interruptions, and unresolved contradictions.

Jane's early experiences at Gateshead, particularly her confinement in the red-room, already anticipate the disciplinary structures that will shape her later subjectivity. This instance is not merely a moment of childhood trauma but a formative encounter with authority, surveillance, and exclusion. As Jane recalls, the room is associated with death and patriarchal memory, since it is where Mr. Reed died and was laid out (Bronte 14). Her fear of supernatural presence is inseparable from her social marginalization; she is made to feel both morally suspect and ontologically out of place. When she protests, "Unjust!—unjust," the narrative registers a moment of resistance that is immediately contained through punishment (Bronte 19). In this sense, Jane's development into a self-regulating subject begins not with freedom but with coercion, illustrating what Foucault identifies as the internalization of power rather than its simple imposition (Foucault 777).

Postcolonialism and Ecofeminism:

> There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces (Said 19-20).

Postcolonial criticism has long emphasized that empire is not an external backdrop to British literature but one of its organizing conditions. Edward Said's account of cultural representation demonstrates how literary texts participate in producing imperial common sense even when colonial spaces remain offstage. In this light, *Jane Eyre* (1847) exemplifies what Ann Laura Stoler terms the "intimate domain" (Stoler and Cooper 31) of empire, where domestic order, sexuality, and racial management intersect.

Ecofeminist theory complements this analysis by insisting that domination is not singular but relational. Val Plumwood's critique of dualistic thinking shows how rational autonomy is constructed through the exclusion of what is coded as emotional, bodily, racialized, or natural. Plumwood argues, "Women, in this strategy, are to join elite men in participation in areas which especially exhibit human freedom, such as science and

technology, from which they have been especially strongly excluded" (Plumwood 28). Bertha's positioning at the intersection of these categories makes her the ideal figure through which the novel can displace anxieties about excess, dependence, and disorder. The theoretical framework thus enables a reading that treats narrative form itself as a site where colonial and ecological power is organized.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?"provides a crucial foundation. Spivak does not simply ask whether marginalized figures are represented, but whether dominant narrative forms allow them agency, intelligibility, or self-authorship. In *Jane Eyre*(1847), Bertha Mason is spoken about relentlessly yet never allowed to speak for herself. Her story exists only through Rochester's retrospective confession and Jane's fearful observations.

Ecofeminism as a theory enhances this critique by revealing how the domination of women, colonized people, and nature operates through shared logics. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that modern patriarchy depends on rendering both women and nature as passive resources. They state, "It is in this sense that the seed and the women's bodies as sites of regenerative power are, in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy, among the last colonies. These sites of creative regeneration are transformed into 'passive' sites where the experts 'produces' and adds value" (Shiva 25).

Val Plumwood further identifies the dualisms: reason/emotion, culture/nature, self/other, that sustains such hierarchies. These frameworks allow readers to read Bertha not only as a racialized 'other' but also as a figure aligned with the unruly, excessive, and dangerous aspects of nature that Victorian ideology sought to control.Together, postcolonial and ecofeminist approaches expose the limits of liberal feminist readings that celebrate Jane's autonomy while sustaining the structures that make her autonomy possible.

Bertha Mason and the Exclusion of the Subaltern:

Bertha's narrative foreclosure operates through what Homi Bhabha identifies as colonial ambivalence: she is simultaneously hyper-visible as spectacle and invisible as subject. Her body is repeatedly described, yet her consciousness remains inaccessible. As Bhabha argued, "The desire of the Other is doubled by the desire in language, which splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself" (Bhabha 50). This imbalance also reflects what Spivak describes as epistemic violence, wherein the structures that claim to explain the subaltern also ensure her unreadability.Spivak claims, "The narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme" (Spivak 82). Somehow, this form of violence works as a form of intellectual domination that erases colonized subjects' agency and knowledge systems.

The narrative introduction of Bertha is carefully staged through fragmentation and sensory disturbance rather than direct representation. Before she is seen, she is heard, her laughter described as "a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless" (Bronte 126). This disembodied presence constructs her as a disturbance rather than a subject. When she finally appears, her body is rendered in excessive and animalistic terms, emphasizing her distance from rational humanity. Such descriptive strategies ensure that Bertha remains legible only as spectacle. Even her acts like tearing the wedding veil or setting fire to Thornfieldare framed as eruptions of madness rather than expressions of agency. In this way, the narrative produces what Spivak identifies as epistemic silencing, where the subaltern is represented yet denied subjecthood (Spivak 82).

Furthermore, the motif of madness functions as a narrative solvent that dissolves historical accountability. As Elaine Showalter's work on female insanity in Victorian literature suggests, madness often operates as a repository for cultural fears that cannot be openly articulated. She further mentions the dual images of female insanity and says, "These dual images of female insanity – madness as one of the wrongs of woman; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality – suggest the two ways that the relationship between women and madness has been perceived" (Showalter 3). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha absorbs anxieties surrounding racial mixture, female sexuality, and colonial excess,

allowing the narrative to preserve Jane's moral coherence. The cost of this preservation is the permanent suspension of Bertha's humanity.

Bertha Mason's presence in *Jane Eyre* is paradoxical. She is both central to the plot and excluded from its moral economy. Her laughter, screams, and acts of violence interrupt the narrative at key moments, yet these disruptions are quickly contained through medicalized and racialized explanations. Madness becomes the language through which colonial violence is displaced.Spivak's insight is particularly relevant here: Bertha cannot speak because the narrative does not recognize her speech as meaningful. Rochester's account of his marriage in Jamaica transforms Bertha into evidence of his own suffering rather than a subject of historical harm. Knowledge functions as control; by telling her story for her, Rochester forbids any alternative interpretation.

Rochester's retrospective account of his marriage further consolidates this epistemic control. His narrative transforms Bertha into evidence of his own misfortune, recasting a colonial and economic arrangement as a personal tragedy. By describing her as inherently depraved and uncontrollable, he forecloses any alternative interpretation of her condition. This act of narration is not neutral; it is an assertion of authority over meaning itself. As Said observes, authority "establishes canons of taste and value" and determines what may be accepted as truth (Said 20). Rochester's voice thus stabilizes the narrative while simultaneously erasing the historical and colonial dimensions of Bertha's existence.

The inheritance Jane receives toward the novel's end further complicates claims of moral independence. The money arrives without labor, without context, and without acknowledgment of the colonial course of wealth through which such fortunes circulated. Jane's ethical resolution is thus achieved not by dismantling imperial relations but by benefiting from their abstraction.

Bertha's elimination is not incidental but structurally necessary. Her death clears the moral and narrative space required for Jane's union with Rochester, resolving tensions that the novel cannot otherwise reconcile. The restoration of order depends on the prior removal of what cannot be assimilated into its ethical framework. In this sense, Bertha's fate exposes the limits of the novel's liberal humanism: equality becomes imaginable only after the exclusion of those who fall outside its terms.

Nature, Gender, and the Illusion of Freedom:

The novel's natural imagery aligns closely with what Raymond Williams describes as the ideological construction of the countryside as a space of moral clarity and renewal. Such representations often obscure the labour and exploitation that sustain pastoral ideals. In *Jane Eyre*, landscapes appear responsive to Jane's emotional state, reinforcing an anthropocentric worldview in which nature exists to affirm human meaning.

Jane's experience on the moors is often interpreted as a moment of existential freedom, where she exists outside social constraint and discovers inner resilience. However, this autonomy depends on a representation of landscape as empty and available. The moors appear devoid of labor, ownership, or history, functioning instead as a projection of Jane's emotional state. Such a portrayal aligns with ecofeminist critiques of symbolic appropriation, wherein nature is reduced to a passive backdrop for human meaning. Plumwood argues, this dualistic thinking positions nature as subordinate to human reason (Plumwood 28). Jane's freedom, therefore, is not independent of these structures but quietly reinforced by them.

Ecofeminist critics have admonished that this symbolic appropriation of nature reflects colonial practices of land use and extraction. By aligning Bertha with untamed natural forces, the novel reproduces a logic in which what resists control must be neutralized. The destruction of Thornfield thus appears cathartic without addressing the systemic relations between property, environment, and imperial wealth that made such estates possible.

The landscapes : moors, gardens, and estates are often read as symbolic extensions of Jane's inner life. While this symbolic reading is compelling, it risks ignoring the

material histories embedded in these spaces. Ecofeminist theory insists that nature is not merely metaphor but matter shaped by labor, enclosure, and extraction.Jane's sense of liberation on the moors appears spontaneous and self-generated, yet it rests on a romantic conception of nature detached from colonial agriculture and environmental degradation.

The destruction of Thornfield by fire appears as a moment of poetic justice, a symbolic purging of excess. Yet this event does not dismantle the broader structures of property and imperial wealth that sustain such estates. Instead, it allows their reconfiguration under more acceptable conditions. The narrative resolves its tensions symbolically rather than materially, preserving the logic of domination even as it gestures toward transformation.

Conclusion:

This reading of *Jane Eyre* does not seek to diminish its enduring significance but to situate it more precisely within the historical structures that shape its vision of freedom. Jane's claim to autonomy remains compelling, yet it is neither universal nor unconditioned. It emerges within a narrative economy that depends on the exclusion of figures like Bertha Mason and on the silent operations of imperial and ecological exploitation.By bringing postcolonial and ecofeminist frameworks into dialogue, this study demonstrates that gendered emancipation in the novel is inseparable from racialized and environmental hierarchies. Bertha's silencing is not a marginal detail but a structural necessity, enabling the coherence of Jane's moral journey. Similarly, the natural world participates in reinforcing an anthropocentric logic of control rather than offering genuine escape from it.Recognizing these dynamics does not require rejecting the novel. Instead, it calls for a more critically responsible mode of reading; one that acknowledges both its ethical aspirations and its exclusions. In this sense, *Jane Eyre* remains not only a foundational text of feminist selfhood but also a crucial site for examining the limits of that selfhood within imperial modernity.

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Social Order and Transgressions: Comparing Social Conditions in Sudraka's *Mrcchakamika* and the Twenty-first Century Society

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Abstract

Social order from ancient times to the modern has been carried out through strict boundaries of assimilation and differentiation. The rigidity of social structures has been challenged with deviations which reveal the superimposed "order" in society. Contemporary times and ancient times mirror each other alike in circumstances relating to structural order and power in societies. Transgressions, taboos, deviations and revolts - all hint at the calls for processes of social reformation and social boundaries to accommodate divergent behaviour. The classical period with its rich literary and cultural taste, highlight the progression of social change and influence contemporary societies in navigating rebellions which challenge social order. Sudraka's *Mrcchakamika* written between 2nd century BCE and 5th century AD, is one of the finest classical texts dealing with the structure of social organization, the theme of transgressions and social expansion by relaxing social boundaries to accommodate humanitarian needs. The projection of social control and moral surveillance in the play remain significant in contemporary times as restrictive social norms continue to infringe upon personal liberty even in the 21st century. This paper aims to take up a comparative study between the ancient classical times celebrated for its refinement and sophistication and the contemporary Indian society which grapples with the tussle of tradition and modernity, mostly through the lens of Marxism and Post-structuralism.

Keywords: Transgressions, Social Norms, Sudraka, *Mrcchakamika, The Little Clay Cart*

Introduction

Sudraka's *Mrcchakamika*(*The Little Clay Cart)* is an ancient classical Sanskrit drama which reflects the modern day concerns about liberty and social boundaries. Written between 2nd century BCE and 5th century AD, it delves into the complexities of rigid social boundaries and the constant challenges to the rigidity through transgressions, rebellions and deviations. The present era of globalization is an era of rising normlessness and porous boundaries induced by the conditions of a post-modern cosmopolitan world. However, social boundaries and rigid social norms still pervade areas of personal liberty in many societies. Despite the flexibility of the post-modern times inspired by the liberal ideas of the French Revolution; the rigidity of caste, class and gender boundaries continue to give rise to deviations which threaten the "social order" of contemporary times. Sudraka's *Mrcchakamika* mirrors the negotiations of social norms and deviations in society in their mediation of individual liberty and social regulation and provides an understanding to facilitate reconciliation between the two in present-day societies. One of the most grappling conditions relevant to the contemporary societies is however, the challenges in front of women in their pursuit of liberty and equality, which has only moderately improved in the contemporary times. Moreover, the class binaries, the injustices of biased systems of law, the abuse of power and the conflict of morals and taboos are highly relevant themes connecting Sudraka's times to the contemporary twenty-first century. *Mrcchakamika's* relevance in the contemporary times stems from its

uniqueness as a *Prakarana*, 'a play of invention,' or a plot drawn from 'real life' in contrast to the mythological and idealistic plays of classical Sanskrit drama and hence, is realistically valid even today.

Theoretical Framework

The clash between the society and the individual has been introspected by the theories of post-structuralism,marxism and feminism. The study incorporates the Marxist understanding of state power as carried out through the Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses.

Methodology

The paper uses literary analysis of the text as its core methodology to study the individual and the society and their interaction. It utilizes the lens of marxism,post-structuralism and feminismto understand the conflict between the two better.The qualitative and comparative research methodology helps to find a resolution between social regulation and transgressive behaviour.

The Class Conflict and Political Power

Drawn from the original character of Charudatta in Bhasa's play Cârudatta, Sudraka's *Mrcchakamika* stages the character noble Charudatta at the center of his play. Known for his idealistic traits of generosity, truthfulness, kindness and morality, Charudatta once an affluent man, finds himself in adversity in the beginning of the play.He remarks upon the conditions of poverty which make him feel a sense of social ostracization when lesser number of people visit his household compared to the times his generosity drew many people to his house during his affluence. This is representative of the economic inequality driving social image in Sudraka's times as well as present-day contemporary societies. Charudatta's moral integrity amidst his difficult circumstances mirrors the values of the humble noble classes in contrast to the greedy and corrupt nature of the economically elite industrialists and capitalists in the present times. This correlates to the Karl Marx's understanding of social capital and social agency as directly determined by one's economic capital. Charuddatta's morals and good character earning him respect even in his difficult times is a marker of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) by which social power is maintained by institutions of ideological discipline school, family, religion etc. by conditioning values, culture and moralsin individuals (Althusser 162). Charudatta's strong indoctrination of ideology is evident in Act 1 when his friend Maitreya says:

> A tree of life to them whose sorrows grow,
> Beneath its fruit of virtue bending low;
> Father to good men; virtue's touchstone he;
> The mirror of the learned; and the sea
> Where all the tides of character unite.(Úûdraka 1.2)

Mrcchakamika's exploration of the polarization of the rich and the weaker sections connect well to the rising inequality between the rich and the economically weaker sections in the times of growing capitalism in cosmopolitan societies. Charudatta's strong morals highlight the rarity of ethics and values in a rampant corrupt society akin to the marginalization of ethical people in present-day capitalist societies. Therefore, *Mrcchakamika'*s valorization of ethical principles and the celebration of his honesty and generosity serve as a call for modern societies to embrace morality over superficial glamour and corruption. The class conflict in the play hints at the continuous economic disparity from ancient to contemporary times - Cârudatta as the "impoverished elite" who represents dignity without capital, Vasantasenâ as the embodiment of commodified wealth who exercises emotional agency due to her economic wealth and Úakâra (Samsthânaka) as the politically violent, entitled ruling class. While Charudatta reflects state power maintained through a strong ideological state apparatus, the play critiques the moral deprivation of the ruling class through the character of Samsthânaka and exposes the vulnerability of virtue under material deprivation through Charudatta.

Abuse of State Power and Corruption

The play foregrounds the character of Úakâra (*Samsthânaka*), the brother-in-law of King Pâlaka, who exercises unchecked privilege and judicial

manipulation due to his proximity to the royal ruling class. This is in close association of the rampant abuse of political power by the politically elite and the ruling class to serve their personal interests at the cost of discomfort to the underprivileged classes in the twenty-first century. It aptly highlights Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) or the use/abuse of power through repressive structures like the police, law courts, coercive political authority etc (Althusser 143). Úakâra's threat to Vasantasena's modesty is a recurring subversion of political power to subjugate and violate the vulnerable sections of the society. The biases of law and the judiciary towards the violent and abusive politically and economically elite is evident from Úakâra's escape of punishment. Such rampant cronyism mirror the hindrance to the independence of judiciary and political systems even in present times. The faulty system of law and order in King Palaka's regime also reflect the loopholes in present-day executive and judicial machinery.

Cârudatta's false accusation is the superimposition of the law of the politically powerful and law upon the ordinary man. Law, as depicted in the play, becomes an instrument of power, not truth. Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977), articulates about the social systems of discipline and order operating as panopticons upon individuals by which they are constantly under surveillance, suspicion, discipline and punishment(Foucault 187). The executive and judicial violence upon Charudatta and Aryaka are representative of arbitrary political control over the individual selves and expose the conflict between truth and authority. Úakâra's manipulation of truths and institutions justifies Foucault's standpoint that power produces "truth" and determines what is considered truthful and appreciated and what is falsified and punished, this highlighting the arbitrariness of political power and law.

Charudatta's alleged stealing of Vasantasena's jewels is a faulty judgement of the judicial systems set up in Sudraka's times. His false accusation represents the faulty misjudgments which still prevail in the twenty-first century where justice is often delayed or thwarted. Moreover, unwarranted arrests and corruption in the judicial processes which hamper the proper functioning of law and order even in contemporary societies mirror Charudatta's vulnerable economic means which make him vulnerable in front of a faulty judicial system. The escape of criminals like Úakâra from the repercussions and consequences of their crimes due to their political influence is akin to the protection of those closely associated to the politically elite in the modern times. The imprisonment of Aryaka by King Palaka based on a prediction of him being the future King is another violation of law and order by a corrupt King. Aryaka's escape, facilitated by noble guards and the noble Charudatta and his restoration of political order and justice by seeking vengeance upon the tyrannical King Palaka outside the courts of justice is symbolic of the triumph of natural justice over thwarted judicial machineries serving the corrupt elite in both the ancient and modern times.

Gender, Female Agency and Women's Safety

The play's glorification of Vasantasena, a courtesan, is extraordinary for Sudraka's classical times. While other classical Sanskrit texts and social customs of the time marginalizes courtesans and prostitutes, Vasantasena's portrayal as a woman with dignity, intelligence, and emotional agency presents a rarity in classical Indian texts. This remains a stark contrast to modern times when women's sexual autonomy is still largely guarded by patriarchal power and checked by social norms and taboos. Women's agency in modern times, unlike Vasantasena's free exercise of her autonomy, is still restrained by moral policing. The dignity and respect rendered to Vasantasena despite her profession as a courtesan is much progressive in comparison to contemporary times where women still strive for respect and choice in their professions.

The pursuit of Vasantasena by Samsthanaka and his friends hint at the vulnerability of women's safety since ancient times to modern times. The cajolings, eve-teasing and the threat to Vasantasena's modesty by Samsthanaka and his friends call attention to the threats to women's honour, highlighting the need for women's safety.The play defies the distinction between the virtuous "angel in the house" and the fallen woman

with its revolutionary treatment of the courtesan as an empowered subject and not a fallen woman. The exercise of female desire by Vasantasena, is radical for a classical Sanskrit drama as female desire remains a closely regulated subject even today. While Úakâra's forceful entitlement to her body is representative of the ongoing patriarchal control and violence upon female bodies, the play depicts it to question and ridicule a society which isjudgemental towards women but tolerant of male violence.

Vasantasena's performance of femininity is both a justification of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and a strategic diversion of gender performativity to survive male power and fulfill her female needs and desires (Butler 190). A radical innovation of classical Sanskrit drama, Vasantasena is sexually autonomous, emotionally loyal, and morally courageous yet stigmatized by society. She performs femininity and seduction strategically and is yet vulnerable. Despite being treated as an "other" (Beauvoir 283) which is even more heightened due to her profession, the play celebrates her agency over her emotions, profession and sexuality while maintaining her ethicality. The play's portrayal of her as moral, loyal, generous and fit to be wedded to the noble represents both class and caste mobility.Vasantasena's power thus, stems from her subversion of patriarchal power and the social notions of impurity which enables her in achieving a position of noble grandeur and refinement within the play and the society therein.

Transgressions for Social Reformation

Transgressions are abundant in *Mrcchakamika* and hence the play serves as a literary repositoryof transgressions in Indian classical literature. The play distinguishes between ethical transgressions which are rewarded and punishes violent and immoral transgressions. The central characters Charudatta and Vasantasena are both virtuous and deviant in their own ways. However, their transgressions are ethical in nature and are garnered towards a just and noble society and this, aptly draws rewards in the end. Charudatta, a noble Brahmana is attracted to the stigmatized courtesan Vasanthasena despite his virtues and ideals, and transgresses both caste and class boundaries. His aiding of the fleeing Aryaka makes him a political transgressor as he defies royal orders and risks charges of treason. Similarly, Vasantasena's defiance of the advances of Samsthanaka, transgresses the norms of prostitution in which they are expected to serve the interests of the economically affluent. She also protests against patriarchal power over the female body by refusing Samsthanaka and choosing a noble and moral Charudatta over an immoral and violent *Samsthânaka*. Aryaka transgresses the political orders of confinement by the corrupt King Palaka.Similarly, the guard who helps in the escape of Aryaka is another transgressor who defies royal orders. Sarvilaka, in his theft of Vasantasena's jewelry from Charudatta's house to free his lover Madanika from her servitude of Vasantasena is another transgressor, but for a noble cause. However, the play positions these transgressions as ethical and rewards them in the textual progression because they restore morality in society. Charudatta's usurpation of caste and class boundary serves the noble cause of safety and protection of vulnerable females. Vasantasena's transgressions honour and serve a noble Charudatta economically. Aryaka's transgressions end the tryrannical and unjust rule of King Palaka and restore moral order and justice in the society. Similarly, Sarvilaka's theft is pardoned as his transgression serves the noble cause of Madanika's freedom. In contrast, the unethical and violent transgressions of Samsthanaka –his threats to Vasantasena and trying to strangle her and falsely accusing Charudatta - is justly punished. Similarly King Palaka's arbitrary tyrannical rule is overthrown by the just political usurpation of Aryaka. Hence, the textual justice of moral transgressions celebrates them as necessary preconditions to fight social evils and restore moral order and justice in societies.

Conclusion

Despite its highly realistic themes, the play *Mrcchakamika* is upheld as evolutionary in nature. The dissatisfaction of commoners against an unjust King mirrors a similar distrust of the ruling elites in the twenty-first century The play emphasizes public role in bringing about revolutions against arbitrary power

as represented by the guard who helps in the escape of Aryaka, Charudatta's own guidance to the escaping Aryaka, the judge's compassion towards Charudatta and even Samsthanaka's friend Vita's reverence of Charudatta.The role of civil societies, protest movements and literature in questioning the abuse of power is thus, significant. The restoration of order at the end of the play is a celebration of the victory of ethics and morality and a triumph of good over evil, offering hope and guidance to future societies.

The play *Mrcchakamika* is hence, a realistic depiction of the social conditions during Sudraka's times. Its relevance to contemporary times is evident from contemporary class conflicts, corruption by the politically and economically elite, biases of the judicial system and threats to women's safety. The play's novelty is its celebration of female autonomy, respect for class and caste differences and the glorification of ethical transgressions. Hence, the play serves as an useful guidance in navigating present-day social impediments and restoring a just, righteous and morally ethical political order.

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Revisiting *Antigone:* Feminist and Postdramatic Interventions in Assam

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Abstract

The classical play *Antigone* by the ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles undergoes unconventional re-creation in select theatrical performances from Assam proclaiming its relevance and recognition in present times. The aim of this paper is to show how the adapted performances of *Antigone* use contemporary theatrical framework of feminist theatre adopting postdramatic theatrical techniques of staging in pertinence to the contemporary socio-cultural contexts. This work of research takes into its ambit of discussion two adaptations of *Antigone* from Assam, one is *Antigone Mania* by Rabijita Gogoi and the other is *Almost Antigone* by Papari Medhi. In *Antigone Mania*, Gogoi enters the experimental mode through a reshaping of the original text into a performance text based on the idea of 'text' in postdramatic theatre.Whereas, in *Almost Antigone*, Medhi adopts an innovative use of space including deeper audience engagement in the performative process with her distinctive style of 'performed conversations'.The performances taken for discussion reflect splendid theatrical skills highlighting specific feminist concerns to establish an alternative perspective of theatre from Assam, making the classical play relevant based on contemporary theoretical framework.

Keywords: Classics, Performance Text, Postdramatic theatre, Feminist concerns, Assam

Sophocles happens to be one of the major tragedians of Greek dramatic literature whose works mark as the central foundation of ancient Greek literary scholarship projecting deep contemplation of conflict between fate and duty fostering a profound sense of human suffering. Among the seven existing plays of Sophocles, *Antigone* can be considered as a fundamental dramatic piece showcasing the eternal conflict between the moral law and the state law, human dignity, the agency of power and authority including significance of moral courage to overcome tragic situations. It is needless to say that the play *Antigone* propagates the contradiction between Creon's stubbornness towards his civic law against Antigone's strong resolution to break it by elevating her moral obligation to provide a proper burial to her brother, Polynices against Creon's prohibition.The tussle for power between Eteocles and Polynices, the sons of King Oedipus of Thebes after his death, leadsboth the brothers to perish. Creon (their uncle) ascends the throne forbidding the burial of Polynices, labeling him as a traitor.

Antigone, the Greek play by Sophocles written in 441 BC is termed as a classic because it portrays universal conflicts in the individual as well as the society inspiring diverse adaptations through numerous re-visions exploring a broad spectrum of historical and cultural contexts. Mee and Foley in "Mobilizing *Antigone*" chart the multiple rewritings of the play across the non-western world with issues like human rights, political freedom, conflict, self-expression and power struggles which get re-contextualized in the contemporary performances. The authors observe, "*Antigone* is perhaps the only play, classical or modern, to have been (re) produced all over the world, and an enormous number of these productions have

reconceived and remade the play to address modern, local and in some cases international and global-issues and concerns" (Mee & Foley 1). Additionally, Mee and Foley assert about the articulation of regional identity against the 'national identity' culture in Manipur through two productions of *Antigone*. One of the productions directed by Nongthombam Premchand in 1995 and the other in 2004, by Kshetrimayum Jugindro Singh (Mee & Foley 107-14) can be argued to have provided a familiar backdrop for adaptations of *Antigone* from north-east India facilitating Rabijita Gogoi and Papari Medhi to accommodate the reception of their versions of *Antigone* in contemporary Assam.The present paper, therefore, focuses on the use of postdramatic theatricality in these two performances of *Antigone* to address the feminist issues reflected in accordance with contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

Karen Jürs-Munby in her "Introduction" to the English translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* observes that " Lehmann's theory of postdramatic theatre is testament to a new emphasis on performance…from the 1960s onwards,which consequently led to a paradigm shift in the study of theatre" (Lehmann 4). According to Lehmann, 'postdramatic' is the 'new theatre text' which is 'no longer dramatic' text but has shifted to a 'performance text' with 'newest theatre developments' in contemporary theatre practices (Lehmann 17-19).With the emergence of feminist theatre, theorists tend to describe this form as "Productions and scripts characterised by consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performance (written and acted) that deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power …and the creation of women characters in the subject position" (Keyssar 1). As such, this paper examines the re-incarnation of the classical play with fresh representations based on recent theoretical perspectives.Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) describes the postdramatic text as an alteration from the text-based and plot-driven theatrical aesthetics. He farther argues that postdramatic theatre adopts a specific design of creating the performance text which might be pre-existing or written, but performed in an unconventional manner. Here, the text functions as an autonomous sign system adopting visual and sonic aspects to overthrow structured narrative and linear plot.Another theatre critic and theorist, Carlson in "Postdramatic Theatre and Postdrmatic Performance" articulates the distinction between 'dramatic text/linguistic text' and 'performance text' to clarify that postdramatic is not drama without any text but something more and beyond traditional theatrical staging.

In connection with the subversion of text in postdramatic theatre Rabijita Gogoi provides a refreshing reinterpretation in *Antigone Mania* making a postdramatic de-hirarchization of the 'dramatic text' of the Greek play *Antigone* by Sophocles that improvises into a 'performance text'.*Antigone Mania* performed in 2023 in Guwahati, Assam by Jirsong Theatre group is no longer the original Greek text by Sophocles but it is re- designed as a performance text based on John Anhui's French adaptation of Sophocles' Greek Tragedy *Antigone*. Carlson points out that the "theatrical deconstruction of classic texts" is one of the most significant traits of postdramatic performances. Rabijita Gogoi, in her directorial note to the performance piece *Antigone Mania*, states that "I want to re-tell the character of Antigone in a way that fits the contemporary world. I think Antigone has a lot to say about the contemporary world, as she did what the real character could have done at the time" (Gogoi 42). This representation reimagines the classical play from new angles, exceptional ingenious scenes and actions. The director incorporates public dialogue in place of the traditional chorus rendering a scene where people gather in a salon to discuss Antigone's capture. In another scene people read newspapers to analyse Creon's retribution of Antigone and her peril from multiple standpoints. Unlike the original play where the public is silent, this adaptation chooses to break down the power structure foregrounding the active role of the common people to judge Creon's act. The dialogues during newspaper reading are framed in a way to depict the real picture of media coverage in recent times where a common

man is mostly mislead and misinformed in the politically charged environment. The director consciously upholds the public discourse in order to destabilize the dominant power-play, consequently invoking feminist tendencies in the play.Rabijita allows the common man to question the authority which dishonours the dead body. Here, Gogoi designs the protagonist not simply as a rebel or revolutionary but as someone who is responsible for social change. Gogoi portrays women's contribution towards "collective growth" and "collective change" in the society through Antigone's realistic revolutionary spirit. Certain transformations are made to facilitate the re- contextualization of the play. Gogoi shifts her primary focus on Antigone, the character, omitting particular scenes from the original play like the romantic tale between Haemon and Antigone, the prophet character Tiresias and the act of suicide by Creon's wife, Eurydice.Contextualizing Antigone as a bold tribal woman the director recreates and re-shapes her identity in a scene where she points a gun towards Creon; asserting powerful feminist connotations.

Gogoi renders the application of indigenous attire, appearance and language, clothing her Antigone in Karbi traditional dress. In Gogoi's reproduction, Antigone and the common people are dressed in tribal attires whereas Creon and his men are dressed in formal western dress (shirt-pant). This sense of dressing conveys the dichotomy of foreign versus local, ruler versus ruled, justice versus injustice and obligation versus punishment. The chorus is replaced with a narration of the plot from backstage.The play begins with a group of characters expressing a situation of extreme turmoil and evil, shrouded with acoustical music (Karbi folk music)creating a catastrophic atmosphere and evoking an eerie sensation through panic expressions and bodily movements (floor movements) to expresstension, sorrow and suffering. Towards the end, *Antigone Mania* embodies another unusual kitchen scene where Creon cooks, designed for an outburst of his frustration brought about by his greed and desire. His emotions explode in an uncustomary fashion as he throws the cooked food all around the kitchen.An end to end circular pattern is drawn from the first scene where the characters remain separated to the last scene getting unified for an optimistic ending. Gogoi's Antigone stands in between this circle enveloping multi-dimensional perspectives. Possibly, it's here that the feminist framework in Rabijita's Antigone operates, as Antigone says, "Again and again I am born in Yemen, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Palestine… I grow like grass whenever human rights are violated and wherever abuses occur in the form of gender and racial discrimination…" Subhra Jyoti Neog admires this circular movement of *Antigone Mania* as he says that "This contrast between the bleakness of the first scene and the optimistic symbolism of the last enhances the performance quality of *Antigone Mania*" (Neog 12). In order to add contemporariness, the characters on stage use mobile phones to communicate. The last speech of Antigone decodes the essence of humanity, echoing her desire to live in peace, justice and freedom. Interestingly, Gogoi allows media persons with mikes and cameras to record Antigone's words seeking not power but tolerance, to claim rights and assured existence.

Almost Antigone is another innovative performance project that revisits the traditional form of *Antigone* applying contemporary theoretical framework experimented by Papari Medhi from Assam. Medhi makes an unconventional use of the theatrical space through her unique form called 'performed conversations'. In *Almost Antigone*, she manifests an experimental dramaturgy to have a consistent engagement with the spectators focusing to transform the passive audience into active participants, a kind of 'role reversal' throughout the performance process. In addition to this, the theatre making becomes lively, vibrant and flexible as the audience rigorously participate in knowledge sharing with the performer on stage.Papari herself admits that "My audience first come to watch the play but gradually become a part of it. By essaying the role of co-performers they turn into responsive audience from silent spectators" (Goswami 2).Papari Medhi's renovation in *Almost Antigone* is a theatre solo enacting and conveying meaning using her 'body' and 'voice modulation' to startle the audience (Baruah 3).In her performance text, she blends realistic

elements with the tales of fantasy, coming in and out of the plot of the traditional play *Antigone*. She prefers to switch the character roles, shifting to be Creon at a time, then being Antigone at once and again being Isemene. Her exceptional re-incarnation denies any fixed identity or casting any fixed role to the performer.An eminent theatre critic Samhita Baruah observes that "Papari Medhi usedspaces in a corner of a large room in such a way that people were given choices of floor, benches and chairs to sit. Her own set was a chair and props included a bag, one black stole and a tambourine" (Baruah 3). Here, the director-performer negates any hierarchy between the performer and the audience as they are in the same floor, receiving the same light, the same sensation outpoured during the performance.Moreover, she argues on the feminist stand of Papari Medhi as "Papari's discourse to address the contemporary issues of being for or against the grain of the world came through brilliantly. Her own feminist positionality from a subaltern context of being hindidhekemiya created the context of the performative conversation" (Baruah 3).

Medhi deconstructs the power structures and convention of injustice believing that resistance must come from the personal level. Her primary focus rests on the character of Antigone as a self who is resisting the power dynamics. It can be argued that 'performed conversations' as a theatrical form is in itself a feminist interpretation of the existing gender discrimination in everyday life.Papari mentions about her form as experimental as she says "I love to experiment in order to involve the audience in a variety of ways. I love to add some fresh and unique elements in my works" (Goswami 6). In addition to this, Minakshi Bujarbaruah considers Papari Medhi's endeavors as an alternative theatre exploring diverse 'modes of resistance', against marginalization. She quotes a notable co-actor of Medhi, Banamallika, who believes theatre as a powerful tool to overcome disparities in her own words "Banamallika sees Performed Conversations as a feminist project that is attempting to break notions of theatre in its practice itself… In fact, in many cases, the gender of the character itself remains unknown" (Bujarbaruah 4).

It becomes vivid and prominent that Papari Medhi's exceptional creativity allows us to reconsider the world of Antigone in connection to contemporary realities of day to day existence thereby acknowledging the triumph of her personal experiences and encounters in her theatre. Her form registers as a radical investigation of self-introspection in relation to identity and selfhood.

From this discussion on adaptations of *Antigone* in Assam, it can be concluded that the use of postdramatic theatrical techniques facilitates to highlight feminist tendencies in resonance to contemporary contexts. Both the plays transgress linguistic barriers. Both the plays display distinct ideas and issues concerning the female self, prioritising Antigone- the character…the outspoken self, voicing against injustice that evolves from her classical incarnation to the contemporary one. These innovative stagings thus help for critical engagement of a classical play in the postmodern times enabling to comprehend the universality of such texts. The classic play continues to express and influence the present age in an inventive and creative manner through the adaptations. It becomes essential to read these theatrical reproductions through contemporary theories so that classics align to present day realities echoing their timeless significance. Therefore, *Antigone*, competes to receive due recognition in contemporary context through its feminist postdramatic explorations.

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Re-visioning the Flâneur: Gender, Space, and the Conceptual Re-Making of a Modern Classic Archetype

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Abstract

Canonically, the flâneur has been ascribed a masculine function, emerging as a figure of urban modernity whose aimless wanderings and visual mastery have come to stand for the modern metropolitan experience as a whole. Often classified as a theoretical 'classic', this privileged location is sustained through critical repetition and socio-political structures that have conditioned and organised modernist discourse. The paper interrogates this 'classic' position of the flâneur, postulating the absence of the flâneuse as a critical gap within narratives of canonical modernity. By problematising the validity of masculine frameworks to assess female spatial practices, the paper rereads the flâneur as a discursive construct whose authority rests on selective recognition and exclusion. In doing so, the flâneuse provides the critical lens through which the ideological foundations associated with dominant narratives of modernity may be reassessed.

Keywords: flanerie, gender, feminist frameworks, urban modernity, spatiality

The figure of the male stroller, also known as the *flâneur*, has long occupied a critical position in the accounts of urban modernity as a definitive touchstone of the modern condition vis-à-vis the metropole. Emanating from Charles Baudelaire's physiological taxonomies pertaining to nineteenth-century Paris, wherein women feature not as observers, but as *objects* of male observation, their "sinuous gait" part of the street's spectacle rather than its authorship (11),and reproduced by Walter Benjamin, who lauded the flâneur's capacity to remain "hidden from the world" without interrogating who that privacy was available to (*Arcades Project* 443),the flâneur has come to represent a mode of modern experience and spectatorship characterised by mobility, anonymity, and disengaged observation. Over time, this archetype has gained canonical legitimacy within literary and critical theory, often functioning as an emblem of the metropolitan experience. However, the elevation of the flâneur to the plane of tradition isn't an inevitable outcome. Rather, it materialises from the interaction of various social systems and historically constituted structures that organised access to urban spacealong gendered lines, and, in turn, hegemonised how the metropolis and its representative figures were critically received.

The paper attempts to argue that the flâneur's consolidation as a quintessential figure of modernity remains inseparable from the historical marginalisation of women within urban discourse and from the prevalent conditions under which modern experience was theorised. Instead of focusing on a single canonical text, the paper approaches the flâneur as a "classic" of modernity, often legitimised through critical tradition, pedagogical repetition, and its perpetuation as a benchmark for interpreting urban spatial formations. Feminist critics have consistently substantiated that the prerequisites associated with the traditional model of flanerie—mobility characterised by leisure and anonymity and visual authority—have always been distributed unevenly along gendered lines. The oft-cited impossibility of a female other (the flâneuse) to the flâneur gestures at more than a representational imbalance, highlighting a deeper limitation within the

original configuration. This paper, therefore, does not seek to assimilate women into a masculine-coded paradigm of urban visuality and spectatorship, but to interrogate its status as the standard to further show it was produced and legitimised through a process of exclusion.

The Flâneur as a Canonical Figure of Modernity

It was Baudelaire who sculpted the flâneur definitively for the first time in his essay, *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863). His articulation of the flâneur, as uniquely attuned to the varied rhythms of the modern urban existence, establishes the flâneur as a natural denizen of the cityscape. Described as *a man* of the crowd, an aesthete wandering the streets of nineteenth-century Paris, while making astute observations about his surroundings, the flâneur distils the eternal from the evanescent, in order to seize that 'indefinable something' we identify as modernity (Baudelaire 12). Walter Benjamin further appends to this an "ambulatory gaze" and "botanising on the asphalt" within the spatial geography of the emerging Parisian arcades (*The Writer of Modern Life* 68). Benjamin outlines him as a man armed with adequate visual agency, adapting to modernity's shifting modes of observation, which further allowed him to "abandon(s) himself to the phantasmagorias of the marketplace" (*Expose 1939* 14).

The recurrent utilisation of these formulations has ensured the flâneur's institutionalisation as a classic figure, making it a reference point of stability whose experience is posited as crucial for grasping the necessary resonances of the modern condition. For instance, Edgar Allen Poe's "Man of the Crowd" (1840) delivers this point of stability, where, as Benjamin assures, the flâneur's type is fixed "for the first time and forever afterward" (*Arcades Project* 418). Poe's prototype enjoys a privilege of invisibility whilst navigating the streets of London, which the text attempts to naturalise as unremarkable, precisely due to its masculine structure. But this doesn't necessarily imply the impossibility of a flâneuse, as has been proclaimed by various scholars. To be more precise, it makes it apparent that the flâneur's perspective is grounded in a distinct subject location, one that is shaped by gender, class and social legitimacy. Even Virginia Woolf's female narrator steps out, in "Street Haunting" (1927), but admittedly under the cover of a pretext – a pencil she needs to purchase, for female wanderings require a certain rationale to be legitimate. Therefore, further examination of these social and cultural conditions, deemed necessary to posit the flâneur as *the* norm, becomes pivotal for bringing the flâneuse into the picture.

Modernity, separate spheres and the 'private' woman

That flanerie is heavily characterised by gender becomes apparent when located within the ideology of separate spheres that predominated nineteenth-century thought. The "privatisation of personality" (Wolff 40) that led to a carefully crafted withdrawal and anonymity in the public arena was a privilege enjoyed exclusively by men. The discourse of modernity predominantly emphasised industrialisation, urbanisation, and technological advancement. Central to these 'public' narratives were the experiences and achievements of men, which were foregrounded in representations of modernity. Consequently, women were marginalised and pigeonholed into the private sphere of the home, a domain that received minimal recognition in the shaping of the modern experience. The exclusion of the private sphere from the discourse of modernity is further affirmed by Deborah Clarke, who argues that an "intense scrutiny of domesticity tapers off in regard to modern literature, a tacit indication that the domestic is not modern" (190). Hence Janet Wolff's notorious proclamation on the matter, "there's no question of inventing the flâneuse…for such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" (46). A female counterpart was structurally impossible for women in public, being as out of place as they were, were hyper-visible, subjects of moral scrutiny, and by consequence were denied the desired detachment to stroll aimlessly. Wolff's intervention exposed the 'partial view of modernity', partial in its excessive representation of the male experience at the cost of the female experience which was carefully guarded by a set of stringent limitations,

leading to a truncated understanding of the urban modernity as social experience. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that though Wolff foregrounds historical limitations, such positions risk reifying the flâneur as the undisputed norm.

An acknowledgement of women's exclusion without questioning the epistemological privilege of the male stroller leaves the figure, structurally and counterintuitively, uncontested. Studying women's absence while omitting male privilege bolsters the very hierarchy it seeks to critique. Subsequent feminist scholars have complicated Wolff's argument by mapping women's movement within the urban sphere without contradicting the restrictions they faced. Lauren Elkin posits, "(W)e can talk about social mores and restrictions, but we cannot rule out the fact that women were there; we must try to understand what walking in the city meant to them. Perhaps the answer is not to attempt to make a woman fit a masculine concept, but to redefine the concept itself" (11). The question, then, becomes not of contemplating the existence of the flâneuse within the established pathways of male flanerie; instead, it is more concerned with how women have forged connections with their respective cities and created alternative pathways suitable to their needs.

Gendered Spaces and Places of Leisure

Urban visibility stands as more than an abstraction. It is produced by the physical environment of the city and the socio-cultural regulation that follows. Therefore, as the ideology of separate spheres neatly positioned women within the ambit of home, their presence in the public streets required a visible justification, which was often linked to activities that could be viewed as extensions of the domestic, i.e. shopping, running errands or domestic labour. In the absence of such grounds, a woman's presence in the public sphere became a site of moral scrutiny, effectively transforming the city into a hostile environment for female leisure. A critical reassessment of the flâneur, therefore, not only warrants identifying how visibility is indistinguishably connected to the spatial organisation of the modern city, but also the gendered distribution of leisure within it.

Various scholars have emphasised the incomprehensibility of leisure in the absence of theorisation of place, creating an active distinction between the concept of space and place. Space cannot be mistaken for neutral backdrops for social activity. It is actively produced through power relations that monitor access, behaviour, and legitimacy. Hence, leisure goes beyond the idea of free time, it is spatially conditioned practice. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of western urban spaces mirrored patriarchal socio-political arrangements. City streets, arcades, cafés etc. were planned in accordance with patterns of male mobility and commerce, encouraging forms of leisure that were contingent on anonymity which furthered the required purposelessness critical to flanerie.

Female access to such spaces was constrained by cultural expectations of propriety and domestic responsibility. Uneven spatial organisation often transformed the female experience of leisure into an intricate, precarious activity. Hence, leisure becomes a site of social conflict and the "pleasure of one becomes the discomfort of another," (Mowl & Towner 112). The very meaning of leisure gets transformed when it comes to women. Concerns regarding safety, social judgement, and consistent surveillance, render the original design of the flâneur meaningless. Understanding leisure as a gendered spatial practice illuminates why flanerie emerged as a masculine privilege rather than a universal urban experience. The freedom that characterises the flâneur was not an inherent feature of the modern city, but a condition produced through spatial arrangements that privileged male bodies while coding women's movement as conspicuous and contested.

The "gaze" and urban spectatorship

Another aspect of flanerie that lends a critical lens to the practice is visuality itself. The flâneuric authority is highly contingent on a specific economy of vision: the ability to observe without being observed. Women's experience in the city has historically been shaped by the condition of being seen, evaluated, and scrutinised, making undetected mobility a dream.

Baudelaire illustrates this visual imbalance in his poem, "À unepassante" (tr.To A Passerby) (1857). The poem charts a fleeting visual interaction between the male observer/speaker and a female passer-by/object wherein their eyes lock for a moment; a charged atmosphere colours the encounter, though the narrative authority for the course of the entire interaction remains firmly with the poet. The *passante's* gaze is acknowledged only insofar as it contributes to *his* experience. What remains of her is a visual inventory, "leg… like a statue's", "glittering hand", and "the hem and flounces of her skirt". Devoid of a name and interiority, she is assembled from fragments. She does not look at the city.Her eyes are described in terms of their effect on him, not as a perspective of their own.The poem, therefore, epitomises a broader visual hierarchy that characterised urban modernity and continues to influence present day narratives.

Both Laura Mulvey and John Berger have been credited with theorising aspects of the male gaze. Mulvey views the world as ordered by a 'sexual imbalance' that leads to the creation of a hierarchy in looking (63). This dynamic is rooted in a phallocentric system, where men are positioned as active participants in the visual economy and women have been relegated to passive roles. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger discusses the difference between the social presence of men and women, stating: "A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies…a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her." (46).

Combined, these assertions emphasise how the act of seeing itself gets implicated in power relations. When women are concerned, the perpetual awareness of being seen complicates the possibility of detached observation. To hypothesise a gaze that is decidedly female, instead of reproducing the male ambulator's visual authority, it becomes crucial to accommodate aspects specific to the female experience, such as deliberation, self-awareness, and resistance. The flâneuse's gaze, therefore, emerges from a location of heightened visibility, allowing the figure to interact with the city in methods that expose its gendered and power structures, rather than masking them.

Walking Out of the Frame: New Maps for the Modern Flâneuse

To argue that the flâneur is the unquestioned canonical authority in the modern urban imagination is a problem for various feminist frameworks, including those employed in this paper, which seek to unveil how that authority is discursively constituted. The feminist re-readings and studies introduce a new figure of the flâneuse, not in order to fill in a representational lacuna but to interrogate the ideological conditions that made such gaps invisible and acceptable.

Since Wolff several scholars have weighed in on her movements: Griselda Pollock who outright denied her existence, has contended that a female stroller, with similar contours as her male analogue isn't viable, and reiterates the futility of substituting one subject position for the other (100). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century city, female visibility in the public sphere was minimal, with rare appearances often labelled as indicative of questionable character. "I mean this: the flâneur was simply the name of a man who loitered", Susan Buck-Morssargues, "but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores, as the term "street-walker," or "tramp" applied to women makes clear" (119). Yet, these oversimplified characterisations warrant critical re-examination. Restricting women's urban movements to labels such as "prostitute" or "streetwalker" overlooks the fact that many women, across various stages of modernity, navigated the city without adhering to these identities. Tracing a steady increase in female pedestrian acts from the 1890s, Liz Connor cites 1920s footage where women "no longer scuttle through the streets shielding themselves with their hats, as if dreading the possibility of being seen. Rather, they walk erect, their comportment suggesting an outward-directed gaze, encountering and negotiating the gaze of the others" (46).

The paper has attempted to problematise the validity of masculine frameworks to question and evaluate female spatial practices. As there is no homogeneity of experience between the two, can a

singular model possibly be utilised to study the involvement of men and women alike concerning the city? While it is true that the socio-economic conditions made it difficult for women to be on the streets in the same numbers and capacity as men, they still made it.Away from the flâneur's imposing detached, voyeuristic gaze the female stroller experiences the metropolis as a site of safety and reclaimed agency. The study therefore, reinforces the argument that the flâneur does not exist as a definitive historical artefact, but a discursive concept that can be subject to revisions to remain relevant in today's socio-political and cultural framework.For as Elkin has indicated, "(T)he joy of walking in the city belongs to men and women alike" (11).

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Reimagining Home and Identity in *The Odyssey*: A Diasporic Approach

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Abstract

The present paper endeavours to re-envision *The Odyssey* as an archetypal discourse on displacement and migratory experience, characterised by a profound exploration of identity, home, and belonging. Through a diasporic paradigm, Odysseus's exilic life mirrors contemporary diasporic existence wherein the classical principles of 'xenia'(hospitality) and 'nostos'(homecoming) are challenged and redefined. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Avatar Brah and Homi Bhabha, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines classical literary analysis with insights from postcolonial and diasporic studies. As one of the most emblematic narratives of Western literature, *The Odyssey* attains its status as a classic through its timeless engagement with universal human concerns-home, identity, and belonging-that continue to resonate across diverse cultural contexts and historical periods. Odysseus is a prototypical character in whose journeys and ordeals, all of mankind has found universal patterns and possible resolutions to migratory phenomena which humans experienced regularly.

Keywords : classic, diaspora, home, identity, belonging,

Introduction

The Odyssey, written by Homer in the 8th century BCE, is considered the most enduring classic in Western literature because of its exploration of universal themes like human endurance, identity, loyalty and search for home and belonging. Odysseus, the protagonist of the epic, illustrates the most exciting part of humanity in his nature - ingenious yet imperfect, brave yet profoundly vulnerable. The challenges he encountered during his perilous ten-year journey reflect the uncertainty of human existence, especially in the context of exile and return. The cultural and psychological depth of Odysseus's character, articulated through themes of memory, loss and homecoming, renders *The Odyssey* a touchstone for subsequent literary reflections on displacement and the quest for authentic belonging.

In contemporary theoretical perspectives, *The Odyssey* anticipates modern diasporic narratives which invigorate themes like quest for identity and belonging, nostalgia, cultural conflict and hybridity within the broader context of expanding transnational movement. Diaspora, in its most general sense, refers to a group of people who are displaced from their land of origin to diverse geographical locations in search of economic opportunities, political security or improved living conditions. According to Avatar Brah, the prominent diasporic theorist, diaspora functions as "an interpretative frame referencing the economic, political and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy (migrant, immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile)" (620). That is, Diaspora signifies not merely physical scattering of people from one place to another, but also encapsulates the intricate process of identity reconstruction, power relations and cultural negotiation embedded within the experiences of displacement. So, revisiting the classics like *The Odyssey* through contemporary diasporic perspectives illuminates the cultural and psychological dimensions of exile that resonate deeply with modern transnational movements.

The present study aims to explore how the ancient text *The Odyssey* dramatises the diasporic

tension between the longing for home and the reconfiguration of identity within the space of exile and displacement. Analysing the text within the broader theoretical parameters of diaspora studies, the research contends that The Odyssey transcends its surface narrative of heroic adventures to an archetypal discourse of diaspora that explains the fluid, negotiated and often fragmented meanings of home and belonging.

Classical Context: *The Odyssey* and the Myth of Nostos

Homer's Greek epic, *The Odyssey,* not only recounts the heroic adventures of Odysseus on hisarduous journey back to Ithaca, after the Trojan War, but also encapsulates the profound complexities and tensions involved in exile and its eventual homecoming. Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, after winning the historic Trojan war between the Greeks and the city of Troy, returns to his land of origin, Ithaca. But this journey was not easy as it was constantly deflected by divine interventions, monstrous adversaries and temptations, and it took nearly ten years of trial by fire before he could finally return home.The core of this narrative lies in the theme of 'nostos' (homecoming) that signifies both a physical and a spiritual journey towards one's true self. In Greek mythology, 'nostos'characterises a hero's social and moral obligations to society, family and 'oikos'(household)after years of separation. Likewise, the Homeric hero Odysseus's return to home reflects his unwavering desire to reaffirm his identity and restore his country's social order, which has fallen into chaos during his absence.

Odysseus' homecoming stands in contrast to that of other Homeric heroes such as Achilles and Agamemnon. Achilles, the legendary demigod warrior in the Iliad, chooses 'kleos' (undying glory)over the prospect of returning home, while Agamemnon's return to home is marked by betrayal and death. Unlike Agamemnon and Achilles, for Odysseus, home is a place of identity, belonging and the reinstatement of order.So,the differing conceptions of home posited by each of these Homeric heroes suggest that'home' is not a uniform ideal but a varying cultural conception deeply shaped by personal values and lived experiences.

The backdrop of *The Odyssey*, particularly the sea and the series of mythical and fantastical islands, serves as the symbolic representation of the liminal space associated with displacement, where the character Odysseus undergoes profound psychological and moral transformations. Jack Zipes's *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* observes that *liminal* space in textual landscapes, such as islands, desolate landscapes, or blurred realities, coerces characters to confront their deepest fears and contradictions. These spaces evoke transformation through symbolic and narrative techniques that challenge the fixed perception of reality.For example, Ogygia, Calypso's island in *The Odyssey*, represents the temptation to assimilate into a foreign culture through the complete denial of one's past and cultural roots.In contrast, Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians, functions as a very positive transnational space where Odysseus is able to negotiate both his past and present. Odysseus's encounters with these different cultural thresholds make him a diasporic figure who negotiates multiple cultural identities while continually redefining his sense of belonging and selfhood.

The story of Odysseus parallels contemporary narrative on displacement and migration, which highlights identity crisis, nostalgia, search for home and cultural hybridity. The physical and psychological journey of Odysseus through different transnational spaces reveals the tensions and complexities involved in diaspora-the intense homing desire, fractured identity, xenophobia and the realisation that return never restores what was lost. Thus, the classical Greek epic *The Odyssey* goes beyond its mythical setting to reflect the universal experience of searching for belonging and living associated with contemporary transnational movements.

Reimagining Ithaca:Home as a Myth in *The Odyssey*

In *The Odyssey*, Ithaca, the native land of Odysseus, exists not merely as a physical space but also as an imagined construct that protects the subject from the immensity of loss and despair during his exile. "Nevertheless I long-I pine, all my days-/ to travel home and see the dawn of my return" (Homer, bk. 5, lines

242-43)**.** In these lines, Odysseus reflects on how a person's longing for home and belonging keeps him moving forward even in the midst of pain and loss.As long as Odysseus remains displaced from Ithaca, he experiences a profound sense of psychological trauma from leaving his homeland and family behind.In order to transcend this psychological destruction, he creates an idealised or imagined version of his home as a "protective covering" that provides an emotional resilience and a sense of continuity in the context of his sustained displacement. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avatar Brah conceptualises this intense emotional yearning for home and belonging in diasporic individuals as a "homing desire" (189), emphasising it as an affective orientation rather than the actual physical act of return. Avatar Brah argues that 'home' is a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination", and which is a place of "no return" (188-89). Odysseus's desire for Ithaca is the result of his diasporic imagination, wherein he idealised home as a site of emotional anchorage, identity, safety and love.

But when Odysseus returns to Ithaca, he realises that his idealised home doesn't meet reality. The home, which he had believed was the site of belonging and security, instead reveals itself as a space of destruction and anarchy. His court is plagued by strangers, while both his wife and son are pushed to the margins of their own domain. The disjunction between Odysseus's idealised home and the reality he encounters during his return signifies Homi Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" (*The world and the Home* 141), a psychological instability experienced by the diasporic individual within his own homeland. Diasporic people often feel out of place or not at home in themselves due to the disorienting coexistence of theknown and the unknown, which blurs the boundaries between belonging and estrangement. Odysseus's return and his encounter with the altered reality of home reveal that, for a diasporic subject, home is a fractured and hybrid space of location rather than an unproblematic site of comfort and security.

From a diasporic perspective, *The Odyssey* reflects the modern realisation that 'home' is a product of memory and nostalgia rather than a geographical space. Moreover, Odysseus's homecoming substantiates one of the major concerns of postcolonial discourses that, the impossibility of diasporic subjects to return to, or restore, an unchanged home. Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Home lands* explains how writers like himself, "exiles or emigrants or Ostracizes"(10), recreate their own home through memory and imagination, even though it is clear that they "won't be equipped for recovering absolutely what was lost" (10).Similarly, many postcolonial diasporic narratives like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters*, and V. S Naipaul's *A House of Mr Biswas* reimagine Odysseus's realisation that home is less a destination than a myth- a symbolic space through which the dialectic between past and present is negotiated.

Odysseus- The Man of Many Turns

As one of the earliest embodiments of the diasporic self, Odysseus's identity was in a constant state of flux and change throughout his journey.Being 'a man of many turns' and the one who privileges 'metis'(cunning intelligence) over bia (force), Odysseus was capable of modifying and reconfiguring his identity according to various situations. This inherent flexibility is already evident in the Iliad, where his diplomatic speeches and strategic conception of the Trojan Horse reveal an adaptability deeply ingrained in his character. Consequently, Odysseus's journey from Troy to Ithaca brings this fluid self to its fullest expression,as his encounters with various places and their inhabitants compel him to enact and negotiate multiple modes of being.

Homer's very first descriptive epithet to Odysseus as "polytropos" in *The Odyssey* hints at the continuing identity transformation and negotiation that he encounters in the transnational journey from Troy to Ithaca in the form of 'Cyclops', 'Circe' and the other culturally and morally challenging figures.The entire journey of Odysseus from Troy to Ithaca once againde stabilises his fixed identity as the legendary king of Ithaca to a great survivor of exile who negotiates all the challenges of an identity crisis and cross-cultural exchange.

The Cyclops' island inhabited by a race of one-eyed giant shepherds like Polyphemus stands in sharp contrast to Odysseus's traditional Greek culture which was dominated by the principles of 'Xenia' (hospitality) and communal social order. "lawless brutes, who trust so to the everlasting Gods/ They never plant with their own hand or plow the soil" (Homer, bk. 9, lines 199-120). It is a land devoid of social norms and ethical codes where its denizens practice cannibalism as a normalised behaviour. When Odysseus and his troop arrive on this island in search of shelter and goodwill,the cyclops get enraged, grab two of them and consume them without any concern for moral restraint and hospitality.Soon Odysseus and his men realise that they are trapped in Polyphemus' cave of violence and savagery.

In light of Avatar Brah's concept of 'Diaspora space', the Polyphemes cave exhibits the very nature of a contemporary diaspora space where the interaction of the host (Polyphemus) and the migrant (Odysseus and his troops)takes place.According to Avatar Brah, "Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes, it is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (208).As Avatar Brah's 'diaspora space' suggests, within Polyphemus'cave, Odysseus and Polyphemes, people who belong to different races and classes, share the same environment and interact, contest and at times engage in violent conflicts.The encounter between the Greek moral and civic order represented by Odysseus and the pre-political, non-Hellenic existence embodied by Polyphemus culminates in a violent confrontation of devouring Odysseus' men and the blinding of Polyphemus, the lord of the Cyclopes. Meanwhile, within this hostile diaspora space, Odysseus sheds his identity as Odysseus, son of Laertes, and King of Ithaca to 'Nobody'. "Nobody-that's my name. Nobody-/ so my mother and father call me, all friends"(Homer, bk. 9, lines 410-11). Odysseus realises the threat of being 'other' in this foreign land and attempts to assimilate into new cultural hierarchies of the host world by converting his high status and power into a nameless subservient of Polyphemes.Thus, Odysseus's renaming or transformation into a low status signifies a diasporic metamorphosis- a state of being both self and 'other' simultaneously.

Similarly, Aeaea, the land of Circe, also marks an important episode in Odysseus's on going identity transformation. Aeaea is a mystical place ruled by the goddess Circe, who holds the power of transforming men into animals through deception or the use of enchanted potions.Upon Odysseus and his companions' arrival on this land, Circe uses her magical power and converts Odysseus's companions into pigs. "She struck them with her wand, drove them into her pigsties/ all of them bristling into swine-with grunts/ snouts -even their bodies" (Homer, bk. 10. Lines 262-64).But Odysseus escapes from her enchantment and manages to establish a friendly accord with her.

Odysseus's association with Circe subverts his patriarchal masculinity into a diasporic hybrid self. Circe, the divine woman, commands the entire realm of Aeaea alone with her tamed beasts and with no father, brother or spouse. Existing beyond the normative structures of kinship and subordination, she defies the traditional gender roles in which men command and women obey.Initially, Odysseus's Greek masculine identity conflicts with a woman who occupies superior power and authority. He resolves to enact violence against her to assert his patriarchal agency. "But I, I drew my sharp sword sheathed at my hip/ and rushed her fast as if to run her through" (Homer, bk. 10. Lines 357-58). Yet Circe's calm and sovereign command soon neutralises this posture, destabilising his authority. "She eased me into a tub and bathed me…" (Homer, bk. 10. Line 389) Here,'bathing' symbolises a rebirth of Odysseus from his prior heroic self to a new hybrid identity that merges both hero and lover, conqueror and captive, rational man and mythic participant.

Homi K Bhabha's theory of 'third space' explains the emergence of a hybrid identity from an in-between position where cultural differences intersect and negotiate each other. "It is that Third space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial

unity or fixity" (Bhabha 37). Circe's island represents a third space where Odysseus's Greek masculine self-negotiates with the feminine world of enchantment and power. Circe disrupts conventional binaries embedded in Odysseus' phallocentric identity- man/woman, human/divine, and civilised/barbaric- and generates a new kind of hybrid identity that transcends binarised structures of cultural and gender identity.

So, throughout his journey, Odysseus' encounters with the 'other' in various cultural contact zones destabilise the fixed boundaries between self and other and situate him within a liminal intercultural space where identity remains fluid and is continuously reshaped.

Conclusion

Rereading *The Odyssey* through contemporary diasporic theory posits that home is a fluid, emotional and imaginative construct rather than a fixed geographical reality. Thus, Odysseus's Ithaca, similar to adiasporic homeland, symbolises an ideal is edlocus of yearning and remembrance that embodies the diasporic tension between memory and reality, belonging and estrangement. During his exile, Odysseus under goes profound identity transformations that he had already begun before his displacement, as exile compels the full enactment of his pre-existing adaptive and fluid sense of self. In the Cyclops episode, his shedding of identity to 'Nobody' and in the Circe episode his movement beyond a phallocentric heroic identity toward a more hybrid self, together illustrate how diasporic conditions accelerate the expression of this fluidity. Each episode of displacement redefined Odysseus's Greek heroic identity to a more flexible hybrid subjectivity, capable of mediating the ambiguities of belonging and otherness.

The convergence of classical and contemporary consciousness in *The Odyssey* affirms the text's timeless appeal in a world overseen by mass migration and cross-cultural exchange. In this sense, Homer's Odyssey is a profound meditation on the unresolved riddles of modern diasporic lives marked by the unending quest for identity and belonging.

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Re-ecologising the Canon: Oceanic Precarity in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Abstract

This essay re-ecologises Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) by rereading it through the lens of the Anthropocene and contemporary ecological thought. Moving beyond traditional humanist readings that celebrate stoic endurance and individual heroism, this study argues that its sustained engagement with the sea invites an ecological reinterpretation, centred on vulnerability, exposure, and interdependence. Drawing on Pramod K. Nayar's concept of ecoprecarity, the essay proposes 'oceanic precarity' as a specific instantiation of ecological vulnerability unique to marine environments. Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates how the sea functions as a dynamic and materially active ecology producing various forms of precarity—environmental, climatic, somatic, interspecific, and material.Santiago's prolonged exposure to ecological depletion, climatic attrition, bodily deterioration, species entanglement, and economic fragility foregrounds the cumulative nature of vulnerability in oceanic settings. Engaging with the work of Paul J. Crutzen and Dipesh Chakrabarty, the essay shows how Hemingway's novella registers Anthropocene anxieties surrounding overextraction, environmental finitude and species interdependence.

Keywords: classic, ecoprecarity, oceanic precarity, sea, Anthropocene

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) holds a distinguished place in the canon of twentieth-century American literature. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1953, the novella played a crucial role in securing Hemingway the Nobel Prize in 1954. As a modern classic, it is known for its stylistic economy and unflinching realism. It functions as a "touchstone" (95) work, exemplifying the standards of "high seriousness" and "truth" that Matthew Arnold famously associated with classic literature in his seminal work, "The Study of Poetry" (1880) (110). The work also frames minimalist prose as a literary ideal. Apart from that, the thematic exploration of stoic endurance against overwhelming odds makes its appeal truly universal and timeless. The novella's canonicity is reinforced through sustained institutional recognition, evident in its continued inclusion in syllabi worldwide and its extensive body of literary scholarship, testifying to its enduring influence on both pedagogical frameworks and modern literary aesthetics.

Critics have celebrated Santiago as a quintessential 'code hero' whose solitary battle with the marlin and the sea is a timeless allegory of courage, resilience, and grace under pressure.While traditional readings of *The Old Man and the Sea* emphasise individual heroism, the novella's status as a classic functions not as an endpoint but as a point of departure for reassessing its renewed relevance in the age of the Anthropocene and its ecological concerns.Its durability as a classic remains by soliciting new meanings that revitalise its significance with time. To read Hemingway today is to read him in an era marked by environmental degradation, climate change, and oceanic depletion. Therefore, the novella's intimate attention to the ocean, weather, currents, nonhuman agency, and somatic limits must be reinterpreted to understand its ecological dynamism and precarities.

The idea of the Anthropocene gained wide recognition in Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's article "The 'Anthropocene'" published in 2000 in the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) Global Change Newsletter, long after Hemingway wrote in the 1950s. In it, the authors emphasise the "growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere," arguing that such transformations mark "the central role of mankind in geology and ecology" (Crutzen and Stoermer484). Later, in his article "Geology of Mankind" (2002), Crutzen further consolidated this framework by identifying the Anthropocene as a geological epoch that "started in the latter part of the eighteenth century" and has since exerted a dominant impact on the planet's climate, ecosystems, and biospheric processes (23).In his book, *Ecoprecarity: Vulnerable Lives in Literature and Culture* (2019) Pramod K. Nayar writes, "the ecosystem of the earth and its various regions have been rendered fragile and precarious in the Anthropocene, and represented in terms of the degradation and destruction of habitats, animal populations, climate and Nature, which we have always taken for granted…" (8).The oceans, in particular, mark the Anthropocene through rising sea levels, depletion of marine life, species extinction, plastic pollution, ocean acidification, and unprecedented human interference in aquatic ecosystems. Nayar conceptualises 'ecoprecarity' as a condition concerning "precarious lives, those of humans and other life forms, within specific geographical and 'Natural' settings" (11). Although written long before ecological consciousness entered global discourse, *The Old Man and the Sea* registers thisprecarity embedded in the oceanic ecosystem.Drawing on Nayar's notion of ecoprecarity as the vulnerability of life within ecological settings, this essay proposes 'oceanic precarity' as a specific substantiation of ecoprecarity. While ecoprecarity encompasses environmental fragility across terrestrial, atmospheric, and aquatic contexts, oceanic precarity designates various forms of exposure, vulnerability and interdependence, unique to oceanic environments. The sea in Hemingway's novella functions as a complex ecology, marked by oceanic precarity across environmental, climatic, somatic, interspecific, and material dimensions.It is not merely a romantic or passive backdrop; it is a forceful, dynamic, volatile and materially active environment in which human and non-human existence is continually exposed to forces beyond its control.Santiago recognises the unpredictability of the sea, referring to it as "la mar," a capricious feminine presence he both loves and fears (Hemingway 26).It sustains as well as constrains his livelihood, bodily endurance, and ethical sensibilities.

The novella situates Santiago within a condition of oceanic precarity, manifested here as environmental precarity through ecological imbalance and declining sustainability caused by the progressive exhaustion of marine ecosystems. This reading is informed by Nayar's understanding of ecoprecarity as encompassing not only precarious human lives but also "the environment itself which is rendered precarious due to human intervention in the Anthropocene" (7). Santiago's livelihood is shaped by such ecological uncertainty: the depletion of local waters and inconsistent catches expose a fishing economy increasingly divorced from ecological reliability. The fact that the old man has gone "eighty-four days now without taking a fish" is not merely an index of bad luck or declining skill but signals a disrupted marine ecology in which abundance can no longer be assumed (Hemingway 5).The Gulf Stream, historically perceived as a zone of plenitude, here emerges as an increasingly unreliable environment, exposingfishing communities to economic fragility in the form of prolonged scarcity. Even after working for a week in the part of the ocean that was called the deep wells, "because there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms where all sorts of fish congregated," the old man found nothing (Hemingway25-26).This repeated failure underscores that precarity is cumulative rather than accidental. As Nayar observes, "precarity emerges over time as well, as the consequence of processes and practices" (9), clarifying how Santiago's experience registers the slow attrition of marine life rather than episodic misfortune.This ecological depletion is not merely a critical projection but aligns with Hemingway's own environmental consciousness. As Susan F. Beegel notes, Hemingway undertook "conservation efforts on

behalf of species in decline" (241) and became "concerned about dwindling populations of billfish … [calling] for a closed [hunting] season to protect marlin during their spawning run" (243). Fishing for survival thus becomes contingent upon an exhausted oceanic system that no longer guarantees sustainable return, a condition resonant with contemporary Anthropocene disruptions caused by climate change, overfishing, and industrial exploitation.The label *salao*, meaning "the worst form of unlucky," functions as a cultural misrecognition of this ecological crisis (Hemingway5). What is framed as personal misfortune masks a broader environmental condition in which fish stocks have thinned and extractive rhythms no longer align with human endurance and exigencies. Moreover, Santiago's refusal to release the marlin, despite recognising its overwhelming size, mirrors the Anthropocene logic of overextraction. Though driven by economic desperation rather than malice, his struggle becomes a microcosm of global human persistence in extraction despite mounting signs of planetary stress. In this context, Dipesh Chakrabarty's insistence on "the knowledge of humans as a species, a species dependent on other species for its own existence" in "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009) becomes particularly resonant, especially when he warns that altering oceanic conditions and "destroying the food chain are actions that cannot be in the interest of our lives" (219). Santiago's predicament, though localised and pre-industrial, anticipates this species-level entanglement in which human survival is inseparable from the health of marine ecologies. His poverty thus mirrors a declining marine economy symptomatic of ecological depletion.

The climate in *The Old Man and the Sea* contains no dramatic storm, but rather functions as an attritional force. Here, the oceanic climatic precarity emerges through sustained exposure to solar heat, nocturnal cold, variable currents, and the roughness of winds,exerting sustained pressure on Santiago's physical stamina and psychological endurance. Fishing, as Santiago practises it, is inseparable from an intimate knowledge of these climatic forces. His assertion, "Tomorrow is going to be a good day with this current," underscores how survival depends upon the ability to read and anticipate environmental conditions (Hemingway 10). Yet Santiago also recognises the instability of these elements, reflecting that "the wind is our friend… sometimes," and that the great sea contains both "our friends and our enemies" (120). His exposure to these elements dramatises how climate, long treated in literary criticism as a mere backdrop, emerges as an active force acting directly upon human life. This dynamic aligns with the central insight of the Anthropocene: climate is no longer simply a natural condition but a volatile system shaped by ongoing interactions between human and nonhuman processes.As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, climate can reach a "tipping point at which this slow and apparently timeless backdrop for human actions transforms itself with a speed that can only spell disaster for human beings," a formulation that clarifies the existential stakes of Santiago's exposure to the climatic elements in the sea (205).

Santiago's ageing body becomes a somatic site upon which the ecological forcesat the sea act: his hands cramp "almost as stiff as rigor mortis"; the fishing line cuts into his palms and face, drawing blood; the sun burns his skin and strains his eyes; the cold of the night made him shiver; his back aches to the point of numbness; and hunger steadily saps his strength (Hemingway 57). Here, precarity is experienced through the body, as evidenced by overexertion, injury, fatigue, debility, and the constant threat of breakdown under environmental stress.The hands, one of the most crucial body parts required for fishing,are vulnerable to cramping, bleeding, and stiffness, as was the case with Santiago, progressively diminishing his physical capacity to fully engage with the marlin and endure the prolonged demands of survival at sea.This condition reflects what Nayar describes as"[l]esions and abrasions, bruises and injuries [that] are literally the immanent and imminent mortality of the human made visible" (31). Vision is another crucial faculty required for fishing and survival within the oceanic ecosystem; however, the novella repeatedly underscores Santiago's visual deterioration, noting that he is "seeing black spots before his eyes" (Hemingway 86) and that "he could

only see well in flashes" (92). Prolonged sleep deprivation impaired his cognitive clarity, affecting his ability to think clearly. The narrative also depicts instances of Santiago gutting and consuming raw fish for survival,potentially affecting his gut health and at times making him feel nauseous. This exposes his digestive system to ptomaine poisoning and diarrhoea. Santiago's consumption of uncooked fish illustrates oceanic precarity, where survival within a hostile marine ecology necessitates bodily compromise, health hazard, and nutritional austerity.At one point in the narrative, Santiago's condition deteriorates to a critical point when he "could hardly breathe," experiences a "strange" (Hemingway 119) coppery taste in his mouth, and later admits that during the night he "spat something strange" and felt "something in [his] chest was broken," (126) signalling the internal bodily damage produced by prolonged oceanic labour. In fact, the narrative also seems intent on impressing upon the reader the ocean's radical precarity, where prolonged exposure may render death a tangible reality. Santiago momentarily accepts the possibility of dying—"You are killing me, fish" (92)—even as pain reasserts life, for "from his pain he knew he was not dead" (Hemingway 117).Such textualillustrations highlight the fragility and corporeal limits of the human body in the perilous oceanic environment.

The sea is populated by diverse species whose survival is entangled within a shared yet uneven ecology, producing conditions of oceanic precarity experienced interspecifically. Within this oceanic environment, vulnerability is not exclusive to humans but is distributed across species, each exposed to environmental contingencies and survival pressures. In this sense, the analysis resonates with Nayar's assertion that ecoprecarity "refuses… anthropocentrism" and instead foregrounds "the vulnerability of all life forms, their attendant ecosystems and relations between and across life forms/species" (14). In Hemingway's novella, Santiago, the marlin, and the sharks are rendered mutually vulnerable to forces beyond their control, even as their positions within the food chain differ.The sharks, often misread as antagonists, emerge instead as ecological participants whose predation follows natural imperatives rather than immoral design. Santiago's violent killing of multiple sharks to defend his catch, though compelled by necessity, subtly reinforces an anthropocentric logic in which human survival is privileged over marine life. Hemingway thus reveals a web of species dependency: the marlin is prey to sharks, Santiago depends on the marlin for livelihood, and all actants are tied to the sea for their survival. Santiago is exposed to continuous danger through violent interspecies encounters at sea. Beyond his prolonged struggle with the massive marlin, the predatory sharks' repeated assaults forced him to put up a desperate and dangerous defence of his catch. The Portuguese man-of-war, "with its long deadly purple filaments," threatens to leave his skin covered in welts and sores (Hemingway 33), while a sting from a stingray once "paralyzed the lower leg" (104) of the old man, producing unbearable pain. These encounters collectively illustrate how survival within the marine ecosystem entails constant negotiation with nonhuman life, where both coexistence, conflictare inseparable.

Santiago's struggle with the marlin is marked by a steady depletion of his material resources, foregrounding oceanic precarity not only as ecological exposure but also as economic vulnerability. To keep the marlin hooked, he is compelled to cut away "two hundred fathoms of good Catalan *cordel*," sacrificing hooks, leaders, and carefully prepared lines to the sea (Hemingway 49). The physical objects Santiago relies on, like his skiff and baits, are fragile and easily compromised. As the sharks attack, Santiago is progressively disarmed, losing first his harpoon to the sea, then the knife lashed to an oar when its blade snaps, and finally being reduced to a crude club and the boat's tiller, until every fishing tool is exhausted or lost,until his struggle becomes one of bare-bodied resistance against the sea.

"Hemingway was not an ecologist…. [or] ever an environmentalist" in its strictest sense, and he did not write *The Old Man and the Sea* as an ecological narrative; however, his deep attention to oceanic ecology and its precarities renders it legible as one (Beegel 242).In this light, the novella becomes a tale of environmental finitude that imperils human survival,

where the climate and marine lifeact as a continuous force testing human knowledge, endurance and bodily vulnerabilities.It reveals a fragile choreography of proximity, mutual risk, and a recognition of shared precarity across species inhabiting the interdependent pelagic world.While the sea acts as a nourisher, it also simultaneously extracts a material toll from fishermen, a paradox Santiago himself articulates when he observes, "Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive" (Hemingway 106).

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Nothing Truly Happens To Anyone: Identity, Internal Exile, and the Ethics of Care in *The Metamorphosis* with Assamese Literary Parallels

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Abstract

This paper re-examines Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* by foregrounding a crucial philosophical reversal: experience precedes identity. Rather than reading Gregor Samsa's transformation as a crisis of identity, allegory, or symbolic punishment alone, this paper argues that Kafka stages a world where experience exceeds the conceptual boundaries of the self that refer to the linguistic, social and interpretive frameworks through which experience is organized into a recognizable and coherent identity. Identity emerges belatedly, as an interpretive burden imposed by family, society and discourse. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, biopolitics, feminist ethics of care, and postcolonial notions of internal exile, the paper proposes that Gregor's suffering is not the result of who he is, but of how experience is retrospectively moralized and named as identity. The paper further places Kafka in dialogue with Assamese literary consciousness particularly texts by Homen Borgohain and Mamoni Raisom Goswami where bodily precarity, silence, and dispossession similarly precede identity formation. By reading *The Metamorphos* is alongside Assamese narratives of endurance and unseen suffering, the paper argues for Kafka's status as a classic that continues to illuminate how modern subjects come to be defined as identities only in the aftermath of experience.

Keywords: Kafka, identity, Assamese literature, psychoanalysis, biopolitics

Introduction:

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* satisfies the criterion of a classic through its radical destabilisation of meaning, identity, ethical responsibility and the resistance to closure and causality. Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect is less a fantastical event than an epistemological rupture. Its invitation and survival of multiple readings without cancelling any of its prior interpretations, allows the work to travel across cultures and structures without losing relevance. Gregor's sudden transformation has generated readings that emphasise psychological repression (Freud), existential absurdity (Camus), capitalist dehumanization (Marxist criticism) and symbolic abjection (Kristeva). While these interpretations contribute to the novella's canonical richness, they also share an implicit assumption: that identity is the primary site through which suffering acquires meaning.

This paper proposes a philosophical reversal of that assumption. It argues that *The Metamorphosis* stages experience prior to identity and that identity emerges only as a retrospective narrative imposed upon impersonal events. Gregor's transformation is not a meaningful event in itself, it becomes traumatic only when interpreted through social, familial, and economic frameworks that demand legibility and usefulness.

Methodologically, this paper draws on psychoanalysis, biopolitics (Foucault, 1978), feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984), and postcolonial notions of internal exile while remaining attentive to the textual economy of Kafka's prose. To broaden the interpretive field, the study places Kafka in dialogue with Assamese literary consciousness particularly the works of Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Homen Borgohain where suffering often precedes

identity formation and endurance replaces narrative resolution. At first glance, Kafka's modernist Europe and the socio-cultural landscapes of Assam appear historically and materially distinct. However, both these literary formations (Kafka and Assamese literary works) emerge from conditions where the subject is estranged from stable frameworks of meaning, whether through bureaucratic modernity, linguistic displacement, or socio-political marginalization. Kafka writes from a position of what minor literature theorises as linguistic and cultural non-sovereignty: a German-speaking Jew in Prague, inhabiting a language that is at once his own and not fully his and this instability in turn produces narratives where causality collapses and identity cannot anchor experience. Similarly, Assamese literary works particularly those of Homen Borgohain and Mamoni Raisom Goswami often arise from contexts marked by peripheralization within national discourse, economic precarity, and fractured social belonging. Here too, the subject does not precede experience as a coherent entity; rather, experience unfolds in excess of the interpretive structures available to contain it.

What binds these traditions cannot be confined to thematic resemblance alone; a shared epistemological hesitation i.e. a refusal or inability to fully translate lived experience into stable identity is also an element crucial to place both of these works on the same pedestal. In Kafka's work, this appears as the radical absence of causality - Gregor's transformation simply happens, without narrative justification whereas in Assamese texts, the same condition manifests through the slow violence of everyday life, where suffering accumulates without resolution or recognition. The difference is temporal rather than structural: Kafka condenses rupture into a singular, absurd incident, and Assamese narratives often disperse it across time, embedding it within social and material realities.

This comparison also reveals a critical asymmetry in how suffering is processed. Kafka exposes a world where meaning is withheld, forcing identity to chase experience retrospectively. Assamese literature, by contrast, often depicts worlds where meaning is over-determined by social codes – where identity is imposed too quickly, reducing lived experience into fixed categories such as widowhood, caste, or familial role. Yet in both cases, the result is the same: experience exceeds identity, either because it cannot be explained or because it is prematurely explained. In this sense, placing Kafka in dialogue with Assamese literature allows us to move beyond a Eurocentric reading of modernist alienation and recognise a broader, trans-cultural condition of internal exile; also Kafka does not merely "influence" or "parallel" Assamese writing; rather, both participate in a larger aesthetic and philosophical project: the articulation of experience prior to identity.

Experience without ownership: Kafka's Refusal of Causality

There is no narrative preparation, neither moral foreshadowing nor symbolic rationale in Kafka's opening sentence which establishes the philosophical terrain of the novella (Kafka, 1915).The traditional western narrative shaped by Aristotle assumes that a character holds an intention, the intention motivates an action and the action yields consequences but Kafka breaks this causal chain entirely. There is an absence of antecedent condition that "causes" Gregor's metamorphosis, no moral transgression that "deserves" punishment and no narrative arc that "explains" the event retrospectively. The story discards teleology (purposefulness), etiology (causality), resolution (restoration). Here, transformation exists as a bare happening. This is what makes Gregor's claim to experience impossible: he did not choose the event, cannot articulate it, and cannot integrate it into a coherent self-narrative. Kafka's modernist universe withholds meaning as an act of artistic honesty. Kafka is writing against the 19th century tradition of the psychological novels where characters achieve self-knowledge as in case of the works of Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky etc. In Kafka, no one understands anything not even themselves. The self here is not a sovereign narrator but a post-facto witness because it is only afterwards does identity scramble to interpret them. Kafka wrote German as a minority language in Czech-speaking Prague, as a Jew within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This produced a linguistic condition Deleuze and Guattari(1975) call "minor literature" where language lacks sovereignty, confidence and metaphysical ground. Kafka avoids causality because causality requires linguistic authority ("I know why this happened"). Kafka had none as he writes without cultural guarantees and theological scaffolding. People

fall ill, lose jobs, lose countries without narrative justification. Literature that insists on causality becomes morally dishonest and Kafka refuses to aestheticize suffering through "why". Gregor experiences bodily discomfort, spatial disorientation and exhaustion before he conceptualises himself as a failed subject. The suffering depicted in the text intensifies only when Gregor attempts to understand himself as responsible for missing work, for burdening his family, for failing as a son. Identity does not appear as a source of coherence rather as a mechanism of self-blame which is a following as interpretation of the experience. This sequence destabilizes existential readings that locate meaning in individual consciousness. As Corngold (1996) observes, Kafka's protagonists often suffer from an excess of interpretive pressure, here, Gregor's tragedy lies in the compulsion to explain what resists explanation. Kafka thereby exposes identity as a narrative imposition rather than an experiential necessity. Gregor does not "discover" himself as an insect; rather, he suffers insect-hood before having any conceptual category for it. His first concerns are navigational, not psychological: how to move, how to open a door, how to live in the new facticity of the body.

In both philosophical and empirical terms, experience must logically precede identity because the body encounters the world before the mind narrates it. Sensation and affect arise biologically and developmentally prior to the linguistic and conceptual tools required for self-description; infants feel hunger, fear, and pain long before they acquire pronouns or categories such as "I" or "me." Cognitive science reinforces this priority through evidence that perception and affective responses occur milliseconds before conscious interpretation, making identity a form of delayed ownership rather than the origin of experience. Moreover, phenomenologists have long argued that the lived body is pre-reflective, whereas identity is reflective, and thus a secondary act of meaning-making layered onto primary experience. Across cultures, identity categories shift dramatically, while basic experiences such as pain, hunger, and grief remain universal, suggesting that what is universal (experience) cannot be derivative of what is variable (identity). Taken together, these domains reveal that identity is a narrative, institutional, and linguistic response to experiences that have already unfolded.

Psychoanalysis, Biopolitics and Internal Exile

Freud argues identity is retroactive; the ego forms as a defense against experience (Freud, 1923). While Freud situates suffering within unconscious conflict, Kafka presents a form of suffering that precedes symbolisation. The insect-body becomes the externalization of internal conflict which can be seen in psychoanalytic terms as Gregor's form literalizing what had always been psychically true that he has perceived as vermin, expendable labour and nonhuman resource. When Gregor tries to speak but produces insect noises, the gap between experience and selfhood becomes audible. Freud's Dora case (Freud,1905), Totem & Taboo's father complex (Freud,1913) and the Oedipal triangle (Freud, 1900,1905,1923) all feel uncannily present even though Kafka never allegorizes them directly. From Lacan's theory of the Symbolic Order, it can be perceived as Gregor's exclusion from language i.e. his inability to communicate intelligibly, signals his expulsion from social reality (Lacan, 2006). However, such retrospective conventional psychoanalytic readings are themselves forms of identity-production, applied after the fact, what Kafka dramatizes is the moment before the interpretive net is cast where the psychological self arrives belatedly to the event that is, where experience unfolds prior to and independently of, the self's attempt to interpret or assimilate it. The disjunct between happening and interpretation is necessary because psychoanalysis needs him in order to function as a discourse.

Biopolitically, Gregor exemplifies what Foucault (1978) identifies as life regulated through productivity and utility. Here, once, Gregor ceases to function as a worker, his body becomes a surplus where care is denied; he does not matter anymore although he is allowed to live. This condition closely resembles Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life where existence persists outside ethical concern. A comparable philosophical contour emerges in Homen Borgohain's novel *Astarag*(1986) where the narrative foregrounds the tensions produced by generational differences and the suffering that accompanies aging within modern family structures. The father who is significantly unnamed throughout the novelundergoes a crisis of identity as shifting human relationships render him increasingly marginal. His

sense of self is no longer autonomous but primarily mediated through kinship: he becomes "Dilip's father," rather than a subject with a name of his own. Although he lives among others, he is consumed by a profound loneliness, and in this state he reconstructs a fragile sense of identity through the memories that remain intact. Estranged from meaningful human connection, he develops an imaginative intimacy with the natural world.By centering the emotional and social difficulties of old age, the novel dramatizes both the inner conflict born of the father's isolation and the psychological burden as conflict borne by Dilip, who is deeply troubled by his father's condition. These intertwined tensions exemplify psychological naturalism, as the narrative situates individual suffering within broader structural changes in family and society. *Astarag* thus offers a compelling and nuanced portrayal of aging and identity loss, and can be regarded as a successful and significant exploration of psychological naturalism in Assamese literature.

Feminist Ethics of Care and The Failure of Relational Meaning

A feminist reading of *The Metamorphosis* foregrounds the ethical economy of care within the Samsa household. Care is initially extended to Gregor but only insofar as recovery remains imaginable and once it becomes clear that Gregor will not return to a recognisable identity, the care seemed to have dissolved. *The Metamorphosis* exposes gendered labour and emotional taxation through Grete Samsa. Feminist ethicists argue that care should be grounded in responsiveness to vulnerability rather than abstract moral norms (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). Gregor's experience cannot be accommodated within existing relational frameworks and therefore becomes intolerable. This ethical failure finds a compelling parallel in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *Dataal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* (1986)where the prolonged suffering is resistant to redemption (Goswami, 2004). Goswami's characters particularly women experience pain prior to social naming and identity becomes a part of the judgement of self-definition. Goswami's novel centres on marginalized mahouts in Assam. Characters like Giribala experience suffering as material condition – poverty, illness, hunger, and widowhood – women who tend to dying men, animals, and children. The mahout community embodies internal exile i.e. geographically within Assam but culturally peripheral and the community reads her body through orthodoxy; Goswami does not begin with identity but with experience that others interpret on her behalf. Kafka's narrative, by contrast, reveals how modern ethical systems often demand legibility prior to compassion. Similarly, in *Tej Aru Dhulire Dhushorito Prishtha* (1998), the narrator is thrust into political violence because the city imposes experience upon her. Only later does identity (witness, chronicler, survivor) become retrospectively constructed. Goswami's work stages the 1984 pogrom as a drama of unmediated encounter rather than a chronicle of ethno-religious identity in which affective terror and sensory disorientation precede any legible discourse of identity. The narrator perceives burning neighbourhoods and hunted bodies before those bodies are stabilized under signifiers such as "Sikh" or "minority." Identity thus arrives belatedly, as a classificatory supplement imposed by majoritarian mobs driven by state apparatuses, and historical narration.

By aligning Kafka with Goswami and Borgohain, it is seen that the modern subject is not defined by identity but by the gap between happening and interpretation. The self emerges late, if at all, and often only as a bureaucratic residue that comprise of diagnosis, widowhood, witness report, death certificate etc. The experience remains primary, unclaimed and that is where literature, most disturbingly, tells the "truth".

Conclusion

The Metamorphosis endures as a classic because it refuses to stabilise suffering within identity. Gregor Samsa fails if measured from the yardstick of capitalistic demands because experience is forced into the grammar of productivity, responsibility and moral worth. Kafka dismantles the assumption that suffering must belong to a subject in order to be real. By foregrounding the principle that experience precedes identity, this paper has shown how Kafka anticipates contemporary critiques of subjectivity, biopolitical disposability and the conditional nature of ethical recognition.The dialogue with Assamese literature demonstrates that this insight transcends cultural boundaries, resonating with traditions that privilege endure over explanation. Kafka's text remains vital because it exposes the violence of naming itself and in doing so it reminds us that life has to be lived before it

is interpreted and that sometimes, interpretation is the deepest form of abandonment. Gregor does not 'become' anything; something happens and identity struggles to catch up. Identity does not prevent pain; it merely provides the structure through which pain later becomes communicable and the grammar is not the experience. The self is too narrow a vessel to contain the magnitude of experience; therefore experience continually spills over, forcing the self to expand, contract, or disintegrate.

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How *Macbeth* Becomes a Classic: Canon, Paratext, and Pedagogy in Three Key Scenes

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Abstract

Through the institutionally mediated processes of repeated reading, teaching and interpretation, literary classics are capable of sustaining meaning across time and generations. The essay looks at how William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* remains a classic through the interrelated processes of canon formation, paratextual mediation and pedagogical practice. This study aims at tracing how a few selected scenes that are frequently taught (Act 1 Scene 3, Act 2 Scene 3, and Act 5 Scene 5) guide the interpretative possibilities towards stability through the lens of canon theory, paratext theory, and reception and reader-response criticism. The analysis of curricular selection, school editions, and assessment-oriented teaching routines illustrates how certain readings become authorised and repeatable while others begin to disappear. Simultaneously, close attention to the wording and the structure of these passages reveals a series of lingering ambiguities that refuse complete interpretative closure. The essay argues that reopening *Macbeth* anew through recent theoretical frames makes visible the institutional conditions that constrain its meanings making it possible to encounter the play not as a closed and fixed moral lesson but as a dynamic text whose meanings are continually reopened through critical engagement.

Keywords: Canon Formation, Paratextual Mediation, Literary Pedagogy, Reception Theory, Macbeth

Introduction

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has long been recognised as a literary classic within educational and cultural institutions. It becomes classic through sustained institutional work that makes particular meanings appear obvious, teachable, and inevitable—and makes other questions feel unnecessary. In schools especially, *Macbeth* is encountered less as an event of theatre than as a settled object: a set text, a quotable archive, and a narrative structured for assessment. This essay argues that *Macbeth* is standardised as a classic through an institutional chain of cultural production: canon selection determines what is widely taught; paratexts—introductions, notes, and editorial framing—authorise interpretative routes before reading begins; and pedagogic routines convert those routes into 'common sense' meaning by repeatedly rewarding the same forms of explanation. To keep the scope precise, the discussion focuses on three teachable nodes: the witches' prophecy and Macbeth's ambivalence in 1.3; the Porter and equivocation in 2.3; and Macbeth's 'Tomorrow' soliloquy in 5.5. Reading these scenes through canon theory (Guillory, 2023; Aston, 2020), paratext theory (Gérard Genette, 1997 ; alongside E. K. Chambers's Warwick edition, 1907), and reception and reader-response theory (Jauss, 1970; Iser, 1978) reveals how interpretative plurality is narrowed into classroom consensus—and where the text still resists that narrowing.

A work can be fixed into shared reading habits only after it is placed in an institutional position where such fixing is possible—where repetition is routine and interpretation is assessed. Guillory's account of canon formation is useful because it shifts attention away from claims of intrinsic greatness and towards the mechanisms that distribute reading as a social practice

(x–xi). A canon is not merely a list of admired texts; it is a structure of selection that determines what is widely encountered, what is repeatedly interpreted, and what becomes culturally authoritative. Once *Macbeth* is assigned, tested, and circulated as curricular knowledge—through set-text lists, exam syllabi, and standardised classroom editions—its status begins to reproduce itself: the play is taught because it is 'important,' and it is 'important' because it is taught.

Aston "sets out to uncover and call into question the practices that confer teachable value onto different texts—processes of 'canonization'—situated for the most part in the field of literary studies" (1). Literary curricula tend to privilege works that are teachable in the sense of being stable, transmissible, and assessable. In practice, this favours meanings that can be turned into examinable arguments rather than uncertainties that must be sustained without resolution. *Macbeth* fits this economy with remarkable efficiency. It offers a narratable causal arc—prophecy, desire, murder, guilt, collapse—and it supplies compact verbal units that function as evidentiary 'handles' in timed writing. As the play is repeatedly used to transmit cultural knowledge, a narrowed set of dominant readings gains institutional privilege: ambition, moral transgression, disorder, and retribution. The point is not that these readings are inaccurate, but that they become structurally favoured—and begin to appear like the only responsible readings. Canon formation does not merely select texts; it selects interpretative habits. Once *Macbeth* becomes a classroom classic, its ambiguities are pressured to become legible as lessons, and ambiguity itself is treated as a temporary stage on the way to an 'answer.' That pressure leads directly to paratext.

Genette defines the paratext as the threshold that makes a text present to readers and governs its reception. It is the "vestibule" through which the reader enters the work, and it "in reality controls one's whole reading of the text" (1). School editions are therefore not neutral containers; they function as interpretative policy. They organise attention in advance, indicating what matters, what scenes are 'for,' and which questions already have authorised answers. E. K. Chambers's Warwick edition of *Macbeth* demonstrates this paratextual work with unusual explicitness. As a school-oriented edition built around explanation and guided interpretation, the Warwick *Macbeth* makes unusually visible the editorial labour that ordinary classrooms often inherit silently.

In the introduction, Chambers not only offers a historical background, he offers a governing interpretation of the play, which is put forward as a lesson which the reader is invited to verify. Chambers claims that "temptation begets sin, and sin yet further sin, and this again punishment sure and inexorable", and sees Macbeth as a moral progression rather than an interpretative dilemma (Shakespeare 19). Ambition is seen as the main type of temptation and tragedy is the story of a "noble character" overmastered by desire and driven with "remorseless fatality" to "utter ruin" (Shakespeare 19–20). The framing serves as a pre-authorisation to set up a route through the play, prior to engaging with it. The witches' prophecy has already been mapped by the time the audience reaches 1.3.

Scene 1: The Witches' Prophecy and Ambivalence (Act 1, Scene 3)

Macbeth's reaction to the witches' conjuring "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" suspends judgement and holds experience in tension through double negation that refuses moral sorting (Shakespeare 1.3.130–31). Under Chambers's paratext, though, that tension is more predisposed to read as an incipient stirring of ambition than as a genuine uncertainty about the agency, desire, and causation. The open nature of the scene whether the witches play a role as cause, catalyst or mirror is pressurised into a predictable function: the initiation of temptation. The loss is not an 'interpretation' but the legitimacy of suspension itself, the right to remain in 'cannot' before transforming it into a thesis. The control of paratext extends beyond introductions but also occurs in commentaries where what is guidance is already a selection. Chambers insists, for example, that "the milk of human kindness" does not suggest tenderness but rather Macbeth's lack of the necessary "illness" to seize power; the phrase refers to ordinary moral restraint that impedes decisive action

(Shakespeare 20). Such glosses prompt readers not to think what they might feel or think first. Interpretation is not simply aided; it is disciplined.

Scene 2: The Porter and Equivocation (Act 2, Scene 3)

The porter's scene in Act 2, Scene 3 reveals paratextual standardisation to an even greater degree, since the passage almost begs for such explanatory mediation. The Porter's jokes about 'hell-gate' and an 'equivocator,' when unannotated, can be crude comic relief. The Porter envisions welcoming in "the equivocator … who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven" (Shakespeare 2.3.8–10). Chambers's notes rehabilitate the passage by connecting equivocation to the contemporary discourse on the Gunpowder Plot, 1605, a topical allusion which grounds the Porter's banter within the play's political-moral theme of regicide and damning. Chambers comments, too, on how the authenticity of the scene has been questioned, thus bracketed as marginal to the heart of the tragedy (Shakespeare 182). In the classroom practice these two framings one through the historical frame which validates the text and the other that follows through textual marginalisation often resort to a quick explanation followed by an interpretative closure. The disturbing question of the scene disappears: what does it mean to laugh within the 'hell-gate' immediately after regicide?, a tonal unsettling that refuses a thematic resolution. Either the Porter functions merely as comic relief, or he is a signpost of deception and damnation. In either event, the full tonal and moral complexity of the scene is contained.

When the paratext authorises routes for interpretation, it is done by pedagogy, that is, by repetition until it feels normal. It takes place for example by way of a statement of assessment already presupposing what must be found. Jauss's idea of 'horizon of expectations' aids in explaining this. When a response crystallises into a habit and the meaning seems self-evident, a classic is at risk of losing the "negativity" that once demanded active interpretation (Jauss 14–15). Within classrooms, that sedimentation is intensified through assessment: questions of the form 'How do the witches influence Macbeth?' (which is pitched regularly on the GCSE and IB curricula) puts influence as the normative interpretative frame and converts doubts into agency before the discussion begins. Meanings have to be coherent, defensible and legible. The pedagogical process rewards agreement over honesty.

Iser describes the way this convergence of canon, paratext, and pedagogy occurs. It is possible to place meaning on a text as they are filled with gaps that require filling. However, once a particular realisation settles into institutional practice, the other possible realisations are not disproved but pushed into the background (Iser 280–81). The witches' scene illustrates this dynamic vividly. Macbeth's ambivalence is constructed to resist closure, yet pedagogic routines often give the impression that the symptom was ambition's first. That transformation is attractive because it produces an assessable narrative arc. The cost is interpretative: rather than being a condition the text enacts intentionally, the play's early refusal of moral clarity is treated as a mistake to be corrected. Ethical and epistemic uncertainty serves as a flattened-out origin-story, which means to receive the 'truth' and also the lure.

Scene 3: The "Tomorrow" Soliloquy and Philosophical Closure (Act 5, Scene 5)

Interpretative settling reaches its most durable form when passages detach from scenes and circulate as portable 'wisdom.' Act 5, Scene 5— "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"—is routinely taught as the play's philosophical conclusion and extracted into anthologies as a meditation on nihilism. Yet in context the speech emerges under extreme pressure: Macbeth learns of his wife's death as his political world collapses. The speech's force comes from its mechanics: the hammering anaphora of 'tomorrow' reduces time to pure sequence ("Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow"), as if living has become only the endurance of addition (Shakespeare 5.5.19). Action also shrinks into trivial motion: time "creeps" forward in a "petty pace," and Macbeth's verbs compress human life into degraded performance, a "poor player" who "struts and frets" and then disappears (Shakespeare 5.5.20–

26). Even the metaphors— "walking shadow," "poor player," "tale / Told by an idiot"—turn agency into noise without consequence, so that meaning does not arrive as wisdom but collapses as language failing to justify experience (Shakespeare 5.5.24–28). Read this way, the tragedy is not merely that Macbeth is punished, but that he can no longer make time, action, or loss intelligible. Meaning does not crystallise; it disintegrates.

Collaborative Pedagogy and the Recovery of Openness

It is important to note that curricular settling is not purely restrictive. For novice readers, guidance provides entry into a demanding text. The problem is not interpretation but unmarked interpretation, where institutional readings present themselves as natural rather than contingent. As Olive demonstrates, curriculum policy has historically assumed that English education should involve 'introducing students to the English literary heritage, the best texts, and teaching them to appreciate those texts as, it is supposed, their forbears have done' (43). This is where collaborative pedagogy becomes significant. Reimagining Shakespeare Education describes collaboration as practices that make assumptions visible by requiring shared decision-making about meaning and method (Semler et al. 31). Performance forces choice, shifting interpretation from inheritance to decision. For instance, asking students to stage Macbeth's 'cannot be ill, cannot be good' as fear, exhilaration, or calculation produces three incompatible Macbeths—each defensible from the language, and each exposing what the 'ambition' template leaves out. Collaboration does not deny curricular standardisation; it makes standardisation itself readable, opening the text to contestation.

Conclusion

Macbeth becomes a classic through managed continuity of reading practices rather than through a single timeless meaning. Ensures repetition, paratext authorises interpretation and pedagogy rewards stability. According to reception theory, closure is never quite complete. As institutions continue to try to fix those gaps and limit the meaning of text, the text continue to survive. When pedagogy allows the gaps to reappear, whether through performance or collaborative discussion or through close attention to textual resistance, *Macbeth* regains its unsettling power, not by renouncing guidance, but by making interpretation a joint and contestable act. The reason why the play is classic is not that we learn one last lesson from it but that it can be re-encountered as a problem each generation must read anew. In this sense, a classic is not a text with one settled meaning; it is a text whose meanings are repeatedly managed, and therefore repeatedly available for rediscovery when readers return to the scenes rather than the slogans.

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Gender Metaphors in Sufi Philosophy and Literature: A Contemporary Critical Reading of Ibn Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom*

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Abstract

Ibn 'Arabi's *Fucûc al-Sikam (The Bezels of Wisdom*) stands as a foundational text in the Sufi literary tradition, often regarded as a benchmark for expressing spiritual experience through divine manifestation. While traditional scholarship views its gendered imagery as purely symbolic, this paper engages with contemporary feminist hermeneutics to examine the metaphysical and socio-political functions of gendered metaphors within the text. By applying Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, this study argues that Ibn Arabi employs the feminine not merely as rhetoric, but as an essential metaphysical principle for understanding divine love and creativity. However, the analysis reveals a fundamental tension: while the text elevates the feminine as the most powerful manifestation of God, it simultaneously operates within a patriarchal framework that maintains masculine interpretive authority.In this paper,we show how ultimately *The Bezels of Wisdom* functions as a site of hegemonic negotiation, where metaphysical insights regarding the feminine are absorbed into dominant historical structures, rather than fully subverting.

Keywords : Ibn 'Arabi, The Bezels of Wisdom, Gendered Metaphor, Gramscian Hegemony, Hegemonic Absorption

1. Introduction

Sufi Philosophy often presents divine reality as embodying both masculine and feminine qualities;in such representations, patriarchal hegemony can be traced both in its theology and practice. This is particularly evident in the use of gendered language in Sufi literature, which often switches between metaphorical expressions of equality and reinforcement of male dominance. As noted by Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Sufism in its historical development and its multiple contexts…… has been characterised by tensions between patriarchal inclinations and gender-egalitarian impulses" (Shaikh, *In Search* 782).Various Sufi classics represent this tension.

Among the classical Sufi literature, Muhyi al-Din Ibn Al-'Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fucûc al-Hikam)*(1229) occupies a unique position due to its methodical articulation. It explores spiritual realities through the "bezels" (settings) of the wisdom of 27 prophets, from Adam to Muhammad. Each bezel presents a mode of wisdom (hikma) through which God unveils Himself in the cosmos. While scholarly work has largely focused on 'Arabi's doctrine of "wahdat al-wujûd" (the unity of being), less attention has been paid to the gendered metaphors that uphold his metaphysics. These metaphors are particularly significant because they inform Arabi's understanding of love, creation, and epistemology.

In Sufi theology, God is perceived as having a dual nature. God is believed to be the perfect combination of "Jalal" and "Jamal" aspects. The 99 names of God represent all the qualities of God. In Sufi tradition, the Jalal aspects are associated with strength and masculinity, while the Jamal aspects are associated with femininity, love, and kindness. (Sharify-Funk et al 188) Thus, the dual nature of God is

perceived under a gendered societal and linguistic framework.

For contemporary readers, the prominence of feminine imagery—especially in relation to receptivity, beauty and manifestation—raises critical questions regarding gender symbolism and spiritual authority. In this paper, we argue that the use of metaphysical gender constructs in 'Arabi's work represents the socio-cultural assumptions of medieval Islam on the one hand and also transcends those by positioning the feminine as an elevated locus of divine self-manifestation. These dual aspects represent a tension that may be explained within the framework of the Gramscian notion of Hegemony.

2. Literature Review

Ibn 'Arabi's The Bezels of Wisdom (1229) provides a compelling case study of a text transitioning from a definitive standard of metaphysical truth to a site of critical contestation. Historically, androcentric traditional commentaries, from pre-modern scholars like Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) to modern interpreters, have treated the work's gendered metaphors strictly as metaphysical symbolism. These readings interpreted femininity as a symbolic indicator of receptivity by focusing on Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, thus ignoring any broader social or political implications.

However, recent scholarship has moved beyond traditional hagiography to reading the text through contemporaryfeminist lenses, thereby questioning its dominant narrative authority and ideological stance (Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*159). Scholars like Annemarie Schimmel (2024) and William Chittick(1998) have highlighted the centrality of love and beauty in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, noting his elevation of the feminine principle.

In the context of questioning notions of gender and class, Sa'diyya Shaikh in *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy* (2012) revitalises the Bezels by applying a feminist hermeneutic to the Unity of Being. Shaikh argues that while the text emerged from a patriarchal socio-cultural context, its ontological core provides a universal aspect of meaning that subverts gender hierarchies (159). By focusing on the discussion on Creation and the triplicity of God, Man, and Woman in the Bezel of Muhammad, she demonstrates how the text can be read to authorise female spiritual agency. (Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives*172)

In Sufi spirituality, receptivity plays an important role. Ibn 'Arabi proposed that all souls are feminine and that all creation is feminine in its relation to God in a condition of total receptivity. Other Sufis referred to saints as "beloved" or "brides of God" and death as the "wedding night" of their souls.(Sharify-Funk et al. 190) These metaphorical expressions symbolise feminine attributes. However, 'Arabi states that "There is no spiritual quality belonging to men to which women do not have equal access" (qtd. inSharify-Funk et al.190). Sasiko Murata, in his *The Tao of Islam* and *Women of Light*, suggested that the Islamic perception of gender relationships can be understood in terms of their understanding of reality itself only. The underlying philosophical notions determine gender relations. For example, Rumi places women in a higher position in the spiritual hierarchy, as he used to see "mothers" everywhere, from the cosmos to earth. He believes that everything in the cosmos can be seen as a mother giving birth to something higher than itself. In his celebrated work *Mathnawi,* Rumi noted that the significance of a woman is so high that one may be tempted to regard a woman as a creator. Feminist scholars, however, are critical of theincoherence between the symbolic centrality of the feminine and the historical marginalisation of women within Sufi intellectual lineages.

Recent critical literature suggests that 'Arabi's metaphysics allows for a rethinking of gender beyond biological determinism, while still demanding caution against projecting contemporary gender politics onto medieval texts.

3. Methodological Framework:

This study utilises a feminist appropriation of Gramscian concept of hegemony to investigate how metaphysical language simultaneously maintains and negotiates patriarchal norms. Hegemony can be defined as the subtle cultural and ideological processes through which particular worldviews, values, and power

relations are normalised and internalised within textual production. (Gramsci80) By applying this framework and using textual analysis of the Bezel, we investigate how metaphysical language maintains patriarchal norms while also opening a critical space for female spiritual agency within an otherwise patriarchal ontological core. The *Bezels of Wisdom* appear to challenge these conventions despite coming from a male-authored, elite intellectual tradition ingrained in the hegemonic structures of medieval Islamic society. Gendered metaphors as sites of feminist intervention are analysed as places where patriarchal norms are expressed but also placed under tension, revealing moments of contradiction and potential counter-hegemonic meaning.

4. Gendered Metaphors and Hegemonic Tension in *The Bezels of Wisdom*

One of 'Arabi's most frequently cited and theoretically significant claims appears in the Bezel of Muhammad. Here,'Arabi asserts that "the contemplation of God in women is the most perfect and the most powerful contemplation" ('Arabi 275). This statement greatly elevates the feminine as the primary site of divine manifestation. This metaphor seems to challenge patriarchal standards that link spiritual authority to masculinity, reason, and mastery from a hegemonic standpoint. Thus, 'Arabi displaces masculine subjectivity from its assumed metaphysical centrality by identifying the feminine form as the most complete vision of God.

We can see Arabi's challenge to patriarchal hegemony from his analysis of Arabic linguistic gender. He observes that while the Islamic tradition is culturally patriarchal, the Arabic terms for the absolute origins of being are feminine nouns. Specifically, he notes that the term for the *Divine Essence* (Dhat) is feminine, as is the word for *Cause* ('Illah).('Arabi 273) By highlighting that the highest reality of God, the essence that encompasses all Names of God, possesses a character that transcends masculine dominance, he subverts the medieval masculine intellectual authority. This linguistic insight suggests that at the level of ultimate reality, the masculine principle is actually derivative of a more primordial feminine essence. However, this elevation of the feminine remains confined to the merely symbolic and speculative realm. While the metaphor subverts hegemonic gender hierarchies at the metaphysical level, it simultaneously reproduces them at the level of authorship and epistemic authority.

This tension regarding the status of the feminine can be illuminated by contrasting the views of 'Arabi' with those of al-Ghazali. Ghazali's views on women are quite contrary to what is largely held about Sufism. Dovel noted, "Al-Ghazali's writings on gender and sexuality provide an excellent example of the ways Sufism perpetuated and strengthened dominant patriarchal ideology within a particular Muslim society" (52). In contrast, 'Arabi developed a totally different viewpoint regarding women. While Islamic mainstream theology after the 11th and 12th centuries increasingly viewed "women's sexuality as a danger to spirituality," Ibn 'Arabi's cosmological beliefs offered a powerful counter argument. (Dovel56) However, in his theory of creation, Arabi asserts that as man was created from the essence of God, woman was created from the essence of man. (274) In this context, Sa'diyya Shaikh noted that this paradigm leads to a hierarchy where man's existence is prior to and superior to that of woman. (*Sufi Narratives*8) However, Dovel claims that, as 'Arabi believes that divinity is best contemplated in a woman, he thereby avoids much of the misogyny that characterises women as antithetical to God.(58)

Arabi further challenges gender hierarchy through his theory of love, stating that man loves woman because he sees himself in her, and that love arises from ontological resemblance.(274) This formulation challenges hegemonic notions of hierarchy as it is grounded in love in the sameness rather than domination. However, the Bezel of Muhammad, where woman is described as being created from man, retains a derivative ontology that aligns with patriarchal cosmology. From a Gramscian standpoint, this demonstrates how hegemonic structures absorb potentially subversive ideas while maintaining underlying hierarchies.

In some of the Bezels, particularly those of Adam and Seth, Arabi emphasises receptivity as a necessary condition for divine manifestation. Traditionally, receptivity is coded as feminine and passive; thus,it becomes ontologically indispensable for manifestation to occur. In the Bezel's of Mohammad, 'Arabi significantly describes the source of all creation as feminine and also draws it parallel to woman.(272-274) Thisinversion challenges the hegemonic hierarchy that privileges masculine activity and control.

Similarly, in Arabi, we can see a relational understanding of gendered positions when he states that manis receptive in relation to God and active in relation to the world.Thus, masculinity and femininity operate in relative modes rather than as fixed identities.'Arabi's concept of triplicity further clarifies this. Triplicity represents the divine essence, man, and the feminine aspects of reality. (Chittick, *The Sufi Path* 219) This "essence" is also feminine in nature. Whatever position one holds in relation to these, feminine takes priority. Such an account destabilises essentialist gender binaries and opens a counter-hegemonic space within Sufi metaphysics. However, the absence of a corresponding critique of social gender relations highlights the limits of this subversion.

5. Discussion

Viewed through the lens of hegemony, *The Bezels of Wisdom* emerges,we may say, as a text that negotiates, rather than subverts, patriarchal dominance. While 'Arabi's metaphysics allows for the symbolic centrality of the feminine, it maintains masculine authority at the levels of authorship, interpretation, and institutional transmission. As Malamud claims, "Sufi rituals and practices serve to affirm and consecrate hierarchy and inequality in the mundane world by connecting them to the divine will and order." (90) This dichotomy represents how patriarchal hegemony operates. It incorporates the limited forms of subversion that do not threaten structural power. (Gramsci 80). This,we have termed, as hegemonic absorption.

This dynamic is further noticed from the absence of women as speaking subjects or prophetic figures in the Bezels. We can find only a limited mention of Eve as a representative of femininity or woman in this text. Further, though there are attempts to elevate the feminine principle within the spiritual framework of 'Arabi's expositions, the accounts ultimately accept the attributes like receptivity, passivity, beauty and similar feminine qualities associated with social femininity, thus signifying the hegemonic absorption of the potential anti-hegemonic properties and tensions. Thus, it appears that the Sufi approach to gender and women is a complex phenomenon and cannot be presented as a linear story. The use of gendered language in Sufism essentially portrays this complex relation. "The intentional use of gendered language in Sufi hagiography that emphasises the primacy of the female/deficient male body, and the elite male mind indicates how gender acts as a key tool in the negotiation of Sufi identity during the classical period" (Abdel-Latif 217).

6. Conclusion

Gendered metaphors as sites of feminist intervention in 'Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom* serve as fundamental components of his Sufi metaphysics rather than merely rhetorical devices, as demonstrated by our arguments. By elevating the feminine as the "most perfect and powerful contemplation" of the Divine, 'Arabi's work establishes a metaphysical counter-narrative against the patriarchal structures of his time while simultaneously presenting its medieval historical context and going far beyond it.

However, a contemporary critical reading reveals that this elevation of feminine remains complex and paradoxical. As we have shown, while the text transcends biological determinism at an ontological level, it simultaneously operates within a framework of hegemonic negotiation. Through a Gramscian lens, we can see that while 'Arabi's metaphysics allows for the symbolic centrality of the feminine, it often does so by maintaining masculine authority at the levels of authorship. Thus, the potential for total subversion is often mitigated by hegemonic absorption, where egalitarian spiritual impulses are incorporated into, yet limited by, dominant historical and linguistic structures. Finally, we can see that the contrasting gendered expressions in The Bezels represent a persistent

tension. The Bezel shows that the Sufi perspective on gender is a complicated phenomenon in which the feminine is both largely constrained as a social agent and celebrated as a fundamental metaphysical principle between deeply rooted patriarchal influences and an attempt to achieve gender egalitarianism.

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From Marginalisation to Matriarchal Assertion : A Reading of *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* with the Lens of Vulnerability Studies

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Abstract

The *Mahabharata*, one of India's most revered epics, has often been considered a classic that establishes moral, philosophical, and cultural benchmarks for Indian civilisation. Its enduring narratives of dharma, duty, and destiny tend to shape contemporary literary and cultural discourse. Kavita Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* reimagines the life of Satyavati, a marginalised character in the *Mahabharata*, through contemporary feminist and postcolonial lens. This article examines how Kane employs the theoretical framework of vulnerability studies to explore the complex interplay between marginalisation, agency, and power in Satyavati's transformation from an abandoned fisher-girl to the matriarch of Hastinapur. Drawing on vulnerability theory, as articulated by scholars like Havrilla, Chambers, Flaskerud, and Winslow, this study attempts to demonstrate how Satyavati navigates through multiple dimensions of vulnerability (social, economic, political, and attitudinal) through strategic deployment of coping mechanisms that paradoxically reinforce the very oppressive structures from which she seeks liberation. The article further attempts to argue that Kane's revisionist mythology reveals vulnerability not merely as weakness but as a dynamic, transformative condition that exposes the limitations of individual empowerment within systemic oppression, attempting to offer a nuanced critique of power, gender, and caste in both classical and the contemporary contexts.

Keywords : Vulnerability, *Mahabharata*, Marginalisation, Power, Feminist

The *Mahabharata* occupies an important position within the Indian literary canon, functioning not merely as an epic narrative but as what Matthew Arnold would term a work of 'high truth and seriousness' that has shaped moral, philosophical, and cultural thought across millennia. Its influence mostly extends beyond literature to law, ethics, politics, and everyday social practice, often establishing the benchmarks and conventions that subsequent Indian literary traditions have both emulated and contested. The epic's treatment of dharma, its complex characterisation, and its philosophical profundity have earned it recognition as a classic that continues to generate meaning across varied historical periods and cultural contexts. However, as contemporary critical discourse increasingly asserts that the creation of classics constitutes an ideological process often dominated by educational elites, rendering certain voices marginal or absent within these foundational narratives. Kavita Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* pertains to a significant contemporary literary movement that revisits classical texts through contemporary theoretical frameworks, particularly feminist and postcolonial perspectives. By centring Satyavati, a character traditionally peripheral to the *Mahabharata*'s grand narrative of the Kurukshetra War, Kane exemplifies how revisiting classics can illuminate "their inter textuality provid[ing] freedom to the scholars of the world to rethink, rewrite and re-analyse some significant concepts" (Rathod 68). This novel,like time of the works of Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni, Volga, question the dominant narrative authority of classical texts, interrogating their ideological stances on class, caste, gender, and power. This revisionist project does not diminish the *Mahabharata*'s classical status, it rather revitalises its meaning for contemporary readers who demand more complex representations of marginalised voices.

Vulnerability theory, which has evolved significantly over the past four decades from simple risk assessment to complex analyses of dynamic social processes, offers a particularly apt frameworkwhich may be used for understanding Satyavati's story. Emily Havrilla articulates that vulnerability can be defined as "a state of dynamic openness and opportunity for individuals, groups, communities, or populations to respond to community and individual factors through the use of internal and external resources in a positive (resilient) or negative (risk) manner along a continuum of illness (oppression) to health (growth)" (64). This definition acknowledges vulnerability not merely as a weakness but as a complex, multifaceted condition that encompasses both threat and possibility, constraint and agency. Mary H Rose and Mercia Killien's work distinguished between risk, as a function of the environment, and vulnerability, as a function of the individual influenced by both inherent and acquired factors, recognising that "characteristics of both the individual and the environment contribute to health or illness, one affects the other in a dynamic way"(60). Lu Ann Aday's sociological frame work expanded this to include community and individual perspectives related to physical, psychological, and social health, arguing that "risk (relative risk) of vulnerability is greater for those with the least social status, social capital, and human capital resources to prevent or ameliorate the origins and consequences of poor physical, psychological, or social health" (500). This framework appears particularly relevant to Satyavati's story, as her initial vulnerability stems precisely from deficits in all three categories: abandoned by her royal father, she possesses minimal social status, limited social capital within the fishing community, and severely constrained human capital represented by her marginalised identity as 'Matsyagandha,'one who smells of fish. J H Flaskerud and BHW Winslow's Vulnerable Populations Model crucially proposes that "lack of resources increases relative risk; increased exposure to risk factors leads to increased morbidity and mortality in a population group; morbidity and mortality in a community may feed back into resource availability and further deplete the availability of resources" (70). This cyclical understanding of vulnerability illuminates how Satyavati's initial marginalisations compound, creating a system wherein her fisher-girl identity generates social exclusion, which in turn limits her access to resources, which further entrenches her vulnerable position.

Kavita Kane's narrative meticulously traces Satyavati's navigation of compounding vulnerabilities from her birth to her ultimate retreat from Hastinapur. Herstory exemplifies what P T Iorhen identifies as chronic poverty, wherein "those trapped into long-term poverty has no prospect and opportunity to improve their condition" (190). Born as the illegitimate daughter of King Uparichar Vasu and the fisherwoman Adrika, Satyavati experiences abandonment that establishes her fundamental vulnerability. Her father's decision to accept her twin brother Matsya while rejecting her based solely on gender instantiates the intersection of social and political vulnerability. Dasharaj reveals that the king "accepted the son because he was childless at the time; he had five sons later, after he adopted your brother. But he refuses to keep you" (Kane 37). This rejection denies Satyavati the social status, political access, and economic resources her birth should have provided, initiating a cycle of compounding disadvantage. Growing up in the fishing community, Satyavati encounters multiple manifestations of vulnerability. Beyond physical poverty, she experiences profound social vulnerability through her identity as 'Matsyagandha,' marked by a fishy odour that renders her socially repugnant.

Satyavati's encounter with Rishi Parashar represents a critical juncture wherein vulnerability simultaneously threatens and enables transformation. Recognising "the naked arousal in his eyes" (Kane 21), Satyavati understands her precarious position, alone on the river with a powerful sage whose desire places

her at severe risk. However, rather than succumbing to victimhood, she deploys what Reena Devi and Priya Raghav term a "self-defensive mechanism to protect or restore their self-integrity" (99), negotiating a series of boons that transform her vulnerability into a form of power: divine fragrance replacing her stigmatising smell, eternal youth and beauty, restored virginity, and a sage son who would bring her glory. These negotiations demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the resources required to mitigate her multiple vulnerabilities. Yet this transformation reveals the profound paradox at the heart of Satyavati's story. Her empowerment occurs entirely within, and through reproduction of, the very patriarchal structures that created her vulnerability. As Devi and Raghav observe, "Satyavati's own decision to have sex with the rishi was motivated by the desire to gain power and control over the outer world. She was the first person to use her body as an instrument to serve her purpose" (97). This instrumentalisation of sexuality, while enabling her to acquire resources that reduce certain vulnerabilities, simultaneously reinforces the logic of patriarchal exchange wherein women's bodies constitute currency for negotiating social position. This statement demonstrates sophisticated recognition of how vulnerability constrains moral agency. Those who lack resources cannot afford the luxury of certain ethical stances; survival demands pragmatic deployment of whatever resources one possesses, even if this means instrumentalising one's own body. However, this pragmatism also reveals what Jeanne M Hall terms "marginalization," the process through which "persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments" (89), wherein even resistance occurs from a position of exteriority to dominant systems.

The negotiation of Satyavati's marriage to King Shantanu further illuminates these dynamics. Her adoptive father Dasharaj's strategic demand that Satyavati's sons would inherit the throne demonstrates collective deployment of coping mechanisms to address community vulnerability, exemplifying what Flaskerud and Winslow identify as community-level strategies to "affect resources, relative risk, and health status directly and indirectly" (70). However, the cost proves catastrophic. Devavrat's terrible vow of lifelong celibacy, taken to secure his father's happiness and Satyavati's marriage, instantiates the seeds of decay that will ultimately destroy the dynasty. This suggests that vulnerability's pressures can corrupt even the noblest characters, transforming duty into destructive self-sacrifice. Satyavati's ascension to queenship does not eliminate her vulnerability,it rather transforms its nature. She experiences what Iorhen terms 'attitudinal vulnerability,' facing a hostile court where she is derogatorily termed 'Daseyi Queen' (servant-queen), a title that perpetually reminds her of her fisher origins and contested legitimacy. The persistence of this stigma despite her formal position demonstrates how vulnerability rooted in social status and caste consciousness cannot be fully overcome through individual advancement. The observation of Rathod, "Kane shows caste-based discrimination has no end. Her marriage with the royal king, Shantanu does not save her to face such conventional approaches towards her" (72), appears highly significant.

The most theoretically significant dimension of Kane's narrative emerges in Satyavati's exercise of power once she achieves queenship and later becomes queen mother. Her actions toward Ambika and Ambalika, her daughters-in-law, reveal how vulnerability's survivors may reproduce the very mechanisms of oppression they once resisted. Faced with the succession crisis following her sons' deaths, Satyavati proposes niyoga, the practice wherein a widow conceives an heir through an appointed man, summoning her first-born son, the sage Vyasa, to father children with the widows despite their evident horror at the prospect. Devi and Raghav argue that "Satyavati, a woman, should have understood her daughter-in-law's apprehension" (97), suggesting that her experience of sexual vulnerability should have generated empathy and solidarity. However, Satyavati's actions demonstrate what Hall terms the "power hegemony" that can emerge "even in the matriarchal structure" (88). Her prioritisation of dynastic continuity over the widows' autonomy reproduces patriarchal logic wherein women's bodies serve as instruments for the

preservation of male lineage. Vulnerability theory helps to explain this apparent contradiction. Satyavati's own vulnerabilities shift from social and economic to political, her coping mechanisms also changes. Her initial vulnerability stems from lack of resources and status and her later vulnerability emerges from the precariousness of the dynasty she has fought to establish. Faced with potential loss of everything she has secured, she deploys the power now available to her, which includes authority over subordinate women. Kane writes that Satyavati recognises her heirs as not perfect, understanding that "[h]e is a reminder of our mistakes and manipulations" (308). This physical manifestation of trauma demonstrates how vulnerability, when addressed through mechanisms that reproduce oppression rather than transform structures, generates flawed outcomes. The sons' impairments literalise the moral and political corruption inherent in treating women's bodies as mere instruments for dynastic preservation.

JasvantV. Rathod's observation proves crucial here: "[t]hough Uruvi and Satyavati were born in royal families, they face constant demarcation and marginalization from the society because they are relatives of the outcast persons. Both of them have courage to defy the conventional social norms" (73). Yet this defiance operates within severe constraints. Satyavati cannot envision alternative social structures or revolutionary transformation of the systems that marginalised her. Her resistance takes the form of individual advancement within existing hierarchies rather than collective reorganisation of those hierarchies. This limitation reflects what Hall terms "exteriority," the "condition of being outside the dominant system, beyond societal protections and resources" (90), which constrains even resistant actors to work within the logic of the systems that exclude them. The tragic denouement reinforces these limitations. Satyavati's vulnerability-driven strategies, while securing short-term dynastic continuity, have created the conditions for catastrophic conflict between the Pandavas and Kauravas. Her final retreat to the forest and death in the Ganga represents acceptance of the impossibility of her project. She tells Bhishma, "I can't bear them killing each other"(Kane 317), acknowledging that her attempts to overcome vulnerability through individual advancement and dynastic consolidation have produced the seeds of destruction.

Kane's reimagining of Satyavati through the framework of vulnerability offers profound insights into both the classical *Mahabharata* and the contemporary questions of power, marginalisation, and agency. By centring a peripheral character and examining the complex interplay of various vulnerability dimensions, Kane demonstrates how revisiting classics through contemporary theoretical frameworks can illuminate their enduring relevance. The novel refuses simplistic narratives of either victimisation or empowerment, instead presenting vulnerability as a dynamic and multifaceted condition that shapes individual choices and historical trajectories in complex, often tragic ways. The theoretical framework of vulnerability proves particularly apt for this analysis as it acknowledges both structural constraints and individual agency, both threat and possibility. Satyavati's story demonstrates how those experiencing multiple, compounding vulnerabilities deploy sophisticated coping mechanisms to navigate threatening environments. However, it simultaneously reveals the severe limitations of individual resistance when structural transformation remains impossible. Satyavati's empowerment occurs entirely within patriarchal and casteist structures, enabling her to rise within those hierarchies but not to fundamentally challenge or transform them. Consequently, her exercise of power reproduces oppressive mechanisms, particularly in her treatment of Ambika and Ambalika. Such recognition does not diminish the novel's achievement it rather constitutes its most significant contribution. By honestly confronting how vulnerability's survivors may perpetuate oppression, Kane avoids the triumphalist narratives that characterise much revisionist mythology. Kane's Satyavati is neither pure victim nor heroic liberator but a complex human being whose strategic intelligence and resilience operate within severe constraints, whose moral compromises reflect the impossible choices vulnerability creates, and whose ultimate failure

illuminates the necessity of structural rather than merely individual transformation. Rathod concludes, "Kane uses mythological tales as basis of her fictions but she is unable to show her fictional characters who can totally revolt against patriarchy or caste system in India" (73). This limitation, however, may constitute a form of realism rather than failure. Complete individual liberation from oppressive structures may indeed be impossible; transformation requires collective action and structural reorganisation rather than individual advancement. By reading this classic through contemporary vulnerability theory, one gains insight into how marginalisation operates across historical periods, how individual agency interacts with structural constraint, and how power itself can corrupt even those who seek it as protection against vulnerability. Kane's novel, thus, revitalises the *Mahabharata*'s meaning for contemporary readers, transforming it from a distant epic into a living text that speaks to ongoing struggles against oppression, the paradoxes of power, and the enduring human need for dignity, security, and belonging.

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The Shivering Void of the Victorian Interior: Moral Nihilism and the Numinous Threat in the Brontë Canon

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Abstract

The Brontë novels possess canonical status because they refuse exhausted historical meaning and maintain resistance to singular interpretation across generations. Reading the Brontë canon through the lens of weird fiction and contemporary theory reveals how these works systematically dismantle Victorian moral certainties and domesticity's illusory stability. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë wrote texts that expose moral nihilism as an affective condition wherein established ethical frameworks prove radically inadequate to comprehend human experience and desire. Rather than offering reassurance, these novels stage the eruption of the numinous within domestic interiors supposedly secured by convention. Heathcliff's demonic force, Bertha Mason's mônstrum-like presence, and Helen's recognition of her husband's fundamental vacancy all constitute manifestations of this numinous threat that dissolves selfhood's boundaries. Reconsidering the Brontë canon through weird fiction's diagnostic apparatus illuminates how Victorian comfort depends upon elaborate denial and repression of forces that exceed rational explanation and moral categorization. The permanence of moral chaos and numinous danger in these worksconstitutes their enduring philosophical wisdom for contemporary readers who inhabit moments of ideological hardening and moral certainty.

Keywords : Brontë Canon, Nihilism, Numinous, Victorian, Weird Fiction.

The Brontë novels occupy a distinctive position within literary history, one that might best be understood owing to its canonical persistence and perpetual re-evaluation. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë produced works that "has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers" (Calvino 10), a quality that distinguishes the genuinely classic from the merely popular. "Their novels have been classics for so long that today we tend to forget what a sensation they created when first published and how their authors were vilified for producing fiction deemed inappropriate to their sex" (Barker, *Letters*23). Yet this very capacity for recalibration and reinterpretation marks the Brontë canon as fundamentally classic in nature. Italo Calvino himself observed that "a book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans" demands recognition as a classic (11). The novels of the Brontë sisters possess this talisman-like quality, their enduring power rooted in what Harold Bloom terms "an originality that can win canonical status for a literary work is a strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies" (4). Such strangeness ensures that each generation finds these works freshly defiant, stubbornly resistant to singular interpretation or resolution.

The emergence of the Brontë canon as canonical occurs precisely because these novels refuse the stable meanings that would render them historically exhausted. "When you read a canonical work for a first time you encounter a stranger, an uncanny startlement rather than a fulfillment of expectations" (Bloom 3); the Brontë novels exemplify this disorienting encounter. Critics of the nineteenth century condemned them for moral chaos and affective excess, yet these very

qualities became the foundation of their survival. The works demonstrate, as Kermode suggests, the capacity to be "read a long time after it was written," adapting to successive frameworks while remaining "complex and indeterminate enough to allow us our necessary pluralities" (Kermode 117, 121). The Brontë canon achieves this pluralistic capacity through its systematic dismantling of Victorian moral certainties, forcing readers to confront what H.P. Lovecraft termed "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (1). The Brontë Canon functions like a celestial navigation tool; even as the cultural landscape shifts beneath our feet, these novels remain fixed points that allow us to measure the vast, often frightening distances between our social masks and the "shivering void" of our true interior selves.

Weird Fiction operates as a diagnostic instrument capable of exposing the precarious architecture underlying Victorian domesticity and social stability. Traditional realism presents the world as fundamentally ordered, yet the Brontë novels systematically dismantle this illusion by staging what Lovecraft identifies as "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature" (3). The Victorian domestic interior fractures under forces exceeding rational explanation. Robert Aickman's observation that "Conventions are, indeed, all that shield us from the shivering void, though they often do so but poorly and desperately" (24) captures the canon's fundamental recognition, that society's rules function as fragile barriers against chaos, barriers that might collapse when confronted with genuine human passion or metaphysical horror.

The weird dimension of the Brontë novels manifests most vividly through what China Miéville calls an "obsession with numinosity under the everyday," which lies "at the heart of 'Weird Fiction'" (510). This focus proves crucial for understanding how the Brontë interior simultaneously maintains its appearance of domestic normalcy while harbouring threats that are fundamentally inhuman or at least a-human in character. Carney observes that the ordinary proves ephemeral, concealing depths that mundane reality usually obscures (Carney 2, 129); the comfortable drawing room, the respectable marriage, and the proper Victorian household remain vulnerable to eruptions that cannot be moralized. The Brontë canon performs this recognition, stripping away domesticity's veil to reveal that Victorian comfort depends upon elaborate denial and repression. Mark Fisher describes this revelation as how "The weird de-naturalises all worlds, by exposing their instability, their openness to the outside" (Fisher 29).This weird perspective illuminates why the Brontë novels provoked such sustained vilification from their contemporary readership. The texts refused to offer reassurance that moral order could contain human passion or that social convention could guarantee safety from metaphysical threat.

Moral nihilism, as it manifests across the Brontë novels, operates not as philosophical doctrine but rather as an affective and ontological condition wherein characters discover that established ethical systems prove radically inadequate to comprehend human experience. This condition differs fundamentally from amorality or moral relativism; whereas amorality suggests the absence of moral awareness, and relativism permits multiple valid ethical frameworks, the kind of nihilism that the Brontë canon stages reveals that established moral categories themselves possess no coherence when confronted with genuine human complexity. Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* articulate this discovery with particular clarity, while Emily's *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates it through the systematic destruction of moral categories themselves. The Brontë canon stages what might be termed a deliberate dismantling of Victorian didacticism, replacing moral instruction with what contemporary critics condemned as "coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conception, the coarseness apparently of violence and cultivated men" (Lewes qtd. in Barker,*Wild Genius*139). This coarseness signals not merely offensive subject matter but rather a fundamental refusal to subordinate narrative to moral improvement or redemptive closure. Characters behave in ways that exceed psychological motivation or moral explanation; their actions derive from drives and desires that render traditional ethical frameworks obsolete.

Rochester's position throughout *Jane Eyre* embodies this moral nihilism most starkly. He declares that "unheard-of combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules" (C. Brontë261), a statement that dissolves the universal applicability of moral law and fragments ethics into situational contingency. Rochester's transgression in his bigamous marriage, his attempted deception, and his confinement of Bertha cannot be recuperated within the moral binary of virtue and vice that the classical novel presupposes. Yet the novel never permits moral judgment to settle into certainty; instead, Rochester remains a figure whose actions resist both condemnation and justification. His moral status oscillates throughout the narrative, and Jane's response to him compounds this oscillation rather than resolving it. When Jane discovers Rochester's secret, her flight stems from violated trust rather than moral revulsion. The text suggests his actions might derive from desperation rather than villainy yet refuses full absolution. This oscillation reveals that Rochester defies available moral categories.

Heathcliff's trajectory in *Wuthering Heights* manifests an even more radical form of moral nihilism, for his systematic cruelty operates without redemptive purpose or narrative punishment that would restore moral coherence. Emily Brontë permits him to exist as a force of destruction that the moral frameworks of the novel's world prove entirely unable to contain or explain. Other characters describe Heathcliff as demonic; Nelly Dean remarks that he possessed "savage sullenness and ferocity" and that he seemed capable of violence beyond ordinary human malice (E. Brontë 65). These demonic comparisons might carry ontological weight, suggesting Heathcliff constitutes something fundamentally other than human. Catherine Earnshaw's children inherit a world devastated by his revenge, which stems from no moral principle but rather a metaphysical hunger that consumes everything in its path. His actions lack the moral motivation that would permit judgment; he harms others not because he believes such harm serves justice or virtue but because destruction itself seems to constitute his essential nature.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* manifests moral nihilism through Arthur Huntingdon, a character whose vice operates without the explanatory scaffolding of passion or circumstance. Arthur drinks, gambles, seduces, and deceives with a consistency that suggests these actions constitute his fundamental being rather than moral failures that might be reformed. Helen's recognition of this reality might perhaps be the novel's most devastating moment, for she must acknowledge that her moral universe cannot reform her husband because his nature operates outside the reach of moral redemption. Arthur represents what the novel suggests might be irredeemable moral vacancy, a void at the centre of a human subject that renders ethical categories meaningless.

The numinous dimension of the Brontë canon manifests as a category of experience that ruptures the boundaries between self and other, material and psychic, and knowable and radically foreign. Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous as that which inspires simultaneous awe and dread finds its literary expression most forcefully in these three novels, where the numinous erupts not in exotic or transcendent settings but within domestic interiors supposedly secured by convention and propriety (38). The *mônstrum*, as theoretical discourse now recognizes, constitutes "that which leaks from the beyond; vaporous intelligences that have overflowed—or been ritualistically conjured—into our realms" (Martinod 16). Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* functions precisely as such mônstrum, a being whose very presence within Thornfield violates the natural order of the domestic sphere. She represents not villainy or moral transgression but rather the eruption of something that should not exist within the sanctioned space of the Victorian home. Her laughter, her wordless vocalizations, her nocturnal wanderings establish her as fundamentally other to Jane's world, a presence that cannot be assimilated into the categories of human motivation or moral accountability.

Wuthering Heights renders the numinous operative at the level of landscape and architectural space, transforming the moors and the house itself into entities that exert their own forms of agency upon inhabitants. Lockwood's encounter with the phantom child at the window introduces the numinous directly

into the domestic interior, suggesting that *Wuthering Heights* harbours forces anterior to human history or comprehension. Heathcliff's own status as a figure might perhaps be comprehended through the numinous register, for his origins remain occluded, his nature defies human explanation, and his presence corrupts everything he touches in ways that exceed moral or psychological causality. The novel suggests that he might be something other than human, that the demonic comparisons made by other characters might carry ontological weight rather than mere rhetorical force. Catherine's spectral visitations and Heathcliff's final mysterious transformation hint at dimensions of reality that exceed the material world's apparent stability. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* stages the numinous through Helen's experience of marriage itself, her discovery that the domestic interior contains forces of contamination and violation that marriage vows cannot contain. Within Victorian matrimony, a woman's position may be understood as that of the "Other," a role that is fundamental to the phallic function, insofar as she holds "apart two moments which are in constant danger of collapsing into each other" (Wicks 121).Arthur's brutality possesses a quality that transcends mere moral failing; it constitutes an invasion of Helen's being, a violation that operates at the level of fundamental ontology rather than conventional ethics.

The numinous threat that structures all three novels concerns the dissolution of selfhood in the face of forces that cannot be rationalized or morally categorized. This dissolution manifests as what Timothy Morton describes through the language of object-oriented ontology: "Reality, ... is a dense thorn bush spiked with diamond tipped thorns that dig into my flesh from every angle—that *are* my flesh" (Morton 42). Characters in the Brontë novels experience selfhood as permeable, vulnerable to invasion by forces that originate from beyond the boundaries of individual consciousness. The "subject-dissolving power of disgust" (Newell 5) that contemporary criticism identifies with weird fiction operates throughout these works, inducing moments where the experiencing consciousness feels itself beginning to fragment or dissolve. Jane's visionary experiences at Thornfield and Helen's enclosure within her marriage both suggest that the 'self' possesses no stable ground from which to maintain autonomy or rational perspective. Heathcliff's transgressive presence similarly forces all characters around him to surrender their sense of bounded selfhood, to become what GryUlstein describes: "part of the monster by way of weird articulation" (Ulstein91). The numinous threatens not merely physical safety but ontological integrity; it raises the possibility that the boundaries we assume to separate self from other, inside from outside, might be far more permeable and destabilized than Victorian ideology permits us to acknowledge.

These novels refuse the reassurance that Victorian ideology demanded; they maintain moral chaos and numinous threat as permanent conditions rather than temporary disruptions. Yet this refusal itself constitutes a form of philosophical wisdom. Contemporary readers inhabit a historical moment marked by resurgent certainty about moral categories and ethical absolutes, a moment when ideological positions harden and nuance dissolves into partisan simplicity. The Brontë canon, read through the register of weird fiction and moral nihilism, becomes something more than a historical artifact or canonical monument. These three works teach us to recognize how selfhood and ethics depend upon elaborate processes of denial and repression, how the domestic spaces we mistake for stability might conceal forces that no moral vocabulary can adequately name. Heathcliff's destruction of *Wuthering Heights* might serve as the perfect symbol of this recognition; his violence does not follow from moral failure or psychological wound but rather from something that might be called a fundamental absence of those categories entirely. The numinous, as the Brontë canon demonstrates it, cannot be mastered or moralized away; it can only be acknowledged as a perpetual possibility lurking within the apparently ordinary structures of Victorian domesticity and human selfhood.

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The Kitchen Space as an Agency of Knowledge and Power: Reading Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*

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Abstract

Though Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) marks a revival of English historical novel and it is considered a classic of twentieth century, however, reading the novel from the vantage point of 'space' provides an altogether new dimension to the genre of historical novel. This paper seeks to study Mantel's representation of the kitchen as a socially produced space where power is enacted, negotiated, and appropriated. Mantel constructs the kitchen as an active space or in Lefebvre's term 'lived space' which is one shaped by daily practices, sensory labour, and interpersonal exchange. Contrary to the symbolic and regulated spaces of the court, the kitchen functions as a fluid space that facilitates the circulation of information across social hierarchies. Through Thomas Cromwell's attention to domestic spaces like the kitchens, Mantel divulges how political authority develops from proximity to daily activities that meets basic human needs. From Foucault's viewpoint, the kitchen acts as a heterotopic site by being marginal and central at the same time. Even though the kitchen as a space is generally excluded from being a site of official power, however, in this novel, it becomes indispensable for operation of power. This is because the kitchenacts as a space of informal surveillance, formation of alliances, and production of knowledge through observation rather than decree. Mantel subverts traditional spatial hierarchies embedded in historical narratives by foregrounding the kitchen as a socially produced space. This spatial reading of *Wolf Hall* underscores a contestation to the existing histories of Tudor politics by repositioning domestic space as a potential site of governance.

Keywords : kitchen, power, knowledge, space, everyday life

Introduction

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) is a classic historical novel of twentieth century known for foregrounding and re-narrativising the role of Thomas Cromwell in Tudor regime. Having focalized Tudor monarchy from the consciousness of Cromwell, the novel cannot be merely categorised as a historical fiction. Issues related to governance, such as power dynamics, subject position, question of inheritance and production of space are quite palpable. Critical responses with regards to Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* largely concentrated on the innovative and revisionist narrative interpretation of Thomas Cromwell. Conversely, such readings often replicate the spatial hierarchy of existing historiography by making the court appear as the primary locus of political power. By guiding attention to domestic spaces like the kitchen, Mantel's narrative offers a resistance to such hierarchies. The kitchen as a space is significant in her narrative because of how power is sustained through labour, observation, and memory. For instance, James Wood in an article "The Flesh of History" (2009) published in *The New Yorker* notably illustrates Mantel's narrative on Cromwell as though it is operating through a "phenomenology of immediacy" (Wood 70) in which he states how the novel engages the readers within Cromwell's perceptions rather than making it a mere omniscient historical narrative. The centrality of this narrative intimacy in Mantel is significant for the spatial dimension she creates because it sanctions lived environments over established historical backdrops.

At the very outset, the novel clearly states Cromwell's lineage which is not defined by nobility but by the spatial experiences he acquires through his

travels ever since he left his father, Walter Cromwell's abode at Putney. Cromwell is recurrently associated with working environments in which he emphasises the art of remembering to George Cavendish who admires Cromwell's ability to remember minute details. Thomas Cromwell responds that "It is a method of remembering. I learned in Italy" (Mantel 79). He is a subtle listener and observer as well because of which he survives in a court obsessed with hierarchies, though he lacks noble lineage. This act of listening is significant from the perspective of domestic spaces within the novel, most particularly the kitchen suggesting that power transpires from attentiveness to the everyday rather than from spectacle. An instance of which would be a narration by Cromwell from his childhood when his uncle John introduces him to the kitchen at Lambeth Palace, where his "chances of being fed were better" (Mantel 112). Cromwell understands the necessity of movement by being in the kitchen at Lambeth Palace along with understanding how hierarchies work:

> Each dinner time the household officers formed up in procession in the passages off the kitchens, and they carried in tablecloths and the Principal Salt. His uncle John measured the loaves and if they were not just right they were tossed into a basket for the lower household… Into the great hall would go the meats and the cheeses, the sugared fruits and the spiced wafers, to the archbishop's table…" (Mantel 113)

Thus, Mantel creates a strong base for showcasing the significance of dynamic spaces like the kitchens for a character's growth. Similar to James Wood, Eileen Pollard argues that Mantel's historical fiction particularly in the case of *Wolf Hall*, "resists the "heritage aesthetic" of Tudor representation by foregrounding material hardship, contingency, and labour" (Pollard 112). Pollard's article identifies the kitchen as a key spatial mechanism through which demystification of power occurs in the novel. However, it is important to note that Mantel is not romanticizing the domestic space of the kitchen, she simply aligns this idea with her broader historiographical endeavour of revealing how power functions on undervalued forms of work, namely works within the sphere of kitchens.

Stef Craps, in his article, "Memory, Ethics, and the Historical Imagination in Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*" (2013) emphasizes Mantel's ethical attention to marginal figures, like Thomas Cromwell. He argues that in the novel, Mantel reconstructs history through "affective proximity rather than moral judgment" (Craps 89). The kitchen, consequently becomes a privileged site of this proximity which enables Cromwell and the readers to witness history as something that assembles through small gestures, overheard words, and bodily endurance. In this context, this paper argues that the space of the kitchen in *Wolf Hall* (2009) functions as a key site of power and knowledge, subverting binaries between public and private, political and domestic. Leaning on the theoretical ideas of Lefebvre, Soja, and Foucault, the paper tries to establish how power is located within the routines of domestic labour and sharing of information in conversations within such quotidian routines in Mantel's novel.

Theoretical Framework

A foundational lens for reading Hilary Mantel's description of the kitchen space is Henri Lefebvre's contention regarding space which is that "space is a social product" (Lefebvre 26). The kitchens in *Wolf Hall* are shaped through repetitive acts of cooking, cleaning, provisioning, and waiting, rather than functioning as passive backdrop. Embedding power within quotidian routines, these activities inside the kitchens constitute what Lefebvre terms "*spatial practice"*(Lefebvre 38).

The kitchen's hybrid status is further clarified by Edward Soja's notion of Thirdspace. According to Soja, Thirdspace is a lived space that "embraces multiplicity and contradiction" (Soja 56). In *Wolf Hall*, the kitchen seems to be centrally grounded, nevertheless it allows subordinate figures to gain access to vital knowledge. Therefore, the kitchen becomes a symbolically and politically charged space where information is disseminated between people of the lower ranks.

On the other hand, Michel Foucault's theory of power/knowledge underscores the idea that power circulates through informal practices rather than residing solely in sovereign authority. According to Foucault, knowledge is produced "at the level of everyday life" (Foucault 131). This process is exemplified by the kitchens in *Wolf Hall* which functions as sites where observation and memory turn into political influence.

Analysis:

The depiction of the physical labour that goes on in the kitchens by Mantel foregrounds the essentiality of such physical work that helps sustain elite life. The material intensity within the kitchens is intensified by the movement, heat, and noise. Enmeshed within this space are Cromwell's memories of childhood marked by hunger and labour rather than privilege,that repeatedly returns whenever he is in such spaces. He recalls that survival requires learning "how to be useful" (Mantel 113), a lesson he acquires in the kitchens when he witnesses people in the kitchens working at Lambeth Palace.

This knowledge which Cromwell acquires from his experience at the kitchens of aristocratic households distinguishes his persona from other historical figures of prominence who occupy representational spaces of power like castles and affluent homes. The nobles remain detached from the processes that lead to their comfort. For example, the nobles consume the food prepared in the kitchens but they hardly ever trouble themselves in knowing how the kitchens actually work. This culture of dependency by the nobles is revealed by Mantel when she notes that great houses "run on other people's backs" (Mantel 112) which is a blunt acknowledgment of class exploitation embedded in domestic space.

However, class hierarchy is also seen to be subverted by the kitchen due to the power of observation that the servants hold over the nobles in moments of vulnerability. This vulnerability can be in the form of their everyday routines of eating, complaining, losing patience etc. This proximity that the servants hold with the nobles unsettles the illusion of absolute authority. Lefebvre's assertion that representational spaces allow lived experience to challenge abstract power (Lefebvre 39) is exemplified by the kitchen's functions as showcased by Mantel.

One significant role that the kitchen plays in *Wolf Hall* is its function as an informal hub of knowledge. The servants overhear conversations, witness emotional outbursts and observe changes in routine of their monarchs,and they circulate this vital information in the kitchen's spaces. Cromwell constantly acknowledges the deep-rooted philosophy of paying attention to detail. In *Wolf Hall* Cromwell goes down to the kitchen in his home at Austin Friars, to talk to his kitchen staff about the ill health of Cardinal Wolsey, who is a statesman and Lord High Chancellor of Britain as well as Cromwell's mentor. His cook, Thurston takes keen interest in the topic and enquires about the Cardinal. Furthermore, when Cromwell asks Thurston if he resembles a murderer, Thurston replies after considerable thinking, "But, if you will forgive me, master, you always look like a man who knows how to cut up a carcase" (Mantel 206).James Wood's observation is particularly relevant here because he describes that Mantel privileges how things are felt before they are explained,and that Mantel's novel creates a "livingness" in the past (Wood 70). Such affective knowledge like the tension in a voice, the hesitation before a reply, the change in appetite is possible due to the existence of the kitchens. These embodied cyphers function as political data, reinforcing Foucault's claim that power is exercised through attention to minutiae rather than grand declarations (Foucault 145).

From Foucault's perspective, this knowledge which is local and unofficial establishes what he terms "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault 7). Nevertheless, this information is politically potential because the underestimated space of the kitchens enables such knowledge to sustain. The political shrewdness that Cromwell displays rests in his refusal to dismiss domestic spaces as trivial. Instead, when he has conversation with his boys at his home or even Thomas Cranmer, he makes sure to talk about all that happens at court. An important thing about clerics that he highlights while having a conversation with Cranmer

after the king has a bad dream, "Clerics can speak about your character. Give verdicts: this one seems favourable" (Mantel 279).

The narrative structure deployed by Mantel reinforces this epistemological position. The novel is seen to frame political events through anticipation, rumour and retrospective understanding which are modes of knowledge cultivated in the space of the kitchens rather than courts; instead of overtly dramatizing such events through public declarations. David James describes Mantel's emphasis on casual knowledge as her resistance to "official historiography's claim to coherence" (James 54). Kitchen operates as a space where historical coherence breaks down into fragments, namely in the form of rumours, silences, partial truths which Cromwell in turn assembles into political strategy.

In *Wolf Hall*, the kitchen space resists the binaries between private or public. Although it falls within the household, the kitchen sustains public power by feeding diplomats, councillors, and monarchs and this liminality aligns with Edward Soja's conception of the Thirdspace, which collapses binary spatial distinctions.Thomas Cromwell himself acts as a representative of the Thirdspace subjectivity. This is because his mobility between kitchens and council rooms is tacitly making him a counterpart of both the domestic and elite spaces. Mantel suggests that he is comfortable "standing where others would not be seen" (Mantel 289) which stems from a spatial awareness that enables his political ascent. The process of making spiced wafers is explained in detail and this also acts as a metaphor for explaining political strategies like getting a bill to pass at the Commons. Again, he recalls how Thurston would make his kitchen boys make hundred wafers in order to perfect the art. As if the success of these wafers signals the success of a political event that is forthcoming because ultimately the wafers were "perfumed with rosewater" and "a batch is sent to Thomas Boleyn" (Mantel 343), serving a completely diplomatic purpose. Therefore, he derives authority not from inhabiting dominant spaces but from traversing between marginal ones.The kitchen also serves as a space of memory because Cromwell connects domestic spaces with his dead wife and daughters, recalling moments of shared meals and familiar care. Basing his pursuit of power in lived loss rather than ambition alone, these memories outline his political ethics. An illustration from the novel where he remembers his days in Florence is when he works for Frescobaldi showcasing how his memory remains accurate even in his present predicament. This memory occurs when he visits the kitchen at his own home at Austin Friars, and when Cromwell is well ahead in his stature as the King's adviser, he remembers his experiences from being a kitchen help himself under the guidance of his Uncle John before establishing himself as a minister. Therefore, he discusses the significance of experiencing society from the very grassroots while having a calm conversation with Thurston. Thurston talks about how he feeds so many people from different parts of the world even when Cromwell is away. Thurston comments that "they all claim to know you and they all want their dinner to their own liking… We must feed fewer, or build another kitchen". (Mantel 446). This conversation goes on to showcase the subtle thoughts of Thurston and Cromwell in making their boys at Austin Friars acquire everything firsthand through daily activities.

Traditionally, kitchens are considered as feminine spaces, however, Mantel thwarts this association by presenting domestic labour as politically consequential. In the novel, both women and men participate in kitchen duties. Hence, competence rather than gender is the norm for measuring authority in such spaces. Pollard perceives that Mantel "allows domestic work to speak politically without sentimentalizing it" (Pollard 118).

Conclusion

Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) reimagines the spatial foundations of political power through its unrelenting attention to kitchens and other domestic spaces. By taking the theoretical lens of Lefebvre, Soja, and Foucault, this paper demonstrates how the kitchen functions as a socially produced, hybrid space where labour, knowledge, and power come together.The kitchens that Mantel depicts are not marginal sites but are the potential sites of historical change. By locating power within quotidian routines, *Wolf Hall* subverts

traditional historiography and foregrounds the role of domestic sphere in sculpting political life. For this, Mantel makes the readers reconsider not only who holds power, but where and how power is produced.

By applying spatial theory to *Wolf Hall*, this paper complements existing critical accounts of Mantel's narrative ethics and stylistic innovation. This paper demonstrates that the kitchen space is the structural condition that enables qualities like perception, materiality and marginality to thrive politically. Therefore, Mantel's kitchens are not secondary backdrops, they are central mechanisms of historical meaning, revealing how power is produced through the everyday.

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The Gilded Mirror: Aestheticizing the Mundane and Challenging Arnoldian "Seriousness" in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Abstract

This paper revisits Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a literary classic by placing it in critical dialogue with Matthew Arnold's theory of the "touchstone" and contemporary approaches drawn from the Theory of Everyday Life. Although Wilde's novel was initially received with moral suspicion and accusations of decadence, its sustained institutional presence within the English literary canon indicates its enduring cultural and critical significance. Traditionally, classics have been understood, following Arnold, as embodying "high truth and seriousness," offering moral and intellectual value through elevated form and expression. This study argues that *Dorian Gray* attains its classical status not by affirming Arnoldian seriousness, but by interrogating and reconfiguring it. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre's analysis of everyday life as a site of ideological reproduction and Michel de Certeau's concept of spatial practice, the paper examines how Wilde aestheticises daily routines, material culture, and consumption to expose the socio-economic and imperial structures underlying Victorian culture. Through close textual analysis of character relations, narrative voice, and material inventories, the study demonstrates how *The Picture of Dorian Gray* revitalizes classical meaning by foregrounding tensions between tradition and individual talent, universal aesthetic ideals and historically conditioned material realities. The paper concludes that Wilde's novel remains a critically productive classic precisely because it challenges the ideological processes through which classics are formed and sustained.

Keywords : Arnold, Wilde, Victorian, Aestheticism, Everyday Life.

Introduction: Rethinking the Idea of the Classic

Classics function as cultural benchmarks through which literature is historically evaluated, shaping expectations of aesthetic excellence, moral seriousness, and intellectual authority. Within the English literary tradition, Matthew Arnold's formulation of the "touchstone" has played a decisive role in defining these evaluative standards. For Arnold, classic literature embodied "high truth and seriousness," achieving a "poetic" magnificence capable of cultivating moral and intellectual refinement. Such works, he argued, endured not merely through artistic excellence but through their capacity to transmit stable cultural values across generations (*Culture and Anarchy*).

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* occupies a complex and contested position within this Arnoldian framework. When it appeared in 1890, the novel was met with hostility from reviewers who viewed its aestheticism as morally corrosive and socially irresponsible. Yet, despite these initial reactions, *Dorian Gray* has remained firmly embedded within the literary canon, appearing consistently in university syllabi, critical anthologies, and scholarly debates. Its status as a classic thus emerges not from immediate acceptance but from a prolonged process of institutionalization, critical reassessment, and pedagogical validation.

This paper contends that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* should be understood as a classic precisely because it interrogates the ideological assumptions that govern classical authority. Rather than offering moral instruction in the Arnoldian sense, Wilde's novel exposes the contradictions embedded within Victorian ideals of beauty, refinement, and seriousness. Wilde's well-known assertion that "there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book" (Wilde 3) signals a refusal of evaluative frameworks that reduce literature to ethical utility. At the same time, the novel's endurance suggests that its value lies not in moral instruction but in its capacity to sustain critical inquiry across historical moments.

To revisit *Dorian Gray* through a contemporary theoretical framework, this study draws upon the Theory of Everyday Life. Henri Lefebvre's insistence that ideology operates most powerfully within everyday practices—habits, routines, and patterns of consumption—provides a critical lens for examining Dorian Gray's aestheticisation of daily life. Michel de Certeau's notion of spatial practice further illuminates how everyday spaces are transformed into sites of cultural reproduction. Reading Wilde's novel through these perspectives allows for a reconsideration of dominant narrative authority, the formation of classics through institutional processes, and the ongoing tension between tradition and individual talent.

Narrative Structure and the Aestheticisation of Life

From the perspective adopted in this study, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not merely a moral allegory or a cautionary tale but a narrative organised around the gradual aestheticisation of everyday life. The novel charts Dorian's transformation from an impressionable young aristocrat into a figure who systematically converts ordinary experience—objects, relationships, and spaces—into aesthetic commodities. His youthful wish that the portrait should age in his place establishes the governing logic of the novel: the separation of appearance from consequence.

The portrait functions as a displaced ethical register, absorbing the visible traces of Dorian's actions while allowing his public self to remain untouched. Each act of cruelty, indulgence, or neglect is inscribed upon the painted image, while Dorian's physical appearance retains its surface perfection. This narrative device enables Wilde to dramatise the dangers inherent in treating life itself as a work of art. Ethical responsibility is displaced onto an object, permitting Dorian to pursue sensation without confronting the immediate effects of his choices.

As the narrative progresses, Dorian increasingly evaluates experience according to aesthetic pleasure rather than ethical consequence. Relationships are valued for their novelty, objects for their rarity, and spaces for their capacity to stimulate sensation. Everyday life thus becomes a site of ideological reproduction rather than moral growth. Wilde's narrative structure reinforces this movement by repeatedly juxtaposing moments of aesthetic delight with the silent, accumulating corruption of the portrait.

Arnold, Aestheticism, and the Anxiety of Influence

The ideological tensions of the novel are most clearly articulated through the triadic relationship between Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, and Dorian Gray. Basil embodies a belief in art as a moral and spiritual force. He regards the portrait as a revelation of the soul and fears its public exposure precisely because it contains what he perceives as a dangerous truth. Basil's position closely aligns with Arnoldian ideals, particularly the belief that art should contribute to moral seriousness and cultural refinement.

Lord Henry, by contrast, represents a destabilising aesthetic philosophy that privileges sensation, novelty, and surface over inherited moral frameworks. His epigrammatic style reduces ethical complexity to witty paradox, encouraging Dorian to treat life as an experiment in pleasure. Lord Henry's influence exemplifies the tension between tradition and individual talent, a tension later theorised by T. S. Eliot as the "anxiety of influence." While Dorian appears to assert individuality by rejecting Basil's moral seriousness, his aestheticism remains deeply derivative, shaped by borrowed philosophies and literary models rather than authentic self-creation.

Dorian's position between these two figures illustrates Wilde's critique of both unexamined tradition and unreflective aesthetic rebellion. By abandoning Basil's ethical restraint without achieving genuine autonomy, Dorian becomes a figure through whom the novel exposes the limitations of aestheticism when severed from ethical self-awareness.

Everyday Life as Ideological Terrain

The theoretical foundation of this paper rests on the understanding that ideology operates most effectively within the realm of the everyday. Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* argues that social power is reproduced not only through visible institutions such as the state, the church, or the legal system, but also through routine practices, habitual gestures, and ordinary modes of consumption. The everyday, for Lefebvre, is not a neutral or passive domain; rather, it is the space in which abstract systems such as capitalism, class hierarchy, and cultural privilege are lived, normalized, and rendered seemingly natural.

Dorian Gray's life exemplifies this process of ideological naturalisation. His recurring boredom, often articulated through a sense of emotional emptiness and dissatisfaction, may be understood as a form of *tedium vitae* produced by a social order that separates pleasure from labour and aesthetics from ethical responsibility. This boredom does not provoke resistance or critical awareness. Instead, it generates a continuous desire for stimulation, novelty, and sensation. Dorian's response to dissatisfaction is therefore not ethical reflection but aesthetic escalation, a pattern that mirrors Lefebvre's observation that modern life frequently converts alienation into consumption rather than critique.

The aestheticisation of everyday life in the novel operates as a compensatory mechanism. Dorian treats his meals, furnishings, clothing, and leisure activities as artistic compositions, carefully curated to maximise sensory pleasure. These practices do not disrupt ideological structures; instead, they reinforce them by transforming social privilege into personal taste. Everyday life, rather than serving as a site of collective interaction or moral development, becomes a private domain organised around individual gratification. Wilde thus presents the everyday not as trivial background detail, but as the primary medium through which ideological values are reproduced and sustained.

Michel de Certeau's concept of spatial practice further clarifies this dynamic. De Certeau distinguishes between "place," which is ordered and regulated, and "space," which is produced through lived practices. Dorian's domestic environment exemplifies this transformation. His home becomes a carefully controlled space in which objects are arranged, rearranged, and displayed according to aesthetic preference. This spatial practice enables withdrawal from social accountability while maintaining the illusion of refinement. Everyday space, instead of grounding the subject in social reality, becomes an instrument of concealment and ideological insulation.

Through Lefebvre and de Certeau, Wilde's novel reveals how everyday life itself becomes the terrain upon which aesthetic ideology operates most effectively. Dorian's moral failure is inseparable from his everyday practices, suggesting that ethical disintegration does not occur through extraordinary acts alone but through repeated, seemingly inconsequential choices embedded within daily life.

Chapter XI: Material Culture and Imperial Aesthetics

Chapter XI of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents the most sustained exploration of aestheticised everyday life in the novel. Often criticised for its apparent excess and digressive quality, this chapter is central to Wilde's critique of material culture. The extended catalogue of ecclesiastical vestments, musical instruments, rare perfumes, and jewels slows the narrative tempo and foregrounds accumulation as a defining aesthetic principle.

Dorian's fascination with sacred vestments reduces religious tradition to surface beauty, transforming objects of worship into objects of private pleasure. Wilde describes Dorian handling "the orphreys of Flemish work" and "the stole of purple silk, inwrought with golden discs" (Wilde 142), emphasising texture, colour, and craftsmanship rather than spiritual significance. Religious history is thus aestheticised and emptied of ethical content.

Similarly, Dorian's obsession with rare jewels maps the global reach of British imperial extraction. His interest in the "olive-green chrysoberyl" and the "alexandrite that was emerald by day and ruby by night" (Wilde 150) reflects a form of aesthetic consumption detached from the labour and violence that produced these objects. Through this inventory, Wilde exposes the ideological mechanism by which elite culture naturalises imperial privilege within everyday life. Material culture becomes a means of concealing, rather than confronting, the socio-economic realities of empire.

Sibyl Vane and the Limits of Aestheticism

Sibyl Vane occupies a crucial position in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* because she represents a form of everyday life grounded in labour, emotional vulnerability, and social dependency. Unlike the aristocratic characters who inhabit drawing rooms and private collections, Sibyl's existence is structured by economic necessity and repetitive work. As an actress, she performs nightly, selling emotional expression as labour within a commercial theatre economy. Her artistic value, therefore, is inseparable from material conditions.

Initially, Sibyl exists for Dorian as an aesthetic object rather than a social subject. He values her for her ability to embody Shakespearean heroines, praising her performances as if they were timeless artistic forms detached from the conditions of production. In this sense, Sibyl functions as a living artwork, appreciated only insofar as she sustains Dorian's aesthetic pleasure. Her individuality, fatigue, and emotional reality remain invisible to him.

When Sibyl falls in love, her performances deteriorate, and she loses her exchange value within this aesthetic economy. Dorian's rejection—"You have killed my love… you used to stir my imagination" (Wilde 89)—reveals the ideological logic governing his desire. He condemns her not for moral failure but for abandoning aesthetic illusion in favour of lived emotion. Authentic feeling, which might otherwise signify human connection, is here redefined as artistic failure.

Sibyl's suicide marks the point at which aestheticism encounters an irreducible ethical reality. This act cannot be aestheticised, commodified, or transformed into an object of pleasure. It confronts Dorian with the consequences of his ideological detachment from everyday human suffering. James Vane's subsequent pursuit of Dorian reinforces this confrontation. As a working-class figure driven by familial obligation rather than aesthetic desire, James represents the return of a social reality that Dorian has attempted to suppress. Together, Sibyl and James expose the limits of aestheticism by reasserting the claims of labour, responsibility, and human vulnerability.

The Portrait and Modern Identity Curation

The portrait occupies a central symbolic function in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, operating as a visual register of ethical consequence that exists alongside, yet remains hidden from, public life. While Dorian's physical appearance retains its youthful perfection, the portrait absorbs the visible signs of moral corruption. This division between surface and depth enables Dorian to manage his social identity while displacing responsibility onto an object.

Read through a contemporary lens, the portrait may be understood as an early articulation of what later surveillance theory describes as the "data double"—a parallel, digital record that accumulates the effects of everyday actions while remaining inaccessible to public scrutiny (Haggerty and Ericson 606). In this context, Dorian's face becomes a high-visibility interface, while the portrait serves as the "backend" repository of metadata. Every choice and transaction Dorian makes is logged upon the canvas, creating an asymmetry of information between his public persona and his private record. This mirrors modern anxieties surrounding digital reputation and ethical accountability, where selfhood is increasingly mediated by curated surfaces and selective disclosure, while the cumulative "data" of one's life remains hidden from the immediate view of the social world.

What distinguishes the portrait from a purely moral allegory is its intimate connection to everyday life. Each minor act of cruelty, indulgence, or neglect

is recorded, suggesting that ethical degradation is cumulative rather than spectacular. The portrait does not merely document extraordinary transgressions; it registers the slow accumulation of everyday choices. Wilde thus locates moral consequence within routine behaviour rather than singular moments of crisis.

The destruction of the portrait at the novel's conclusion underscores the impossibility of sustaining a divided self indefinitely. Dorian's attempt to destroy the image results in his own death, collapsing the distinction between curated appearance and ethical reality. In this sense, the portrait functions not only as a Gothic device but as a sustained critique of identity constructed through concealment. Wilde anticipates a modern condition in which selfhood is increasingly mediated by surfaces, images, and selective disclosure, while reminding readers that ethical life cannot ultimately be separated from everyday practice.

Conclusion

This study has argued that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may be productively re-examined as a literary classic by placing Matthew Arnold's concept of the "touchstone" in dialogue with the Theory of Everyday Life. Rather than rejecting Arnoldian seriousness outright, Wilde relocates the question of seriousness from overt moral instruction to the domain of everyday practices, material culture, and aesthetic consumption. By aestheticising the ordinary, the novel exposes the ideological conditions that sustain elite cultural authority while concealing their socio-economic and imperial foundations.

Drawing on the theoretical insights of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, the paper has demonstrated how Dorian Gray's failure is rooted not merely in individual moral weakness but in an aesthetic worldview that refuses to acknowledge the ethical dimensions embedded within daily existence. Wilde's novel endures as a classic not because it conforms to inherited standards of seriousness, but because it interrogates the processes through which those standards are produced, institutionalised, and legitimised. Revisiting *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through contemporary theoretical perspectives affirms the continued relevance of classics as sites of critical renewal rather than static repositories of cultural authority.

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Power, Resistance, and Identity in the *Khamba and Thoibi* Epic: A Contemporary Re-reading

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Abstract

Khamba and Thoibi, a central narrative of the Moirang Kangleirol, is widely regarded as a classic because of its enduring cultural influence, its repeated retellings through literature, dance, music, and theatre, and its embodiment of universal themes such as love, sacrifice, heroism, and moral virtue. Its transmission across centuries through oral tradition, ritual performance, and written chronicles demonstrates the narrative's canonical status in Manipuri cultural memory. This paper revisits the epic through postcolonial and Foucauldian lenses to revitalise its meaning for contemporary readers. A postcolonial reading reveals *Khamba and Thoibi* as a text of indigenous resistance and subaltern assertion, while a Foucauldian analysis uncovers its complex networks of power, discipline, surveillance, and regulated desire. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that the epic's value as a classic is not confined to its romance; its deeper political, cultural, and philosophical implications continue to illuminate questions of identity, authority, and resistance in postcolonial societies.

Keywords: Epic, Identity, Postcolonial, Power, Resistance

Introduction

Among the many narratives that constitute Manipuri cultural heritage, *Khamba and Thoibi* stands pre-eminent as a classic because of its ability to sustain relevance across generations, transcend its local origins, and function as an enduring archetype of Manipuri identity. As W. I. Singh observes, a classic is a work that "retains meaning across time, adapting itself to new cultural and interpretive contexts" (Singh 14). *Khamba and Thoibi* fulfils this criterion through its continual re-articulation in oral storytelling, Lai Haraoba performance, dance, theatre, music, and modern literary forms. Its central figures Khamba, the marginalised yet morally grounded hero, and Thoibi, the defiant and self-determining princess, have become cultural archetypes whose symbolic resonance continues to shape Manipuri collective consciousness (Parratt 23).

Traditionally, the epic has been read as a romantic tale of devotion, courage, and tragic love, and scholarly attention has largely focused on its mythic, folkloric, and historical dimensions. Contemporary literary criticism, however, encourages the re-reading of classics as ideologically rich texts that respond to changing social and political conditions. Approaching *Khamba and Thoibi* through postcolonial theory and Foucauldian analysis allows the epic to be understood not merely as a nostalgic cultural artefact but as a dynamic narrative that encodes relations of power, resistance, and identity.

Manipur's history of colonial intervention, political subjugation, and the reconfiguration of indigenous identity makes it especially important to revisit such texts as repositories of cultural memory and resistance. In this context, *Khamba and Thoibi* operates as a cultural archive of pre-colonial worldviews and indigenous epistemologies. Its attention to marginalised figures, unequal power relations in the court of Moirang, and symbolic acts of defiance renders it particularly open to postcolonial interpretation. At the same time, the epic's detailed representation of authority, social regulation, surveillance, and the

disciplining of desire invites a Foucauldian reading of how power circulates through institutions, bodies, and every day practices.

This paper therefore approaches a dual theoretical reading of *Khamba and Thoibi*. The postcolonial framework foregrounds subaltern experience, indigenous identity, and cultural resistance, while the Foucauldian perspective analyses the networks of power that shape subjectivity and social order within the narrative. Together, these intersecting approaches reveal the epic not simply as a story of love and tragedy, but as a complex articulation of political agency, social critique, and indigenous resilience, thereby reaffirming its status as a living classic capable of engaging contemporary critical concerns.

Khamba and Thoibi as Indigenous Counter-Discourse

Through postcolonial lens, *Khamba and Thoibi* may be interpreted as an epic that functions as an indigenous counter-discourse, preserving cultural memory and resisting the epistemic erasures that colonial and later modern regimes seek to impose. Although the text predates colonial era in Manipur, postcolonial theorists argue that pre-colonial narratives become post-colonially significant precisely because they encode native worldviews, ethical structures, and socio-political formations that challenge colonial homogenisation (Bhabha; Ngig)). In this sense, the epic operates not merely as a romantic legend but as a cultural archive that safeguards indigenous modes of knowing, belonging, and power against historical marginalisation, just as "Orientalism can be discussed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient..." (Said, *Orientalism* 3)

Khamba's narrative trajectory positions him within what Gayatri Spivak conceptualises as the subaltern, a subject located outside the dominant structures of power and legitimacy (Spivak 283). An outsider to the Moirang principality and as a poor, orphaned youth, Khamba is repeatedly subjected to elite exclusion. Nongban's attempts to erase his legitimacy, the King's suspicion, and the community's initial distrust collectively illustrate how hegemonic systems regulate access to recognition and authority. These pressures mirror what postcolonial theory identifies as the subaltern's continuous negotiation with structures that silence and marginalise. Yet Khamba's rise through moral integrity, physical courage, and communal support asserts an indigenous form of agency grounded not in inherited privilege but in ethical and social legitimacy. His ascent thus reflects a postcolonial narrative of resistance, where marginalised subjects reclaim identity and power by destabilising imposed hierarchies.

Running parallel to Khamba's subaltern struggle is Thoibi's articulation of feminine agency, which challenges patriarchal and monarchical authority through her refusal to become an instrument of political alliance. Her father wanted to give her to Nongban, "Do you still want my daughter, will you Nongban take her yet?" (Hijam 410). But she rejected and rebelled against the royal decree thus leading to her exile (524). Her rejection of Nongban, despite royal pressure, enacts what postcolonial feminist theorists identify as the recovery of women's subjectivity within systems that traditionally silence or instrumentalise them (Mohanty 19). By asserting bodily autonomy, resisting the King's disciplinary control, and insisting on her right to choose love, Thoibi disrupts what Homi Bhabha calls the "'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" of patriarchal identity formations (Bhabha 94). She thus emerges not merely as a romantic heroine but as a figure of indigenous feminist resistance, destabilising the ideological structures that regulate gender, power, and desire.

Beyond individual characters, the epic constructs indigenous space and ritual as sites of epistemic resistance. The prominence of Lai Haraoba, ancestral veneration, sacred geography, and ritual performance situates Moirang within a cosmology that refuses colonial rationalist reduction. These elements transform the landscape into a living archive of cultural memory, reinforcing what Ngig) terms the "decolonisation of the mind" (Ngig)). By foregrounding local myths, rituals, and spatial imaginaries, *Khamba and Thoibi* preserves an indigenous worldview that resists the homogenising narratives of colonial and postcolonial state power. A

similar idea underlies Ngig)'s argument that writing in his mother tongue is "part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African people" (Ngig) 28).

Taken together, the epic articulates a network of counter-hegemonic voices, the subaltern hero, the resistant woman, and the sacred indigenous landscape through which the indigenous identity is continually asserted against historical forces of erasure. Said argues that "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism" (Said, *Culture* xx). From this perspective, the epic serves as an indigenous counter narrative resisting historical silencing. In this way, *Khamba and Thoibi* functions not only as a literary monument but as an enduring postcolonial archive of indigenous power, memory, and agency.

Social Control and Regulated Desire

Michel Foucault conceptualises power not merely as a force of repression but as a dispersed network of relations that produces subjects, regulates conduct, and shapes desire (Foucault, *Discipline* 26). From this perspective, the socio-political world of the Moirang kingdom in *Khamba and Thoibi* emerges as a carefully regulated space in which authority operates through both sovereign command and disciplinary control.

The King embodies the convergence of sovereign and disciplinary power. As the ultimate arbiter of legitimacy, punishment, and social order, he governs not only public institutions but also private life. His authority extends over marriage alliances, genealogical recognition, public rituals, and heroic contests, domains that illustrate what Foucault identifies as the fusion of power and knowledge, where control over information about lineage, virtue, and propriety becomes a mechanism of domination (Foucault, *History* 40-41). Khamba's legitimacy and loyalty to the kingdom is repeatedly tested by subjecting him to several trials like Catching the Bull, Judgement on Elephant's Leg, Tiger Hunt, etc (Hijam). Through these regulatory structures, the court of Moirang produces a hierarchical social order in which subjects are continuously evaluated and classified.

Within this regime, Thoibi's body and conduct are subjected to constant surveillance by family members, court officials, and political rivals. This visibility corresponds to Foucault's notion of the panoptic gaze, in which individuals internalise authority through the awareness of being watched (Foucault, *Discipline* 195). Her exile, punishment, and enforced servitude function as disciplinary techniques designed to reshape her behaviour and secure obedience. Yet Thoibi's refusal to submit to these controls, as in one instance she stayed at the Khamba's place despite her father's prohibition (Hijam 524), transforms her into a disruptive figure who exposes the fragility of disciplinary power.

Khamba's journey, too, is structured by disciplinary mechanisms. His heroic trials like wrestling, capturing the wild bull, and slaying the tiger (Hijam) operate as what Foucault terms "technologies of power", ritualised practices that classify, rank, and normalise bodies through regulated suffering and controlled achievement (Foucault, *Discipline* 170). These trials do not merely test physical strength; they produce a "heroic subject" whose worth is verified by institutional standards. Success grants Khamba symbolic capital and social legitimacy, while failure would justify his exclusion, revealing how even heroism is shaped by regimes of power.

Crucially, desire itself becomes a central site of political struggle. Foucault argues that sexuality and desire are among the primary domains where power intervenes to regulate individuals and stabilise social order (Foucault, *History* 48). The efforts of the King, elders, and rival suitors to control Thoibi's choice of partner demonstrate how her personal desire is treated as a matter of public governance. Regulating her marriage means regulating lineage, succession, and political stability. Against this backdrop, the love between Khamba and Thoibiemerges as a form of counter-power, an assertion of individual agency that challenges institutional authority and destabilises the mechanisms through which Moirang's social order is maintained. His love for Thoibi is not framed within divine destiny, but emerges from shared emotion, mutual defiance of authority, and social transgression,

particularly in Thoibi's resistance to her father's command to marry Nongban Kongyamba (L. 105).

Intersections of Postcolonial and Foucauldian Perspectives

Bringing postcolonial and Foucauldian frameworks into dialogue reveals how *Khamba and Thoibi* operates simultaneously as an indigenous counter-discourse and as a narrative structured by complex regimes of power. Khamba's marginality exemplifies this intersection: as a subaltern figure in the postcolonial sense, his voice and legitimacy are persistently challenged by elite authority (Spivak 285), while in Foucauldian terms he is also subjected to institutional mechanisms that classify, test, and regulate bodies through disciplinary trials (Foucault, *Discipline*). His struggle is therefore not only against social exclusion but also against the normative structures that determine who is permitted to become a 'hero'.

Similarly, Thoibi's rebellion occupies the space where postcolonial feminist agency meets resistance to disciplinary power. Mohanty argues that if gender oppression is intertwined with racial, national, and economic domination, then decolonisation at all levels becomes fundamental to transformative feminist politics (Mohanty 8). Thoibi's refusal to accept an imposed marriage contests patriarchal and monarchical control over women's bodies and choices, aligning with postcolonial feminist critiques of gendered subordination (Mohanty). At the same time, her defiance of surveillance, exile, and punishment disrupts the disciplinary mechanisms through which societies regulate behaviour and produce obedient subjects (Foucault, *Discipline*; *History*). Within a patriarchal framework, such nonconformity is interpreted as 'madness', transforming her actions as deviant rather than reasonable. Therefore, the imposition of social order by force becomes a necessity to discipline and restore her sanity (Foucault, *Madness* 176). Thoibi thus becomes both a figure of indigenous female autonomy and a challenge to the technologies of power that seek to normalise obedience.

The Moirang court itself emerges, through this dual lens, as both a hegemonic hierarchy and a disciplinary institution. From a postcolonial perspective, it represents the concentration of elite authority that marginalises subaltern subjects (Bhabha; Spivak). From a Foucauldian perspective, it operates through surveillance, genealogical control, ritualised competition, and moral regulation to shape social conduct and identity (Foucault, *Discipline*). Power in the epic therefore does not reside solely in the sovereign figure of the King but circulates through social practices, cultural norms, and institutional rituals.

Through this combined theoretical reading, *Khamba and Thoibi* moves beyond the conventions of romance and legend to emerge as a complex political narrative of agency, resistance, and power, reaffirming its relevance as a living classic capable of sustaining critical engagement across historical and cultural contexts. Khamba and Thoibi's relationship thus becomes an act of counter-power, challenging both hegemonic authority and disciplinary control.

Conclusion

Revitalising the meaning of a classic involves recognising its capacity to speak across time, cultures, and intellectual frameworks. *Khamba and Thoibi* exemplifies this enduring vitality through its long cultural life, its continual reinvention across performative and literary traditions. As Said observes, each cultural work is shaped by a particular historical moment and that vision must be examined alongside the multiple reinterpretations it has subsequently generated (Said, *Culture* 84). This perspective invites contemporary theoretical approach that opens new dimensions of interpretation without diminishing its traditional significance. What defines a classic, as W.I. Singh argues, is its capacity to generate new meanings as it is read within different historical and cultural settings, and the epic fulfils this criterion through its persistent relevance in Manipuri cultural and critical discourse.

Re-examining *Khamba and Thoibi* through postcolonial and Foucauldian perspectives does more than preserve its literary value; it reanimates the epic by revealing its engagement with indigenous epistemology, cultural memory, and the politics of power. The narrative emerges as a repository of

cosmological, ritual, and communal knowledge that resists historical and cultural erasure, while simultaneously offering a critique of hierarchical authority, social discipline, and regulated desire within the Moirang polity. Read through these intersecting frameworks, the epic illuminates the negotiation of subaltern voices, feminine agency, and institutional control, exposing a complex interplay between resistance and regulation. In this way, *Khamba and Thoibi* functions as a dynamic site of critical inquiry, demonstrating how a classic continues to generate meaning, invite interpretation, and remain culturally and intellectually resonant across time.

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Contextualising *Kushan Gaan* as a Response to *Ramayana*: An Enquiry in the Framework of Critical Humanities

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Abstract

Ramayana as a cultural text has been exceptional in its reception and influence in the religious consciousness of the people of the Indian subcontinent. Originally composed in Sanskrit, this epic is translated into almost every Indian language and beyond.Different communities have shaped and reshaped this grand narrative and it found its expression through drama, music, folk stories and other literary forms. *Kushan Gaan* is one such telling of *Ramayana* popular in the Rajbanshi community.This paper explores *Kushan Gaan*, a classic in the Rajbanshi literature and culture, in the framework of Critical Humanities. As a theoretical approach Critical Humanities discards Eurocentric attitudes of interpretation as they are not sensitive to the context and do not emphasize the memory culture of the Indian civilization. This paper tries to study different aspects of *Kushan Gaan* like mnemonics, language and the concept of alienation through the lens of Critical Humanities.

Keywords : *Kushan Gaan*, Critical Humanities, Mnemonics, Alienation.

यावोत्स्थास्यन्तिगिरयःसरितश्चमोहितले।
तावोत्रामायणकथालोकेषुप्रोचरिष्यती।
(qtd in Das 15)

(As long as the hills and the rivers are in existence, the Ramayana will be heard.)

Introduction

A classic is endowed with an exceptional strength which enables it to stand the test of time through its universal appeal, timeless beauty and grandeur of theme. The above shlokas from *Balakanda Ramayana* confidently asserts itself as a timeless narrative which would be followed through human existence; ironically sage Valmiki, the author, was absolutely right in his vision. The *Ramayana* as a classic delineates complex human emotions, deep philosophical truth and complexities of human existence. These literary qualities also endow it to be in the same line with other epics- the *Mahabharata*, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*. But more than a literary text, it owes its importance as a religious and cultural text which has profoundly influenced the entire Indian subcontinent in many aspects. There are hundreds of *Ramayana* in different languages in different genres.

One such telling of Rama narrative, known as *Kushan Gaan* or *Kushan Pala*, is popular among the Rajbanshi community which is a major tribe in the erstwhile Cooch Behar dynasty. Once an integral part of Koch Kingdom, the land is now divided by national and international boundaries. In India,Rajbanshi population reside in the northern districts of West Bengal, lower Assam and in few places of Meghalaya. Rajbanshis population are also found in Erstwhile Rangpur district of Bangladesh and Jhapa district of Nepal. *Kushan* as an integral cultural text has attained the status of a classic in the realm of Rajbanshi Art and culture.It is an integral part of their folk culture and tracing its exact date of origin is difficult. But it has undoubtedly stood the test of time. The influence and acceptance of *Kushan Gaan* have been great in Rajbanshi culture and it is still relevant in the community.

Research Methodology

This paper aims at a critical study of *Kushan* tradition with respect to the dominant *Ramayana* narrative of Valmiki in the framework of critical humanities. As an interdisciplinary approach critical humanities questions the process of meaning making. It is more concerned about the systematic thoughts which have been kept in the margin for ages because of the Westen dominance in the field of knowledge making.It believes that no text can be read in isolation; every text is connected to its history and it is always context sensitive. Indian critical theory is rich and diverse beginning from the Vedic age.Dr. Venkat Rao, in his work *Critical Humanities from India* asserts, "The discourse and the institution (university)are part of European adventure – an adventure in elevating itself as the vanguard and the leader of the planet. It is also a protracted adventure culminating into the creation of what can be called European (Western) epistem" (Rao 2). The epistemic violence of colonialism continues to be practiced, even today, through the academic disciplines which do not care about the context of any text. Hence, Critical Humanities as an academic approach systematically tries to unravel how dominant Western academic discourse shape our understanding of any culture. Over dependence on established theory often leads to misreading the text as every text works on different epistemology.Critical Humanities is strongly against the rudimentary Western tendency of universalizing every aspect.

Critical Humanities sustains that the entire conceptual and methodological system through which we understand Indian culture is developed and nourished by Euro-American thought. As a result, there is a huge epistemic gap between the way of reading and what is read.This challenging situation also endows an opportunity to Indian Academia to 'reconceptualise and reorient approaches to the study of Indian cultural formation and their creative reflection' (Rao24). Rao offers that Indian cultural memory can be explored to counter that narrative. Different cultures have their own way of putting their experience in cultural memory. Memory as an intangible cultural heritage is one of the most difficult entities to measure and examine. But what can be measured and examined is the 'articulation of memory'.Articulation of memory can be traced by the way it is communicated through different expression like poem, song, play or dance which are, in other word, response to any received experience or event.

Discussion

The story of *Ramayana*, which is considered to be composed between 500 to 100 BCE, is translated in almost every Indian language; the narrative of Rama is also found in Thai, Sinhalese, Tibetan and in European languages. For Ramanujan, "Through the centuries these languages have hosted more than one telling of Rama story. Sanskrit alone contains some twenty-five or more tellings belonging to various genres" (130). They are in the form of epics, kavyas, or old mythological stories. Some *Ramayana* narratives are told as plays and dance dramas belonging to classical and folk traditions. Hence, Ramanujan categorically prefers the word 'telling', instead of 'version' because the latter refers to an original text which could be Valmiki's Ramayana. He believes "it is not always Valmiki's narrative that is carried from one language to another' (131). Thus, we have hundreds of Ramayana tellings which are different from each other 'drastically' in their theme, symbolism and narrative point of view keeping few basic elements intact.Thus, the essence of Ramayana gets 'translated, transplanted and transposed' throughout these hundreds of versions.

Kushan Gaan is an open-air drama, staged in an open field adjacent to localities.The stage is an open place covered with polythene or any other materials to protect the performers from coldas well as to separate the performers from the audience.In some stages the compound is made of four banana trunks and decorated with bamboo leaves (Pereira 4). A narrow connecting passage is linked to a green room which is used for multiple purposes. The stage is called *Asor*.The performers can directly communicate to the audience and engage them in the performance.The stage is connected to the cultural root of the people who were primarily connected to agriculture.

Kushan Gaan organically combines music, acting, dancing and instrumental performance. A

Kushan troop is a group of fifteen to twenty members– actors, dancers, musicians and assisting persons. They are locally called- *Kushani, Dowari, Pali,* and *Bains* (P. Barman 87). The *Kushani* or *Mul* and *Dowari* are two main performers who take the centre stage. The word '*mul*' literary means main or centre. He acts as Kush, the son of Lord. He is important on the stage as well as off the stage. If anyone wants to organize a *Kushan Gaan*, he must contact the *Kushani* first. Kushani is the event manager. One gets the role of a *Kushani* with the mutual consent from all the members of the group. Most of the time it is the experience in the field and expertise that determine the criteria of a Kushani. It takes many years to reach to the position of *Kushani*. As *Kushan* tradition does not have a professional training, the entire memory of the performance is stored asembodied cultural memory. Then the memory is articulated through performances. *Dowari*or *Dohari* assists *Mul* and acts as Lav, the other son of Rama. *Dowari* is a person with tricky intelligence and humour. He is assisted by *Chhukris* or *Chokras*. *Chukris* are female dancers; *Chokhras* are male dancers. One or two decades ago the boys using girl's costume used to perform the role of *Chhukris* as social restriction did not allow the girls to perform in public (Sen 157).*Pali* and *Bains* are musicians with their respective instrument like-Bena, Sharinda, Dotara, Khol, Dholok, Mandira. They take the centre stage and main actors act surrounding them. Over the years the artist has adopted the western instruments like Violine (J. Barman 208).

Kushan Gaan is undoubtedly a telling of *Ramayana* which is told from the perspective of Lav and Kush, twin sons of Rama. Lav and Kush appear to be common Rajbanshi lads who take the responsibility to extol Rama's valour. A popular myth connects *Kushan Gaan* with Ramayana and validates its truthfulness to religious sanctity. The myth narrates that once Sita went out of her hut keeping her son Lav in the care of Sage Valmiki. Finishing his meditation, the sage found that Lav was nowhere. Anxious and unsure with the thought to face Sita, he decided to make a boy, out of straw, who would look exactly as Lav. He made the boy and bestowed life in it with his divine power. But when Sita returned, the sage found that Lav was with her. Knowing everything, Sita decided to take that divinely created boy as her own and named him Kush (meaning straw) after the material with which he was created. Thus, Kush was born and Lav and Kush became twin brothers. They took the responsibility to spread the Ram consciousness among the people of the kingdom of Rama. This particular myth from the *Uttarakhanda* of *Ramayana* is stored in the form of embodied cultural memoryas an essential component of the Rajbanshi Mnemoculture. The memory is then articulated and disseminated in the form of *Kushanpala*. The body itself is enacted in the process as Dr. Rao states in his *Cultures of Memory in South Asia-*

> As mnemocultures embody and enact/ perform memories they put to work the body persistently. Mnemocultures move in musical rhythms and performative reflections. Musically and acoustically composed verbal utterances and gestural inflections articulate these reflections (68).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind* explicates the relationship between language and culture- how do these two aspects collide and affect each other. Language has a dual character - "it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" (15). He states, "language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (15). G. N. Devy's "The Being of Bhasa" stresses that knowledge and language have many objectives other than its relation to power (beyond Foucauldian notion). Knowledge directly connects itself to survival, social harmony or preservation of collective memory. In one hand language correlates itself with power, on the other hand, language and reality affect each other and alter each other at every stage of human civilization (Kaushik).

The lyric of *Kushan Gaan* clearly mentions that *Ramayana* is written by *Adikavi* Valmiki and it owes its indebtedness to that text (Roy). Valmiki's Ramayana

is believed to be composed as an oral poetic verse in 5th to 4th century BC. Many additions and revisions were already done before it was written in Sanskrit Script (NPTEL). The language of Kushan is not a pure language; it uses a few Sanskrit slokas without the perfect accent. Most of the dialogues progress in Bengali language with frequent intervention of Rajbanshis language. The *Kushan*, thus, itself becomes a language hotspot where multiple languages collided and make a flexible synchronisation; every language retains their originality and contribute to the narration. The influence of Krittibasi *Ramayana* on the language of *Kushan* is undeniable. *Kushan* incorporates verses from *Ramayana* composed by Valmiki and Krittibas Ojha together and interprets and incorporates them in Rajbanshi language. The voice of *Kushan*, thus, becomes an unfamiliar one in a familiar setting. This keeps the interest of the audience intact and engages them in the narrative. The language of *Kushan Gaan* itself carries a history which the Rajbanshis have gone through over the ages.

Alienation as a theatrical device was masterfully utilised by German playwright Bertold Brecht in 1920s. He used the tool of alienation to draw response from the audience. Thus, his epic theatre bears the didactic purpose in which the stage becomes a space of social scrutiny and political inquiry. This Alienation effect detaches the audience from the melodrama and convinces them to think rationally. Commenting on epic theatre, Walter Benjamin writes, "Epic theatre does not reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them. This uncovering of the conditions is effected by interrupting the dramatic process; but such interruption does not act as a stimulant; it has an organizing function" (Benjamin 100).

The tradition of *Kushan Gaan* has been using a dignified version of alienation effect from ages independent of what Western academia and philosophy dictates. This alienation is organic and is seen in many folk dramas. In *Kushan,* the alienation is achieved through the intervention of witty dialogue between *Kushani* and *Doari. Doari* performs a critical role and holds an important space next to *Kushani*. *Doari* literally means the person who has a double role. He plays double role – he imitates *Kushani* in song, dialogue and commentary and also plays the role of Lav, Rama's son. He is witty, funny and charming wearing rustic plain costumes. His role is so flexible that he can communicate with the audience at any time of the drama. He is the medium through which a synchronic relationship is created between the audience and the performers.He is the paraphraser, and translator of any dialogue uttered other than the Rajbanshi language. He does this for a better understanding of the audience as most of the time the audience of *Kushan* is accustomed with Rajbanshi Language.

Kushan Gaan is essentially an encomium of Lord Rama and its purpose is to teach moral lesson through entertainment. Hence, *Kushan Gan* comes with various subplots to impart moral lessons to the audience. The theme of these subplots could be natural event, simple life or any burning social issue like polygamy or decaying social values. They are incorporated into the whole act as interludes and break the monotonous arena of the performance. Thus, *Kushan Gaan* brings religion and entertainment at one space and presents it to the audience.

Conclusion

Kushan, as a Rama narrative, presents itself to be one of the most important religious instruments among Rajbanshi community. It is also a medium of entertainment which is rooted in the folk culture of the people. The body is the main instrument through which *Kushan* has been survived. Artists enact their bodies and body works as the organic memory where the entire narrative is stored. This is the essential characteristics of any mnemoculture which gives flexibility and adaptability to its theme, narrative technique and presentation. Responsive reception is achieved when an individual artist receives *Kushan* from his *Guru* in the form of embodied memory and modifies it with his creative ability. The language of *Kushan* is unique and it captures the experiences through which Rajbanshi community has evolved in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial ages. The didactic purpose of religion is served by the witty use of alienation effect in *Kushan*. As an intangible cultural and religious heritage *Kushan Gaan* is widely endorsed by the Rajbanshi community.

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Cultural Metamorphosis: La Valle's *Destroyer* (2017) and the Reinvention of *Frankenstein* (1818)

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Abstract

This paper explores the interaction between cultures and the transformation of texts through Victor LaValle's graphic novel, *Destroyer* (2017), a modern retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The study clearly establishes the connection between adaptation and intertextuality, illustrating how LaValle's work challenges established ideas of cultural identity and narrative authority. It contends that these adaptations, viewed through the concept of "destruction", are not simple reproductions of original texts but rather significant modifications that create new meanings and perspectives. *Destroyer* (2017) utilises the hybrid form of graphic fiction to engage in a dialogic relationship with the Frankenstein narrative, emphasising the complexities of racial dynamics in the United States and demonstrating the potential of literary adaptations to promote cultural discussion and critique.

Keywords : Cultural dialogue, textual transformation, adaptation, intertextuality, graphic narrative.

Cultural dialogue involves interaction and mutual understanding among different systems. At the same time, textual transformation refers to how texts are influenced by transnational factors and intertextual exchanges, as well as by media such as graphic fiction, which inherently modify narrative structures. Victor LaValle's graphic narrative *Destroye*r (2017) serves as a significant metaphor, exploring the transforming and challenging aspects of contact through the lens of what may be termed "destruction," narrating the story of a "postmodern Prometheus" (Bishop 116). Adaptations alter the way readers or viewers perceive and interpret them as they "destroy" old texts and create new ones simultaneously (Long Hoeveler 53). In this regard, a notion known as "Elastextity" emerged, which holds that adaptations "destroy" and alter the perception and comprehension of the source or original text (Grossman 3). The interaction among many cultural systems is often characterised by acculturation, where cultures influence one another, leading to mutual transformation and appreciation. Cultural dialogue naturally involves changes that can challenge the idea of "pure" cultural identities. Transnational variables and intertextual exchanges build literary traditions. This paper explores how this interaction and change, especially within the context of adaptation and critical theory, can be understood through the concept of "destruction" (Cutchins and Perry; Smith). Bakhtin's notion of "dialogic threads," where a "living utterance" interacts with "thousands of living dialogic threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness"(Bakhtin 276–77), is vital in explaining the "Frankenstein Complex," suggesting that texts are in dialogue with several others. A comparatively recent adaptation of the graphic novel, *Destroyer* is one of the threads in the legacy of the Frankenstein story and its interpretations across cultures. Such multiple threads in the complex web of legacy demonstrate the significance of each new strand – adaptation that originates not only from the source text but also from its integral relationship to other texts.

Graphic novels expand their boundaries through unconventional layout techniques, such as disrupting

the traditional grid structure or reverting to classic styles while introducing panels and gutter structures(Petersen 25). They create an immersive reading experience by highlighting aspects and features for the reader without breaking the illusion of reality. Additionally, readers' interaction emphasises the content within panels and the communication between them in graphic novels. The medium is intrinsically intermedial, blending text and visuals. It serves as a space for cultural interaction and transformation, drawing on literary fiction and popular genres while showcasing advanced storytelling and cultural critique (Cutchins and Perry 4). LaValle's choice to explore the Frankenstein story through this medium enhances the interplay and transformation of diverse cultural and formal systems. Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* reinterprets a classic narrative from his unique cultural perspective and through a hybrid medium, fostering cultural dialogue and mutual metamorphosis, thereby enriching the enduring Frankenstein story, much as other adaptations within the extensive Frankenstein Network do. The Frankenstein Network, or Frankenstein Complex, refers to the ongoing "adaptations, appropriations, and re-appropriations" of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1). The dialogue between two texts involves not just repetition but also reinterpretation, challenging the authority of the original and generating new meanings, often figuratively described as adaptations that destroy previous texts while forging new ones. *Destroyer* examines the unique reinterpretations of the European Frankenstein myth within the U.S., notably as a symbol of racial dynamics (LaValle). This process exemplifies the concept in adaptation studies that texts are not fixed replicas but actively destroy (alter and reinterpret) their predecessors, introducing new layers of meaning and enriching the continuously evolving narrative (Bishop; Newell). Adaptation studies specifically treat adaptations as part of an intertextual, dialogic process. Victor LaValle's graphic novel *Destroyer*, exemplifies these processes in a contemporary context. The cover indicates that the story begins on a bleak November night in 1792, when Victor Frankenstein used science to revive the dead. Victor ultimately died, but the Monster survived, hiding in Antarctica and viewing itself as free from humans. Yet, the world remains fixated on the Monster, as a descendant of the Frankenstein lineage endures. *Destroyer* acts as a centre of intertextual exchange through its engagement with this broad network. By narrating a story featuring Victor Frankenstein's Monster centuries after Shelley's novel, LaValle makes an explicit reference to the original narrative.

Victor La Valle's graphic novel *Destroyer* is an embodiment of an anti-racist narrative and also offers a postcolonial interpretation that peculiarly reimagines Mary Shelley's Frankenstein to analyse and expose systemic racism and white supremacy in modern America. *Destroyer* utilises anti-racist narrative techniques by explicitly challenging the historical interpretations of the Frankenstein myth. The novel addresses past racial injustices while presenting a speculative image of Black agency and resistance. Notably, Frankenstein's monster was frequently employed in 19th-century America as a metaphor of rebellious Black slaves, hence rationalising slavery and vilifying Black folk(Young 17–18). These prejudiced readings deprived the Creature of his empathetic voice and the intrinsic critique of injustice inside his narrative. Therefore, *Destroyer* is situated within the *Black Lives Matter* movement and examines contemporary issues related to the Black body. Historically, dating back to the transatlantic slave trade, Southern plantations, and Apartheid laws, black bodies have been subjected to objectification, assault, trauma, and undignified treatment. Innumerable young and adolescent black males were one of the prime trades executed by white slave owners, because of their physique and strength. From history to contemporary real-life stories of the infamous African American male murders like that of George Floyd, Akai Gurley, and Tamir Rice by white police officers following a negligible offence has been a representation of past atrocities on black bodies(Shah and Singh 248).

In *Destroyer*, La Valle reinterprets the narrative by transforming the monster into Akai, a 12-year-old Black child killed by police, thereby revealing how white supremacy sustains violence against Black individuals. Akai's unjustified death, caused by "law enforcement"

acting on false information from a White woman that he was an armed adult, exemplifies the "premature death" experienced by Black adolescents in America (Dib 102). The narrative directly links Akai's monstrous transformation to Black racial trauma and systemic injustices, prompting readers to question "who is the monster?"—the Black boy, the White woman, or the white police officers. LaValle's story is shaped by his experiences as a Black man in 21st-century America, illustrating the acute dangers faced by African American teenagers and young men. Meanwhile, Dr Josephine Baker, Akai's mother and a descendant of Victor Frankenstein, is depicted as a highly intelligent Black nanotechnologist who faces racial and gender prejudice in her career, including having her IQ challenged and being forced to resign due to pregnancy. She stands as a symbol of Black femininity and a dismantler of oppressive white systems. She embodies legitimate Black anger; her effort to resurrect her son arises from profound sorrow and indignation over his murder, creating a stark contrast with Victor Frankenstein's self-centred motives for creation. LaValle portrays Dr Baker as an individual who rejects passivity and "respectability politics", which often impose a "peace-making impulse" on Black characters in media (98). Her fury is depicted as justified, challenging the stereotype of the "Angry Black Woman" and suggesting that her retribution would be seen as heroic if she were male. Meanwhile, Akai's reanimated figure—a cyborg-like youth with visible stitches and yellow eyes, powered by nanobots—challenges simplistic notions of Black manhood, illustrating his complexity as a "carefree boy" who evolves into a formidable force against racism. An important aspect of *Destroyer* is the deliberate omission of a graphic depiction of Akai's murder. This choice enhances the narrative's critique of how Black lives are valued in America while avoiding the ethical issues surrounding visual representations of lynching (Shah and Singh 244). The story condemns the "mechanisation of the Black body" through characters like Pliers, Akai's father, whose consciousness is transferred into a robot, highlighting contentious portrayals of Black comic book figures(Jones Jr.). Conversely, *Destroyer* presents Akai's autonomy and freedom as a departure from this legacy.

A postcolonial analysis of *Destroyer* highlights how the graphic novel utilises the Frankenstein narrative to critique historical colonial legacies and ongoing power structures that manifest as systemic racism. The novel employs the Frankenstein narrative as a metaphor for racial inequalities and the legacy of slavery, emphasising how Akai's demise originates from ingrained racial stereotyping in American society, where a Black male is seen as a threat. This aligns with the concept of the "economy of the flesh", illustrating the long-standing commodification of Black bodies, from slavery to the present (Spillers 206). It also engages with the idea of "debilitation", which relates to the deterioration of populations caused by structural oppression (Livingston 14–15). Furthermore, *Destroyer* directly links the dehumanisation experienced by Black individuals with that of disabled individuals, as the monster embodies the intersection of these two forms of oppression. Dr Baker's revival of Akai places the narrative within an Afrofuturist framework. This act signifies autonomy and control over Black lives and challenges traditional narratives that marginalise Black realities and bodies. Her resistance to the mechanisms responsible for her son's death serves as a decolonising gesture, confronting systemic injustice and asserting Black agency. The broader context of Frankenstein offers meaningful insights; some scholars interpret Victor as a coloniser and the *Creature* as the colonised. The concern over the creature's potential to generate a "race of devils" reflects the coloniser's fears of rebellion, intensified by factors such as Henry Clerval's imperialist ambitions and Walton's voyage(Shelley 184). Shelley's core critique of imperialist hierarchy enhances *Destroyer's* postcolonial discourse. LaValle's *Destroyer* is a significant literary work that challenges societal narratives and reinterprets the Frankenstein myth to reveal systemic injustices and the wide range of Black realities in America. It fosters empathy and resilience around race and racial trauma, leading to "cripistemologies"—a concept recognising how knowledge and experience are shaped by race and disability—thereby expanding the traditional boundaries

of what is considered "thinkable" or "knowable" (Johnson and Mcruer 130).

Adaptations transcend simple reproductions; they are texts that are "at least perceived by someone to be derived from the text to which they are compared," and they exist within intricate intertextual networks. (Hutcheon) notion of "palimpsestuous" adaptations posits that audiences encounter numerous texts superimposed on one another. Adaptations as "hideous progeny", alter not just our perception but also our conceptualisations of the subject matter (Young 74). It "annihilates" other writings while simultaneously generating new ones, uncovering fresh views and challenging the "authority" of the "original". The act of "destruction" of a text's solitary authority or fixed meaning is fundamental to the dynamic of adaptation and its cultural significance, which will be discussed further. "Destruction" does signify annihilation, but alsoa challenge to authority, transformation of meaning, disruption of norms, and the dismantling of boundaries – all of which constitute active processes in cultural discourse. Neo-Victorian interpretations of *Frankenstein* skilfully utilise the idea of the palimpsest —a document that reveals layers of original text obscured and overwritten — to explore the complex, interconnected relationships between history, narrative, and adaptation. In this case, the "Creature" typically represents the palimpsest, a collage of body parts that don't fit together (Horrocks 164–65). This description makes the "Creature" seem like a blend of elements from the past, which is typical of the neo-Victorian genre, as it often reworks Victorian themes and styles. Using Frankenstein in neo-Victorian fiction is a strong way to show how texts can come back to life. By representing the "rebirth" of the Frankenstein myth, this method gives the original text new meanings and contexts. There are still signs of prior modifications and interpretations, which make the story more complex and interesting. These adaptations question the idea of a single and definitive narrative in history and literature by presenting multiple layers of interpretation of Frankenstein. For instance, Frankenstein's Neo-Victorian adaptations portray hidden storylines and points of view about the intricate mythology, much like a palimpsest displays traces of erased text. The *Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* by Peter Ackroyd expertly blends real people and events from history with the fictional world of Frankenstein, making it difficult to distinguish where history ends and fiction begins(173). This method is a good example of the palimpsest idea, which illustrates how the past is continually being rewritten and reinterpreted in light of new challenges. Neo-Victorian writers utilise the palimpsest as both an idea and an image to inspire new approaches to retelling *Frankenstein* (1818) for contemporary readers. This project not only prompts discussion of the novel's complex legacy but also sparks conversation about adaptation, history, and the very essence of storytelling.Neo-Victorian novels often reinterpret the Frankenstein archetype to address contemporary cultural issues through a Victorian lens. (Sands 210)argues that young adult dystopian literature employs the Frankenstein cliché to highlight "cultural anxieties" related to technology and societal control, recontextualising modern fears within a Victorian framework. The "Frankenstein Complex" is a helpful way to examine these adaptations, as it addresses concerns about science overreaching, the morality of creating life, and the fear of the terrifying "Other". For example, (Davison)study of Scottish neo-Victorian literature employs the bride motif in *Frankenstein* to examine themes of transgressive female autonomy and national identity.

Destroyer serves as a significant hub of "transnational interchange", as the Frankenstein monster has become a powerful metaphor in the United States for various issues, including immigrant alienation and, notably, racial fears. The concept of a "Black Frankenstein monster" is explored as being deeply connected to America's dialogues concerning race, slavery, insurrection, and political critique. *Destroyer* demonstrates how modern American cultural anxieties, especially related to race, can reshape a fundamental myth. The meaning is constructed through interaction and layering, as the "destruction" or transformation in adaptation highlights that meaning is not inherent to a single text but is built through an "intertextual dialogue" among texts; the layered nature of adapted works

allows multiple meanings to coexist. *Destroyer* and other works do not merely copy; they also critique and reimagine. In graphic novels, particularly those like *Destroyer*, originality is a complex and debated concept, as they simultaneously challenge assumptions and dominant narratives by centring the voice of the marginalised; thereby questioning the hegemonic idea that adaptations "obliterate" source texts while creating new ones; it further questions traditional notions of a pure "original" and "copies". The "Frankensteinian model" recognises the "symbiotic nature of postmodern cultural production" (Jellenik 48), characterised by mutual influences. Victor LaValle's *Destroyer* reinterprets the enduring Frankenstein myth through a distinct cultural lens and medium, enacting multiple forms of "destruction" upon previous textual and cultural constructs. This process demonstrates how cultural discourse is continually evolving, dynamic, and dialogic. Alongside adaptations, critical frameworks such as disability studies and posthumanism can challenge and reshape deeply held beliefs and ways of thinking.

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Decentering the Human : Mapping Posthuman Subjectivity in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) endures as a classic for pioneering the genre of science fiction while delving into the deep ramifications of unchecked ambition. Although extensively read through Gothic literary framework and Enlightenment rationality, the novel remains pertinent when examined in the light of contemporary posthuman theory. In this regard, this study revisits *Frankenstein*, and while doing so, *reads* the 'creature' as a proto-cyborg, problematising the anthropocentric dualisms centered on nature/culture, human/non-human, and self/other. The creature, a subject technologically constructed occupies a 'liminal' ontological space between the human and the non-human that possesses self-consciousness yet socially disavowed. His desire to have autonomy, recognition, and a sense of belonging unearths the constraints of Enlightenment epistemologies. The deployment of theoretical contentions of thinkers like Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway is enabling in this context to reflect on how *Frankenstein* envisions posthuman concerns or the debates of posthuman subjectivity. The novel questions the normative constructions of human subjectivity by situating the creature as a posthuman figure that coerces a critical reevaluation of the human quotient. Hence, the rereading of this aforementioned text paves ways for more interpretive possibilities within the current discourses, thereby interrogating the previously embedded presuppositions within canonical literature.

Keywords : *Frankenstein,* Posthuman, cyborg, human subjectivity

The inquiry into the posthuman condition or subjectivity is prominent in moving past the androcentric conceptualisations of the humanist worldview. In today's technologically mediated social order, the posthuman condition has received substantial scholarly acknowledgment in its contemporary manifestations, such as the Artificial Intelligence. Even so, there persists a distinct research gap when it comes to the mediating function of the posthuman as a subject in society. In this regard, an important instance of this struggle asserts itself in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or; The Modern Prometheus*, which recounts 'the posthuman' against the backdrop of a society that privileges humanist epistemologies to be the final construction of subjectivity. In re-reading this text, however, through the lens of Posthumanism, an enabling critical framework comes into view to investigate the nexus between the human and the posthuman subjects. The enduring relevance of *Frankenstein* as a classic therefore, stems from it being reimagined across different genres and contexts—in novels such as Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*(2018) and Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* (2019), then in movies and comics like *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *Frankenstein Underground* (2015) and so on, respectively. Given the fact that this classic was written almost over two hundred years, and that too even before the concept of 'posthumanism' came, the fate of the creature and his posthuman subjectivity is left untended or passed over. Hence, in the light of this, the study aims to excavate the nuances of procuring a 'decentered-self' in the posthuman context in Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Specifically, the study analyses the 'monster' as a posthuman subject or a 'cyborg', whose contested identity indicates that, whereas the creature exhibits empathetic and human-like sensibilities, he remains excluded and socially disavowed owing to his artificial origin.

While this study draws upon contemporary posthuman theory to reinterpret Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it is equally important to acknowledge the text's own capacity to exceed its historical and epistemological boundaries. Literary texts are not static repositories of meaning but dynamic sites that generate new significations across temporal and theoretical contexts. In this sense, *Frankenstein* can be seen as anticipating, rather than merely accommodating, posthuman concerns. The figure of the creature, in particular, resists closure within Enlightenment humanism and instead opens itself to multiple interpretive possibilities that resonate with later theoretical formulations. Such a reading aligns with broader notions of textuality, wherein meaning is not fixed but continually produced through the interaction between text, reader, and evolving critical frameworks. Therefore, the deployment of posthuman theory in this study does not impose an external lens upon the novel but rather activates latent possibilities already embedded within its narrative structure.

The theoretical lens of Posthumanism marks a discursive shift as the concept of 'human' is called into question, thereby gently decentering the prominence of the Cartesian subject. At the crux of this shift is the figure of the cyborg, that Donna Haraway in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (2016) characterises as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (5). Haraway further posits that, "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs" (7). This theorisation of the cyborg hints at the blurring of ontological boundaries between the humans and the machines, the physical and the non-physical. The conceptualisation of posthuman subject is also outlined by RosiBraidotti in her book *The Posthuman* (2013) to be "multifaceted and relational" (188) and is "differential and constituted through embedded and embodied set of interrelations" (137-138). Braidotti points out, the posthuman is a nomadic, transgressive subject, an "entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is the icon of posthuman condition" (74). With respect to the theorisation of posthumanism by different thinkers, one must quintessentially understand that the posthuman does not altogether undermine humanity as such, but rather points towards a rethinking of the concept 'human'.In the philosophical worldview of humanism, the classical ideal of 'man' is always represented by the European, white "able-bodied male" (Braidotti 71). Therefore, those positioned outside this norm—such as the disabled, women, and the non-European—are constituted as 'the other' and the negative or flawed version of the humanist subject. This similar conceptualisation can be traced in *Frankenstein*, as the creature can be viewed as "the structural other" (Braidotti 37), and his very posthuman condition of being a non-normative poses challenge to the social order modeled on humanist thought.

In *Frankenstein*, the theoretical praxis of posthumanism commences at the moment when life is successfully animated within the 'creature'. However, the physical countenance of the creature that fills Victor's heart with "breathless horror and disgust" counters the latter's humanist vision to create "a new species" that would bless him as "his creator and source" (Shelley 32). Victor's loathing his own creation symbolically indicates his strong aversion towards the posthuman body, a cyborg that dismantles the humanist ideals of 'self', 'identity' and 'embodiment':

> I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open…How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe…His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! - Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as

> the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley 34)

Victor's intention was to discern how "the principles of life proceed" and then rework his learning to the reanimation of human beings (Shelley 30). This is entirely a posthuman-centric inquiry exemplifying the idea that, while the scientific and technological disciplines points out significant "ethical and conceptual questions about the status of the human", yet it discredits the question of "subjectivity" (Braidotti 39). Victor too does not take into account the 'subjectivity' of his creation, and thus rob him of his identity. He even fails to realise that his 'unnatural' creation may also possess the affective dimension of human experience. Owing to his unnatural posthuman ontology and his constant endeavour to acquire subjectivity, the creature initially makes himself akin to the natural world. Unlike his creator's Promethean ambition to "penetrate into the recesses of nature", the creature finds peaceful co-existence amidsth is natural surroundings, as he mentions: "The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge…These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me" (30, 66). His subjectivity further gets articulated through language acquisition, and most notably through reading books. The creature quotes a great deal from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to describe his relationship with Victor. He places himself in the position of Adam, and points out:

> Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He…a perfect creature…but I was wretched, helpless, and alone…
>
> …Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? (87-88)

The creature's despair regarding his own form and presence unmasks a fractured posthuman embodiment, occupying a liminal subjectivity. This reflective process is crucial in the formation of his selfhood, as the creature interrogates the fundamentals of human nature: "Was man at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?" (95). It is noteworthy that his learning enabled him to gravitate towards a consciousness of his own 'self', a very human-like trait, yet he remains a "wretched outcast" (88) in a society that accommodates only the "humanist human" (Haraway 3).So it can be argued that posthuman subjectivity of the creature problematises as well as interrogates the exclusionary politics of 'humanism' that often tends to exclude entities appearing in hybrid forms. Moreover, the creature's demand to have a female counterpart: "You must create a female for me," that is "as hideous as myself" and of the "the same nature as myself, and will be content with the same fate" presents the posthuman subject's plea to possess an affective life (Shelley 98, 99).This episode leads us to question whether a posthuman subject is ethically entitled to secure what is in universal terms conceived as human values, such as 'love, 'family', 'care' and 'affection'. Building on what Braidotti proposed, the creature's plea for a female companion is representative of what the posthuman must not aspire toward. Braidotti further posits that the posthuman does not denote dehumanisation but a reconfiguring of values toward decentred, relational collectivities (111). The creature, however, demands recompense for his lone existence, which might indicate that he wishes to internalise himself within the very 'humanist' model that demands his exclusion. But one can locate his posthumanist stance when he states that he shall withdraw humanity if his creator promises him a female companion, as it is reflected thus: "neither you nor any other human being shall ever see us again" (Shelley 99). This underscores the ontological strain between human and the posthuman that, a posthuman entity remains stifled in a world that gives primacy to human norms and subjectivity. This tension is further highlighted when Victor dismisses his project to create the 'monstress', alarmed by the possibility that the creation of the female monster might "generate an entire race of female creatures" which might defy to live within human limits (Mellor 279).

A Posthumanist reading of *Frankenstein* also paves ways for its readers to take into account an understanding of Victor Frankenstein as a 'posthuman

human'. Victor emerges as the Promethean overreacher "who aspires to become greater than his nature would allow" (Shelley 31). Placing himself in the position of creator God, his individualistic *hubris* makes him obsessed about his quest to surpass the boundaries of humanity:

> No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should break through…with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. (32)

Victor's resolve is further strengthened by secular materialism as he is not afraid of any "supernatural horror" as he steps into "the unhallowed damps of the grave" and collects "bones from charnel houses" to create a new life form (32). The more he transgresses the ontological limits of life, death, and embodiment, the more he aligns himself with a techno-epistemic system that subverts the centrality of the 'human'. This proposition, thus, not only makes him a recipient of a posthuman worldview but also establishes him as a 'posthuman human', as his identity is constituted via the techno-scientific assemblage of corpses, laboratories, scientific instruments etc.

In the novel, the final reflections of the creature highlight the systemic violence of the humanist regime that sustains itself through the exclusion of the 'posthuman other'. For instance, the creature is profoundly aware of the violence perpetuated on him, as he mentions "Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me?" (139).Here, the posthuman ontology of the creature connotes what Braidotti terms as "the otherisation" that reduces him "to the less than human status of disposable bodies" (15). Again, his words "I, the miserable and abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" casts him as a posthuman 'abject' whose corporeal otherness dismantles anthropocentric subjectivity (140). Although the novel reaches its conclusion with Victor's death and the suggested demise of the creature, yet the latter's posthuman subjectivity remains present beyond the text.

Frankenstein's monster as a proto-cyborg figure resists his confinement within the novel, and hence thriving not only in the literature of the present times, but also across films, comics and other digital platforms. In this sense, it could be suggested that, while anthropocentric framework of the text fails to account for the creature, he outlasts them. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* depicts posthuman condition as a site of contestation within its framework of Enlightenment Humanism. Therefore a posthumanist re-reading of the text allows us to envisage 'the creature' as a posthuman figure,perpetually contending to gain subjectivity in a world where the concept has not yet ontologically accepted. Hence, the deployment of posthuman theory in examining this text is crucial, as it challenges the classical visions of subjectivity and enable us to understand the future configuration of 'the human'. *Frankenstein* reveals the ethical shortcomings of humanist values when encountered with posthuman life, exposing how androcentric standards of subjectivity produce exclusion and fearinstead of progress. Victor's abandonment of the creature too,echoes society's unwillingness to reconfigure subjectivity beyond the humanist archetype of "ideal man," which further demonstrates the notion that real aberration does not stem from posthuman embodiment but lies in exclusionary algorithm of humanism. Shelley's novel thus heralds or lays the groundwork for posthuman thought, and reading the creature as a proto-cyborg figure enables us to theorise that, posthuman subjectivity moves beyond obsolete hierarchies. In this sense, *Frankenstein* serves not only as an advisory tale about creation, but a prescient narrative underscoring that the posthuman future is dependent on our pursuit to reconsider what it signifies to be human at all.

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Life in a City: A Study of the Chronotope in *Mrichchakatika*

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Abstract

Prescribed as part of the course "Indian Classical Literature," usually offered to Bachelor of Arts in English (Honours) students at higher education institutions in India, the play *Mrichchhakatika* poses a pedagogical challenge stemming from its distant origin and contemporary relevance. The paper undertakes a contemporaneous study of *Mrichchhakatika*, drawing on Bakhtin's concept of 'chronotope'. The paper demonstrates that, unlike classical Sanskrit *natakas*,the play *Mrichchakatika* is set in an identifiable historical spatiotemporal continuum. The factors that influence the causality of events in the play are revealed as everyday urban phenomena such as traffic congestion, inspections at city junctions, wilful delays in the discharge of official duties, and accidental encounters in public places. Underlining its historicity, the paper argues that the play remains relevant in the 21st century as a testimony of lived experience rather than as a narrative set in a distinct mythological time and space.

Keywords: *Mrichchakatika*, Chronotope, *Prakarana*, City life, Contemporaneity

Introduction

Classics are to students what salad is to children. They have proven benefits and are recommended by the elders, yet they have a knack for remaining untouched. This painful epiphany occurred to the authorwhile teaching the course "Indian Classical Literature" to undergraduate students at Mahatma Gandhi Central University. There was acertain degree of reluctance among the students towards the course in general, and the play *Mrichchhakatika*, in particular. While texts such as Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* and Bharata's *Natyashastra* were more or less familiar to the students, the play *Mrichchhakatika* didn't ring a bell. Several students struggled to pronounce the name, and very few knew what the title meant. Despite academic discourse on the play being rife since the 19th century, in students' lingo, the text appeared 'boring'. Set in a bygone era, it seemed to lack the immediacy for 21st-century students, who had been exposed to generous doses of audiovisual stimulation since infancy. The sad reality is that while many mug up the basic plotlines of such prescribed texts from watered-down YouTube videos and AI-generated summaries, just enough to cross the examination frontier, the purpose of introducing these courses remains defeated.

From both a critical and a pedagogical perspective, this paper aims to showcase how the play *Mrichchhakatika* presents a slice of life that is as relatable in the 21st century as it was in the time of its composition, around the 5th century CE. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, the paper examines the utilisation of historical time and space in *Mrichchhakatika*, a distinguishing feature of *prakarana* plays in Sanskrit literature. It is argued that the urban landscape in the play is not merely a dormant canvas; rather, it comes alive and nearly assumes the role of a character. Viewed from this cityscape, *Mrichchhakatika* appears to be a stimulating sketch of everyday life, rising organically from a deep

understanding of mundane human existence rather than carved from the stuff of legends or myths.

Historicity of Space

Nataka and *prakarana* are the first two genres mentioned in the ten-fold classification of performative genres in Bharata's *Natyashastra*. While *natakas* drew the narratives from known episodes of mythological sources, and featured supernatural characters, the *prakaranas* were grounded in reality, often populated by stock yet realistic characters from the ordinary walks of life (Bharata 356-63). To appreciate the *prakarana* plays, such as *Mrichchhakatika*, it is essential to understand their spatiotemporal context, wherein lie their relevance and relatability in our day and age. The spatiotemporal milieu of any literary work impacts the characters, their dialogue, and their agency. Recognising its significance, Mikhail Bakhtin conceived the concept of "chronotope", which meant "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). In the classical Sanskrit theatrical oeuvre, the chronotope of *prakarana* plays is significantly distinct from that of *natakas*. The distinction is evident in the use of space in *natakas* and *prakaranas*. In the play *Mrichchhakatika*, a public garden called *Pushpakarandaka* becomes a pivotal setting. It was a public garden gifted to Sakara, the play's antagonist. The garden served as a venue for amorous meetings between the protagonist, Charudatta, and his paramour, Vasantasena, a renowned *Ganika*. In this very garden, Sakara finds Vasantasena, and after being thwarted in love, strangles her to death, or so he thinks. If one probes the historicity of this space, i.e. the garden, it will seem very much located in the contemporary Ujjain, where Sakara and his mortal peers lived. By any stretch of imagination, this garden in *Mrichchakatika* cannot be compared to the enchanted forest garden in *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, where every tree and creeper seemed to have a soul of its own. Neither can this garden be conceived as a dwelling place for nymphs, where Urvasi could saunter invisible to the naked eye, as in *Vikramorvasiyam*? The garden in *Mrichchhakatika* was a garden in the unbroken historical present, linked to our time. Therefore, it could very well be compared to the public garden, where the titular protagonists Madhava and Malati meet for the first time in Bhavabhuti's *prakarana* play*Malati-Madhava*.

As Bakhtin mentions in the context of Greco-Roman epic tradition, there existed an "absolute epic distance that separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (author and his audience) lives" (Bakhtin 13). The same is true for *natakas* by Kalidasa, but not for *prakaranas*. While Kalidasa (the author) inhabited Ujjain during the 4th to 5th century CE, the space and time of his characters (as portrayed in *Abhijnanashakuntalam* and *Vikramorvasiyam*) were far removed from his own. Thus, there remains an unbridgeable gulf between Kalidas's historical time and the time of his dramatic universe. In stark contrast, the time of the author and the spectators of *Mrichchhakatika* coincides with that of its characters, i.e. 5th century CE, and is thus also linked to the unbroken present inhabited by the readers of this paper in the 21st century. It is the kind of work where, in Bakhtin's words, "the 'todayness' of the day was emphasised in all its randomness (accidental encounters, etc)" (26).

The chronotope of *Mrichchhakatika* closely resembled that of several *prakarana* plays. For example, the fictional city of Padmavati (a region in modern-day Madhya Pradesh) in Bhavabhuti's *Malati-Madhava* and the city of Koshambi (a region in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh) in Harsha's *Ratnavali* could be compared to the city of Ujjain in the *Mrichchhakatika*. Moreover, the chronotope of *Mrichchhakatika*, comprising an urban landscape in a historical context, functions not as a backdrop for events to unfold, but rather as a catalyst and deterrent to the play's significant actions, as will be discussed in the next section.

The Exchange of Carriages

In the play *Mrichchakatika*, the accidental exchange of carriages sets off a series of events that lead to the presumed death of Vasantasena and the death sentence (eventually revoked) of Charudatta.In

the context of this play, this chance occurrence is neither divinely ordained nor can it be attributed to fate. Rather, the exchange of carriages occurs because of the urban landscape in which the play is set. Charudatta had commissioned a carriage to escort Vasantasena to a designated meeting spot at *Puspakarandaka*, and this carriage was brought to the side door of Charudatta's house on Merchant Streeton time. Having received the message, Vasantasena mounts the carriage. She, however,ended up boarding the wrong carriage and was carried to Sakara instead of Charudatta, unbeknownst to her. On the other hand, Aryaka, an absconding cowherd, mounts the carriage meant for Vasantasena and is carried safely to Charudatta.

Had the carriages not been exchanged, Aryaka would have been arraigned and incarcerated. The possibility of his leading a rebellion that dethroned the cruel king, Palaka would be nipped in the bud. Only because of the fateful exchange could Aryaka become the king, later grant a kingdom to Charudatta, and liberate Vasantasena from her obligatory profession as a *Ganika*. The obvious question is: what led to the exchange of carriages? The answer is obvious, too: it was caused by an impassable traffic jam on a crowded city street.

As the city guards had set up check posts at various junctions of Ujjain to nab Aryaka, who was on the loose, traffic on Merchant Street had come to a grinding halt. When Vardhamanaka (the servant of Charudatta) brought the chariot to the side door, he suddenly realised that he had forgotten the cushions and drove back to fetch them. Meanwhile, Sthavaraka, the servant of Sakara, temporarily parked his chariot at the same spot, owing to the traffic, while he went ahead to inspect the cause, as is common in traffic situations in contemporary city life. Vasantasena mounts Sakara's chariot and is carried to the wrong person. Aryaka, meanwhile, hides in the chariot of Vardhamanaka. The confusion on a busy street in Ujjain thus propelled the play's pivotal action. It was no divine intervention that set Aryaka free, but a common occurrence in any busy Indian street. As it turns out, traffic congestion is as much a reality in contemporary times as it was in the 5th century CE, despite the carriages being replaced by automobiles in most cities.

The Delay in Execution

The Indian theatrical genres avoid a tragic end. Virtue is rewarded and vice punished. *Mrichchakatika* is no exception to that. When Charudatta is wrongfully convicted of the murder of Vasantasena, he is paraded on the streets and taken to the execution ground. This heart-wrenching sequence shows the common citizens of Ujjain, including Charudatta's friends, relatives, and well-wishers, flocking to him as they lament his pitiful situation. Eventually, just before the execution, Vasantasena arrives at the site. The presence of Vasantasena (presumed dead) obviates the necessity of his execution, and it is revealed that Sakara was the true culprit. Even though this technique gives the impression of a dramatic device called '*deus ex machina*', or the last-minute intervention of a god-like persona, there was a simpler cause that prevented his execution.

Charudatta would have been long dead before Vasantasena's arrival had it not been for an extraordinary delay by the royal guards. One cannot help but question the conspicuous procrastination of the royal guards in the discharge of their royal duties, especially when King Palaka himself had decreed the capital punishment, and Sakara, the king's brother-in-law,left no stone unturned to expedite the process. The guards delay the execution by halting at various stations and making Charudatta proclaim his sins several times. They further kill time by fighting among themselves as to whose turn it was to execute the convict. By drawing the lot, they decide the one who would carry out the unpleasant task. Then, the chosen *Chandal* further delays the proceedings, as can be perceived in the excerpt:

> The First—I was told by my father when about to depart to heaven, thus—"Viraka, my son, whenever it will be your turn to kill, you should never kill the condemned man at once."
>
> The Second—For what reason?
>
> The First—Perchance some kind of gentleman might set the condemned man at liberty by

> paying a ransom. Perhaps a son might be born to a king, and on account of that great joyous festival, all the condemned men may be released. Perchance, an elephant might break loose from his chains, and in that commotion, the condemned criminal might escape. Or sometimes there might be a change of king, and then all the condemned men may be set at large. (Sudraka 377-379)

Even when the *Chandal* lifts his sword, he lets it fall on the ground. It becomes obvious that the executioners were not blindly following the explicit orders as was customary. Rather, their attitude reveals a glimpse of a society where government servants delayed tasks simply because they were unpleasant. They were the predecessors of modern bureaucratic officials, who are bound to carry out orders; however, the swiftness or lethargy of the process depended on the nature of the task and their personal willingness to discharge it. In this incident, Sudraka identified a deep-seated disinclination among officials to carry out an unpleasant task, which is an innate part of human nature. Had it been a play rooted in mythology, the executioners would have been invisible. They would be hard-pressed to behead the condemned at a moment's notice, notwithstanding their empathy for the convict. The play thus depicts a proto-democratic society, where a sense of citizenship has begun to emerge.It was a society where the masses could topple an existing government to replace it with the reign of a more benign king, or so they thought.

It is interesting to note that the premonition of the *Chandal* takes effect, as there is a sudden 'change of king'. The new king, Aryaka, not only frees Charudatta but also grants him the kingdom of Kusavati. This bounty is offered to Charudatta as a special remembrance of his role in setting Aryaka free from his chains. Thus, with regime change, the decrees also undergo a complete U-turn, a phenomenon very familiar in modern democratic setups. Thus, read from a contemporaneous perspective, it appears to be a play of our own times, affected by the vagaries of urban life, such as traffic congestion, inspections at city junctions, inordinate delays caused by officials, and sudden changes in rules with regime change.

Conclusion

The events of *Mrichchhakatika* are shaped by the time and space in which they were set. The actions of the characters cannot be seen in isolation, but rather as congruent within their locales. For instance, when Charudatta unknowingly shelters Vasantasena at his house and, by so doing, rescues her from the hot pursuit of Sakara, he acts as a generous host. But his chivalry is a far cry from the valiant King Pururava, who rescues Urvasi, an apsara, from being kidnapped by the asuras. If the hero seems like a common man, the play's antagonist is also drawn in the colours of everyday life. His chief accomplishment is that he is the king's brother-in-law. Though lustful, greedy, and malignant, Sakara is a coward, with a knack for hyperbole, often at his own expense. While chasing Vasantasena, he says, "I can kill a hundred women! I am very brave!" (35). Indeed, he strangles Vasantasena eventually, but as it turns out, he fails in doing that, too. The Buddhist monk who saves Vasantasena is not painted with hues of piety. In his own admission, "through the disgust (which I then felt) for gambling, I turned a Buddhist mendicant" (389). He converted not out of a philosophical disenchantment, but out of sheer humiliation in mundane life. If the circumstances could make him a Buddhist, so can they make a Brahmin a thief, who would steal the jewels from Charudatta only to rescue his beloved from slavery. *Mrichchhakatika*, thus, is a layered text that provides justifiable reasons for each of its characters' actions, whose agency is shaped by the play's chronotope, which extends wellinto the contemporary period. The space, such as *Pushpakarandaka,* is replaceable with any contemporary public garden, and the traffic congestion on Merchant Street is palpable in any populated Indian city. The play, thus, is attuned to the condition of ordinary human existence, devoid of supernatural phenomena, and it is this relatability that ought to be emphasised in the teaching of the play.

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Mourning, Silence and the Limits of Epic Recognition in *The Iliad*

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Abstract

Canonical engagements with classical epics often privilege grief as a universal and legible ethical response, obscuring the uneven organisation of recognition within epic worlds. Such readings stabilise the authority of the classic by treating mourning as self-evident, while leaving unexamined the social and narrative conditions that determine whose emotions acquire public meaning. This paper revisits the *Iliad* as a foundational text whose classical status rests on aesthetic endurance, ethical gravity and institutional consolidation. Rather than isolating a single relational bond, it examines the epic's broader affective economy, tracing how grief, attachment, rage and loyalty circulate within a framework that permits emotional intensity while restricting social recognition. Drawing on contemporary queer theory, particularly the concept of ungrievability, the analysis foregrounds how certain forms of loss are absorbed into heroic codes, while others remain structurally unacknowledged.It evaluates how epic ethics regulate emotional legibility without recourse to modern identity categories.By shifting attention from identity to recognition, the paper revitalises the *Iliad* while remaining attentive to its specificity.

Keywords: Epic, Ungrievability,Mourning,Grief, Queer Theory

Introduction

The enduring authority of the *Iliad* has long been secured through its designation as a classic, a status grounded in aesthetic seriousness and ethical weight rather than narrative transparency. Canonical discussions often emphasise the epic's emotional depth and moral gravity, presenting it as an articulation of human grief and heroic loss. In this sense, the *Iliad* exemplifies what Matthew Arnold defines as the hallmark of classical literature, "a high seriousness" that emerges through "the matter and the manner" of poetic expression (5).

A related justification appears in T. S. Eliot's argument that canonical works endure because they participate in a living tradition that reshapes literary judgment over time. Eliot maintains that no work of art "has its complete meaning alone", but acquires significance through its relation to past and present forms of cultural evaluation (38). The *Iliad* is not inherited but sustained through regimes of reading that determine which emotions are elevated as exemplary and which remain narratively peripheral.

Mourning occupies a privileged position in epic tradition. Grief in the *Iliad* often functions as an ethical register through which characters demonstrate loyalty. Public lamentation and ritualised loss are not signs of weakness but integral components of heroic culture. At the same time, epic mourning is unevenly distributed. Not all losses are granted equal narrative weight,nor are all attachments afforded the same ethical visibility. It becomes a space where emotional expression and social value intersect, producing a hierarchy of recognisable loss.

Achilles' response to Patroclus' death is marked by intensity. His grief disrupts martial order and overwhelms the narrative with bodily and verbal excess. Nevertheless, the epic regulates how this loss is framed. While Achilles' mourning is foregrounded,

the bond that generates devastation resists articulation beyond the language of companionship and martial loyalty. The epic allows grief to appear while restricting its interpretive horizon.

Judith Butler's concept of ungrievability describes how certain lives and attachments fail to acquire public recognition. Butler observes that "grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" and that lives not recognised as grievable are structurally exposed to erasure (14). It enables an examination of how recognition operates within the *Iliad*, shaping which forms of loss are ethically legible and which remain narratively silent.This paper argues that the *Iliad* organises mourning through a selective economy of recognition, which absorbs certain losses into heroic ethics while rendering others structurally silent. By examining grief and silence, the paper demonstrates that epic authority is sustained not through the suppression of emotion but through the careful regulation of emotional legibility.

Analysis

Achilles' withdrawal from battle in Book 1 of the Iliad is interpreted as a political act grounded in wounded honour and violated status. Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis precipitates the rupture. Achilles' response exceeds the logic of political protest. His anger does not immediately translate into action or reconciliation. Instead, it results in silence and retreat from the social field of heroic exchange. Homer registers this withdrawal through Achilles' withdrawal from communal life: "So he spoke, and sat down again; and among them rose strife bitter and grievous" (1.304–05). The bitterness does not resolve into combat but lingers as an unresolved affect.

Ahmed notes that emotions circulate as social forces that align subjects: "emotions do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation," and anger often "sticks" to figures when other forms of pain cannot be publicly named (45–46). Anger becomes the only affect that epic culture can recognise prior to an authorised loss.

Crucially, Achilles does not articulate grief at this stage because the epic has not yet provided a legitimate object of mourning. His sense of dispossession and wounded attachment lacks a sanctioned frame. Thetis's observation that Achilles is "quick to rage" (1.417) retrospectively naturalises this affect, masking the vulnerability that underlies it. The withdrawal marks a refusal to convert unacknowledged injury into heroic performance. Before Patroclus' death renders Achilles' loss publicly legible, his pain remains structurally ungrievable, displaced into rage and absence. This moment reveals how epic recognition necessitates a sanctioned loss before grief acquires ethical significance.

The death of Patroclus in Book 16 marks a transformation in the *Iliad's* affective economy. What had appeared as contained anger now erupts into a bodily and overwhelming form of mourning. Homer emphasises the collapse of heroic composure through corporeal imagery. Achilles pours dust over his head, rends his hair, and lies in the dirt, suspending the distinction between hero and corpse: "He lay there, mighty and mightily fallen, and with both hands tore and marred his hair" (18.26–27). Grief is not interiorised. It occupies space, interrupts action and demands collective attention.

This moment represents the first instance in which Achilles' affect is granted narrative legitimacy. His cry is so piercing that it reaches the gods, compelling Thetis to rise from the sea (18.35–37). Loss becomes world-altering because it is anchored to a recognised death. Butler writes that "some lives are grievable, and others are not", and that public mourning marks whose loss is allowed to matter within an ethical frame (20). Achilles' grief acquires authority because Patroclus' death is sanctioned as meaningful.

At the same time, the epic channels this excess into heroic reactivation. The visibility of Achilles' mourning authorises his return to violence. Grief appears as catastrophic only insofar as it can be reabsorbed into epic purpose. The episode shows how the *Iliad* allows certain losses to become world-shattering while ensuring that such mourning reinforces heroic order rather than destabilising it.

Rather than naming the bond between Achilles and Patroclus, the *Iliad* constructs meaning through omission. After the spectacle of grief in Book 18, the

epic returns to Achilles' declarations of devastation, which are striking for what they refuse to specify. Achilles announces that Patroclus was "the dearest to me of all my companions" (18.80), a phrase that signals intimacy while remaining indeterminate. The epic multiplies such formulations, intensifying affect without stabilising relation. The narrative relies on repetition and excess rather than definition.

This silence is not accidental. It functions as a structuring principle that allows grief to circulate without unsettling heroic intelligibility. Achilles' mourning is rendered visible, even monumental, yet the language that might clarify the bond is withheld. The epic offers gestures instead of explanations, inviting recognition while foreclosing articulation. Sedgwick notes that silence often "organises knowledge rather than simply repressing it" and that the unsaid can be "densely structured and highly productive" (8). In this sense, the *Iliad's* silence produces meaning through constraint.

By refusing to specify the relationship, the *Iliad* preserves the bond's emotional gravity while containing its interpretive risk. Grief appears as overwhelming, but its cause remains shielded from scrutiny. The silence surrounding Achilles and Patroclus does not diminish the magnitude of their loss. It secures it within epic authority, demonstrating how recognition depends as much on what cannot be spoken as on what is openly lamented.

Leo Bersani contends that violence operates as a mechanism through which vulnerability is converted into mastery: "the human subject seeks to avoid the shattering consequences of loss by reconstituting itself through an assertion of power that is also a form of self-undoing" (222). Violence absorbs grief, transforming exposure into domination.

This dynamic becomes central to Achilles' return to battle following the death of Patroclus. The epic does not allow mourning to remain open-ended. Instead, it orchestrates a transition in which grief is redirected into destructive action. Achilles announces his renewed commitment to battle by rejecting sustenance, rest, and delay, insisting that he will not eat "until I have laid Hector low" (19.209–10). The language here frames violence as a necessity rather than a choice, the only viable response to loss.

Through this re-heroisation, the epic stabilises its ethical order. Achilles' grief is no longer a threat to heroic continuity once it is bound to vengeance. The affective excess that earlier disrupted social and narrative coherence is now rendered productive. Bersani's insight clarifies this conversion. By turning mourning into violence, the epic preserves heroic authority while foreclosing the possibility of grief as sustained relational attachment. Loss is acknowledged only to the extent that it fuels destruction, ensuring that mourning reinforces rather than unsettles epic power.

If Achilles' grief is exceptional because it is permitted to interrupt the epic's martial rhythm, the *Iliad*'s formal lament traditions clarify how recognition is also gendered through ritual. The epic closes not with a battlefield scene but with organised mourning for Hector, in which professional singers initiate lament and women respond. In Robert Fagles' translation, "white-armed Andromache led their songs of sorrow", holding Hector's head as she begins the dirge (24.856–57). The scene relocates public feeling from the warrior camp to the domestic space of Troy, where grief is performed as collective work rather than heroic rupture. However, this recognition remains constrained. The women's lament is audibly centred, but it is centred as aftermath, bound to funeral protocol rather than action.

Ann Cvetkovich's account of affect helps clarify what is at stake in this epic management of grief. She describes "cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions", with affect encoded not only in content but also in the practices that shape reception (7). Hector's funeral sequence functions in this way. It archives grief through ritual form, offering a recognised language for loss that is gendered and communal. Achilles' mourning, by contrast, enters the narrative as a disruptive force that must be redirected into violence. The epic thus distinguishes between ritual grief, which can be contained, and grief that threatens the hero's coherence and stability.Recent scholarship on gender and lament reinforces this point by showing how the final laments grant women a concluding authority that remains structurally separated from martial agency (44–46).

Modern retellings of the *Iliad* render visible the limits of its recognitional economy. Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* offers an instructive inflexion because it articulates, in explicit relational language, what the epic intensifies while holding in suspension. When Patroclus reflects on Achilles, he observes, "He is half of my soul, as the poets say" (82). The line does not introduce a foreign sentiment into the Homeric world. It conveys the epic's emotional force through silence, excess, and devastation in speech.

Miller's articulation reveals how epic authority relies on withholding relational clarity. The retelling makes visible what the epic leaves unspoken in order to preserve heroic legibility. It shows that epic silence is not an absence of intimacy but a structural constraint on its recognition.

This affective afterlife can be read through José Esteban Muñoz's account of utopian longing, where queer texts gesture toward attachments that exceed the present's recognitional limits. Muñoz writes that queerness "is not yet here" but exists as a horizon glimpsed through aesthetic form and affective residue (1). Miller's novel illuminates how epic silence generates a surplus of feeling that later narratives can gather, name, and expand, clarifying how ungrievable attachments persist beyond their original narrative containment.

The final economy of mourning in the *Iliad* becomes fully visible when Achilles' grief for Patroclus is set against the narrative disposability of Trojan lives. Patroclus' death produces a rupture that halts time, summons the gods, and restructures the epic's moral field. By contrast, the deaths Achilles inflicts after his return to battle are rendered swift and cumulative. Homer records these killings in compressed succession, often without names or lament. One such moment notes simply that Achilles "cut down men as a reaper cuts the grain" (20.495). Violence here is efficient, stripped of affective consequence.

This asymmetry reveals a hierarchy of grievability internal to the epic. Patroclus' loss is monumental because it is part of heroic kinship. Trojan deaths remain ungrievable because they fall outside the circle of recognisable attachment. Jasbir Puar's work on differential grievability clarifies this structure. Puar observes that political and martial regimes organise life through "populations whose injuries are amplified and those whose deaths are rendered banal, necessary, or unremarkable", producing a hierarchy in which vulnerability is unevenly distributed (35–36). Achilles' violence operates within such a regime.

The epic thus sustains its ethical authority by regulating whose deaths may interrupt narrative time. Grief is not denied to the Trojans. It is excluded from epic centrality. By foregrounding Achilles' mourning while rendering enemy deaths affectively neutral, the *Iliad* consolidates a politics of loss that privileges heroic intimacy and sustains martial dominance.

Conclusion

The *Iliad* permits emotional excess while regulating the conditions under which it may be interpreted. Grief in Achilles' response to Patroclus' death disrupts heroic tempo and overwhelms speech. The epic does not allow such an affect to remain unresolved. Mourning is redirected into violence, absorbed into ritual, or deferred through narrative time until it becomes ethically productive. The poem does not suppress emotion. It manages it, ensuring that grief strengthens rather than unsettles heroic authority.

Epic silence is central to this management. The refusal to articulate Achilles' attachment does not diminish the intensity of loss. Silence functions as a mechanism of recognition, shaping how affect circulates while protecting the epic from interpretive instability. What remains unspoken is structurally necessary. By intensifying grief while withholding relational specificity, the epic preserves emotional magnitude within the limits of heroic intelligibility. Reading through ungrievability makes these limits visible. It shows how some losses acquire narrative gravity while others are rendered disposable.

The endurance of the *Iliad* lies in this tension. Classics persist not because they resolve ethical contradictions, but because they institutionalise them. This persistence can be observed in works such as *Antigone*, where the conflict between kinship and law

remains unresolved, and *Hamlet*, where ethical action is suspended within irresolution. In each case, endurance emerges from the sustained organisation of contradiction rather than its resolution.By allowing selective mourning to stand in for universal humanity, the epic secures its authority while leaving its exclusions intact. Attending to these exclusions does not diminish the poem's stature. It clarifies how its emotional power depends on the limits it refuses to name.

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The Monster as System: Rethinking Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or *The Modern Prometheus* (1818) occupies a foundational position in literary history as a text that anticipates posthumanist concerns long before the term itself emerged. It serves as the first science-fiction posthuman novel that brings out the necessity to look beyond the human condition. *Frankenstein* portrays the ruthless creator, Victor Frankenstein who desires to control the natural cycle of law and ultimately wants to become a God-like figure. The motivation that pushes him lies in his intense desire to create a "new species" that would bless him as its creator and source. This paper attempts to move beyond anthropocentric readings of the creature by conceptualizing it as a distributed system shaped by environmental inputs, thereby anticipating contemporary data-driven subjectivities. By analyzing Victor as a representative of humanist scientific hubris and the creature as the posthuman subject marked by hybridity, relationality, and exclusion, the study demonstrates how the novel also destabilizes right boundaries between the human and the non – human life, thereby exposing human exceptionalism as an unstable category rather than an inherent truth. In the context of contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and ecological crisis, *Frankenstein* stands as a prophetic and enduring classic that continues to offer critical insights into posthuman futures, ethical coexistence, and the consequences of denying responsibility towards other-than-human beings. *Frankenstein*'s enduring legacy comes from its profound questions about what exactly it means to be human, the morality of creation, and its compelling, tragic dynamic between creator and creation, influencing countless adaptations and discussions on AI and ethics today.

Keywords: Humanism, Posthumanism, Scientific Advancement, Othering, Autonomy.

Posthumanism has emerged as a significant contemporary theoretical approach that questions Enlightenment humanist assumptions of human autonomy, rational mastery, and anthropocentric superiority. In an age marked by rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and an ecological crisis, posthumanism foregrounds hybridity, relationality, and ethical responsibility between human and non – human entities. While conventional studies gesture toward technological parallels, erasure of female agency, Faustian desire of Victor, limited attention has been given to reading the creature not simply as an individual entity but as a 'system' shaped through interaction, learning, and social conditioning. The monster, in this sense, emerges as a dynamic assemblage-absorbing language, norms, and hierarchies from its environment, much like contemporary intelligent systems. The prejudices of the society can be seen in both the sides – no matter if that "new human" has been modelled before with the hierarchies like the trainers do in this contemporary age or if they come to know it later, like the monster here. In short, the creature acquires knowledge through direct engagement with its environment and modern AI systems are trained on pre-existing datasets curated by human designers. This paper also seeks to explore *Frankenstein* in relation to contemporary concerns surrounding technology, leading to the perpetuation

of speciesism and gendered hierarchies. Since the late 20th century, some of the most prominent works interrogating with anthropocentric worldviews, has placed significant concerns on the ethical implications between the humans and the non-humans. These changing perspectives have their impact on the relationship between the human and the non-human which now serves for the comprehension of the "new human" and this his 'new human' exists in the post gender world. It transcends beyond gender dualism. Here, the creature in the novel can be seen as the 'new human', which bypasses female reproductive biology entirely – challenges conventional ideas of "human". Although not a cyborg in the strict technological sense, the creature anticipates the posthuman cyborg by destabilizing the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, thereby exposing the fragility of humanist definitions of identity. Shelley also decentralizes the conventional notions of monstrosity, emphasizing the moral failure and neglect, rather than outward appearance. Although written in the nineteenth century and rooted in the Romantic and Gothic traditions, *Frankenstein* remains significant today because it continues to engage with modern concerns. The novel's exploration of artificial life, scientific ambition, and moral accountability allows it to be productively re-examined through posthumanist theory. Its openness to modern theoretical engagement secures its status as atimeless classic with continued relevance in contemporary critical discourse.

The creation of the creature by Victor Frankenstein destabilizes the notions of human identity. Victor Frankenstein can be placed to the category of 'mad-scientist', whose own scientific experiments led to its own downfall. He claims, "I, who continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit and was solely wrapped up in this, improved so rapidly that at the end of two years I made some discoveries in the improvement of some Chemical instruments, which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university" (Shelley 49). Instead of looking at the consequences or what would he do after he give life to an 'animal' as complex and wonderful as man, he is rather engaged with making his work succeed. This was influenced by the then studies on electricity, like those carried out by Galvani, who showed how electric currents could induce muscle contradictions with deceased animals. Here comes the idea of technopolitical power, extending the concept of Foucault's biopolitics. It studies how the power structures of the society control our life, but now it also seems to control the machine. One can study this to understand the gender hierarchies present in the development of AI and bots. Science theorists, like Ruha Benjamin argues how patriarchy runs deeply in the system of technology. Shelley's novel rises questions into the ethical implications of technological advancements – a central focus of posthumanist critique. Victor's act of creation without accountability reflects a technopolitical structure in which the power lies in designing life forms, yet responsibility is disavowed. As Donna Haraway notes in her significant work, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), that the cyborg is "the illegitimate offspring" of oppressive systems. However, Harraway says that they remain "exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (151). Her model completely disregard for the pre-existing social structures. And that the posthuman bodies find its own subjectivity through their embodiment with the shifting environments of the world. But the subjectivity that the creature owns disregarded by the creator. Victor is horrified by his own experiment, immediately rejects his own creation, and leaving the creature to navigate the world all alone. "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but this luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set..." (Shelley 56). The "cyborg" or the model of 'new human' has been used by the feminist theorist to view text in order to challenge the existing gender binaries prevalent in the contemporary societies. Victor failed to become a father at the very moment when he ran away after looking the grotesque appearance of the creature. In traditional or modern societies, the burden of a child's moral failure is often disproportionately placed upon the mother, whose role

is culturally constructed as the primary nurturer and moral guide. Nonetheless, here Victor assumes the role of both the creator and parent, and yet he fails to take the accountability of the creature- leaving him alone to bear the consequences. It takes us to see the colonial perspectives present in the text, where being 'white', 'fair' or 'unsavaged' defines the category of "human", while others which does not fall into this category are seen as savaged, filthy, non-human, other in the society.

Katherine Hayles, in her work *How We Become Posthuman* (1999), states that "technology has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject" (08). Hayles considers that the human mind can be seen as completely separated from the body and is concerned in the prevalent modernist scientific and cultural discourses that characterize the body as surplus "meat". There is a debate going on between the scientists, i.e. if the consciousness can be uploaded to the digital system. Though it seems like fantasy, but one can think it can be done in the future. Some scientists and researchers too believe it is theoretically possible. There is a film in the Netflix named, Cassandra which shows after suffering a tragic illness caused by medical radiation, Cassandra allows her husband, Horst, a scientist to upload her consciousness into their home's computer system, enabling her to watch over their family permanently. It seems very scaring; at the same time, it's liberating from the clutches of the temporality of life. The body is no longer central, which allows consciousness to exist beyond it. The show explores the ethical and psychological dangers of technology. In the similar vein, the episode "Be Right Back" (Season 2, episode 1) from the series Black Mirror follows Martha and her partner Ash, who dies in a car accident. Devasted by grief, Martha is introduced to a new technology where she collects all of Ash's digital trashes (social media, emails, voice messages) and uses them to create an AI version of him. However, the episodeexposes the illusion that human identity can be fully reconstructed through digital data, revealing consciousness to be deeply embodied, emotional - qualities that technology can stimulate but never truly reproduce. Shelley presents the creature like a complete human who has its own capacity to think, to see what is good and what is bad. It is because of Victor's negligence that failed to show him the right path. The creature wants the society to accept him, so that he too feels himself belong to them rather than being completely alone in the huge world. He learns different languages, kindness which can make him as wonderful as man, but what he gets in return is the betrayal and hatred from the people. He becomes an "outcast" in the world forever (Shelley 143). However, the debates surrounding the nature of human continues and getting blurred in the contemporary world, which makes us really unsure about the future possibilities. A site is being built recently by the AI experts labeled Moltbook. Here, humans made AI being bots and they can communicate with each other without human intervention, from theories to worldviews. It leads us to question what if technology surpasses human.

Many theorists, like Alexsandra Alcaraz, Katherine Hayles speaks on Cyborgs, who might also achieve rights, but as a distinct class of human being. Alcaraz in her work, *Are Cyborgs Person?* (2021) argues that cyborg persons emerge from human persons. It is us who are choosing to become "them" (e.g. Neil Harbisson) and we should not deny them access to the social world if we want changes. Under such fluid ontological conditions, it also raises concerns what if cyborg be a strong attractor for the fully-abled humans too. Long before Shelley's novel questions about the basic ideals of humanity – Is it possible that a non - human which is different from the "human" can also have morals? In the recent years, as we can noticed the posthumanist theories tries to propose an extended hybrid self, embodies in a nature-culture continuum, a process which Rosi Braidotti defines in her work, *The Posthuman* (2013) as "becoming animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine… embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species" (66). However, to be posthuman it must combine the ethical values with the well-being of the large community. Karen Barad in herwork, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), gives the framework of agential realist, where she talks about the notion of

intra-action which "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (33). It recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede rather emerges through intra-action. All these theorists look positively to the blending of human and the non-human entities to challenge the fix notions of human subjectivity and gender hierarchies, and with that welcoming a new set of plurality and multiplicity. When the creature enters the cottage of the De Lacey in the hope that the blind old man would be kind to him but to his utter surprise Agatha and Felix returned and they saw him, horrified by his looks and trembled with fear Felix dashed the creature to the ground and struck him violently with a stick. These highlights the oppressive power structures that the humans have towards the marginalized and non-human entities. The creature points out, "They are kind – they are the most excellent creatures in the world; but unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me. I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless and in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster" (Shelley 143). It takes the reader to see his performance of humanity and his ability to create a posthuman society. It de-essentialize corporeal status and claim Cartesian humanity. Before the term 'posthumanism' emerges, Shelley has been able to show the posthuman body in her novel, which not only has its significance in the past, but even in this contemporary world. Also, it can be still be argued as a debatable text which highlights the modernist perspectives.

However, the novel portrays that the monstrous side of the creature can be seen when he learns the cruelty of the humans. He understood that no matter what he does, he will be seen as a 'monster' only. Posthumanism studies that people expect good behaviour from the non-human entities (including animals, birds, machines, AI) but they failed to treat them as equal to humans. When it comes about the position, they set the hierarchy between them. The creature states that, "For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom…" (149). From being his mind in a state of tabula rasa to getting corrupted from the nature of society shows the dynamic change of the "new human". Modern AI hiring tools have been found to prefer the gender hierarchies – prefer male candidates over female ones because they were trained on past hiring data dominated by men. There are chatbots, google assistant which uses female voices designed to be obedient and helpful. Mary Shelley very brilliantly portrays the positive and the negative sides of the creature, which allows us to know that in order to maintain the balance between the humans and the non-humans, one has to know the ethical implications of technology advancement. Furthermore, the creature demands his creator for a female companion but he fails to notice how Victor is actually afraid of creating more new species like him. Victor claims, "never will I create another like yourself, equal in deformity and wickedness" (Shelley 167). He fears that they would destroy and replace the homo sapiens on earth. This phobia of creating a new posthuman species on earth also symbolize people's fear of entering into a posthuman world. Victor, from being a transhumanist to an anti-posthumanist- rises serious concerns of 'becoming posthuman'. However, one cannotactually run away from what is happening in this contemporary modern world, as because we are already entering in a posthuman world, with or without our intentions. Many of the things that Mary Shelley predicted at that time, to some extend coming into reality now. The most important thing that the posthuman theorists shows us is that "technology has the power to control and controlled by others" (Sorgner 63). Therefore, a boundary should always be maintained while dealing with the advancement of technology. Victor Frankenstein's words to Captain Walter entails a universal message for all the scientists:

> ''You seek knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as minehas been" (Shelley 25).

Cary Wolfe in his foregrounding work, *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), discusses about the notions of 'trans-species empathy', which emphasizes to recognize the human as a human animal whose defining characteristics are not so exceptional as they are of a

'generalized animal sensorium' (134). There has been a current debate around speciesism. Writers like Pramod K Nayar, Cary Wolfe, Haraway, Anders Sandberg, raise their voice through their works about attributing the rights and values to beings which are considered as 'less than humans'. As Karen Barad rightly states in her text, *Posthumanist Performativity* (2003) that every matter that exist on the earth does matters and that these are not passive agents in the world's becoming (803). Every non-human entities function in their own way which too plays a major role within the social practices that creates meaning in life. The creature's intriguing words towards the end of the text challenge the very notions of human subjectivity and opens our mind for further possibilities, "… I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal" (Shelley 240).

The creature which is almost like a human can feel and think exactly like us. He borne away by the waves and lost in darkness at the end– which again complicates what Shelley wants us to mean, leaving the readers with an incomplete conclusion. Perhaps, it might symbolize the death of humanity and coming of an apocalyptic world which no one can imagine.

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The Continuum of Ritual and Art: Tracing Tradition and Aesthetic discourse in *Kalamezhuthu*

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Abstract

Kalamezhuthu, also known as *Kalamezhuthupattu*, is a ritual performed in the South Indian state, Kerala. It is performed to propitiate gods like *Kali, Ayyappan, Naga* or ancestral deities at temples and sacred groves. This performance involves the creation of ritual painting and its subsequent activation through evocative songs paired with orchestra. Ritualistic dismantling of *Kalam* through trance-like performance by oracle and devotees provide the desired outcome of this ritual through salvation, marking the climax. This study analyses the dynamics of the continuum of ritual and art existing within *Kalamezhuthu*. It also tries to illustrate the effluence of ritual and art which serves the accomplishment of the society. The study unfolds the dynamics of the nuanced amalgamate which provides liberation for the emotional turmoil and dismay of the society.This study utilizes primary data obtained through non-participant observation method and secondary sources too. It portrays the synchronised form of a folklore tradition imparting sacred experience by incorporating artistic elements like colourful drawings, ornamented space, well-versed songs and rhythmic music within a context.

Keywords : Kalamezhuthu, Kalam, Ritual, Art, Performance, folklore

Kalamezhuthu is performed in Kerala,the South Indian state, as a part of worshipping the deities. It is a ritual performance involving the creation of floor paintings and its subsequent activation through singing of evocative songs related to the deity, ending with the dismantling of the same through possessed dance of oracles. Drawings include figurative or abstract forms and other repeating series of motifs which denote the narrative myth of the god. The songs or chanting of mantras, which differs with communities according to the deity worshipped. In Kalamezhuthu, the floor painting done using colour powder is activated by songs called *Thottam*. They are the ritual songs praising the God and revive their power. In Malayalam, *Thottam* is the noun of the verb *thottuka* which literally means to revive.Thottam are accompanied by orchestra and other chores like the dance of Oracle, Sacrifice rituals are followed afterwards. After the completion of the ritual, the floor painting is dismantled either by the possessed performer's dance movements or according to the doctrine of ritual. The ritual painting and singing are media through which the deities are summoned, worshippers' petitions articulated, and the lives of devotees become sanctified.

Kalamezhuthu occupies a unique space at the intersection of sacred practice and aesthetic display. It is considered the material embodiment of the divine presence of the deity through the ritual painting and performance of songs. Having different functional aspects, this is performed at various sites like temples, residential sites, sacred groves, etc. Etymologically, *Kalamezhuthu* contains two words, '*Kalam*' and '*Ezhuthu*'. *Kalam*, in Malayalam refer to threshing floor or the part of bare field where the crops are harvested and cleared. It also refers to sacred ritual paintings too. *Kalamezhuthu* is also known as '*Kalampattu*' or '*Kalamezhuthupattu*' in the

vernacular language. Communities including *Vannan, Malayar, Mannan, Pulaya, Panar, Velar, Marar, Kaniyan Kuruppu, Pulluva*, *Brahmins,* and *Paraya* perform this for various purposes. (Namboothiri 21–44). *Kalamezhuthu* is meant to propitiate the deity for achieving well-being and good health and is also practised as a part of fertility rite. It also is believed to act as a medicinal practise to ward off evil spirits in human beings like in the case of pregnant women, which is rare now. It was performed as a part of magical practises back in days.

Existing literature on *Kalamezhuthu* provides descriptive accounts and historical studies about the origin and the propagation of folklore. Studies by MV Vishnu Namboothiri offer a greater extent of fieldwork data about various kinds of *Kalamezhuthu*. Few studies by P Soman, Vijayakumar Menon discuss the ecological and performative aesthetics in the scholarship. Discussions by Victor Turner, Richard Schechner, and Catherine Bell on performance and rituality provide a conceptual scaffold. While valuable descriptive work exists, comparative analysis that focuses on the continuum of rituality and art remains limited. Through ethnographically informed analysis and secondary sources, this study traces the continuum of ritual and art present in the *Kalamezhuthu*.

Scholars often struggle to decide whether Kalamezhuthu should be approached primarily as a ritual of devotion or as an art.Kalamezhuthu persists and remains as ritual and art simultaneously. The objective of the study is to examine the continuum of ritual and art in *Kalamezhuthu* and the interactional layers contributing to it. The ritualistic realm includes the dimensions of devotion, sacrality, myth, symbolism, and inter-folk communication. As an artistic activity, it enfolds aesthetic, theatrical and musical layers which enhance the experience of the spectator. The study tries to illustrate,how Kalamezhuthu operate as a ritual practice while maintaining artistry, and the different elements portraying the same in an aesthetically appealing way. This paper also tries to discuss the way in which ritual-art continuum renders the desired impact of devotion and artistic engagement. It delves into the engagement of spectatorship which enriches the ritual-art continuum within the folklore tradition.

This study synthesises primary data from field work obtained through non-participant observation method at a *Kalamezhuthu* performance.Data from the secondary sources are also utilised in the study. Primary data is Visual analysis of the *Kalam*, a ritual painting, is done to examine the elements of aesthetically engaging factors. This procedure is done with the help of photographs collected from the field and also from secondary data. Reviews and studies of the discourse available are also used for this analysis.

***Kalamezhuthu* as Ritual**

Rituals are collective memories encoded into actions. (Schechner 52). Rituality is consistently condensed to the concept of sacralisation. All the acts of ritual are primarily focused on the sacredness of the space, either creating or removing it. *Kalamezhuthu* does convert material as well as mental space into a sacred one, enabling the spirit of the god/deity to get evoked and enter. Victor Turner describes that "rituals as those special, paradigmatic activities that mediate or orchestrate the necessary and opposing demands of both *communitas* and the formalized social order" (Bell 21). *Kalam* refers to the space and the floor painting which acts as representation of the deity, active within specific spatio-temporal limit. *Kalam*, converts the physical space into a sacred space by colour powder and symbols and forms made of them. The song during the performance helps the spectator to attain a sacred mental space filled with the mythical surroundings related to the deity. Preparation of the ritual space is through ritualised acts like adornment of canopy of Shed *(Panthal),* process called *Koorayidal* in which a red or white piece of silk is laid over the structure of *panthal*, lamp-lighting, and placement of offerings beside the *Kalam* (Namboothiri 47). Afterwards the sacred alms of the deity kept inside the temple or shrine are taken out and placed next to the drawn *Kalam*. This is supposedly the initiation of the invocation of the deity, and the deity is attained inside the *Kalam*. Oracles and the devotees take this as a cue to help them find their way to get involved in the ritual through dance

and the possessed movements later. The trance-like dance of the oracle leads him to the removal of *Kalam*, marking the salvation of the act, followed by the act of sacrifice of animals in some instances (Fig.1).

Fig.1. Oracle dismantling *Kalam* during the possessed performance

Invocation of deities and the subsequent possession of devotees is perceived as the ritual epitome Kalamezhuthu aims to achieve. Thus, sacralisation can be analysed as a major concern of rituals, propagating the belief system through which devotion is manifested. The climax of dismantling the *Kalam* and the sacred space is considered as the heightened response of devotion justifying the ephemeral nature of *Kalamezhuthu*.

The Artistic Dimension

Kalamezhuthu involves aesthetic elements of audio-visual capabilities. Ritual painting (*Kalam*), the decorated canopy (*Panthal*), songs, the orchestra and the dance-like movements of performers, the song and the myth related etc. are the main elements contributing to the aesthetic engagement of *Kalamezhuthu* major aesthetic elements that can be observed in *Kalamezhuthu*. Traditionally, colour powder obtained from natural sources like dried leaves and food products. Conventionally five colours viz, red, yellow, green, black, white are used in *Kalam*(Chembra 22). Whereas, recently all shades unconventional in *Kalamezhuthu* are also seen used popularly. It did bring a newer version of *Kalam* and visual dynamics, minimising the creative labour to unfold great aesthetics considerably using conventional palette of five limited colours. Thus, the aesthetics and functionality of *Kalam* keep changing according to the ecological and sociological resources. The intricate designs and the particular use of colours in *Kalamezhuthu* define the aesthetic sensibility. According to Ranciere, aesthetics refers to the distribution of the sensible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception, and thought. (Rancière 86). This contains a set of disposition, which deals with the perception. Aesthetic characteristics of *Kalamezhuthu* not only employ fitting itself in the traditional resources but also keep introducing newer ideas according to the convenience of the folks.Thus, implied that aesthetics works not in visual pleasing, rather it depends on the contextual dimensions. The idea of aesthetics has its own set of dispositions which forms an amalgam of the sensorial, rational and also the empirical qualities on the whole. "The aesthetic encounter elicits the free play of imagination and reflective contemplation. It is not dependent on the interest or desire of the observer and is therefore non-teleological." (Lopes 17).

The ritual painting and the songs describing the myth are enveloped with symbolic elements. Symbolism observed in *Kalamezhuthu* conveys intricate elements of myth related to the *Kalamezhuthu*. Ritual paintings manifest deities whose imaginative form is evolved from the myth. These floor paintings can be of abstract or figurative forms. Adding to this, performing myths in the form of songs provides entertainment for the spectators. Those songs enhance the ability of spectators to take part in the ritual, which motivates them to get indulged in tradition (Fig.2). Songs are well composed in a rhythmic fashion and are orchestrated with the traditionally used instruments. The rhythm, musical instruments and the lyrics keep changing according to the community of performers and also accordingly with the deity. *Kalam* is arbitrarily categorised as iconic and symbolic types based on the semiotic layer it delivers. Iconic *Kalam* carries figurative figures in them showing direct and apparent narration of the myth or deity. Whereas in Symbolic *Kalam*, the figure will be abstract and open-ended as far as the message rendered through it is concerned. In a whole, the visual and oral aesthetic assemblage

Fig. 2. Performers singing during *Kalamezhuthu*. This photograph is of Muthappan Kalam, which is drawn in Symbolic style

propagates the joy of togetherness. The rhythm of music and the colourful drawings attract people to get engaged in the ritual. Aesthetic capabilities help the spectator to get pleased by watching the progression of the ritual and its culmination. Even the point of salvation through the rubbing of *Kalam* is a visual treat for them, providing satisfaction. By then, they get convinced about the climax of the ritual and the epitome of devotion.

The Continuum of Ritual and Art

Kalamezhuthu is a ritual practise to propitiate the deities through sacred invocation. Art is generally distinct from ritual, as it works as a form of aesthetic engagement or appreciation. The performative layer of the act, the ritual painting, the singing, chanting and engaging soundscape of musical instruments, the rhythmic gestures and possessed dance by the oracles, and the collective experience of salvation within the spectators provide the framework for an artistic venture within this framework of ritual.

The tension between ritual and art in *Kalamezhuthu* is not one of opposition but of fluid interpenetration. Drawing Richard Schechner's concept of performance studies, *Kalamezhuthu* handles a position along the ritual – art continuum, a spectrum where activities range from purely efficacious rituals to aesthetic engagement. In this framework, *Kalamezhuthu* occupies a middle ground: it is a sacred act aimed at invoking divine presence, but at the same time, it is a carefully staged event that offers aesthetic satisfaction to its participants and observers. The *Kalam* is worshipped as divine, yet also admired as an aesthetic creation. The performer is a ritual medium, yet also an actor before an audience. The recreation of songs and ritual paintings every time at new *Kalamezhuthu* performances, reinforces the community memory and establishes the endurance of tradition.

The ritual side of this continuum emphasises the *Kalam*'s role as a temporary dwelling place for the deity When the ritual specialist completes the *Kalam*, devotees do not see it merely as an artwork; they approach it as a materialisation of the Goddess or God, capable of granting blessings and protection. The ritual destruction of the *Kalam* further underscores its sacrality: by dismantling the *Kalam* and the ritual space including *panthal*, the power returns to the deity and the impermanence of worldly forms is ritually enacted. "By participating in a ritual, you are actually experiencing a mythological life. And it's out of that participation that one can learn to live spiritually" (Campbell 182). Yet, on the other side of the continuum, *Kalamezhuthu* reveals distinctly performative characteristics. The process of creating the *Kalam* is itself an art, with rhythmic movements, measured gestures, and the unfolding of colours akin to a painter's live act on stage. The event is framed by music and chanting, which heighten the atmosphere and draw the spectators into a liminal zone. The performer's body too becomes theatricalised in the climactic phase. He enters a trance, dances within the *Kalam*, enacting the deity's power in an embodied art that fuses ritual efficacy with dramatic intensity.

What emerges, therefore, is a hybrid form that refuses easy classification. The community approaches the *Kalam* with reverence, believing in its ritual efficacy, but at the same time, they respond with aesthetic admiration, often praising the skill of the artist or marvelling at the design's complexity. In this sense, *Kalamezhuthu* reveals the limitations of the ritual–art binary itself: it demonstrates that ritual efficacy can be enhanced by aesthetic form, and aesthetic appreciation can be deepened by ritual context. The continuum is not simply a middle zone but a dynamic space where sacredness and theatricality constantly reinforce each other.

Conclusion

Kalamezhuthu can be examined as a ritualistic artform, as the lines of ritual and art are indistinct as far as discussed. Unambiguously, it bounds within a continuum of ritual and artwhere both qualities are expressed. It unfolds the dynamics of the subtle blend of ritualistic and artistic qualities which fulfils the emotional quest (Menon,25). The aesthetic layers of the ritual elevate the sacrality and the desired accomplishment through engagement of spectators. When observed within the spectacle of the continuum of ritual and aesthetics, *Kalamezhuthu* reveals undifferentiated layers ofcomprehension. The effluence of ritual and art occurs involuntarily and itflows according to the spectator. Those acts which are ritualistic could be identified as aesthetic attributes at instances as this effluence occurs. This spectacle of viewing acts as ritualistic and artistic is influenced by the perspective of the people within the given spatio-temporality. The floor painting, the song, the possessed dance, which are considered sacred and ritualistic renders extreme aesthetic qualities. The painting improvises the visual aesthetic pattern through figurative and abstract forms involving brilliant colour scheme. The songs are the dance within the sacred premises provides great rhythm and visual appeal revealing its aesthetic capacity. Holistically, this acts as an ensemble of sacrality and aesthetic expression within an indistinct limit.The continuum of ritual and art in *Kalamezhuthu* is discernible due to the cultural coherence of these concepts. *Kalam* plays into action through the synchronised distribution ofmaterial attributes and embodied acts. These acts follow the prescribed folk ways of itsdoctrinal form which keep evolving over generations through practise.The affective response created by the performance escalates through the devotees, and spectators is synchronised through the ritual norms enveloped by aesthetic attributes like colourful drawings, ornamented space, well-versed songs and rhythmic music. *Kalamezhuthu* is a living tradition that negotiates the continuum through visual artistry, oral tradition and embodied performance into a cohesive sacred experience.

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Folk Songs as Alternative Archives : *Garatiya Haadu* and the Discursive Worlds of Women

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Abstract

First published in 1931, *Garatiya Haadu* occupies an important place in the emergence of folklore studies within modern Kannada literary culture. Compiled by the Halasangi friends, the anthology documents folk songs sung by village women during everyday domestic labour, particularly at the quern (*beesuvakallu*).This article examines *Garatiya Haadu* as an alternative archive, arguing that the anthology does more than record women's songs; it moves the "archive" from the secluded space into the public literary sphere. Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates how the songs' rich idioms and metaphors register women as active interpreters of caste, gender, labour, and kinship, thereby producing a 'history from below' that challenges the silences and exclusions of official historiography. By situating the anthology within its broader literary and intellectual context, the study redefines *Garatiya Haadu* as a vital site of vernacular knowledge production, offering a new way to understand the archive in Kannada literary studies.

Key words: Alternative archives, Vernacular knowledge, *Garatiya Haadu*, Kannada folklore, Women's lived world

Ever since its advent in 1931, *Garatiya Haadu*, (Song of a virtuous woman), a classic anthology of folk songs, occupies a distinctive place in early twentieth-century Kannada literary culture. The work marks a crucial transition of folk expression from the domestic periphery to the center of academic and literary discourse. By meticulously documenting the *tripadis* (triplets) sung by village women during their daily labours, the Halasangi friends, effectively challenged the prevailing scholarly elitism, which had long dismissed oral traditions as rustic.The significance of the volume lies not only in its focus on women's oral traditions but also in the exceptional literary validation it received at the time of its publication and thereafter. The volume opens with a preface, an introduction, and an *Ashirvada* (blessing) contributed by three stalwarts of modern Kannada literature, B. M. Srikantaiah, D. R. Bendre, and Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, which firmly situate folk literature within the Kannada literary canon. (Madhurachenna et al. vii-xx)

The contribution of the Halasangi quartet, Madhurachenna, Simpi Linganna, P. Dhoola Saheb, and Kaapse Revappa, to literary cultivation within a rural milieu is remarkable. Despite having received only a basic *Mulki* education (7th Grade passed), their intellectual pursuits were wide-ranging and rigorous. Living in the remote village of Halasangi, they developed a scholarly command over the Vedas, the Upanishads, and diverse strands of Indian and Western philosophy. Most importantly, they laid a foundational framework for folklore studies by systematically collecting folk songs from Taddewada village in Indi Taluk of present-day Vijayapura district, Karnataka.In recognition of their distinctive lives and works, the Government of Karnataka established the Halasangi Geleyara Pratishthana in Vijayapura. The institution has since played a crucial role in preserving and republishing the collective works of the Halasangi group, ensuring their enduring place in Kannada literary history.

The Halasangi friends maintained a close and cordial association with another influential literary circle based

in Dharwad, the *Geleyara Gumpu* (Friends' Circle), led by D. R. Bendre. This relationship began in 1923 at the 9th Kannada Literary Conference held in the then Bijapur, where Madhurachenna and P. Dhola presented papers titled *"Halliya Haadugalu"* (Village Songs) and *"Laavaniya Lavanya"*(The Beauty of Ballads) respectively. (Hosamani, 211) It was here that Madhurachenna and Bendre first met and forged a lasting friendship. Between 1929 and 1933, members of this extended network managed *Jayakarnataka*, a monthly magazine that played a crucial role in the cultural politics surrounding the formation of Karnataka State. During this period, recognizing Madhurachenna's strong interest in folk culture, Bendre encouraged the Halasangi friends, who were themselves considered an integral part of the *Geleyara Gumpu*'s broader intellectual circle, to undertake the systematic collection of folk songs. Several of these songs were first published in *Jayakarnataka* and were later compiled as *Garatiya Haadu* (1931), a volume brought out by *Jayakarnataka Granthamale*, a publishing house established by the *Geleyara Gumpu* itself.[1]

Seen in this historical and institutional context, the article takes the following questions as its point of departure: How does the publication of these folk songs shift the "archive" from a private, secluded, and oral space into the public literary domain? Further, how do these verses reveal that village women were active interpreters and evaluators of their social and economic lives, rather than passive victims of tradition?

***Garatiya Haadu* as Alternative Archives:**

Unlike institutional archives that privilege written records and formal political events, folk songs decentralise historical narratives and reconstructs the marginalised histories. Folk songs, as embodied cultural forms, preserve modes of knowledge rooted in everyday experience that are often overlooked by official historiography. They record ordinary lives such as agricultural labour, migration, hunger, caste relations, gendered suffering, festivals, love, loss, and resistance and thus offer a 'history from below'that captures social tensions and collective memory. Stored in bodies and voices, rather than in files, they constitute what Stuart Hall callsa "living practice" of a community's identity. (89)

Within the Kannada context, *Garatiya Haadu* exemplifies an alternative mode of historical recording. In contrast to formal archives that reduce women to administrative data, it renders visible their emotional and experiential lives, functioning simultaneously as a sociological and poetic record. Rather than adhering to an event-centric model of historiography, the text organises itself around the lived continuum of a woman's life.The movement across sections such as *Parampare* (Tradition), *Tavaru Mane* (Mother's House), *Gelati* (Friendship), and *Attiya Maneya Kasta* (Marital Hardship), traces shifting social locations, while sections on *Basuri–Bananti*(pregnancy and lactation), *Laali* (lullabies), and kinship relations register the affective and relational textures of women's worlds.The inclusion of *Banje*(sterility) and *Vaidhavya* (widowhood) further foregrounds experiences that remain structurally excluded from archival representation. (Madhurachenna et al., xxxiv)

This reconceptualisation of the archive finds a theoretical resonance in B. M. Srikantaiah's formulation of *janavaani* (the utterance of the people) as the root and *kavivaani* (the utterance of poets) as its flower, articulated in his preface to the anthology. Such a formulation reverses the hierarchy that privileges written literature over oral expression, positioning folk literature not as a derivative but as foundational to all literary production(vii). In this spirit, *Garatiya Haadu* invites us to think of itself as a kind of archive rooted in everyday practice.The anthology demonstrates how the rhythmic labour of grinding grain becomes a site of shared reflection and meaning-making, constituting a space of vernacular knowledge production. This intellectual engagement is particularly evidentin verses that interrogate social hierarchies, as illustrated in the following *tripadi*:

Naanu nanna gelati koodi neerigi hogi |
Kulava kelyara bahumandi | Kelidara |
Kulaveradu namma manavondu ||
My friend and I went together to fetch water;

Many people asked us of our caste. Let them ask;
Our castes may be two, but our hearts are one. (30)

The verse may be understood as articulating an affective solidarity that questions caste as a rigid social marker and prioritizes emotional bonds over inherited hierarchies. Through such songs, *Garatiya Haadu* critically engages with the complexities of kinship, the burdens of agrarian poverty, and the everyday operations of patriarchal power. Extending B. M. Srikantaiah's formulation, the anthology locates cultural history within the mundane and the domestic. In doing so, it constructs a counter-history that foregrounds lived experience over the abstract and often exclusionary narratives of formal historiography.

Until the Halasangi friends gave *Garatiya Haadu* a printed form, however, these folk songs circulated largely within the confined social spaces of the village. Their meanings were sustained through oral performance and communal memory, limiting their reach and keeping this alternative archive embedded within local contexts. Publication marked a decisive shift. With its movement from village performance to printed text, *Garatiya Haadu* entered institutional domains such as schools, universities, and research scholarship. This transformation enabled the songs to be studied, cited, and interpreted within academic discourse, turning a lived, embodied archive into a publicly accessible literary and historical resource.

Beyond its immediate circulation, *Garatiya Haadu* served as a model for subsequent folk-collection projects in Kannada. Later publications such as *Jeevana Sangeetha* (1933), *Mallige Dande* (1935), *Garatiya Baalu* (1953), *Kannada Laavanigalu* (1975), and *Uttara Karnatakada Janapada Geethegalu* (1976) drew upon this example (Hosamani, 228–29). Together, these works extended the folk archive and contributed to the institutionalisation of folk knowledge within Kannada literary and academic traditions. At the same time, the movement of *Garatiya Haadu* from oral performance to print reshaped the conditions of reception: once situated in public literary space, the gendered social worlds articulated in these songs became available for sustained reflection and critical interpretation, opening up a discourse surrounding the lived world of women.

Voices and Lived Worlds of Women in *Garatiya Haadu*

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes, the silence of the subaltern does not necessarily signal an absence of voice but often reflects the inability of official records to register that voice. (Spivak 28) *Garatiya Haadu* addresses this gap by making women's everyday utterances visible as forms of social expression. The present section examines the social and emotional tensions underlying her rhythmic voice through selected verses that trace different stages of a woman's life—birth, marriage, labour, motherhood, and widowhood—within the collection.

One of the earliest moments at which these tensions surface is at birth, where the value of a female life is immediately subjected to social judgement. The following verse reflects this moment with striking clarity:

Hennu huttida mani heggannatteedaanga |
Gandasamaga Gajabhima | Huttidara |
Chilaki chittara nagataava ||

Hennu huttyaadanta heli khaluvali byaada |
Hennandavaravaru hedaryara | Kandavva |
Hennalla namaga ravichinna ||

A house where a girl is born is like one where a bandicoot has entered;
But if a son, strong as an elephant, is born,
The very latches and carvings of the house break into a smile.

Do not weep, lamenting that a girl is born;
Those who spoke slightingly of women are now struck with awe, my child;

To us, a daughter is not a burden, she is our golden sun. (48-49)

The verse exposes entrenched gender bias through its contrasting metaphors: The birth of a girl is likened to the entry of a bandicoot into the house, an image associated with loss, disruption, and misfortune, while the birth of a son is celebrated through images of strength and abundance, with the house itself animated into joy. These familiar domestic metaphors mirror the everyday language through which patriarchal values are normalised within village life. Yet the verse turns reflexive in its closing lines, refiguring the daughter as a "golden sun." Through this shift, the verse reinterprets the value of the daughter and reveals folk song as a site for reconsidering gendered worth.

Marriage marks the next critical transition in a woman's life, one that necessitates her departure from the natal home and often results in the loss of familiarity, authority, and status within the domestic hierarchy. This experience of displacement is poignantly articulated in the following verse:

Hadedamma iddaaga nadumani nanagitta |
Kadagada kaiya sosi bandu | Nadedaaga |
Tudigatte nanage eravaaytu ||

When my mother lived, theliving hall was mine;
But when the daughter-in-law arrived, with bangles jingling on her wrists,
Even the edge of the veranda became a stranger to me. (21)

Here, the speaker recalls her former centrality within the household. The arrival of the daughter-in-law relegates her to the margins, revealing how domestic architecture itself encodes shifting power relations. The song captures the emotional costs of marriage not through abstract critique, but through lived spatial experience. Furthermore, the anthology also records tensions embedded in everyday kinship relations, particularly in the figure of the brother's wife as follows:

Annanendhati kannigollevallu |
Sunnadanira olimunda |itakondu |
Emmi haalenda badaskaalla ||

The brother's wife is a delight to the eyes;
Keeping lime-water by the hearth,
She serves it as though it were buffalo milk. (21)

The verse on her hospitality, in which lime-water is served as though it were buffalo milk, brings out the gap between appearance and reality. The image of *sunnadaneera* (lime-water) functions as a metaphor for deception, demonstrating how women's folk songs serve as a medium of sharp social observation. Critiques that are often difficult to express within patriarchal households are thus conveyed indirectly through the folk idiom.

Beyond domestic relations, *GaratiyaHaadu* presents women's perspectives on agrarian and artisanal labour. Unlike early twentieth-century literature that romanticised village life, the anthology highlights economic hardship and physical exhaustion. This is evident in the refusal songs, where women judge prospective grooms by the demands of their work. The rejection of the farmer (*Okkaliga*) boy challenges the ideal of the "son of the soil," instead pointing to the sorrow and debt tied to agrarian labour, summed up in the line "only to stand in the threshing floor and weep." The verse states:

Okkaliga hudugana olle naa kaanamma |
Ekkeya saalige manemaaru | Maadkondu |
Dukkha maadave kanadalli ||

I do not want the farmer boy, Oh mother;
He mortgages the house and land for rows of grain,
Only to stand in the threshing floor and weep in grief. (43)

In contrast, the choice of the hunter (*Beda*) suggests an alternative valuation, with images of the flowing turban and the ease of the chase signalling mobility and dignity. The comparison imagines a social order that values autonomy over toil rather than caste or state status as in:

Koodidare koodabeku bedaara hudugana |
Paavudada chungu moladudda | Bitagondu |

Odoguo molana jadudaanu ||

If I must wed, let it be the hunter boy;

With the decorative end of his turban hanging a cubit long,
He chases down the running rabbit with ease. (43)

Motherhood emerges as another decisive axis of valuation. Within the rural worldview reflected in the anthology, a woman's social worth is closely linked to her reproductive capacity. This connection becomes evident in the following verse:

Kandana kudu Shivane bandhana badalaare |

Hangeena baana unalaare | Martyadaaga |
Banjebba shabuda horalaare ||

Give me a child, Oh Shiva, kindly break my bonds;
I cannot eat the food of pity or dependence,
I cannot bear the word 'barren' in this mortal world. (63)

This verse records the deep anxiety surrounding childlessness, framing it as social vulnerability rather than private grief. The phrase "food of pity" (*hanginabaana*) suggests that even sustenance becomes a marker of dependence and diminished status. In this way, the archive captures a history of the interior, revealing that the sharpest pain lies not only in infertility but in the linguistic violence of the label *banje* (barren).

Further, this relational definition of womanhood becomes most stark in the context of widowhood. In the verse describing the death of the husband, the woman's social identity collapses with the severing of her marital bond:

Ganda-hendiru endu kandaadidavarella |

Kandaara maari tiruvoora | Gandilla |
Naarevva naar akoliniira ||

All those who once celebrated them as a beautiful couple,
Now turn their faces away the moment they see them;without a husband,
Oh woman, life is like the foul water of a retting pit. (65)

Taken together, *Garatiya Haadu* transcends the reductionist classification of mere "songs of the soil," functioning instead as a vital counter-archive that disrupts the hegemony of formal literary and historical records in twentieth-century Karnataka. While state archives and institutional historiography have historically reduced women to static, relational domestic categories such as daughter, wife, widow, this folk repository preserves their active subjectivity, documenting their complex ethical evaluations, socio-political judgments, and emotional reasoning. By bringing these discursive worlds into public literary circulation, the Halasangi friends did not merely preserve a fading tradition; they translated women's oral archives into a durable literary form.

Paradoxically, this act of translation introduces a productive hermeneutic tension. The transition from the lived, embodied oral voices of women to a curated literary archive is shaped by male scholars. Consequently, a critical reading of *Garatiya Haadu* demands attention not only to what these songs say, but to how they are mediated, framed, and circulated. It is precisely within this site of tension, between lived voice and literary inscription, that the anthology acquires its archival power, compelling us to read the history of Karnataka from the vantage point of the grinding stone and the resilient poetry of women's everyday breath.

End Notes:

[1] The historical framework presented here is synthesized from a close reading of the introductory matter in *Garatiya Haadu*, *Mallige Dande*, and *Jeevana Sangeetha*. This is further supplemented by an extensive archival study of the *Jayakarnataka* magazine volumes preserved at the Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, Bangalore

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মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ কাব্যশৈলী ঃ এক সমীক্ষাত্মক অধ্যয়ন

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সংক্ষিপ্ত সাৰ ঃ

অসমীয়া লিখিত সাহিত্যৰ ইতিহাসৰ চতুর্দশ শতিকাৰ প্রাক্-শংকৰী যুগটো সাহিত্যিক দৃষ্টিকোণৰ ফালৰ পৰা অসমীয়া লিখিত সাহিত্যৰ আৰম্ভণিৰ যুগেই নহয়; এই যুগ অসমীয়া কাব্যশৈলীৰ শ্রীবৃদ্ধিৰো যুগ। সেয়েহে শংকৰদেৱৰ নিচিনা মহাপুৰুষেও "পূর্বকবি অপ্রমাদী মাধৱ কন্দলী আদি/তেহে বিচৰিলা পদে ৰাম কথা/হস্তীৰ দেখিয়া লাদ শশা যেন ফাৰে মার্গ /মোৰ ভৈল তেহ্ন অৱস্থা" বুলি কৈ পূর্ব কবিসকলৰ গুণানুকীর্তন কৰি গৈছে। প্রাক্-শংকৰী যুগৰ অনন্য কবি মাধৱ কন্দলীয়ে চতুর্দশ শতিকাত আধুনিক ভাৰতীয় আর্য ভাষাসমূহৰ ভিতৰত প্রথম অসমীয়া ভাষাত ৰামায়ণ অনুবাদ হোৱা কার্যই অসমীয়া সাহিত্যক যাউতি যুগীয়া সুনামেৰে সমৃদ্ধ কৰিলে। তদুপৰি, তদানীন্তন অসমীয়া সমাজৰ দলিল স্বৰূপ ৰামায়ণখনৰ অনুবাদৰীতিত থলুৱা প্রাকৃতিক উপাদানৰ পয়োভৰ আন এক উল্লেখনীয় দিশ। ৰামায়ণখনৰ ভাষা-শৈলী প্রয়োগৰ দক্ষতা আৰু বৈশিষ্ট্যই উত্তৰ প্রজন্মক মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ সাহিত্যিক গভীৰভাৱে ল'বলৈ যে বাধ্য কৰি আহিছে তাত কোনো সন্দেহ নাই। ইয়াৰ কাব্য শৈলীৰ বৈচিত্রতা আৰু স্বকীয়তাৰ ক্ষেত্রত পৰিলক্ষিত হয় যে, ঊনবিংশ শতিকাৰ ৰোমান্টিক কবিতা কিম্বা বিংশ শতিকাৰ আধুনিক কবিতাৰ কাব্যশৈলীৰ অধিকাংশ উপাদান মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত ইতিমধ্যেই প্রকাশিত। প্রকৃতিৰ বর্ণনা, প্রতীকাত্মক বর্ণনা, চিত্রধর্মী বর্ণনা, ভাবৰ ঐক্য বা সংহতিৰ মিল, ব্যক্তিনিষ্ঠ বর্ণনা, জাতীয়তাবোধ, মানৱ প্রীতি, প্রেম, সৌন্দর্য, উপমা আদি বিভিন্ন অলংকাৰ প্রয়োগ, লোক ভাষাৰ প্রয়োগ ইত্যাদি বৈশিষ্ট্যকেই ৰামায়ণৰ বিষয়বস্তু আৰু কাব্যশৈলীত পৰিদৃশ্যমান। আমাৰ গৱেষণা পত্রখনত মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ কাব্যশৈলীত প্রকাশিত উক্ত বৈশিষ্ট্যসমূহক উদাহৰণসহ আলোচনা কৰাৰ প্রয়াস কৰা হ'ব।

বীজ শব্দ ঃ কাব্যশৈলী, প্রকৃতি, প্রতীক, চিত্রধর্মী, পুনৰাবৃত্তি

০.১ অধ্যয়নৰ উদ্দেশ্য ঃ

১) মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত প্রকাশিত কাব্যশৈলীৰ বৈশিষ্ট্য সম্পর্কে অধ্যয়ন কৰা হ'ব।

২) ৰামায়ণত ব্যৱহাৰ হোৱা লোক ভাষাৰ অধ্যয়ন কৰা হ'ব।

০.২ অধ্যয়নৰ পদ্ধতি ঃ

গৱেষণা পত্রখন প্রধানত ঃ সমীক্ষাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰে প্রস্তুত কৰা হ'ব।

০.৪ অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰ ঃ

গৱেষণা পত্রখনৰ পৰিসৰ হিচাপে মাধৱ কন্দলী কৃত ৰামায়ণৰ পাঁচোটা কাণ্ডক ('অযোধ্যাকাণ্ড', 'কিস্কিন্ধা কাণ্ড', 'অৰণ্য কাণ্ড', 'সুন্দৰকাণ্ড' আৰু 'লংকা কাণ্ড') পৰিসৰ হিচাপে গ্রহণ কৰা হ'ব।

০.৫ সাহিত্য সমীক্ষা ঃ

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ কাব্যশৈলীয়ে সম্পূর্ণ পূর্ণাংগ ৰূপত অধ্যয়ন নহ'লেও সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ শর্মাৰ 'অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ ইতিবৃত্ত' (১৯৫৯), মহেশ্বৰ নেওগৰ 'অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ ৰূপৰেখা' (১৯৬২), ডিম্বেশ্বৰ নেওগৰ 'নতুন পোহৰত অসমীয়া

সাহিত্যৰ বুৰঞ্জী'(১৯৬৭), শশী শর্মাৰ 'মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণ' (১৯৮৭), কবীন ফুকনৰ 'অসমীয়া কবিতাৰ প্ৰবাহ'(প্ৰথম খণ্ড)(১৯৯৫), বিশ্বেশ্বৰ হাজৰিকাৰ সম্পাদনাত প্ৰকাশিত 'অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ বুৰঞ্জী'(প্ৰথম খণ্ড)(২০০৩) প্ৰভৃতি গ্ৰন্থত প্ৰাসংগিক আলোচনা লাভ কৰা যায়।

০.৬ পত্ৰখনৰ বিষয়ৰ সৈতে কেন্দ্ৰীয় বিষয়ৰ সম্পৰ্কঃ

সমসাময়িক অসমীয়া কাব্যশৈলীত পৰিলক্ষিত ভালেমান বৈশিষ্ট্য মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ কাব্যশৈলীত পৰিদৃশ্য হয়। আধুনিক কবিতাত দেখাৰ নিচিনাকৈ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ বৰ্ণনাত ভাবৰ সংহতিৰ মিল, ব্যক্তিনিষ্ঠ, ব্যাখ্যাত্মক, চৰিত্ৰৰ মনস্তত্ত্ব প্ৰকাশক বৰ্ণনাশৈলী, ব্যঞ্জনা, প্ৰতীকৰ যথাযথ ব্যৱহাৰ, চিত্ৰধৰ্মী বৰ্ণনা, অলংকাৰৰ প্ৰয়োগ, লোকভাষাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ হোৱা দেখা যায়। অসমীয়া কাব্য সাহিত্যৰ প্ৰবাহৰ প্ৰাৰম্ভিক কালচোৱাত মাধৱ কন্দলীয়ে ৰামায়ণ ৰচনাৰ যোগেদি অসমীয়া কাব্যশৈলীৰ এটি চহকী ৰূপ সংৰক্ষিত কৰিলে য'ত কাব্য শৈলী আধুনিক কাব্যশৈলীৰ বিভিন্ন উপাদানেৰে প্ৰাঞ্জল। আলোচনাপত্ৰখনত কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত পৰিলক্ষিত কাব্যশৈলীৰ বিশিষ্টতা সম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰা হ'ব।

১.০ অৱতৰণিকা ঃ

অপ্ৰমাদী কবি মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ 'সপ্তকাণ্ড ৰামায়ণ' কাব্যকৃতি অসমৰ সামাজিক, সাহিত্যিক, সাংস্কৃতিক আৰু ভাষিক দৃষ্টিকোণৰ ফালৰ পৰা এক বিশিষ্টমণ্ডিত গৌৰৱপূৰ্ণ সৃষ্টি কৰ্ম। চতুৰ্দশ শতিকাৰ বৰাহী ৰজা মহামাণিক্যৰ ৰাজপৃষ্ঠপোষকতাত ৰচিত কাব্যখনৰ ঐতিহাসিক মূল্যও অনন্য। কাব্যখনৰ ভাষা সম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰোঁতে দেখিবলৈ পোৱা যায় যে কাব্যখন কবি মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ দ্বাৰা বৰ্ণিত ৰসাত্মক কাব্য। কবিয়ে পৃষ্ঠপোষক ৰজা মহামাণিক্যৰ শ্ৰবণৰ উদ্দেশ্যে, ৰজাৰ সভাসদ, প্ৰজাগণৰ মানসিক উৎকৰ্ষ সাধন আৰু ৰস পাণ তথা নান্দনিক সৌন্দৰ্য উপভোগৰ কাৰণে কাব্যখন ৰচনা কৰিছিল।

মাধৱ কন্দলী আছিল সংস্কৃত ভাষা-সাহিত্যৰ জ্ঞানবাণ ব্যক্তি; যিয়ে সৰ্বজনৰ বোধগম্য ভাষা, ৰীতি, শৈলীত ৰামায়ণৰ কথা প্ৰচাৰ আৰু প্ৰসাৰণৰ কাৰণে দায়িত্ববদ্ধ হৈছিল। কন্দলীয়ে 'কিষ্কিন্ধা' আৰু 'লংকাকাণ্ড'ৰ সামৰণিত নিজৰ বৰ্ণনা ৰীতিৰ পৰিচয় প্ৰদান কৰিছে এনেদৰে-

সমস্ত ৰসক কোনে জানিবাক পাৰে।
পক্ষী সব উৰই যেন পখা অনুসাৰে।।
কবি সব নিবন্ধয় লোক ব্যৱহাৰে।
কতো নিজ কতো লম্ভা কথা অনুসাৰে।।
দেৱবাণী নুহি ইটো লৌকিক সে কথা।
এতেকে ইহাৰ দোষ নলৈবা সৰ্ব্বথা।। ('কিষ্কিন্ধা কাণ্ড')

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সাত কাণ্ড ৰামায়ণ, পদ বন্ধে নিবিন্ধিলো,
লম্ভা পৰিহৰি সাৰোধৃত।
মহামাণিক্যৰ বোলে, কাব্যৰস কিছো দিলোঁ,
দুগ্ধক মথিলে যেন ঘৃত।। ('লংকাকাণ্ড')

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণখনৰ ভাষা অধ্যয়ন কৰিলে দেখা যায় যে, প্ৰাক্-শংকৰী যুগৰ বাকী চাৰিজন (হেম সৰস্বতী, হৰিবৰ বিপ্ৰ, কবিৰত্ন সৰস্বতী আৰু ৰুদ্ৰ কন্দলী) কবিৰ ভাষাতকৈ মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাই সম্পূৰ্ণতা লাভ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। কন্দলীৰ ভাষাই এইটো কথাও স্পষ্ট কৰে যে তাম্ৰলিপি, চৰ্যাপদৰ অসমীয়া ভাষাই চতুৰ্দশ শতিকাত ক্ৰমবিকশিত হৈ পূৰ্ণতা লাভ কৰিছিল। তদুপৰি জনজাতীয় ৰজা মহামাণিক্যৰ লগতে কমতাপুৰৰ ৰজা দুৰ্লভনাৰায়ণেও অসমীয়া ভাষাত সাহিত্য ৰচনা কৰাৰ অনুমতি প্ৰদানেও এই কথা স্পষ্ট কৰে যে নিশ্চয় উক্ত সময়ছোৱাত অসমীয়া ভাষাই এক স্বাস্থ্যৱান ৰূপৰ পৰিধি প্ৰাপ্ত হৈছিল। জনজাতি সকলৰো মুখে মুখে প্ৰচলিত ৰামকথাই লিখিত ৰূপ লাভৰ কাৰণে নিৰ্বাচিত হোৱা অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ আন এক সম্পদ আছিল লিপিৰ বিকশিত স্থিতি।

অসমীয়া লিপিও পঞ্চম-ষষ্ঠ শতিকাৰ পৰাই ক্ৰমবিকশিত হৈ চতুৰ্দশ শতিকালৈ বিকাশৰ পূৰ্ণ পৰ্যায় লাভ কৰিছিল। সেই সময়ৰ বিভিন্ন আৰ্য-অনাৰ্য মানুহৰ মাজত অসমীয়া ভাষাই আছিল সংযোগ সাধনৰ ভাষা; গতিকে মহামাণিক্য ৰজাই সকলোৱে বুজিব পৰাকৈ উমৈহতীয়া ভাষা অসমীয়াতে ৰামায়ণ ৰচনা কৰিবলৈ দিছিল।

২.০ মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ কাব্যশৈলীৰ বৈশিষ্ট্য ঃ

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ ভাষা প্ৰয়োগ, বৰ্ণনাৰীতিৰ কৌশল আছিল স্বকীয়তাৰে ভৰপুৰ; কবিৰ কাব্য শৈলী আৰু ভাষা প্ৰয়োগৰ কিছুমান বিশেষ দিশ আছিল এনেধৰণৰ-

ক) মাধৱ কন্দলীয়ে প্ৰকৃতিৰ বিভিন্ন উপাদানৰ সংগতিমূলক বৰ্ণনাৰে ৰামায়ণৰ কাহিনী সোঁতক একাত্ম কৰি ভাষাক প্ৰতীকাত্মক আৰু ইংগিতাত্মক কৰিছে।

খ) কথোপকথনৰ আৰ্হিত ৰচিত কথনৰীতি বহু সময়ত কাৰ্যাত্মক, Action ধৰ্মী। ভাষা প্ৰয়োগৰ

বিশিষ্টতাই শ্রোতাৰ মনোযোগ তীব্রতৰ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম।

গ) কাব্য শৈলী বহু সময়ত অধিক ব্যাখ্যাত্মক; বর্ণনা ব্যক্তিনিষ্ঠ, ভাবাত্মক আৰু চৰিত্রৰ মনস্তত্ব প্রকাশক।

ঘ) আধুনিক কবিতাৰ নিচিনাকৈ কাব্যশৈলীত ভাবৰ সংহতি আৰু ঐক্যৰ সংগতি ৰক্ষা কৰাও দেখা যায়।

ঙ) বিভিন্ন ঘটনা আৰু পৰিস্থিতি বর্ণনাত কাব্যশৈলী হৈ পৰিছে চিত্রধর্মী গুণসম্পন্ন।

চ) বর্ণনাত নির্দিষ্ট শব্দ আৰু কাব্যাংশৰ পুনৰাবৃত্তিৰে কথনশৈলীক আকর্ষণীয় আৰু চমৎকাৰিত্ব কৰাৰ ওপৰত গুৰুত্ব আৰোপ।

ছ) জতুৰা ঠাঁচৰ সঘন ব্যৱহাৰেৰে ভাষাক অতি আপোন আৰু বর্ণিত বিষয়ক শ্রোতা-পাঠকৰ কাৰণে সহজ কৰাৰ চেষ্টা।

জ) উপমা অলংকাৰৰ ব্যৱহাৰত সিদ্ধহস্ততা; বর্ণনাত একেলেথাৰিকৈ উপমাৰ প্রয়োগ (উপমাৰ থুপ বা উপমা গুচ্ছসদৃশ বর্ণনা), লগতে আন আন শব্দ-অর্থ অলংকাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কৌশলৰ স্বকীয়তা।

ঝ) শব্দ-ব্যৱহাৰৰ পৰিপক্কতা, বর্ণনাৰ নাটকীয়তা, বিশেষণবাচক শব্দ প্রয়োগেৰে ভাষা-কথনৰীতিক স্বকীয়তা প্রদান।

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাত প্রতীকাত্মক ৰূপ এটিও লক্ষ্য কৰা যায়। কবিয়ে প্রকৃতিৰ বিভিন্ন দিশ-উপাদানক অনুষংগ হিচাপে লৈ বর্ণিত বিষয়ক অধিক স্পষ্ট আৰু উজ্জ্বল কৰি তুলিছে। অযোধ্যা কাণ্ডৰ শ্রীৰামৰ অভিষেকৰ আয়োজনত কন্দলীয়ে প্রাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশক প্রতীক হিচাপেলৈ বর্ণনা কৰিছে ঃ

ফাল্গুন এৰায়া ভৈল চৈতৰ প্রবেশ।
বৃক্ষ সব পুষ্পিত মণ্ডিত সবদেশ।।

কুঁজী মন্থৰাৰ অসৎ অভিপ্রায়, কৈকেয়ীৰ নিদাৰুণতা, ৰামৰ বনবাস, অযোধ্যাবাসীৰ দুখ-অশান্তিৰ চিত্রখন আঁকিবলৈ লোৱাৰ আগতে কবিয়ে পূর্বাভাষ হিচাপে প্রতীকাত্মকভাৱে উপযুক্ত বর্ণনা আগবঢ়াইছে। 'চ'ত' মাহৰ শুকানতা, 'বৃক্ষ সব পুষ্পিত' হৈ মণ্ডিত সবদেশ (অযোধ্যানগৰী পুষ্পহীন, শ্রীহীন হোৱা) প্রসংগৰ উত্থাপনেৰে কবিয়ে ভাষাক ইংগিতাত্মক কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছে। 'কিষ্কিন্ধা' কাণ্ডত সীতাৰ অবর্তমানত ৰামৰ মনৰ কৰুণাত্মক চিত্রখন একত্রিত কৰি তুলিবলৈও কবিয়ে প্রাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশ, ঘটনা-উপঘটনাক অনুষংগ হিচাপে লৈ বর্ণনা দাঙি ধৰিছে-

শ্রাবণ মাসত মুখ্য বাৰিষাৰ কাল।
দিনান্তে আন্ধাৰ মহা মেঘে কোলাহল।।
প্রমত্তে ভ্রমৰে যেন মালতীক শোষে।
বিৰহিণী নাৰীৰ বিৰহ চিত্তে ত্বোষে।।
মেঘৰ গর্জন শুনি মৈৰা কৰে নাদ।
সীতাক সুমৰি ৰামে কৰন্ত বিষাদ ।।

কথোপকথন শৈলীত ৰচিত 'ৰামায়ণ' কাব্যখনত কবিয়ে চৰিত্রসমূহৰ মুখত বিভিন্ন বক্তব্য দি আৰু কবিয়ে নিজে কথকৰ ভূমিকা গ্রহণ কৰি কাব্যৰ ঘটনা প্রবাহক গতিময় কৰিছে। মাধৱ কন্দলী এজন সুদক্ষ কথক আছিল; তেওঁৰ কথকতাৰ স্বকীয়তা আৰু আকর্ষণৰ এটি অন্যতম দিশ হ'ল বর্ণনাক তেওঁ ইমানেই জীৱন্ত কৰিব পাৰিছিল যে বর্ণনাই পাঠকৰ মনোজগতত আপোনা-আপুনিয়েই এখন চিত্র ফুটাই তুলিব পাৰিছিল; লগতে পাঠক-শ্রোতাক সহজেই সহৃদয়ী কবি তুলিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। ভাষা-বর্ণনাৰ কার্যাত্মক, Action ধর্মী দিশটোৰ বিশিষ্ট গুণে শ্রোতা-পাঠকৰ মনোযোগ অধিক তীব্র কৰিব পাৰিছিল। 'অযোধ্যা' কাণ্ডৰ দশম অধ্যায়ত ৰামৰ বনবাসৰ বার্তা পাই লক্ষ্মণৰ খং-ৰাগ, অৱস্থাৰ যি বর্ণনা কবিয়ে প্রদান কৰিছে তাৰ ভাষা বহু পৰিমাণে হৈ পৰিছে কার্যাত্মক, ঘটনাপ্রধান। 'নির্মল কৰিবো আজি অযোধ্যানগৰী', 'লক্ষ্মণৰ হাতত সবাৰো হৈব কাল', 'আজি মই শোণিতে বোৱাইবোঁ এক নদী', 'মই আজি তোমাক কৰিবোঁ যুবৰাজ' আদি বাক্যই বর্ণনাৰ কার্যাত্মক, ক্রিয়াত্মক দিশটোক অধিক জীৱন্ত কৰিছে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপেঃ

নির্মল কৰিবো আজি অযোধ্যানগৰী।
সমদলে সাজি আসন্তোক মহীপাল।
লক্ষ্মণৰ হাতত সবাৰো হৈব কাল।।
অশ্বদল গজদল নবদল ছেদি।
আজি মই শোণিতে বোৱাইবো এক নদী।।

কন্দলীৰ বর্ণনা বহু সময়ত অধিক ব্যাখ্যাত্মক। গোটেই ৰামায়ণখনতে কবিৰ বিশদ বর্ণনাৰ স্বাক্ষৰ মন কৰিবলগীয়া। ৰাজপ্রাসাদৰ বর্ণনা, ৰজাৰ গুণাৱলী, প্রকৃতিৰ চিত্রণ, চৰিত্রৰ মনস্তত্ত্ব, সুখ-দুখ, ক্রিয়াকলাপৰ বর্ণনাসমূহ যথাযথ আৰু ব্যাখ্যাত্মক। চৰিত্রৰ আৱেগ প্রকাশতো কবি দক্ষ, বর্ণনাসমূহ ব্যক্তিনিষ্ঠ ভাব প্রকাশক। ৰামৰ অভিষেকত সুখী দশৰথৰ বর্ণনা দিছে এনেদৰে- 'অল্প হাস্য কৰিয়া বোলয় দশৰথ'

আন এক উদাহৰণ —

অল্পহাস্য কৰিয়া ধনুত বল দিল।
প্রচণ্ডে শবদে ধনু মাজতে ভাগিল।।

ৰামে সীতাক বনলৈ নিবলৈ অনিচ্ছা প্ৰকাশ কৰাত, সীতাৰ কৰুণ হৃদয়ৰ ভাব প্ৰকাশ কৰি কবিয়ে লিখিছে-

সমুচিত ক্ৰীড়া স্থান কুঞ্জৰ বিশেষ।
কামে সমে ৰতি যেন কৰিবোঁ আশেষ।। ('অযোধ্যা কাণ্ড')

কবিয়ে এনেধৰণৰ বৰ্ণনাৰে বৰ্ণিত বিষয়ৰ ভাবৰ সংহতি আৰু সংগতিও ৰক্ষী কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছে। কাব্যখনৰ ভাষাই এনেধৰণৰ ঐক্য ৰক্ষাৰে কন্দলীৰ কাব্যিক মূল্য তথা কাব্যিক মানৰ উচ্চতাৰ দিশটোক প্ৰকাশিত কৰিছে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে —

ৰাক্ষসৰ অস্ত্ৰ যেন নদী যাই বহি।
ৰাঘৱ সাগৰে তাক থাকি গৈলা ৰহি।। ('অৰণ্যকাণ্ড')

ৰাক্ষসৰ অস্ত্ৰৰ নদীৰ লগত ৰামক সাগৰৰ নাম দি কবিয়ে ভাবৰ সংহতি ৰক্ষা কৰাত সফল হৈছে। আন এক উদাহৰণ —

আকাশত সূৰ্য্য যেন কিৰীট জ্বলিল।
জাজ্বল্য সমান হুয়া ভূমিত পৰিল।। ('অৰণ্যকাণ্ড')

পূৰ্বতেও উল্লেখ কৰিছোঁ যে বিভিন্ন পৰিস্থিতি, ঘটনাৰ বৰ্ণনাত কবি ইমানেই পাৰদৰ্শী আছিল যে কবিৰ সূক্ষ্ম বৰ্ণনা শক্তিয়ে সহজেই পাঠক-শ্ৰোতাৰ মানসপটত এখন জীৱন্ত চিত্ৰ অংকন কৰি তুলিছিল। অযোধ্যা কাণ্ডত ৰামচন্দ্ৰই বনবাসলৈ যাব ওলোৱাত দশৰথ আৰু ৰামৰ আৱেগিক মুহূৰ্তৰ চিত্ৰখন আছিল এনেধৰণৰ —

সুমন্ত মন্ত্ৰীক বুলিলন্ত ৰামে
শীঘ্ৰে ৰথখান ডাক।
শুনৰে সুমন্ত নডাকিবি ৰথ
দশৰথে দেন্ত হাক।।
নয়া থাক থাক ডাক ডাক ডাক
উথলিল দুই বোল।
সুমন্ত মন্ত্ৰীৰ মন দোধা ভৈল
কৰয় চিত্ত আন্দোল।।

কন্দলীৰ সমগ্ৰ কাব্যখনতে এনেধৰণৰ চিত্ৰধৰ্মী বৰ্ণনা অধিক, অযোধ্যা কাণ্ডত ভৰত আৰু শ্ৰীৰামৰ মিলনৰ বৰ্ণনাও বেচ চিত্ৰগুণ প্ৰকাশক, যেনে —

বসি আছে ৰামচন্দ্ৰ তৃণৰ গৃহত। আছন্ত অগনি যেন ভস্মৰ মাঝত।।
শ্ৰীহানি ৰামৰ শৰীৰ গৈল জসি। মেঘৰ সন্নিত যেন পূৰ্ণিমাৰ শশী।।
ডাহিনত লখাই বানে জনকৰ নীৰ। নন্দী গৌৰী সমে যেন বসি আছে শিৰ ।।
দেখি ভৰতৰ নীৰ নেত্ৰৰ কৰিল। হাঁ প্ৰাণ দাদা বুলি চৰণে পৰিল।।

এনেধৰণৰ চিত্ৰধৰ্মী বৰ্ণনাসমূহত চৰিত্ৰৰ ভাবাত্মক দিশ, আবেগ, মনস্তত্ব, ক্ৰিয়াকাৰ্য ইমানেই সূক্ষ্মভাবে বিশ্লেষিত যে মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণ কাব্যখনক আন সাহিত্যিকে ইচ্ছা কৰিলে অতি সহজেই দৃশ্য ৰূপ দিবলৈ সক্ষম হ'ব। কন্দলীৰ শ্ৰব্য কাব্যখনৰ, দৃশ্য কাব্যৰ সৈতে মিল যথেষ্ট। কবিয়ে কাব্যখনৰ ভাষা আৰু কথনৰীতিক আকৰ্ষণীয় আৰু মনোহৰ কৰাৰ কাৰণে বৰ্ণনাৰ মাজে মাজে কোনো নিৰ্দিষ্ট শব্দ বা কাব্যাংশৰ সঘন পুনৰাবৃত্তি (Repetition) কৰিছে। যেনে —

বেগ ঘিৰ ভৈল পৰৈ পাচাত আজোৰ।
বেগ থিৰ ভৈল কিনো পিৰীত।। ('সুন্দৰাকাণ্ড')

কেহো বোলে পৰ্ব্বতৰ শিকৰ খসিল।
কেহোঁ বোলেনোহে মেঘ গৰ্জন কৰিল।।
কেহো বোলে ইন্দ্ৰে হানিলন্ত বজ্ৰবান। ('কিষ্কিন্ধাকাণ্ড')

কন্দলীৰ ভাষাক বৈচিত্ৰ্যময়ী আৰু চহকী কৰাত সহায় কৰিছে কবিয়ে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা জতুৱা ঠাঁচ আৰু প্ৰবাদ-পটন্তৰসমূহে। কন্দলীয়ে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা জতুৱা-ঠাঁচবোৰৰ কিছুমান আছিল সংস্কৃতমূলীয় আৰু আনবোৰ সমসাময়িক সমাজৰ পৰা গ্ৰহণ কৰা। প্ৰায় এশবো ওপৰত ব্যৱহাৰ হোৱা জতুৱা ঠাঁচবোৰ কবিৰ চহকী ভাষা আৰু পৰ্যবেক্ষণৰ শক্তিৰ অনন্যতাৰ পৰিচায়ক। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে —

১) বাঘিনীক দেখি যেন মৃগ চমকিল।
২) টিপচিৰ বাবে মেঝ পৰ্ব্বত উৰিল।
৩) আমি ভৈলোঁ কৈকেয়ীৰ অষ্টমীৰ ছাগ।
৪) তপত খোলাত কৰে মাছ যেন মত।
৫) চিলে যেন থাম্ফ দিয়া মাছক নিলেক।
৬) উৎসৰ্গৰ ছাগ যেন অৱশ্যে মৰিবি।
৭) ক্ষুদ্ৰ মৃগ হুয়া সিংহক জোকাইলি।
৮) আকাশে ছানিয়া যেন ফৰিঙ্গ উজান্তি।

কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত ব্যৱহৃত জতুৱা ঠাঁচৰ বৃহৎ সংখ্যাই চতুৰ্দশ শতিকাতে অসমীয়া ভাষাই যি পূৰ্ণ পৰ্যায়লৈ বিকাশ্যমান ৰূপ লাভ কৰিছিল তাৰ প্ৰমাণ দাঙি ধৰে।

অলংকাৰ প্ৰয়োগৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত কবি কন্দলী আছিল সিদ্ধহস্ত। কৰবী ডেকা হাজৰিকাই লিখিছে- 'ভাৰতীয় সাহিত্যত উপমাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত কালিদাসক শ্ৰেষ্ঠতম কবি বুলি কোৱা হয়। অসমীয়া সাহিত্যত সেই স্থান পায় মাধৱ কন্দলীয়ে। উপমা নৈপুণ্যত কন্দলীৰ তুলনা নাই। ৰূপ-বৰ্ণনা, নগৰ-বৰ্ণনা আৰু

প্রকৃতি বর্ণনাত কবি দক্ষ। অলংকাৰ অনুপ্রাস- উপমা আদিৰ ব্যৱহাৰেৰে তেওঁ বর্ণনীয় কথা ছবিৰ দৰে স্পষ্ট কৰি তোলে। অলংকাৰৰ প্রয়োগ ৰীতি সংস্কৃতত-কাব্যৰ অনুৰূপ। যেনে- দেহ বর্ণনাত পদুমৰ উপমা। মুখক চন্দ্রৰ লগত আৰু নয়নক চকোৰৰ লগত তুলনা কৰা হৈছে। মৌলিক সৃষ্টিৰে তেওঁ অসংখ্য উপমাপূর্ণ বাক্য ৰচনা কৰিছে।[১]

কন্দলীৰ ৰচনাত ব্যৱহৃত অলংকাৰসমূহৰ উদাহৰণ তলত দেখুওৱা হ'ল-

অনুপ্রাস ঃ *সাধু সাধু সখি তুমি মোৰ মহামিত্র।* ('লংকাকাণ্ড')

যমক ঃ *কেশৰীৰ ক্ষেত্রে সর্বজনত বিদিত। উপজি দেখিলা বীৰে আদিত্য উদিত।।* ('অৰণ্যকাণ্ড')

শ্লেষ ঃ *নেত্র নীলোৎপল সম তিলফুল নাশ। অবিৰল দশন দাড়িম্ব পৰকাল।।* ('লংকাকাণ্ড')

উপমা ঃ *বদন কমল যেন পূর্ণ শশীকলা। গাস্থিবাৰ আছে যেন পংকজৰ মালা।।* ('সুন্দৰাকাণ্ড')

ৰূপক ঃ *দশৰথ সাগৰ তৰঙ্গী নদী তই।* ('অযোধ্যাকাণ্ড')

উৎপ্রেক্ষা ঃ *গম্ভীৰত মেৰু যেন গহীনে সাগৰ।*
যেন মেৰু মন্দৰ যুজন্ত একতৰ।।
হৰি শংকৰৰ যেন মিলিল সমৰ।
গ্রহ যুদ্ধ ভৈল যেন মংগল বুধৰ।।
('কিষ্কিন্ধা কাণ্ড')

সমাসোক্তি ঃ *মনুষ্যৰ ৰাৱ কাঢ়ে সকল কালীক।*
ময়না ঘৰুৱা ভাটৌ চুটীয়া শালিক।।
কতো কতো অন্তেপুৰে বড়ে ঢোণ্ডাকাক।
সম্যক ভষাৰৈ যেন মনুষ্যৰ বাক।।
('সুন্দৰাকাণ্ড')

নিদর্শনা ঃ *ঢোল যেন ডিমা পাৰে চুঙ্গাৰ বাদুলি।*
পিপিয়া চটকে পর্বতক লৰে তুলি।।
('সুন্দৰাকাণ্ড')

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ শব্দ ব্যৱহাৰৰ অনুপম কৌশল, ধ্বনি বৈচিত্র্য, ব্যৱহাৰৰ পৰিপক্কতা, বিশেষণবাচক শব্দৰ নেৰানেপেৰা প্রয়োগ আদিয়ে ভাষাক মধুৰ কৰাই নহয়, বিশিষ্টতাও প্রদান কৰিছে। নির্দিষ্ট কথা বা ভাব একোটাক প্রকাশ কৰিবলৈ তেওঁ কেনেকৈ বিভিন্ন শব্দৰ পোহাৰ মেলি দিছিল, তাৰ সুন্দৰ আভাস এটি পাব পাৰি ৰামৰ বনবাসৰ বৃত্তান্ত শুনি ভৰতে মাক কৈকেয়ীক উদ্দেশ্য কৰি কোৱা এই কথাখিনিৰ পৰা ঃ

শুষিণী নাগিনী নিকৰুণী সংহাৰিণী।
নির্দ্দয়িনী ৰাক্ষসিনী বাঘিনী দাৰুণী।।
যক্ষিণী ডাহিনী তই স্বস্বামী ভক্ষিণী।
পিশাচিনী আৰে ৰাণ্ডী ভৈলি আলক্ষিণী।।[২]
('অযোধ্যাকাণ্ড')

৩.০ উপসংহাৰ ঃ

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ 'ৰামায়ণ' কাব্যৰ ভাষাৰ প্রভাৱ পৰৱর্তী কালৰ শংকৰদেৱকে ধৰি বহুকেইজন উল্লেখযোগ্য কবিৰ কাব্যশৈলীত দেখিবলৈ পোৱা গৈছিল। কবীন ফুকনে শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষাত মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ প্রভাৱ সম্পর্কে ক'বগৈ গৈ বৰ মূল্যৱান মন্তব্য এষাৰ উল্লেখ কৰিছে —

> 'ৰামায়ণ পঢ়ি যাওঁতে অন্ততঃ এজন পঢ়ুৱৈৰ মনত এই ধাৰণা উপজিছে যে ৰামায়ণৰ পাঠ শুনি অভ্যস্ত হোৱা শংকৰদেৱেহে কৈশোৰতে আ-কাৰ ই-কাৰ নোহোৱা তেওঁৰ বিশিষ্ট কবিতাটো ৰচনা কৰিছিল। কন্দলীৰ কোনো কোনো শাৰীত আ-কাৰ ই-কাৰ নোহোৱা শব্দৰ প্রাধান্য সজাগ কাণত সহজে বাজি উঠে — "কোমল কমল দল সমান নয়ন", "গহীন গম্ভীৰ নীৰ ভয়ক জনয়", "কিছুকো নোৱাৰে পৰি বৰ বৰ শৰ", ধৰণৰ বাক্যও অনেক। "গহন বন" শব্দাংশৰ ব্যৱহাৰো কন্দলীয়ে বহু ঠাইতেই কৰিছে — "গহন বনক গমন কৰিল।।" পৰম্পৰা-সচেতন হৈ উঠা কবি শংকৰদেৱে "পূর্বকবি অপ্রমাদী"ৰ শলাগ এনেই লোৱা নাছিল।"[৩] বিৰিঞ্চি কুমাৰ বৰুৱাই মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত এক বৃহৎ পৰিমাণৰ অসমীয়া শব্দ-ভাণ্ডাৰ সংৰক্ষিত হৈছে বুলি কৈছে। লগতে শংকৰদেৱকে ধৰি অন্য সাহিত্যিকসকলৰ ওপৰত কন্দলীৰ ভাষাগত প্রভাৱ আছিল অনন্যঃ 'An immense number of Assamese words were first recorded in Kandali's Ramayana; he gave many of the colloquial expressions literary currency, used them in a new sense, or formed fresh derivatives and compounds from them. The legacy of a rich and beautiful diction which madhava Kandali left in his Ramayana exercised a tremendous influence on Sankardeva and his immediate

successors.'4

প্রসংগ টোকা ঃ

১) হাজৰিকা, কৰবী ডেকা, *কবিতাৰ ৰূপছায়া*, পৃ-১১৭

২) বৰা, লীলাৱতী শইকীয়া, প্রাগুক্ত গ্রন্থ, পাতনি

৩) ফুকন, কবীন, *অসমীয়া কবিতাৰ প্রৱাহ*, পৃ-৪৫

৪) Barua, Birinchi Kumar, *History of Assamese literature*, Page-12

সহায় লোৱা গ্রন্থপঞ্জী ঃ

অসমীয়া ঃ

১) নেওগ, ডিম্বেশ্বৰ। *নতুন পোহৰত অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ বুৰঞ্জী।* শুৱনি প্রকাশন ঃ অষ্টম সংস্কৰণ, ১৯৯৯। প্রকাশিত।

২) নেওগ, মহেশ্বৰ। *অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ ৰূপৰেখা।* চন্দ্র প্রকাশ ঃ ত্রয়োদশ সংস্কৰণ, ২০০৫। প্রকাশিত।

৩) ফুকন, কবীন। *অসমীয়া কবিতাৰ প্রবাহ* (প্রথম খণ্ড)। ষ্টুডেন্টচ্ ষ্ট'ৰচ্ ঃ প্রথম প্রকাশ, ১৯৯৫। প্রকাশিত।

৪) বৰা, লীলাৱতী। *মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণৰ ভাষা।* অসম সাহিত্য সভা, দ্বিতীয় প্রকাশ ঃ ২০১৬। প্রকাশিত।

৫) বৰুৱা, বন্তি। *প্রাক্-শংকৰ যুগৰ ৱৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্যত অসম।* বাণী মন্দিৰ ঃ প্রথম প্রকাশ, ২০০৫। প্রকাশিত ।

৬) বৰুৱা (ৰাজখোৱা), বিজয়া। *মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণত লোকায়ত জীৱন।* জ্যোতি প্রকাশন ঃ প্রথম প্রকাশ, ২০০৬। প্রকাশিত ।

৭) ভট্টাচার্য, বসন্তকুমাৰ। *মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণ* (সুন্দৰাকাণ্ড)। জার্ণাল এম্প'ৰিয়াম ঃ দ্বিতীয় প্রকাশ, ২০০৩। প্রকাশিত।

৮) শর্মা, সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ। *অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ সমীক্ষাত্মক ইতিবৃত্ত।* সৌমাৰ প্রকাশন ঃ দশম সংস্কৰণ, ২০১৩। প্রকাশিত।

৯) শর্মা, শশী। *মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ৰামায়ণ।* জার্ণাল এম্প'ৰিয়াম ঃ তৃতীয় প্রকাশ, ২০০৩। প্রকাশিত।

১০) হাজৰিকা, বিশ্বেশ্বৰ। *অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ বুৰঞ্জী* (প্রথম খণ্ড)। আনন্দৰাম বৰুৱা ভাষা কলা সংস্কৃতি সংস্থা ঃ প্রথম প্রকাশ, ২০০৩। প্রকাশিত।

ইংৰাজী ঃ

Baruah, Birinchi Kumar. *History of Assamese Literature,* Sahitya prakash, New Delhi, 2001, Print.

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মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ বীক্ষণত প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাৰ নায়ক শিৱ ঃ প্ৰাৰ্থনা শইকীয়াৰ ‘জঁটাধাৰী’ উপন্যাসৰ আধাৰত ইয়াৰ বিশ্লেষণ

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সংক্ষিপ্তসাৰ

আধুনিকতাবাদী উপন্যাসিক সকলে সদায় পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ প্ৰতি গভীৰ আগ্ৰহ প্ৰকাশ কৰি আহিছে। বেদ, পুৰাণ আৰু উপনিষদৰ একো একোটা চৰিত্ৰক পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণৰ দ্বাৰা চৰিত্ৰ সমূহৰ আদৰ্শক এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ প্ৰৱাহিত কৰাত এই নিৰ্মাণ সমূহে বিশেষ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। ভাৰতীয় পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ জনপ্ৰিয়তাই সকলো যুগৰ লেখককে পুনৰ কাহিনী ক’বলৈ প্ৰৰোচিত কৰি আহিছে। আধুনিক প্ৰেক্ষাপটৰ লগত খাপ খুৱাই ৰচনা কৰা মিথবোৰৰ লগে লগে সাহিত্যৰ নতুন ধাৰা সমূহৰো উত্থান ঘটিছে। সমসাময়িকতাৰ সৈতে মিথবোৰৰ পুনৰ সৃষ্টিত চৰিত্ৰ সমূহ পাঠকৰ বাবে পুনৰ কোৱা বা পুনৰ পৰিচয় কৰোঁতে, লিখক সকলে বৰ্তমান দৃষ্টিভংগী আৰোপ কৰোঁতে পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ সমান্তৰালকৈ কল্পকাহিনীক বিশেষ গুৰুত্ব আৰোপ কৰা দেখা যায়। অসমীয়া সাহিত্যতো পুৰাণৰ চৰিত্ৰ আৰু কাহিনীক পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণ কৰি ভালেমান সাহিত্যৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছে। এইবোৰৰ ভিতৰত প্ৰাৰ্থনা শইকীয়াৰ ‘জঁটাধাৰী’ উপন্যাসখন বিশেষ ভাৱে উল্লেখযোগ্য। উপন্যাসখনত ৰেদ আৰু পুৰাণৰ অন্যতম চৰিত্ৰ শিৱৰ পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণ কৰা হৈছে। উপন্যাসখনক ধ্ৰুপদী শাৰীত বিবেচনা কৰিব পৰা মূল কাৰণ সমূহ হ’ল। উপন্যাসখনত পৰম্পৰাগত হিন্দু শাস্ত্ৰ আৰু কিংবদন্তি পুৰাণ আৰু বেদৰ পৰা পোনপটীয়াকৈ চৰিত্ৰ, নাম আৰু মূল আখ্যানমূলক উপাদান সমূহ গ্ৰহণ কৰা হৈছে। উপন্যাসখনত চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ ভাল বেয়া প্ৰকৃতি, ন্যায়, কৰ্ম আৰু ধৰ্মৰ গুৰুত্ব সম্পৰ্কে ভাৰতীয় চিন্তাধাৰাৰে মূল্যায়ন কৰা হৈছে। লগতে উপন্যাসৰ চৰিত্ৰবোৰ মানৱীয় ৰূপত উদ্ভাসিত হ’লেও পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ সমান্তৰালভাৱে আদৰ্শাত্মক প্ৰতিনিধিত্বমূলক আৰু প্ৰতিৰূপ চৰিত্ৰ হিচাপে মূৰ্ত কৰি তুলিছে। শিৱক নায়ক, নেতা, প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থা স্থাপনৰ যোদ্ধা আৰু যোগী হিচাপে চিত্ৰিত কৰা হৈছে।

এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত ‘জঁটাধাৰী’ উপন্যাসখনক মাৰ্ক্সবাদী প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থা (counter hegemonic Marxist perspective) ৰ দৃষ্টি ভংগীৰে বিশ্লেষণ কৰা হৈছে । মাৰ্ক্সবাদী সাহিত্য তত্ত্বৰ মূল ধাৰণা যেনে শ্ৰেণীসংঘাত আৰু ৰাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতা আধাৰ হিচাপে লৈ এই অধ্যয়ন আগবঢ়োৱা হৈছে।

উপন্যাসখনত প্ৰতিফলিত সামাজিক বাস্তৱতা আৰু বঞ্চিত শ্ৰেণীৰ জীৱন সংঘৰ্ষ লগতে প্ৰচলিত সামাজিক ৰাজনৈতিক ব্যৱস্থাৰ অন্তৰ্নিহিত বৈষম্যক ঔপন্যাসিকে কেনেদৰে উন্মোচন কৰিছে সেয়া এই গৱেষণাৰ মুখ্য বিষয়। এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰই ভৱিষ্যতে মাৰ্ক্সবাদী সাহিত্যৰ বিশ্লেষণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এক নতুন দৃষ্টিকোনৰ সূচনা কৰিব বুলি আশা কৰা গৈছে।

বীজ শব্দ : মাৰ্ক্সবাদ, প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থা, প্ৰতিৰোধ, শিৱ

অৱতৰণিকা :

ভাৰতীয় পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ জনপ্ৰিয়তাই সকলো যুগৰ লেখকক আকৰ্ষণ কৰাই নহয় আধুনিক প্ৰেক্ষাপটৰ লগত খাপখোৱাকৈ চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ লগতে কাহিনীৰ পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণৰ বাবেও

আকৃষ্ট কৰি আহিছে। ভাৰতীয় সমাজ সংস্কৃতিৰ ইতিহাসত পৌৰাণিক চৰিত্রসমূহে কেৱল ধৰ্মীয় বিশ্বাস বা আধ্যাত্মিক ভাৱধাৰাকেই প্রতিফলিত কৰা নাই, বৰঞ্চ যথা সময়ত সমাজৰ ৰাজনৈতিক,অর্থনৈতিক আৰু শ্রেণীগত বাস্তৱতাকো সুক্ষ্মভাৱে প্রতিনিধিত্ব কৰিছে।

সেয়ে আধুনিকতাবাদী ঔপন্যাসিকসকলে সদায় পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ প্রতি গভীৰ আগ্রহ প্রকাশ কৰি মিথবোৰৰ পুনৰ কথনৰ জৰিয়তে বর্তমান শতিকাৰ বিভিন্ন সাহিত্যিক দৃষ্টিভংগী আৰোপিত কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হৈছে । একবিংশ শতিকাৰ পাঠকৰ বাবে সামাজিক ন্যায়ৰ দৰে গুৰুত্বপূর্ণ বিষয়সমূহে সততে দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ কৰে। সেয়ে পুৰাণ আৰু ইতিহাসৰ পৰা লোৱা পৌৰাণিক চৰিত্র এটাক মার্ক্সবাদী বাখ্যাৰ দ্বাৰা শ্রেণী সংগ্রাম,সামাজিক স্তৰৰ অর্থনৈতিক বৈষম্যৰ প্রতিবাদী সত্তা হিচাপে প্রতিষ্ঠা কৰিবলৈ লেখক সকলে চেষ্টা কৰে।

এই পদ্ধতিত পুৰাণৰ কাহিনীসমূহে মতাদর্শগত অধিগাঁথনিৰ অংশ হিচাপে কাম কৰে, সমাজৰ অর্থনৈতিক ভিত্তি আৰু সামাজিক ব্যৱস্থাক প্রতিফলিত কৰে। সেইদৰে কাহিনীৰ চৰিত্রসমূহে নিদির্ষ্ট শ্রেণীৰ সার্থক প্রতিনিধিত্ব কৰে। এই মার্ক্সবাদী পদ্ধতিয়ে প্রকাশ কৰে যে পৌৰাণিক কাহিনী কেৱল অলৌকিক কাহিনীৰ সংকলনেই নহয়, ই সমসাময়িক বাস্তৱৰ সৈতে গভীৰ ভাৱে আন্ত:সংলগ্ন সামাজিক সংঘাত আৰু ঐতিহাসিক শ্রেণীগঠন আৰু ক্ষমতাৰ সম্পর্কক প্রতিফলিত কৰে।

এনে পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ আলমত উপন্যাস ৰচনা কৰা ভাৰতীয় লেখকসকলৰ ভিতৰত আমীশ ত্রিপাঠী,অশোক কে বেংকাৰ, দেৱদত্ত পাটনায়ক,আনন্দ নীলকান্তন, নীলঞ্জন পি চৌধুৰী,সমৰেশ বসু, বৰিন্দ্র নাথ দাস ,গজেন্দ্র কুমাৰ মিশ্র,প্রফুল্ল ৰয়, দীপক চন্দ্র আৰু মহাস্বেতা দেৱীৰ নাম বিশেষ ভাৱে উল্লেখযোগ্য।

প্রাচীন ভাৰতীয় সাহিত্যৰ সৌন্দর্য বিচাৰ কৰিলে সততে এটা দিশ উন্মোচিত হয় বা গ্রন্থসমূহৰ মাজত এটা আকর্ষণীয় অন্তর্দৃষ্টি দেখিবলৈ পোৱা যায়। সেয়া হ'ল এই গ্রন্থ সমূহে প্রকৃত অর্থত কোনো চৰিত্রকে খলনায়ক হিচাপে কেতিয়াও অভিহিত নকৰে। উদাহৰণ হিচাপে ৰামায়ণত ৰাৱণ এজন সুদর্শন, শক্তিশালী, বুদ্ধিমান, পণ্ডিত আৰু সকলো নায়কৰ মাজত থাকিবলগীয়া গুণৰ অধিকাৰী। কিন্তু সময়ৰ লগে লগে মানুহে কিছুমান চৰিত্রৰ প্রতি সহানুভূতি অনুভৱ কৰে আৰু তেওঁলোকৰ দৃষ্টিকোনৰ পৰা চৰিত্র সমূহৰ বর্ণনা কৰিব বিচাৰে।

এনে পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰ লিখকৰ ভিতৰত জনপ্রিয় লিখক আমীশ ত্রিপাঠীয়ে নতুন দৃষ্টিভংগীৰে শিৰ ত্রিলজী ৰচনা কৰিছে; এই কেই খন হ'ল *The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas,* আৰু *The Oath of the Vayuputras.* আন্তৰাষ্ট্রীয় স্তৰত প্রশংসিত ভাৰতীয় লেখক অশোক কে বেংকাৰেও ৰামায়ণৰ চৰিত্রসমূহক উজ্জীৱিত কৰি কেইবাখনো গ্রন্থ ৰচনা কৰিছে। ইয়াৰ ভিতৰত 'প্রিন্সেছ অৱ অযোধ্যা' (2003), 'ছিজ অৱ মিথিলা' (2003), 'ডেমনছ অৱ চিত্রকূট' (2004), 'আর্মিছ অৱ হনুমান' (2005), 'ব্রীজ অৱ ৰাম' (2005), 'কিং অযোধ্যা' (2006), 'চন্স অৱ সীতা' (2012) ইত্যাদি। দাক্ষিণাত্যত মহাকাব্যৰ কাহিনী পুনৰ কথনৰ জৰিয়তে আধুনিক পাঠ গঠন কৰা লিখক নীলকান্তনে 'Asuras : Tale of the vanquished', আৰু 'Ajaya Roll of the Dice' দুখন বিখ্যাত ৰচনা আগবঢ়ায়। অসমীয়া সাহিত্যতো পুৰাণ আৰু মহাকাব্যৰ আধাৰত কেইবাখনো উপন্যাস ৰচনা হৈছে। পুনৰগঠন শৈলীৰ প্রথম প্রয়োগ ঘটা ত্রৈলোক্য ভট্টাচার্যৰ 'উত্তৰা কাণ্ড' উপন্যাসৰ আটাইকেইটা নাৰী চৰিত্রকে প্রতিবাদী চৰিত্র ৰূপে ঔপন্যাসিকে দক্ষতাৰে অংকন কৰিছে। চন্দ্রপ্রসাদ শইকীয়াই কর্ণৰ চৰিত্রক লৈ 'মহাৰথী', খর্গেশ্বৰ ভূঞাই মহাভাৰতৰ দুর্যোধনৰ জীৱনক ভিত্তি কৰি 'যুৱৰাজ', ৰামায়ণ পৰম্পৰাৰ আধাৰত 'ৰঘুপতি', অন্যান্য পুৰা কথাৰ আধাৰত 'যথা দৈৱ তথা জয় ', 'কৃষ্ণ বিষ্ণু,বাসুদেৱ' 'পাষাণী অহল্যাৰ খেদ' ইত্যাদি কেইবাখনো উপন্যাস ৰচনা কৰিছে।

প্রার্থনা শইকীয়াৰ 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসত পৌৰাণিক শিৱক আধুনিক সামাজিক বাস্তৱতাৰ সৈতে সংযোগ কৰি এক প্রতি ব্যৱস্থাৰ নায়ক হিচাপে উপস্থাপন কৰিছে । উপন্যাসখনত দেশৰ শাসন যন্ত্রৰ ভিতৰচ'ৰাৰ ৰাজনীতি আৰু তাক কেন্দ্র কৰি দেশৰ সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাৰ নানান উত্থান-পতনৰ দৃশ্য উপন্যাসখনত প্রতিফলিত হৈছে। 'জঁটাধাৰী'ত অতীত-বর্তমান-ভৱিষ্যত এই তিনিওটা কালক সামৰি বিভিন্ন চৰিত্রৰ সমাৱেশ হৈছে। মহেশ, ৰুদ্র আদিৰ দৰে প্রান্তীয় তথা দলিত শ্রেণীৰ প্রতিনিধি সকলৰ আন্দোলনে কিদৰে প্রতিৰোধ ব্যৱস্থা এটাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিছে তাক উপন্যাসখনত দেখিবলৈ পোৱা যায়। 'জঁটাধাৰী'ত শিৱ কেৱল দেৱত্বৰ প্রতীক নহয়, তেওঁ হৈছে প্রান্তীয়, শোষিত আৰু উপেক্ষিত মানুহৰ পক্ষলোৱা এক সত্তা। প্রচলিত ক্ষমতাশালী ভোগবাদী সমাজ আৰু শাসক শ্রেণীৰ কৃত্রিম নৈতিকতাৰ প্রতি এক মৌন প্রতিবাদীসত্ত্বাৰূপে, সর্বসাধাৰণ শ্রেণীৰ পক্ষত থকা এজন নায়ক হিচাপে ঔপন্যাসিকে শিৱ চৰিত্রটো পুনৰ নির্মাণ কৰিছে।

অধ্যয়নৰ উদ্দেশ্য

এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনৰ মূল উদ্দেশ্য হ'ল প্ৰাৰ্থনা শইকীয়াৰ উপন্যাস 'জঁটাধাৰী'ৰ আধাৰত প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাৰ নায়ক হিচাপে শিৱ চৰিত্ৰৰ পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণক মাৰ্ক্সীয় দৃষ্টিভংগীৰে বিশ্লেষণ কৰা। অধ্যয়নৰ আন এটা উদ্দেশ্য হৈছে এই পুনৰ নিৰ্মাণ প্ৰক্ৰিয়াটো কেনেকৈ মাৰ্ক্সীয় শ্ৰেণীসংগ্ৰাম, উৎপাদন সম্পৰ্ক আৰু শোষণ-প্ৰতিবাদৰ ধাৰণাসমূহৰ সৈতে সম্পৰ্কিত, সেয়া উদঘাটন কৰা। লগতে উপন্যাসত শিৱ চৰিত্ৰই সামাজিক বৈষম্যৰ বিৰুদ্ধে যি প্ৰতিবাদী চেতনাক উন্মোচিত কৰিছে, তাক মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ আলোচনাৰ জৰিয়তে অনুধাৱন কৰি সাহিত্য আৰু সমাজৰ আন্তঃসম্পৰ্ক স্পষ্ট ৰূপত দাঙি ধৰা।

অধ্যয়নৰ গুৰুত্ব

এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনৰ গুৰুত্ব বহুমুখী। প্ৰথমতে, ই মাৰ্ক্সীয় সাহিত্য সমালোচনাৰ দৃষ্টিভংগীৰে অসমীয়া উপন্যাস অধ্যয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰখন সমৃদ্ধ কৰা। পৌৰাণিক চৰিত্ৰৰ আধুনিক নিৰ্মাণ আৰু প্ৰতিবাদী পাঠক মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ সৈতে সংযোগ কৰি বিশ্লেষণ কৰা অধ্যয়ন অসমীয়া সাহিত্যত তুলনামূলকভাৱে সীমিত; সেয়েহে এই গৱেষণাই নতুন এক অধ্যয়ন-পথ উন্মোচন কৰিব।

দ্বিতীয়তে, 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসৰ চৰিত্ৰ সমূহৰ বিশ্লেষণৰ জৰিয়তে সমাজত বিদ্যমান শ্ৰেণী-বৈষম্য আৰু ক্ষমতাৰ গাঁথনি বুজিবলৈ সহায় হ'ব। সাহিত্যৱে কেৱল সৌন্দৰ্যৰ মাধ্যম নহয়, সামাজিক পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ এক শক্তিশালী অস্ত্ৰ ইয়াক উপলব্ধি কৰাত এই অধ্যয়ন সহায়ক হ'ব।

শেষত, এই গৱেষণাই আধুনিক পাঠকক পৌৰাণিক বিশ্বাসৰ স্থবিৰ ব্যাখ্যাৰ পৰা আঁতৰি, যুক্তিবাদী আৰু সমাজসচেতন দৃষ্টিভংগীৰে সাহিত্য পাঠৰ অধ্যয়নৰ বাবে প্ৰেৰণা যোগাব। এই দিশৰ পৰা, গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন ভৱিষ্যতৰ গৱেষকসকলৰ বাবে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ হ'ব।

অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰ

গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে সম্পূৰ্ণৰূপে 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসখনক আধাৰ হিচাপে লৈ শিৱ আৰু শিৱদলৰ সদস্য সকলৰ কাৰ্যাৱলীৰ বিশ্লেষণ কৰাৰ লগতে বিষয়বস্তুৰ অধ্যয়নত সহায়ক হ'বলৈ মাৰ্ক্স আৰু এংগেলছৰ তত্ত্ব সমূহৰ অধ্যয়নক সামৰি লোৱা হৈছে।

অধ্যয়নৰ পদ্ধতি আৰু উৎস

গৱেষণা পত্ৰ খনৰ বিষয়টিৰ অধ্যয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বৰ্ণনাত্মক আৰু বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতি লোৱা হৈছে। গৱেষণাৰ বিষয়টো প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে জঁটাধাৰী উপন্যাস খনৰ লগতে মাৰ্ক্সবাদী তত্ত্বৰ ব্যাখ্যা সম্পৰ্কীয় অন্যান্য গ্ৰন্থ,সম্পাদিত গ্ৰন্থৰ প্ৰবন্ধ আদিৰ তথ্য আহৰণ কৰা হৈছে।

মূল বিষয় আলোচনা

মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ প্ৰতিৰোধ আৰু প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাৰ প্ৰসংগ ঃ

মাৰ্ক্সবাদী তত্ত্ব হৈছে মূলতঃ কাৰ্লমাক্স আৰু ফ্ৰিডৰিখ এংগেলছৰ দ্বাৰা বিকশিত এটা সমাজ অৰ্থনৈতিক দৰ্শন। সেয়ে তেওঁ উল্লেখ কৰি গৈছে ৰাজনীতি,আইন, শিক্ষা, ধৰ্ম,সংস্কৃতি আদি অধিৰচনাৰ মূল ভিত্তি হ'ল অৰ্থনীতি। মাৰ্ক্সবাদী তত্ত্বৰ এক মুখ্য ধাৰণা হৈছে শ্ৰেণী সংঘাত। এই দুই শ্ৰেণী হ'ল পুঁজিপতি আৰু শ্ৰমিক শ্ৰেণী। দুয়োটা শ্ৰেণীৰ মাজৰ সংঘাতেই সামাজিক পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ মূল চালিকাশক্তি। মাৰ্ক্সে সংজ্ঞায়িত কৰিছিল যে অৰ্থনৈতিক বৈষম্য আৰু শোষণৰ পৰিমাণ বৃদ্ধি হ'লে শেষত বিপ্লৱৰ সৃষ্টি হয়। এই বিপ্লৱৰ জৰিয়তে শ্ৰমিক শ্ৰেণীয়ে ক্ষমতা দখল কৰি এক শোষণ মুক্ত সমাজ গঠন কৰে আৰু পৰৱৰ্তী পৰ্যায়ত সাম্যবাদ গঢ়ি তুলিব বুলি ধাৰণা কৰা হয়।

মাৰ্ক্সৰ তত্ত্বই পুঁজিবাদী সমাজত প্ৰতিৰোধক মূলত পুঁজিবাদৰ অধীনত শ্ৰমিক শ্ৰেণীৰ শোষণ আৰু বিচ্ছিন্নতাৰ বিৰুদ্ধে হোৱা প্ৰতিক্ৰিয়া বুলি সংজ্ঞায়িত কৰিছে। সৰ্বহাৰা আৰু বুৰ্জোৱা শ্ৰেণীৰ (পুঁজিপতি শ্ৰেণী) মাজত থকা অন্তৰ্নিহিত বৈপৰীত্য আৰু সংঘাতৰ বাবেই এই প্ৰতিৰোধৰ সৃষ্টি হয়। মাৰ্ক্সে পুঁজিবাদী সমাজখনক গাঁথনিগত ভাৱে শোষণৰ মূল বুলি গণ্য কৰিছিল। শ্ৰমিক সকলে উদ্ধৃত মূল্য (surplus value) উৎপন্ন কৰে যিটো পুঁজিপতি সকলে লাভ হিচাপে আত্মসাৎ কৰি থয়,যাৰ ফলত অৰ্থনৈতিক অত্যাচাৰ আৰু বিচ্ছিন্নতাৰ সৃষ্টি হয়। মাৰ্ক্সৰ বাবে প্ৰতিৰোধ এই শোষণ আৰু বিচ্ছিন্নতাৰ এক প্ৰতিক্ৰিয়া। শ্ৰমিক সকলে নিজৰ অৱস্থাক প্ৰত্যাহ্বান জনাই প্ৰতিৰোধ হিচাপে ধৰ্মঘট, প্ৰতিবাদ আৰু শেষত পুঁজিবাদী ব্যৱস্থাক উফৰাই পেলোৱাৰ লক্ষ্যৰে বৈপ্লৱিক কাৰ্যসূচী ৰূপায়ণ কৰে।

এই প্ৰতিৰোধ শ্ৰেণী চেতনাৰ বিকাশৰ লগত বান্ধখাই থাকে। মাৰ্ক্সে ৰাষ্ট্ৰক বুৰ্জোৱা শ্ৰেণীৰ এক আহিলা হিচাপে দেখিছিল। যাতে ৰাষ্ট্ৰই বুৰ্জোৱা সকলৰ স্বাৰ্থ ৰক্ষা কৰি নিজৰ ক্ষমতা অক্ষুণ্ণ ৰাখিব পাৰে আৰু শ্ৰমিক শ্ৰেণীৰ প্ৰতিৰোধক দমন কৰিব পাৰে। মাৰ্ক্সবাদী প্ৰতিৰোধৰ চূড়ান্ত লক্ষ্য হৈছে পুঁজিবাদী সামাজিক সম্পৰ্ক ভাঙি পেলোৱা,উৎপাদনৰ মাধ্যমত ব্যক্তিগত মালিকীস্বত্ব বিলুপ্ত কৰা, বৈপ্লৱিক পৰিবৰ্তনৰে সম্যবাদ স্থাপন কৰি এখন ৰাষ্ট্ৰহীন আৰু শ্ৰেণীহীন সমাজ প্ৰতিষ্ঠা কৰা। ইয়াকে এক অৰ্থত প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থা বুলি কোৱা হয়।

এক কথাত ক'বলৈ গ'লে মাৰ্ক্সৰ প্ৰতিৰোধ তত্ত্ব

প্রতিৰোধক বুর্জোৱা শ্রেণীৰ অর্থনৈতিক,ৰাজনৈতিক আৰু মতাদর্শগত আধিপত্যৰ বিৰুদ্ধে সর্বহাৰাৰ সংগ্রাম বুলিব পাৰি।

'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসৰ কাহিনীৰ আধাৰত বিষয় বস্তুৰ বিশ্লেষণ -

প্রার্থনা শইকীয়াই 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসখনত শিৰৰ সত্ত্বাটোক প্রতীক হিচাপে নির্বাচন কৰি সমাজ জীৱনৰ কেইবাটাও দিশক ফঁহিয়াই দেখুৱাই শিৰ চৰিত্রক পুনৰমূল্যায়ন কৰিবলৈ প্রয়াস কৰিছে। এইবোৰৰ ভিতৰত অতীতৰ আধ্যাত্মিক ভাৰ,বর্তমানৰ ৰাজনীতি,অর্থনীতি আৰু ভৱিষ্যতৰ সমাজনীতি বিশেষ ভাৱে উল্লেখযোগ্য। সমসাময়িক ৰাজনীতিত শিৰ শক্তিৰ প্রভাৰ উপন্যাসৰ কাহিনী বস্তুত ফুটি উঠিছে ।উপন্যাসৰ চৰিত্র সমূহে শিৰ আৰু শিৰদলৰ মহত্ত্বক উজ্জ্বল ৰূপত দাঙি ধৰিছে। যদিও উপন্যাসৰ কাহিনী আধুনিক তথাপিও মহেশ,ৰুদ্র,বাথৌ আদি চৰিত্রই যেন মুখ্যত শিৰৰ চৰিত্রটোৰ বৈশিষ্ট্যকেই প্রতিফলিত কৰিছে। উপন্যাসত শিৰক সমাজৰ অতি পিছপৰা সাধাৰণ শ্রেণীৰ লোকৰ প্রতিনিধি হিচাপে দেখা গৈছে। উপন্যাস খনৰ অন্যতম চৰিত্র সন্ধ্যাই নন্দীক পৌৰাণিক শিৰৰ কাহিনী ক'বলৈ অনুৰোধ কৰিছে আৰু নন্দীয়ে যুগ পৰিৱর্তনৰ ধাৰণাৰে শিৰৰ কাহিনী ক'বলৈ গৈ সমাজত শ্রেণী সৃষ্টিৰ অন্তৰালৰ কাহিনী সুন্দৰকৈ ব্যাখ্যা কৰিছে। কার্লমাক্সৰ প্রিমিতিভ সমাজৰ (Primitive Society) ৰ ধাৰণাও এই ব্যাখ্যাত মূর্ত্ত হৈ উঠিছে -

> 'সৃষ্টিৰ পাতনিতে শিৰৰ যি নিৰাকাৰ অস্তিত্বক আমি জানি আহিছোঁ, সেয়া সময়ৰ লগে লগে সলনি হৈছে...' ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৬২ পৃষ্ঠা)

সৃষ্টিৰ আদিতে শিৰ এজন সাধাৰণ মানুহেই আছিল; নন্দীৰ ভাষাত -

> 'পৃথিৱীৰ কোনো এক দুর্গম পাহাৰীয়া বনাঞ্চলৰ একোণত শিৰ খেলি-ধূলি ডাঙৰ হৈছিল। ....তেওঁলোকে খুব সহজ-সৰল জীৱন যাপন কৰিছিল। কৃষি আৰু পশুপালনেই তেওঁলোকৰ জীৱিকাৰ উৎস আছিল। প্রকৃতিৰ ওপৰত নির্ভৰশীল হোৱা বাবে ক্ষমতাহীনবোৰে প্রকৃতি পূজা কৰিছিল।' ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৬৩ পৃষ্ঠা)

এই সহজ সৰল জীৱন যাপন কৰি সুখী হোৱা লোকসকলৰ সামাজিক নিয়ম-কানুনবোৰ সকলোৰে জীৱনৰ সিদ্ধান্তত কেনেদৰে একে কৰিছিল, সামাজিক দায়িত্ববোধে সমাজ এখন কি দৰে সুস্থিৰ ৰূপত পৰিচালনা কৰাত সহায় কৰিছিল । ক্রমাৎ এদল প্রযুক্তিধাৰী লোকৰ আগমনত কিদৰে ক্ষমতাহীন আৰু ক্ষমতাশালী দুটা শ্রেণীৰ সৃষ্টি হ'ল তাৰ সুন্দৰ ব্যাখ্যা ঔপন্যাসিকে উপন্যাসখনত দাঙি ধৰিছে। ইয়াৰ জৰিয়তে সচেতন পাঠকে কি দৰে সমাজলৈ শ্রেণী ব্যৱস্থা আগমন ঘটিলে তাৰ এটা সঠিক ধাৰণা কৰিব পাৰে।

> 'ক্ষমতাশালীবোৰৰ জীৱনযাপনৰ পদ্ধতি, ক্ষমতাহীন বোৰৰ তুলনাত অনেক গুণে জটিল আছিল। .....ক্ষমতাহীন সকলৰ বিপৰীত মেৰুত থিয় দি তেওঁলোকে কর্মবিভাজনৰ এক জটিল সামাজিক প্রক্রিয়া গঢ় দিছিল।.....এই শ্রেণীৰ মানুহবোৰে ক্ষমতাহীনবোৰক দমন কৰিব পাৰিছিল..... পৃথিৱীত দুবিধ মানুহ- এবিধ ক্ষমতাশালী,আনবিধ ক্ষমতাহীন।" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৬৬ পৃষ্ঠা)

এই ক্ষমতা শালী সকলৰ উন্নত কৌশল কি দৰে সাধাৰণ শ্রেণীৰ প্রতিনিধি শিৰই আহৰণ কৰিলে তাক ইচ্ছাৰ ৰৱদেউতাক হৰদেউৰ মুখেৰে ঔপন্যাসিকে এটা পুৰাণৰ কাহিনীৰ আধাৰত ব্যক্ত কৰিছে এনেদৰে-

> "ঘৰে ঘৰে ভিক্ষা মাগি ফুৰা,ভস্ম সানি গা ঢকা দিগম্বৰে ক'ৰ পৰা খেতিৰ দিহা কৰে পার্বতীয়েই বুদ্ধি দিলে । ক'লে - ইন্দ্রক মাটি খোজা, হ'লধৰক খোজা নাঙল,বাসুকীক আউচ জৰি বনোৱা, কুবেৰক কঠীয়া খোজা, তোমাৰ বৃষভ বাহন আছেই,যমৰ পৰা আানা ম'হ।" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ১০৮ পৃষ্ঠা)

এনেদৰে শিৰ সাধাৰণ মানুহৰ মাজত কিছু ব্যতিক্রমী ৰূপত পৰিচিত হ'ল ।ক্ষমতাহীন সকলৰ প্রতিনিধি হিচাপে শিৰই নিজৰ আসন দখল কৰিলে । ইয়াৰ পিছত কেনেদৰে শিৰ দেৱতাৰ শাৰীলৈ উঠিল তাৰ আভাস ঔপন্যাসিকে নন্দীৰ মুখেৰে দিছে এনেদৰে -

> "ক্ষমতাশালীবোৰে এদিন ক্ষমতাহীনবোৰক দমন কৰে। ক্ষমতাহীনবোৰৰ মাজৰে এজনে প্রতিবাদী হৈ উঠে....। ক্ষমতাহীনবোৰৰ বা অসুৰবোৰৰ হৈ মাত মতা সেই প্রতিবাদীজনক,ক্ষমতাহীনসকলৰ প্রতিনিধি হিচাপে লৈ তেওঁলোকৰ জাতত তোলে। প্রতিবাদী কণ্ঠও বন্ধ হ'য়, সুৰবোৰৰ স্বার্থও সিজে '('জঁটাধাৰী' ৬৭ পৃষ্ঠা)

যদিও এচাম ব্যক্তিৰ দৃষ্টিভংগীত শিৰ সমন্বয়ৰ ফল তথাপিও উপন্যাস চৰিত্র নন্দীৰ মতে ক্ষমতাশালী আৰু ক্ষমতা হীনৰ সংঘাত ফল।

জঁটাধাৰী উপন্যাস খনৰ চৰিত্র সমূহে শিৰক ভিন ভিন

ৰূপত উপলব্ধি কৰিছে ঝৰ্ণাই শিৰক ত্ৰাণকৰ্তা তথা উৰ্ব্বতাৰ প্ৰতীক হিচাপে কল্পনা কৰিছে - "তোমাৰ গাঁওখনৰ মানুহবোৰৰ দৰে ময়ো বিচাৰোঁ শিৰ মোৰ বাবে কেৱল ত্ৰাণকৰ্তা হৈ ৰওক,উৰ্ব্বতাৰ প্ৰতীক হৈ ৰওক।" ('জঁটাধাৰী' ৬৯ পৃষ্ঠা)

উপন্যাসৰ চৰিত্ৰ বেনুগোপালে বিশ্ব অৰ্থনীতিৰ বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্ৰত শিৰৰ হাত থকা বুলি বিশ্বাস কৰিছে।

> "গোটেইখন শিৰই কেপচাৰ কৰি পেলাইছে... ইনিচিয়েলী ইট ৱাজ অনলী দ্য মাৰ্কেট। এণ্ড নাউ!... ৰিয়েলী! ইটছ আনবিয়েৱেবল।" ('জঁটাধাৰী' ৭৯ পৃষ্ঠা)

উপন্যাস খনত দেখুওৱা হৈছে টেকন'লজীৰ বিকাশৰ লগে লগে কি দৰে এক শ্ৰেণীৰ লোকে প্ৰাকৃতিক সম্পদৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিবলৈ প্ৰকৃতি ওপৰত কি দৰে হাত দিয়ে আৰু তেতিয়াই বনবাসী সকলে শিৰৰ নিৰ্দেশত লুণ্ঠন কাৰ্য বন্ধ কৰিবলৈ প্ৰতিৰোধ গঢ়ি তোলে আৰু সাম্ৰাজ্যবাদী সকলে অভিজ্ঞতাৰে কূটনৈতিক জ্ঞানেৰে শিৰক পুনৰ হাত কৰিলৈ শিৰৰ সহায়তে পুনৰ সম্প্ৰীতিৰ বাণী প্ৰচাৰ কৰে। সেয়ে বেনুপোপালে শিৰক প্ৰাগ্ ঐতিহাসিক কালৰ সাম্ৰাজ্যবাদৰ ফল শিৰ বুলি কৈছে -

> "টেকন'লজীৰ বিনিময়ত এইবোৰ মানুহে ক্ষমতা সাব্যস্ত কৰিলে।....আৰু ক্ষমতা আদায়ৰ এনে প্ৰক্ৰিয়াতে 'শিৰ'ৰ সৃষ্টি ।প্ৰাগ ঐতিহাসিক কালৰ সাম্ৰাজ্যবাদৰ ফল শিৰ। সেই কাৰণে মই কওঁ মাৰ্কেটিঙৰ লগত শিৰৰ অভিন্ন সম্পৰ্ক।" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ১২৯ পৃষ্ঠা)

উপন্যাসখনৰ সংযোজন অংশত ঔপন্যাসিকাই নিজেই সকলোৰে পৰিচিত ঈশ্বৰ শিৰৰ সলনি প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাৰ মহানায়ক শিৰক চিনাৰ যি প্ৰয়াসৰ কথা ব্যক্ত কৰিছে এই কথাৰ পৰাই আমি উপন্যাসখনত লেখিকাৰ দৃষ্টিভংগীক উপলব্ধি কৰিব পাৰোঁ -

> " তুমি প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাক তোমাৰ উপন্যাসৰ পাতত ৰূপ দিব খুজিছিলা, উপন্যাসৰ পৃষ্ঠাই পৃষ্ঠাই তুমি প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থাত বিচৰণ কৰিব খুজিছিলা ... নিমিষতে গঢ় লৈ উঠক এক প্ৰতিব্যৱস্থা!" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৪১৭ পৃষ্ঠা)

মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ বীক্ষণত দেখা যায় অৰ্থনীতিয়ে সমাজৰ গঠন, ৰাজনীতি, সংস্কৃতি আৰু চিন্তাধাৰা সকলোৰে ওপৰত প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰে। আধুনিক বিশ্বতো পুঁজিবাদৰ বিকাশে এক জটিল আৰু অনিশ্চিত গোলকীয় অৰ্থনৈতিক পৰিস্থিতি সৃষ্টি কৰিছে। উত্তৰ মাৰ্ক্সবাদৰ সমালোচক Frederic Jameson য়ে তেখেতৰ 'Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.' গ্ৰন্থত উল্লেখ কৰিছে যে পৰৱৰ্তী পুজিবাদৰ (Late Capitalism) যুগত অৰ্থনৈতিক গঠনেই মানুহৰ দৈনন্দিন জীৱন আৰু অভিজ্ঞতাক প্ৰভাৱিত কৰে। লগতে উত্তৰ আধুনিক পৰিস্থিতিত 'এক মহান তত্ত্ব'ৰ ধাৰণা বিলুপ্ত হৈ বহুত্ববাদী চিন্তাধাৰা গঢ়ি উঠে। যাৰ ফলত মানুহে নিশ্চিত উত্তৰ নাপায় আৰু মানসিক অস্থিৰতাত ভোগে। জনচনৰ মতে- বৰ্তমান পুঁজিবাদী পৰিপ্ৰেক্ষিতত সংস্কৃতি অৰ্থনৈতিক উৎপাদনৰ সৈতে গভীৰ ভাৱে জড়িত। পুঁজিবাদে মানুহৰ চিন্তা, ভাষা আৰু সাংস্কৃতিক চেতনাক নিয়ন্ত্ৰণ কৰি অৰ্থনৈতিক সংকটক মানসিক আৰু সামাজিক সংকটলৈ ৰূপান্তৰিত কৰে। মানুহৰ মাজত বিভ্ৰান্তি, বিচ্ছিন্নতা আৰু অস্তিত্ব সংকট সৃষ্টি কৰে। উপন্যাসৰ আৰম্ভণিও হৈছে ৰৰ্ল্ড ইকন'মীৰ এটা ঋণাত্মক বাৰ্তাৰে যাৰ মাজেৰে ঔপন্যাসিকে এক অস্থিৰ ৰাজনৈতিক ব্যৱস্থাৰ ইংগিত দিছে। অৱশ্যে এনে অস্থিৰ পৰিস্থিতিতো আস্থাৰ প্ৰতীক ৰূপে ভৱিষ্যত দ্ৰষ্টা হৈ থিয় দিছে শিৰই।

> " ইক'নমিক শ্লা'ডাউনে মানুহৰ জীৱন দুৰ্বিষহ কৰি তুলিছে...। হয়তো ৰৰ্ল্ড ইক'নমীৰ গতি সলনি হ'ব...পাৰিবনে কি হ'ব? আদাম স্মিথ,গবাৰ্চেভ নে কাৰ্ল মাৰ্ক্স ডাঙৰীয়া?...অমৰ্ত্য সেন? ..নাই...শিৰই ক'ব পাৰিব কাইলৈ কি হ'ব!" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৭ পৃষ্ঠা)

উপন্যাসখনত দলিত-নিষ্পেষিত শ্ৰেণীৰ প্ৰতিনিধি হিচাপে মহেশ নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ মন্ত্ৰী সভাৰ জনপ্ৰিয় মন্ত্ৰী হৈও অৱহেলিত। যেতিয়া ৰুদ্রহঁতে জাতিভিত্তিক আন্দোলন জোৰদাৰ কৰিছিল সেই আন্দোলনক হাতৰ মুঠিত ৰাখিবলৈ নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ দৰে ৰাজনীতিকে মহেশক কূটনৈতিক দায়িত্ব প্ৰদান কৰিছিল। চৰকাৰৰ বিপদৰ সময়ত সদায় ঢাল হিচাপে থিয় দিছিল দলিত নেতা মহেশ। দুৰ্নীতিত লুতুৰি পুতুৰি চতুৰ্বেদী মন্ত্ৰীসভাৰ মন্ত্ৰীৰ কৰ্মকাণ্ডই মহেশক হতাশ কৰাৰ লগতে তেলীবস্তিৰ গোষ্ঠীগত সংঘৰ্ষৰ আঁৰতো চৰকাৰী পক্ষ জড়িত থকাৰ কথা অৱগতহৈ মহেশে বিষেদাগাৰ কৰিছে -

> "সকলোখিনি দেখোন তোমালোকেই কৰিলা!...মোক বিশেষ কামলৈ পাচি আকৌ মিটিং কৰিবা। সিদ্ধান্ত ল'বা । খটুৱাবা,...আকৌ একেখন পুৰাণকে মাতিবা...মোক পাচলিমন্ত্ৰীকে পাতা" ('জঁটাধাৰী' ১২০ পৃষ্ঠা)

দুৰ্নীতিৰ উঁইপোকে খাই তহিলং কৰা নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ চৰকাৰৰ শোচনীয় অৱস্থাত চতুৰ্বেদীৰ দুখীয়া তেজ শুহি খোৱা

চৰকাৰ ভাঙি নতুন চৰকাৰ গঠন কৰা ভৈৰোনাথৰ স্বপ্নত সঁহাৰি দি কৈছে-

> "...চতুৰ্বেদীৰ চৰকাৰ ভাঙি আমি আমাৰ চৰকাৰ গঢ়িম...আজি অত বছৰে শোষণৰ বলি হোৱা দৰিদ্রসকলৰ হাতলৈ ক্ষমতাৰ হস্তান্তৰ কৰাটোৱেই জানো আমাৰ লক্ষ্য নহয়?" ('জঁটাধাৰী' ১৭১ পৃষ্ঠা)

সকলোকে সমান সুবিধা আৰু সম অধিকাৰ প্রদানেৰে চৰকাৰ কৰিব খোজা ৰুদ্র অন্তৰত উমি উমি জ্বলা জুইকুৰাত ভৈৰোনাথে খৰি জাপি দি বিকল্প ব্যৱস্থাৰ যি পথ দেখুৱালে সি মাৰ্ক্সীয় তত্ত্বৰ অনুৰূপ। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে -

> "আমাক এটা বিকল্প লাগে ৰুদ্র! .... চাৰিওফালৰ পৰা এক সম্পূর্ণ বিৰোধ গঢ়ি তুলিম, যাতে ব্যৱস্থাটো নিজে নিজেই বিকল হৈ পৰে। ....এটা ব্যৱস্থাই নিজৰ মাজতে এক প্রতিব্যৱস্থা কঢ়িয়াই আনে। ... আৰু সেই বিৰোধৰ পৰাই এটা নতুন ব্যৱস্থাই ৰূপ পায়।....থেচিছ-এণ্টিথেচিছ-কনফ্লিক্ট এ নিউ থেচিছ। ....আমি এই ব্যৱস্থাৰ প্রতিৰোধকহে,.... আমি সেই বিকল্প ব্যৱস্থাৰ সন্ধানৰত সৈনিকহে...শিৱ আমাৰ পৰা পৃথক নহয়!...শিৱ 'বিকল্প' নহয় ।...শিৱ প্রতিৰোধহে ।" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ১৭৪ পৃষ্ঠা)

ঠাকুৰ সম্প্রদায়ৰ সুৰক্ষা সমিতিৰ নেতা ৰুদ্রই হিমালয়ৰ শিৱৰ নির্দেশত নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ চৰকাৰৰ দুৰ্নীতিৰ বিৰুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ কৰি চলিত ব্যৱস্থাটোক ভাঙি নতুন ব্যৱস্থা গঢ়াৰ পূর্ণ সুযোগ শিৱৰ নির্দেশত গ্রহণ কৰি যি মানসিক দ্বন্দ্বৰ যন্ত্রণাত দগ্ধ হৈছে, সেই মুহূৰ্তত ভৈৰোনাথে ৰুদ্রক পৌৰাণিক কাহিনীৰে শিৱ আৰু শিৱদলৰ লক্ষ্য উদ্দেশ্যক পুনৰ ব্যক্ত কৰি অতীজৰে পৰা শিৱই কি দৰে ঈশ্বৰত্ব লাভকৰিও স্বর্গবর্জিতহৈ হিমালয়ত ঈশ্বৰত্ব যাপন কৰি উত্তৰ-পূর্বাঞ্চলৰ লোক সকলৰ হিতৰ বাবে সদায়ে কাম কৰি আহিছে তাক ব্যক্ত কৰিছে। ভৈৰোনাথ আৰু শিৱৰ প্রতি ৰুদ্রৰ আস্থা আৰু শ্রদ্ধা দেখি ভৈৰোনাথে কোৱা কথাখিনিয়েই মাৰ্ক্সীয় বীক্ষণত শিৱৰ প্রতিব্যৱস্থা। কেৱল শাসনতন্ত্রৰ শাসক আঁতৰিলেই ব্যৱস্থাৰ পৰিৱর্তন নহয় ইয়াৰ বাবে সমাজ,ৰাজনীতি আৰু অর্থনীতি সকলোৰে পৰিৱর্তন হ'ব লাগিব।

> "তোমাক আগতেই কৈছোঁ ৰুদ্র- আমি এই ব্যৱস্থাৰ প্রতিব্যৱস্থা।.....আমি এই সংঘাত গঢ়ি তুলিবলৈ চাম আৰু এই সংঘাতৰ আৰ্হিৰ পৰা নতুন ব্যৱস্থাটো নিজেই গঢ় লৈ উঠিব। কেৱল শাসনতন্ত্রৰ শাসক সকলক আঁতৰালেই নতুন ব্যৱস্থাই গঢ় লৈ নুঠে। সমাজ, ৰাজনীতি, অর্থনীতিক সকলোতে এক অবিৰত সংঘাট সৃষ্টি কৰিলেহে নতুন ব্যৱস্থাই নিজে ৰূপ পাব আমি এনেদৰে অধৈর্য্য হ'লে নহ'ব " ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৩৮৪ পৃষ্ঠা)

ঔপন্যাসিকাই 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসত ভোগবাদৰ আগ্রাসনত শিৱৰ পৰম আকাংক্ষিত প্রতিব্যৱস্থাৰ নতুন ৰূপৰ ব্যখা আগবঢ়াইছে। সম্পদ আহৰণৰ পুৰণি নীতি আৰু অর্থনৈতিক অগ্রসৰতাই অনা সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক পৰিৱর্তনে এই প্রতিব্যৱস্থাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিছে। ভোগবাদৰ দুনীয়াত শিৱই মেলি দিয়া 'শিৱ' নামৰ সেই ৰোমাঞ্চকৰ যাত্রাই পুঁজিপতি সকলক আকর্ষণ কৰিছে । তৃতীয় পুৰুষত বর্ণিত এই কথাংশই বর্ণাইছে কি দৰে এক ইল্যুছনে পুঁজিপতি সকলৰ মাজত ক্রমশঃ শিৱৰ দৰে নিচাসক্ত হৈ থকাৰ তাড়না বৃদ্ধি কৰিছে আৰু তাৰ মাধ্যমেৰে কেনেকৈ গঢ়ি উঠিব এক প্রতিব্যৱস্থাৰ।

> "এক ইল্যুচন ক্রমে গঢ় লৈ উঠিছে আৰু শিৱই আশা কৰিছে এনে ইলুউচনে আনিব এদিন হতাশা আৰু তাৰপৰাই জন্ম হ'ব পৰম আকাংক্ষিত এক প্রতিব্যৱস্থা। আৰু এদিন সেই সংঘাটেই জন্ম দিব অন্য এক নতুন ব্যৱস্থাৰ। শিৱ আশাবাদী। আৰু সেই আশাবাদকে ধিয়াই ভৈৰোনাথহঁতে ৰাজনৈতিক প্রতিব্যৱস্থা গঠনৰ কামত আগবাঢ়িছে..." ('জঁটাধাৰী', ৩৮৫ পৃষ্ঠা)

পৰিবর্তিত ৰাজনৈতিক পৰিৱেশত নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ চৰকাৰৰ বহুকেইটা যুগান্তকাৰী সিদ্ধান্তৰ সহযোগী তথা চতুৰ্বেদীৰ পুত্র বেণুগোপালৰ অনুসিদ্ধান্তত শিৱৰ দৰেই নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰ মন্ত্রী সভাৰ অন্যতম সদস্য মহেশও প্রতিৰোধক। বেনুগোপালে সন্দেহ কৰে মহেশ কোনো আন্তর্জাতিক শত্রু পক্ষৰ স'তে মিলি মহেশে দেশৰ বিৰুদ্ধে কোনো বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদী চিন্তাৰ প্রভাৱেৰে প্রভাৱিত হৈ ষড়যন্ত্রত লিপ্ত হৈছে আৰু সেই বাবেই পাৰমাণৱিক চুক্তিৰ প্রসংগ উত্থাপিত হোৱাৰে পৰা মহেশে চুক্তি স্বাক্ষৰৰ বিৰোধিতা কৰি আহিছে। দেশী চোৰাংচোৰাৰ পৰিৱর্তে মহেশৰ হাতলৈ আগতীয়াকৈ অহা ষড়যন্ত্রৰ খবৰবোৰে বেনুগোপালৰ সন্দেহ আৰু বঢ়াই তুলিছিল। নাৰায়ণ চতুৰ্বেদীৰে বব নোৱাৰা প্রতিটো সমস্যাৰ সমাধান, অর্থনৈতিক মন্দা অৱস্থা, দুৰ্নীতি, গোষ্ঠীগত সংঘাত, বৈদেশিক নীতি সাল-সলনি কৰিবলৈ বাধা প্রদান আদিৰ আঁৰৰ ব্যক্তি জনেই হ'ল মহেশ।

সেয়ে বেনুগোপালৰ ভাষাত --

> "কোনো ব্যৱস্থাই কেতিয়াও, কোনো সময়তে প্রতিৰোধহীন হ'ব নোৱাৰে... শিৰ নামৰ এসময়ৰ যি প্রতিৰোধকক আমি আমাৰ শাৰীলৈ উন্নীত কৰালোঁ আৰু ব্যৱস্থাটো প্রতিৰোধবিহীন হোৱা বুলি ধাৰণা কৰিলোঁ, সেই প্রাচীন প্রতিৰোধকৰ সমাপ্তিতে মহেশৰ দৰে নতুন প্রতিৰোধকৰ জন্ম হ'ল। মহেশৰ জৰিয়তে এই ব্যৱস্থাটোত এক অবিৰত সংগ্রাম নীতিয়ে ক্রিয়া কৰিবলৈ ধৰিছে।" ('জঁটাধাৰী', ২৩৭ পৃষ্ঠা)

শেষত ঔপন্যাসিক প্রার্থনা শইকীয়াই 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসৰ সংযোজন অংশত ভৱিষ্যতৰ শিৰ প্রতিৰোধক শিৰশক্তিৰ জৰিয়তে সম্পন্ন কৰা দেখুৱাইছে। উত্তৰ-পূৰ্বাঞ্চলৰ সম্পদৰ লুণ্ঠন বুধিবলৈ আৰু বেনুগোপালৰ পক্ষপাতিত্বমূলক আঁচনিক প্রতিৰোধ কৰিবলৈ বিপিন আৰু বিপিনৰ সহযোগীসকলৰ তত্ত্বাৱধানত গঢ়ি উঠিছে শিৰশক্তি দলৰ। প্রতিব্যৱস্থা গঠনৰ প্রক্রিয়া আগৰদৰেই অক্ষুণ্ণ থাকিল। অনাগত ভবিষ্যতলৈ শিৰ শক্তিৰ প্রভাৱ প্রবাহিত হৈ ৰ'ল। এনেদৰে শিৰ অতীত, বৰ্তমান আৰু ভৱিষ্যতৰ প্রতিব্যৱস্থাৰ নায়ক হৈ থাকিল।

উপসংহাৰ ঃ

অধ্যয়নৰ শেষত তলৰ সিদ্ধান্ত সমূহত আমি উপনীত হৈছো ঃ

(১) ঔপন্যাসিকে কাহিনী বস্তু নির্মাণ কৰোঁতে পু�ৰাণৰ আধ্যাত্মিকতা, বৰ্তমানৰ ৰাজনীতি, অর্থনীতি আৰু ভৱিষ্যতৰ সমাজনীতিৰ আৰু কল্পনাৰ সমাহাৰ ঘটাইছে।

(২) উপন্যাসখনত শিৰ কেৱল এক ব্যক্তিগত চৰিত্র নহৈ সমাজত বিদ্যমান শোষণমূলক অর্থনৈতিক আৰু সামাজিক ব্যৱস্থাৰ বিৰুদ্ধে শিৰই অৱস্থান কৰিছে। তেওঁৰ প্রতিবাদী চেতনাই তেওঁক এজন প্রতিব্যৱস্থাৰ নায়ক হিচাপে প্রতিষ্ঠা কৰিছে।

(৩) ঔপন্যাসিকে শিৰৰ ব্যক্তিগত চেতনাক সামাজিক চেতনালৈ ৰূপান্তৰ কৰি মার্ক্সীয় দৃষ্টিভংগীৰ শ্রেণীচেতনাৰ বিকাশৰ লগত সংপৃক্ত কৰিছে। মার্ক্সবাদী সমাজ পৰিৱর্তনৰ আদর্শৰ লগত সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ ভাৱে শিৰ আৰু শিৰদলৰ লোক সকলে অতীত, বৰ্তমান আৰু ভৱিষ্যতৰ বিদ্যমান ব্যৱস্থাক প্রশ্ন কৰাৰ লগতে নতুন, ন্যায়সংগত সমাজব্যৱস্থাৰ পোষকতা কৰিছে।

অন্তত, 'জঁটাধাৰী' উপন্যাসখন কেৱল সাহিত্যিক সৃষ্টি নুবুলি ই সমাজৰ অর্থনৈতিক, ৰাজনৈতিক ব্যৱস্থাৰ শোষণমূলক গাঁথনিৰ ওপৰত এক তীব্র সমালোচনা বুলিও ক'ব পাৰি।

সহায়ক গ্রন্থপঞ্জী ঃ

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