iafor

IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities

Volume 10 – Issue 1 – 2023

Edited by Alfonso J. García-Osuna

Table of Contents

From the Editor

Dear readers,

Welcome to *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities: Volume 10 – Issue 1*. In line with established tradition, this volume represents our continuing endeavour to unfurl the vast tapestry of the arts and humanities in a profound, inclusive, and illuminating manner. Herein we embark upon an expedition to find the new directions taken by the arts and humanities in their interplay with new technologies. Several of our contributors attempt to throw light on the manner in which the Internet, Artificial Intelligence and new media are converging with our creative imagination and artistic expression to structure the cognitive framework of the modern world.

The articles included herein are a treasure trove of cogent analyses that resonate across a wide spectrum of interests. They epitomise the humanistic endeavour to better understand the complexities of our past and present while envisaging the contours of our future.

The fast and unprecedented intrusion of technology and artificial intelligence upon what was once the exclusive realm of the human intellect has given rise to an unparalleled array of artistic reflections and socio-cultural dynamics. Hence, in this volume we bear witness to the new-fangled convergence of astonishing technological innovation with the compelling and time-tested solidity of traditional scholarship. We celebrate the cacophony of diverse ideas that are born out of this convergence, so this intellectual dissonance will be found to echo compellingly within these pages. The new world of critical analysis inaugurated by a swiftly changing environment requires the courage to expand the boundaries of intellectual inquiry beyond the familiar shores of convention. This evidently contributes to the sense of cacophonous dissonance. Yet today, more than ever, imagination needs to flow unimpeded by convention into uncharted domains. And more than ever we need innovative and vibrant brushstrokes to paint the portrait of our collective scholarly initiatives.

In this regard, in his article "A Structural Analysis of Religious Legends about an Iconic Image in the Philippines", José Macatangay conducts a structural analysis of seven legends surrounding an iconic image in the Philippines, the Santo Niño de Cebú. The corpora used for the study are limited to the legends on healing people's illnesses through the Santo Niño's miraculous interventions. The study identifies the binary oppositions found in the legends, derives syntagmatic sequences or mythemes and their variations from them, sheds light on the central message of each legend based on the mythemes, and relates each legend to one another.

In "Digitalised Responses: Understanding the Digital Literary Spaces in the Light of Keshava Guha's *Accidental Magic*", Sapphire Mahmood Ahmed and K. Rizwana Sultana study how digital technology is adopted and utilised by literary readers in *Accidental Magic*. It also analyses the impact of digital technology on the art of storytelling. The paper concludes that online communities have introduced a new means of storytelling, which, unlike what was the case in the pre-internet era, is now a two-way process. Guha's novel illustrates how online

platforms impact people's lives, suggesting that digital platforms have the power to change the dynamics of human relationships and alter reader interactions with literature in general.

Preethika S and Chitra Sivasubramaniam in "Legislation, Reaction and Ecological Degradation: An Eco-critical Analysis of John Grisham's *The Appeal*", studies the ways in which author John Grisham, an attorney by profession, elaborates on people's response to the slow process of environmental deterioration in his novel *The Appeal* (2008). Meena shows how Grisham painstakingly depicts the tragedy of the inhabitants of a degrading bio-region and provides insights into the gradual process of environmental litigation in the contemporary world.

In "Television as a Tool of Memory and Identity in Khaled Hosseini's Novels", Priya Meena and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi analyse how in Khaled Hosseini's novels, television assumes the function of capturing, collating, and disseminating personal and cultural memories. Its significance is especially pronounced in the context of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where television's role as a tool for constructing memories and shaping the identities of the characters is scrutinized by the author. The ramifications of the Taliban's television ban are also examined in this paper, highlighting how this drastic measure has significantly impacted the nation's culture.

In "Historicising Foreign Powers' Intervention in the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970)", Uwomano Okpevra sets out to historicise and deconstruct determinant factors for the role played by foreign intervention in the war. The article employs both primary and secondary data to achieve its objective and reveal national interests and foreign policy objectives – as expressed in economic, strategic and political objectives – that were factors in the foreign powers' intervention in the Nigeria-Biafra War.

In Priyanka Singla's "Impact of Broken Homes on Children's Psychology in Indian Writing in English", the author analyses the reasons why Indian Writing in English has been successful in portraying the devastating effects of broken homes on children. The paper discusses the critical portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology in Indian Writing in English. Such representation provides an insightful view of the psychological and emotional challenges faced by children living in such situations.

In "Memory and Identity in Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*", Nidhu Kumar Dhar discusses how Murakami's novels present an opportunity to understand the workings of memory and how people are led by its dictates. His characters often find themselves recollecting their past in order to sustain a present existence that is marred by some type of crisis. As they progress in time, protagonists experience a profound sense of disequilibrium that prompts them to return to the past in order to rebalance their self's sense of value. In this regard, Dhar's paper investigates the dynamics of memory as well as its role in the formation of identity in Haruki Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2014).

In "Turbulence of the Fin-de-siècle: Arts Through the Looking-Glass of Intermediality" Mykyta Isagulov addresses the *fin-de-siècle* period as a time when most of what are called

intermedial processes, that is to say, those processes that arbitrate aesthetic design at the intersection between different media, began to play a substantial role in the production of cultural artifacts. The epoch is investigated through the prism of intermediality, which manifested itself as a valuable tool in the development of the arts and media, particularly after the birth of photography and cinematography.

Sushrita Acharjee, in "The Poetics of Borderlands: Reflections on Oral Folk Poetry from Assam's Barak Valley during Bangladesh Liberation War", argues that despite the abject living conditions in the saturated refugee camps in the West Bengal, Tripura and Assam borderlands, the space inhabited by the war's refugees was charged with powerful national imaginaries laced with an eclectic blend of emotions – resistance, hope, nostalgia, desire, aspiration. Drawing on ethnographic and anthropological research, this essay explores the various forms of folk poetry that emerged out of these refugee camps and guerrilla army training sectors during the war.

In "Gardening as Activism: Cultivating Human Minds in *A Gardener in Wasteland*", Arundhati Sen studies Aparajita Ninan and Srividya Natarajan's graphic novel *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2011) by revisiting Jotiba Phule's ground-breaking text *Gulamgiri* (1873), examining issues of contemporaneity and the continuity of caste explicit in them, and attempting to articulate a conversation between the past and the contemporary reality of casteism. The study focuses on the centrality of the metaphor of the garden in highlighting the gravity of the caste problem and its larger implications in the lives of India's marginalised Dalit community.

Ankita Sen studies "The Significance of Colour Symbolisms in Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber (1979)" by focussing on the recurrent invocation of three major colours, namely red, black, and white; the paper studies how chromatic coding becomes a potent rhetorical device through which the psychological and physical implications of gendered violence are negotiated in the story.

Abhirami S and Smrutisikta Mishra's "(Re)Visiting the Traumatised Indian Matriarch Through Contemporary Retellings: A Psycho-Cultural Exploration" Focuses on Kavita Kané 's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, suggesting that the trauma experienced by protagonist Satyavati in her infancy shaped her character and her actions as the Queen of Hastinapur. The authors analyse the influence of trauma in the protagonist's life and how it led to her determination to re-establish a powerful clan.

I follow on with my editor's essay "U.S. Civil War Redux? A Prevue".

In a world where specialisation often reigns supreme, this edition stands as a celebration of intellectual latitude and creativity. *The IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities* embraces the exceptional and encourages the unexpected, fostering an environment where radical ideas and divergent interpretations are welcome.

Dr Alfonso J. García-Osuna, Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Arts and Humanities*
New York, 30 July 2023.

A Structural Analysis of Religious Legends about an Iconic Image in the Philippines

Jose Macatangay
De La Salle Lipa, Philippines

Abstract

The study aimed to conduct a structural analysis of seven legends surrounding an iconic image in the Philippines, the *Sto. Niño de Cebu.* The corpora used for the study were limited to the legends on healing people's illnesses through the *Sto. Niño*'s miraculous interventions. Specifically, this study identified the binary oppositions found in the legends, derived syntagmatic sequences or mythemes and their variations from the legends, determined the central message of each legend based on the mythemes, and related each legend to one another. This qualitative study adopted the procedures used by Gray (1978) in "Structural Analysis of Folktales: Techniques and Methodology." The study found that each legend has its binary opposition/s and central message textually, and the mythemes were expressed in different details and bundles. Intertextually, such binary opposition sickness vs. healing, may be linked with the mythemes and central messages. The researcher recommends that future researchers study the other legends about the Sto. Niño focused on other themes to validate if the mythemes found in this study may apply or if a new set of mythemes may surface. It is also highly recommended that the Sto. Niño legends are included in the reading list or required readings in English and Philippine Literature classes. For the study's academic implications, the study of religious legends, particularly the Sto. Niño legends as texts for critical analysis to apply Literary Criticism theories may be integrated into the basic and higher education curricula.

Keywords: binary oppositions, Catholicism, mythemes, Sto. Niño, structural analysis

At the height of the pandemic in April 2021, the Catholic Church started the year-long celebration of the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines. With the theme, "Gifted to Give" the celebration of the different events was spearheaded by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Part of remembering Filipino Christianity is the arrival of the Spaniards in Cebu with their leader, Ferdinand Magellan offering the Holy Image of the Child Jesus Christ or the Sto. Niño as a token of friendship to Raha Amihan (Queen Juana), wife of Rajah Humabon Based on a survey on the most revered figures of the Filipino Catholics among the suffering Christ, the Sto. Niño, and the Sacred Heart, the Sto. Niño is the unique image that links the nation's birth with Christianity's establishment, as Bautista (2021) articulated in his paper. Indeed, the Sto. Niño has been part of the local church for almost 500 years of Christianity, with the devotion to the image as a symbolism of the foundation of Christianity in the Philippines.

The devotion to the Sto. Niño can be considered part of every Filipino's everyday Catholicism. According to Cornelio (2014), everyday Catholicism "covers a wide range of religious experiences that include folk beliefs in local spirits and healing practices, crucifixion rituals, feasts dedicated to saints, Marian piety, and even charismatic Christianity." As a matter of fact, almost every local church in the Philippines has the image of the Sto. Niño either as the patron saint or as one of the saints venerated by people. In some households, the Sto. Niño or Holy Child is usually dressed according to the profession of one of the dwellers of the house. Likewise, in private cars or public utility jeepneys, there is a small altar where the image of the Sto. Niño is displayed.

Guerrero (2016) quoted National Artist for Literature, Nick Joaquin, who stated that the Santo Niño of Cebu "is believed to have been carved in Flanders in the 15th century and was presented the Queen of Cebu when she turned Christian." The TriValley Sto. Niño Prayer Group website also quotes Nick Joaquin "during that strange interlude, the wondrous miracle happened: we accepted the Santo Niño as part of our land, part of our culture, part of our history. During those 44 years when the Cross had vanished from our land, the Santo Niño kept us faithful to him."

The Sto. Niño is known for being miraculous. One pious legend of the Sto. Niño was recently narrated by Modequillo, (2017) who recalled that many men were imprisoned in Atocha in Madrid because of their faith. Further, to make the lives of the prisoners miserable, the prison steward ordered to have only children 12 years old and below to bring food to their male family members. The families with no children of the prescribed age suffered from hunger. The town's women invoked the help of the Virgin of Atocha for their male family members to be fed. The children who fed their families said they saw an unfamiliar young boy who visited the hapless prisoners without children who could bring them food. The children recounted that the gourd the little young boy carried never ran empty, and there was always plenty of bread in his basket. The strange young boy who brought food to the prisoners came at night while the guards were sleeping, and he smiled at those who were awake. The townspeople believed that the young boy was the Sto. Niño.

In another anecdote, Lachica (2021) narrated an account about the daughter of the Lim family, who had a heart problem and was scheduled for operation. They went to the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño two days before the operation as part of their devotion and to ask for the Holy Child's intervention. They were surprised that after the pre-operation tests, the doctor told the family that the hole in the heart of their youngest daughter was closed.

Sala-Boza (2008) classified the numerous accounts of Sto. Niño miracles as medical, non-medical, and other manifestations of the image in the legends. Medical miracles included medical cures and granting of children. Non-medical miracles were granting rain, special protection, domestic peace, economic assistance, finding lost people or objects, caution, conversion, and retribution. Other manifestations of the image included voyages and miraculous returns to Cebu, the wandering Sto. Niño, the black Sto. Niño and its supernatural manifestations.

As folk narratives, myths and legends are losing popularity among educators and students; thus, they are considered the most understudied component or area of literature. There is a course on Greek Mythology in the curriculum of students who want to become teachers of English in the Philippines. However, there is no course provided on Filipino or Philippine Mythology in the curriculum.

Damiana Eugenio (1992), the mother of Philippine Folklore, classified legends as etiological and non-etiological. Etiological or the explanatory type of legends refers to the origin of things and places and how they got their names. Non-etiological or non-explanatory legends are heroic/historical, religious, supernatural beings, and miscellaneous. Likewise, in her handbook on Philippine folklore, Lopez (2006) outlined the classification of Philippine folklore. Folk narratives include legends, myths, folk epics, genealogical tales, and folktales. Legends are classified as religious and secular. Religious legends are Christian legends about the miracles of God and the saints, miraculous images, revelations as blessings, and biblical sources.

Few studies were conducted on religious legends. Guzman (2013) did a textual analysis of Kalinga legends and myths and clustered them according to thought, emotion, behavior, and folkways. The analysis made by Guzman (2013), revealed that faith belonged to one of the dominant thoughts of the Kalingas as revealed from their myths and legends. In addition, Austria (2005) claimed that oral traditions such as religious legends incorporate details of the environment where they originated. The legends, which served as "photographs" of the everyday life of people in Santa Cruz de Malabon, reflected the social conditions of the 19th century Tagalog province. The author found four salient features of early 19th century Sta, Cruz de Malabon: (1). Santa Cruz de Malabon had a wide-geo economic disparity (2). The 19th-century upheld a rigid-patron client relationship as a value (3). The search for water was an integral part of the life of people, and (4). The devotion of people is attuned to their mentality.

Aim of the Study

Generally, this research undertaking is a literary analysis that aims to apply the literary theory of Structuralism in the select Sto. Niño de Cebu religious legends. The seven Sto. Niño de Cebu legends were analyzed based on the two layers of content analysis: the textual and the intertextual levels. Specifically, the study identifies the binary oppositions found in the legends about Santo Nino de Cebu, breaks down each legend into syntagmatic sequences or mythemes, finds each legend's message based on the mythemes and relates each legend to one another.

Significance of the Study

This study has significant implications in the fields of narratology, research, and school curriculum and in the development of students' critical thinking skills and literary appreciation. The study contributes to Philippine narratology since the structural analysis may help the practitioners of the discipline to see how the binary oppositions found in the legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu, one of the favorite miraculous icons in the Philippines, maybe linked with the mythemes and the individual message.

Conducting a structural analysis allows researchers to apply a literary theory using a critical approach in local literary texts. Future researchers may replicate the study by using other texts about the Sto. Niño or other religious legends but still applying the principles of Structuralism.

As folk narratives, myths and legends are losing popularity among educators and students; thus, they are considered the most understudied component or area of literature. This study may serve as additional readings and its results may serve as lessons for inclusion in the English curriculum to enhance understanding of the Filipino local culture. Likewise, this study may offer an enhancement in the curriculum by including Philippine Mythology in the course Mythology and Folklore.

Reading and understanding literary texts based on a particular lens is a way of developing students' critical thinking skills and, at the same, enhancing their appreciation of the local culture that is in line with the foundation of Christianity in the Philippines. By recognizing the structures of Sto. Niño legends of Cebu and understanding the universal truths behind these structures, students may appreciate the beauty of language engraved in local literature and inspire them to be proud of their local traditions expressed in literary texts.

Literature and Sources Review

The Sto. Niño has inspired social and political movements. For instance, Bautista (2006) studied the politics of "use" and "misuse" of religious iconography during popular uprisings in the Philippines and discussed how "religious icons, specifically, the Santo Niño and Our Lady of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), were co-opted for specific political and social agendas." He mentioned the Tres de Abril revolution in Cebu as a "religiously inspired uprising" with divine backing from the Sto. Niño. The revolution was considered a successful

political upheaval and a victory of folk Catholicism with the belief of the Sto. Niño's intercession in the success of the revolution.

Ati-Atihan, a festival in honor of the Sto. Niño was studied by a few researchers. Coldero, N. et al. (2020) analyzed and interpreted the Ati-Atihan Festival of Kalibo, Aklan as a literary event applying semiotics and narratology. The authors concluded that the various signs in the Ati-Atihan Festival were classified as iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Iconic signs included the Sto. Nino, the devotees, aetas, dancers, and spectators. Indexical signs were the street dancing known as "sadsad," paepak, where the body of a sick person is rubbed with the image of the Sto. Nino and the procession. Moreover, among the symbolic signs were the costume, painting, devotion, or vow known as panada, sound of the drums, time of the day, and mass among others. Each sign has denotative and connotative meanings and a sub-theme. The feast of the Sto. Niño, which transformed the previous Ati-Atihan Festival, has shown the merging of the past and the present. The completion of the celebration is the celebrants entering the church to kiss the wooden image of the Sto. Niño. They will have the "peapak," defined as having their back be massaged with the Sto. Niño. Their willingness to engage with this gesture shows their belief that the "peapak" heals their body and spirit.

In his study, Mujal R. (2020) elaborated on the relationship between the believers' faith to the Sto. Niño and the healing for their health condition through the practice of the "pahilot" or "peapak." The ritual is done by rubbing the image of the Sto. Niño in the body and pressing the small hand statues. The faithful believe that the Holy Child Jesus will continue to bless them, and they will be relieved of their fatigue during their participation in the festival. Data were gathered through oral history and validated by library research. The study revealed that the Pahilot or Peapak, a healing ritual observed during the Ati-atihan in Aklan, "is an essential notion" that will remain as the traditional practice of the Aklanon people because of its deep religious significance.

In the study of religious legends surrounding the Sto. Niño de Cebu, faith remains an overarching theme. For instance, Brion, M. et al. (2018) studied the testimonies of the devotees of the Sto. Niño de Cebu through interviews and thematic analysis. From the narratives of the devotees, the researchers extrapolated the following themes on faith: (1) answered prayer, (2) miracles, (3) sacrifices, (4) intimate personal obligation, (5) adversaries, and (6) tradition. Based on the multiple perspectives of faith deduced from the study, the authors concluded that the faith of the Cebuanos, though criticized by other religious nominations, would remain strong and undying.

Another study about the faith of the Cebuanos to the Sto. Niño is through the Fluvial Parade, which is a part of the Sinulog Festival, was conducted by Ibones, N. et al. (2016). Through a phenomenological type of qualitative research, the study delved into the lived experiences of the devotees. Using field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, observations, and storytelling, the researchers gathered data from the five elderly respondents aged 60 and above who have witnessed the parade for at least two years. One important finding of the study was when the participants emphasized the significance of the Fluvial Parade as being a part of their

faith and tradition. They witnessed and participated in the event to express their gratitude to the Holy Child Jesus Christ for the abundant blessings such as good health and many opportunities that come into their lives. The Fluvial parade will remain a significant celebration to the devotees of the Senor Sto, Niño. The celebration manifests the devotion to the Child Jesus Christ, which shows the Cebuano's unconditional faith.

The aforementioned studies showed that faith in answered prayers and faith in miracles were the overarching themes in the religious legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu. The difference between this study and the reviewed studies is that the former is a literary criticism employing the theory of Structuralism. The latter is more participatory and ethnographic research involving human participants who were devotees narrating their discourses on the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu. This study will fill a research gap because much has been studied about the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu from the perspectives of participatory research, but very little was done on the textual analysis applying a literary theory on religious legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu.

Materials and Methods

Structuralism as Literary Theory

This study applies Structuralism, which is one of the literary theories employed when doing literary criticism. As a theory of literature, Structuralism has been viewed from different perspectives. Some viewed that, in structuralist reading, the author is dead, and the reader is insignificant, while for other followers of the theory, a literary text can be analyzed and interpreted as an autonomous structure, that is, the text is not married to its context. However, for Saussure and his followers as cited by Sanusi (2012), "the text shall be analyzed and interpreted as part of a larger structure." The larger structure, which determines the worth of a literary text, maybe a particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a model of a universal narrative structure, or recurrent patterns.

Structuralism implies that elements of human culture must be understood in their relationship to a broader system. It means that the text is more of a product of culture; and in turn, it creates the culture. Since myths and legends mirror the culture of people, they are potential materials to apply Structuralism.

According to Mambrol (2016), Claude Levi-Strauss applied the structuralist outlook to mythology through a binary as a useful approach in the analysis of myths. Since myths are part of a country's culture, the binary oppositions like high/low, inside/outside, and life/death may exist in mythology as a literary form.

As contextualized in this literary study, which systematically applies the Theory of Structuralism, how the binary oppositions operated in the texts, which are the religious legends, and how the mythemes revealed patterns in the legends when related to other legends of the same theme were done. Thus, the study adheres to the principle of Structuralism that a text is

not an autonomous structure because it belongs to a larger structure. In this study, the larger structure are the intertextual connections expressed through the binaries, mythemes, and messages of the legends.

Research Methods

This study used the qualitative type of literary analysis, which is the process of analyzing a literary piece or several literary pieces textually, intertextually, and even contextually. Specifically, to show textual unity and coherence of the seven legends of Sto. Niño of Cebu, a textual analysis was done to identify the binary oppositions present in them, break down each legend into syntagmatic sequences or mythemes, and find the individual message of each legend based on the mytheme. To relate the structure of each legend to one another, an intertextual analysis was done wherein recurrent patterns are deciphered.

According to Lopez (2006), structural analysis applies to all folklore genres. As a research method, Structuralism is a type of textual research used by literary critics to interpret and analyze literature, which focuses on contrasting ideas or elements of structure and attempts to show how they relate to the whole or larger structure in the forms of a particular genre, a range of intertextual connections, a method of universal narrative structure, or recurrent patterns. This study adopted the following four procedures advanced by Gray (1978), "Structural Analysis of Folktales: Techniques and Methodology": (1) A systematic reading of the selected legends to list all the binary oppositions. Binary oppositions may occur when two poles for example, night/day and dry/wet, are presented in the same subject. However, in some cases, the opposites do not have to be completely opposed in all traits, but only in one or two important attributes like rich/poor or kindness/greediness. Binary operations are the universal binding factors related to each myth; (2). Find mythemes by breaking down each legend into the shortest possible sentences. (3). Analyze each legend by finding the individual message based on the mythemes, and (4). Link or relate each of the legends intertextually based on the binary oppositions, mythemes, and messages.

Sources of Data

In this study, the sources of data came from the book "The Legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu," written by Enrique de la Calzada. The book is a historical anthology of folk stories translated into English by Martin Abellana in 1965. It covers the origin and legends about the small wooden image of the Child Jesus that was given as a gift by Ferdinand Magellan to the King and Queen of Banawa in the Central Philippines in 1521 when he landed with the Spanish expedition. The English translation of the anthology contains two parts: the historical background and the legends. There are about 37 stories collected as legends of the Sto. Niño. The 37 legends are narratives of local accounts dealing with the miraculous interventions of the Sto. Niño.

To gather relevant data for the study, the researcher scrutinized the 37 Sto. Niño legends about the Sto. Niño of Cebu from the source. After scrutinizing the Sto. Niño de Cebu religious

legends, the corpora, or the texts were focused only on the theme of the legends related to how people were cured and saved from sicknesses and plagues through the Sto Nino de Cebu interventions. By focusing on the specific theme based on the representative texts, the textual and intertextual analysis became more systematic since the identification of binary oppositions, mythemes and messages was centered only on an overarching theme.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The inclusion criterion used for the textual analysis in this study was on the theme of the legends of the Sto. Niño de Cebu that revolved on the miraculous interventions that saved people from plagues and cured their sicknesses; thus, from the 37 legends, the landmark texts were reduced to seven (7) religious legends of the Sto. Nino de Cebu. The study did not intend to reveal a distortion of historical facts in the published religious legends. Likewise, the researcher recognized the miracles of the Sto. Niño de Cebu published in the book were purely for literary analysis, and the veracity of the miracles is already beyond the purview of this study. The inadequacy of the study was in the absence of sociological analysis since no fieldwork was applied or employed in conducting the study. As for the limitation of the literary theory used in this study, Structuralism is confined only to the recurrence of patterns within the same genre of legends that occurs in the same source.

Table 1 outlines the Sto. Niño legends used for the study and indicated the pages where the texts are found in the book "The Legends of Sto. Niño de Cebu." (de la Calzada, 1965)

Table 1
The Legends Analyzed

Sto. Niño Legend	Pages
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	18-19
2. How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped	20-21
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	25-26
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	32-33
5. The Mysterious Boy	41-42
6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883	59-61
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	79-81

Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents tables 2, 3, and 4 that depict binary oppositions, mythemes and their variations in the legends, and the message deduced from each legend.

Table 2

The Binary Oppositions

Sto. Niño Legend	Binary Oppositions
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	Sickness vs. healing Prayer vs. ritual Superiority vs inferiority
2. How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped	Sickness vs. healing Simplicity vs complexity
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	Sickness vs. healing Tradition vs nature
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	Sickness vs. healing Good vs evil
5. The Mysterious Boy	Sickness vs. healing Superiority vs inferiority
6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883	Sickness vs. healing Prayer vs ritual
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	Sickness vs. healing Negligence vs fulfillment Truth vs falsity

The binary opposition sickness versus healing operates in all the seven legends. Sickness includes poisoning of family members, epidemic of children's disease, people bitten by mad dogs, cholera that caused the death of people everywhere, strange sickness that led to simultaneous death, sickness because of the inclement weather, and peculiar sickness of a person (Otik). The *Sto. Niño* performed miracles as a child dealing with people, and a ritual dedicated to Him healed the different kinds of sickness and epidemics.

Prayer versus ritual, superiority vs. inferiority, and simplicity/grand vs. complexity/complex are the next dominant binary oppositions in all the seven legends about the *Sto. Niño de Cebu*. In the legend, "*The Case of the Poisoned Family*," the opposing binary, prayer versus ritual, is evident in the instances when King Humabon told the Amoy "to say a prayer for the dead." Simultaneously, Queen Juana approached "each member of the poisoned family, letting the feet of the image touch the forehead of each." Likewise, the binary opposition, prayer vs. ritual, is manifested in the legend *"The Cholera Epidemic of 1883,"* when "auroras" were held in places where many people were dying. During the procession, the women who sang the gozos of Santo Nino Jesus alternately recited the Litania Mayor.

King Humabon ruled the kingdom, and he was the one who directed and led the actions of people; thus, the existence of the binary opposition superiority vs. inferiority in the legends "*The Case of the Poisoned Family*" and "*The Mysterious Boy.*" When King Humabon learned about the case of the poisoned family, "he ordered that all members of the poisoned family be brought to the square." The King's intention for such command was for the people to see the consequence of eating poisonous fish and teach them a lesson. The people willingly obeyed

the King: "A great crowd gathered around the family who was lying flat on three lantay (bamboo beds)." In the legend "*The Mysterious Boy,*" the wise men decided to sacrifice the innocent boy to cure the strange sickness that broke out in the kingdom. The boy's playmates were against the King's order: "But it was the command of the King. The King's command should be followed and obeyed." In another instance, while the decision was not yet made about the fate of the mysterious boy, "the King commanded that the boy should meanwhile be put in prison. It took a long time to make a final decision." The different scenarios showed the power of King Humabon, thus satisfying the binary, superiority vs. inferiority.

The life of the Cebuanos during the nineteenth century could either be simple or grand. However, when the epidemic struck the land, the simplicity of life turned into complexity. Two legends on the epidemic, "*How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped*" and "*The Cholera Epidemic of 1883*," exhibited the simplicity-complexity and grand-complex binary oppositions. In the legend *"How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped*"; it was stated that "the people who lead a simple life in the Kingdom of King Humabon were happy, but a time came when there was a foreboding gloom over the whole kingdom." The happiness turned into sadness when an epidemic on children happened, and the remedy seemed out of hand because the quack doctors could not control the disease.

In another legend on the epidemic, "*The Cholera Epidemic of 1883,*" the luxurious life of people is demonstrated in the following words and phrases: "singing, laughter, afternoon promenade of the rich and the high government officials; they road in their *caruaje*." A gloom fell over the whole city and the outlying barrios: "No longer could the people be heard singing. Laughter became as rare as the proverbial dodo. The tolling of the church bells added to the dreariness and the gloom of the city and the barrios. The afternoon promenade of the rich and the high government officials wherein they road in their *caruaje* stops. The markets, the stores, were closed. The schools were closed. Desolation crept over the land."

The legend "*The Baybay, Leyte Mystery*" offers two related binary oppositions: negligence-fulfillment and truth-falsity. Amazed by the merrymaking they experienced when they went to Cebu, the young couple, Pitong and Bini, forgot to get a cutting of Magellan's cross, which would cure the sickness of Otik. To fulfill the promise, even if it is not true, they resorted to the sailor's advice to cut from any piece of wood and give it to Otik. When the couple reached Baybay, they went to the house of Otik to give him the fake cutting from a piece of wood. Otik greeted them and told them that a "chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit" gave him the cutting from Magellan's cross. Pitong admitted that he did not send a boy and what they brought was not from Magellan's cross. Otik was perplexed about who sent the boy and who the boy was. Nobody could answer the question, but the parish priest told Otik that the boy who gave him the cutting from Magellan's cross was the Holy Child. Otik was cured of his strange sickness, and Pitong and Bini were gifted with a healthy baby boy.

A mytheme is a generic unit of narrative structure from which myths and legends are constructed. This study banks on Levi-Strauss's notions of mytheme to reduce each legend into its smallest component parts. Table 3 presents the mythemes derived from the seven legends

about the Sto. Niño de Cebu. Also found in the table are the details in the legend based on the mytheme or the mytheme variations.

Table 3

Mythemes and their Variations in the Legends

Legend	Mytheme	Mytheme Variations
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals. 2. Solutions are offered to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness. 3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form or image of a child. 4. The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears. 5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.	1. A family in Pansil ate a poisonous fish. 2. a. The Amoy mumbled the prayer. b. Queen Juana let the feet of the image of the Holy Child touch the forehead of each poisoned family member. 3. 4. The poisoned family members opened their eyes and stood up as if nothing had happened to them. 5. The onlookers were surprised to witness a miracle.
2. How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped	1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals. 2. Solutions are offered to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness. 3. The *Sto. Niño* appears in the form or mage of a child. 4. The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears. 5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.	1. An epidemic of children's disease broke out that made everybody sad. a. The quack doctors cannot control the epidemic. b. Queen Juana brought the sick children to the room where the image of the Holy Child was there. 3. 4. The children slept soundly and asked for food when they woke up. 5. The grateful parents who witnessed the miracle shouted with joy.
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of	1. The dogs in Banawa, the Kingdom of Humabon, suddenly

people or certain individuals.

2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy/sickness.
3. The *Sto. Niño* appears in the form/image of a child.
4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears.
5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*

became fierce that they attacked everyone, even those in their houses.

2. King Humabon organized brigades fully equipped with weapons.
3. A small boy who seemed unafraid of mad dogs appeared during the desperate situation.
4. The small boy disappeared, and a giant white dog appeared, then proceeded to the palace and lapped with its tongue the wound of everyone. Everyone was healed.
5. The people believed that the little boy who appeared at the palace's doorway was the *Sto. Niño*. They were free from fear and terror.

5. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883

1. Tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals.
2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.
3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child.
4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears.
5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.

1. In September-November 1883, the worst cholera epidemic hit Cebu.
2. The government with its soldiers and employees, the church with its priests, and a handful of doctors united to curb the pandemic.
3.
4. The dreaded disease disappeared after the typhoon.
5. The grateful Cebuanos who attended the mass of Accion de Gracia attributed their

		deliverance to the Holy Child.
6. The Mysterious Boy	1. Tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals. 2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy. 3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form or mage of a child. 4. The tragedy is solved. /The sickness disappears. 5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.	1. A strange sickness believed to be caused by people's sins broke out in the kingdom. 2. With the king's consent, the wise men decided that a child should be sacrificed. 3. They decided to sacrifice a boy with an unknown residence. 4. When the king decided to set the boy free, the sick people became healthy again. 5. The crowd, knowing who the boy was, went in a group to the altar of the palace, knelt and gave thanks.
7. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals. 2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy. 3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form or image of a child. 4. The tragedy is solved. 5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.	1. The inclement weather made the people sick. 2. Queen Juana took the Image of the Holy Child from the altar. She went around the palace to touch the heads of the sick with the feet of the Image. 3. 4. The sick people were cured. 5. Thanksgiving happened on schedule.
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	1. Tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals. 2. Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy.	1. Otik, the husband of Ilang (the old couple), got a peculiar sickness where his joints were weak so that

3. The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child.
4. The tragedy/sickness is solved.
5. The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*.

he could not sit, stand, or walk.
2. Pitong, the husband of Bini (the young couple), thought of going to Cebu to dance in the Sinulog and cut a piece of wood from Magellan's cross to be given to Otik.
3. Otik greeted them and thanked a "chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit" to give him the cutting from Magellan's cross.
4. Otik was cured of his strange sickness, and Pitong and Bini were gifted with a healthy baby boy.
5. Nobody could answer the question, but the parish priest told Otik that the boy who gave him the cutting from Magellan's cross was the Holy Child.

For the first mytheme, "A tragedy/sickness disrupts the life of people or certain individuals," the seven legends yielded tragedies such as epidemics and different kinds of sickness experienced by a group of people, families, and individuals.

The second mytheme, "Solutions are provided to end/mitigate the tragedy," the solutions are in the forms of prayers, rituals, sacrifices, traditional practices, and brigades. The government, the church, and a handful of doctors worked together to curb the problems.

The third mytheme, "The *Sto. Niño* appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child," is explicit in the three legends: *"When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom," "The Mysterious Boy,"* and

the "*Baybay Leyte Mystery.*" The boy who appeared unafraid of the mad dogs, the mysterious boy who was imprisoned, and the chubby boy with curly hair who wore a red suit" were all representations of the Holy Child who performed miracles to cure the sickness of people.

For the other legends, there was no appearance of the *Sto. Niño*. However, his intervention was mostly in rituals performed by Queen Juana. She put the feet of the image of the Holy Child on the forehead of the sick or brought the sick children and left them lying to the room where the image of the Holy Child was there.

The fourth mytheme, "The tragedy/sickness is solved/cured," is bundled in different details: recovery of the sick people as if no serious illness happened to them, a couple gifted with a child, and disappearance of the dreaded disease after a destructive typhoon.

The final mytheme found after analyzing the legends is "The people attribute the miracles to the *Sto. Niño*." The attributions were through shouting with joy, attending mass, kneeling in front of the altar, and giving thanks.

Table 4 exhibits the central message of the seven legends about the *Sto. Niño*. The message shows the *Sto. Niño*'s miraculous interventions in sicknesses and epidemics experienced by a group of people, family members, and individuals. Three of the legends, "*The Case of the Poisoned Family,*" "*How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped,*" *The* "*First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child*" featured the presence of Queen Juana rendering the ritual of putting the image on the forehead of the sick people. In the legends "*When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom,*" "*The Mysterious Boy,*" "*The Baybay, Leyte Mystery,*" the *Sto. Niño* appeared as a little boy dealing with people yet performing extraordinary things.

Table 4
The Legends and their Messages

Legend	Message
1. The Case of the Poisoned Family	The *Sto. Niño* cured the poisoned family when Queen Juana let the feet of the image touch each one of them.
2. How the Epidemic of Children's Disease was Stopped	The sick children were healed when Queen Juana left them in the room where the image of the Holy Child was.
3. The First Procession of the Image of the Holy Child	The sick people could join the thanksgiving procession after Queen Juana went around the palace touching the heads of the sick with the feet of the image of the Holy Child.
4. When the Mad Dogs Ruled the Kingdom	From being a child unafraid of the mad dogs, he turned into a giant white dog that every person bitten by mad dogs was cured after licking everyone's wound.

5. The Mysterious Boy	He transformed into a mysterious boy that the sick people were cured after following him.
6. The Cholera Epidemic of 1883	The cholera epidemic disappeared after the Aurora was held in places where many people died.
7. The Baybay, Leyte Mystery	Otik was cured of his strange sickness when a "chubby boy with curly hair who wore red suit" brought him the cutting from Magellan's cross that was promised to him by Pitong and Bini.

The overarching message of the legends is "Miracles happen to those who believe in them." The Sto. Niño de Cebu cures people of their sicknesses. Sala-Boza (2008) stated that the beliefs in miracles "can only be understood through the eyes of faith, which Cebuanos have in abundance. Sala-Boza (2008) related the miracle principle in the miracle discourse of the *Sto. Niño* devotees through a paradigmatic cycle. The paradigm shows the relationship between the devotee and the *Sto. Niño*: such a relationship may be seen as a "cycle of love." The devotees who received or experienced the miracles "gratefully acknowledged them in thanksgiving. The beliefs in miracles, according to Sala-Boza (2008), "can only be understood through the eyes of faith, which Cebuanos have in abundance."

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the Structuralist criticism applied in the seven legends of the Sto Nino de Cebu, the researcher found that textually, each legend has self-contained binary opposition/s, mythemes, and central message, which belong to the intertextual connections as a larger structure. Intertextually, the binary opposition sickness vs. healing may be linked with the mythemes and central message.

Sickness versus healing, prayer versus ritual, superiority versus inferiority, and simplicity/grand versus complexity/complex are the binary oppositions found in the seven legends about the Sto. Niño. The binary opposition sickness vs. healing prevails in all the seven legends analyzed for the study.

The mythemes deduced from each legend were: (1). A tragedy disrupts the life of people or certain individuals; (2). Solutions are offered to end the tragedy, (3). The Sto. Niño appears/intervenes in the form/image of a child (4). The tragedy is solved/The sickness disappears, and (5). The people attribute the miracles to the Sto. Niño.

The message drawn from the seven legends that faith in God brings to the cure of sicknesses brought by the epidemic, bad weather, or those sickness of unknown origin is derived from the central message that miracles happen to those who believe in them.

The researcher recommends that future researchers study the other legends about the Sto. Niño de Cebu that focused on other themes to validate if the mythemes found in the study may apply or if a new set of mythemes may surface. For the study's academic implications, it is highly recommended that the Sto. Niño legends are included in the reading list or required readings in English and Philippine Literature classes. Likewise, the study of religious legends, particularly the Sto. Niño legends as texts for critical analysis to apply Literary Criticism theories may be integrated into the basic and higher education curricula.

References

Austria, J. A. (2005). Social realities in early 19th century Santa Cruz de Malabon as reflected in religious folklore. *The Journal of History 51*, 1–4.

Brewton, V. Literary theory. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https://iep.utm.edu/

Brion, M., Cabaluna, G. A., Mencede, D. J., Ladera, N., Lape, E. , Laput, M. E., Nunez, R. , & Inocian, R. (2018). Devotees' Testimonies of Faith of Señor Santo Niño De Cebu. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 6*, 89–96. http://www.apjmr.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/APJMR-2018.6.2.2.12.pdf

Bautista, J. 2021. On the personhood of sacred objects: Agency, materiality and popular devotion in the Roman Catholic Philippines. *Religions 12*, 454. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070454

Bautista, J. (2006). The rebellion and the icon: Holy revolutions in the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Social Science, 34*(2). https://doi.org/10.1163/156853106777371166

Coldero, N. & Aguila, A. (2020). Ati-Atihan festival as a literary event. *International Journal of Science and Research, 9*, 543–548 https://doi.org/10.21275/SR20806181508

Cornelio, (2014). Popular religion and the turn to everyday authenticity: Reflections on the contemporary study of Philippine Catholicism. *Project MUSE, 62*(3–4), 471–500. https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2014.0024

De la Calzada, M. (1965). The legends of Santo Nino de Cebu: University of San Carlos Library.

Eugenio, D. (1992). Philippine folk literature; The Legends. Quezon City: College of Arts and Letters, UP Diliman

Gray, J. P. (1978). Structural analysis of folktales: Techniques and methodology. *Asian Folklore Studies, 37*(1), 77–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/1177584

Guerrero, A. (2016, January 11). Santo Niño through the ages. LIFESTYLE.INQ. https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/219013/santo-nino-through-the-ages/

Ibones, N., Oliverio, J., Ondo, H. J., Tagpuno, H. P., & Inocian, R. (2016). Senor Sto. Nino devotees' lived experiences in a Fluvial parade. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 4*, 180–187. http://www.apjmr.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/APJMR-2016.4.2.24.pdf

Guzman, E. (2013). Kalinga folk literature as materials for Literature of the Philippines. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Science, 2*, 285–307.

Lachica, I. (2021). A family's Sto. Niño miracle. Cebu Daily News. https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/359608/a-familys-sto-nino-miracle

Lopez, M. (2006). A handbook of Philippine folklore. (1st edition) Philippines: The University Press.

Mambrol N. (2016). Structuralism. Literary theory and criticism. https://literariness.org/2016/03/20/structuralism/

Modequillo, J. (2017, January 15). The miraculous Santo Niño. The Freeman. https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/cebu-lifestyle/2017/01/15/1662365/miraculous-santo-nio

Mujal, R. (2020). Pahilot: The faith healing tradition of the Ati-Atihan Festival. Philippine Association for the Study of Culture, History, and Religion, Inc. 3, 71–80. https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=15695

Pahayagang Balikas. (2016). Maikling Kasaysayan ng Sto. Niño ng Batangan. https://balikasonline.wordpress.com/2016/01/08/maikling-kasaysayan-ng-sto-nino-ng-batangan/

Sala-Boza, A. (2008). Towards Filipino Christian culture: Mysticism and folk Catholicism in the Senor Sto. Nino de Cebu devotion. *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society, 36*(4). https://www.jstor.org/stable/29792658

Corresponding Author: José Macatangay
Email: jose.macatangay@dlsl.edu.ph

Digitalised Responses: Understanding the Digital Literary Spaces in the Light of Keshava Guha's *Accidental Magic*

Sapphire Mahmood Ahmed
University of Calicut, India

K. Rizwana Sultana
University of Calicut, India

Abstract

Literature was quick to respond to emerging digital technologies in the late 1990s. Fiction writing and publishing took to the Internet, although traditional methods of print publication largely remained in place. However, it became evident that the literary world had embraced online platforms to produce and consume literature. Keshava Guha's debut novel *Accidental Magic* (2019) captures this transformation from print to the digital world in the early 2000s. This paper is a study on how digital technology is adopted and utilised by literary readers in *Accidental Magic*. It also analyses digital technology's impact on the art of storytelling. The paper concludes that online communities have introduced a new means of storytelling, which is now a two-way process, unlike what was the case in the pre-internet era. Also, mainstream literature is frequently and actively challenged – and promoted – on digital media. Guha's novel illustrates how online platforms impact the lives of four people, suggesting that such platforms have the power to change the dynamics of human relationships and alter reader interactions with literature in general.

Keywords: digital literature, storytelling, prosumers, social media

The development of digital technologies in the 1990s has had a profound effect upon literature. Digital platforms have delivered added opportunities as well as unanticipated challenges to literary readers and writers. An emerging form of literature, evolving over the past three decades, digital literature can be broadly defined as any form of text that is produced in a digital platform. In the 2019 book *Electronic Literature*, Scott Rettberg, a digital culture scholar and the co-founder of the Electronic Literature Organisation, argues that electronic literature must be read in the light of avant-garde literary practices since the early 20th century and also in the light of the novel technologies and software used to produce the work. We may say that digital literature is a point of intersection between digital media and textuality. As Nasrulla Mambrol points out in his blog, the exciting part of this new form of literature is that we could convey our readings and thoughts immediately to others, and they can be debated and revised. It provides a common space for all types of identities and voices, despite the various differences in terms of class, race, gender, sexual orientation and the like.

With the internet, communication became faster. This meant that readers and audience of any literary work could now respond and provide their feedback immediately. There were many websites created, some by the creators and some by the audience, solely devoted to one of their favourite TV shows or books, where they could give feedback and also could update information regarding the show. By the year 2000, it had become a common practice for readers to search for a favourite book or show on a search engine like Yahoo! and find websites that hosted related discussions. Unlike earlier times, the websites, blogs and mailing systems allowed people to remain anonymous. They need not reveal their true identity. While this had its own disadvantages, it also attracted more people to the digital spaces to express their thoughts and opinions which they would not have expressed in fear of the repercussions from the society around them. They could explore their diverse identities, sexualities and the like in this virtual space. Besides this, compared to the traditional print literature, publishing online did not cost much. Also, it had a wider reach and was easily accessible to the literary audience all over the globe. As a result, an increasing number of literary works were being published via blogs and related websites.

Keshava Guha's debut novel *The Accidental Magic* (2019) documents this early phase of digital literature and its influence on four major characters: Kannan, Curtis Grimmet, Malathi and Rebecca. The four protagonists, who belong to diverse cultures and nationality, are brought together by their common interest in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter.* They meet each other in the context of online fan communities dedicated to Rowling's novels. The novel explores the dynamics of their relationship with each other and how it is affected by the presence of digital platforms among them. It is about the characters' search for a sense of meaning and belonging, which they try to achieve through the online fan websites. It also explores the characters' relationship to literature in general, in a world that is rapidly changing.

This paper attempts to analyse Keshava Guha's novel to understand how digital technologies have influenced the lives of literary readers. It looks at how digital technology becomes a subject and also a tool, impacting the art of storytelling. It also delves into the effect of digital technologies on the mainstream, traditional literature.

Digital Technology as a Subject and a Tool

Set in the early 2000s, *Accidental Magic* depicts a transforming world and the characters' way of adapting to the transformation. This is the story of a generation that has started to depend on digital spaces to express their thoughts and diverse identities. It shows their struggle to place themselves and create an identity of their own in both the real world as well as the virtual world. The novel clearly understands how technology has transformed our lives and how people have become emotionally involved with it. This was a time that the internet became a space for sociability.

It is interesting that Harry Potter, a children's fantasy fiction, itself becomes a subject of another fiction. The wide popularity of Harry Potter over the past 25 years shows how much it means to a whole generation of literary readers. Despite the diversities in identity, class or gender, Rowling's novel has a global reach that is worth studying about. It is this common love for Rowling's books and her characters that draw the four diverse characters of Guha's novel together. The online fan communities, illustrated in the novel, reminds us that reading is not just about personal preferences, but it is also an act of committed sharing among fellow readers, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds. Curtis Grimmet, a host of a radio talk show and the founder of an online fan group, almost always stresses the fact that the internet can be used for socialising. In the mayhem of urban life with its huge emphasis on personal space and abundant silence, the online fandom becomes the only social life some people have. They form communities of their own, despite the variance in class, race or gender, and they share the same interest and passion in this online social circle.

"HP4BK represented the fandom intelligentsia. It was a chatty, erudite, insular club, and at this stage it was impossible for Kannan to be more than a lurker." (19). Harry Potter for Big Kids (HP4BK), the fan group founded by Curtis Grimmet and of which Kannan becomes an important contributor, was a pathway for him to have a social life in Boston. Kannan, being socially awkward and introvert, finds it easy in this online community to express his thoughts and opinions without the fear of any repercussions. He would even develop the courage to refute other members' arguments and also defend his arguments very well, eventually. Unlike his real family where he could not voice his objections, the online fan community was a place where he got respect and was taken seriously. This elevated his sense of self-respect in a way.

The plot of the novel is pushed further with the involvement of digital technology in the lives of each character. They turn to the digital spaces to console themselves and move forward in their life. Each major character in the novel is slowly and deliberately set into the digital literary world. All the four characters are from different backgrounds in terms of their race, class and nationality. Yet, what they have in common is their passionate love for literature, especially J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter.* Grimmet is almost like the Albus Dumbledore of Guha's novel. He is familiar with the digital spaces and knows many things regarding the fandom in advance. He even invites into and even promotes people within it. Kannan is introduced into fandom through Grimmet, who promotes him among other popular writers of fandom when he starts contributing to it. Rebecca turns to the online spaces so as to distract herself from the

gloominess following her abrupt break up with Connor. For Malathi, fandom is the only common factor between herself and her fiancé Kannan. Except Grimmet, all the other characters are newly introduced to the fandom community. Yet, they get accustomed to it as easily as reading books. Kannan, Rebecca, Malathi and Curtis would not have known each other if not for the online communities, which provided them with a sense of belonging and meaning in their lives. Online platforms do not demand the revelation of your true identity. One can use pseudonyms as well. As much as this has its disadvantages, it was also a relief for many, like the characters in the novel. Kannan is comfortable with the ID Grimmet has created for him: chudcannon26. Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture* (2006), quotes Zsenya, a member of a Harry Potter fan fiction website The Sugar Quill, who commented that when one does not have to be face-to-face with others, it "equalises everyone a little bit" (178). This gives everyone the opportunity to speak their mind without feeling intimidated. This is another way of being liberated.

The presence of digital technologies like the computers and internet is naturalised in the novel. For Grimmet, the digital space is as natural and comfortable as any other platform. Long before Kannan meets him, Grimmet is actively involved in a number of online activities, even coordinating some; whereas for Kannan, this is a comparatively new world where he has to build up his own space. Being the techno-guy, however, Kannan is fast to catch up with Grimmet. He spends most of his time at the office and after work, online. He has quickly extended his habit of reading books (he has read each of the Harry Potter books twelve times) to digital platforms as well. Besides the aesthetic side, reading fiction via digital platforms has an element of emotional side also. The instance of the Athena Alice scandal is a depiction of how emotionally involved Kannan was in the fandom. When Athena Alice, a popular fanfic writer, is accused of plagiarism by a librarian, it creates such mayhem in the online communities. Many are in support of Athena Alice while many are against her. This leaves Kannan quite disturbed:

> But Grimmet was exultant. 'There is justice in this world,' he said. 'A great fraud has been found out at last... .' He went on in this way for over a minute before he noticed Kannan's discomfort.

> 'But Kannan, I didn't think you were much of a fan of hers, either?'
> How could Grimmet take *pleasure* in something like this? In an event that might tear fandom apart? (23)

For Kannan, the internet was not a new thing, but online communities and literary discussions were new. However, when introduced into it, he had no inhibitions and merged into it quite easily. "It was an instinct he had never felt outside fandom, a lack that he dimly knew made all the difference between him and Shanthanam" (103). For the first time in his life, Kannan was having a space where he was valued, unlike his own home where he was always overshadowed by his elder brother Shanthanam. He could now create an identity of his own, an identity that did not have anything to do with his brother or any family. In an interview "*Fandom as an Object and the objects of Fandom*", with Clarice Greeco, Matt Hills, the author of *Fan Cultures*

(2002), describes fandom as a performance of one's own identity although you may use fake IDs: "...it's about a sense of self, it's about affect, in terms of working at an emotional, subjective level. And it's about the individual being placed within the community, where you may need a notion of discourse as well as affect" (150).

The online fandom was a place that offered Kannan something that his own real family did not offer. "He's never been in any sort of community, never felt that the broadcast of his thoughts was a possibility, much less a right" (48). He tended to show more loyalty to this space than to his own family. It was turning into his virtual family in a sense. And he did not want it to come to an end. He wanted to hear this from his mentor, Grimmet, which was why he had approached the older friend as soon as he heard of the scandal. The end of fandom was terrorising for Kannan, but for Grimmet it was just another day of entertainment "…and in that lay the gulf between them." (24). Grimmet knew where to draw the line between the virtual world and the real world. Kannan, at times, is confused about this. Being emotionally distant helps Grimmet to take an objective stand regarding the future of his online communities. For Kannan, his responses come from his deep insecurities.

Kannan's relationship with the other major characters in the novel depends on how much they are related to the online communities he is involved in. He gets close to Grimmet, his first friend in Boston, and maintains this friendship only because the latter is running a Harry Potter fan group and Kannan wants to discuss more about it. There was not anything else common between them to share. Kannan has not expressed much interest in knowing more about Grimmet, his personal life or his life beyond Harry Potter. In case of his and Malathi's relationship, he married her primarily because he could not defy his family. But the only thing he found interesting in her was that she too was a fan of *Harry Potter* and liked to be part of online fan communities. However, this common interest does not eventually help them in building a bond or maintaining their marriage. The only communication between them was via emails. He is neither interested nor does he attempt to know the girl he had married. When Malathi arrives in Boston to live with Kannan, he does not want to be with her and the novel ends with their impending divorce. His relationship with Rebecca is also, likewise, comfortable only when it is on the virtual level. He is never able to express his liking to Rebecca when they take a walk together. Nor is he really interested to know the real person. Both are initially comfortable with their brief friendship only because of the common factor that they are connected in the digital space, sharing similar interests. They have formed a bond with each other even before they have actually met in real life. Although he creates an online group to impress Rebecca, when her actual response comes, he is only interested in what bayswater1977 (Rebecca's user id) has to say, rather than Rebecca the real person: "… he read the long post by bayswater1977, laying out the limitations of OBHWF with moving precision, and didn't even read it as Rebecca. He thought, instead: this is a person who gets it, and a teammate worth having" (128). In the case of Malathi and Kannan, they have used digital technology to overcome the barrier of time and space in order to connect with each other. However, it is not very fruitful. The only factor that attracts Kannan to Malathi is their shared interest in the *Harry Potter* books. Kannan further introduces her to a few fan fictions when they first meet in

Bangalore. Despite having no deep interests in fandom, Malathi gets herself involved in this online reading activity only to get closer to Kannan.

Digital technologies are welcomed by this generation as an easy, comfortable, and faster way to connect with people. It helps them to form bonds and relationships, but it does not help in maintaining a trustful one in their lives. Like the virtual world, the nature of Kannan's relationships with the other major characters seems so unreal. Unlike the other three protagonists, Kannan always runs away when he is to meet real-life relationships. Malathi, Rebecca and Grimmet value relationships and try to establish strong bonds with people. He asks Malathi to leave when she arrives in Boston. He does not pick up the courage to pursue his feelings for Rebecca. And with Grimmet, with whom he spends most of his evenings, their relationship does not go beyond discussions on Harry Potter and the online fan communities. Kannan seems incapable of forming warm bonds with people he seems to like. When it is time to confront Grimmet and Rebecca regarding his refusal to accept Malathi as his wife, Kannan chooses to run away from the country. Had it been an encounter on a digital platform, he would have been more comfortable. His emotional involvement in the virtual spaces can take him only this far. For Rebecca and Malathi, who were not as emotionally involved in the fandom as Kannan, forming a closer bond seems to be much easier.

When the virtual world is brought to the real world, it negatively affects the relationships in the novel. When Grimmet comes to know about Kannan's marriage to Malathi, he realises that he had never really known this man whom he believed to be his friend. Rebecca, having already known the harsh side of digital spaces (Connor had broken up with her through just an email), does not invest a lot of her emotions into online fandom. She, like Grimmet, has drawn a line between the digital space and her personal emotions so as to guard herself. If she had let her guards down a bit, it was with her acquaintance with the fanfic writer Peridita. However, this too does not turn out to be fruitful for her. For Malathi, communication through emails did not suffice. She felt something was missing in this kind of online relationship, where she could not get to know the real Kannan. For her, the digital space provided only minimal intimacy and she could feel the void in it. On the other hand, Kannan uses this space to maintain the distance between himself and Malathi. When Grimmet is shocked to know of Malathi, she says, "You say you knew your dearest friend. I thought I knew a husband. Neither of us knew any real human being" (229). Both Malathi and Grimmet had been close to Kannan only in the context of the online fandom communities. They could not know him beyond that.

Similar to this is the relationship between Rebecca and Peridita. Peridita, whose real name is Michelle, does not reveal much about herself through the websites or personal emails with Rebecca. Peridita, or Michelle, decides to stop writing fan fiction when she has conversations with the pastors and her church. She infers that her writings are inconsistent with the teachings of her religion and hence she must stop. Rebecca, who had frequently corresponded with Peridita and thought that they had been friends, later realises that she knew nothing about the true Michelle. She felt the warmth of a real friendship missing in their relationship. There too was a void. "Not their Friendship: the fact that Michelle had told her nothing, that she learned of her retirement in this public way, showed how little that was worth. What was being lost,

given up, was everything of Michelle that had gone *Time Regained…*" (179). Their friendship was never beyond the fan fiction Michelle wrote. Rebecca immediately knew that when Michelle decided to stop writing, it was the end of their brief friendship too.

In a nutshell, we may say that digital technology, in Keshava Guha's novel, is explored as a subject. The lives of the major characters revolve around it, helping them in forming relationships but they are not strong bonds. Digital platforms are also used to keep the distance between people and even end relationships. *Accidental Magic* explores this contradictory role of digital technology. Besides, it gives us valuable insights into the nature of the emerging genre of digital literature, which will be delved into below.

Literary World and the Digital Technology

Since the 1990s, digital platforms have made it possible for the readers of any literary product to be more active and productive. When the feedback was faster, it also helped the producers to mould their products in the future, understanding the tastes and expectations of the audience. The readers are not passive, blind consumers of the literary work, but they are creative individuals with their own personality and psychology. They take advantage of the technology available for their own purposes consciously. Grimmet, in *Accidental Magic,* uses his fan community groups to promote Kannan. Kannan, on the other hand, forms a group of his own, One Big Happy Weasley Family (OBHWF) to catch Rebecca's attention. Besides such personal reasons, they also use these online groups for appreciating and sometimes questioning Harry Potter and the authorial power of J. K. Rowling. "His first post on [the website Harry Potter for Big Kids] would posit a theory of Harry Potter in which J. K. Rowling was not the last word but merely the first, the prime mover, the originating genius, the only possible creator" (33). This means that readers can put their thoughts online and be involved in intellectual discussions. He is a shipper of Harry/Hermione. The shippers in the fandom continue to reinterpret the available Harry Potter books. As Piotr Suida observes in her article "From deviation to mainstream-evolution of fan studies" (2014), the readers and writers on digital media have more public visibility because they are on a virtual platform shared with similar-minded people.

Collective Intelligence is a concept put forward by Pierre Levy in 1994. When people, in order to share their knowledge and skills so as to solve some issues, gather to form large communities, it is called collective intelligence. They use technology to enhance their capacity to mobilise their ideas, insights and any information. The fandom illustrated in *Accidental Magic* has the nature of collective intelligence. Both Grimmet and Kannan had taken advantage of this nature of the fan communities for introducing Kannan into the fan community and furthering his popularity within it. At a point, Kannan decides to form a new group so that fresh conversations could be carried out in the Harry Potter fandom:

> He has wanted for months to start a debate on the idea of One Big Happy Weasley
> Family. OBHWF-no fandom cow was holier. He had wanted to wait until he was more

sure of his own position in fandom; he didn't want to be thought of as an attention-seeker. (110)

Kannan, who was attracted to Rebecca at the first fan convention, wanted to impress her. For this, he had turned again to the most comfortable place: the online fandom. Although this did not go as he had intended, Kannan did succeed in forming a new knowledge community.

The practice of shipping (creation of romantic pairings of their favourite characters) within the online fan community was intense in the novel. It had formed a subculture of its own within digital literary spaces. Kannan feels that this has the power to divide the fan community into two or more groups. Having a gap of three years between the publication o*f Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) an*d Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), there were a lot of speculations regarding what would happen in the next book. This was a time when the number of Harry Potter fan communities increased manifold, and also there were a number of fan fictions being produced online based on the fans' speculations. Many of the fan fictions would be written as a sequel to Rowling's fourth book and was mostly structured in the same way. The only way to know, in 2001 and 2002, what happened in Harry Potter's fifth year was to read fan fictions and be part of online fan communities. The internet was the space for quenching the readers' thirst for more or their curiosity. When they did not get enough information, they created their own information on the internet through these fan websites. This would change how people looked at Rowling's book, eventually.

As Melissa Anelli puts it in her book *Harry: A History,* "The Internet changed Harry Potter about as much as the Internet was changing everything else" (88). Rebecca, for instance, finds herself hooked to those fan fictions which had relationships as its subject. She pondered on friendships and romances i*n Harry Potter*. "They allowed her, in a way that the books could not, to truly escape into Harry's world" (85). Guha equates this literary addiction seen online to that of the fans of Charles Dickens' novel*, The Old Curiosity Shop,* who demanded to know whether Little Nell was dead (84). However, Dickens' fans did not publish anything like we see in the online fandom. Fan fiction was now becoming the life-blood of the Harry Potter fandom. The existence of such online platforms liberated the literary readers from the confines of the traditional books. Although Rebecca turned to the fandom to distract herself from the grief of a sudden break up, she finds this space as a way to express herself and to belong to a larger literary community. She wanted to be part of a larger group, to be with the right people. Unlike the traditional methods of storytelling, which was mostly based on a teller-listener relationship, digital storytelling made it possible for the listener to add more to the story. Rather than being a one-way communication, digital spaces transformed the art of storytelling into a two-way process. Hence, Kannan, Grimmet, Rebecca and many other Harry Potter fans could communicate their agreements and disagreements with Rowling's books and could speculate on what they thought should happen in the future books.

Print literature cannot be completely separated from the digital literatures. Post-2000, they go hand-in-hand. Grimmet's fan conventions are a literal manifestation of this. These fan conventions attempted to bring in the Harry Potter books as well as the online fandom out of the virtual world into the real physical world. Grimmet takes the virtual platforms to the real

world through the fan conventions he conducts. He takes the shipping debates usually conducted online into these fan conventions, calling it the "Deathmarch". While Kannan is quite comfortable with the internet, Grimmet is aware of the limitations it has. He wants to go beyond the virtual and take his passion onto the real world. Hence, he conducts interaction through his radio talk shows, founded a website for the same purpose and also conducts fan conventions frequently to bring in the online fans together. Extending the virtual world into the physical world becomes a necessity for Grimmet. However, this too has its limitations. When the virtual world meets the reality of the physical world, many are tended to step away from the fandom.

When Kannan ran away from Boston so that he did not have to face questions regarding his marriage to Malathi, it also marked an end to his and Grimmet's friendship, which did not go beyond the digital spaces despite being physically together. On the other hand, Rebecca and Grimmet seem to hint at a stronger bond. Though they met each other at a fan convention organised by the latter, they united to support Malathi in her predicament and share a mutual respect. Malathi and Kannan do not have anything to share besides the emails that they had send initially. Towards the end of the novel, Grimmet does not sever ties with his online fan groups. Rebecca decides to move away from fandom, yet is still in love with reading. Kannan and Malathi, though parted ways, wishes to return to fandom to write. When each of the characters decides to step back from fandom or be less involved in it, it does not anyway diminish their love for literature and reading. They continue to adore books, yet do not want to do much in the fandom.

Revaluating Traditional Print Literatures

Since only a few studies have developed in this evolving literary field, there are many stereotypes and prejudices against digital literature in general. This is mainly because of the lack of proper review before publishing a literary work online. Since anyone can publish anything online at a cheap cost, it has affected the maintenance of quality of the art produced. This has been severely criticised by scholars also. Genuine, authentic literature is rare, and most writers prefer to publish their works in hard copy format so that it gets the deserved recognition in literary circles. Digital literature is not usually included as part of other mainstream literatures. There are clear cut boundaries between the traditional print literature and digital literatures. This is reflected in the response of Lydia, who scorns Harry Potter and online fan fiction when Rebecca tells about her newfound interest in them: "You can't possibly be *enjoying* that crap, Bec', she said. 'You of all people! Harold Bloom took [Rowling] down in grand style in the *Journal* a few months ago … Reading children's fantasy books and then *fan fiction* … about those books? Seriously?" (61).

As S. Rowberry observes in the 2018 article, "Continuous, not discrete: The mutual influence of digital and physical literature", literary critics remain under the assumption that digital literature as a genre has not yet produced any remarkable works that warrant close scrutiny. Scholars do acknowledge the experimental nature of it, yet they are reluctant to position digital literature in the same circle as traditional print literature (4). Both Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills

agree that there has been a mutual marginalisation of digital literature and print literature. This has caused the consistent devaluing of the former. As a result, very rarely do studies on digital literature probe into its multiplicity and contradictory natures. However, the success of Harry Potter fandom, as we see in *Accidental Magic*, has given the genre of digital literature more public visibility. It is now being included and studied along with mainstream literatures, among literary scholars.

Accidental Magic looks at how the advent of digital literature, with its emphasis on children's fictions, has affected general readers' relationship with the other genres of literature. Rebecca's parents are worried when they come to know about her interest in the *Harry Potter* books and her involvement in online fan communities. Her father suggests she read *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee and *The Human Stain* by Philip Roth as an "antidote" (211). Her parents preferred what constitutes the mainstream, "high-class" literature to the children's fantasy literature. Rebecca, after reading the suggested books, appreciates their profoundness and seriousness, yet does not become a fan of them. What she wanted, as she says to Grimmet, is some lightness. When literature turns to depend on the digital spaces for its own promotion, it does not diminish the value of the traditional print literatures. We see that the literary readers learn to take both print and digital literature together, rather than placing one in a superior position than the other. There are no such hierarchies. It only depends on the mood and taste of the reader as to what he or she would read at a particular point of time in their life. As for Rebecca, who had had a breakup, she did not want anything serious to deal with right then. Hence, she preferred the lightness of J. K. Rowling's books. The novel does not place one form of literature above another. It simply asks why all kinds of literature cannot be valued equally. The novel also questions the existence of the boundary line between traditional print literatures and digital literatures. It seems to hint that such boundaries would only confine and restrict the readers. Today, we see that many of the literary works of the pre-internet years are being digitised. Readers can read a novel either in its hard copy from a bookstore or a library, or can access it in its soft copy form. Also, there are a number of books being published exclusively via various websites. Online publishing and selling of e-books are preferred due to being less costly and more accessible.

The involvement of digital technologies has also made explicit another aspect of literature. Besides its aesthetic and emotional value, literature has a commercial side as well. The social media platforms are valuable marketplaces for the exchange and circulation of literary products. They also help to build a socio-cultural community of similar minded people. Grimmet builds these both virtually and in real life. Like the print literatures, digital literatures also depend on the process of accumulation of dissemination of knowledge for its own survival and progress. As we see in Guha's novel, digital media, however, is less expensive and more inclusive of all sections of society. Rather than emphasising on the quality, online literatures tend to stress on quantity and quick popularity.

The online discussions through the various fan groups also have the potential to suspend the assumptions regarding the superiority of traditional print literature. It asserts the fact the digital media can no longer be considered trivial in the literary world. The feedback of the audience is now immediate. This can affect the upcoming literature both positively and negatively. Here,

the audience has the upper hand in deciding the future and market scope of a literary work. Were it not for the online fans communities and their unwavering support, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books would not have garnered the popularity they have enjoyed over the past two decades. The online Harry Potter fandom has also paved the way for other major fantasy literatures of this decade. The most prominent example is that of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga. This new vampire fantasy also had a huge fan base on the internet. The Harry Potter fandom, as depicted in Guha's novel, had already set up the online fan culture and *Twilight* fandom followed almost the same model. Unlike the Harry Potter fandom, which stuck to the books and its characterizations mostly, the Twilight fandom mostly did not stick to the canon. Anne Jamison, in her 2013 book *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World* explains that fans online "could be ambivalent about their source. Or they might not love it at all, but love the fiction-writing community, bound by its characters and the actors who play them." Both Harry Potter and Twilight fandom had caused a revolution in the internet fan culture. Despite the various controversies these have created, it has also brought about major commercial success to the books and a handful of fan fiction writers. One of the most notable fan fictions of Twilight, *Master of the Universe*, had become so popular that it was eventually made into a book by the name *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) by its author E. L. James and then made into a movie. There are many such literary works which became so popular and celebrated on the online platforms, although they did not find a way into print literary spaces.

The digital platforms for literary communications favour both the readers' side as well as the creators' side. The readers or audience can easily communicate their expectations and opinions. The creators can easily mould their products based on the expectations of the potential readers. The fan groups that Grimmet and Kannan moderate are highly interactive spaces where people participate actively. It is participatory culture, a term proposed by Henry Jenkins, which has contributed majorly to the success of the digital literary platforms. In a participatory culture, new talents are promoted and encouraged by the entire community. These communities provide opportunities for readers to cross the threshold of writing their own stories. Rather than being in a subordinate or marginal position, the readers are integrated into the process of production of a literary work and their voices are recognised at a very early stage by a reading public (Jenkins 179). The American TV show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (by Joss Whedon) is an example of the participatory culture changing the dynamics between the creators and audience. The creators of the show developed an official website where they posted new updates regarding the show. They also provided space in the webpage for the viewers to comment. This soon became an actively interacting space for the viewers, who expressed their excitement and opinions. Besides, the creators of the show knew the expectations of their audience from the webpage (*Fic,* Jamison). The frequent interactions with the readers would help shape the perceptions of the writers. It is also a fact that conforming to the perceptions of the readers would be beneficial for the popularity, success and financial benefit of the work being produced. Such digital platforms become a market space for the producers to understand the current trends and needs of their audience. The free flow of content across various digital platforms changed the nature of the relationship between the creators of a literary work and its audience. It has made it possible for the audience for more participation.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins, in 2006, called this feature of digital literature the convergence culture, indicating the merging of old and new media and the free flow of content among various platforms. Guha's novel perfectly depicts this convergence culture, where Harry Potter books, produced as a traditional print literature in the late 1990s is taken to the digital media, is promoted to a hitherto unseen level by its own fans and has garnered digital literatures of its own. The characters we see in Guha's novel are die-hard fans of J. K. Rowling's books. Not just reading the books, they eventually turn to fan fiction writing as well. Every character, except Rebecca, has something to contribute in writing into the world of Harry Potter fandom. In short, they are not merely consumers of the books, but they themselves produce something based on it. Fan groups have formed a social network that frequently communicate and support each other. They, in turn, produce some kind of text that is a contribution to the overall body of Harry Potter literature. They are, what the American Futurist Alvin Toffler would call, prosumers. Prosumers seek information actively and also involve themselves in content creation and production, thereby resulting in the generation of more digital literatures. They consume a text, produce one by themselves and may even form a culture of their own. Grimmet's fan conventions are a manifestation of this online culture they have formed. It unites a group of people with the same interests and passions in the same place. Such conventions and the content they create online become valuable assets for the producers of media texts.

Like Keshava Guha has used the Harry Potter text as a subject for his novel, the characters within this novel also use Harry Potter for their own literary purposes. They have commoditized Rowling's books, in other words. They are consuming the product and also promoting it. As Matt Hills explains in his 2002 book, *Fan Cultures*, in relation to online fan communities, both these positions are important for the prosumer. Commoditization of the source text is inevitable in this capitalist cyber space, irrespective of the fact that its viewers or readers accept or reject it (4). The digital space is a market for the capitalist world. When the scandal of Athena Alice breaks out, Grimmet grabs an opportunity in this to further develop his own website. "HP4BK could take advantage of [Athena Alice's] fics' temporary unavailability to set up their own website. With exclusive access to the Malfoy Chronicles. They would have an immediate audience. Theirs would be the first site in fandom to publish only the best, to curate and edit every fic until it was worthy of Harry Potter" (32). For Grimmet, digital technology is a tool to be used for his own benefits. Were it not for this digital space, he would not have been friends with Kannan also. Here, he discovers and takes advantage of a market space for production and consumption of quality fiction. The fan community consumes the Harry Potter books and also produces their own related fan stories. Consumption and production go hand-in-hand and complement one another in digital spaces.

Conclusion

The nature of the art of storytelling has changed in the past three decades. The development of digital technologies and the incorporation of literature in them has made storytelling a two-way interaction process, rather than creating a hierarchy of superior author (or creator) of literary work and the inferior reader or audience. The art of storytelling, now, is designed such that there are opportunities for more audience participation. *Accidental Magic* illustrates how

digital platforms become an informal space to refine one's literary skills. The fan communities and discussions, both online and in the fan conventions, allow each participant to feel like an expert in what they are involved in and develop their literacy. Jenkins rightly puts it when he says, "Storytellers now think about storytelling in terms of creating openings for consumer participation" (169). Digital media, a new technology, is being used by the audience to consume old print literature as well. The internet becomes a space for creativity and collective problem solving. Keshava Guha's debut novel does not speak of the dominance of traditional print literature or the rise of digital literatures specifically. Yet, it gives us valuable insights into how digital technologies work within literary genres in order to promote it, both at an aesthetic level as well as a commercial level. This is why the online literary readers/audience is termed as prosumers. The participatory nature of the online fan communities is a reflection of how both digital and non-digital literatures must go together. The digital literary spaces help in the forming of a subculture, where readers are actively participating in activities that assert their identity and authority over their favourite work. They also encourage conversations between generations and learn from each other.

References

Anelli, M. (2008). *Harry: A History*. Gallery Books.

Guha, K. (2019). *Accidental Magic*. HarperCollins.

Hills, M. (2002). *Fan Cultures*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361337

Hills, M. (2015). Fandom as an object and the objects of fandom. *MATRIZes*, Interview by Clarice Greeco, University of Sao Paulo.

Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

Levy, P. (1994). *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyber Space*. Basic Books.

Mambrol, N. (2018). Introduction to Electronic Literature. *literariness.org* (accessed 10 April 2021).

Rettberg, S. (2019). *Electronic Literature*. Wiley.

Rowberry, S (2018). Continuous, not discrete: The mutual influence of digital and physical literature, *Convergence, 26*(2), 319–332. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856518755049

Suida, P. (2014). From deviation to mainstream: evolution of fan studies. *Studia Medioznawcze, 3*. 87–100.

Toffler, A. (1980). *The Third Wave*. William Morrow.

Corresponding Author: Sapphire Mahmood Ahmed
Email: sabi.zafire@gmail.com

Legislation, Reaction and Ecological Degradation: An Eco-Critical Analysis of John Grisham's *The Appeal*

Preethika S
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, India

Chitra Sivasubramaniam
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, India

Abstract

We are witnessing environmental degradation on a massive scale. Popular reactions to the devastation of our natural surroundings are a ubiquitous image in newscasts everywhere, and yet nations and institutions seem unable to cohere around programs to stop the looming disaster. American author John Grisham, an attorney by profession, elaborates on this issue in his novel *The Appeal* (2008). Grisham meticulously describes the human tragedy of a degrading bio-region and provides insights into the gradual process of contemporary environmental litigation. Grisham provides a panoramic view on the lives of people in Cary County, the place where a corporate toxic waste dump has caused massive groundwater pollution. The use of polluted drinking water destroys many lives and creates the worst cancer cluster in history. Plaintiff Jeannette Baker, along with her suffering neighbours, seeks justice through legal means against the corporate companies for the loss of life caused by corporate interests. The author makes us witnesses to the long judicial process that gathers a motley group of people with conflicting interests: victims, local authorities, and corporation representatives. They come together to analyse and acknowledge their role in the process of environmental devastation.

Keywords: eco-criticism, environmental degradation, ecology, law and literature

The modern era has made it possible for many contaminants to become deeply ingrained in all life forms and blended with natural elements. Pollutants have interfered with virtually all living processes, and the ecosystem has been substantially altered by their presence. Nature is being sacrificed on the altar of prosperity, social harmony, and modernity. Governments have been hesitant to respond with specific legislation, policies, and schemes to counter the infiltration of hazardous materials into all aspects of life. The growing, conglomerated urban populations, especially those largely made up of newly arrived groups of rural origins, have not placed high on the local authorities' list of priorities, who are not normally well uninformed and are reluctant to pay the costs of social planning, public health, and civic improvements.

The ever deeper human footprint on the environment is increasing the frequency and intensity of the global ecological crisis. It is reducing the quality of the environment, making it irreparably compromised and leaving the human beings increasingly exposed to the lethal effects of environmental degradation. In many areas the air is smoky, the water is changing colour, the land is filled with plastics and people are becoming unhealthy and sick with incurable diseases.

Ecocriticism

"Ecocriticism" is an ecological approach to literary criticism that responds to the global ecological crisis and addresses important environmental issues by investigating ecological values in literary texts. "Ecocriticism" revolutionised into a literary movement by the late twentieth century. Many ecocritics sought to reveal the prominence of the environment and the greater presence of environmental problems in the literary field. They formulated different definitions of ecocriticism that illuminated the development of this theory. Critic Camilo Gomides, in the article, "Putting a New Definition of Ecocriticism to the Test: The Case of The Burning Season, a Film (Mal) Adaptation" (2006) offered an operational definition of ecocriticism as "The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (14). Scott Slovic in the preface to Swarnalatha Rangarajan's *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* (2018), proposed that "Ecocriticism is a branch of scholarship that considers the meaning of our lives within the broad context of the more-than-human-world by examining the texts we produce" (vii).

Simon Estok, in the article "Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: An Analysis of 'Home' and 'Power' in King Lear" (2005), argued that "ecocriticism" was more than:

> … simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function–thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise–of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds. (16-17)

To Estok, the rise and expansion of "ecocriticism" has paved the way for an earth-centred approach to the study of human civilization that is entangled with the politics of human development and its consequences for the preservation of the natural world.

Ecocriticism is associated with multiple disciplines and enables an ecologically oriented panoramic study of catastrophic events in human history. It helps man rethink the deleterious effects of conscious and insensible human actions that increase ecological problems. William Howarth, in the article "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", (1996) argues that:

> ...in fact texts do reflect how a civilization regards its natural heritage. We know nature through images and words, a process that makes the question of truth in science or literature inescapable, and whether we find validity through data or metaphor, the two modes of analysis are parallel. Ecocriticism observes in nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning. Ecology leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity. (77)

Howarth perceived the changes in natural resources from an aesthetic perspective that recognised the rejuvenating role of nature in human civilization. He seeks to tackle environmental problems with ethical principles intended to arouse ethical contemplation of the issues.

John Grisham addresses the plight of vulnerable people who have witnessed the death of their loved ones in the City of Bowmore, Cary County, as he also does in the book *Cancer County*. The fictional town of Cary County acts here as a metaphorical representation for the world. The place is well equipped with natural resources and is a pleasant place to settle, as its healthful environment provides a most pleasing prospect for development. The county also reflects the world's diversity, with heterogeneous groups of people from various socio-economic strata. Grisham follows the county's citizens through their tragic experiences for more than a decade, exploring both individual and collective reactions to the decline in the quality of the county's ecosystem.

An Appeal to Break the Oblivion

Grisham focuses on the impact of ignorance through stories that elaborate on the multi-faceted nature of the ecological crisis. In *The Appeal*, Grisham traces the cycle of human reactions from ignorance to enlightenment through a series of some of the most dreadful man-made environmental hazards that affect the public. It becomes evident that the lack of response from the population is due to ignorance. His characters tend to disregard the cause and dire effects of environmental deterioration and remain in a state of oblivion as they go about their daily business. Rob White, in his book *Crimes Against Nature: Environmental criminology and ecological justice* (2008), states that the main reason for not recognising the presence of hazardous materials in one's environment is

> … a considerable disjuncture between what is officially labelled environmentally harmful from the point of view of criminal and civil law, and what can be said to constitute the greatest sources of harm from an ecological perspective. For example, there are profound, long-term adverse environmental effects following from such historically legitimate practices as using long-lines and drift-nets to catch fish, injecting cyanide and arsenic into the earth to mine precious metals, or destroying nonhuman nature in the course of building freeways. Indeed, many conventional, and legal, forms of human production and interaction do far worse things to the natural environment than those activities deemed illegal. (11)

Ignoring ecological degradation has become a generalised trend and tends to be collective in nature. Jennifer Wightman and Suhyung Lee, in their article "Human's Ignorance towards Environmental Issues", state that ignorance and unawareness are the tools that have put mankind in this state of chaos. They further remark that "[a] fair number of people say that when they hear about current environmental issues, they think everything seems so distant. Also, when they try to search for information about the issues, they feel a lot of pressure from the massive and difficult data on the Internet" (4–5).

In general, people are unaware of and uneducated about the environment's declining health, and Grisham observes that the state of collective ignorance is broken when nature retaliates with massive fatal destruction, like that of a cancer cluster. He suggests that people in general start researching environmental issues only after being direct victims. Plaintiff Jeannette Baker, a resident in Bowmore, files a case regarding the cause of the cancer cluster in Cary County only after she loses her husband and son to the disease. For a long time, the process of collecting evidence produces dead-ends because of the inadequate time, energy, manpower and the technology required for the interdisciplinary investigative research. The environmental case succeeds only when it is proven scientifically and by statistical analysis that Jeannette's husband and her son, Chad Baker and Pete Baker, died because of groundwater contamination.

Grisham also portrays the end of the county residents' ignorance regarding the environment and their journey towards ecocritical awareness. Grisham describes the effective legal procedures that led to a successful outcome in the case, although it took years of vicious courtroom battles. Legal procedures in environmental cases are meticulous and time-consuming. The Environmental Law Handbook states that "This legal system is complex in itself and is made even more challenging by the difficulty of the interdisciplinary subject matter to be regulated (health, safety, and environment) and the quickly evolving scientific and technical issues typically presented in environmental cases." (1)

Interpreting the Primary Understanding

In *The Appeal*, it is the awareness and purposeful actions of a single human being that the author uses as spearpoint for the awakening of a whole population to the realities of environmental degradation. It is communal support that enables Jeannette to trace and prove the particular features of the disaster that led to her family's tragedy, devising the strategy best

suited to produce a just verdict for her and for all others similarly affected. This struggle for environmental justice mirrors an increasing trend in the global scenario, as more people around the world seek legal help for protecting their surroundings. "The UNEP Global Climate Litigation Report: 2020 Status Review" states that there is a considerable increase in this type of litigation, from 884 cases in 24 countries in 2017 to at least 1,550 cases in 38 countries in July 2020.

For years, the inhabitants of Cary County assumed that the water was the cause for many unusual incidents. Some residents of Bowmore suspected that "the water caused the tiny cracks in the paint of their automobiles after a few wash jobs" (31). Yet they speculated about unimportant events while largely overlooking the ominous sea-change in their health. Residents tolerated, adjusted, and coped with the situation patiently, drinking the water after receiving official guarantees of its safety. As Jeannette points out:

> We drank it when it changed colours. We drank it while we complained bitterly to the city. We drank it after it was tested and the city assured us it was safe. We drank it after we boiled it. We drank it in our coffee and tea, sure the heat would cure it. And when we stopped drinking it, we showered and bathed in it and inhaled its steam. (31)

Grisham further develops the plot in the direction of the residents' response after they come to terms with the problem. He points out that "understanding a problem" is a transient state of mind, especially when things are associated with nature and a collective group of voiceless people with no discernible socio-political power. In a book of essays entitled *Observations on Modernity*, German sociologist Niklas Luhmann says that understandings are negotiated provisos that can only be relied on for a small amount of time. Understanding does not mean the implication of consensus, reasoning, or even finding the correct solutions for the problems. Understanding, Luhmann continues, attempts to fix the reference points in a controversial issue. In the case of Cary County, ten years prior to Jennette's victory, the County witnessed the explicit effects of the deterioration from the city-installed irrigation "…for its youth baseball field, only to watch the grass turn brown and die" (30). The response to this incident is the momentary closure of the city swimming pool and its treatment using massive amounts of chlorine, which turn the water brackish and make it reek like a sewage pit.

After recognising the problem, the community's unawareness makes it easier for industrial tycoons to devour the natural resources in the name of economic development. In *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism* (2011), James O'Connor says it is essential to recognise the dynamic relationship between economic growth and natural resource depletion. O'Connor connects the economic and environmental crises, writing that "there is a global economy that is undergoing a process of "accumulation through crisis" that is impoverishing tens of millions of people, destroying communities, degrading hundreds of thousands of bioregions, and exacerbating a global ecological crisis" (267).

In *The Appeal*, a vast industrial operation leads to a very significant ecological nosedive. Grisham says that the corporation well knows of its contribution to environmental degradation,

but finds loopholes in the legal system that enable it to continue the degradation while stockpiling large profits. Greedy officials corrupted with bribes forge documents that facilitate environmental crimes, knowing full well the harm they cause. With the positive verdict in *The Appeal*, the author presages the emergence of environmental criminology, the specialised, interdisciplinary study of crime and aberrant behaviour that has extensively reconceptualised the nature of harm, aiming to expose the different facets of the environmental and ecological injustices perpetrated by powerful modern corporations, who keep depleting the planet with the voracious appetite for wealth that characterises their corporate culture.

The Tussle of the Choice

In the novel, Krane Chemicals represent the global industrial degeneration of the environment. Krane Chemicals receives the support of the local residents at the onset of their operations. The oblivious citizens of Cary County rejoice over the prospect for economic development and commercial growth. The government supports the industry and gives Krane Chemicals freedom to function without proper implementation of waste management, which the company readily exploits. The company dumps all its untreated toxic waste in the mines and pollutes the region's rivers, streams, and aquifers. It also saves a lot of money in the process and becomes the most powerful institution in the county. The government neglects its duty as it promotes ecological harm by failing to provide adequate regulations to stop the company's destructive activity. Joakim Kulin and Ingemar Johansson Sevä, in their article "The Role of Government in Protecting the Environment: Quality of Government and the Translation of Normative Views about Government Responsibility into Spending Preferences" (2009), remind us that

> …it is becoming increasingly evident that environmental problems such as climate change and global warming constitute existential threats to human societies, these problems will very likely persist and even intensify unless governments enact effective and potentially costly environmental policies. (110)

Yet in *The Appeal*, neither the residents nor the government are prepared to accept the issues raised by the recognition that pollutants were degrading the environment, and their first reaction is that of denial. Speculation circulates among the residents denying any suggestion that there is a decline in the quality of the ecosystem. Grisham says that

> …the experts pointed at their charts and lectured the city council, and the mob packed into a crowded boardroom, telling them over and over that the water had been tested and was just fine if cleansed adequately with massive doses of chlorine … the government scientists with their lofty vocabularies talk down to the people and assure them that the water they could barely stand to smell was fine to drink. (31–32)

According to Grisham, the process of denial continued even after an official count revealed an enormous increase in the number of people dying, as "the rate of cancer was fifteen times the national average" (32).

The author points out that people ignore problems that require exorbitant, time-consuming effort and involves seemingly unending drudgery. He suggests that developing a healthful environment is a costly process. Local communities are often driven to opt for short-term coping mechanisms in dealing with immediate problems in their constantly degrading natural surroundings. The difficulty in understanding the issue is pointed to by Rob Nixon in his seminal work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2013). Therein he states that the process of environmental degradation is quite slow, with multiple intermediate events and unexpected outcomes. Nixon focuses on the powerlessness of underprivileged communities that are negatively affected by the poor quality of their environment. Grisham describes precisely this same conflict portrayed by Nixon, that is to say, the unequal fight of the economically weaker residents of Bowmore and Pine Grove against the powers that be. He describes the place thus:

> …on a gravel road in a forlorn Bowmore neighbourhood known as Pine Grove…Most of the cars and trucks parked around the trailers were decades old, unpainted and dented. There were a few homes of the permanent variety, immobile, anchored on slabs fifty years earlier, but they, too, were aging badly and showed signs of obvious neglect. There were few jobs in Bowmore and even fewer in Pine Grove, and a quick stroll along Jeannette's street would depress any visitor. (12)

Understanding the problem is the key. According to Grisham, once understanding takes place, a viable strategy for the battle against the powerful can be fashioned. Plaintiff Jeannette Baker understands the reasons behind the death of her husband and child. She then prompts her neighbours to remember events that led to their tragedy and their place within the ecological devastation. Knowledge of the judicial system's mechanisms also plays a vital role in gaining a successful verdict. Olivier Fillieule and Manuel Jiménez, in their article "The Methodology of Protest Event Analysis and the Media Politics of Reporting Environmental Protest Events", assert that:

> In general, due to the defensive nature of many environmental protests, economic crises are associated with decreasing protest activity. However, it is difficult to know to what extent such declines are due to the media marginalizing environmental issues in favour of traditional economic issues or, alternatively, to a decrease in potential conflicts associated with the pressures of economic activity. (269)

The citizens of Cary County initially protest when they experience the diminishing quality of the water, but because of the state's disregard, they engage in the legal contest. The first to start the legal procedure in the novel is the plaintiff, Jeannette Baker, who sticks to her case despite the discouraging ordeals of the trial. She is not so happy even after her success and the monetary compensation, as the tribulations of the trial outweigh the thrill of victory, "... her husband and son were still so dead" (28). Moreover, a solution for the devastation of the land and the water is not yet on the horizon.

Others involved in the case (lawyers, bankers, neighbours, and relatives) are all focused on the issue of personal monetary compensation, not on the need for research and detection of future tragedies such as this. Grisham adds that outsiders in the case felt elated at the victory, happy that someone like local residents had "struck back at Krane, a company they hated with every ounce of energy they could muster, and they had finally landed a retaliatory blow. Maybe the tide was turning. Somewhere out there beyond Bowmore someone had finally listened" (13).

John Grisham's *The Appeal* doesn't provide a happy ending for the environment or for the victims. Grisham shows the reality of a modern legal system whose injustices continue even after the final verdict in favour of the plaintiffs. The appeal that follows Jeannette Baker's victory favours Krane Chemicals. The tide ultimately turns through the use of unlimited corporate funds, indicating that the problem of ecological deterioration will continue, perhaps even stronger than ever. The environment will be freely used as a dump for corporate companies, who place profit ahead of people. In response to such an anti-environmental verdict, the plaintiffs, lawyers, bankers, and Cary County citizens are discouraged, dejected, and hopeless, unable to continue their journey for environmental justice. They find themselves again on the path of ignorance regarding ecological degradation and again go about their daily chores. Their resilience abates, and the legal system and the authorities remain docile and allow the ecosystem to continue in the hands of the powerful.

Legislation Breaks the Pattern

Yet the future is not entirely grim. Grisham points out that after the judgement of Jeannette Baker case

> A hundred and forty lawsuits were on file against Krane because of the Bowmore mess, about a third of them being death cases. According to an exhaustive and ongoing study … lawyers in New York, Atlanta, and Mississippi, there were probably another three hundred to four hundred cases with "legitimate" potential, meaning that they involved either death, probable death, or moderate to severe illness. There could be thousands of cases in which the claimants suffered minor ailments such as skin rashes, lesions, and nagging coughs, but for the time being, these were classified as frivolous. (31)

But corporations remain very powerful. They stand firm, knowing that plaintiffs have a long, hard road ahead in their struggle to prove negligence: "Because of the difficulty and cost of proving liability, and linking it with an illness, most of the cases on file had not been pushed aggressively" (31).

The pattern of reaction to environmental degradation is universal, and the responses are archetypal. The process of ignorance, understanding, denial, analysing, rebelling, and becoming ignorant again traces a detrimental pattern of behaviour. With every return to ignorance, people fail to recall and acknowledge the proliferation of ecological threats and the decline in the quality of their ecosystem. It becomes necessary for the collective consciousness to understand the need to react competently towards life-threatening changes in the natural

surroundings. From the beginning of the novel, Grisham gives the reader confidence that even small actions of modest comprehension can contribute to saving the earth and, with it, the human being. "The verdict was echoing through the judicial system. Government regulators had to take note. The chemical industry could no longer ignore them" (Grisham, 35).

Conclusion

Powerful people will always exploit the judicial system and many people will support them for political reasons. Human beings might neglect the ecosystem, but as the environmental quality declines, nature will eventually take its toll on each and every individual. The verdict in *The Appeal* might lead us to entertain the evanescent expectation that the economic elites, the poor and everyone in between will come to consider, honestly, the best way to protect the environment through individual and collective effort. For this to happen, legislation must address nature as a living being, but not from an anthropocentric perspective, and move to safeguard the entire ecosystem, if nothing else, for the future of the human race itself. In a world like that, the judicial system might just become the righteous agent that fights environmental degradation and brings long-lasting sustainability to the environment. In such a scenario, effective legislation will be enacted to prevent the misuse and degradation of the natural environment, curb the destructive practices of unscrupulous people like forest mafia groups, poachers, polluters, and over-exploiters of environmental resources. But as Grisham shows us, there is a long way to go before legislation and the judicial systems become the enforcing agents that make the powerful abide by the law and ultimately ensure and enforce the implementation of environmentally-friendly development, changing by degrees the consumer mentality that is consuming the planet.

Acknowledgement

References

Estok, S. (2005). Shakespeare and ecocriticism: An analysis of 'home' and 'power' in King Lear. *AUMLA*, 103. https://doi.org/10.1179/000127905805260537

Fillieule, O., & Jiménez, M. (2003). The methodology of protest event analysis and the media politics of reporting environmental protest events. In C. Rootes, Editor, *Environmental Protest in Western Europe* (pp. 1-16). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252068.005.0001

Gomides, C. (2006). Putting a new definition of ecocriticism to the test: The case of 'The Burning Season', a Film (Mal)Adaptation. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/13.1.13

Grisham, J. (2010). *The Appeal*. Random House.

Howarth, W. (1996). Some principles of ecocriticism. In C. Glotfelty, Ed., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 5–18). The University of Georgia Press.

Kulin, J., & Johansson Sevä, I. (2019). The Role of Government in Protecting the Environment: Quality of Government and the Translation of Normative Views about Government Responsibility into Spending Preferences. *International Journal of Sociology, 49*(2), 110–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2019.1582964

Luhmann, N. (2000). *Observations on Modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.

O'Connor, J. (1998). *Natural causes: Essays in ecological Marxism*. Guilford Publications.

Rangarajan, S. (2018). *Eco Critcism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies*. Orient BlackSwan.

UNEP. (2021, 26 January). *The UNEP Global Climate Litigation Report: 2020 Status Review*. UNEP.org https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-climate-litigation-report-2020-status-review

White, R. (2013). *Crimes Against Nature: Environmental Criminology and Ecological Justice*. Taylor & Francis.

Wightman, J., & Lee, S. (2016, May 1). *Human's Ignorance towards Environmental Issues*. New School. https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/portfolio.newschool.edu/dist/d/3947/files/2016/05/Sustainable_SuhyungLee_-2i928gc.pdf

Corresponding Author Preethika S
Email: preethikas7@gmail.com

Television as a Tool of Memory and Identity in Khaled Hosseini's Novels

Priya Meena
Delhi Technological University, India

Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi
Delhi Technological University, India

Abstract

Globalization epitomizes the convergence of diverse cultures, economies, and communities on a worldwide scale, engendering the exchange of ideas, technology, inventions, and import and export services across nations and societies. Technology, as a pivotal agent, assumes a vital role in building bridges among the global economies by overcoming information disparities and thereby empowering people. Specifically, television, a very influential medium, assumes the function of capturing, collating, and disseminating personal and cultural memories. Its significance is especially pronounced in the context of Khaled Hosseini's literary works, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, where television's role as a tool for constructing memories and shaping the identities of the characters is scrutinized. The ramifications of the Taliban's television ban are examined in this paper, highlighting how this drastic measure has significantly impacted the nation's culture.

Keywords: American movies, culture, identity, memory, television

The credit for the advent of electronic television is unequivocally attributed to Philo Taylor Farnsworth, who successfully demonstrated its functionality in 1927 at a momentous event held in San Francisco, United States of America. The ensuing decades witnessed the proliferation of television's popularity across numerous countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, the Soviet Union, China, and also India, which marked a significant milestone with its first TV channel, Doordarshan. It was only in the aftermath of the 1970s that countries like South Africa, Qatar, Oman, Burma, and Sri Lanka joined the ranks of television accessibility.

In the context of Afghanistan, the launch of television broadcasting occurred in 1978 with the establishment of Afghanistan National Television, a development catalyzed by the resolute advocacy of Dr. Hafiz Sahar, who recognized the indispensability of television as a tool for education and technological advancement. However, the path to progress, in terms of technology and utilization, was fraught with challenges for Afghanistan. Following its transition to a republic in the early 1970s, the country was beset by the intrusion of the Soviet Union in December 1979, a turbulent period that endured until 1989. The subsequent period of civil war from 1992 to 1996 further disrupted the nation's economy, culminating in the rise of the Taliban, an ideological group espousing Islamic Fundamentalism, which seized control.

Despite brief periods of resurgence and growth under NATO protection from 2001 onwards, Afghanistan's technological trajectory experienced a setback in 2021 as the Taliban once again assumed control, imperiling existing technology and depriving the citizens of their rightful access to knowledge and education. This unfortunate turn of events casts a somber pall over the lives of ordinary people, denying them the rights they so deserve.

In the present era, the ubiquity of television has entrenched itself as an indispensable aspect of modern society, profoundly influencing our outlooks, norms, and recollections. However, within the Taliban regime, the once taken-for-granted entitlement of television viewership faces scrutiny due to the imposition of their dogmatic Islamic ideology. Khaled Hosseini, a gifted diaspora writer, one renowned for his poignant portrayals of life's vicissitudes in Afghanistan, captures the intricate interplay of human relationships in a nation ravaged by conflict.

Curiously, despite the profundity of television's presence as a narrative device in Hosseini's literary works, scant scholarly attention has been devoted to exploring its multifaceted significance in his novels. Notably, television assumes a significant role in depicting emotional details in the lives of his characters, both within Afghanistan and in their adopted homelands, where they survive as refugees. Within this context, the pages of Hosseini's masterpieces, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, offer a profound exploration of the diverse roles television plays in preserving memories, disseminating cultural values, and fostering connections between individuals separated by geographical expanses.

In this paper I endeavor to undertake a qualitative analysis, delving into the nuanced role of television in Hosseini's literary opus. Specifically, the focus will rest upon discerning how this medium functions as a potent instrument for preserving memory and shaping identities among the characters inhabiting Hosseini's narrative landscapes. By unfurling the myriad subtleties of television's thematic involvement in the tapestry of his stories, this inquiry aspires to provide insights on the profound intellectual and cultural implications intricately woven into the heart of Hosseini's timeless prose.

Television, Memory and Conflict

In his scholarly work, Rawan (2002) expounds on the widely acknowledged disapproval among orthodox followers of Islam concerning realistic depictions of living beings, perceiving photography and visual representation as an imitation of the divine creations. Such mimetic endeavors are believed to attract severe retribution from Allah on the Day of Judgment, even though the Quran itself does not overtly prohibit the portrayal of human forms (p. 162). Remarkably, the censure of graphic human depictions endures to this day, with contemporary religious adherents and clerics upholding the stance (p. 162).

Osman, in his book *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars* (2020), casts a light upon the deeply contentious nature of television within the Afghan context. This medium has historically been considered a crucible of violence due to its representation of social, cultural, and religious values. Paradoxically, television also has the potential to buttress democracy, national unity, and peace (p. 13). Furthermore, it has traditionally served as a conduit for Afghans to engage with foreign cultures, thereby exposing them to Western influences. Nevertheless, such exposure is diametrically opposed to the fundamental tenets of the Taliban's ideology, which staunchly imposes draconian restrictions on women's rights, encompassing prohibitions on public display of their bodies and faces and the curtailment of educational liberties. Under the Taliban regime, all forms of entertainment are rigorously prohibited, as they ostensibly contravene the conservative principles of Sharia Law (p. 13).

According to Rashid's account (1999), the tumultuous 1990s in Afghanistan were marked by a media ban, encompassing photography and television, which left the majority of the populace oblivious to the appearance of their newly instated leaders (p. 24).

Hatef and Cooke (2020) have propounded that a substantial segment of Afghanistan's populace lacks formal education. Consequently, television emerges as a more accessible and compelling medium for disseminating educational content vis-à-vis print media. The authors contend that television's wider reach holds the potential to furnish educational opportunities to a more extensive cross-section of Afghanistan's population.

In the aftermath of the 2001 triumph over the Taliban, Afghanistan underwent a transformative phase, metamorphosing into a nascent modern nation. An article from 2010 reveals that radio and television have become indispensable sources of entertainment for the Afghan people, with estimates suggesting that eight out of ten Afghans possess a radio and four out of ten possess a television (Auletta).

Amy Holdsworth's tome, *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*, delves into diverse forms of reflection that prove valuable in scrutinizing the interplay between television memory, the self, the family, domestic space, and the external world. Television, rather than being perceived as a mere object occupying a corner of the room, is seen as an integral facet of the domestic environment, engendering memories constructed from audiovisual impressions. It assumes a pivotal role in our comprehension of the past, and by attentively examining how it recollects and contextualizes its own history, we can discern prevailing attitudes towards television as a cultural phenomenon and towards our own historical identities. Nostalgia emerges as the dominant foundation through which television recollects and references itself.

Childhood Memories

In one of his interviews, Khaled Hosseini stated:

> I was watching a news story in the spring of 1999 on television, and this news story was about the Taliban. And it was talking about all the different impositions that the Taliban had placed on the Afghan people. And at some point along the line, it mentioned that they had banned the sport of kite flying, which kind of struck a personal chord for me, because as a boy I grew up in Kabul with all my cousins and friends flying kites. (RFE/RL)

Hosseini's literary voyage, kindled by the profound impact of televised news about Afghanistan, unveils television's powerful capacity to evoke long-lost childhood reminiscences. In his inaugural novel *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini artfully explores the characters' profound introspections as they retrace their past and establish emotional connections with their dear ones, catalyzed by the medium of television.

Set against the backdrop of a tumultuous Afghanistan marred by Russian invasions, the novel chronicles the poignant tale of Amir and his devoted friend and servant, Hassan. Amidst the harsh circumstances, Amir's father forges a path to America, taking Amir and leaving Hassan behind with aspirations for a brighter future. Years later, upon learning of Hassan's untimely demise, Amir embarks on a journey back to Afghanistan. Once there, he confronts his inner vulnerabilities and endeavors to rescue Hassan's son, all the while being engulfed by a wave of nostalgic recollections from his youth alongside his cherished companion, Hassan.

Permeated by poignant feelings, Amir's memories include his father's passion for soccer and his ritualistic pilgrimages to Tehran merely to witness "world cup games on television, since at the time Afghanistan didn't have TVs yet" (p. 19). This emotional reflection allows Amir to peer into the depths of his relationship with his father, unearthing a kaleidoscope of powerful emotions from that era of his life. The television, in its symbolic significance, serves as an emissary of memories intertwined with Hassan, epitomizing the profound bond that was their friendship.

The transformative era when Daoud Khan, Afghanistan's president from 1973 to 1978, heralded progress for the nation, notably with the advent of television, leaves an indelible mark on Amir's psyche. In contemplating the future acquisition of vividly colorful televisions, one each for himself and Hassan, Amir conveys his feeling of anticipation: "And not the black-and-white kind either. We'll probably be grown-ups by then, but I'll get us two. One for you and one for me." (p. 54). But fate's grim power thrusts the two kindred souls apart, ensnared in the perilous grip of their homeland's woes.

As destiny reunites Amir with Hassan's son, Sohrab, the melancholic sight of the young boy transfixed before the television, with "his green eyes, stone-faced, rocking back and forth," strikes an evocative chord within Amir's soul (p. 286). The television acts as a conduit, ferrying Amir back to the memories of his cherished camaraderie with Hassan and, concurrently, stirs within him the unfulfilled promises that linger as haunting echoes of his past.

Hosseini's eloquent portrayal of the interplay between television and memory weaves a tapestry of emotions, bridging the chasm between past and present, thereby underscoring the timeless human struggle for connection and redemption.

A Dreamland of Prosperity

Hosseini's literary works abound with allusions to American cinema, which constitutes an integral facet of the cultural milieu. In a particular recollection of Amir's, he divulges the denouement of *The Magnificent Seven* to a boy who inquired if he had viewed the film. This incident, transpiring at the video store, imparted a crucial lesson to Amir: in the United States, the disclosure of endings is deemed inappropriate, a divergence from Afghanistan's customs, where inquiries about denouements, particularly concerning the attainment of happiness and fulfillment of aspirations by characters, are commonplace. This preoccupation with happiness mirrors the yearnings harbored by the Afghan populace. Nonetheless, Amir, in the course of reminiscing, comes to the realization that life rarely adheres to cinematic conventions, particularly when confronted with the desolate and traumatized landscape of Afghanistan, as is illustrated in one of the chapters: "We passed the rusted skeleton of an overturned car, a TV set with no screen half-buried in rubble" (p. 232). These movies function as a conduit between South Asian nations such as Afghanistan, where the quest for happiness is fervent, and the Western world, where the United States embodies a land of affluence and the realization of dreams and desires. Despite America – his newfound home – having buried his childhood memories, the sight of the Pacific Ocean nearly moves Amir to tears, evoking recollections of his conversations with Hassan about visiting the beach and relishing the sensation of water beneath their feet, having hitherto only encountered "oceans on the movie screens" (p. 126).

It is noteworthy that Afghanistan, ensconced by mountains, is landlocked, rendering the experience of an awe-inspiring ocean view nearly unattainable. An article on thestar.com recounts the reminiscences of a man who lived under the Taliban's rule during his formative years, a period in which all forms of entertainment were strictly proscribed. Haris and his neighbor pooled their resources to acquire a pirated copy of the film *Titanic*, an expenditure amounting to "ten times as much as a night's rental" (Latifi). After a month of anticipation, they finally had Haris's home to themselves, where they watched the film. Haris shares an astonishing reaction to witnessing the majestic boat on-screen, stating, "I couldn't believe what I was seeing, they actually created a boat. I remember everyone was saying the actual boat was the size of Khair Khāna [a neighborhood in north west Kabul]" (Latifi). The allusion to the sea in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* emerges when Hosseini mentions that the movie Titanic encapsulates themes of "the sea. The luxury. The ship" (p. 296). Hosseini's portrayal not only accentuates the unattainable nature of beholding the sea, emblematic of vastness and freedom, luxury representing a life of abundance, and the ship as a means of escape, but also underscores the myriad challenges routinely faced by the impoverished Afghans.

The Making of an Identity

In his masterpiece *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini unfolds the poignant narrative of Laila, a modern and well-educated Afghan woman, whose life takes a tragic trajectory following the loss of her parents, the separation from her beloved Tariq, and her ensnarement in an abusive marriage with the elderly and brutal Rasheed, who is already wed to Mariam.

Initially, a sense of animosity prevails between Mariam and Laila, yet the shared subjugation they endure as women under the oppressive grasp of Rasheed forces an unlikely convergence, fostering a profound sisterhood between them. Throughout the novel, we bear witness to the relentless rule of the Taliban, their unremitting cruelty impelling the characters to seek liberation from their harrowing circumstances.

Remarkably, the medium of television assumes a prominent role in shaping the identities of the characters. Laila's affinity for television and cinema serves as a lens through which we observe the evolution of her character. Notably, the allure of cinema conjures reminiscences of Tariq, as well as recollections of her father, underscoring the intricate interplay of personal connections and familial heritage in the author's construal of the cultural significance of cinema.

Osman aptly expounds on the influence of television in Afghanistan, elucidating its dual function as both a mirror and an amplifier of the nation's essence. By enabling the Afghan populace to engage in self-observation and articulate their own imagery and representations, television assumes an integral role in shaping the nation's collective consciousness.

For Laila, her experiences and relationships with her loved ones profoundly color the memories and emotional associations she harbors with cinema. Beyond a mere source of entertainment, cinema assumes a deeply personal and culturally significant dimension for her, molding her sense of self and contributing to the construction of her individual identity.

Upon receiving the disconcerting news of the Taliban's cinema closures, Laila's mind drifts back to the days spent in her father's cinema park, where she fondly reminisces about the moments shared with Tariq, indulging in the captivating narratives of Hindi movies. These poignant tales of star-crossed lovers, torn asunder by the capricious whims of fate, one adrift in distant lands, the other ensnared in the shackles of forced matrimony, evoking tears and serenades amidst fields of marigolds, all resonate deeply with the somber realities of her own distressing life.

Despite the stark contrast between the illusory realm of cinematic dreams and the relentless hardships that mark her existence, these cherished movie memories serve as a consoling balm, an avenue of escapism for Laila, offering a glimmer of optimism and the promise of a brighter tomorrow amid the gloom. Ultimately, destiny intertwines their paths, and in the denouement, Laila finds solace in a long-awaited reunion with Tariq, reaffirming the enduring power of love and hope in the face of adversity.

Amidst the aura of a promising and idyllic reunion shared by Laila and Tariq, they soon confront a stark disparity between the realities they now face and the idealized portrayals found in the romantic films of yesteryears. Departing from each other has wrought profound changes, evident in the melancholic countenances they take on while witnessing President George W. Bush declaring war on the Taliban. In this poignant moment, Tariq's voice falters, and Laila senses the weight of his emotions threatening to manifest as tears.

Their agonizing struggle to reclaim the euphoria of cherished memories, despite their relentless troubles, underscores not only the transformations in the external world but also the profound metamorphoses within themselves. The televised declaration of war serves as an unwelcome trigger, casting Laila's thoughts back to the tragic fate her parents endured - a cruel demise at the hands of a rocket during the Afghan Civil War.

The declaration, too, serves as a poignant trigger, rekindling somber memories of Laila's brothers, Ahmad and Noor, who fell victims to the ravages of war. When Tariq ventures the notion that the conflict may not necessarily be adverse, it stirs a maelstrom of emotions within Laila, underscoring the intricate interplay of their perspectives.

Holdsworth astutely notes the potent influence of news and media events in constructing lasting imprints in our television memories, encapsulated by the dictum, "You'll remember where you were and who you were with the first time you saw them" (2011, p. 244). The profound impact of the war announcement in the novel leaves an indelible mark on both Laila and Tariq, forging memories that will forever be etched in their consciousness.

A parallel scenario emerges in *The Kite Runner*, where an adult Amir, while watching "the communist propaganda" and witnessing the unfolding of "the second war" on his television screen, is forever bound to those memories that linger like an enduring specter. The recollection of encountering the Taliban for the first time on the small screen, amid the allure of Afghanistan's landscape upon his return, demonstrates the enduring impression cast by televised imagery.

Hosseini's perspicacious delineation of the "Titanic fever" phenomenon in Afghanistan, triggered by the screening of the eponymous movie, serves as a captivating exploration of the profound sociocultural ramifications that media consumption had under the Taliban's rule. The surreptitious dissemination of pirated copies of the film, discreetly concealed even in the recesses of one's underclothing amidst the restrictive curfew, conjures a poignant tableau where spectators surreptitiously shed tears for the fateful protagonists, Jack, Rose, and the ill-fated passengers aboard the ill-fated vessel.

This shared encounter bestows upon the collective psyche an indelible memory, transcending the confines imposed by an oppressive regime. By partaking in this clandestine cinematic communion, the people of Afghanistan forge a poignant interconnection that defies the suppressive measures of authority and fosters a profound cultural resilience amidst adversity.

In Laila's psyche, the tale of Jack and Rose begets touching reminiscences of her own bygone romance with Tariq. She discerns striking resemblances between the tragic fate of Jack and that presumed to befall Tariq. Both figures, she firmly believes, have succumbed to an untimely demise. This realization profoundly contributes to her despondent state and a pervasive sense of despair, for she apprehends that neither Jack nor Tariq shall ever come to her rescue. As she succinctly proclaims, "Every soul seeks salvation in a Jack-like figure amidst catastrophe, but such a savior remains a mere chimera—Jack shall not return, for Jack is no more." (p. 297)

The scenario wherein Mariam and Laila's daughter, Aziza, engage in a theatrical representation inspired by the movie epitomizes their longing for escapism. Aziza, in a pronounced act of identification, assumes the persona of Jack, while Mariam takes on the role of Rose. When Mariam, in jest, remarks that Aziza shall perish young, while she herself will live to a ripe old age, Aziza resolutely counters that her demise shall be heroic akin to Jack's. And when Laila's son Zalmai queries which part he shall assume, Aziza audaciously assigns him the character of "the iceberg." (p. 296) This fervent aspiration to embody heroism, rather than subscribing to the conventional, subordinate female archetype of being rescued, especially amid the women's collective yearning for a Jack-like savior amidst Afghanistan's oppressive circumstances, unequivocally showcases Aziza's courage and nonconformist disposition. The scene, thus, accentuates her capacity to find solace and amusement amid the yoke of oppressive conditions, thereby enriching her individuality. Furthermore, this lighthearted enactment facilitates the forging of cherished memories amongst the trio.

For Mariam, Laila, and the children, *Titanic* assumes the role of an escapist medium, much like it does for other Afghans. Limited access to resources in Afghanistan often restricts their

possibilities, compelling them to immerse themselves in fantasies of a serene existence beyond their borders. However, television furnishes a window into the outside world, offering glimpses of life in other nations and imbuing them with a sanguine outlook towards their own existence. The power to immerse themselves in an alternate realm through television can prove to be a potent source of solace and inspiration for Afghans, providing a brief respite from their daily hardships and instilling in them the impetus to strive for a brighter future. Jaya Yadav aptly underscores the role of television as an escape from reality in Hosseini's works, noting that despite Afghanistan's stringent prohibitions against "illicit" materials, films, television sets, and VCRs were clandestinely smuggled, providing many Afghans a portal to escape their harsh actuality (p. 867).

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the American cartoon movie "Pinocchio" within the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* affords a perceptive lens through which to explore the intricacies of Mariam's character, establishing a profound metaphor for her profound sense of isolation and displacement. Much like Pinocchio, the anthropomorphic figure crafted from wood and imbued with life, Mariam emerges as a child of unwedded lineage, reared in destitution within a diminutive village, despite being the progeny of an affluent father. This milieu engenders a persistent sense of alienation and a recurrent disdain from the villagers, akin to Pinocchio's struggle to find his place within the human realm. Consequently, Mariam's longing for acceptance and affection becomes distinctly molded by this animated cinematic narrative.

Amidst the allegorical fabric lies Mariam's father's broken promise to attend the same film, an act that betrays his own deceitful nature, paralleling the gradual elongation of Pinocchio's nose with each falsehood he utters. This unfulfilled pledge serves as a potent symbol for her father's negligence and the estrangement that pervades their relationship, mirroring the detachment evident in Pinocchio's own familial dynamics. Both characters seem to perpetuate a profound feeling of disconnection, exacerbating their shared sense of isolation.

While Mariam's father belatedly acknowledges the harm inflicted upon his daughter through rejection and disavowal, the revelation comes too late to mend their fractured bond. An earnest effort to atone materializes in the form of a movie dispatched to Mariam, yet tragically, it never finds its way to her. This celluloid creation, an inextricable facet of Mariam's life, is unveiled as Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* during a pivotal scene where Laila endeavors to forge a connection with Mariam's past. Laila's persistent scrutiny of the film, alternating between playback and rewind, inadvertently illustrates the profound significance it holds in Mariam's existence. Alas, despite Laila's sincere endeavors, she attempts to fully grasp the movie's profound import in Mariam's psyche.

Ultimately, akin to the metamorphosis of Pinocchio, Mariam experiences a transformative realization of her intrinsic worth, ultimately embracing her authentic self in the denouement.

In the denouement of the novel, a particular American film, *Superman*, causes Zalmai's bemusement because of the curious notion that, in Afghanistan, a boy would be precluded from bearing the appellation "Clark" (p. 402). Shahzad (2011) delves into an intriguing examination of a respondent's post-television viewing experience, reminiscent of Zalmai's inquisitive nature, wherein the participant transcends a mere passive observer or impotent bystander of the encoded contextual tapestry. Rather, they actively exercise agency, making discerning choices and probing inquiries that pertain to the embedded messages within the representations (p. 383).

Conclusion

The utilization of television in Khaled Hosseini's literary works serves as a discerning portrayal of its role as a medium for evoking memories and bridging the cultural chasm between Afghanistan and the West. In *The Kite Runner*, the recollections of Amir's formative years with his companion, Hassan, become intertwined with the advent of television in Afghanistan. Additionally, references to American movies within the novel facilitate a connection between the two disparate cultures.

Similarly, in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, television plays a momentous role in shaping Laila's character, enabling her to forge connections with memories of her father, Babi, and Tariq. It serves as a reflective and amplifying lens for Afghanistan, allowing for introspection and communication of diverse representations. These novels exemplify how television has the potential to evoke intimate and cultural ties, even amidst the backdrop of calamitous circumstances.

Subsequent to the Taliban's invasion in 2021, the survival of media, particularly television, has been imperiled. Despite international efforts, the domestic television broadcasts have depicted how female journalists were initially mandated to conceal their faces, and eventually, they were altogether prohibited from appearing on screen. This jeopardizes the future and masks the heritage of Afghanistan, as opportunities for exposure to other cultures are once again constrained, impeding people's ability to connect with the outside world. The concerns extend beyond just the fate of women but also encompass the freedom of expression for all individuals through television.

Nevertheless, there have been instances of resolute defiance. Notably, a Kabul University Professor displayed a powerful act of protest by tearing up his diplomas on live television, signifying his disapproval of the deteriorating system under the new leadership. This demonstration not only underscores the influence of this medium but also emboldens people to resist the encroaching despondency. As he vociferously articulated, "From today, I don't need these diplomas anymore because this country is no place for an education. If my sister and my mother can't study, then I don't accept this education." (Bose, 2022)

The impact of television on Afghan society is complex, defying uniformity and predictability. Its effects are intricately woven with a multitude of factors, encompassing the political, economic, and cultural dimensions, necessitating future comprehensive analyses and scholarly investigations.

References

Auletta, K. (2010, June 28). The networker Afghanistan's first media mogul. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/07/05/the-networker-2

Bose, S. K. (2022, December 28). "If mother, sister can't...": Afghan professor tears up diplomas on TV. *NDTV*. https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/taliban-afghanistan-ban-on-women-education-if-mother-sister-cant-afghan-professor-tears-up-diplomas-on-tv-3643516

Hatef, A., & Cooke, T. R. (2020). Winning hearts and Mminds: A critical analysis of independent media development in Afghanistan. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 13*(2), 114–129. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2020.1740764

Holdsworth, A. (2011). *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hosseini, K. (2007). *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Bloomsbury.

Hosseini, K. (2003). *The Kite Runner*. Bloomsbury.

Latifi, A.M. (2022, December 17). How James Cameron's Titanic became an under-the-surface sensation in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. *The Toronto* Star. https://www.thestar.com/news /world/2022/12/16/how-james-camerons-titanic-became-an-under-the-surface-sensation-in-taliban-ruled-afghanistan.html

Osman, W. (2020). Television and the Afghan culture wars: Brought to you by foreigners, warlords, and activists. Urbana: University of Illinois.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (2012, June 21). 'Kite Runner' Author on his childhood, his writing, and the plight of afghan refugees. *RFE/RL*. https://www.rferl.org/a/interview-kite-runner-afghan-emigre-writer-khaled-hosseini/24621078.html

Rashid, A. (1999). The Taliban: Exporting extremism. *Foreign Affairs, 78*(6), 22–35. https://doi.org/10.2307/20049530

Rawan, S. M. (2002). Modern mass media and traditional communication in Afghanistan. *Political Communication, 19*(2),155–170. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584600252907425

Shahzad, F. (2011). Collective memories: A complex construction. *Memory Studies, 5*(4), 378º391. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1750698011419121

Yadav, J. (2019). Reading Lolita in Tehran and a thousand splendid suns: Through history, politics, gender. *International Journal of Advanced Research, 7*(10), 863–869. http://dx. doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/9901

Corresponding Author: Priya Meena
Email: priya1996meena@gmail.com

Historicising Foreign Powers' Intervention in the Nigeria–Biafra War (1967-1970)

Uwomano Okpevra
Delta State University, Nigeria

Abstract

The fratricidal war between Nigeria and Biafra ended some over five decades ago. But the lessons learned are not yet forgotten. This article attempts to historicise the role of foreign powers in the Nigeria–Biafra war of 1967-1970. Most scholars erroneously refer to the war as the Nigerian civil war, but historically it was a war fought by two "independent" countries – The Republic of Nigeria and Republic of Biafra, for *There was a Country*, as Achebe puts it (2012). Over the years the *raison d'etre* of foreign powers' intervention in the war has not been properly contextualized. This work, then, sets out to historicise and deconstruct the determinant factors and the role played by foreign intervention in the war. The article employs both primary and secondary data to achieve its objective and reveal the national interests and foreign policy objectives – as expressed in economic, strategic and political objectives – that were factors in the foreign powers' intervention. The fallout from the 1963 and 1964 general elections is a relevant initial cause of the Nigeria-Biafra war. The article intends to analyse and interpret the political thought processes that generated foreign intervention, and suggests that, should there be another implosion that leads to a repeat of 1967-1970, the foreign powers that politicians usually rely on for aid and assistance can be expected to respond in line with certain patterns of economic, strategic or political interest, to the detriment, needless to say, of the Nigerian people.

Keywords: Biafra, civil war, foreign powers, historicising, intervention, Nigeria

This work attempts to provide an assessment of the role of foreign powers in the Nigeria-Biafra War. It aims to expand the discussion on the respective roles of Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. In so doing, the work relies on a number of pertinent peripheral documents as well as primary sources. This broadens the bandwidth in the effort to advance critical arguments proposed herein.

An important text that scrutinizes foreign intrusion in the war is Chibuike U. Uche's "Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian civil war" (2008), gauging the true extent of the role that British oil interests played in the British government's decision to insist on a "One Nigeria" solution to the Nigeria/Biafra conflict. Chibuike uses newly available evidence, primarily from the Public Records Office (now the National Archive) in London. Although the British government's stated stance was that its major objective in the Nigerian conflict was to stop the division of the nation along tribal lines, the reality was more nuanced. British oil interests were more significant than is typically acknowledged in determining the British stance in the conflict. Britain at the time was desperate to maintain the flow of oil from Nigeria in order to lessen the effects of local oil shortages brought on by the Middle East Six Day War. To defend its interests, backing a "One Nigeria" approach was the best course of action – a flagrant pursuit of economic advantage through foreign policy.

I generally agree with the above thesis in several ways and, moreover, maintain that the foreign powers' rationale for intervening during the war has not been properly contextualized over the years. This work, therefore, sets out to re-examine and deconstruct the determinant factors and the role played by foreign interests. The work reveals that national interest and foreign policy objectives as expressed in their economic, strategic and political objectives, were the exclusive causes of foreign intervention in the Nigeria – Biafra war, 1967-1970.

Conflict situations have always been seen by foreign powers as an ideal opportunity to actively intervene in African States. The Nigeria – Biafra war, 1967-70, offered an opportunity for foreign powers to meddle in the internal affairs of Nigeria. The immediate reason given for interference was the inability of African States to manufacture weapons with which to maintain their internal security. Consequently, African states are forced to rely solely on foreign powers to arm themselves. In such a one-way relationship, the foreign powers seize the opportunity to further their own foreign policy objectives. It is the furtherance of these policy objectives that formed the core motive for involvement in the Nigerian – Biafra war (Ifidon & Orieso, 2004).

Politics of the International Arms Trade

During the war, Nigeria was caught in the vortex of international arms trade politics. Before the war, Nigeria was assured of normal arms supply. She was able to freely purchase arms from Britain, Switzerland, Belgium and the United States (Hansard, 1968). Because Nigerian governments did not feel threatened by weak neighbours at the nation's borders, Nigeria did not regularly update military supplies (Luckham, 1971). However, during the outbreak of hostilities in 1966, Nigerian leaders came face to face with the politics of the international arms trade. In international arms transactions, arms could be sold on cash or on credit or given out

freely to friendly countries (Stanley and Pearton, 1972). They could be given out freely to win political influence. In the international scene, arms and influence are greatly interwoven. Arms are used to exercise influence and, therefore, achieve a set of desired policy objectives. These desired goals might be economic, strategic or political. In order to further their interest, governments use various means in their diplomatic portfolio, including economic and military aid. In this regard, arms are a means for conducting "power politics" on the international landscape. In this game of power politics, arms are the most pungent aspect of the relationship between two nations. When a nation's weapons are examined, its ideological leaning can be gauged. In today's world, the arms trade is very serious business. Through it, arms exporting governments hope to achieve specific foreign policy objectives.

It was, therefore, not surprising that during the civil war, foreign powers were variously motivated to become involved in the conflict. National interest as articulated in their economic, strategic or political objectives, fashioned the character of their involvement. At the beginning of the war in 1967, Nigerian leaders had expected support from western countries, which they had regarded as the "traditional friends of Nigeria". But to their bitter disappointment, Nigerian leaders would soon learn that there were no true or permanent friends, but inconsistent scaffolding for shifting geopolitical structures, reminiscent of British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston's dictum that "we have no permanent allies, we have no permanent enemies, and we only have permanent interest (Benner and Pastor, 2015, 315). What Nigerian leaders failed to realise fully was that the decisions of the foreign powers were based solely on the dictates of their national interests. If the Nigerian Federal Military Government had its objectives in buying arms, those major arms suppliers also had their own objectives that did not necessarily synchronise with the Nigerian government's.

Britain's Role

Britain's initial role in the Nigeria-Biafra war was imprecise; this would become a source of souring bilateral relations. At the outbreak of hostilities, when Nigerian leaders approached Britain, its government hesitated and decided to "sit on the fence". Why was Britain, Nigeria's former colonial master and traditional arms supplier and friend, behaving this way? Most of the Nigerian leadership was mystified. But from all indications, the subsequent decision to support the Federal Military Government in Nigeria was in line with British official policy. Many British officials and politicians all held a view similar to that of Michael Stewart, then British Foreign Secretary, when he said, among other things, that

> This is something about which a newly-independent country must have some assurances. That meant that Britain was probably the only country in the world that could not, in fact or in honour, be neutral about this (Nigerian civil war). If we continued the supplies, it would be assumed that we supported the Nigerian Government. If we cut off supplies that they had reasonable grounds to expect, on the ground that they were fighting a rebellion, the inevitable conclusion must be that the rebellion was justified. (Stewart, Hansard UK Parliament column, 40)

Ultimately, it could not have been otherwise: Britain could not have remained neutral or abandon Nigeria to the Soviets, considering her strong economic interest in Nigeria and NATO's strategic interests in the South Atlantic. Neglect of its former colony was also complicated by the numerous political, cultural and military ties. Despite the fact that Nigerian leaders failed to ratify the Anglo-Nigeria defence pact (Wyss, 2016); (The Times (London) 20 August, 1968); (Idang, 1970); (Ojedokun, 1971) looking at the total arms supply into Nigeria in 1966, Britain supplied 37.75% of Nigeria's total arms imports. Also, during the same period, and despite Nigeria's increasing trade relations with other countries, the U.K. was still Nigeria's single largest trading partner. The United Kingdom's percentage share of Nigeria's external trade was 37.9% in 1966. In 1966, Nigeria's exports to the United Kingdom was 44.8% of her total exports while imports from U.K. stood at 38.3% (Hansand House of Commons Report of 28 October, 1968). By 1966, there were many large UK firms like Liver Brothers, Shell BP, U.A.C., Kingsway and John Holt, and over 20,000 United Kingdom citizens working and doing good business in Nigeria. Also at the cultural level, Nigeria's institutions, political, educational, legal and marriage systems had been largely patterned after Britain's. There were also many Nigerians studying and living in the United Kingdom.

Regarding all these factors that bind the United Kingdom and Nigeria, it was quite incomprehensible to the Nigerian leadership why the British government was hesitant and equivocal in its support for the Federal Military Government at the beginning of the war. From the very beginning, it was known that a section of the British press was against the war and had called on the British government to intervene to stop the impending blood bath (Cronje, 1972). Also, some British members of Parliament were against the war. In a parliamentary debate, members of both benches had voted against traditional British government policy of support for the Nigerian Federal Military government. Nevertheless, despite these various oppositions, the British government had, after being "pushed off the fence", persisted in its support for Nigeria during the remaining period of the war.

There were several reasons which the British government claimed as motivation to ultimately support the Federal Military Government. One of these claims is that Nigeria was a commonwealth country facing a secessionist revolt (Ifidon and Orieso, 2004). Another claim was based on the fact that Britain was Nigeria's traditional arms supplier and that to stop such supply at the moment of Nigeria's need would be an injustice and a disservice, and that such an action would act as an incentive to secessionist tendencies in other "tribes" in Africa. Another motivation was based on the assumption that supplying arms to Nigeria would enable the British government to enforce caution and moderation on Nigeria (Northedge, 1976).

The question one is tempted to ask is, how is it possible that the British government did not have these reasons at hand at the start of the war? Secondly, during the war, was the British government really able to leverage the arms supply to enforce restraint on the Federal government? In fact, these stated reasons did not influence the British government's decision to supply arms to Nigeria. The motives for supplying Nigeria were based on well calculated and enlightened self-interest. The British policy of prevarication was coldly calculated. To the Nigerians, the British attitude was nebulous and surprising. But "Perfidious Albion" knew her

game well. Britain was playing a game of wait and see. In other words, she wanted to see who could control the oil fields, the Federal Military Government or Biafra. The Federal Military Government's decision to make overtures to the Soviets may have pushed Britain "off the fence" (Ifidon and Orieso, 2004). The prospect of the Soviets replacing them in Nigeria was not very palatable to the Britons.

The Economic Motivation

Britain

Strategic and economic issues related to Nigeria were high stakes to the British, just as they are now in the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war. NATO strategic interests were very important and were taken into consideration when reaching the decision to arm the Nigerian Federal Military Government, but to the British, economic interest was an even higher priority. The conjunction of NATO strategic interest and British economic interest only made arming the Nigerian Federal Army even more convenient for the British. The British economy's performance in the mid-1960s was not receiving accolades. The state was experiencing a period of serious economic downturn. In 1967, Prime Minister Harold Wilson devalued the Pound from \$2.80 to \$2.40, a devaluation of 14%. There were continuous balance of payment problems resulting from this devaluation (Brett, 2017), (Bennett, 2017). In the industrial and labour sectors, the panorama was not better. There was a high rate of inflation, high unemployment and very frequent industrial labour lockouts and strikes.

These economic problems were further complicated by the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, during which the Egyptians closed the Suez Canal to shipping. This closure badly affected British Merchant Shipping, which had to undertake the longer route from the Indian Ocean round the Cape of Good Hope and into the Atlantic to reach Britain. This was costly to the shipping business. Again, when Harold Wilson's administration announced its policy of withdrawal from the Eastern Mediterranean (Roucek, 1968), there were fears about Britain's ability to protect her eastern oil supply line. Records show that British oil supply from the Persian Gulf area was huge, as it amounted to 54.1% of her total oil imports (Roucek, 1968). In the event of an eventual withdrawal policy being put into effect, it was speculated that British oil interest would be adversely affected. Moreover, Libya, Britain's second largest oil supplier, was categorically unreliable, (Samantha, 2017) as its political environment was volatile. Alternatively, Venezuela's oil supply to Britain might be increased, but the South American country was too far and not within the Sterling zone. There was not much allure for Britain there. Therefore, even though Nigeria in 1966 supplied Britain with only 1.9% (Cronje, 1972) of its oil imports, the world situation had started to make British policy makers look to Nigeria to supply Britain with about 25% of her oil needs in the future (The Sunday Times, 24 January 1971).

From every perspective, the importance of oil scored high in British calculations on whether to supply Nigeria with arms. The influential British newspaper *The Economist*, while commenting on the civil war, expressed it quite clearly when it affirmed that in the Nigeria

crisis, "oil will decide". This could be interpreted to mean that whatever Nigerian combatant that was in control of the oil fields would have British support. Federal government troops captured all the oil fields and received British support.

As A. B. Akinyemi (1972) amply demonstrates, the Harold Wilson administration also considered oil in Nigeria a fundamental issue, its safeguard a priority. Naturally, this successful exploitation was being carried out by British Firms, toiling to meet the 25% of total oil imports from Nigeria proposed by the government. In fact, by 1969 the British had invested the sum of ₦700 million in Nigerian oil production (De St Jorre, 1972).

With such strong financial, oil and economic interests, Britain could not abandon Nigeria and allow the Soviets to interfere in its vital interests. As mentioned earlier, the British policy of not hurriedly supplying the Federal Military Government with enough arms at the early stages of the war was based on a strategy of "wait and see". It was imperative to be able to deal with whomever controlled the oil fields. Also, British economic interest in Nigeria synchronised with NATO needs. In fact, the NATO allies would have been most uncomfortable if the Soviets had been allowed to replace the British in Nigeria. Having the Soviets in Nigeria with a strong foothold in the Atlantic could be disastrous. To the British, Nigeria should be safe within NATO's sphere of influence, but the fear of a "red" Nigeria was strong among some Western officials. Both Nigerian and British officials agree that Nigeria's turning to the Soviets for arms may have helped push Britain "off the fence" (see Stent, 1973)

Fresh evidence that emerged fifty years after the end of the Nigeria – Biafra war points to the fact that the British government declared total support for Nigeria, which made her a collaborator and not a mediator. According to Forsyth,

> It is a good thing to be proud of one's country, and I am – most of the time. But it would be impossible to scan the centuries of Britain's history without coming across a few incidents that evoke not pride but shame… The northern and western regions of Nigeria were swept by a pogrom in which thousands of Igbo were slaughtered. But there is one truly disgusting policy practised by our officialdom during the lifetime of anyone over 50, and one word will suffice: Biafra. This referred to the civil war in Nigeria that ended 50 years ago this month… London, ignoring all evidence that it was Lagos that reneged on the deal, BRITAIN denounced the secession, and made no attempt to mediate, the British Government declared total support for Nigeria (Forsyth, 2020)

In his account, Forsyth maintains that the British government was an accomplice in the war. In the article that he titled "Buried for 50 years: Britain's shameful role in the Biafran war", he elaborates:

> I arrived in the Biafra capital of Enugu on the third day of the war. In London I had been copiously briefed by Gerald Watrous, head of the BBC's West Africa Service. What I did not know was that he was the obedient servant of the government's Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), which believed every word of its high

commissioner in Lagos, David Hunt. It took two days in Enugu to realise that everything I had been told was utter garbage. I had been briefed that the brilliant Nigerian army would suppress the rebellion in two weeks, four at the most. Fortunately, the deputy high commissioner in Enugu, Jim Parker, told me what was really happening. It became clear that the rubbish believed by the CRO and the BBC stemmed from our high commissioner in Lagos. A racist and a snob, Hunt expected Africans to leap to attention when he entered the room – which [Yakubu] Gowon did. At their single prewar meeting [Chukwuemeka "Emeka" Odumegwu] Ojukwu did not. Hunt loathed him at once (Forsyth, 2020)

The above suggests that the British position aside economic and strategic interest had a somewhat imperialistic hatred for the Biafran leader (Ojukwu) because of his refusal to kowtow. The Nigerian leader (Gowon) apparently had no issue with grovelling. Essentially, Forsyth was able to expose the British role in the war when he further posits:

On a visit to London in spring 1969 I learned the efforts the British establishment will take to cover up its tracks. Every reporter, peer or parliamentarian who had visited Biafra and reported on what he had seen was smeared as a stooge of Biafra – even the utterly honourable John Hunt, leader of the Everest expedition…. What is truly shameful is that this was not done by savages but aided and assisted at every stage by Oxbridge-educated British mandarins. Why? Did they love the corruption-riven, dictator-prone Nigeria? No. From start to finish, it was to cover up that the UK's assessment of the Nigerian situation was an enormous judgmental screw-up. And, worse: with neutrality and diplomacy from London it could all have been avoided. Biafra is little discussed in the UK these days – a conflict overshadowed geopolitically by the Vietnam War, which raged at the same time. Yet the sheer nastiness of the British establishment during those three years remains a source of deep shame that we should never forget.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the role Britain played in the Nigerian – Biafra war was pernicious.

France

France's attitude during the civil war was not forthright either. The French were very ambivalent, and their stance is analysed by Ibe and Okpalaeke. According to Lambert Ibe and Patrick Okpalaeke (2020), the 13 February 1960 French nuclear experiments in the Algerian Sahara region, which had an explosive force of 70 kilotons, were a significant cause of hostility between France and Nigeria, the only African nation to sever diplomatic ties with France in protest. Another source of concern was French support for Biafra, albeit throughout the war France did not recognise the Biafran government of Colonel Ojukwu. But French actions were openly hostile to the Federal Government's efforts at winning the war. The Federal Government of Nigeria had on several occasions complained of French actions (Uwechue, 1971). Throughout the war the French government allowed rebel agents to buy arms in the open

market in France (Stanley and Pearton, 1972) and mount a propaganda campaign against the Nigerian federal government.

On the diplomatic front, it was reported that France actively encouraged her former colonies, Gabon and Ivory Coast, to give diplomatic recognition to Biafra. The French Government itself was said to have been advised against recognising the rebel Biafran government by the Ivory Coast government (Cronje, 1972). The French also persuaded their colonies to allow their territories to be used as a base for supplying arms to Biafra. Public opinion and the Press in France were generally hostile to the Federal Military Government, and to many in France, the war was painted as a religious war, in which the dominant Muslim North wanted to liquidate the minority but energetic Catholic east. This assertion and its narrative are well corroborated by Nwobosi and Ikeazor (2021).

There remains the question of French motives during the civil war in Nigeria. Many people generally believe that France's support for Biafra has been generated by her oil interest in Nigeria. French oil company SAFRAP was already exploring and prospecting for oil in Nigeria (Stanley and Pearton, 1972). It may be that, where oil id concerned, France preferred to deal with a smaller, more compliant entity like Biafra than with the larger Nigeria. But the oil issue cannot be referred to as the sole reason for France's support of Biafra: the French did not declare backing for the rebels in 1967, a time when all the French SAFRAP oil fields were in the Biafran enclave.

In fact, the French started to be vocal in their support for Biafra in July of 1968, when the SAFRAP oil fields at Obagi, Upomani and Obodo were no longer under the control of the rebels (Stanley and Pearton, 1972), having been captured by federal forces. This begs the question: why did the French government not declare support for the rebels at the outset of the war (ostensibly on the grounds of the principles of self-determination)? It certainly was to be expected, given the French government's interest in its oil assets (Ibe and Okpalaeke, 2020). Early support for Biafra would have been based on the UN General Assembly resolution of 1960, "[r]eaffirming also the importance of the universal realisation of the right of peoples to self-determination, national sovereignty and territorial integrity and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples as imperatives for the full enjoyment of all human rights", (U.N. Resolution 45/130, 1960).

Remarkably, France declared its support of Biafra after the Biafrans had lost the Midwest and most of the Rivers States, an area responsible for nearly all of Nigeria's oil production. Moreover, because of its colonial history, France is not known for supporting Rebels in Africa on the principles of self-determination. So French support for Biafra must be traced to other factors that have not been seriously entertained. These factors, nevertheless, account prominently for the rather nebulous character of French interference in Nigeria's internal affairs. In fact, France's attitude during the war cannot be explained in simple terms.

French support for Biafra might have been prompted by the apoplectic relationship between Nigeria and France since Nigeria's independence, even though the two countries had

diplomatic and trade relations. There are strategic reasons for their problematic association. France's colonial African empire abutted Nigeria, and it is very possible that the French saw in a large, united Nigeria a potential threat to its colonies' (and ex-colonies') stability, and therefore, to its interests. The Nigerian government was aware of the unstated French animosity. Thus in 1961, when the French performed their atomic bomb tests in the Sahara, Nigeria hurriedly – and quite surprisingly – broke off diplomatic relations with France (Kulski, 1966) and (Ibe and Okpalaeke, 2020). Under Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's relations with France were not blissful. The dismemberment of Nigeria would have been a welcome prospect to the French, but France failed to act decisively to secure her objectives, despite the reported 15-million-dollar loan that the De Gaulle government gave to Biafra (Uwechue, 1971).

Another assumption to explain French support for Biafra is the Anglo-French rivalry. This rivalry was particularly tense during De Gaulle's presidency. Because the British supported the Federal Military Government, the French would inevitably back the other party, despite what this support might cost France. De Gaulle's view of French grandeur (Cronje, 1972) was a substantial integer in French calculations. The statement credited to Charles De Gaulle that "[t]here is no corner of the earth, where, at a given time, men do not look to us and ask what France has to say. It is a great responsibility to be France, the humanising power par excellence" (Gordon, 1993, p. 15). This attitude explains much of French political thought regarding the Nigeria - Biafra war. France needed to be involved because its government wanted to have a say in the event of a negotiated settlement. Britain and the Soviet Union were already involved.

It is also argued that French officials saw the war as an African affair and wanted to keep out of it. (Griffin, 2015). Recognizing Biafra would have meant that only France, out of the great powers, would have done so. France did not want to step over any red lines. That is why it is difficult to see French real motives in her half-hearted support for the Rebels. If France had economic motives she did not come out strongly to back up her interests. It was not in the material interest of France to go all out and give diplomatic recognition to Biafra. In the French national interest, all she could do was to make her presence felt in case of an eventual negotiated settlement materializing. Apart from this contention, one would tend to agree with the view that "French support for the 'Biafra' was footed in the personality of General De. Charles Gaulle and his view of France's role in the world" (Martin, 2006).

The Soviet Union

The Soviet position in the civil war was clearer and more straightforward. Its role was direct and decisive. In a letter to General Gowon, USSR Premier Alexei Kosygin expressed support and understanding for the Nigerian stand in the war (Ifidon and Orieso, 2004). For Kosygin, intervention in the Nigeria–Biafra war was a golden opportunity to consolidate the rising influence of the Soviet Union by offering protection from imperialist machination–a baseless and quite histrionic altruism on the Soviet leader's part, but good for Third World consumption.

The Soviets had minimum contact with the Balewa government, which saw Communism as a cancer that should be prevented by all means from entering Nigeria. Because of such a posture,

Nigeria did not establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union until 1962, and the Soviet embassy Staff was "deliberately kept to ten" (Ezirim, 2010). It was only in 1963 that Nigeria signed a trade agreement with the Soviet Union, with Nigeria's imports from the Soviet Union amounting to N 10,420 and exports to the Soviet Union N 511,562 in 1966 (Ifidon and Orieso, 2004). There were no military ties or arms trade between the two countries.

The Soviets' international image did not endear them to Nigerian leaders, who saw the Soviets as aggressive and anti-democratic. Nigerians were also mindful of Soviet assistance to the Kwilu and Simba rebels during the Congo Crisis (1960-1965). Therefore, with little or no influence in Nigeria, the Soviets were very cautious in getting involved in the conflict. When Nigerian leaders decided to approach the Soviet Union for arms, Soviet leadership took many factors into consideration in reaching a decision to supply Nigeria with weapons. Firstly, the British government had refused to give Nigeria weapons, especially air power material. Secondly, the United States had already declared its neutrality, so another factor to consider was potentially creating an arms race in Nigeria with Britain and the United States on the opposing side. Thirdly, and on a positive note, the African States through OAU were already pro-Federal Nigeria and, therefore, there was no fear of receiving hostile reactions from African states if the U.S.S.R. decided to arm the Federal Government (Nwobi, 2021). Additionally, there were many in Gowon's war Cabinet who favoured Nigeria approaching the Soviet Union for arms. Acquiescing to their request, the Soviets hoped, would ensure their friendship with the higher echelons of power in Nigeria.

The Soviet decision to support and arm the Federal Military Government was based on cold political logic. The motives were both calculating and rational, and the decision was based on enlightened self-interest. Although the Soviet Union was to rationalise its actions by whitewashing those motives, those actions were evidently based on pure political, economic, diplomatic and strategic calculations. The Nigeria-Biafra war was a means of achieving the long-time dream of establishing an influence in Nigeria, the largest and most populous Black Country in the world. But Soviet officials justified their support of the Federal Government by concealing unpleasant facts about their strategic interests. Thus, they framed it 1- as a humanitarian gesture to help a third world country; 2- as assistance to help Nigeria to achieve unity and prevent the partition of the country, and 3- they wished to help Nigeria "strengthen her political and economic independence" (Steven, 1976).

Despite these reasons, what are the benefits that the Soviets hoped to gain from such help? There were several. The late 1960's was not a politically favourable time for the Soviets in Africa. In 1966 the Soviets had lost two associates: A coup in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana realigned the country's political associations away from the Eastern Block, and Sekou Toure's Guinea was becoming ever more unstable (Aluko, 1977). In the eastern part of the continent, Soviet rival China was actively constructing the Tanzanian railway line and making political friends, to the understandable chagrin of the Soviets. In Egypt the Soviets were being chastised by Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian being unhappy over the outcome of the Six-Day War. The Soviets seemed to have no true friend in Africa at this moment, a low ebb for Soviet African policy. Thus, the Soviets calculated that if Nigeria could be won over to their side it would

constitute a master stroke for Soviet foreign policy in Africa, largely counterbalancing the loss of Ghana and Guinea. In fact, in their hurry to make good their catch, the Soviets quickly requested permission to establish consulates in all twelve Nigerian states.

Strategically, since the 1960s the Soviet Union has developed a global policy of competing with the west for influence in Black Africa. The Soviet Union's approach was one of challenging Western monopoly and achieving a position of significant influence (Ogunbadejo, 1976). Therefore, to have Nigeria in their orbit would have been a significant step towards achieving the Soviets' African strategic plan and a blow to the NATO monopoly from Cape Verde to South Africa. Nigerian ports could also offer facilities to Soviet naval vessels. In 1967, Soviet ships paid a goodwill visit to Nigerian ports. This was the first time that the Soviets had access to ports in the South Atlantic.

Economically, the Soviets had their eyes on the Nigerian market, but trade relations with Nigeria were negligible before the civil war. Soviet leaders were well aware of Nigeria's growing market, perhaps the largest in Africa. Automobile exports to Nigeria, for example, would prove beneficial to the Soviet economy, while cocoa, which had stopped coming from Ghana, would again be available in the U.S.S.R. Sundry areas in which they could co-operate with Nigeria were identified, so in November 1968 a technical, economic, and cultural agreement was signed between the two states. According to this agreement, the Soviet Union agreed to build an Iron and Steel Mill in Nigeria and to finance it to the tune of N120 million (Nigeria Trade Summary, 1976). The Soviet Avtocks port acquired an 80% share of the West African Automobile and Technical Company (Ogunbadejo, 1976). However, the economic benefits accrued to the Soviets during and after that period have been relatively immaterial, although "by 1969 trade had reached N 14.3 million" (Ogunbadejo, 1988, p. 91).

The most important motivating factor for Soviet support for the Federal Government does not appear to be economic. Soviet calculation seems to have been based upon political and strategic interest. Ideological factors scored very low in the transactions between Nigeria and the Soviet Union. Nigeria was likely anticipated as an effective political reply to China' successes in Africa. Although it is ironic that the Soviet and British governments decided to arm the same Federal Military Government, they had different reasons for doing so. To the Soviet Union, a united and strong Nigeria in the Soviet orbit would be a good ally. A friendly Nigeria, the Soviets believed, could be an asset in wining some support from African States in the United Nations. A strong Nigeria was seen as a future leader of Africa and a powerful voice in the O.A.U. Moreover, O.A.U. support through Nigeria would be invaluable to the Soviet Union in its conflicts with the West (Hutchinson, 1975).

Conclusion

The role of foreign powers in the Nigeria-Biafra war was imprecise and variegated. Were they mediators or collaborators? The immediate reason for interference was the inability of African states to manufacture weapons with which to maintain their internal security. Consequently, the combatants – Nigeria and Biafra – were forced to rely solely on foreign powers to arm

them. In such a one-way relationship of dependence, the foreign powers seized the opportunity to further their own foreign policy objectives. It is the furtherance of these policy objectives that formed the core motive for their involvement in the war. They were never mediators; they were collaborators.

Clare Daly, speaking on the "The EU's strategic relationship and partnership with the Horn of Africa (debate)" described European relationship with Africa thus:

> What we call our 'strategic relationship' isn't about human flourishing; it's about the EU's ambitions as a superpower. There's now a new great game in the Horn of Africa. Greater and lesser powers are pockmarking the place with military bases: France, the US, China, Germany, Japan, Italy, (and) Saudi Arabia all have a presence in the tiny area of Djibouti alone. Mercenaries are swarming in from all quarters. The entire region is being militarised. War is in the air… We talk about instability, but we only make it worse. We flood the place with weapons, hand over the profits to European arms companies, and charge the bill to our citizens. And then with the carnage, we go back in and we do it all again. It's a racket! 'Strategic relationship'? It's one thing after another, isn't it? Really, it's the same as it ever was. And all I can say is, God save Africa from Europeans offering help. (Daly, 2022)

Fifty-three years after the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war, the broader issues that led to the war in the first place are still left unattended. The international community is patiently waiting, akin to proverbial vultures, ready to swing into action whenever the carcasses show up, driven by the self-interest that guides their foreign policy objectives.

References

Akinyemi, A. B. (1972). The British press and the Nigerian Civil War. *African Affairs, 71*(285), 408–426. http://www.jstor.org/stable/720847

Aaronson, M. (2013). The Nigerian Civil War and "humanitarian intervention." In B. Everill & J. Kaplan (Eds.), *The History and Practice of Humanitarian Intervention and Aid in Africa* (pp. 176–196). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137270023_9

Achebe, C. (2012). There was a country: A personal history of Biafra. Penguin Books.

Aluko, O. (Ed.). (1977). *The Foreign Policies of African States*. Hodders and Stoughton.

Benner, C., & Pastor, M. (2015). Collaboration, conflict, and community building at the regional scale: Implications for advocacy planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 35*(3), 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X15580024.

Bennett, G. (2017, November 17). What's the context? 18 November 1967: Devaluation of Sterling. *Gov.UK*. https://history.blog.gov.uk/2017/11/17/whats-the-context-18-november-1967-devaluation-of-sterling/Cronje, S. (1972). *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafra War 1967 – 70*. Sidgwick and Jackson.

Daly, C. (2022, October 4). The EU's strategic relationship and partnership with the Horn of Africa. *European Parliament*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-INT-2-456-0000_EN.html

De St. Jorre, J. (1972). *The Nigerian Civil War*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Brett, D. (2017). Pound devaluation: how the lessons of 1967 apply today. *Schroders*. https://www.schroders.com/nl/nl/particulieren/nieuws-marktinformatie/markets/pound-devaluation-how-the-lessons-of-1967-apply-today/

Daoudi, M. S., & Dajani, M. S. (1984). The 1967 Oil Embargo revisited. *Journal of Palestine Studies 13*(2), 65–90. https://doi.org/10.2307/2536897.

Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 59, No. 1428. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v01/d315

Ezirim, G. E. (2010, May). Fifty years of Nigeria's foreign policy: A critical review. *Research Gate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268575383_Fifty_Years_of_Nigeria's_Foreign_Policy_A_Critical_Review

Forsyth, F. (2020, January 21). Buried for 50 years: Britain's shameful role in the Biafran war. *The Guardian: International Edition*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/buried-50-years-britain-shameful-role-biafran-war-frederick-forsyth

Gordon, H. P. (1993). *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy.* Princeton University Press.

Griffin, C. (2015) French military policy in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2*(1), 114-135. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592318.2014.959766

Gross, S. (2017). The 1967 War and the "oil weapon" *Brookings Institution*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/05/the-1967-war-and-the-oil-weapon/

Hansard. House of Commons Report of 24 October, 1968. *UK Parliament.* https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/sittings/1968/oct/24

Hansard. House of Commons debate of 30 June 1969. *UK Parliament.* https://hansard.parliament.uk/ Commons/1969-06-30/debates/17612d2a-b1e1-436b-8200-bcf4bd44945e/Nigeria

Hansard. House of Lords official Report, 20 June 1976. *UK Parliament.* https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1976-06-20

Holden, D. (n.d.) Britain's Arabian oil empire: Its rise and fall. *The British Empire.* https://www.britishempire. co.uk/maproom/britainsarabianoilempire.htm

Hutchison, A. (1975). *China's African Revolution*. Cambridge University Press.

Ibe, L., & Okpalaeke, P. (2020). International dimensions of the Nigerian Civil War (1967 - 70): A Deconstruction of France's Involvement. *Africa Update 27*(3). https://www2.ccsu.edu/africaupdate/?article=492

Idang, G. J. (1970). The politics of Nigerian foreign policy: The ratification and renunciation of the Anglo-Nigerian defence agreement. *African Studies Review 13*(2). 227–251. https://doi.org/10.2307/523471

Ifidon, E. A., & Orieso, M. A. (2004). Anglo – Soviet arms supply and the struggle for influence in Nigeria, 1967-1969. *African Studies Review 3*, 25–52.

Institute of Army Education. (1977, January). Nigeria's Foreign Policy, 1960-1976. *Nigerian Army Information Brief, 4*(1), n.p.

Kulski, W. W. (1966). *De Gaulle and the world: The foreign policy of the Fifth French Republic*. Syracuse University Press.

Luckham, R. (1971). *Nigerian military: A sociological analysis of authority and revolt, 1960-67*. Cambridge, 1971.

Martin, G. J. (2006). *Untying the Gaullian Knot: France and the struggle to overcome the Cold War Order, 1963–1968*. [Doctoral dissertation, London School of Economics]. https://etheses.Ise.ac.uk/1920/1/U221606.pdf.

Nigeria Trade Summary. (1966). Federal Chief Statistician. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/ elibrary/read/1241297

Nigeria Trade Summary. (1976). Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng /elibrary/read/1241297

Nigeria Trade Summary. (1963, 1964, 1965). Federal Chief Statistician. https://nigerianstat. gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241297

Nonthedge, F. S. (1976). *The International political system*. Faber and Faber.

Nwobi, O.I. (2021). *The Nigeria-Biafra War, OAU and the politics of diplomatic recognition of Biafra, 1967-1970*. Exceller Books.

Nwobosi, N. E, & Ikeazor, C. (1966). *The dark truth – An insider's account of Nigeria's first military coup. (A Soldier's Story)*. Anchor Books.

Ojedokun, O. (1971). The Anglo-Nigerian Entente and its demise, 1960–1962. *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, 9*(3), 210-233. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662047108447150

Ogunbadejo O. (1976, January). Nigeria and the great powers; The impact of the Civil War on Nigeria's foreign relations. *African Affairs 75*(298), 14–32. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a096696

Ogunbadejo, O. (1988, January) Nigerian Soviet relations, 1960-1987. *African Affairs 87*(346), 83–104. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a098014

Roucek, S. J. (1968, June) Britain's retreat from Aden and East of Suez. *The politician 33*(2), 413–426. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43209559

Stanley, J. and Pearton, M. (1972). *The International Trade in Arms*. Praeger.

Stent, A. (1973). The Soviet Union and the Nigerian Civil War: A Triumph of Realism. *A Journal of Opinion 3*(2), 43-48.

Steven, C. (1976). *The Soviet Union and Black Africa*. The Macmillan Press.

Sunday Times, London. (1971, January 24). *The Times Archive*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk › archive

Times of London. (20 August, 1968). *The Times Archive*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk › archive

Uche, C.U. (2008, March). Oil, British interests and the Nigerian Civil War. *The Journal of African History 49*(1), 111–135. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853708003393

U.N. Resolution 45/130. (1960). Right of peoples to self-determination/Struggle by all available means. *United Nations*. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-184801/

Uwechue, R., 'Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War, Jeune Afrique 1971. Revised edition.

Corresponding Author: Uwomano Okpevra
Email: ubokpevra@gmail.com

Impact of Broken Homes on Children's Psychology in Indian Writing in English

Priyanka Singla
Government College for Women, India

Abstract

Indian Writing in English has emerged as a significant genre of literature, reflecting the complexities of Indian society and culture. One significant theme explored in this genre is the impact of broken homes on child psychology. Indian Writing in English has been successful in portraying the devastating effects of broken homes on children. This paper will discuss the importance of the portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology in Indian Writing in English. The portrayal provides an insightful view of the psychological and emotional challenges faced by children living in such situations. In contemporary Indian society, divorce and breakups are still considered taboo subjects, and children of such homes are often stigmatized. However, Indian English literature provides a platform for these stories to be told, giving a voice to the silent victims of such circumstances. Its portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology brings forward the notion of resilience and hope in children amid adversity. The books depict the children's struggles to cope with the separation of their parents, to adapt to new family dynamics, and find their identities. The character development and struggles of such children can be particularly inspiring to readers who have faced similar situations.

Keywords: broken homes, child psychology, Indian writing in English, loss of identity, social stigma

Indian English literature has been successful in bridging the gap between cultures, ideologies, and people. These books serve as mediators, helping readers understand and empathize with the complexity of family dynamics in a changing society. They give readers an idea of what it is like to experience such upheavals and how it shapes one's personality. Additionally, the portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology in Indian Writing in English highlights the importance of mental health and counselling for children going through such situations. Literature has the power to inform and educate, and such books play a critical role in raising awareness about the mental health challenges of children living in such circumstances. By discussing the psychological impacts of broken homes in their novels, writers have made it possible to start a meaningful conversation about mental health and counselling for children. These books provide readers with insights into the psychological and emotional challenges children face in such situations, inspire readers, build empathy and educate readers. By shedding light on these critical issues, Indian English literature can help society understand the importance of providing care and support to children in broken homes. Thus, the portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology is essential in Indian Writing in English.

Two States: The Story of My Marriage

Chetan Bhagat's novel, *Two States: The Story of My Marriage*, depicts the tumultuous relationship between Krish, a Punjabi boy and Ananya, a Tamilian girl, who not only face opposition from their respective families due to cultural differences, but also navigate their complex personal histories. Krish is haunted by his parent's acrimonious divorce, which has left a deep scar on him. His estranged mother's absence and his father's animosity towards her and women, in general, have severely impacted Krish's views on relationships and women. He views women as problematic, disloyal, and untrustworthy, leading him to question his relationship with Ananya. The impact of a broken family on Krish's psychology is evident when he is unable to commit fully to Ananya, even though they are deeply in love. Krish's hesitation stems from his fear of repeating his parent's mistakes and being left heartbroken and alone. The fear of abandonment has made him sceptical of long-term relationships and commitment, which further exacerbates his low self-esteem and self-doubt.

Krish's father's views on women are also part of his psychological makeup. His father's views and the way he brings Krish up leave a lasting impact on Krish's psyche. Krish's father often insists on his viewpoint and denigrates Krish's opinion. This leads to a power imbalance and a sense of frustration at Krish's inability to express his own opinion. Moreover, the toxic behavior of Krish's father towards his mother has led Krish to view women in a negative light. The novel portrays the psychological impact of broken homes on children, as seen in Krish's character. The trauma of separation, the absence of a parent, and the negative influence of the remaining parent can leave a profound impact on a child's psychology, leading to fear, self-doubt, and mistrust. *Two States* highlights the extent to which a broken home can impact a child's psychology. The novel portrays Krish's fear of commitment due to his parent's divorce, his father's negative views on women, and his sense of frustration about expressing his own opinion in a male-dominated patriarchal society. Children who go through such upheavals often

struggle to form healthy relationships and maintain healthy self-esteem. Therefore, providing a supportive and nurturing environment is crucial for the psychological development of a child. Parents should strive to minimize conflicts and provide a stable and secure living environment for their children, which can help them navigate their lives with a positive outlook.

Difficult Daughters

The novel *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur poignantly depicts this theme in the character of Virmati who is raised by her mother and grandfather, the only male presence in her household. Due to the absence of her father, Virmati develops a low opinion of herself, feeling that she is not equal to her male peers. Her sense of worthlessness is entrenched even further as her grandfather does not think highly of women and considers them inferior to men. Moreover, Virmati's fear and sense of vulnerability are heightened when she is sent away to an all-girls' college in Amritsar. Due to her lack of male guidance and support, Virmati finds it difficult to adapt to her new environment and develop a sense of belonging. The other girls in the college, who come from wealthy families and have loving fathers, have a different attitude towards life, which Virmati finds difficult to relate to. The theme of low self-esteem and fear due to a broken home is also addressed in Chetan Bhagat's novel which deals with the relationship between Krish, a Punjabi boy, and Ananya, a Tamilian girl, who face opposition from their respective families due to cultural differences. Krish's father, who was abandoned by his wife, harbors a deep-seated hatred towards women which affects Krish's relationship with Ananya. Due to his father's insecurities, Krish develops a fear of commitment, and his self-esteem also takes a hit, as he begins to doubt his ability to form a loving relationship. In both novels, the characters' sense of low self-esteem and fear are directly linked to the breakdown of the family. The absence of a father figure, or a negative male presence, leaves the characters feeling insecure, vulnerable and inadequate. Due to the lack of guidance and support from their male counterparts, they feel like they have to face the world alone, which affects their confidence and self-worth. It underscores the need for parents to provide a nurturing environment where children can receive support, guidance, and positive role models, which can help cultivate a strong sense of self-esteem and eliminate feelings of vulnerability and fear.

The Bachelor of Arts

R.K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* is a classic work in Indian Writing in English that explores the impact of a broken home on the psychology of a child. The novel tells the story of Chandran, a young college graduate in the 1930s, who lives with his mother and struggles with his relationship with his estranged father. Narayan's portrayal of Chandran vividly illustrates how the breakdown of parental relationships can have a profound effect on a child's psychology and affect their development into adulthood. Throughout the novel, Chandran grapples with anxiety, insecurity, and feelings of inadequacy, which can be traced back to his strained relationship with his father. His father, who left the family and moved to London, is depicted as being indifferent and uninvolved in Chandran's life, causing him to feel a sense of abandonment and rejection that carries over into his adult life. Moreover, the novel also shows

how Chandran's mother's overprotectiveness has led to a sense of dependency in him. Chandran's mother is adamant that her son does not suffer the same fate as his father and encourages him to avoid anything that would distract him from his studies. This lack of exposure to the outside world further exacerbates Chandran's sense of anxiety and insecurity. Furthermore, Chandran's emotional struggles are also reflected in his romantic relationships. He is unable to form a real connection with women due to feeling unworthy and inadequate, which further hampers his emotional growth and development. As the novel progresses, Narayan portrays the complex layers of Chandran's emotional turmoil, depicting how the child's psychology is inextricably linked to the familial landscape of his upbringing. Narayan highlights how the break-up of a family can leave a profound impact on the child, shaping their personality and identity. He underscores the importance of fostering relationships based on love, trust, and empathy, which can help promote healthy emotional development and lead to resilience against the strains of life.

Clear Light of Day

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* explores the tensions, conflicts, and disconnections within a family as they negotiate the post-Partition era. The novel centres on the Das family – two brothers and two sisters – who are forced to come to terms with the painful memories of their childhood and the tumultuous circumstances that forced them apart. The novel examines how these experiences shape the characters' identities, relationships, and individual psychologies. Desai's work shows how the traumatic experiences of childhood can have lingering impacts on a person's development. The novel highlights how the disintegration of the family can set the stage for intense psychological struggles, such as depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental illness. The characters in *Clear Light of Day* struggle to overcome the painful memories of their past and the subsequent fallout of their fractured family. Similarly, R.K. Narayan's novel explores the psychological effects of a broken home on the protagonist, Chandran. The novel follows Chandran as he navigates the struggles of his early adulthood, grappling with academic pressures, romantic entanglements, and familial tensions. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Chandran's fractured relationship with his father has left a lasting impact on his psyche, leading to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Narayan's portrayal of the psychological toll of a broken home reveals how it can limit a child's emotional growth and make it difficult for them to form healthy relationships later in life. Narayan illustrates how the child's identity can be formed by the parent's reactions, causing an individual to internalize their familial struggles and intensify their emotional turmoil. These various works of literature illustrate the different ways in which familial struggles can leave deep emotional scars on an individual, imprinting their identity and influencing their development until adulthood. Such works underline the importance of stable family structures, nurturing emotional environments, and the resilience required to overcome such unintentional emotional consequences.

The Shadow Lines

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is a novel that magnifies the far-reaching effects of broken homes on child psychology. The novel follows the life of an Indian boy named Tridib, who

grows up with a strong connection to his family and community in Calcutta. But Tridib's world is upended when he is sent away to London due to political upheaval, causing him to question his identity and struggle with psychological trauma. The novel explores the theme of the impact of broken homes on child psychology, highlighting how it shapes the development of children and affects their sense of self. In the novel, Tridib is exposed to the political turmoil that is gripping India, which leads to his displacement from the country. His exile from his native land leaves him feeling disconnected from his roots and struggling with his identity. He is forced to confront his own sense of belonging and what it means to be Indian. Tridib's journey is marked by feelings of loneliness and isolation, and he finds himself searching for a sense of meaning in his life. The psychological impact of Tridib's displacement is explored in the novel, which reveals how a broken home can affect a child's sense of self. Tridib's experience of trauma due to his displacement is manifested in his ability to perceive and process stimuli around him. He finds himself constantly in a state of psychological unrest, leading him to try to make sense of his own inner turmoil. Ghosh uses Tridib's psyche to portray the long-term ramifications of broken homes on child psychology. In one scene, Tridib tells the narrator about his habit of hiding little objects, such as pebbles, in his pockets. Ghosh uses this behavior to illustrate Tridib's inability to let go of his past and the traumatic experiences he has endured. Tridib is trying to hold on to something that he can anchor himself to, something from his past that gives him a sense of stability in the midst of chaos. The novel also sheds light on the physical and emotional toll that a broken home can have on a child's mental and physical health. It shows how broken homes can lead to anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders. Tridib's journey is marked by instances of anxiety, depression, and an overall sense of disorientation, which is evident in the way he perceives his environment. It highlights the importance of stability and security in shaping a child's development, as well as the need for a strong sense of identity to cope with the challenges of life.

The Namesake and The God of Small Things

One of the most poignant works that explores the loss of cultural identity among children due to broken homes is *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The novel tells the story of a boy named Gogol who is born to Bengali immigrant parents in America. Growing up in a house that reflects both American and Indian culture, Gogol struggles to reconcile these two identities. When his father dies, Gogol is forced to confront his cultural identity and the loss of his father's wisdom and guidance. A similar theme is explored in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The novel tells the story of two twins, Estha and Rahel, who grow up in a broken home. As children, they experience great loss and trauma, and as a result, they struggle to find a sense of cultural identity. Their mother is Anglo-Indian, their father is Syrian Christian, and their family background is a mix of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian traditions. This complex heritage is difficult for the twins to understand and embrace, and they feel lost in a world of conflicting cultural identities. The works of these authors illustrate the challenges faced by children who grow up in broken homes, especially in terms of cultural identity. They show how the loss of stable family structures can lead to a confused sense of identity, as children are forced to reconcile their heritage with the fractured nature of their upbringing. This theme is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where cultural identity is often tightly bound to familial and

societal structures. These authors highlight the importance of stability and a sense of rootedness in maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity.

Midnight's Children

Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* explores the theme of the impact of broken homes on child psychology. The novel follows the life of Saleem Sinai, who is born on the same night as India gains independence. Saleem grows up in a family that is fractured by secrets and lies, which affects his mental state and personality. Saleem's parents, Aadam Aziz and Naseem Ghani, have a dysfunctional relationship that is marked by a lack of communication and emotional intimacy. Saleem's father is a doctor who is distant from his family, focusing more on his work than his relationships. His mother, on the other hand, is a strong-willed woman who is fiercely independent and determined to make her own way in the world. The combination of these factors creates a family environment that is fraught with tension and conflict. Saleem's experience of growing up in a broken home has a significant impact on his psychological development. One of the most prominent effects is his sense of isolation and alienation. Saleem feels disconnected from his family and culture, and this leads to feelings of loneliness and detachment. He is unable to connect with those around him and often feels like an outsider in his own country. In addition to his sense of alienation, Saleem's experience of a broken home also leads to feelings of resentment and anger. He feels that his parents have failed him and that their inability to communicate effectively has caused his problems. This bitterness drives his actions and colours his relationships with those around him, including his own wife and children. Furthermore, Saleem's experience of a broken home also leads to issues around his cultural identity. His parents hide their Muslim roots in an attempt to fit into the upper-class society of India. Saleem feels disconnected from his cultural heritage and struggles to find a sense of belonging in a society that is defined by religion and social status. His experience of isolation, anger, and disconnection underscores the importance of a stable and supportive family environment in supporting a child's emotional health and wellbeing.

The Inheritance of Loss

The theme of bitterness among children due to broken homes is a common thread in Indian Writing in English. Several authors have explored the emotional impact of family breakdowns on children's attitudes and personalities. In *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai, the theme of bitterness among children due to broken homes is present in the story of Biju, the son of a cook. Biju grows up with his father in India while his mother lives and works in America. Biju is sent to study in America, but when he returns, he is disillusioned with the world he has come back to. He feels angry and bitter towards his father, who he sees as weak and unable to help him with his problems. Biju's bitterness leads him to feel like an outsider in both India and America. Indian Writing in English often portrays the theme of bitterness among children caused by broken homes. The works of authors such as Roy, Rushdie, and Desai show how the fracturing of families can lead to feelings of isolation, anger, and bitterness. Their works highlight the emotional turmoil that children often experience in broken homes and the impact that this can have on their personalities and attitudes. Ultimately, these works underscore the

importance of a stable and supportive family environment that can provide a foundation for emotional health and wellbeing.

The Palace of Illusions

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* explores the theme of the impact of broken homes on child psychology. The novel tells the story of Draupadi, also known as Panchaali, who grows up in a dysfunctional family after the death of her father. The novel's protagonist is portrayed as a child who is profoundly affected by the loss of her father and the brokenness of her family, leading to a lifelong struggle with emotional and psychological damage. Panchaali's mother becomes emotionally distant after the death of her husband, resulting in an unhappy and emotionally unsatisfying upbringing for Panchaali. The feeling of abandonment leads to deep-rooted anger and resentment, leading to an inability to connect with others on an emotional level. The novel shows how broken homes can adversely affect children, causing severe damage that can last a lifetime. Panchaali's inability to trust others and form healthy relationships stems from her childhood trauma. Her struggle with depression is attributed to the feeling of abandonment and lack of parental guidance in her childhood. Her bitterness is fueled by a sense of injustice that stems from the loss of her father and her mother's indifference towards her.

Later in the novel, Panchaali's marriage to the five Pandavas serves as a temporary escape from her emotional baggage. However, this marriage can be seen as an extension of her childhood trauma. She subconsciously seeks validation and love from her husband, which is something she was denied as a child. Her relationship with the Pandavas, particularly with Arjuna, serves as a reflection of her childhood trauma and the impact it has had on her psyche. Throughout the novel, the psychological impact of broken homes on children is emphasized. The story illustrates how the lack of love, attention, and parental guidance during their childhoods can be emotionally and psychologically damaging. The difficulties children face in coming to terms with their experiences and their resulting emotional scars can hinder their ability to form healthy relationships and find closure. *The Palace of Illusions* highlights the profound impact that broken homes can have on children's psychology. The novel portrays how children who grow up in dysfunctional homes often carry emotional and psychological scars that affect their adult life. Panchaali's character serves as an example of how childhood trauma can lead to lifelong emotional and psychological struggles. Through the story of Panchaali, Divakaruni emphasizes that nurturing and providing a secure and loving environment for children is crucial to their emotional and psychological well-being.

The White Tiger

The novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga explores the theme of the impact of broken homes on child psychology. The story follows Balram Halwai, a poor boy from rural India who works his way up the social ladder as a driver for a wealthy family. The novel highlights how Balram's upbringing in a broken home affects his personality, beliefs, and life choices. Balram's childhood is marked by poverty, abuse, and neglect. His father dies at an early age, leaving his

mother to support the family by working as a maid. Balram is sent to work as a servant in a tea shop, and his mother subsequently dies of illness. The absence of his parents and the harsh reality of poverty left Balram with deep emotional scars. As a result of his upbringing, Balram develops a cynical and manipulative personality. He learns how to survive in an unfair and unjust society by exploiting opportunities and undermining others. Balram's experiences make him believe that the only way to succeed is by breaking free from societal norms and expectations. He becomes rebellious, independent, and resourceful, which helps him secure his job as a driver for a wealthy family. Moreover, Balram's upbringing in a broken home leaves him with a deep sense of mistrust towards authority figures. He loses faith in the institutions that are supposed to protect him, and he learns to rely solely on himself. His distrust extends to his employers and the society at large, which he views as corrupt, exploitative, and insensitive. However, like Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, Balram's broken home also leaves him struggling with emotional trauma. He struggles with guilt and shame over his past and his actions, as well as a sense of loss that he can never compensate for. The novel portrays the potential dangers that arise when children are deprived of secure and supportive homes. The book highlights how Balram's experiences led him to adopt a cynical, selfish, and distrustful outlook on life, highlighting the importance of nurturing happy, healthy families as a critical step towards creating a better world.

Broken Homes

The theme of the impact of broken homes on identity questions in children is a prevalent theme in Indian novels written in English. Indian Writing in English has been instrumental in exploring various themes and issues that are prevalent in contemporary Indian society. The theme of broken homes is a common feature in Indian society, and it has been portrayed effectively in many Indian Writing in English novels. One such novel is *The God of Small Things*. The novel explores the experiences of fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha, who grow up in a broken home as their parents, Ammu and Baba, get divorced. The novel portrays how the experience affects the children and their identities. The novel portrays the twins' struggle to find their place in the society they live in as they are the products of a broken home. They struggle with their sense of belonging as they are not fully accepted by their peers, nor do they feel entirely accepted by their parents or families. This struggle is presented as a constant battle for the twins throughout their lives, as they are haunted by the past and struggle to deal with the emotional scars that the broken home has left behind.

Similarly, the novel *The Namesake* explores the theme of broken homes' impact on identity questions in children. The novel tells the story of Gogol Ganguli, a first-generation American born to Bengali parents who struggle to reconcile their Indian heritage with their American life. Gogol's parents' emotional distance and unresolved conflicts lead him to experience identity confusion and rootlessness, which he tries to resolve by changing his name from Gogol to Nikhil. The novel portrays how the experience of growing up in a broken home influences Gogol's identity formation and how he perceives himself and the world around him. His search for identity is marked with confusion and uncertainty, highlighted by his name change from Gogol to Nikhil, which represents his attempt to distance himself from his Bengali heritage and

assimilate himself into American culture. The novels highlight how broken homes can impact the identity formation of children who grow up in such environments. It portrays how the experience of coming from a broken home can lead to identity confusion, rootlessness, and an inability to form meaningful relationships. It highlights the need for parents to provide a stable and emotionally supportive environment for their children to develop a strong sense of identity and self-worth.

Indian Writing in English has seen a significant transformation in recent years. With the emergence of contemporary themes, authors have begun to explore issues that were once considered taboo by Indian society. One such theme is the portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology. The family is considered the basic unit of society in India. However, in recent years, the Indian family has undergone a transformation. The traditional joint family system has given way to nuclear families, and with the increase in divorce rates, broken homes have become a reality for many children. This has led to several issues related to child psychology, which is reflected in Indian Writing in English. Indian Writing in English has seen a shift from traditional themes related to culture and tradition to contemporary themes related to current issues. The portrayal of the impact of broken homes on child psychology is one such contemporary theme. Authors have attempted to highlight the psychological impact of broken homes on children. The study of child psychology in literature can help society acknowledge the challenges faced by children from broken homes and develop ways to address them.

Conclusion

The present paper has explored the theme of broken homes and child psychology in modern Indian Writing in English. It aims to highlight the importance of the portrayal of this theme in the context of the current societal scenario. A broken home is one where the parents are not together, resulting in a family that is incomplete. The issue of broken homes is a growing concern in contemporary Indian society. The portrayal of this theme in modern Indian Writing in English is significant as it reflects the societal changes experienced by modern India. The focus of this paper has been on the portrayal of the theme of broken homes in modern Indian Writing in English and the impact it has on the psychology of the child. The novels expose the complexities of family relationships, particularly the psychological implications on the child. They highlight how children from broken families struggle to understand and come to terms with their reality. They depict how children from broken homes struggle to balance their identities while navigating through their different familial ties. In conclusion, the theme of broken homes and child psychology is a significant issue, which modern Indian Writing in English has explored extensively. The portrayal of this theme highlights the societal changes that India has undergone in recent times. The impact of broken homes on the child's psychology is a topic that needs to be addressed urgently. The portrayal of this theme in modern Indian Writing in English has brought attention to this matter, raising awareness and stimulating conversations. It is essential to recognize the significance of the portrayal of the theme in modern Indian Writing in English and the impact it has on child psychology.

References

Arora, B. (2011). Father absent homes and child development in India. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 42*(6). 893–907.

John-Herpin, M., & Chakraborty, M. (2013). Impacts on psychological health and well-being of children living in divorced and separated families. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health, 7*(1). 1–11.

Pandey, S., & Ashish, K. (2017). The consequences of broken homes as reflected in selected works of Indian women writers in English. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Advanced Studies 4*(4), 23–29.

Rawat, R., & Savita, M. (2020). The psychological impact of broken homes on vhildren as depicted in Chetan Bhagat's novels. *Journal of South Asian Studies 8*(1), 54–61.

Roy, P. (2014). The broken home and its impact on children in Indian writing in English: A study of selected novels. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities, 2*(6). 567–574.

Sen, A. (2017). The impact of broken homes on children in India: A critical dtudy of the novel Custody by Manju Kapur. *International Journal of Literature and Arts, 5*(2), 9-16.

Sengupta, S. (2013). The impact of broken homes on children in Indian writing in English: A study of Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences, 2*(9), 36–42.

Srimathi, S., & R. Sharmila. (2017). The imprint of broken homes: A study of Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 5(7), 262–67.

Verma, D. (2014). The impact of broken homes on children in Indian writing in English with special reference to Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss'. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research, 3*(7), 77–83.

Corresponding Author: Priyanka Singla
Email: priyanka.ind81@gmail.com

Memory and Identity in Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*

Nidhu Kumar Dhar
Assam University, India

Abstract

Haruki Murakami introduces a wide array of issues and topics in his fiction; his variegated characters typically enact a wide range of human attitudes and behaviours when encountering the problems of modern life. One recurrent theme in Murakami's novels is memory. The novelist has a unique ability to present his characters "from the inside", as it were, describing thus the interior mechanisms that make them who they are. His novels present an opportunity to understand the workings of memory and how people are led by its dictates. His characters often find themselves recollecting their past in order to sustain a present existence that is marred by some type of crisis. As they progress in time, protagonists experience a profound sense of disequilibrium that prompts them to return to the past in order to rebalance their self's sense of value. In this regard, the paper investigates the dynamics of memory as well as its role in the formation of identity in Haruki Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2014). For this purpose, the paper draws on different theories of memory and identity in its analysis.

Keywords: identity, memory, Murakami, time, Tsukuru

The role of literature, as observed by Japanese author, Oe Kenzaburo, "...is to create a model of a contemporary age which envelops past and future and a human model that lives in that age" (Ōe, 1988, p. 360). Since human existence is fundamentally a time-specific experience where memory plays a defining role in shaping reality, literature, as a reflection of human life and society, commonly embraces the workings of memory. Traditionally, memory has appeared in literature as a means to instil an atmosphere of nostalgia in a text. Memory then emerges as a method for portraying the progress of characters' individual and cultural identities, in other words, as a system to balance yesterday's self with the present identitary disposition. This method uses memory as a catalyst for the characters' faculty to reflect on who they are. It thus sheds light on the connection between the characters' sense of identity and their lived experiences.

Identity generally refers to the traits, social relations, roles, and social group membership that define who one is. It is argued that "Identities can be focussed on the past – what used to be true of one, the present – what is true of one now, or the future – the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 71). We see here that the emphasis is on memory, on how human understanding of the self is dependent on memory, which is a kind of storehouse for innumerable conflicting ideas. Moreover, identity includes one's conception of the self, a sort of feeling that things are "about me". Thus, the self "can be considered primarily a memory structure such that the me aspect of self has existence outside of particular contexts and social structures" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 71).

Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith's conception of the self as being situated in memory also highlights the importance of time. Here, memory makes the continuous movement from present to past and vice-versa possible. The concept of memory is strongly entangled with time, for recollection of moments in the human mind is occasioned by and consequent upon one's present time and situation. Emotions in the present evoke images of certain moments of the past. We can infer that the construction of memory is inversely related to the notion of time, for "time provides us with a framework not just to order the events we know of, but also to wonder about what happens when we are not looking, what happened while we were asleep, or what will happen in the future" (Hoerl and McCormack, 2001, p. 3). Memory often appears as fragments that lack sequential order. Conceivably this is due to a particular characteristic of time, as time "is braided, intertwined, a unity of stands layered over each other; unique, singular, and individual, it nevertheless partakes of a more generic and overarching time, which makes possible relations of earlier and later" ... (Grosz, 1999, p. 18).

The paper intends to examine the workings of memory in relation to the formation of identity in Haruki Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazakai and His Years of Pilgrimage*. Apart from being inextricably interwoven in all aspects of human life, when it comes to literature, the study of memory not merely presents a glimpse at characterisation but also acts as a tool for studying the narrative framework of a particular work. The paper investigates the dynamics of memory and identity primarily by delving into the life of Tsukuru Tazakai. It is argued that memory, a place where conflicting ideas reside, plays an important role in defining his identity.

With this objective in mind, the paper takes up various theories of memory and identity for discussion. Accordingly, different tools of psychoanalytic literary theories such as close reading of unconscious motives and feelings, as well as dream analysis, will be applied to unravel the workings of memory in this novel.

The Novel

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese novelist and recipient of numerous honours including the Kafka Prize (2006) and the Jerusalem Prize (2009). Murakami has been influenced by various philosophers and their ideas, ranging from "Kafka to Hegel, Vonnegut to Bergson, or Franz Liszt to The Beatles… [and] in one of his famous books *Kafka on the Shore* he incorporates elements of Hegelian dialectic into the story" (Bluemink). His *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, originally written in Japanese and published in 2013, presents the life and growth of Tsukuru Tazaki, a homophonic name that means "To make or build," who for sixteen years suffers from depression and psychic disorder that, to a certain extent, disabled his ability to lead a good life. The reason behind such complications in Tazaki's life is the result of an incident that occurred when he left Nagoya, his birthplace, to pursue railroad engineering in Tokyo. At a certain point, four of his closest friends suddenly deserted him with "no explanation, not a word" (Murakami, 2014, p. 3). Since then, he has been suffering from depression and the thought of suicide never leaves his mind: "From July of his sophomore year in college until the following January, all Tsukuru Tazaki could think about was dying…Taking his own life seemed the most natural solution, and even now he couldn't say why he hadn't taken this final step" (p. 1). This incident has impacted him greatly, to the point that he has given up leading a normal life. Reflecting on why his friends have cut him off from their group seems to consume his mind. As a result, "Alienation and loneliness became a cable that stretched hundreds of miles long, pulled to the breaking point by a gigantic winch" (p. 3).

Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage is a bildungsroman, describing the psychological and moral growth of Tsukuru Tazaki from his youth to adulthood. The narrative moves forward and backwards, chronicling the series of events that took place in Tazaki's life that wrecked his very existence. Murakami offers the introspective journey of a protagonist who recollects his past in order to assemble its disjoined, jigsaw-puzzle pieces in the attempt to make sense of his present. The event of separation from his friends makes his life dysfunctional and, owing to this, even at the age of thirty-six he is unable to establish a healthy relationship with anyone. Murakami's narrative focuses on a tormented individual and his emotional predicament, highlighting his endeavours to return to the events of the past as a way to revise and perhaps amend his emotional crisis. It might also be a way to manage otherwise irrevocable losses. We can observe in intimate detail how Tsukuru Tazaki grapples with a loss and mourns while seeking relief in a kind of anticipated catharsis. Tsukuru Tazaki's mind travels back to a traumatic incident that took place in July of his sophomore year in college.

Ever since Tsukuru Tazaki became a part of the group of five friends, he always felt insecure. The reason behind his insecurity lies in the fact that his four friends have something in common. The last names of all four of them, two boys and two girls, have colour in it: The two boys'

last names were Akamatsu (meaning 'red pine') and Oumi (meaning 'blue sea'), and the girls' family names were Shirane ('white root') and Kurono ('black field'). The four friends then began to use nicknames: "…the boys were called Aka (red) and Ao (blue); and the girls were Shiro (white) and Kuro (black)" (Murakami, 2014, p. 6). The thought of being odd in the group always troubled Tsukuru Tazaki, who often contemplated his importance in the group: "Sometimes Tsukuru couldn't understand why he was included in their group of five?... Did the others really need him?... Maybe they just hadn't realized it yet, and it was only a matter of time before they did?" (pp. 11–12). Tsukuru's insecurity, however, turns into reality when he moves to Tokyo to pursue railroad engineering while the others stay in Nagoya, their hometown. Initially, the five maintained contacts. But in the summer of Tsukuru's sophomore year in college his friends cut him off from the group, an event that tore his soul.

The fear of being left out of the group materialises, and Tsukuru Tazaki is traumatized. Sara seems to understand Tazaki's predicament when she remarks: "The pain caused by that incident is still in your mind, or your heart. Or maybe both. But I think it's clearly there" (Murakami, 2014, p. 32). The events that follow the separation demonstrate the extent to which Tazaki has isolated himself from worldly life and is on the verge of death. Though he recovers physically, in the course of time the sense of isolation and trauma continue to clasp his mind. As Janet Walker (2017) observes, "A person who is traumatized will re-experience such events as 'recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions,' that may take the form of memories, dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations, recurrences, and/or dissociation" (p. 106). Thoughts of the past surface incessantly in Tazaki's mind, his memory overwhelming his perspective on the present.

Memory is generally understood as something that is linked to the past, something we should have overcome in the present. It also is a medium through which the representation of things and events that are absent is possible. Memory, thus, not only preserves the traces of the past for retrieval, but in doing so it "become[s] a presence in the present" (Schuback, 2017, p. 180). In *Memory: A Very Short Introduction*, Jonathan K. Foster (2009) describes how "…memory is not…dependent upon an intention to remember events…Memory also plays a role regardless of our intention to retrieve or utilize past events. Many of the influences of the past events are unintended, and may 'pop into mind' unexpectedly" (p. 6). What Foster implies is that memory functions unconsciously, and as such, the retrieval or remembrance of the happenings of the past is an involuntary act. Freud elaborates on the source and the mechanism that support the operations of memory. He termed the "unconscious" as the source and the "return of the repressed" as the mechanism. According to Freud, there exists a "conflict" in the human mind, the conflict between emotions that seek discharge or visibility and the part of the mind that refuses to admit or discharge these emotions. This conflict gives rise to what Freud postulates in many of his writings and lectures as "neurotic symptoms". It is imperative to mention here that sometimes repressed emotions, being unable to find expression, convert into physical symptoms: For instance, "constriction in the throat might express an inability to swallow an insult; or a pain in the region of the heart might signify that the patient's heart had been metaphorically broken or damaged" (Storr, 2001, p. 21). We can observe such physical symptoms in Tsukuru Tazaki. Tazaki often feels unbearable pain in his chest: "When he didn't

see her for a while it was as if something vital were missing from his life, and a dull ache settled in his chest" (Murakami, 2014, p. 79); "All that remained now was a quiet sorrow. He felt a sudden, stabbing pain in the left side of his chest, as if he'd been pierced by a knife" (p. 195); "Sorrow surged then, silently, like water inside him…Pain struck him, as if gouging out his chest, and he could barely breathe" (p. 264). The unbearable pain in Tazaki's chest is perhaps connected to his grievance over the loss and, therefore, shows symbolically through his broken physical self.

According to András Keszei (2017), "Feelings of love, the longing for attachment, hate, anger, distrust, pain, shame, and guilt are inseparable from memory – indeed they are defined by memories…memories accompanied by strong emotions are likely to remain vivid than more general and less emotional memories" (p. 808). In the novel, Tsukuru Tazaki claims to have no memories of being close to his father, except when it comes to his father's choice of his name. He maintains that his father naming him "Tsukuru Tazaki" has always been a predominant aspect of his social life. He dives into deep philosophical contemplation and asserts that he was nothing but void before he was given the name. Here, one can observe a religious undertone, as Tsukuru believes that "[b]efore that [name], he'd been nothing – dark, nameless chaos and nothing more. A less-than-seven-pound pink lump of flesh barely able to breathe in the darkness, or cry out. First he was given a name. Then consciousness and memory developed, and, finally, ego. But everything began with his name" (Murakami, 2014, p. 50). One can recognize here the reference to the Christian notion of creation. Tukuru, perhaps, likens his naming to the Christian ritual of baptism, and as such, his sense of the self comes into existence once he is given the name. Thus, an event held with such veneration is likely to plant its seed in his memory. In the course of the novel, Tsukuru often reflects upon his name, considering its significance and its suitability. The author's allusion to the Bible is certainly important for studying memory as essential to the protagonist's development (see Freedman, 2008, p. 82).

András Keszei observes (2017) that "We cannot remember everything, recollection is guided by emotional relationships concerning past events" (p. 808), an observation that is useful in this context. Most of the events that Tsukuru Tazaki recalls have some sort of emotional association. The pain and agony of having been so openly rejected is always with him. Sometimes this feeling appears to him nebulously, as he cannot trace its source, but, at other times, he feels it flowing up to his feet, this in spite of the fact that he considered bygone days in Nagoya as finished and closed, something "foreign, alien" (Murakami, 2014, p. 57).

Murakami's novel provides the possibility to explore the various dimensions in which memory operates. Tsukuru Tazaki laments the losses that remain etched in his mind. At the age of thirty-six he still remembers, albeit partially, his life with the group. He tells Sara "…it [maintaining the group] remained an important collective goal. But as time passed, simply being a community ourselves became our goals" (p. 16).

An important factor that seems to complicate Tazaki's life is an early stage that involved the suppression of sexual desires. To Sara he describes how he liked the two girls in the group:

"Both of the girls were appealing in their own way. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't attracted to them. But I tried as much as possible not to think of them that way" (pp. 17–18). In this context, psychoanalytic tools can provide us with the means to better understand Tazaki's repression of sexual desire:

> For psychoanalysis, the unconscious is memory's fundamental repository. The memories to which psychoanalysis attends, the memories that define its theoretical originality, are those that reside in this archive but have been subjected to repression…They are recorded in the unconscious, but only their derivates, the "screen memories" and so on, are available to consciousness as part of the tactics by which repression protects itself. (Terdiman, 2010, p. 100)

Freud explains how certain ideas, once consciously or unconsciously repressed, remain suppressed and can lead to psychic disorder. Tazaki's desire for the girls becomes evident, as the author narrates that whenever Tsukuru Tazaki thought of or longed for a girlfriend or a woman, an image of Shiro and Kuro automatically conjured up in his imagination: "Why, even now, does it always have to be these two? He thought. They flatly rejected me. Said they never wanted to see me anymore, or talk to me ever again. Why can't they just make a quiet exit and leave me alone?" (Murakami, 2014, p. 58). Moreover, he occasionally had erotic dreams involving Shiro and Kuro. In those dreams, he engages with them in sexual intercourse. Tazaki also confesses that he had many such dreams after he had been cast out from the group. For Freud, what is repressed in the unconscious finds its way into dreams, as its access into consciousness is denied,. Tsukuru Tazaki's dreams are very explicit and filled with graphic imagery. If dreams, as Freud termed it, are wish-fulfilment, then it appears that Tazaki's repressed desires found their way to his dreams: "The tension of suppressed sexual feelings began to take on greater significance than Tsukuru could imagine. The graphic sexual dreams he had later were probably an extension of that tension" (Murakami, p. 293).

At the end of the novel Tsukuru realizes that they revered and respected their group to the extent that they barely were able to express their emotions within the group. Even Kuro (Eri) confesses her feelings to Tazaki when they met after years, saying that she liked him for his diffident and yet organized nature. Yet she could not disclose her love because safeguarding group cohesion was more important at the time. For all of them, the group was something like a religious institution, the preservation of which was a matter of great concern, even if it meant suppressing their emotions. Such inhibitions appear to jeopardize their emotional development, such that the five members of the group, to a greater or lesser degree, suffered emotional crises. Although Murakami choses to put on full display Tsukuru Tazaki's emotional turmoil, it is evident that all the members of the group suffered in kind.

On Sara's deliberate insistence, Tsukuru Tazaki embarks on a journey to unfold "the cause of his severed relationship, hoping this 'pilgrimage' will resolve his fear of intimacy" (Lee, 2019, p. 8). He then comes face to face with reality as he meets his friends, one after another, eventually discovering the reason that disrupted their friendship. Tsukuru is flabbergasted to learn from his friends that he raped Shiro, a story told by Shiro herself. The truth of the story

comes to light when Tsukuru meets Kuro, who is now called Eri and is living with her Finnish husband in Finland. Kuro tells him that Shiro was really raped and had undergone a miscarriage. Although Eri could not believe that Tsukuru could do something like that, the story is presented to her with such intensity that she has to believe Shiro's claims. The conversation between Tsukuru and Kuro provides the readers with some possible reasons as to why Shiro blamed Tsukuru instead of the real rapist. They realized that, just like them, Shiro could have felt suffocated in the tightly-knit group, unable to express her emotions. It is perhaps for this reason, as the narrator suggests, Shiro chose to blame Tsukuru and thus disrupt the group's coherence. Blaming the real culprit would only work to further consolidate the group, as external threats tend to strengthen internal group cohesion.

The more Tsukuru approaches the truth, the more he matures and comes closer to reality. This enables him to realise his true self and resolve the conflict within him. Tsukuru Tazaki, who grieved when his friends abandoned him, thus realizes at the end of the novel:

> Their group in high school had been so close…each of them found a deep contentment and happiness…But such bliss couldn't last forever. At some point paradise would be lost. They would each mature at different rates, take different paths in life. As time passed, an unavoidable sense of unease would develop among them, a subtle fault line, no doubt turning into something less than subtle (Murakami, 2014, p. 292).

Initially, Tsukuru fails to acknowledge what Murakami offers as a fact of life. He prefers to hold on to the illusion that his friends deserted him, embracing his ensuing loneliness.

Tsukuru Tazaki also suffers from maladaptive patterns of thought, one of which has caused an inferiority complex that makes him think of himself as an odd member of the group of five friends. Because of his general lack of ebullience, he considers himself boring, a perspective that has a negative impact as his emotionally charged self participates in the transactional world of daily existence. Tsukuru has "no deep interest in the arts, no hobby or special skill…he blushed easily, wasn't especially outgoing, and could never relax around people he'd just met" (Murakami, p. 10). Murakami reinforces this description, adding that "he lacked a striking personality, or any quality that made him stand out" (p. 11), and therefore, everything about him was "middling, pallid, lacking in color" (p. 10). Murakami's descriptions, done by an outside observer (the author), reinforce the idea that Tsukuru's social environment has consequences that shape and restructure his inner world. His memory, thus, is a complex blend of all these feelings.

Freud's theory of "mourning" and "melancholia" here seems important to understand the unconscious self of Tsukuru Tazaki. Freud believed that the memory of something lost is usually associated with mourning over that loss. For Freud, the act of remembering is a work of mourning which, although a painful exercise, can lead to a reconciliation that allows one to come to terms with oneself and one's losses. In more simple terms, mourning is a process that ends with a kind of acceptance, in that the mourner can eventually feel motivated to participate in the external world, even though the loss has ultimately changed it. Freud, however, makes a

distinction between mourning and melancholia where the former preserves self-esteem and the sense of the self, whereas the latter produces despair, a longing to hold onto what is lost instead of peacefully letting go. Freud said in reference to melancholia that "The melancholic displays something else besides which lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale...he [the patient] reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished…This picture of a delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority is completed by sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment…" (Freud, 1964, p. 246). The pain of loss in melancholia is felt within the unconscious, that is, the significance of the loss is not quite so apparent to the griever, even though the pain of it might still be deeply felt. This is evident in the case of Tsukuru Tazaki.

His ego seems to be hurt most by the rejection, as he said to himself "That was the first time in my life that anyone had rejected me so completely…And the ones who did it were the people I trusted most, my four best friends in the world" (Murakami, 2014, p. 30). Moreover, for five months, Tsukuru lived an impoverished life – he set up a tiny place to live in Tokyo and was sleepless and cared little about food or anything. Murakami describes the tribulations of his spirit thus: "He was himself then, but at the same time, he was not...When he could not stand the pain, he distanced himself from his body…" (pp. 33-34). Tsukuru Tazaki tried hard to forget the trauma of separation, yet deep inside in his unconscious the pain remained stuck. If one has consciously forgotten the pain of loss, it does not mean that pain is not there, lurking in the subconscious. Tazaki's grief apparently exists in the unconscious, but it cannot be processed by the conscious. The unconscious makes its appearance, nevertheless, in dreams and other delusions.

Melancholia, linked to emotion and not to reality, can lead to the repetition of the past, that is, it surfaces again and again in order to assert its existence, thereby impelling the person to experience psychological disarray. Kuro's announcement that they don't want to see Tazaki anymore, shocks Tazaki to the extent that an intense feeling of loss overwhelms him. He never attempts to contact any of his friends to discover the reason behind their decision. He prefers not to face them again; instead, he starts blaming them for their unforeseen resolution. It is only after Sara's deliberate urging that he decides to meet the four friends again for the first time after sixteen years. Sara realizes that their relationship is full of irreconcilable differences on the face of Tazaki's troubled feelings and emotional crisis. Thus, she advises him to sort out his inner crisis first by facing the truth about his past. Tazaki then begins to uncover a different reality, one utterly divorced from the presuppositions that shattered his long-held impressions regarding the group of friends.

But by then Shiro has died and the other members of the group are leading a life whose characteristics were totally unanticipated. In short, the initial goals that they had set for themselves after high school have not been achieved by any of them. Paul Ricoeur observes that "[m]emories have not only to be understandable, they have to be acceptable, and it is this acceptability that is at stake in the work of memory and mourning. Both (understanding and acceptance) are types of reconciliation" (1999, p, 7). Understanding and acceptance are what

Tsukuru Tazaki achieves at the end of the novel and is therefore able to resolve his inner conflicts.

Conclusion

Murakami's use of memory has allowed the representation of a past that persistently resurfaces to intervene in the direction of the protagonist's thoughts and actions. The impingement of the past upon the present and the process of memory itself are subtly revealed and explored by Tsukuru Tazaki's rendering of the events of the past through both his own reflections and the voice of the narrator. Memory becomes the present reality for Tsukuru Tazaki, jolting his spirit for sixteen years. It is used to evoke a variety of emotions and dreams, not only those of the protagonist, but of other characters as well. For instance, Kuro (Eri), who helped Shiro come to terms with life after her miscarriage, is deeply hurt by Shiro's death. She tries to memorialise Shiro by naming her daughter Yuzu, a changed name that Shiro took later in her life. The idea of collective memory, a shared body of knowledge, surfaces here as the name Yuzu, as Kuro thinks, will be remembered and will inevitably bring forth the memory of Kuro. The Japanese word "yuzu," in various contexts, refers to citrus fruit, a symbol of resurrection and eternal life. The idea of commemoration also hints at the idea of static time, of an ever-existing present. This important idea could form the basis for future research.

The trauma of being cast out of the group makes Tsukuru Tazaki succumb to illusion. From the fallacies of his notions about the past, he builds all the misconceptions of his present, thus ruining his inner life. He lives a suicidal life for a year, after which he decides to utterly change himself, but the process is presented as a metaphorical attempt to kill himself by trying to erase his past. Without his past, he is a blank slate. He has not realised that it is impossible to erase memory; to survive, he *must* come to terms with the past. This is the reason why he continuously tormented by it, as the thought of being lonely and discarded involuntarily is a necessary component of his inner life.

Murakami's handling of memory in *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* provides us with ample scope to infer that memory is the means by which the relationship between events past and their reconstruction is negotiated. Tsukuru Tazaki's experience is an excellent example of the fact that much of our present experiences take place in the shade of a sort of existential innocence. To the point: one comes to possess meaningful knowledge of the significance of past events, of the way they could have been altered *then*, only after the event is past, that is to say, in the present moment when one recalls it. In this process, the self builds a narrative of the past that gives logical texture to the present and, as a consequence, to the individual's identity: "Consistency of consciousness and a sense of continuity between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, would appear to be integral to a sense of personal identity" (King, 2000, p. 2).

The formation of a personal identity and a sense of the self, therefore, hinges on the complex nature of the relationship between past and present selves. Memory not only helps in conciliating the past and the present in the process of the construction of identity, but it could

also be detrimental to the emotional wellbeing of the person if such a conciliation is not forthcoming, as in the case of Tsukuru Tazaki.

References

Bluemink, M. (2023, January 4). *Borges and Murakami: Philosophy in fiction.* Blue Labyrinths. https://bluelabyrinths.com/2015/05/19/borges-and-murakami-philosophy-in-fiction/

Foster, J. K. (2009). *Memory: A very short introduction.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192806758.001.0001

Freedman, A. (2008). Theories of memory: Developing a canon [Review of Theories of Memory: A Reader, by M. Rossington & A. Whitehead]. *Journal of Modern Literature, 32*(1), 77–85. https://doi.org/10.2979/JML.2008.32.1.77

Freud, S. (1964). Mourning and melancholia. In Anna Freud et al. (Eds,), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, volume XIV: On the History of the Psycho Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works* (pp. 243–258). The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Grosz, E. (1999). Thinking the new: Of futures yet unthought. In Elizabeth Grosz (Ed.), *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* (pp. 15–28). Cornell University Press.

Hoerl, C., & McCormack, T. (2001). Perspectives on time and memory: An introduction. In C. Hoerl & T. McCormack (Eds.), *Time and Memory* (pp. 1–33). Clarendon Press.

Keszei, A. (2017). Memory and the contemporary relevance of the past. *The Hungarian Historical Review, 6*(4), 804–824. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26374407

King, N. (2000). *Memory, narrative, identity: Remembering the self.* Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748611164

Lee, J. M. (2019). Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage: Through a psychodynamic lens. *The American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal.* https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp-rj.2019.140605

Murakami, H. (2014). *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage.* Vintage Books.

Ōe, K. (1988). Japan's dual identity: A writer's dilemma. *World Literature Today, 62*(3), 359–369. https://doi.org/10.2307/40144281

Oyseman, D., et al. (2012). "Self, self-concept, and identity". In Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 69–104). The Guilford Press.

Ricoeur, Paul (1999). "Memory and forgetting". In Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (Eds.), *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy* (pp. 59–11). Routledge.

Schuback, M. S. C., & Schuback, C. S. C. (2017). Memory in Exile. *Research in Phenomenology, 47*(2), 175–189. https://doi.org/10.1163/15691640-12341364

Storr, A. (2001). *Freud: Very short introduction.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192854551.001.0001

Terdiman, R. (2010). Memory in Freud. In S. Radstone & B. Schwartz (Eds.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (pp. 93–108). Fordham University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.10

Walker, J. (2017). The traumatic paradox: Autobiographical documentary and the psychology of memory. In Katharine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone (Eds.), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (pp. 104-119). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203785751-8

Corresponding Author: Nidhu Kumar Dhar
Email: nidhudhar1@gmail.com

Turbulence of the Fin-de-siècle: Arts Through the Looking-Glass of Intermediality

Mykyta Isagulov
University of Exeter, United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper addresses the *fin-de-siècle* period as a time when most of what are called intermedial processes, that is to say, those processes that arbitrate aesthetic design at the intersection between different media, began to play a substantial role in the production of cultural artifacts. The epoch is investigated through the prism of intermediality, which manifested itself as a valuable tool in the development of the arts and media, particularly after the birth of photography and cinematography. These intermedial processes fostered a media-based creative experimentation that culminated in the modernist and postmodernist movements. The role of intermediality in the *fin-de-siècle*, particularly in light of the syncretic processes it originated, is considered as an aftereffect of the tumultuous events of the time, which in a way acted as a stimulus for this new-fangled aesthetics. The paper concludes that the turbulence that characterizes this epoch, as well as the diffusion of new artistic and philosophical movements, impacted the development of mixed (intermedial) arts, stimulated their growth and activated the exploration of intermedial forms and genres in all the arts. This is the era of mass publishing and the growth of literacy rates, an era that laid the foundations for future theories on intertextuality and the idea of the work of art as an inclusive "canvas" inside of which all media have a place.

Keywords: art studies, fin de siècle, intermediality, media studies

Intermediality has been a subject of scholarly attention since the 1980s. However, even though its objects of study – intermedial artefacts – have their origin in the early art forms of the ancient world, there still remains to be crafted a defining theory that would circumscribe its critical characteristics. Thus, scholars from various research "clusters" offer different, sometimes contradicting approaches. In view of this methodological quandary, I've had to choose the definition that I believe best describes the word: "intermediality" in this paper will be regarded as "(the study of) specific relations among dissimilar media products and general relations among different media types" (Elleström, 2017).

The term "intermediality" first appeared in 1983, when Aage A. Hansen-Love published his research on problems of correlation between verbal and pictorial arts in Russian modernism (Hansen-Löve, 1983). Therein he opposed his newly coined word both to "intertextuality" and Dick Higgins' term "intermedia", having investigated the phenomenon rather from a semiological perspective. However, most research that followed and used the newly-coined term was dedicated to modern and postmodern works, new media, mass media, and cinematography, thus ignoring any creative output from earlier periods that had a direct impact on the development of the concept and provided the fruitful basis for its growth and eventual maturity in the modernist spirit.

However, whether modernism is to be seen as "the expressive domain of modernity" (Susan Stanford Friedman, qt. in Moody & Ross, 2020) or literature that "registers" modernity (Immanuel Wallerstein, qt. in Moody & Ross, 2020), it is in either case the response to the new sensibility ushered in by the *fin-de-siècle* temperament and its concomitant aesthetic requirements. Modernist aesthetics "burgeoned across Europe" from the 1860s to the 1930s (Bell-Villada, 1996), which makes the turn of the century an aesthetic precursor to what is nowadays considered "true" modernism.

Bearing in mind that the aestheticising of contemporary life under the forces of new media has been growing since the end of the XIX century (Guillory, 2022), it should be assumed that the media wields a very significant influence on the subjective valuation gradient of a modern person's judgment, aesthetic or otherwise. This presumably requires a re-calibration of the *foci* of literature studies to integrate the significance of the unmediated, raw influx of information.

In this regard, this paper is an attempt to draw attention to the broad *fin-de-siècle* epoch as a period when, yet unknown under this term, intermedial processes intensified due to the birth of photography, cinematography, phonography, telephony, radio and mass publishing of literature. The methodological approach comprises elements of literature review, context analysis and historical research.

Pre-Context: Romanticism and Realism

Before expanding on the reasons for analysing the *fin de siècle* as a critically important period for intermediality and related processes, it would be beneficial to highlight the concept of "integral medium". It would be fair to say that romanticism, which from a theoretical and

aesthetic perspective preceded turn of the century artistic tendencies, revered artistic activity as a critical foundation for leading a meaningful life; romantic art aimed at the transformation of the world in a way that would allow this to happen (Kagan, 1972). This made it possible for G.W.F. Hegel and F.W.J. Schelling to formulate and methodise a new intermedial paradigm, one that might systematise the search for intermedial processes in art history from antiquity to modernity. Thus, the philosophers spoke about the sequence *architecture/sculpture > painting > music > poetry*. Here, antiquity and the medieval period are seen as artistic epochs when architecture and/or sculpture served as a key integral medium, the one considered by artists and philosophers as the one capable of amalgamating and incorporating all other media. In this sense, painting is the avatar of the renaissance; music is romanticism's key medium; and literature (poetry) is regarded as a dominating art form for all the subsequent periods: post-romanticism, realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

When considering intermediality, romanticism is also decisive in terms of its ability to cross the hitherto stable borders between styles (classical and romantic), religions (Christianity and pantheism), and arts and sciences (literature and natural studies) (Nivala, 2016). Its capacity to usher in a new category of art – mixed or complex arts – resisted previously accepted distinctions between technical/mechanical/non-depictive productions and muse/liberal/depictive arts. Within this context, initially recognised mixed arts included music-dramatic art, music-choreographic art, architectural-depictive synthesis, theatrical art, synthesis of music and poetry, and pictorial-poetic synthesis (Kagan, 1972).

Owing to the new, inexpensive and quick mass publishing options introduced by new press and stereotyping technologies in the 1840s and 1860s (Altick, 1999), the realism that characterises what followed established literature as a dominant medium, one capable of directing other media, and turned it into the key instrument for creative communication. The growing literacy rates in Europe – for example, in England and Wales from 1800 to 1900 literacy grew from sixty per cent for men and forty per cent for women to ninety-seven per cent for both sexes (Lloyd, 2007) – supported the spread of verbal genres and forms, including newspapers and journals, that were no longer exclusive or inaccessible to wider audiences. The vastly enlarged readership, coupled with urban growth, established a concentrated market for literature as a commodity (Altick, 1999). Sharing information through the telegraph, newspapers or the publication of literary works through journals and pamphlets supported free or low-cost access to verbal artefacts, making word-based experiments easier. Serialised fiction actively exploited illustrations and other pictorial forms to support the readership's imagination, which laid a solid foundation for intermedial experimenting. In addition, realism's aesthetics began to assimilate the idea that the arts were not structurally stable categories, but rather consisted of non-absolute forms without stable boundaries; this launched and facilitated the constant transformation of the arts, the searching for the continuation of one art in another (Takho-Godi, 1982). This eventually characterised art-related processes during the *fin de siècle* and following periods.

Historical Context: The Picture of Turbulence

The decadent *fin de siècle* period of the second half of the XIX century may seem remote from modernist aesthetics. But when speaking of this epoch as a prefigure for the birth of intermediality as we now know it, one should think of a distinction "between the *fin-de-siècle* as a chronological period, and *fin-de-siècle* as a unique attitude or response to this period" (Nottingham, 2015, p. 351). It is the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic temperament that flows into and influences modernism, eventually allowing the emergence of sundry intermedial forms.

Thus, *fin-de-siècle*, society, as memorialised in the voice of its artists, philosophers, scientists and technicians, faces and responds to multiple crises, turmoil and abrupt changes, allowing Heidegger to call the century from 1850 to 1950 "the darkest of all the centuries of modern times" (qt. in Franks, 1994, p. 11). As proposed by the authors of *The Fin-de-siecle World* (Saler, 2015), one may best describe the aesthetics of the period, with its literature of decadence reflecting the rapid development of cities, the mass movement from rural areas to urban settlements, its industrial revolution and the associated changes in the concepts and perception of time and space, using Bakhtin's *chronotope* concept (Bakhtin, 1981). The period also brings with it the birth of new nationalism, a new imperialism, and new politics of "higher individualism". Changes in mass culture included the above-mentioned mass publishing, acceleration of transport, the birth of consumer culture, the spreading of advertisement, the development of "human" or social sciences, a new philosophy, eugenics, mind-breaking developments in psychology and psychiatry, and medicine. People began to conceptualise their selfhood in a different manner, and there was a significant shift in the perception of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race, religion and atheism and, very importantly, aesthetics. New challenges stimulated new music, new visual arts and new realism, whereas new arts, in particular cinematography, stimulated a spiral of artistic development and troubled the minds of people through the unique experience of witnessing pictures actually move, a novelty that so genuinely corresponded to the speed of the events happening around them.

The feeling created by this turbulence, with its rapid developments, and the rate of critical changes that occurred within one generation, evolved into the artistic sensitivity that we call modernism. Modernism, in turn, faced more brutal wars (World War I and World War II) and economic crises (worldwide Great Depression), societal unrest (equality movements, class changes, spread of socialism and bolshevism), violent political upheavals (collapse of most empires), all of which impacted culture (birth of new music, domination of Paris as the modern world's artistic centre and its shift to New York, spread of visual culture, growth of architectural scales, revival of Olympic games). Political nationalism developed actively and served as a constituent of a wider trend to adapt old forms into new and different ones, producing a deeper degree of self-consciousness and explicitly defining "the other" in opposition to self, to the "national" (Baycroft, 2015). The refining processes, when the national self was to be grasped through awareness of national characteristics and culture, echoed internal personal processes, which would resonate in modernism's description and normalisation of self-perception using measures of "efficiency, productivity and health" (Killen, 2015, p. 47).

The *fin-de-siècle* crises also facilitated reflexive practices that reinforced binaries and oppositions, dividing the world into enemies and friends; modernism matured these practices and transformed them into the juxtaposition of cultures and national discourses through its own, modernised and upgraded self-reflexion. While the literature of decadence adopted an anarchistic style, when, as psychologist Havelock Ellis puts it, "everything was sacrificed to the development of the individual parts" (in Gagnier, 2010, n.p.), the self-reflexion at the turn of the century was a wider process and included various constituents. An increase in "individuation led to the disintegration of the whole" (Gagnier, 2010, n.p.), which was eagerly accepted by modernists as a tool for artistic, economic, political, and social re-assessment of external processes that had an impact on the internal, personal world and, as a consequence, it laboured to find a new concept of the self. At the same time, the turn of the century and modernism have been notionally linked by the aesthetic doctrine of art for art's sake (Bell-Villada, 1996) which, because of its inclusive nature, ties into one intermedial knot various artistic streams, genres, approaches and generations.

The pain of going through unknown and unpredicted turbulence, like Dorian Gray's fear of growing old and dying, is what unites *fin de siècle* and modernism like parents and children. They face different experiences, but they are equally tough and painful, and the response to rapid changes is similar – rejection, questioning, re-inventing, recycling, re-writing, sewing together multiple strands in the intermedial fabric... This leads to the creation of new intermedial artefacts and other prolific intermedial processes.

Both decadent artists and modernists search for new creative forms that reflect both the interior world of the artist and the dramatic external events. The creators require a new synthesis and dialogue at all levels to keep their sanity in the twisted, chaotic world – they existed at the borders between cultures, civilisations, arts, and social classes and reflected on them. Because of its social relevance, art became the voice of change, the voice heard by millions. And the need for these new voices and new creative forms reflected the artistic obligation to incorporate a variety of new media. And, while *fin de siècle* prepared the solid base of knowledge, practices and experience, modernists gathered it to re-invent the arts and present new medial forms, having grounded them in literature as an ever-growing and dominating form, given the ultimate authority of the verbal media in human communication processes.

Medial Context: The Flowers of Change

As culture transitions between the XIX and XX centuries, *fin de siècle* sensibilities begin to appraise art synthesis more critically. On the one hand, they designate literature as the new (or first-ever) mass art, and on the other – they praise the achievements and experiments of painting. Moreover, along with the change in communication brought by the railroad and telegraph (Plunkett, et al., 2012), and the improved lighting in dwellings and consequent ease of reading as time-spending activity (Altick, 1999), the new technologies encroach upon the traditional ways of living as never before, to such an extent that they cannot be ignored by artists. Art and science tend to disagree, yet the artistic horizons are extended by scientific inventions while the scientific ethos extant at the turn of the century profoundly influences

modernism (Bell-Villada, 1996). Photography (1839), cinematography (1878), phonography (1877), telephony (1876) and radio (1895) change the world of art and technology by giving people access to new dimensions of experience. Recording and transmiting sounds and images, the power to conserve things that before were non-preservable, non-documentable, challenge literature and its documenting functions by enlarging the role of aestheticism in people's lives and the role of media in general (Guillory, 2022). Thus, photographic imagery impacts the entire system of artistic vision and creativity and facilitates the birth of new genres and techniques through the development of new documentalist features; cinematography, as a synthesis of verbal and photographic mediums, is born at the junction of new visual "moving pictures" techniques and literary fables, stories, and motifs; phonography allows recording voice and sound and its replication on secondary devices, whereas telephone and radio allow transmitting sounds and information instantly all over the world.

This media explosion and consequent variety of *fin-de-siècle* genres and forms eventually led to modernism. Significantly, while these technologies appeared during the broad *fin-de-siècle* period, a time of pessimism and decay when one might perceive these new technologies as just more malevolent concoctions, modernists, on the other hand, encouraged their growth and dominating influence on society. On the one hand, there was an emergent literary dynamism supported by mass publishing, which reinforced the dominant position of the novel (Plunkett, et al., 2012), on the other – the new media seeded confusion, rejection, fear, all in connection to the fear of the new century and its all-to-rapid developments. Speaking of the growth of new media, the very first radio interchange happened in 1895, whereas the first commercial radio broadcast was in 1920; additionally, Auguste and Louis Lumière showed the first film to the mass audience in 1895, while in 1896 multiple cinematographic theatres were built all over Europe. By 1902 there appeared a first film with the natural colour process and in the 1910s most films had sound integrated to them. The speed of certain media-related processes bordered on insanity for many observers of the time, who thought that the speed of change could prove psychologically devastating. Thus, for instance, Queen Victoria, a symbol of British stability, ascended the throne in 1837 before any of these technologies and media appeared, and by the time of her decease in 1901, there were half a dozen new media forms, using new mediums, new processes, new techniques, producing the outcomes and artefacts that none would have expected in so short a time frame.

The development of key modernist writers, their childhood and youth, happens to coincide with the turn of the century. They absorbed *fin-de-siècle* cultural traditions from their birth and were witness to the spread of new media, which they were more than eager to accept. Accordingly, James Joyce owned Ireland's first cinema and borrowed elements of the cinematographic craft for his writing, while Virginia Woolf published her essay *The Cinema* (1926), where she stressed the simultaneously existing archaism, primitivism and newness of the cinematographic art. As modernists, they are concerned with everyday life, perception, time, and "kaleidoscopic and fractured experiences of urban space" (Marcus, 2016); they also borrow cinematic techniques of close-up, flashback, and montage to shape their experimental works. This can be said of other modernists as well – some researchers would argue that modernisms are the individual responses to the media that appeared and began to re-shape lives; some would say

that analysis of decadent literature is a valuable tool for the exploration of the works of Joyce, Woolf and other modernists (Boyiopoulos, Choi, & Tildesley, 2015); others would stress that modernist masterpieces emerged from the colonial world of the XIX century (Bell-Villada, 1996) – altogether linking the pre-modernist XIX century and modernism into a unified artistic, political, historical, social and cultural fabric.

At the same time, while speaking about these two artistic epochs, one should bear in mind the vagueness of the border between modernism and pre-modernism, especially regarding the appearance of the new media forms, as it is not clear whether modernist techniques and works appeared after the turn of the century or during its peak. Global modernism has multiple, asynchronous timelines reflecting specific experiences and developments in various cultures and historic discourses (Moody & Ross, 2020). Thus, for instance, John Ruskin's theories, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophies, and Sigmund Freud's approaches were formulated and publicised earlier than the "official" chronology proposes the beginning of modernism in Europe. The close link between *fin de siècle* and modernism is like an umbilical cord between a mother and her child – at a certain stage they are so closely tied together that any attempt at delineation is impossible. However, the notion of the aestheticization of life through new media obviates the need for this rupture between the *fin de siècle* and modernism. Thus, sometimes one must speak about non-modernist works raising modernist topics through non-modernist language. Was Oscar Wilde a modernist? No. Was the focus of his writing modern? Yes. Besides, one may see significant differences between the novels of E. M. Forster (which are far from being experimental and resemble Wilde's writings) or Somerset Maugham's "pop literature" and the works of Samuel Beckett, who is a representative of late modernism. Comparing the works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Elliot, or D. H. Lawrence published in the 1920s would also be problematic, as they represent different modernisms.

On the opposite side of the intermedial fabric, modernism in pictorial art may start its chronology from Édouard Manet (1890s), or the pre-Raphaelites if conceived as his foreshadowers (1850s), or even J. M. W. Turner's studies of light, colour and atmosphere (1830s-40s). In addition, there were many historical delays in terms of the "uneven politics of language" (Moody & Ross, 2020). Thus, for instance, Karl Marx's works are a product of the early *fin de siècle*, however, his *Das Kapital* (1867) reached the English-speaking world twenty years later, in 1887, energising the minds of anti-realists and supporting modernist processes when German-speaking cultures had already developed their response to it.

This allows speaking of new media as a collection of synthetic forms that required no documentation through literature and were easy to spread, influencing the masses and uniting people from countries that had reached a certain level of technological advance. While *fin de siècle* fathered such media, modernism used them as a tool, as a reinstatement of experimental forms, and as a stimulus. Cinematography, phonography, radio, and later television would confirm that the borders had been broken – heretofore strange lands were no longer so mysterious, almost everyone could see foreign landscapes or "exotic" people without travelling, and people could hear the voices of prominent singers or listen to operas without the need to travel to Italy or the nearest theatre. Boundaries, shattered physically and mentally,

began to be questioned, along with the oppositions they embodied. Artists delved ever deeper into themselves and thought more of their own bodies, health and mind. However, these innovations did not yield universal acceptance, as certain of its products were met with challenges and faced rejection. Such is the case with Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleur du mal* (censored in 1857), Oscar Wilde's works (which, along with his love for Lord Alfred Douglas, caused him to flee to France in 1897), and D. H. Lawrence's sensual novels (1920s). Some would be praised, like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), however, the depth of modernist provocation would not be easily detected due to the experimental nature of its methods. Processes of assemblage and collection, triage and sorting would be established by turn of the century mediums (Moody & Ross, 2020), and modernists would make the discernability of these processes a fundamental element in their creative efforts.

Rupture: In Search of Lost Art

A deeper understanding of *fin de siècle* aesthetic attitudes allows for a better appreciation for this epoch as the source of key stimulating substances for modernist sensibilities. There is no doubt that the researcher can always go as far back as Homer's *Iliad* in that work's Book XVIII description of Achilles's shield, which remains one of the better-known cases of ekphrasis. But *fin de siècle* sensibilities are what give modernist arts *the* significant impetus. There is a new impulse positively to re-evaluate the role of earlier aesthetic sensibilities, from the Middle Ages to romanticism, and to incorporate this inclusivity into its new perception of art and life, aesthetics and philosophies.

Strictly speaking, modernism is an intermedial cauldron. On the one hand, artists attempt to create new artefacts, new concepts and new art in general, however, on the other hand, they draw from the legacy of the previous artistic epochs. *Fin de siècle* attempts to combine individual-sensitive-internal with the inherited-communal-external that comes in the forms of historical and mythological archetypes, legends, and epics. It comes with a re-assessing of the roles of text and image (Emden & Rippl, 2010) which continues to this day and facilitates the reassessment of literature's role in the global context.

Thus, methodologically, modernism should be perceived as a phenomenon of multiple scales and dimensions (Moody & Ross, 2020), with its historic, political and cultural legacy being one of its fundamental characteristics. Like Marcel Proust searches for lost time, modernists continue the *fin-de-siècle* tradition of searching for lost arts, though more surreptitiously. They are not painting dozens of literary characters as the pre-Raphaelites did, but they integrate the archetypal qualities of these characters into their works and plant semi-veiled references. James Joyce's *Ulysses* directly refers to Homer's Odysseus and his wandering on the way back home after the Trojan war, although in other cases the links are not that obvious and require deciphering by the informed reader. E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) may be seen exclusively as a modernist novel with multiple ekphratic depictions of Italian Renaissance painting, or as an interpretation of the Endymion myth – both approaches making it intermedial through the use of ekphrasis or adaptation of one literary form by another. In the *Foreword* to his *Sons and Lovers* (1913), D. H. Lawrence calls the work an interpretation of

the Oedipus myth, although both chronologically and thematically the *Foreword* rather refers to Lawrence's next novel, *The Rainbow* (1915), which has as sequel in *Women in Love* (1920). This allows all three novels to be studied as intermedial adaptations of the Oedipus story, making them a modernist re-cycling of the ancient drama. Samuel Beckett's novels tie an even more complex intermedial knot, as they can be seen both as allusions to ancient myths and parodies or echoes of James Joyce's works, primarily *Ulysses*.

Examples of such intermedial intensification are plenty. It is modernism that openly reflects on media, is impacted by it, and ultimately seeks to integrate it or experiment with it in its literary forms. It builds, as we have seen, on the legacy of earlier generations of artists, philosophers and scientists. The popularity of such experiments is observed in the ever-growing dominance of literature, extant in the self-reflective artistic explorations of the modernist novel. Thus it is that modernist experiments generate a historical context and reveal the influence of earlier conventions, as "dialectic of art resembles the social dialectic" (Adorno, 1984) they exist in.

Thus, while speaking of intermediality and its multiple phenomena, it is necessary not only to draw parallels with other epochs, but also to search for the origin of specific fables, plots, archetypal characters, and analyse how they unfold in modernist works. This straightforward consideration may help reveal additional features, conceivably identifying a subconscious legacy in modernist creators, instilled in them in childhood and adolescence by parents and grandparents. The link with *fin de siècle* and its turbulence can make the research more penetrating, interdisciplinary, intercultural, and international by dissolving boundaries.

Moreover, the alignment of cinematography and literature, and the interplays between these two media at the turn of the century are "among the most crucial factors that shaped what came to be called modernist literature and culture" (Marcus, 2015). Early films often attempted to capture the particular traits and peculiarities of cities. Fine examples are Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1926) and Dziga-Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1928). It is easy to see how James Joyce tries to replicate film's facility for visual depiction not only in *Dubliners* (1914), but also in *Ulysses* (1922). Moreover, in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Virginia Woolfe focuses on Clarissa's perambulation around the streets of London on a single day. The imagistic quality of Joyce's depiction of Blum's wanderings around Dublin and of Clarissa's around London, for example, is a testament to the intermedial outlook of the times.

On the other hand, literature served as key material resource and source of inspiration for film, as a slew of novelists and playwrights became involved in the cinematographic business (Trotter, 2007). Additionally, literature gave context to the new mediums in terms of poetics and montage (Schmid, 2019; Stewart, 1999) and, taking their cues from film, writers were able to give new and unconventional characteristics to their literary endeavours, engaging in a self-aware search for new forms that was "at once fragmentary and encyclopaedic" (Trotter, 2007). In this sense, intermediality and its processes can be construed as nurturing the birth of the cinema.

Given the significant role of cinema in the development and progress of modernisms, one may assume that intermediality is a *fin de siècle* phenomenon that facilitated the birth of modernism. At the same time, despite the intimacy between new media and modernism, one should bear in mind that these "cross-breeds" were conscious and artificial, as the new media were essentially recording mediums, while literature is representational (Trotter, 2007) and they vary in nature, form and purposes.

Conclusion

The turbulence of the epoch and the evolution of new artistic movements, new aesthetics and philosophies, impacted the development of mixed (intermedial) arts, stimulated their development, and activated the exploration of intermedial forms and genres in all the arts. Intermediality served as a basis for modernist developments and for new thinking in terms of all the arts and creative processes on which they are contingent. This is the legacy of the *fin de siècle*.

The period also enhanced the role of the literary medium due to the introduction of mass publishing and the uptick in literacy rates. New media, *inter alia*, facilitated the introduction of new techniques to the verbal forms and stimulated experimental writing in key modernists, facilitating the birth of new literature-based synthetic, intermedial forms and genres. New concepts of time and space, the shrinking of intervals between events, the speedier diffusion of information due to the invention of the telephone and the radio–not to mention photography, cinematography, phonography–facilitated the collapse of boundaries, guiding the modernists towards a deeper study of the self, especially in relation to others. Incidentally, psychological analysis is also a *fin-de-siècle* legacy.

Altogether, *fin de siècle* and its crises and turbulences created the basis for modernist trends and catalysed the intermedial experiments and birth of new forms and genres – this should always be considered when researching literary artefacts established after the 1840s, as they are expected to bear a significant intermedial load or be directly influenced and/or impacted by the treatment of media.

References

Adorno, T. W. (1984). *Aesthetic theory.* (G. Adorno, R. Tiedemann, Eds., & C. Lenhardt, Trans.) Routledge & K. Paul.

Altick, R. A. (1999). Publishing. In H. F. Tucker (Ed.), *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* (pp. 289-304). Blackwell Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1111/b.9780631218760.1999.00020.x

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* (M. Holquist, Ed., C. Emerson, & M. Holquist, Trans.) University of Texas Press.

Baycroft, T. (2015). The New Nationalism. In *The Fin-de-siècle World* (pp. 323-334). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748115-24

Bell-Villada, G. H. (1996). *Art for Art's Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape The Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism 1790-1990.* University of Nebraska Press.

Boyiopoulos, K., Choi, Y., & Tildesley, M. B. (Eds.). (2015). *The Decadent Short Story: An Annotated Anthology.* Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748692156

Elleström, L. (2017). Adaptation and Intermediality. In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (pp. 509–526). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199331000.013.29

Emden, C., & Rippl, G. (Eds.). (2010). *ImageScapes: Studies in Intermediality.* Peter Lang.

Franks, J. (1994). *Revisionist Resurrection Mythologies: A Study of D. H. Lawrence's Italian Works.* Peter Lang.

Gagnier, R. (2000). *The Instability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society.* The University of Chicago Press.

Gagnier, R. (2010). *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859-1920.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277540

Guillory, J. (2022). *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study*. University of Chicago Press.

Hansen-Löve, A. (1983). Probleme der Korrelation von Wort- und Bildkunst - Am Beispiel der russischen Moderne [Intermediality and Intertextuality. Problems of Correlation of Verbal and Pictorial Art - Using the Example of Russian Modernism]. *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 291–360.

Kagan, M. (1972). *Морфология искусства: Историко-теоретическое исследование внутреннего строения мира искусств: [монография, части I, II, III] [Morphology of Art: Historical and Theoretical Study of the Internal Structure of the World of Art: [monograph, parts I, II, III]]*. Искусство [Art].

Killen, A. (2015). The Second Industrial Revolution. In *The Fin-de-siècle World* (pp. 45–58). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748115-5

Lloyd, A. J. (2007). Education, literacy and the reading public. *British Library Newspapers*.

Marcus, L. (2015). Film and Modernist Literature. In *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music* (pp. 179-184). De Gruyter.

Marcus, L. (2016, May 25). *Cinema and modernism*. Retrieved from The British Library: https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/cinema-and-modernism#:~:text=Modernism%20was%20concerned%20with%20everyday,as%20Mrs%20Dalloway%20or%20Ulysses.

Moody, A., & Ross, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Nivala, A. (2016). Mediality and Intermediality in Friedrich Schlegel's Early Romantic Thought. In *Afterlives of Romantic Intermediality: The Intersection of Visual, Aural, and Verbal Frontiers* (pp. 75-94). Lexington Books.

Nottingham, C. (2015). The New Politics of 'Higher Individualism'. In *The Fin-de-siècle World* (pp. 351-364). Routledge.

Plunkett, J., Vadillo, A., Gagnier, R., Richardson, A., Rylance, R., & Young, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Victorian Literature: A Sourcebook.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-35701-3

Saler, M. T. (Ed.). (2015). *The Fin-de-siècle World.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748115

Schmid, M. (2019). *Intermedial Dialogues: The French New Wave and the Other Arts.* Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474410632.001.0001

Stewart, G. (1999). *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis.* University of Chicago Press.

Takho-Godi, M. (1982). Литература и живопись в романе Р. Роллана «Жан-Кристоф» [Literature and Painting in Romain Roland's Novel Jean-Christophe]. *Литература и живопись [Literature and Painting]*, 252-267.

Trotter, D. (2007). *Cinema and Modernism.* Blackwell Publishing.

Corresponding Author: Mykyta Isagulov
Email: mi338@exeter.ac.uk

The Poetics of Borderlands: Reflections on Oral Folk Poetry from Assam's Barak Valley during Bangladesh Liberation War

Sushrita Acharjee
Adamas University, India

Abstract

In 1971, the civil war in the Pakistani state and consequent genocide in present Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) led to a great influx of refugees who were desperately crossing the porous borderlands of the eastern states of India. Despite the abject living conditions in the saturated refugee camps and the stringent regimentation of the youth camps and *muktijoddhā* (Liberation Warrior) training sectors in West Bengal, Tripura and Assam borderlands, the space inhabited by the refugees was charged with powerful national imaginaries laced with an eclectic blend of emotions – resistance, hope, nostalgia, desire, aspiration. Drawing on ethnographic and anthropological research, the essay aims to explore various folk forms of poetry which emerged out of these refugee camps and guerrilla army training sectors during the war, such as *kabigān* (a form of lyrical oral poetry where the poet spontaneously composes verses to be performed at a public gathering) or *hāture kabitā* (poems to be read aloud in the middle of a *hāt* or marketplace) written and performed by refugees from Assam's Barak Valley in North-East India, and later collected by Bangladeshi historian Shahid Quader Chowdhury. Besides problematising aesthetic practices and their relationship to the idea of border-crossing, refugeehood and national identities, to what extent do these poems – *loka kabitā* or oral folk poetry, open up a discursive space where shared cultures, histories and memories play a momentous role in political mobilisation and in the creation of a radical alterity within the "national" culture and history? To what extent do these aesthetic registers succeed in combating the irrepresentability of violence, injustice and trauma? These are primarily the questions that this essay aims to ask and resolve.

Keywords: Bangladesh Liberation War, Barak Valley, borderlands, folk poetry, *Kabigān*, refugee poets

> What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.
> – Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Certeau's statement (1984, p. 134) which seems to have acquired an aphoristic quality in contemporary spatial scholarship complicates the negotiations between cartographic space, space explored by a wandering, storytelling subject, and space produced through and represented by oral narratives and histories. The dichotomy between abstract cartographic maps along with the statist memorialisation of the border-making process and the lived border-space generated through personal, embodied memories is a significant feature of various political folk art practices that engage with border-crossing, exile and refugeehood. African-American author Bell Hooks in her seminal essay, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" claims that a space at the margin – a profound edge as she calls it, is capable, more than any other space, of transcending the conventional associations of oppression and despair, and becoming a "radical creative space" (Hooks, 1989, p. 23) as it can be "interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice" (p. 23). With reference to *The South African Freedom Charter* which was adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, South Africa on 26 June 1955 in response to the peoples' movements against South African Apartheid, Hooks insists that the struggle of marginal art and cultural practice is "a struggle of memory against forgetting" (p. 17). Echoing Hooks, this essay investigates folk art practices, such as *kabigān* (a form of oral folk poetry where the poet spontaneously composes verses to be performed at a public gathering) and *hāture kabitā* (poems to be read aloud in the middle of a *hāt* or marketplace) that emerged from the borderlands and refugee camps in Assam's Barak Valley adjacent to present Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, and sought to transform the border-space with its disenfranchised refugees into a discursive space of "everyday resistance" (Schendel, 2004, p. 2) to the West Pakistani military occupation.

Following the fateful night of Operation Searchlight (West Pakistani Army crackdown in Dacca) on 25 March 1971 and Pakistan's official plunge into what would culminate into a prolonged civil war, refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan began to pour into the eastern and north-eastern states of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and so on. After the first influx of refugees, a month later, on 24 April 1971, at a meeting between the Union Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation and the Minister of State for Relief and Rehabilitation in Assam, it was discussed that 100,000 refugees had already entered the state and that there was a lack of supply of provisions, such as sugar, kerosine, salt, and so forth (The Assam Tribune, 1971; Datta, 2013, p. 93). Images of refugees at the West Bengal, Assam and Tripura border areas, huddled together on the streets without shelter or provisions, rattled civil society to its core. The lack of drinking water and sanitation created a mammoth public health crisis, giving rise to the cholera epidemic which seemed to have stalled the influx for a while. (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1971; p. 94) In the North-Eastern states of India, the Department of Rehabilitation was grappling with logistical limitations of relief work – shortage of medical supply, proper communication, insufficient import of grains, and so forth. The hilly terrains, lack of road and airfield in some areas, especially in Southern Meghalaya which was saturated with refugees from Sylhet and Mymensingh (Luthra, 1975, p. 3) only added to the adversity. Barak Valley

situated in the southern parts of Assam is adjacent to the Sylhet district of present Bangladesh, and therefore, was left to bear the brunt of a rapid influx of refugees. From April onwards, refugees started entering the valley through the borderlands of Karimganj district; by 12 May, Cachar district adjacent to Karimganj reported the settlement of 50000 registered refugees. Later, thousands of refugees were transferred to the valley from the Balat camp in Meghalaya, presumably raising the number to nearly 100000, which was 28 per cent of the total refugee count in Assam by the end of the war in December 1971 (Chowdhury, 2017, p. 29). Despite the horror of the saturated refugee camps and the stringent regimentation of the youth camps and *muktijoddhā* (Liberation Warrior) training sectors in India's north-east borderlands, the space inhabited by the refugees was charged with an eclectic blend of emotions – resistance, hope, nostalgia, desire, aspiration, which transpired most viscerally in their aesthetic practices.

Assam's Barak Valley and the Resurgence of *Kabigān* and *Hāture Kabitā* in 1971

There has been a difference in opinion on how far back the folk form of *kabigān* can be traced to the history of Bengali poetics. Some are of the opinion that it dates back to as early as the 16th or the 17th century when the verses of *Vaishnav Padābalī* gained currency at a mass level. Some scholars seem to believe that the form of *kabigān* as we have known it till the 20th century, emerged in late 18th century and flourished in the 19th century with the democratisation of print- making, as a group of self-taught, economically low-class itinerant music-merchants began to wander from one place to another and performed poetry in a lyrical rhythm at a public gathering to earn money. (Bhattacharya, 1977, p. 481) There is no debate, however, about the fact that this poetic form was extremely popular across the pre-Partition undivided Bengal – especially so in Birbhum, North and South Dinajpur, Nadia, Hooghly, North and South 24 Parganas in present West Bengal, Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj in Barak Valley of present Assam in India, and Dacca, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Noakhali, Khulna, Barishal in present Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2009, p. 72-73; Singha, 1978, p. 3). Bangladeshi historian Muntassir Mamoon informs that the form of *kabigān* was immensely popular in the towns and villages of Bangladesh at least till the 1970s (Mamoon, 2021, p. 225). These poems were performed in marketplaces, which is why this form of poetry was commonly known as *hāture kabitā* (*hāt*, in Bengali language, denotes market; hence, in turn, *hāture* is something that emerges from or is related to the *hāt*). In the context of Assam's Barak Valley (comprising Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts), the tradition of *kabigān* dates back to as early as 1857 – the year of the Sepoy Mutiny against British colonial occupation. Its testimony lies in an anonymous poem of 1344 metrical feet (Chowdhury, 2017, p. 33) narrating the tales of fortitude, courage and patriotic sentiments of the people of this valley towards the great Indian revolution. This legacy of resistance poetry is carried forward and elevated to a more robust form in the *kabigān* composed by the poets of Barak Valley during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, many of whom were refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan.

In 1971, from the borderlands of Barak Valley, emerged these bards or *kabiȳāl* as they were called, narrating tales of horror and hope from the *desh* (homeland) they had to leave behind, as well as performing the turbulent time and the border-space forever in transition. The community of the folk poets was built on the creative collaboration between refugee poets who

had to escape *desh* because of the war and civilian poets living in Barak Valley at the India-Bangladesh border, who had chosen to extend their voices in solidarity and protest. *Mārā gelo lakhkha lakhkha Hindu-Musalman Dhaka shahar-e/atyāchār kare Yahya Khan-er dal-e/hājār-e hājār nara-nārī-ke māriyā phele/Dhaka Faridpur-e lok mare balā nāhi jāẏe/rāstā ghāt-e hāt-e, māth-e jekhāne jār-e pāẏe/Jilā Jashohar gūṛa char hailo ghatanā/bomā chhāṛi Bāngāli-der mārlo sab janā/Jilā Khulna-e gelo bhāi Bāngāli-r parān/nārī-purush sesh karilo chhariẏā kāmān...* (In the city of Dhaka, hundred thousand of people are killed/Yahya Khan's men torture/and slay in thousands/words fail to suffice as I speak of the dead in Dhaka or in Faridpur/in the streets, in the markets, on the fields, they await to kill/A grave incident has happened in the district of Jessore/Bengali people have been killed in bombing/In the district of Khulna, Bengali lives are lost/men and women are destroyed by cannon fire…; Chowdhury, 2017, p. 59; translation by the author of the essay.) By drawing the names of significant places, such as Dhaka, Jessore, Faridpur, Khulna, and describing the death and destruction that has transformed the thriving cities into an abject space "where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2), poet Raimohan Debnath maps erstwhile East Pakistan as a site of genocidal oppression where the Bengali people as an ethnic group are being subjected to mass carnage.

The acts of resistance performed by these poets were two-pronged; through the very act of crossing the international border and taking shelter in India, they were defying and threatening Pakistan's territorial sovereignty. At the same time, considering the linguistic and cultural marginalisation faced by the Bengali-speaking community under West Pakistani regime, the bards, by performing poems in the Bengali dialects, and spreading the news of genocide and destruction at the very grassroots level established various forms of everyday resistance to the military censorship and unfair cultural oppression. Their popularity lay in the spontaneous interaction with the audience – asking them questions as well as incorporating their answers in their verses and thereby opening up an interactive performative space where oral stories and narratives were incessantly being woven into the fabric of a *kabigān* as the performances went on.

Raimohan who would perform regularly at the marketplaces, refugee camps, guerilla training sectors and other public places around Kanaibajar in the Cachar district of the valley produces poems that do not merely mourn the mindless aggression on human beings, but also bereaves the destruction of cities, villages, towns, huts and houses, harvest fields and rivers of the land. His poems thus become an active form of protest, denunciation and testimony of the almost ritualistic atrocities performed by the perpetrators: *town bandar hāt bājār kare chhārkhār/loke ghar-er bhetar-e garta kare bn̆āchibār kāraṇ/Māti-r nīche thāke loiẏa jīban/…/jilā Barishal-e shunen shakāle/town ekti chhilo/bomā chhn̆āchhi town-tāre nashta korechhilo/loker hāhākār nāi pārāpār shei jāgā-r bhitar/khete-r phashal khete roilo loker nāi khabar...* (They destroy the town, the port and the market place/people dig trenches in their home to survive/they keep their lives buried underground/…/all of you kindly listen, in the district of Barishal/there was a town/they hurled a bomb and destroyed it/the town is now replete with the lament of its people/the fields remain unharvested, the townspeople are nowhere to be found…; p. 68; translation by the author of the essay.) Poet Mohammad Abubakkar seems to have extended Raimohan's sentiments to express the all-encompassing enormity of the genocidal violence that had permeated even the natural world of East Pakistan in 1971: *garu, chhāgal, ghorā,*

rehāi nā pāilo tār/ bāgh, hāti jata jārā chhilo jangal-e/gāchh briksha taru lata sakal-er āj ek abastha/pākhi sab e kaẏna katha boshiā dāl-e... (Cows, goats, horses – none is spared/tigers, elephants – in the forest/the trees and plants – all have met similar fate/the birds no longer sing from the branches…; p. 69; translation by the author of the essay.) Similarly, Digendra Kumar Das' poem addresses the atmospheric and spatial violence and the grotesque mass cremation in the wake of the genocide: *kare putrahārā mātrihārā hishāb nikāsh nāi/shata shata jaṛo kariā puriẏā kare chhāi/.../thare thare dhūmrarāshi ambar khāni chhāẏe/edike Bānglā-r māti shonā khāti rakte lāl-e lāl/hāt ghāt nad nadī ār jata khāl/bahe shonit dhārā srot dhārā manda manda jāẏe/kāk shakuni shiẏāl kukur maṛā lāsh khāẏe...* (Countless women have lost their sons, the sons too are without mothers/their corpses are piled up in hundreds and are burnt/…/a gust of smoke covers the sky/the golden soil of Bengal has turned crimson red with blood/river banks, streams and canals/flow sluggishly with blood streaming down/crows and vultures feed on the corpses…; pp. 93–94; translation by the author of the essay.)

Both Muhammad Abubakkar and Digendra Kumar Das, similar to Raimohan, would perform around the district of Cachar; their poems which did not demand literacy to be understood succeeded in creating an informed audience and more importantly raised ethical questions regarding the role of poetry in alleviating the suffering or depoliticisation of the refugees especially when the body politic seemed too helpless to do so. In the face of violent historical situations, these performances of *kabigān* or *hāture kabitā* are reminiscent of German philosopher Theodor Adorno's observation about the paradoxical role of poetry in times of extreme forms of human suffering. Adorno insists that the "abundance of real suffering" (Adorno, 1980, p. 188) makes the production of poetry seem "barbaric" (p. 188) and yet,it simultaneously "also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice" (p. 188). However, the role of folk poetry as a faithful form of witnessing the genocidal violence and an authentic response to it is not devoid of the ethical dilemma characterised by the oscillation between "a possibility and an impossibility of speaking…that constitutes the vital dimension of the testimony" (Agamben, 2002, p. 157). On one hand, the poetic responses of the bards of Barak Valley are faithful testimony and often lived experience of the suffering of the refugees, therefore, it creates a valid opportunity for them to speak of the urgency of the refugee situation. At the same time, they had already escaped the genocidal violence that was still ravaging their homeland, and thus, as they speak of the motherless sons, towns destroyed by bombing, rivers red with blood and the corpses piled up for mass cremation, their words seem to fall flat. Hence, the possibility of composing poems on the violent situation of the Civil War, genocide and subsequent refugee crisis seems to be juxtaposed with the impossibility of doing full justice to the lost lives and deafening silence of the victims.

"Sites of Memory against Forgetting"

Despite stringent censorship, their politically charged poems drew even the most compromised refugees into public discourse, propelled the common inhabitants of border villages towards mobilisation in favour of the refugees, and designed sites of what Hooks calls "memory against forgetting" (Hooks, 1989, p. 17). Assamese archivist and professor Amalendu Das'

documentation of these *kabigān* in his personal diary for the year of 1971 and later Bangladeshi historian Shahid Quader Chowdhury's research indicates the presence of seven to eight Bengali-speaking poets who, in totality, composed nearly fifty significant folk poems in the form of *kabigān* around Cachar and Karimganj districts of Barak Valley (Chowdhury, 2017). Satya Narayan who would perform in the marketplaces of the border village of Latu in the Karimganj district of the valley, Raimohan Debnath who was celebrated amongst the grassroots people in the Hatkhola village of Patharkandi, Digendra Kumar Das and Atul Chandra Das of the Cachar-Sylhet tradition of *kabigān*, Sheikh Zamir Ali and Ashwini from the erstwhile East Pakistan who had crossed border to enter Barak Valley in 1971 seem to form the *kabigān* canon on the theme of the Liberation War in Barak Valley. The compositions of some of these poets garnered such popularity that their poems were performed all across the valley, especially in Silchar, Hailakandi, and Badarpur by other *kabiẏāls* who did not necessarily write original poems but were itinerant performers. Some of most popular poems of this tradition traverse a broad range of themes – the West Pakistani army occupation and the socio-economic, cultural discrimination faced by the Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan for the past 23 years from 1948 to 1971, the mass uprising of 1969 and the subsequent general election of 1970, the infamous public speech delivered by Mujibur Rahman on 7 March and his declaration of unequivocal freedom for the Bangladeshi people, the army crackdown in Dhaka and the beginning of the genocide, the influx of refugees in India, common people's mobilisation to aid the refugees, the harrowing experiences of the refugees and the news of mass carnage from *desh*, armed resistance built by the guerrilla army of Bangladeshi Liberation Warriors at the borderlands, and the like.

Evidently, the *kabiẏāls*, despite being guilty of oversimplifying and often sensationalising what would, by scholars and experts, be considered undeniably complex political events, succeeded in writing an embodied, lived history of the people at the periphery with the help of this form of performative poetry. Their verses offer possibility of an alternative way of conceptualising or recovering a people's history of the times by filling the gaps and absences, such as the incidents of mass rape (leading to the honorary epithet, *bīranganā* or war heroine), being conferred on the thousands of sexually violated women after the end of the war in 1972). While there was a deliberate silence about these appalling incidents in the civil society as the violated female bodies were seen to be symbolic of "national" shame, Raimohan's verse speaks of it plainly as though to jar the audience into action: *...meye loker upar kare anẏāẏ atẏāchār/meye loker upar-e atẏāchār kare grāmāntar-e giẏā/stree-r sāmne swāmi ke phelen kātiẏā...* (…They brutally torture the women folk/they roam about, from one village to another, torturing the women folk/afterwards, they even slaughter their husbands before them…; Chowdhury, 2017, p. 63.)

These *kabiẏāls* resemble the wandering, storytelling subjects (see the first paragraph of this essay) who produce and represent the lived border-space generated through personal, embodied memories despite the predominance of the powerfully unified national memory where no discontinuity exists. The poems written and performed spontaneously during the historical moment itself are reservoirs of what French historian Pierre Nora calls "an integrated, dictatorial memory, memory – unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously

actualising" (Nora, 1989, p. 8) which is "by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual" (p. 9). Despite their limitations, the verses create an emotive space where the trauma and injustice faced by the victims in war-torn East Pakistan as well as by the refugees who escaped is represented to some extent, especially in a lucid language that was spoken in both sides of the border. The poems were written and performed in the Sylheti dialect of the Bengali language and narrated the stories directly without stylised poetic diction characteristic of the poems written by the socio-culturally elite *Bangali* refugee poets (who belonged to the genteel *Bhadralok* class and had taken shelter in metropolitan cities and affluent towns of East and North-East India). Professor Amalendu Das, a young man in 1971, was fascinated by Ashwini, a refugee *kabiẏāl* who would perform frequently in the marketplaces of Silchar. Through his poems, he would make a momentous effort at explaining the grim situation in present Bangladesh while broadcasting the heroic feats of the *muktijoddhā* – the guerrilla army fighting for liberation. There is very little biographical information that could be found about the poet, except that his home was in present-day Bangladesh and that he had taken refuge in India during the war (Chowdhury, 2017). Nonetheless, Professor Das confirms that the emotive style of his performance almost always generated a crowd and his verses created an indelible experience for the listener. The only source of his poetry at present seems to be the diary entries by Professor Das for the year of 1971, and therefore the poems may have been subjected to interpolation.

Ashwini's poetry seems to have a distinctive refinement to it, in contrast to that of the other bards in the area. Instead of simply narrating the tales of the times in rhyming lines, Ashwini metaphorises Bangladeshi people's resistance through the imagery of a boat filled with people from erstwhile East Pakistan led by their undisputed leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The people on Mujib's boat are prepared to brave an imminent storm while the West Pakistani military forces are seen as pirates who have been scheming to rob the treasures of the boat: *O bhāi tomār lāigẏā/Oi noukā khān pāthāilo khoda-e/Noukā-r dňāri – mājhi shab ek kathā-e rāji/ kebal jaẏ Bānglā-r jaẏ baliā shāri gān gāẏe/jadi āshe tuphān,/shabāi habo shābdhān,/ pāgal Ashwini kaẏ/Mujib-er nāo lāglo kinārāẏ...* (Brother, for you/The Almighty has sent the boat/the boatsman – the oarsman, all are ready/They sing in unison of Bengal's victory/Lest a storm comes/we shall be alert/mad Ashwini says/Mujib's boat is about to reach ashore…; p. 76, translation by the author of this essay.) This particular symbolic representation of a momentous crisis and common peoples' resilience in its wake not only inspires a national imaginary that equates the leaders of the resistance movements with a marginalised class of people – the boatsmen and oarsmen, but also proves the embeddedness of the poem into the very fabric of the riverine land of Bengal. In another poem, Ashwini draws an analogy between the solidarity of seventy million Bengali people with Mujib's campaign of independent Bangladesh and the making of Mujib's boat with seventy million pieces of iron: *Mujib- er nāo re sundar kariā/Jaẏ Bānglā-r jaẏ gān-e/dui gāl-e bharilā-re/bānāilā Mujib er nāo re/.../shāt koti lohā āchhe/shei noukā te gāthā re/bānāilā Mujib er nāo re...*(Mujib's boat is vibrant/with the songs of victorious Bengal/the songs reverberate from one mouth to another/Mujib's boat is ready to set sail/…/The boat is wreathed/in seventy million pieces of iron/Mujib's boat is ready...; p. 78, translation by the author of this essay.)

His poem functions as a call to people irrespective of social station. It also serves as a symbolic manifestation of the ideal nationhood – Mujibur's vision of independent Bangladesh where the rich, the poor, the upper class and the working class would cherish equal citizenship rights: *e dīn Ashwini bale/māth-e āchhe jārā (bhāi re māth-e āchhe jārā)/oi noukā-e nā hoile pār/sheshe jābe mārā re.* (Poor Ashwini says/those who are working in the field, brother, those who are in the field/must cross the river on that boat/otherwise, they will perish; p. 78, translation by the author of the essay.) Beyond the national memorialisation of the genocide through monuments, museums, archives, documentaries, history books, medallions, where a staggering number of three million civilians were killed (Mukherjee, 2011, p. 74), these oral folk poems thus embody a radical alterity within the national culture, through which the people at the margins could reclaim their past and the legacy of personal loss and suffering, heroism and valour.

Figure 1

Map of Barak Valley (Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts) in the Indian state of Assam, located adjacent to the borderlands of present Bangladesh.
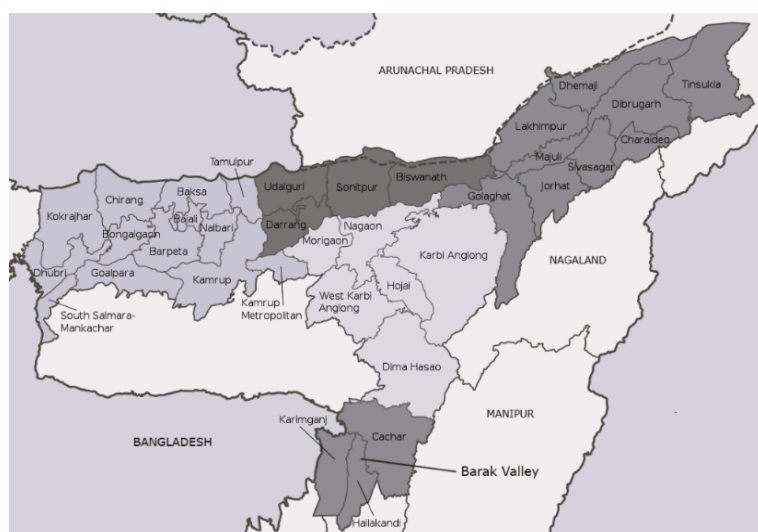
Figure 2

Cover pages of booklets, titled, Bangladesh-er Kabitā (Poems for Bangladesh) on the left and Jaẏ Bangla-r Kabitā (Poems of the Victorious Bengal) on the right respectively by Sheikh Zamir Ali who had crossed the border from Sylhet in present Bangladesh during the Liberation War and Atul Chandra Das who was an inhabitant of the Cachar district of Barak Valley; photograph courtesy: Shahid Quader Chowdhury.
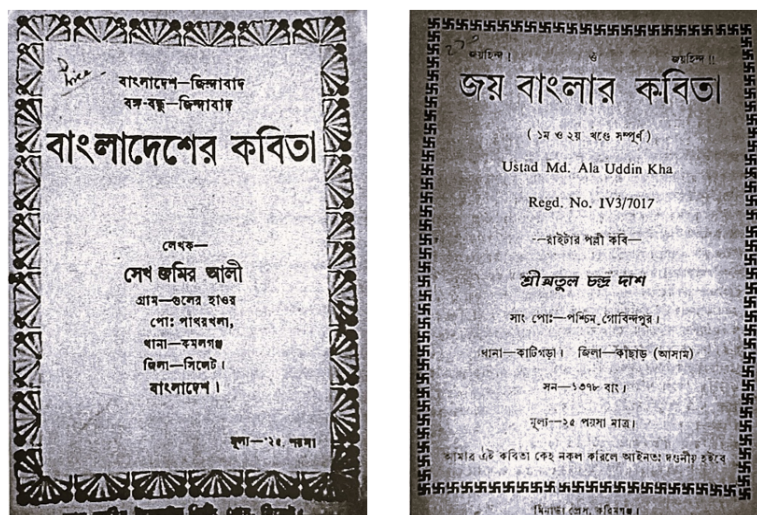
Conclusion

Despite the compromised state of the refugees in the north-east border of India and the growing frustration and hostility of the "legitimate" inhabitants of the border-space towards the refugees whom they eventually begin to consider as infiltrators (Datta, 2022, p. 306), the oral folk poems produced a creative space informed by aesthetic articulations with a power to transform the space of suffering into a space of resistance. In 1971, the *kabiẏāls* were either refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan or representatives of civil society in the borderlands, who belonged to the lower rungs both economically and socially. Most of them neither had financial support to print their spontaneously written and orally performed poetry nor did they feel the need to archive the texts; therefore, a great number of poems of this tradition have now been lost. Besides, interpolation, several texts had been plagiarised by so many that the identity of the original author could no longer be verified. In addition to the ethical responsibility borne by these bards through aesthetic practices, many of them contributed money earned from the performances or from the sales of their booklets to funds set up for the welfare of refugees and Liberation warriors. (Chowdhury, 2017, p. 41) Commonly printed on newsprint papers of either double demy (22.50 x 35 inches) or double crown (20 x 30 inches) size, each booklet would cost a minimal figure between 0.25 and 0.20 Indian Rupee. Following the manner of various other folk forms of poetry and music from Bengal, Barak Valley's *kabigān* begins with a sentimental *prabhu-bandanā* (praying in adoration of ancestral Gods and Goddesses); juxtaposed with it, the uncompromisingly direct engagement with harsh, often unpalatable incidents of the war influenced mass opinion in the valley more than any other forms of media could. The orality of most of these poems ensured a lack of censorship which propelled the

kabiẏāls to express their opinions to their audience in uninhibited fellowship and confidence; for instance, poet Mohammad Abubakkar criticises the silence of other Islamic countries who chose not to act in favour of Bangladesh in spite of the war crime being committed on their Muslim brethren. Although the political leaders and diplomats tiptoed around the subject to maintain equilibrium in global politics, Abubakkar writes: *Arab prajātantra desh-e, Saudi Arab abasesh-e, Kabul-e suniẏā hāshe Bangali marle/…/shuno bhāi āshcharj-er bishay, Muslim rashtra onek hay/keu na kono kathā kay, ei gandagol…* (In the Republic of Arab, in Saudi Arabia, in Kabul, they seem to laugh when a Bengali Muslim dies/…/ Listen, brother, it is astonishing that the Islamic world is silent amidst this pandemonium…; Chowdhury, 2017, p. 68; translation by the author of this essay.) Abubakkar's poem reflects the anxiety and frustration of Bangladeshi Bengali-speaking Muslims stemming from the accusation directed towards them by primarily West Pakistani army officials and statesmen of being inadequate Muslims.

Much before the 1971 civil war, their Islamic piety was denigrated by West Pakistani Muslims as they were seen as "half Muslims" who had turned their backs on the Urdu language, who had become sufficiently Bengalised and absorbed by Hinduism (Khan, 1967, 2007; Mascarenhas, 1971, 1986). By the 1960s, Bengali language and culture had become abhorrent for the Pakistani state (Khawaja, 2021), which led to the ban of *Rabindra-sangīt* (the songs of Bengal's most beloved poet-composer Rabindranath Tagore) by the then governor of East Pakistan, Monem Khan. Set in the political context of the 1971 Liberation War, an heir to the Bengali Language Movement of 1952 which mobilised mass protest against forceful Urdu imposition on the Bengali-speaking Muslims of East Pakistan, the verses in the *kabigān* tradition composed and performed in various Bengali dialects became a cultural weapon of the expansive people's resistance. Defying the prejudice against the Bengali Muslims who, according to the West Pakistani army officials, were emotionally driven by the non-Islamic Bengali cultural domination of Calcutta (Khawaja, 2021), the *kabiẏāls* invite their audience to assume a transnational Bengali identity based on shared cultures, to break free of the chains of religious divisions and to take part in the resistance against political injustice. For instance, poet Atul Chandra Das from the Cachar district of the Valley writes, *Bānglā Bāngāli-r swādhīn, parādhīn thākbe ken hoiẏā/Bānglā desh-er janye Bāngāli gān-e diteche parāṇ/Bāngāli Bāngāli'e rākhbe Bāngāli-r sammān/…/Bāngāli sab ek thākile sab'e jaẏī haẏ…* (Bengal belongs to the Bengali people, why would it remain colonised?/For Bengal, the Bengali people laid down their lives/Only a Bengali can protect the honour of another/…/the Bengali people will win only if they are united…; Chowdhury, 2017, 75.) Despite their rustic form, the poems remain testimony of a turbulent times in its lucid articulation of global politics; in the production of a vibrant space of people's resistance irrespective of class, caste, creed and race; or in the *kabiẏāl*'s assumption of the role of a seer who would, despite being away from the warzone, faithfully place himself, through a language spoken by the people and a poetic form well-liked by them, in the position of all who could not speak for themselves. By inhabiting the border-space and by redefining it as a space of vast possibilities, the rustic, folk poems assume custodianship of refugee experiences that would otherwise drift aimlessly in-between national territories.

References

Adorno, T. (1980). Commitment. In Ernst Bloch et al (Eds.) & Ronald Taylor (trans.), *Aesthetics and Politics* (pp. 177–195). Verso.

Agamben, G. (2002). *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans.). Zone.

Bhattacharya, A. (1977). *Bangiya Loka-Sangeet Ratnakar* 1 (reprint). A Mukherjee and Co. Pvt. Ltd.

Certeau, M. de. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life.* University of California Press.

Chowdhury, D. (2009). *Gram Nagar-er Gan (1800–2005).* Lok-Sanskriti o Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra.

Chowdhury, S. Q. (2017). *Barak Upatyaka-r Kabi o Kabita.* Ganahatya Nirjatan o Muktijudhha Bishayak Gabeshana Kendra.

Datta, A. (2013). *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971.* Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203104613

Datta, A. (2022). Bordering Assam through affective closure: 1971 and the road to the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019. *Asian Affairs,* 53(2), 298–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2076477

Hooks, B. (1989). Choosing the Margin as a space of Radical Openness. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media, 36.* 15–23. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660

Khan, Mohammad A. (1967). *Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography.* Oxford University Press.

Khan, Mohammad A. (2007). *Diaries of Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, 1966-1972.* Oxford University Press.

Khawaja, Hafsa. (2021, Dec 16). The caricatured Bengali & the Pakistan Army. Jamhoor (May, 2023). Accessed from https://www.jamhoor.org/read/the-caricatured-bengali-amp-the-pakistan-army.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Leon S. Roudiez, trans). Columbia University Press.

Lok S. (1971). *Lok Sabha Debates* 126 (20). Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Luthra, P. N. (1975). *Problems of Bangladesh Refugee Influx and Emerging Lessons for Administration.* Department of Personnel and Administrative Reform, Cabinet Secretariat.

Mamoon, M. (2021). *Muktijuddhe Sanskritik Abadan: Paschim Banga o Simantabarti Rajya-samuha.* Prothoma Prakashan.

Mascarenhas, A. (1971). *The Rape of Bangladesh.* Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

Mascarenhas, A. (1986). *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood.* Hodder and Stoughton.

Mukherjee, N. (2011). 'Never again': aesthetics of 'genocidal' cosmopolitanism and the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *17*, 71–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2011.01690.x

Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, *26*, 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520

Schendel, W. v. (2004). *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*. Anthem Press.

Corresponding Author: Sushrita Acharjee
Email: sushrita1.acharjee@adamasuniversity.ac.in

Gardening as Activism: Cultivating Human Minds in *A Gardener in Wasteland*

Arundhati Sen
Presidency University, India

Abstract

Jotiba Phule's *Gulamgiri* (1873), which is widely translated as *Slavery*, equates casteism with slavery. His book carefully deconstructs the Vedic scriptures, which make up the largest chunk of central religious texts in Hinduism, in order to expose the latent hypocrisy and the conspiracy of Brahminical ideology to dominate a section of society. *Gulamgiri* was the radical manifesto of the social reform society called Satyasodhak Samaj, founded by Phule in 1873 along with his wife Savitribai Phule. Aparajita Ninan and Srividya Natarajan's graphic novel *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2011), by revisiting Jotiba Phule's ground-breaking text *Gulamgiri*, examines the contemporaneity and the continuity of caste issues and thus attempts a conversation between the past and the present historical reality of casteism. The present study focuses on the centrality of the metaphor of the garden in highlighting the gravity of the caste problem and its larger implications in the lives of India's marginalised Dalit community. By focusing on the physical aspects of gardening, this paper touches upon Dalit eco-literary concerns and brings to the fore the role of labour that defines the relationship between Dalit bodies and nature. It also aims to capture Natarajan and Ninan's contribution to Phule's task of metaphorical gardening, thus becoming co-gardeners in distant time and space.

Keywords: activism, dalit eco-literary, caste, gardening, narrative

Jotiba Phule's *Gulamgiri* (1873), popularly translated as *Slavery*, equates casteism with slavery. His work carefully deconstructs the Vedic scriptures which make up the largest chunk of principal religious texts in Hinduism and justifies the prevalent inequality while sanctioning the discrimination in a hierarchical caste-divided society. *Gulamgiri* was a radical manifesto of the Satyasodhak Samaj founded by Phule in 1873 along with his wife Savitribai Phule. The graphic novel, *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2011) by Aparajita Ninan and Srividya Natarajan, by revisiting Jotiba Phule's ground-breaking text *Gulamgiri* examines the contemporaneity and the continuity of the caste issues and thus attempts a conversation between the past and the present historical reality of a caste-ised nation.

The graphic retelling of Phule's struggle begins with the authors, writer Srividya Natarajan and artist Aparajita Ninan discussing their plan to adapt Jotiba Phule's *Gulamgiri*. While strolling through a suburb in New Delhi, they witness a group of children encountering casteist slurs and being beaten by an upper-caste man for accidentally kicking a football into his house. They stop at a banner for a movie – *Batman Begins* – a popular superhero movie, as they go past this incident, Ninan (2011) explains why she thinks superheroes are necessary: "to swoop down out of the sky and kick the baddies to bits" (p. 9). The subsequent pages highlight the ideology of the oppressive caste system and Jotibha and Savitribai Phule's struggle to fight it. This incident thus not only sets the tone of the narrative by foregrounding the relevance of Ninan and Natarajan's project but also necessitates the featuring of a contrasting superhero in the figure of the gardener-couple who instead of swooping down out of the sky, remained rooted in the ground and decided to "kick" out the roots of casteist ideology by cultivating young minds with the spirit of liberty and equality. It is in this context that the metaphor of the garden becomes relevant and demands careful attention which the present study outlines.

Literature Review

The text has received wide critical attention owing to its narrative technique and graphic genre in recounting the Dalit trauma and everyday experience. The success of the graphic novel genre in chronicling the historical trauma around the caste system with utmost authenticity has been traced by Promod K. Nayar (2018). Also, Ruma Sinha (2018) investigates how the graphic genre not only visually maps the caste atrocities but by problematizing the very notion of authentic representation argues for the inclusion of everyone, not just Dalits in the anti-caste theorisation and struggle. Again, Deepali Yadav's (2016) focus on the politics of visuality in understanding caste in contemporary Indian society helps her to examine the role of the same in extending *Gulamgiri*'s critique of Hinduism and Phule's relevance in current times. Although the politics of representation and the genre have retained sufficient attention, the visuality of the organic metaphor of gardening which is crucial to the title of the novel is often mentioned in the passing and the intricate thematic concerns underlying it are overlooked. The present study aims to fill in the lacuna by focusing on the centrality of the metaphor in highlighting the gravity of the caste problem and its larger implications in Dalit lives. By focusing on the physical aspects of gardening, this paper touches upon the Dalit eco-literary concerns and brings to the fore the role of labour that defines the relationship between Dalit bodies and nature and the representation of this intricate relationship in Dalit self-narratives

only to subvert it by Phule's act of metaphorical gardening. Besides, Natarajan and Ninan's contribution to Phule's task of metaphorical gardening and thus becoming co-gardeners has been illustrated.

Scott McCloud's (1993) critical engagement with various aspects of the visual communication and technical components of the comic art form informs the analysis of the metaphor. The technique of "amplification through simplification" (McCloud, 1993, p. 30) which promotes the artist's stripping away of detail in order to heighten its meaning, has been extremely pertinent here, especially in the discussion of the author and artists' contribution towards the mission. The focus on simplification, exaggeration, and repetition is partly borrowed from Kai Mikkonen's (2017) significant revision of narratological concepts through the study of narrative comics. By allowing for its subversion rather than ideal romanticism, the Dalit eco-literary tradition, which records the strong relationships between Dalits and nature, has provided the necessary theoretical framework for tracing the organicity of the metaphor in the Phules' lives. The first section of the paper concerns itself with the symbol of gardening and its connection with Jotiba and Savitri Phule's lives, while the latter part will deal with the extension of the metaphor in the lives of the authors of the text.

Analysis and Discussion

The assertion that "[k]ey incidents, especially those which lend themselves to visual presentation, do receive multipanel treatment" (Witek, 1989, p. 83) helps to deduce the symbolism of the flower. Instead of any incident, the image of a flower with its dense symbolism has received multipanel treatments. The flower becomes a crucial aspect of Jotiba's characterisation besides contributing to the larger thematics of the graphic novel. Kai Mikkonen (2017) stresses on repetition of any aspect of the character's external feature, behaviour, speech, thought, gesture, or even "a word, phrase … forms of graphic style, such as colour and the graphic line" (p. 184) as having the potential to be an indication of personality which is served by this ever-present flower. Jotiba Rao Phule is introduced in the panel following a crowd of Brahmin's resentment and consequent threatening of his father, Govindrao for allowing his son and daughter-in-law, Savitri Phule to teach the "untouchables[1]" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 15) by admitting them to his school. The panel depicts a threatened Govindrao pleading with his "children" in the following words: "Joti, Savitri, my children. This is the final straw – our lives are being threatened. Either give up the school or stop living under my roof" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 15). To which, Jotiba identifiable by the flower marked behind his left hand, replies, "This is my life's work, father" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 15). His surname, Phule which contains the word "phul" is the Hindi translation of the word flower not only just identifies him throughout the novel but also

---

[1] "Untouchables" was the derogatory term used to refer to the members of the Dalit community. They came to be known as the Dalits in more recent years. Dalit is a term that literally means "downtrodden" or "oppressed" in Marathi. However, "Scheduled Caste" is the word designated for this particular group of people under Article 341 of the Indian Constitution, and as a result, they are referred to as such in official papers. They have historically been given the lowest position on the social echelon of Hindu society. Upper castes, more recently known as Caste Hindus or Savarnas, were those awarded a high rank in the caste system.

emphasises his role as a gardener. The flower on him acts as a marker of his Mali[2] caste besides being a constant reminder of his success with respect to what he has achieved. It distinguishes him visually from others and stands for the blossoming that is at the heart of his egalitarian project. Savitri is also marked by flowers in the form of prominent earrings in almost every panel. Even in the wanted poster where Savitri is targeted "for educating sudra[3] and atisudra[4] girls" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 13), the flower is noticeable on her left ear, peeping out of her veil covering the head. The enlightened consciousness symbolised by the flower has become an intrinsic part of their social and individual identity.

Again, it is noticeable that the visual retelling of Jotiba Phule's life and beliefs is adorned by Dalit labouring bodies in the field under extreme weather conditions (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 11, p. 107, p. 113). Mukul Sharma's observation is particularly relevant in this context. He takes into account an eco-critical dimension of labour by examining different environmental questions: "What does it mean when work, rather than leisure, is your central ecological experience?" (Sharma, 2019, p. 1013) and thereby marks the centrality of labour in explaining relations between society and nature in Dalit autobiographies. The idea of labouring bodies as their form of interaction with nature is pertinent in the context of gardening as well. Gardening is a physical activity that involves weeding, tilling the land, watering, mulching, trellising, and harvesting without being affected by harsh weather circumstances. Often perceived as a leisure activity or a hobby, it is interesting to note that gardening is not merely a choice for the Mali caste, but rather a profession ordained to the community by hierarchical caste order. Therefore, Phule's act of metaphorical gardening instead of physical gardening subverts the traditional occupation imposed on them, and consequently, marks a rejection of physical labour that has become indeed a defining parameter to gauge the relationship between Dalits and Nature. The lack of physical labour in favour of mental work in Phule's garden can be interpreted as his activism where he urges the Dalits, so long forcefully denied their right to education, to take up the pen as their strongest weapon. The blossoming of his garden implies the awakening of their consciousness as human beings capable of enjoying equal rights and opportunities, following his reading of Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" as depicted in the text (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 19). He realised that empowerment can be achieved only through education which has been visually depicted as pens with their nibs as flowers in the illustration of the chapter titled "The seeds of change" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 99).

The lower half of the page is depicted in dark shades from where the pens are raised and the direction in which they are pointed is left uncolored, thus pointing to the journey from darkness to light that the pens alone can make possible. He revisited the "The Weed-bed of Myths" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 29) by questioning the absurdity of glorifying myths as preached by the Brahmins through their sacred texts like the *Manusmriti*. He attacks the very root of the

---

[2] Mali is a Hindu caste who have historically worked as florists and gardeners, predominantly found in all of North and East India, as well as in Maharashtra and the Terai region of Nepal.

[3] The four castes that make up the traditional Hindu social structure are Brahmins, Khastriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Shudras are placed in the lowest rung of the hierarchical caste order.

[4] Apart from the four castes, there is the fifth category called the Atishudras which exists outside of this caste structure.

ideology of casteism by exposing the historicization of myths to uphold the superiority of the Brahmins over the lower castes which finds admiration in Ninan's words, "I love how deliberately outrageous Phule is when he walks the borderland between mythology and history. He reminds one that history is story too" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 63). His weeding, dedicated to the elimination of the poisonous roots of casteism, is thus not a physical activity but rather an intellectual exercise of deconstructing and demythologizing what is held as sacred and sacrosanct. Accordingly, the process of seeding has a distinct connotation in Phule's gardening. The seeds of emancipation from enslavement are sowed by educating young minds (Sinha, 2018). The joy of harvesting finds expression in the gardener couple's conversation: "Jotiba, do you remember 14-year-old Muktabai after three years in our second school for atishudra girls? Do you remember her brilliant essay on caste?" and the adjacent panel shows a young girl reading passionately: "Oh, Mahars and mangs, you are poor and sick. Only the medicine of knowledge will cure and heal you. Let that religion where only one person is privileged and the rest deprived perish from the earth, and let it never enter our minds to be proud of such a religion" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 93) with the spotlight on her. Their aim as nurturers of minds taste the fruits of success in the end with the fragrance being spread among all as evident on the last page.

On the last panel, we witness how all of them are marked by flowers, be it Ninan or Natarajan or those who are listening to the poem, "Rise to Learn and Act" being read (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 123) amidst a garden full of flowers. The facing page illustration suggests a breaking of the panel and the spreading of flowers all over the pages (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, pp. 122-123). Jotiba is pictured here as holding a book containing phrases like, "lack of education leads to lack of wisdom, which leads to lack of justice, which leads to lack of progress, which leads to lack of money, which leads to the oppression of the lower classes. See how lack of education can affect society!" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 122) in the backdrop of flowers without any restriction of the panel. This indicates brilliantly how ideas and principles are free to circulate irrespective of time and space and the oppressive attempts to throttle them. Hence two flowers do escape from one page to another highlighting their impacts on the lives of Ninan and Natarajan along with others in a different space and time. Closer attention to the panel shows a flower defying the margins of the panel reaches the corner-most space of the page, therefore indicating how from Ninan and Natarajan's pages, its journey would continue to the days to come.

Moreover, the transformation of a deserted flies-infested wasteland littered with garbage and broken objects along with wild plants into a garden full of flowers inhabited by people of all ages, reading and listening at the end of the chapter "The Seeds of Change" is truly a welcoming change that has been brought about by the power of education. Likewise, the organicity of the metaphor runs through the titles of the chapters as well. While the first chapter "The Wasteland of Caste" depicts garbage-littered wasteland to symbolically represent the ugliness of casteism (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 7), the second chapter titled, "The Weed-bed of Myth" traces the ideological underpinnings of the caste system that is rooted in ancient Brahmin scriptures. The image on the title page illustrating the wild growths of shrubs and thorny bushes implies how the myths function as weeds and thus prevent the healthy growth

of plants (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 29). Therefore, in order to ensure proper growth of seedlings, the weeds have to be uprooted first, hence Phule's countering of the scriptural logic by writing *Gulamgiri* is the first step. Moreover, the third chapter, "The Roots of Tyranny" visually demonstrates how the physical map of India is strangled by thick wild roots and almost choking the nation (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 66). The subsequent pages trace the nakedness of ideological and physical manifestation of upper-caste violence from ancient ages (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 67) to modern times (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 78), even not sparing the Indian Freedom Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Savarkar, V.D. Savarkar, M.S. Golwalker (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 91) and thus preventing the attainment of equality for all. The final chapter, titled "The Seeds of Change" as previously discussed, showcases the nips of pens as flowers marking the change that can be ushered in with the power of education (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 99).

In fact, Ninan and Natarajan almost after 138 years resort to visuality to uphold Phule's logical argument in *Gulamgiri* by highlighting the absurdity of the Brahminical logic. As Yadav observes, how "contrasting images meant for deconstructing the Manusmriti myths are widely spread out on entire pages of the novel offering ample space and time for their internalisation" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 51) to the readers which "leads to an awakening of our consciousness in a way that is difficult for a verbal description to achieve. When we see a body of a human and fish forcefully put together to form one being we come to appreciate the absurdity of the story" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 53). The juxtaposition of Brahman's perspective with that of Phule's in a single panel makes space for both sides of the narrative thus allowing readers to choose the one that appeals to their sense of rationality.

Besides, the caricature of the greedy, lusty, cruel Brahmin as a hairy, heavily moustached, obese man with another twisted lock of hair points to the very function of caricaturist in not seeking the perfect form but the perfect deformity, "thus penetrating through the mere outward appearance to the inner being in all its littleness or ugliness" (Gombrich & Kris, 1938, p. 320). The readers hence witness not merely what they see but how Natarajan and Ninan interpret the stereotypical Brahmins through their artistic vision (Douglas, 2007). Moreover, the bringing together of the caricature and human-like characters enable us to identify with one and reject the other. Dalits are individualised therefore allowing us to think of them as convincing life-like characters. This distinguishing thus allows a better identification with the plights of the Dalits, unlike the typified and caricatured Brahmins that arouses ridicule and contempt. The individuation and typification have been achieved by the carefully drawn expressions on their faces. Phule and Savitri can be seen experiencing a range of emotions – resoluteness in being asked to stop their work as detailed in the panel immediately after being threatened (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 16), anger while explaining the use of "absurd mythology" to keep a hold on all the people (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 72), scepticism about laws prescribed in the *Manusmiriti* (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 78), joy at recounting how a 14-year-old from their school has excelled (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 93). On the contrary, the unnamed Brahmin figure is depicted mostly with a constant expression of anger and disgust towards the Dalits except on occasion being sly with the British in conspiring against the masses (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 105).

Drawing from E. M. Forster's conception of "flat" and "round" characters in the context of a novel, David Fishelov's (1990) development of Forster's model with regard to the comic genre holds significance in our discussion. Fishelov distinguishes the characters' flatness and roundness on the two levels of textuality and the reader's construction. Flatness on the textual level refers to the amount of space and literary or linguistic attention that is apportioned to a particular character (Fishelov, 1990). The character's textual flatness typically amounts to limited and one-dimensional attention so that a character is portrayed only from one perspective, always saying the same things, repeating some pattern of behaviour, or is associated with only one trait. Contrarily, roundness of a character is attributed to multidimensional representation which involves, for instance, the presentation of consciousness and inner life, varied points of view on the character's action, behaviour, and perception through narratorial strategies, focalisation techniques, speech and thought representation (Fishelov, 1990). The caricatured Brahmin with his constant hostile behaviour towards the lower-castes ascertains him a flatness of character. On the other hand, Dhondiba, the Brahmin friend of Jotiba Phule is portrayed with a roundness of character by highlighting his thorough transformation. The dialogic argument between the two friends shows his metamorphosis from being someone who believed in Hindu mythology to the one who realizes at the end: "Ah! Well at least you opened my eyes to so many things I never saw before, my friend" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 121). This differential treatment of two kinds of upper-caste people, the Brahmin type and the Brahmin ally through Dhondiba helps us to understand the motive behind the book, which is to raise awareness and make upper-caste people see the roots of the problem by acknowledging and accepting the accountability.

Besides, techniques like visual simplification as well as exaggeration, as elaborated upon by Kai Mikkonen are used here to focus on certain themes. Exaggeration helps to emphasise a trait, mental state, idea, or the nature and impact of an action (Mikkonen, 2017). For instance, the twisted hair lock and the distorted speech bubble of the Brahmins are an indicator of their distorted perception of humankind. Again, the illustration of faces without eyes and other facial features, but only the mouth reminds us of McCloud's "amplification through simplification" (30) technique. The absence of accurate facial features allows focus on the mouth that spreads the false narrative of caste purity through the interpretation of their sacred texts and justifying their words as the ones being spoken by God (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, pp. 76-77). Moreover, it allows us to see how master narratives are constructed and validated by a powerful community, not an individual. It is a commentary on the fictionality of the narrative and rejecting distinct features provides for the "universality" (McCloud, 1993, p. 31) of the typified characters. Thus, by employing all the necessary visual and narrative techniques in raising awareness about the caste problem in the 21st century, Ninan and Natarajan become co-gardeners along with Jotiba and Savitri in their mission.

Conclusion

In this paper, the significance of the metaphor of gardening along with other organic metaphors that prove themselves vital in the narrative space of the novel and the lives of its protagonists are explored in greater detail. In the course of the exploration, the transformation of the Phules

from being merely the "cultivators of earth" (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011, p. 16) to the cultivators of minds by subverting the social hierarchical caste order that reserves manual work for the lower-castes is noticeable. Not only by choosing metaphorical gardening they challenge the pre-ordained profession, but they also become the torchbearers of the anti-caste movement which still holds considerable weight in our contemporary society as evident from the incident that marks the opening of the text. Gardening thus assumes a proportion of social activism in the lives of this firebrand couple. Education becomes the principal tool of their form of gardening thus proving instrumental in Dalit empowerment. The couple's vision finds its allies in the 21st century writer and illustrator, Srividya Natarajan and Aparajita Ninan who takes it upon themselves to expand Phule's argument in a timely fashion, thus making it more appealing with pictorial description and increasing its reach among all ages. By roping in incidents of caste discrimination taking place on a daily basis even in today's India, Natarajan and Ninan makes a strong case for Jotiba and Savitri's relevance in independent, democratic India and point to the society's failure to uphold ideals of liberty, justice, equality for all its citizens.

References

Fishelov, D. (2008). Types of character, characteristics of types. *Style*, *24*(3), pp. 422–39. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42945871

Gombrich, E. M., & Kris, E. (1938). The principles of caricature. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, *17*(3–4), pp. 319-342. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8341.1938.tb00301.x

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: HaperCollins Publishers.

Mikkonen, K. (2017). *The narratology of comic art*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315410135

Natarajan, S., & Ninan, A. (2011). *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.

Nayar, P. K. (2018). The Indian graphic novel and dalit trauma: *A Gardener in the Wasteland*. In Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak (Eds.), *Dalit Literatures in India*, (2nd ed., pp. 330–348). New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429489563-23

Sharma, M. (2019). 'My World Is a Different World': Caste and dalit eco-literary traditions. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *42*(6), 1013–1030. http://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1667057

Sinha, R. (2018). Aesthetics, gender, and canon in anti-caste graphic narratives, *A Gardener in the Wasteland* and *Bhimayana*. *South Asian Review, 39*, 1–17. doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2018.1514148

Witek, J. (1989). *Comic books as history: The narrative of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press.

Wolk, D. (2007). *Reading comics: How graphic novels work and what they Mean.* Boston: Da Capo Press.

Yadav, D. (2016). Visualising caste: *A Gardener in the Wasteland* and the politics of graphic adaptation. *South Asian Popular Culture*, *14*(1-2), 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2016.1241347

Corresponding Author: Arundhati Sen
Email: senarundhati7@gmail.com

The Significance of Colour Symbolisms in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979)

Ankita Sen
Presidency University, India

Abstract

The paper seeks to critically explore Angela Carter's use of colour symbolisms in her short story "The Bloody Chamber" (1979). By focussing on the recurrent invocation of three major colours, namely red, black and white, the paper studies how chromatic coding becomes a potent rhetorical device through which the psychological and physical implications of gendered violence are negotiated in Carter's story. Paying close attention to the protagonist's interaction with an aesthetically stimulating narrative world, steeped in visceral colours, the paper attempts at problematizing the politics of victimisation and female agency that underlies the entire narrative. Carter's deployment of colour symbolisms has a quasi-theatrical dimension that tends to visualise the subversive implications of the text. Keeping that in mind, the paper seeks to crack the chromatic codes at multiple levels; for instance, red is studied in context to patriarchal violation of female bodies, as an embodiment of female desire and a manifestation of female bonding. Black is read through the lens of motherhood where it becomes a visual trope that deconstructs the prototype of an ideal mother and individualises her as a redemptive and rebellious figure. Finally, by paying attention to Carter's use of the colour white, the paper seeks to trace its dual purpose in perpetuating invisibilization of female desire and charging the act of seeing with an agential import.

Keywords: body, colour, female sexuality, patriarchy, violence

The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1979) is a short story collection by Angela Carter, in which she borrows the basic themes from familiar fairy tales and legends like "Little Red Riding Hood," "Bluebeard," "Puss in Boots," and "Beauty and the Beast," and re-works them into synesthetic concoctions of stimulatingly fresh narratives pervaded with tropes of Gothic Romanticism. Angela Carter's stories primarily draw their narrative power from exploding stereotypes surrounding female sexuality and desire. Through systematic subversion of established representations of women in fairy-tales, Carter reconfigures "the virtuous virgin versus the wayward whore" binary in her dark and sensual adaptations of such tales. Carter's peculiar use of symbolisms, stylistics and rhetorical devices charge her writing with a deconstructive import that undercuts the deeply didactic concerns of the kind of tales she chooses to re-write, without ever compromising on the carefully crafted intertextuality.

The first story in the collection, "The Bloody Chamber", is an eroticised version of Charles Perrault's "La Barbe-Bleue" (translated as "The Bluebeard") told from an essentially feminist point of view. The plot revolves around a young woman who takes an old and much married husband owing to his riches. The husband, referred to as the Marquis, embodies a beastly virility that is theatrically mapped out against the corporeal presence of a libidinous virgin. In the Marquis's absence she ventures out of curiosity into a room, whose key has been placed in her custody but she is strictly forbidden to use it. Inside, she discovers the bloodied remains of her husband's former wives and out of fear drops the key into a pool of blood. The stain gives her away to the husband once he returns and just as she is about to be killed for transgression her mother bursts into the scene like a *deus ex machina* and saves her.

Literature Review

Many critics have commented upon the text's feminist subversion of sadomasochism and its celebration of women's right to libidinal gratification. Robin Ann Sheets (1991), for example, while elaborating on Carter's essentially politicised interrogation of female masochism in the story, argues that sexual initiation has urged "the protagonist of 'The Bloody Chamber' to learn that she is not a perfect woman; she has the right to act, to experience the consequences of her decisions, to learn from error" (p. 650). Focussing on Carter's use of physical abuse as a central trope to "decolonize" the female body within phallocentric cultures, Merja Makinen (1992) explores the construction of a "complex vision of female psycho-sexuality, through [the author's] invoking of violence as well as the erotic" (p. 9). Becky McLaughlin (1995) contends that the text conceptualises the complex relationship between male sexual fantasy and female curiosity. Commenting on the seventeen-year-old protagonist's initiation into the world of pornography, McLaughlin writes, "Until now the marquis's wife has been an obstacle to his fantasy, but when her curiosity lures her into innocent prurience, she is projected into his fantasy (p. 411). Patricia Duncker (1996), in her analyses of the text, focuses on the dynamic power equations latent in pornographic discourses. To quote her, "The critical relationship between women and men in Carter's fictions, whether the women be wives or whores, is always economic: the heterosexual cash nexus, where cocks and cunts carry price tags" (p. 62). Christina Bacchilega (1997) reads the heroine's incipient access to knowledge and agency as an outcome of her materialistic and masochistic desires by arguing that "Carter's re-

presentation of Perrault's heroine, explores her socio-economic motivations for entering the bloody chamber of collusion while parodying her masochism in order to build resistance to it" (p. 126).

Analysis and Discussion

Although Carter's construction of a female subjectivity predicated mostly on female desire has been studied from feminist and psychoanalytic viewpoints, an aspect which has been largely overlooked, particularly in this context, is the text's use of colours to negotiate the complex inner-world of the narrator as she comes to terms with her first ever sexual awakening and the perils accompanying it. The narrative is steeped in colours. Even a cursory reading of the story reveals the sheer amount of artistic energy that Carter has invested in evoking different colours to mark the shift in the moods and tones of the narratives. In this paper I propose to study the colour symbolisms employed in the text to achieve an alternative critique of Carter's representation of the female body and its complex relationship with violence and sexual politics. The text repeatedly evokes comprehensive colour palettes: the sensual champagne of the "satin negligée" (Carter, 1979, p.7), the "ruby red" of the choker (p. 11), the seductive sheen of the "black muslin" (p. 7), the crimson of the velvet armchairs, the "fiery opal" (p. 9) of the engagement ring, the warm caramel glow of a distant window (p. 11), the "vermilion lacquer" of the gilded frames in the Marquis's hallway, the ominous whiteness of the lilies adorning every part of the Marquis's bedroom and the staining "turmeric' of the pollen from the lilies (p. 15). In this paper, my attempts at exploring the chromatic symbolism of Carter's narrative is restricted to three primary colours- red, black and white. I propose to elucidate on how the heroine, through literal and symbolic interaction with the mentioned colours, either in the form of tangible objects like rubies and fabrics, or in the form of bodily fluids like blood and semen, communicates her processing of the psychological and physical wounds inflicted on her.

The association of the colour red with sexual transgression is a common trope in literature. Whether it is a scarlet "A" pinned on Hester Prynne as a mark of disgrace for flouting conventional sexual codes in puritanical England; or the dark red of Riding Hood's cloak which anticipates her potential consummation at the hand of the wolf, the colour red is often considered as a signifier for the eroticised gendered body, vulnerable to patriarchal consumption. Likewise, in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (circa 1400), we come across the Wife of Bath whose preference for the colour scarlet is symbolic owing to her moral dubiety and sexual waywardness. The inevitable presence of red at three crucial points in a woman's life- the onset of puberty, defloration and giving birth, intimately and inextricably link this colour with the very ontological reality of womanhood. Concomitantly, it has become a complex and potent trope in literature when it comes to the representation of female sexuality. In the introductory passage of the text, Carter has hinted at a "moving away" from the colour white signifying a movement from virginal chastity towards sexual initiation: "the train that bore me through the night, away from Paris, away from girlhood, away from the white, enclosed quietude of my mother's apartment, into the unguessable country of marriage" (Carter, 1979, p. 18).

At a figurative level, this marks a moment of rift in the narrative which anticipates the literal "rupture" of the heroine's hymen following her loss of virginity later in the story. This is further confirmed a few passages later where Carter aligns the mother's concerns about her daughter's decision to marry a much older man, with her unpacking of the white wedding dress symbolically fastened with red ribbons: "Are you sure, she'd said when they delivered the gigantic box that held the wedding dress he'd bought me, wrapped up in tissue paper and red ribbon like a Christmas gift of crystallised fruit. Are you sure you love him?" (Carter, 1997, p. 18). The chromatic juxtaposition of the ribbon's red with the fabric's pristine white evokes visual images of what critic da Silva refers to as "feminine bleeding" (da Silva, 2007, p. 240) associated with menstruation. Pamela Cooper (2010) in her analyses of "blood symbolisms" in the works of Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood writes, "menstruation genders the subject by designating a bodily openness both to fertility and to injury. Menstrual blood marks the renewal of life through procreation and its potential destruction through a sexualized violence of invasion and occupation" (Cooper, 2010, p. 93). A reflection on the scene at hand in light of Cooper's argument reveals that the strategic wrapping of the white fabric in red ribbons without compromising on its whiteness, underlines the sexual chastity of the heroine while simultaneously implying the potential fertility of her body. Moreover, at the political level, the heroine's conscious unfastening of the red ribbon in spite of her mother's authoritative warning points towards Carter's subversion of the heroine's victim-role in her retelling and subscribes to Bacchilega's argument that "the heroine self-consciously viewed her innocence as an asset— she exchanged her virginal body for her husband's riches" (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 120).

Carter has further exploited this symbolic link between red and the biological phenomenon of procreation to construct what da Silva defines as a "dynamic frame of a shared destiny where related women interact, both for good and for evil" (da Silva, 2007, p. 245). In Carter's story, red is quite explicitly the red of blood-lines through which the "eagle-featured, indomitable mother…[who] has defied the yellow outlaws of Indochina" passes on her "nerves and will" to the daughter (Carter, 1979, p. 19). The moment of untying the red ribbons connotatively coincides with the discovery of a black dress sent specially for the mother: "There was a dress for her, too; black silk, with the dull, prismatic sheen of oil on water, finer than anything she'd worn…" (Carter, 1979, p. 18). This sudden interruption of the red-white colour palette by the appearance of black marks a moment of crisis in the mother-daughter relationship. It anticipates a Freudian renouncement of the bond with the mother which according to Freud is necessary to prevent oneself from being pulled "back to what [he] calls the "limitless narcissism" of infancy", as argued by Jessica Benjamin in her essay "The Oedipal Riddle" (Benjamin, 1988, p. 135). But critic Robin Ann Sheets rightly argues that since "The mother in "The Bloody Chamber" has experienced autonomy and adventure in the world; she has also acted according to her desires" (Sheets, 1991). Carter's characterisation of her inverts the Freudian image of the castrated and effete mother figure. The introduction of black colour as a signifier of the mother's severed bond with her daughter also marks the beginning of a process of individualisation that comes to a full circle at the end of the story when the mother appears as "A rider, her black skirts tucked up around her waist so she could ride hard and fast, a crazy, magnificent horsewoman in widow's weeds" (Carter, 1979, p. 52). This strategic recurrence of

the colour black reinforces the idea that it is not a rejection of but a reunion with the mother that facilitates the restoration of the child's bodily and psychic wholeness.

Also owing to the transactional terms of the marriage and the lopsided power dynamics between the bride and groom, the black dress becomes a kind of uniform assigned to the mother by patriarchal forces, denoting her inferior rank in society (as an essentially asexualised presence that inspires love but not desire, hence the lack of red). Carter, instead of idealising female nurturance, invokes the mother as an individually existing subject who expresses her own desires: "You never saw such a wild thing as my mother, her hat seized by the winds and blown out to sea so that her hair was her white mane, her black lisle legs exposed to the thigh" (Carter, 1979, p. 54). Such a reading lays bare the feminist underpinnings of Carter's chromatic encoding by foregrounding how the colour black, which at the beginning of the narrative is a metaphor for the confining "roles" that a phallocentric culture doles out to mothers as "bearers" and "nurturers" of children, becomes a visceral embodiment of power and freedom by the end. Carter has exploited the easy relation between blood and violence to overturn the dominant narrative of heterosexual romance. The text negotiates the gendered trauma of brutal sexual encounters through strategic usage of the colour red. For example, the description of the ruby red choker titillates the fine balance between love and violence/power to a terrifying end: "His wedding gift, clasped round my throat. A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat" (Carter, 1979, p. 22). Here, the parallel between rubies and spilled blood not only emphasises the easy susceptibility of the female body to patriarchal exploitation but also exposes how the popular discourse on love is predicated on an implicit threat of violence. The blood-red of the choker reminds her "the aristos who'd escaped the guillotine had an ironic fad of tying a red ribbon round their necks at just the point where the blade would have sliced it through, a red ribbon like the memory of a wound" (Carter, 1979, p. 22). The positioning of the rubies around her throat simultaneously evokes conflicting images of adornment and wound, or to be precise a wound as an adornment. The "slit" of this wound-like contraption which the narrator must carry on her person even at the cost of a potential distortion of her flesh: "the bloody bandage of rubies" (Carter, 1979, p. 23), is significant. One can read it as a metaphor for the openness of the female reproductive mechanism that augments the flesh's vulnerability to violation.

Thus, the choker becomes what Cooper calls an "ambiguous signifier of buried violence as well as of promised hope" (Cooper, 2010, p. 96). This dual implication of the colour red forces the narrator into a synecdochical relationship with the choker, where one particular aspect of her body (the sexual) ends up defining her corporeal and social wholeness. This is further confirmed, when before the defloration ceremony, the man "kissed those blazing rubies, too. He kissed them before he kissed my mouth. Rapt, he intoned: 'Of her apparel she retains/Only her sonorous jewellery'" (Carter, 1979, p. 29). With the choker standing out as a pool of redness against the monochromatic nudity of her flesh, it becomes a simultaneous sign of caution against the destruction awaiting her body and a possibility of redemption through libidinal gratification: "I clung to him as though only the one who had inflicted the pain could comfort me for suffering it" (Carter, 1979, p. 30). Thus, the destructive and restorative potencies of the colour red is filtered through the heroine's masochism as can be inferred from the above lines.

In the next passage, following the scene of sexual intercourse the narrator states, "I had bled" (p. 30); this marks a symbolic diffusion of the red of the rubies into the red of her blood which finally establishes the choker as a powerful trope for both the "scarlet, palpitating core" (Carter, 1979, p. 27) of her body and the patriarchal wound inflicted on it.

Apart from a cursory mention that she has bled, there is hardly any evocation of the colour red in the copulatory scene. During the intercourse, white predominates red – the oppressing whiteness of the lilies that made the bedroom look "like an embalming parlour"(Carter, 1979, p. 30) the impenetrable whiteness of the Marquis's mask-like face "still as a pond iced thickly over" (Carter, 1979, p. 25) the fragile whiteness of "a porcelain vase flung against a wall" (Carter, 1979, p. 29) depicting how the man's "deathly composure shatter" (Carter, 1979, p. 29) and the tainted whiteness of the heroine's "dishevelled virginity" (Carter, 1979, p. 29). This conspicuous absence of red in one of the most vividly violent scenes of the text where the colour's presence would have cemented its association with sex and violence is another narrative stance on Carter's part. Instead of continuing with the red-against-white chromatic pattern, Carter departs from it to subvert the trope of female victimisation in fairy tales. Given the intimate association between red and the heroine's functioning sexuality, an absence of the colour during this scene of intense physical intimacy can be read as an attempt at visually tracing the systematic invisibilization of female sexual desires and her right to its gratification while portraying women as eroticised subjects in popular culture. The heroine's consciousness of it is manifested in her description of sex as an "one-sided struggle" (Carter, 1979, p. 30). It can be noticed that during the copulation, it is the man's libidinal urgency and his orgasmic satisfaction that get registered through the omnipresent whiteness: "In the course of that one-sided struggle, I had seen his deathly composure shatter like a porcelain vase flung against a wall; I had heard him shriek and blaspheme at the orgasm" (Carter, 1979, p. 30). The conspicuous lack of female participation in determining the pace, rhythm and nature of sexual practices is negotiated through the inconspicuousness of red in this scene.

da Silva, in her theorization of the visual aesthetics involved in Carter's storytelling, delineates how Carter unpacks the traditional troping of the colour white in her short story "The Snow Child" (1979). da Silva argues:

> Whiteness risks sounding minimal. Not that this color is not important - in tales as elsewhere, white stands for luminosity and untainted sheen, thus for luminous heaven as much as for purity…But, precisely, our theme denies such untainted otherworldliness. White is pertinent regarding our heroine *insofar* as it is tinged with red" (da Silva, 2007, p. 245).

Here too, the symbolic scope of the colour white is determined largely by its proximity to the colour red. da Silva reads the interplay between these colours as a metaphysical passage "from the purity of infancy (white) to the mature realm of procreation (red)", while hinting at the possibility of the "red-on-white stain" to be an embodiment of the "threshold" between the two stages in the protagonist's life (da Silva, 2007, p. 246). While in "The Snow Child" the colour white marks a point of departure in the experiential reality of the concerned protagonist, I argue,

in "The Bloody Chamber" the same colour takes on a symbolic dimension that implies an intersection. Here, white represents a zone of confluence where the sexual innocence of the heroine is subsumed within the sexual prurience of the Marquis. For instance, the symbolic spectrum of the colour in the discussed scene acquires a panoramic sweep as it engages on one end with the virginal paleness of the lilies and on the other end with the stained satin of the bedsheets. Also, as da Silva claims the significance of the colour white can never be fully realised unless studied in context to red. Drawing from this argument it can be enquired whether the heroine's absolute awareness about her inferior status in this lopsided power dynamics within the bedroom space can be read as a potential for female disobedience, which was always there but hardly ever.

Just as the colour white, the lack of red too assumes a paradoxical signification at this point because unlike in the above paragraph where it stood for a negation of female agency, here it represents a dormant possibility of transgression. As da Silva pointed out, the idea of red in Carter is an obscure yet omnipresent threat lurking in all that is perceptibly white. A critical understanding of the chromatic codes in Carter's narratives helps one to unpack the process by which she subverts the patriarchal practice of upholding female virginity as an emblem of a pure, pristine signifier of womanhood. Simply by locating desire as a subterranean presence within a space that presupposes its lack, she manages to rethink the feminine ideal. Through tracing the trajectory of the heroine's surreptitious yet sustaining longing for physical pleasure right from the very first scene of the text, she shows how the very concept of an ideal femininity sustained on the patriarchal assumptions of virginal purity is already a fraught one because it envisions a sexuality that is completely stripped of agency.

It can also be noted in this context that since the physical properties of pure white make it the most reflective colour in the spectrum, Carter has deliberately used it in association with the Marquis and his world to reinforce the visual politics involved in patriarchal objectification of female bodies. The bedroom of the castle is bathed in whiteness owing not only to the lilies but also to the clear daylight that streams in through "white gauze curtains" and is reflected by the multitude of mirrors fixated on the walls: "Our bed. And surrounded by so many mirrors! Mirrors on all the walls, in stately frames of contorted gold, that reflected more white lilies than I'd ever seen in my life before" (Carter, 1979, p. 26). This architectural illusion of light and whiteness serves to increase the visibilisation of the female body at the cost of minimising her individuality. This is substantiated when in response to the young bride's concerns about having sex in "broad daylight", the Marquis replies – "All the better to see you" (Carter, 1979, p. 29). Moreover, the play of light and mirrors facilitate visual splitting of the protagonist's self into multiple selves which in a sense, further alienates the woman from her body as it gets sexually invaded and colonised. The moment of copulation as reflected on the "screens" of the mirrors strikes her as some shot from a movie where "A dozen husbands impaled a dozen brides while the mewing gulls swung on invisible trapezes in the empty air outside" (Carter 29). This strategic narrative approach lays bare the theatrical underpinnings of the sexual relationship between this couple thereby lending it pornographic undertones.

Angela Carter's visually potent mode of storytelling allows immense scope for engaging with the question of sexual objectification of the female body from a cinematic perspective. For instance, Rosalyn Stilling argues that "Male power within 'The Bloody Chamber' is correlated with sight" (Stilling, 2018, para. 7). The blindness of the piano-tuner as a symbolically castrated male presence in juxtaposition to the overpowering "gaze" of the Marquis is extensively analysed by Stilling in tandem with Laura Mulvey's essay titled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). To quote Stilling, "Following Mulvey's theory, the Marquis, in assuming the power of his position in the patriarchy, captures the narrator's body within his gaze so he can form her passive body into an image…" (Stilling, 2018, para. 7). While Stilling goes on to delve deeper into the nuances of Mulvey's theory and how the powerful act of seeing can deauthorize female subjects; I propose to deviate and focus on how even in such a deeply patriarchal setting of the bedchamber Carter has managed to manipulate the gaze-effect to a subversive end. The morbid performance of "love-making" becomes a visual narrative that is witnessed in entirety by none but the heroine- and that sight invokes a sense of liberation because it demystifies her perspective. The socially invested power in what Stilling refers to as the "gluttonous gaze" of the Marquis is rendered reductive within the introspective gaze of the heroine where more than the abject powerlessness of the female subject, it is the destructiveness of hypermasculinity that is prominently reflected on the mirrors. By locating agency in the act of seeing, Carter deploys different modes of visualisation to delineate the protagonist's arrival at a fully decolonised state of self-actualisation. Such a way of seeing liberates the heroine in the sense that she can now dissociate power from pleasure and by doing so assume the role of a player within a power-structure that is bent on assigning her the role of a passive participant. It can be argued easily that the heroine's mode of contemplation is inevitably more powerful than the Marquis' because it is directed to the self and facilitates the access to knowledge at both symbolic and literal levels of the narrative.

Conclusion

Florian Bast (2011), while troping trauma through the colour red in her analysis of Morrison's *Beloved*, writes that "[c]olour symbolism constitutes a particularly powerful realisation of the profound psychological and moral depths of traumatic experience" (Bast, 2011, p. 1071). Jack F. Stewart (1985), in his critical exploration of the colourful world of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* contends that "While colour in the novel expresses individual qualities, colour/ character associations are not reducible to one-to-one symbolic equations" (Stewart, 1985, p. 439). Drawing on the patterns they applied to crack chromatic codes in literary texts, I have tried to trace the significance of colours in Carter's re-telling of Perrault's "Bluebeard" legend. A study of Carter's strategic use of colours such as red, black and white has helped me unpack her handling of the complex relationship between gendered body, violence and sexual politics. I argue that the presence of colours is not simply to enable aesthetic stimulation of the readers, but has a deeper and more symbolic purpose. Besides charging the writing with a synesthetic import, I have tried to show how the recurrent use of colours also plays an important role in foregrounding the key themes of the story, such as: patriarchal prohibition, the subversive power of female disobedience, objectification of the female body, sexual trauma, visual politics concerning the female body and finally its sufferance and healing over the course of the

narrative. I conclude that a zooming in on the seductively perverse world of Carter's storytelling through the chromatic lens can facilitate the emergence of an unique vantage point to consider her engagement with the female body and patriarchal politics surrounding it.

References

Bacchilega, C. (1997). "Be Bold, Be Bold, But Not Too Bold": Double agents and Bluebeard's plot. In *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (pp. 104–21). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bast, F. (2011). READING RED: The Troping of Trauma in Toni Morrison's Beloved. *Callalo*, *34*(4), 1069–86. https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2011.0222

Benjamin, J. (1988). The Oedipal riddle. In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1st ed., p. 135). Pantheon Books.

Carter, A. (2006). The bloody chamber. In *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (pp. 18-55). Vintage Books.

Cooper, P. (2010). "A body story with a vengeance": Anatomy and struggle in the Bell Jar and the Handmaid's Tale. *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*, *26*(1). 93. Library Genesis. Retrieved March 14, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1997.9979152

da Silva, F. V. (2007). Red as blood, White as snow, Black as crow: Chromatic symbolism of womanhood in fairy tales. *Marvels $ Tales*, *21*(2), 240-52. JSTOR. https://doi.org/10.1353/mat.2007.a241688

Duncker, P. (1996). Queer Gothic: Angela Carter and the lost narratives of sexual subversion. *Critical Survey*, *8*(1), 62. JSTOR. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41555969

Makinen, M. (1992). Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" and the decolonization of feminine sexuality. *Feminist Review*, *42*(9). https://doi.org/10.2307/1395125

McLaughlin, B. (1995). Perverse pleasure and fetishized text: The deathly erotics of Carter's "The Bloody Chamber". *Style*, *29*(3), 411. JSTOR. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42946295

Mulvey, L. (2014). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (pp. 359–70). University of California Press.

Sheets, R. A. (1991). Pornography, fairy tales, and feminism: Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber". *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, *1*(4), 633–57. JSTOR. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3704419

Stewart, J. F. (1985). Color in To the Lighthouse. *Twentieth Century Literature*, *31*(4), 438–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/441465

Stilling, R. S. (2018). Hypermasculinity and fetishized martyrdom in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber". *Apollon Undergraduate EJournal*. Accessed from: https://www.apollonejournal.org/apollon-journal/hypermasculinity-and-fetishized-martyrdom-in-angela-carters-the-bloody-chamber

Corresponding Author: Ankita Sen
Email: senankita534@gmail.com

(Re)Visiting the Traumatised Indian Matriarch Through Contemporary Retellings: A Psycho-Cultural Exploration

Abhirami S
National Institute of Technology Puducherry, India

Smrutisikta Mishra
National Institute of Technology Puducherry, India

Abstract

The *Mahabharata* (composed in Sanskrit sometime between 400 BC and 400 AD), is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India. It has been used as a source of inspiration for various literary, artistic, and cultural expressions, and its themes and characters have been reinterpreted to reflect contemporary political and social concerns. This has led to the creation of new interpretations and revisions of the epic, which have challenged traditional narratives and added new perspectives to the epic's cultural significance. Focusing on Kavita Kané 's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, the paper suggests that the trauma experienced by Satyavati in her infancy shaped her character and her actions as the Queen of Hastinapur. The author analyses the influence of trauma in her life and how it led to her determination to re-establish a powerful clan. The author's perspective offers a unique interpretation of Satyavati's character and highlights the importance of considering the impact of traumatic experiences on an individual's life and behaviour. The protagonist's abandonment by her father was a traumatic event that influenced her emotional fabric and perception of the world. She was constantly haunted by a past that fuelled her insecurities and anxieties. The paper analyses this modern narrative representation of female desire for power and autonomy (which is repressed by the patriarchy) and how this desire can originate in past traumatic experiences.

Keywords: abandonment, *Mahabharata*, memory, Satyavati, trauma

Because of its universal themes of morality, ethics, justice and power, the *Mahabharata* is a classic work that never seems to lose its contemporary relevance. It is also a source of Hindu mythology and an important part of India's cultural heritage; its stories, characters, and teachings endure as inspiration for works of literature, art, and philosophy. The *Mahabharata* significantly has impacted Indian revisionist mythmaking, its story reinterpreted to reflect contemporary political and social concerns. These revisionist efforts have served to challenge traditional interpretations and add new perspectives to the epic's cultural significance. These revisions work to portray women as complex and multi-dimensional characters rather than stereotypical or one-dimensional figures. This allows for a deeper analysis of the various predicaments faced by women throughout their lives, including issues related to gender roles, sexuality, power dynamics, and societal expectations. By retelling myths from a feminist perspective, these stories can challenge traditional gender norms and bring attention to the struggles faced by women past and present.

Kavita Kané is an Indian author known for her works in revisionist mythmaking, particularly in the realm of Indian mythology. She retells and reimagines classic Indian myths and legends, particularly those featuring female characters, from a feminist perspective. Kané's works challenge traditional patriarchal interpretations of these stories and offer fresh, nuanced versions that give agency to women characters and highlight the predicaments they face. By doing so, she has made a significant contribution to the revisionist mythmaking canon, bringing attention to the experiences and perspectives of women in Indian mythology. Her novel *Fisher Queen's Dynasty* (2017) is a retelling of a portion of the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Satyavati, the fisherwoman-queen. The novel focuses on the story of Satyavati and her family, exploring themes of power, loyalty, love, and the complexities of relationships in ancient India. As sketched by Kané, Satyavati is a woman who must navigate the challenges of being a fisherwoman, a mother and a queen while dealing with issues of identity, power, and legacy. The text explores the inner workings of Satyavati's mind, revealing her fears, insecurities, and ambitions as she rises to become the powerful queen of Hastinapur. Through Satyavati's journey, Kané delves into themes of identity, gender and power, showcasing the character's growth and transformation as she evolves from a fisherwoman to a confident and assertive ruler. This paper attempts to perceive the life, actions, desires, and motives of Satyavati in terms of the trauma she bore from her infancy. It analyses the impact of trauma in Satyavati's character development, and how she steers her life as a queen by re-establishing a powerful clan.

Traumatic Impact on Personality Development

The word 'trauma' has its roots in the Greek word *traumatikos*, which means a severe physical injury. However, eventually, the word meaning evolved to conceptualise emotional injury. It refers to the psychological wound caused by a traumatic event in an individual's life. Trauma is a term used to describe a severe and disruptive experience that has a profound impact on a person's emotional well-being and their perception of the world around them. It can lead to feelings of distress and psychological distress, and it can also affect an individual's ability to function normally (Trauma Studies, 2018). The author portrays Queen Satyavati as a strong

woman despite all the traumatic events she had to undergo since birth. It is significant that the illustrious Kuru clan once teetered on the precipice of extinction, necessitating the infusion of a fisherwoman's lineage and diplomatic prowess to avert its irreversible demise. Subsequently, she ascended to the position of the Kuru clan's venerable matriarch. Nonetheless, the life of this fisherwoman turned queen was fraught with traumas whose importance have not been explored; what is salient in analyses of her character is the criticism of her ambition and unscrupulous ways of achieving everything she wants.

Childhood trauma refers to a traumatic experience that occurs in childhood, typically defined as age 0 to 18. It is often characterized by events that are frightening, dangerous, violent, or life-threatening, and can have a lasting impact on a child's emotional and psychological well-being. Childhood trauma can include events such as physical or sexual abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, or natural disasters (What Is Child Trauma?, n.d.). The events that occur in childhood and induce trauma in children are called "abuse" events. And they can happen in different forms like physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect. Psychological abuse is a form of childhood trauma that refers to a range of non-physical actions that harm a child's emotional and psychological well-being. It can include actions such as threats, berating, disparagement, confinement, physical humiliations, and coercing the child to harm themselves. Psychological abuse can have a lasting impact on a child's mental health and can lead to long-term emotional distress. (ISTSS - Childhood Trauma, n.d.)

The life of Satyavati, the Kuru Matriarch, evolved from a traumatic childhood to power-seeking adolescence and adulthood to retirement or renouncement. She was a victim of early childhood trauma. She was born a princess, the offspring of the union between King Uparichar Vasu and the fisherwoman Adrika, the sister of a ferryman named Dasharaj. Satyavati was a twin: Adrika gave birth to a boy and a girl. Of the twins, the King accepted the boy as his son, but he did not accept the girl as his daughter. Satyavati was abandoned by her biological father. The king was childless and was in need of an heir. When Satyavati asks her foster father why she was denied her right, he says "Because you are a girl. Kings need princes, not princesses! If it had been up to him, he would have probably drowned you in the river" (Kané, 2017). This reminds the reader of the gender stereotypes and discrimination that prevailed in ancient society, biases whose impact can be severe. Her traumatic encounters and experiences have shaped her different phases of life, the decisions she took, and how her life strategies were formulated.

Infliction of the Early-Childhood Trauma

Research shows that trauma that occurs in early childhood can have a lasting impact on an individual (Ringel & Brandell, 2012). The theory of attachment, developed by psychologist John Bowlby, is a framework for understanding the importance of close emotional relationships in human development, particularly during childhood. The theory posits that children have an innate need for attachment and security, and that the quality of the attachment relationships they form with their primary caregivers has a profound impact on their emotional and psychological well-being. Bowlby's theory also explains how children react to separation and loss, and how their experiences in early childhood can shape their later relationships and

emotional regulation. Bowlby's attachment theory was influenced by René Spitz's observations of "abandoned babies in hospitals". It was found that, along with the obvious elements of food and shelter, babies need love and nurturing to thrive. Bowlby also recognized that "young children had a profound emotional need for their mothers (or caregivers) and that separation and loss sustained a profound impact on their developmental experiences" (Ringel & Brandell, 2012).

Her father abandoned Satyavati, and she lost her mother immediately after her birth. This should have caused a profound impact on her. "When a caregiver dies, this is universally experienced as abandonment by infants and young children and may lead to the loss of both physical and emotional security". (Ringel & Brandell, 2012) Children who experience early childhood trauma may develop "internal representations of being bad, incompetent, and unworthy or beliefs in a threatening world and dangerous others" (Ringel & Brandell, 2012). Thus, Satyavati was always angry and insecure. "The street was littered with trash and fish scales, groups of men stood around street corners eyeing her as she walked towards the house. Loafers, her lips curling in contempt, they are sick, seedy looking bunch- dirty, tired and angry. Like me" (Kané, 2017).

Despite being the daughter of a fisherman chieftain, she felt unsafe and anxious about her survival in a threatening world. On one occasion after being physically searched by the kings' men, she thinks,

> if they can suspect me of theft, then they can arrest me, strip me naked and search me, and then lead me through the streets with an escort of soldiers, cast me into a cold dark cell with mice and woodlice, exactly like the dungeons in which dethroned kings are imprisoned. Who will stand up for me? My poor, old father will probably not have enough money to come and rescue me. If taken to the city, I will be absolutely alone, like a solitary, lost person in a desert, without friends or kin. They can do what they like with me…" (Kané, 2017)[1]

Kali3 has been subjected to toxic stress ever since her royal father abandoned her and her mother died after giving birth to her and her brother. Toxic stress response is a condition that occurs when a child experiences chronic and severe adversity, such as physical or emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, or family economic hardship, without adequate support from adults. This can result in the activation of the body's stress response systems for prolonged periods of time, which can have a negative impact on brain development and other bodily systems. Over time, toxic stress can increase the risk for stress-related health problems and

---

[1] Editor's note: Passage bears a striking resemblance to one in Anton Chekhov's story *An Upheaval*: "If they could suspect her of theft, then they might arrest her, strip her naked, and search her, then lead her through the street with an escort of soldiers, cast her into a cold, dark cell with mice and woodlice, exactly like the dungeon in which Princess Tarakanov was imprisoned. Who would stand up for her? Her parents lived far away in the provinces; they had not the money to come to her. In the capital she was as solitary as in a desert, without friends or kindred. They could do what they liked with her".
https://americanliterature.com/author/anton-chekhov/short-story/an-upheaval

cognitive impairment that can persist into adulthood. This highlights the importance of providing children with a supportive environment and access to appropriate resources to help them cope with adverse experiences. (Burke Harris, 2020)

Kali could not forgive her royal father, who abandoned her, because of who she was forced to live a pathetic life. She could not forgive her father, who chose a son over a daughter. Once, she tells her foster father, "I owe you my life. But I cannot forget that I was deprived of what I deserved." (Kané, 2017) Though her maternal uncle became a foster father to her, their constant exposure to poverty added to her stressful life. Her old and powerless foster father was little help for her to overcome the hurdles of her life.

In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Freud and Breuer emphasise that

> We may reverse the dictum "cessante causa cessat effectus" (when the cause ceases, the effect ceases) and conclude from these observations that the determining process (that is, the recollection of it) continues to operate for years—not indirectly, through a chain of intermediate causal links, but as a directly releasing cause—just as psychical pain that is remembered in waking consciousness still provokes a lachrymal secretion long after the event. Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences". (Breuer and Freud, 1895)

An event may not have been particularly distressing when it initially occurred, but its impact can become traumatic in the future through repeated recall and reliving of the event in one's memory ("Trauma Studies," 2018). Likewise, Satyavati is a character who has undergone constant discrimination. Her father did not accept her, and she only lived due to her maternal uncle's generosity. Her biological father denied her the right to live a royal life because she was a girl, and she led a turbulent life as a fisherwoman. She was also subjected to class discrimination despite having a royal birth. "The weight of what had happened with her stayed with her continuously. She felt wronged, and the need to earn her birthright back burned strong within her" (Kané, 2017). She was severely traumatised by the shame and stigma projected on her, constantly reminding her of her father's abandonment. She was forced to live among the tribes and suffer oppression and discrimination.

She always knew about her biological father and his power, and she often envied her brother, who had the exact birth as hers but had a high status merely because he was a son. She says, "I cannot expose the baby to shame and stigma or be termed a bastard. That is the least I can do as his mother". She was never freed from her past. She has recurring thoughts of her parents, to the extent that when she gave birth to her and Rishi Parashar's son, she could not stop thinking about why her own father "had given her away so easily? (Kané, 2017)

An anxious Satyavati asks her father, "Will my son face the same humiliation and rejection? For what Parashar did to me? Will my past haunt my future? Will my son hate me as I hate my father?" (Kané, 2017)

Every thought led her to her royal father's abandonment and her subjection to unimaginable humiliation. These are "pathogenic reminiscences" the process whereby memory not only inflicts psychological pain but also assigns value to a previously repressed experience in the unconscious. This traumatic remembering is termed "pathogenic reminiscences" for the pathologic symptoms the memory causes (Breuer and Freud, 1895).

Proliferation of Traumatic Traits

Memories are dynamic. As both survival and self-representations are among the attributed functions of memory, it is not surprising that, during the act of retrieval, people might reshape and reconstruct the past to support current aspects of the self and match future goals that are coherent with one's goals, self-image and system of beliefs (Markowitsch & Staniloiu, 2011). The trauma from which she had been suffering made her ambitious. Her ambitious nature became associated with her identity. All Satyavati wanted in her life was power and status to rule. That was her response to her trauma.

The following instance marks the beginning of Satyavati's ambitious personality –

> He will be our child, Matsyagandha. He will be so exceptional that no one will dare call him illegitimate,' he said cryptically. 'You are an extraordinary girl yourself. You can never be bound by conventions or be tied down by others. You were born to rule, princess!'
> She stiffened pleasurably against him, aroused not by desire but by ambition. Born to rule, she murmured to herself". (Kané, 2017)

After her episode with Rishi Parashar, Satyavati's life was steered by her ambitious nature, and she keenly caught hold of all the opportunities that came her way. She believed her bare hands to be her "sole fortune" (Kané, 2017). Additionally, her ambition and lust for power made her seduce King Shantanu. "She would not allow ambition to be a dirty word. It would cleanse her, empower her and be the cause of her rebirth. She was sick of poverty… she wanted wealth, which was power. She wanted power too". (Kané, 2017)

However, fate was not done testing her. She became a widow at a very young age and lost two sons whom she had had with King Shantanu. For some time, the throne remained heirless. Nevertheless, she didn't want the fruit of her ambition to perish with her. She tried to secure her throne and continue her lineage by relying on the niyoga tradition. She initially requests Bhishma to break his vow, which he turns down. She pleads with him, "As their brother-in-law, you have a right of niyog over them. Break your wow and marry your brother's wives!" (Kané, 2017) Finally, she approaches her firstborn, Ved Vyas, who agrees to practice niyoga with his half-brother's widows. When Satyavati tells Bhishma about her episode with Rishi Parashar and the child she bore from him, Bhishma is unable to hide his disbelief. However, later, Bhishma understands the complexity of her character.

He understood and believed her - he saw that from her sudden pallor and from the way her hands lay loosely in her lap. In one instant, all that had happened of late flashed through his mind. He reflected, and with pitiless clarity, he saw the whole truth – her abandoned child; her quest for prestige through power; her fear of losing it all; her drive and determination stemming from her basic instinct for self-preservation. Her zeal for heirs for her dynasty was not about ambition; she was beyond that. (Kané, 2017)

Trauma and its Transhistorical Potential

The transhistorical potential of trauma refers to the idea that traumatic experiences from a cultural group's historical past can continue to shape the emotional and psychological landscape of individuals who belong to that same cultural group. This means that the effects of past traumatic events can persist across generations and be passed down through cultural traditions, beliefs, and practices (Trauma Studies, 2018). This way, trauma gets transmitted across time. Trauma inherited from generation to generation is called "cultural trauma". Cultural trauma refers to the idea that traumatic events can have a profound and lasting impact on the collective identity and consciousness of a cultural group. Cultural trauma occurs when a group of people experiences a traumatic event that leaves a mark on their collective memory and changes their future identity in significant and permanent ways (Alexander, 2004). In the text, there is more than one reference to women who have been sexually exploited by powerful men. The sexual exploitation of women forms a collective trauma, where men become the perpetrators and women become the victims. The exploitation of the powerless by the powerful has been a common scenario in a patriarchal society. The depiction of sexual violence against women in Greek mythology is a recurring theme and highlights the historical normalization and justification of such acts. Greek mythology portrays several stories in which women are raped or sexually violated by male gods, such as Zeus and Poseidon. Medusa was raped by Poseidon and was subsequently also punished for being raped in Athena's temple. In these instances, women were just bodies to unleash men's sexual needs and fantasies. and these incidents of exploitation of the "weaker" sex by men cause trauma in the psyche of the next generation of women. Satyavati is also constantly alert during her encounters with Parashar and King Shantanu. Her thoughts kept going back to what had happened to Shakuntala and Adrika (Kané, 2017). Examining these incidents from Hindu myths, it is evident that the exploited women mostly belonged to the less privileged class.

To illustrate the concept, a further example of the story of Shakuntala is considered here. Shakuntala, the child born after the plotted union of Sage Vishwamitra and the celestial nymph Menaka, was a forest maid brought up by Sage Kanva after her mother abandoned her on the forest floor. She was seduced by King Dushyant, who was spellbound by her flawless beauty and doe-like innocence. The King makes love to her after a Gandharva marriage (method of marriage where the girl selects her own husband). King Dushyanta leaves for his kingdom, promising that he will return when her father, Sage Kanva, comes back to his ashram and will also ask for her hand in marriage. However, to her horror, the King does not return, and she eventually finds herself out with a child. After the birth of their son, when Shakuntala goes to King Dushyant's court in search of her husband, she is spurned by the King.

Similarly, the story of Adrika, Satyavati's mother, also involves a King's union and an ordinary woman. The famous story of the dubious birth of Satyavati is

> King Vasu, while hunting, sorely missed his beautiful queen, Girika, and while dreaming about her, was so aroused that he spilled his seed he wrapped it in a leaf and gave it to a hawk to carry it to his wife. Instead, the hawk was attacked by another hawk, and the semen fell into a river to be swallowed by a fish named Adrika, who was a cursed apsara. After ten months, a fisherman caught the fish and killed it, and when he cut it open, he saw two babies, one male and one female, inside the fish. He gave the babies rightfully to the King. The boy child grew up to become a famous Matsya king, and the daughter was suitably named Matsyagandha and was destined to be brought up by the childless fisherman. As for their fish-mother, Adrika, she was freed of the curse and went back to Heaven. (Kané, 2017)

The story of King Vasu spilling his seed while dreaming about his wife in the forest and "its consumption by a fish is perhaps an elaborate tale to cover a king's indiscretion with a fisherwoman" (Pattanaik, 2010). Kané has a novel version of the story, which resonates with Pattanaik's analysis of the episode. She writes that Adrika was Dasharaj's sister (Satyavati's foster father). After learning the miserable truth about her birth, Satyavati asks her foster father, "He (King Vasu) didn't marry her. She was what – a passionate moment?" (Kané, 2017), to which Dasharaj responds, "yes, she was. But she was a fool to hope that a married king would marry her…. He accepted the son… but he refused to keep you…" (Kané, 2017)

The humiliation a woman faces in such a situation can be traumatising. This trauma can have the potential to span across generations. Satyavati is constantly reminded of these episodes of pleasure and powerful men's consequential abandonment of women. The fear that she also might become one of those women was consistent in her mind, influencing her thoughts, choices, decisions and desires. Despite her strong ambition, she was subjected to this fear of being a mere plaything in the hands of men. When Parashar makes advances towards her, she stops him and voices out her genuine concerns blended with the art of seduction: "'You won't marry me, since you are a wandering mendicant', she persisted. 'So how do I go back to the world I come from? And what if I have a child from you?' she questioned shrewdly, thinking again of Menaka and Shakuntala. 'Who will marry me?'" (Kané, 2017).

After receiving the boon from rishi Parashar, Satyavati transformed from a "young woman and innocent girl to a woman who was aware of her sexuality and her power over men" (Kané, 2017). "Kali found that she was rediscovering herself, unrepentant and unapologetic about her deeds and decisions. Desire did not shame her, nor did lust overawe her" (Kané, 2017). She realized her value as a person in society:

> She found herself involved in matters of the village, be it resolving domestic fight or mending of the fallen school roof, or demanding a fairer share in the fish market from

the bigger merchants. She was the voice of the poor and the wretched, a leader most were wary of; even the soldiers dared not intimidate her anymore. (Kané, 2017)

She was empowered and confident to realise her ambition, vowing that she "will not be a wretched victim like her (Adrika)" (Kané, 2017). She also promises to be responsible for her happiness and future. After giving birth to her son, who was to become a great scholar later, she feels a "cold fury grip her". She fears that she too will "continue living in these stinking lanes, in this derelict house? Or would she be married off to some village boy, or a young fisherman, to live in inconspicuousness?" (Kané, 2017). She decides she will not be exploited ever again:

> She would not allow herself to be used, never again, she promised herself fiercely. Parashar, in his moment of passion, had been as mindless as King Vasu. If one had been a man of power, the other had been a person of knowledge – privileged and powerful-imposing on the weak and vulnerable. But she was neither weak nor vulnerable now. (Kané, 2017)

In all these stories of fleeting feelings of Kings for the maidens they come across during their haunts and leisure walks, there is the exploitation of the vulnerable.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American law professor, coined the term Feminist Intersectionality, explaining it as a "prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. An intersectional approach shows how people's social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination (Carastathis, 2016). For instance, though Satyavati was of partial royal birth, she was brought up as a fisherwoman. She was a vulnerable person in the hierarchal society. She belonged to the lower class, was of the "weaker" sex, and was financially poor. All these contributed to her vulnerabilities. Had Satyavati been a princess or a noble-born woman, she would not have had to make sexual favours to a strange sage or seduce a King to receive a secure and respected place in society.

The very introduction of Satyavati in the text starts with her being mistreated by the kingsmen.

> She [Satyavati] had sat down on the rock, burying her face in her hands, her slim body shuddering with silent cries. Never in my life I have been so deeply insulted…. I, well educated, refined, daughter of a fisherman-chieftain, suspected of theft by the kingsmen, she thought. They had ransacked and rummaged through the boat she ferried across the river every day. She had been searched like a common street-walker. (Kané, 2017)

After the unfortunate incident with the kingsmen, she "shuddered at the thought of going near her boat again to work" (Kané, 2017). She had to endure these insults and suffer exploitation, firstly because she was a woman, and secondly because she belonged to the lower class of society. Even after her marriage to King Shantanu, after becoming his queen, Satyavati was at

the receiving end of the verbal abuses and gestures tinted with bigotry and prejudice inside the palace. She was addressed as Queen "Daseyi", which meant "one of the dasa – slave, or at the most polite, an aboriginal woman" (Kané, 2017). The one who was first to address Satyavati as Queen Daseyi was an abandoned daughter herself. However, her privileged life came from the cast she was born into and the social status she was brought up in. "She (Kripi) and her twin brother, Kripa, had been adopted by his (Devavrath's) father when he had found them as babies, abandoned in the woods" (Kané, 2017).

The insults and taunting projected against Satyavati inside the palace were many. Everyone addressed her as Queen Daseyi, "reminding her of who she was in the palace" (Kané, 2017). These kinds of trauma developed in the minds of specific communities of people have transhistorical potential and affect the upcoming generations as well.

Drawing from Freudian theories associated with Trauma, Cathy Caruth argues that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past" but identified only in "the way it is precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1996). Haunted by her trauma of abandonment which was exacerbated by the constant class struggles she experienced, Satyavati desired to secure the lives and rights of her offspring. This strong desire controlled her actions. She cleverly makes demands that would be in favour of herself and her offspring before she agrees to get married to King Shantanu. She ensures that her children become heirs to the throne so that, unlike her, they can lead a secure life free of humiliation and suffering. She "wrested the throne" from Bhishma and "grabbed it for herself and her future children" (Kané, 2017).

The Clan Resurrection – The Farsighted Victor

Understanding the struggles she has to face in a class-conscious society, she develops a pragmatic self. After the death of her son, Vichitravirya, she is hungry for heirs. She was aware of all the eyes that were lusting for her power. She shrewdly controls the situation in such a way that she not only preserves the throne but also ensures that her blood flows through the royal lineage. She was not someone who harboured feelings of love, attachment and longing. Right from her encounter with Rishi Parashar to her carefully planned seduction of King Shantanu and later the critical execution of Niyoga. She re-established a clan that stemmed out of her crisis-management skills.

Sorrows forever invaded Queen Satyavati's life. Nevertheless, she diminished the sufferings given by her life and changed the course of events with her diplomacy to prevent them from sinking into the chaos caused by sorrows which were often the consequences of her own choices and decisions. Satyavati is one of the strong women from the Hindu epics who lived unbound to the conventionalities of the age. "…she had won, going straight into the battlefield but not shedding a drop of blood" (Kané, 2017).

Conclusion

Ambition, far-sightedness and determination are believed to be the traits found in men; therefore, when a woman in an epic possesses these traits, she is considered villainous rather than heroic. This is possibly why Queen Satyavati did not receive the recognition and honour she deserved. The matriarch of the Kuru clan had the intellect and diplomacy of a king. Her deeds and actions were worthy of praise. Yet, as of today little exploration has been done to find the meaning behind the motives of the fisher queen.

She never surrendered to the men in her life and did not conform to societal rules; she was self-righteous and the owner of a powerful mind. She gained all these qualities from her traumatic past. She chose not to sulk over her difficult birth and consequent life. She was never a victim to her senses. She embraced her trauma instead, extracted everything she wanted from it, and strived. It resulted in both the death and resurrection of a clan.

References

Alexander, J. C. (2004). *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (J. C. Alexander, Ed.). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520235946.001.0001

Breuer, J., & Freud, S. (2013). *Studies in Hysteria* (A. A. Brill, Trans.). Digireads.com Publishing.

Burke Harris, N. (2020). *Toxic Childhood Stress: The Legacy of Early Trauma and How to Heal*. Pan Macmillan.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press. https://doi.org/10.1353/book.20656

Carastathis, A. (2016). *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons*. University of Nebraska Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1fzhfz8

Childhood Trauma. (n.d.). istss. Retrieved August 2, 2022, from https://istss.org/public-resources/trauma-basics/what-is-childhood-trauma.

Gandharva marriage. (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandharva_marriage

Kané, K. (2017). *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Westland Publications Limited.

Markowitsch, H. J., & Staniloiu, A. (2011, March). Memory, autonoetic consciousness, and the self. *Consciousness and Cognition, 20*(1), 16–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.09.005

Pattanaik, D. (2010). Jaya. Penguin Books.

Pattanakil, D. (2016). *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik*. Penguin Books.

Ringel, S., & Brandell, J. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230597

Trauma Studies. (2018). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *A Companion to Literary Theory* (pp. 360–371). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch29

Corresponding Author: Abhirami S
Email: en20d1001@nitpy.ac.in

Editor's Essay

Lee Lawson on unsplash

U.S. Civil War Redux? A Prevue

Alfonso J. García-Osuna

Abstract

The thought that the United States could engage in a second civil war is disturbing, as it represents a significant threat to the stability not only of one nation, but also of the world. Harbouring the idea of such a conflict is not as outlandish as it might seem at first glance: Several movements that have gained attention in recent years seem to be preparing for such a scenario. The two that are most interesting, essentially because they come with territorial claims, are the Greater Idaho Movement, which advocates for the secession of rural counties in eastern Oregon and northern California to join the state of Idaho and create a super-state, and the American Redoubt, which supports the establishment of a territorial entity that would include most of Greater Idaho plus Montana and Wyoming. Significantly, northern Colorado, along with North and South Dakota, while ideologically in tune with American Redoubt political and cultural philosophies, are specifically excluded in the territorial plan for this super state, as they are mainly flat and therefore difficult to defend against a modern mechanised military. It is obvious that the American Redoubt's hypothetical defensive operations are being calculated to thwart United States Army advances in case of conflict. I will argue here that these movements' ideology is secessionist, and that they may cause armed conflict in the United States, the likelihood and scale of which is difficult to determine.

Keywords: American Redoubt, civil war, Greater Idaho Movement, secession, United States

Despite the adjective in its formal appellation, the United States has a history of discord and disunity, marked by significant events and challenges that have sculpted the character of its politics. A pivotal event in its long history of disagreements is the U.S. Civil War, a violent conflict fought from 1861 to 1865 that resulted in profound societal and political transformations. While it might seem that the nation has since made substantial progress in negotiating political and social discord, after the January 6, 2021 attacks on the Capitol some analysts have begun seriously to consider the potential for a new civil war in the United States (Gale et al., 2021). Moreover, there appears to be very little interest in investing political capital to mitigate this risk.

Secessionist movements have always proliferated in the USA, with levels of gravity that range from the hilarious (Great Republic of Rough and Ready) to the potentially dangerous (Alaska, California, and Texas movements for independence). While the XXI century offers a very different social and political panorama from the world of 1861, it is important to consider that the potential for violent conflict in the United States is growing. Today's political climate tells us that past is the time when divisions were approached with caution and an emphasis on the importance of unity, dialogue, and understanding. There is an increasingly polarised political discourse that boosts the prospects for armed conflict and appears relentless in its advance, as witnessed by the 2023 bitter partisan standoff over the debt ceiling (Rappeport et al., 2023).

Sharp divisions along ideological lines keep feeding the heightened tensions between the two main political parties, resulting in an environment where compromise and cooperation are no longer normative. It is a reality confirmed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi very publicly tearing the copy of the State of the Union address provided by then-president Donald Trump. That simple act is an eloquent statement that bygone is the time when conflict might be resolved through words. Additionally, the unapologetic partisan views of national news outlets and social media echo chambers keep expanding social and political fault lines daily, generating a breeding ground for conflict.

But when one thinks of civil war, it is generally a conflict that pits a well-defined territory in a country against another. For example, the U.S. Civil War was fought between the North and the South, in Sudan it was essentially the northern areas against what would eventually become South Sudan, in Spain it was the progressive cities against the traditionalist interior... Thus, it begs the question: how can a new Civil War erupt in the contemporary United States when there is no territory attached to each opposing faction, when in the same city, county, state or even in the same neighbourhood partisan support for different factions might be divided right down the middle? Should I be preparing a viable defence against my neighbour in the next-door flat?

I should begin by addressing the obvious question of what do I mean by "civil war". I fundamentally agree with Harvard University political forecaster Jay Ulfelder that it is "a violent conflict between two organized, armed groups within a country that kills at least 1,000 people. Sometimes it's a certain number of people per year – usually, in the hundreds – and where those people are killed directly by violent clashes between those armed organized

factions" (Pazzanese, 2022). A Zogby Analytics poll showed that 46 % of Americans thought that another civil way is likely (43% unlikely, 11% Not sure), adding ominously that "[v]iolent protests in cities across the country during the summer, white supremacists, hate crimes on the rise, and tensions between two political parties have put the country on the brink" (2021). Many analysts, including Ulfelder, still assume that another widespread armed conflict in the U.S. is, for several reasons, inconceivable. Ulfelder highlights the fact that civil war in wealthy democracies "almost never happens" (in Pazzanese, 2022), while Nathan J. Robinson, in an article in *Current Affairs* (2022) to which he gives the title "Can we drop the silly idea that America is heading for a civil war?" states that "The civil war framing misleads us about what our problems are. It's not going to be Antifa versus Proud Boys in the streets. Instead, there's a class struggle between those who own the country and those who work...".

Remembering how in the Northern Ireland conflict opposing parties built walls to separate their areas and "territories" from their opponents, I would argue that many analysts insist on the unlikelihood of another civil war largely because the opposing sides today (liberals [the Left] vs. conservatives [the Right]) do not have the classic territorial base needed for such conflicts, as was the case with the civil war of 1861-1865 pitting the northern against the southern states of the nation. Nowadays, it can be argued, your enemy might live in next-door proximity. With the Greater Idaho and American Redoubt movements, however, the reason for that implausibility is being progressively erased. In view of the growing movements whose agenda includes a blueprint for territorial integrity, political forecasters are already analysing the prelude to the conflict: novelist Stephen Marche (2022) argues that the "battle plans for the next civil war have already been drawn up. And not by novelists", and people have begun the exodus from states where the majority's socio-political ethos is at variance with theirs. John Burnett, in his article "Americans are fleeing to places where political views match their own," states that "America is growing more geographically polarised – red ZIP codes [conservative] are getting redder and blue ZIP codes [liberal] are becoming bluer. People appear to be sorting" (Burnett, 2022). What are the reasons for this progressive fragmentation? There are several.

The Dwindling Importance of National Identity

Ask a Frenchman, a Mexican, a Pole, and so forth. what they are, and they will usually respond "I am French", "I am Mexican", "I am Polish," and so on. Ask a U.S. American, especially in the northeast and other urban areas, and they will often respond "I am Italian," "I am Puerto Rican," "I am Irish," and so on, depending on where their families originated. While this may be expected of a population that is overwhelmingly made up of descendants of immigrants, such responses also signal a weakening of the sense of national identity in the United States, a reality that, compounded by the extreme polarisation of social and political beliefs, compounds the risks of conflict. Argentina, arguably more of an immigrant country than the United States, does not have that problem. When a society becomes as siloed as U.S. society has become, encouraging the pursuit of common goals and valuing the democratic principles upon which the nation was founded sound like uninspired clichés, unimaginative commonplaces that do nothing to foster civil discourse or mitigate the risks of a new civil war.

But besides identifying as something other than "American", there are several other identity categories that seem to be superseding the inclusive national designation. People are dividing according to sexual preference, gender, skin colour, political party allegiance, and so forth, which means that the super-identity that is expected to supersede all others, that of "American", has destabilised and no longer performs its anticipated unifying function. As more and more people relegate their "American" identity to the back of their identitary file cabinet, that identity has, to an unnerving extent, been appropriated by far-right, white nationalist groups. Since they are exclusionary by definition, that means they believe that everyone that doesn't look and think like them is not "American". So, the flag with the stars and stripes, an erstwhile symbol of unity, could become the object of animosity and division in the not-too-distant future.

The problem that identity politics brings to the U.S. is that political movements and ideologies that are based on the interests and perspectives of specific social groups, such as racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious assemblages, are sectarian by nature and propose changes to society that are often unappealing to other identity groups. Consequently, the prodigious predisposition among US Americans to feel offended because of perceived transgressions against particular identity groups can, in many instances, escalate tensions, sow the seeds of conflict, steer prejudiced beliefs along the ideological lines of distinctive identitary groups and, very significantly, solidify the boundaries of those groups to the point where discrimination against external groups is encouraged. Thus, individuals from external groups can become "acceptable targets for discriminatory behaviour" (Monroe, 2022). In a nation with its dominant national identity in flux, once particular identities begin influencing political agendas, cultural attitudes, experiences, and policy preferences, a fragmentation of the body politic must necessarily follow. While it is true that identity politics seeks to address the concerns and promote the rights of marginalized or underrepresented groups, advocating for their inclusion and equality within a fragmented society becomes a threat to many in the zero-sum game of competing identities. In contemporary U.S. society, we are not "all in this together".

Hence, it is becoming evident that people's affiliations with different ethnic, religious, or ideological groups are eclipsing whatever affiliation they might feel with "the rest of us", that is to say, with the nation. Identity-based movements and issues are gradually contributing to the polarization of political debates and to the formation of distinct ideological camps. How does this happen? Identity politics depends on the identification of group differences, a process that leads to the documentation of discriminatory practices – real, perceived or exaggerated – against the group based on those differences. This is inherently divisive, as it opens a gap between those who are legitimised as the objects of historical discrimination and those accused of having perpetrated it. Moreover, identity politics prioritises group interests over common objectives and, more importantly, fosters a sense of victimhood or grievance among group members; that sense of victimhood can even reach an immense section of the public that is the recipient of every privilege and entitlement modern society can bestow. It thus hinders constructive dialogue and compromise by polarizing political discourse through acrimonious victimiser versus victim narratives.

Identity politics in the United States has gained prominence over the past few decades as various social movements have emerged to advocate for the rights and recognition of specific groups. These movements include the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the LGBTQ+ rights movement, and many others. They have sought to challenge systemic discrimination, fight for social justice, and push for policy changes that address the needs and concerns of marginalized communities. Unfortunately, some of these warranted challenges have triggered the rise of ideological extremism, the decline of centrist positions, and the breakdown of consensus-building and compromise. Notwithstanding the moral foundations of their cause, political fragmentation has been their unmistakable outcome.

Political Fragmentation

There are several ways in which political fragmentation has blossomed in the United States. Most obvious is partisan polarisation: The two major – one might argue the only viable – political parties, the Democratic and the Republican, have become more ideologically distant from each other, with an ever-decreasing number of moderates or centrists in their ranks. This has led to increased partisanship and a diminished willingness to cooperate across party lines. I would argue that it is a reflection of a growing regional divide: In her article "Democrats and Republicans do live in different worlds", Christina Pazzanese writes that "[o]verall, most Democrats and Republicans live in levels of partisan segregation that exceed what scholars of racial segregation consider highly segregated...", as "Democratic and Republican voters live in partisan bubbles, with little daily exposure to those who belong to the other party" (Pazzanese, 2021).

Media echo chambers have also contributed to the increasing geographic polarisation and to the estrangement of people along political lines. Case in point is James Wesley Rawles's popular blogs where he calls for a "transmigration", the goal of which is "to solidify a conservative Christian worldview through a demographic shift. [...] With passing years we will further solidify a conservative Christian redoubt within the United States. [...] I am a separatist" (Gribben, 2021, p. 11). This "transmigration", as we will see, is not new, but it has been energised by echo chambers of all types. The rise of social media and personalized news consumption has allowed individuals to curate their information sources, accessing only those sources where they are exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, thus reinforcing their ideological perspectives and reducing exposure to alternative viewpoints. The growing migration to regions where a group's beliefs are shared by a large majority of the population is a physical manifestation of digital echo chamber estrangements.

Thus, this divisive trend in social and political thought has a prominent and efficient ally: the Internet. While digital platforms have given us exceptional access to information, they have also enabled the rapid spread of disinformation and misinformation. This has allowed radical groups to weaponize information and has fostered foreign interference in domestic affairs. Digital media has to a great extent permitted the manipulation public opinion, the sowing of mistrust, and deepened societal divisions. And as this digital world has been left essentially unbridled, it is rapidly and proficiently creating an environment that is conducive to conflict.

It is interesting to note that "While Facebook, the largest social media platform, has gone out of its way to deny that it contributes to extreme divisiveness, a growing body of social science research, as well as Facebook's own actions and leaked documents, indicate that an important relationship exists." (Barrett, 2021).

Changes in the country's demographics and cultural landscape have also contributed to rising tensions and divisions. Immigration, which is believed to be a significant contributor to the ongoing changes in the character of the nation's culture, is another factor in the process of political fragmentation, as the erstwhile *status quo* is being erased to the dismay of traditionalists. Tomás Jiménez observes that "[c]lose observers have marvelled at the ways that immigrants to America have transformed virtually every aspect of our national life" (Jiménez, 2017, p. xiii). It is easy to see how some groups within the generations of people that have swallowed the mantras "we are number one in the world; we are the best; we are the beacon of freedom for every human on the planet; they all want to be like us; USA! USA! USA!; God bless America, land of the free", and so forth, would reject transformation of any sort, as change can only mean diminishment.

In short, political fragmentation and identity politics present challenges to consensus-building, compromise, and the pursuit of common goals. Challenges to common goals are not a new phenomenon in the U.S., but the nature and the proliferation of such challenges is. Evidently, the nation is ill-prepared for the onslaught: Overcoming political fragmentation requires a collective regard for constructive dialogue that does not exist in the United States' present political landscape, where promoting understanding across ideological divides, finding ways to address the concerns of diverse identity groups, and seeking common ground seem like quixotic delusions.

The Growing Territorial Divide

The Tyranny of Majority Rule

There is a growing concern among religious, conservative whites that they are (or shortly will be) a subjugated minority in a country where a majority of individuals (liberals, immigrants, atheists...) will impose their will or preferences on them, thereby suppressing their rights and freedoms while making the country a den of immoral pursuits. The conundrum is that majority rule is a fundamental principle of democracy, the most basic tenet of what even radical conservative whites will tell you is a fundamental standard to measure that which can be considered "American". Consequently, this "democracy mirage" can only be sustained in a territorial entity where *they* are the majority. Many of them ignored this when, with the January 6 insurrection, they attempted "make America great again" through the most unamerican act conceivable: the abolition of majority rule. Covering this basic fact up by claiming that Biden's election was stolen did not convince anyone. And, besides it being unfeasible, such undemocratic insurrections don't look particularly good on your movement's *curriculum vitae*, so staking out a particular territory where you can be a majority and act somewhat

democratically seems the best option. But this requires secession from the broader entity in which you are becoming a minority.

The idea of secession from a majority-multicultural nation is not new. In the early 1980s, Robert E. Miles – "Pastor Bob" – (1925–1992), a white supremacist from Michigan, presented his idea of a territorial separation in the Northwest in his seminar "Birth of a Nation", where he urged whites to leave the American multicultural areas, writing "[l]et us go in peace [...] let us be considered a Racial Nation of Aryans" in a region where, evidently, they would remain a majority (Gardell, 2003, p. 112).

To justify outright secession, the religious white conservative movement will have to give up the notion of the sanctity of majority rule, which served it for so long, and claim that the new majority is engaged in a progressive suppression of minority rights: that claim will be based on accusations that the new majority enforces its views and decisions without considering the rights and perspectives of the conservative minority, resulting in the suppression of their rights by limiting their freedom of speech, assembly, religion, and imposing discriminatory policies. This – they will claim – has led to a lack of representation and a failure to address their unique needs and concerns. The dominance of the majority will be said to stifle the white Christian minority's progress by inhibiting their traditional ideas and viewpoints.

Racism does not drive the movement: The government's lack of consideration for the conservative minority is what has created divisions within society and led to increased polarisation, animosity, and righteous social unrest, or so the story will go.

These claims are not entirely without merit: Let us recall that majority rule in the United States has traditionally perpetuated inequality and discrimination, as the majority held biased views and prejudices against minority groups believed to be inferior. Policies that favoured the majority enslaved and marginalised vulnerable minority populations and exacerbated social disparities that hold to this day. Democratic majority rule is not a faultless system, by any means. When the majority determines public policy based solely on its own interests, these are its harvests. In spite of it, it will be difficult to assign credibility to claims of minority discrimination from conservative whites, a majority group that has practised it from the inception of the republic until only recently.

Causes

The causes for the activation of ideologies that could cause the effectual dismemberment of the United States are to be found in a basal historical flaw in U.S.-style democracy. Majority rule is the backbone of U.S. democracy, but traditionally the majority has failed to embody the sense of morality that is widely shared by a significant number of minorities. There are just too many instances throughout the nation's history of majorities committing atrocities against minorities or otherwise limiting their basic human rights. Thus, it has been difficult for the United States to avoid what has been called the "tyranny of the majority": One must not forget what, for most of the USA's history, American democratically-elected policymakers imposed upon Blacks and

indigenous peoples. So, while majority rule is a fundamental principle of democracy, it is not flawless and can be challenged, as one can see presently in United States secessionist movements.

Today, as one looks at the myriad of conservative bloggers and pundits who rail against the U.S. government, what becomes clear is that a growing number of citizens embrace the idea that the majority is enforcing its liberal views and decisions without considering the rights and perspectives of a sizeable conservative minority, resulting in the suppression of its rights. In this growing mindset among conservatives, the tyranny of the liberal majority is seen to undermine the protection of individual rights and deteriorate constitutional safeguards and legal protections. The contention is that these protections are weakened or ignored by a majority in Washington that determines public policy based solely on its own interests. There is also the widespread idea that the liberal majority has achieved the requisite numbers to form itself as a majority through fraud and the enlistment of recent immigrants and social misfits – who are viewed as not very patriotic – into its ranks.

In this sense, Oregon can be analysed as an avatar for the whole of the United States. A liberal majority lives in and legislates from a relatively thin slice of the state that hugs the Pacific coastline, while a very conservative minority occupies the much larger portion of the state in the east, the inland area closer to conservative Idaho. That minority's needs and opinions, it is argued, are not given a fair hearing by liberals, who impose their will with little consideration for the rest of the state. That polarization, as we can see, has a distinct territorial definition. The remedy, as reflected in the recent vote in several eastern Oregon counties, is to create a different majority, one that will make what is a minority in Oregon part of a majority in Greater Idaho. Interestingly, this is a crafty initiative to retain the basic democratic ideal of majority rule by manipulating the boundaries of an electoral constituency, in this case by altering state borders. This might be interpreted as a case of gerrymandering gone wild, but more importantly in considering future conflicts, the territorial division along ideological lines has begun. Greater Idaho and the American Redoubt are a case in point.

The Greater Idaho Movement

Figure 1
*Greater Idaho Proposed Boundaries*

Source: Greater Idaho   MOLLY QUINN/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Greater Idaho is a movement that advocates for the partitioning of certain counties from the state of Oregon and eventually other states in the region and the creation of a new super state called Greater Idaho (Figure 1). While this movement is not explicitly aligned with any particular political ideology, many proponents of the Greater Idaho movement do hold far-right and conservative views, and precursor movements like the Pacific Northwest Aryan Nation demonstrate the radical, racist, secessionist nature of groups that have set their sights on Idaho. "Speakers at the Aryan World Congress in July 1986 announced that Kootenai County, Idaho, would henceforth serve as provisional capital of a five-state Pacific Northwest Aryan Nation" (Aho, 2014, p. 7). The Northwest Territorial Imperative, fashioned in the 1970s, is another project for an all-White ethnostate (The Northwest American Republic) that is centred in Idaho and includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Northern California (Medina, 2018, p. 1011).

Figure 2
Pacific Northwest Aryan Nation. Wikimedia Commons
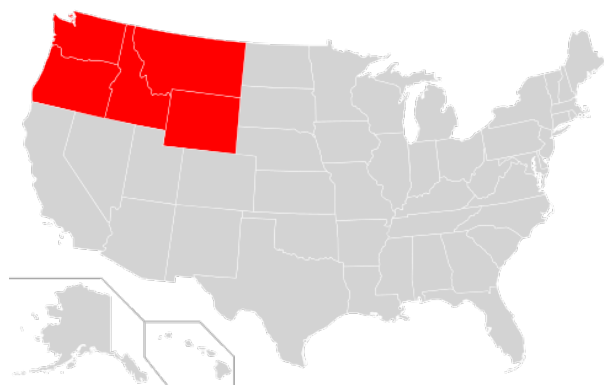
Greater Idaho has gained attention in recent years because its proponents advocate for the secession of rural counties in eastern Oregon, northern California and eventually parts of eastern Washington State to join the state of Idaho. This would create a super-state of like-minded individuals that would occupy a large swath of the USA's northwest. Although federal and state laws place considerable obstacles in front of this process, voters in many counties in Oregon have already –and democratically – expressed their wish to become part of Idaho. Likewise, "it would be no surprise if California counties [...] joined Oregon areas pushing to join Idaho. Their complaints are the same: Most are politically more conservative than the dominant coastal, urban areas of their states" (Elias, 2023).

The Greater Idaho movement has tried to distance itself – not very convincingly – from the ethnocentric ideology of its precursors. Ostensibly, the motivation behind the movement is rooted in cultural, economic, and political differences between urban and rural areas. Supporters argue, for example, that the rural counties in Oregon, which are less populated and more conservative-leaning, feel politically marginalised and disconnected from the policies and values of the more populated urban areas such as Portland. "Sandie Gilson owns a real estate business in rural John Day, Oregon, which is closer to Boise [Idaho's capital] than it is Portland [largest city in Oregon] in virtually every way. She told [correspondent Lee] Cowan,

"When you have a government that won't listen to the opposition or take into account those of us that live out here, then we have no government representation" (CBS News, 2022). By joining Idaho, which they perceive as more aligned with their values, they believe they would have a greater voice in governance, that is to say, they would become a majority.

Greater Idaho Movement leaders would like us to believe that their motivations are primarily political and have nothing to do with Aryan nationalism, arguing that Oregon's rural areas have more in common with Idaho's culture, economy, and political ideologies than with Oregon. They merely seek to redraw state boundaries and establish a new state that reflects their rural identities, values, and interests. But their calls for like-minded people everywhere in the United States to migrate to Greater Idaho belie contentions that this movement is a local political association merely intended to move state boundaries. Notably, their assertions are based on the claim that the government does not represent them; if the American Revolution has taught us anything, it is that this contention is a well-established ideological building block for nation-building rationalisations.

While I hesitate to believe that there is little or no racism lurking in the dark underside of these secessionist ideologies, I should add that, undoubtedly, many of the folks that are migrating to Idaho, or even areas that they believe will someday become part of the American Redoubt, are honest in their claims of having ideas about freedom and morality that clash with those of progressive liberal majorities. They are consciously removing themselves and their families from what they perceive as a corrupt environment, a move not motivated by hate or racism. Many are not Aryan supremacists; they are engaging in what I'd call righteous migration:

> Californians and others have been moving to the American Redoubt region for decades in order to escape what they take to be the overthrow of American society by leftist politics, the breakup of the nuclear family, and the diminishment of religious freedom. When folks from my church move there now, they are joining a decades-long caravan of migrants who see the Gem State [Idaho] as the last frontier of freedom left in the United States. (Onishi, 2023, p. 205)

But this actually complicates matters, because to understand the relation between the Greater Idaho Movement and a potential major conflict, it is essential to recognise that the varied motivations and grievances that drive this movement are not always aligned with those of white supremacist racism. This means that the good versus evil dualism that pervades in American culture impedes the dialogue needed to deal with this problem. The "we are right because we are intelligent; they are wrong because they are ignorant racists" argument is as popular today as it is misguided.

The American Redoubt

Adjoining and overlapping parts of Greater Idaho in the vast landscape of the United States is a region that has been dubbed The American Redoubt. Comprising the states of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, eastern Oregon, and eastern Washington, this area already has become a

haven for individuals that say they seek self-reliance, independence, and a lifestyle that aligns with values of freedom and individualism that stand in stark contrast to those of more progressive, liberal areas of the country.

As is the case with the Greater Idaho movement, the concept of the American Redoubt emerged in the early years of the 21st century, driven by a combination of political, cultural, and ideological factors. As a response to increasing government intrusion, diminishing personal liberties, and a perceived erosion of traditional values, individuals began looking to the northwest as a place where they could establish communities based on self-sufficiency, self-governance and a like-minded majority of voters. The American Redoubt, with its vast natural resources, low population density, and a spirit of independence, has become an attractive destination.

Political migration to the Redoubt was proposed in 2011 by survivalist, novelist, and blogger James Wesley Rawles, and although this is not the first time that such a proposal is made, it is currently, along with Greater Idaho, making the headlines. In his plans for the American Redoubt, Rawles has time and again affirmed that his Christian faith makes him an unyielding anti-racist, and that all like-minded groups (conservative Christians, Messianic Jews, Orthodox Jews) have a place in the Redoubt regardless of colour or ethnic background. His apparently benign argument will seem familiar to scholars of U.S. politics: Rural communities feel neglected, economically marginalised, and politically overshadowed by liberal urban centres.

But even if Rawles is honest about his anti-racist, non-supremacist philosophy, it is important to recognise that cultural and ideological differences can also play a major role in the outbreak of conflict. In many rural areas in the U.S. – like the immense region chosen by Rawles for the American Redoubt – people understand their values as divinely commanded and therefore inviolable, so laws and policies that contravene such values also contravene divine commandments. The subsequent resentments involve foundational principles whose importance outweighs any political concern. The resulting bitterness can result in large-scale violence, as we have seen in Charlottesville (Aug. 11 - Aug. 12, 2017) and in Washington, D.C. (January 6, 2021).

The question then becomes, how does a deeply fractured nation, one whose factions are becoming indifferent to the ideas and needs of their opponents, bring itself to address the grievances of the Greater Idaho, American Redoubt, and similar movements. Untended, they have the potential to escalate and contribute to a further fragmentation of society. In today's political and cultural scenarios, the desire for greater autonomy and representation can only intensify as the fissures multiply, leading to increased calls for secession and potential clashes between the Right and the Left. Such conflicts could metamorphose into a clash between the United States of America and an entity like the Northwest American Republic. Already those divisions are straining the fabric of national unity, and the solution is not on the horizon.

Judging by the acrimonious political environment evident in U.S. political institutions, it seems that to hope for open dialogue, empathetic understanding, and effective governance is a fool's

dream. The elements needed to prevent further divisions and foster a sense of unity are just not there. The political will needed for all stakeholders to make a proactive effort to bridge the urban-rural divide, address disparities, and ensure that the concerns and perspectives of all citizens are heard and respected, is regrettably depleted:

> The air is poison. Tension grips even the most casual conversations, which have become an exercise in short, cryptic remarks, many times more grunted than spoken. Distrust is the order of the day. [...] you need only to spend a little time under the Capitol Dome or in one of the six office buildings spread over Capitol Hill to be consumed by its reality. [...] The real danger is that the political water has been poisoned.
>
> In conversations with both Republican and Democratic Members of Congress and their staff, the story is the same: Acrimony rules, and the number of people willing to work together is shrinking and shrinking. Even mundane issues breed contempt. This is a dangerous path our country has started down. [...] Unfortunately, statesmen have faded away. (Lightfoot, 2004)

In the absence of statesmen, solutions based on violence usually fill the political void their absence generates.

Not surprisingly, and in spite of the rhetoric, when one observes the explicit founding ideology of the American Redoubt Movement, the idea of a secession that will be defended through violent means is remarkably prominent. It is explicit in Rawles's essay "The American Redoubt—Move to the Mountain States [the Northwest]". Therein he advances his rationale for selecting the states and areas to be included within American Redoubt territories (Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, along with eastern parts of Oregon and Washington), but also, and very importantly, he justifies the exclusion of adjacent areas whose populations, given their political/religious affiliations, are remarkably amenable to the idea of joining the Redoubt (Utah, the Dakotas, and Colorado). Rawles states that some of those areas cannot be included because "I have my doubts about how defendable they would be if it ever came down to a fight. Plains and steppes are tanker country. It is no coincidence that the armies of the world usually choose plains for their manoeuvre areas, for large scale war games" (Sterling, 2017). This begs the question: Whose tanks does Rawles assume would advance against the American Redoubt? Why? It seems clear that the idea of the American Redoubt is infused with secessionist ideology, and that in the anticipated push for independence they would need to defend themselves against a predictable confrontation with federal armies, who would be tasked by the "liberal" government to prevent the dismantling of the Union. If that is not secessionist thinking, I don't know what is. Violence is becoming an option to many U.S. Americans.

Conclusion

The grievances of the Greater Idaho and the American Redoubt movements seem substantially ignored at present. The media's biased presentation of its proponents as either uncouth retrogrades or culture war heroes does little to address grievances and has the potential to escalate ideological divisions and contribute to a further fragmentation of U.S. society. This is

evident to media historians. In his history of media bias in the United States, Jim A. Kuypers explains:

> [M]y interest is in how the American news media changed over the course of over 235 years—how it transformed itself first from a partisan press to professional, objective, fact-based journalism, then how it changed yet again back into a biased and overwhelmingly liberal press, then again transitioned into a 'partisan' press with new conservative competition. (Kuypers, 2014, p. 6)

As it stands, and because the potential for a new civil war in the United States exists, it is imperative to approach this issue without demonising opponents and presenting them as either enemies of reason or enemies of God. In the present circumstances, this seems impossible. A new style of political dialogue is needed to deal with a situation that seems to be spiralling out of control. Politics are so muddled that, in truth, we are forgetting what civilised dialogue sounds like.

Moreover, identity politics pose a significant risk to the social fabric of the nation, as the once-powerful U.S. American super identity, capable of subsuming all others, will not be sustainable in the long run. The media's weaponization of information does not help in this regard. Prioritizing open dialogue, empathy, and a commitment to democratic principles, critical values that underpin statesmanship, appear today in the press like old-fashioned bits of political nostalgia. Currently it is generally ignored that the strength of the United States was historically grounded in its governments' ability to bridge divides, find common ground, and focus on the shared values that bind its diverse population together. Abraham Lincoln understood this. He also understood that generosity and magnanimity were mainstays of such values, as he ordered General Sherman to allow surrendering Confederate soldiers to keep their sidearms and horses and go home.

> "[G]et the men composing the Confederate armies back to their homes, at work on their farms and in their shops." He did not ask for punishment or humiliation. He wanted them to be treated not as conquered foes but as fellow citizens. He further said, "Let them have their horses to plow with, and, if you like, their guns to shoot crows with. I want no one punished; treat them liberally all round. (Lloyd, 2020)

If this occurred in the present moment, this act of generosity would largely be gauged as weakness by today's viciously polarised political standards.

Finally, while it is challenging to predict the future with certainty, movements like the Greater Idaho and American Redoubt Movement demonstrate the potential for social and political divisions to escalate and contribute to many more violent, albeit localised, clashes. Nevertheless, while there exists the danger of the many violent movements coalescing into one powerful political movement, another civil war in the United States is not, in my opinion, within the realm of possibility. At least not in the foreseeable future. First, movements that oppose the federal government, while abundant, are too variegated to ever form a unified front.

The "Unite the Right" movement is not going anywhere. Secondly, elements in the U.S. military would have to back the secessionist rebellion, if there were to be one, and that is highly unlikely. Thirdly, I would venture to guess that most of the people who move to places where their political and social views form a majority are not secessionists, and in any case are not in a hurry to provoke the federal government into a major violent confrontation.

Perhaps it is this certainty regarding the impossibility of a new civil war that prevents policymakers and society at large from attempting to understand the motivations and grievances behind secessionist movements. Secession is not a real danger, so why bother to address it? If Lincolnian magnanimity is not needed to prevent a major armed conflict, why foster inclusive dialogue, address underlying issues, and promote harmony and national unity? There are no Abraham Lincolns on the horizon. The problem will be that an unending string of factional bickering will lead to localised violence and will undermine the voters' confidence in government, making scoundrelly rapscallions, outsiders to government, more palatable as leaders. But wait... hasn't this already happened?

References

Aho, J. A. (2014). *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism*. University of Washington Press.

Barrett, P., Hendrix, J. and Sims, G. (2021, September 27). How tech platforms fuel U.S. political polarization and what government can do about it. *Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-tech-platforms-fuel-u-s-political-polarization-and-what-government-can-do-about-it/

Burnett, J. (2022, February 17). The widening political chasm is revealed in real estate data. *NPR/WNYC*.https://www.npr.org/2022/02/17/1081387076/america-is-growing-more-geographically-polarized

CBS News. (2022, October 16). Over the line: Why some Oregonians want to become part of Idaho.https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-some-want-to-move-the-oregon-idaho-border/

Elias, T. D. (2023, March 22). Will 'Greater Idaho' inspire new State of Jefferson push? *The Coast News Group*. https://thecoastnews.com/elias-will-greater-idaho-inspire-new.-state-of-jefferson-push/

Gale, W. G., & West, D. M. (2021, September 16). Is the US Headed for Another Civil War? *Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/is-the-us-headed-for-another-civil-war/

Gardell, M. (2003). *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384502

Gribben, C. (2021). *Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America: Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest*. Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199370221.001.0001

Jiménez, T. (2017). *The Other Side of Assimilation: How Immigrants Are Changing American Life*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520968370

Kuypers, J. (2013). *Partisan Journalism: A History of Media Bias in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Lightfoot, J. R. (2004, March 15). Poisoned Political Water Breeds Acrimony, Contempt. Roll Call. https://rollcall.com/2004/03/15/poisoned-political-water-breeds-acrimony-contempt/

Lloyd, J.J. (2020, February 12). Abraham Lincoln, Epitome of Political Civility. *The National Review*.https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/02/abraham-lincoln-virtue-civility-gettysburg-address/

Marche, S. (2022). *The Next Civil War*. Simon & Schuster.

Medina, R.M., Nicolosi, E., Brewer, S., and Linke, A.M. (2018). Geographies of Organized Hate in America: A Regional Analysis. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers 108*(4). 1006–1021. doi:10.1080/24694452.2017.1411247.

Monroe, K. R., Hankin, J., & Van Vechten, R. B. (2020). The Psychological Foundations of Identity Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *3*, 419–447. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.419

Onishi, B. (2023). *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism and What Comes Next*. Broadleaf.

Pazzanese, C. (2021, March 16). Democrats and Republicans do live in different worlds. The Harvard Gazette. https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/democrats-and-republicans-live-in-partisan-bubbles-study-finds/

Pazzanese, C. (2022, January 12). Political scientist says US civil war unlikely. *Phys.Org* https://phys.org/news/2022-01-political-scientist-civil-war.html

Robinson, N. J. (2022, September 14). Can We Drop the Silly Idea That America Is "Heading for a Civil War"? *Current Affairs*. https://www.currentaffairs.org/2022/09/can-we-drop-the-silly-idea-that-america-is-heading-for-a-civil-war

Sterling, B. (2017, October 22). American Redoubt ideology. *Wired*. https://www.wired.com/beyond-the-beyond/2017/10/american-redoubt-ideology/

The Zogby Poll. (2021, January 19). Will the US Have Another Civil War? *Zogby Analytics*. https://zogbyanalytics.com/news/997-the-zogby-poll-will-the-us-have-another-civil-war

Corresponding Author: Alfonso J. García-Osuna
Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities*
Email: publications@iafor.org

IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities

the iafor
journal of arts & humanities