

# About Author



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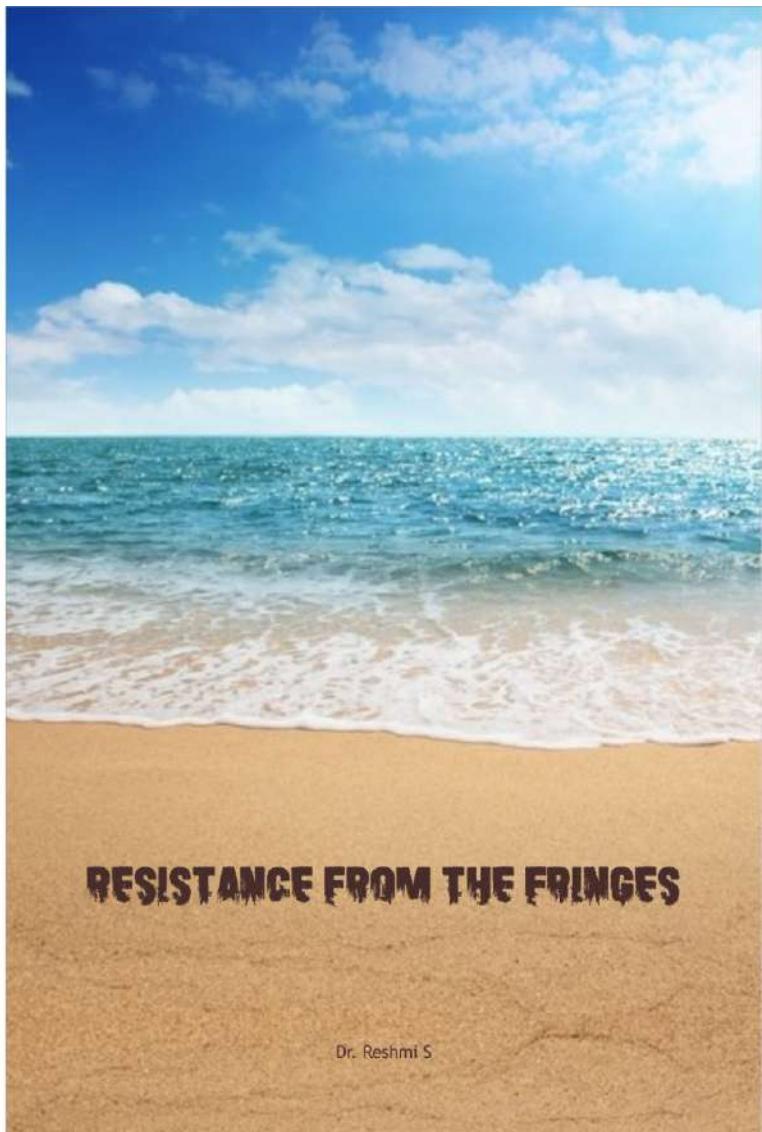
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RESISTANCE FROM THE FRINGES



Dr. Reshma S

# **Resistance From The Fringes**

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# CHAPTER 1

## MULTIPLE VOICES FROM THE HAREM: AN APPRAISAL OF THE FEMALE FIGURES IN ELIF SHAFAK'S FICTIONAL OEUVRE

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### ABSTRACT

*Women have diverse experiences based on factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Therefore, it is crucial to have a range of voices and experiences represented in literature in order to fully understand and appreciate the complexity of women's lives. The significance of a plurality of women's voices lies in the fact that women are not a monolithic group. Historically, women's experiences have been marginalized or ignored in literature, and their voices have often been silenced or overshadowed by male perspectives. Many authors have contributed to the plurality of women's voices in literature, including Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Kamala Das, Dorris Lessing, Adrienne Rich, Anita Desai, Bell Hooks and Elif Shafak. Their works have explored themes related to intersectionality, identity, and power, emphasizing the need for diverse representation in order to fully capture the complexity of women's experiences.*

*Elif Shafak is a Turkish-British women novelist who explores themes of identity, gender, and cultural diversity in her works. Shafak's novels often present a plurality of women's voices, challenging stereotypes and traditional narratives about women. A fierce advocate for equality and freedom of speech, Shafak's perspectives often brought her into conflict with the increasingly repressive government of Turkey. This paper*

*scrutinizes how meticulously the author fashions her striking female characters each of them embodying her concern for a plurality of female voice, a return to the authentic self, a universal sisterhood and female solidarity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Plurality of voices, Silenced, Universal Sisterhood, Intersectionality

Every word a woman writes changes the story of the world, revises the official version.

--Carolyn See

Women's writings in literature have contributed immensely to the richness and diversity of the literary landscape. They continue to inspire, challenge, and shape literary discourse, fostering greater inclusivity and representation in the world of letters. The plurality of women's voices in literature, including Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Kamala Das, Dorris Lessing, Adrienne Rich, Anita Desai, Bell Hooks and Elif Shafak marks distinctive and unrivalled feminine perspectives of the entire world. Their works have explored themes related to intersectionality, identity, and power, emphasizing the need for diverse representation in order to fully capture the complexity of women's experiences.

One of the exclusive and august writers of contemporary fiction, the Turkish-British women novelist who explores themes of identity, gender, and cultural diversity in her works, Elif Shafak's novels often present a multitude of women's voices, challenging stereotypes and traditional narratives about women. A fierce advocate for equality and freedom of speech, Shafak's perspectives often brought her into conflict with the increasingly repressive government of Turkey. Born to Turkish parents in France, brought up by her separated mother and grandmother in Turkey, married to a Turkish man, having resided in the US, currently living in London, Shafak is "Turkey's leading female novelist" (Metcalfe 2011) who speaks of "carrying Istanbul in her soul" (Kellaway 2017).

Her obsessive love for Istanbul, reclaiming of faith from religion, intense exploration of feminist matters, apprehensions for political upheavals and earnest stipulation for a universal sisterhood looms large on the fictional landscapes of Shafak for whom 'multiple belongings... is an attitude, a

way of thinking,’ (Shafak 2020) and the current societal state is in “a crucial moment for global feminism”. (Leach 2017) According to Elif Shafak, ‘When women are divided it is the male status quo that benefits’, hence the activist author “encourages women to realize their own selves, speak for their rights, to pave their own paths and to find their individuality”. (Atta ullah et al. 2021) Readers acquaint with a wide range of female characters, powerful portraits of womanhood and motherhood, in Shafak’s fictional matrix often thought-provoking and multi-layered novels that explore themes of personal identity, cultural integrity, spiritual well-being, financial freedom and the actual life experiences of women. Contrary to the conventional and primitive ideologies of feminism that adhered to man-woman dualism, Shafak marks her distinctive mettle in scrutinizing the complex, sophisticated, fragmented, marred selves of women around her. Her literary endeavours are evident in her statement that in Turkey, “men write, women read. I would like to see this pattern changing”. (Skidelsky 2012)

In her prize-winning novel *The Gaze* (1999), the author probes into the terrains of body, body image, and desirability. As the plot revolves around a neurotic obese woman and a feisty dwarf, her lover, elements of magic realism and meta-fictional writing foregrounds how a penetrating gaze can traumatize the lives of men and women. The narrative opens up fluid time zones and “fluctuates between three sub narratives set in nineteenth-century Istanbul, seventeenth-century Siberia, and nineteenth-century France, all of which culminate in a circular carnivalesque whole”. (Atayurt-Fenge 2016) The couple sick of being gazed by everyone anywhere they go “offers a contemporary, non-Western interrogation of the relationship between perceptions of the female body/subject as other, and the spectacles of the exotic that have functioned to privilege logocentric standards of bodily normativity”. (Coussens 2010) The female storyteller who is the central character “first represents an object of the hostile and judgemental outside “gaze”, and finally becomes a subject able to confront and scrutinize its effects”. (Coussens 2010) When both steps out into the biased society that ridicules them by the reversal of roles, the man wears makeup and dresses like a woman; she draws a moustache on her face, Shafak underscores “intensively on the theme of the body: as grotesque in its excess, or as otherwise transgressing boundaries of acceptable physical appearance”. (Coussens 2010)

Most of her novels were multi-layered, engaging and thought provoking manifesting an array of female characters often complex, compelling, and often confront societal expectations and challenges. No different are Pembe and Jamila, the twin sisters whose destinies serve as the credo of her novel *Honour* (2012), a gripping story of guilt, innocence, loyalty, betrayal and the trials of immigrants as well. Shafak presents the family stories of three generations of a culturally split Turkish-Kurdish family that experiences another cultural division. Though her intention was to identify how culture inherently shapes people's lives, Shafak employs Pembe Kader and Jamila Yeter, who become victims of gender inequality, sexism, domestic violence and honour crimes. Through these female figures Shafak manage to make hammer blows at the conservative Turkish society and the patriarchal Turkish culture.

Naze, the mother of the twin girls was condemned for not giving birth to a boy, desperate of getting daughters even in her ninth delivery, meeting with a pathetic death during her delivery, "It's a boy don't you see? My son is coming... Take a pair of scissors! Now! Cut my belly open and take my son out! (Shafak, 2015, p.19) The bold Pembe is married to Adem Toprak, a young man who was actually in love with the beautiful Jamila, but rejected her as she was kidnapped and later examined by a mid-wife who discovered that the girl a had no hymen. "What if she was not a virgin? How could he live with this doubt for rest of his life? What would his brother Tariq say when he learned that he had found himself a tainted wife-an exact replica of their mother.(Shafak, 2015, p.99) The author audaciously exposes a society where "Women are subjected to a variety of types of violence, including forced virginity tests, honour murders, rape and sexual assault, as well as domestic abuse".(Barka 2021)

Elif Shafak uses her fictional repertoire to disclose several social issues, much to her indignation, that Turks preferred to hush up. Uncovering the disgraceful and brutal act of the Armenian genocide (1915-16) by the Turks during the First Wold War, she designs her much disputed novel *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) portraying a clan of wounded and mortified women. Through the intertwined lives of two teenage girls, Asya Kazanci and Armanoush Tchakhmakchian, the author unveils a disturbing past and a secret connection linking them to a violent event in the history of their homeland. The much debated novel opens with Zeliha Kazanci, Asya's unmarried mother, a stunning and revolting character whom

Shafak uses to question the atrocities and hypocrisy latent in Turkish society, culture and law. Quite interestingly “she brings together all women's issues, calling them 'Istanbul Women's Prudence Guidelines'”. (Iskandaryan RAU)

Shafak who was charged twice under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code for 'denigrating Turkishness'<sup>1</sup> stands unwaveringly like the women beings of her novel, Zeliha, a victim of incest, Asya, the titular 'bastard' of the story, Armanoush, born to an American mother and Armenian father yet living with a Turkish stepfather, Grandma Gulsum and Grandma Shushan, epitomes of a distressing history, cultural identities, turbulent past and fragmented memory. Shafak aims at resolving not just global political issues but carefully examines the lives of Turkish and Armenian women drawing profound similarities between them as she rightly puts it “The Copper Rule of Prudence for an Istanbulite Woman: When harassed on the street, you'd better forget about the incident as soon as you are on your way again, since to recall the incident all day long will only further wrack your nerves!” (Shafak, 2007, p.10) *The Bastard of Istanbul* reminds us of Orhan Pamuk's *Snow* (2002), both tells us “the same story of modern-day Turkey and Turks”-love mixed with pain. “If Pamuk prefers to "blow up" the reader, then Shafak herself "explodes". (Iskandaryan RAU)

Perhaps the authorial intention in these realistic depictions of actual human stories was to “observe that the commonly used definitions for female and male are no more in our lives, but turned into the myths of societies”. (Toksöz 2009) In most of these feminist struggle and gender identity issues it is the concern for equivalence that forms the basis of all arguments just as theoretically explained by Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan, Virginia Woolf and Susan Bordo. "Man is defined as a human being and woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male."(Beauvoir 2017) This assertion is cruelly confirmed in the Shafakian narratives where one can discern a plurality of feminine self-redeeming voices amidst a multitude of women still confined in what Beauvoir calls “the bad faith”<sup>2</sup>.

To look at matters from a religious and spiritual frame of reference, Shafak interrogates how religion, gender and culture intersect to define women's lives in terms of values, beliefs, ethics and morals, in fact stereotypical representations of women in social as well as personal roles.

*Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) is her cognition of women's status in Islam and society, perceiving the "complex nature of identity and self-understanding among women in the Middle East" (Al-Zahrani and Al-Sharqi 2022) through an intersectional feminist discourse. Peri, Shirin and Mona, "the believer, the confused, and the sinner" (Shafak, 2016, p. 212), the three protagonists of the novel silhouette against the backdrop of a severe interlocking system of oppression, abuse and exploitation, primarily the Western notion of Muslim women that they "need to be "saved" from male domination" and "Muslim women's experiences of compounded levels of discrimination based on their religion, mainly due to Islamophobia, in their struggle to develop their identity and self-image". (Al-Zahrani and Al-Sharqi 2022)

Peri, who grew up amid the rift between an alcoholic secular father and a devout extremist mother, meets Shirin, a faithless Iranian and Mona, an Egyptian-American who proudly identifies herself as a religious feminist-in a philosophy class at Oxford University. As they share the common desire to explore their antithetical perspectives on God and Islam, the readers witness appalling experiences of "hostile sexism" women undergo by their family members, friends, teachers, co-workers, or strangers. These experiences impact females' body image and self-esteem, placing young women in a challenging mental state that negatively affects their wellbeing" (Oswald et al., 2013). Elif, both an academic and an activist shatters the 'family archetype'<sup>3</sup> that restricts women's roles to domestic realms and men placed in public work environment; and explains how conventional family structure "accepts the traditional separation of work and family life." (Al-Zahrani and Al-Sharqi 2022) Through episodes of religion and politics, crushed dreams and love, 'blending faith and uncertainty' (Williams 2017) Shafak substantiates her own religious disposition as evident in her words "I am not a religious person in any sense. In reality, I do not like organized religions nor collective identities, but I am spiritual in my own way. I have respect for both faith and doubt". (qtd. in Bilal 2021)

"Shafak's unflinching fiction that explores gender, abuse and political repression" (Phillips 2019) envisages a bold, subversive, excellent novel, *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019), where Tequila Leila, an Istanbul prostitute who was brutally murdered and shoved into a rubbish bin, is described in her last moments in this world. Her heart stops

beating yet she begins to think, the writer meticulously captures the crucial “moments of Leila’s consciousness as she crosses from life into death”. (Phillips 2019) Shafak begins her story with a peculiar strangeness wherein a woman keeps thinking even after she is dead. “People thought you changed into a corpse the instant you exhaled your last breath. But things were not clear-cut like that”. (Shafak 2019)

Revolving around the prismatic variants of love – spousal love, filial love, mystical love, young love – Shafak’s intriguing and engaging novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009) presents “how female creativity collides with marriage and motherhood” (Malak 2016). Through the parallel plot-lines of a tantalizing love between Ella Rubinstein and Aziz Zahara; Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, Elif unfolds the stark realities underlying societal exploitation against women who were “were restricted to traditional and stereotyped confines which shaped their roles”. (Malak 2016) Ella is an ordinary unhappy housewife with three children and an unfaithful husband. In addition, Ella is “in charge of everything at home: managing the finances, caring for the houses, reupholstering the furniture, running errands, arranging kids’ schedules and helping them with their homework” (Shafak, 2010, p. 62).

Ella’s marriage to David is summed up in her statement ““Twenty years of marriage, twenty years of sleeping in the same bed, sharing same shower, eating the same food, raising three kids-and what it all added up to was silence” (Shafak, 2010, p.239). Kimya is yet another female victimised by “the myth like customary beliefs” and “strictly controlled by and afraid of the codes of honor in her community”. (Malak 2016) On the night of their marriage, Shams even cuts his left palm dropping blood stains on their bed sheet (an indicator to the loss of virginity) to save Kimya from societal disgrace. Indignantly Shams says, “These codes of honor had less to do with the harmony God created than with the order human beings wanted to sustain.” (Shafak, 2001, p. 307)

Shafak’s fury against the stinking social codes, religious ethics and moral values is given vent through another female figure of the same novel Kerra who “does experience her gender as a painful obstacle, or even a debilitating inadequacy” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 24) Lack of education and denial of opportunities leave her disempowered crushing away her creative talents and “anxiety of authorship” (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p.51)

Elif Shafak's exploration of men and women in her writings is characterized by a nuanced and inclusive approach. Most of her novels evoke the silenced voices of women by patriarchy, politics, casteism and sexism. Apparently Shafak is intensely bothered of human beings and human dispositions, men or women, she perceived with an absolute sensitivity just as "It seemed to Leila that human beings exhibited a profound impatience with the milestones of their existence" (Shafak 2019). Every role, every aspect, every part ascribed to a person, male or female, is brutally conditioned and pre-determined by religion, culture, geography, politics, ruling system compelling them to perform their part as per the anticipated norms. The author, above all must be a great human being with compassion, comprehension and congruence. In Elif's female characters one can feel the importance of empathy and understanding in fostering meaningful connections between men and women. Her works often emphasize the need to break down barriers and transcend societal divisions, promoting empathy as a means of fostering healthier and more equal relationships.

Almost all women in Shafak's fictional realm often navigate through the social expectations imposed upon them and seek to find their own paths. Be it Zeliha, Asya, Armanoush, Leila, Ella, Peri, Pembe or Naze, all of them seem to recognize an intense cause, a similar creed and common grief, that they share which Shafak puts rightly "What is worrying is that when women are divided into categories it is the status quo – the patriarchy – that benefits" (Kellaway 2017) She identifies women around her living as islands, alienated, fragmented, wounded, scarred, categorized, divided and this is painful. Shafak accuses the entire womanhood, "They don't see they have things in common. If they could be sisters, there would be so much they could challenge." (Kellaway 2017)

To her Istanbul is a 'she-city', "a city of dreams...but it also has scars and wounds" (Saeed 2019). Each novel is a clarion call for a universal sisterhood, a feminine solidarity, "to find strength in each other" (Saeed 2019). With a mischievously grave tone Elif opens up "Inside us as women we have a little harem of female voices, coexisting and competing." (Metcalfe 2011)

To me, womanhood is something I need to observe and study, learn and imitate and still can never fully comprehend – Elif Shafak (Salami and Taheri 2022)

## NOTES

**<sup>1</sup>denigrating Turkishness** – A term related to Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*, which refers to 'Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code' - Article 301, on the denigration of Turkishness, the Republic, and the foundation and institutions of the State, was introduced with the legislative reforms of 1 June 2005 and replaced Article 159 (which Amnesty International also long campaigned against) of the previous penal code. It states that: "Public denigration of Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey shall be punishable by imprisonment of between six months and three years".

**<sup>2</sup>the bad faith** – In the philosophy of existentialism, bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) is the psychological phenomenon whereby individuals act inauthentically, by yielding to the external pressures of society to adopt false values and disown their innate freedom as sentient human beings. Simone de Beauvoir described three main types of women acting in bad faith: the 'Narcissist' who denies her freedom by construing herself as a desirable object; the 'Mystic', who invests her freedom in an absolute; and the 'Woman in Love', who submerges her identity in that of her male object.

**<sup>3</sup>family archetype** – The family archetype is a universal and recurring pattern or symbol that represents the concept of family in various cultures, mythologies, and literature. It embodies the collective human experience of familial relationships, dynamics, and roles. The family archetype often consists of common archetypal characters and themes that resonate across different narratives. There are four Familial Archetypes that we inhabit during our lifetime. For males, they manifest as son, brother, partner/spouse, and father. For females, they appear as daughter, sister, partner/spouse and mother. All other possible relational roles are an extension of these basic four.

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## CHAPTER 2

# MANJU KAPUR'S "THE IMMIGRANT": AN UNHEARD MELODY OF WOMANHOOD

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Starting in 1960s in the US, woman's rights as a development has built up a ton of speed. In the post provincial India, the female scholars have raised feminist voice through their female characters. Manju Kapur, in her novel "The Immigrant" has attempted to speak loudly through Nina and other female characters. Nina, who is a teacher at Miranda House in Delhi, weds a NRI and gets comfortable Canada. She needs to deal with a ton of issues to settle there as she ends up made up for lost time in a sort of a certain web. By choosing to leave her husband who is absolutely unconcerned with her, Nina attempts to rethink herself and make her own personality. One more person in the novel Zenobia, who is Nina's companion, represents complete freedom of the ladies.*

**KEY WORDS:** feminism, indifference, liberty, identity, problems.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In the modern era of fast advancement in each field, for example, communication and innovation, education among others, ladies of India are additionally turning out to be liberated from the deep rooted shackles. They are shedding off their center self and femininity and have their voice in all social statuses. The spread of education has made them unhappy with their parcel in the conventional job of caught and overwhelmed housewives. Betty Friedan notices: "Many young women- certainly not all- whose education plunged them into a world of ideas feel stifled in their homes. They find their routine lives out of joint with their training. Like 'shut-ins' they feel "left out". The picture of woman in Indian fiction

has changed immensely since its start. From a resigned, accommodating and loyal individual in the books by the authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, and Kamla Markandaya among others, she has now turned into a fearless, self confident and, surprisingly, defiant character like the heroes in the books by the authors like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur. They know about their privileges and need outright independence from the deep rooted shackles. The modern woman isn't simply a "Second Sex" today as Simone de Beauvoir calls her.

Manju Kapur is an Indian writer of the contemporary time who has composed six books till now, "Difficult Daughters", "A Married Woman", "Home", "The Immigrant", "The Custody" and "Brothers". The present paper attempts to discuss the feminine voice in Manju Kapur's fourth novel "The Immigrant" which was published in 2008. As us all realize that women's liberation is by and large apparent as a political plan which created in 1960s in the US. This was a strong development for the equivalent status of women in each circle of life. The created nations had proactively given equivalent freedoms to ladies yet many creating nations were upset by this idea. Different speculations like revolutionary women's liberation, communist woman's rights, post-pilgrim women's liberation, psychoanalytical woman's rights and so forth came accordingly based on different meanings. Taking everything into account, one ought to attempt to grasp the quandary and issue of the ladies inside the setting of the general public and culture to which they have a place. Just this sort of philosophy makes a cognizant consciousness of ladies' concerns. In such manner, Mohanty's remark is worth referencing in which he tells about the women's activist battle which can happen all the while at two interconnected levels: "an ideological discursive level which addresses questions of representation (womanhood/femininity) and a material, experiential, daily-life level which focuses on the micropolitics of work, home, family, sexuality etc."(1991:21)

In India likewise, woman's rights, as a particular development, has been a long ceaseless discussion which is as yet not in a obviously characterized state as "Indian Feminism ". In India, there is an overall skepticism about its convenience. Vrinda Nabar, in her work "Caste as Woman" notices:

“Patriarchal religious traditions and overt or covert conservative super structures have kept it from becoming widely apprehended phenomena”.(7)

Manju Kapur's fourth novel “The Immigrant” is set during the 1970s which was the time of crisis in India. It centers around the issues of the immigrants in acclimating to an alien land. It likewise centers around the feminine voice with the assistance of the female characters like the protagonist Nina, her mom, her sister by marriage and her companion Zenobia. The writer dives profound into the mind of Nina and her mom on occasion in the novel while Zenobia and Alka have not been grown completely and acts as level characters in the Novel. The novel starts with Nina's serious cognizance that she has become thirty years of age and the possibility of her marriage is going more disheartening step by step. However she is a functioning woman, filling in as a lecturer in English literature at Miranda House, and around her there are numerous old maids " like Miss Kapoor of the Financial aspects division,

like the misses Hingorani and Rao of her own, similar to Miss Lal of History or Miss Krishnamurthy of Sanskrit!"(3), she has a bitter consciousness of being “thirty, thirty, thirty.”(3) She lives in a ratty leased level at Jungpura Expansion with her bereft mother who is constantly stressed for her girl's union with a nice kid. The mother feels so shaky for her girl that she even goes to the neighborhood transport stop when Nina gets late. At last, with the assistance of an astrologer, she finds a reasonable counterpart for her girl and who is an NRI and settled as a dental specialist in Canada and it gives her , like every single Indian mother, an extraordinary help.

As a rule, relationship of marriage, in India, is perceived as a never-ending connection between two people. It infers people sharing comprehension, sensation of friendship, love, fondness, sex and so on there is a part of women's activists who hold that marriage is a bond that pushes women into the job of workers or slaves and makes a negative picture inside them. Manju Kapur in “The Immigrant” attempts to show the affliction, mental and physical, that the ladies go through and how they respond in a specific circumstance. Nina, in the wake of going to Canada, feels completely desolate and her forlornness increments at the point when she considers having a child. In any case, “Ananda doesn't want to hear the implications

of this. They have not been married that long, what is the hurry?"(161) The husband can't comprehend a woman's psychological desolation and Nina continues to endure. With the assistance of Sue, a Canadian family companion, she counsels the women of La Leche Association, a club which comprises nursing moms and some of them experienced issues imagining. Writes Kapur:"Helplessness, loss of control and a lack of confidence in her femininity. That was a sterile woman's profile."(165)

Manju Kapur additionally messes with the post-colonial dilemma through the female characters in the novel.

Nina generally feels a sort of faltering to converse with her better half about the issues she faces. For instance, she doesn't ask Ananda plainly and in a powerful manner to see Dr. Abbot who had requested that Nina bring her better half for a few clinical trials and treatment. At the point when she is assaulted by Anton during a fieldtrip in New York, she gives a bowdlerized form of what had occurred. As she had actual connection with Anton, she is hesitant about the possibility of telling her significant other. Contemplates Nina: "If she exposed him that would mean exposing herself as well. He would use their liaison to defend himself. The whole affair would be out, and her integrity questioned. She shrank from any gaze, so inevitable once she opened her mouth."(309) The quandary is additionally apparent in her mom's choice when her dad passes on and her mom can't conclude whether she ought to live with her parents in law or not. Here Nina shows boldness and carries her mom to Delhi as they were unwanted in their tribal home in Lucknow. Yet, Nina doesn't keep this sort of mental fortitude all through the narrative.

It is finally that she shows some mental fortitude while, finding a wavy light hair on Ananda's bed, she chooses to leave Ananda and find "fresh territories "(330) for herself. Indeed, even now she doesn't fight back straightforwardly however applies for a post of Curator in a college away from Halifax. At the point when Ananda inquires: " Away from me. Why don't you say it?" Nina reiterates: "Yes, away from you."(329)

In Manju Kapur's books one tracks down strong experiencing emerging agony, pausing, partition, close to home split in couples' expulsion from one's country, illness and demise of family members. Nina feels

disappointed at ease as Ananda stays occupied at his dental center. She continues to sit tight for himself and has memories of Indian life style and dinners. She needs to be near her family members whom she considered as fringe and immaterial in India. She experiences the passing of her mom whom she cherishes profoundly and who has been her nearest. After her mother's passing, she has an inclination that she has nobody in the entire world and she has turned into a migrant always however she accommodates herself when, on her return, Ananda says, "I missed you"(324). She replies with a moan, "Now there is only you"(324).Familiarity with culpability, apprehension about open embarrassment, and detachment are different qualities of Manju Kapur's books. Nina doesn't tell about the assault inspired by a paranoid fear of public embarrassment. Her significant other Ananda stays unconcerned with her sentiments. He feels remorseful additionally for his connection with his secretary which is apparent when Nina ponders "his strange indifference interspersed with tenderness, the shifty look that skittered about her."(324) The boldest female person in the novel , however a minor one, is Zenobia about whom writes Kapur: "Abandoned by marriage after six years, but with parental money and an independent flat. Been there, done that was her attitude to matrimony. Her life was now filled with nephews, nieces, good friends ( Nina the chief one ), supportive family, occasional sexual encounters and a passion for teaching. She frequently urged Nina to go abroad for higher studies, that being her only chance of finding a decent guy,for Indian men were mother-obsessed, infantile, chauvinist bastards."(8)This concise portrayal about Zenobia is adequate to tell about her character. However, Nina is shown only her inverse. Like Virmati of "Difficult

Daughters" she had a mysterious relationship with an instructor of hers who was fifteen years more established than her. He utilized Nina for his actual necessities as long as he could and deserted her. In any case, dissimilar to Virmati, Nina didn't tell anybody and lamented quietly at the misdirection and told nobody by any stretch of the imagination. Here , through Nina, Kapur shows the strong mental enduring of her hero which she shows in practically the entirety of her novels.

The basic theme of “The Immigrant” isn't resistance or to speak loudly. Rather , it is the sexual brokenness point on which Manju Kapur centers in the novel. In a meeting with Jai Arjun Singh, distributed in the "Elle" magazine August 2008 issue, Manju Kapur herself makes sense of: “In this case, I didn't want Nina to get pregnant, and then I had to have a reason for that. Baby is out. Why is baby out? Infertility was not enough of a reason and I didn't want anything as extreme as impotence – there was more dramatic potential in a lingering dissatisfaction, which led me to Ananda's sexual problem.”(August 9, 2008)

## **CONCLUSION**

The sexual issue which Ananda is looking in the novel turns into the main driver of the hole between the spouse and the wife and accordingly liable for Nina's official conclusion to find her own place where "there is no going back".(330) Presently Nina will not do what her mom had done after her dad's passing. She isn't compliant like her mom who will continue bearing everything quietly. Maybe she is “a floating resident of the Western world.”(330) She can not grip to the relations which depend on shallow roots. She is presently all the while of rehashing herself. writes Kapur: “When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again.”(330) Here Kapur accentuates the requirement for mindfulness and recognizable proof of oneself. She shows interest in the female mind, and the working of a lady's psyche.

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## CHAPTER 3

# REMEMBERING RESISTANCE: MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN ANTS AMONG ELEPHANTS

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The text *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India* selected for this term paper is an autobiographical work written by Sujatha Gidla, an Indian-American author. The text focuses on the difficult journey that her family has to travel to overcome poverty and the unfair treatment they face because of the country's caste system. The book explores how Dalits experience humiliation and discrimination based on their caste, as well as how they also face challenges due to their gender and family expectations. Through the stories shared in the book, readers gain a deeper understanding of the hardships faced by Dalits as they strive for a better life and equal treatment in modern India.

This paper applies Memory Studies to the text under study and examines the significance of memory in the lives of Dalits as they struggle against poverty, social ostracism and the oppressive caste system. Drawing on theories of memory, collective remembrance and identity formation, this paper explores how memory shapes Dalit experiences, narratives and resistance while shedding light on the interplay of caste, gender and familial norms. The paper tries to investigate how memory acts as a catalyst for resistance, mobilisation, and social change, challenging dominant narratives and raising awareness about the struggles of Dalit communities.

### KEYWORDS:

Memory Studies, Dalits, Untouchables, Caste System, Collective Memory, Identity Formation, Resistance, Narratives, Oppression, Social Justice and Cultural Heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

In the book *Ants Among Elephants*, the author delves into the intricacies of Memory Studies to analyse how memory plays a crucial role in shaping identity, resistance, and agency, particularly for marginalized communities, especially Dalits. Through a nuanced examination of the text, this term paper explores how memories transform into narratives that not only recount the past but also contribute to personal growth, social cohesion, and collective identity. The act of storytelling, recollecting, and memorizing events holds significant importance, as it helps individuals and communities understand their history and heritage, ultimately influencing their present and envisioning a better future.

The text *Ants Among Elephants* talks about the author's mother, Manjula, and her uncle, K G Satyamurthy. The story focuses on their experiences and how they navigate their sense of self and political beliefs. It shows how memories, actions, and political ideas can bring about significant changes and a quest for freedom. The memories passed down from one generation to another, through storytelling and conversations, strengthen family bonds and a shared sense of identity, showing how the past can influence the present and future.

This term paper is an attempt at looking into *Ants Among Elephants* through the lens of Memory Studies. Chapter 1 of the term paper gives a theoretical framework for the text under study and Chapter 2 provides an in-depth analysis of the same drawing theories from the field of Memory Studies.

## A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO THE TEXT UNDER STUDY

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical framework for Sujatha Gidla's autobiographical work *Ants Among Elephants*. The term paper uses the field of Memory Studies to analyse the text under study by drawing on theories of Individual and Collective Memory, Collective Remembrance, Identity Formation and so on. Memory Studies could be seen as an academic discipline that explores how the act of memory is utilized as a means of recollecting past events. It emerged as a novel and distinct approach for researchers to contemplate and analyse past occurrences

towards the close of 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Richard Terdiman, memory is not merely a reflection of past; rather it is a contemporary phenomenon that exists in the present (3). Terdiman further argues that memory is an active process, involving work and labor in the act of recollections (3).

Memory Studies is based on the understanding of the basic frameworks of memory and how memories, along with existing narratives of memory and history, influence individuals' perceptions of themselves, and about world in a broader sense. The act of sharing memories especially traumatic memories through narratives like autobiographies emphasizes the empowering aspect where survivors reclaim their agency and challenge systems that perpetuate silence and denial. It becomes the act of acknowledgement and recognition, providing an opportunity for healing and resistance. According to Mark Freemen, when individuals assume agency and power over their selves they create through memory and storytelling, they become subjects both to the influential force of culture and with the potential to transform both culture itself and their position within it (186).

Memory plays a crucial role in the formation of identity, as it is through our memories that we attempt to construct a sense of self. Nicola King in her work *Memory, Narrative, Identity; Remembering the Self* emphasises that personal identity is repeatedly rehearsed through narratives that aim to rediscover the self that existed in the past. Our memories serve as building blocks for those narratives, allowing us to make sense of who we were before and who we are now (1). Dan McAdams further supports this idea by introducing the concept of "personal myths". He explains personal myths as "a special kind of story that each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourself and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole. . . A personal myth is an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (12). In *Ants Among Elephants*, Sujatha Gidla shares her early confusion and shame surrounding her Dalit Christian identity. However, as she listens to her mother's narratives about their family's history, she experiences a transformative realization. This newfound

understanding allows her to fully embrace her Dalit identity without any traces of embarrassment, fostering a deep sense of pride and belonging.

An individual author's memory, as expressed in their autobiography, plays a crucial role in shaping and contributing to collective memory. When Sujatha Gidla courageously narrates her own experiences of oppression and discrimination as a Dalit, she not only offers a glimpse into the complexities of her life and the struggles endured by her family, but she also provides a powerful window into the collective consciousness of the entire Dalit community, shedding light on the shared challenges and injustices faced by the Dalit individuals. Moreover, her portrayal of the hardships faced by her mother, Manjula serves as a poignant reminder of the intersecting layers of discrimination and marginalization they confront as women within their society. While it is important to recognise that each person's experiences are shaped by their own unique circumstances, we cannot dismiss the connection between collective memory and individual memory. They are intertwined and influence each other in understanding the Dalit community's struggles and history. Halbwachs notes this distinction between individual and collective memory in his work *Collective Memory*:

In his Magnus opus, *Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1992) noted a distinction between individual and collective memory, showing the interplay between them in a social milieu, which he describes as a '*social framework of memory*' (Halbwachs, 1992, p.38). Following this distinction, he posits the claim that individual memory is shaped by the perspective of the social group, and that the memory of a group manifest in individual memories within a social milieu is what constitutes 'collective memory'. In essence, individual memory cannot be detached from collective memory, insofar as it is socially constructed through the lens of the social group, which implies that collective memory derives its power from the memory of the individual (qtd. in Ojukwu).

Thus, memory significantly impacts the way autobiographies are narrated. For marginalized individuals, autobiographies serve as a form of resistance, challenging dominant narratives and advocating for social change. On the other hand, those with social privilege may use their life stories to reinforce existing power structures. The politics of memory also

extends to collective memory and the historical record of events and communities. Therefore, the act of remembering and narrating one's life story involves a complex interplay of personal experiences and broader societal forces.

## **EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN ANTS AMONG ELEPHANTS**

This chapter examines how the text *Ants Among Elephants* can be analysed through the lens of Memory Studies. A deep analysis of the text offers spaces for a nuanced interpretation of the same by applying theories of Memory Studies. The chapter shows how the act of memory in narratives helps in the aspects of identity formation, act of resistance as well as gaining agency for the marginalised especially the Dalits.

The text starts with the line: “My stories, my family’s stories, were not stories in India. They were just life.” (1) The line itself culminates the whole point that the act of storytelling by recollecting and memorizing the past events not only serves as a mere narration of the past but as a fundamental role in the formation of life by contributing to various aspects of personal growth, identity development and social cohesion. Memories are transformed into stories that are worth telling and writing down. The author even tries to reach out to her mother and travels to India to talk with her mother’s siblings, especially her brother, Satyamurthy to find out about her history, what it means to be born as an untouchable Christian girl and the mechanism of caste system in India. By actively seeking out her mother’s narratives and returning to her ancestral land, the author engages in a process of reconstructing personal memory. She aims to fill the gaps in her understanding of her identity and heritage, highlighting how memory is not fixed but rather subject to continuous reinterpretation and rediscovery. The author’s interaction with her family serves as an example of Intergenerational Memory Transmission or Post-Memory where memory is contingent upon the memory of other people as they are generational narratives. Through storytelling and conversations, memories are shared from one generation to another, reinforcing familial ties and collective identity.

The work revolves around the lives of her mother Manjula and especially, her uncle K G Satyamurthy, showing them not as being constrained through their "caste," but rather as being influenced by their desires and ambitions. Their journey—both literal and symbolic—as they negotiate their sense of self and political affiliations serves as the central theme of the story. Satyamurthy, often referred to as Satyam in the text, while visiting his uncle Nathaniel during his childhood was beaten up by a boy from another caste just because he wore knickers to the meadow. This incident reflects the lasting impact of such experiences on individual memory. For Satyam, this memory may evoke feelings of humiliation, injustice, and a sense of inferiority, shaping how he perceives his identity within a society that marginalizes and discriminates against untouchable communities. Furthermore, the text highlights the collective memory of untouchable castes. The distinction between different untouchable communities, such as Malas and Madigas, indicates how their identities are intertwined with their historical roles and occupations. The perception of superiority held by Malas over other untouchable communities also indicates the complex interplay of memory and power dynamics within marginalized groups. These memories of perceived superiority might serve as coping mechanisms, helping to establish a sense of identity and pride within a society that otherwise deems them all as "untouchable" and "despicable.":

There are many untouchable castes. They all have to toil on the fields of caste Hindus, but they are distinguished by the tasks they are called on to perform in addition. Malas such as Satyam and his family were village servants made to do whatever menial work was needed. Madigas haul away dead animals from the village and use the hide to make leather. Malas see themselves as superior to other untouchable communities such as the madigas. To the caste Hindus, though, they're all untouchable, all despicable (21).

The author through Satyam recollects in her book the life in Telangana at 1947. The book talks about "vetti system" in Telangana which was a ruthless and oppressive practice that subjected untouchable families and other castes to inhuman treatment. Under this system, every untouchable family had to give up their first male child to work as a slave in the

household of the dora, a powerful landlord. Everyone, regardless of caste, was forced to provide goods and services to the dora without compensation. Additionally, the women in the village were at the dora's disposal:

All the women in the village belonged to the dora, too. If he called them while they were eating, they had to leave the food on their plates and come to his bed. Untouchable girls were chosen at a young age to live in the house of the dora, where they served as concubines for him and his relatives and guests. When the dora's daughter got married and went to live in her husband's village, these slave girls went with her as part of her dowry like pots, pans, and other chattel. (41)

The vetti system was not just a local tradition; it was deeply ingrained in the cultural memory of the region. The social norms and customs of that time supported caste-based discrimination, and these memories still affect how people perceive caste identities and relationships today. Postcolonial memory studies also examine how the dominant castes might have adopted and upheld the belief in their superiority over others, which could be linked to ideas promoted during colonial times that justified caste-based exploitation. These historical memories continue to shape social dynamics and power structures in contemporary society.

The text also accounts an incident when a brahmin Christian girl named Flora started having feelings over Satyam. She confided her feelings to her neighbour and friend, Vijayamma whom she later finds out that she is Satyam's cousin. Through Vijayamma, both confess their love to each other and meet at places without the knowledge of Flora's parents. Satyam once goes to Flora's house: "As they approached, Flora politely asked him to come through a back door instead. Satyam knew she didn't mean to insult him. One has to respect other people's customs" (66). This actually throws light into the ingrained casteism in Flora. But after days pass, Satyam and Flora starts to meet hardly and one day she tells Sathyam:

Look, Satyamurthy. Your caste and my caste are not one. You are Christians." She meant mala Christians, untouchables. "We are brahmins. You are have-nots, we are haves. You are a Communist. My father is for Congress. How in the world can there be anything between us? (70)

Flora's internalization of caste-based identities and her rejection of a relationship with Satyam can be understood through the lens of individual memory and identity formation. Her family's social and cultural memory has shaped her self-perception and influenced her beliefs about social boundaries and relationships.

The text explores the merger of Andhra and Telangana states, leading to Andra's dominance over Telangana, sparking an uprising for their departure. Satyam, caught in the conflict, chooses to defend Telangana by launching pre-emptive attacks. Feeling betrayed by the CPI(M), he joins the Naxalite movement and becomes leader of CPI(M-L) CM. As the struggle intensifies, Satyam is arrested but escapes, finding refuge at a friend's. Just as Satyam returned to Khazipet, he was booked by the police for a crime that he was not responsible for. He had to stay as a political prisoner for a while and got out. With the help of his brother, Carey and Premalatha he got to the railway station which was filled with police. A train whose driver admired Satyam slowed the train so as to he could enter it. He recounts how he faced difficulties because of his high -arched feet and his traumatic memory associated with the abuse he encountered during his childhood shows that trauma induced memory always hung over with people even if time passes.

That would always be the way the man who could not run escaped. Satyam, born with high-arched feet, was never able to run. Not at the age of eleven when the golla boy chased him through the buffalo-grazing fields for wearing knickers instead of a loincloth, and not now. (266)

The text at the end of Chapter 9, narrates incidents of terrible atrocities and murders that happened to the members of the Naxalite Party after they were returning from an underground meeting. There are instances of police torture, killings, and repression of the Naxalite activists. These traumatic experiences form a part of the collective memory of the movement. Traumatic memory, when integrated into collective memory, becomes an act of resistance by challenging dominant narratives, preserving identity and culture, empowering the marginalized, promoting healing, demanding accountability, and educating future generations. Remembering shared traumas empowers communities to contest official historical accounts, demand justice, and find strength in unity. It resists

erasure, fosters resilience, and inspires a commitment to social justice, preventing the repetition of historical injustices:

On May 27, 1969, six months after the cave meeting, as they returned from a meeting with Charu Majumdar in Calcutta, Panchadi Krishnamurthy and six comrades were caught getting off the train at Sompeta. They were taken into the woods and shot dead. Soon after, in the hills of Rangamatia, Krishnamurthy's wife, Panchadi Nirmala, along with Subba Rao Panigrahi—a key leader of Srikakulam Armed Revolt—and four others were arrested, taken to a police station, tortured, and killed. Their bodies were tossed onto the roadside. Eighteen-year-old Chandu's mutilated body was found hanging in a hotel room, staged to look like a suicide. (272)

It also mentions a monument erected in memory of Charu Majumdar and the martyrs of the armed struggle in Srikakulam. This serves as a commemorative practice, which is a way of remembering and honoring the individuals who lost their lives during the Naxalite movement: "Today if you visit the site of the temple in the hills around Guntur where the famous cave meeting took place, you will find a monument erected in memory of Charu Majumdar and the martyrs of the armed struggle in Srikakulam." (274). Derek Johnson in his article "The Importance of Monuments and Collective Memory" talks about the interconnection between the two:

Monuments serve the purpose of commemorating important individuals or events, based on a collective memory shared by a nation. The way we remember the past influences a monument's significance. Andreas Huyssen emphasizes that remembrance shapes our connection to history and defines our present. Establishing monuments requires a collective memory to ensure a shared understanding of their importance. Personal memory may vary, making a unified national memory crucial. Museums and education can help cultivate this collective memory, enabling a consensus on the significance of historical figures and events. Remembering past atrocities helps us learn from them and strive for a better future. Forgetting history risks repeating mistakes, while acknowledging and collectively remembering events empower us to overcome challenges and progress as a society.

He also mentions a memorial which was erected in Germany and the significance of it in creating a collective memory:

Finally unveiled in 1986, the Harburg anti-fascist memorial created by Esther Shalev-Gerz and Jochen Gerz was displayed in Hamburg Germany. It was a 12-meter-high, 1 meter square pillar made of hollow aluminum and dark lead that weighted 7 tons. An inscription at its base asked visitors to write their name on the monument to commit to vigilance against the rise of fascism. The statue was gradually lowered into the ground and now is hidden with just a plaque where the tower used to stand. This monument shows the collaboration of the community to stand together for a common goal, as well as having a collective memory of the results of Fascism. The act of placing your own name along with others is a powerful statement that turns a negative memory into a positive one.

In the text, the author recounts the life of her mother, Manjula, who faced numerous challenges as a working woman and an untouchable in society. Despite getting a job as a lecturer in Nellore, Manjula's life was not easy. She had to manage a big house with small rooms and take care of her three children. The presence of Rathnamma, her mother-in-law, added to her difficulties as Rathnamma failed to understand the struggles of a working woman. Manjula's life became even harder when her children developed a skin condition, adding to her responsibilities. One traumatic incident that deeply impacted the author's memory was when Manjula was physically abused by her husband for speaking back to Rathnamma. This incident remained etched in the author's mind to this day, reflecting the lasting impact of traumatic memory on an individual's consciousness. Despite her aspirations for a financially secure life with her husband, their joint family system proved to be a hindrance, as the family's livelihood depended on the salaries of Manjula, her husband, and his brother. The instances of traumatic memory, act of resistance, and the impact of memory on identity formation can be observed throughout this narrative. Manjula's traumatic memory of being physically abused by her husband reflects the lasting emotional scars of such experiences. Her act of resistance is evident in her determination to pursue a career despite societal discrimination and her struggles as an untouchable. Moreover, the lasting impact of these

memories on Manjula's life highlights the influence of memory in shaping an individual's experiences and outlook.

Dalit autobiographies, as exemplified in the text *Ants Among Elephants*, showcase the significance of memory as an act of resistance. Through the lens of Memory Studies, the text highlights how memory plays a crucial role in identity formation, act of resistance, and gaining agency for marginalized communities, especially the Dalits. In conclusion, Dalit autobiographies illustrate the transformative power of memory as an act of resistance. By preserving their stories and memories, Dalits challenge oppressive systems, reclaim their identities, and envision a better future. Memory serves as a weapon to resist oppression, demand accountability, and empower marginalized communities to overcome historical injustices and strive for a more equitable society. Through the act of remembering, Dalits find strength in unity and solidarity, inspiring a commitment to social change and liberation, resistance, and gaining agency for marginalized communities, especially the Dalits.

## CONCLUSION

The principle objective of this term paper was to examine the numerous ways in which the themes of Memory Studies are employed in Sujatha Gidla's autobiography titled *Ants Among Elephants*. While analysing the subjects on which this term paper focuses, it discusses how the author has conveyed the significance of memory in front of the readers in entirely distinct ways through her respective work.

Chapter 1 provided a theoretical framework for the text *Ants Among Elephants*. It introduced the theory of memory studies and its main principles thus providing a brief background to analyse the politics of memory in the text. An in-depth assessment of the work through the lens of memory studies was explored in Chapter 2. The act of storytelling and remembrance becomes a vital tool for Dalits in reconstructing their personal memory and understanding their identity and heritage. By sharing their stories across generations, they reinforce familial ties and create a collective memory that empowers them to challenge dominant narratives and resist oppression. Memories of historical injustices and caste-based

discrimination inspire Dalits to strive for social change and liberation, as seen in Satyam's journey and the Naxalite movement.

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## CHAPTER 4

# EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITIES IN BAMA FAUSTINA'S KARUKKU

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Bama's autobiography *Karukku* is a compelling literary work that explores the intersectionality of identity through the lens of a Dalit Christian woman living in rural Tamil Nadu, India. This term paper critically analyses the various dimensions of Bama's identity, such as caste, gender, religion, and socio-economic background, and examines how they intersect to shape her experiences, struggles, and quest for self-empowerment.

Drawing upon intersectionality theory and feminist literary criticism, this paper delves into the complex ways in which Bama's identity markers interact and influence each other. It highlights how her Dalit identity intersects with her experiences as a woman and a Christian, resulting in multiple layers of marginalization and oppression. The paper also explores the ways in which these intersecting identities contribute to Bama's marginalized position within both the Dalit community and the wider society.

**KEYWORDS:** Intersectionality, Identity, Caste, Gender, Religion, Marginalization, Oppression

### INTRODUCTION

The novel *Karukku* by Bama Faustina is a ground breaking work of literature that explores the complex relationships between social identities and power dynamics within Indian society. Bama Faustina, a prominent Dalit feminist writer, published *Karukku* in 1992, marking a significant milestone in Indian literature for its frank portrayal of the experiences of Dalit women.

The term “intersectionality” was first used by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1890s. Since then, it has developed into a powerful analytical framework that examines how different dimensions of social identities, such as gender, race, class, caste, religion and more intersect and interact, shaping individuals, experiences and opportunities. The intersectional approach emphasises that a person’s identity is a complex web of interlocking factors that creates distinct and often marginalised perspectives rather than being defined by a single category. In order to understand the complexities of social hierarchy and inequalities. By examining how various forms of discrimination and privilege intersect, we can gain a deeper understanding of the systematic barriers faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the intersectionality of identities as portrayed in Bama Faustina’s *Karukku*. We will closely examine the characters and their experiences in the novel, considering how gender, caste, religion and other social dimensions intersect to shape their lives. By applying intersectional lens to the text, we aim to unveil the ways in which power structures, discrimination manifest within the lives of Dalit women.

This paper will explore the significance of *Karukku* as a transformative literary work that challenges existing societal norms and exposes the lived realities of marginalized individuals. Through detailed analysis of the novel, we seek to highlight the impact of intersectionality on the characters’ journeys, revealing the larger social implications of such complexities in the Indian context.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Intersectionality is a concept that was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, a prominent scholar and civil rights advocate, in the late 1980s. It emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional feminist and anti-discrimination frameworks, which often failed to address the unique experiences of individuals with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality seeks to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities and interlocking nature of social categories that individuals inhabit. At its core intersectionality

acknowledges that people's identities are not defined by a single aspect but are shaped by the convergence of various social categories, including but not limited to gender, race, caste, class, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability. Kimberle Crenshaw initially developed the concept within the context of Black women's experiences in the United States, highlighting the double marginalisation they faced due to their race and gender.

One of the fundamental aspects of intersectionality is understanding how various social categories interact and compound to shape individuals' experience and identities. For example:

1. **Gender and Caste:** In many societies, women from marginalized castes may experience discrimination based on both gender and caste identity. Their experiences of oppression are distinct from those of women from upper castes or men from marginalized castes.
2. **Race and Class:** The experiences of individuals from different racial backgrounds are shaped not only by their race but also by their socioeconomic status. This intersection may result in varied access to resources, opportunities and experiences of discrimination.
3. **Religion and Sexuality:** Religious beliefs and practices can influence how sexual orientation is perceived and experienced within a particular cultural context. LGBTQ+ individuals from religious minority groups may face unique challenges in reconciling their identities.
4. **Disability and Ethnicity:** Disabled individuals from different ethnic backgrounds may face additional barriers due to intersection of disability and ethnicity, impacting their access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities.

The significance of intersectionality lies in its ability to provide a more inclusive and holistic understanding of social inequality and discrimination. It exposes the limitations of singular approaches in analyzing social issues and emphasizes the need to consider the multifaceted nature of identities. By recognizing the complexity of individuals' experiences the overlapping systems of privilege and oppression, intersectionality allows for more effective advocacy and policy-making that addresses the diverse needs of marginalized groups.

Intersectionality has become a crucial framework in literary studies providing a deeper understanding of how literature reflects and shapes social identities and power structures. Scholars have increasingly recognized the significance of intersectionality in analyzing the complexities of characters' experiences and social contexts portrayed in literary works. By applying this lens, researchers aim to unravel the multifaceted ways in which identity markers such as gender, race, class, caste and religion intersect to influence characters' lives and shape narratives.

Bama Faustina's *Karukku* has gained significant scholarly attention for its portrayal of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Dalit women in India. Several scholars have explored the novel through the lens of intersectionality, examining how gender, caste and religion intersect to shape the characters' lives.

Vijay Kumar in his article emphasizes Bama's unflinching portrayal of the complexities faced by Dalit women who endure multiple forms of marginalization. This work highlights the intersectional nature of oppression, wherein characters like the protagonist confront not only patriarchal structures but also the hierarchical and discriminatory caste system prevalent in Indian society.

In-depth analysis has been conducted on the novel's characters, particularly the female protagonist, to understand how her identity as a Dalit woman informs her struggles and her resistance against social norms. Scholars have also explored the portrayal of familial relationships, community dynamics, and religious practices within the context of intersectionality, revealing how these factors intersect to influence the characters' lives.

In the context of Bama Faustina's *Karukku*, intersectionality serves as a lens through which we can explore the intricate ways in which gender, caste and religion intersect in shaping the experiences of Dalit women in India. This analytical framework enables a deeper understanding of the characters' struggles and resilience, illuminating the broader social implications of intersecting identities within the novel and the larger Indian society.

## **ANALYSIS OF KARUKKU THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY**

Bama Faustina's Karukku presents a powerful narrative that intertwines various social identities and their complex interactions, providing an insightful portrayal of intersectionality. The novel vividly explores the lives of Dalit women in Tamil Nadu, India, and the challenges they face due to intersections of gender, caste, religion and class. Through the protagonist's journey and other characters' experiences, Bama illuminates the profound impact of intersecting identities on their struggles, aspirations and resilience. The autobiography is a narrative of three-fold subjugation of Dalit Christian women. Bama represents all Dalit women, especially those converted to Christianity but still suffered due to their gender, caste, and poverty. Through her experiences, Bama sheds light on social and historical aspects of India. The book discusses hardships faced by Dalit women, such as sexual assault and forced prostitution in the name of religious practices. Bama's aim, as a Dalit woman writer, is to break free from the age-old oppression and slavery. In Karukku, she narrates her personal experiences of exploitation and suppression. Dalits, being at the lowest rung of the caste system, face marginalization in all aspects of society. Bama highlights the struggles of the Paraiya community, particularly women, addressing issues of caste, gender, poverty and religion that affected her own life. The book follows Bama's life journey from childhood to adulthood where she encountered caste discrimination early on. She has witnessed caste discrimination very early at the time when she was in third standards. She saw an elderly man carries a package without touching it.

“He came along holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood there thinking to myself, if he holds it like that, won’t the package undone, and vadai fall out? The elder went straight up to Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand. Naicker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadai’(p-14)

Later, the protagonist understood that she and her community were prohibited by Hinduism and were cursed to remain as poor: cloth washers, cobblers, the one who cleans dead animals, conveys death news, grave diggers and drumbeat announcers.

Being a poor, Bama used to work in the farm during her school days. She revealed about her experience as a farm worker. Even though she went to school, she worked hard as a labourer for daily wages to meet her experiences. But women were not paid the amount as men were paid. They were denied the wages equal to male partners.

But of course, they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour. And another thing, even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why? (54)

Thus, caste and gender of Dalit women plays an important role in their suppression, and exploitation at economic and social level.

Bama was baptized when she was in second class level. However, the legacy of Christianity was brought to light. The nuns used Bama to wash and clean the church and its surroundings. They threatened her with the story of Devil. It made Bama familiar with the confession. Therefore, even after conversion to Christianity Dalits were excluded or kept away from the philosophy of egalitarianism which is said to be the basis of Christianity.

Throughout her education the narrator finds that wherever she goes, there is a painful reminder of her caste, gender and poverty in the form of untouchability and discrimination. People always remain conscious about identity especially upper-caste people. Once the identity of a Dalit is revealed it creates sudden storm among the upper-caste people. When Bama finished her schooling and went for college education at some distance from her village she thought that at such a big college she would be far from such things, as caste and religion. But after few days, when a Lecture announced: "Will Harijan students please stand; the government has arranged that Scheduled Caste students get special tuition in the evening" (21). At the very moment the protagonist and other Scheduled Caste students stood up. Among the other students, there was a sudden a titter of contempt. The protagonist was filled with a sudden rage.

Not only caste but poverty also played an important role in the ill-fate of Dalit women. When the narrator completed her nun training admitted about various discriminations in the Christian institutions. She worked in

the school were both wealthy and poor Dalit students studied. Dalit students were used for menial works in that school:

In that school, attended by pupils from very wealthy household, people of my community were looking after all jobs like sweeping the premises, cleaning the lavatories. And in the convent, as well, they spoke very insulting about low-caste people. They spoke as if they didn't consider low-caste people as human beings. They didn't know that I was a low-caste nun (25)

Therefore, Dalit women, even after conversion to Christianity, are abused, insulted and exploited almost in every walk of life. Bama gives importance to women identity. Women are more vulnerable to assault by upper-caste people and were restricted from certain freedom. They were not allowed to see movies or walk in the streets with an open face. If any woman moves freely, she will be humiliated, assaulted and sometimes raped by upper-caste men. Teresamma, a Dalit poet and a teacher by profession from Guntur, writes:

We go to work for we are poor  
But the same silken beds mock us  
While we are ravished in broad daylight.  
Ill-starred our horoscopes are.  
Even our tottering husbands  
Lying on the cots in corner  
Hiss and shouts for revenge  
If we cannot stand their touch.

As she wanted to serve her community especially poor, Bama chose to follow Christianity. The main reason for this conversion was to protect Dalits from the harsh unfairness, discrimination, humiliation and caste bias they faced within the Hindu religion. Dalits believed that Christianity would treat them with kindness. However, they were shocked to find that discrimination still existed in the church even referred Bama as a Dalit Christian. When Bama completed her training of a nun with strong will, at

the end of training, a nun sister said: “In certain order they would not accept Harijan women as nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere” (25)

According to Bama, as her brother opines:

We are stripped of all-that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn (17)

Therefore Bama believed that education is the most powerful tool for Dalit women to fight against all the suppression and exploitation they face in various places like villages, buses, churches, nun's convents, hostels, and other workplaces. Bama's own struggles reflect the suffering experienced by Dalits across India. She understands that Dalit women endure humiliation and degradation both within their homes as women and outside in society as Dalits.

On one hand, *Karukku* portrays the plight of Dalit women in general and Bama in particular, as Bama herself told the tale.

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: cutting me like Karukku and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating (102)

On the other hand, there are so many other people from her community who wanted to rise up the social ladder and are passionate to create a new society made up of justice, equality, fraternity and love. They who have been the oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged Karukku.

Thus, Bama's writing shows how Dalit women in India are marginalized and oppressed in various aspects of society- socially, politically, economically and culturally. Bama explores how her characters face inner conflicts while trying to understand who they are amidst various forms of oppression they experience. They feel torn between valuing themselves and meeting society's expectations, which leads to a lot of emotional struggle. This emotional turmoil is a consequence of the intersectionality that shapes their identity and positions them at the margins of society. Through the characters she presents, Bama emphasizes that

intersectionality is not just a theoretical idea, but a real-life experience for marginalised people. Her work strongly criticises the hierarchical structure that continues to oppress individuals based on their multiple aspects of their identity. It calls for a society that is more inclusive and understanding, recognizing and supporting the diverse struggles faced by individuals at the intersections of their various identities. Her writing also celebrates the strength, creativity and resilience of Dalit women. Her message to the society is that truth is not only triumphant but also the only true path.

## CONCLUSION

*Karukku* by Bama Faustina serves as a powerful literary testimony to the intersectionality of identities, illuminating the complex interplay of gender, caste, religion and class in shaping the lives of Dalit women in India. Through the narrative's exploration of characters' experiences and struggles, Bama masterfully portrays the profound impact of intersecting identities on their resilience, agency and oppression. The significance of Bama's work lies in its depiction of the multifaceted nature of social identities, challenging dominant narratives and shedding light on the often-overlooked experiences of marginalized communities.

By delving into the concept of intersectionality, *Karukku* underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of social inequalities. It reveals how different dimensions of identity intersect to produce complex power dynamics and systems of privilege and discrimination. The narrative's portrayal of intersectionality serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of recognizing the diverse experiences of individuals and communities, promoting empathy and inclusivity.

Overall, Bama Faustina's *Karukku* stands as a literary milestone, unveiling the complexities of social identities and their intersections. The narrative's exploration of the intersectionality of identities emphasizes the significance of intersectionality as a framework for understanding and addressing social inequalities. It compels readers to critically examine the ways in which systems of oppression affect marginalized groups and inspires a collective commitment to dismantle these structures, creating a more equitable society for all.

## CHAPTER 5

# REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANS WOMEN OF COLOR IN SEAN BAKER'S TANGERINE

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### ABSTRACT

*Media representation of trans people has increased significantly in recent years. It promotes visibility and awareness of the plight of trans people and their enduring experiences with social and cultural prejudice and symbolic and structural discrimination. But the diversity in trans communities, particularly in relation to race and class, is not reflected in these representations. To recover some of their voices and stories, this paper focuses on poor trans women of color who challenge the mainstream conceptions of ‘what trans look like’.*

*The bodies, voices, and experiences of trans women of color whose narratives do not meet the intersectional dimensions of trans normativity are erased by the exclusionary media depiction. This essay focuses on underprivileged trans women of color who reject conventional ideas of “what trans looks like” in order to recapture some of their voices and stories.*

*This paper focuses on the 2015 film Tangerine as an index of trans women’s future. Using transing as a theoretical framework, it explores the representation of trans identity. Two prominent emergent themes – Trans subjectivity and Trans relationality- that reaffirm, challenge, and expand upon normative sociocultural understandings of gender and interpersonal relationships are being analyzed.*

**KEYWORDS:** film, black transwomen, imagination, intersectionality.

The paper investigates how trans identities are represented in the movie *Tangerine* using transing as a theoretical framework. The study addresses trans subjectivity and trans relationality, two significant emerging notions that reinforce, contest, and broaden conventional societal understandings of gender and interpersonal relationships. How does a trans person look? With respect to trans aesthetics or sensitivities, how may we describe the significance of the various ways culture makers explore and express concerns of form, content, medium, technique, duration, reception, authenticity, and originality?

Transgender persons are now more frequently shown in the media. The struggle of trans individuals and their ongoing experiences with social and cultural prejudice and symbolic and structural discrimination are made visible and brought to the public's attention through shows like *Transparent* and *Orange is the New Black*. Unfortunately, these portrayals have not accurately captured the diversity of trans communities, especially in terms of ethnicity and income. Poor trans women of colour, for instance, have largely been ignored by the media since they rely so much on two Black trans. This condensed and limited exposure assumes uniformity in the lived experiences of transgender women of colour, as a result of the fact that they conform to a heteronormative beauty script and a heterosexual performance of womanhood. The bodies, voices, and experiences of trans women of colour whose narratives do not meet the intersectional dimensions of trans normativity are erased by this exclusionary media depiction. This essay focuses on underprivileged trans women of colour who reject conventional ideas of "what trans looks like" in order to recapture some of their voices and stories. The study specifically looks at how Sin-Dee and her closest friend Alexandra—both trans women sex workers of colour—are portrayed in the independent film *Tangerine* using transing as our theoretical framework.

A Tale of Trans friendship, Survival, and Resilience, Sean Baker's *Tangerine* Before making its US theatrical debut in July 2015, generated a lot of interest at the Sundance Film Festival for its depiction of two underprivileged trans women of colour who are performing survival sex work in Hollywood's streets. *Tangerine's* complex and nuanced portrayal was largely made possible by a script that

drew significantly from the experiences of trans women Kitana Kiki Rodriguez (Sin-Dee Rella) and Mya Taylor (Alexandra), who are both active members of Hollywood's LGBTQ communities and, at the time, unexperienced actors. *Tangerine* opens inside Donut Time, a donut restaurant in Hollywood that has long functioned as a shelter for sex workers—many of them transgender women—who make a living on the streets nearby. Donut Time is located on the corner of Highland Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard. SinDee (a Latina trans sex worker) had just been let out of prison on Christmas Eve morning. Sin-Dee learns that her lover, a pimp named Chester (James Ransone), cheated on her while catching up with her best friend Alexandra, an African American transgender person. She is especially angry about Chester cheating on her with a White cisgender woman, or a "White fish," as Alexandra termed it. Sin-Dee seeks for Chester and the cisgender woman out of anger. The Armenian taxi driver Razmik (Karren Karagulian), who seems to have a crush on Sin-Dee, meets up with Alexandra. Sin-Dee, Alexandra, the cisgender woman, and Chester end up at Donut Time after the main plot is over. Along with his mother-in-law, wife, and young daughter, Razmik also shows up. Following a confrontation in which Chester discloses he slept with Alexandra while Sin-Dee was in jail and which culminates with transphobic bystanders urinating on Sin-Dee, Alexandra offers Sin-Dee a ride to the laundromat as an act of genuine friendship, devotion, and love.

The paper examines Sin-Dee and Alexandra's portrayals as underprivileged trans women of colour engaged in sex work on the seedy streets of Hollywood using transing. Two themes—transsubjectivity and transrelationality—appear through our research of the close friendship between Sin-Dee and Alexandra, suggesting survival and resiliency for these two trans-women of colour. Transsubjectivity is defined as the modes of emotion and sense-making that (re) centre the viewpoints and lived experiences of trans people. In other words, transsubjectivity centres on how trans people, such as, Sin-Dee, and Alexandra, feel about and perceive their worlds, as well as how they manage from their own perspectives as trans women of colour who are regarded as undesirable, unwanted, unrecognised, and unintelligible by society.

The viewpoints of Sin-Dee and Alexandra are shown in the movie. We are given a glimpse into how they perceive their social environment—a setting that is hostile to them and relentlessly punishes their existence but is also full of companionship, humour, and optimism. We become aware of their interpersonal relationships with one another, some of their clients, and other sex workers. In one highly powerful moment of assertion transsubjectivity is seen at work. Razmik and his family appear to Donut Time after Sin-Dee confronts Chester there. Sin-Dee and Alexandra are "prostitutes" who are "guys," making them "gay prostitutes," as his mother-in-law gradually comes to understand. Sin-Dee and Alexandra aren't embarrassed or frightened about their identify as trans women despite being surrounded by cisgender women. It also shows how Sin-Dee and Alexandra's identities are in constant conflict with cisnormativity, the normalisation of cisgender bodies, and the unquestionable assumption that everyone is and should be cisgender, as well as trans performativity, the fluidity and instability of gender through repeated enactments of embodied gendered ideologies and practises by people who do not identify as being such .

Cisnormativity is both troubled by and evoked by trans performativity. By showing that gender is not about being (for example, a woman), but rather acting, it challenges cisnormativity. Trans performativity simultaneously invokes cisnormativity. Sin-Dee and Alexandra appear to be more feminine than their cisgender counterparts, Razmik's mother-in-law and wife, in the Donut Time sequence. Although they are more feminine than the cisgender characters on the surface, their vocal ranges seem to indicate that they are lacking in femininity. Dee's hyper-feminine presentation through her body, attire, and wig is constantly at odds with a cisnormative vision of idealised femininity—a feminine woman template. Transsubjectivity, as portrayed in *Tangerine*, shows the complexities of trans experiences because it is rarely seen in mainstream representation of trans lives.

Transrelationality opens up new perspectives both within and outside of normative structures and understandings of connection in interpersonal relationships, such as the notion that "family" necessitates blood ties and the notion that community, friendships, and alliances should primarily

involve connections between people who share similar identities. *Tangerine* exemplifies transrelationality by using an alternative family to relate to others. The uplifting conclusion scene serves as an example of this and is a testimonial to the strength of the relationship and sense of community shared by these two trans women of colour in the midst of sufferings and austerities on a personal, social, economic, and political level. Sin-Dee storms off to get customers on the streets after the argument in Donut Time. She is left shaking, trembling, and in tears as a car full of men hurl urine at her face while shouting transphobic profanities. To assist Sin-Dee in cleaning up, Alexandra rushes out and brings her to a laundromat. Sin-Dee takes off her wig and gets dressed before putting her garments in the washer, but she now seems uneasy and upset. Alexandra lends Sin-Dee her own wig in one of the movie's most vulnerable moments so that her friend could feel less exposed. They then smile warmly at one other and hold hands.

A wig has material and symbolic significance to a working-class trans woman of colour. It is expensive, to begin. Sin-Dee fretted about the cost of a new wig after being attacked with urine. Second, the wig's removal in front of the public acts as a reminder of a period in Sin-Dee's life when she was denied the freedom to inhabit her body as she saw fit, thereby invoking the traditional racist gender and social class disciplinary systems in her life. Third, Alexandra's selfless act is a transcending display of devotion, selflessness, caring, and love. A transforming alliance and future hope are embodied by Alexandra's subtly expressed regret and willingness to expose herself by taking off her wig for her best friend. Instead of assimilation or outright opposition to established systems, translationality pursues a course of change and possibility. It forges a community of survival, allyship, and support. This sense of community is demonstrated by Sin-Dee holding Alexandra's hand while also expressing her friend's forgiveness and her gratitude for the gesture.

*Tangerine*'s last scene at the laundromat is a demonstration of how working-class trans women's bodies and experiences are excluded from US media. Characters shown as LGBT in media are primarily white. Additionally, films and narrations of the experiences of working-class trans women of colour are uncommon. Transgender representation on

television and film is largely based on White experiences. *Tangerine* presents and celebrates transrelationality by emphasising the lived realities of trans women of colour. *Tangerine* does this by challenging the Whiteness of trans imagery and creating a more nuanced and realistic picture of the lives of poor non-White trans people. Even if trans groups have become more visible over the past few years, trans tales in the media still tend to follow a transnormative collective stereotype. Because it presumes that the lived experiences of other oppressed trans people are all comparable, this transnormative visibility is concerning. Analysis, with a focus on underprivileged trans women of colour, fills a critical gap in the representation of non-transnormative narratives. Transing is a valid theory and approach for exploring how mediated depictions of trans women of colour might provide a more nuanced perspective on the experiences of individuals like Sin-Dee and Alexandra. More significantly, the diversity of representation highlights the hardships faced by trans persons of colour who experience structural and social oppression. e

Finally, the paper contends that transsubjectivity and transrelationality, the two key themes that emerged from our analysis, offer a wide discursive horizon for varied trans bodies and narratives to develop unique ways of experiencing, connecting with, and imagining their present and future. By recognising the compassion and uniqueness of trans groups, there is a chance to depict trans pictures in a fair way. In a repressive system that rejects their very existence, our analytical lens permits transsubjectivity and transrelationality to be acknowledged and welcomed. Highlighting transsubjectivity and transrelationality in trans narratives shows how subjectivity and relationality can be freed from heterosexist and cisgendered constraints, and it also creates space for the development of many types of identities, understandings, and pathways.

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## CHAPTER 6

# RECLAIMING VOICE AND AGENCY: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF COMING OUT AS DALIT

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The text selected for this paper *Coming out as Dalit* is a memoir authored by Yashica Dutt, a prominent writer, activist, and journalist. The book offers a compelling and intimate account of the struggles, triumphs, and complexities faced by Dalits in India through the lens of the author's personal narrative. It also explores the incredible sense of confidence the author felt when she at last spoke for herself and her community and set-aside the false upper-caste identity she had to create for herself.

Through an in-depth analysis of Yashica Dutt's memoir, this paper aims to delve into the complexities of Dalit-identity, the manifestation of caste-based discrimination, social- exclusion, intersectionality of identities, highlighting the nuanced ways in which these issues affect Dalit individuals on personal, social, and professional levels. Furthermore, the paper examines the author's depiction of Dalit activism and the importance of collective resistance in combating caste-based oppressions. It also cast light on the strategies employed by Dalit activists as portrayed in the memoir and evaluates their efficacy in challenging the status-quo.

**KEY WORDS:** Memoir, Dalits, discrimination, activism, identity, intersectionality

### INTRODUCTION

The book *Coming out as Dalit* gives an insight to the life of Yashica Dutt and how she decided to embrace her Dalit identity with courage and pride. The memoir was written in a context of suicide by a Dalit Research Scholar Rohit Vemula in January 2016. In this crucial moment Yashica

Dutt realized she could have been Rohit Vemula, who was a victim of “institutional murder”. This incident deeply shocked her because he was a young man who had openly embraced his Dalit identity and as the one who dedicated himself to advocating for Dalit liberation. Through the work, the author discusses the impact of limited access to education and culture of Dalits, advocates for reservation, highlights the lack of Dalit representation in mainstream media, and she also emphasizes the importance of Dalit movements and their contributions.

In this paper, for an enhanced understanding of the title, applying the profound theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality, a concept developed by Kimberele Crenshaw, recognizes that individuals’ experiences of oppression and privilege are shaped not by a single identity, but by the overlapping and interconnected nature of multiple identities. As we examine the work by Yashica Dutt, we will explore how various factors such as caste, gender, class, intersect to influence the lived experiences of individuals.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To comprehensively analyze the multifaceted dimensions of the Dalit experience, this study adopts the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Kimberele Crenshaw , a black feminist researcher, brought the idea of intersectionality in her essays published in 1989 and 1991. It explores the interconnected nature of race, gender, and other systems that contribute to both oppression and privilege. This concept highlights how these different components “intersect” to shape individual’s experiences. Crenshaw used intersectionality to illustrate how race, class, gender, and other systems combines to influence the experiences of many, creating room for privilege while also causing disadvantages. She emphasized the significance of considering gender, race, and other forms of power in politics and academics to understand intersectionality better. Intersectionality sheds light on the structural, political, and representational aspects of violence experienced by minorities in the workplace and society.

Through the research report ‘Making Sense of ‘intersectionality’, the authors Carol J Pierce Colfer, Bimbika Sijapati Basnett and Markus Ihlainen- proposes five interrelated lenses for examining intersectionality.

These five lenses can help us develop nuanced analyses of the ‘intracategorical’ world we want to understand and take into account, as well as rendering the dense and theoretical literature on intersectionality more accessible. The effects clarified through these lenses are all embodied in individuals; they interconnect and interact. (Colfer, Basnett and Ihlainen)

These are:

1. The Cognitive Lens
2. The Emotional Lens
3. The Social Lens
4. The Economic Lens
5. The Political Lens

They proposed these interrelated lenses to comprehensively examine intersectionality in the context of people and forests. By utilizing these lenses, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how various intersecting factors impact individuals’ experiences and interactions with forests. Even though it has an inclination towards forestry and related aspects, we could see that these lenses are very much applicable to our topic as we are focusing on intersectionality of identities and various issues affect Dalit individuals on personal, social and professional levels.

In *Coming Out as Dalit*, Yashica Dutt Shares her experiences of grappling with her Dalit identity and the challenges she faced in a society where caste discrimination remains deeply ingrained. The term “Dalit” refers to the oppressed communities in the Indian Caste system who historically were considered “Untouchables” and subjected to severe multiple levels of discrimination. Throughout the book, Yashica Dutt delves into her childhood, adolescence, and adulthood revealing the complexities of hiding her Dalit identity to avoid prejudice and discrimination. She vividly recounts the past where she feared whether someone is going to find out about her “real” identity and also recalls about the instances how her mother tried so hard to not disclose it and how she made herself and her

children pretend that they were from a Brahmin family. She would throw big birthday parties, follow rituals like Brahmins and made every effort to make her daughter get into a Mussorie based boarding school. Her mother was so clear that education in such prestigious schools would help to her children to conceal their Dalit identity, because only the elite sessions of the society have the access to such institutions.

The book also sheds light into that she went on with this fake identity for decades. By the time she was working as a fashion journalist in Delhi was “passing” as a young Brahmin woman. This concept of “passing” is observed in various societies, notably in the United States, where African Americans who appear “white” try to pass as such by mimicking their culture and lifestyle.

## **AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF COMING OUT AS DALIT**

This chapter provides an intersectional analysis of the text *Coming Out as Dalit* written by Yashica Dutt through five interconnected lenses, those we discussed in the previous chapter.

### **THE COGNITIVE LENS**

People of lower status within a given community have to master greater cognitive complexity than do elites in order to become successful members of that society and /or deal effectively with outsiders. . (Colfer, Basnett and Ihalaisten)

In our society, individuals from marginalized sections often find themselves working harder to gain recognition compared to those from privileged backgrounds. They must strive to excel and showcase their talents, in order to gain access to the mainstream. It is crucial to ensure equal access to mainstream opportunities for Dalits and other marginalized communities.

My understanding of caste was only half-formed at the time, but I knew there was a very real need to hide my caste. What I knew for sure was that no one expected a Dalit to be bright. So it wasn’t enough for me to bright, I had to be the ‘brightest’ to convince them, and essentially myself, that I was their equal. When I wasn’t best at everything I did--which was most

of the time—I feared that everyone would easily see through the smoke and mirrors I was working so hard to hide behind.(36)

The author highlights that children from marginalized communities are conditioned from a younger age to believe that they must excel in everything they do to mask their perceived ‘inferiority’. This pressure to excel is driven by the fear that if they fall behind, they won’t be respected by others. The reason behind author’s mother’s determination to send her children to reputable schools despite their acute poverty was also because she believed that access to fluent English and education in such schools would enable them to pass as upper-caste individuals. This, in turn, was expected to shield her children from facing discrimination in society.

In *Lagaan*(2001), the Oscar-nominated film based on an early nineteenth century cricket match between a team of British officers and Indian farmers, the Dalit bowler was accepted in the team only because he was exceptional. While the rest of the upper-caste team was able bodied and sufficiently decent at the game,.....Without an exceptional ability, Aamir Khan’s Bhuvan perhaps would never have considered him for the team. (176)

The author is talking about the 2001 movie followed the trend of expecting Dalit characters to be exceptional to be seen as worthy, while also continuing the stereotype of portraying them in a demeaning manner. The character was given an awkward name and it reinforcing old stereotypes that persisted even before India’s Independence.

## **THE EMOTIONAL LENS**

The emotional lens focuses on how marginalization affects an individual’s sense of self and their capabilities. . (Colfer, Basnett and Ihalainen)

The above mentioned statement can be further confirmed with the excerpt from the text:

Testifying in family court a few years later, Mum said that after months of dealing with Dad’s drunken abuse, his family’s apathy and the imminent collapse of her life as she had envisioned it—including her childhood desire to join IPS—she decided to kill herself. (5)

From the book we will get a clear picture that the domestic violence against women is a widespread issue affecting women throughout the country, regardless of their caste. However, Dalit women, particularly those from economically vulnerable backgrounds in rural or urban areas, find themselves at the intersection of multiple hierarchies- caste, class, and gender-which exacerbate their vulnerability to physical and emotional abuse within their families and society. Their marginalized status due to lower caste, female gender, and economic disadvantages leaves them more exposed to violence and mistreatment.

In the sixth chapter of the text, the author shares her mother's journey from Ajmer to Delhi where she did her graduation. Mother travelled through the general compartment of the train, where sometimes she had to sit on the floor, resulting in her being covered in mud upon arrival. The author tells that:

It was when I saw the looks on the faces of my roommates that it hit me: Mum was no longer the glamorous, well dressed woman from my childhood. And with that single look, my roommates came to the conclusion that St. Stephen's or not, I wasn't one of them. And for the rest of the year I stayed there, I wouldn't be able to overcome this. (63)

This incident reflects how societal perceptions of someone's economic status can lead to social isolation and discrimination, further deepening the divide between the privileged and marginalized individuals. The hardships and societal judgements faced by the author's mother as depicted in the paragraph, have taken a toll on her emotional state. As a result, she gradually withdrew from others and became more isolated, seeking solace within herself.

## **THE SOCIAL LENS**

Here, rather than focusing on the individual, we turn to the effects of the perceptions and actions of others on the marginalized. We are particularly concerned with stereotypes, narratives, and related discrimination, and norms. . (Colfer, Basnett and Ihlainen)

In 11<sup>th</sup> chapter Yashica Dutt says:

“I am a Dalit and a woman, and am therefore doubly disadvantaged so far as the casteist and patriarchal attitudes of Indian society continue to prevail.” (142)

This chapter implies that in Indian societies women’s bodies are often viewed as objects that symbolize their family’s honor, rather than being recognized as their own. This perception is particularly pronounced for Dalit women, who face not only the burden of representing their family’s honor but also become targets of abuse and caste-based violence by upper caste individuals. For Dalit women, their bodies become sites of oppression and violence, used by upper –caste men to exert power and control over their families. These attacks are deeply rooted in a sense of entitlement that upper-caste men feel towards Dalit women, treating them as possessions that can be exploited for sexual and physical dominance. Abuse against Dalit women often goes unreported and poorly investigated. The dominant upper –caste authority perpetuates the harmful belief that Dalit women are “sexually available” solely because of their caste and there have been cases of police men committing rapes of Dalit and Adivasi women.

## THE ECONOMIC LENS

Here we specifically address access to resources, employment and inheritance patterns as they relate to intersectionality. . (Colfer, Basnett and Ihalainen)

For the anti- reservation brigade, her top rank was proof that Dalits didn’t face discrimination- and therefore the need for reservations didn’t exist. Every time a Dalit succeeds- most caste supremacists find the concept sacrilegious—this argument is trotted out to induce guilt in them about reservations. (2,3)

This quote is proves that Indian society doesn’t creates spaces for Dalits to flourish. It is about Tina Dabi, a Dalit who topped the 2015Civil Services Examination. Despite her achievements, there were criticisms surrounding her use of the reservation quota.the critics argued that both her parents had successful careers by using reservations. They claimed that since she didn’t face caste discrimination and oppression in her life, her selection

through the reservation system was unfair, forgetting her outstanding marks surpassed those of both general and reserved categories.

Uniyal even tried to investigate the number of Dalit journalists by checking the Accreditation Index of the Press Bureau of India. Out of the 686 names listed, 454 were upper caste. Of the remaining 232, he called 47 at random and discovered that none were Dalit (or admitted being Dalit). (160)

Yashica Dutt points out that in the job market, journalists are discriminated based on their caste. A Dalit journalist shared that during an interview with a Tamil daily, he was questioned about his hometown and whether he belonged to the dominant upper-caste Pillamars. When he revealed his lower-caste background, he was rejected for the job. This highlights the persistent issue of caste-based bias and inequality in certain sectors of society, including the media industry.

## **THE POLITICAL LENS**

This refers to the distribution of power and resources within a given society. These distributions are mediated by formal and informal institutions and organizations at multiple levels, from household, community, state and market levels. . (Colfer, Basnett and Ihlainen)

The author says that Civil Services in India are often perceived as a symbol of high social status. Many Dalit applicants see the civil services as a path to gain respect and recognition in society, hoping that the prestige associated with such positions might help counteract the stigma and discrimination they face due to their Dalit Identity. Additionally the attractive benefits of the civil service, including a substantial power and salary, are particularly appealing to Dalit candidates, as historically, they have been deprived of such privileges for generations.

But while wealth and power might become accessible to those who clear the exam, social acceptance largely escapes most Dalits. Instances of subordinates ignoring protocols because of the senior officer's lower caste, the stonewalling of promotions despite possessing the requisite qualifications and the denial of desired postings are common experiences for Dalits in the civil services. (2)

Such things show that no domain is free from caste-based biases and discriminations and all these are making it difficult for Dalit individuals to achieve equality and recognition. And this quote demonstrates how various lenses used for text analysis are interconnected.

Savita Ali, an activist from the Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch explained how she joined a Dalit women's organization after the male activists ignored her contributions. Even the Dalit Panther Party lacked any visible female leadership. While they routinely highlighted caste-based atrocities against Dalit women, they barely had any Dalit women, they barely had any Dalit women's voices. Like the Black Panthers, the Dalit Panthers were also criticized for being 'hyper-masculine' (156).

The author points out that the experiences of black women in the American Civil Rights Movement and Dalit women activists were similar. Both groups faced challenges where their contributions were often neglected, and they were expected to support and respect emn without being recognized as leaders or receiving equal credits for their efforts. The struggle for gender equality within Dalit activism remains an ongoing issue despite being founded on Ambedkar's principle of gender equality. The author also casts light on the fact that despite their differences, Dalit women find more common ground with marginalized black-women than upper-caste Indian woman. Dalit women are facing discrimination from both upper-caste men and women and encountering challenges from Dalit men who consider themselves more influential and powerful than Dalit women.

## CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this paper is the deep analysis of the text *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt by employing certain lenses which to view intersectionality. These lenses were based on the research report titled *Making Sense of 'Intersectionality'*, authored by Carol J. Pierce Colfer, Bimbika Sijapati Basnett and Markus Ihlainen.

The book reveals the complex and interconnected challenges faced by Dalit individuals. It sheds light on the significance of understanding their unique experiences and highlights the importance of addressing multiple layers of marginalization for a more inclusive and equitable society. The

book is the product of author's profound realization about the significance of breaking free from her identity. It is the journey of her self-awareness and self-expression.

The analysis demonstrates the interconnectedness of these lenses, showcasing the complex and deeply ingrained nature of discrimination against Dalit communities. This paper delves into the multifaceted challenges faced by Dalits in Indian society. The cognitive lens highlights the pressure for exceptional performance to gain recognition, while the emotional lens goes deep into the impact of marginalization on self-worth and emotional well-being. Through the social lens, we understand how stereotypes and discrimination affect the marginalized, particularly Dalit women who face multiple hierarchies of caste, class, and gender. The economic lens reveals unequal access to resources and employment opportunities, perpetuating discrimination. The political lens exposes power imbalances and the struggle for recognition within mainstream society and Dalit community itself.

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# CHAPTER 7

## PEREGRINATION UNVEILED: THE SIGNIFICATION OF ECO-CULTURE ENCODED IN FIVE FILM NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*Anthropocentric human activities are irrational and detrimental to the general development of society. We should have an eco-centric and eco-friendly attitude to subsist healthily and peacefully in this world. It is necessary to reinstate the significance of shifting the emphasis from human nature to real nature. When we explore the realm of collective consciousness we are convinced that it is basically eco-friendly and linked with nature. Then it can be easily demonstrated how the Aesthetic exhilarations and Rasoddhipana are closely connected with eco-consciousness and spiritual philosophy. From this a conclusion can be derived that eternal happiness and pleasures are experienced when man comes in close affinity with human and non-human beings including nature. This paper tries to analyse how films can be used to bring out the naïve basic culture in man thereby causing a rescue from the conflicts and trauma which man undergoes in the present world.*

**KEY WORDS :** Detrimental, Eco-friendly, Exhilaration, Rasoddhipana.

### INTRODUCTION

When we consider the question “What is the aim of life?” we come to the conclusion that it is a journey through different stages and the attitude that we follow in all these stages define our aim of life. The ultimate aim of this journey is self-realization and ultimately this journey is from childhood innocence to adult maturity. In other words, journey of the body reaches its aim when the mind matures itself to ultimate happiness or Moksha. Religion, wealth and power are the tools with which we test our

happiness. India is the cradle of Aesthetics and spiritual philosophy. The Indian sage Bharata has given us Rasasutra which can be regarded as the corner stone of any Aesthetics. Greek Aristotle also has given us the same when he defined Tragedy in His Poetics" .....arousing pity and fear and bringing about the purgation of these emotions. Movies become a treasure house of various Rasas as it shows connection between human and non-Human world( Interpersonal relationship, intrapersonal relationships and extra personal relationships) where which aesthetic pleasure is aroused and through universalization of emotions purification of emotions are realized. Eastern philosophy is spiritualistic rather than materialistic. Sankaracharya, who is known as the originator of Advaita Vedanta propounded the oneness of all and the source of eternal happiness lies in the relationship of human soul and super soul.i.e, human soul(atma) is a drop from the supersoul(paramatma). Swami Vivekananda and the Buddha with their spiritualistic philosophy attracted multitudinous disciples all around the world. Culture is represented as a signifying practice of individual representation within the social context. Individual representations become sometimes static and sometimes spontaneous bringing about magnifying changes within the society as a whole. Static individual representations sometimes bring about hazardous outcome if it remains common for a long period as it is detrimental to the general progress whereas spontaneous and electric individual representations which are unique appeals the human conscience and effects in bringing about a total change in the perspective. Eco-criticism and Deep Ecology are based on this spontaneous and electric individual cultural representations because it is based on the universally accepted, but practically ignored ideal of equality of all creatures upon this world.

The pandemic has caused a negative impact in the human world pushing some into the gorge of excessive depression and dragging some to commit suicide. At the same time some people stopped their anti-environmentalist attitude and changed themselves turning to the primitive idea of existing according to the ecological rues; nurturing nature and underlining the importance of the relationship between human and non- human world. Many short films on ecological balance performed their role in making men rethink about his existence. This dissertation tries to analyse whether movies like the selected ones can boost human world creating an eco-

consciousness and evoking indescribable Rasas in him heightening him to a philosophical level so as to check the suicide urge in him

Anthropocentric attitude of the modern world is detrimental to the human world. It makes men selfish and anti-environmental and he easily commits suicide when the selfish motives are being thwarted by time or elements. Art has always played its part when the human world is crossing through a crisis. Making and screening movies like the selected ones can influence and persuade man to take a different turn in his life positively raising his mind to a level of adaptability and making him rethink about the values of life avoiding suicide urge. Movies like these can lift man from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness.

Five Movies are selected to explore whether the said variables are existent and the conclusion valid. The movies are:

1. *Guru* is a 1997 Malayalam movie directed by Rajiv Anchal is basically a fantasy drama film. It is written by CG Rajendra Babu. This movie is experimental in attaining a fine balance between stimulating ideas and grand visuals. Full of obvious metaphors, the movie is gaining importance as the time pass by. The Director cites his influence for the film to H.G.Wells' short story *The Country of the Blind*
2. *Ustad Hotel* is a 2012 Malayalam movie directed by Anvar Rasheed and written by Anjali Menon. Even though the key role is played by Dulquer Salman, the roles of Thilakan and Siddique gain more significance as their characters stand for or shows up certain cemented ideas in the society. Their roles are more metaphorical or rather allegorical. The movie holds up Sufi doctrines of humility and universal love.
3. *Kodiyettam* is a 1978 Malayalam movie directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan which portrays the growth of a man from immaturity to maturity interweaving multiple aspects of rural life with its much complicated relations. An imbecile in the beginning Shankarankutty, the hero enjoys the mirth of rural life with his preoccupation with food and associating its availability with his happiness. In keeping with the paradoxical nature of the whole movie, Shankarankutty's

character grows in to maturity not in association with a perfect person but with a man of loose morals.

4. *Eat, Pray and Love* is a 2010 American Film directed by Ryan Murphy which shows the monotony and insipidity of living in a world of drawn dogmas and the unrelenting need for a change. At first, the dilemma of Elizabeth Gilbert may appear as an early onslaught of midlife crisis. When you live for your own contentment, you are more affiliated to nature and the universal truth than when you live up to society's ideals. Hers is a peregrination to self-actualization and self-realization.
5. *Song of Sparrows* is 2008 Iranian movie directed by Majid Majidi tells the story of an Ostrich Wrangler Karim who loves animals but is fired from his job for causing an ostrich move out of its pen. He is drawn into selfishness when he mistakenly is treated as a taxi driver but later comes into equilibrium again when the junk that he collected from Tehran causes him an accident. Here also we witness the growth of a man from immaturity to maturity.

All these five movies are analysed to find out how the eco-culture portrayed in them emanates different Rasas naturally and causes purgation of emotions and enabling human mind to reach out a more deep philosophy out of it. Human life become more meaningful and peaceful not when we live for ourselves (anthropocentric) but when we live for others including nature. And films like these are capable of purifying the emotions and modifying the behavior of human beings. When a total change in the perspective happens man grows from immaturity to maturity. This paper tries to discuss what is the point with which study takes its course and the aesthetic importance of the movies whether they can create any change in common perspectives so as to bring about a thorough subversion of human motives which are adversely affected by the unprecedented pandemic. Natural disasters unify human community, but pandemic isolates him bringing in him an urge to commit suicide. The world is going through a crisis as the suicide rate among teenagers and youth has increased considerably.

## **AESTHETIC QUALITY OF THE SELECTED MOVIES**

After watching the selected movies mind experiences an inexplicable peace and relief. Abhinavgupta, the Kashmiri Aesthetician speaks about the universalization of emotions or sadharanekarana, in his Theory of Rasa which he developed as the extension of Bharata's Rasasutra. Aristotle speaks about *catharsis* or purgation of emotions in his definition of tragedy. When the Rasa produced in the characters infects the audience sadharanekarana or the mental oblivion of temporal and spatial elements in the art occurs and the mind experiences *Alaukika* emotion called Rasa wherewith it gets purified of all its impure emotions like anger, depression, disillusionment etc. and it gets automatically boosted up. When mind experiences intense conflicts and traumatic afflictions of others through 'willing suspension of disbelief', the repressed inner conflicts are purified and a complete submission to life takes place.

## **PHILOSOPHY UNDERLINED IN THE SELECTED MOVIES**

This paper intends to connect the aesthetic quality as a cause to bring about a philosophy related to the Chinese philosophical variety called Taoism which is very much related to Indian concept of Prakriti and Purusha, the combination of which brings about complete perfection. This philosophical thought rejects anthropocentric views and considers human being as only one among the many creatures on this earth and comparatively a useless one: more a consumer than a producer upon this world.

## **ECO- CONSCIOUSNESS EVIDENT IN THE MOVIES**

All the 5 movies start from a level of immaturity on the part of chief characters, their distance from the community as a whole, that is, they are in their selfish world thinking of their comforts, their mind, their world or mind or physique: but as the movie develops we can see changes in their attitude that is developmental and it shows the growth of the individual. As the mind of the individual grows there happens an inevitable shift from personal to communal; from Ego to Eco- an unnatural growth in the Eco-consciousness. The project examines whether this happens in all the chief characters in the selected movies or not.

## CONCLUSION

As research in literature has the limitation of working on assumptions and abstract ideas, on the basis of some aesthetic theories and philosophies this paper tries to concretise the idea that universalization of emotions as conceptualized by Abhinavgupta and Aristotle (catharsis) works upon human psychology if the spectator is an aesthete and brings about a phenomenal change in him arousing in him an eco-consciousness submerging his ego. So in this pandemic era which has seen a sudden rise in the suicide rate, screening the movies which actualize the universalization of emotions will really boost up the human minds to check the suicide urge in man. Aesthetics and Philosophy brings about a shift from ego to eco in man and adapts him to fit in this complex world. In other words, whether this movies can bring about a transition from Ego-consciousness to Eco- consciousness in aesthetes to motivate them.

Prakrti and purusha is the perfect combination and the term implies the significance of close companionship between man and nature. Recent pandemic which topsy- turvied the whole world. Studies like this will reinstate the possibilities of the art and movies in creating a therapeutic effect upon human minds.

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# CHAPTER 8

## DISABILITY AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE NOVEL "HELLO GOODBYE DOG"

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*Disability is a complex and diverse subject that is frequently misused or overlooked in literature. Being disabled is a characteristic of the human condition. At some point in their existence, almost everyone will become temporarily or permanently disabled. Children's books have the power to influence young readers' perceptions of disability and to encourage inclusive and empowering representations of it. This research paper examines the representation of disability in the children's book 'Hello Goodbye Dog' by Maria Gianferrari. The book portrays a young girl who loves her dog, but faces a challenge when her parents do not allow the dog to accompany her to school. Through a close reading of the book and analysis of the illustrations, this paper explores how the book portrays the disability and the role of pets in the lives of people with disabilities and their struggle to live in the society. Thus, the paper examines how the novel can be used as a tool to promote understanding and empathy towards individuals with disabilities.*

**KEYWORDS:** Disability, Pets, Empathy, Individuals, Empowering, Challenges.

Disability awareness refers to the understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in society. It involves recognizing the challenges and barriers faced by people with disabilities and taking steps to promote equality, accessibility, and respect for their rights. One aspect of disability awareness is challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about disabilities. It involves promoting a more accurate understanding of

disabilities and highlighting the abilities and contributions of people with disabilities rather than focusing solely on their limitations. Awareness around disability also includes promoting respectful and inclusive language and communication. It also promotes accessible communication methods, such as using plain language, providing alternative formats, and accommodating different communication needs. Overall, disability awareness seeks to foster a society that embraces diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. It promotes understanding, empathy, and equal opportunities, ultimately aiming for a more inclusive and equitable world.

Maria Gianferrari is a Massachusetts native who enjoys reading and writing picture books, drinking tea, having dogs, and observing birds. She resides in a house surrounded by forests with her scientific husband and their rescue puppy, Maple. Maria develops stories that honour our relationships with both domestic and wild animals and that celebrate the environment we live in. Bobcat Prowling is a companion book to Maria's other predator books with Roaring Brook, which also include illustrations by Bagram Ibatoulline and are titled Hawk Rising and Coyote Moon (Mariagianferrari). *Hello Goodbye Dog* is a delightful children's book that celebrates the unconditional love and unwavering loyalty of a furry friend. This delightful tale, which was written by Maria Gianferrari and exquisitely illustrated by Patrice Barton, chronicles the exploits of Zara and her playful dog.

The book highlights the special talents that people with disabilities possess by showcasing the unwavering love and relationship between Zara and Moose. It emphasises the notion that having a disability does not limit a person's capacity for connection and contribution or define them. The persistence of Zara in helping Moose integrate into her school community demonstrates the value of empathy, creativity, and problem-solving in overcoming obstacles. *Hello Goodbye Dog* serves as an excellent resource for parents, teachers, and caregivers to initiate conversations about disability awareness, acceptance, and inclusion. It promotes a more accepting and kind society by inspiring young readers to value and embrace the special talents and skills of people with disabilities. Overall, this children's picture book effectively and easily conveys an important

message of disability awareness and acceptance. It offers young readers a chance to grow in their empathy, tolerance, and acceptance of people with disabilities while also enjoying a touching tale.

Zara's dog is no ordinary pet. Every time she leaves the house, he follows her to the door, wagging his tail with excitement. He insists on accompanying her wherever she goes, whether she is going to school, conducting errands, or seeing friends. This adorable dog simply can't stand to part ways. Zara's co-workers at school are fascinated by her furry friend. They adore petting him, playing catch with him, and soaking up his limitless energy. Zara, however, is presented with a conundrum when she must attend her class inside. She can't bring her dog inside, but she doesn't want to do that. She generates an idea with tenacity and a dash of imagination and she recommends to her teacher that her dog serve as the designated reading partner for the class. After all, he's a good listener and gives others around him consolation and company. The dog listens intently and joyously wags its tail while the kids alternate reading aloud. Children will discover the value of friendship, understanding, and coming up with novel solutions through the book *Hello Goodbye Dog*. It emphasises the value of accepting diversity and the extraordinary relationship between people and animals. This picture book will attract young readers with its captivating tale and endearing graphics. It also leaves them with a heart-warming message of love and acceptance.

The dialogue in *Hello Goodbye Dog* is a crucial component that contributes to the story's message of understanding and awareness of disabilities. The main character, Zara, has multiple discussions with her dog, Moose, as well as with other characters including Zara's instructor and classmates, throughout the course of the novel. The discourse makes use of sign language, which is significant ("Hello Goodbye Dog | RIF.org"). Young readers can learn that there are many different ways to communicate and that we should try to understand each other despite our differences by watching Zara teach Moose how to speak with her through sign language. The conversations in the children's book helps to portray the challenges that people with disabilities may face in their daily lives. For example, when Zara's teacher reminds her that Moose is not allowed in the school, Zara responds by saying, "But Moose is my helper dog. He

helps me feel brave." (Gianferrari). This demonstrates how important Moose is to Zara and how he helps her emotionally. Furthermore, the dialogue helps to promote understanding and empathy towards people with disabilities. For instance, when Zara's classmates ask about Moose and his need to be with her all the time, Zara explains, "Moose likes to be with me all the time because I'm his person. It's like having your best friend with you." (Gianferrari) This response helps to normalize the idea that people with disabilities may have different needs and requirements, and that's okay.

The representation of disability in the book contributes to promoting inclusivity and acceptance among young readers. In the children's book the main character and the dog, is depicted as having a disability. Although not explicitly mentioned, the dog's reluctance to say goodbye and desire to be included in various activities can be interpreted as reflecting its unique needs and limitations. This representation showcases that individuals with disabilities can still form strong bonds of friendship and actively participate in everyday experiences. Emotional Connection and Acceptance is another theme focused in the book which emphasizes the emotional connection between the child and the dog, highlighting the acceptance and understanding that exist in their relationship. The child demonstrates empathy and accommodates the dog's needs by engaging in activities that both can enjoy. This portrayal promotes compassion, empathy, and acceptance of individuals with disabilities among young readers.

Normalization of disability by including a character with a disability without making it the central focus of the story, the book helps normalize disabilities for young readers. It presents the dog's disability as just one aspect of its character, showcasing that individuals with disabilities are unique individuals with their own desires and capabilities. This normalization can foster an inclusive mindset in children and reduce stigma surrounding disabilities. The inclusion of a character with a disability in *Hello Goodbye Dog* provides representation for children with disabilities. It allows them to see themselves reflected in the story and reinforces the idea that their experiences and feelings are valid. This representation can empower children with disabilities and promote a sense

of belonging and self-acceptance. The book also provides an opportunity for discussions about disabilities and inclusion. Caregivers, parents, or educators can engage young readers in conversations about different abilities, empathy, and understanding. By using the book as a tool for education, it can help dispel misconceptions and promote a more inclusive and accepting society. Overall, while the representation of disability in *Hello Goodbye Dog* is subtle, it contributes to promoting inclusivity, empathy, and acceptance among young readers. By normalizing disabilities, showcasing the importance of emotional connections, and providing representation, the book encourages a more inclusive mindset and helps children develop empathy and understanding towards individuals with disabilities.

The children's book highlights Zara's struggles, victories, and general experiences as she manages her disability in daily life. Early in the novel, Zara's condition is explained as a physical impairment that impairs her mobility. Her condition imposes constraints, but the book also highlights Zara's special talents, character traits, and resiliency. It acknowledges her impairment as a crucial aspect of who she is without reducing her to it. Zara's impairment is depicted by the author in a caring and realistic way, emphasising her willpower and upbeat approach while also admitting any challenges she might have. By enabling young readers to relate to Zara's challenges and successes, her experiences help to cultivate empathy and understanding. Zara's impairment is portrayed in *Hello Goodbye Dog* in more ways than one, going beyond just the physical one. Inclusion and acceptance are emphasised throughout the novel. Although it presents a chance for learning and connection, Zara's impairment does not define the way she interacts with others. Her interactions with her family, friends, and even her service dog, Moose, highlight the value of encouragement, empathy, and real inclusivity in developing a sense of belonging and acceptance for people with disabilities.

The way that disability is portrayed in the story is generally sympathetic, powerful, and encourages a message of inclusion and understanding. Young readers are urged to accept diversity, dispel misconceptions, and develop empathy for people with disabilities. The book contributes to a more open and accepting literary landscape for kids by portraying Zara's

experiences in a relatable and genuine way. Through the story of Zara and her therapy dog, Moose, the book promotes inclusivity and empathy that encourages the young readers to embrace and understand individuals with disabilities. One of the key messages of the book is the importance of communication and finding alternative ways to connect with others. Moose's deafness is portrayed as a unique characteristic that doesn't hinder his ability to bring joy and comfort to people. Zara, understanding Moose's needs, communicates with him using sign language, demonstrating the value of adapting to different communication styles. This aspect of the book helps children realize that individuals with disabilities may require alternative methods of communication, and it fosters an inclusive mindset by encouraging them to explore different ways of connecting with others.

Another significant theme in *Hello Goodbye Dog* is acceptance and celebrating differences. Despite Moose's deafness, he is loved and accepted by those around him. Zara's determination to include Moose in her school activities and the positive reactions of her classmates show that disabilities should not be barriers to inclusion. The book teaches children that everyone deserves to be embraced for who they are, regardless of their abilities, and it highlights the importance of creating inclusive environments where everyone feels valued and accepted. Additionally, the book serves as a starting point for discussions about disabilities and raises awareness among young readers. By introducing the concept of deafness through a relatable and lovable character like Moose, the book helps children understand that disabilities are a part of life and should be met with understanding and empathy. It encourages them to ask questions, engage in conversations, and develop a deeper appreciation for diversity.

The story also emphasizes the significance of the human-animal bond and the therapeutic benefits of animals. Moose's role as a therapy dog showcases the positive impact that animals can have on individuals' lives, including those with disabilities. The book illustrates the profound connection between Zara and Moose, highlighting the power of companionship and unconditional love in overcoming challenges and making a difference in the world. Overall, *Hello Goodbye Dog* beautifully intertwines disability awareness and a heartfelt message of acceptance. It teaches children the importance of embracing differences, finding

alternative means of communication, and creating inclusive spaces for all. Through its engaging story and relatable characters, the book fosters empathy, understanding, and a sense of compassion in young readers, paving the way for a more inclusive and accepting society.

Pets play a significant role in the lives of people with disabilities, providing various physical, emotional, and social benefits. Here are some ways in which pets can positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities: Pets offer unconditional love, companionship, and emotional support. They can help alleviate feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety that individuals with disabilities may experience. The presence of a pet can provide comfort and a sense of security. Pets can be constant companions, offering consistent and reliable companionship to individuals with disabilities. They provide a source of social interaction and help combat feelings of isolation. Pets can be particularly beneficial for those who may have limited social interactions due to their disability.

Interacting with pets has been shown to reduce stress levels and promote relaxation. For individuals with disabilities who may face daily challenges, having a pet can provide a calming and soothing effect. Service animals, such as guide dogs for individuals with visual impairments or assistance dogs for individuals with mobility limitations, are specifically trained to perform tasks that enhance independence. These animals can assist with daily activities like retrieving items, opening doors, turning on lights, or providing stability and balance. Having a pet often requires regular exercise and physical activity. For individuals with disabilities, this can be particularly beneficial in promoting a more active lifestyle. Walking a dog, playing with a cat, or engaging in other physical activities with a pet can help improve mobility, strength, and overall physical health.

Pets can serve as social catalysts, facilitating social interactions and enhancing communication skills. They can act as conversation starters and help individuals with disabilities initiate conversations or interact with others. This can be especially valuable for individuals who may struggle with social interactions due to their disability. Having another living being to care for can boost self-esteem, foster a routine, and provide a sense of accomplishment. This responsibility can contribute to the overall well-being and personal growth of the individual. It's important to note that the

specific benefits of having a pet may vary depending on the type of disability and the individual's unique circumstances. Additionally, it's crucial to consider factors such as the person's abilities, resources, and the suitability of the pet to their specific needs when considering a pet for someone with a disability.

The conclusion of the book emphasises the value of friendship and the part that animals may play in helping individuals with disabilities feel more emotionally supported. As a result of the adoption of a second dog by Zara's family, Moose now has a companion while Zara is abroad. This story serves as a reminder of the importance of companionship and how it can enhance the quality of life for those who are disabled. In conclusion, Hello Goodbye Dog's dialogue is a crucial component that contributes to the story's capacity to spread its message of disability understanding and awareness ("Hello Goodbye Dog by MariaGianferrari, Illustrated by Patrice Barton"). It illustrates how crucial it is to communicate with, empathise with, and accept persons who have difficulties.

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## CHAPTER 9

# THE MOVEMENT OF THE CONQUERED: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MYTHOLOGY AND SYMBOLS IN SILKO'S ALMANAC OF THE DEAD

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### ABSTRACT

Literature of borders is an emerging genre that recognizes the existence of borders as much more than mere material constructs of the geopolitical nature. As Georg Simmel wrote, "the border is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that takes a spatial form". They represent ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences. Countries are becoming increasingly determined about protecting their borders. The causes of border conflicts vary according to the history of the countries involved. From centuries old religious and cultural conflicts to modern day expansionist agendas, world is riddled with differences and this has evidently resulted in strained relationships and wars of various degrees. This chaos usually leads to displacement of people who are literally and figuratively living at the fringes of the society. Leslie Marmon Silko in her novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, narrates the displacement and fragmentation of Native Americans as the result of colonialism and establishment of borders. Through the use of a fictionalized Almanac, a pre-colonial artifact which was very important to Mayan tribes, Silko brings together a story of indigenous unity that leads to a powerful movement by the landless refugees and native people. This paper is a detailed investigation into the indigenous myths and symbols employed by Silko and how they transcend and intermingle with present day borders and history.

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead*, which she calls, "my 763-page indictment for five hundred years of theft, murder, pillage, and

rape" (Horovitz 48) is a metanarrative set amid rising geopolitical tensions between the 'destroyer' and the natives; a non-traditional novel haunted by the echoes of the Native American past and apocalyptic prophecies for the future, concealed in an ancient mysterious Mayan 'Almanac' – an oracle of impending doom. The novel which is spread across the United States, Mexico and Africa, weaves together interlinking stories of deception, conflicting agendas, promiscuity, and homosexuality, fuelled by an approaching revolution to "reclaim the land" of the natives against the resistance from the white Americans whose unreasonable disgust for the natives is seen in the way they are described as "swarms of brown and yellow human larvae" (Olmsted 464). In an interview with Silko for *The New Yorker*, Ibrahim writes that, The book's interlinking stories extend across time and geography, but it has a concentrated fury, aimed at ongoing efforts by Europeans and their descendants to wipe out the people native to the Americas. (2023)

For aficionados of Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* came as a surprise with its complex and unrelenting structure sprawled over six parts, each considered as a book. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn in *Why I can't Read Wallace Stegner and other Essays* (1997) compares Silko to contemporary Indian writers like Michael Dorris, James, Welch, Louise Erdrich and N. Scott Momaday in their tendency to detach their stories from nationalist concerns. She says that Silko "may have moved away from nationalist concerns in order to gain the interest of mainstream readers" but later praises *Almanac of the Dead* for its "nationalist approach to historical events". Even though it fails in this approach at the end, the novel succeeds in envisioning pan-Indian connections at the risk of seeming offensive to white nationalists who insist upon the accuracy of their own historical narratives. Throughout the novel, the myth of the Mayan Almanac together with native cultural symbols such as the Snake Stone and spirit macaws, maintains an upper hand in steering the course of the events, thereby effectively proving the triumph of the ancient over the modern. This paper is an investigation into these symbols and myths; their hands in shaping the events of the novel, studied in a multi-cultural context, keeping in mind their relevance in the contemporary setting.

The most dominant myth that has been employed in the novel is that of the Almanac, which also acts as a symbol connecting the past and the present. The novel begins with Grandmother Yeome, a Native American with psychic abilities entrusting the mysterious Almanac in the hands of the twin sisters, Leta and Zeta. They are left with the purpose of transcribing the Almanac that carries secrets that are answers to many of life's mysteries. The book has an illustration of a 'Five Hundred Year Map' at its beginning and at the end, which depicts the US-Mexico borderlands along with details of the characters. There is a brief description of the map on the top left corner which says, "Through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americas the Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives." (Silko 18) The presence of the map at the opening and at the end of the book provides a sense of spiral thinking. It is almost as if the author is communicating the nature of the story to the readers and it gets proven to be true at the culmination of the story, where the readers realize that the beginning is in the end.

Historically speaking, Almanacs have been around for centuries, the earliest one being found in the Near East around the middle of the second millennium BC. True to its name, derived from Greek, an Almanac is a calendar that contains weather forecasts, farmer's planting dates, and information on tides; celestial predictions and horoscopes. The Mayans preserved their almanacs as glyphs carved into stone. These almanacs have many counterparts in other cultures, the most notable one being the 'Panchangam' in Hindu culture. Although the style of presentation varies, their purpose is almost identical. Stollznow in her article sums up the historical importance of Almanacs.

Before the days of modern meteorology, people relied on almanacs for their weather forecasts. Various versions of almanacs have been in existence since Babylonian times, when astronomers produced tables to predict planetary phenomena. A one-time apothecary, Nostradamus found his fortune when he began writing almanacs, which included astrological prophecies, weather forecasts, and political predictions. He began writing one or more almanacs annually, compiling thousands of predictions. The

success of these almanacs prompted him to pen his best-known book, *The Prophecies*. (2017)

The relevance of almanacs has definitely faded through the ages but has not completely become a victim of oblivion. This is evident in the occasional threads of discussion that rise regarding predictions of Nostradamus and Baba Vanga. Silko uses the prophetic potentials of the almanac to give an apocalyptic tone to her novel. Contrary to Silko, her characters, especially Leta, either misuses or undermines the power of the almanac. Leta, in what she describes as her 'coyote years', uses the almanac along with her psychic powers, for fame and money and becomes a celebrity psychic. She allows herself to be manipulated and conjures up evil spells and thereby strays away from her real purpose. Thus, the almanac becomes a symbol for temptation. It is this same temptation that leads the old hunchback to kill one of the four girls who were entrusted with the almanac in the old days. The ability of the almanac to create temptations of desire and power, reminds one of Tolkien's infamous "ring of power" and Rowling's "horcruxes". Both artifacts had the ability to possess its carriers and develop unhealthy obsession and violent appetites. Just like the ring of power and the horcruxes that carried souls of Sauron and Voldemort respectively, the almanac carries the spirits of the ancestors. This element of the story, according to Silko was not added merely to bring Magical realism but to incorporate her own experiences with spirits, who, as Silko claims in an interview, inspired her to write the *Almanac of the Dead*. She tells Laura Coltelli in 1993, "In Almanac, I go farther with my thinking about the influence of spirit beings as well as animal beings" (Arnold 4). Her travels to Germany and Europe brought her to the realization of her ancestry and in her interview to Arnold she says,

It was the Almanac where I realized that there are these spirit entities. Time means nothing to them. And that you can have a kind of relationship with them. They rode me pretty hard in *Almanac of the Dead*. But then I learned not to be afraid of them, to go ahead and trust them...I was meant to go there. And the spirits were waiting there, probably called around by the Almanac. But by then, I was also able to see fully the whole of it, that

there was so much positive energy. And the old spirits that made me write the Almanac, they meant well (Arnold 5)

Silko has employed the motif of spirit entities in the form of ‘spirit macaws’, similar to Seven Macaws of Popol Vuh. For the Mayans, the Seven Macaws represented ‘The Big Dipper’ or ‘Ursa Major’ constellation. Seven Macaws tail feathers are believed to be the handle of the dipper and its body represents the ladle portion of the constellation. In Almanac, the spirit macaws are analogous to the spirits that led Silko to write the novel and Silko portrays her own experience through the continuous warnings the macaws give the Hero Twins and Tacho of the times to come. What is eerie about Silko’s situation is how the events of the novel became a precursor to real time events. She spent ten years writing the novel, which describes the border between the United States and Mexico, the black market in drugs and arms and ecological catastrophe. The portrayal of reckless development and mass migration through Sonora are scenes that have become increasingly pertinent today. Three years after the book was published, the Zapatista uprising took place in 1994, which was mysteriously parallel to the story line in the novel concerning a group of Marxist guerillas in Southern Mexico. In her interview with the New Yorker, Silko describes how when writing the novel she unknowingly chose those locations which became grounds of revolution in the real world. She says,

I was writing “Almanac of the Dead,” I had to choose a location for the uprising of the tribal people in Mexico. I had a big map of Mexico. I saw that, down in Chiapas, there’s a city named Tuxtla Gutiérrez. I saw that the first part, “*Tuxtla*,” comes from an Indian word, I believe, and “Gutiérrez” was European, and I chose the mountains outside Tuxtla Gutiérrez for the location of my rebels. And that’s exactly where Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas<sup>3</sup> were located. When the uprising happened, I was approached, and people that had read “Almanac” asked if I had some kind of inside information or if I was connected. Absolutely not. (Ibrahim 2023)

The removal of the Columbus statue, in Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City in October 2020 runs parallel to Silko’s prophecy of trans-American protest against “racial violence and indigenous dispossession”. The

sections “Death-eye Dog” and ‘Fire- Eye Macaw’ are a remnant of the present day issue of global warming and its subsequent consequences. Silko describes the sun as burning “with a deadly light... and the heat of this burning eye looking down on all the wretched humans and plants and animals had caused the earth to speed up too-the way the heat makes turtle shiver in last frenzy of futile effort to reach shade” (Silko 257) This description is not far from reality. This shows that Silko ‘s work illustrates an indigenous understanding of history as constantly and simultaneously shaping our present and future, making it both timely and prophetic. Silko's vocation as a storyteller stems from her ancestral origins in the Laguna Pueblo's oral tradition, but she also looks for conceptual links among the tribal philosophies of the Americas, where time is frequently seen to be nonlinear. (Ibrahim, 2023). It is yet to be determined whether Silko had any inkling of the events that were to happen in reality or she was forced by the spirit entities to predict the future through her novel. In both scenarios, it can be concluded that, Silko, intentionally or unintentionally, created an almanac. Aside from its plot, the novel's structure with fragmentary scenes, dreams, maps, tales, lists and prophecies resemble the ancient Mayan almanac. The novel itself becomes an almanac in the end.

Silko in her interview with Perry reveals that her intention as a writer was primarily to reawaken the indigenous spirit and inspire the natives to go deep into their own history. Sterling, a character in the *Almanac* struggles with his identity as a native. He is disappointed in the remaining Indians for forgetting their tribes and ancestors' world and is himself disillusioned about his ancestry. Silko uses Sterling to represent the reawakening of the native spirit and the image of the “stone snake’ to fuel his understanding of the role of his ancestral history in the events that will unfold. The stone snake represents Damballah, the African god, who lives in the mountain and is the central spiritual figure in the book. When he returns to Pueblo people, Sterling starts appreciating the old beliefs. He becomes a symbol of reawakening when he understands that the Giant Serpent has returned.

Sterling knew why the giant snake had returned now; he knew what the snake’s message was to the people. The snake was looking South, in the

direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come (Silko 763)

Although, the novel ends before the revolution, ‘the great change’ mentioned at the beginning of each part is inevitable. This takes us back to the realization that the beginning is in the end. Cortland states in his review that...“the final product of Silko recalls generally the structure and the spread of Dos Passos’s USA with its myriad of characters and its mosaic of sites, people, and historic events. Reading it offers a challenge not only to fiction readers, but especially to Silko aficionados” (Cortland, 56) But for African American writers and other contemporary writers who have been victims of slave trade and displacement as a result of white supremacy, this novel is significantly relatable. The great African American writer, Toni Morrison wrote of Almanac that she can’t stress enough how ecstatic she is to have this book in the world. Silko presents a bleak vision of corruption, disarray and hopelessness in America and the apparent advent of a local New World Order. Even though it proves to be laborious to follow sometimes, the story is wonderful and carries fine details that appreciate the centuries old Native American culture and highlights the struggle of the indigenous Diaspora of America.

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# CHAPTER 10

## EMBRACING THE PLURALITY OF WOMEN'S VOICES: CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND EMPOWERING EQUALITY

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper explores the significance of embracing the plurality of women's voices as a means to celebrate diversity and empower equality. It highlights the importance of recognizing and amplifying the diverse experiences, perspectives, and struggles of women across various social, cultural, and geographical contexts. By doing so, it seeks to challenge traditional and narrow notions of womanhood, promoting inclusivity and fostering a more equitable society.

It emphasizes the need to move beyond a singular, homogenous representation of women and instead acknowledge and celebrate their multifaceted identities. This involves acknowledging and respecting differences based on factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and ability.

It examines how literature, art, and media can provide platforms for marginalized voices, enabling them to share their experiences, challenge stereotypes, and shape collective understanding. By recognizing and embracing diverse women's voices, society can move towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of gender equality.

The paper also delves into the intersectionality of women's experiences, emphasizing the interconnected nature of gender with other social

identities. It explores how issues such as racism, economic disparities, and discrimination based on sexual orientation intersect with gender to shape unique challenges faced by women. Recognizing these intersections is crucial to address the complexities of inequality and work towards meaningful and lasting change.

In today's rapidly changing world, the voices of women have gained unprecedented prominence. Women from all walks of life, representing diverse cultural, social, economic, and political backgrounds, are stepping forward to share their stories, perspectives, and experiences. This emergence of a plurality of women's voices is an empowering and transformative phenomenon that challenges traditional narratives, breaks down stereotypes, and paves the way for a more inclusive and equal society.

The presence of a single narrative for women has long overshadowed the rich diversity within the female experience. The plurality of women's voices ensures that multiple stories are told, dispelling the notion of a single "universal" woman's experience. Acknowledging this diversity is essential for creating a comprehensive understanding of women's lives and dismantling stereotypes that limit their opportunities.

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of recognizing and embracing the plurality of women's voices. For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality, highlighting how women's experiences are shaped by the intersection of various identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and ability (Crenshaw, 1989). This framework challenges the idea of a monolithic woman's experience and underscores the need to acknowledge and amplify diverse voices.

**B. Intersectionality and Amplifying Marginalized Voices:** Intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding and addressing the experiences of marginalized women. By recognizing the interconnected nature of different forms of oppression, we can amplify the voices of women who are often marginalized and silenced. Patricia Hill Collins, in her book "Black Feminist Thought," explores the importance of intersectionality in

understanding the experiences of Black women and their contributions to feminist theory and activism (Collins, 2000).

Plurality enables the amplification of marginalized voices and fosters a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by different groups of women. This understanding is essential in driving social change and promoting equality. For instance, the SayHerName movement, initiated by the African American Policy Forum, aims to raise awareness about the violence experienced by Black women, highlighting the need to address the intersectional dimensions of their experiences (AAPF, n.d.).

Plurality allows women to reclaim their narratives and share their personal experiences. Through storytelling, women can challenge societal norms, inspire others, and foster a sense of solidarity. Digital platforms have played a significant role in providing spaces for women to share their stories. For example, the MeToo movement, which gained momentum on social media, empowered women to speak out about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault, emphasizing the power of personal narratives in driving social change (Burke, 2017).

Research has shown that storytelling and sharing personal experiences can lead to empowerment and community building. In her book "Testimonies and Secrets: The Storytelling of Women's Lives," Janet Finch explores the transformative potential of personal narratives in women's lives (Finch, 1990). By sharing their stories, women can challenge dominant narratives, combat stigmatization, and inspire others to find their voices.

The plurality of women's voices challenges narrow beauty ideals by embracing diverse representations of beauty. Body positivity movements, disability activism, and inclusive fashion campaigns demonstrate the power of women speaking out against restrictive beauty standards. This plurality not only boosts self-esteem and acceptance but also pushes society to redefine beauty on more inclusive terms.

Research has indicated the detrimental effects of traditional beauty standards on women's well-being. In her book "The Beauty Myth," Naomi Wolf explores how beauty standards have been used as a tool to maintain women's subordination and limit their opportunities (Wolf, 1991). By

embracing the plurality of women's voices, we can challenge these damaging norms and create space for diverse representations of beauty.

The rise of women's political participation is driven by a plurality of voices demanding equal representation in decision-making processes. Women's collective voices have influenced policies on reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and workplace equality. By advocating for diverse perspectives, women are reshaping political landscapes and challenging the status quo.

Research conducted by Mona Lena Krook and Sarah Childs in their book "Women, Gender, and Politics: A Reader" highlights the transformative power of women's political participation (Krook & Childs, 2010). The inclusion of diverse women's voices in politics is crucial for addressing the unique concerns and needs of different communities and promoting gender equality in policy-making processes.

Plurality in women's voices is crucial for addressing economic disparities. Women entrepreneurs, business leaders, and advocates are speaking up about gender pay gaps, workplace discrimination, and barriers to career advancement. By highlighting these issues, they drive efforts towards gender equality in the workforce and pave the way for economic empowerment.

Studies have consistently shown the importance of gender diversity in the corporate world. Research by Catalyst, a global nonprofit focused on advancing women in the workplace, has found that companies with more women in leadership positions tend to outperform those with less gender diversity (Catalyst, 2019). The plurality of women's voices in the business world is crucial for challenging discriminatory practices and advocating for inclusive policies.

A plurality of women's voices provides an array of role models for aspiring individuals. By sharing their achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, successful women inspire and mentor others, helping to break down barriers and empower future generations. This mentorship contributes to a more inclusive and supportive environment for women across various fields.

Research on the importance of role models and mentorship has demonstrated their positive impact on women's career development and aspirations. A study by Faye Crosby and colleagues found that exposure to successful female role models increased women's self-efficacy and aspirations for leadership positions (Crosby et al., 2007). By celebrating the plurality of women's voices, we can foster mentorship opportunities and provide a source of inspiration for women and girls.

Women's diverse voices have a profound impact on arts, literature, music, and other forms of cultural expression. Through storytelling, poetry, visual arts, and performances, women challenge norms, celebrate their identities, and promote social change. These creative expressions create spaces for dialogue, empathy, and understanding, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and diverse society.

Numerous feminist scholars and activists have explored the cultural impact of women's voices. For instance, bell hooks, in her book "Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black," highlights the transformative potential of women's voices in challenging systems of oppression and imagining alternative futures (hooks, 1989). By embracing the plurality of women's voices in artistic expression, we can challenge dominant narratives, disrupt stereotypes, and promote social justice.

The plurality of women's voices transcends geographical boundaries, promoting international solidarity. Movements like #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and the Women's March have demonstrated the power of collective voices in addressing gender inequality and violence against women on a global scale. Women from different countries and cultures join forces to amplify their demands for justice, safety, and equality.

Scholars have examined the impact of global feminist movements in fostering solidarity and driving social change. In her book "Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity," Chandra Talpade Mohanty explores the interconnectedness of feminist struggles worldwide and emphasizes the importance of global solidarity in addressing gender oppression (Mohanty, 2003). By recognizing and celebrating the plurality of women's voices globally, we can build alliances and work collectively towards a more just and equal world.

The plurality of women's voices is a powerful force that reshapes narratives, challenges stereotypes, and empowers individuals and communities. By embracing diversity, intersectionality, and personal narratives, we can break down barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable society. Women's voices, regardless of their backgrounds or experiences, are crucial in shaping policies, promoting social change, and inspiring future generations. It is essential to celebrate and amplify these voices, providing platforms and opportunities for women to be heard, valued, and supported. Through collaboration, empathy, and recognition of the interconnectedness of women's experiences, we can continue to move towards a world where every woman's voice is acknowledged and respected.

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# CHAPTER 11

## EXPERIENCE OF A DALIT ACADEMICIAN: RAMIFICATIONS OF FEUDALISM, DEFINING AND REDEFINING THE MILIEU OF ACADEMY IN

<sup>1</sup>*M. Kunhaman's Dissent*,<sup>2</sup>*Kiran Viswanathan*,<sup>3</sup>**Dr. Boopathi. P**

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### ABSTRACT

*In the current socio-political context, the necessity of education for the lower class is a topic that needs to be discussed. The experiences of Kunhaman, who belongs to the Dalit community and emerged in the academic field after fighting against his adverse circumstances and understanding the importance of education, are relevant and admirable in the current scenario. Kunhaman would be probably the first Dalit Malayali to write about Dalits from the field of academy.*

*The major themes highlighted in this paper are various hindrances face by the Dalit community and how illiteracy and lack of education did not give space to Dalit to raise their voice against the mainstream, how the power passed on from Brahmanical caste to the backward class (Upper caste). Through the experience of an Academician, this paper discusses the impact of feudalism on Dalits across India, the socio-political and economic context which did not favour the upliftment of them and the role of education in shaping the identity of Dalits in the modern society. This paper gives light to the Dalit movement happened in Kerala, and the ramifications of feudalism and other political contexts exist not only in Kerala but also in other states in India in general.*

### KEYWORDS

Dalit Education, Representation, Language, Emancipation, Kerala Dalit History.

This paper assesses whether education should be defined in terms of the injustice done to Dalits by the upper castes using their hegemonic power or in denigration of educated Dalits in terms of seeing education as transcending caste and religion. Secondly, it is necessary to examine how the Dalits remained as Dalits as a consequence of feudalism, as Kunhaman claims in his memoir. As stated in the Dalit Panther Manifesto, the reason why Dalits are not given land as part of land distribution is also the reason for the oppression of Dalits. This paper discusses how Dalits even after received education did not recognize by the community at large. This paper discusses how the caste hegemony, power and current political scenario do not allow the educated Dalits to be grown. They do not allow the Dalits to grow and flourish. This is the point where education should be redefined in the new social milieu. To discuss about ramifications of feudalism, Dalit representation, Dalit education it is important to discuss the Kerala Dalit history. This paper intends to integrate Kerala Dalit history with ramifications of feudalism, Dalit education and representation through the experiences of the Dalit academician from Kerala, Kunhaman and other people.

When Marxism was revised in India, the Marxists did not leave their caste aside. The feudalism endured through their surnames. What is the reason why the communist party formed in 1925 did not deliberately bring a Dalit to the position of leader? The communist leaders in India were remnants of feudalism and Marxism is a class-based ideology. “They look upon caste as a superstructure phenomenon” (Kunhaman 90). Jagjivan ram became the deputy prime minister during the Congress rule. It goes without saying that in any era, a person belonging to the Dalit community to rise to a high position in politics is only a part of the agenda of today’s politics.

“Jagjivan Ram was even made a Deputy prime Minister. The objective was to curb Ambedkar through this move, but they nevertheless did it. Congress and BJP have lifted up individuals in this manner. However, the communist parties which claim ownership of us, have not done this. The reason – it is the bourgeois caste leadership that controls them” (Kunhaman 89).

Jotiba Phule and Savithri Phule were the first Indian couple to play a major role in providing education to Dalits. Despite the efforts of both, the Dalits did not get the education they needed, and also the compulsory education mandated by the Indian constitution. Kunhaman says that he is in a position to think and say this because he has been able to rise academically. However, even famous campuses in India do not have a desirable environment for Dalits. An example of that is suicide of Rohit Vemula in 2016. Oppression changes only in its form, be it feudalism, autocracy or otherwise.

Through Kunhaman's experience, we can see how the upper caste criticise and look down on the education he receives:

"I had secured First Class for Pre-Degree. When it came to be known that the Pre-degree results were out, the first question I was asked by our landlord's daughter, who herself was a teacher, was, 'which subjects have you failed in?'. Not whether I had passed. This was all in an effort to discourage us. The landlord's family did not like my going to college. Thereafter, I stopped visiting that house" (Kunhaman 25).

"Oye, I knew all along that you would be the one to get the first Rank'. 'How so?' I queried. 'The reason being, you're a donkey. The First Rank is meant for donkeys. Seeing you slogging away like a donkey, I had concluded long back that you would secure the top rank'" (Kunhaman 27).

These are examples of caste supremacy in the feudal system where education was denied to Dalits and educated Dalits were not accepted. Thinking that all his academic certificates are a waste. Kunhaman tries to burn them all, but his classmate V. Krishnan stops him. Education defines one's personality not caste. Moreover, the life of such Dalits should be an inspiration to the upcoming generation.

"O Mash! These Certificates do not come handy for me even for getting a cup of tea. I must burn them'. 'Mash, what stupidity is this? These are record that ought to remain as inspiration to the next generation'" (Kunhaman 29).

Due to feudalism, illiteracy, poverty, lack of self-confidence etc. are the only asset possessed by Dalits. If the environment is favourable, let it be

said that they have received education, but the truth is that Dalits do not have much chance of growth beyond economic independence. Because the problems of Dalits are not a economical issue. It is a social stigma associated with the mainstream. This was the case with Ambedkar as well. It is not the lack of education but the lack of social recognition. That is why the Dalits have to remain Dalits forever.

The Kerala Land reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 led to the collapse of feudalism. Land was transferred from the Brahmins to the lower castes (now upper castes). There has been no change in the condition of Dalits. It is evident from the Dalit Panther Manifesto that they criticise the government in power during those days for not implementing Land Reforms in favour of Dalits. However, Kunhaman in his memoir, criticises the communist party for not allowing Dalits to demand land. He argues that communist party silences the Dalits as well as other people. On the other hand, Congress party has a liberal approach, hence they welcomed Ambedkar though they opposed his ideologies.

“The bourgeois Communist Party will not allow the Dalits to demand the land...they will not react if the issue of land reforms, or of the Dalit-Adivasi lands being alienated through the encroachment by others, is raised”. “Congress is an exception to this. Therefore, they accepted Ambedkar even when he was not liked” (Kunhaman 77).

The contorted land reform happened in Kerala is substantiated with the distribution of land to Adivasis in Kerala. According to the law introduced by Indira Gandhi during 1975 the lost land can be redeemed by the tribal group, which in effect, not implemented. The land reform did not favour both tribals as well as Dalits across India.

As far as the Kerala Dalit movement is concerned, Marxism was revised by the leftist thinkers belonging to the SEEDIAN (Socially, Economically, Educationally Depressed Indian Ancient Natives) group. They studied Marxism and Ambedkarism and tried to analyse Dalit issues in Kerala, or India in general. Kunhaman claims that without Seedian Manifesto history of Kerala is incomplete.

“The toiling population has alone has a history (Seedian manifesto). If that is so, the real history of Kerala has still not been written. The moving

forces behind the social transformation process have as yet not been revealed. The existing Kerala history is not that of those who produced the social product; on the contrary, it is that of those who shared the social surplus” (Kunhaman 128).

The existing social scenario is entirely different from the old one. The Dalits who claimed for basic human rights are now demanding for equal rights despite of the caste system. However, this is not a generalised social context. It differs from region to region. Kerala as an advanced and progressive state in many aspects, may stand out a little from other states. More importantly, the land would not be distributed to Dalits by the backward class (upper caste). Perhaps the communist party will be able to bring the land distribution from the backward class to the Dalits. However, today’s politics remain as mere vote banks, and such a economic plan to integrate the downtrodden cannot be expected from the government. In other words, the career politics cannot cater the needs of any kind of marginalised and downtrodden community. Apart from all this, the feudal people then and now have conditioned the lower castes and the downtrodden to remain under their feet, take slave labour as well as to act as scavengers. It must be that inferiority that deters many from raising their voice even today.

Things like division of labour, control of wealth etc. are related to super structure in western countries whereas in India it is a part of basic necessity in India. To be more specific, here all this is decided on the basis of caste (even though some changes have come in the modern world). But the struggle for covering the upper portion of the body (women) in Kerala was a successful struggle in adopting Marxism. It was both a class and caste struggle in Kerala.

“With the exception of a few like Rosa Luxemburg in her The Accumulation of Capital/1913, it was an approach of neglecting the non-class struggles that Marxists later followed” (Kunhaman 173).

Education of Dalits, feudalism, Dalits then and now are all issues that come under one umbrella. The demands of the downtrodden have evolved from demanding basic conditions and rights to equality and freedom. However, the subtle workings of caste may not lead to other problems

tomorrow. So, caste is something cannot be easily removed. Its strengths vary from region to region. In today's socio-political scenario, we cannot hope that caste will disappear. Its graph may be reduced in one region over the other but it is a deep-rooted scourge spread all over India. Feudalism and governance are changing and caste problems are enduring.

In conclusion, it was seen that the education of Dalits is not an easy task in terms of practise. Now and then, educated Dalits are not seen as worth by the upper caste. The paper discussed the hindrances of Dalit education and upliftment, how feudalism takes it different shapes over the period of time. Both congress and communist party did not try to uplift the downtrodden and many communist leaders of Kerala had their upper caste surnames which reflected in their ideologies. The reinterpretation of Marxism in India was a failure. The Kerala history never touched the history of Dalits which is insufficient to talk about the real history of Kerala, or any other states for that matter. The present landowning castes benefitted the land reform and squandered Dalits when land was distributed under land reform bill. The leftist ideology never talked about Dalit issue and it will continue to be the same. However, Kunhaman claims that only communist government can save Dalits despite of its class based western ideologies. Today, the division among labourers and other issues have undergone sea changes, however, it would not be sufficient to eradicate the problems of Dalits and questions of uncertainty about their future.

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## CHAPTER 12

# TO BE OR NOT TO BE LIKE A CARTOON PROTAGONIST: THE DILEMMA OF CHILD SOCIALIZATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Imitating some bizarre actions or famous dialogues of well-known cartoon protagonists is a hobby of many children across different generations. The aim of this paper is to explore the dilemma faced by children when trying to reconcile their desire to emulate the heroic behaviour of cartoon characters, specifically the protagonist, with the need to fit in with their peers in real life. Drawing on research from psychology and media studies, we will examine how cartoon characters are constructed as powerful role models for children, and how this can create a tension between the expectations of the fictional world and the demands of the real world. We will also discuss the potential risks and benefits of this phenomenon, including the impact on children's self-esteem, socialization, and ability to navigate complex social situations. Ultimately, we argue that a nuanced understanding of the relationship between children and cartoon characters can help educators and parents support children in developing a healthy sense of self and social identity.*

**Keywords:** *Imitation, Group Psychology, Role Models, Identity Crisis, Dilemma*

### INTRODUCTION

A child can be related to a white paper that is yet to be drawn. It can turn out to be a good piece of art or an entire mess. Children take in whatever they are exposed to and there is a less scope of debate on the fact that children are heavily exposed to cartoons. The cartoon scene is created

using delightful characters. Light Colour is used to attract children's aspirations to watch cartoons. (1) The advancement in technology has made it easy for the children to access the imaginary world of cartoons. The messages these cartoons spread is often positive and mostly follow a pattern which glorifies the actions, efforts, and words of the protagonist. Children can confuse themselves with cartoons and the characters in it with their own true lives. (2)

An animated cartoon can be defined as a movie or television show, usually intended for children, created from static drawings, models, or objects posed in a series of incremental movements that are then rapidly sequenced to give the illusion of lifelike motion. According to the Cambridge Advance leaners Dictionary, the meaning of the cartoon is strong, heavy paper of pasteboard form the Italian word "cartone" and also the Dutch word "karton".(3) First cartoons were up to fifteen minutes, drawn and painted by hand pantomime lasting. Even then, could be applied sound, synchronized with the image. Raynaud also created cartoons, where in production were used photos and drawings. Later on, others made the contribution to the development of animators, creating paintings in a variety of genres and techniques. Active development of animation started at the beginnings of 20th century. In one moment, several independent people separate to each other started to create animation. Walt Disney was the first who used sound in animation. He was pioneer who used colour in animation. One of the most reasonable Disney's inventions was animation stand which helped to get to receive the effects of parallax, elongated shapes of figures, the depth and fuzziness. At this studio was created many famous characters Mickey Mouse, Pluto, Goofy etc. Walt Disney Production and some other great cartoons such as Popeye, Tom & Jerry, Bugs Bunny, etc. caught a great deal of viewership and attention in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Commercial successes of animators spread all over the world and inspires people to open animation studios.

Since then, the cartoon industry grew exponentially and grabbed a worldwide view. These Children's cartoons have long been a source of entertainment and inspiration, capturing young minds with colourful characters and thrilling narratives. However, beneath the surface of these animated worlds, lies a potential dilemma. This article delves into the

wrong message conveyed by dominant protagonists in cartoons such as Chhota Bheem, Beyblade, and Power Rangers, examining their influence on children's group psychology. Drawing upon insights from literary theory, we aim to shed light on the implications of these narratives and their effects on the collective psyche of young viewers.

## **THE POWER OF DOMINANT PROTAGONISTS**

Dominant protagonists in cartoons often possess extraordinary abilities, superior strength, and unwavering confidence. While these traits may initially seem empowering, they inadvertently propagate a skewed perception of power dynamics and individualism, undermining the importance of collaboration and diversity within a group. By analysing characters like Bheem (Chhota Bheem), Gingka (Beyblade series), and Jason (Power Rangers), we explore how their dominance can impact children's understanding of group dynamics and hinder the development of essential social skills. The narratives of these works are scripted in such a way that these protagonists come top over the antagonists.

Chhota Bheem is a young boy who lives in an imaginary village in India called Dholakpur. He has some friends viz. Raju, Chutki, Jaggu (a speaking monkey) and Kalia, Dholu, and Bholu are their rivals. Chhota Bheem is portrayed as a heroic figure who always saves his village and friends from mighty villains. In the case of Beyblade Metal Fusion series, we can see that Gingka is the young protagonist who travels along with his friends; Masamune, Madoka, Kenta, Yuki across the world and fight in different Beyblade tournaments. A Beyblade is a metallic version of a spinning top which is launched using a launcher. The strongest Beyblade in whole series belongs to Gingka, which is known as Pegasus. Even though this Beyblade loses one or two games, it rises up after those defeats and Gingka always makes his team win the games. The whole story about the Power Rangers on the other hand, let it be any of their series, is focused on the red power ranger who is the main character among all the power rangers. All power rangers team up to fight the evils that try to destroy the world, but the protagonist of these series coordinates all their attacks and mainly puts himself on the line.

From the description of these cartoons and their protagonists we can derive at one of their common attributes, success. No matter how strong the villains are, the protagonists always defeat them, even when some of their friends have failed miserably.

## **UNMASKING THE PROTAGONIST**

The power of dominant protagonists in children's cartoons cannot be underestimated. These characters are often portrayed as exceptional individuals possessing extraordinary abilities, unwavering confidence, and superior strength. They become the epitome of heroism and serve as role models for young viewers. At first glance, these qualities may seem empowering, as children are inspired to believe in their own potential for greatness.

However, the portrayal of dominant protagonists inadvertently sends a wrong message about power dynamics and the importance of individualism. The emphasis on these characters' personal abilities and achievements overshadows the significance of collaboration, cooperation, and the diverse skills that different individuals bring to a group. This can create a distorted perception of success, where individual prowess is prioritized over collective effort.

For instance, in cartoons like Chhota Bheem, the titular character's unmatched strength and combat skills are glorified, but the importance of teamwork and inclusivity within a group is often overlooked. Children may be influenced to believe that one individual's dominance is enough to overcome any obstacle, diminishing the value of cooperation and the power of diverse perspectives and abilities within a group dynamic.

Similarly, in Beyblade, the focus on individual battles and the portrayal of champions as solitary figures engenders a culture of competition rather than collaboration. Children may internalize the idea that winning at any cost is paramount, often neglecting the benefits of cooperation, shared decision-making, and collective problem-solving.

Power Rangers, despite promoting teamwork, sometimes reinforces the dominance of the Red Ranger as the primary leader. This can inadvertently overshadow the significance of shared decision-making and

equal contributions from all team members. The hierarchical structure within the group can perpetuate power imbalances and undermine the democratic spirit of collective action.

In essence, the power of dominant protagonists in children's cartoons lies in their ability to captivate and inspire young viewers. However, it is essential to critically examine the unintended consequences of these portrayals. By emphasizing the individualistic achievements of these characters, cartoons may inadvertently undermine the value of collaboration, empathy, and the collective decision-making process. Recognizing this influence is crucial for parents, educators, and content creators to ensure a more balanced representation of group dynamics and foster the development of essential social skills among children.

## **THE IMPACT OF CHHOTA BHEEM, BEYBLADE, AND POWER RANGERS ON GROUP PSYCHOLOGY**

Chhota Bheem:

Chhota Bheem, with its dominant protagonist, can impact children's group psychology by influencing their perceptions of power dynamics within a group. The emphasis on Bheem's individual strength and combat skills may lead children to believe that dominance and personal abilities are the primary factors for success within a group. This can disrupt the delicate balance of power, cooperation, and collective decision-making that is crucial for healthy group dynamics.

Beyblade:

In Beyblade, the focus on individual battles and the portrayal of champions as solitary figures can affect children's group psychology by promoting competition over collaboration. The intense focus on individual achievement may lead children to prioritize personal success rather than valuing cooperation and the collective effort required for effective group dynamics. This can hinder their ability to work together harmoniously and diminish their understanding of the benefits of collaboration and shared decision-making.

## Power Rangers:

Power Rangers, with its team of superheroes, presents an opportunity to explore the theory of group psychology. While teamwork is emphasized, the dominance of the Red Ranger as the primary leader can impact children's perceptions of leadership within a group. This may contribute to hierarchical structures and power imbalances, potentially undermining the democratic spirit of collective action and decision-making. Children may internalize the idea that one individual's dominance is more important than the equal contributions of all team members.

By examining these cartoons through the lens of group psychology, we can better understand how the dominant protagonists influence children's perceptions of power, collaboration, and decision-making within a group setting. Children often identify with and aspire to be like the dominant protagonist in cartoons. The qualities, abilities, and achievements of these characters can be highly appealing and create a sense of admiration. As children strive to emulate these characters, it can create a desire to be dominant or superior within their own peer group. In a group of children, only one child can typically assume the dominant or superior position. This leads to a competition for that role, as children try to assert their dominance or establish themselves as the "leader" of the group. The rest of the children may face a dilemma of feeling either superior or inferior based on their perceived standing within the group. For the child who assumes the dominant role, there may be a boost in self-esteem and confidence. They may feel a sense of validation and accomplishment, which can positively impact their mental well-being. However, for the children who do not attain this position, feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and lowered self-esteem can emerge. They may question their worth and feel overshadowed by their peers. The competition for dominance within the group can create tension and disrupt the harmony of relationships. It can lead to power struggles, exclusion, and a sense of hierarchy, as children vie for superiority. This strain on group dynamics can further exacerbate feelings of inferiority and isolation for those who do not attain a dominant position. Children's sense of belonging within the group can be affected by this dynamic. Those who feel inferior may struggle to find their place, experiencing a sense of isolation or alienation. This can have

long-lasting effects on their social identity development and their ability to form healthy relationships within peer groups.

This analysis helps highlight the potential implications for children's socialization and provides insights into promoting healthier group dynamics that foster inclusivity, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Understanding these influences helps us guide children towards more balanced and inclusive group dynamics, where power is shared, collaboration is valued, and leadership is distributed among team members. It empowers children to develop essential socialization skills, such as cooperation, empathy, active participation, and collective decision-making, which are vital for their interactions and relationships within various social contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of dominant protagonists in children's cartoons, such as Chhota Bheem, Beyblade, and Power Rangers, reveals important insights into the impact on children's group psychology. These cartoons, while entertaining and captivating, can inadvertently convey wrong messages that influence children's understanding of power dynamics, collaboration, and leadership within a group setting.

The emphasis on dominant protagonists in these cartoons, with their exceptional abilities and individualistic heroism, can create a skewed perception of power distribution. Children may be led to believe that dominance and personal achievements are crucial for success within a group, potentially marginalizing other members and hindering their ability to actively participate and contribute. It is essential for children to recognize that power should be shared and that diverse skills and perspectives within a group are valuable for its overall functioning.

Furthermore, the focus on individual battles and the portrayal of champions as solitary figures in Beyblade can reinforce the notion that personal achievement and winning are of utmost importance. This understanding may overshadow the significance of collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective problem-solving within a group. Encouraging children to value cooperation and recognize the benefits of

working together as a team fosters healthier group dynamics and strengthens their socialization skills.

Similarly, Power Rangers highlights the need to examine leadership dynamics within a group. While teamwork is emphasized, the dominance of the Red Ranger as the primary leader may shape children's understanding of leadership roles. This understanding can perpetuate hierarchical structures and undermine the collective decision-making process and the contributions of other team members. Promoting shared leadership and encouraging active participation from all group members fosters a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of leadership within a group.

While further analysing the impact of such cartoons and protagonists we can find a sort of dilemma that arises in children between superiority and inferiority. The superiority of protagonists always inspires a mass of children and hence creates an impression in them of being like such a character. But the dilemma arises on deciding who will be the dominant one like the protagonist among the group of children. Even if someone who is strong and mighty like the cartoon protagonists dominates the rest and acts like he/she is the centre of attention, the rest of the children feels themselves inferior which affects them psychologically.

To address these concerns, it is essential for parents, educators, and content creators to critically analyse the messages conveyed by dominant protagonists in children's cartoons. Promoting a balanced representation of group dynamics, where power is shared, collaboration is valued, and leadership is distributed among team members, is crucial for supporting healthy socialization and the development of essential social skills in children. By recognizing the potential consequences of dominant protagonists in children's cartoons, we can work towards empowering young minds to become active participants in harmonious group settings. Encouraging children to value collaboration, empathy, shared decision-making, and diverse contributions within a group fosters healthier group dynamics, cultivates social skills, and contributes to their overall social development.

In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of the relationship between dominant protagonists and children's group psychology is crucial. By critically examining the messages conveyed in cartoons and promoting inclusive and cooperative group dynamics, we can support children in developing a healthy sense of self, social identity, and effective socialization skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

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## CHAPTER 13

# RE-DESIGNING IDENTITIES: VENTURE OF SURVIVAL

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Literature as a universal mode of resistance left its distinguished mark in the lives of many people, who have been wronged by life. When the state of being disabled, mentally or physically, is represented in literary texts, it helps to bring a stigmatized topic to the center of public discussion. Along with that when disabled people share and spread a positive outlook on how they can look in to the green pastures of life despite of the trauma they are passing through, what happens there is a pragmatic social reform.

“I Complained to my parents because I did not have shoes, I stopped complaining when I saw a man without feet” (Bosco). In the contemporary age diseases and disability are considered as merit. Special care for disabled people and glorifying them with special privileges and attention, is another form of marginalization. There are several organizations which claim to serve disabled people, but instead, indulge in unethical money making in the name of charity. The disabled and the so-called abled people should coexist in harmony in society. All the necessary care and needs of the disabled people should be taken care of without either degrading them or over glorifying their condition. The value of self-reliance is the most valuable and effective remedy for all forms of discrimination. Many physically disabled people have proved this fact by performing better in many fields better than many of us. Negative approach from family members or the outside world, can seriously damage the healthy evolution of society.

Disability is not at all alien to mankind. No man is born perfect in this world. Everybody has experienced disability temporarily or permanently at some point in their life. Studies say that almost 15% of the global

population live with some form of disability. The World Health Organization identifies three dimensions for disability- impairment, activity limitation and participation restrictions. Disability is imposed upon those people who have got one or more 'impairments'. An impairment refers to an absence of or significant difference in a person's body structure or function or mental functioning.

An impairment may be structural or functional. Structural impairments are problems related to an internal or external body part whereas functional impairment refers to the complete or partial loss of function of a body part. Loss of a limb, loss of vision, memory loss, etc. are examples of impairments. Activity limitations include difficulty in seeing, hearing, walking or even mental difficulties such as difficulty in problem solving. Participation restrictions refer to the inability of a person to engage in normal daily activities like working, socializing, recreation, etc. Although the term 'disabled' sometimes refer to a single population, this is actually a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs. The same disability can affect two people in different ways. Each disabled person's pain and suffering is different. While many are explicit, some disabilities may be hidden or not easily visible to the others.

Disability can be defined as a mental or physical condition (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the disabled person to perform certain activities and interact with the world around them. Disability is more like a social construct rather than a physical impediment, according to some critics. It is that imposition which is laid upon the disabled by the society which prevents or discourages the person from doing the things that only the 'normal' people are supposed to do. This is why the use of the term disability is still under debate I personally believe that this generation is more compassionate and considerate and humanlike compared to the previous generations. There is far less discrimination and brutality among the people. We have started to think wisely (in its real sense) about the feelings of other people and try our best not to hurt others mentally or physically (at least in public). There is a growing awareness among the public about what is actually wrong and right.

*When Breath Becomes Air* is an eloquent, heartbreaking and powerful autobiography of the neurosurgeon and writer Paul Kalanithi. It is the

story of his exploration of human identity and struggle with inoperable lung cancer. *When Breath Becomes Air* is a deeply emotional and poignant book that chronicles the author's journey from being a promising neurosurgeon to confronting his own mortality. Kalanithi's writing is raw and honest, conveying the fear, hope, and resilience he experiences as he faces the inevitable reality of death. The book evokes a strong emotional response from readers, prompting introspection and empathy. "I was a neurosurgeon, and I was a patient. In the space of a moment, I changed." (Kalanithi 1). Kalanithi skillfully weaves together his medical expertise and philosophical musings. He delves into questions about the meaning of life, the nature of identity, and the ethics of life and death decisions in medicine. The book provokes readers to contemplate profound existential questions and wrestle with the human condition. "(54) I had met many patients like him. Amidst their pain, they remained human, with human desires – one last chance to see the ocean, a son who might yet make it to law school – and they had a right to be recognized as such." Kalanithi grapples with the question of identity and the pursuit of a meaningful legacy.

As a doctor, he seeks to alleviate suffering and leave a lasting impact on his patients. However, his terminal illness forces him to confront the possibility of a truncated life and the uncertainty of his impact on the world. "What makes life meaningful enough to go on living?... And I knew that in writing you work toward that end. You may never reach it, but you try to convey an honest impression of your life."(76). The memoir serves as a meditation on mortality and death. Kalanithi's poignant insights into his own mortality offer readers a profound perspective on the fragility of life and the importance of cherishing each moment. "What makes life meaningful enough to go on living?... And I knew that in writing you work toward that end. You may never reach it, but you try to convey an honest impression of your life." The legacy through words and writing is very clear. "That message is simple: When you come to one of the many moments in life where you must give an account of yourself, provide a ledger of what you have been, and done, and meant to the world, do not, I pray, discount that you filled a dying man's days with a sated joy, a joy unknown to me in all my prior years, a joy that does not hunger for more and more but rests, satisfied. In this time, right now, that is an enormous

thing." These lines demonstrate how Paul Kalanithi grapples with his changing identity as a neurosurgeon turned patient, his search for meaning and legacy amid illness, and the role of writing as a way to leave an impression on the world. The memoir beautifully explores the complexities of identity and the desire for a meaningful legacy, offering profound insights into the human experience in the face of mortality. The memoir raises ethical considerations related to end-of-life care, the role of physicians in making difficult decisions, and the importance of patient autonomy. Kalanithi's personal experiences with illness provide a unique perspective on these ethical dilemmas.

"When Breath Becomes Air" is a profoundly moving and thought-provoking memoir that explores themes of mortality, meaning, and the human experience. Paul Kalanithi's honest and eloquent reflections on life and death resonate deeply with readers and offer valuable insights into the human condition. The book's impact lies not only in its literary merit but also in its contribution to conversations on life, death, and the pursuit of purpose.

*Tales From Tale End; My Cancer Diary*, is a memoir of Ananya Mukherjee. A young woman is diagnosed with breast cancer and is gone soon. Her diary is an insight into the last two years of her life and her cheerful fight with cancer till the end. It is a book of hope, courage for those who living with cancer and their caretakers, loved ones and also for anyone determined to live life on her or his own terms despite adversity. "Tales from The Tail End" takes readers on a candid and intimate journey through the author's experience with cancer. Ananya Mukherjee narrates her story with honesty, humor, and emotional depth. The memoir captures her thoughts, emotions, and reflections as she faces the challenges and uncertainties that come with a cancer diagnosis.

The book starts with Ananya discovering a lump in her breast and her subsequent visit to the doctor for diagnosis. As she grapples with the shocking news of having cancer, she takes readers along the roller-coaster ride of emotions that follow – fear, anxiety, hope, and determination. Throughout the memoir, Ananya shares her experiences with various treatments, medical procedures, and their physical and emotional impact on her. She also talks about the support and love she receives from her

family and friends, which becomes an essential source of strength during her journey. "Tales from The Tail End" is not just a story of medical treatments; it is also a tale of self-discovery and resilience. Ananya delves into her personal growth, shifting perspectives, and the realization of the importance of cherishing life's simple joys. The narrative of the book also sheds light on the challenges faced by cancer patients, including the side effects of treatments, the uncertainty of the future, and the need to navigate the medical system. Ananya's experiences humanize the struggles that cancer patients go through and create empathy and understanding among readers. Through her writing, Ananya Mukherjee aims to inspire and encourage others facing cancer or any life-altering situation. Her storytelling is an honest portrayal of her emotions, fears, and triumphs, making the memoir relatable and engaging for readers.

In common, the disability or disease will discourage the mind of the people. But here in these works they try to survive till the end, even though they died. Disability studies is a relatively new interdisciplinary field focusing on how people with disabilities show up in history, literature, social policy, law, architecture and other disciplines. Coming to the Indian context, disability is a concept that is widely misunderstood even in the modern day. There still exists marginalization of people with disabilities. This is due to lack of awareness among the people about disability. It is a pity to admit the fact that many of the Indian households still believe in the age-old superstition of equating disability with 'karma' - disability is seen as a punishment for committing crimes or sins in the past life or even due to the misdeeds of parents in their past lives! The saddest part is that not only the uneducated people but also the well-educated ones also firmly believe in such illogical craps. Thus, with the aid of superstitions, the non-disabled people continue to marginalize and alienate the disabled ones. This has been happening since ages in India. The term 'disability' has a number of meanings that have accumulated over it over the decades. Disability has no socioeconomic boundaries and anyone can become a victim to it. A disabled person is either born disabled or has acquired disability as the result of an accident or a disease. There is no certainty that a disabled person can overcome his disability. There is also no certainty that an able-bodied person will never acquire disability. In fact, almost every person in the world experiences at least some kind of

disability during his or her lifetime. Thus, disability is not at all unfamiliar to mankind.

Till the 19th century, disability was related with a lot of negativities. The disabled ones were seen as unfortunate people who were punished by God. The terms used to describe such people were itself showcased the negativity in people's attitude towards them – 'crippled', 'handicapped' or 'less fortunate'. These terms stressed the biological imperfections of the disabled people. Some other terms like 'physically challenged', 'impaired', 'persons with special needs' stress their reliability, isolation and inability to adhere to the mainstream society. The use of such terminologies only helped to increase the level of their marginalization in the society.

However, things began to change for good in the 20th century. This was made possible as a result of the professionalization of medicine and growth of technology. The attitudes of doctors and scientists began to change which eventually reflected in that of the common people too. As a result, the disabled people began to be treated as normal individuals with certain different kinds of abilities and hence were designated with the new term 'differently abled'

In When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi and Tales From The Tail End: My Cancer Diary by Ananya Mukherjee, they tries to survive till the end. Here both the protagonists were trapped in the hands of cancer. Their fighting spirit were reflected in both the works. The spirit is deeply analysed in the books. They want everyone to know their troubling experience they had in their life. The positivity that Kalanithi had himself reflected in each page of his book making it as a token of inspiration to everyone from the late young doctor. Life in itself is a gift. It is restored by the doctor, when it goes out of balance.

Giving life back to so many patients, it is sometimes hard for a doctor to accept that he or she is also a recipient of the gift of life which can be cruelly snatched away from them too, anytime. Well, the boon of life comes with the bane of uncertainty and that's the reality. But Paul Kalanithi didn't lose his positivity, when he was faced by such a situation. Here the portrayal of a man facing his mortality, it represents thoughtful

excursions and reflections on family, literature, medicine, truth, knowledge and survival. Here both the protagonists emerge as a potential personality both in society and in literature. In both works can be reached towards a positive finding. We have to fight against our disabilities. We can also consider them as role models for society. Instead of having a negative mind or negative thought, try to find out positiveness or positive mind to fight against all disabilities.

The subject matter of disability studies is not exactly the cheeriest stuff in the world. After all, when we talk about disability studies, we are talking about illness, we are talking about injuries, we are talking about deformities and sometimes we are even talking about death. It's about you. And it's about us. It's about everyone with a body. In other words it is about everybody. The fact is that nobody or no body is perfect. Regardless of whom we are or where we are from, the one thing that unites us is that we are all born into bodies. And if we live long enough, at some point, these fragile bodies of ours are going to get sick and these bodies are going to die. So we have to make sure that people were not treated differently or less well because they have a disability. These works remind us that in the end, it's not the years in your life that count but the way in which we decided to move on. Many people are marginalized on the basis of colour, gender, race, sexuality and so on and they are silenced and misrepresented. So, a positive representation of such people is a must. It does make a difference.

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## CHAPTER 14

# WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH AMONG WORKING WOMEN: A STUDY BASED ON IT FIRMS.

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Corporate communication is an emerging field in mass communication discipline with far reaching prospects and strategies. Effective communication is the essence of any organisation building unique identity and engagement among employees of an institution. Work-life balance is an inevitable factor contributing to the success of a person. Emotional health plays a significant role in a person's life that determines their ability to cope up with the challenges in life. Women have to do multiple roles at home and office that put more stress on them weakening their physical and emotional health. Women working 24x7 in corporate firms have to take extra effort to balance work and family life. The study tries to identify the various factors determining work-life balance among women IT employees from three corporate organisations based in Bangalore. Work from home schedule introduced in firms during and after pandemic has further affected the mental health of women in several ways. The study adopts qualitative methodology to examine the psychological situations of women employees in corporate firms. Interviews were conducted among 200 women employees to understand the mental health among them. Interviews were conducted among HR managers and corporate managers of these firms to analyse the various gender policies introduced by firms during the last two years. Content analysis of corporate websites of these firms was conducted to analyse the various measures and initiatives carried out by firms to make their institutions to a gender friendly work place and their impact on women employees' emotional health.

## **KEYWORDS**

Corporate communication, Emotional Health, Psychological well-being, Work-life balance.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Emotional health is an important factor in the overall well being of an individual. The status of emotional health determines the success of a person's life. The quality of a person's life depends more on the mental health and emotional well being of that person. To have a control on one's own thought and emotions is a crucial factor to be achieved in life. A balanced state of mind and emotions increases the productivity, quality and success of a person. Hence it is a must to attain a stable state of mind for productive and successful life. Emotional balance is the foundation for attaining sound physical and mental health. Mental health develops better relationships and also offer the power to overcome stress and crises situations in a better way. Several researches have proved that there exists a strong correlation between the mental health and success in life. It has proved that people with sound emotional health overcome challenges in life with more courage and easiness.

Researchers have found that gender is an inevitable factor to be considered in determining the mental health of a person. There exist gender differences, gender factors leading in to disparities in society. Therefore, it's a must to analyse the gender identity of a person to determine the psychological make up of that person. Social conditioning and stereotyping play a significant role in developing the psychological make up of a person. Gender conceptions and practices play a crucial factor in moulding the emotional status of a person.

Gender related differences has to be primarily considered while measuring the mental health status or emotional status of people, especially regarding women. Gender discrimination is the foremost thing to be seriously dealt with to avoid gender bias existing in the society. Research evidences suggest that there exists a gender gap in delivering the health outcomes to people. There are several factors determining the emotional wellness among women. The pandemic has further worsened the situation of working women leading to mental stress and anxiety disorders. 24x7 work

from home schedule has put extra pressure on working women who have to manage both work and family at the same time.

Corporate communication is an emerging discipline in mass communication studies with far reaching prospects and possibilities. Nowadays corporate organisations rule the majority of the business world and has become the major source of income for nations all over the world. Corporate world offers umpteen job opportunities globally with far reaching prospects. Mushrooming growth of corporate institutions has offered placements to a large number of people. The number of women working in corporate sector has shown a drastic increase in the last two decades contributing to their professional and personal development

Maintaining work-life balance is very important and contributes to the success of a person. There exists an interrelationship between the emotional, mental and physical health of a person. Healthier and better engagement at work place contributes to the productivity of person, strengthening self-reliance and confidence among them. It also adds to the happiness index of a person instilling in them the confidence to lead both the work and familial work altogether at a time. Achieving work life balance is therefore very important in maintaining the physical, emotional and mental health of a person.

## **NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study tries to examine the work- life balance among women working in IT firms and its impact on their emotional health. The study tries to analyse the corporate communication strategies and practices of various IT firms and tries to find out how it contributes to the healthy working atmosphere contributing to their wellbeing, social status, and emotional status. It's high time to find new ways and approaches in addressing women's issues and problems existing in society. It tries to analyse the social condition of working women, their psychological situations at workplace and in families especially when IT firms switched on to work from home schedule due to covid pandemic. The study tries to identify the various factors determining work-life balance among women IT employees from three corporate organisations based in Bangalore. Work from home schedule introduced in firms during and after pandemic has

further affected the mental health of women in several ways. The study adopts qualitative methodology to examine the psychological situations of women employees in corporate firms. Interviews were conducted among 200 women employees to understand the mental health among them. Interviews were conducted among HR managers and corporate managers of these firms to analyse the various gender policies introduced by firms during the last two years. Content analysis of corporate websites of these firms was conducted to analyse the various measures and initiatives carried out by firms to make their institutions to a gender friendly work place and their impact on women employees' emotional health.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study tries to examine the challenges/problems the working women face during the hectic work schedule and the work in their familial set up escalating their mental imbalance and tries to offer solutions to the crisis. The study tries to identify the various factors determining work-life balance among women IT employees from three corporate organisations based in Bangalore. Work from home schedule introduced in firms during and after pandemic has further affected the mental health of women in several ways. The study adopts qualitative methodology to examine the psychological situations of women employees in corporate firms. Interviews were conducted among 200 women employees to understand the mental health status among them. Interviews were conducted among HR managers and corporate managers of these firms to analyse the various gender policies introduced by firms during the last two years. Content analysis of corporate websites of these firms was conducted to analyse the various measures and initiatives carried out by firms to make their institutions to a gender friendly work place and their impact on women employees' emotional health.

## **THEORETICAL BASE**

### **TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM**

Technological determinism states that a society's technology drives its social and cultural development. Technology plays a vital role in social change. Technology has the capacity to change the way people think and react and can also influence how they interact with others. Social progress

is connected to the technological advancement of that society and technology influences the political, cultural, economic and social aspects of a society and application of this theory that can lead to societal development along with the technological upgradation. Nowadays technology drives the lives of people, socially, politically and economically. It is the technology that connects people, especially those working in IT sector experience the presence of technology both in their professional and personal life. Technology thus has a great influence on women working in IT sector both in their personal and professional lives. Now a days it's the technology that defines the social, political and cultural life of a person.

## **COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY**

A psychologic theory which says that people try their best to avoid conflicts knowingly or unknowingly. People constantly try to balance their mind by avoiding dissonance. Women working in IT sector try their best to balance their emotions knowingly or unknowingly to avoid work-life conflict and to gain work-life balance.

## **UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY**

Corporate communication is an integration of internal and external communication. According to these theories, people communicate with each other to reduce uncertainties and social exchange strengthens relationships. Working women in IT sector try their best to develop and cement relationships, encourage mutual communication both personally and professionally to balance their emotions and psychological mind.

## **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

The study tries to understand and explore the emotional health among women employees working in IT sector. The study also looked in to the various corporate communication strategies and initiatives employed by the corporate firms in order to make their corporate environment employee friendly. The study tries to understand the mental status of women employees working in IT firms and how they maintain work-life balance to satisfy their social and psychological needs especially during lockdown

days when work from home was made compulsory. The study tries to examine the psychological, emotional and social needs of women and the various barriers and challenges that affected their mental health status. The study looked in to the work schedule, nature of work, duration of work and the family work to be done simultaneously with the office work.

## **WORK FROM HOME SCHEDULE**

The compulsory lockdown measures due to pandemic compelled organisations to implement work from home schedule, especially among IT employees which further put extra load, stress and pressure on women employees who had to complete both office work and family work from home on time. Confinement to home lone further aggravated the situation causing psychological distress and emotional health issues among women. In depth interviews and mobile conversations revealed that the employed women are facing extra burden due to change in job nature that has changed to work from home schedule plus the work they do for their family. In depth interviews and mobile conversations revealed that the employed women are facing extra burden due to change in job nature that has changed to work from home schedule plus the work they do for their family. The study revealed that most of them faced emotional stress during lockdown days as they were restricted themselves or forced to be at home. Family issues were on rise, physical tortures; mental tortures were also reported by women in some households leading to domestic violence. Some of them expressed their anxiety as they do not know how to handle their children who were psychologically upset as they were denied entry to playgrounds or social places where they once gathered to share themselves.

## **OVER WORKED AND UNDERRECOGNIZED**

Interviews reveal that women had a hectic work schedule and faced severe pressure on performance and appraisal reviews. The change in time schedule and change in work culture was a new experience during the initial days. Due to hectic work schedule, as demanded by women employees, the firms formulated new communication plans and guidelines for flexible work. Some of them felt over worked and under recognized in their firms as they were denied the regular financial increments and promotions when compared to men holding the same position. A few of

the respondents opined that there exist gender disparities in pay rolls, hikes, promotions and increments. Some of the respondents were of the opinion that some women employees who were pregnant were denied of their increments and promotion during their maternity leave though it was granted as per company rules.

## **SOCIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT**

Findings of the study points out to the need for more social and organisational support for working women so that they can maintain the work-life balance and face life with more confidence. Here organisational communication, both internal and external communication plays a significant role in working environment and social support from both the family and the work place is the need of the hour for women to excel in both personal and professional life.

## **EQUAL ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

The most needed factor for professional development for a person is their equitable access to professional development opportunities such as promotion, increments etc. Women should have equal access as that of men in professional sector too in order to excel at par with men. Institutional support plays a crucial role here. Gender sensitive policies and programmes can help firms in this regard to achieve gender equity at work place.

## **WORK LIFE BALANCE AND WORK PERFORMANCE**

The findings prove that there exists an interrelationship between work -life balance and work performance. Women received support from family in domestic work at home could manage both family and profession in a balanced way. Women who were supported mentally from home could perform well at profession too. Some of the women expressed their stress and anxiety on the work pressure they have, the insecurities they felt and the lack of care and support from family and work place. They experienced emotional imbalance, stress and anxiety that brought down their work performance and career graph.

## **MOTHER VS TECHIE**

Interviews reveal that women having kids experience more stress and work-life conflict due to extra responsibilities. Women who were highly passionate about their jobs even experienced work-life conflict due to the timing of work, extra work assigned to them and household responsibilities.

## **GENDER INITIATIVES BY CORPORATE FIRMS**

Even after lockdown most of the firms are encouraging work from home schedule as part of cost reduction putting additional pressure on working women as they have to work from home and do the additional responsibilities at home which has further caused mental agonies and psychological discomfort among them. Taking this into consideration, firms have put forward employee friendly measures for work including work time reduction for women having children below two years. Interviews reveal that they have further initiated counselling sessions for women employees who face work load stress thus helping them in stress management. The employees also availed counselling sessions from supporting teams on family matters including domestic violence cases which were on the rise during the lockdown period. Classes on gender rights and laws were imparted to its employees contributing to gender awareness and personality development that really benefitted its employees prioritizing gender equality.

## **COUNSELLING SESSIONS**

Respondents were of the opinion that the hectic work schedule affected them physically and mentally. Sessions on psychological enhancement for children, adults and old aged people, gender equality, addressing domestic violence cases, stress management, awareness classes on home Vs work balance techniques, engaging and handling children at home during lockdown, work from home issues, sessions on encouraging vocational skills among children were conducted by the firms that helped them to gain work-life balance and maintain psychological balance during stressful period.

## **CSR INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMES**

Interviews with HR managers and corporate communication managers reveal that most of the firms revised their CSR policies and plans in order to meet the needs of employees, especially women employees. Firms formulated gender sensitive measures to meet the requirements of women employees especially to make them feel free at workplace and to help them gain work-life balance.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Work-life balance is a necessary and inevitable concept to be encouraged and promoted among employees , especially among women in IT sector, enhancing their participation in several facets of their lives promoting women's rights, emotional well-being and empowerment. The way we communicate women's issues have changed. It is the need of the hour for organizations to promote an employee friendly especially gender friendly work space to enhance the mental health and emotional well-being. Women's participation and awareness is crucial for the development of a society. However there still exist challenges that are gender-specific which deter women from participating in various societal activities. Gender sensitivity is the pre-condition to be achieved in any developmental activities of society in order to promote inclusive development. Research studies must explore the needs, necessities of women in both familial atmosphere and work place and offer solutions to the problems and challenges faced by them. Emotional balance brings happiness to life which in turn contributes to work place productivity. Inculcating positive values and culture among employees adds to the sound emotional and physical health of employees. Motivation is the most important aspect to be encouraged in work culture which can offer emotional stability among people. It is a must to consider the family atmosphere and the work context to understand and analyze the problems and challenges faced by women in a better way. Free, fair and balanced communication has to be encouraged in work space in order to excel in both personal and professional lives

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## CHAPTER 15

# “THE WRITER IN ME IS STRONGER THAN THE WOMAN IN ME”: A FEMINIST READING OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM IN MEENA KANDASAMY’S WHEN I HIT YOU

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Meena Kandasamy’s novel *When I Hit You or the Portrait of the Artist as a Young Wife* came out in 2017 and since then; it has received a lot of plaudits. The novelist deserves credit for her emotive language and the well-knit plot which turns the novel into a ‘page turner’. The author has succeeded in drawing attention of her readers to the serious issues of domestic violence and female subjugation within the patriarchal marital set up; themes that are not alien to the Indian English Fiction. The focus of the present paper, however, is none of these issues. The focus here is how Meena Kandasamy, as a writer, deals with the question of artistic freedom in the context of her personal experience of a short-lived marital life. The attempt here is to show that the biggest violence male chauvinism does to a female author is the assault on her freedom to write. The reason for this antagonism between patriarchy and women’s writing is that the latter always tries to expose and undermine the former. For a female writer, writing itself becomes a subversive act. As a result, it becomes impossible for her to exist both as a writer and as a wife. This is the conundrum that the novel deals with. And the paper delves into this ‘writer-wife’ duel. It begins with a brief description on the concepts of artistic freedom and women’s writing.

## ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND WOMEN'S WRITING: TWO GENEALOGIES

The antagonistic attitude of patriarchal social structure towards women's writing has a long history. Virginia Woolf was one of the first writers to deal with the prejudice against women's writing. The following note on women's writing taken from *A Room of One's Own* is worthy to be quoted here. "Thus, towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middleclass woman began to write (Woolf 48)." Wolf wrote her treatise when women's writing was coming of age in Europe and it was commonplace to think that women's writing was inferior to the writings of their male counter parts. Women writers had to face unfair criticism about their work. One common practice was to judge women's writings based on the sexuality of the writer instead of appreciating their literary style (Rogat 97). The underlying assumption was that it was the woman's sexuality- and not her literary talent- that is responsible for what she writes! Though the women writers broke off many of those prejudices, a lot of them still survive. The case of women writers in India is not much different. Along with the existing prejudices, the female writer has to face strong opposition from many a social institutions. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan observes that the major adversary that the feminist writer in India encounters is the "family". According to her, family acts as a "site of women's oppression". She observes that "articulation of this oppression" is the first step a feminist should take in her fight against patriarchy (Rajan 222).

The genealogy of artistic freedom has a different pattern. Mostly, the theme of artistic freedom is discussed in the context of larger social events. It is less common to discuss it within the context of family or personal relations. Thus artistic freedom is often posited against a totalitarian regime, dictatorship, or a particular social system; and artists are viewed as the victims of such oppressive social mechanisms. The question of how artistic freedom is curtailed in the everyday life, that too within a domestic space, has been ignored more often than not. Thus the issue of a writer's freedom to express his/ her thoughts is primarily treated as a "political"

one. The discussions on how some writers had to flee from Hitler's Germany or the oppression of some writers under the Stalinist era<sup>1</sup> fall in this line. Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nazrin are two other recent examples. Thus the tendency to view artistic freedom in connection with political freedom is dominant even today. The personal dimension of the problem is not given serious consideration. The cry for artistic freedom can be heard in every totalitarian state. Whenever the theme of artistic freedom is discussed in such social contexts, it follows a similar pattern. The dominant trend is to view artistic freedom as an issue of the individual artist constricted by a larger social mechanism. The case of the Arab uprising is an example. After the uprising, many of the restrictions faced by the artists in Egypt have been removed. At the same time, the censorship laws remained more or less the same<sup>2</sup> (Schwartz 15). Even in this context, the issue of artistic freedom will be discussed as a matter of the individual artist v/s the state.

<sup>1</sup> Discussions on Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak are good examples. Recently, scholars started taking more interest in finding rebel voices that existed within the Soviet Communist Party set up itself on the issue of artistic freedom. The case of Lunacharsky is an example. His support to the artists has been discussed a lot. For more details, see Howard

R. Holter's paper on him. The paper is titled "The Legacy of Lunacharsky and Artistic Freedom in the USSR".

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to see that the same writers who speak about artistic freedom in the Arab world also speak about the contributions of the US for the same cause (33-43). It is no secret that artistic freedom has become a convenient tool in the hands of the US imperialism to attack its opponents.

Another dimension of the issue of artistic freedom can be seen in the traditional debate about the ultimate objective of art. While a group of artists maintain that the true purpose of art is to radically convert the society; another group vehemently argues that the purpose of art is fulfilled in the artistic creation itself (the "art for art's sake" argument). The emergence of the mass media helped the artist articulate his/ her points more clearly and take an anti-conformist stance (Kaba 201). This

is a new development in the history of artistic creation and it is a relevant one too. One more dimension of artistic freedom can be seen in its affinity with academic freedom. It has been argued that academic freedom and artistic freedom are collaborators and cannot be viewed separately (Strossen 8). Though all these dimensions are relevant, they all have a panoramic view which crucially omits the more specific; namely the “personal”, “everyday” and “domestic”. Feminism has to be credited for bringing this “personal”, “everyday”, and “domestic” aspects into the centre of the discussions concerning artistic freedom. Long before the motto “personal is political<sup>3</sup>” became popular, Feminist thinkers like Woolf had already dealt with the importance of the personal element. The question of the relationship between the personal freedom and artistic freedom is a theme that is already discussed by writers in different contexts<sup>4</sup>. The present paper is an attempt to take those discussions further.

It is one of the most famous slogans of the second wave Feminism. Many scholars attribute this phrase to Carol Hanisch’s 1970 essay “The Personal is Political”. She argues in this treatise that unlike the popular belief, articulating the personal problems of women is political; but at the same time, she says that there are no “personal solutions” to these problems (Hanisch 3). One has to look at the “objective conditions” around her and change them in order to get the solutions. However she herself and many other scholars argue that the origin of this phrase goes back to the Second World War. Judith Grant observes that the second wave feminists used this slogan to contradict the view that the issues of women are merely personal or even psychological which cannot be resolved through political action (Grant 404).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Bela Kiralyfalvi’s paper titled “Lukac’s views on artistic freedom”.

## **REDOMESTICATION AND CLAUSTROPHOBIA**

Meena Kandasamy is a public figure and has got exposure to the world quite a lot unlike the majority of the Indian women. The novel in hand shows how she fell from the status of an independent author to the level of a subjugated woman through the marital trap. Marriagehappens to

be a retrogressive social mechanism that takes all her liberties away. As an educated woman and as a writer, she enjoyed a good deal of freedom prior to her marriage. But she loses all that with the marriage. The institution of marriage turns out to be a means of redomestication and her husband's house becomes a prison house of her incarceration.

Her misfortune starts with the moment she decides to marry a man who had the aura of a revolutionary. She fell in love with her future husband while she was running a campaign against death penalty. He was a college lecturer and a Naxalite guerilla. He would use the more appropriate word "Maoist" to describe himself (Kandasamy 28). They get married eventually. It is interesting that the writer never mentions the name of her (ex-) husband though she does say that he assumed several names and spoke many languages. More than a particular individual or husband, in the novel, he is presented as the incarnation of all the male chauvinistic and patriarchal values. This makes his name irrelevant and probably this is why the author doesn't call him by any name in the novel. On the other hand, the wife's name is also not mentioned in the novel even though one can assume that the wife in the novel is Meena Kandasamy herself. It is the narration in first person and the similarity between the character in the novel and the author that make the readers think that the wife in the novel is none other than the author herself. Thus the two characters in the novel, the husband and the wife, transcend individual attributes and become representatives of two archetypal figures; the patriarchal husband and the writer-wife. The novel portrays the bitter encounter they had during the course of their marital life.

The husband figure in the novel wants to confine his wife to the domestic sphere. Confinement makes the writer-wife claustrophobic. The description of his house reveals the kind of claustrophobic atmosphere she is confined. It also points at the psychological state of the author:

... she has been trapped for two months in the space of three rooms and a veranda.....In the middle of this, the house itself stands, small and self-contained, its well defined boundaries in sharp contrast to the open, vibrant garden. (13)

The author eloquently describes the suffocating atmosphere of her husband's home and its psychological impact on her. Spatially confined; physically tortured; and mentally claustrophobic, the writer is forced to suffer the diktats of her husband silently within this landscape.

Redomestication ends any hope of literary creation in the author. "Domestic chores do not allow me to work with deadlines," says the author. As she sits and tries to write poetry, he will observe her with antagonistic attitude. Then she realizes that there is something about her act of writing poetry that disturbs him deeply (81-2). His argument against her writing career is that it will lead to a break up between them (82). He invents many such arguments against her writing career. He cannot withstand the author's status as a well-known writer. Apart from the traditional antagonism between women's writing and patriarchy, there is one more reason for which the author's husband hates the writer in her. It is the fact that the writers, male or female, have become public figures in the age of the social media and the image of a female public figure is something that a sexist can hardly acknowledge.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIALIZATION, AND ONLINE FREEDOM**

The social media opens up endless possibilities of socialization for the female subjects even within a domestic space that acts as a means of their subjugation. This is what prompts the author's husband to curtail her social media activities. He has a plan to curtail his wife's activities including, her social media activities. He systematically implements his plan to suppress his wife and subdue the writer in her. First of all, he takes her phone away (56). Then he gets a new SIM card for her. He gets it issued in the name of one of his students (57). The next step is to restrict her online activities. He makes her deactivate her facebook account. He uses all his rhetorical skills to convince her that facing Facebook is an evil thing. He argues that face book is meant to satisfy the narcissistic instincts of people and it is a means of exhibitionism. It doesn't occur to him that his wife is a writer and she can survive as a writer only by keeping her contact with the outside world. In fact, the relation between women's fight against domestication and the emergence of women's writing is more closely connected than one may think. Virginia Woolf has dealt with this relationship thoroughly well. She explains this relation with an imaginary

situation. She asks her readers to imagine what would have happened if Shakespeare had a sister who was extraordinarily gifted and who was an aspiring writer. Her wish would never have been fulfilled; so argues Woolf. The reason is that she would never be allowed to travel the world like Shakespeare did. Without the freedom and opportunity to closely observe the world, one cannot write like Shakespeare. So, however gifted Shakespeare's imaginary sister be, she could never have achieved the same status of Shakespeare at that point in time. This is the point Woolf makes (Woolf 35-6). Now, as a writer, Meena Kandasamy represents a class of women who have achieved a certain level of freedom (unlike Shakespeare's imaginary sister). This freedom poses a serious threat to the patriarchal values which her husband represents. The only way he can deal with this is by trying to "redomesticate" her. The liberty she has achieved should be taken away from her and she should be limited to the domestic sphere. This is what her husband does.

To be a writer means to be a social being also. Allow women to socialize is a taboo according to the patriarchal values. This system cannot acknowledge a woman writer because a writer maintains close contact with the world by breaking the domestic boundaries. With the popularization of social media, it has become difficult to cut off all the ties of a woman with the outside world. So, whatever justification is given by the writer's husband, the ultimate aim of prohibiting the use of social media by his wife seems to be killing the social being in her. "This will kill me as a writer," says the author. Meena Kandasamy is clearly pointing to a conflict that the social media culture has developed. Social media has opened up scope for online social life. This paved the way for women to come out into the public sphere. Now the social identity of an individual is determined by the identity s/he has in the social media as well. These days, public figures' identity is partly created and maintained through social media platforms like the Facebook. What the author's husband does to curtail his wife's freedom kills the writer in her. In fact, this is not an inadvertent outcome of his sadism; to kill the writer and his wife is his prime objective. She is afraid to tell her husband about what she has written recently.

“Being a writer invites constant ridicule from my husband,” says the author (Kandasamy 74). He is unable to understand the concerns of a writer. If he finds her looking at a blank page on the monitor of her laptop; he thinks that she spends her time idly. But for her, it is an attempt to get some inspiration (75). Anyway, the author’s husband is skeptical and afraid of the social media as it allows her survival as a writer. It is also a means to escape the limitations of domestic space. Again, this shows that the author’s husband was afraid of her status as a writer which, naturally led him to commit horrendous violence against her.

## **EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST THE WRITER**

The violence committed against the author is worth mentioning here. Definitely, it is aimed at suppressing her as an individual. But when the husband encounters the writer in his wife, his physical violence gives way to epistemic violence. The labels that the author’s husband throws on her show how epistemic violence becomes a convenient tool in order to tame the writer. He portrays himself as a teacher and his wife as a learner. He is a political figure and has the aura of a revolutionary. He pretends to be talking on behalf of the downtrodden and accuses the writer of having upper class prejudice. Class theory is, to him, a means to downgrade and devalue his wife’s artistic creativity. “Communist ideas are a cover for his sadism,” says the author (80). He hates any sort of artistic creativity from her side. “Within our marriage, my husband holds the role of People’s Commissar for labor (78),” comments the author on their relationship. The subjugation that he demands takes military lines sometimes. Though he denies her all kinds of freedom to her, what he is most afraid is her artistic creativity. He despises her status as an author and calls her all the derogatory names that class theory can offer. To him, her writing is nothing but a brand of elite prostitution. “He suffixes a lot many derogatory terms with the word writer and tries to present the writer as someone to be detested. On one occasion, he calls her a “petit bourgeois woman writer” (80). On another occasion, he calls her a “petit bourgeois prostitute” (132). Writing is a petit bourgeois exercise and the writer is a prostitute in his world view. The writer slowly recognizes that the violence he shows is directed more against her as a writer than as an individual.

The case of artistic freedom faces more threats than the case of individual freedom,

I would be writing about this moment, about this moment, about this fight, about the stinging slaps that mark my cheeks and only stop when I have deleted what I have written, about how I am forced into arguing about freedom of expression with the man I have married, about the man I have married with whom it has finally come to this, to this argument about the freedom of expression. (87)

Though the domination of the husband over the narrator is comprehensive, the writer in her suffers more than the individual in her. “Everything about my life as a writer is gone. There is no contact. There is no email conversation that I can return to at a later date. There is no past. There are no drafts of poems I sent to friends. There are no love letters (139).” What is worth looking at here is the realization that the author’s subjugation is her subjugation as a writer and that her liberation means getting back her freedom to write: “I just have to wait for this to end and I can write again... (87)”. Thus whatever violence the husband in the novel does is not just an act to curtail the individual freedom of the writer; more importantly, it is an act to impose restrictions on her being as a writer. The reason is that the status of being a writer is more threatening to patriarchy than the condition of being a free individual. Thus artistic freedom always poses more threats than individual freedom as far as patriarchy is concerned.

From the part of the author, she could never react against her husband’s violence as a wife. But once she is out of the marriage and into writing, she is able to give him apt reply. In her novel, she exposes him and even subjects him to a trial. According to Katzenstein, the strength of the women’s movement in India has been its “ability to ‘name’ issues” (Katzenstein 53). Due to her vulnerable state and her fear of the consequences, the author was not able to name/ label her husband’s deeds when she was inside the marital relation. But as a writer, she is in a better position to analyze him and his behavior. Her husband sarcastically calls her a “writer madam”, “writer wife”, “petit bourgeois woman writer”, “petit bourgeois prostitute”, etc. She silently suffers all this bullying as a wife. But she retorts as a writer. She is able to expose him even without

using similar labels or name calling in her novel. Thus she gets some kind of poetic justice in her life as a writer. This was something she lacked in her personal life.

## **INDIVIDUAL/ SEXUAL FREEDOM AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM**

The story of the novel (not the plot) can be summarized in the following pattern. The author of the novel was an independent lady and a prolific writer who had many romantic premarital affairs; then she marries someone and gets imprisoned within the marital relation; she loses all her freedom and the writer in her dies; she gets out of the marital relation and regains her writing career. The story line clearly points out the connection between individual/ sexual freedom and artistic career. The author was able to maintain her writing career in her pre-marital life. She describes many relations she had in her pre-marital life and how they ended up. Many people came after her whom she discarded. “I left behind a long chain of broken hearts and bruised egos and devdases and majnus and romeos and salims and Kattabommans and atthai payyans,” says the author. She says she was in a “Quest for One True Love” (35). And she narrates the story of her first love, which she thought to be that “True Love”. “Faraway from seascapes, deep in the forest ranges of central Kerala, I encountered a leopard. I am transfixated by his eyes. Being the catwoman that I am, I stroke him on the head, I scratch him at the scruff of his neck, I let him sniff me.” This romantic affair turns out to be a physical affair and it lasted for two or three years. Then he leaves her and leaves her depressed for two years. This is not the only premarital relation that she mentions in the novel. She mentions a special relation that she had with a political leader. That turns out to be a failure. He was a charismatic politician having a revolutionary pedigree. He was a great orator and a lone crusader against injustice. This is what she says about him. They fall into a relationship which goes on for some time. But things take an unexpected turn and she recognizes that he would not acknowledge her publicly. She breaks that relation (109-128). Her broken affairs prompt her to get married. But marriage proves to be more horrifying than relationships to her.

The moment she gets married is also the moment she loses her sexual freedom. This happens to be the loss of her artistic freedom as well. It is

noteworthy here that she rebels to her husband by writing love letters to her imaginary lovers. The only way the writer in her survives during the course of their marital relationship is by means of writing love letters to her many imaginary lovers. This again hints at the correlation between artistic freedom and the freedom to choose one's partner. Again, it is marriage that undermines the woman's freedom to be a free individual and thus spoil her artistic freedom.

### **THE IMPOSSIBLE “WRITER WIFE”**

The novel outlines a series of incidents that clearly points to the fact that, in India, it is difficult or even impossible for a woman to function both as a writer and as a wife. Once, the author was asked to write an article on sexuality by the editor of *Outlook*. Her husband finds it offensive. He says that she was asked to write about it because she has experienced sex with a wide range of men of different age groups. He rails and rants at her;

You are selling your body. This is elite prostitution, where men do not get to touch you, but they masturbate to the image of the woman you represent. This is not freedom. This is sexual anarchy. This is not revolutionary. This is pandering to vulgar imperialist culture. (76)

He also makes the suggestion that she has slept with the entire editorial board of *Outlook*! The very idea of writing a sex article seems unbearably offensive to the author's husband. “Should I remind Writer Madam that she is also a wife?” asks her husband (76). This statement is expressive of a general predicament that a male dominated society is unable to deal with. The author's husband suggests that one cannot be a writer and a wife at the same time. In the present scenario, the author had to write the article without the knowledge of her husband. As pointed out repeatedly in this paper, in the Indian context, it becomes impossible for a woman to multitask as a writer and wife.

So many examples of the dual identity of the author- which she fails to come to terms with- can be drawn from the novel. But, for the present purpose, the examples cited above are enough. Before concluding this paper, it should be mentioned that the case of Meena Kandasamy's encounter with a sexist husband within a patriarchal marital set up should be treated with its own specificities. For example, not all women in India

may face the same level of physical and epistemic violence from their partners that the author encountered in her marital relation. In that sense, one should not generalize the incidents of the novel as “quintessential” Indian family condition. Also, it is legitimate for one to say that the level of violence committed against a woman writer in India inside and outside the family may vary in degree; but no one can deny the existence of such violence. Contrary to the popular misconception, even an established writer like Meena Kandasamy is not able to transcend these adversities. *When I Hit You* demythifies and denies the concept of a free female author even in urban circles. The novel is an eye-opener in this regard.

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# CHAPTER 16

## DON'T HUSH MY BABY: SOMETHING BEYOND A WISH UPON A STAR

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Transgender studies in the recent past paved a way for both research and exploration of identity which questions the existing gender norms of the society. Transgender literature and theory are an exciting and still emerging field that promises to increase understanding, knowledge, and acceptance of transgender people. Literature is a medium of self-expression and resistance to the prevailing power structures. Autobiographical accounts of intersex lives conveyed from the perspective of intersex individuals, have appeared in considerable numbers and produced a new discursive space that has challenged the monolithic medical discourse on intersex. This paper focuses on the poem Neither Boy Nor Girl written by Vijayaraja Mallika the first Transgender poet in Malayalam literature. She is a queer activist, and educator and is the founder of Sahaj foundation working on transgender education. Neither Boy Nor Girl is the first reported lullaby written for intersex-born babies. This paper focuses on how her poetries challenge the heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality. How the binary modes are questioned and replaced through writing is analysed in this paper.*

**KEYWORDS:** gender, literature, resistance, myths, identity, affirmation

After a long period of deliberate mutation, literature starts talking about marginalized experiences and in this line the significant change in intersex representations can be considered. Autobiographical accounts of intersex

lives conveyed from the perspective of intersex individuals, have appeared in considerable numbers and produced a new discursive space that has challenged the monolithic medical discourse on intersex. Several factors have contributed to the emergence of first-person accounts of intersex experiences. First, the civil rights movement, feminism, and sexual minorities movements have paved the way for all kinds of minorities whose voices had been considered nonauthoritative and consequently been suppressed within mainstream cultural discourses. The gradual emancipation from dominant cultural notions about sex, gender, sexuality, 'race,' class, etc. has opened up possibilities for marginalized identity groups and individuals to represent their life stories, or their selves from their own perspectives and to gain access to and inclusion into a cultural collective.

Through the narrating of their own experiences, the intersex people no longer remain in the role of the powerless 'victim' of medicine but can develop a sense of mastery over their bodies and gain confidence and self-determination. The postmodern critical attitude towards master narratives and the postmodernist theoretical conception of identity, gender, and corporeality as constructions contingent on cultural, historical, social, and linguistic contexts have enabled intersex persons to reclaim both the definitions of their identities and bodily self-determination. The first-person intersex narratives constitute legitimate alternative or counter-narratives to hegemonic medical narratives and to other dominant narratives about sexed embodiment and gender and thus challenge the notion of one 'truth' regarding intersex. The quest for 'truth' and authenticity regarding one's own corporeality and sense of gender is a structuring principle of many intersex narratives. While notions of truth and authenticity are problematized in the individual narratives, these narratives nevertheless refer back to the idea of a 'true self' which has been appropriated or corrupted by medical and other authorities. Moreover, the academic and activist work of and about genderqueer, transgender, and other gender-nonconforming individuals and groups has provided a 'queer space' in which identities and bodies that do not, or do not want to, conform to cultural sex and gender standards get a platform to live out their own sense of (gender) realities (within and against the normative gender and sex constructions and the vocabularies that are available).

While there are themes and needs that are specific to intersex persons and cannot be appropriated or ignored by an umbrella category of gender nonconformity, many intersex people have found support and a small space for themselves within various queer or trans communities.

This paper focuses on the poem *Neither Boy Nor Girl* written by Vijayaraja Mallika the first Transgender poet in Malayalam literature. She is a queer activist, and educator and is the founder of Sahaj foundation working on transgender education. *Neither Boy Nor Girl* is the first reported lullaby written for intersex-born babies. Is it a boy or girl is the first of the endless saga of questions that a human being is liable to answer in a lifetime. When a third option is introduced this question can be complicated. Children are born with mixed sexual characteristics. Intersex is an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy. These are natural human variations and not disorders. Intersex is a socially constructed category that reflects real biological variations. Nature presents us with sex anatomy spectrums. Organs vary in size, shape, and morphology and sex chromosomes can vary quite a bit too. But in human cultures sex categories get simplified in to male and female and sometimes intersex in order to simplify social interaction and to maintain order. Even the doctors are not sure about how to define intersexuality and have different opinions. But beyond this semantic game, a world free of shame, secrecy, and stigma is needed. People deserve their own choices about their own bodies.

Lullabies have a key psychological value for the linguacultural component of the development of the younger generation and carry with it a positive emotional charge necessary for a person to adapt to the new world, to feel the surrounding space as benevolent, safe, in which he is loved. Lullaby creates a calming effect, and builds confidence in the world and the mother. In addition, lullabies are the first contact of the child with the language. He develops speech skills, and gets acquainted with the names of objects, and the correct word order in the sentence. Due to the influence on speech, the child's thinking develops, and the transition from figurative thinking to formal, that is, what is done with the help of concepts. It is interesting to analyze the etymology of the word lullabies which are considered the first lessons of love, peace, and protection in human life. A

folk etymology derives lullaby from "Lilith-Abi" (Hebrew for "Lilith, begone the Jewish tradition, Lilith was a demon who was believed to steal children's souls in the night. To guard against Lilith, Jewish mothers would hang four amulets on nursery walls with the inscription "Lilith – abei" ["Lilith – begone"]. Baby-stealing sex demons aren't exactly uncommon. Like the vampire, the siren, or the restless dead, it seems that they represent universal human fears. Fears about loss, sexuality, about women who exist beyond acceptable frameworks as mothers or caretakers. And that was about all there was to Lilith for centuries. Lilith's name is not included in the creation story of the Torah but she appears in several midrashic texts. Her symbolism, history, and literature are debated among Jewish scholars, feminists, and other intellectuals. There are multiple origin stories for Lilith but the most popular history told views Lilith as the first wife of Adam. According to the "first Eve" story, Lilith was created by God from dust and placed to live in the garden with Adam until problems arose between Adam and Lilith when Adam tried to exercise dominance over Lilith. One story tells that Lilith refused to lay beneath Adam during sex. She believed they were created equal, both from the dust of the earth, thus she should not have to lay beneath him. After Adam disagreed, Lilith fled the Garden of Eden to gain her independence. Adam told God that Lilith had left and God sent three angels, Senoi, Sansenoi, and Sammangelof, to retrieve her. The three angels found Lilith in a cave bearing children but Lilith refused to come back to the garden. The angels told her they would kill 100 of her children every day for her disobedience. In revenge, she is said to rob children of life and is responsible for the deaths of stillborn infants and crib deaths. Male children are at risk of Lilith's wrath for 8 days after birth (until circumcision) and girls are at risk for 20 days. Although Lilith stole children's lives in the night, she agreed not to kill the children who had amulets of either of the three angels.

After the angels' departure, Lilith tried to return to the garden but upon her arrival, she discovered that Adam already had another mate, Eve. Out of revenge, Lilith had sex with Adam while he was sleeping and "stole his seed." With his seed, she bears 'Lilium,' earth-bound demons to replace her children killed by the angels. Many Jewish myths have depicted Lilith as androgynous with her husband Samael for a time; sharing the same existence. This is profound in a world in which gender identity is being

increasingly built. She could be seen here as a goddess of gender neutrality, transgender, and/of intersex persons. Here the word Lullaby itself is an affirmation of gender power structures and a prayer against all the ideologies which may disrupt the existing orders and bring equality and acceptance. Lilith is a constant symbol of resistance and rebellion against the subordination and so-called normalcies in the poems of Vijayaraja Mallika.

*Neither Boy Nor Girl* starts with the line ‘Not a boy, not a girl’ is a statement towards society that denies the individual the right to decide for themselves who they are and how they want to live their life. More than an individual or personal experience this statement is transformed into a political force. The formation of community structures and communication networks based on a shared experience is crucial for the development of an intersex collective. The poet considers them as victims of language and reclaiming the power of language can serve as a tool to rearticulate one’s own sense of self. Intersex objects are deprived of their individuality, subjectivity, and humanity by blacking out their eyes and only exhibiting their genitalia. The prevalent images of intersex subjects are constituted of fragmented bodies and mutilated body parts. Here, the baby is addressed with sweetest lyrical terms as in other lullabies to reinforce the preciousness of its birth. Mallika calls the baby a ‘honey drop’ and a reward for long years of the tiring wait which physically and emotionally crushed her.

She wishes her child to grow beyond the checkered boxes. Beyond every human-made shadow lines distinguish human beings in the name of gender, sexual orientation, class, caste, and so on. She wants her child to fill with every possible goodness and wisdom and urge it to acquire everything without any sense of unwanted shame or guilt, as we are not responsible and answerable for the narrow-mindedness and ignorance of society. The lullaby is a protest against the forced invisibility of intersex people. This invisibility and social silencing render intersex bodies ghostlike, and an intersex subject position is problematized.

In her theory of the performativity of gender and the sexed body, Butler conceives of gender as the persistent repetition of cultural conventions on the body which is not an individual choice but operates within an already

existing cultural and historical framework. The body, however, is not a site passively inscribed with cultural codes (Butler 1997a: 411f). Breaking the silence by finding their own voices and healing through sharing experiences and creating a more inclusive and humane matrix are the structuring principles of this poem. Her other poems also can be read as quests for finding ways to articulate their sense of their lived sexed and gendered reality, starting from childhood and passing through emotional crises, problematic relationships, and disturbed sexuality during adolescence and adulthood, constantly accompanied by silence and shame. However, the journeys generally end with a sense of a new awareness, which is sometimes followed by pain, but always results in a sort of healing. Writing is both the starting point and the result of articulating a new sense of intersex self. It creates a space for ‘other’ intersex experiences, that deviate from the norms established by this dominant activist narrative. While the narratives present organizing as a strategy of resistance against the dominant discourse on intersex, at the same time they risk reproducing the very same mechanisms of appropriation, exclusion, and silencing or erasure of intersex subjects and perspectives that do not conform to their own intersex narratives. The poem ends with the blessing that the child may nourish all their dreams and be a point of relief and solace for everybody. The lullaby reaffirms that intersex babies are not a curse or sin but lucky charms and sources of great strength that can heal the world.

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# CHAPTER 17

## FROM CINDERELLA COMPLEX TO SELF-ASSERTION:

### TRAVERSING THE ‘FEMINIVERSE’ IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S NOVEL PURPLE

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#### ABSTRACT

*Nigerian women writers frequently tackle feminist themes and issues related to gender roles, patriarchy, and women's rights. They challenge societal expectations and explore women's experiences, struggles, and triumphs in Nigerian society. This article analyses the transformation of female characters in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* based on the concept of the Cinderella complex described by Colette Dowling in her book *Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*. As a postcolonial feminist reading, Adichie successfully portrayed Nigerian female subjugation and the two forms of domination they face in their lifetime. One, continued by the father figure and the other by the husband.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cinderella complex, self-assertion, postcolonialism, feminism, male chauvinism.

#### INTRODUCTION

*Purple Hibiscus* is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel published in 2003. The story is set in post-colonial Nigeria and revolves around the life of 15-year-old Kambili Achike, a member of a wealthy Catholic family in Enugu. Kambili's father, Eugene, is a strict and devout Catholic who runs his household with an iron fist. He is respected by the community for his

philanthropic work, but at home, he is a tyrant who inflicts physical and emotional abuse on his wife and children. The story is told through the eyes of the protagonist, Kambili. The use of this narrative style allows readers to intimately experience the events of the novel through Kambili's point of view, gaining insight into her thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. Through Kambili's narration, readers have a deeply personal and subjective understanding of her world. The narrative is filtered through Kambili's perspective, allowing for a close exploration of her inner thoughts, fears, and growth.

Mama, Kambili's mother, Kambili and her brother, Jaja, live in fear of their father, adhering strictly to his rules and expectations. However, their lives are changed when they visit their aunt, Ifeoma, in Nsukka, a town in southeastern Nigeria. Ifeoma is Eugene's sister, but she is very different from him, advocating for freedom of expression and open-mindedness. Kambili and Jaja are exposed to a world beyond their father's strict and oppressive household, and they begin to question the beliefs and values that have been imposed on them.

As Kambili begins to find her own voice and assert her independence, she also grapples with her feelings for Father Amadi, a young and charismatic priest who catalyses her personal growth and transformation. However, their relationship is complicated by the fact that he is bound by celibacy. The novel deals with themes of family, religion, politics, colonialism, and personal growth. It explores the complex relationship between tradition and modernity and the struggle for identity in post-colonial Nigeria. Adichie's writing style is lyrical and insightful, and she expertly weaves together the various threads of the story to create a compelling narrative that draws the reader in. *Purple Hibiscus* is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that has earned critical acclaim and has become a classic of contemporary African literature.

As described by Colette Dowling, the Cinderella complex is the subconscious female urge to be taken care of by others. Referring to a set of unconscious beliefs that women are fragile, dependent, and in need of rescuing by a male figure in the book *Cinderella Complex*, Dowling criticises the patriarchal treatment of women as a damsel in distress. This title is named after the fairytale *Cinderella*, where a woman is expected to

be beautiful, polite and incapable of taking care of themselves and is taught to believe that a male, usually a Prince, escapes her from all the endangered situations and takes care of her. Kambili Achike, the protagonist of the novel, and Beatrice, Kambili's mother tend to have this complex. Like most of the women in Nigeria, they initially believed that man is the ultimate power and by following the rules put forward by their father or brother or husband, they satisfy the role as a daughter, sister, wife and mother.

Eugene, Kambili's father, is a prominent figure in Kambili's and her mother's life. His oppressive nature embodies the patriarchal society in which she lives. He controls every aspect of his family's existence, imposing strict religious practices and inflicting physical and emotional abuse on his wife and children. Eugene is an authoritarian, rich and religious fanatic. His expectations from his children are very high. Even though the principal of Kambili's school compliments Kambili as a brilliant student, Eugene is not satisfied with that. He wants her to be the topper rather than being the second. Eugene's perfectionism is imposed on his family. He mapped schedules for his children even on their vacations. His rigid, religious fanatic personality can be absorbed from his dialogue, "God has given you much, he expects much from you"(47).

At the beginning of the story, Kambili is a timid and obedient teenager, moulded by her domineering father's strict rules and religious beliefs. Her journey towards self-discovery and independence is shaped by various influences, ultimately leading her to challenge the Cinderella Complex and find her own voice. Kambili is introverted, almost silent, and deeply fearful of her father, Eugene. She follows a rigid routine, rarely expressing her opinions or desires, and suppresses her emotions due to the fear of punishment. Kambili's life revolves around fulfilling her father's expectations, including academic excellence and religious devotion. Kambili and Jaja try to cooperate with Papa's rules and schedules despite considering their interest. Jaja tries to break the shackles secretly as he understands about the world. Meanwhile Kambili is surrounded by the belief of being the good servant of God and her father in order to enter heaven in the afterlife. She has been told to obey and to stay away from people. As Kambili is grown inside the circle drawn by Papa, socialising

with people even with her cousins feels tougher. Kambili yearns to socialise with others, but her beliefs and Papa's rules holds her back from it.

When Kambili and Jaja visit their Aunty Ifeoma's home in Nsukka, their world begins to change. Aunty Ifeoma is an academic, fiercely independent, and nurturing. She exposes Kambili to a more liberal and open-minded environment, encouraging her to question her father's strict beliefs and rules. Through Aunty Ifeoma, Kambili discovers a different way of life, free from the constraints of the oppressive environment at home. Aunty Ifeoma's resilience and refusal to conform to societal expectations inspire Kambili to reconsider her own beliefs and break free from the stifling environment in which she grew up. Aunty Ifeoma's strength becomes a guiding light for Kambili as she navigates her own journey towards self-empowerment. Aunty Ifeoma's love for her children and her nurturing nature also have a profound impact on Kambili. She provides a safe and loving space for Kambili and Jaja, allowing them to express themselves freely and encouraging their individuality. Aunty Ifeoma's motherly love contrasts with the harsh discipline and control enforced by their father, Eugene. Her acceptance and support provide Kambili with the emotional foundation needed to explore her own identity and find her voice.

One of the critical aspects of Aunty Ifeoma's influence on Kambili is her more liberal and nuanced approach to religion. While both families are devout Catholics, Aunty Ifeoma questions certain aspects of the faith and encourages critical thinking regarding religious practices. She challenges Kambili's father's rigid interpretation of religious doctrine, opening up a space for Kambili to question her own beliefs and form her own understanding of spirituality. Aunty Ifeoma also emphasises the importance of embracing one's cultural heritage and roots. Through her connection to their Igbo heritage, Aunty Ifeoma exposes Kambili to Igbo language, customs, and traditions. She teaches Kambili to take pride in their cultural identity and challenges the notion that Western values and influences are inherently superior. This exposure to her cultural heritage contributes to Kambili's overall awakening and helps her develop a stronger sense of self. Aunty Ifeoma's influence on Kambili in "Purple

Hibiscus" is multifaceted and transformative. Her intellectual nurturing, independent spirit, motherly love, willingness to challenge religious orthodoxy, and emphasis on cultural heritage all combine to empower Kambili to question and eventually break free from the Cinderella Complex. Aunty Ifeoma serves as a role model and guide, providing Kambili with the tools and inspiration necessary to embark on her journey of self-discovery and liberation.

The character of Father Amadi, a young and charismatic priest, introduces a romantic element to Kambili's life, which further challenges the Cinderella Complex she initially experiences. Father Amadi serves as a catalyst for Kambili's growth and offers her an alternative perspective on relationships, love, and self-worth. He encourages Kambili to express herself freely and openly without fear of judgement or retribution. Through their conversations and interactions, Father Amadi creates a safe space for Kambili to shed her inhibitions and find her own voice. He teaches her to value her thoughts and opinions, providing a stark contrast to the oppressive environment she grew up in. His affection towards Kambili awakens her to the possibilities of romantic love and emotional intimacy. Their relationship allows Kambili to experience emotions that were previously suppressed due to her father's control and her own internalised sense of unworthiness. Also, his love and attention validate Kambili's sense of self and help her realise that she deserves happiness and affection, contrary to the limitations imposed by the patriarchal society.

Kambili's feelings for Father Amadi also raise questions about her predetermined path in life. As a young woman confined by her father's strict rules and expectations, Kambili starts to question whether she truly wants to follow the path set out for her by her father, including an arranged marriage. Father Amadi's presence challenges her to question the limitations placed on her, empowering her to consider alternative possibilities for her future. In the beginning, the feelings developed for Father Amadi catalyses the Cinderella complex in Kambili. She expects him to rescue her from her father and she wants him to be her protector. "Didn't he know that I did not want him to leave, ever?" (69). Her inner complex of being a damsel in distress awakes when she falls in love with

Father Amadi. Father Amadi began to influence Kambili and his influence ultimately aids in her transcending the Cinderella Complex. He helps her realise that her worth is not dependent on external validation or the protection of a male figure. Instead, he encourages her to discover her own strengths, desires, and aspirations. Through their relationship, Kambili gains the confidence to assert herself and make choices that align with her own happiness and well-being. Father Amadi's character plays a crucial role in challenging the Cinderella Complex that initially engulfs Kambili's life. Through his liberating presence, Father Amadi empowers Kambili to embrace her own voice, challenge traditional gender roles, and seek love and happiness on her own terms. He serves as a catalyst for her personal growth and independence, allowing her to break free from the confines of the Cinderella Complex and embrace her own individuality.

Towards the end of the novel, Kambili is transformed to a self asserted woman rather than being a damsel in distress. Father Amadi's love and affection teach Kambili to value herself and recognize her own worth beyond societal expectations. This newfound love empowers her to embrace her own desires and pursue her own happiness. Also, witnessing the freedom, intellectual curiosity, and independence of Aunty Ifeoma and her children opens Kambili's eyes to different ways of being and thinking. As Kambili's self-assertion grows, she learns to accept imperfections and complexities within herself and others. She recognizes the flawed nature of her father, Eugene, and realises that perfection is not a prerequisite for love and self-worth. Kambili's journey allows her to embrace her own humanity, forgiving herself for past mistakes and finding strength in her vulnerabilities. Her inner confidence becomes the fuel for taking control of her shattered family and she develops into a woman who refuses to be defined or controlled by others. Through her experiences with alternative perspectives, romantic awakening, and personal growth, Kambili breaks free from the constraints of the Cinderella Complex, empowering herself to live authentically and on her own terms.

Beatrice, Kambili's mother is portrayed as an oppressed woman. The societal pressure placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles, often characterised by dependence, submissiveness, and self-sacrifice embodies Beatrice's character. She is depicted as a submissive and

obedient wife, constantly deferring to her husband's authority and adhering to his strict rules. She internalises the belief that her primary role is to serve and please her husband, prioritising his needs and desires over her own. This suppression of personal agency prevents Beatrice from expressing herself fully and pursuing her own aspirations. Her adherence to the Cinderella Complex stifles her ability to express her own thoughts, emotions, and desires. She remains silent and submissive, rarely speaking up or asserting herself. Her voice is overshadowed by her husband's dominance, creating a dynamic where her opinions and needs are consistently suppressed.

Beatrice's submissiveness is born out of fear, primarily due to her husband's abusive behaviour. Eugene's physical and emotional abuse instils a sense of fear and dependence in Beatrice, further deepening her adherence to the Cinderella Complex. The fear of retribution and punishment leaves her trapped in a cycle of compliance, afraid to challenge the established power dynamics. She considers Eugene as her Prince and places Heaven as her safe place, to where her Prince accompanies her. Thus she embodies self-sacrificing nature. She dedicates herself to the care and well-being of her children, enduring her husband's abuse in the hope of protecting them. Beatrice neglects her own needs and desires, putting the needs of her family above her own, which perpetuates the idea that a woman's worth lies solely in her ability to sacrifice and serve others. She even considers Eugene as a great man when he rejects the marriage proposals which came as a result of Beatrice's incapability of bearing another child. She praises him for his wealth and success.

Beatrice is a mother who is absent for the vast majority of the text. She meekly accepts her spouse Eugene while remaining silent. She loves and respects him so much that she even defends Eugene's physical abuse of her and her children by claiming that such actions are the product of outside factors. One of these instances occurs when Beatrice is severely battered by her husband and needs to be brought to the hospital. She explains Eugene's behaviour in this instance by claiming that it was a reaction to the stress and pressure he has been under since his editor and friend, Ade Coker, was killed: "Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraines and fever," she said. "He is carrying more than any man

should carry. Do you know what Ade's death did to him? It is too much for one person" (250).

As the novel progresses, Beatrice's character undergoes a subtle transformation. She begins to question her role within the family and seeks moments of independence and self-expression. Through her actions, Beatrice challenges the Cinderella Complex and asserts her own identity, even if in small ways. Her transformation serves as an example of the potential for growth and empowerment that lies within women affected by such complexes. Beatrice's awakening begins with the recognition of her own oppression within her marriage. She becomes increasingly aware of the physical and emotional abuse inflicted upon her by her husband, Eugene. This realisation sparks a desire for change and a yearning for personal freedom, setting the stage for her journey towards self-assertion. As Beatrice's awareness grows, so does her inner strength. She finds courage to challenge the established power dynamics and assert her own opinions and desires. Beatrice starts to recognize her own worth and the importance of her voice, breaking free from the silence and submissiveness that characterised her earlier life.

Beatrice's transformation is closely intertwined with her role as a mother. She seeks to protect her children from the same oppressive environment she endured, becoming their source of strength and support. By empowering her children to think independently and fostering an environment of love and respect, Beatrice indirectly empowers herself, realising her capacity to create positive change. By the end of the novel, Beatrice emerges as a symbol of freedom and resilience. She exhibits strength and courage in asserting her independence, standing up against the abuse and oppressive beliefs that once held her captive. Her assertion paves the way to escape from the shackles and that leads to poisoning Eugene's tea with rat poison in small doses and eventually.

## CONCLUSION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* delves into the intricate journeys of its female characters, exploring the transformation from the stifling grip of the Cinderella Complex to the empowering realm of self-assertion. Through the experiences of Kambili, Beatrice, and others,

Adichie masterfully illustrates the challenges faced by women trapped within societal expectations, while highlighting the transformative power of self-discovery, resilience, and rebellion against gender norms. The novel immerses readers in a patriarchal Nigerian society, where traditional gender roles are rigidly defined, and women are expected to adhere to submissive and self-sacrificing roles. Kambili initially embodies the Cinderella Complex, characterised by fear, obedience, and a lack of agency. Her father's strict religious beliefs and abusive behaviour restrict her freedom, hindering her personal growth and stifling her individuality. However, as the narrative unfolds, Kambili embarks on a journey of self-discovery, propelled by her encounters with influential figures such as her Aunt Ifeoma and Father Amadi. Through these relationships, she gradually sheds the constraints of the Cinderella Complex, embracing her own voice and asserting her autonomy. Kambili learns to question the oppressive dynamics of her family and society, challenging the patriarchal norms that perpetuate female subjugation.

Aunt Ifeoma, a strong and independent woman, serves as a catalyst for Kambili's transformation. Ifeoma defies societal expectations, pursuing her academic and professional ambitions while raising her children single-handedly. Her unwavering spirit and determination inspire Kambili to question the limitations imposed upon her, encouraging her to explore her own passions and talents. Ifeoma becomes a beacon of hope, demonstrating the possibilities that exist beyond the confines of the Cinderella Complex. Father Amadi, a progressive and compassionate priest, also plays a significant role in Kambili's evolution. He challenges the conventional beliefs ingrained in Kambili, encouraging her to question the oppressive religious practices that reinforce gender roles. Through her connection with Father Amadi, Kambili learns to embrace her sexuality, challenging the notion that female desire should be repressed or vilified.

Beatrice, Kambili's mother, represents a complex portrayal of a woman affected by the Cinderella Complex. Initially submissive and self-sacrificing, Beatrice's journey towards self-assertion is more nuanced. She grapples with her own internalised beliefs and the fear instilled by her abusive husband, Eugene. However, as the narrative progresses, Beatrice slowly begins to assert her own desires, prioritise her own well-being, and

challenge the oppressive dynamics within her marriage. Her growth serves as a testament to the possibility of change, even in the face of deeply ingrained societal expectations. The novel's exploration of the Cinderella Complex and the subsequent transformation towards self-assertion reflects larger societal issues faced by women worldwide. Adichie's vivid storytelling highlights the need to challenge gender norms, dismantle oppressive structures, and create spaces where women can flourish and assert their agency. By navigating the 'Feminiverse' within *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie calls for the empowerment of women, encouraging them to reject the confines of societal expectations and embrace their own unique identities.

This novel serves as a powerful exploration of the journey from the Cinderella Complex to self-assertion. Through Kambili, Beatrice, and other female characters, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shines a light on the struggles and triumphs experienced by women in a patriarchal society. The novel serves as a call to action, urging readers to challenge societal norms, foster environments of empowerment, and embrace the transformative power of self-discovery and rebellion against gender expectations. Adichie's work stands as a testament to the resilience and strength of women, reminding us of the importance of self-assertion and the need for a more inclusive and equitable world.

# CHAPTER 18

## ADORNING THEIR OWN PROTECTIVE SHIELDS : UNVEILING THE VEILED MYTHS OF 'CHUDAIL' IN 'STREE' AND 'BULBUL'

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*"tis now the very witching time of night,*

*When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world."*

- William Shakespeare , Hamlet.

### **ABSTRACT:**

*Answers probing questions to that unattended part of logical reasoning. Such is the case of the myths of supernatural entities like 'preth', 'bhooth' 'pisasu' 'chudail' in Indian culture and belief system. Stories in resemblance to bedtime grandmother fairy tales are innumerable. Difficult to believe yet happening. This leads us to the fantasizing scripts of two recently released films in Bollywood: Stree ,which was a 2018 released horror comedy directed by debutant Amar Kaushik and Bulbbul,a directorial debut by Anvita Dutt Gopalan released in 2020 yet set in a backdrop f 1880's Bengal presidency. These movies embedded notions of the often twisted or broken beliefs of feminism movement. The unanswered question "Why always women portrayed as an embodiment of unsatisfied souls wandering around killing or harming people?" is one to be pondered upon. 'Stree ' has its roots in the Karnataka- based legendary myth of Nale-ba which means 'come tomorrow' and the movie paces itself by the words slightly modified as 'O Stree Kal Aana'(oh woman come tomorrow). Shradha Kapoor plays the role of a witch who walks the*

*streets visiting peoples' houses, luring men to come out of their homes in voices familiar to them. The men are never heard from again. 'Bulbbul' a lady landlord who had lost her husband in a very young age and now lives as the new majesty of the mansion. Surrounded by a mysterious aura and a strange depth in her eyes, she ultimately is revealed as the 'bloody handed' chudail to the audience by the end of the film. In fact, keeping apart the logic factor, they tend to wear the shield of protection-protection against PATRIARCHY. When darkness falls, setting off to the streets in order to unveil the covered up deceitful pits dug by the patriarchal society.*

**Key words:** patriarchy, witchcraft, culture, belief system, logic.

Wicca is a minority religion whose proponents, regardless of their gender, call themselves as witches. It began in the U.K in the 1940s. Wicca and Witchcraft are part of the larger contemporary pagan movement, which includes priests and polytheists among others. All these spiritual paths base their practices on pre-Christian religions and cultures.

Ever since Wicca arrived in the United States in the 1960s, it has been growing. It is estimated that there could be around 1.5 million witches in the U.S.

The *daayan* (other name for witch in Indian culture) refers to a secret society which emerged during the 1916 era in Maharashtra. The concept generated from this cult has been transformed to major popular television shows and has hit box –office collections on big screen too .The belief in *daayans* has existed in most regions of India, particularly in Jharkhand and Bihar. Vasvi Kiro, a member of the Jharkhand Women's Commission says, 'victims of witch-hunting are usually old or widowed women. These women are victimized for their property, or due to problems in the family or for sexual exploitation". The practice is prevalent in rural and semi-rural areas, with "witch-hunts" causing women to be killed or isolation from society. Recently the state of Kerala was held chilled by a cold- blooded murder in which the police suspect to be cases of human sacrifice as part of a "witchcraft ritual",, *two women in Kerala were allegedly abducted, beheaded and buried at Elanthoor village in Pathanamthitta district on(October 11/2022. Kochi police said they were*

*also looking into allegations of cannibalism by one of the three people who were arrested.*( Indian Express)

*Daayan* is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *churel* or *chudail* although differences exist between them. A *churel* is a ghost with vengeance that arise from the death of a woman during pregnancy or childbirth, with supernatural powers similar to a witch. Indian witch stories vary across the country; the north Indian states believe that the *churel* (which lives near graveyards or in forests) can change its form and lure young men, who they will kill if they have physical contact with them. While in the western and eastern parts of India, it is believed that a *churel* looks like an old hag who lures small children away from their families to kill and eat them so as to keep herself younger. Allegedly, *daayan* is considered to be more powerful than *churel*.

According to Folklore a woman treated badly by her family or who died in childbirth as a result of family negligence returns as a *daayan*, haunting the family and drinking the blood of male family members, which directly is a plunge upon the practices of domination and suppression by the patriarchal society prevailing in India for the past many years. Beginning with the youngest male in the family, draining his blood changes him into an old man before she progresses to the other men. According to Mohanty, the ‘demonising’ of women emerged as a ploy to keep them oppressed in a society where overt gestures of ambition and independence were seen with wrath. Mohanty who hails from Orissa, has been all over the country, investigating Indian supernatural creatures and says, ‘I’ve been to those places, heard the stories and seen the fear on the faces of the people who believed in it. They’re rooted in mass hysteria and we’ve never been able to find any proof.’ He shares the legend of the *Muhnochwa* — an entity that scratches people’s faces, that was allegedly terrorising more than 20 districts in rural India. The concept of *chudail* was so common, that people openly killed their wife, daughter or sister claiming that she was a *daiyan*, and that they were doing the village a favour by beheading her. You’ll find many cases where women were beheaded, and their murderers surrendered themselves to the police by presenting the severed head.”

Bulbbul is a fantasy fable of a woman who has been exploited but unlike the ones who remain suppressed she is out there to avenge her predators.

And this echoes the actual situation of majority of women because they all have been through this at some point or the other of their life. The movie begins with the wedding of the titular Bulbbul, who is a little girl, with a much older man. This is 19<sup>th</sup> century India, of course, with child marriage being commonplace. With all her innocence, little Bulbbul has assumed that she has been married to Indra's brother, Satya, who is closer to her age. She is told that as she grows up, she will learn the difference between a husband and a brother-in-law. Indra's other brother, Mahendra, who is a person with an intellectual disability, is also fascinated by Bulbbul, who he keeps referring to as a doll and brutally rapes her before choking her to death. The fact that the other victims of Bulbbul are those who have done crime against women she has acquaintance with; a wife beater, a pedophile, a man who cheats upon his wife and marries another woman in her presence, all meet the same cruel end. For once and for all time, the 'chudail' with inverted feet emerging at the end performs rites of avenge with complete justification.

The character played by Shradha Kapoor as 'Stree' had once been an extremely beautiful courtesan whom every man in town desired. At last, she found a man who truly loved her and wanted to marry her, but on their wedding night, Stree and her husband were killed by the town's jealous men. Her spirit has ever since been searching for her true love and also seeks revenge on the town by aiming to abduct every last man in it. Vicky( Raj Kumar Rao) realizes that Stree only desires love and respect and hesitates with the plan of destroying her. The anonymous woman who accompanies Vicky then suggests him to simply cut her long braid - the source of her powers - so that she will be rendered powerless. He does so, and Stree vanishes. The woman leaves the city the next day and Vicky bids her farewell. On the bus, the woman merges Stree's braid with her own hair and then vanishes from the bus, implying that she is the witch who wanted Stree's power through her braid. Stree visits Chanderi again the following year and finds her own statue at the town entrance with a new phrase - "O Stree, protect us" thus giving her respect, and she does not enter Chanderi. Thus enhancing the mesmerizing fact that 'respect takes its place above all; including revenge and anger'.

**Chutni Mahato** was a lady who was branded as a witch by her in-laws in Jharkhand. She was stripped and paraded naked throughout the streets due to her title labeled and was brutally treated. However she managed to escape in 1995. Afterwards striving to survival was her main task of life. Now an activist battling social evils she acts as major personality in social service. She won the Padma Shri in 2019 for her services. *Kaala Sach: The Black Truth is a movie inspired by her life*; but never did justice to her real life story. According to Mahato, "In real life, though, 'witches' are not demons but women like you and me."

To conclude, witches portrayed in fictional stories and movies are mere embodiments of living "Damsels in distress". Women who are deprived of their rights and freedom in society bear to their limits and unleash their frustrations and wrath in nothing less than a witchcraft manner. Such portrayals leads men and other audience to false beliefs of women being able to get justice only by evil means. Thus normalizing women as beings in desperation doing deeds of evil quality. Men watching such movies are amused by the woman power of the spirit world from the movies rather than acceptance of individuality in reality. They are fancied by the fact of empowering women only in imagination but when it comes to reality they refuse. Women portrayed in movies as brutal are nothing but a mirroring of the cruel actions against them in society. All the audience watching movies with women as such mythical characters and in central protagonist character should realize this fact.

However the question that still exists unanswered is; How are only women picturized as unsatisfied souls wandering around harming people or are they just wearing a protective shield to evoke their power within?! This year-old question does not need an answer but a solution where men should be ready and come forward to accept women as individuals as themselves. They need to understand women are not downtrodden or weak.

Yet for so long, the word 'witch' has had negative connotations - being used as an insult, a term to induce fear and terror. In the book, WITCH; UNLEASHED UNTAMED UNAPOLEGETIC by the third generation hereditary witch *Lisa Lister*, she explains the history behind witchcraft; why the witch is now waking once again in women across the world today. This book will help women to remember, reconnect and reclaim the word

'witch' and its power. Women portrayed as forces taking revenge gains an altogether new ventilations to utilize power within. Once they are done, they are ready to rest these powers in their predecessors. Thus a never-ending saga of taking up arms against men doing wrong against them.

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# CHAPTER 19

## FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CENTRE:AN ANALYSIS OF TRUTH ABOUT ME BY A REVATHI

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### ABSTRACT

*Moving from the periphery to the centre is a challenging task. It needs herculean efforts to cover the distance and gain acceptance in the new territory. This fact remains true in the case of travelling as well as ideology. Transgenders in India were treated as outcasts until recently. In some cases, they were considered degraded than animals. The society simply forgot that transgenders were humans too and need basic necessities of life. When food, clothing and shelter were denied to them by their own kith and kin, they had to turn to begging and prostitution. The work taken for study is Truth About Me by A Revathi. In the autobiography Revathi provides minute details from her life. Through this revelation the readers can understand what transgenders had to go through. Pain, insult, humiliation and trauma added to their outcast stature. Truth About Me is all about constantly striving to gain acceptance and acknowledgement from the main society.*

**KEYWORDS:** LGBTQ, Outcast, Queer theory, Transgender, Sex change operation, education

Transgender in India faced discrimination in education, employment and public amenities. Even the most basic need of toilets in public places has been implemented in some parts of the country. They are named as 'Third gender'. They are discriminated mainly in educational institutions and work places. They constantly face social exclusions and homelessness, transphobia and large psychological stress. They are not provided legal protection so they become victims to hate crime. Section 377 of the British

colonial penal code criminalizes all sexual Acts ‘against order of nature’. It categorized consensual sexual intercourse between same sex people as an ‘unnatural offence’ which is ‘against order nature’. It prescribes a punishment of 10 years imprisonment. It was introduced by British India on Beggary Act of 1533. On July 2, 2009 the Delhi High Court scraped the portions of section as unconstitutional, because of changing attitudes.

In earlier society people faced transgenders with fear and treated them below the status of animals. A person who became transgender is only given minimal amount of acceptance and no social status. They were forced to do begging and to sell their body as sex workers for their living. Society always treated the third genders as outcast. Transgenders survived barely with the hope of creating a better society in future. Years of hardwork paid for their present status and existence in Indian society. ‘Third gender’ is celebrated with thematic importance by Indian and foreign writers. Many writers have created a large impact on the society by helping to transform the lives of transgenders. Some of the reputed works are: *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (2015), *Neither Manner Woman. The Hijras of India* by Sarena Nanda(1990), *We Are Not The Others: Reflections of A Transgender Activities* by Kalki Subramanyam(2021), *Transgender in Indian Context:Right and Activism* by Dipak Giri(2019), *India Transgender Challenges India* by Mysore Rajgopal Uranyadhar(2016)

All these texts gives a major outline about the different situations in a transgender life. The works also throw light upon how they lived and how they are living. The work taken for study is *Truth About Me* by A Revathi. A Revathi is an writer, actor and artist in Bangalore. She works with Sangama, a sexual minority human right organisation for people who faces trouble due to their sexual preference. She was born as a male named ‘Doraiswamy’ in the district of Namakkal in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. She suffered a lot of trauma from her family. Her family was one of the high caste in her village. She has to act as a boy for her her loving ones. But her ‘feminity’ opens up everytime, even she tries to hide it. A Revathi is the first member to write a book from the Hijra community. Hijras were marginalized by the society and the society sees them as incapable of performing the expected roles of the male or the female gender. So they

were left out behind the main stream of the society and they lead a life of their own.

In our society we speak the language of the rights loud. Individuals are denied their rights in the name of sex, sexuality, caste and religion. They have to either arrive at comprise or engage in struggle. I am one such individual who has been marginalized because I was born a male and wanted to live my life as a woman. *The Truth about Me* is about my everyday experience of discrimination, ridicule and pain; it is also about my endurance and my joys. (Revathi preface)

Through writing an autobiography of her own she tries to portray the problems faced by the sexually marginalized in the society. She wanted the society to know about the problems and discriminations faced by the transgenders or Hijras in the society. She wrote about her suffering, torturing and pains. Because of this she faced several criticism. Her autobiography is a perfect example of a Hijra life or a transgender's journey.

A Revathi begins her autobiography with a preface, in which she clearly mentions her motive behind writing this book:

As a Hijra, I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you about being a Hijra and also about doing sex work. My story is not meant to offend, accuse or hurt anyone's sentiments. My aim is to the readers the lives of Hijras, their district culture and their dreams and desires. I hope this book of mine will make people see that Hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from society or the government. I seek to show that we Hijras do not have the right to live in their society. (Revathi preface)

She clearly had an aim during writing this book and she achieved it. Through her book, she wanted to show the society that Hijras are not someone who are worthy of nothing. Through her life she proved to the society that Hijra's can do a lot of this other than sex work and begging. They can also lead a normal life like other people. They can also do respectable jobs. This book gives us a complete picture of Hijra's life, their customs, culture and traditions and also their dreams and desires.

Revathi was born as the youngest child in the family of five with three brothers and a sister. She was initially named as Doraismay, a male in a peasant family in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. She faced violence and bulling right from her childhood, from her school and from her own family for her ‘feminine’ ways. “They would chant, Girl-Boy ! Ali ! Number 9’ ! my heart would sink at these words, but I also felt faintly gratified and even happy that these boys actually conceded that I was someone a women”(Revathi 6).

Though she was insulted by her classmates for her girly behaviour. She managed to find happiness in these words. She wanted to be recognized as a girl by them. She loved to play with young girls and to dress up as a woman than playing with boys. She also felt discomfort or unease of belonging to a wrong body. As a child Revathi went through immense mental turmoil and confusion over her gender identity.

A woman trapped in a man’s body was how I thought of myself. I wondered why God had chosen to inflict this peculiar torture in me, and why He could not have created me wholly male or wholly female. Why am I a flawed being, I wondered often. I might as well die, I thought. I could not study, yet pretended to and all the time I was obsessed, confused and anxious. (Revathi 15)

At some point of her life she felt tired. She felt that she was trapped in a wrong body. She wanted to be free from this body. At some point she even questioned God for making her like this. She even thinks about ending such life an uncomfortable, a life that prevents her to be herself she feels exhausted. “As soon as I got home from school, I would wear my sister’s long shirt and blouse, twist a long towel around my head and let it trail down my back like a braid: I would then walk as if I was a shy bride, my eyes to the ground” (Revathi 4). She wished to be a woman. To dress up like them and to go to school. She admired the other girls in her class. She longed to be like them.

By doing these things she found relief. By doing these small things she managed to continue her restless life. “In my class, I would sit staring at the girls, taking note of the way their braids fell, the intricate knot of their colourful ribbons, the jasmine and kanakambaram they wore in their hair,

and their shirts and blouse. I longed to be like them and suffered and I could not dress so. (Revathi 6)

Later she met a group of people who were like her during a school trip to Namakkal. He felt a sense of attachment and feeling of being with one's own and decided to run away to Delhi with them. So she can live a life with her true gender identity. After she reached Delhi, she began to live with Hijra community. Here, we can see the guru-chela system that existed in Hijra community. And it was during this period she underwent her sex-changing operation.

Revathi's nani sent her for her operation along with her gurubai's chela. They are going to do the operation illegally. They reached the hospital which was actually a small house. They were all alone and had nobody to look after them after the operation. So the doctor appointed an 'ayah' to look after them after operation. Both of them were very tensed. Their identities were kept secret. After the operation she was given an iron bed, on which they had spread a sheet of plastic. She was not treated very well. She had to suffer the pain. She and her gurubai's chela remained in the hospital for several days. After removing the stitches she along with her gurubai's chela left the hospital. Their journey back to Delhi was not easy. She faced difficulty in walking and her wound bleeds due to long time sitting, but somehow, she managed to reach home. They were several customs and ritual to be followed by a Hijra after her operation. She followed everything and there was a celebration for her completing the operation. During that ceremony she was renamed as 'Revathi' by her guru.

After the operation, she fulfilled her desire to live a woman but she was unable to live freely. She faced not only physical and sexual violence but also economic hardships. For her living she did several jobs like dancing at wedding and blessing during child birth, begging and sex works. After a couple of month tired of her life in Delhi. She ran away and went back to her home. She was not welcomed by her family. She faced beatings, taunts and insult from them.

Later she moved to Bangalore for work. Initially she engaged in sex work. During this time she was confronted by the police, she was physical and

sexually humiliated in the presence of her inmates. Hijras were publicly assaulted by the cops for whom they were easy preys. Later she joined Sangama, an NGO working for the rights of sexual minorities. From there, she learned more about the transgender rights and many other things.

It is very rare to hear about a transgender marriage. Not everyone gets the chance to be in a relationship. Revathi was lucky in the matter. She met a man who was her colleague in Sangama. He was someone who understands her and encourages her to work and to lead a normal life. She falls in love with him and later they got married. They lived a very good life full of love. But all this happiness only last for a few months. After that the gap between her and her husband widened. He began to ignore her. When he is in home he spends time in front of the computer doing his work. It hurts her a lot. Once she explained him about her situation, he got angry and said: “I can be romantic only when I feel like it. If you ask me to feel romantic, it as if, I have no freedom of choice here” (Revathi 287). He continued to hurt her with his words. Their love began to scatter away. “We shared the rent, food, brought things for the house together, but he failed to share his love with me” (Revathi 288). Later a year after their marriage they had a big fight and her husband left her.

Currently Revathi is a writer and activist who work for the sexual minorities. Through her autobiography, she attempts to bring out the problems faced by the Hijra community. The violence they face from their family, sexual assaults tortures by police and their effort to find real love and to live a life with dignity. It also focuses on the urgency to protect the right of minorities. In olden days the condition was worse. Most of them have been abandoned by their families and were left with no other option but to resort to begging, prostitution and performing at social gatherings. They face persistent bias that denies them even basic education and jobs. They face discrimination and harassment both at schools and colleges. Non-cooperation from their co-workers and employers forced them to quit the job. These circumstances again let them back to sex works and begging.

Revathi didn't get chance to complete her studies. Because of her feminine characters and her desire to live like a woman she was forced to stop her schooling before completing her tenth. She left her home and went to live

like a woman. She faced several difficulties because of her lack of education in her life. If she was educated enough sometimes her life would be different. She didn't get any respected jobs and she was forced to do begging and sex work. She didn't like doing these jobs but there was no other way to earn the money for her living. If she had enough educational qualifications she may get another good jobs. Later she was lucky to get a job in sangama. She herself felt confused at sometime in her life what will she do if she didn't had a job in sangama. What will be her future? From her experience we can understand the importance of education in a transgender's life. Education plays an important role in the development of transgenders life. It is necessary for the improvement of their life conditions. So we should give importance to educate them.

But in the case of Revathi, it was totally different. She feels herself as a product or a slave under patriarchy. She thought that the money can buy everything back to her – family, dreams and happiness. But she wasn't able to get them fulfilled. "All I ask is that you accept as worthy of respect what you've all along considerable unnatural and illegal. We want to live as woman and if we granted the facilities that will enable us to do so, we will live as other women do" (Revathi). Nowadays some changes have come in the society. People are broadminded to include Transgenders as well. The Government of India has ensured that all transgenders be given equality in education and employment. LGBTQ theories explore different perspectives of understanding their lives. Pride month is celebrated every year in the month of June as a festival to celebrate their identity and unity throughout the continents.

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## CHAPTER 20

# DECENTRALIZING THE CENTRE: A DERRIDEAN READING OF WHEN THE MOON WAS OURS BY ANNA-MARIE MCLEMORE

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### ABSTRACT

Humans are the most dependent race in the universe. They seek solace in companionships, be it of mother, a friend, a lover or sometimes an all-in-one company. But sometimes, in a Freudian investigation, the subconscious realm of mind contrives a seemingly real (imaginative) existence to sympathize with the real lone self. In *When the Moon Was Ours*, Anna-Marie McLemore flaunts an opulent tale of a girl born out of water and a boy concealing orphic mysteries. Throughout the narrative, Miel exists mainly through the accounts of Sam and occasionally through author's interludes. A Derridean reading of the text decentralizes Miel from the core character of the narrative to the creative imagination of Sam, who constructed her as a companion to sooth the pains of his soul. Ostracized from the homeland, Sam is trying to re-construct a new family in a new mystic land, with his mother and Miel. But is Miel just an imagination of Sam? does she have an existence out of his mind? Why gendered identities create barriers in social relationships? This study attempts to answer these questions by extracting a deconstructive study of *When the Moon Was Ours* with all its connotations including the traumatic experiences of transgender existence, the question of survival in a prejudiced society and the ideology of deconstruction in the text.

**KEY WORDS:** Deconstruction, Decentralizing, Derrida, Transgenderism, trauma, marginalization.

## INTRODUCTION

The plot of a text revolves around the protagonist. But what if the protagonist is just an imagination of another character. Does that mean the text is built around a void or does it mean the text has no actual protagonist? The Derridean theory of deconstruction deals with the complex questions regarding the structure, grammatical implications, an existence of a text out of its author's image, and most importantly the 'language game' within a text. A story in which the mundane reality entangles with the magical realm, a Derridean intuitive analysis always interesting.

Two characters, always searching for their identity and self-consciousness beyond the traditional virtues of society, is the subject matter of the study here. The story of a girl sweet as honey and a boy enchanting as a moon started in an old unknown village which is full of confusing yet enchanting events, people, and their stories. For narrating the story of the girl who grows roses from her wrist and the boy who loves her, Anna-Marie McLemore extracts the core of magical realism and presents a colourful world, with a transgender protagonist who embraces lies to hide the truths. *When the Moon Was Ours*, categorized in to several chapters named after different sources of water on earth like sea, river, bay, lake etc. is a strong emotional current deep enough to trap the reader in a maze of supernatural occurrences. The significations between the reality and 'seemingly real' dawdling in the novel is enough to be the subject of Derridean investigation. Started off as a reaction against the basic arguments of structuralism, 'Post-structuralism' or in Derridean methodology, the 'theory of deconstruction' plays a pivotal role in the developments of contemporary literary theory.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study primarily attempts a structural analysis of the text, along with the transgender portrayal through the metaphysical narratives regarding the characters' backgrounds. The study further explores,

- ❖ An expedition to transgender existence in the contemporary world in general.

- ❖ Delineate the origin and development of Post structuralism and Deconstruction.
- ❖ Remould the existence of the protagonists in the text using the linguistic and structural concepts of deconstruction.
- ❖ A detailed contemplation on the plight of transgenders which is leading them to create an alternate reality to live beyond the constraints in of a prejudiced society.

## METHODOLOGY

Just like the name itself, deconstruction came into existence in an absurd way. It was first proposed in 1966 by the French critic Jacques Derrida, in a conference at Johns Hopkins University on Structuralism, which was initially intended to uplift the declining interest in structuralism. Derrida's arguments in the conference later became one of the papers which marked a milestone in his oeuvre, under the title "Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences" and laid the foundation for the theory of deconstruction. Emerged as a reaction against the structuralist arguments regarding the concept of reality, concept of binary opposites and the concept of single unified meaning, poststructuralism argued that meaning is multiple, and the world is too complex to be explained in binaries. As a technique in literary theory, deconstruction identifies meaning as the result of the differences between words rather than the things they signify. In that sense, deconstruction does not mean destruction as it may seem, but a keen remoulding of meaning which is a mode of contemplation. Thus, searching for meaning in terms of Derridean sense, is like rummaging through a million books for a never existing elixir, which ultimately leads the critique to an impasse or as Derrida calls, an 'Aporia'.

*The Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the term, "Deconstruction," as applied in the criticism of literature, designates a theory and practice of reading that questions and claims to "subvert" or "undermine" the assumption that the system of language is based on grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a literary text (Abrams and Harpham 80).

The concept replaced Western philosophical idea of 'logocentrism' with an 'ultimate referent', a self-sufficient concept beyond the playground of

language. Derrida redefined Saussure's idea of signifier-signified relationship by declaring that their acquaintance sprouts out of differences rather than similarities, as it was the case with structuralists. In a discussion between himself and Helene Cixous 'Littérature en déconstruction, déconstruction en littérature: les enseignements derridiens, avec et autour de Jacques Derrida', which took place at the Institut d'anglais Charles V, Université Paris 7, on 14 and 15 March 2003, Derrida explains on deconstruction.

Deconstruction is not critique, not only critique, because it doubts, it puts in question even problematisation, critique, doubt, scepticism, nihilism, etc. It is more childlike than every philosopher who claimed to start over *ab ovo*, from the beginning (Derrida and Cixous 153).

By 1970, apart from Derrida critics like Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and Barbara Johnson applied the term to their work. As a critical theory deconstruction spread beyond the bounds of literature and philosophy to law, psychology (Lacanian psychoanalysis), architecture, anthropology, theology, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, political theory, historiography, and film studies.

Deconstruction is a suspicion that a text is concealing something from the reader, and a quest to unveil this secret. It is an infinite chain of rapidly changing maze, with every reader by continuous deferral of meanings or significations. Anna-Marie McLemore's *When the Moon Was Ours* is indeed a complex whirlpool of language, which restrains the characterisation, narrative techniques, plot and the text from revealing a mystic truth. A Derridean expedition to the depths of the text might be a new experience for its readers.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Striking of all the pre-consumed notions regarding the existence of the unified and coherent meaning of a text, deconstruction always searched for the scorching truths, trespassing beyond the impasses. To ride beneath the bleeding revelations of a trans-teen's life, nothing would do more justice than this ruthless technique, devised under the brilliance of Derrida. The world of ensuring magic in *When the Moon Was Ours*, evolved under the wand of Anna-Marie McLemore, layers the horrible past that Sam

wants to hide. Through the foul play of language, McLemore has created a treat-for-eyes kind of fiction with contrasting colors, weather, geographical illusions etc as a façade for the emotional trauma that is engulfing Sam slowly. The comment of Laura Ruby, a Printz Award-winning author on McLemore's *When the Moon was Ours* as, "lushly written and surprisingly suspenseful, this magical tale is not just a love story, but a story of the secrets we keep and the lies we tell, and the courage it takes to reveal our authentic selves to each other and to the world" (Ruby 2016) alludes to the underlying truths buried between the lines of the novel.

The tale that's circulating in the old village regarding how Miel was appeared in the world questions her very existence from the opening chapter of the novel itself.

As far as he [Sam] knew, she [Miel] had come from the water. But even about that, he couldn't be sure...Sam didn't know any more than anyone else about where she'd come from before he found her in the brush field. She seemed to have been made of water one minute and the next, became a girl (McLemore 1).

Even though Sam's life is unexplainable without Miel, who is the love of his life as the readers may find, he was unsure about who exactly is Miel. Miel is the centre of Sam's universe. Without her he wouldn't be who he is today. But the author's explicit narration regarding the origin of Miel portrays her as a mere imagination inside Sam's mind, to whom he "Talked...in a voice soft enough that no one else could hear it" (3) as if he was talking to his soul. This 'rupture' in the characterisation of Miel, as parallel to the Derridean concept of the rupture in the whole structural pattern of meaning which until then was consumed as the result of binary oppositions, is the evidence of her being a mist that covers up Sam's scars which might break open and bleed at a stranger's touch.

Miel can also be a symbol of Sam's lost self, the feminine side he had lost under the custom of bacha posh, which made him a transgender female, that means a female who have a strong emotional and psychological attachment to the masculine aspects of society and he identifies his gender as male. Miel's memories of lost moons can be a reference to the lost self

of Sam, who synonymously referred as Moon throughout the novel. “I lost the moon, she had said, sobbing against her fingers. I lost the moon... Her feeling that the moon had slipped from her grasp seemed locked in a place so far inside her that to reach it would break her open” (5). Here the ‘moon’ can be a signifier that refers to Sam, the moon in Miel’s sky, the lost self of Sam and the light Sam always wanted to chase out of the restraints of his circumstances. This reduces Miel and her nickname for Sam- ‘Moon’ – to mere subjects of author’s multiple significations within the text. The statement “Moon had become his name to this town because of her...Without her, he had been nameless. He had not been Samir or Sam. He had been no one” (5) asserts the same idea of Miel being an inseparable part of Sam, a part that exist within himself and outside at the same time, like how Derrida explained the concept of centre, existing both inside and outside the structure which led to the assumption that there is no actual centre within a structure. Likewise, decentring Miel as an integral part of Sam’s life, it can be assumed that she is a mere image born out of Sam’s longing for a companion to embrace his true self.

The roses that grew out of Miel’s wrists, which changed color with Sam’s presence, can also be considered as another signifier which allude to Miel being a symbolic representation of Sam’s hidden identity. The roses burst,...through the opening on her wrist that never healed. One grew, and she destroyed it...but now she hesitated before cutting them...they’d responded to Sam...if she thought of him too much, her roses grew deeper and brighter...as dark pink as her favourite lipstick (7-8).

The changing contrast of Miel’s roses can be referred as the fading and remembering of Sam’s past that he wants to leave behind. Rather than “pushing them underwater so the river’s current carried them away” (8), Miel’s existence helps him to ease his mind and embrace the warmth of love. Even the images of flowing water always associated with Miel showcases her adaptability as Sam wants her to be. Here Miel herself is a signifier whose “existence is a conception that does not have a matching association with observed reality” (Thamarana 266).

All along Sam’s journey from accepting his new homeland to finding his true identity, it was Miel who accompanied. Sam’s metamorphosis from Samira to Sam,even though the name sounded less like a thing that had

once belonged to Sam than the name of some Specter, a spirit that might come and take him if Miel did not keep it away. It was a name of a girl who had not died because she had never quite lived. She had never truly existed (McLemore 109).

What that existed all this while and what will be existing all along, would be the boy called Sam who can paint luminating moons for the girl called Miel to brighten up her world, who loved him for what he really is. Miel even went to the extent of cutting her roses which grew from her wrists to protect his identity as Sam. The thought of Bonner girls finding his real identity terrified her. Because “if he ever trusted them as much as he trusted Miel, they would ruin him. They would take everything from him without trying” (McLemore 23). Here Bonner girls signifies the society which gauges out the spirit of an individual who decides to stand out of the gender normative norms of culture and tradition. Here the character of Miel acts as a protective shield for Sam, which blocks everything that could break his charm of protection, casted by his imaginary companion Miel.

Throughout the novel, Miel was an ever-evolving structure constantly signifying one meaning after another, both as the light and shadow of Sam’s existence. Since *When the Moon Was Ours* is an autobiographical account of McLemore’s life and her experiences with her transgender husband, the character of Miel can be witnessed in a new light, the author’s own inner self. Roses and moons might be the symbolic manifestation of the real-life experiences of McLemore entrusted to reader’s imagination through the fiction. Miel was a both a cause of and a path to Sam’s real self. Although McLemore’s character was afraid to face the reality and caught up in between the flood of narration, towards the end of the novel Sam decides what he really wants to become and who he really had been all this while.

## CONCLUSION

*When the Moon Was Ours* is all about the bone-wrenching pain, harassments, insecurities, broken dreams, longings and many more things that a transgender has to carry while living in a prejudiced society. Deconstructing the text against its own underlying meanings, reveals how

hazard of a task is to come out as a transgender in contemporary world. In McLemore's words,

That space, between the lives of boys and girls are expected to inhabit, came into sharper focus when my husband did come out as transgender, and as he transitioned to living in a way that better reflected his gender identity. As teens, we feel the growing weight of questions...in our hands. For my husband, that question was how he wanted to live and what name he wanted to be called. For me, it was whether I could see myself as something more than a daughter born in that space between worlds (McLemore 272).

For everyone out there, there is something they hold dearest to their soul, may be an identity, a person, an imagination, or a dream. No matter what it is, everyone has the right to be their true self, just like how Sam embraced his true self and Miel.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

To break the shackles of exclusion and be true to oneself, going against the social norms of binary gender concepts needs so much courage and self-esteem. No matter feminine, masculine or transgender, everyone deserves to be heard and loved. For a harmonious coexistence beyond the diminutions of society in to a binary world, reading beyond the written words are always necessary. To speak out some truths, a careful destruction and 'de'construction is inevitable in present scenario.

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## CHAPTER 21

# THE ABILITY IN DISABILITY: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL IN PREETI MONGA'S THE OTHER SENSES, JEEJA GHOSH'S RIVER OF TIME AND NASEEMA HURZUK'S THE INCREDIBLE STORY

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The world worries about disability more than disabled people do. The social construct called disability and the disabled characters are portrayed as individuals with their own desires and aspirations. Disability studies revolves around the experiences of people with disabilities and in critiquing the system of power and oppression. The depiction of disabled characters in literature challenges the dominant narratives that always push the disabled individuals, especially disabled women, to the backdrop for a more equitable society. These three works, Preeti Monga's *The other Senses* (2012), Jeeja Ghosh's *River of Time* (2017) and Baseman Huzruk's *The Incredible story* (2005) by Indian disabled women brings forth the gender dynamics pondering us with the question - how a disabled woman in India survive? All these books reveal the hardships of women because of their disabilities and their restrictions at home even in pursuing the higher education.*

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Disability, Survival, Struggle, Restrictions, Power, Oppression

Survival, a common theme in literature even though expressed in varied ways are similar in some way or the other. The skill of overcoming the strokes of turbulence and the waves of adversity is what the survival

literature focuses on. The survival tales always remind us of the concept of adapt and change. The survival literature always is glued on to the idea of march ahead or move forward. Indian English literature has portrayed the disabled women 's agonizing tales focusing their identities and contributions, which in turn voices the voice of the already silenced marginalised lot. Through these narratives - Preeti Monga's *The other senses*, Jeeja Ghosh's *River of Time* and Naseema Huzruk's *The Incredible story* more clear image of the intricacies and vivid life experiences of disability is pictured to the world.

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argued that the disability is a narrative device that gives fiction energy and ultimately reaffirms normalcy in the works. The disability studies, a genre flourished in the late twentieth century started focusing on all stratas like sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, literature and political science with the main motto of promoting justice and equality for the disabled, who were always looked down by the abled public as someone who is naive to the functions of the society. The following lines by Anuradha Mohit clearly depicts the status of a disabled marginalised woman in the Indian society:

“Women face triple discrimination because of disability, gender, and economic status. Prejudice prevail even within the three categories among women, disabled women are seen as inferior, resulting in isolation and marginalization. They become the poorest of the poor” (26).

Disability studies shows how disability is irreducible to bodily impairment and over the last few decades, this genre has become a catching new field of inquiry within the critical branch of identity studies. The broad term, disability amalgamates such ideological terms as sick, ugly, deformed, mad, abnormal, which in turn devalue their bodies instead of paying attention to the terms like beautiful, healthy, fit, normal etc which the disability system focuses on. The literary landscape of disabled Indian women offers a rich tapestry of narratives that delve deep into their experiences, deftly navigating the intricate interplay of identity, empowerment and societal perceptions. Through their poignant stories these three disabled Indian women writers illuminate the multifaceted challenges faced by disabled women in India, offering an authentic portrayal that often remains overlooked. By highlighting the resilience and

agency displayed by these women, the literature not only amplifies their voices but also contributes significantly to the broader discourse on inclusivity and representation.

The late disability historian, Paul Longmore says that the people with disabilities experienced a social death as disability is a marker of isolation. The word, 'debility' coincides with the term, 'disability' which refers to the condition of being weak or feeble either physically or mentally. Aristotle viewed 'monstrous' bodies as national *anomalia* (Greek for irregularities/unevenness) that represents different types of ability. Helen Keller's series of autobiographical works, *The story of my life* (1903), *The world I live in* (1908) and *My religion* (1908) at various stages of her life centres around her struggles and hardships to learn Braille, to gain right to education by being a deafblind American woman. Such literature often underscores the human transformation and the importance of self-acceptance leading to personal growth in the Indian society.

The genesis of the age-old bodily perfection myth could be traced to the ancient Greece where the bodily perfection of the Olympians is looked upon as the flawless Gods and goddesses. In Greek mythology, the only flawed or disabled God was Hephaestus, born lame to Zeus and Hera. The upset Hera throws away the baby Hephaestus from heaven, who was then rescued and looked after by Aphrodite, the Goddess of love. Bharati Ray's novel, "So many hungers" delves deep in to the hardships of a visually impaired rural Bengali woman and her difficulty in achieving self-discovery and empowerment. Shanta Gokhale, the disabled author of "One foot on the ground" brings forth her hardships and experiences subjectively focusing on the complexities of disability. The book of Mathew, The New Testament gives the linkage between the disability and sin by giving example of the Jesus Christ who cures a man with palsy by declaring that his sins were forgiven. All these works contribute to a more detailed understanding of the complexities of disability and the varied life experiences of the disabled women in India.

"The Other Senses: An Inspiring True Story of a Visually Impaired" is a powerful memoir by Preeti Monga that takes us on a journey through the ups and downs of her challenging life. Her life took an unexpected turn when she was diagnosed with impaired vision resulting from partial

paralysis of her optic nerves. Over time, her vision gradually worsened leading to the complete loss of her eyesight when she was just thirteen years old. However, she found herself met with sympathy from friends and neighbours, even then, felt increasingly isolated from society. In studies, Preeti proved to be an exceptional learner even though she faced difficulties due to her inability to see things clearly. While studying in Delhi, her education was disrupted and was unjustly expelled from the school on behalf of her disability. The transfer of the school principal Sister Clare, her sole supporter to another location left her without the opportunity for formal education in any regular school. Despite this adversity, Preeti's determination led her to pursue other skills and knowledge. She learned typing, music and essential life skills through her own efforts.

Disability proved to be a significant obstacle even in her pursuit of happiness in marriage. Life had more surprises in store for Preeti. She received an offer to work at a prestigious five-star hotel and harboured dreams of working independently. But, these dreams were cut short when a strike by other employees who were unwilling to work with a blind girl led to the abrupt termination of her job. Forced to relocate from Goa to Delhi, Preeti's life took a new turn. She ventured into pickle marketing and proved her exceptional skills by outselling other salespersons. Recognizing her talent, Sunil, a family friend, offered her the position of a marketing manager. Preeti excelled in her role and her success led to the possibility of a partnership in the business, though it never materialized. Despite the setbacks, Preeti persevered taking on various part-time assignments to make ends meet. Her talent and dedication earned her an offer to head the public relations department of Dr. Shroff's Charity Hospital. Unfortunately, she fell seriously ill and the road to recovery was long and difficult. Determined to forge her own path, she established her own company, Silver Lining Human Resource Solutions Private Limited and also founded an NGO focused on educating the blind children.

Jeeja Ghosh's *River of time* is a poetry collection which portrays her struggles, feelings and incidents she faced during the most unfavourable phase of her life. A social activist now, she was born with the thorns of cerebral palsy with which she tamed her life in to a celebration of roses.

This book is a reformation poetry collection. Goodley illustrates that “impairment is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment. Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers” (8). The atrocities against women like rape and human rights violation is clearly expressed in poems like 'Nirbhaya', 'Wheel chair' and 'Abandoned Love'. Her mind journey with many empowering emotions and thoughts is best brought out in poems like 'Ballad of a dark room', 'Intrigued' and 'What if'. Her poem 'Disfigured' is featured in Action Movies United Project of UNESCO.

Waves fume in white bubbles

Lashing on the shores

Darkness befell

In to the cold realms of depth These lines taken from the poem, 'Cloud' from her collection of poems *River of time* clearly brings out the passionate crusader in her for the disability rights.

Naseema Mohammed Amin Huzruk, the determined and resilient woman becomes a ray of hope as she acted like a pole star guiding and empowering many wheel-chaired disabled women like her by overcoming all the obstacles she encountered before the historical enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act in 1995. According to Addlakha “Historically in India as elsewhere in the world, there has been a deep-rooted cultural antipathy to persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages the disabled have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they were sub-human. They have been portrayed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden on family and society” (9). Her autobiography, *The Incredible story* gives us a detailed picture of the various obstacles she encountered in pursuing her education due to her recurrent doctor visits, which in turn led to a great financial strain for her parents. But she turned all her scars in to stars with great unwavering spirit and with the help of the disabled Babu kaka, she led an organisation for the disabled, 'Helpers of the Hand' in Kolhapur, her homeland. Through this organization, she empowered thousands of less privileged disabled

people from rural Maharashtra. Her autobiography insists on the importance of self-reliance to achieve anything in life.

Javed Abidi, the late disability activist and the founder of Cross-Disability Movement in India mentions on the Naseema M. A. Huzruk's approach to empower the financially weaker section of the disabled in Maharashtra in his foreword to Naseema's autobiography by drawing attention on the correlation between disability and poverty. Also, he acknowledges Naseema Huzruk for taking up a highly challenging responsibility of creating an approachable and unbiased system during a period when Indians were not much aware about disability. Abidi notes her efforts to establish accessible environments in an era of little disability awareness. He criticizes premier institutions like the National Human Rights Commission and Planning Commission for neglecting disabled concerns until 2000. Abidi concludes by urging a "yellow revolution" for a disabled-friendly India. The book's editor, Rukmini Sekhar, emphasizes Naseema Huzruk's impact on enabling disabled individuals to live independently and with self-respect, combating their usual deprivation of these traits in India (4, 5).

The survival theme in Indian disability literature is focused on resilience, strength and indomitable spirit of the disabled individuals as they are always navigated by societal barriers and prejudices. The three disabled authors, Preeti Monga, Jeeja Ghosh and Naseema Huzruk have delved deep into this theme portraying characters who triumph over adversity, challenging prevailing norms and misconceptions about disability. These three literary works triumphs over the success of the disabled individuals highlighting their ability to adapt, overcome and assert their identities. Through these narratives, Indian disability literature resonates with the universal human spirit of survival against all odds, thus it becomes a testament to the power of human determination and the capacity to thrive in the face of challenges. Through the survival theme, these works of Indian disability literature challenges preconceived notions about disability, offering nuanced and authentic portrayals that resonate with the complex realities faced by disabled individuals in India.

The Hindu scriptures have created a disparity between the abled and the disabled by the notion of the disabled being born as a result of the 'karma

palah'. Even Dhritharastra had been denied throne many times as he was visually impaired. The dejection, sufferings, pain, agony, trauma and the obstacles faced by all the three disabled women writers - Preeti Monga, Jeeja Ghosh and Naseema Huzruk voices out the voice of the disabled women as a whole who survived the threats of the cruel abled society successfully. These life narratives - Preeti Monga's *The other senses*, Jeeja Ghosh's *River of Time* and Naseema Huzruk's *The Incredible story* have created a new dimension to the already instilled identity assumptions and illusions of the disabled. The human life becomes an irony because the abled individuals take their life for granted and the disabled look for opportunities every day and count their blessings. These three disabled women writers make the abled society rethink the ways in which disability is depicted, understood and deciphered across different cultural and historical contexts.

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## CHAPTER 22

# DAUGHTERS OF HEAVEN: AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE SUBJUGATION DEPICTED IN THE NOVEL MENAKA'S CHOICE BY KAVITA KANE.

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Researcher

The Apsaras had always been a symbol of eternal beauty. They are often titled as seductress who could make the gods breathless and could even break the eternal penance of Venerated rishis. Their sole purpose is to give pleasure to the gandharvas and mesmerize the divine realm with their dancing skills. They are seen as women who had everything from beauty, luxury, immortality, and even gandharvas to love. All these led them to have a place among our history as an epitome of ‘perfection’. But is it really their resilience or subjugation which made them part of our history? What about their freedom? Were they given equal right with their male counterparts or rather servants of the heavenly male hierarchy?

Menaka’s Choice by Kavita Kane is a novel which tells the untold story of Apsaras, their life held in captivity and restrain. The paper analysis the various instances depicted in the novel which makes them symbol of oppression rather than perfection.

**KEYWORDS:** subjugation, resilience, hierarchy, captivity.

### INTRODUCTION

“Well behaved women rarely make history” is a famous phrase by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, professor of Early American History at Harvard used in her article titled “Virtuous Women Found: New England Ministerial literature, 1668-1735” to indicate that good women were not properly recognized in our history. The word good women should be given new definition and meaning when we try to look into females from our great myths who are often delineated and sidelined under the dominating male

hierarchy. Even in the great epics too they are left unspoken and their life untold. Our religious and historical text also shows women as a weaker species who needs constant protection, care and comfort from their males. One such example is that of Eve in paradise lost where she is portrayed as weak, mild and vulnerable which made her susceptible to the plans of Satan which ultimately led to their downfall from heaven. Manusmriti the holy text also lays down strict rules regarding female conduct “even in her home, a female whether she is a child, a young Women or an old lady, she must remain under her father’s control, as a young women under her husband’s and when her husband is dead under her sons” (pp.5, 148).

## **IDEAL WOMEN**

The concept of ideal women can be seen to have taken from myths, epics and other cultural text. These concepts are believed to have made not by females for their well-being on the contrary by their male counterparts who wants to control and subjugate them rather than allow themselves to unique and have their own voice. The question of female freedom and expression has long been a question of debate nowadays. Those who raise their voice are left alone and criticized greatly. Often those section who fight to establish their opinions will be labelled as feminist but the meaning given by society to those people are often misinterpreted.

## **MENAKA’S CHOICE**

when we mention the names of women in myths we have often come across Sita, Ahalya, Draupadi and Eve as the prominent ones. But are they the only one’s worth mentioning in our epics? What about those who are not highlighted but had a powerful voice? Should they be left unspoken and unknown? These questions are answered in the works of Kavita Kane as she has brought these female figures into prominence by attempting a re-telling of epics. She has tried to give justice to those women warriors who had secured a place on the history but was over shadowed by circumstances. Being an Indian writer especially a journalist she has been heavily interested in mythological female figures and in an interview she stated that “by telling stories from their perspectives I have brought feminism in much needed part of history that is in mythology. Marginalized characters like Urmila or Menaka or Souparnika are women

of conviction too and have their own story to tell, a story we don't know of I like to tell their stories" (Kane).

She has started her career as a journalist by working in famous newspapers before becoming a writer. *Sita's Sister* (2014) is book written under the voice of Sita and Urmila who had giving very little importance in Ramayana. Here Urmila's struggle and her strong nature is shown into the forefront by Kavita Kane. Her book *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2019), which tells about story of Urvashi, an accomplished Kshatriya princess who should come in terms with social implication so as to get accepted by Kama. The book opens another side of hardship and struggle between Pandavas and Kauravas. In *Sarasvati's Gift* (2021) Kavita Kane brings into light her life, her association with creator Brahma. The book explores more about her being a goddess and also motivates us to think beyond our beliefs and customs. The Fisher Queen's dynasty by Kavita Kane talks about a Women who is determined that next time she is with a man she will win at any cost. It's a story about the sequence of events that led to the great Kurushetra war and an insight at the great matriarch of the Kuru family.

Kavita Kane focuses on giving voice to all those female characters and tries to intensify their emotional, mental, and physical turmoil by carefully foregrounding their lack of freedom and incapacity to take control of their own life. She talks about one such tale in her novel *Menaka's Choice* by Kavita Kane. The title itself is contradictory as we can see opinion and decisions of women especially Menaka getting obstructed by the powerful Indra. Apsaras had a prominent position in the Vedic text as goddess but in the later Vedic periods they were brought down as a mere celestial prostitute who would trap their prey by employing the art of seduction. They are the ones who would adorn the godly chambers with their enchanting dance moves. A close reading of the text shows us that their sexuality is highlighted rather than their personality. These beauties are often associated with Indra and their stories of seducing most powerful sages are often popular stories in our myths.

Heaven or Amaravati according to Hindu mythology is a place of perfection. A place devoid of sadness, death and decay where everyone enjoys equality, unity and peace. But is that the really a place exactly like

in the texts? Or rather a mere illusion of the hidden truth. Apsaras are viewed as docile bodies whose individuality is compromised by treating themselves as a symbol of pleasure. They are expected to be heartless as they should not love but they should be loved. They are constantly sourced as symbol of beauty and lust. It is not love that has been attributed to them but that of passion and lust which fills the skin. From the moment of their creation itself they are trained to become sexual weapons. As Kama denotes: “submerge your personality, take a new one when you dance and you lead the man to the final act, but not before building up that sexual tension first through each move, each gesture. There is no touch yet. Excite him with a look, your body language” (Kane, 26). These lines are perfect example of female suppression as they are expected to master the art of seduction so intensely but are directed to pull back their hopes, views, aspirations, decisions and their individuality. They are supposed to act like robots who will obey each and every command given by their superiors. In this novel not only these women are discussed but lives of other major women figures like Padmavati, Hemavati, Shakuntala are also re-visited.

The Novel can also be examined under patriarchal power structure. The heaven is a center which is controlled by Indra. He should be the supreme ruler who looks after his subjects needs and desires but here he is seen as a jealous god who is blinded by power and ambition. From the opening lines itself we can see his lustful eyes on Menaka despite having a wife. ‘He wished he had claim her too but he knew he could not. His wife Sachi would never allow it. But heavens, Indra thought ruefully, Menaka is intoxicating’ (Kane,4). Indra uses his power over all his subjects. All apsaras in the novel have a story of their own to tell where they had to unwillingly agree to Indra.

Menaka is a powerful character in the novel. Her beauty is what makes her a victim to the male gaze. With her intelligence she even makes Indra doubt himself and manages to remain as his most favourite apsara. But it doesn’t allow her to break free from the imposed rules and restrictions. Heaven does not give her equal status. She had become a lover, wife, daughter and even mother but could not enjoy a blissful life. She becomes the pawn in the battle between Indra and Vishvamitra. Indra knew

Vishvamitra would become a threat to his rule and kingdom so he devises a plan to destroy him by employing his favourite apsara. He commands her “I need you to go down to Earth, seduce him, sap him entirely of all his powers and find a way to trap him into domestic bliss on more permanent terms” (Kane,102). Here it shows how she is trained to operate in accordance with the power system. Her sexuality is being used by higher authority as a source to trap their prey from getting powerful. He considers Menaka as a true weapon and often says apsaras are born to love and leave. As a Women she had gone through intense heartbreaks and deception as her husband had been banished from heaven to roam as Kabandh on earth and her daughter to be taken away without her consent. It is from here she had been assigned the task of preventing Vishvamitra from being Brahmarshi. Indra’s cunning personality is evident as he psychologically traps her by assuring that she is his most prized possession and later sends her on a death mission so as to fall in love with Vishvamitra. He cheats on Menaka by commanding Kama to use the love arrows on her so that his plan does not fail.

In the novel we see Menaka as a very resilient and thought provoking Women but her voice and opinions go unnoticed and it’s not her story alone but it is the reality faced by many women in their lives. In most of the times it is women alone who need to compromise her freedom, prestige, honour and those who resist these find themselves being silenced by the society. Menaka becomes a failure in her personal life and we see an immense change in her character from opening chapters to the end. The revelation of Menaka’s pregnancy angers Indra who proclaims that “The dancing Nymph can’t have babies” (Kane, 30). She is just an assorted piece to be used and tossed by the power system of Indra. He plans everything so cunningly that even the most intelligent persons get fall into his trap. The act of not allowing her to see her daughter itself shows his monstrous nature. We can also analyze a hint of possessiveness in Indras thoughts over Menaka because he doesn’t want anybody to love her and her to love anyone. He is in a kind of dilemma at times which makes him mad with rage. She is given immortality and eternal youth not a symbol of happiness but as a reminder that she is a private property. Her confrontation with Vishvamitra is a period of drastic change as a Women in her life. Her plan to seduce him backfires as she finds herself consumed

by his love. She lives with the great sage where she is able to get the love and family she always wanted, to live as human and to be blessed with a baby. But these beautiful days with her Kaushik were numbered as Urvashi articulates “neither family nor marriage subjugates us, we have no husband, no sons, no daughters, indeed no relations” (Nagendra and Meenakshi, 94).

Menaka leaving Kaushik can be taken as her way of protesting against Indra’s plan. She wants him to defeat Indra and put an end to his rule. Their love for each other leads them to have a common target and which ultimately leads to his failure. She shatters his heart to million pieces as she leaves Kaushik so that those fire will turn into an arrow of vengeance to destroy the powerful Indra. Several other women characters are also discussed in the novel one such powerful character is Hemavati wife of Kaushik. When Kaushik decides to leave his kingdom to attain eternal atonement she strongly opposes her discontent by saying that “I am arguing for us. For you. Me. Our children. Our family. Give us some of your time. She said pleading, I don’t want to lose you” (Kane,23). Her words are not of a jealous wife but of a queen who is concerned about her kingdom and her husband. It also shows the miserable plight of many women where she is destined to become a dutiful wife, preserve her chastity and to confine herself within the four wall of home and ultimately die without even being acknowledged. Her unhappiness of his decision springs from her love toward s him he is blinded by his ambition to attain the unachievable. He doesn’t care about her feeling and says that she is being a jealous wife and an ‘ideal wife’ will always be one who supports her husband. Here the societal expectation of women as all enduring is highlighted and thus it again puts women in a difficult position.

Another significant character is Tilotamma. The author has attributed the term ‘made’ to her rather than born which signifies that she is made for a specific job and not as a personality. She is crafted not to unite a kingdom but rather to destroy the inseparable demon brothers Sunda and Upsunda. She had made them fall in love and fight over her eventually killing them. Tilotamma is a mere puppet whose freedom is at the hand of the male puppeteers. Ramba’s rape by Raven is another shocking news of female injustice we see in the novel. His words to Ramba “for me you are just a

harlot of the Heavens made to make me happy. So make me happy! Make love to me, apsara!” shows how she is objectified as a tool for sexual satisfaction. Her case does not confine to her alone as this is a sad reality which many women face in our society.

## **CONCLUSION**

Women had to face various types of discrimination in our society whether in workplace, public place and even in their home. Most of the times it is women alone who had to suffer and endure the pain just because she is born as a female. Nowadays we have so many Organisations working for women empowerment and equality still she is silenced and put on chains by our patriarchal power system. Myth according to *Oxford Dictionary* is a ‘traditional story concerning the early history of people’, Kavita Kane through her re-telling has taken these histories and channeled it through a feminist perspective so that the least known female figures together with their sacrifices and achievements in our history will never go unnoticed.

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# CHAPTER 23

## WHAT THE SOUL MUST BEAR: GENDERED ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE AND FRACTURED BONDS OF MEMORY IN YAA GYASI'S HOMEGOING

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### ABSTRACT

*This study delves into the intricate interplay of gender and memory in Yaa Gyasi's novel "Homegoing." Employing a framework of intersectionality, the research analyses how gendered memories shaped by traumatic experiences influence character's identities and responses to historical legacies. The study also considers how the characters' memories of gendered oppression and resilience inform themes of resistance, empowerment, and healing. Additionally, it examines how the alternating narrative structure of the novel serves to reflect and reinforce gendered memories, highlighting the distinct perspectives of male and female characters. The analysis also underscores the novel's portrayal of memory as a transformative force that shapes characters' perceptions of self and others.*

**KEY WORDS:** gender, memory, identity, self, trauma

### INTRODUCTION:

Yaa Gyasi's acclaimed novel *Homegoing* (2016) traces the parallel histories of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, and their descendants in Ghana and America from the 18th century to the present day. In *Homegoing* (2016), memory acts as a conduit for marginalized voices that have been excluded from dominant historical narratives. While much scholarship has focused on the novel's depiction of slavery, relatively little attention has been paid to the significant role of gender and memory in Gyasi's

narrative. This paper aims to address that gap by analysing how memory is gendered in *Homegoing*, arguing that the act of remembering is portrayed as a distinctly female experience. Whereas male characters are oriented towards the future and survival, the novel's women shoulder the burden of preserving familial and historical memory. This paper illuminates the integral role of African and African-American women in preserving cultural identity amidst slavery's disruptions. I examine how enslaved African women are repositories of memories that counter dominant historical narratives that have excluded or misrepresented women's experiences thereby highlighting the 'significance of memory in historical trauma' (Figueroa-Vásquez 108)

The narrative of *Homegoing* commences in an area designated "Fanteland" on the West African coast, charting the lineages stemming from two half-sisters of Ghanaian heritage with divergent fates - one married to a British slave trader and the other kidnapped into bondage in America. The family genealogy concludes with Marcus and Marjorie, who encounter one another in California and subsequently voyage to Ghana in a gesture of ancestral reconnection. While each generation's distinct experiences are encapsulated in vignettes, the cumulative effects of slavery and colonialism emerge as forces that continually impinge upon the present realities of the characters. By depicting the persistence of historical traumas across time, the text illuminates the enduring damages of the transatlantic system of bondage upon both African and diasporic African identities across the Black Atlantic.

### Gendered Journeys

Gyasi's narrative expanse structured as a "multigenerational family saga" traverses divergent geographies and generations, mirroring the diasporic journeys of the characters themselves. (Gallego 9). While each chapter of the novel functions as a discrete short story, a sequential reading allows readers to construct interrelations between the vignettes through cross-generational references and overarching thematic motifs. When taken in isolation, the individual chapters stand independently as self-contained narratives. However, when considered cumulatively, the recurring crossover mentions of prior protagonists and enduring thematic preoccupations facilitate an integrative framework that bridges the stories

into a broader interlinked saga spanning seven generations. Through these intersecting narrative techniques, Gyasi weaves the disparate strands into a macro-narrative fabric, with each thread interconnected across temporal and geographic divides through subtle narrative resonances. Lisa Ze Winters says, 'the characters in Gyasi's novel persistently navigate the never-ending reverberations of their diasporic beginnings'(Winters 340). This panoramic canvas not only elucidates the complex gender dynamics of varied sociocultural contexts but also crafts a vivid portrayal of how gender mediates processes of cultural memory, identity formation, and resilience in response to collective trauma. The alternating narrative structure, distinctly crafted for each character, invites exploration into the differential evolutions of gendered memories, as well as the indelible imprints of traumatic experiences.

The ability of Gyasi's female characters to remember comprises a vital yet burdensome inheritance, allowing them to preserve intergenerational continuity and identity. From Effia's haunted first-person account of the slave dungeons to Quey's narration of her vision of H's lynching, Gyasi's female characters 'negotiate' the memories of trauma. (Figueroa-Vásquez). Rather than representations of factual accuracy, these gendered memories provide subjective truths that convey varied experiences of oppression and survival. However, memory also serves as a source of anguish for certain female characters, such as Esi, who is defined by the loss of her matrilineal past. By framing memory as a gendered act, Gyasi recentres African women's marginalized voices in accounts of slavery and its "afterli[ves]" (Hartman 6)

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi traces a matriarchal family tree with Maame at the top of the family tree. Following Maame's subjection to rape and subsequent delivery of a daughter named Effia, the ancestress of Marjorie, Maame flees and eventually weds Big Man Asare, bearing another daughter named Esi who is the ancestress of Marcus. Through the narrative, Gyasi traces two divergent ancestral lines stemming from the common matriarch Maame, exploring one branch through her offspring Effia and the other through her offspring Esi, as means of examining the reverberating trauma of slavery, colonization, and racism across subsequent generations. Gyasi gives voice to the stories of women or

survivors of slavery who have been silenced either in the form of serious trivialization or complete erasure. (Michel-Rolph Trouillot)

In tune is the structural organization of the narrative which bears an intimate connection to the delineation of the characters' senses of fractured identity, as well as the evolution of such identities across generational time, characterized by fluctuating degrees of alignment with the founding matriarchal progenitors. Through its structural choices, the text endeavours to mirror the complex dynamics of identity formation processes, highlighting the discontinuity of selfhood stemming from the traumatic historical legacy of slavery. By tracing the lineage back to the inaugural maternal ancestors, the text signifies the characters' quests to reconstruct identity by reclaiming ancestral origins and constructing lines of coherence across ruptured histories. In this way, the form of the novel stands in a metaphorical relation with its theme of splintered selves striving for synthesis and continuity with ancestor figures from whom they have been exiled by the severing forces of the past.

Esi's chapter commences within the dungeons below Cape Coast Castle, where Esi has remained incarcerated for two weeks subsequent to her enslavement from her Fante village during a slave raid. Despite the chapter's events temporally unfolding within this dungeon setting, the discourse primarily focuses on elucidating the circumstances that bring Esi to the dungeon. The dungeon constitutes a liminal space, an anti-home and non-place for Esi and fellow captives, one in which they are confined for an indeterminate duration before being transported to an undisclosed location. As a transitional holding cell, the dungeon epitomizes displacement and indefinite suspension for the imprisoned women, severed from origins and community. The instant Esi recognizes her permanent severance from her home village, she splits her life into 'Before the Castle and Now' - two discrete eras demarcated by her captivity:

Before the castle she was the daughter of Big Man and his third wife, Maame. Now she was dust. Before the Castle, she was the prettiest girl in the village. Now she was thin as air". (31)

Esi's narrative which presents her experience of incarceration within a dungeon alongside "hundreds of women" (28), illuminates the gendered

conditions of confinement and dehumanization within the slave trade. In addition to the severe psychic trauma of losing liberty, home, and kinship structures, Esi endures bodily and emotional violation through rape perpetrated by one of the guards. The rape also illustrates the ways in which slavery enacted both physical and psychological devastation specifically upon the bodies and psyches of African women. Goldenberg defines objectification as ‘an instrumental subjugation of a people by those with power.’ (81). The rape Esi suffers objectifies her, rendering her body a location for the guard to carry out acts that assert his gendered power and domination. She is dehumanized into an object upon which the guard enacts his abusive masculinity. Esi’s subjectivity and humanity are overridden as she is horrifically reduced to a physical site for performances that reinforce the rapist guard’s control, hypermasculine authority, and deprivation of her agency. Esi’s emphasizes how sexual violence within slavery objectifies women’s bodies.

Through her nuanced depiction of gendered acts of remembrance, Gyasi reveals the integral role of memory in reconstituting identity, reconnecting fractured lineages, and promoting healing in marginalised groups impacted by “intergenerational trauma” (Figueroa-Vásquez 98).

### Inheriting Memory

In the book, women are the main storytellers. They share their own stories and their mothers’ stories about surviving and making it through hard times. Early on, the women’s voices are the ones telling the stories of slavery and survival and histories of strength in facing difficulties. The narrative unravels the intricate relationships between gender, memory, and, “trauma of the rapes of enslaved African women”, and encapsulates the intricate interplay of individual and collective memories (Figueroa-Vásquez 102). By employing the gendered experiences and acts of remembrance of its female protagonists Gyasi illuminates how the traumatic ancestral memories impact processes of identity construction.

Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” describes how later generations have a strong mediated connection to traumas experienced by previous generations. Though they didn’t live through the trauma, the stories, images, behaviours, and impacts are transmitted so deeply that

these inherited recollections feel like personal memories. Through intergenerational accounts and effects, the trauma becomes deeply internalised as memory in its own right by generations that follow. (Marianne Hirsch)

Many women in the novel experience sexual violence and the lasting effects it has on them psychologically. Esi, subjected to a horrific sexual assault, later has a daughter, Ness who is similarly enslaved. For Esi, her memories of being repeatedly raped by her white masters haunt her. The rapist's smile haunts her preventing her from ever smiling again, a trait her daughter, Ness, born into slavery, inherits as she "...had never learned how to do it quite right. The corners of her lips always seemed to twitch upward, unwillingly, then fall within milliseconds, as though attached to that sadness that had once anchored her own mother's heart. (Gyasi 72)

Ness would always associate real love with a hardness of spirit' (Gyasi 71). The narrative here communicates that Esi's traumatic experiences are inherited by her daughter Ness.

Again, the following passage in "Marcus" examines how traumatic experiences by previous generations gets passed down and have an impact on their descendants in later generations:

He had only heard tell of his great-grandpa H [a victim of the convict leasing system] from Ma Willie, but those stories were enough to make him weep and to fill him with pride. Two-Shovel H they had called him. But what had they called his father or his father before him? What of the mothers? They had been products of their time, and walking in Birmingham [Alabama] now, Marcus was an accumulation of these times. That was the point. (296).

H grapples intensely with his identity, evident from the outset with his name reduced to a mere letter. Deprived of connections, he never encounters his mother, Kojo, or any other family member. Further, he remains unfamiliar with his ancestral language, a crucial aspect of his African heritage, due to ignorance of his roots. The only legacy bestowed upon him, besides his single-letter moniker, is the shared trauma and memory of slavery, a fate he endures because of a purported crime. Moreover, H bears the physical aftermath of slavery, evidenced by

constant lashes and resulting scars. These marks on his back and arms serve as enduring indicators of his enslaved status and also as a reminder “that he couldn’t go back to the free world, marked as he was” (Gyasi 167).

Evidences of the long-lasting traumatic effects of slavery on the characters who did not directly experience the brutality their ancestors faced are ample in *Homegoing*. Despite the physical liberation of many characters who were once enslaved, the legacy of slavery remains a source of re-traumatization and unresolved grief, manifesting in both physical and psychological wounds across generations. The history of enslavement casts a shadow over the present day, leading to a prevailing sense of confusion and uncertainty for the characters.

Also, we are aware that trauma haunts Effia's descendants when Cobbe “knew then that the memory of the fire that burned, then fled, would haunt him, his children, and his children’s children for as long as the line continued” (Gyasi 2).

Cobbe's premonition manifests in Akua nightmares where:

fire consumed everything, where it ran from the coast of Fanteland all the way into Asante. In her dreams the fire was shaped like a woman holding two babies to her heart. The firewoman would carry these little girls with her all the way to the woods of the Inland and then the babies would vanish, and the firewoman’s sadness would send orange and red and hints of blue swarming every tree and every bush in sight. (177)

The disturbing dreams psychologically affect Akua, ultimately driving her to kill her child by setting fire to their home while sleepwalking, evidencing the generational impact of past trauma. A pivotal scene depicts Akua discussing post-war songs with her daughters, prompting her to query whether such songs will memorialize them. While Ama expresses certainty, Abee counters they will receive no such veneration as they are merely the progeny of "a Crazy Woman raised by white men." (Gyasi 194). This exchange in Akua's chapter highlights how oral traditions by women preserves collective memory and traumatic histories.

As stated earlier, Gyasi positions femininity and the subjective experiences of female characters as central to its elucidation of slavery and its enduring influences on African and African American identities. By privileging women's voices and standpoints, the narrative furnishes innovative frames of reference and epistemologies for analysing the institution of slavery and its intergenerational reverberations. The textual foregrounding of feminine perspectives serves to renew the examinations of this historical phenomenon and its complex interrelationships with the formation of cultural identities. In centring the specificity of women's vantage points, the narrative provides a significant counterbalance to masculinist frameworks that have conventionally dominated historical accounts within this domain.

In *Homegoing*, the representation of the processes of enslavement – including the terrors of raiding, confinement, and transatlantic shipment – are focalized primarily through the experiences of female characters. Rather than depicting these traumas of bondage from a masculine perspective, Gyasi centres experiences of women undergoing the horrors of being reduced to commodity (Hartman). By detailing the brutalities of the slave trade through subject position that the female characters take Gyasi foregrounds the gendered dimensions of this system of exploitation and violence.

Ness's experiences on the first plantation are described thus: "In Hell, the sun scorched cotton so hot it almost burned the palms of your hands to touch it. Holding those small white puffs almost felt like holding fire, but God forbid you let one drop. The Devil was always watching," (Gyasi 74). This hellish metaphor underscores the harsh realities and inhumane treatment black men and women endured. Gyasi employs this rich imagery to convey the notion that the life of a slave was, in essence, a terrestrial inferno. The characterization of the plantation owner as "the Devil" underscores the omnipresent dread that these overseers evoked in the enslaved.

Arguably, the act of recollecting and recounting these memories and testimonies related to generational trauma signifies an inaugural move toward reconciling this agonizing history. The processes of accessing, vocalizing, and transmitting remembrances of suffering and resilience may

enable initiatory progress in working through grief stemming from the wounds of the past. According to Claudia Marquis, familial contexts may facilitate practices of remembrance and reconnective historical recuperation that counter dominant imperial narratives, enabling alternative articulations of Black histories ((Marquis 32).

This article has argued that the gendered body, deprived of autonomy, may become a locus of struggle. Hence, it is imperative to re-examine women's lived experiences through a gender-conscious lens, elucidating the patriarchal power dynamics that normalize rape and sexual violence while simultaneously silencing afflicted women. Conceptualizing embodied womanhood as a site contested by competing forces is important to expose the systems that simultaneously perpetrate and conceal gendered abuse. By scrutinizing events through a gendered perspective, we can re-politicize the frequently depoliticized, moving marginalized women's suffering from the peripheries of understanding to a position of centrality that provokes structural critique.

## **CONCLUSION**

The suffering of African women has frequently been relegated to a peripheral position in literary analyses. Hence, it is crucial to re-situate and engender portrayals of women's experiences, traumas, and silences within African literary traditions, contextualizing them within appropriate cultural frameworks. By approaching women's tribulations as a marginal subject, past critical orientations have often obscured the gendered dimensions of female characters' depictions. Centring and engendering the specifics of African women's represented hardships, within their proper sociocultural milieus, can illuminate and re-politicize what has often been critically sidelined. This approach insists upon the importance of contextualizing and theorizing women's suffering in African literature through consciously feminist and gender-attuned lenses.

Integrating women's lived experiences, stories, recollections, and trauma into collective memory and public dialogue establishes a foundation for renewed platforms advocating empowerment, equity, truth, and the disruption of silencing. The inscription of marginalized female voices into dominant accounts creates openings for the airing of grievances and

redress, while illuminating parallels with the oppressions endured by other minoritized groups. When women's testimonies are incorporated into communal stores of knowledge and civic discourse, a scaffolding emerges upon which previously suppressed narratives may construct counter-hegemonies and repair historical fissures. Retrieving women's effaced histories into the light of acknowledgement is an essential step toward justice and solidarity across experiences of oppression.

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