

ISSN 2348 – 3369



Singularities

a peer reviewed international transdisciplinary biannual research journal

Vol. 8 Issue 2 July 2021

Singularities

a peer reviewed international transdisciplinary biannual research journal

Vol. 8 Issue 2, July 2021

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief Editor

P. K. Babu., Ph. D

Principal, Al Shifa College of Arts and Science
Kizhattoor, Malappuram Dt. Kerala.

Editorial Board Members

Professor Bill Ashcroft

Emeritus Professor,
School of English, Media and Performing Arts, UNSW Research,
Sydney, Australia.

Professor Jonathan Culler

Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University,
USA

Professor Ronald Strickland

Professor of Literature, Michigan Tech University, USA

Professor Udo Klaiber

DHBW Ravensburg, International Business, Germany

Dr. Darshana Samaraweera

Director at National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka

Professor Fabio Parasecoli

Professor of Food Studies, Director of the Food Studies Doctoral Program,
Nutrition and Food Studies Department, Steinhardt, New York University

Dr. Nivedita Menon

Professor, Centre for Comparative Politics & Political Theory,
School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Professor M. V. Narayanan

Fellow at Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

Professor Muhammed Abdul Sami Siddiqui

Director, Center for Professional Development of Urdu Medium teachers,
Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad

Dr. Ashley N.P.
Asst. Professor, St. Stephan's College, Delhi

Dr. N.S. Gundur
Chairman, Department of English studies,
Davengere University, Karnataka

Dr. K. K. Kunhammad
Asst. Professor,
Dept. of Studies in English, Kannur University

Aswathi. M . P.
Asst. Professor, Dept of English
KAHM Unity Women's College, Manjeri, Kerala

Dr. Suresh Frederick
Associate Professor and UG Head
Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu

Dr. Ronita Roy
Associate Professor and Head, Department of English,
Bangabasi Morning College, Kolkata, West Bengal

Mammad. N
Asst. Professor, Dept of English,
Govt. College. Malappuram, Kerala

Prof. Rajendra Chenni,
Professor, Kuvempu University, Shimoga

Dr. Priya. K. Nair
Asst. Professor,
Dept. of English, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam.

Reena C. M
Assistant Professor
Department of English, KAHM Unity Women's College, Manjeri

Editor's Note

This is the second in-pandemic issue of *Singularities* being published. Covid -19 forced us to switch our annual conference to online mode and subsequently the 2020 January conference issue was the first one to come out amidst the pandemic isolation. Curiously the in-pandemic issue deliberated the conference theme of liberty, though confined to screens and homes.

The current issue of *Singularities* is not theme-specific and carries articles which explore topics and issues which vary from the traces of liberty debate left over from the Conference issue to matters of existence, expression and interpretations of multiple perspectives. The 'postcolonial alterity' comes in for a close look in Abhilash Kaushik's reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. The author takes Kathy, a lead character from the novel as a prototype of the fluid, 'cloney' state of post-coloniality itself. Denish Raja Durai juxtaposes Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* with the theme of incomplete self and its discontents as the touchstone. The idea of wholeness of rather the quest for the idea, becomes the crux of the enquiry. Mahasweta Devi is a writer whose contribution to the cause of women empowerment through her literary works is immense. 'Bayen' one of her much read and admired works is looked into from a spiritual, eco-feminist point of view, emphasizing the patriarchal abuse inherent in the system by Rohit Joseph Sebastian. Rosemaria Regy Mathew's article on the K. R. Meera's *The Angels Beauty Spots* critically reflects on the way the narrative takes down normative masculinity constructs. Salman Rushdie's *Shame* raises pertinent queries on the way the idea of liberty has undergone stressful transition, fracturing the core concepts on which liberal- democratic ideas of the India of the past, argues Roshmina Udhay in 'Rule of Law: Conceptualizing Liberty in Post Independent Era, Taking Reflections from *Riot: A Novel*'.

Walker Percy's major novels like *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, and *Love in the Ruins*, Rupasree Pattnayak's article

argues, carry protagonists who are struggling with the ‘malaise of everydayness’ and an ‘obsessive concern about the widespread cultural and spiritual crises’ of the time, but who also seem to wriggle out with hope from the narrative. Sabira. K I reads Andrew Krivak’s *The Bear* eco-critically, challenging the androcentric attitudes towards nature and championing biocentric views in the light of Arne Naess’ principles of Deep Ecology. The exploration of Anthropocene in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* by Sameera K. I is again pointing accusatory fingers at the man-centered perceptions which cause extinction of the human world altogether. The social media interactions on social networking sites like WhatsApp and the expression of self in personal or group interactions (online-identity) is a seminal issue in the digitally mediated contemporary lives. Shibila A.’s article is an attempt to lay bare how the varied forms of self-expression on the social media platforms like WhatsApp is overhauling the self-architecture as we have known it so far. The realm of language education has insistently explored alternate pathways to connect to the learners so that language learning process will be profitable in terms of skill acquisition and M.K. Vineetha in her paper titled , ‘Blended Approaches for A Blurred World Order: Mixing it Right in the ESL Classrooms’ argues why it is imperative for language instructors to understand the limitations of the concept of method and that the post-method pedagogy is not a monolithic entity. What is called for is a blending of the old, new to address the varying needs of the learners through novel conceptual frameworks closely allied to the actual experiential world the learners inhabit. Epidemic is so contemporary a thought today and P. M. Abdul Sakir reads Alessandro Manzoni’s *The Betrothed* through a narrative that traverses the triangle of pandemic, poverty and imagination.

P. K. Babu., Ph. D
Chief Editor

Contents

1. **Abhilash Kaushik** 9 - 16
To be or not to be: Demystifying
Postcolonial Alterity in Kazuo Ishiguro's
Never Let Me Go
2. **Denish Raja Durai K.** 17 - 21
Towards Incompleteness:
A Comparative Reading of Kafka's
The Metamorphosis and Karnad's *Hayavadana*
3. **Rohit Joseph Sebastian** 22 - 28
Re-reading Mahasweta Devi's *Bayen*:
Identifying the Pangs of Patriarchy
from the Lens of Spiritual- Ecofeminism.
4. **Rosemaria Regy Mathew** 29 - 36
Dr. S. Balasundari
On Writing *The Angel's Beauty Spots*
5. **Roshima Uday** 37 - 44
Dr. Abubakkar K.K
Rule of Law: Conceptualizing Liberty
in Post Independent Era,
Taking Reflections from *Riot: A Novel*
6. **Rupasri Pattanayak** 45 - 50
The Existential-crisis of Modern Man
in Walker Percy's Major Novels
7. **Sabira K. I.** 51 - 55
Tracing the Last Human on the Planet:
An Ecocritical Exploration of Andrew
Krivak's The Bear
8. **Sameera K. I.** 56 - 61
Exploring the Anthropocene
in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

9. **Shibila A** 62 - 70
Interpersonal Interactions in Virtual Space:
'WhatsApping' as Popular Culture
10. **M.K.Vineetha** 71 - 77
Blended Approaches for
A Blurred World Order: Mixing it Right
in the ESL Classrooms
11. **Dr. P. M. Abdul Sakir** 78 - 87
Epidemic and Enlightenment Thought:
Textual Evidences from Alessandro Manzoni's
The Betrothed

To be or not to be: Demystifying Postcolonial Alterity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Abstract

*The idea of the “Other” or the process of “Othering,” in the field of postcolonial studies, has been one of the hot-seats of critical engagements in the literary circle. There have been numerous discussions concerning the relegated state of either a particular individual or a particular community in the broader discourse of postcolonial studies. However, this general “othering” seems to be as problematic as the term ‘postcolonial’ in present-day world. Postcolonial alterity, or plainly, “different” or “the state of being other” has, at least in the case of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, opened up a wide array of negotiations which render its meaning to be manifold in nature. The novel is primarily about clones but it perfectly deviates away from the traits of being labelled as a science fiction novel. It showcases the caught between state of the thirty-one-year-old narrator, Kathy, who glaringly suffers from a concrete independent space of her own. It is never an exaggeration to state that Kathy becomes the prototype entity of theoretical postcolonial studies which echoes the lack of a specific identity. This paper attempts at comprehending the fluctuating position of Kathy throughout the narrative using the concept of alterity. It also tries to depict that postcolonial alterity becomes the representation of the amalgamation of the native body of Kathy with the constructed one by the dictates of her guardians.*

Keywords: alterity, discourse, identity, post-colonial, space

...writing is all about enchantment. It is a form of magic, of something from beyond the ordinary mind of the writer. Beyond the singular human form.

Linda Hogan

It is absolutely a no-brainer to blatantly state the theoretical domain of the broader realm of postcolonial studies has gained tremendous traction in the modern world. It can easily be said that the word has almost come out of the domain of a 'buzz word,' something exotic in nature. In the present day literary circuit, the theory of postcolonialism has become something fundamental to the concerns of the both humanity and academia at large. Erroneously understood though, postcolonialism, in one way or the other, represents the inherent angst and agony of the suppressed group of people.

Although this sort of comprehension of the theory cannot out rightly be rejected, it is definitely a reduction in its general entirety. There are much more to the theory in all its forms and branches which, with every passing day, find new meaning and understanding. Be it Said's *Orientalism* in the very beginning or Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* of the 90s, every masterpiece of the theory reiterates the nuances of the same in a methodological manner.

Binary projections and positions appear to be of paramount importance in the field of postcolonial studies. The concept of postcolonial alterity, which this paper is concerned about, was baptised as the “Other” for the first time by the great thinker, Frantz Fanon. He understood the concept to be as 'other' is “not me.” Thus, from the very beginning, the 'other' became an idea which was always secondary to the 'self.' It epitomised a negligent position which was devoid of a concrete and specific presence and was seen to be becoming the victim of the authoritative position of the 'self.'

Eminent theorist Homi Bhabha opines,

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples. (Bhabha 171)

The “Minorities” which Bhabha talks about in the above lines can be equated to the position of the central character, Cathy in *Never Let Me Go* by the Japanese born Nobel-Prize winner, Kazuo Ishiguro. At one go, the novel appears to be the tale of clones who are seen to be getting used as replacements for human organs. However, clones and their associated position in the novel is a topic of serious deliberation which demands both observation and critical explication. Kathy H., along with her other friends in the novel, never really enjoy the concrete space related to one's identity which postcolonial criticism so vehemently proposes. The very idea that the clones in the novel are different gets highlighted by the mind set of Kathy who considers themselves to be different in the following dichotomy- “other people” and “us.” Shameem Black opines that “representing alterity is frequently understood as an act of discursive domination that replicates, in literary form, the violent operations of political, economic, and social inequality” (Black 19).

The development of the novel in terms of narration and depiction not aligning together on the same plane is one of the integral pathways which aids the fluctuating position of identity of the clones in the novel. Ishiguro adheres to a narrative style which denotes the tale to be in same line with the fictions which echo technophilic pleasures, but the

presentation of the clones in an alternative England creates all the instances of othering in the novel. The fictional England which the clones live in is seen to be very much different from the England in reality. This marks the difference between the world of the clones and the world of the humans. Moreover, history also plays a vital role when it comes to understanding the differences between the two as biotechnological advancements reigned supreme among the clones. On the other side, it was nuclear developments which were actually prized in the actual England of the late 1990s. Clones like Tommy, Ruth, Cathy and many others, in the novel, seemed to reify the process of harvesting extra organ parts which were used for the cure of the fatal cancer. This also, at the same time, showcased the success in the field of scientific developments.

As a general picture, a postcolonial novel, more often than not, tells the tale from the standpoint of the oppressed group. In such a scenario, the presentation of otherness does not seem to be that problematic because the 'other' is always evident. However, in the context of this particular research, the presentation of the 'other' appears to be problematic because of the foremost reason that the female narrator, Kathy abides by the system constantly throughout the novel. There is no such attempt being seen from the clones in order to change their position or their state of living which renders the issue of marginalisation a bit tedious to be delineated. The reason being that, postcolonial marginalisation always involves a powerful and a submissive force but in this novel, the clones ever really complain their secondary position. Although located between the artificial and the natural worlds at Hailsham, it is the language used by the Kathy which presents the fact that she is both within/outside the system. As “a choice of language is a choice of identity” (Durring 126), the identity of the clones is very much a self-appreciated one. Kathy, sort of accept the differences between them and the actual people living in England as she remarks,

I realized, of course, that other people used these roads; but that night, it seemed to me these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafés were for everyone else. (Ishiguro 267)

Boundary appears to be one significant aspect related to the process of alterity in the novel. The above lines by Kathy ably substantiate the same to a great extent. It was seen that the various clones who studied at Hailsham were prevented from crossing their demarcated border. Moreover, there were also restrictions being imposed on their ways of talking and codes of conduct and were strictly asked to refrain from any kind of inappropriate behaviour which their guardians could not grasp. In these ways, there was an unseen system and process of regulating the clones in a manner which the guardians preferred and wanted as opposed to the wishes of the clones. An identity or rather a constructed identity was what formulated which rendered the positions of the clones to be secondary in nature. It also has to be kept in mind that the so called degree of difference

from the mainstream people is dependent on how far the clones deviate from them which again ramifies postcolonial othering from the self. The differences associated with the binary language of “the normal” and “the clones” also find their manifestation in the process of othering to a great extent.

The notable Freudian critic, Erik Erikson opines that the identity of an individual comes with a duality; it is the duality between the personal image of the individual alongside the societal image based on the public appearance. Defining identity, he states that,

A subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. As a quality of unselfconscious living, this can be gloriously obvious in a young person who has found himself as he has found his communality. In him we see emerge a unique unification of what is irreversibly given-- that is, body type and temperament, giftedness and vulnerability, infantile models and acquired ideals--with the open choices provided in available roles, occupational possibilities, values offered, mentors met, friendships made, and first sexual encounters. (Erikson 22-23)

Erikson also talks about the idea of “identity crisis” which he inaugurated in the literary circle in 1940s. This very idea of the crisis of one's identity was according to him the state when a particular individual was never really amidst the ramifications of a particular society and has also lost sense of his or her basic self. The clones in the novel drastically suffer from this crisis in their identity as the treatment meted out to them by the normal people of the society was one of frustration, retardation and negligence. The idea of difference also leads to the creation of a mental distance between the clones and the 'normals' in the novel as the clones are made to believe that they don't belong to the mainstream society of the people. Even the educational setting of Hailsham propagated the structured layers of othering, albeit not directly. It was indoctrination which aided the glorification of differences because the clones were taught to abide by the rules and dictates of their teachers or guardians without retorting back. Regarding her childhood friend, Tommy, Kathy remarks,

I think I was a pretty decent carer. But five years felt about enough for me. I was like you, Tommy. I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it? (Ishiguro 223).

The above lines are an ample testimony to the fact that Kathy and the other clones at Hailsham were taught to perform their duty of a donor without opposing the system which both made them the product and the by-product of the system they are a part of. K. Boréus

opines that “Exclusion occurs when human beings are deliberately excluded from a group, locked out, being deprived of goods of various types, and tends to be generally seen as unfavorable treatment” (Boréus 73). Postcolonial alterity hinges on the process of othering using numerous ways and treating the individuals as mere objects is another significant way. It is never a derogatory remark to state that Kathy was a clone who was devoid of a basic ontological existence in the novel. Aged thirty-one, the primary role served by her in the novel was to adhere to the dictums of her guardians and preparing herself ready to act as a donor. Moreover, the process of objectifying an individual is also associated with the larger picture of 'gazing.' The act of gazing an individual in a manner not appropriate also downplays to a great extent the attributes of identity of the individual. There is an instance in the novel when the clones, Kathy and Tommy were 'gazed' in a relegated by the Madame which was stated in the followed manner,

And as her gaze fell on us, a chill passed through me, (...) Her eyes were as cold, and her face maybe even more severe than I remembered. (...) you could see her stiffen - as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her (Ishiguro 243).

One of the significant aspects associated with the rearing up of the clones is the cultural environment at Hailsham which was never conducive to them. In the words of Phil Scratton, “Childhood is not a static, objective and universal fact of human nature, but a social construction which is both culturally and historically determined” (Scratton 2). This statement appears to be very true in the lives of the clones because right from their childhood, they have been sort of modified and taught to be the donors in order to support the human beings. What is significant is the location of various cottages, schools and other centres for harvesting the organs. The very act of harvesting the organs of the clones also seemed to have been accepted by the clones themselves as they are seen to be mere passive beings without having any kind of say of their own. On the flipside, it is again the poignant language which acts as the push to substantiate the scenario of othering of the clones. The clones, in the novel, have been described as “special” and “gifted” and in this regard, it can be said that this language is adorned with a touch of manipulation by the guardians. Once they are killed, the act is again said to be “completion” which reiterates the fact that the sole purpose of the clones in the society is to serve the humans which proves their state of being the 'Other.'

Pierre Pascalion argued that culture is a comprehensive interpretation of nature, a whole system of understanding and changing the world. Culture comprises all the productive expressions of man, technological, economic, artistic and domestic. It implies a systematic relationship between every aspect of life as it is lived. (Pascalion 1)

The above definition of culture implicitly leads to the fact that there is always a kind of relationship between individuals which exist within the broader domain of cultural atmosphere. The question which pervades the entire engulfing atmosphere of 'Other' in the novel is why does Kathy and her friends stay in a relegated position? Moreover, this question also highlights the basic idea of the trajectory of the novel to be bifurcating from the general postcolonial 'coloniser-colonised' binary because they are almost muted entities. The basic aspect of othering becomes vividly evident in the fact that although the clones live in the same world as other humans, their world is pretty much different as technology reigns supreme there. However, in spite of the differences, the fictionality remains quite intact because the clones are different in the form of them being genetic copies, not something to be discarded. The position of inferiority and relegation which sort of envelop the entire social existence of the clones gets summed up in the following introspection which Kathy had in the novel, “we were different from our guardians, and also from the normal people outside” (Ishiguro 66).

More importantly, it was also seen that passivity of the clones rose to such an extent that they were almost not aware of the processes involved in the act of being a donor. The ignorance of the clones gets heightened in the following lines by Kathy who regarded the act to be a simple one,

The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you'd hand it over. It wasn't something we found so funny in itself; it was more a way of putting each other off our food. You unzipped your liver, say, and dumped it on someone's plate, that sort of thing (Ishiguro 86).

Needless to say, words like “unzip” in the above lines are more than enough to indicate the state of 'othering' which the clones suffer from in the various cottages at Hailsham. It also, on the flipside, indicates the aspect of the clones being thought of as mere objects more than human beings who need to be given importance and valued. In this way, it becomes vividly evident that there was both existential and ontological crisis suffered by the clone at the hands of their guardians. Staggeringly enough, postcolonial alterity also appears to the forefront in the so called 'life after donation' of vital organs by the clones as well. Once the clones donate their organs, although they are kept under observation, the state of their being becomes drastically 'Other' with them devoid of their organs and turning into the oxymoron, living-dead bodies.

The selves of the clones at Hailsham or other cottages no longer remain authentic selves as they are always structured in a manner which would help the 'normal' human beings. There is a process of transformation of the authentic selves of the clones to infrastructural selves associated with utility at large. A caught between state permeates the entire process of existence of the clones who get sandwiched between their state of

individuality and the state of them being using as mere infrastructures for the benefit of the people. The initial lines of the novel which Ishiguro states, are more than enough in order to drive home the point that there are complexities involved in the schema of cloning. As Kathy describes herself initially,

My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So I'm not trying to boast. (Ishiguro 3)

The significance of the lines lies in the differences between the two worlds- the clones and the humans. Moreover, the lines are also a clear indication of the secondary position which the clones have to sustain in the novel without having to deal with any kind of highly productive enterprise. The build up to the very situation of being ripe enough to be able to donate a healthy organ to the humans by the is one of the integral processes which is associated with the creation of their identity. It can safely be said that the clones, at the hands of guardians like Mrs. Lucy ingrain their fate of acting as a donor without having their own subjective existence. The heart-wrenching remarks by another clone, Ruth in front of some other clones clearly vindicate the fact that at some point, there is the realisation in the minds of the clones that they are mere objects having 'othered' identity,

We all know it. We're modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. (...) If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from (Ishiguro 164).

Postcolonial alterity finds its manifestation and expression in the novel in utter perfection. If on one side, it is the fluctuating and 'othered' position of Kathy and other clones who seem to be structured to be donors right from their childhood, there is also their own submissive nature on the other hand which greatly aids their relegated identity. Thus, it is crystal clear that the concept of alterity itself is a fluctuating one in the novel with no static depiction of one particular concern related to the clones. It is simply the artistic genius of Ishiguro who, through this sheer brilliance, problematizes the process of postcolonialism itself in the novel. As was well remarked by Salman Rushdie,

Literature is an interim report from the consciousness of the artist. [...] Literature is made at the frontier between the self and the world, and in the act of creation that frontier softens, becomes permeable, allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world. (Rushdie 427)

There are primarily issues and concerns related to the existence of the clones in the novel but, at the same time, considering the larger picture, Ishiguro also paints two spatial locations thereby bringing in spatial politics to some extent. The world of the clones was seen to be confined within the four walls of the cottages and the boarding school of Hailsham whereas, the society outside the world of the clones in England was altogether different which comprises of 'normal' human beings carrying out mundane daily activities. Ishiguro, although quite subtly, creates a kind of cultural depiction of the local scenes coupled with the larger global perspective because “cultural construction is a process that is simultaneously global and local” (Griswold 4). All told, “to be or not to be” a clone seemed to remain unanswered in the novel as Kathy and other clones rightfully adhered to the norms of their guardians. There was no defiance from them, what was seen was acceptance of the passive kind, to be precise.

References

- Bhabha, H K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Black, Shameem. *Fiction across Borders. Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-century Novels*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Boréus, K. “Discursive discrimination and its expressions.” *Nordicom Review*, Vol. 22, No 2, 2001, pp. 31-37,
- Durring, Simon. “Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today.” *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. London, NY: Routledge, 1995, pp. 125-129.
- Erikson, H. Erik. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. W.W. Norton and Company, 1968.
- Griswold, Wendy. *Bearing Witness. Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*. Princeton UP, 2000.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never Let Me Go*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.
- Pascalion, Pierre, “The Cultural dimension of Development,” *Intereconomics*, Verlag Weltarchiv: Hamburg, Vol. 21, No, 1, 1986, pp. 38-45.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*, 1981- 1991. Granta, 1991.
- Scratton, Phil. *Childhood in Crisis*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Towards Incompleteness: A Comparative Reading of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Abstract

The study investigates by comparing; Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis (1916) and Girish Karnad's Hayavadana (1970) from the perspective of 'incompleteness' as a theme. Both works are placed in completely different times, places, cultures and language contexts. The study on Kafka's The Metamorphosis and Karnad's Hayavadana is with reference to the character's search of "incompleteness of self" (identity) and self-realization. This paper describes the pain experienced in the search for completeness by Gregor Samsa in Metamorphosis and Padmini in Hayavadana.

Keywords: Incompleteness, Life, Self- Realization, Transformation, Hopelessness, Existence.

Comparative Literature involves two pieces of literature. It deals with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, national, disciplinary boundaries. It traces the transformation and travels of literary genres and culture and also they study the intersections of literature with other cultural forms. Franz Kafka (1883 – 1924) is a well-known German writer. He is known for his famous works such as *The Trial*, *Before the Law*, *A Hunger Artist*, *Amerika*, *The Judgment*, etc. His works have been ever-fixed in the World classics especially his *The Metamorphosis*. This is a surreal and fantastical novella in which the human protagonist turned into an insect. Girish Karnad (1938- 2019), a multi-talented Kannada artist, is regarded among the foundations of contemporary Indian theatre. He is ever remembered for his well-known plays, *Tughlaq*, *Nagamandala*, *Yayati*, etc. Despite the fact that Karnad authored just a few dramas, he had acquired a renowned place in Indian Literature. Karnad employs folk theatre troupes in his third play, *Hayavadana*. This drama pictures the struggle for one's identity in the midst of complicated human interactions.

“... Nor the exterior nor the inward man, Resembles
that it was”

- (Shakespeare, Act-II, Scene-ii)

“And thus we half- men struggle”

- (Browning, 140)

The quoted line sums up the essentially existential theme of both Franz Kafka's *The*

Metamorphosis and Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*. The Bhagavata, at the beginning of Karnad's experimental play, traces the “search for completeness” (Karnad, 11) as an underlying theme. This search becomes representative of man's eternal quest for perfection of self-realization and is the link between the main and subplots. In reshaping the old myth from *VetalaPanchavimshati* retold in Thomas Mann's novel, *The Transposed Heads*, Karnad brings out the existential anguish and the insignificance of the incomplete being through four characters – Hayavadana, Kapila, Devadatta, and Padmini's son.

'Hayavadana' is half man - half horse. He is the offspring of a princess and a Gandharva who was cursed to become a horse. When the curse was finally broken and the horse turned into a celestial being, the Gandharva found that his wife was still in with loving with his horse- self. Thereupon he cursed her to become a horse herself and she “ran away happily” (Karnad, 9). While both his parents have in their own way achieved completeness, Hayavadana has had no such luck and yearns to be 'complete.' He is totally alienated from society

“... I took interest in the personal life of the Nation- Civics, Politics, Patriotism, Nationalism, Indianization, the Socialist Pattern of Society ... I have tried everything. But where's my society? Where? You must help me to complete become a complete man” (Karnad, 9)

Indeed he can neither integrate with the human world nor with the animal. In being neither man nor animal, he is alienated from Nature and from his true 'self'. Upon the advice of Bhagavata, he goes to the Kali temple and asks the goddess to make him 'complete'. The wish is granted and he becomes a complete horse – but “not complete being” (Karnad, 68). His human voice is still intact. It is only laughter that completes his transformation for “laughter releases repressed tendencies” (Chakravartee, 44). Thus, the loss of human speech paradoxically ends up as again to the horse and becomes a symbol of wholeness.

The main plot of *Hayavadana* is also centered on the theme of 'incompleteness' and revolves around three characters, who form the eternal triangle: Padmini, Devadutta, and Kapila. Padmini is the central figure – the woman, “the embodiment of the life- force” (Chakravartee, 36). Padmini is married to the intellectual Devadutta, yet yearns for both brawn and brains in her man. She develops an attraction for her husband's best friend, the brawny Kapila. However, her yearning for him is not overt but sub-conscious. It eventually manifests itself at the Kali temple in a Freudian slip. Padmini, on finding both her husband and Kapila dead, 'unintentionally' transposes their heads. According to the traditional belief, the head is superior to the body. Hence, the man with the head of Devadutta and the body of Kapila is deemed her husband, much to Padmini's delight. But this perfection – intellect and physically vested in one man- does not prove lasting. For

soon, Devadatta loses Kapila's "sweaty smell" (Karnad, 44), becomes his former soft self, but never regains his former love or ability to write poetry, becoming the poorer in the bargain. Kapila relegated to the forest in self-exile, trains Devadatta's soft body to muscularity, but finds he is haunted by memories of his friend's body. And Padmini still yearns for the perfect man. The son of Devadatta also is incomplete. As an orphan, he is initially accepted by the forest folk as Kapila's son. Soon he is rejected by them as a child of the city and is totally alienated. He becomes dejected and loses the child's capacity to laugh. It is through Hayavadana that he learns to laugh and once more commune with wholeness.

Transformation and incompleteness find a parallel in the metamorphosis. The novel begins thus: "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin" (Kafka, 3). No reason or cause for the metamorphosis is given, nor does Gregor have any choice in the matter. With the change in form, Gregor discovers that his life and that of his family is about to turn topsy-turvy. He becomes an object of disgrace and shame for his family and is imprisoned in his room. Like Hayavadana, he finds that he belongs neither in the world of human beings, because of his physical appearances, nor in that of animals, because he can think. He is estranged from his 'self'. Initially, he does not identify with the beetle that he has been transformed into. Although eventually, he gives into the insect's mode of life, because he has no other choice- he is at first trapped in the emotions and memories of his human life and is pained, when he is unable to make people understand him. His transformation hurts him away from the nitty-gritty of everyday life but that does in no way diminish his attachment to the world around him. When his mother and his sister decide in the best of intentions to clear out his room to make way for his arthropodal crawling, Gregor realizes he is still attached to his old room with furniture he no longer has any use for.

“...he really wanted to have his warm room, comfortably fitted with furniture that had always been in the family, changed into a cave, in which, of course, he would be able to crawl around unhampered in all directions but at cost of simultaneously, rapidly, and totally forgetting his human past” (Kafka, 33).

Gregor finds himself in a condition of 'thrownness', a phrase coined by Martin Heidegger to describe the state of utter loneliness and despair. The metamorphosis also changes the intra- familial balance of power. Five years ago, when Gregor's father's business had collapsed, Gregor had taken over the reins of the family and became the only earning member. Mr. Samsa, with his loss of business, also lost his self-esteem, which was reflected in his listlessness, his painful shuffle, and his lack of interest in his clothes. Post-metamorphosis, Mr. Samsa goes back to work, regains his status as the head of the family and thus his self-worth. Gregor sees the change:

“Was this the same man who in the old days used to lie wearily in bed when Gregor left on a business trip; who greeted him on his return in the evening, sitting in his bathrobe in the armchair, who actually had difficulty getting to his feet but as a sign of joy only lifted up his arms... Now, however, he was holding himself very erect, dressed in a tight- fitting blue uniform with gold buttons...” (Kafka, 37-38)

In both *Hayavadana* and *The Metamorphosis*, the situation of love is hopeless. At the beginning of the play, the Bhagavata announces: “Each one to his own fate. Each one to his own desire, Each one to his own lack” (Karnad, 11). The three elements – fate, desire, and lack – play an important role in *Hayavadana*. Devadatta and Kapila are fated to fall in love with the same woman and both become conscious of their lack only after they fall in love. And Padmini has the misfortune of loving – or desiring – them both- or the aspect that each lover represents. The transposition fails to solve the problem but only further complicates it. For a while, the inadequacies of Padmini's two lovers become all the more evident after the transposition, their strength gets diluted. Possessing someone else's body, they naturally become “fragment creatures” (Naik, 196). And they realize that neither can share Padmini with the other.

Kapila : Devadatta, couldn't we all three live together – like the Pandavas and Drupadi?

Devadatta : What do you think?

Kapila (laughs) : No, it can't be done (Karnad, 60)

The two men decide they'd rather kill each other and let Padmini perform *sati* rather than let the other have her.

In *Metamorphosis*, love is hopeless for the incomplete being. Although Gregor's mother and sister love him, they are unable to love the creature he has turned into. “The most gruesome aspect of Samsa's fate is not his metamorphosis but the blindness with which everybody treats this metamorphosis” (Emrich, 124). Although Gregor's mother and sister try in their limited way to help him- his sister gives him food and cleans his room everyday and both his mother and sister try to clear out his room for him one day – they never really understand him. Neither had they understood him prior to the metamorphosis. They had not realized that his job has been 'grueling' and unrewarding. “If I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I would have quit long ago, I would have marched up to the boss and spoken my piece from the bottom of my heart” (Kafka, 4), Gregor says of his work. Initially, his earning was appreciated by his parents and sister, but as time went by, they began to take it for granted. The more money he gave them, the cooler they become towards him. As things turn out, Gregor's sacrifice was needless since his father had saved enough money for the family. Eventually, the 'affection' of his sister begins to wane and it is she who decides that Gregor has become a liability and must be dispensed with.

Like the protagonists in *Hayavadana*, Gregor's self is fractured. The question that confronts him is: Is he a human or an insect? Within the form of a vermin, he has human emotions. He can be lured by the sound of violin music from the confines of his room. "Was he an animal that music could move him so" (Kafka, 49) he asks himself? The Music then becomes a metaphor for wholeness. But after this last foray into the world of humans and the subsequent mortal wound that he gets the most 'human' of his faculties – his self-consciousness begins to dim and finally fades out.

Death is the only means of putting an end to the absurdity and the nothingness of life for Gregor. However, in Padmini's case, even with the death of her lovers, the original existential question – who is her husband? which remains unresolved. It creates yet another 'absurd' problem: on whose funeral pyre should Padmini now perform *Sati*? Padmini ultimately decides: "Make me a large funeral Pyre. We are three." (Karnad, 63). Indeed, neither the death of the two men nor Padmini's is presented as tragic. But with Padmini's decision, the three protagonists finally find liberation from the absurdity of life, like Gregor did, in death.

References

- Browning, Robert, Andrea del Sarto, *Index of the Project Gutenberg Works of Robert Browning*, Edi. David Widger, [EBook #59123]/<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59123/59123-h/59123-h.htm>
- Chakravartee, Moutushi. (1991), "Myth and Symbol as Metaphor: A Re-consideration of Red Oleanders and Hayavadana", *Literary Criterion*, vol. 26, no.4, p. 44.
- Emrich, Wilhelm, The Animal as Liberating "Self". *Metamorphosis*, P. 124.https://prezi.com/nmtvf3ssijd_/the-animal-as-liberating-self/
- Kafka, Franz. (1988), *The Metamorphosis*, Tran. Stanley Corngold, New York: Bantam Books. https://www.academia.edu/43471892/Kafka_Franz_-_Metamorphosis_Bantam_1986_
- Karnad, Girish. (2010), *Hayavadana*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. https://kupdf.net/download/hayavadana-giris-karnadpdf_5b7a3cd3e2b6f5e162fe7c3d_pdf
- Naik, M.K. (1984), "From the Horse's Mouth: A Study of Hayavadana", *Dimensions of Indian Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, p.196.
- Raja Durai, Denish (2019), "East Meets West: Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* and John Keats' *Lamia*", *The IUP Journal of English Studies*, vol.xiv, no. 4, p.68.
- Raykar, Shubangi S. (1990), "The Development of Girish Karnad as a Dramatist: Hayavadana", Edi. Sudhakar Pandey and Freya Taraporewala, *Contemporary Indian Drama*. New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Shakespeare. William, *Hamlet*. Edi., Barbara A. Mowat & Paul Westine, Folger Shakespeare Library. <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/>

Re-reading Mahasweta Devi's *Bayen*: Identifying the Pangs of Patriarchy from the Lens of Spiritual- Ecofeminism.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to delineate the play Bayen, written by the author Mahasweta Devi as an example of patriarchal abuse on Indian women in a Spiritual Eco-feminist perspective. Spiritual Eco-feminist theories discuss about "Femme Divine", which they use as an instrument to empower women through spiritual means by revisiting pre-Abrahamic or other native religions. This theory abandons the postulations put forth by male-centric religions and postulates that women are inseparably intertwined to nature, and accordingly, debauchery of the earth is viewed as interchangeable with debauchery of women. Focus of this paper is to revisit the plight of the story's titular character Bayen as a result of patriarchal oppression persisting within the Indian society. The study, thus attempts to fathom the degeneration of spiritual status attributed to the woman Chandidasi Gangadasi due to her misinterpreted position with nature by the patriarchal Indian society in the Spiritual Eco-Feminist perspective.

Keywords : Spiritual, Eco-Feminist, Patriarchal, Women, Indian, Nature.

Introduction

Mahasweta Devi was a Bengali writer who was considered a hallmark for the pragmatic portrayal of the so called "Subaltern". Thus, it is not a revelation to find many academicians, students, researchers who base and analyze a gamut of her works, especially in the fields of Gender Studies, Subaltern studies, Protest studies etc. Being a self-recognized Communist, most of her works did question the intricacies pandered by the caste, class and cultural entities in India and her works usually do possess the ingredient of an aggressive, emotive and expressive rendition of the societal fallacies present in the Indian context. She has been an influence on many critics, chiefly Gayatri Spivak. Though most of her writings postulate on the position of women, she is not widely considered as a feminist writer, and more over her work identify themselves in many other genres. Her work Bayen is amongst a cluster of five plays. Bayen is a dramatic narration of the poignant and pitiful tale of a woman named Chandidasi Gangadasi, who hails from the reputable Mahadalit caste of Kalu Dome. Her caste demands her presence to safe guard the mounds of the newly-deceased infants. We can observe in the work, that despite her highly regarded occupation, the manipulation and misrepresentation meted upon her spiritual Eco-Feminist position of "Femme Divine"

Rohit Joseph Sebastian is student, Loyola College.

has caused denigration of her social status to that of a witch due to the patriarchal abuse that is doled upon her.

According to the general principals of Eco-feminism, women are inseparably intertwined to nature, and accordingly, debauchery of the earth is viewed as interchangeable with debauchery of women. (Sineath 1) The term was coined by the French author Françoise d'Eaubonne in her seminal piece *Féminisme ou la Mort*. The eco-feminist hypothesis affirms that a feminist purpose of read of nature does not place women within the inundating state of affairs of intensity, nevertheless rather needs an advocate, cooperative society within which there aren't any predominant factions. Spiritual Eco-feminism presents women as spiritual being who has deep knowledge of the intricate working of nature. According to Starhawk—a prominent Spiritual Eco-feminist—the three most important concepts of earth-based spiritualities are the “immanence of the Goddess in the living world; interconnection of mind, body, and nature; and a compassionate life-style”. (Sineath 1) Many famous eco-feminists like Charlene Spretnak, Julia Mies, Karen J. Warren & Riane Eisler etc. all have aforementioned about this concept in their theories. Starhawk calls this sublunary pietism, which perceives that earth is alive and that we are an interconnected local area, where nature is revered as mother Gaia. (Starhawk, “Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-Based Spirituality.” 73-86) Carolyn Merchant however calls this as “Cultural Eco-Feminism” which “celebrates relationship between women & nature centered through the revival of ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals & the female reproductive system”. (Starhawk, “The Gaia Tradition & The Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto, 23-24) Vandana Shiva is a leading proponent of Indian ecological Eco-feminist movement; she attempts to consociate the role of Indian women and that of ecological conservation throughout her works. (SAN TELMO MUSEO A) The term Eco-Feminism comes under the umbrella term Eco spirituality, which in turn connects ecology with spirituality thus thereby various classifications in this genre including Christian paganism, Hindu paganism, neo-paganism etc. The paper, therefore wishes to highlight the influence of the theory in Hindu Feminism. Mahasweta Devi parodies hegemonic patriotic accounts which re-appropriated the figure of a lady for divinization of the country. The incongruity here is that the women come up short on the "virtue" of the Hindu lady in the patriotist iconography, as caste sullies and dirties the female subaltern subject.

Deconstruction and misrepresentation of Femme Divine in Bayen.

Throughout Indian culture, women have attained the status of divine being, dutiful mother, wife or sister. They could not harbor an independent identity of their own in such a patriarchal social space. Therefore, the emancipation of women, even in the perspective of self-identity remains an insurmountable challenge. It is in this conjecture; Mahasweta Devi introduces us to her titular character Bayen. In the beginning of the play, Bayen is

treated as a “necessary evil” by the villagers rather as a witch. The ignorant and superstitious nature of Indian villagers is deeply exposed and Devi bases her deconstruction of ChandidasiGangadasi from these social fallacies. Devi, being a writer of the subaltern temperament has depicted the plight of Mahadalits from the Kalu Dome community, who despite being a respected community, still endure confinement to the menial job of guarding graves due to their social status.

The situation is excessively dire for ChandidasiGangadasi, being a woman born in this community and also fulfilling the role of a mother to a natal infant she is riveted into her social and spiritual position. Lactating mothers are seen as a symbol of fertility in cultural eco feminist construct provided by Caroline Merchant. (Sineath2) Unfortunately due to the presence of patriarchal cannons she is reduced to an image of a semi- demonic being who commands nature for adverse actions. Devi has been inspired from villages in Bengal and other parts of rural India where it was the norm to designate women “Chodail” or “Dayal” etc. Despite these connotations and her own complete unconsciousness of her true identity, the sole reminder of her past self is her nurturing motherhood due to which she constantly sings the lullaby

“Come, sleep, come to my bed of rags,
My child god sleeps in my lap,
The elephants and horses at the palace gates,
The dog Jhumbra in the ash heap”(Debi, and Banerjee 90).

Chandi, as a mother, is trapped in her own duty. She exposes the subjugation of women, their struggle and survival in this inhuman world. In *Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir postulates the role of maternity in the fulfilling the physiological destiny of the female object. (Beauvoir 501) Thus it is counterfeit to comprehend that maternity proffers equality of sexes. (540) One can fathom that the existence of Chandidasi in an idiosyncratic where she did not face the fortune of Gender Equality despite her condition. Hence, a sense of nullification occurred to her decrepit condition.

Thus, motherhood is what makes a woman spiritual. This element of nurture is what the Bayen possessed right from the genesis of the play to its culmination. She represents the nature as a whole wherein the nature, despite the rambunctious acts of mankind, still remains hospitable to human race. A great example of this postulation would be the climax itself, where she eventually exchanges her role of Bayen to that of a martyr who saved hundreds of human lives by thwarting an attempt of a train robbery, a symbolic act of how nature saves humanity from rampant disintegration. The catharsis lies in the realization that Bayen is a physical, spiritual and superstitious manifestation of patriarchal influence on nature. Man does not share a symbiotic relationship with nature; thus, they attempt to control female, feminine and flora. We observe the fact that interactions of Chandidasi are also on a spiritual realm not only because she adorns the

role of protecting the spirits and bodies of deceased neo-natal children from wildlings but due to her transcendental interactions with such spirits. She becomes a nurturer to the dead children too. Her interactions can be analyzed through the notions of Indian eco-feminism as most of her dialogues invoke to goddess Ganga, who in Indian cultural context is a spiritual embodiment of the river itself. Therefore, the goddess construct was a spiritual reverence and status that Indians had pandered to nature, which highlights Hinduism's synchronous relationship with nature. This relationship is used inimical to her eco-feminist status which thus causes her role as guardian to have a negative overturn in the society. Thus, her job becomes a burden to her as it gifts her only social stigma, suspicion and ostracization. The impingent patriarchy does not waste any time in reminding her status either.

GOURDAS: how can you say that? you're a progeny of the illustrious Kalu Dome... you are the destination, you embody the mother Ganga... denied your service, the dead child hangs over the mother (Debi, and Banerjee 94).

The deconstruction of her status happens at the hands of patriarchal figures like Gourdas and her husband Malindar, who with their irreverence and naiveté to the functions of nature misrepresent the given reality this is depicted in the following lines.

Malindar: Then, who was it whom you were so lovey dovey? Why is your sari dripping with milk? Whom were you suckling? For whom was the lullaby? (97).

The aforementioned lines present the apathetic situation that Chandidasi face from her husband himself. Gourdas, Sashi and her husband have a faint idea about the role of a tomb protector and this sciolism with patriarchal hegemony peppered with superstition gave the misrepresentation and deconstruction of Chandidasi's status. Here the Spiritual Eco-feminist construct associated with lactation i.e., as a sign of fertility is abrogated and the abhorrent notion of a demonic woman begins. Thus, the patriarchy debases one of the features of human nature proximity i.e., "the celebration of women as deities" and it is this proximal shift that inherently affects both nature and the women associated. It is prompting to note Noel Sturgeon's feature is also fulfilled by the text i.e., "how women identify the problems of nature first". (Ray 621) Here the dubious plot taken by the patriarchal figure Gourdas is initially identified and thwarted by the Bayen herself in an act of self-redemption. She also fulfills the condition of eternal nurturers.

Hegemony and abuse of Patriarchy on Nature.

Vandana Shiva had once stated that the vicious presence of western and imperialistic ideologies, sciences and development led to the downfall of ecology and female in India. (SAN TELMO MUSEOA) Critic Meera Nanda obliterates this statement with a counter argument wherein she retorted that it was farcical to blame western influence

alone and that the damage was also present in the so-called traditionalist oriental society. Nanda states that Shiva had overlooked the factors of caste, class, power, privilege and other such elements present in Indian society. Gabriel Dietrich points out that Shiva appears to presuppose a society that is equitably sorted out, where individuals possess sufficient land to make due on its produce. She appears to treat caste factors and political alternatives as nonexistent and ignores the substances of chains of command, subjection, patriarchy and savagery inside conventional tribal and laborer communities. (Dietrich.)

Through Bayen, Devi reiterates Nanda's counter argument. The presence of caste and paterfamilias in traditional Indian society has led for man to bulldoze the rights of both women and nature. The male-centric culture around her is happy to permit Chandidasi to live alone in a hut.

BAYEN: I've no oil for my hair, it's all matted, and I can't comb it. There's no kerosene at home to light a lamp. I've had no rice since Thursday. I've been living on water; I'm here to draw water (85).

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler postulates 'patriarchy' as an idea that has taken steps to turn into a universalizing construct that abrogates or diminishes unmistakable verbalizations of sexual orientation imbalance in various social settings (45). That distinguish between "One" and the "Other" is climacteric for an individual to develop his pragmatism. Remembering this in the event that we examine this play *Chandidasi* can be considered as a working person who was fangled with the identity of Necromancy due to her subverted existence. She never accepts that she is a witch and has malevolence powers. There are numerous circumstances where the patriarchy is attempting to keep her out by accusing malice powers on her. The play expands on the concept of Hierarchic Oikos theory by Nirmal Selvamony the human world was also imagined as a hierarchically ordered one, with the superior ruler, and the inferior ruled. The distance between the two was clearly determined when the ruler was confined to a special space, namely, the court/ palace, and the ruled to the space outside of it (SELVAMONY). Thus, the subaltern world visualized by Mahashweta Devi is a world adhering to this theory. All the characters of this play are from the lower Dome caste. The Kalu Dome community where Chandidasi is a part of is a higher class amongst the common Dome community. Thus, there is hierarchy ubiquitous throughout the text. In fact, the most acrimonious hierarchy is reserved to opposition between men and women whose endearing conflict hampers the spiritual existence of nature as well.

In the play we can also espy the characters of Gourudas and Malandar who act as adversaries of patriarchy in this play. Gourdas is a typical ignorant, chauvinist and superstitious villager who was already envious of Malandar for marrying a beautiful girl from the reputable family of Kalu Dome. He thus becomes a bore whose bavardage eventually changes the perception of the villagers against her. Envy therefore is a

powerful emotion and just like man is envious of nature's power, Gourdas is envious of the Bayen. Thus, he influences her brother-in-law Shashi and makes him believe that it was her evil eye that caused illness and eventually her death to his child. Malandar is introduced as a rational man who seems to understand the folly of Gourdas, yet upon the given circumstance he also abandons his wife. Some researches claim that this was due to the Mob mentality where he believed that it was better for his wife to exist as a Bayen than be lynched as a witch. Gourdas uses Bayen's defiance against her and relies on prejudiced village superstitions to squash the assertion of Chandidasi's power and brings it under the patriarchal heel.

The greatest instance for this scenario is set in the scene when Gourdas's contrivance against Chandidasi has successfully impregnated the mind of Malandar. Despite her repeated plea and denial, the manifestation of the lactate and surreal hymn that accompanied her was too suprasegmentally for his mortal apprehension. (Debi, and Banerjee 98) This results in an innate bias and expository prejudice stemmed from intellectual vacuity and incredulity towards realities.

A male-centric world does not respond to the pleas of a lactating mother instead they impose their thoughts and actions on them. In Chandi's words "Men in general are so insensitive." (Debi, and Banerjee 93)

Chattim tree is a sacred grove that is revered in many Indian cultures, yet in Bayen one observes that the same grove is used to constrict a woman free. Thus, the role of nature is interpreted abhorrently by the society and it becomes a demarcation point for Bayen to receive her sustenance.

Conclusion

The crux of the play is perhaps uttered by Bayen through the dialogue "Jackals shy away from light". (96) Here Devi presents a referential statement which intends to make a jibe at patriarchy. It is interesting to note the fact that she compares patriarchy to carnivorous Jackals. Poignant reality grips in only when one realizes that the real hunt by the real Jackal is for the protagonist rather than the dead child. Thus, Mahasweta Devi invokes a natural being to depict the corrupted forces that meddle with nature-female praxis. In essence of recapitulation, through the various theories propagated by Starhawk, Carolyn Merchant, Noel Sturgeon, Nirmal Selvamony etc. we attain a holistic awareness and reveal new insight upon an otherwise subaltern text.

References

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 1999.
- De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley, London: Picardor Classics, 1988
- Debī, Mahāśveta, and Samik Banerjee. *Bayen*. Proquest LLC, 2004.
- Dietrich Gabriele, Plea for Survival, in "*Economic and Political Weekly*", (February 18, 1990).
- Ray, Sarah Jaquette. "Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, And the Politics of The Natural". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol 17, no. 3, 2010, pp. 621-623. *Oxford University Press (OUP)*, doi:10.1093/isle/isq054. Accessed 21 Apr 2021.
- SELVAMONY, NIRMAL. "OIKOPOETICS AND TAMIL POETRY". *Angelfire.Com*, 2021, <https://www.angelfire.com/nd/nirmaldasan/oikos.html>. Accessed 24 Apr 2021.
- Sineath, Karl. *Ecofeminism in Feminist Thought*. University of Oregon, 2019, pp. 1-2, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/munno/OregonCourses/WGS352W09/TongSummariesStorage/Karl-Tong.rtf>. Accessed 24 Apr 2021.
- Starhawk. "Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism." "Power, Authority, and Mystery: Ecofeminism and Earth-Based Spirituality.", *SIERRA BOOKS*, 1990, pp. 73–86.
- "Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism," "The Gaia Tradition & The Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto.," *SIERRA BOOKS*, 1990, pp. 23–24.
- TELMO MUSEOA. *Vandana Shiva | Ecofeminism and The Decolonization of Women, Nature and The Future*. 2020, <https://youtu.be/hVbbov9Rfjg>. Accessed 23 Apr 2021.

On Writing *The Angel's Beauty Spots*

Abstract

K.R Meera is a prominent Malayalam writer who is best known for her masterpiece, Hangwoman, the work which fetched her numerous literary accolades and immense popular acclaim. The paper makes a critical study of K.R Meera's The Angel's Beauty Spots, a collection of three novellas translated from Malayalam by the noted academic and translator, J.Devika. It briefly traces women's writing in Malayalam and proceeds to make a critical study of the novellas. It delves into Meera's characters who are far from 'ideal' models of 'normative' masculinity or femininity, the way she explores questions of female identity and desire and her inspirations and reflections behind the plot and characters. The paper also scrutinizes her manner of narration and other pertinent aspects raised in the novellas. It is thus a series of critical remarks and reflections on The Angel's Beauty Spots.

Keywords: desire, identity, masculinity, femininity, women's writing, gender relations

The Angel's Beauty Spots is a collection of three novellas authored by K.R Meera and translated from Malayalam by J.Devika. Exploring different aspects of passion in a shockingly daring manner, the narratives seem refreshingly original and enticing, yet deeply disturbing and unsettling. When one first reads *The Angel's Beauty Spots*, there is this unmistakable wave of emotions surfacing up from deep within. With characters and contexts which feel as real as the trees around us and situations which one can easily pinpoint from the bounty of experiences that people have in their life, the book keeps away from the oft seen ways of addressing questions of desire and vulnerabilities, passion and love. With its intense and emotionally charged narrative, the book seems to have struck a chord with many and try as one may, the characters in the narrative absolutely refuse to walk out of our minds even after closing the book. It jabs at our complacency and shakes us to the core, forcing us to confront our 'real' selves. The lyrical narrative on the myriad hues of love, passion and desire keep the readers in a kind of a frenzy and shock, an excitement to turn the pages, a desire to get more, to feast more on the 'truth' of the narrative, to delve deeper and deeper into the folds of the text.

When one looks at the creative outpourings of contemporary women writers in Kerala, particularly of women writers who write in feminist lines, one cannot ignore the bold feminist writers of yesteryears who carved out a stable space for women's writing in Malayalam literature. "The women of Kerala have had a long tradition of enlightenment. Even when women were not sent to schools for formal education, they were tutored

privately at home in the Sanskrit classics and classical music. Art and literature were significant components in the formation of the female mind in Kerala” (James 98). According to Jancy James, the first known contribution of women to Malayalam literature can be traced back to early nineteenth century and it emerged from the royal families. She identifies Manorama Thampuratti (Her Highness Manorama) as the first woman writer of Kerala (99). Others include the princesses Kilimanoor Umadevi Thampuratti (1797-1836) and Ambadevi Thampuratti (1802-1837), Ikkuvamma Thampuratti (1844-1921), Nagarkovil Thangachi (1839-1909) et al. V Saratchandran Nair in his article titled “Feminist Writing in Malayalam – A Study” opines that women writings in Malayalam have happened only towards the end of the nineteenth century or early twentieth century (7). He points out that Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, the great poet and historian of Malayalam literature, accounts for twelve women writers of Malayalam from 1760 to 1947 (7). However during this phase, women writers were “confined to be satisfied with devotional songs, tiruvatira songs, kaikottikkali songs and historical themes, particularly the heavily sanskritised based ideas and forms” (7). The dawn of the twentieth century saw the rise of several distinguished women writers and poets in Malayalam such as Mary John Thottam (1901-85), Kuthattukulam Mary John (1904-78), Kadatunattu Madhavi Amma (1909-2000), Muthukulam Parvathi Amma (1904-85), Balamani Amma (1909-2004), Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-1987), K. Saraswathi Amma (1909-1976), Rajalekshmy (1930-65) (Nair, James). While the pre-independent women writers were influenced by the national freedom movement, the post-independent era made them realize that female liberation from the tight-gripping clutches of patriarchy involved much more than liberation of the nation from foreign rule. The writings of Kamala Das introduced the trait of the confessional and the 'personal inner self' of the woman in Malayalam literature. Later, with writers like Manasi, Sara Joseph, Gracy, Ashita, Valsala, Sobha Warriar, the short story became the most powerful medium of feminist expression in Malayalam literature (James 109). From the 1990s, one comes across writers such as Sithara S, Priya A.S., K.R. Meera, C.S. Chandrika, K. Rekha, Geetha, K.P. Sudheera, K.S. Veena, Devi, M.P. Pavithra, Indu Menon, R. Sreelekha, and Shahina E K, Sheeba E K, Soorya Gopi, Aswathy Sasikumar, Yama, Sonia Rafeeq et al in the 2000s (“Review” 17). Contemporary women writers not only shed light on the socio-cultural conditions of women, but they also explore new dimensions such as sexuality, desire and the body etc. From Vijila Chirrapad's *A Home without a Kitchen* (2006) to C.K. Janu's *Mother Forest* (2004) to Nalini Jameela's *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* (2007), the Malayalam literary scene now seems to have women writers from diverse spheres of life.

K. R Meera occupies a distinct position among the contemporary women writers in Kerala. A recipient of some of the most prestigious literary awards and accolades, she is best known for her works such as *Ormayude Njarambu* (2002), *Mohamanja* (2004), *Meera Sadhu* (2008), *Yudasinte Suvishesham* (2009) and *Aarachaar*

(2012). Talking about how she perceives writing, K R Meera says, “*Earlier writing was a mode of liberation. These days, it is like a salvation.*” Being a woman writer in a male-dominated world is as much a critical responsibility as much as a creative endeavour. A woman writer is not just an artistic figure, but also a “subversive force within this strongly patriarchal and tradition-ridden society” (James 107). Women writers, over the years, have been not only exploring their creative abilities, but they have also been trying to sketch the 'real' woman in literature- the woman free from the illusions and constructions of patriarchy, a woman of flesh and blood rooted in the real world. As much as the woman writer is bound to the external world of realities where complete gender equality goal is still a long way ahead, she also envisages and experiences a 'free' space in her mind, an artistic space that transcends the restrictions of a patriarchal world, through creativity and imagination. This is the space that enables her to create literary models for women to emulate, to critically reflect on her social realities and to confront issues such as what it means to be a woman caught in a web of intersectional power relations. Inspired by the social realities around her, she envisions the ideal and attempts to interrogate, critique and rectify what she sees around her. Hence the artist's desire to glimpse the ideal and to transcend the quotidian, and observations and reflections culled out from the realities of the world that root the text in its ground reality exist simultaneously. Here one is perhaps reminded of Lalithambika Anantharjanam's idea of merging of realistic depictions of life with the heart to a resultant rebirth and the creation of art. Women writers over the years have been trying to bring to the literary limelight the 'actual' woman we see around us- the woman who is not a product of male fantasies, but the one stripped from her socially defined roles of a daughter, wife and mother and as an individual replete with human flaws and fallibilities, virtues and vices, desires and needs. Naturally contemporary women's writings do not shy away from writing the innermost selves of women and exemplify a shift of focus from the larger power structures and restrictions to everyday intimacies and intricacies. With rising critical attention on aspects once considered to be irrelevant or too trivial for academic scrutiny, we have now come to realize that nothing is 'innocent' or devoid of power. Power relations in day-to-day life are constantly exposed and the binary of the 'norm' and the 'Other' is continually attacked. From the creative to the critical, this shift is perceptible. Women writers today absolutely refuse to relegate elements such as female sexuality and desire to their once 'tabooed' position in the margins. According to K. R Meera, her writings offer the readers a world of freedom, a space free from illusions and pretensions.

My stories are offering you the real world of freedom. The world we call 'real' is actually very unreal and fake, because we all are trained to pretend as someone in someone else's imagination. All women writers over the centuries have been trying to smash that illusion so that the future generations can stop pretending and start living life to the fullest. I am also doing my bit.

The book brings in the whole question of female desire in its diverse manifestations- a woman who bears the trauma of failed love, a woman who finds it difficult to leave behind her former love and a wife who yearns for a love that transcends lifetimes. Women in different contexts and backgrounds, in different stages of life, caught in diverse entanglements of life, yet all seem to be tormented by love while simultaneously craving for a love that completes or haunted by a past love that refuses to fade. Interestingly Meera's heroines in her tales of passion are not seventeen- year- olds who dot on their secret lovers or elope at the first spell of love and the first freedom of adulthood. They are ordinary middle aged- middle-class women who are free and independent, yet chained to the reality around them. While Angela is a thirty-year- old mother of two kids, Radhika is a middle- aged lawyer and a wife. Similarly Geeta in "The Deepest Blue" is a retired professional, a mother to two girls and wife to a forty-year-old man. As J.Devika rightly points out, "Meera has an especial talent for capturing the experiences of middle-aged women and their suffering, perhaps one [of] the most neglected demographics of literary fiction around the world"(qtd. in Palit). Her female characters are strong individuals who live life on their own terms and have the courage to take responsibility for their words and deeds. They acknowledge their needs and desires without scruples and express them without guilt. They move beyond their socially scripted gender roles and confront their real individual selves head on.

For a society which has glorified motherhood, the chaste wife and the idea of the sacrificing woman, and in a socio-cultural context where the family is valued above the individual, the unapologetic and daring attitudes of the female protagonists in these novellas are like arrows shot directly at the biases, prejudices and notions of a collective mindset. The writer is brave enough to shatter every aspect of conventional gendered expectations as she goes ahead with her narrative. Interestingly Meera also adopts the approach of talking to the readers directly which is also one of the most striking narrative features of "The Deepest Blue." She directly addresses the readers, breaking the 'authoritative' and long contested boundary between the author and readers. In fact, the narrator/writer-narrator in the tale does not innocently talk to the readers, establishing an intimate connective and communicative channel with the readers. On the other hand, the writer or narrator actually warns the readers. This is evident from the opening of "The Deepest Blue" which goes as "...here's advance warning: chaste wives...and strictly monogamous men...are advised against reading this account....You can stop reading right now" (101-102). This manner of directly talking to the readers is carried on throughout the narrative in a frank and consistent manner. K.R Meera opines that, this was much more than merely connecting with the readers or taking them along with the narrative. For her, "*It was a conscious effort to remind the world that it should prepare itself for more stories from women who are not ready to pretend.*" Quite true to this, the female protagonist of the tale refuses to ignore her deepest desires, admits her true thoughts and acts on her inner voice. She remains true to herself and tells the readers, "I

warned you early on. I'm shameless. The mother of two girls. The wife of a forty-year-old man. Impossibly bold. Immeasurably assertive" (115).

The novellas raise questions about a woman's identity and the roles she plays in a patriarchal society. Connected to this is the element of women attempting to distance themselves from the roles they play and to analyze *who* they are or what they expect from life. This is most evidently seen in "The Deepest Blue" where the woman looks carefully at her reflection in the mirror and ponders on *who* she is. She takes out her husband and children from her frame of life and ruminates on deeper questions of her existence, her identity and her purpose in life. "I looked closely at myself in the mirror... Who is this? ... what is this woman? Why was she born? Why is she living? This forty-year-old man... and these girls aged ten and twelve, who are they to her? She herself, who is she, really?" (117) For a woman to not only accept herself, but to heed to her 'self' and to ponder on deeper questions of her identity except in relation to the roles she plays is significant, particularly in a society which assumes that a woman finds her self-fulfillment in fulfilling her socio-culturally scripted gender roles. The novellas thus emphasize the individuality of a woman-the fact that she is much more than the gender roles she performs in any given context.

Just as the female characters are much more than beauty pieces to be admired or silent beings to endure and tolerate, the male characters are far from walking 'masculine models' or tight-lipped men with stony faces who refuse to express their emotions. The readers are not met with protective father figures or ideal lovers who rescue their lady love from the brutalities of life, but with a father who abandons his daughter on the street and forgets about her after a couple of drinks and a visit to the local prostitute, and a lover who is also a husband to another woman and who fails to protect his lover from being murdered. Oscillating between honest expression of inner desires and adherence to roles and responsibilities, men like Christy and Narendran seem to be far away from the oft glorified versions of masculinity. While Christy in "And Forgetting the Tree, I..." doesn't hesitate to seek out Radhika again and again, Narendran in "The Angel's Beauty Spots" admits his helplessness and looks up to Angela for strength. Same goes for the women who have the courage enough to be their true selves irrespective of what others think or what the society expects from them. Radhika seeks out her former lover irrespective of being a wife and Angela finds her love in Narendran, despite her trauma of failed love and infidelities. They look up to each other for strength and complement each other, attempt to be honest and stumble along their paths. Hence these narratives steer clear from the typical hegemonic masculinity or submissive femininity that dominate our socio-cultural imagination. For K.R Meera, this is about being true to the life around her, more than adopting a revolutionary turn on literary representations of gender.

In my stories, I haven't done anything to subvert the so called gender roles. All I have done is being true to myself. All these stories are told

truthfully based on my observation and experience. The best men I have seen are not the masculine ones, they are the most humane ones. That all men are extremely powerful and all the women are weak and mute, is just a superstition. There are equal number of strong and weak men as well as women. The boys are suffering a lot more than the girls, the men are devastated a lot more than the women, because it is agonizing to live up to the idea and ideal of the illusionary masculinity, as women all over the world are asserting their rights. From my personal and professional interactions, I have been convinced that the typical hegemonic masculinity and the submissive femininity are two big, catastrophic lies. I haven't seen an 'alpha male' ever in my life. But I have seen many alpha females all over the world. They work round the clock, take care of their loved ones, rule and control, win all the fights, fair and just. At the same time, there are reports of highly educated and socially privileged men conducting the pisachineemukti pooja to exorcise the demon of Feminism, to save their families, which means that the time -tested patriarchy which promotes the idea of masculinity is growly insecure about women asserting their rights.

Hence the novellas seem to brim with complex human beings who are enmeshed in the equally complex nets of reality and everyday life. While the women are “hungry for love, profusely scarred and unrelenting,” the men “are blemished and all too human with burdens of their own” (Susan). There also seems to be a conscious effort on the part of the writer to keep the tales away from unrealistic clichés or purposefully concocted happy endings. On the contrary, her tales of love and desire have neither happy forevers nor blissful meetings, but are deeply grounded in familiar experiences we see around us. The writer's adherence to keep the narrative realistic is also reflected in the sharp observations she makes in different contexts.

These novellas were written at a time I was exploring with themes and crafts and different modes of narration. There was not much conscious planning regarding characters or story at all. They took shape as if they had been already there in my subconscious. Of course there was this intense desire to tell stories which were not thought of by other writers, and tell them as grippingly and shockingly, as I can.

The writing style and the manner of narration are as interesting as the tales being told. Her long-time translator, J. Devika, describes her writing style in Malayalam as “similar to a mason carefully laying out bricks, with short compelling sentences that sting, like you're walking on sharp shards of glass” (qtd. in Palit). The narrative brims with images and metaphors from the world of nature. From coiling and curling serpents to beauty spots

that stand out to claustrophobic smell of wood, the writer adroitly uses elements from nature adding to the narrative beauty and symbolic richness of the tales. While the raw scent of wood brings back troubled memories and puts Radhika at unease, the wild jasmine, white *mandaaram* flowers, *kilichundan* mango trees and the *njaavaltree*, swaying vines and kaitha flowers, crushed *njaaval*berries and withered leaves, calm river, lush paddy fields and enticing serpent groves in “The Deepest Blue” create a dreamlike and magical setting that arouses passion and desire. The way K. R Meera explains the presence of such images in *The Angel's Beauty Spots* is interesting.

One reason could be that I have observed nature so much so that I have a visual from nature for every emotion I want to express. Another reason could be, that I have retained some genes of the first amoeba we all have descended from and when I sit down to write all those memories of evolution take life. The third reason could be, since my ultimate dream is equal citizenship, nature becomes integral to it, as equal importance to everything and every one, is the law of the nature.

Moreover the novellas have a lyrical tone that not only keeps the plot flowing seamlessly, but also pulls the readers deeper and deeper into the world of love and desire. The writer also shares with her readers her own worries as a writer, and often these serve as critical metafictional comments. Talking about other writers who have inspired her, she says:

It is true that I have been enchanted by many writers. The only writer who has inspired me to write was M D Ratnamma, my mother's school mate and colleague. She was the first writer I got an opportunity to watch closely. My mother was so proud of her friend that I thought of becoming a writer to impress her. But as years passed, with each wonderful book I read, I was discouraged to write instead of being inspired. Even today, I feel very nervous about my books and there is this constant question 'is this story already told?'

The Angel's Beauty Spots, apart from being an enchanting artistic piece also raises pertinent questions, particularly in relation to women's identity, gender roles and expression of desire. They also explore multiple aspects related to desire and passion. All this is set in an ordinary social landscape where multiple forces operate in varying degrees and with different levels of impact to contain the multiplicity of desires within us. It is also significant that writers like K. R Meera explore the contours of female sexuality and existence in a patriarchal social landscape. To explore the nuances of sexuality which is suppressed and that too the expression of female sexual desires, particularly those aspects of the 'forbidden' female sexuality (e.g.: extra marital affairs) is definitely no easy task for the writer. Neither is it easy for the writer to pen it down nor for the readers to break their

rigid (social, cultural and gendered) codes internalized over the years and to let themselves go freely into the narrative. And certainly not easy when just as the writer the readers too accept the fact that the narratives are 'more' than just fiction. These are emotions felt deep within the human heart, desires suppressed and stories which have been waiting to be told for quite a long time. Perhaps it is the realization of the 'facts' in the fiction of *The Angel's Beauty Spots* that penetrate the minds and hearts of the readers and leave them stunned and mesmerized. Similarly the readers are as much haunted by the realities in the life around them that mirror the fictional world of these novellas as much as the fictional characters and the predicaments they are caught in. Perhaps, long after having read the book, the reader is left to wonder as to who else can find the angel's beauty spots and the deepest blues of life!

(**Note:** The paper is based on an interview with K.R Meera conducted by the author)

References

- Antharjanam, Lalithambika. "Author's Note." *Agnisakshi*. Translated by Vasanthi Sankaranarayan. OUP, 2015.
- James, Jancy. "From Veneration to Virulence: A Case for a Women's Literary History in Malayalam." *Social Scientist*, vol. 23, no. 10/12, Oct-Dec. 1995, pp. 98-111. *Digital South Asia Library*. <dsal.uchicago.edu/books/socialscientist/pager.html?objectid=HN681.S597_269-71_102.gif>
- Kashyap, Neera. "How Sahitya Akademi winner K.R. Meera explores the dark heart of love." *Kitaab*. <kitaab.org/category/sahitya-akademi-award/>
- Kundu, Sreemoyee Piu. "Erotic Pleasure Transcends Both Inhibition and Hedonism." *Outlook*. 21 Dec. 2016. <www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/erotic-pleasure-transcends-both-inhibition-and-hedonism/298295>
- Mahurkar, Vashnavi. "6 Books by Dalit Women Writers Exploring Lives Lived On the Margins of Caste and Gender." *Intersectional Feminism-Desi Style*. 18 Apr. 2017. <feminisminindia.com/2017/04/18/six-books-dalit-women-writers/>
- Meera, K.R. *The Angel's Beauty Spots*. Translated by J.Devika. Aleph, 2019.
- . Interview. By Rosemaria Regy Mathew, 17 July 2020.
- Nair, V. Saratchandran. "Feminist Writing in Malayalam – A Study." *Academia*. <www.academia.edu/32903101/FEMINIST_WRITING_IN_MALAYALAM_A_STUDY>
- Palit, Maya. "Inside the Passion of Meera: Why Are Women So Obsessed With Malayali Novelist?" *The Wire*. 5 Mar. 2017. <thewire.in/culture/k-r-meera-malayali-writer>
- "Review of Literature". *Shodhganga*. <shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/259689/2/11_chapter2.pdf>
- Susan, Resh. "KR Meera: I Want to Write Stories Which Turn Readers into Feminists" *Huffpost*. 2 Oct. 2019. <www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/kr-meera-books-politics-feminism_in_5d931d42e4b0e9e760527397>

Rule of Law: Conceptualizing Liberty in Post Independent Era, Taking Reflections from *Riot: A Novel*

Abstract

*The seeds of communal divide were sown by the britishers and the politics of hate still exists here. The capitalist Media and selective memory of the government and all kinds of state apparatus put their effort to create communal backlash and social divisions in the name of cast, creed, ethnicity and language. The current political situation in India is a redo of Indira Gandhi's prime ministerial years between 1971- 77. In contrast to the declared emergency, what we witness today is an undeclared emergency. The existing chaotic condition of our state has brought the need for a re-examination of the theoretical and historical foundations of the liberal-democratic state in India and of its relation to the history and theory of modern state in Europe and America. The present paper tries to problematise the concept of liberty in two different time frames in the pretext of the novel *The Riot: A Novel*(Shashi Tharoor, 2001), which was set during a Hindu-Muslim riot in India in 1989. Questions are addressed at the concept of liberty which was envisaged during the time of nationalist movement and what happened to the very concept of liberty after freedom of the country; how social disorganization or breakdown of communal harmony hamper individual liberty and how it effect harmonious pluralistic relations/ system of co existence. With Post Truth analysis, incorporation of sociological insights in Partha Chatterjee's works further widens the horizon of study.*

Keywords: Liberty, media-politics, fragmentation, Hindu- Muslim divide, communalism, Post Truth

“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty or democracy?”

(Gandhi, 1962)

The period since the implementation of Global economic policies, India embarked on the journey towards increased prosperity, partly triggered by increasing trade volumes, investment, and growth through global endorsement of open markets. Conversely, in this present era of intense globalization, the country also witnesses an excessive proliferation of violence, ethnic cleansing and extreme forms of political violence against civilian populations. Statistics shows that there has been an increase in India's annual average

GDP growth of about 6 - 7% in the beginning of 21st century and from 2013 to 2018, India transformed into world's fastest growing economy, all of which raises a big question-within which strata of society can this development be attributed to? Because in India, the top 10% of the population owns 77% of the country's national wealth and GDP being an average ballpark figure, it is the economic progress of this 10% of population that contributes to this surge whereas the other section is getting debilitated. The lower classes face exclusion, impoverishment and humiliation that they associate themselves with their predatory leaders that they are more prone to the diversions of ethnophobia. In the present scenario, one faces the disappearance of liberal individuals and emergence of “mass man” (Gasset, 1972). The Indian population is composed of half-educated economists, career bullies, kleptocratic business tycoons that work through monopoly, lobbying and straightforward corruption, and the newly shameless class of criminal politicians and legislators (Appadurai, 2020). The elite class revolts against the Nehruvian socialism, secularism and pluralism. They propagate that India is a Hindu nation and it is only the Hindus, who can rescue India from deep slumber of Mughal, British and Congress rule. They also serve an important role in promulgating anti- Muslim ideologies and stirring communal riots in the nation.

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution reads as, “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law” (Bakshi, 2018). The Preamble of the Indian Constitution describes that the Liberty shall be of *thought, expression, belief, faith and worship*. Also, the right to live doesn't mean a mere animal existence but the right to live with human dignity, right to livelihood, right to health, right to pollution free air, etc. *Article 21 secures two rights: right to live and right to personal liberty*. However, the present scenario totally repudiates the proposals made by our constitution makers while framing the constitution to a side for considering the wishes and welfares of the people in power. The architects of the constitution expected that the Indian republic would provide the poor people all the basic amenities. However, if we take the period from 1949 to 2020, we can see that millions of people in India still lives under sub human condition. In the latest reports, Indian Unemployment Rate increased to 9.5% in December 2020 and the country's Labor Force participation Rate has dropped to 40.6% in December 2020.

Riot: A Novel by Shashi Tharoor foregrounds the intricacies of human relations, cultural collision, the clash between the English-educated elites of India and people in the rural heartland, issues of the obscurity of history and finally, perhaps, the inscrutability of the truth. The writer constructs the novel in the background of an actual riot that took place in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh. The main plot of the novel revolves around the death of an American social worker - Priscilla Hart, during the sectarian violence in the wake of Babri Masjid agitation. Tharoor examines the past with objectivity and causticity and transfigures it into historiographical meta-fiction. Narration of the actual accounts of

Coca-Cola controversy in India and the Hindu-Muslim conflicts in connection with Ram Janam Bhoomi and Babri Masjid shows how the author transforms History into fiction. He balances the views of both the communities and presents the core idea that emerges out of the conflict instead of a religious conflict. The author foregrounds the strife in politics, the state of affairs that existed at that time and unveils the role of politicians in the Hindu-Muslim partition in India and how they handled it for their own advantage.

Critics have reviewed *Riot* from different theoretical angles. From the studies of Rushiraj Waghela, it is proved that the major features of Postmodernism like self-reflexivity, fragmentation, discontinuity, subversion of conventional modes of narration, multiple viewpoints, intertextuality, metafiction, mixing of the genres are all present in the novel. Studies are also done to examine cultural relationships within the text. However, the present paper examines the social realities, which Tharoor intends to convey through his fictional oeuvre presented in the form of a documentary. As part of the study, denial of individual liberty is gauged by locating it within the Post Truth phenomena, a product of symbiotic relationship between media sensationalism and political hate and lying. It is through a series of reports, interviews, transcripts, journals and diary entries that the writer introduces his characters. Multiple narrative voices resonate inside the text where events are described from different perspectives. The novel begins and ends with the same newspaper article in its original form with its introduction at the beginning and conclusion at the end. This leaves interpretation at the hands of the readers. The novel exhibits two kinds of passions; one is the passion of having sexual intimacy and the other is communal passion. The work also explicates the rich-poor gap, which cannot be bridged. In her diary, Priscilla Hart writes a poem depicting a very clear picture of life among people from lower strata dwelling in India's darker side. The incidents in the novel are mainly centered on Zalilgarh, a town in Uttar Pradesh. Pictures of crumbling roadsides; rusting tin roofs; women struggling to clutch both babies and baskets to their undernourished bodies and their deliberate submission to their men in all sense, producing more off sprigs to wallow in misery with the rest; show that Zalilgarh is a representative of the country's poorest half. Priscilla suggests the reason for the hands of the district magistrate to be soft as "hands of a child of privilege in a land where privilege meant there were always other hands to the heavy lifting, the rough work for you" (Tharoor, 48). This shows the visible social division, that is of the privileged and the unprivileged apart from the divisions based on cast, community, religion, gender etc.

The novel in itself sets the scene for interrogation of Indian history, where one can see five major sources of division in India, including language, region, caste, class and religion. Since independence in 1947, the choice of official language has been a point of significant controversy. The question of language and linguistic affinity serves as a basis for increasingly sensitive political issues. It evokes irony as Hindi is chosen as one of the official languages along with English in a country where half of the people do not speak

the same. Anti-Hindi riots of 1965 in southern India by ethnic Dravidians, whose languages has little in common with the Aryan languages spoken in the north, resulted in the death and immolation of many people. The violence that broke out in the state of Assam in the early 1980s reflected the complexities of linguistic and ethnic politics in South Asia. In March 2018, India also signed a memorandum with the UN Secretariat for an initial period of two years to boost the volume and frequency of Hindi content produced by the UN and Mr. Tharoor who was formerly the Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information at the U. N. questioned this move. In Riot Lakshman tells Priscilla:

So language divides. And this is compounded by the fact that within a decade after independence, the government reorganized the states on linguistic lines, so most language groups have their own political entities to look toward to give expression to their linguistic identity. The people of Punjab speak Punjabi, of Bengal Bengali, of Tamil Nadu Tamil, and so on. So we have that twenty- five states in the Indian Union becoming ethnolinguistic entities, helping give rise to strong regional feeling going beyond the states themselves. The “Hindi belt” in the North- over populated, illiterate, poor and clamorous- is resented by many in the better- educated, more prosperous South. And both are seen as distant and self obsessed by the neglected North East. There's a real risk of disaffection here, especially as long as power remain concentrated in Delhi and the outlying states find themselves on the periphery, paying tribute to the north. (42)

The caste system in India is perhaps the world's longest surviving social hierarchy. In Hinduism, caste is determined based on ritual purity. This is why Partha Chatterjee says that power in India cannot be understood without reference to the cast system. Murder of Priscilla is an epitome for the recent incident of Hathras gang rape and murder. Priscilla corrects the notion that Whites always enjoy privilege in India. The question of privilege is all about power and money. The plight of both the fictional and real characters shows how laws framed for the protection of women are disposed with the help of lawmakers. Throughout the fictional opus, the male dominance in India is very clear even with its settings in the 21st century. As Abraham Lincoln describes democracy as the government of the people, by the people, for the people, India being world's largest democracy and considering the plight of its citizens, the quote in Indian context should focus on questions like whose government and government for whom. This can be termed as a phenomenon where, “a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) has become almost entirely disconnected from policy (the substance of legislation)” (Roberts, 2021).

Class in India divides it into a group of privileged elite, which forms five percentage of the country; the middle class that accounts for twenty percent of the population; and the rest of in lower class. The fifth major source of division in India is religion, which has paved way for various clashes- Hindu- Muslim, Muslim- Sikh, Sikh- Hindu, Hindu-Christian etc. Through *Riot*, Tharoor points at the responsibilities of a Historian, he says that being someone who can influence people, one should contribute in uniting the nation by digging deep into the myths that divide the country and there by resolve the communal arguments. The novel never takes an extremist side, neither the martyred jihadi revered by Muslim fundamentalists, nor the noble cow- protector worshipped by Hindus. It reveals how Hindutva brigade creates a politics of hate towards Muslims by creating a new past for India through fabrication of Historical data. It is the jihadi versions of Gazi Miyan that is circulated most (66). The great Urdu poet Mohammed Iqbal is often quoted for his advocacy of Pakistan and his desire for a Muslim homeland within confederal India. However, the author reminds us that it is Iqbal who wrote one of the most quoted lines about India, “Sare jahan se achha Hindustan hamara”, that is “better than all the world is our India” (67). The *contemporaneity* of Iqbal's words which are mostly ignored today is well established through his lines which state that ours is a civilization that will commit suicide out of its own complexity; he who builds a nest on frail branches is doomed to destruction (67). The novel handles the issue of religion very delicately. It posts questions to the readers to rethink on the facts, which the politics driven media delivers them. Professor Mohammed Sarwar in the novel speaks about the sad plight of Muslims in India. He says that in most part of the world, even when people cease to be Muslims, they are still given the identity of their nation, like Iranian, Egyptian, and Turks etc. However, in India when people cease to be Muslims, others are not ready to entitle them as Indians. He speaks about the danger of a second partition and calls for an urgent need of unity among Indians to draft an India that is neither Hindu nor Muslim. People should realize that it is not revenge against history what is required as history is its own revenge.

The novel has an instance where, Superintendent of police Gurinder Singh says in an interview that the Sessions Court released the accused Hindus on bail refusing to give bail to the Muslims in connection to a bomb case. He states, “the same riot, the same offenses, the same sections of the Penal Code- how can there be two such openly different standards for people of two communities? It is not an ordinary case,” he added. “It is question of the faith of a whole community in the system of justice in our country” (178). This shows how individual liberty is denied and the author has used this incident as a representative of such similar cases in India which occur for real. Partha Chatterjee claims that class system in India is closely tied to caste as practiced at local levels and the marginalized group of people are not able to access the institutions of political society. The state recognizes its members as citizens and empowers them with rights allotted by the jurisdiction. When the state renders citizenship, it considers every citizen as a

homogeneous entity and the will of these citizens gets expressed as generalized political objective and popular sovereignty. This gives legitimacy to the state and forms the grounds for democracy. However, Partha Chatterjee finds this concept of citizenship and democracy constraining and vexed. To explain this, he elucidates his concept of civil society, which he finds as the domain of the elites who enjoy all the advantages of a citizen. As the elites claim full citizenship mediated through institutions located in the public sphere, a large number of people remain blackballed from this process. He also advocates that the civil society institutions that support the elites are actually the benefactors of the colonial rule because, it is the colonizers who have created the civil society among the inhabitants who could converse in the language of modernity and could act as the top dogs and spokespersons of the colonial rule. The elites though were complicit with the colonizers, stood with them as their colonial subject, intending to claim citizenship after independence and hegemonize the new nation- state and rule the roost. Thus, Chatterjee's concept of civil society alludes to the process of exclusion (Sarkar, 2008).

“It is foolish to pretend that the legacies of colonialism can be consistently erased without a trace” (Partha Chatterjee, 2002). The Supreme Court's terse answer “Every case is different”, to the question of the Republic TV chief's bail shows the trio of politics, media and capitalism target the people whom they discern and support those who favor them with the help of judiciary. One can find the incidents narrated in the novel highly relatable with the real situations in India. Even after completing seven decades after the framing of the constitution, Individual liberty is still a question here. Including the recent issue of media censorship by the center; injustice done towards the people of Lakshadweep where all their individual liberty is curtailed; the Ayodhya verdict; and current issue of attack on liberty in the garb of love jihad for politicizing the issue and giving communal colour; evince another dimension of communal divide and polarization. Denial of liberty specifically at the individual level alludes to cases like Meneka Gandhi v. union of India where she filed a writ petition under article 32 of the constitution of **India** challenging action of government in impounding her passport and declining to give reasons for doing so. The lawsuit continues to be a milestone case in that it gave another and exceptionally shifted understanding to the significance of 'life and individual freedom' under Article 21 of the Constitution. Additionally, it extended the skylines of the right to speak freely of discourse and articulation such that the regional limits of the nation never limit one's privilege. Indeed, it stretches out to nearly the whole world. Hence, the case saw a serious level of legal activism, and introduced another time of extending skylines of major rights overall, and Article 21 specifically. The hit and run case of the popular Bollywood actor again foregrounds the truth that liberty is being denied to the lower section of society in India and that it is the people in power and the people with money power are the only ones who enjoy all the rights issued by the constitution. Shreya Singhal v Union of India and the later decision of Supreme Court of

India to invalidate Section 66A of the Information Technology Act of 2008 in its entirety show the struggle of the common people in gaining the individual liberty established in 1949.

To conclude, we have tried to look at probably the most essential issues of our day on a little canvas. In *Riot*, Priscilla Hart educated women of Zailgarh about birth control, about their rights to sleep with the men they choose and about their entire rights over their body. However, the Indian system failed to give justice to Priscilla and her family. The real circumstance under which she got killed was never investigated and the main culprit behind her pregnancy, Mr. Lakshman, was rescued from the clutches of law using the power of politics. The arguments made here are devoted to every one of those individuals who feel embarrassed to be Indian and have feelings of resentment against Indian social and social qualities. Detailed appraisal imparted to considerable lengths gives a valiant effort at bringing up the circumstance and the historical backdrop of turmoil existing between two-religions and a romantic tale of diverse creatures. It raises issues past the specificities of time, spot and culture to enlighten bigger inquiries upon liberty, whether it gets really granted or not to the common people. The work states that national integration which was the dream of constitution makers, still remains as a dream and that the democratic potential of India is evidently subverted in the present Post Truth society. To get hold of liberty advocated by the constitution in its real sense, people should realize the real potential of being in a democracy. Through fact checking and realizing the threats offered by the internet filter bubbles, one can check the lapses of the government and its administrators to a great extent. In short, “it is the ethos of the people and their competence that assures for themselves good Government and proclaims the way the Constitution serves them” (Reddy, 1988). One should realize that in a secular democracy, there is no majority or minority on religious or communal grounds. There exists only one majority that is of the poor and illiterate; and one minority, that is of the rich and the uneducated. History proves that greed and thirst for power will only destroy themselves and the institutions. Hence, people in power must realize this fact and should rectify the doldrums that prevail in our country today.

References

- Chatterjee, Partha. "Classes, Capital and Indian Democracy." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 Nov. 2008, epw.in/journal/2008/46/discussion/classes-capital-and-indian-democracy.html.
- . (2004). *The Politics of the Governed*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- .(2001). "On Civil and Political Society in Post-colonial Democracies", in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England
- . (1993). *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Kumar, Chitranjan. "Unemployment Rate Rises to 6-Month High of 9.1% in Dec: CMIE." *Business Today*, 4 Jan. 2021, www.businesstoday.in/sectors/jobs/unemployment-rate-rises-to-6-month-high-of-91-in-dec-cmie/story/426893.html.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "We Are Witnessing the Revolt of the Elites." *The Wire*, 22 Apr. 2020, thewire.in/politics/populism-elite-narendra-modi-donald-trump.
- Bakshi, P. M. *The Constitution of India*. Universal Law Publishing, 2018.
- Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *Non-Violence in Peace and War*. Navajivan Publ. House, 1962.
- Gasset, J. Ortega y. *The Revolt of the Masses*. UnWin Books, 1972.
- Reddy, Jaganmohan Pingle. *In Search of Unity and Secularism: February 18-19, 1988*. Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh Muslim University, 1989.
- Roberts, David. "Post-Truth Politics." *Grist*, 5 Apr. 2021, grist.org/article/2010-03-30-post-truth-politics/.
- Sahu, Gyanendra Kumar. "An Overview of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution." *International Journal of Law*, 1 May 2017, www.lawjournals.org/archives/2017/vol3/issue3/3-3-31.
- Sarkar, Swagato. "Civil Society and Exclusion: Partha Chatterjee on 'The Politics of the Governed.'" *Indian Journal of Human Development*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008, pp. 449–458., doi:10.1177/0973703020080210.
- Tharoor, Shashi. *Riot: a Novel*. Penguin Books, 2003.
- Varshney, Hemant. "Maneka Gandhi vs Union Of India - Case Summary." *Law Times Journal*, 4 June 2019, lawtimesjournal.in/maneka-gandhi-vs-union-of-india/.

The Existential-crisis of Modern Man in Walker Percy's Major Novels

Abstract

*This article focuses on the study of the existential-crisis of modern man embodied in Walker Percy's major novels. The phrase existential-crisis is interwoven with the philosophy of existentialism. A pervasive sense of the existential-crisis is constantly invoked in the works of Percy. The main motive behind Percy's every work of art is to find out a purpose in the purposeless world. He exhibits the suffering of the modern man in his three major novels, *The Moviegoer*(1961), *The Last Gentleman*(1966), and *Love in the Ruins*(1971). His protagonists search for an authentic-self and they escape themselves from the snares of everydayness. In each novel, the Percy hero is in despair because of his dislocation, his cutting himself away from his own self, and from the meaningful social, cultural, and religious relations. Every one of them suffers from the malaise of everydayness and existential alienation. This article aims at examining the existentialistic ideas in the novels of Walker Percy. By examining the existential experience of his protagonists, it proposes to show that Percy's fiction works upon the idea of the end of the world to express his obsessive concern about the widespread cultural and spiritual crises of his time. The novelist presents the moral collapse of the modern age, first, by pointing at modern man's degradation and then, by asserting that there is still hope.*

Keywords : existential-crisis, Walker Percy, existentialism, despair, malaise, everydayness

Introduction

Existential-crisis is an important part of the philosophical school of existentialism. It became identified with a cultural movement that flourished in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. The major philosophers of the school of existentialism are Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Frantz Kafka, Fyodore Dostoevsky, Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul-Sartre, and Albert Camus. Existentialism cannot be more deeply understood until the essence of existential-crisis is interpreted in the right way. An Existential-Crisis is a moment at which a modern man raises several questions about the very foundations of his life. It is commonly tied with despair, malaise, depression and a feeling of purposelessness. It deals with prolonged isolation and dissatisfaction with one's life. The person who is suffering from this existential despair feels a sense of being alone and isolated in the world.

Walker Percy, an eminent American novelist and the National Book Awardee, involved himself in reading great philosophical books of Soren Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. And the consequence was his number of essays got published in 1950s in both academic and literary journals. Meanwhile, he wrote two novels, both were unpublished. It was only in 1959, an editor at the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group received the manuscript that became *The Moviegoer* and after being revised for multiple times it was published in 1961. It won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1962, beating out Joseph Heller's *Catch22*. His other major novels in the list were *The Last Gentleman* (1966), and *Love in the Ruins* (1971).

All the three novels of Percy show what the southerner do in the face of such cultural, spiritual and existential crises. The protagonists believe in God and feel that religion alone would give direction to their lives, but, given their situation, they cannot embrace any faith. Each of Percy's men finds himself in such a state of moral and spiritual vacuum. Binx Bolling looks with disapproval at the acceptance of a common place and everyday kind of Catholicism by his mother's family. He is shocked when his mother speaks of God, death, and love in a very casual manner. When he visits the church, he feels that his sitting inside is no different from his sitting on the subway. Sutter Vaught, the failed physician in *The Last Gentleman*, finds his world thoroughly immoral and godless. While analysing the cause of his society's degeneration, Sutter observes, "Paltriness is the diseases. Americans are not devils but they are becoming as lewd as devils. Americans practice it with their Christianity and are paltry with both. Americans are the most Christian of all people and also the lewdest" (230).

Review of Literature

Hundreds of critics reviewed on the existential aspects of Percy. Besides, a number of thesis and dissertations are being done by scholars on the same aspects of the novelist. Robert H. Brinkmeyer's book, *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, examines Percy's existential views and groups him with Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon. Brinkmeyer finds that Percy, like the other two, grew up in the heritage of the old South. But, later in his life, he becomes sceptical of the South's traditional Stoic values and hold tightly Catholicism. The critic argues that Percy's fictional narratives reflect his new-found faith in God and religion and his reaffirmation of Christianity's ability to solve the personal and cultural crises of his time. Mary Sweeny, in *Walker Percy and the Postmodern World*, makes a close study of the first five novels and claims that they depict modern southerners "in a state of extraordinary fragmentation as a result of living in a world that has lost its bearing and is disintegrating" (2).

Martin Luschei in *The Sovereign Wayfarer*, examines Percy's themes and places in the existential tradition of Dostoevsky, Heidegger, Marcel, Camus, Sartre and above all Kierkegaard. Luschei shows how Percy borrows such favoured terms like, "rotation," "repetition," "everydayness," "inauthenticity," and "wayfarer", from the existential

philosophers, and uses them in his fiction and nonfiction. Elizabeth Ellington Gunter in her doctoral dissertation “The Critical Response to Philosophical Ideas in Walker Percy's Novels” (1985) states the critical response to philosophical ideas in Percy's five novels to date, as evidenced first by reviews, then by the later articles and books. The critical response developed gradually as critics became aware of Percy's aims and pointed out his use of Christian existentialism and his attacks upon Cartesianism, Stoicism, and modern secular gnosticism. These critical evaluations of Percy's philosophical concerns have sometimes overshadowed interest in his more purely artistic concerns.

In “The Humanity Strain: Diagnosing the Self in the Walker Percy's Fiction” Hillary McDonald argues the Christian agenda than medical healing that occurs in Percy's novels. Various scholars have observed the influence of Percy's medical background in his fiction. Percy uses “diagnostic fiction” in his work and states that its purpose is to diagnose philosophical problems of the self, thereby assisting the suffering persons in clinical terms. The critic demonstrates the coexistence of medicine and philosophy in Percy's novels in terms of Kierkegaardian three stages of existence- aesthetic, ethical and religious- by placing the context in medical terminology. To the critic, the neurologists can measure the activities of the human brain, psychologists can perform psychoanalysis, and philosophers can develop the theories of existence. One important tool for treating the self that is often overlooked is language, particularly in communication between a doctor and a patient. The critic argues that Percy always referred to his work as “diagnostic fiction,” a series of philosophical experiments to determine the condition of society and the nature of the self.

Mary Deems Howland's dissertation, “The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Inter Subjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels,” establishes that Percy's imagination is very close to the French philosophers. Estranged from self and society, Percy's protagonists find no solutions to their spiritual problems in the scientific materialism of today. They find solace in inter-subjectivity towards which they move at the end of each novel. Jerome Taylor traces Percy's affinities with Kierkegaard in his book, *In Search of Self: Life, Death, and Walker Percy*. Taylor sees Percy's heroes as choosing religion as a remedy for their sense of alienation and inauthentic existence. For Taylor, they are knights of faith who make a final leap from unfaith to faith. Robert Coles, in *Walker Percy: An American Search*, analyses the alienation and despair of Percy's protagonists and shows that Percy, like Kierkegaard, has a firm faith in Orthodox Catholicism. For Coles, Percy's novels profess that a renewed faith in God and religion is the only solution to modern man's anguish and despair.

Objectives

To find out the reasons as well as the solutions of the existential-crisis of the modern man, this article studies three major novels of Walker Percy. By analysing these novels,

this article explores an alienated young man's spiritual and moral vacuum. The modern man tries to find his own existence in the world like the protagonists of Percy; Binx Bolling, Will Barret, and Dr. Thomas More. The study of the three novels in an analytical way will help the readers to recognize the state of mind for what it is and then define the meaning of life by anchoring beliefs and focusing light on the productive tasks.

Methodology

The methodology which is used in this research work is a qualitative one.

The Existential-crisis of Modern-man in Walker Percy's Major Novels -

In each novel, the hero of Percy is in despair because of his dislocation, his cutting away from his own self, and from the meaningful social, cultural, and religious relations. All of them failed desperately in this world. Failure drives them to despair. They helplessly watch the phenomenon of things falling apart and wait for the end. All his characters pass through an intense phase of suffering in life. This suffering is more psychic than physical. Binx Bolling often sinks into painful states of depression. Will Barrett's obsession with his past makes him mad. On occasions he contemplates suicide like his father to escape the strain. Dr More's sickness lies in his spirit. It has no name in medical science. It manifests every now and then as morning terror and frequent bouts of elation and depression.

These observations about the present time reflect his fear that the modern man lost his identity in the chaotic world. Each of Percy's fictional characters is a sensitive, late twentieth-century southerner, well-to-do, intelligent, successful and leading the life of a good citizen up to a certain point in his life. Binx Bolling, in *The Moviegoer*, is a successful stockbroker living in a New Orleans suburb who flirts with his lady secretaries and increases his income every year musing: "Our name is Increase" (82). Will Barrett, in *The Last Gentleman* is a young Princeton graduate who lives in New York City and works at night in Macy's basement as a humidification engineer. He says about himself, "I am also an engineer in a deeper sense: I shall engineer the future of my life according to the scientific principles and the self-knowledge I have so arduously gained from five years of analysis"(39). Dr Thomas More, in *Love in the Ruins*, is a successful psychiatrist, leading a comfortable life in Louisiana.

But, these people are not what they appear to be. Each man enjoys an outwardly successful life. Each one experiences a deep feeling of despair. Binx Bolling is afflicted by the malady of everydayness and Will Barrett by amnesia. Dr More is subject to attacks of elation, depression, and occasional seizure of morning terror. Each of them feels like a stranger in his own world that offers no convincing explanation as to why things are as they are. Binx Bolling knows not why, but he is often led to feel that "everyone is dead... It happens when I speak to people. In the middle of a sentence it will come over me: yes beyond death"(86). Will Barrett, most of whose life "was gap"(18), thinks that although

“he was as engaging as could be, something was missing”(15). Even at the young age of twenty-five, Will has developed an “alarming symptom. He felt bad when other people felt good and good when they felt bad” (25). Dr More, who attempts suicide on a Christmas morning after watching Perry Como singing “Silent Night,” realizes that his entire life has been “a longing, longings for women, for the Nobel Prize, for the hot bosky bite of bourbon whiskey, and other great heart-wrenching longings that have no name” (29).

Binx reads self-help books and watches movies in order to make sense of his life. But he gets to know that these external aids are not enough to satisfy his existential-despair. He looks back to his family's southern codes of honour and dignity represented by Aunt Emily and Sam Yerger. But he finds no value in the past traditions and values. Then he would love to believe God, but the false faith of people around him forced him not to put faith. But gradually the presence of his cousin Kate in his life awakens morality in him. He decides to marry her, care his half-brothers and sisters, and to take up the medical profession with a purpose of helping others. Yet he cannot develop faith in God. It is only his half brother Lonnie's death which enables Binx to create faith and to conceive of a meaningful future for him and others.

Will Barret wishes to organize his life of scientific principles. The material prosperity of the North attracts him towards New York. But soon the middleclass culture overwhelms him. And returns to his native South in search of a quiet life. He finds the reality that his South is now no more different from the other corners of the world. He met with Vaught family; there he also finds that they are also in search of their own identity. Will's dependence on Sutter indicates his need of someone who could help him find faith. At the end of the novel, Will comes close to attain faith when he experiences the reality at the baptism and death of Jamie. But the experience is momentary and he fails to attach any meaning to it.

A failed physician, a bad catholic, alcoholic, and a womanizer; Dr More is the representative of the new southerners. He thinks that his prize invention, the lapsometer can scan and cure the infirmity of the human spirit and thus can save the world from the mental disease which spreads rapidly. But unfortunately the instrument falls into the hands of Art Immelman, who with its help releases the forces of anarchy. Dr More realizes his own foolishness and the inability of his scientific knowledge to cure the disease of the human soul. He leaves the thinking of being a Messiah. He marries Ellen and rears children. But at the novel's end, he runs after bodily pleasure and still needs his pack of whisky.

Conclusion

The above study establishes Percy's preoccupation with the existential crisis of modern man. The novels depict the socio-cultural climate of the modern era. Percy

believes that people today are responsible for what they have become. As an Orthodox Catholic, he looks at the world from a Christian point of view. He has infinite faith in the grace of God and this faith in God resolves all the conflicts of modern-man's existential-crisis. In his optimism and strong affirmation of the essential glory of human life, Percy asserts that God is not dead. The existential-crisis of the modern man can be solved with the help of others only. The healing power of the others cures the malaise of the modern man. Finally, the protagonists of Percy remain successful in their endeavours to get out of the trap of everydayness. They also find their identity and means of existence. The action of the three novels steadily progress from nihilism to hope, from existential-crisis to an authenticated outlook of their life.

References

- Brinkmeyer, Robert H. *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*. Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1985.
- Coles, Robert. *Walker Percy: An American Search*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1978.
- Donald, Hillary Mc. "The Humanity Strain: Diagnosing the Self in the Walker Percy's Fiction." North California: Wake Forest University. 2014.
- Gunter, Elizabeth Ellington. "The Critical Response to Philosophical Ideas in Walker Percy's Novels." Texas: North Texas State University. 1985.
- Howland, Mary Deems. "The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels." Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.1990.
- Luschei, Martin. *The Sovereign Wayfarer: Walker Percy's Diagnosis of the Malaise*.Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press. 1972.
- Percy, Walker. *The Moviegoer*.US: Alfred A. Knopf. 1961. Print.
- . *The Last Gentleman*. US: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.1966. Print.
- . *Love in the Ruins*. US: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1971. Print.
- Sweeny, Mary. *Walker Percy and the Post-Modern World*. Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press. 1987.
- Taylor, L. Jerome. *In Search of Self, Life, Death and Walker Percy*.Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications. 1986. Print.

Tracing the Last Human on the Planet: An Ecocritical Exploration of Andrew Krivak's *The Bear*

Abstract

*The present paper aims at analysing the life and surroundings of the last human on earth in the light of the novel, *The Bear* (2020) by Andrew Krivak. The novel presents a father and a daughter who are the last survivors of human species. An ecocritical examination of the novel is conducted with a special reference to the concepts of ecospirituality and deep ecology. The paper tries to trace out how the non-human world contribute to the physical and psychological development of a person. The analysis of the novel proposes the idea of return to nature. The ecocritical reading of the novel questions the androcentric attitude towards nature and tries to prove the importance of biocentrism by comprising Arne Naess' principles of Deep Ecology. The analysis of the novel reveals the novelist's deep concern for nature and the egalitarian attitude towards its entities. The novel stands separate from the genre of apocalyptic narrative. Hence, the paper offers a new platform of exploration in the field of ecocriticism.*

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Extinction, Ecospirituality, Deep Ecology, Arne Naess

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and nature from an ecological perspective. An ecocritical study tries to investigate how nature and its elements are presented in a work of literature. Ecospirituality, deep ecology, wilderness, pastoral, climate change and ecofeminism are some of the areas of concern which come under ecocriticism. The present paper is a spiritual deep ecological study of Andrew Krivak's *The Bear*. Spirituality is considered as an understanding of one's place in the cosmos and interacting it with environmental concern and action (Taylor 3). Deep Ecology is one of the forms of environmentalism which inspired the formation of many environmental movements. The term 'deep ecology' is introduced in Arne Naess' article titled "The Shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement, A Summary" (1973). Naess speaks of the shallow and the deep responses to ecological degradation. The shallow response is based on the 'give respect and take yours' concept. The deep ecological response proposes the idea of equality and friendly approach to the members of the earth community. Deep ecology is based on the principles of biocentrism, biocentric egalitarianism and holism (Barnhill 6). It considers human as part of nature. Celebration of wilderness, communion with nature and sacredness of nature are some of the deep ecological concerns.

Andrew Krivak is an American author of *The Sojourn*, the National Book Award Finalist. His other works include *A Long Retreat: In Search of a Religious Life* and *The Signal Flame*. Krivak's *The Bear* (2020) tries to picture the life and surroundings of a father and daughter who are the very last human beings on the planet. Krivak's deep awareness and concern for the natural world can be traced from the novel. The characters are not named in the novel and the beginning of the novel is so striking: "The last two were a girl and her father who lived along the old eastern range on the side of a mountain they called the mountain that stands alone" (1). Major incidents of the novel occur after the girl loses her father. A close reading of the novel provides a clear picture of the earth, domains of the earth and members of the earth community during the final stage of human existence. Krivak uses magical realism as a technique of narration and that technique can be analysed from an ecocritical perspective mainly because of his use of characters from the natural world. Krivak's use of the elements of magical realism in the novel helps in providing a clear picture of a world of human extinction. The novelist employs animal characters for the representation of the realities in a world which is in the verge of human extinction.

The ecological key points proposed by Arne Naess can be traced from the novel. The first key point proposed by Naess is on the 'intrinsic value' of the human and non-human life on earth. The novel presents the inherent worth of each of the entities in nature. The instances in the human and non-human world are narrated with equal importance. Like human beings, the members of the nonhuman world are given voice in the novel. Krivak tries to maintain a balance between the human, animals and the landscape. The second key point is about how the diversity of life forms in nature contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human world (Naess 29). The value of mutual understanding and sharing among the human and nonhuman world is revealed from the novel. Sharing is the chief lesson that the solitude teaches the girl. She starts to share the food with the animal world and vice versa. For instance, she gives a part of her food to the Bear, Puma and the Cat and an Eagle gives her a goose when she is in extreme hunger. The girl acknowledges that she would not have survived in winter without the food offered by the animals. The third point "humans have right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" (Naess 29) is so true with reference to the girl. In contrast to the earlier culture characterised by unlimited exploitation of nature, extreme exploitation of nature is absent in the final stage of human extinction. As opposed to anthropocentric utilitarianism, hunting is just a means of survival for the girl. For example, the girl hunts only when she is in need of food. She also leaves a fair portion of food for other creatures. Her action denotes the ecological concept of respect for the nonhuman entity. Naess' concept on the flourishing of nonhuman life with the decrease in human population is applicable to the novel. Natural resources and nonhuman beings are in a good condition after the human extinction. The description of the river water is an example: "The water was a uniform blue, its edges shades of white and green, with swaths of high grass reaching across the

plain and into the woods" (Krivak 97). From the description, it is understood that the river water is less polluted compared to the earlier state of human existence.

Many elements of deep ecology can be found in the novel. The girl becomes more attached to nature when she loses all ties with humanity. It is after her father's death that she befriends the Bear, the Puma and the Cat. The conversation among the girl and the animal world echoes the deep ecological and ecospiritual aspects. For instance, the Bear tells the girl, "long ago all the animals knew how to make the sounds the girl and her father used between them. But it was the others like her who stopped listening, and so the skill was lost" (62). When the girl is left alone she becomes capable of understanding the voices of the creatures around her. From the Bear's words, it is understandable that when human started ignoring the nonhuman world, the ability of understanding was also lost. The importance of the trees is also revealed by the Bear:

The trees are the great and true keepers of the forest... Some animals of old have said it was the trees themselves that taught them to speak, for they never make an unnecessary sound. Each word, like a breath, carries with it some good, some purpose. For this reason, trees are the wisest and most compassionate creatures in the woods. They will do all in their power to take care of everyone and everything beneath them, when they have the power to do it. (62)

The Bear's words can be analysed from an ecospiritual perspective. A maternal quality is attributed to the trees. Like a mother who is the first teacher of a child, tree takes an active role in the psychological and physical development of creatures around it. Nathaniel Altman's concept of sacred trees is worth quoting here:

A tree becomes sacred through recognition of the power that it expresses. This power may be manifested as the food, shelter, fuel, minerals used to build boats, or medicine that the tree provides. How a tree is used will vary according to geography, species of tree, and the particular needs (and ingenuity) of the human culture involved. Sacred trees have also provided beauty, hope, comfort, and inspiration, nurturing and healing the mental, emotional, and spiritual levels of our being. They are symbols of life, abundance, creativity, generosity, permanence, energy, and strength. (9)

In Altman's opinion, trees remain as a means of survival for the human and the nonhuman world. They contribute immeasurably to the physical and mental growth of those around them. According to Steven C. Rockefeller and John Elder "Trees are extraordinary revelations of the spirit in Nature. And given the multitude of ways that trees and their products benefit and enrich human culture, they are an especially appropriate symbol of the interdependence of spirit and nature" (qtd in Sponsel 1). The

father and daughter use natural remedies for the ailments. For instance, when the man is hurt by an animal they make poultice for the wound with plantain leaves and groundnut vine. Their action denotes their belief in the healing power of nature.

Before his death, the man teaches the girl everything that is needed for survival. The girl uses natural as well as scientific measures for her survival. For example, she uses "the sun along the ecliptic and her compass as a way finder" (74). She wears snowshoes while travelling through the forest and avoids sleeping in her house and sleeps in a cave. The girl in the early part of the novel possesses certain elements of human culture. During her final years, she speaks to all the living things around her and showcases an egalitarian attitude towards the nonhuman world. She no longer goes inside the house and instead spends her life in different parts of the forest in various seasons. Finally she abandons her dresses and walks naked as the animals do. It can be argued that the girl's belief in the rejuvenating and spiritual quality of nature gives her strength in facing the threats and dangers that come across her way after her father's death. The girl does not feel strangeness when she reaches in different landscapes and considers the place as her own. The wild nature plays an active role in creating an authentic personality of the girl. The girl's visit to the wilderness gives her strength and she feels some relief during her visit to the new places.

The notable point is that unlike the story of creation of man mentioned in the Genesis, it is a woman who witnesses the end. The description of the final stage of her life is remarkable. She takes her last breath and lays at rest on the dew-covered ground: "She remained there untouched throughout the fall and winter under a blanket of leaves and snow, and she lay there in the spring when the snows melted and shoots of grass, wildflowers, and young maples grew around and through her soft and sunken body" (110). And finally a Bear comes and cremates the remains of her body on the mountain where her parents rest. The animal world shows respect to the girl's dead body instead of using it as a means of survival.

As opposed to other androcentric narratives, the Bear is the protagonist of the novel. The presence of the Bear can be felt throughout the novel. The Bear appears when major incidents occur. For instance, the rock beneath the tomb of the mother is shaped like a Bear. When the man and the girl meet the bear for the first time, the girl asks the father was her mother a bear (12). The father tells her the story of a bear who saved the entire villagers. The story itself makes the bear a super hero. The depictions of the Bear in different parts of the novel express the reverence the novelist has for the nonhuman world. The bear seems to understand the fear, grief and suspicion of the girl after her father's death. The Bear accompanies the girl for cremating the remains of her father's dead body on the mountain. The deep concern of the girl to the nonhuman world can be understood from her attitude towards them. For instance, the bear and the girl eat the same food and sleep in the same cave. The girl acknowledges that the bear knows the forest better than her and she seeks his help while travelling through new places.

In Alan Bleakley's words " Without such a variety of psychological and conceptual animal presences, language, imagination and culture would be impoverished as a landscape stripped off dipping birds and industrious insects"(Bleakley xii). The presence of the animal world makes the novel interesting. Though Krivak is narrating the story of the last human on the Earth, he bestows more importance to the depiction of non-human entities. Nothing changes after the human extinction and everything continues as it is. He even continues his narration and ends with a commentary on the life of the Bear. The novel ends with the sentence: "the world itself is being born" (Krivak 1120). The final words of the novel impart a sense of hope for the reader. The words provide an impression of fresh nature unhindered by human civilization.

One of the important messages that the novel conveys is that nature still exists even after human extinction. From the above analysis one can come to the conclusion that the novelist succeeds in making a balance between the human and non-human world. He gives equal importance to both. The novel is narrated from a biocentric perspective. The members of the earth community unite for a cause of survival and they support each other when it is needed. Nature is the only companion of man which does not forsake him when he is forsaken by family and friends. Life with nature helps in developing reverence and concern for the non-human entities and makes one a better individual.

References

- Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. Robin Clark, 1992.
- Altman, Nathaniel. *Sacred Trees*. Sierra Club Books, 1994.
- Barnhill, David Landis, and Roger S. Gottlieb, editors. *Deep Ecology and World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Ground*. U of New York P, 2001.
- Bleakley, Alan. *The Animalizing Imagination: Totemism, Textuality and Ecocriticism*. Macmillan, 2000.
- Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. CUP, 2011.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.
- Gatta, John. *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and Environment in America From the Puritans to the Present*. OUP, 2004.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. U of Georgia, 1996.
- Krivak, Andrew, *The Bear*. Bellevue Literary Press, 2020.
- Naess, Arne. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*. CUP, 1989.
- Sponsel, Leslie E., 2007. "Spiritual Ecology: One Anthropologist's Reflections," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, vol. I, Equinox, 2007.
- Taylor, Bron. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. U of California P, 2010.

Exploring the Anthropocene in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

Abstract

Literatures produced across the world play a decisive role in portraying the harsh realities of ecosystem and its inhabitants. Cormac McCarthy's The Road addresses the issues of a post-apocalyptic world where the outbreak of an unnamed cataclysm contributes to the extinction of a largest population of the world, including the humans and the non-humans. The novel cautions the "Anthropocene" intervention on the global ecosphere. The world depicted in the novel echoes the end of a civilization, resulting in the catastrophic life of its survivors. The prime reason for the destruction of the natural environment can be related to the anthropocentric outlook of the human population. As nature plays a crucial role in the progress of the novel's plot, ecocriticism can be considered as an appropriate critical framework that evaluates the depiction of nature in literary works. The paper attempts to trace the aftermaths of human induced dangers on the ecosystem. The devastated atmosphere of the novel represents the realistic aspect of the modern environmentally degenerated world and demands the need for generating a responsible population who fights for the cause of environmental protection.

Keywords: Cormac McCarthy, post-apocalyptic world, extinction, Anthropocene, ecocriticism.

The existence of nature and human beings are so interrelated that the one governs the existence of the other. Human beings have to depend nature inevitably in all their prospects of development. Nature plays a significant role in safeguarding the fundamental necessities of human existence such as fresh air, drinking water and a favourable climate for their expansion. Various developmental and destructive measures proposed by the human beings contribute to the miserable existence of nature and its inhabitants. The irony is that it is human beings who threaten the equilibrium of nature and thereby affect their own existence.

Literature has always played a decisive role in dealing with various aspects of nature and its functioning. The prime concern of the earliest literatures were based on the exquisite or aesthetic aspect of the environment. But, the arrival of ecocriticism brought about a remarkable transformation in the outlook of the literary writers. They began to deviate their attention from attractive or romantic aspect of nature to realistic or pragmatic one. Men of letters began to educate the reading public on the grave realities of nature by investigating various challenges in the current environmental scenario. "Anthropocene fictions" can be considered as the category of fiction that represents the

realistic aspects of the contemporary ecological set-up. Adam Trexler in *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* signposts the advent of a new literary genre called the “Anthropocene fictions” that depict the outcomes of human interference in the global ecosystem. Trexler states “Anthropocene is also anticipatory, indicating humanity's probable impacts on geophysical and biological systems for millennia to come” (1). These fictions concentrate on different aftereffects of human interaction on the ecological system by analysing distinct elements of climate change and global warming that transcend beyond individual existence.

Human intervention on the balanced ecosystem forewarns many undesirable transformation predicting the doom of the entire ecosystem. Anthropocene fictions quintessence the grave realities that human intercession can bring on the entire ecosystem. Climate change can be considered as the immediate impact of this disagreeable arbitration. Adam Trexler lists out some of the consequences of the anthropocentric interactions in the global ecosystem: “global temperatures are likely to rise between 3 and 5 degrees centigrade by 2100, leading to a number of predictable geophysical, biological, social, and economic outcomes. Droughts, cyclones, heat waves, crop failures, forest diebacks and fires, floods, and erosion will become more extreme” (2). Trexler replaces the term “climate change” with “anthropocene” and relates human beings as the lone reason for all these alterations in the ecosystem. Thus, the “Anthropocene fiction” portrays the human induced modifications in the universal atmosphere by forecasting its immediate effect in the global environment.

Cormac McCarthy is a modern American novelist who is famous as the writer of post-apocalyptic fictions. McCarthy's novels address the critical threats of life and adopt violence as one of its prominent theme. Most of his fictions scrutinize the relationship between man and nature and portray the anthropocentric exploitations of nature. McCarthy expects a moral perspective from the part of human beings towards nature which stands as the sole provider for them in all their realms of existence. McCarthy can be considered as a pessimist who sets a futile ending for most of his writings.

The Road(2006) by Cormac McCarthy depicts the journey of a Man and a Boy through a post-apocalyptic world where, everything in the universe including the human and the non-human have witnessed an unnamed cataclysm and have submitted to the fate of extinction. The novel also illustrates the excruciating alterations in the climate and the Man's and the Boy's attempt to rescue from this totally devastated world. Ecological devastation can be considered as the central issue of the novel, where the landscape, weather, and atmosphere represented pinpoint to an irretrievable and futile condition of a distressed world.

Climate change is one of the momentous area of concern in the current ecological devastations. It has a degenerative power that has the ability to get reflected in the global ecological system. Antonia Mehnert in *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of*

Global Warming in American Literature contemplates the universal reflection of climate change: “Climate change is the epitome of a deterritorialized environmental crisis... the effect of other environmental problems are often visible locally in the form of mine tailings, land erosion, or loss of biodiversity, the impact of climate change is cumulative and cannot be immediately felt” (53). The novel instigates with the portrayal of an utterly destroyed world that has lost the control of all its occurrences. The climate in the novel stands absolutely unpredictable leaving least rays of expectation for its inhabitants: “Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world” (McCarthy 1). The atmosphere depicts the onset of some unlikely era for the survivors in the universe. The lines convey the irregular and capricious transformation that occurred in the universal atmosphere. The new world displays least concern for its survivors' existence. The ecosphere behaves like one who retaliates the destructive acts of the degenerated human population.

The new ecosphere rendered in the novel leaves the entire residents in uncertainties and utter disorder. The countryside experiences a volatile climate and its inhabitants are not even aware of the transformations of seasons and the moving of spheres. The landscape appears totally infertile, devoid of any musical rhythms of its creatures in its background. There are only a few survivors on earth and they are in pursuit of a better pasture for their existence. The environment appears “barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here” (McCarthy 2). The lines express the inhabitability of the newly created world and the people are trying to escape themselves to “south”, where they believe they will be provided with an improved condition for subsistence.

The landscape one spends has a decisive role in shaping the mental capacities and assisting an individual to inculcate various personality traits that supplement his existence in a complex world. Mark Allister in *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow: Nature Writing and Autobiography*, discusses the connection between a person and the landscape he inhabits: “Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are” (Allister 3). Thus, landscape plays a pivotal role in determining the existence and progress of a person. The population who spend their life in the unpredictable and intolerable environment derive a pessimistic attitude towards life and they view the world desperate and disruptive. The Man and the Boy represent the hopeless population in an entirely demolished world. The Man expresses his terror over the survival of the Boy in the destroyed world. Many incidents in the novel reflect the uncertainties and insecurities experienced by the Man and the Boy. The Man desires to escape from this devastated state and approaches everything with fear. The insecurity sense of the Man is revealed well through the words “This was not a safe place” (McCarthy 3).

Human beings can be considered as the principal destroyers of the natural surroundings. They in the process of acquiring their day today progress depend nature at great extent. Daniel J. Philippon in "Is American Nature Writing Dead" elaborates on the human induced destructions done to nature and its surroundings. Philippon states: "In the process, they use the Earth's resources at vastly different rates, generate waste in vastly different ways, and transform vastly different aspects of the planet: its atmosphere, waters, and soils, its genes, species, and ecosystems. And they do this again and again, every day, all over the world" (391). Anthropocentric destruction dominates the natural surroundings in the novel. Many natural objects have become the subjects of man-made desolations. The trees, meadows and the natural landscape appear like one demolished from a fire or other human induced methods of destruction: "on the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side... A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned" (McCarthy 6). The burnt atmosphere transforms the colour of nature to a dull looking gray and the environment conveys its sorrow by shedding black tears in the form of rain. Thus, annihilation of nature dominates the atmosphere of the novel and human beings can be considered as the prime demolishers.

The devastated state of the trees and other reeds replicate the large scale extinction of the world's vegetation. There are events in the novel that embody the elimination of its fauna in a greater magnitude. The burnt trees provide little chances of survival for the birds and their search for a tree to inhabit themselves goes in vain and finally concludes with their death, contributing the disappearance of the bird population from the surface of earth. Another instance that designates species extinction is the odour of the cows. The odour of the cows reminds the Man of the days when there used to be a lot of animal population and finally with great demise the Man comes to the realization that the species of cow are no longer found in the new environment and they have surrendered to extinction.

Along with flora and fauna, an enormous human population has also yielded to the fate of obliteration. The empty roads represent the nonexistence of human population in the area. Death in many forms predominate the climate of the novel. The reason behind the large scale extinction of human beings can be related to the sphere of "Anthropocene". The negative human involvement in the environment has propagated the absence of natural resources that justify the fundamental human necessities. The entire population are on the verge of starvation and the clutches of an unnamed disease that play a substantial role in speeding up the process of extinction.

The country appears as a waste land where nature has stopped its rhythm and the natural objects stand stagnant and colourless. The environment has become a sheer pile of garbage with little organisms on its surroundings: "The road was empty. Below in the

little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds” (McCarthy 4). The river water and the natural surroundings witness the threats inflicted by the egoistic man who has less concern for their fellow organisms. The river is compared to a “gray serpentine” that has lost its brightness and has become the carrier of poison and the river bank is adorned with the remnants of deceased plants. The countryside echoes the aftermaths of the deliberate efforts of human beings to spoil the ecosystem.

Human beings have an intrinsic urge to get themselves connected to natural environment in all their prospects of development. The absence of a progressive environment in their life leads them to insanity and horror. Donelle N. Dreese in *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures* deliberates the attempt of human beings to get associated to certain natural environment. Dreese claims that nature plays a significant role in perpetuating the cultural elements and personality traits of an individual (2-3). The Man can be illustrated as the best figure who reflects the transformations that an unfriendly ecosystem can contribute in a person's life. The deficiency of an optimistic and luxurious natural system lead the Man to a devastated state and he feels completely insecure and irregular in the newly found ecosystem. The Man can be considered as a person who has experienced both the pessimistic and optimistic aspect of nature. He is a resident of the place before and after the disaster. He finds the circumstances of the newly created world unbearable and perilous. He firmly believes in the existence of a place that can provide him and the Boy, a healthy existence in the universe. The Man along with the Boy travels towards the south in search of a landscape that blesses them with its resources and calm atmosphere.

The excruciating climate forces the Man and the Boy to accept certain things as a necessity to their lives. The dust and smoke compel them to wear a mask to protect themselves from the contaminated atmosphere. The Man is not capable of thinking a moment without wearing a mask and check whether the Boy has worn a mask even at the time of sleeping. They are not able to remove their shoes for an instant as the cold climate often turns too intolerable for them. The weather turns unpredictable most of the times and the region experiences a snowfall and a heavy rain alternatively. The cold climate along with the absence of oxygen in the devastated environment often lead them out of breath forecasting their death each time.

The environmental catastrophe leaves the world in utter disorder. There are only a few survivors who are in a constant fight to ensure their fundamental needs. The changed condition of nature affects their morality and they get involved in a lot of unethical and immoral activities to derive their egoistic needs. They adopt various life-threatening attacks and even commit murders to reclaim their position in the degenerated world. They experience the scarcity of food materials and there occurs a lot of dissension in the name of food. The moral degradation of the human beings make them resort to violence and other unethical practices such as eating their fellow people alive. The Man always fears

the survival of the Boy in this frustrating circumstance and he tries to designate human beings as the cause of this cataclysm. The Man is more afraid of human beings and he trusts nature in protecting their lives.

Most of the climate change fiction carries an undertone of politics in the treatment of its subject matter. It warns the future generation on the advancement of certain unlikely climate in the immediate future. Adam Trexler in *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* states: “Arguments for urgent action, then, rest on an awareness that the damage is likely to be great, perhaps unpredictably so... Predictions about future climate raise ethical issues as well, demanding we balance the cost of reducing emissions in the present against the harm done by climate change to humans both in the present and in the future” (119-20). The countryside depicted in the world stands for the entire world devastated by the anthropocentric dimension of the human beings, who gives less respect for nature and its organisms. The characters in the novel are unnamed and they are simply denoted as the 'man' and the 'boy'. The characters without a proper identity attribute a universal acceptance to them and they can be compared to any human beings in the world. The insecurities and lack of identity experienced by the characters also caution the world population on the upcoming disasters that has the power to demolish the whole universe.

The novel has a positive ending that traces hope in the future generation in restoring the deteriorated world. The death of the Man reflects the end of civilization that has greater concern for the prosperity of the ecosystem. Whereas, the Boy is adopted to a new family who ensures the security of the Boy in the future. The survival of the boy gives way for the emergence of a generation in the future who has greater aspirations in saving the ecosystem. Thus, the novel can be considered as a realistic representation of a degenerated world emerged from the anthropocentric exploitations of the egoistic man. The novel prompts the reading public in accepting a nature centred way of life that gives justice to the life of all organisms on earth, thereby ensuring their own existence.

References

- Allister, Mark. *Refiguring the Map of Sorrow: Nature Writing and Autobiography*. Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2001
- Mehnert, Antonia. *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Dreese, DonelleN..*Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.2002.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Picador, 2008.
- Philippon, Daniel J.“Is American Nature Writing Dead.” *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard, OUP, 2014, pp. 391-407.
- Rueckert, William. “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by CherylGlotfelty and Harold Fromm, Georgia UP, 1996, pp. 105-23.
- Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*.University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Interpersonal Interactions in Virtual Space: 'WhatsApping' as Popular Culture

Abstract

WhatsApp, one of the most popular instant messaging (IM) free apps, facilitates interpersonal communication along with easy sharing of multimedia contents like photo, video, voice note, GIF and so on. WhatsApp mediated dialogues assist in the formation of intimacy, and foster phatic interactions, where the emotions and feelings stimulated through network or connectedness is esteemed while the content shared is irrelevant. The expression of self in WhatsApp based personal or group interactions (online-identity) varies according to the context of interaction. WhatsApp profile picture and WhatsApp status state the contemporary vogue as well as contribute to self-expression through visual and textual cues. Further, lifelogging practices, instant online sharing of multimedia contents like photographs and videos of events in which an individual participates, manifest the participation to the simultaneous unfurling of the occasion in virtual space. Sexting and cyber flirting constitute novel ways of voyeurism in digital space, as individuals explore sexual fantasies away from face-to-face interactions. The propagation of micro-narratives, which serve as a galactic space for individuals to express themselves regarding anything and everything and the forwarding of gender-sensitive messages through WhatsApp demand attention these days. Thus, this paper explores numerous nuances unbolted through online interactions provided by the popular social networking site (SNS), WhatsApp.

Keywords: Lifelogging, Micro narratives, Phatic internet, Self-expression, Sexting, WhatsApp.

Raymond Williams identifies culture as a particular way of life, whether “of a distinct people, or other social group” (11), and personal computers, tablets and smart phones along with internet connectivity have been deeply incorporated into the 'lived culture' of the post-millennium society to communicate as well as to express and reflect on existing socio-political aspects. The digital revolution has ushered in various innovative inventories like instant messaging (IM), voice over internet, two-way interactive video calls, blogs, e-commerce and prominently, social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and so on, which have gained tremendous traction recently, where youths and adults hangout alike. Among these, WhatsApp enjoys a great deal of popularity.

The term 'popular' always demands a quantitative dimension, and in the most common

sense, something is “said to be 'popular' because masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and seem to enjoy them to the full” (Hall 186). Evidently, WhatsApp, launched into cyberspace in January 2009 by two former Yahoo! developers, Brian Acton and Jan Koum, has fledged into one of the most installed and used messaging apps available, with a user base of over 1.3 billion, and still growing. It has now become the easiest way of contact and sharing information, including documents, images, videos, voice notes, GIFs, weblinks and even the location of the user. Unlike Facebook and other SNSs, the restricted environment offered by WhatsApp amplifies users' sense of presence in the communication process and provides a sense of security, which contributes to its popularity. As Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore point out in their seminal work *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967), “[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication” (8), and in this digital era, social interdependence and every aspect of personal life are re-patterned by internet and electric technology.

A significant share of today's population expresses themselves through interpersonal communication via the space introduced by WhatsApp, utilizing dialogic interaction. Interpersonal exchange engages a relatively smaller number of participants in contrast to traditional mass communication, where one-way message transmission occurs from one source to a large, undifferentiated and anonymous audience. Here, partakers exchange “messages designed for, and directed toward, particular others” and “communication strategies are shaped by the instrumental and relational goals of the individuals involved, and knowledge about one another's idiosyncratic preferences” (Walther et al. 19). Recent studies on WhatsApp and other instant messaging applications reveal that such services sustain a more intimate and private way of communication with others, better gratifying the fundamental human need for relatedness—the impression that one has perpetual intimate contact with others who care for, rather than feeling disregarded and alienated. WhatsApp affords intimate synchronous communication and also assists in crafting desired experiences on recipients through constructing the message or monitoring the timing of the response. It allows to express emotions without interruptions and also eliminates the uncertainties that might occur in a face-to-face communication as the user can decode the message several times through repeated exposure to the content received, and frame reply accordingly.

A recent trend in virtual interactions, labelled as the 'phatic internet', proposes that the information or content shared through internet communication is increasingly irrelevant, but the effects these texts stimulate in the users have greater significance in terms of the feeling of connection, sociability or of group membership. A paradigm shift in communicative interaction can be observed, as the dialogic exchanges between the users formerly provided substantial content or information, whereas now, the sustenance of the network or connected presence is valued. The ever-increasing number of contacts and

networks and the intimacy provided by these connections make up for the triviality of the contents shared. Francisco Yus argues that in the phatic internet “very often the key to the relevance of many of the messages exchanged on the Net, and specifically on WA [WhatsApp], does not lie in the informational value of the content coded (i.e., typed), but in (intentional) phatic propositional implicatures” (79). WhatsApp is extensively used for phatic interactions as it offers an ideal environment to form social bonds through the exchange of trivial information, and chat idly with someone becomes a valuable expression of care and reassurance of their connectedness. A channel for communication is made readily available through WhatsApp, and it somehow strengthens the relationship or intimacy.

Furthermore, the anonymity provided by digital space assists individuals in exhibiting preferred self-expression. Multiple aspects of one's identity can be dissociated, enhanced, or integrated online. Negative aspects or undesirable traits of personality can be hidden, and positive aspects or accepted behavioural attributes can be developed and expressed. Online identity might be real to life or imagined, and the needs and emotions of the users can be controlled in the online platform. Luiz Carlos Baptista liberates that new identities are not created online, rather as the division of self is apparent in everyday face-to-face interactions, online-self is a facet of broader identity (209). On the other hand, Emmanuelle Vaast confers the construction of new identities in an electronic chat environment (348). Andrea J. Baker in her study on online rock fans, through the concept of 'blended identity', concludes that offline-self aids in the creation of a new online-self, which then reinforces the offline-self in further interactions (20). In the case of WhatsApp facilitated interactions, the findings of Baptista are fundamental when the individuals interact face-to-face frequently and use IM facilities at times of physical detachment. A complete persona adoption, as Vaast argues, is possible when the interaction is mediated through WhatsApp alone. The manifestation of 'blended identity' is probable when users first interact virtually and then move to offline contexts.

WhatsApp profile picture and WhatsApp status confide key attractions of WhatsApp messenger. Only the profile picture gives a clue to the physical aspects of the person, and the photo which makes into the display picture is chosen by the individual according to the latest trend. Sanja Kapidzic observes the significance of images in online self-presentation and declares that the users of SNSs, “manage their online presentation through textual and visual cues. Images, especially, are a crucial tool in this process. Profile pictures on SNS are a feature that can frequently be viewed by everyone on the network, and are considered one of the most important aspects of online self-presentation”, additionally “users strategically manipulate visual cues to reflect an ideal, rather than their actual self” (14). Users create a 'desired image' of themselves, and the stereotypes of beauty broadcasted by mainstream media function as standards for profile pictures (Kapidzic and Martins 295). Further, WhatsApp status, with the span of twenty-four hours, provides a platform and audience for one's self-projection of a day's most

important aspects. Individuals post pictures, texts or mini-movies with the duration of thirty seconds as their WhatsApp status. Comments on relevant social issues, users' protest or opinion about contemporary on-goings, inspirational quotes or motivational speeches, clippings from one's favourite songs or movies and so forth find a place in WhatsApp status. These choices of photographs, descriptors, and favourite quotes and songs, according to Gerardo Blanco Ramirez and Lyssa Palu-ay, "constitute a process of identity construction" and self-disclosure online (140).

WhatsApp also provides a 139-character blank space, 'About' (earlier WhatsApp status), where users could write any thing to complete their profile information. Either auto-generated text or self-generated text (purely verbal, a hybrid of verbal and emoticon, purely iconic, or blank) occupies this space according to the users' preference, and it patents the textual construction of self-expression.

In addition, common predilections and interests among individuals enable them to actively engage in group interactions provided by WhatsApp, which allows to create and interact with groups with three to two hundred and fifty-six members. One individual may belong to numerous groups according to the multiple personality traits of that individual, and groups allow multiple self-expressions. Work-place groups, school/college groups, family groups, a group comprising the individuals of the locality or friends and so on are basic WhatsApp groups in which usually users are a member. Apart from these, support groups aimed at a common cause, for instance, cigarette cessation support group or fan-based groups of sports or movie stars, bring together people with a common interests and institute a platform for group interactions. Tali Gazit and No a Aharoni delineate various factor sex plaining participation in WhatsApp groups and regard "social support" (emotional, instrumental and informational) as a significant drive behind WhatsApp group interactions. Users recognize that WhatsApp groups are environments where they are loved, their opinions valued and esteemed, and participate in WhatsApp groups that they acknowledge as meaningful (392). Apart from posting general texts, members of these groups share particular information, images and videos which are appropriate to the inhabitants of that particular group, and they project the part of their identity that is acceptable in that social group. Different aspects of their identity are divulged in diverse social groups. Abdullah Kocak and Ozgur Yuksek Vergiveren in their analysis of content sharing behaviour in WhatsApp based group interactions observe that the most popular contents shared in WhatsApp groups are professional issues and personal events and developments, followed by chain messages and gossip, cultural issues, news, political issues, humanitarian relief activities and advertisements (12).

Life logging is yet another vogue among WhatsApp users where important events in which an individual takes part is instantly shared as multimedia messages such as photos, videos or voice notes in WhatsApp groups. Interestingly, this is observed habitually in family groups where moments of rejoicing like engagement, wedding, birthday

celebrations or the first words of the baby are shared among all family members. This near-real-time sharing of events make members separated by distance feel present in the event. Evangelos Karapanos et al. enumerate lifelogging as one of the satisfying experiences with WhatsApp in their study, and acknowledge that this form of lifelogging displays several interesting properties.

First, rather than being personal, it is a shared corpus, with input coming from different members. Second, its content entails purpose and authorship as it is captured from someone, directed to someone, and shared with a particular purpose (e.g., making one's family feel present in her life). Third, the resulting social interactions that take place around the lifelogs further augment the experience of revisiting the lifelogs and increase one's motivation for doing so.

They also note that even co-located individuals, participating in the same event, perform lifelogging. This tendency denotes not only a form of “collective lifelogging, but also a form of participation to a second thread of the event, unfolding in the online space” (892).

A new phenomenon emerged out of cyberspace, 'sexting', constitutes sending, receiving or forwarding self-generated sexually explicit photographs or texts primarily between mobile phones through SNSs, and it opens portals to novel ways of voyeurism. The seemingly confined and private direct message feature of WhatsApp contribute a potential space for sexting, and a false intimacy is formed between individuals through continuous texting or chatting. Scholars argue that sexting done with mutual consent can be considered as a usual part of adolescent development, and “a normal part of adult romantic relationships, and can be explained by a general human tendency to create sexually explicit texts and sexual imagery” (Ouytsel et al. 2). Sexting as a consensual intimate communication is harmless while coercion to engage in sexting behaviour among tweens and teens poses psychological threat as it might lead to guilt and embarrassment. Jeff R. Temple and Ya Lu investigate the risky sexual behaviour linked to sexting, and warn about the psychological health risks associated with it as individuals might be bullied to sext. They conclude that “sexting among teens calls for sexting education” and “adolescents should be educated about the potential consequences and acquire relationship knowledge and skills to handle it properly” (60).

Transmitting a sexually explicit image of the partner or sexting content beyond the intended audience, without the consent of the originator, is a crime. Nonetheless, studies show that young adults do share such images within their friend circle. Ouytsel et al. perceive that one motive behind such sharing among adolescents is to brag to friends about having received sexting content, and researchers have found that male adolescents notice an enhancement of their social status in the peer group as a result of exposing sexting content they received, through posting online as well as showing content on the

screen of their mobile device (2-3). Some people even blackmail their partners by threatening to release private images of them and intensify crimes by means of digital media. People even post exposed images of their partner on other pornographic sites, which could lead to reputational damage, cyber bullying and victimization.

Myriad texts, micro-narratives, flow through the walls of WhatsApp mostly accompanied by matching photographs or videos. Micro-narratives circulating through WhatsApp range from humorous texts to serious political issues and commentaries on day-to-day affairs. People even post their opinion about various socio-political incidents that occur worldwide, and it is forwarded by people who share a similar opinion on such social circumstances. Forwarding messages or “the pass-along effect” (Norman and Russell 1086) create the viral message, which is quick to move within a close-knit network due to the frequent contact between members. However, dissociative anonymity and invisibility circulate through WhatsApp along with these micro-narratives. Most of the text-based micro-narratives propagated through WhatsApp lack authorship, and forwarding micro-narratives without verifying the reliability of the content is a principal concern these days.

Forwarding of gender-sensitive messages especially ridiculing the female sex is a threatening aspect of WhatsApp micro-narratives that needs attention. The patriarchal netizens create texts or mini-stories that humiliate women or girls. Narratives about women flourish through WhatsApp and mostly, the contradiction between the naïve or wise husband or male and the wicked or irrational wife or female is the main attention of these messages. Fascinatingly, there are many text messages that catalogue the good conduct and mannerisms expected from women in a patriarchal society, and the obstacles and ridicules that one might face if deviated from these expected norms. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her renowned work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), recalls how gender roles were prescribed for women along with emphasizing the need for a protector. She says, “women are told from their infancy...that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man” (15-16; ch. 2). Even after centuries, the content of the advisory messages specified to women remains the same, only the medium of propagation has changed. Gender roles and binaries are once again enforced through the narratives circulating via WhatsApp.

The below-given micro-narrative, forwarded through WhatsApp, exemplifies the messages that ridicule women.

Once a woman and a man were driving in opposite directions and their cars collided with each other due to the ignorance of the woman. They both escaped with no injuries even though their cars crashed badly. Soon the woman approached the man and said: “it's our destiny

to meet, and us being alive after such an accident is an evidence for that. It is god's will that we marry each other". And the man agreed by repeating her words: "yes... it is god's will". Then, the woman took a wine bottle out of the crashed car and said: "look at this wine bottle; it survived the accident without breaking. So, it is an omen that we start celebrating our life by opening and drinking from it". She handed over the bottle to the man. He drank the wine and offered it back to her. But she refused to drink from it. The man inquired the reason for her refusal and she replied: "I am waiting for the police to arrive and take evidence" (drinking alcohol while driving causes accident). Again, Adam ate the apple. Men never learn and women never change.

Towards the end of the narrative, women are generalized through the explicit biblical reference. The allusion to Adam and Eve is given deliberately to enforce the so-called innocent and pious nature of men, and it depicts women as treacherous and morally inferior. It also discreetly underlines the religiously sanctioned superiority of men over women. Kevin Harris in *Sex, Ideology and Religion: The Representation of Women in the Bible* acknowledges that men were given the right to dominate women, because woman was tempted and man was not, and "right from the description of the creation, the bible can be seen as prescribing, supporting and endorsing a gender differentiation in which women take an inferior place and adopt a subservient role to men" (41). Moreover, it portrays women as the bringer of misfortune and embodiment of evil by drawing parallels to the mythological character Pandora. It is a shame to note that many women forward such patronising micro-narratives they receive to other groups.

Every micro-narrative flooding through WhatsApp and text messages are adorned with emojis or emoticons. Emoticons aid in adding emotions to the narratives with the yellow miniature faces depicting various emotions. Emoticons or emojis are graphic symbols or ideogram that not only display facial expressions but also wider concepts like celebrations, festivals, vehicles, buildings, weather, emotions and feelings, animals and plants, food and drinks and so on. Emoticons speak more than words in a text-based WhatsApp conversation. It strengthens the message delivered as well as the receiver will feel the emotion of the sender through the add-on expressions like sad, happy, angry, disappointed, shocked or any other universally recognized emotion. Despite, it is observed that users do not always use the proper emoji to express themselves, instead they utilize other emoticons to cover the real feelings generated so the receiver stays ignorant of the genuine impressions (Chairunnisa and Benedictus A.S. 122).

In conclusion, even though WhatsApp voice call and video call facilities are possible, WhatsApping is mainly accomplished through text messages. The ever-widening popularity of WhatsApp has made it the easiest accessible way of contact as well as

sharing pictures, texts, videos and audio files. Interpersonal communication provided by WhatsApp satisfies the users urge for relatedness by providing a long-standing channel for connection and network. Irrelevant or trivial texts shared through this platform account for deep positive emotional impact on individuals as it fulfils their need for sociability. WhatsApp allows multiple expressions of identity, and users choose which facet of their identity to expose during interactions. A complete persona adoption is also possible in virtual interactions, where there is no face-to-face encounter. WhatsApp groups display group identity, and individuals behave differently in various social groups. Lifelogging is yet another fascinating expression in WhatsApp groups. Users share pictures or videos of the events they participate in instantly in groups so that other members, spatially removed, could enjoy the experience of 'being there'. WhatsApp and other social networking sites play a major role in the spreading of sexually explicit messages and gender-sensitive messages. Sharing sexually explicit contents and sexting contribute to improvised forms of digital voyeurism. Circulating gender-sensitive micro-narratives are once again the enforcement of the societal gender binaries that establish women as inferior to men in many ways, which have been so far propagated through holy scriptures and mythologies.

References

- Baker, Andrea J. "Mick or Keith: Blended Identity of Online Rock Fans." *Identity in the Information Society*, vol. 2, Dec. 2009, pp. 7-21. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12394-009-0015-5>.
- Baptista, Luiz Carlos. "Framing and Cognition." *Goffman's Legacy*, edited by A. Javier Trevino, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 197-215. *Z-library*, <http://1lib.in/dl/831776/fdff3e>.
- Bullingham, Liam, and Ana C. Vasconcelos. "'The Presentation of Self in the Online World': Goffman and the Study of Online Identities." *Journal of Information Science*, vol. 39, no. 1, Feb. 2013, pp. 101-112. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551512470051>.
- Chairunnisa, Sabrina, and Benedictus A.S. "Analysis of Emoji and Emoticon Usage in Interpersonal Communication of Blackberry Messenger and WhatsApp Application User." *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management*, vol. 4, no. 2, April 2017, pp. 120-126. *Nepal Journals Online*, <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v4i2.17173>.
- Davis, Katie. "Tensions of Identity in a Networked Era: Young People's Perspective on the Risks and Rewards of Online Self-Expression." *New Media & Society*, vol. 14, no. 4, June 2012, pp. 634-651. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422430>.
- Gale, James, editor. *The Complete WhatsApp Manual*. 5th ed., Papercut Ltd, 2020. *Z-library*, <http://1lib.in/dl/5808655/b40e5d>.
- Gazit, Tali, and Noa Aharoni. "Factors Explaining Participation in WhatsApp Groups: An Exploratory Study." *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, vol. 70, no. 4, pp. 390-413. *Emerald Insight*, doi:10.1108/AJIM-03-2018-0053.
- Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'." *Cultural Resistance Reader* by Stephen Duncombe, Adarsh Enterprises, 2012, pp. 185-192.
- Harris, Kevin. *Sex, Ideology and Religion: The Representation of Women in the Bible*. Barnes & Noble, 1984.
- Harvey, Christopher G., et al. "Forward or Delete: What Drives Peer-to-Peer Message Propagation Across Social Networks?" *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 10, 2011, pp. 365-372. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.383>.

Kapidzic, Sanja, and Nicole Martins. "Mirroring the Media: The Relationship Between Media Consumption, Media Internalization, and Profile Picture Characteristics on Facebook." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2015, pp. 278-297.

Kapidzic, Sanja. "Narcissism as a Predictor of Motivations Behind Facebook Profile Picture Selection." *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2013, pp. 14-19. *Mary Ann Liebert*, <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0143>.

Karapanos, Evangelos, et al. "Need Fulfillment and Experiences on Social Media: A Case on Facebook and WhatsApp." *Computers in Human Behaviour*, vol. 55, Feb. 2016, pp. 888-897. *ScienceDirect*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.10.015>.

Kocak, Abdullah, and Ozgur Yuksek Vergiveren. "Group-Based Communication: Contents and Practices of WhatsApp Group Use by Generations and Genders." *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1-14. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcm/5900>.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Gingko Press, 2001. *Library genesis*, <http://library.lol/main/10821490E2EF6B94DFB5E615A0BE1AA5>.

Norman, Andrew T, and Cristel A. Russell. "The Pass-Along Effect: Investigating Word-of-Mouth Effects on Online Survey Procedures." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 11, no. 4, July 2006, pp. 1085-1103. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00309.x>.

Ouytsel, Joris Van, et al. "Sexting." *The international Encyclopedia of Media Literacy*, 2019, pp. 1-6. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118978238.ieml0219>.

Papacharissi, Zizi, editor. *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. Routledge, 2011. *Library genesis*, <http://library.lol/main/1BD8E2377D032965057BF043217106D8>.

Ramirez, Gerardo Blanco, and Lyssa Palu-ay. "'You Don't Look Like Your Profile Picture': The Ethical Implications of Researching Online Identities in Higher Education." *Educational Research and Evaluation*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015, pp. 139-153. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2015.1024009>.

Vaast, Emmanuelle. "Playing with Masks: Fragmentation and Continuity in the Presentation of Self in an Occupational Online Form." *Information Technology and People*, vol. 20, no.4, 2007, pp. 334-351. *Emerald insight*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09593840710839789>.

Walrave, Michel, et al., *Sexting: Motives and Risk in Online Sexual Self-Presentation*. Palgrave macmillan, 2018. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71882-8>.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. Fontana Paperbacks, 1981.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Vintage, 2015.

Wysocki, Diane Kholos, and Cheryl D. Childers. "'Let My Fingers Do the Talking': Sexting and Infidelity in Cyberspace." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol.15, Sept. 2011, pp. 217-239. *Springer Link*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-011-9091-4>.

Yus, Francisco. "Contextual Constrains and Non-Propositional Effects in WhatsApp Communication." *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol.114, June 2017, pp. 66-86. *ScienceDirect*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.04.003>.

Blended Approaches for A Blurred World Order: Mixing it Right in the ESL Classrooms

Abstract

If by about the second half of the twentieth century, language pedagogy entered a systematic, theory driven phase, evolution of technology and globalisation gave it multiple approaches and methodology, which Kumaravadivelu calls a march from method to postmethod. Despite the short term success, no approach has yet been considered the best. Technology, the tool, having delivered much lesser than what it had promised to education in the lines of access and equity, has on the contrary widened the gap, besides the hoaxes upon social and personal security. At this juncture it is imperative for language instructors to understand the limitations of the concept of method and to be aware that the postmethod pedagogy is not a monolithic entity. Unless blending of the old, new and the unknown is attempted, the varying needs of the learners can never be fulfilled. This paper is an attempt to throw light on certain conceptual frameworks that can be used by teachers to create patterns between the taught and the universe they become an inherent part of.

Keywords: approach, postmethod, blending, communicative rationality

With the evolution of technology and the surge in computing capabilities, much of the traditional boundaries between goods and services have blurred. From a phase of industry that believed in working in silos, policy framework has seen paradigm shift with technology driving increasing share of the value add, coming from digitisation and capital formation. On the other extreme are the threats created by disinformation and hoaxes upon personal and social securities. With deep fakes fabricating media without consent and synthetic media creating possibilities and opportunities for all, educational policies need a clear revamping, from curricular design to class room instruction, so as to mould universal citizens who would be trained to handle the freedom a democracy grants and to use the unbridled tool of technology with less of its debilitating impacts.

Driving on the analogy of the blurring lines in goods and services, language instruction and methodologies too stand the need to have a revamped mode, with the potentials of technology and its far reaching impact offering much to optimise the desired outcomes. In a world that is torn between boons and banes of technology, teachers have ceased being resources of knowledge or even references. The high pedestal on which the

teacher once stood has been blurred to a dissolved space between the teacher and the taught, giving them the terms facilitator, mentor and coach. Many traditional patterns, some even sustainable, have become obsolete, and so have the traditional needs of the generations that were taught. The world created by disinformation and proliferation of information is the ground on which the generation Z has to play. What must be the approaches adapted that must design our methodologies and resources, and what is to be gained by the students from our classrooms that befits their future, must be a serious thought in the mind of every academician. This paper is an effort to throw light on the approaches that can be mastered by teachers of English classrooms which are fertile grounds to instil the right blend of information, attitudes, and skills, whereby creating discomfort to create minds committed to learning becomes a reality, safeguarding the liberty a democracy promises. The focus is primarily on the approaches rather than the methodology since one serves to shape the other.

Evolution of approaches and methods

Twentieth century has seen tremendous developments in educational debates and innovations as branches of learning like psychology and linguistics saw unprecedented growth along with the advent of information technology. The increased demand for speakers of second and foreign languages has also been an impetus for change in approaches to language teaching. Internationalisation of education and large scale movement of people through immigration are other factors that prompted the need for innovative language programmes and a reassessment of language teaching policies and practices. Though twentieth century had seen much development, the centuries that preceded were not devoid of them. Throughout the history of language teaching, the questions and debates on quality improvement have been ripe. These debates have taken the ELT classrooms a long way from the grammar schools of 16th -18th centuries, where rote learning of grammar rules, study of declensions and conjugations, translation and practice in writing sentences using parallel bilingual texts and dialogues were the ways, (Kelly 1969, Howatt 1984) this rigid approach to language teaching and the adoption of corresponding methodologies were based on the assumption that Latin developed intellectual abilities and was hence indispensable a basis for all forms of higher education. The methods that followed in the 18th century followed the same procedures as the Latin mode which eventually became the standard way of studying foreign languages in schools even into the 19th century. The said approach became so strongly rooted as the assumptions on objectives of language learning remained the same- it was seldom connected to oracy skills or real life applications. This approach created text books with lessons centred around grammar points. The grammar translation method based on this approach made foreign language learning a 'tedious experience of memorising endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted and literary prose'. (Richard & Rodgers 7)

Jin and Cortazzi observes that traditional approaches like grammar translation method, for which there is no theory, are seen persisting more in developing parts of the world than the economically developed ones owing to the slower development of educational systems and language teacher training, cultural perceptions and limited learning resources and financial aid. Moreover, it can be seen that the text books that became resources for this approach were products mostly by people trained in literature than in language teaching or applied linguistics.

The changes in approach that followed these centuries were primarily due to the emphasis linguists placed on speech, which they argued was the primary form of the language. Thus approached, phonetics, inductive mode of teaching grammar, and teaching new meanings through establishing associations with the target language etc. became the mode. These reformers of the late nineteenth century strongly believed that the learners should hear the language before seeing it in the written form and so oral based methodology got incorporated into the teacher training programmes. The writings of scholars like Sweet, Victor and Passy provided suggestions on how applied linguistic principles could be put into practice, but they gradually moved towards naturalistic principles of language learning where the approach was more oriented towards those of first language acquisition. It was L. Sauveur's(1826-1907) method of intensive oral interaction in the target language, using questions to present and elicit language that came to be referred to as the Natural Method, which provided the foundation for the Direct Method. This method that became popular in France, Germany and the USA took away the focus from books, grammar and translation and placed it on plans, teachers, demonstrations and actions. The enthusiasm this approach generated, quickly declined owing to multiple factors: limited time available for language teaching in schools, perceived irrelevance of conversational skills in a foreign language, lack of required skills in teachers, etc. One among the prominent linguists who identified the lack of a thorough methodological basis for this approach was Henry Sweet who argued that only sound methodological principles could serve as the basis for teaching techniques. Oral approach, Audio-lingualism, Situational Language teaching were all subsequent developments of this assumption. It was the Direct method that marked the beginning of the 'methods era' in English language teaching. The Reading method which evolved later was the result of the Coleman Report, which subsequently led to implementing different ways of reading. This was based on the assumption that American students had less of the need for conversing in English than reading literature and texts in colleges.

The later approaches and methodologies show more concern for learner roles and accepts variation among learners with the significance given to later explorations on multiple intelligence, differentiated learning, learner centred approaches, etc. However, all these approaches place distinctive student and teacher roles in attaining the objectives, in the choice and use of resources/ learning materials, activities and assessment patterns. The ontogenic metaphor used by Curran in 1976 to suggest the development of learners is

by and large underpinned by all approaches and methodologies. He divides the developmental process into five stages, extending from total dependency on the teacher in stage I to total independence in stage V, which he sees as a parallel to the growth of a child from embryo to independent adulthood; passing through childhood and adolescence. The 20th and 21st century approaches also saw an indispensable connection with the developments in theoretical concepts of language which took it way beyond the phonological, syntactic and semantic features of language to language as ideology, locating it as sites of power and domination, treating it both as a 'transporter and translator of ideology that serves vested interests (Kumaravadivelu 1753)'. This complexity added to the still unknown subject, language, has not spared its instruction, methodology, or approaches. Adding to this has been the unprecedented access to media and the proliferation of information, leaving the academia aghast on how to best mould the learners to adapt to this socio-politico-cultural scenario, where all traditional boundaries have blurred, in terms of goods and services. A Post Method era has hence set in to the instructional milieu.

The Post Method condition

Kumaravadivelu in his introductory note to Post method condition observes that the language teaching profession appears to have exhausted the kind of psychological, linguistic and pedagogical underpinnings it has depended on for constructing alternative methods. At this juncture, the possibility of the invention of a truly new method going slim, he suggests that what remains for further manipulation and management are different combinations and permutations of the familiar principles and procedures. He associates a state of renewed awareness to the post method condition, ie, as long as the language teaching profession is caught up in the web of method, 'it will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives it to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas, and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation' (1910).

Why Blending?

Analysing the design and content of different editions of text books by the same authors, Kumaravadivelu observes that nearly twenty methods are contained in these books with the assumption that they might all provide different pathways to language acquisition. He argues that it is not so and states that the cookie cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals fails to acknowledge the basic reality that second language or foreign language learners across the world learn a language for different purposes and hence follow different paths. What is missing in this approach is the 'essential local touch'. He also states that there is a misplaced faith in 'a universally applicable method and its top down orientation'(p1914) which he considers a myth about methods. Many reputed scholars like Brown(2003), Allright(1991), Mackey(1965) and Stern(1985) have all expressed the same thought in varying phrases.

The latest trend of using a wide range of applications and technology has opened the debates wider as to whether virtual learning environments offer novel pedagogical and assessment modes, making the position of teachers even more complex and even divided as tech savvy and incompetent with technology. Multiple scholars and academicians opine that new delivery platforms do not constitute a new pedagogy and many see technologies as nothing more than alternative forms of delivery. The success of these tools also depends on the essential factors of lesson content, preparation and planning. Besides, the bewildering array of unnecessary options can even hamper the focus and structure which is conducive to learning and language acquisition. The in-depth learning of the four skills of the language are still not considered an achievable aim nor have our assessments been modified to exercise more of the much desirable critical and analytical thinking skills. Trained teacher shortages still remain a challenge and the gap between the demand and supply in this service can never be bridged due to many factors. The requirements of students are also different from one another but a list of key objectives may be formulated to ensure that students develop the skills of analysis, decision making and enquiry and questioning appropriately so as not to misuse the liberty and freedom of choice guaranteed by a democracy. With the unbridled impact of deep fakes and individual liberties exercised in representing and misrepresenting events through media prevailing, English language classrooms must adopt approaches and methods which help students respect, evaluate and value both the familiar and the unfamiliar. What sustains a democracy is the learning of how liberty is exercised by its citizens for which one approach and method will not suffice. With this larger goal in mind, there are experts who opine that it 'would be foolhardy to exclude any of the wealth of methodologies and activities on purely ideological grounds'. In the post method era, an ESL classroom remains a space for experimentation and reflective teaching aiming at behavioural transformations that promote peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic, dialogic democracy.

Andrew Dobson in *Listening for Democracy* argues that deliberative democracy's promise is more likely to be realised if the dialogic conditions for inclusivity and free deliberation are taken into account. Stating inclusiveness as a function of effective listening out and deliberation at its best as integral outcomes of the discipline of listening, Dobson argues that it will lead to an increase in legitimacy in pluralist societies as it promises to draw on as wide a range of viewpoints as possible. Though listening is a power that we make not enough use of, reflective reception is what the dialogic approach nurtures in an ESL classroom.

The Theory of Communicative Action

The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas's notion of communicative rationality may also be considered a reference point in formulating approaches, methods and activities in the English language classroom. Communicative rationality refers to the capacity to engage in argumentation under conditions approximating the ideal situation

with the aim of achieving consensus. He looks at human rationality as a necessary outcome of successful communication. Three major dimensions of human learning proposed by this philosopher may be focussed upon for a more comprehensive form of lifelong learning which are: the transformative, the citizenship and the intersubjective dimensions. By the intersubjective dimension, he refers to the psychological relationship between people as used in social sciences. Each experience the world and relationships uniquely as an individual, but as social beings we are designed to operate in groups. As explained in *Habermas, Critical Theory and Education*,

“According to this theory, all communication is open to being tested as to whether it is comprehensible, sincere, truthful and appropriately expressed. Habermas calls these validity claims and they are redeemed in what he calls discourse or communicative action. In fact, in any communicative action, in performing any speech action, we raise universal validity claims and assume that these claims can be vindicated (Habermas 1979, 2). Validity claims are the assumptions that we always already make in an unquestioning manner concerning the truth and sincerity of another's communications”.(9)

Such discourses, he believes, help people identify their needs, and transmit these needs to the political sphere, which in turn would help its inclusion in public policies and law. This he states, would ensure that “all are heard, no one is excluded, all have equal power to question the ideas and justifications of others, to ask questions, all are equal in making a decision and reaching a conclusion, coercion is excluded and the only power exercised is the power of the most reasonable argument. Not only are validity claims redeemed in this rule-led discourse but these are the conditions for a democratic society”. Emphasising how liberal and communitarian traditions have failed to grasp the intersubjective dimension and the system of rights citizens mutually accord one another, Habermas advocates developing a communicative competence, 'having opportunities to make use of one's citizenship rights by developing one's communicative abilities, and being recognized and listened to in different settings'. Developing this citizenship literacy is considered a civic responsibility of teachers, which hence can shape the approach and methods of an English language classroom.

In the preface to *Distrusting Educational Technology: Critical Questions for Changing Times*, Neil Selwyn blatantly states that though digital technologies have long promised much in changing education along fair, equitable, and democratic lines, they have in reality delivered far less. Adding to these had been the uncertainties and anxieties caused by the pandemic, economic crisis and other socio-political factors. As the world order continues to blur, ESL classrooms must become creative spaces for young minds, where experimentation and collaboration, integrating the best of technology, shall create roductive citizens capable of upholding democratic values, creating a better world order.

References

- Claypaul, Maurice. *Controversies in ELT*. Lingua books, 2016.
- Cook, Vivian. *Second language learning and language teaching*. Routledge, 2016
- Dobson, Andrew. *Listening for Democracy*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Freeman, Diane Larsen. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Jin, L & M Cortazzi. *Researching Intercultural Learning: Investigations in Language and Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Johnston, Ingrid & Jyoti Mangat. *Reading Practices, Postcolonial Literature, and Cultural Mediation in the Classroom*. Sense Publishers, 2012.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. *Understanding language teaching: From Method to Postmethod*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 2006.
- Mehra, Sharad. "Learning Must be Human Centric" *The Hindu*, 12 Nov. 2020, p.7.
- Murphy, Mark, & Ted Fleming. *Habermas, Critical Theory and Education*. Routledge, 2010.
- Richards, Jack C et al. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Selwyn, Neil. *Distrusting Educational Technology: Critical Questions for Changing Times*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014

Epidemic and Enlightenment Thought: Textual Evidences from Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*

Abstract

The pestilence of plague had ravaged Italy throughout its history especially during the early modern period and it had caused great devastations upon the people and the country. The 1630 Milanese plague is set as the backdrop of the novel The Betrothed by Alessandro Manzoni. The novel makes an exploration of the socio-political and cultural upheavals happened in the period before and after the arrival of plague in Milan. The paper argues that pestilence, with the accompaniment of poverty, causes for irrational thinking and contriving of false stories regarding the origin of the disease which eventually make man beastly and xenophobic. Thus vulnerable people and communities were easily targeted, put to mistrusts and the resultant brutalization. These epidemics have thus caused for unearthing the racism and hatred deeply ingrained in the Western societies. Hence, a literary text nullifies the tall claims of Enlightenment project in the west and exposes the fault lines of the social fabric of European Societies.

Keywords: *Epidemic, Poverty, Origin Stories, Popular Imagination, Anti Semitism, Enlightenment Thought*

Pestilences and pandemics have ravaged mankind throughout history. The regular occurrences of the diseases have made drastic reconfigurations in the demographic structures of the regions where the illness has originated and spread. The growth of mankind and the flow of life have been momentarily arrested by the occurrences of pandemics. Similarly, the diseases have caused for unveiling the human vulnerabilities and exposing the fault lines and deep fissures that remain latent in the socio-political and cultural textures of the society. Volatile economic conditions too have contributed towards the fast spreading of the diseases and towards the greater miseries and human casualties. Until medical science provides scientific explanations and vaccines and effective cure for deadly diseases, mankind had widely expatiated on false, illogical and superstitious popular imaginations regarding the origin of the illnesses. The French Surgeon Ambrose Pare has memorably written that the plague was a “furious, tempestuous, monstrous, dreadful, frightening, wild and treacherous malady” (cited in Crashaw 570). Bubonic Plague had attacked Europe widely and particularly Italy at various points of its history in the second millennium. Human mortality rate in these epidemics was very high. The plague of 1630, in Milan in Italy, had claimed 80,000,

around 40 percent of the population of 200000 (Alfani 411). The people of Italy had gone through serious famines and poverty particularly during the preceding years of 1556 Udine Plague and 1630 Milanese Plague (411). The wretched conditions of poverty and deprivations made the entry of the pestilence easier to the above cities. The paper, by examining the textual evidences of Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, argues that pestilence, with the accompaniment of poverty, causes for irrational thinking and contriving of false stories regarding the origin of the disease which eventually make man beastly and xenophobic. Thus vulnerable people and communities were easily targeted, put to mistrusts and the resultant brutalization. In the paper I further argue that epidemics cause for unveiling the deep rooted racism and hatred ingrained in the Western societies which eventually disqualifies the Enlightenment thoughts of reason and universal toleration.

1630 Milanese Plague is the setting of the novel *The Betrothed* (1824), written by Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), a nineteenth century Italian poet, novelist and philosopher. The interconnectedness of economic deprivations and the occurrence of the pestilence are woven through the narrative of *The Betrothed*. The novel tells the story of Renzo and Lucia intertwining with the political and historical narratives of the time in which they lived. Through the lens of the story of Renzo and Lucia and Don Rodrigo, Don Abbondio and Father Cristoforo, Manzoni looks at the socio-political and economic conditions of Milan in early modern period. The novel begins with the attempt made by Renzo and Lucia to get married but it was refused by the Friar Don Abbondio and, towards the end of the novel they get the religious sanction to get married. In between Manzoni tells the story of Milan in Italy with the socio-political, religious and historical churning with the occurrence of pestilence in the backdrop of it. In another way, in the novel, Manzoni examines how the destinies of individuals are embedded in the larger structures of the society and altered by invisible microbial organisms in the form of contagious diseases.

Pestilence and Poverty

The novel documents how poor economic conditions of the State and the wretched state of the people paved the way for the arrival and spreading of a disease like plague. The 1630 Milanese plague was preceded by a famine in which people suffered widespread shortage of food grains and other food stuffs and the authorities had to order decrees for controlling and regulating hoarding and against price rise of food grains. People too were prevented from collecting food stuffs in their homes as buffer stocks. The government had fixed the prices of food stuffs and proclaimed declaration of greater penalties like hefty fines and corporal penalties “up to service in the galleys, at the discretion of His Excellency, and according to the gravity of each case and the rank of the person involved” (Manzoni, *Betrothed* 197). Even though the steps like this had been taken by the government, it didn't stop the inevitable from happening. The author gives a

detailed description of the horrendous scenes of human deprivation and miseries in the novel:

Shops were closed everywhere, and the workshops were nearly all deserted. The streets were a terrible sight – a parade-ground for passing miseries, and a dwelling place for the miserable who could no longer move on... all wandering from door to door, from street to street, leaning against the corners of buildings, lying huddled on the paving-stones, by houses and by churches, either pleading pitifully for alms or silently torn between cruel necessity and still unconquered feelings of shame; lean, exhausted, and shivering with cold or hunger in their scanty, ragged clothing, which often still showed traces of their earlier prosperity (198).

People, irrespective of their social class or occupations they pursued, were ended up as beggars, penniless and starving. Amid these miseries of hunger, famine and deprivations, Manzoni writes that, a team of six priests under the leadership of Federigo Borromeo took care of the neediest through their generous act. Cardinal Borromeo distributed grain and money to various parishes and distributed alms to the needy and secretly rescued many poor families. Every morning, the Cardinal was able to distribute two thousand bowls of rice soup from his palace. The famine had spread still and reached mortal proportions. Manzoni adds that “Death was everywhere, and from every side more people flocked into the city” (200). Famine, hunger and human miseries had caused for great reconfigurations in the demographic structure of Milan. As people died, their places were filled by people who migrated from the neighboring villages and districts and even from towns outside of the frontiers. The exodus of people in large numbers across the borders of Milan and the wretched and unhygienic conditions in which people lived caused by the famine and miseries made Milan a vulnerable place and the threat of the breaking out of a pestilence of some kind was looming large in the atmosphere. The ubiquity of death prevailed in Milan was evident of this possibility. Manzoni writes:

‘I myself,..., 'saw the corpse of a woman lying in the road that girds the walls round about ... half-chewed grass was dropping out of her mouth, and her lips were still twisted as if in an expression of angry effort ... on her back was slung a bundle, and on her chest was slung a baby in its swaddling clothes, weeping as it sought for the breast ... some compassionate people came by, who picked the poor little creature up, and carried it away, thus fulfilling in the meanwhile the first duty of a mother(201).

Manzoni further observes that a great blessing of the great famine that ravaged the city was that the contrast between the rags and the riches that was widely apparent in Milan was completely eroded (201). The threat of an epidemic seemed more imminent as more

number of people died and the miseries of hunger and deprivations increased. The number of beggars was increased and corpses began to pile upon in the city. Significant warnings regarding this had been given by the Commission of Public Health. Then the authorities decided to move all beggars to the Lazaretto, the pest house, where they would be properly fed and looked after at the public expense. As plague had afflicted Italy at regular intervals, the original purpose of this building was providing shelter to those stricken by plague. Lazaretto of Milan was a rectangular enclosure outside the city separated from the city wall by a road and a water-course. Each side of the rectangular building was divided into a series of small rooms in a single storey. Manzoni tells that “the construction of the Lazaretto had begun in 1489 with money from a private legacy and had been continued with the help of public funds and of other requests and gifts” (201). Dante. M Zanetti authenticates this fact:

The plans for the lazaretto dated from the era of Francesco Sforza, mid-fifteenth century, and the cornerstone was laid in 1488, shortly after a severe plague in 1483-1485. Threats of plague between 1506 and 1516 hastened its completion, a nearly square compound of 288 rooms surrounding a large campground, bounded on the outside by a moat or ditch. It was fully operational during the plague of 1524, though it was insufficient to the needs of that great plague (cited in Carmichael 152).

All beggars of the city were invited to the Lazaretto to take refuge in it and those who resisted the invitation and preferred to remain in the city streets were forcefully brought to this place. Soon the number of inmates in the Lazaretto was increased to nearly ten thousand. Carmichael observes:

Estimates of the lazaretto population during the peak months of plague range from 12,000 to 16,000 daily—far greater management challenge than that in Fra Paolo's plague. But the lazaretto had also become a small city unto itself, with more space devoted to the maintenance of living quarters (both "clean" and "dirty" servants' areas), and stables for the horses (156).

Historical evidences evince the fact that wretched conditions had prevailed in this pest house. Authorities were not able to maintain cleanliness and food distributed inside was of inferior quality or “adulterated with various heavy unnourishing materials” (Manzoni 201). Amidst the shortage of healthy and clean food and water, the high toll of daily deaths inside the Lazaretto created the panic of pestilence inside this pest house. As the daily death toll reached above hundred, the health commission doubted the spreading of the infection. Thus lazaretto was opened and all those who were not stricken by the illness were permitted to go and the city again “resounded with the cries of the poor” (201).

Pestilence and Popular Imagination

As the death toll out of plague and confusions inside the lazaretto were increased, divergent theories and stories began to be constructed regarding the origin of the disease. The doubts of the people regarding the origin of the disease began to acquire multiple proportions. Manzoni views that a letter signed by King Philip IV and dispatched to the Governor endorses the monstrous treachery devised by some enemies as the root cause of plague. The health commission proclaimed rewards for information leading to the conviction of the author of the outrage.

Galore of traditional stories and folktales had flourished regarding the genesis of the epidemic in early modern Europe. Many of the plague narratives are documents of individual experiences and they provided measures to prevent the occurrences of the disease in future. More, these narratives had significantly helped for capturing the essence and meaning of a deadly disease like plague before it was scientifically proved as microbial transmissions based on the germ theory of the disease. Ann G Carmichael observes in this regard:

Different oral and written memories sometimes fused, sometimes diverged, in order to promote particular ideas about how the plague could be handled, about who presented a danger to the community in times of crisis, and about whose version of the past carried the truths upon which future action could be guided (Carmichael 133-34).

False stories regarding the origin of a disease become the cause for the targeting, expulsion and demonization of a particular community by the dominant communities and such commonplace injustices were widely prevalent during the sagas of early modern European plagues. Manzoni gives enough evidences to the fact that Jews were particularly targeted during the Milanese plague in 1630. When plague entered Udine, the Italian town in 1571, a Jewish pregnant woman became its first victim. Within two months, the Christian Udinese decided to expel the Jews from Udine "in perpetuity" (136). To effect this action they needed the local Venetian governor's cooperation, which Domenico Bollandi readily provided, possibly as a strategy to save their lives" (136). Candido, an Italian diarist, remarks that as plague was first discovered in a Jewish household first, on the façade of the house a sign with the word MEMINI, with the meaning "Remember" was exhibited. Carmichael views that this infamous memorial remained on the house from 1556 to the early twentieth century as a reminder of why none of the Jews were permitted to reside within Udine (137). Carmichael, citing Predo, observes:

Between 1348 and 1350 the idea of *pestis manufacta* first took shape: a plague-causing substance could be manufactured—that is, created by humans rather than merely harnessed by them or passively

transmitted in their person or belongings. Thus Jews did not have to have plague to cause it or to spread it (137).

These historical evidences corroborate the view that before the scientific discovery of the actual causes of the transmission of the disease, false narratives and stories of plague were constructed with the vested interest of targeting a particular community. Samuel K. Cohn, in the context of anti-Semitism expressed in the burning of Jews, points out that Jews “were accused of poisoning food, wells and streams, tortured into confessions, rounded up in city squares or their synagogues, and exterminated en-masse” (4). As more people were fed with these stories, the harassment and brutalization of the targeted group were legalized by the authorities and became more widespread. Henry of Hervodia, a German chronicler, narrates the horrific burning of Jews as “cruelly slain...women with their small children cruelly and inhumanly fed to the flames” (Cited in Cohn, 16). The widespread and horrific massacres of Jews during the Black Death had greatly altered the demographic structures of Europe with respect to the Jewish community. Cohn views that “the Black death persecutions fundamentally transformed the Jewish population across Europe for the next five hundred years- their numbers and their settlement patterns” (21).

Ann G. Carmichael observes that the origin legends of plague operated like a folkloric tradition. He further views that “the material, historical realities are effectively suppressed by a collective memory of where plague appears first” (138). The false propaganda of these sorts has worked upon the imaginations of the common folk and they used it for their purposes of vendetta. Many of such stories have been later proved as false and unfounded stories. Edward Muir observes that “Documents strictly contemporary with the plague of 1511 give no account of the relationship of Jews to the outbreak of plague; they do not mention any one house or even district of the city in particular as the early focus of plague controls” (209). Similarly, Edward Eckert, who painstakingly studied the overland routes of the spread of plague in Germanic Europe, views that origin stories of plague are xenophobic in nature and they make people “to watch closely and bear witness to the sinister but everyday causes of catastrophe” (133). The origin stories of plague devised and manipulated by people were sinister in nature and intended for the purposes of escaping the wrath of the experiences of the disease and to play venomous games upon the targeted communities. Manzoni's *The Betrothed* renders us the instances of such stories fabricated by people to escape from the somber realities of the pestilence.

The Betrothed is replete with instances of man turning vengeful and xenophobic in the midst of the pestilence. The acceptances of the false stories regarding the origin of the disease authenticate this argument. The theory that the disease spread by anointing unguent as the cause of the spread of the disease was widely spread among the people faster than the disease itself and thus the fear of the disease was projected towards the fear of the anointers. The violence of the disease was called as “a subtle, instantaneous, most penetrating poison” (Manzoni, *Betrothed* 225). Plague had created a panic situation of

mutual suspicion and foreigners began to be mistrusted, arrested, interrogated and beaten up cruelly. Manzoni writes:

Any traveler who was found by the peasants off the main road, or who loitered on the road to look around, or who lay down for a rest; any unknown person with anything strange or suspicious about his face or clothing, was an anointer. The first word of his arrival from anyone, even a child, was enough to set bells ringing and crowds gathering. The unhappy stranger would be stoned, or dragged off to prison by the mob (225).

Manzoni has undertaken extensive researches into the 1630 Milanese plague and has found the strong grip the false stories regarding the origin of the plague had on human imaginations. In his book *The Column of Infamy* (1964), Manzoni makes remarks about the people's fear of *untori* or unguent spreaders and about the contriving of unfounded stories about them. He cites one such story:

One rainy mid-summer day in 1630, a widow named Caterina Rosa looked out her window and saw a cloaked man with a black hat pulled down over his eyes. Walking close by the wall, he was dipping what looked like a stylus in and out of what resembled an ink pot, stopping to wipe his fingers along the walls (*Infamy*, 202).

Manzoni notes that the man with the pen was named as Guglielmo Piazza and he with another unguent spreader named as Giangiacomo Moro were “hastily tried and sentenced to death, then piecemeal tortured and dismembered”(202). The fear of anointers thus acquired wider circularity and it became the common talk of the people inside the families and outside in the society. Manzoni notes that the rumor of unguent spreaders was percolated to the present from the past incidences of plague and the imagination of the people added coloring and vividness to such stories and that had sustained the interest of the people and provided it credence as well. There prevailed many such popular stories of anointing in circularity and Manzoni relates one such story in *The Betrothed*:

...a certain citizen of Milan, on a certain day, had seen a coach and six arrive in the cathedral square, inside which sat, among others, a great nobleman, with a dark and fiery face, burning eyes, bristling hair and menacingly curled lips. The onlooker gazed with interest at the coach, which stopped in front of him; then the coachman invited him to get in, and he found himself unable to refuse. The coach drove off on a winding course through the streets, and put its passengers down at the door of a certain palace. The onlooker went in with the rest of the company, and found himself amid scenes of beauty and terror, desolate wastes and lovely gardens, ugly caves and splendid halls, in

which ghosts sat at council. Finally he was shown great boxes of money, and told to take as much as he liked – on condition that he would also take a jar of unguent and go through the city anointing the walls. He refused, and in the twinkling of an eye he found himself back at the place where he had been picked up (*Betrothed* 229).

The stories were also spread of the *monatti* and *apparitori*, the servants of the government, and their involvements in the role of the spread of the disease by deliberately “taking the drop infected clothes off the carts on purpose”, in order to maintain and “spread the pestilence, which had become their livelihood, their domain, their pride and joy” (228). Manzoni adds that the absurd beliefs which dominated men's thoughts have then “acquired extraordinary power” and this has contributed towards the special fear of anointers (229).

Manzoni believes that the authors of the imaginary stories of anointers were the victims of plague itself and they themselves gave it a wide currency as well. The dreams of the learned men were also unfounded as the popular delusions. The author tells that the appearance of a comet in the month of June in 1630 was taken by the learned people as a “manifest proof of anointing” (229). People searched books, both ancient and modern, and authors like Livy, Tacitus, Dion, Homer and Iliad for finding out whether they “had written authoritatively about poisons, spells, anointing and powders”(229). Both the educated and the crowd had mutually contributed towards constructing the confusing and terrifying tales of follies. Even the educated doctors believed that poisonous anointing and witchcraft had created plague, instead of being transmitted through contact. The following story has been cited by Tadino, one of the physicians who predicted the coming of plague, as the proof of anointing and diabolical conspiracy:

Two witnesses, he says, swore that a sick friend had told them that unknown visitors had come into his room one night and offered to cure him and make him rich if he would promise to anoint the neighboring houses; but when he refused, they vanished, their places being taken by a wolf lying under the bed and three great cats on top of it, 'which did remain there until the Break of Day (230).

The author emphasizes that the whole illogical and irrational manipulations regarding anointing and witchcraft as the causes of plague is an example for how systematically reason and scientific logic are sidelined by popular delusions. The delirium of the pandemic had made people, both ordinary and the learned, superstitious and irrational and made them believing the unfounded and false stories. Manzoni writes that there were some learned men who still believed till their end that “the whole idea of the anointing was a fantasy” but they were less courageous to contest a popular view widely believed by the people (230). These intelligent people of Milan remained unconcerned of the stories of anointers and they protected themselves from “violence of general opinion” (230).

Robert S Gottfried observes that “one of the most important effects of Black Death was its role in the provocation of popular rebellion” (cited in Cohn 11). This hints at the mass hysteria and fear arose out of the human tragedy occurred in the prevalent occurrences of the pestilence and the resultant persecution of the vulnerable sections of the society. This predicament was exacerbated by the hopelessness regarding the curing of the disease and the failure of the scientific and rational explanations both for the origin and cure of the disease. In the context of Black Death, Samuel K. Cohn argues that “from 1348 to 1350, wide groups of people found the plague with little hope and turned inwardly against the self in ceremonious expiation, or outwardly beyond society to God or against the outsiders- the beggar, the foreigner and the Jew” (11). Similarly, violence erupted in the post plague period were mostly targeted “forces outside political and economic hierarchies to resolve anxieties, fears and anger” (9). Cohn cites a Montpellier doctor named Simon de Couvain as lamenting in 1340: “the Black Death has left medicine in confusion; the art of Hippocrates was lost” (10). This is amply evident of the fact that science had even lost its optimism to find an empirical explanation for human casualties of such a large scale happened during the Black Death. Hence it can be argued that in the absence of reason and logical, scientific thinking, purely irrational, illogical and superstitious thinking was prevailing rampant during the incidents of epidemics in the whole West. This was manifested in the persecution of Jewish communities and foreigners and beggars. This practice of demonization nullifies many of the core values of the Enlightenment project propagated by the West, like reason and universal toleration. As a result, anti-Semitism became the prevailing ideology and hatred and persecution of Jews became the recurring practice, particularly during the pandemics. Jews embodied this antinomies embedded in the Western Societies. Adam Sutcliffe, analyzing the ideas of Voltaire, the acclaimed Enlightenment thinker, views that “Judaism signifies primitivism, legalism, and blind reverence for tradition-the very obverse of the Enlightenment values of progress and rational enquiry” (108). He further points out that “in Voltaire's world of binary oppositions, reason and tolerance opposed sectarianism and superstition, the unalloyed fusion of which was presented by Judaism” (109). Thus Jews contained the problematic issues in Enlightenment thought of the West which craved for establishing a universalism of Reason and Toleration. The west addressed the problematic of Jews by following a systematic and organized persecution and brutalization of the Jewish Community. Zizek views the issue of Jews as “the means for Fascism, of representing its own impossibility: in its positive presence, it is only the embodiment of the ultimate impossibility of the totalitarian project-of its immanent limit” (cited in Sutcliffe 118). He views that 'Jews' as a fantasy image of the West through which the Enlightenment accommodates its own failure. The paradox of the irrational superstition and persecution of a particular community, particularly during the time of epidemics, goes against the grain of Enlightenment values of reason and universal toleration and this burden of the antinomies imbricate the narratives of the West, which

got adequately represented in literary writings like *The Betrothed* and in the construction of the stereotype of “wandering Jew” in popular imaginations (cited in Sutcliffe 123). Thus Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed* provides enough textual evidences regarding the fault lines and fissures exist in the fabric of western Society through the invectives against Jews and the anti-rational absurdities regarding the origin and cure of the plague epidemic.

References

- Alfani, Guido. “Plague in Seventeenth Century Europe and the Decline of Italy: An Epidemiological Hypothesis”. *European Review of Economic History*, Vol. 17, No. 4, November 2013, pp. 408- 430. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43298626.
- Carmichael, Ann G. “The Last Past Plague: The Uses of Memory in Renaissance Epidemics”. *Journal of the History of Medicine*, Vol 53, No. 2, April 1998, pp. 132-160. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24624268.
- Cohn, Jr, Samuel K. “The Black Death and the Burning of Jews”. *Past and Present*, No. 196, Aug 2007, pp 3-36. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25096679.
- Crashaw, Jane Stevens. “The Beast of Burial: *Pizzigamorti* and Public Health for the Plague in Early Modern Venice”. *Social History of Medicine*, Vol 24, No 3, 2011, pp. 570-587.
- Eckert, Edward. *The Structure of Plagues and Pestilences in Early Modern Europe, Central Europe*. Karger, 1996.
- Manzoni, Alessandro. *The Betrothed*. Penguin, 1983.
- Manzoni, Alessandro. *The Column of Infamy*. Oxford University Press. 1964.
- Muir, Edward. *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Fractions in Friuli during the Renaissance*. John Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Sutcliffe, Adam. “Myth, Origins, Identity: Voltaire, the Jews and the Enlightenment Notion of Toleration”. *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Summer 1998, pp 107-126. JSTOR, www.Jstor.org/stable/23596100.