iafor

journal of arts & humanities

Volume 9 – Issue 2 – 2022

Editor: Alfonso J. García-Osuna

ISSN: 2187-0616

iafor

The IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities
Volume 9 – Issue – 2

IAFOR Publications

IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities

Published by The International Academic Forum (IAFOR), Japan

Executive Editor: Joseph Haldane
IAFOR Journals Administrator: Mark Kenneth Camiling
Publications Manager: Nick Potts

IAFOR Publications
Sakae 1-16-26 – 201, Naka Ward, Aichi, Japan 460-0008
IAFOR Journal of Arts & Humanities
Volume 9 – Issue 2 – 2022

ISSN: 2187-0616
Online: ijah.iafor.org

Cover Image: Jaredd Craig on Unsplash, “The Last Bookstore, Los Angeles, United States”

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Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors

Article 1:
Is an Explanation a Reason?

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Article 2:
Cartographies of Difference: Inventing Difference in Amitav Gosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Article 3:
Mapping the Motif of the Wandering Jew in Salim Kumar's *Karutha Joothan*

Jeslin Mery John

Dr Asha Susan Jacob

Article 4:
Visual Disability and the Pursuit of Normality in Preeti Monga's Biographical Novel *The Other Senses*

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Article 5:
Cultural Expectations and Gendered Roles: Identity Formations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Article 6:
Decipher Symptoms of Asperger Syndrome: Role of Early Intervention in Colin Fisher

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Article 7:
Editor's Essay
Borges's *Library of Babel*: Consciousness Assaults the Universe

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Is an Explanation a Reason?

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Abstract

Are reasons and explanations the same things? The paper considers explanations and reasons in a range of contexts and identifies similarities and differences in them. It is suggested that, while the two notions are linked in reasoning, there is a difference of focus, with reasons being concerned with more general principles and explanations being concerned with the application of principles to specific instances. However, in a "model-dependent reality", there can be explanations, but not ultimate reasons.

Keywords: causality, determinism, explanation, reason, reasoning, why and how questions

Reasons and explanations are closely related. The search for reasons – curiosity – is a key feature of human rationality. We want explanations for everything. Giving an explanation, either for understanding some phenomenon or for a practical course of action, is usually taken to constitute providing a reason, and giving a reason is taken to constitute offering an explanation (which may or may not be accepted), but are reasons and explanations different things, and – if so – how do they differ? If our conceptions of the world are provisional mental (or scientific) models, what is the status of explanations and reasons offered using such models?

Reasons and explanations imply the attempt to understand; since reasons and explanations are central to understanding, their characteristics show how we understand. We want to achieve certainty, or at least a high level of probability (as Locke maintained, 1973 (1689): 415 ff), ultimately leading to belief as an emotional attachment to certainty. Understanding – finding reasons and explanations – is also its own reward, and a pleasure (as Plato pointed out in the *Republic*). What we consider certain or highly probable through reasoning, as opposed to immediate awareness in perception, depends on the nature of our reasoning and on our level of knowledge and general "culture" of thinking at a given point in time. A major part of our reasoning, however, has always been the idea that reasons must be (logically) sufficient (the consequence follows from the premise), and thus we arrive at the principle of sufficient reason: for every fact there is a reason which explains why the fact is as it is; that is, there must be a connection between a general "truth" and a particular instance (Strawson, 1973, pp. 3–4). If we have a sufficient reason, then we have an explanation. But we may ask what constitutes that sufficiency of reasoning, and the nature of the connection between premises and conclusions.

There is no simple answer. Reasons will be sufficient, in part, if they correspond to our common experience of reality, but we know that the plausibility of explanations varies with time and the level of knowledge (the cultural background), and hence of the meaning of terms in the propositions. However, correspondence with "common experience" is insufficient as a criterion. Science constantly challenges our "common-sense" views. The finding that the earth looks red from outer space using an infra-red camera hardly corresponds to common experience or belief about our "blue" planet (vegetation reflects infra-red light). It is better to speak of experience guided by rational principles (Popper's "enlightened common sense", 1972a, p. 37). Further, we expect that a reason or explanation is more than a feeling, perception, or matter of belief, but feelings, perceptions and beliefs may be the reasons or explanations for ideas or actions (e.g. John spoke to Mary because he felt she was unhappy; John informed the police because he thought it was the right thing to do; religious and other ideological beliefs have been offered as reasons for atrocities from *auto-da-fes* to the *gulags*). Our reasons and explanations exist within conceptual frameworks (Poston, 2014) and, in those frameworks, there must be some fixed points (statements or ideas accepted as generally true; in John's case (above) a moral principle is taken as a justification). Our mental models contain reference points, otherwise there is an infinite regress in explanation. Our frameworks are applied "topically"– they are applied to the particular fact to be explained and are valid for the time and level of knowledge of the explanation. However, the conceptual frameworks are our, human, conceptual frameworks. Thus, while beliefs or feelings may vary and may not be shared, one can see that they constitute reasons (reasonable or misguided) for others. They exist in the individual's conceptual framework or a scientific paradigm (a "model-dependent reality", Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010). Of course, explanations are interconnected, and a particular reason may be just part of a more general explanation (often a "suppressed" major premise in an argument). For example, I may observe, one day in September (in the UK), that the swallows are no longer around and conclude they have gone south for the winter. Generally

(as a (suppressed) major premise), I know that their migration is connected to the length of daylight hours and the availability of food. In all these cases, there is a role for intuition (Ewing, 1951, 48ff); one must just "see" that bird migration is connected to factors such as food and daylight, or that contacting the police and sense of moral obligation may be connected.

One aspect of the issue we are considering is whether the universe is deterministic, that is, whether there is a chain of causes leading to any event or set of circumstances from an ultimate cause so that, if we knew every causal circumstance then every event or circumstance would be explained as a function of all those causes (which seems to have been the deterministic position of Spinoza (2002)). The migration of the swallows would be caused by decreasing daylight time and food sources acting on the birds' brains and behavioural dispositions; the length of day would be determined by the changing position of the earth relative to the sun and its inclination; the amount of food would be decreased by the reduced warmth; the tilt of the earth would be determined by physical forces in the solar system, and so on. Or, in an everyday case, John tripped over a brick; the brick had been left by a builder; the builder had been building a wall; a neighbour employed the builder because he wanted a perimeter barrier, and so forth. The chain of causes and effects goes on indefinitely to include gravity on earth (to hold the brick down) and the rotation of earth around the sun (to account for the presence of anything on earth), back to the formation of the universe. (However, we should note that this form of determinism is incompatible with the probabilistic nature of quantum physics.)

We should note that many of the points just mentioned as background understanding were unknown in earlier times and may still be unknown in some societies (or not accepted in some worldviews), so our reasons and explanations are dependent on time, place, and belief systems. The possibility that our understanding or mental modelling may not correspond to reality "as it is" raises the problem of the relation of theory to reality, and the meaning of terms so that we can relate words to experience. If a theory is successful in explanation, can we assume that the theory is a picture of reality, and hence an ultimate "reason"?

But we might also wonder whether there are non-causal explanations. We first consider some possibilities.

Conceptual Frameworks and Applications to Cases

An apparently fit and healthy middle-aged man with a good lifestyle and diet, a non-smoker who takes regular exercise and has no symptoms suddenly suffers a cardiac arrest and dies. It happens (more often to men than women). It is natural to ask—why? The autopsy shows that his coronary arteries were narrowed by plaque. The plaque forming the blockage became unstable and, when a piece broke off, there was bleeding. A blood clot formed and blocked the supply of blood to the heart, which stopped supplying oxygenated blood to the lungs. The lungs could not function, and death ensued in about four seconds.

The autopsy results give a causal explanation of the man's death. Does that constitute a reason? Clearly, the causal explanation answers the question – how? When we ask for a reason, we normally want an answer to the question – why? In a purely deterministic conception of the world – one of cause and effect –, an answer to the question – how? would be equivalent to an answer to the question – why? That is, an explanation would be a reason (and vice versa). Can all why questions be reduced to how questions?

However, in the case of the man with a cardiac arrest, we might note that the man had had a build-up of plaque over a long period. Why did death occur when it did? A causal explanation would seek to identify a factor such as stress leading to a contraction of the arteries, thus causing the plaque to break off. Of course, the man may have had many periods of stress previously without adverse effects, so the question of why then? remains, and it would be necessary to try to identify all the factors leading up to the instability of the plaque. If all that information were available, we could still have a causal explanation. A persistent questioner might point out that almost everyone has some narrowing of the arteries (it is found in babies and the fittest of soldiers) with no infarction or cardiac arrest, so the question – why that particular man and not others? – remains. A statistical approach showing the percentage of the population who are affected in the way described is of no assistance here (correlation and probability are not causes), so many more details of the man's genetic and physical condition would be needed for a full causal explanation of plaque instability at that precise moment. If we had all that information, would we have a reason? Or is there something about the idea of a reason that escapes causal explanation and the chain of causes and effects? (Some people with religious views might feel that it was the man's "time" to die.) Are there phenomena which are beyond causality or are outside the chain that leads us back to some ultimate cause of everything? There may still be a sense of discomfort (or emotional outcry, however irrational) that no quantity of information really tells us why.

We could model a chain of causes as consisting of <{set of observable phenomena}, {set of connections between the phenomena}; {set of sequenced processes linking the phenomena}>. In the case considered, the phenomena include the fact of the cardiac arrest and the phenomena of the plaque, blood clot, arteries, heart, lungs, and death; the connections include those between the oxygenated blood and the diameter of the arteries as well as the relation of oxygenated blood to heart and lung function, and the relation of (absence of) lung function to death; and the sequence of processes – stress, contraction of the arteries, destabilisation of plaque, breaking off of plaque, blood clot formation, heart failure, lung failure, death. The components of the model serve as components of a causal explanation, but we would also need a set of general principles and logical argument to organise the causal explanation. The components we have described would fit easily into a hypothetico-deductive explanation of the sort given by philosophers of science such as Popper (1972) or Hempel (1965; 1974) with general principles such as, the human body dies without oxygenated blood by the lungs through the cardio-vascular system. The lungs must be supplied with oxygenated blood by the heart. If the heart stops pumping oxygenated blood, then the lungs fail, and death ensues. If the coronary arteries are completely blocked, then the heart stops pumping blood. If these conditions apply to a given individual, then the death of that person is explained (Strawson's general principles applied to the particular case). Of course, the general principles and their logical linkage are not themselves causal; they provide a framework of ideas for connecting the chain of events into an explanation.

However, the acceptance of the explanation involves a number of conditions. First, we must have a general understanding of the cardio-vascular system and its function in the maintenance of life. For people of earlier ages (say, before Harvey's demonstration of the circulation of the blood) or in less technologically advanced societies (or perhaps for people with particular belief systems), such a mental construction is unthinkable. In particular, those who regard life and death as decisions of a deity (or fate) will view the physical-determinist reasoning as insufficient or false. Second, we must accept the logic of the model (logical relations between premises and consequences must ultimately be intuited (as noted above, we must just "see" the logical connections) and apply it to the individual; i.e. we see intuitively that there is a

correspondence between the overall model and the facts relating to the individual – the general must be applicable to the particular case. This means, among other things, that the named phenomena, connections, and processes correspond to observable reality. Connecting the stages of the argument and linking named components to real-world phenomena clearly involves the meaning of terms and relations (a semantic issue, raising the possibility of understanding depending on arbitrary semantic distinctions). Third, we must accept that the idea of a "cause" includes not just a sequence of phenomena (that the cause is antecedent to the effect), but also the idea that phenomena may affect one another in a linkage (unprovable but always presumed, according to Hume, 1968; 1738); that one phenomenon has the "power" to affect (or be affected by) another (as Locke, 1973 (1689): pp. 162–179) put it). In general, the explanation of our man's demise must be related to an overall mental construction (which may be subject to change in the light of further evidence, although that also requires a wider construction in which theory and evidence are linked). In turn, that implies human rationality – our common experience and common sense. There would be no point in offering our explanations of cardiac arrest to a cow. Explanation and reason, therefore, are dependent on human attributes – our way of understanding, or the search for reasons.

Fourth, then, we accept the most general conditions of an explanatory argument. Our notion of "cause" involves accepting the unidirectional "arrow of time" for recognising antecedence, and the idea of "uniformity of nature" (same causes–same effects). But we also accept some limitation in reasoning to that which is considered relevant to the phenomenon to be explained. No doubt, ultimately everything is connected, but reasoning would be impossible if we had to account for every aspect of a phenomenon. The man's heart condition might be linked to weather conditions, his digestive tract, or the state of his left big toe, but we are satisfied to leave those issues aside unless there is some pressing reason to include them; similarly, tripping over the brick does not, in everyday practicality, require quantum physics for a reason.

To some extent, a deterministic view is also built into human thinking. On the other hand, it is known that the quantum universe is probabilistic, as noted above. The physicist, Roger Penrose (2010, 13ff), illustrates the notion of entropy with the example of an egg falling off a table and smashing on the floor. The egg goes from a high level of organisation to a highly disorganised state as a mess on the floor. It is conceivable, but overwhelmingly unlikely, that the molecules in the egg could somehow re-form themselves into an organised egg. If it happened, it would look like magic (as Penrose points out). The possibility of such an eventuality is incalculably small, but not absolutely nil. On the other hand, as Penrose also points out, if we had a film of the egg smashing and ran it backwards, no one (or at least no one with an experience of film) would be in the least surprised to see the egg rise from the floor and re-form itself on the table-it is part of the humour of children's cartoons. As he says, "past teleology" (reversing the film) is common experience, whereas "future teleology" (the self-organisation of the smashed egg) is "just something that we never seem to encounter" (p. 51) – it is inconsistent with the second law of thermodynamics. It would be such "an enormously improbable sequence that we can simply reject it as a realistic possibility" (p. 14). The point here for our discussion is that our understanding of entropy and the egg is in some degree a matter of our way of constructing reality – our common experience. That common experience includes our common sense as a basis for rational thought. Popper (1972a, p. 33) asserts that common sense is the ultimate foundation of scientific thinking.

Naturally, then, we are amazed by animals that can restore lost organs or body parts (such as salamanders or geckos) and by the ability of the human body to self-repair some wounds, but we look for the physical mechanisms which explain such phenomena. Regeneration is, of

course, not reversal. It requires energy and new material as well as genetically based organisation to overcome entropy and is not an exception to the general principle of universal entropy. However, we could imagine worlds in which the self-reorganisation of eggs was the norm (i.e. where entropy is reversed), but it would not be our world even if we see it in cartoons).

Some questions in physics have no ultimate answers. Why we have an entropic universe rather than some self-maintaining organisation, why the cosmological constant is the way it is (along with a number of other key quantum values); these are well-established facts, and they can help to explain our existence (we wouldn't have the universe we know otherwise, and wouldn't exist – the so-called (weak) "anthropic principle"), but we do not know why they are so. There are speculations (e.g. every possibility that can happen does happen in an infinity of time and space) and, no doubt, cosmologists are working on the problems, but what is illustrated is that why questions push us ever further back into more explanations. Why? then, transcends, how? Even if the search seems ultimately pointless, people have always dreamt up explanations of first causes in creation myths and have provided explanations of disease – now known to be false – (humours, miasmas) based on the conceptual frameworks of the time.

However, not all explanations are causal (or perhaps even deterministic), even if some causes may be involved (as is also maintained by proponents of "grounded" explanation, e.g. Dasgupta, 2016). For example, it is known that albinism (say, in blackbirds) is disadvantageous to survival and reproduction (albino birds are more easily predated and mate less frequently), whereas camouflage (e.g. in the tree creeper to merge in with the bark) is advantageous to survival. Most birds have poorly developed smell, but nocturnal birds, such as the kiwi, have developed a strong sense of smell to find prey in the dark. Clearly, our Darwinian explanations of such phenomena involve a similar logical construction to the physical ones above. There are phenomena (albinism, camouflage, sense of smell); connections (colouration to reproductive chances or danger); and processes (development of appearance, sequences of mating or territorial behaviours). We use a similar hypothetico-deductive logic to produce explanations – all animals strive to survive; albinism endangers survival, camouflage assists survival, so albinos survive less well and reproduce less frequently, whereas well-camouflaged birds survive better. The arguments can then be applied to the specific cases of the blackbird, kiwi, or tree creeper. We can add genetic factors (e.g. mutations affecting melanin production or sensitivity to pheromones) to account for the occurrence of, say, white feathers or the olfactory glands.

The Darwinian explanation has similar requirements to the ones listed above, but it is not entirely causal. It requires us to recognise a principle of "survival" which involves feeding, safety from predation, and desire to reproduce. Such a principle is entirely reasonable (at least in a modern world view), but it again arises from our common experience – it is not a cause in the physical sense and requires a specification of its meaning. It is a framework of ideas applicable to particular cases. Even if any biological mechanism is physically determined in genetic terms at a molecular level, a Darwinian explanation appeals to our feeling of "what makes sense" (whereas the idea that the bird god got tired of all blackbirds being black, and decided to create some beautiful white ones, which might be the basis of a nice story, does not make practical sense). But again, various why questions suggest themselves, such as "why should kiwis have become nocturnal? why should tree creepers have adopted their particular way of making a living? Why do they peck upwards while nuthatches (with similar feeding behaviour) peck upside down?" We can only guess that some birds found a niche, exploited it, and passed on behavioural dispositions with a gradual genetic divergence of one population

from another without intermediate forms. (Note Darwin's (1901; 1859, 124ff) explanation of the absence of intermediate forms – they are less well adapted than animals that develop advantages in a particular niche and are not able to survive – we do not find "half-way kiwis"). Why those behaviours and not others? The explanation involves some causal mechanisms at a genetic/molecular level but seems to involve also exploitation of random opportunities in the environment. In other cases, markings involved in species identity and identification seem to have developed as a particular outcome from a range of possibilities through sexual selection. Thus, some bumblebees have red tails, some have white tails, and others have buff tails. While differentiation is advantageous, the particular development of red, white, or buff (species) seems random compared with the selective advantage of camouflage or the development of smell in nocturnal birds. We are dealing with what is, rather than what must be, so – red tails, white tails, and buff tails are equally good for the purpose of species differentiation (one assumes).

Similar remarks might be made about human societies. Rituals, politeness behaviours, and gestures are found in all human societies. Their explanation is connected with human sociality and group cohesion, but the particular forms of rituals and politeness strategies vary across cultures (you might greet by bowing, handshakes, forehead contact, etc.). Our account of them, linked to sociality (Dunbar's "social brain hypothesis", 1998), involves, then, a non-causal construct which "stands to reason" in our model of common experience, but has the same sort of hypothetico-deductive reasoning. Human success depended in early homo sapiens on social cooperation (and other factors such as inquisitiveness, learning, and cultural transmission), but why human development took the particular path it did (e.g. reduction of sexual dimorphism – unlike in gorillas, for example) is unknown, and similarly is why this society adopted a certain structure (e.g. matriarchal or clan-based), ritual or politeness strategy, while another society adopted another. That is, we can offer a how explanation for the actual state of affairs, but not a why reason. The explanation again requires a construction with phenomena, relations, and processes, but the explanatory theory applied to those phenomena is not entirely causal. It requires the notion of "sociality" and its meaning.

In language phenomena, we find changes which spread memetically (and differentially in different sections of a population), and which seem to have no obvious reason. They seem, as the great Danish linguist Hjelmslev (1969) says, "capricious" (p. 170). For example, English has retained apophony in the "strong verb", sing-sang-sung, but help has changed from being a strong verb in Old English (helpan-healp-holpen) to being a "weak verb" – help-helped-helped. Other verbs have disappeared from the language "in favour of others" (e.g. belgan "become angry", frignan "ask", weorpan "throw"), and others have changed in meaning (winnan "to fight"). Generally, the past participle of go is gone in most varieties of English, but in some varieties (e.g. around Tyneside in England) it is went (He should have went). In Scottish and some other varieties of English, the sound change /u:/ > /au/ is non-existent or incomplete (thus, /du:n/ "down", /tu:n/ "town"), and also occasionally in Canadian English (/əbu:t/ "about"). In American English, the French loan word "route" is often pronounced with the (medieval) vowel change as /raut/, whereas in British English it is standardly /ru:t/. The exact origins of language changes, and the social forces and preferences which favour one form or another are generally unknown. It is supposed that changes appeared sporadically in prestige groups and spread by imitation (memetically) through sections of the population, but why a given change (rather than no change or a different change) was adopted is usually quite opaque. It may be that the adoption of a language change is a kind of social badge showing adherence to, or membership of, a peer group or association with a prestige group (and is resisted by other groups). Here we have a kind of unconscious motivation for the adaptation of verbal behaviour

(rather than a rational or causal reason) with plausible (but to some extent speculative) explanations involving similar forms of (non-causal) reasoning to the ones above. The changes are not the result of causal factors, and in some ways the social-memetic forces are similar to the gradual differentiation of bumblebee populations by unconscious sexual selection. However, it is also clear that there may be alternative points of view or explanations (some language change may be due to population changes or conflicts between more "progressive" and more "conservative" speaker groups, for example). That is, there are no definitive paradigms, but conflicting points of view – each with its own "semantics".

Thus, we can explain the difference between the noun, house ending in /s/, and the verb, house ending in /z/, by reference to the Old English contextual phonological "rule", voiceless fricatives become voiced between vowels (e.g. /s/ > /z/), where the verb goes back to husen (/hu:zen/), but the noun goes back to hus, /hus/, and the fossilisation of the two forms into Present Day English, but we cannot say why such a rule emerged in early Germanic.

As Hempel (1974) points out, the form of reasoning in historical explanation also follows the same "nomological-deductive" or hypothetico-deductive pattern as in natural science, but the components in historical reasoning involve the analysis of motivating forces. Naturally, historical explanations/interpretations or reasons for actions, events, or circumstances also involve the analytical perspective (paradigm or political viewpoint) of the researcher. They thus imply wider issues of the "philosophy" of the researcher, and hence an appeal to what is considered reasonable. Historical explanations (such as the causes of World War Two or the Russian revolution) may, like linguistic analyses, be many, subject to definitions, and open to debate. That debate further raises the question of whether it is reasonable to speak of "historical necessity". While it may be reasonable to apply forms of deductive reasoning in historical explanation, the logical necessity of conclusions should not be confused with the necessity of events. The fact that something occurred and can be explained does not imply that events were somehow inevitable consequences of factors in the explanation. As in the language examples, above, even reasonable and well-founded explanations are not necessarily ultimate reasons but may be arguably plausible (and aid understanding).

This is even more obvious in the case of imaginary constructions, such as stories. Thus, we might ask, Why did Anna Karenina fall in love with Vronsky in Tolstoy's novel? Any phenomena to be explained here are not real-world people or events (even if there are known to have been people on whom Tolstoy modelled his characters to some extent). We have a complex document (and its textual development) as well as any hints we can glean from Tolstoy's remarks and correspondence. We know something of the social background, and of the commentary, challenges, and ideas Tolstoy was offering to the public. The answer to the question can be taken in different ways. We could be asking what Tolstoy was offering as a reason for Anna's love, or we might study what the text as presented shows regardless of Tolstoy. The significance of the answer does not lie in the analysis of a real-world event like the cardiac arrest, or of a real-life love affair. It lies in the projection of the novel onto the society of the time and onto universal human relations. It could lie in Tolstoy's "message" in the novel, or in our interpretation from a given perspective. Whatever interpretation of the question we take (and of course there may be many others), we still form a construct of ideas involving the phenomena of the novel; the connections between characters and circumstances; and the sequential processes leading to Anna's elopement. There has to be correspondence of our representation with the "facts" of the novel and the connections and processes, and there must be a logic that "stands to reason" as part of our construction of Tolstoy's novels. We must feel that Anna's love is clearly motivated, "realistic". Any explanations we offer (a loveless

marriage of convenience, release of repressed sexuality, rejection of social convention, etc.) will not be causal, but motivating/dispositional in nature; and they are unlikely to be in any sense definitive or such as to channel thinking into the kind of establishment of relevant experiments to test uncertain points of theory, as in physics. In fact, the field of debate is open. Perhaps, we could say that in social and literary studies there is more emphasis on why and on reasons qua motivations, whereas in physical science there is more emphasis on how and physical-causal explanation. One would doubt whether a causal view of Anna's falling in love in the novel starting with Tolstoy's entire life history and showing the deterministic inevitability of the text would tell us very much at all.

In the case of legal reasoning, there may be (at least in many cases) a high degree of clarity. For example, we may have a law that it is illegal to drive a motor vehicle without a valid licence and insurance, and that infringement of the law is punishable in a prescribed manner. The logic in applying "theory" to the particular case is very clear: if someone is found driving without the relevant documentation, then he or she is guilty and subject to punishment. Such a law is a reasonable way of protecting other people, but the principle of such a law, and hence its use as a reason for punishment, depends on a decision by the relevant power (parliament or other body) and its acceptance by the public – some people may not accept the restriction on personal liberty or may have religious views which conflict with the whole idea of insurance. The application of an arbitrary legal requirement is clearly not a causal matter, but a matter of convention (and definition of terms). That becomes even more obvious in the case of more controversial laws (and punishments). For example, the laws of lèse-majesté in Thailand or the laws relating to treason and espionage in the old Soviet Union would be regarded as extreme and unacceptable restrictions on freedom of speech and action in many societies. Those freedoms themselves are matters of human conventions and definitions; all societies must find a balance between personal liberty and social responsibility by agreement. That too, is a matter of a non-causal construct.

The search for reasons is part of everyday life, not just a matter of scientific, medical, professional, or academic debate. We can ask why a man might drink Glenfiddich rather than any other whisky, why a woman chose to buy, say, a blue dress rather than a green one, why she married John and not Peter, why the fruit bowl has not been replenished, why there are crumbs on the floor, why one should invest in bonds rather than stocks (or vice versa), and so forth. The answers to such questions involve reasons concerned with personal preference (taste in whisky) or opinion (about her appearance or colour likes/dislikes), priorities (in finding a husband), the set of circumstances leading to the observed state of the fruit bowl or carpet, and attitudes to risk and return in investment. Of course, it may be that the decisions and circumstances, preferences, priorities, and attitudes are somehow determined by a long chain of events and psychological forces (or may be whimsical or inscrutable), but what we present as reasons are mental constructions which we assess as reasonable or otherwise – they belong in a human mental framework and tell us more about how we think than about particular decisions or choices.

In legal and everyday contexts, an explanation may also be offered as a justification (a clear category confusion). For example, a speeding driver may plead the necessity of getting to a school to pick up the children on time or a neighbour might explain/justify loud music as part of a birthday party. One might counter-argue that such considerations do not constitute a reason (= justification) for endangering others or disturbing the neighbourhood. That is, in the special case where an explanation is a proposed justification, it may not be a reason (at least for other people). A failed explanation (such as in the case of the speeding driver or noisy neighbour) is

not a reason, that is, the failure involves the lack of a sufficient reason (due to wider considerations), as is also the case of scientific or academic explanations which are not accepted.

Conclusions

To sum up, explanations and reasons are connected notions in our reasoning. We have seen that some explanations are not causal reasons, but involve social and semantic conventions (e.g. legal explanations); in other cases (e.g. language change) we can offer explanations, but we do not know whether the proposed factors are reasons (i.e. they describe events or outcomes) but we cannot know if they constitute actual real-world motivations for human behaviour; and in yet other cases (literature) explanations may not be unique reasons, but instead may appeal to our sense of reasonableness for the purposes of discussion – or they may just be thought-provoking alternative ideas. It seems that explanations and reasons can be differentiated into types.

Our patterns of reasoning seem to work in similar ways, but in science the pathway seems more clearly defined, and has fewer theory options. Proposed explanations can be tested in relation to the phenomena, relations and processes in question. Progress can be made in explanation and in detail. While scientific explanations are almost exclusively causal and physical, we have seen that they require an appeal to common experience and to conventional definition of terms, where quantification is not a central concern. They also exist in a framework of human rationality and presuppose the conditions of reasoning. In other areas of our understanding, explanations involve concepts which are clearly not causal (e.g. survival, adaptation). There is still an appeal to common experience or reasonableness. Furthermore, in our rationality there is a need for some sense of certainty. There may be competing scientific explanations. For a long time, there was dispute between upholders of the "steady state" view of the cosmos and upholders of the "expanding universe" view (currently the favoured view). At the moment, some unexpected observations about the stability of galaxies and galaxy clusters (e.g. why they do not spin apart) are accounted for by the idea of "dark matter". That explanation is disputed by those who invoke a modified view of gravity or those who think the computations are wrong (Clegg, 2019). That is, there are different explanations. Without greater knowledge, we cannot be certain about any explanation and, therefore, cannot speak of definitive reasons for the observed phenomena.

In particular, it is important to resist the strong temptation to equate a successful theory with reality (i.e. be an ultimate reason), rather than to see it as a best explanatory method. Newtonian physics had to be replaced by Einsteinian physics. As Levenson (2015) describes, some scientists were convinced of the existence of a planet, Vulcan, between Mercury and the sun because such a body could explain variations in Mercury's orbit in a Newtonian framework-some even claimed to have seen it. More accurate information rendered the Vulcan hypothesis unnecessary.

Non-quantifiable concepts require definition, and thus involve our notions of meaning. "Semantically based" reasons, as we have seen, include not only common experience or reasonableness, but also preferences, priorities, attitudes, points of view. Reasons include social or political perspectives and correlations which are open to debate. In both (physical) science and non-science, reasons and explanations exist in the framework of human rationality, and in wider constructions, which are not always the same for all, but which are all "model-dependent".

A significant issue in the classification of reasons is the principle of "same cause – same effect". While in physical science, many effects can be explained by the same causes, and any different effects raise questions for research, it should be clear that in other disciplines we may rarely find "same causes", let alone "same effects". The events and circumstances of history, language changes, literature, the making and application of laws, and everyday events may have similarities, but they each require separate explanations as both the causes (or relevant circumstances) and effects vary.

What we have seen is that reasons and explanations cover a range of possibilities from the strictly causal applying to all cases through those involving a reliance on the definition of terms to those which concern only a single everyday event or set of circumstances. All require mental constructions (and sometimes a "paradigm" of thinking), but the conditions for the acceptance of an explanation differ.

If we can find a difference between reasons and explanations, it may lie ultimately in the emotional attachment to why questions (for reasons), and the desire to reveal "the truth" or to achieve a sort of ultimate understanding, possibly illusory – a desire for belief. Explanations answering how questions may sometimes seem prosaic or unfulfilling by comparison. (An autopsy report may not satisfy someone on questions of human mortality and destiny.) Curiosity demands reasons and more reasons. We want to know, for example, whether or not our existence is "real" or the product of a hugely complex quantum simulation, or – as Berkeley would have said – whether we and all existence are ideas in the mind of God- is there any way of telling?; whether we could tell the difference between a rational, conscious being with free will and a zombie who acted in every respect like a rational, conscious being with free will; did the conditions of the big bang determine everything that has happened in our universe? As we have seen, explanatory reasoning requires both a model of the "explanandum" – the phenomena, their relations, and the sequence of processes – and a logic containing general premises accepted as true or reasonable with a deductive argument to show that the phenomena and their relations are accounted for by general principles, along with a recognition of the applicability of the model to the specific phenomenon under consideration. Reasoning further involves the norms and conditions of human rationality, as well as conventions of meaning, as we have seen.

We might propose, then, that an explanation is an end point. It is the application of reasoning to account for a set of phenomena, events, circumstances, and their relations and processes. A reason is a starting point. The focus in a reason is the general premises and logic of the reasoning from which we start an explanation. That is why failed explanations are not reasons; the failure lies in the general premises or the lack of correspondence between phenomena and general premises. A reason is also the starting point for further why questions, that is, the search for further reasons. That is what underlies the emotional content or connotation of a reason as opposed to an explanation.

Our discussion does not resolve the question of whether the universe is deterministic – in purely physical terms it may be, but those are not the only terms that are relevant to us as humans. An acceptance of physical determinism does not imply the acceptance of purely explanatory determinism. As Hempel (1974) points out, commonality of reasoning does not imply an entirely mechanistic universe. What we have seen is that all our reasoning takes place in a human perspective (the social and psychological universe of our experience), and reasons are what we construct and accept within the limits of our capacities, often from multiple perspectives- our mental and scientific models. Part of our reasoning is semantic – and, hence,

a matter of social convention. However reliable our models may be in giving reasons as general principles and leading to acceptable explanations, they are subject to change or debate, and so do not give ultimate reasons. Reasons and explanations are not the same things.

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Cartographies of Difference: Inventing Difference in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

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Abstract

The central image in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is that of the "upside-down house". The "upside-down house" was a product of a notional exercise undertaken by Thamma, the narrator's grandmother, when she was a young girl. When their ancestral home was partitioned with a wall due to persistent familial disputes, the young children of the family found it difficult to cope with the now hostile environment. In response, Thamma invented stories about the portion of the house that belonged to their Jethamoshai, her father's elder brother. The stories told herein are absurd and comical, but they contain a deeper social message, as they suggest that such irrational narratives are indispensable when drawing lines and erecting walls that separate people and communities from each other. As such, the upside-down house becomes a metaphor for the consequences of the Partition that shook the Indian sub-continent in 1947, when two communities that had long co-existed suddenly found themselves on opposite sides of an arbitrarily drawn fence. Collateral to the metaphor is the intimation that, in order to sustain myths of nations and nationalism, the interested players need to concoct narratives of difference and othering. Through the image of the "upside-down house", this paper seeks to explore questions of home, nation and borders as depicted in *The Shadow Lines*.

Keywords: borders, difference, home, invention, nation, nationalism

In *The Shadow Lines*, Thamma, the narrator's grandmother, while reminiscing about her childhood home in 1/31 Jindabahar Lane, Dhaka, told him stories of an "upside-down house" (Ghosh, 2011, p. 92). In the "upside-down house" everything was inverted: "... they sleep under their beds and eat on the sheets, they cook with jhatas and sweep with their ladles, they write with umbrellas and go walking with pencils …" (p. 92). Thamma explains to the narrator that in order to amuse her younger sister Mayadebi, she made up or invented these stories about the house of their Jethamoshai, their father's elder brother. After a property dispute where the two brothers find their differences to be irreconcilable, they agree to erect a wooden wall to partition their house; this barrier is erected "through a couple of doorways" and "through a lavatory, bisecting an old commode" (p. 90). The young children of both families, unable to fully comprehend the dispute, find themselves at a loss to explain this animosity and accept new roles that take them from playmates to adversaries. This bewildering experience prompts Thamma, who was then only a young girl, to imaginatively reconstruct an alternate world where the rules of the familiar world are not applicable. Thamma imagines these differences in order to justify the presence of the wall. Jethamoshai's portion of the house becomes a symbol of the Other – inspiring fear, curiosity and humour in the two sisters.

The tale of the "upside-down house" serves as a poignant metaphor for the disastrous events surrounding the Partition of India in 1947 and the disintegration of a community that heretofore had had strong cultural coherence. The Partition, which produced two new nation states –India and Pakistan–was rationalised by amplifying the dissimilarities that are common in culturally diverse populations. In *The Shadow Lines*, the "upside-down house" is not just the consequence of the separating wall, but also the by-product of the inventive reimagining of familiar space. It challenges the idea that the Partition was an inevitable consequence of unbridgeable differences in the social, political and religious aspirations of two communities. It alternatively suggests that this difference is a fabrication and certainly not as authentic as it has been imagined. Thus, and proceeding along the conceptual lines of the metaphor, Thamma, "makes up" stories about Jethamoshai's (the "other") portion of the house.

Ghosh further raises general questions about the naturalness of the entity called "nation" by raising pertinent questions about what factors binds a nation together. Do an individual's concepts of home and belonging necessarily overlap with the idea of nation? Is it indelibly connected to one's birthplace? How stable and unchangeable are the boundaries that define a nation? Most importantly, the author offers another way of understanding the origin story of nations: the birth of a nation lays as much in the supposed shared similarities of a group of people as in the perceived unsurmountable differences that separate it from others. He goes on to suggest that in the habitual absence of these necessary differences, nations must be contrived by the imagination.

Imagining Nations

Most enquiries about the nature and origin of nations have always hinged upon the efforts to find commonalities. What binds a community of people together? Ernest Renan (2018) has methodically dismissed race, language, religion, common interests and geographical territory as factors that bind people together to form a nation. He attributes their formation to the less tangible collective memory of a heroic past and a continued consent in the present; together they compose the "spiritual principle" (p. 261) that holds that imagined community together. Ernest Gellner (1997) emphasized that it is a "shared culture" (p. 4) that may serve as the uniting principle for a nation. Gellner argues that a certain homogeneity of culture determines membership in a community and by extension in a nation. He further adds that there is a

tendency amongst all members with a similar culture to aspire to form a nation. Benedict Anderson (1983/2006) argues that it was the sense of "simultaneity" (p. 188) generated by the "technological innovations in the fields of navigation, horology and cartography mediated through print-capitalism" (p. 188) in the eighteenth century that played an important role in crystallization of the concept of the nation. For the first time, it became possible for people to imagine a community of individuals whom they would never meet in person but to whom they could feel connected. Eric Hobsbawm (2000) suggested that it was "invented traditions" (p. 13) that brought together a community of people to form a nation. The nation has been understood, then, as the product of some commonality, a common ground shared by members and a focused convergence of multiple and diverse aspirations. These commonalities may be tangible and visible or latent and elusive. It is always explained in terms of the affinity of its constituent members and their consensual desire to share a single polity.

There is a consensus among scholars attempting to define the nation and explain the phenomenon of nationalism: unlike what one sees in politically-inspired narratives regarding its ancient origins, the nation is a relatively new concept (see Renan, 2018; Anderson, 1983/2006; Gellner, 1965). Furthermore, it is not a natural phenomenon as has been unquestioningly accepted. Traditionally, having a certain nationality is considered to be as innate to the individual as are height, weight and shoe size. However, as has been elucidated by numerous scholars, there is nothing natural or essential about that political structure called nation.

The nation's origin stories are often embedded in mythic traditions that systematise a culture's untidy foundations. For the nationalists, this venerable distant past validates their claims and makes the idea of nation an indisputable truth. Nation, the nationalism it inspires and the sacrifice it often demands, all revolve around this illusion. Writing as early as 1882, Renan (2018) recognized this newness of nations when he stated that "Nations, … are something fairly new in history. Antiquity was not acquainted with them" (p. 248). Anderson (1983/2006) pointed out that this was one of the great paradoxes in the concept of nation and its attendant nationalism: the nation is objectively modern for a historian but subjectively ancient for a nationalist. This "newness" of the nation challenges the idea that nations are universal and timeless. Furthermore, it generates the idea that it is a construct and a product of historical forces and circumstances.

Anderson (1983/2006) argued that nation was a linguistic construct and had its beginning in the invention of the Gutenberg Printing Press in 1454, which significantly changed the relationship between language and religion. It made it possible to have an "imagined political community" (p. 6). He began with the idea that all religions assume that truth can be accessed through a very specific language, which is a "system of re-presentation" (p. 14) embedded in the "non-arbitrariness of the sign" (p. 14). For Christianity that language was Latin, a revered ancient foundational language that made the idea of Christendom possible. However, after the printing press was invented, there was a shift in the importance of Latin. Motivated by profit, the owners of printing presses began to print in vernacular languages. Latin was increasingly becoming an esoteric language, to be studied and researched, but not for everyday use. In contrast, publishing in vernacular languages meant that they would have a wider audience and, it follows, increased sales. He refers to this phenomenon as "print-capitalism" (p. 188) and it had a remarkable impact in the emergence of the idea of nation. It enabled a community to imagine that there were people they would never meet but whose destinies were connected to theirs in intricate ways.

The newspaper and the novel, which were legacies of the printing press, generated the concept of "homogenous empty time" (p. 26). The novels specifically were populated with characters "who may be largely unaware of one another" (p. 26) but existed simultaneously in society and moved in a fixed calendrical time for the omniscient readers. This demonstrated "the novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers' minds" (p. 26). Anderson points out that even the simple practice of reading a newspaper created a similar sense of simultaneity through a "mass ceremony" (p. 35) where every reader is aware that his or her actions are being "replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (p. 35). Therefore, print culture and literary innovations as much as technological ones made it possible to become aware of a world which is not limited to the one that we are able to see and experience. This idea of having a community whose reach goes beyond the primordial village, where connections are forged without ever meeting the other members, where aspirations converge and destinies entwine, is truly a useful way to understand the notions of extended community and nation.

It discards categories like race, language, religion and culture that habitually define nations and replaces them with something more ephemeral and elusive. Anderson squarely attributes it to the power of imagination, not in the sense of fabrication or deceit but in its potential for producing novel ideas, new ways of being and existing, and discerning invisible social and psychological patterns. The point to be noted here is that, even in this new-fangled way, a nation is still imagined through links that connect the individual with others and make them fellow members of a circumscribed human collective. It is not common language, religion or race: it is shared imagination.

The recognition of the "imagined community" (p. 24) originated, according to Anderson (1983/2006), in the awareness of others performing similar kinds of ritualistic behaviour – the practice of reading a newspaper, for instance. Yet, what we also need to understand is that a nation is always imagined with boundaries. Anderson himself states that nations are always imagined as demarcated. Anderson stated that "the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind" (1983/2006, p. 7). No matter how expansive its reach is, it cannot encompass the whole world with all human beings as its members. Rather, it is imagined with specific boundaries, which means that membership in a nation is exclusive. Its constituent members might be in constant search for commonalities, but as a group they define themselves as unlike the "others", describing these 'others' as somehow "different". Therefore, boundaries are set to determine who gets a membership and who is excluded from it. In this context, Gellner's ideas about the role of cultural affinities in forming a nation is very relevant and requires a critical examination.

Gellner (1965), dismissing the assumption that nation is natural, stated that, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (p. 168). While discussing what aids the process of the birth of a nation, he states that the creation of a nation depends on a shared culture, but he also adds that it depends on exclusive membership and on defining a difference from the others (p. 167). He states that sometimes it seems most "advantageous to set up a rival nation of one's own instead" (p. 165). To explain this, he considers two hypothetical scenarios. In the first scenario, two regions with unequal industrial and economic development but with cultural homogeneity were more likely to stay together and form a nation (p. 167). In the second scenario, Gellner argues, if the two regions are not only at different levels of economic development and prosperity but also have visible

cultural differences, whether of pigmentation, language, religious practices, then it is more likely that the impoverished region will always seek to liberate itself from the prosperous region and form its own nation (p. 167). Therefore, according to him, cultural differences can be a criterion for determining membership in a national community. The criteria for this membership vary in different scenarios; sometimes these differences may be obvious, sometimes less so and sometimes absolutely deceptive. On the whole, though, he is shedding light on a significant aspect of nation building that is focused not on similarities but on differences.

Part of the difficulty in defining a nation is that the birth of each nation is the result of a unique combination of factors and circumstances. No two nations are the result of exactly same historical events. Linguistic affinity, religious similarity, racial unity, geographical continuity, cultural resemblance, and political and economic aspirations have all been contributing factors in the creation of different states at different moments in history. There is no one reason why one factor becomes the defining feature in the formation of a nation. The world has numerous instances where culturally different people form a nation while culturally similar people form two different nations. Take the example of the Bengali-speaking community in the northeast of India. Despite sharing linguistic and cultural traits, a large part of the area was separated from India on the rationale of religious differences and made a part of Pakistan. Yet religious similarities could not keep East and West Pakistan united as one nation and the result was the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. On the other hand, India is linguistically diverse, religiously multifaceted, culturally fragmented, and yet it is conceived of as one nation.

While most considerations regarding the nature of the nation focus on any similarities found among individuals in its population, it would also be fruitful if we consider how defining differences between a community and other communities may often erect more distinct boundaries around nations. Gellner (1965) states that it always helps if "some pre-existing differentiating marks" (p.168) exist, in weaving a narrative of difference and othering. He asserts that these marks or criteria can even be "purely negative" (p. 168). For Gellner, therefore, the availability of culturally differentiating traits, whether these are the highly distinguishable traits of, race, religion, or language, is critical. He further adds that if the "differentiating marks" (p. 168) are available, then they "provide a strong incentive" (p. 170) for a population to conceive of itself as a separate nation. Therefore, membership in a national community is exclusive, arbitrary and can be denied to anybody who does not meet the required criteria. These differentiating marks also determine where the borders and the boundaries will be drawn to keep other individuals out. The question is, what happens when there are no visible differentiating markers or there are more common features tying communities than diverse features disconnecting them? What are the peculiarities, then, of the process of separating them?

Invented Differences, "Invented Countries"

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* offers an answer to this question. What happens when there are no essential or innate differences between two communities, but each ends up on the other side of the proverbial wall? The answer is in the tale of the "upside-down house": if the walls or boundaries are to be stable, then plausible differences must be devised. Nothing forges nations more rigidly than a perceived rivalry or enmity with an Other. Anderson (1983/2006) acknowledges that nationalism has "its roots in fear and hatred of the Other," (p. 141) and that Other can be racial, linguistic, religious or cultural. The boundaries drawn arbitrarily between nations serve as a constant reminder of the difference between two regions and two

communities. The novel challenges conventional ideas of nation, nationalism and the importance of borders. It examines the long-term consequences of the Partition and the communal disharmony that is its legacy. Stretched across generations and continents, it asserts that just as the borders are "shadow lines" – constructed, elusive and forever shifting, so are the differences between two communities that these borders are meant to separate. The shadowy lines conjure up images of differences for the continued relevance of the borders and the nation.

The novel is centred around the mystery of Tridib's death. The narrator brings together different threads of narratives to arrive at closure regarding Tridib's death. In many ways, Thamma unwittingly sets in motion the events that will lead to the death of Tridib. After her retirement from the school where she taught for twenty-seven years, Thamma suddenly finds herself yearning for a return "home". Initially it is mostly an imaginative journey through the narrow lanes of memory. She increasingly begins to think of her childhood in Dhaka, her old Jethamoshai and the upside-down house that resembled a honeycomb. She wistfully tells the narrator that her only regret about returning to Dhaka is that she "never got to see the upside-down house" (Ghosh 1988/2011, p. 92). She later learns that her Jethamoshai is still alive and living in their old house. Thamma, in her characteristic uncompromising way, decides that she will rescue him from "his enemies" (p.100) there and bring him to her "invented country" (p. 100) where he "belongs" (p. 100). However, going back to Dhaka wasn't just about taking a flight. It was also a homecoming – a "Coming Home", as indicated by the title of the second part of the novel. It churned a wealth of confusion and emotion in Thamma as she began to contemplate the meaning of home and its location, about borders and nationality and about whether the journey would mean "going" home or "returning" home. The most important question that she needed to settle first, however, was which place she considered "home", Calcutta or Dhaka? Thamma had unquestioningly accepted the Partition and that the consequent formation of India and Pakistan was an inescapable outcome of the religious differences. She had wholeheartedly embraced India as her nation. She wanted to "bring the old man home" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 100) to Calcutta. Yet while describing her previous journeys to Dhaka she said that before the Partition she could "come home to Dhaka" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 111) in a Freudian slip. This indicates that she had rationally accepted Calcutta as her "home" but could not erase the emotional ties she had with Dhaka. Thamma faced a similar anxiety about filling out her disembarkation cards when she realized that her birthplace was not a natural determinant of her nationality (Ghosh, 1988/2011). She was born in Dhaka, but her nationality was Indian, which compounded her confusion.

Just before her flight to Dhaka, she was unsettled when she realized that the border between India and East Pakistan was more bureaucratic than tangible. She was even more confounded when her son, the narrator's father, affectionately mocked her and pointed out that she would see no tell-tale signs to distinguish between India and East Pakistan in her flight to Dhaka from Calcutta. All she would be able to discern would be "green fields" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 110) and there would not be any "long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p.110). This prompted her to ask the pivotal question that Ghosh had probably wanted to ask all along: "But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same;" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 110). And if both sides were really the "same", then, "what was it all for then—Partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between?" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 110). Thamma, whose ideas about nation, borders and patriotism reflect the nationalist discourse, assumed the natural and ancient origin of nations.

However, when she realized that there were no distinct differences between the two nations, she became disillusioned about the Partition and the violence that followed.

She was confronted with the fallacy of the nationalist reasoning and was able to see the futility of believing in lines and borders. This question is an evident challenge to the nationalist discourse that finds its rationale in difference and othering; they bolster the myth that the destinies of two communities are never to intersect. It also illuminates that differences need to be established in order to sustain the idea of a nation. The exercise of inventing differences was what kept the "enchantment of lines" alive (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p.169). Having drawn the lines, they believed that the two regions would now be bound in enmity forever, steadily drifting away from each other. Tridib's atlas shows the irony that often the distance between places appears more in the imaginative mindscape than in the material reality. Dhaka or Chengdu, for instance, are geographically closer to Calcutta than Srinagar is. The atlas where each country is of a different colour, separated by dark inerasable lines contains its own undoing because it is a visible reminder that the imaginative distance does not always correspond to geographical distance. The narrator recognized that the indelible lines separating countries on an atlas offered people a sense of safety, security and stability.

Thamma's journey to Dhaka was a journey in both space and in time. As she reached Dhaka, Thamma was bombarded with nostalgic images from her past, having to navigate through a city that was both familiar and unfamiliar. The "Dhaka" of her childhood memory-scape is frozen in time, but Dhaka's landscape has since changed beyond recognition. Confronted with this contradiction she clutched on to one point of fixity – the house in Jindabahar Lane, or rather her memories of it. There, in her childhood home on Jindabahar Lane, she meets a now senile Jethamoshai, locked in the prison of his own memories, refusing to acknowledge the changes wrought by the passages of time and desperately clinging to the certainty of his hatred for his brother and his family. When he is offered to be taken to India, he is absolutely puzzled by how one's nation or nationality can change according to one's convenience. He belongs to the school of thought that believes that having a nationality is a natural and essential part of one's identity, like having a name. Out of his anxiety, he says "but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to?" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 157). His distrust and rejection of "India-Shindia" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p.157 – is a distrust for lines and boundaries and also a dismissal of "invented countries" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p.100). For him, lines have meaning, and they are not arbitrary, but the Partition has shaken this idea. He realizes that lines can be drawn and erased according to shifts in a community's interests. The realization that one's national identity is not innate but constructed and changeable can be terribly unnerving. To cope with this, Jethamoshai refuses to move from his birthplace, which also defines his nationality. In other words, unlike Thamma, Jethamoshai rejects the justification for the Partition that determined citizenship on the basis of religion, overlooking more distinctive qualifications like birthplace. The episode of the Partition, therefore, lay bare the erroneous rationale that nation and nationality are a given and that the borders drawn are innately meaningful.

The irony is that these lines may be arbitrary, elusive, often imaginary, but they are able to inspire sacrifices and promote violence. Nation for Thamma was something one has fought or made sacrifices for. This is made evident when she decides to part with her beloved gold chain with a tiny ruby pendant during the 1965 Indo-Pak War. When the narrator enquires about it, she becomes hysterical and screams: "I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to; don't you see? For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 172). The binary between "we" and "them" is easily

discernible and it is an expression of paranoia and fear about the Other. This fear is not entirely unjustified, as this sacrifice takes place only a bit after she witnessed a violent mob brutally murder her Jethamoshai and her nephew Tridib in 1964. She no longer associates her birthplace as the source of her nationality. The violence that she witnessed on that fateful day convinced her that nation and nationality had to be earned with blood and sacrifice. The border has transformed in her eyes. It is what keeps them safe, largely by restricting the violence at the periphery of the nation. The violence inflicted by one community on another helps consolidate the national boundaries. Linguistic, religious, racial affinities become overshadowed by memories of war, violence and bloodshed. In Thamma's words, once they witness the violence "people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 58). This is what determines the membership in a nation: "they know they are a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood" (Ghosh, 1988/2011, p. 58). In the words of Kaul (1994), this kind of violence is indispensable in nation-building, as it "ratifies boundaries and deepens the ideological and inter-national oppositions necessary to mould an internally-coherent national identity" (p. 136). So, it is not similarity, commonality, shared ideas that bind a nation together, it is the identification and even the concoction of difference and the violence born out of that difference that creates nations. Like all births, the birth of a nation is also written in blood, pain and trauma and is sustained by a collective, repetitive remembering of the pain.

Conclusion

Towards the end of 1963, when Thamma decides to go to Dhaka one last time, little does she realize that all her certainties about home, nation and borders will be shattered and entirely redefined by the journey. Most frequently, in order to create a semblance of stability in a constantly shifting world we create an illusion and a myth – that one's connection to one's birthplace is inextricable, that the birthplace determines the location of one's home and national identity, and that nation is demarcated by the magical lines that have been there since time immemorial. The novel dismantles these myths and suggests that they cannot be considered universal truths. Home is connoted by one's birthplace, but it is not limited by it: one's nationality has nothing to do with one's birthplace, boundaries are forever shifting and changing, and nations are often the creation of an imaginative exercise that depends as much on differences as on similarities. The novel further illustrates that though the differences may be invented, and the lines that represent the differences shadowy, they have the potential to generate a violence that transcends all lines and boundaries, blurring them and creating irreversible adhesions to imaginary communities.

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Mapping the Motif of the Wandering Jew in Salim Kumar's *Karutha Joothan*

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Abstract

The motif of the Wandering Jew is an archaic motif whose conventional elements can function within widespread narrative contexts. Formally the motif might operate in the same manner as do other motifs: as just another component of the narrative structure. But because of the comprehensive nature of its features, this motif is able to deliver its essential message of human suffering even as it migrates through diverse cultural environments, as the interaction of its axiological elements with their newly acquired social and cultural contexts has the capacity to appear seamless and unlaboured. Salim Kumar's Malayalam film *Karutha Joothan* (2017) is a case in point. The work employs this motif remarkably well in what is an uncharted cultural context: the dwindling community of Black Jews in Kerala. Along with articulating the distress of a marginalised community, the film memorialises a significant historical era. This paper examines the ways in which the film's protagonist comes to represent the prototypical lonely wanderer of the generic myth.

Keywords: diaspora, history, Jewish, minority, wandering

The Myth of the Wandering Jew

Historically, the communities of the Jewish diaspora have been racialised, ghettoised, and continually persecuted. As a cultural reflexion of this social phenomenon, the stereotyped and prejudiced representation of Jewish characters has been prevalent in the European literary repertoire, quintessential examples being the antisemitic tropes manifested in Elizabethan plays like *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice*. In many literary works, set against the backdrop of widely differing cultures, "the wandering Jew is typically represented as a male figure wandering through exile, doing penance for some act of wrongdoing, attempting to find his way back to the Jewish homeland" (Potok, 1998, p. 135). Many such representations presumably arise from the age-old story of the condemned Jewish shoemaker Cartaphilus, a mythical tale of crime, punishment, curse and guilt. Legend holds that Cartaphilus taunted Christ on his way to crucifixion and Christ damned him to a "miserable life wandering the earth until the Second Coming" (Morrison, 2012, p. 399).

Morrison (2012) summarises the generic myth thus:

> On the day of his Crucifixion, as Jesus carries the Cross along the road to Golgotha, he comes to the workplace of a Jewish shoemaker called Cartaphilus. Tired, badly beaten, and thirsty, Christ halts and asks the shoemaker for a little water or perhaps the chance to rest for a moment in the shade of his doorway. Considering Jesus a worthless heretic, Cartaphilus abruptly denies the request, and, after some interchange, Christ, having perhaps repeated his plea for a little relief, brings the encounter to a menacing close, saying something like: 'I am soon going to die, but you will not die until I return.' Cartaphilus immediately realizes his catastrophic mistake. Cursed to live until the Second Coming, he leaves his wife and children, takes up a staff to support him as he trudges along, a sack to carry a few possessions, and, with no hope of companionship, home or destination, sets off to wander the earth for ever. (p. 400)

The initial circulation of this myth perhaps served as a warning against blasphemy. However, it is likely that it paved the way for energising a substratal rancour towards the Jews, leading to their invigorated persecution and victimization in several parts of the globe.

In *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, George K. Anderson (1965) does a comprehensive analysis of the genesis and development of the legendary tale in a diachronic manner. Commonly considered a Christian legend, he points out that it is one of the "extrascriptural legends" (1965, p. 11) that was spread far and wide through different periods starting in the first millennium. There have been conspicuous changes in the story's external appearance as it travelled across diverse spatial borders; the numerous regional versions of the same storyline testify to this fact. There are several versions of the account in folktales and different character names – Ahasuerus, Malchus, Cartophilus and others – are ascribed to this mythical character. Anderson (1965) holds that the pamphlet *Kurtze Beschreibung*, published in 1602 in Germany, is perhaps "the most important single milestone in the progress of the Legend of the Wandering Jew" (p. 42). He also brings to light several instances in the western cultural landscape where the legendary character reappears in slightly different forms, as in the Ancient Mariner (that of Coleridge) and the Flying Dutchman (p. 8). Many such characters with uncanny or rather demonic characteristics have sprung up in the British Gothic literature as well.

Due to their diasporic existence, and at least until the formation of the modern state of Israel, Jews were collectively awarded the sobriquet of wanderers. In fact, many theoreticians

considered them the paradigmatic diasporic population. Efraim Sicher (2014) observes that, until quite recently, postcolonial criticism considered the Jew the "archetypal cosmopolitan transnational migrant at home everywhere, with roots nowhere," an epitome of the exploited "disadvantaged minority populations" (p. 2). However, considering today's baneful Middle Eastern politics, he opines that now "the Jews have an ambiguous place as paradigmatic migrants" (Sicher, 2014, p. 10).

The critical volume *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (1986) offers an in-depth analysis of the legendary wanderer from multiple perspectives. The origin of the legend, moreover, is traced throughout several of the essays in this collection. These bring to light that, in many literary works, the futility associated with the Wandering Jew's seemingly endless journey, his miserable and hopeless existence, is metaphorically extended to describe the condition of all Jews. The numerous exiles and subsequent scattering of the community are construed by some as a punishment for some act of wrongdoing in the past. The interpretation of Jewish identity based on certain dubious canards, such as their purported self-hatred and their acutely self-conscious reclusion, have a strong sway in the popular imagination. It cannot be gainsaid that such stereotypical, stigmatised discourses about the Jews have inadvertently crept into literary, filmic and theoretical arenas. However, it is interesting to note that, in many South Asian creative writers, a tendency to reject those commonplace characterisations of Jewishness is observable.

The Jews of India

The Jews constitute a miniscule religious community in India. Untouched by antisemitism, their existence is characterised by a close rapport with the people of other cultures and religions. As evinced from the eloquent testimony by a member of the community, India has shown that there is "at least one country in the world [where], Jews can exist with pride and honour and without any need for self-consciousness or protective withdrawal into a self-created ghetto" (Israel, 1989, p. 52). The Jewish community of the southwestern strip of India, i.e., the Jews of Kerala, have also lived in harmony with the rest of the society. The minor divisions within the community, the separation of Paradesi Jews (White Jews) and Malabari Jews (Black Jews), is a minor blemish on their otherwise cordial, centuries-long inhabitancy in India.

Edna Fernandes (2008) explains the history of these two factions in her salient work *The Last Jews of Kerala*. The settlement of the Paradesi Jews takes place centuries after the arrival of the Malabari Jews along the coast of Malabar. This unusual division within the Jews is viewed by the Jewish scholar Nathan Katz (2000) as an emulation of the Hindu way of stratifying of society, that is, casteism (p. 12). Compared to the somewhat full-fledged assimilation of the Malabari Jews in the Indian polity, the integration of the White Jews is less coherent. Perhaps because of this less effectual assimilation, scholarly studies on the subject focus almost exclusively on the experience of the White Jews, obviating any analytical inquiry into Black Jewish life.

Following the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948, the Jewish population of India substantially declined, as many members of the community emigrated to the newly established nation. The Jews who remain in India resuscitate their memories of growing up in the Indian multicultural milieu through artistic pieces like memoirs, novels, poetry and others. Though sporadically, people from outside the Jewish community have also written about them, mainly as reminiscence of a lost past. Anna Guttman (2010) studies the Jewish characters created by renowned stalwarts of Indian English literature such as Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Vikram

Seth, Amitav Ghosh and others in the article "The Jew in the Archive". Apart from that, several documentaries and feature films have also touched upon the Jews in an attempt to showcase the remnants of a fascinating bygone era. In the Malayalam film industry, the film *Gramophone* (2003) is one of the first attempts in this regard. Most of these creative endeavours invariably present the Jewish existence with a rosy hue. As Guttman (2013) puts it, "colonial and postcolonial Jewish history in India is more complex and less utopian than is often presumed" (p.129). In spite of India's much-acclaimed tolerance, she opines that "Indian Jews remained and remain marginal subjects" (Guttman, 2013, p. 133). The Malayalam film *Karutha Joothan* (2017) follows this trajectory, offering an alternative picture to the widely held cheerful glimpse; here, the bleak reality is brought to the forefront without the predictable euphemistic patina.

In this film the Black Jews may be understood as wretched individuals who were glossed over by the powerful and erased from history. Given the habitual, idealised renderings of this community's experiences, it is difficult to anticipate that soon after these Jews emigrated in connection with the *aliyah* (immigration to Israel), all remembrance of them and of the objects they held close to their heart were wiped from the nation's collective memory. The traces of their existence were expunged and whatever they left behind was physically erased. Encroachments on their assets and material property, including graveyards, became commonplace. In the interest of removing the euphemistic aura that surrounds the story of the Black Jews, the main episode shown in this film is based on a real-life incident.

Karutha Joothan and the Mythological Figure

The story, screenplay and direction of *Karutha Joothan* (meaning Black Jew) are the work of Salim Kumar, who also plays the role of the protagonist. Also starring Shivaji Guruvayoor, Ramesh Pisharody and Usha, the film features the tragic story of a Black Jew in the village Mala, located in the Thrissur district of Kerala. The film won the Kerala State Award for the best story in 2017. The lead character Aaron Eliyahu (fondly called by his peers as Auroni Joothan), who is on a pilgrimage to explore the Jewish culture of India, meets with an accident. After being in a coma for years, he regains consciousness and returns to his hometown only to find that his family has migrated to Israel and his property has been reclaimed by the village council (panchayat). Nobody seems to recognise him except for his childhood friend Beeran, and he wanders destitute and homeless. The social backdrop allows the film to offer glimpses of how people, institutions and the state turn a blind eye to historical injustices and suppress facts in the interest of petty personal gain.

The film's title song is an old Jewish folk ballad; it describes the journey of ancestors who in antiquity landed on the shores of Kerala after crossing the sea. The film unfolds through Beeran's memories, as he recalls the past while perusing a book written by his friend Aaron. The plot moves back and forth in time, shifting between the halcyon days of Aaron's childhood, when there were many Jews in Mala, and the present, one where people have relegated the Jewish presence in the region to a vague, distant past. The genuine acts of kindness and generosity with which Aaron's family treated Beeran, make him emotional as he recalls the past. Different colour palettes are employed in the scenes to highlight the temporal deviations, and the flashbacks offer a glimpse into the extinct Jewish cultural life.

Aaron's book, published after many adversities, is an unmatched storehouse of historical records, those of his personal life as a Jew and of the life of his community. The contents of Aaron's book as well as the dramatic sequences become a platform upon which to discuss the

historical aspects of Kerala's Jewish community. The constant back-and-forth from past to present does not interrupt the even flow of the film, but rather regulates the pulse of its emotional content.

The film itself describes Jews as wanderers. Jewish ancestors came to India when they faced persecution elsewhere and settled in Kerala, acclimatising well with the local environment but always yearning to return to their homeland. They are compared to migratory birds that perch in new places and go back to their home after some time. They are also likened to turtles that go back to the ocean after their brief stay at the seashore. The film has accomplished the task of salvaging a rich episode in Kerala's cultural matrix, one that had been relegated to an indistinct past. It is an indictment of a specific historical neglect.

In some respects, *Karutha Joothan* reclaims the theme of the Wandering Jew, with Aaron becoming the embodiment of the legendary character although, unlike the mythical wanderer, he has not committed any crime. This wandering is not a punishment sin, but is an inevitable mission that, as a Jew, he is destined to fulfil. He takes on a journey that becomes a turning point in his life after vowing to his mother and sister that he would return in a year. He wanders through the tombstones of his ancestors across the length and breadth of India with the aim of finding the roots of his community and recording his findings for posterity. His he needs to shed light upon a period mired in darkness but can only do so by peregrinating through the world of the dead and the spirits.

The futility of his enterprise is brought to the fore, as he meets with an accident and lies in a coma for years. At the moment when the tragedy happens, he is about to finish his investigation. The film thus underscores human helplessness in the face of the absurdities of fate. As the news of his death reaches the village, it shatters Aaron's family. As years roll on and every Jew in the village migrates, they are also compelled to follow them to the Promised Land of Israel. Before leaving, Aaron's mother Veronica, who believes that her son may come back, entrusts the house and all their property to the panchayat on the condition that they return them all when Aaron returns. After about thirty or forty years, Aaron revives from coma only to play the role of the accursed wanderer once again. As he gradually learns of the changes around him, he is shocked at every turn. Harrowed and afflicted by the enormity of the time that has passed, he finds comfort in the prospect of reaching home and reuniting with his family.

However, what awaits him in his village is critically different from what he anticipated. There is no one, except for his bosom friend Beeran, who is happy at his homecoming. The haunted figure of the Wandering Jew resurfaces here without significant transmogrifications. Aaron sees that his house has been turned into a post office. He cannot rationalise this unexpected turn of events. Self-serving authorities and villagers refuse to acknowledge his identity because they have taken possession of the house and the hundreds of acres of groves and farmland surrounding it. Prior to leaving the land decades ago, he enjoyed a respectable position in the village as a teacher; now, his predicament is not much different from that of a beggar.

The panchayat authorities and the politicians join hands to evict the property's legitimate heir from his own land. The state apparatuses lack all integrity, denying him justice by obfuscating facts. Moreover, the police arrest him on account of his so-called illegal entry into the post office. In court he is unable to prove his identity. As a result, the court denies his appeals. It is ironic that there is an abundance of evidence to prove that Aaron is dead, but nothing is there to prove that he is alive. People indeed know the truth, but they refuse to accept it.

The Wandering Jew "is of indeterminate age [...], longhaired, heavily bearded, world-weary and dressed in long, simple, well-worn garments" (Morrison, 2012, p. 400). The physical appearance of Aaron roughly resembles the countenance of this mythical, perpetual wayfarer of lore. Estranged from his familiar environment, Aaron is cast away from the house in which he was born, tossed out to the mean streets as a destitute. He is relegated to the status of a vagrant or tramp, somewhat like the German Jew in Anita Desai's novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). His everyday existence is dreadful, now that he is a laughingstock, the villagers' butt of ridicule. Being dispossessed and repudiated by everyone, he is treated like an eyesore; he becomes the subaltern "other" unable to occupy his legitimate place in society. Dismissed to the level of a ghostly, unwelcome presence who reminds his neighbours of a disavowed past, he struggles to cope with the changing currents. Like a vagabond, he trudges through the streets bereft of sanctuary and rejected at every turn.

The only remains of his past life are the sheets of paper that he scribbled down during his scholarly trips to the Jewish sites of North India. His greatest wish after returning to Mala is to publish them, as it would be an unparalleled historical record for posterity. For him, this manuscript is not simply an expendable collection of papers; it is the fruit of his long visionary wanderings for the completion of which he had to sacrifice a great deal. After going through a myriad of hardships, he gives the documents to a publisher who rejects them on the grounds that no one would be interested in reading about such exotic, minuscule communities.

Weighed down by frustration, he finally bids adieu to his dear friend Beeran. As he is an unwanted presence in the village, he decides to leave in the hopes of discovering the whereabouts of his mother, who might be dead by now, and of his sister. Before leaving he hands over his sole valuable assets to Beeran, i.e., a mezuzah (parchment sacred to the Jews) which his mother had gifted him, and the manuscript containing the findings of his studies. This is an unusual act whereby a Jew gives his most sacred religious object (mezuzah) to a Muslim as a way of expressing his love and his gratitude for standing by him unwaveringly through thick and thin. This solemn, heart-touching farewell scene picturises how the boundaries between religions get effaced in the warmth of genuine human relationships. The very ending of the movie, the final blow to his tragic fate, comes immediately after this scene. The film comes to a close showing the mutilated corpse of Aaron, who became a victim of the unending Israel-Palestine conflicts. He does not get a dignified funeral after his death, as his mortal remains are cobbled together in a wheelbarrow and buried at the cemetery without even a stone to mark the tomb of the last Jew of Mala.

From the outset, the ill-starred ramblings of Aaron provide an image of the doomed fate of the Wandering Jew. The decisive journey he takes throughout India to dig out the roots of his community seals his fate. As James E. Young (1988) points out, the "figure" of the Jew … is always chased, always killed" (p. 116). Aaron is here presented as a Jew on the walkabout, a forlorn figure, one subjected to victimisation and othering who remains composed even after confronting terrible psychological turmoil. In the character's identification with the Wandering Jew figure, fate is an essential compositional element. The inevitable, traumatic torments that he endures, blindly ordained by fate, sketch the lines that give us the image of the mythical character.

Conclusion

Certain archetypes cut across space and time as recurrent efforts to tell the unending story of human tragedy. In the case of *Karutha Joothan*, a western motif is effectively reworked into a

non-western context. The critical analysis of the film shows how universal motifs, archetypes and iconographies cross cultural borders. Like new wine in an old bottle, this film employs the age-old parable to tell the story in a different historical and socio-cultural milieu, all the while performing only the slightest adaptations on the original narrative. Interestingly, this relocation has not removed the original tale's quintessential features. Clear allusions to the myth can be discerned from the plot. Like the legendary wanderer, Aaron has no home and is nowhere welcome; accordingly, he is always on the move, weighed down with the heavy baggage of memories.

Although the wandering and the constant rejection Aaron encounters are similar to the original story, there are differences. First, the social repudiation that he suffers is not the result of any wrongdoing. Secondly, although he constantly faces intractable danger, he is not someone who looks forward to embracing death. Thirdly, while he feels guilty for leaving his family alone and giving them a lifetime of grief, he does it unwillingly as the result of an accident. Furthermore, Aaron's journey is not an endless, eternal one as in the aforementioned tale, as his journey comes to an end with his death. Here, in death he finds solace: death provides an end to his miserable plight.

Despite its undoubted artistic merits, at some points the film's narrative structure needs to resort to melodramatic, perfunctorily sentimental and pessimistic scenes. The intense, emotional treatment given the protagonist throughout the film and the unmeditated theatricality occasionally antagonise the realistic atmosphere that the screenwriter is evidently trying to create. Nevertheless, the film completes an important, historic task. Through the protagonist's plight, the film poses pertinent questions that serve to unsettle the average viewer' complacency. It furthermore seeks to debunk the biased traditional historiography, which ignores the history of the Black Jews and aims to place a delusory façade over acts of injustice. It is also a powerful reminder of the need to protect and reconceptualise cultural artefacts and memories associated with the nation's social and cultural past.

Karutha Joothan provides an evocative, sensitive portrayal of a thus far untold facet of Jewish life, and it does so by employing the motif of the Wandering Jew. The film is suffused with allusions to the allegorical, mythological figure without making any obvious, direct references to this character. The Wandering Jew is the template upon which the plot is built, though the backdrop is a very different, non-western sociocultural milieu. By exposing the raw realities of the life of one individual, the film becomes grounded in its scopic search for a collective identity that has, unfortunately, become a part of an abandoned, forgotten vignette of contemporary history.

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Visual Disability and the Pursuit of Normality in Preeti Monga's Biographical Novel *The Other Senses*

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Abstract

For Ancient Greeks, beauty was a characteristic of individuals and actions that they considered to be morally good. Greek statuary and art in general project beauty based on the assumption that outward appearance reflects personal virtues (Tytler, 1982, p. 36). Pythagoreans, for example, held that ugliness expressed confusion and turmoil, and that beauty was a material expression of universal truth. In more modern times, and in many ways envisaging today's materialistic societies, Kant expresses a certain perplexity that beauty is perceived primarily as a pleasurable response to exterior form (2000, p. 111). In this sense contemporary culture, with the increasing visual refinements of its graphic products and virtual reality, has set new metrics for defining the value of beauty. Our televisions, for example, broadcast images of heroes who are physically beautiful while being morally suspect and socially abrasive. The unstable value of beauty is reflected in literature. In Indian literature disability has been represented, but these representations have lacked significant scholarly diagnostic treatment. The Disability Rights Movement has recently begun to change this situation. This paper strives to examine a disabled individual's struggle for integration through Preeti Monga's autobiography *The Other Senses.* It also analyses how the disabled create subjective normality and the process by which they attain it. By tracing the roles of sexuality, dependency, and interpersonal relationships in the lived experience of Preeti Monga, this research aims to reveal the significance of the quest for normality in shaping personal identity.

Keywords: autobiography, normality, sexuality, visual disability

The definition of "norm" entered history through idea that "abnormality" could be calculated using quantitative data, such that "norm" and "normal" could be the subjects of comparative analyses. In this regard, in 'Disability, Normality and Power' Lennard J. Davis observes that "When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of norm is operative, then people with disability will be thought of as deviants" (2017, p. 17). Basing their investigations on this concept of 'norm,' eugenicists like Ernst Rüdin (1874–1952) and Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer (1896–1969) brought a comparative analysis to bear on human beings. To create a perfect society, many such eugenicists proposed schemes to eliminate the disabled population that included the control of reproductive rights. Thus, the concept of norm results in the concept of deviant bodies and in the ill-conceived idea that they have no place in "normal" society.

The concepts of normality and disability were habitually reflected in literature. From disability imposed as a punishment to the image of supercrip, all tropes of disability narratives are found. One early mention of "curing" a disability after the advent of science is found in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, where Charles Bovary operates on Hippolyte's clubfoot. The character Bertha Mason, who is pejoratively known as the 'mad woman in the attic' in *Jane Eyre*, displays the inhuman treatment of mentally ill individuals in the Victorian era. The villainous portrayals of Captain Ahab and Long John Silver rendered stereotypically negative images of the disabled. In fiction, disabled characters are often employed to invoke pity or horror.

"Disability" as a stable category of study emerged only in the nineteenth century, gradually developing as a field of study with the growing participation of scholars and social activists. The Charity Model is one of the earliest of practices, treating the disabled as an object of pity and charity. The medical model was and still is prevalent in many countries where the disability is considered primarily an anomalous bodily difference. The main aim of this model is to 'cure' or 'fix' the disabled, thus enabling them to lead a "normal" life. According to this model, disability must be dealt with between the disabled and medical professionals and society has no part in it. The social model, on the other hand, perceives disability as the result of social constructs and blames the inaccessible environment for the disabled individuals' plight. Tom Shakespeare, in his essay "The Social Model of Disability", explains that "The social model is distinguished from the medical or individual model. Whereas the former defines disability as a social creation – a relationship between people with impairment and a disabling society - the latter defines disability in terms of individual deficit" (2017, p. 193). The "Identity" Model, on the other hand, involves the disabled owning their impairments and integrating them into their identity. The rights-based model proclaims that the disabled and non-disabled are equally entitled to human rights and that the disabled should participate in policymaking.

The inception of the Identity-Based Model propelled the writing of autobiography by the disabled. Before it, the disabled had been represented by their non-disabled counterparts. In the process of claiming their disability as identity, many people started writing about their pain, suffering, and struggle to cope with impairments. While spiritual narratives of disability (like Oliver Sacks's *A Leg to Stand On*) exist, most other works are written as a way of accepting and affirming disabilities. Stephen Kuusisto's *Planet of the Blind* and Georgiana Kleege's *Sight Unseen* mark their growth as persons professing a balanced self-identity.

In India, however, the scenario is different. In ancient times, although the disabled are known to have been treated with compassion, they were not treated equally. The handicapped were cared for by members of the family with the help of a close-knit community. Thus, the disabled had little control over their lives. In addition, the handicapped were held responsible for their

disabilities, as their infirmities were caused by "Karma". "Applying the theory of karma, disability was considered the result of 'wrong actions' in one's past life or the present one" (Ghai, 2019, p. 44).

In parts of India the charity model is still prevalent. Fuelled by religious ideologies, some people treat the disabled with utmost pity and even offer unsolicited money. With the emergence of science and institutionalization of people with physical and mental disabilities in colonial India, disability was perceived more as a medical condition than a social construct. This resulted in the medical model wherein the family members are the primary caretakers. The social model was acknowledged only when people realized that the absence of accessibility curbs the freedom of the disabled. The identity and rights-based models are largely devised and practiced for the benefit of the disabled in the West. In India, the lack of awareness and education on the subject results in a scenario where, as a rule, only a relative few—academicians and disability activists—are well informed regarding identity-based and rights-based models.

It was only in the 1970's that Indian disability activists began to follow in the steps of their Western counterparts. Until then disabled people were very much excluded from the State's welfare policies. Anita Ghai, in her introduction to the book *Rethinking Disability in India*, pointed out how in the early stages, nobody valued disability rights –

> A country which finds itself immersed in multiple issues, such as sex ratios, violence against women, increasing fundamentalism, the menace of HIV, unavailability of education, and the continuous withdrawal of the state support from public health programmes, it becomes even more crucial for people to engage in social movements. Though these movements have dealt with many issues of exclusion, disability has appeared like a non-essential issue, as the academia as well as activists stress that there are far more serious issues that need attention (2019, p. xviii).

The continuous efforts of activists helped this discourse transform into a movement, thereby forcing the government to recognize the plight of the disabled. At that time, the United Nations announced 1982-1993 as the "Decade of the Disabled Persons", creating awareness and global goals in the area of disability welfare. Activists and academicians in the Disability Rights Movement, along with the United Nations' goals, actuated the government to set up The Rehabilitation Council of India in 1986. Another turning point was the Persons with Disability Act of 1995, which marked the legal recognition of the disabled in Indian society. The Act focused more on education, employment, opportunities, development of manpower, technical education, and institutions for people with severe disabilities. Nevertheless, numerous flaws were pointed out by activists as they argued that the law was firmly based on medical concerns, completely ignoring the social perception of disability. After a two-decade battle, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016 replaced the Act of 1995, enhancing it with many positive amendments.

Indian Disability autobiography is a result of education in the Identity-based Model and new legislative policies. Misrepresented by their non-disabled peers for centuries in the realm of literature and visual media, the disabled started asserting their concerns, thereby creating their own identity. Through their self-representational writings, they discussed the stereotypes associated with disability and presented the real picture of living with an impairment.

The genre of autobiography not only encounters these tropes but also demonstrates the personal autonomy of the disabled. "Often, in literature, disability and cancer serve as a metaphor of social breakdown, but in an autobiography, illness is associated with a unique subjectivity because autobiography serves as a self-reflexive tool that helps to highlight personal experience" (Ghai, 2019, p. 16). Most of the life writings that emerged during the 2000s were called New Disability Memoirs, as they were largely identity-based. These memoirs and autobiographies were written to construct an authentic disabled identity and to destigmatize representation. Some of the notable works are Malini Chib's *One Little Finger*, Shivani Gupta's *No Looking Back*, Madan Vasishta's *Deaf in Delhi*, and Preeti Monga's *The Other Senses*. This paper aims to decode normality and analyses how a visually disabled woman like Preeti Monga creates her normality. It furthermore investigates how it influences her life choices, including her interpersonal relationships and her emergence as a self-assured woman.

The Quest for Normality

Preeti Monga is a disability activist, social worker, entrepreneur, trauma counsellor and first ever visually challenged aerobics instructor. In her autobiography *The Other Senses*, she saunters along her memory lane and lets us read all about her happy and 'normal' childhood. Born as the first child in an upper-middle-class family, with doting parents, Preeti was adored and celebrated, unlike many Indian households that consider girl children as a 'burden.' Monga was diagnosed with partial paralysis of both optic nerves at a young age, an affliction that deteriorated her vision. This visual disability affected her education and her relationship with other people, excluding her family. Expelled from school because of her disability, Monga stayed home and concentrated on activities that interested her, also learning and perfecting the traditionally feminine roles required to run a household with the help of her mother. She also learned and practiced sitar for five long years, hoping in vain to become a performing artist.

Preeti Monga then decided to get married, and her autobiographical accounts give a detailed description of her attempts to date a friend and her expectations regarding her future husband. She fell in love with her brother's friend and got married. But her husband turned out to be an abusive man and an alcoholic. She became a mother of two children and was unable to escape his torture. She lost her self-esteem, and whenever she tried to step out of that torturous marriage she was advised to stay for the sake of her children. When she finally divorced the man she endured for so long, Monga returned to her parent's home. Devoid of formal schooling and any kind of technical education, Monga couldn't find a job to support her family. Her struggle to become a financially independent person echoes the condition of every woman in India who lacks the required skill to make a living on her own. Just like most Indian women, she was equipped well enough to take care of her domestic responsibilities. Fortunately, her grit and will power, as well as her social and entrepreneurial skills, helped her to survive in this disabling environment.

Though it usually denotes the state of being normal or expected, the term 'Normality' is primarily subjective. Tom Shakespeare observes that "In western thought, it is taken for granted that normal human beings are healthy, independent and rational" (2007, p. 52). This thought is universal and is echoed by various cultures worldwide. The state of normalcy is sought after by the disabled's family members to integrate them into mainstream society. This journey towards normality is, however, fraught with cultural baggage. In the Indian context, right from the search for a cure to searching for a life partner, everything would be decided by the family members and the disabled, particularly women, had little say. Every disabled person, once diagnosed with impairment, must undergo the process of search for that "archetypal

reality" (Ghai, 2019, p. 2) called a cure. To be cured indicates the diagnosed person's return to the 'normal' world. And almost all the disabled scholars and writers recount the numerous adversities they underwent in the name of a cure. Indian scholars report the negotiations they had with several gurus, priests, shamans, and faith healers along with medical practitioners.

However, Monga's family considered only medical treatment. When Monga delineates her childhood memories, she portrays the picture of a very happy girl who reads well, had a lot of friends and socialized with everyone she met. Her cheerful nature undergoes a blow when she is diagnosed with partial paralysis in both her eyes. The writer especially notes how *a child's* world changes. The story continues describing how, after spending three months in Calcutta in treatment and sightseeing, Monga brings many stories to share with her friends only to find them avoiding her. She explains: "Little did I know that life was never going to be same again, everything had changed!… I seemed to have been transformed to a strange pitiful object to be handled with extra consideration or simply left alone!" (2012, p. 26). This sudden transformation of the people around her bewildered Monga, but she was quick to evaluate her circumstances. Instead of blaming herself or being isolated, Monga reasoned that "(I) had certainly not opted willingly to face multiple challenges, like losing my eyesight plus my right to be like everyone else, and that too all of a sudden" (2012, p. 28). Slowly she found little ways to include herself in her peer group and she progressed in her studies with the help of her teachers and fellow students. But all her efforts didn't stop her from being expelled from school, as they couldn't accommodate a visually disabled person in a 'normal' classroom.

India is home to one of the world's largest populations of disabled persons. Visual disability emerges as the top disability category. With no education or income, these people are prey to illiteracy, poverty and exclusion, getting caught up in a cycle of destitution. However, recent developments in inclusive education are promising. The United Nations' initiatives helped in creating disability awareness, especially in developing countries. But in Preeti Monga's time, there was little awareness regarding inclusion and integration, and Monga had to discontinue her studies. Though she had the option of joining the school for blind girls in Delhi, which she desired to, her parents decided against it, not willing to leave her in the hostel. This, as Monga writes, "diminished the last ray of hope" (2012, p. 46). With the doors of formal education being closed, her parents turned their attention to the next field, which they considered apt for a visually disabled woman.

Music and visual disability have always been closely associated. It's a widespread misconception that the visually disabled possess an innate talent for music. Though it might be true for some, other disabled people had to undergo an unnecessary ordeal of training in something for which they showed little talent. Monga too was trained in Classical music and sitar for five years, but eventually realized she did not possess a natural ear for music. Monga questions this popular myth, "'When God takes away a person's eyesight, he makes an unfailing gift of an ear for music.' Where was mine?" (2012, p. 52).

Normality tends to impose its standards in multiple social spheres, and gender construct is no exception. The lives of disabled women in Indian society are mostly confined to household chores and the feminine roles of taking care of family members; they are expected to act 'normal' as much as possible. Feminine body ideals and standardization of female bodies tend towards the normative, towards the corporeal incarnation of culture's collective, unmarked normative characteristics (Garland Thomson, 2002). This notion is evident from Monga's narrative. When she read the romance, *Leopard in the Snow* with her diminishing eyesight, she began comparing herself to the female lead, described as "a tall slender figure". In addition to

that, her mother "encouraged" her to trim off the excess weight, so that no one would bother about her vision impairment. Also, Monga feels proud when people don't notice her disability. Disabled women were expected to look normal and be able to deal with gendered work responsibilities. "Thus, the thrust for normalization is both gendered and ability-centred (Ghosh, 2018, p. 106). Preeti Monga moulded her life according to these expectations.

Nowhere else is the idea of normality as indispensable as in marriage. A severely disabled woman has a lesser chance of getting married in Indian society. In many cases, the family of the disabled never bring the prospectus of marriage into a disabled person's life. The common idea is that "impaired female bodies are not deserving of the patriarchal male gaze" (Ghosh, 2018, p. 112). On the other hand, women with disabilities that are strictly brought up in a patriarchal setup fear that their partners will feel ashamed of their disability. When Monga's parents decided to find a groom for their daughter, Monga began to dream about her partner, not knowing society's perspective on disabled women. It is only when the man engaged to Preeti gets married to another woman does she understand the reality and the problems accompanying marriage. She narrates how it "was (certainly) a nerve-shattering experience to watch prospective grooms and their relatives sprint out of our home when they learnt of my impaired vision" (2012, p. 93).

In spite of it, Monga falls in love with her brother's friend and marries him. He turns out to be an alcoholic and a liar who never stops abusing her. Monga became the mother of two children and marriage, which she considered a token of "normality", cemented her into an oppressive relationship.

The narrated scenes of marriage are intended to be disheartening: her husband, for example, would give her an empty plate and laugh when she began searching for food. "Till the time I married him, I had never felt I was blind, but now my blindness was rubbed into me as often as was possible" (Monga, 2012, p. 105). But with her family's support, Monga manages to raise her two children, sometimes fighting and sometimes reconciling with her husband, who starts plundering her parents' money too. Monga's life shows the importance of parents' support in the life of a disabled woman. Ghai points out that, "Historically, children and adults with disabilities have been 'normalized.' They were/are visible within the context of family, largely treating disability as some problem…. within the family, disability was expected, accepted and identified with" (2019, p. xix). Naturally, this explains Monga's ignorance of the outsiders' perspective on her condition. Her disability was considered just a problem by her family, but after she got married, she came to know the prevailing worldview. For five long decades, her family has been a great pillar of support and has stood by her in the ups and downs of her life. It is with the aid of her family that she finally divorces her uncaring husband and remarries to Ashwani, who respected her and gave her the love she deserved.

Independence

One of the key requirements for leading a "normal" life is independence. Adults are expected to share the financial burden of the family, taking responsibility for the money earned and spent. Physically handicapped need to be dependent on other people for their movement, but the disabled strive hard to lead a financially independent life. Lacking social skills, the absence of formal or technical education deprives disabled women of "normal" lives, especially women with visual disabilities. "Disabled women from economically poor families engage in different kinds of work that entails hard labour, despite the connotations of incapability associated with disability and weakness associated with both gender and disability" (Ghosh, 2018, p. 111). On

the other hand, in some middle class and wealthy families "many look for work to keep themselves engaged and prove their worth to the family and community around" (Ghosh, 2018, p. 111). In the case of Monga, her efforts to attain financial independence stem from the treatment she receives from her abusive husband. To earn some respect and develop a sense of self-worth worth, Monga trains to become an aerobics instructor and succeeds in becoming the first ever visually challenged person to work in that field. From selling pickles, becoming a marketing manager, and running consultation services to starting her own company, Monga, with the help of her family and friends, tried several jobs to attain financial stability. She observes that in the workplace people are resentful of the disabled as if they were responsible for snatching away opportunities from the able-bodied. It also takes a lot of patience and tolerance for a co-worker to accommodate and be inclusive of a disabled employee. But Monga enjoys working with people as it makes her "normal" like everyone else. The hardest part, however, is to be dependent. Monga needed to be picked up from work due to her visual disability, but people always nearly forgot to do so. In a section of the book suggestive of those unspoken humiliations, she had to stand in the road for a long time "wondering what to do and then asked (had to ask) for help from a passing cyclist" (2012, p. 154).

Conclusion

Every human being strives to be normal regardless of his/her dis/ability status.

> As disabled persons, we are products of an ideology of normality where communication of messages on the abled body is a constant in any society. As a result, the disabled person is constantly in a mental state of deferral, awaiting the day the body will not just be mended but cured. Until then the disabled tend to impersonate the able-bodied. (Ghai, 2019, p. 2)

As mentioned earlier, normality is a subjective term; by focusing on the life experiences of one disabled individual, this paper has attempted to answer the questions "what is normality?" and "what creates normality in the life of a visually disabled person?" With a penetrating look at Monga's autobiography, it becomes evident that the normality one constructs for oneself is highly influenced by culture and family. In this case, and even while being a school dropout, Monga procured the social skills that she observed throughout the numerous gatherings and parties she attended. She now dances, swims and is very good at holding conversations. These skills, largely imbibed from her surroundings, also helped her run a successful business. These skills secure a pathway to integrate with the normal world in which she wishes to belong.

But her desire to fit into the normal world prevents her from identifying with the visually disabled. She refuses to learn braille, arguing that it would be of no use to communicate with her able-bodied friends and family. "No matter what is said about teaching and training persons with disabilities in special ways, we eventually have to coexist in this one world with all its inhabitants" (Monga, 2012, p. 60). Thus, normality to Monga includes good education, a perfect body, necessary social skills, independence, successful marriage, and a loving family. In this quest for normality, Monga secured a place in this world as a successful woman. It is crucial to note her varied experiences helped her in accepting her disability, if not claiming it as her identity. She still takes pride in passing as a normal person at first glance. Hers is a celebratory autobiography where one strives to overcome disability through success.

The desire for normality is innate in every human being. For a disabled person, it could become a life's goal. Disability studies scholar Ghai opens up to readers thus: "I just wanted to pass as

a ‘normal’ person. Therefore, I lived in associations and spaces between these states of invisibility and visibility, normality and disability” (2019, p. 12). For Monga, this space constitutes success – in relationships, in business, and in life, for she has been “fortunate in having succeeded in leaping into the unknown, in pursuit of my dreams and in the absence of the sense of sight, clutching on to the rope of faith, depending upon the wings of ‘the other senses’” (Monga, 2012, p. 177). Living as disabled person in a world designed for the able-bodied necessitates multiple confrontations with ideas that include conceptions of bodily normality, gender discrimination, autonomy and dependency, and societal perceptions of disability. This paper, by examining the lived experience of Preeti Monga through her autobiography, delineates the pursuit of normality and its implications in a disabled person’s life. Scope for further research would include other factors that enforce normalcy in the lives of the disabled and the portrayal of self in disability arts.

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Cultural Expectations and Gendered Roles: Identity Formations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Abstract

Individual identities are not only a summation of one's unique choices and experiences, but are also influenced by the culture, society and politics of the place in which individuals feel a sense of belonging or of the place where, on the contrary, they experience a disruption of the self. For a diasporic subject, the experiences in the home country and the country to which they've relocated create a binary identitary self, one that develops in the space that opens between the familiar feelings of belonging and the newfound sense of alienation. Within that space the immigrant resides in a transnational and global context that does not fully incorporate either place. Gauri, the protagonist in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, attempts to forsake her Indianness, but her new experiences and her determination to do away with the cultural signifiers of her traditional Indian upbringing provoke a synthesis, one that integrates fragments of the new, envisioned identity with remnants of a past identity that is very much alive in her unconscious. By analysing these fragments and remnants, the paper identifies patriarchy, sexuality, sexism, racism and conflicting ideas of motherhood and family as factors being negotiated by the protagonist as she contrives frames of reference for her new identity.

Keywords: culture, diaspora, gender, identity, Indian women's literature, *The Lowland*

The term "diaspora" is derived from "diaspeirein", meaning dispersion. "Diaspeirein" has been widely associated with the devastation experienced by communities forced from their place of origin. "Diaspora" has long been associated with the Jewish community, the term denoting the enduring anguish of Jews as originally articulated in the Hebrew Bible. Accordingly, the Jewish community's longing for the lost homeland is intimately connected with the term. In the twentieth century, the term saw a gradual alteration to its meaning, now denoting the geographical shift of people or communities across various ethnicities and historical backgrounds. Circumscribing a wider terrain, the present connotation of "diaspora" supports a better understanding of these different migration contexts; it now generally denotes a subject that, for a variety of reasons, shifts geographically to another location. Migration may be forced due to political or ethnic violence; social disorder due to the aftereffects of decolonisation had led many individuals or groups to seek asylum as refugees for protection from socio-political or religious turmoil in the home country. Diaspora could also have a positive association with voluntary shifts such as the search for work, better living conditions and enhanced economic opportunities.

For South Asians, colonisation and subsequent decolonisation are significant drivers of their migrations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Evidently, migrations caused by the colonial experience subsume a myriad of diverse factors such as political, social, economic, racial and religious violence. In the case of Indians, they chose the United Kingdom as preferred country of migration during British settlement in India in the nineteenth century. However, after World War II migration patterns changed for South Asian countries as they became independent and new immigration restrictions were established in the United Kingdom. These restricted Asian and black migration to the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Ranasinha, 2016). As a result, these groups were forced to consider other countries for migration. Many scholars and working professionals from South Asia shifted their focus to the United States. US laws favoured incoming immigrants with skill sets that promoted the country's development. As dependent wives often accompanied South Asian male immigrants, they all endeavoured to adapt to a new country, with its peculiar language and customs.

As a reflection of their experiences, the literature of the diaspora commonly deals with the trope of a lost homeland, either a symbolic loss or a literal one. As the experiences of alienation are visited from different vantage points, the feelings of dread, anxiety, sense of loss and suffering expressed by the authors might show different levels of intensity, but there is evident common ground in the area of identity negotiation. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), protagonist Thamma wishes to return to her place of origin and dwells in constant remembrance of past memories. In *The Namesake* (2003), Jhumpa Lahiri plays up Ashima's angst about the unshakeable sense of belonging to a culturally different nation. Her son Gogol struggles to form a new identity, as his psyche is permanently imprinted with the essence of his roots. In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, Gauri and Subhash are diasporic subjects who shift voluntarily, looking for better opportunities.

Characters like Gogol, Gauri and Subhash become a part of the global culture by negotiating within spatial and cultural flux. This negotiation leads them to the formation of a transnational identity. Transnationalism is informed by an individual or a group's participation in the politics of two nations: the one to which one immigrates and the one from which one emigrates. The individual or group thus becomes the recipient of, and contributor to, both economies, participating in the culture of both societies through daily activities. In *The Lowland*, Gauri shifts to the United States in hopes of a fresh start, away from the political turmoil in her homeland that she now associates with pain and loss. While the shift is voluntary, the diasporic

subject has to deal with the trauma of the past while grappling with the adjustments required by the present. The protagonist Gauri leads a globalised existence as she dislocates from her Indianness to adapt to her new surroundings. Lahiri deals with diverse responses to migration in *The Lowland*. While Gauri's husband Udayan, for example, detests moving to a foreign land, his elder brother Subhash gladly leaves to study in the United States. But he maintains an Indian value system, periodically returning to India to stay connected with his roots.

Literature Review

Women diasporic writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni, and Meera Syal, amongst others, use transnationalism to provide a fresh take on the existing themes in diasporic literature. The post-1990 work of South Asian women writers breaks free from the subject matter, genres and target audiences of previous generations of diasporic authors that consisted predominantly of males. They remove the constrictions of patriarchy and shift the focus to their homelands when negotiating identities. Naidu (2018, p. 372) points out that in women's writing, the women "are not constructed by patriarchy but are self-constructed within and in opposition to cultural formations".

The inclusion of South Asian American women writers in the gamut of US American studies faces problems due to their multicultural backgrounds. Schlote (2006) notes that this inclusion carries the risk of side-lining their cultural and historical differences. She studies that which makes them unique, removing any dependence on their male counterparts by showing how they develop individual identities, free from traditional impediments. South Asian American women, thus, are products of a particularly cosmopolitan process, as they come to identify absolutely neither with their homelands nor with their place of immigration. Dealing with the change in topography allows the immigrants to discern political differences in both nations, the reversal of traditional gender roles, and the economic disparity between the home nation and the United States. They embrace the lifestyle and traditions of both places and refigure themselves to form a transnational identity.

In *The Lowland*, Lahiri subverts the idea of a lost homeland through Gauri's character. As she adjusts to American culture, she consciously attempts to suppress her identity's Indian elements. *The Lowland* differs from other texts by South Asian American diasporic writers in the political awareness and its characters, which are configured as transnational individuals (Ranasinha, 2016). Studying the agency of the immigrant woman, Stoican (2018) concentrates on the gender construct in the transcultural context of *The Lowland*. Through feminine resistance, identity formation in the immigrant woman is enabled by nomadism to go beyond the fixed structures into which women are placed in society, promoting a transcultural identity (Stoican, 2018). Gauri's physical shift, as well as her emotional inability to adapt, leads to her resistance.

Across socio-cultural locations, the questions of race, gender, and politics impact the lived experience of women. Critics have studied how South Asian women's experiences in US society shape their identity. Their transformation from acquiescent recipients of gender normative roles to liberation from convention must pass through a stage where they are victims of their traditions before they are able to redefine their expectations.

This paper argues that the lived experiences of Lahiri's characters in *The Lowland* are based on actual historical and cultural reality. Protagonist Gauri embarks on a journey to find her identity, renegotiating cultural and gender impositions. An analysis of the facets of

motherhood, family, individuality, and sexuality shows how the experiential dimension of women develops identity across cultures. The paper seeks to investigate the process of identity formation through the socio-cultural lens.

Cultural and Political Negotiations of Family and Motherhood

Media and literary representations of brown families reflect the rules they abide by and are often based on stereotypes. It represents an exotic East with colourful cultural and religious traditions and clothing, strict moral codes, and an obsession with science-based careers. Focusing on the Indian diaspora, the retellings of the lived experience of women and their transnationalism can be explored based on traditional expectations, marriage relations and type of visa (Jain, 2006). Popular television series like Never Have I Ever or The Mindy Project portray Indian women in the United States, forming a global and transnational identity that either juggles between Americanness and Indianness or attempts to salvage and reconnect with its Indian roots.

There is a subsequent rearrangement of women's lives when on a quest for identity, separating the woman from their husbands on whom they depend for sustenance. This theme is recurrent in Jhumpa Lahiri's novels and short stories, showing a man's choice to shift for better economic opportunities and the woman's shift obligated by marriage. Marriage requires the diaspora woman to shift to a new cultural dimension (Jain, 2006). Jhumpa Lahiri's women characters subvert the traditionally accepted gender roles so that the woman can exercise her agency. The women in Lahiri's *The Lowland* are bound by their surroundings until they break down the oppressive regime within the domestic sphere, one issue at a time or with collective resistance.

The structure of a family and the expectations of traditional roles of motherhood that come with it are dependent on cultural signifiers. In *The Lowland*, women are confined to gendered roles as caregivers of the family. Women stay with their in-laws after marriage in Indian societies. Gauri, Lahiri's protagonist has to adhere to a similar situation. Her mother-in-law, Bijoli, disdains her presence from the beginning. Bijoli's character is a testament to the long-standing cultural trope of the mother-in-law's hatred towards her daughter-in-law, as seen exploited in Indian regional soaps. Bijoli is an overbearing patriarchal presence in Gauri's life. She chides Gauri for marrying her beloved son, Udayan, for his death and even for bearing his child. The harsh treatment Gauri faces when widowed is heightened by her youth and pregnancy. The culture to which she belongs imposes patriarchal strictures on her: "After the mourning period ended, her in-laws began to eat fish and meat again, but not Gauri. She was given white saris to wear in place of coloured ones to resemble the other widows in the family. Women three times her age" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 130). She is also made to eat alone in the kitchen. Bijoli dislikes Subhash's communication with Gauri and his sympathy toward her. While Gauri accepts Subhash's proposal as a means of escape, Bijoli expresses her hate for Gauri for doing so by blaming Gauri for the ruin of both her sons.

Gauri's revolutionary husband, Udayan, is another patriarchal figure. It is quite paradoxical as he is a part of a revolutionary movement that seeks equality for classes. Yet, his socio-political stance does not coincide with his personal conduct. In the private sphere of the house, he exhibits typical Indian male behaviour by expecting to be served his meals "and wait for Gauri or her mother-in-law to put a plate before him" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 151). Hence, Subhash's self-sufficiency is an eye-opener for Gauri. He imbibes the US American culture that habituates him to fend for himself. He could have behaved like his brother, retaining his Indian male expectations and wanting Gauri to play a domestic role. His awareness of the circumstances

under which he married her prevents this, though it does not pertain to all aspects of their marriage. Subhash frees her from domesticity but asserts his dominance by expressing his will to share the marital bed. He is portrayed as the one who is wronged, naturalising his expectations for sexual fulfilment from the woman with whom he shares a house. However, this is an imposition on Gauri's life and her individuality. She reluctantly succumbs to Subhash's expectations as it had "become more of an effort not to" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 193). Gauri is the typical diasporic prototype of the dependent wife. Her giving up her individuality is from the perspective that she has received a new chance at life because of Subhash and that her sustenance depends on him.

Subhash's expectations of Gauri's domesticity do not match reality, so he reiterates his mother's premonition that Gauri is not cut out for motherhood. While the narrative from Subhash reveals his expectations as something he can rightfully demand, despite the constant reminder of the circumstances of their marriage, Subhash recedes from the noble helping figure to another product of patriarchy. Disregarding her trauma, Gauri is expected to be an involved mother and submit to the role of family caregiver. Subhash opposes keeping a babysitter for Bela, assuming it to be Gauri's task as the mother. He is oblivious to Gauri's needs, even though he makes his own needs clear. When Gauri wants to meet with the German philosophy group weekly, she asserts its importance. When she wishes to take other classes at the university, even then, "Happy to spend time with Bela, Subhash let her go" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 196). The language usage of his having to "let her go" marks his authority over her freedom. Gauri finds herself to have shifted from one patriarchal situation to another.

Udayan's view on Gauri is similar to Ranasinha's (2016, p. 227) analysis of Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* in that the protagonist "is a sexual subject via meanings he inscribes on her body. His sense of nationhood, migrant identity, and masculinity converges around her gendered body". While Udayan and Gauri marry for love, he shapes her into one who resonates with his views and limits her education in her choice of discipline. He uses her to gain information vital to his movement, committing a crime without her knowledge of being involved. Her whole being is engulfed by his beliefs and desire to gain his approval and appreciation, and naturally, his death traumatises her existence. Every decision she makes is to escape from memories of Udayan. She goes to the United States, devotes herself to her education and leaves their daughter. Yet Udayan's untimely death haunts her with the knowledge that he has left her alone while she had planned to spend her life with him. "Politics enters in subtle ways, problematising the boundaries between macro-events and micro-experience and the categories of the personal and the political" (Ranasinha, 2016, p. 192).

When considering the lack of maternal instincts in Gauri, readers look at her from Subhash's point of view and vilify her absence of "maternal instincts". However, she must be read as a character stuck in a historical moment to understand her deviation from traditionally accepted norms of motherhood: Gauri's deviation is her way of resisting cultural expectations. Her daughter Bela is a reminder of the past that Gauri seeks to escape, of Udayan's death and how she was denied the possibility of a happy life. When pregnant, Gauri "felt as if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 149). Even a simple act of caregiving like running her fingers through Bela's hair to unknot it reminds her of her affection towards Udayan. Stoican (2018) remarks that: "Gauri's abandonment of her mother role may express her attempt to resolve her trauma by ceaseless withdrawal. The character appears as an embodiment of individualistic values, as she chooses to focus on her own struggle and overlook the pain of her family members" (p. 168).

Gauri herself was raised by relatives. As a young child, she was aware of her mother's love and did not resent her parents "for not raising her" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 68). Gauri gives Bela an upbringing like hers, and Bela learns to embrace her mother's detachment. However, the difference is that Gauri was separated from her parents because of a car accident while she willingly left her daughter with Subhash. Perhaps because of her experience, she feels that going is the right thing, especially when she has ensured that Bela will be with a caring guardian. She does not inquire about Bela or Subhash, as it is too painful for her to be associated with her past. Ranasinha (2016, p. 219) suggests that Gauri's inability to have a relationship with her daughter is due to the lingering effect of the "political violence she has witnessed". She chooses academics over motherhood, making Bijoli's premonition come true.

The Lowland redefines motherhood and familial roles by subverting Indian traditional expectations. It transcends borders to provide a global view of these issues, helping to form the transnational identity of the South Asian diaspora subjects. While the "taboo of an unloving mother" (Ranasinha, 2016, p. 220) is explored, Subhash's role in Bela's upbringing is a fresh take on traditional norms of motherhood. It is crucial to note that care in parenting does not have a gender, unlike what society dictates. This is why one glorifies what Subhash does as selfless and vilifies Gauri, even though society has always normalised the opposite. The woman can reject motherhood as her choice, as seen in Gauri. She is denied the life she chose with Udayan. She decides not to be stuck in a pretend marriage with Subhash. Her leaving behind Bela is not only to focus on herself. She recognises the closeness that Subhash and Bela share and that Subhash would be a better parent to Bela than she ever could. Through Subhash's narrative, Lahiri shows how the woman is socially expected to put family first. Through Gauri's actions, she breaks the cultural expectations of applying the same culturally mandated roles to women irrespective of their situation.

Individuality and Sexual Liberation

Lahiri cleverly seems to situate Subhash's character within the sphere of what could be called the Indian cultural psyche. At the same time, the author indirectly critiques his perspective, without making it too evident, when Gauri's actions are understood from her perspective. Her participation and subsequent rejection of traditional roles lead her toward liberation. She discards societal expectations and replaces them with elements of her individuality. Transnational characters like Gauri are witnesses and victims of oppression at multiple levels. They learn from their experiences to break free from the shackles of racism and sexism and exist as independent beings, free from historical, social, and cultural impediments on their lives. This leads to them to a critical reshaping of their identities in order to become empowered.

When a diaspora subject shifts from their country of origin to the migration country, their identity undergoes a flux. The person is habituated to the culture and tradition of their home country, and in learning new customs of the migration country, they try to strike a balance between the two. Gauri is a similar subject in diaspora literature. She finds it challenging to retain her Indianness in the American setting but does not mix the two. Rejecting aspects of her Indianness, Gauri cuts off the long hair she used to braid and instead sports a short-haired look. She is aware of the gaze of Americans on her South Asian self, so she discards wearing saris and substitutes them with American clothing like slacks. The transnationalism of the diaspora subject in negotiating identity leads to this cosmopolitanism.

Towards the end of *The Lowland*, Gauri returns to her roots to reconcile with the past. She remains attired in the clothing of the new land with which she now identifies. Her visit to Calcutta is for the last glimpse of everything that encompassed her life; in doing so, she attempts to be free of all that haunts her life and find closure. After visiting all the places of importance to her, she contemplates suicide. In those moments, she realises the futility of the act as death cannot unite her with Udayan. Her identity is not based on locations but on the various instances she has spent with or without Udayan. When she attempts to renew her identity, she forsakes those things that remind her of Udayan and works on developing a mindset that is free of him. Her rejection of Udayan to subside the pain that his death caused her leads to her rejection of her Indianness. Thus, when she is "unable to find him, she felt a new solidarity with him. The bond of not existing" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 393). The realisation that she cannot reunite with him finally frees her from being stuck in a period from her past.

Another instance where Gauri regains her identity is studying the subject she had given up when she met Udayan. She had wanted to study master's in philosophy when she met him. Udayan was critical of the subject, and Gauri gave it up by aligning her studies around subjects he was passionate about. She does not realise how she had given up her individuality in the process by colouring her existence through his beliefs and needs. She found herself "thinking about the things that mattered to him" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 71). She never questioned Udayan's motives. He told her that the officer needed to be taken out of the way, but it did not occur to Gauri that this meant murder. Her faith in and love for him blinds her to the possibility. This is why she feels betrayed when she finds this to be the reason for Udayan's arrest. She is filled with a guilt at having been an accessory to murder that she carries for the rest of her life. Attending Philosophy classes at the university is a significant step toward regaining her individuality. She sheds a part of Udayan's expectations away by completing her education. Gauri asserts her need to attend classes, and, as Stoican (2018) notes, it indirectly reminds Subhash of his promise before their marriage that coming to the United States would mean restarting her life. Stoican (2018) further writes, "Gauri's dedication to an academic career may illustrate her need to block the pain and guilt of her Indian youth. Equipped with the awareness that she cannot be a proper mother, Gauri redirects her efforts to the world of research" (p. 168).

The patriarchal grip on women's lives gives Gauri no say in her reproductive choices. Udayan decides "they'd bring children into the world" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 131) after the revolution is successful. His inability to keep track of time when he is hiding gets her pregnant. Gauri's say in the matter is insignificant as she attunes herself to his needs. Even Subhash expects to share the marital bed with Gauri and have a child because they are married, forgetting the circumstances that led to their marriage. Gauri is with him only to suppress his rising expectations. When Gauri directs her husband on what she wants sexually, it reclaims control over her life. Though dissatisfied, she is a step closer to prioritising her needs, communicated through the non-verbal mode of gestures. The taboo regarding female sexuality is overcome through the expression of her sexual desires. Gauri's fantasy about the man she saw expels her pent-up sexual energies through masturbation. It sexually frees her from the unsatisfied and unfulfilled sexual lives that she leads. Gauri's sexual liberation also enables her to explore her sexuality in a same-sex relationship. Lahiri does not elucidate the implications of this relationship on Gauri's psyche. However, one can find in this instance Lahiri's subtle stepping towards forsaking heterosexual normativity in culture and literature.

Community plays an important role when analysing the development of women's identity across various socio-cultural backgrounds. The diaspora subject finds adjusting to the new

location easier when they are part of a community of people from their home country. About being a part of such a community, Jain (2006) writes that "Coping with excitement of new experiences and both joys and traumas of new situations involves most women into constantly working on their capabilities of creating and then sustaining new relationship" (p. 2312). Gauri, however, rejects the Indian community in her neighbourhood by telling Subhash that she has "nothing in common with them" (Lahiri, 2014, p. 168). It sets her apart as a character who develops her identity in unknown surroundings by forsaking any bonds with her original culture. She does not correspond with her family in India, except for the occasional mail to her brother Manash. The only people from her homeland she takes some responsibility for are the Indian students the University who ask her to help fit in. She finds it easier to host them as she does not need to form emotional bonds. They belong to a new generation and do not share her trepidations about coming to the United States. These are important markers for her dissociation from Indianness. Gauri creates a cosmopolitan South Asian American identity for herself. The only Indian elements in her identity are her name and skin colour.

Individuality in a person develops hand in hand with emotional, sexual, and economic liberation. Gauri leads her life by making decisions to suppress the social traumas of her personal life. Still, she eventually learns the importance of her existence beyond socio-cultural and historical impediments. A broader look at Gauri's journey helps us find traces the developmental processes of diasporic women across the world. To locate the self in a new space or reshape it in the same context requires strength and determination. To read Gauri without understanding the guilt and trauma she's carried with her throughout her life would lead to blaming her for prioritising her career over her daughter. Gauri seeks to find herself despite what she goes through, and in this endeavour, she emerges as a self-sufficient individual. She is no longer the dependent wife of the Indian man who has shifted to America but is a financially independent cosmopolitan Indian American woman.

Conclusion

As much as identity development is dependent on conscious choices taken by an individual, it is also influenced by culture through traditions and racial and sexual oppression. A closer look at the lived experiences of Gauri from Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* shows how her identity is a summation of the same. The paper has delved into various aspects of Gauri's life to show how her social, historical, and racial backgrounds are sources of personal development and transformation.

Women are considered the primary caregivers of the family. Without regard to the situation in which marriage occurs or the potential destructive nature of it, it is expected that women will adapt to domesticity and accept being bound by patriarchal coercions. Gauri conforms to the expectations of being a daughter-in-law, wife and mother as society dictates. Her mother-in-law treats her in a long-standing, continuous tradition of mistreating her daughters-in-law. Bijoli might have undergone similar experiences in her youth but falls back to cultural stereotypes as she converts from the role of a daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law. Moreover, as the novel progresses, Udayan's death profoundly impacts his mother. Bijoli detaches herself from the world, visiting the spot where she pays tribute to her son and losing herself to the trauma of the past, just as Gauri has. Even then, she does not have sympathy for Gauri's predicament.

Ranasinha (2016, p. 20) notes that "Authors like Lahiri highlight ethnocentric white feminism's blindness to white, patriarchal structures by delineating the gendered constraints that affect

white as well as subcontinental women" Women's oppression due to their culture informs how patriarchy is embedded in the family structure. Whether it is the figure of the mother-in-law or the unassuming husband who thinks he is the saviour, the wife/mother of the family will be subjected to their rules and expectations.

Gauri silently tolerates the burden of patriarchy until she can break free. With acts of resistance, assertion, or inspiration from the community, she finds a way to construct her identity. This quest for identity is not only personal: it is also racial and political. Gauri has to deal with the trauma of a critical political event in her homeland. It shapes who she becomes, as most of her decisions revolve around it. She is unable to adjust to domestic confinement and rejects motherhood, devoting herself to her academic career. The visit to Calcutta and her ultimate reconciliation with the past set her free. The negotiation with the past and the lessons of the present, influenced by culture and history, shape the self.

The aspects of family, motherhood, sexuality and individuality in Gauri's life are investigated to determine the contribution of each to her identity. A separate evaluation shows how historical and cultural circumstances inform these elements. The characters' negotiation within each of these contexts establishes the gendered identity of Lahiri's women. While creating their identity, the women attain individuality, one where sexual liberation plays a significant part. In future, Gauri's same-sex relationship and the formation of queer identities can be further explored within historical and cultural contexts.

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Decipher Symptoms of Asperger Syndrome: Role of Early Intervention in Colin Fischer

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Abstract

Historically, few important writers have focused on the developmental disorders of their characters. In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in representing the life of people diagnosed with neuro developmental conditions such as autistic spectrum disorders. In the novel *Colin Fischer*, Ashley Edward Miller and Zack Stentz give voice to an Aspergian named Colin Fischer. While identifying how the symptoms of the syndrome are expressed in Colin, this paper examines this complex and unique protagonist and the way in which home-based intervention plays a significant role in his personal development. Colin demonstrates how individuals diagnosed with Asperger's face multiple challenges, but there is often something in which they excel. His extraordinary memory and his skill in accomplishing diverse tasks that most people would find boring are astonishing; they focus on Colin's quiet dignity in the face of constant victimisation. The social message is that it is crucial to develop these skills in order to make the individual self-confident and successful.

Keywords: Asperger syndrome, Colin Fischer, dysfunctional characters, early intervention

Literary works are habitually concerned with the depiction of their protagonists' remarkable abilities, seldomly focusing on any developmental disorder. Yet in recent years there has been a growing interest in epitomising the life of people diagnosed with neuro developmental disorders such as autistic spectrum disorders. Gordon Bates, in the article "Autism in Fiction and Autobiography", states that "[t]hese accounts also mark a change in societal views towards those with autism, who are increasingly seen not in voiceless supporting roles or bit parts but as characters in their own right" (p. 127).

Asperger Syndrome

Asperger syndrome is regarded as a subcategory of autistic spectrum disorders. It is named after an Austrian paediatrician Hans Asperger, who "did most of his work in Vienna during the 1930s and 1940s. As a child, Asperger himself displayed many traits of the syndrome that bears his name. Shy, remote, and lonely, Asperger had a gift for languages and an astonishing memory for subjects in which he was interested and would often bore and alienate his classmates with recitations of long passages by his favourite poet" (Miller & Stentz, p. 170). The individuals diagnosed with this syndrome are usually prone to a wide range of impairments, including social and motor skills. They face difficulties with communication and also constrain themselves by self-imposing stringent rules and patterns of behaviour.

Asperger Syndrome in *Colin Fischer*

In the novel *Colin Fischer*, Ashley Edward Miller and Zack Stentz give voice to an Aspergian named, Colin Fischer. He is depicted as a fourteen-year-old boy who has begun attending West Valley High School, in California's San Fernando Valley. He belongs to a well-to-do family, his mother working as a project manager for NASA and his father designing "drive systems for unmanned spacecraft at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena" (Miller & Stentz, p. 139). It is because of his parent's educational background and social status, his health condition was identified at an early stage. Home-based intervention along with the adoption of appropriate therapy play a significant role in deciphering the symptoms of the syndrome. It also helps in bringing about an overall development of the child. In the book entitled *Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism*, Gary B. Merelov and colleagues remark:

> Evaluation of AS/HFA by a psychologist, in collaboration with professionals from other disciplines (generally speech/language, occupational therapy, and medicine) provides a foundation for educational and therapeutic interventions for individuals with AS/HFA and their families. Establishing the diagnosis, identifying strengths and needs, and interpreting these to families, teachers, and other service providers are key elements of the assessment process. Evaluations should include information from parents and teachers/caregivers, observation and interaction with the client, and formal testing with specific instruments selected based on the questions and goals of the assessment. (Merelov et al,, 2001, p. 69)

Symptoms and Issues

Miller and Stentz project the social and physical barriers faced by Colin in his day-to-day life at the beginning of the novel. They also touch upon Colin's remarkable qualities, such as his high level of integrity and his candidness. He obeys the values and order of society, as he is aware of the fact that breaking the rules will lead to problems. Children and adults with Asperger's syndrome appear to have a greater adherence to honesty and truth than to the

thoughts and feelings of others (Atwood, 2007, p. 117). Colin is represented as a transparent person who is remarkably honest and says exactly what he wants to say. But he does know when he is expected to tell a "white lie" to avoid offending others. He regards that the other person would be grateful for his observation and advice. He has never considered the likelihood of offending his interlocutor with comments most would classify as rude. Other children would normally restrain themselves from such comments, always aware of the other person's thoughts and feelings.

Colin is puerile in his inability to manage emotions and express empathy, but that does not mean that he is disconnected from others. He has trouble expressing love and affection, and failing to understand his mother's feelings, he does not reciprocate her love. He feels that expressing his feelings is an anomaly. On the other hand, his parents, along with a team of therapists, worked for years to make Colin express affection for his mother without being prompted to do so. Subsequently, when he tells his mother for the first time that he loves her, she becomes overwhelmed with joy. But Colin finds it difficult to comprehend why his mother expresses extreme emotion about something that she already knows. In the book entitled *The Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome*, Tony Attwood states that "[t]he child or adult with Asperger's Syndrome does not recognize or understand the cues that indicate the thoughts or feelings of the other person at a level expected for someone of that age" (2007, 112). He cannot see things from his mother's perspective. As such, he refuses to answer the questions his mother poses, as he finds it absurd to provide a commentary of the whole day, giving importance to every detail.

Colin does not like to be touched by anyone, including his parents. Nevertheless, he realises the importance of touch by reading a book and later begins allowing his parents to do so with prior notice. But he does his best to maintain distance from strangers. He ensures that he does not collide with anyone, and when his elbow accidentally brushes against someone, he says "please don't touch me" (Miller & Stentz, p.).

Likewise, Colin exhibits eating disorders with his unusual preferences for food and its presentation. He prefers to eat crunchy foods such as apples, pretzels, carrots, and celery. On the other hand, he refuses to eat foods that are mushy, as he dislikes its texture. He says, "Cake is slimy and mushy, and I dislike foods that are mushy" (Miller & Stentz, p. 56). This is significant: "concerns about food intake or the diagnosis of an eating disorder could be the starting point for a diagnostic assessment for Asperger's syndrome" (Atkins 2007, p. 18).

The two of the most important problems associated with Asperger Syndrome are the difficulty to involve onself in social situations and the person's unusual sensory sensitivities. Due to Aspergians' limited fields of interest and low emotional attachment, they are prone to feel isolated throughout their life. Even if they have friends, it is short-lived, as they find it difficult to adjust to the relationship. Accordingly, authors Miller and Stenz emphasise how much Colin finds it difficult to make friends. When he was young, he was very close to Sandy. They went to preschool together in the car and their mothers took turns driving them back and forth each day. His mother facilitated social play at home with Sandy, and they played together often. The mother began to entertain visions of a budding friendship and regular playdates, but their friendship ended abruptly when she found "Sandy asleep on Colin's bed, lying in a puddle of her own urine. The scream had come from Colin, whose carefully ordered space had been violated in a most horrifying way. The carpool ended shortly thereafter" (Miller & Stentz, 2012, p. 83).

Colin does not countenance anyone disturbing the order of things in his room, as order is critical to him. His room sports the black-and white photographs of Basil Rathbone and Star Trek's Mr. Spock and Commander Data; a picture of Detective Grissom from CSI also hangs on the wall. From the choice of images his father surmises that "Colin's room was a shrine not to actors he admired, but to cool, clear-headed logic" (Miller & Stentz, p. 18). The floor of his room is also littered with piles of books, magazines, toys and partially disassembled household appliances. Even if it appears to be messy, its true nature is in its details – not as it appeared, as Colin might point out, but rather neatly organized, like-with-like. There is a principle behind every pile in the room, even if understood only by Colin himself. For example, a magnetron from an old microwave sits atop a book about marsupials and several back issues of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, an organizational feat that defied even his parents' efforts to divine a connection. (Miller & Stentz, p. 18) Thus, objects that may seem trivial to others hold a significant place in his room. It is this rigid attitude that stops him from making friends.

The social naivety of the children with Asperger syndrome leads them to be exposed to different forms of bullying. The common places and situations at school where bullying is more habitual are hallways, washrooms, during sports events and in situations when the incident can go unnoticed by adults. In *The Complete Guide to Asperger Syndrome*, Tony Attwood observes that the most common ways of bullying include "verbal or physical confrontation and intimidation; injury and destruction of personal property, and derogatory gestures or comments (2007, p. 96). Colin was bullied by Wayne on the first day of school. As he describes it, "[h]e put my head in the sink, and then he put my head in the toilet and he flushed it" (Attwood, 2007,135). Yet he was reluctant to share this with his parents and teachers out of embarrassment.

Moreover, he was often teased by other children through nicknames such as "Shortbus" (Miller & Stentz, p. 46), referring "to the small yellow bus that trundled through the northwest corner of the San Fernando Valley, taking handicapped and developmentally disabled children from home to school and back again" (pp. 46–47). Colin had never opted to ride in it, but Eddie gave him the nickname in sixth grade anyway. After this, his friends started calling him "shortbus" (Miller & Stentz, p. 46).

Some of Colin's friends were aware of his aversion to sounds that are unpleasant. He especially could not tolerate loud noise and he "winced a little at the sound—too high, too shrill, and too staccato. The first time Colin heard a school bell had been three years earlier. He had shrieked with terror at the unexpected cacophony and continued to shriek until the bell finally stopped ringing" (Miller & Stentz, p. 22). He learned to control his reaction to the noise with a great deal of effort by taking deep breaths and counting silently to dispel his fear of sound.

Knowing that Colin dislikes the shrill sound coming from it, some of his friends, who wish to interrupt the lesson, place a mobile phone in the classroom. His friends incite him to have an emotional outburst, but Colin controls himself by counting numbers. Moreover, his friends provoke him continuously by interrupting him with the song "The 1812 Overture" (Miller & Stentz, p. 33). Meanwhile, he "heard laughter and whispered conversation all around him and found it distracting. Frustrating. His heart pounded in his chest, cold sweat beaded on his forehead. The fire inside had rekindled, and it was building" (Miller & Stentz, p. 34).

Colin's efforts to answer in class was continuously thwarted by the unpleasant loud and shrill sound continuously coming from the cell phone. He finds it difficult to bear the noise any longer and starts barking "like a dog. Louder and louder, so focused on his barking he didn't

notice Mr. Gates discover and shut off the offending phone. He didn't notice the stares in his direction from around the room. He didn't notice Rudy Moore's mouth open wide in deep laughter, showing off his shark teeth with his dead eyes" (Miller & Stentz, p. 34).

Colin did not realise that he has collapsed himself to the floor while barking and closes his ears tightly with his hands. He squeezes his eyes shut gasping for air as the rest of the class laughed and pointed out at him. It was too much for him to bear and so barked continuously. Meanwhile, Mr. Gates approaches the school office for help. Tony Attwood states that

> Covert bullying, because of the havoc that often ensues, can also be used to avoid a class activity or examination. When I was examining the circumstances regarding several disruptive classroom incidents involving a child with Asperger's syndrome, I was told by the child's classmates that they encouraged his emotional outbursts. Since the teacher would then be preoccupied with taking the child to the school principal for punishment, they could successfully avoid having to do a class test or exam. (2007, p. 98)

Bullying is not limited to school. Even at home, he is bullied by his brother, Danny. He has a superficial relationship with his brother, and it is made evident when Danny expresses animosity and hatred: "I HATE YOU, COLIN, YOU'RE A RETARD AND I HATE YOU—" (Miller & Stentz, p. 146). But Colin maintains his self-esteem by remaining calm and self-controlled. He does not react to his insults and feels it as inappropriate and unreasonable to react to something that is not true. He responds in an assertive and constructive way by saying that "Mental retardation is defined by having an IQ below 70 to 75. My IQ is . . ." (Miller & Stentz, p. 146). His IQ actually ranges "between 155 and 180" (Miller & Stentz, p. 146). Marie, his occupational therapist in fact asks him not to disclose this to anyone as they may think he is bragging of an IQ value that is much higher than "normal" persons. Atwood shares her own clinical experience:

> [T]he comments most frequently used as an act of verbal teasing or abuse when the target is a child with Asperger's syndrome are 'stupid' (or 'retard'), 'psycho' and 'gay'. These comments, intended to be derogatory, can be observed in the interactions of typical children but can have more significance for children with Asperger's syndrome. Such children value intellectual ability as one of their strengths, which can be a constructive form of compensation for low social self-esteem if they are not successful in social situations. (2007, p. 95)

Skills possessed by people on the spectrum are unique. In the book *Autism Spectrum Disorder*, Sicile-Kira observes that "there are three basic types of specialised minds: the visual thinking mind; the music and mathematical mind; and the nonvisual numbers and language translator mind" (2014, p. 12). She states that teachers and parents should not stop at deciphering the symptoms; they should work on utilising these strengths.

In fact, Miller and Stenz focus on Colin's remarkable characteristics. They also suggest some of the ways in which Colin could overcome his inability to understand social situations and conventions by highlighting the support rendered by his mother and his occupational therapist. For instance, Colin dislikes to visit new places and hesitates to be a part of the social gathering mainly because of its crowded conditions, smell and noise. So, as a part of his therapy, his therapist Mrs. Fischer begins to take him to the shopping mall in Woodland Hills. Initially, she drives into the mall's parking lot, where they would sit until returning home. Later, she

convinces Colin to walk to the front doors and touch them. But the "automatic glass doors presented a terrifying and impassable barrier for nearly a year, until his mother produced an article from the Internet that satisfied Colin he was in no danger of being chopped in half while crossing the threshold" (Miller & Stentz, p. 94). It is with the timely intervention and the persistent efforts of Mrs. Fischer that Colin was able to overcome his fear of new places. He has learned to "deal with them by closing his eyes, breathing through his mouth, and allowing the discordant voices to melt into white noise" (Miller & Stentz, p. 43–44). He subsequently began to feel that the mall offered him familiarity and comfort.

Similarly, when other children enjoy exploring the social world, children diagnosed with this syndrome specialise themselves at least in one specific field of intellectual or artistic interest. This special interest provides them with intellectual pleasure. Colin has exceptional memory and reasoning skills. He is a walking encyclopaedia who exhibits an unusual learning style with remarkable knowledge in specific areas of interest such as maths, rockets, and so on. He also has extraordinary knowledge in "certain areas—game theory, for example, and the history of the U.S. space program—but he also has trouble grasping things a five-year-old would know automatically, without trying" (Miller & Stentz, p. 6). So, when his friends were finding it difficult to learn maths, Colin considers it as his favourite subject in school. He regards that maths "was true of all subjects. To learn a thing was to know a thing; to know a thing was to understand a thing; to understand a thing was to face it without fear" (Miller & Stentz, p. 32). Colin's interest towards Maths has inspired him to transcribe every word taught by his Algebra teacher, Mr. Gates. He enjoys the clear-headed logic involved in the learning of the subject. He takes up research projects even when they are not assigned. He takes an active participation in class and shows interest in answering the questions posed by his teacher. The novelists remark that:

> Unlike most of his peers, Colin knew what math was for. He understood why it was useful to calculate the time two trains pass if one leaves Chicago at three P.M. headed east and another leaves New York at four P.M. headed west. The answer to the word problem was immaterial, but the calculation was of critical importance because it allowed one to learn about trains. Trains were very interesting to Colin and worth learning about. (Miller & Stentz, p. 32)

Colin gives importance to minute details even during stressful situations. He watches his classmates with "the detached interest of an anthropologist, recording in his Notebook the movements of the nerds, the popular girls, the jocks, the goths, the emo kids, and the most curious of all, the gangsta-wannabes" (Miller & Stentz, p. 54). This helps him in dealing with stressful situations and regulate his anxiety. Also, he depends on reading detective novels as an effective technique to relax.

Colin also employs relaxation techniques that include breathing exercises and muscle relaxation; these calm him down and help control his emotions. He also uses the trampoline, as it helps him "to relax, focus and think" (Miller & Stentz, p. 17). He feels "reassured by intermittent weightlessness, he was free to imagine himself unbound by earthly concerns. Up-down, up-down, up-down...usually for hours, and always alone" (Miller & Stentz, p. 17). Accordingly, Tony Atwood states that "Children and adults with Asperger's syndrome appear less able to release emotional energy slowly by relaxation and reflection, and usually prefer to fix or release the feeling by an energetic action" (Miller & Stentz, p. 160).

Colin adopts different kinds of tools and actions as an effective energy management strategy. He indulges in appropriate and safe energy releasing activities so that he can use his energy in a constructive activity. So other than bouncing on the trampoline, the only real physical activity that brought him joy was running, "Colin loved to run. He learned to love it the first time he closed his eyes and felt the wind on his face, his body in motion, the sweat evaporating off his skin. Running made Colin feel alone and alive" (Miller & Stentz, p. 45).

However, in addition to the problems in social interaction, Colin also experiences certain motor vulnerabilities. Other than running, he had a persistent dislike of gym class and playgrounds. "Regardless of his current physical discomfort, Colin had a long-standing dislike of gym class and playgrounds. Putting aside the usual dangers of overly personal contact, the distasteful smells, and the unsettling, almost animal sounds of human play, Colin did not consider himself particularly coordinated" (Miller & Stentz, p. 45). He finds it difficult to induce coordination between different parts of his body. He can neither throw the ball nor catch it at the right time. He generally has poor awareness of the movement of the body in space and he also lacks the ability to participate in group activities. He explains to his gym teacher that, "I'm diagnosed as high functioning, but I still have poor social skills and sensory integration issues that give me serious deficits in areas of physical coordination" (Miller & Stentz, p. 44). So his parents and his therapy team suggest him to excuse himself from PE classes. However, eight years of occupational therapy has helped him to follow instructions on where and how to move the ball.

When his Physical Trainer, Mr. Turrentine, demonstrates the free throw stance and later asks him to model the posture, Colin exactly mirrors his teacher's position. He depicts every variable involved in making or missing a shot in his diagram as he possesses a uniquely visual thinking mind.

In his Imaginary Notebook, Colin draws a schematic of the asphalt court, overlaid with a complicated force diagram depicting every variable involved in making or missing a shot. He includes every conceivable factor, from the distance between himself and the hoop, to the estimated strength of the breeze he feels on his face. Satisfied that he understands the parameters of the problem, Colin extrapolates the diagram from his imaginary Notebook to a mental image of himself and the hoop in three-dimensional space. Colin throws shot after shot in imagination, testing his calculations, finally arriving at the precise combination angle, velocity, and spin that sent the ball careening into the basket. (Miller & Stentz, p. 50)

It is at that moment that he experiences a strong surge of new feelings which he had not experienced before. He realises that he does not want to lose the match. He tries to compose himself and resist all the distractions that would stop him from concentrating on the game. In this regard, Sicile-Kira asks

> Would Beethoven have created his Ninth Symphony? Would Einstein have come up with his theory of relativity? Temple Grandin (who has designed one-third of all the livestock-handling facilities in the United States) believes that her talent for solving concept problems is due to her 'ability to visualize and see the world in pictures,' which can be attributed to having ASD. (2014, p. 22)

In addition to his uniquely visual thinking mind, Colin also has remarkable language and communication skills. Asperger described these boys as "little professors" (1944, p. 39) as they talk often at great length about the topic of their interest. However, he finds it difficult to comprehend facial expressions and gestures. He has difficulties in comprehending the

nonverbal and pragmatic aspects of communication and fails to interpret the emotions of the speaker based on the modulation of their voice and nonverbal cues during conversation. Thus, he maintains a notebook to record the emotions associated with each facial expression. He refers to his notes to infer the feelings of the people around him. He is "more like an alien anthropologist stranded on Earth, with no choice but to master the local social codes and try to pass as human, or perish" (Miller & Stentz, p. 8). In the article entitled "Asperger Syndrome: An Overview", Fred R. Volkmar et al. comment that "Affectively, Asperger noted that these children had difficulties in dealing with their feelings, often tending to intellectualize them, and had poor empathy and difficulties in understanding social cues" (Miller & Stentz, p. 5).

Colin usually maintains a blank expression, so it is very difficult for his parents to know what he is thinking: "the hardest facial expression for another human being to read is a perfectly blank face" (Miller & Stentz, p. 27). This is because people with Asperger syndrome process faces as if they were mere objects without observing the facial signs and the context to which they are associated. They hardly interpret the emotional expression of the speaker. Thus it is that Colin uses the same speech patterns for both telephone and face to face communication.

Colin rarely uses filler words in his conversation, prompting Marie to advise him that people insert filler words when they engage in a discussion. She also orients him regarding the importance of engaging in a discussion by involving interesting observations and interjections. She similarly spends several days trying to teach him how to distinguish between a rhetorical question and a normal question, "She had drilled Colin for hours in the difficult art of distinguishing literal statements ('You look nice today') from metaphorical, idiomatic ones ('You make a better door than a window')" (Miller & Stentz, p. 87).

Conclusion

The individuals diagnosed with this neurological disorder have multiple challenges, but they often have something at which they excel. They have very good memory and are good in accomplishing many tasks that most people find boring. The novel stresses that it is crucial to develop these skills so that Aspergians can be successful. This can be achieved only when parents and caretakers decipher the symptoms at an early stage. The child can be analysed based on various factors, including the communication of emotions, body language, the ability to narrate events of the day, understand the nuances of language, the nuances of social interaction and healthy food habits. The novel indicates that instead of isolating a child diagnosed with the neurological disorder, an inclusive education should be provided. In the article "Nurturing Development: Treating Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder", Carol Korn-Bursztyn suggests that "When children can interact and imitate gestures and words, and engage in nonverbal problem solving, attendance in an inclusion program or in a general education preschool program with an additional teacher or aide is recommended (2011, p. 100). The support rendered by the mentors along with relevant treatment and medication will help children like Colin to lead a successful life.

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Editor's Essay

Borges's *Library of Babel*: Consciousness Assaults the Universe

Alfonso J. García-Osuna

The story of the alphabet, the story of the written word, is the story of civilisation itself. It is the story of a contrivance with which humanity has ceaselessly attempted to saturate its environment with meaning. Its invention accelerated the progress of knowledge in a manner that was inconceivable before its appearance; it made the repository of ideas exponentially summative, as it was now able to occupy a space that is infinitely broader than the limited landscapes of individual memory. We owe the development and methodisation of practically all our abstract concepts to the collective storehouse of ideas enabled by the alphabet.

This newly found capacity for abstraction altered our intellectual perspectives, redirecting their dominant focus from what had been local and tangible to what was now universal and ideational. The unstructured influx of raw data with which we tried to make sense of the world could now be subjected to a new method for managing and storing; as a consequence, our basic thought patterns began migrating from the rudimentary pursuit of subsistence and time-bound interests to the structured consideration of communal and transcendental affairs. It is in this context that Walter J. Ong writes that "[m]ore than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness". Notably, he adds that written language can be called "context free" or "autonomous", as it cannot be "directly questioned or contested as oral speech can because written discourse has been detached from its author" (2002, p. 77).

Evidently, no one can directly contradict a written text, for "[a]fter absolutely total and devastating refutation, it says exactly the same thing as before. This is one reason why 'the book says' is tantamount to 'it is true'" (Ong 2002, p. 78). This is an eloquent statement regarding the prescriptive power of the written word. Moreover, the concept of "holy book" is a vivid testament to the enduring vitality inherent in those symbols we call letters, to the normative power of the words they form and to the abstractions they bring into being. The alphabet allowed us to enhance our power to memorialise and standardise our assumptions about reality and to develop and enrich our capacity to conceive meaning and purpose in the universe.

The immense normative power of these abstractions is eloquently shown in an incident that took place in the highlands of Perú on November 16, 1532. As the chronicler Guamán Poma de Ayala tells it (Inca chronicler Tito Cusi Yupanqui and Spanish chronicler Francisco de Jerez have slightly different versions), Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro arrived at a meeting with the Inca god-king Atahualpa and sent his chaplain, father Valverde, ahead to speak with him. The priest told Atahualpa that his gods were false gods, to what the emperor replied, "who told you that?" The Dominican friar explained that it was in the Bible, and that the Bible told him. The curious Atahualpa asked to see this "Bible", to listen to this for himself. Handed the Bible, the emperor put it to his ear, and not hearing anything, disdainfully threw it on the ground. A furious Pizarro, seeing the Holy Book thus mishandled, ordered an immediate attack on the infidels, which ended with the devastation of the Inca army and the capture and imprisonment of the god-king (Dei 2003, p. 7). The violent Spanish reaction to the disrespect shown to written words, essentially ink markings on paper, clearly portrays the way in which those markings can create a subjective cosmos whose "reality" can be more convincing than the objective world captured by the senses. Plainly, and as Ong puts it, "writing transformed human consciousness."

The Inca god-king resided in the world. He was a flesh and blood, speaking individual whose words were clearly heard and obeyed by his subjects. The Spanish god was in an abstract "beyond" defined through written signs on collated and bound pages, and as written discourse is "detached from its author", that god's existence – His "reality" – was confirmed through

symbols that allowed Him to speak while residing in an inaccessible "beyond"; He was a notional entity, moreover, whose pronouncements, captured in the written word, were not open to debate. On that fateful November day, abstractions methodised by the written symbol proved mightier, more entangled with "reality" than the somatic, oral mode of understanding that was familiar to the Inca.

In Jorge Luis Borges's 1941 short story "The Library of Babel", the narrator portrays the universe as a vast, ergonomic, perhaps infinite library made up of recurring identical hexagonal rooms, galleries and spiral staircases. The galleries contain twenty bookshelves, five to each side of the hexagon, and their height is that of a normal librarian. There are sleeping compartments and bathrooms. The Library's inhabitants are explorers of sorts, always looking inside the books to find an elusive one that actually conveys meaning.

"The Library of Babel" is one of many stories in which the Argentine writer has explored humanity's variegated conjectures regarding the essential structure of reality. These range from the mystical ("El Aleph"; "The Circular Ruins") to the cumulative and geometric ("Funes the Memorious"; "Death and the Compass"). The consistent presumption underlying Borges's thought process in this regard is based on a simple truism: humanity can only typify these multiform conjectures through language. As such, the human mind gives structure and meaning to reality and the universe through the use of language; consequently, as seen in his Library, the universe will be endowed with an anthropocentric grammar that is alien to it, a logical structure expressed through language that only serves the needs of human consciousness. But this generates a connatural link between language and reality that allows our consciousness, aided by the logical organisation of language, to permeate our notions of reality with a conventional structure. In short, the object that language offers us as "the universe" is a frame within which, as Borges implies, we can only detect language.

Nevertheless, such a connatural link is formidable and compelling: it certainly explains the Spaniards' reaction to the Inca god-king's naive disdain for the Bible, as Pizarro and company assumed that written language expressed a profound reality because it allowed mere mortals to apprehend the propositional contents of God's thoughts. Such an image of "reality" was incomprehensible to the Inca. For this Amerindian culture, the Spaniards somehow expected the Bible to "say" what could only be "shown" or articulated orally, and this piece of processed tree bark and its amusing ink marks could only get between consciousness and its perception of the real world.

Borges incorporates ideas such as these into the fabric of his remarkable Library of Babel. The notion that with the written word humanity will somehow assemble the true image of reality–while proving at the same time that there is an underlying purpose to the universe–is thoroughly discredited by the contents of this library, the author's expressed proxy for the universe. The human being has assembled an intellection of the universe with the only tool available to it, language, so its only obtainable image is an artifact that is systematically described through language and manifested in written form. *Our* universe is, in short, a library.

Consequently, the author is committed to the notion that language is a mechanism intended to provide *meaning*, and meaning rests on human conceptualisations of reality and plays no fundamental role in how the universe works. Language is learned and is, hence, arbitrary and autonomous: it merely expresses concepts that originate in human subjectivity while creating sophistic circles that, like the author's celebrated short story "The Circular Ruins", lack a functional exit. With language we create *our own* universe; with it we do not not capture the

world, we only describe it using language's own internal logic, a logic based on religion, mathematics, natural philosophy and such concepts as are based on human constructs. This explains the distinctly human rationalisations regarding the universe's particular arrangement:

> Idealists argue that the hexagonal rooms are a necessary shape of absolute space, or at least of our *awareness* of space. They consider that a triangular or pentagonal chamber is inconceivable. (Mystics claim that their ecstasies reveal to them a circular chamber containing an enormous circular book with a continuous spine that goes completely around the walls. But their testimony is suspect, their words obscure. That cyclical book is God). (Borges 2017, p. 58)[1]

What we can assume from these rationalisations is that they are the subjective acts of consciousness, that is to say, inadequate internal representations of external context. There is a mark of genius in the conception of reality/the universe as a library in which we, all of us, search for the meaning of existence, for a catalogue of its essential traits, only to encounter the inadequacy of language. "Like all men of the Library, I've travelled in my youth, journeying in quest of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues" (Borges 2017, p. 58). And as we see in the gibberish contained in the Library's books, language is insufficient, as it breaks down when tasked with articulating the constitutive meaning of anything that is alien to the exigencies of consciousness. What we call reality can only be an object of the senses, a description.

There is another level at which our need to make sense of the universe is thwarted. That we can even "explain" reality is due to the fact that we can articulate that which our senses capture through that superb contrivance called language. When we search for meaning in the universe, that meaning can only be negotiated through the medium of language. But language is based on interactions between interlocutors, and as the contents of the Library's books prove, the insensible universe cannot speak to the Library's inhabitants. Borges's idea of universe-as-library then becomes an apt metaphor for humanity's chimerical concoction, that of a universe abounding in meaning. The Library's inhabitants enact the quixotic pursuit of interlocution with the universe; Borges articulates them as protagonists of an eternal quest story with an impossible *dénouement*.

At this point I'd like to ask a question that perhaps has been adequately answered in the previous paragraphs: Why a library as analogue for the universe? But there is an added level of complexity to the analogical function of the collection of data we call a library: A library is a systematised social space dedicated to the eradication of meaninglessness. In a way, a library endows the random circumstance of being conscious with some purpose; it is a repository for meaning-structures that help us define our ambient backdrop; the library is made with "us" in mind, a space in which deductive certainties are extant and seem largely unassailable. As such, the library is an eminently *social* space, and Borges's library metaphor is based on the idea that our perception of reality occurs within a social context. The idea is that we explore the universe with a parochial set of frames of reference, all of which are enabled by that consensual contrivance called the alphabet. As the writer explains, "[t]hat discovery (of the alphabet) enabled mankind, three hundred years ago, to formulate a general theory of the Library..." (Borges, 2017, p. 59). Accordingly, in his Library Borges displays humanity performing an age-old drama: we are constantly challenging the essential meaninglessness of the universe by reimagining and *socialising* its space through the contrivances of our consciousness. But the

[1] All translations are mine.

universe's impervious nature constantly obliterates our auspicious contrivances, so there can be no rational correspondence: a library is brimming with social substance; the universe is empty.

To decipher the universe we draw upon meaning-structures that systematise our *social* environment, structures that support the belief that "the universe, with its elegant appointments—its bookshelves, its enigmatic books, its indefatigable staircases for the traveller, and its latrines for the seated librarian—can only be the work of a god" (Borges 2017, p. 58).[2] This seems to be our only option, to resort to anthropocentric reasoning (which relies on the alphabet, on words) in the false hope of finding some fundamental purpose in our infinite environment. Discovering that letters are only one more meaningless set of objects in a senseless universe, we, the library's inhabitants, are confronted with the limitations of those anthropomorphic meaning-structures: "There are also letters on the front cover of each book; those letters neither disclose nor anticipate what the pages inside will say. I am aware that that lack of correspondence once struck men as mysterious" (Borges 2017, p. 58). In short, our explorations only confirm "the formless and chaotic nature of practically every book" (Borges 2017, p. 59).

The fruitless search for meaning feeds the basal anxiety of the perplexed librarians: "[m]an, the imperfect librarian, may be the product of happenstance..." (Borges 2017, p. 58). Yet we persist in exploring the contents of the Library's books in spite of the setbacks because, from time to time, we find chance combinations of letters that kindle tiny sparks of hope: "A book that my father once saw in a hexagon in circuit 15-95, consisted of the letters M C V perversely repeated from the first line to the last. Another (much consulted in this zone) is a mere labyrinth of letters whose penultimate page contains the phrase *O Time thy pyramids*" (Borges 2017, p. 59).

We persist in the search because consciousness compels human beings to infuse their environs with their own self, so the unadulterated understanding of anything outside human concerns is well-nigh inconceivable. As a result, consciousness cannot countenance existing within a vacant, meaningless environment. *Meaning*, then, is a creation of consciousness that has only one purpose: to satisfy the needs of consciousness.

Thus, an essential anxiety results from consciousness not being able to accept the haphazard purposelessness of its ambient substance (the Library). Moreover, because of this self-serving mechanism, the universe/library's inhabitants are hardwired to assume that there must be a path of communication between the universe and human consciousness. But this presumption requires that there be an autonomous something on the *outside*, a cosmic interlocutor that will respond – using words in the Library's books – to this basic need produced by consciousness. But there is no interlocutor to be found:

[2] This reminds one of Douglas Adams's "sentient puddle" badinage in *The Salmon of Doubt*: "This is rather as if you imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, This is an interesting world I find myself in—an interesting hole I find myself in — fits me rather neatly, doesn't it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!" This is such a powerful idea that as the sun rises in the sky and the air heats up and as, gradually, the puddle gets smaller and smaller, frantically hanging on to the notion that everything's going to be alright, because this world was meant to have him in it, was built to have him in it; so the moment he disappears catches him rather by surprise. I think this may be something we need to be on the watch out for." (Walters 2010, p. 61)

> It is recognised that for every coherent line or straightforward statement there are leagues of senseless cacophony, verbal nonsense, and incoherency. (I know of an untamed region whose librarians repudiate the "vain and superstitious habit" of trying to discover any meaning in the books, equating such a quest with the attempt to find meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines on the palm of the hand... They will admit that the inventors of writing imitated the twenty-five natural symbols, but contend that that adoption was fortuitous, coincidental, and that books in themselves have no meaning. That argument, as we shall see, is not entirely fallacious.) (Borges 2017, p. 59)

It is likely that the pre-literate Inca peoples subjugated by Pizarro did not experience consternation and bewilderment in the way that peoples with alphabets certainly do. Their universe rested upon non-empirical foundations and yet was very much an immediate presence with which they could dialogue and conduct negotiation. They heard the voice of the universe through their god-king and their high priests, from whom they could request guidance and to whom they could direct questions. The universe had meaning, in the Bakhtinian sense that meaning is produced by dialogue.[3] The god-king's ill treatment of the Bible – ostensibly because the Holy Book was unable to speak with him – anticipates Borges's implied injunction against relying on human social conventions like the alphabet (e.g. books, holy or not) in the attempt to communicate with the universe. Modern individuals can only dialogue with each other; for us, the universe is silent and our quest for its meaning is absurd.

Borges suggests that it is not feasible for human beings to capture reality's autonomous essence, as we can only have a conscious experience of the universe. This means that, as external stimuli are experienced, they enter a mental space that is saturated by our consciousness' meaning requirements. In Borges this is allegorised through the inhabitants' investigation: subjected to the meaning designs of their consciousness, the books are incompatible and can only spew nonsensical and random combinations of letters. Borges's Library/universe cannot provide the meaning we require. Because language – especially in its written form – is the way in which we rationalise (e.g. infuse anthropocentric significance) to the data captured by our senses, the universe as library is an image of *perpetua humana stultitia*, the folly of believing that in the search for the meaning of the universe we can do anything other than hold up a mirror to the demands of human consciousness. It is significant that featuring prominently in the Library's vestibules is a mirror:

> In the vestibule there is a mirror that faithfully duplicates appearances. Men often infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite—if it were, what need would there be for that illusory replication? I prefer to dream that the burnished surfaces represent and are a promise of infinitude. (Borges 2017, p. 57)

In short, the Library of Babel represents the anthropocentric language-frame inside of which we locate a universe that, by virtue of being utterly insensate and antithetical to consciousness, is unable to provide meaning.

[3] "In a global sense, there is nothing but dialogue—or rather, nothing that means which can exist apart from dialogue. Because human existence is inseparable from the desire to make meaning, and because meaning is only made in and through dialogue with others, Bakhtin is able to make the claim that 'where consciousness began, there dialogue began,' (Di 40) tagged by a corollary assertion: 'when dialogue ends, everything ends' (DI 252)." (Farmer 2020, n.p.).

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journal of arts & humanities

ISSN: 2187-0616