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*Editor in Chief*

Dr. Luisa Maria Arvide Cambra

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# Reinventing Histories: A Postcolonial Revisiting of Colonial Historiography

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 20 Mar 2025                      Revised on: 25 Apr 2025                      Accepted on: 30 Apr 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords – Colonial historiography, Decolonization, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, Postcolonial theory, Resistance.</b></p>	<p><i>Colonial historiography systematically portrayed colonized societies as inferior to justify Western dominance, framing them as backward "Others" in need of civilizing. Postcolonial theory, following the trails of Edward Said's Orientalism, challenges these narratives, exposing their role in reinforcing imperial power structures. Key scholars like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Leela Gandhi argue that reclaiming and rewriting history is essential to dismantling colonial legacies. Resistance to Eurocentric histories involves interrogating biased representations and centering marginalized voices. The critique extends to colonial policies of James Mill and Thomas Macaulay, particularly the imposition of English, which marginalized indigenous knowledge systems. Debates within postcolonial studies highlight tensions between Western frameworks and decolonial approaches, emphasizing the need for epistemologies rooted in local contexts. The struggle to decolonize history persists, as even postcolonial narratives sometimes inadvertently replicate colonial paradigms. Postcolonial historiography seeks to disrupt dominant narratives by prioritizing subaltern perspectives and challenging enduring power imbalances. This transformative approach underscores the political nature of history-writing and advocates for inclusive, pluralistic accounts of the past.</i></p>

[A]ll history is a story, is a narrative. So, the issue of the postcolonial people is to combat that dominant history, the colonial history which is the story of the West civilizing the world.

(Ashcroft, in an interview with Jose Varghese 83)

Right from the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which was an index to the systematic and strategic portrayal of the colonial people as politically, culturally and socially inferior

to the West, there have been innumerable attempts to explore colonial historiography from various perspectives. This paper concentrates on how the colonial historiographers treated the history of the colonized for the programmatic subjectification of the 'non-Western other,' and how postcolonial theory reviews colonial historiography. Western cultural practices are deeply intertwined with power dynamics, as *Orientalism* reveals. A major function of postcolonial theory therefore has been accepted as resistance to the dominant versions of history. Sridhar Rajeswaran believes that the entire notion of

postcolonial studies is “premised on a position of resistance” (5). In Fanon also one comes across the call for the need for an active “ontological resistance” (110). This resistance is to the images, histories and ideas perpetrated by the colonial powers about the colonized as well as to being “overdetermined from without” by them, as Fanon adds (116). Leela Gandhi holds that postcolonialism can be “seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). The re-writing of official histories thus becomes an important postcolonial project.

The manner in which the colonized were represented in colonial histories was adequate justification for the West to take up its so called ‘civilizing mission.’ The colonized were represented not descriptively but in such a way validating the necessity of Western interference and the implementation of their policies. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* exposes the claims of superiority the West raised over the East which is portrayed as the ‘other’ and inferior to the West. ‘The Orient features in the Western mind,’ comments Said, “as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (193). Neil Lazarus states that “the Orient’ emerges as an effect of Orientalist discourse: representation precedes and produces the reality which it can then claim merely to re-present, having obscured if not obliterated the earlier reality which, as a colonizing discourse, it had begun by misrepresenting. Hence Said’s reference to ‘the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (10-11).

C. Vijaysree comments: “A return to the past, a retrieval of the usable past, and an analysis of the community’s heritage and history emerge as important structural devices in all postcolonial writing” (qtd. in Zaidi 38). So, a postcolonial writer’s task is to demolish the image of one’s nation constructed by the West through history. Most of the ‘official histories’ deliberately misrepresented the colonized for the purpose of keeping them subservient and weak-willed.

Homi K. Bhabha asserts: Colonial discourse ...is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/ cultural/ historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited... the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origins, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction (qtd. in Panwar 16).

It has been demonstrated that history falls prey to the imperial motives of colonization and exploitation of the ‘non-Western Other.’ Whatever version of history is in the limelight is the one that has power, and may be assimilated as an integral part of the history of tomorrow. Besides history is a major area of study at all levels of education. No curriculum is prepared without giving adequate representation to the genre of history. The way the colonized is represented in histories remains as true version and is taught in academic institutions and may be accepted unquestioned by learners. G. N. Devy comments that the difficult task of “constructing historical narratives about India was made by European Indologists during the nineteenth century” and the “context for this development was that of colonialism” (1998, 2).

Edward Said has vehemently criticized Jones, Macaulay and other Orientalists for misrepresenting the colonized. Even Jones’ point of view of India was largely conditioned by Greek legends and histories which had depicted India as having an exotic and intractable culture and the European representations of India as a land ruled by despots in its travel books (Devy 1998, 77). Among the postcolonial theorists of the day, there are those who view colonization in a more positive light. Harish Trivedi criticizes Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989) wherein they “study plans and projections of imperial intervention rather than the reality of the native reaction to imperial intervention” (1995, viii). Trivedi in his significantly titled *Colonial Transactions* (1995) offers extended evidence of mutual exchange between the

British and the Indian in its various sections. He claims that there had been an exchange of ideas and resources between these two countries and that there is no need to perceive them with as much anxiety and concern.

The civilizing mission of the British marked a new stage in the development of colonialism. The natives were brought under administrative control as K. N. Panikkar articulates, presumably for improving their moral and material conditions (3). Panikkar also points out how the Indian intelligentsia's internalization of colonial history worked out in the Indian context. The concept of 'divine dispensation' was one of the obvious fall-outs. According to this, what occasioned God to will British conquest was the pre-colonial past, characterized by social degradation, religious superstition, and political anarchy. This recurring theme, advanced in colonial historiography as the justification for the conquest, also became the guilt-ridden intelligentsia's rationale for their own subjection (123).

James Mill is another colonial historiographer who has misrepresented India. In his *History of British India* published in 1817 in three volumes, Mill has tried to shatter the idea that India ever had a history, and to insinuate that the people of India had affinities with primitive societies which also characterized the developmental stages of Britain. (Niranjana 22). Mill's influence was not limited to the company's administrators. The Indian intelligentsia also succumbed to Mill's History (Panikkar 123).

The translations of Christian missionaries like the Serampore Baptists, William Carey and William Ward reveal their Orientalist perspectives. Niranjana declares that for 'the missionaries theology arises from a historicist model that sets up a series of oppositions between traditional and modern, undeveloped and developed. This kind of attempt to impose linear historical narratives on different civilizations obviously legitimizes and extends colonial domination' (20).

Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" dismissed indigenous Indian learning as outdated and irrelevant and averred the need for English education. He commented that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the

whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Harlow and Carter 58). It is quite ironical that a postcolonial writer like Rushdie himself affirmed the greatness of literature written in English over the vernacular in India. In the introduction to a special issue of the *New Yorker*, Rushdie wrote that the "true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind (50)". Pramod K. Mishra vehemently criticizes the position assumed by Rushdie and also analyzes the historical moment that generated Rushdie's comment in his "English Language, Postcolonial Subjectivity and Globalization in India" (398). Rushdie's judgment of the worth of literature written in Indian languages would not hold at all when the comparatively meager literary output in English from India is compared to the vast and divergent genres of literature produced in various Indian languages since independence. But there is a problem inherent in Rushdie's comment- that a writer of English literature still has to be accepted first in the West if s/he has to be recognized in India.

Theorists like Gauri Viswanathan have pointed out how the study of English had a colonial project to carry out. She explicates the agenda of Macaulay's Filtration Theory in this regard and states that it purported to filter down to the colonized people the colonial ideology of the supremacy of Western civilization and hence the inferiority of the colonized native population (116, 149). Filtration Theory was "predicated on the notion that cultural values percolate downward from a position of power and by enlisting the cooperation of the intermediate classes representing the native elite" (34). Quoting Macaulay's notorious words- a "class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect"- Viswanathan claims that the colonial project entailed the production of an Indian subjectivity suitable to the governance of the colonized country through the colonizer's language and literature.

The field of education witnessed the most powerful impact of colonial hegemony. The prefatory quotation in the first chapter of Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1995) which is taken from Trevelyan's *On the Education of the People of India* (1838) reads:

The passion for English knowledge has penetrated the most obscure, and extended to the most remote parts of India. The steam boats, passing up and down the Ganges, are boarded by native boys, begging not for money, but for books... Some gentlemen who were coming to Calcutta were astonished at the eagerness with which they were pressed for books by a troop of boys, who boarded the steamer from an obscure place called Comercolly. A Plato was lying on the table, and one of the party asked a boy whether that would serve his purpose. "Oh Yes" he exclaimed, "give me any book; all I want is a book". The gentle man at last hit upon the expedient of cutting up an old Quarterly Review; and distributing the articles among them.

Just as Charles Trevelyan proposed that the Indians were desirous of the 'English book,' E. M. Forster also privileged English education and its merits in comparison with Eastern education.

Ashcroft holds the view that by appropriating history as a form, as a genre, appropriating the language in which it is written, by appropriating mediums of publication, distribution, postcolonial readers can interpolate their own history, their story of the past (Varghese 83-4). But this is no easy task because all the norms that one relies on consciously or unconsciously for the narration of histories are what the European colonial masters have bequeathed. Criticizing the practice of giving undue weight to the colonizer's values, Said comments that "most cultural formations presumed the permanent primacy of the imperial power" (*Culture* 199). Referring to the urge of Third World historians to refer to works in European history Dipesh Chakrabarty states, "... "Europe" remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call "Indian", "Chinese", "Kenyan" and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe". In this sense, "Indian" history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of that history" (342). G. N. Devy testifies that colonialism creates a cultural demoralization. It

creates a false sense of shame in the minds of the colonized about their own history and traditions (*After Amnesia* 10). Bhabha in 'Of Mimicry and Man' presents the concept of 'colonial mimicry', and defines it as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference" (126). It's a theory about the constitution of subjectivity under colonialism. It has drastic results too. Chakrabarty comments: The mode of self-representation that the "Indian" can adopt here is what Homi Bhabha has justly called "mimetic." Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain "modern" subject of "European" history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain "grievously incomplete" (360). The attitude of colonial supremacy is again evident in the travel writings of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster and V.S. Naipaul.

The colonial discourses denigrated Indian practices as uncivilized and barbaric. It was through this sort of binary construction of values - privileging the West and decrying the Orient - that colonial histories attempted to legitimize and justify their practices of subjectification and exploitation of the Orient. The greatest contribution of postcolonial theory is the realization that all narratives are tainted by politics and are effective means for establishing power over the narrated. Postcolonial theory has succeeded in 'tempting' us out of our blissful ignorance of Eden, by making the 'Third World' question all forms of authority.

However, it is necessary to subject Said's work to a 'contrapuntal' reading, to consider the problems Aijas Ahmad finds with it, in some detail. Ahmad points at a number of errors that have crept into Said's *Orientalism*, in his essay which is divided into nine sections. Ahmad finds that Said 'offers mutually incompatible definitions of 'Orientalism' so as to deploy these stances, the Foucauldian and the Auerbachian simultaneously" (265). Ahmad comments:

These ambivalences about Auerbach and about humanism and Foucault's discourse theory, which no serious intellectual would want to use simply as a method of reading and classifying canonical books because the theory itself is inseparable from Nietzschean antihumanism and the currently dominant anti-realistic theories of representation (264).

Ahmad holds that Said located "Marx firmly within the boundaries of what he calls the 'western episteme'" (264), and "Foucault's thought was drawn against humanism" (266). On the whole, Ahmad claims that Said's work is self-divided not only between Auerbachian high-humanism and Nietzschean anti-humanism, but also between a host of irreconcilable positions in cultural theory' (267-8). Ahmad dwells at length on Said's subservient attitude towards Western narratives evidenced by the book. He adds:

With the exception of Said's own voice, the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very Western canonicity, which, Said complains, has always silenced the Orient. Who is silencing whom, who is refusing to permit a historicized encounter between the voice of the so called 'Orientalist' and the many voices that Orientalism is said to so utterly suppress, is a question very hard to determine as we read this book. It sometime appears that one is transfixed by the power of the very voice that one debunks (271).

### CONCLUSION

The postcolonial project of decolonizing historical narratives operates by exposing how colonial historiography systematically marginalized non-Western societies to justify domination. Said's *Orientalism* reveals how power dynamics shaped biased representations of the "Other," reinforcing imperial ideologies. Scholars like Fanon, Bhabha, and Gandhi advocate for reclaiming subjugated histories, challenging Eurocentric frameworks that persist in education and cultural discourse. Critiques of colonial historiography, such as Macaulay's dismissal of indigenous knowledge or Mill's erasure of Indian history, exemplify the

deliberate construction of inferiority. Yet, postcolonial resistance remains fraught with contradictions, as even revisionist narratives sometimes replicate colonial paradigms. What is required is a transformative historiography that centers marginalized voices, dismantles lingering colonial epistemologies, and embraces pluralistic truths. Rewriting history is not merely academic but a political act; one vital for healing cultural amnesia and forging equitable futures. By interrogating the past, postcolonial theory equips us to imagine alternatives to enduring structures of oppression.

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# Postcolonial Fiction: Constructing National Identity through Mythology in Krishna Udayashankar's *The Aryavarta Chronicles*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 29 Mar 2025 Revised on: 30 Apr 2025 Accepted on: 08 May 2025 ©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>). <b>Keywords—</b> Post-colonial fiction, Krishna Udayasankar's trilogy, Indian fiction in English</p>	<p><i>In the roughly four decades since the category of post-colonial literature made its appearance it has become one that is able to encompass within its broad parameters texts emanating from diverse locations and dealing with a multiplicity of issues and themes. The distinguishing characteristics that seem to typify these texts for most critics are those of movement and displacement, hybridity, multiplicity/plurality, alienation and the anguish that accompanies it. At the same time, however, there is a significant amount of fiction written within previously colonized countries that does not focus primarily on the issues of movement or displacement, or the anguish of alienation, hybridity and marginality, and instead turns its attention to the conflicts, struggles and materiality of post-colonial societies dealing not only with the aftermath of colonization but with a host of particular, local, internal problem. To address these questions and their implications for postcolonial fiction, I would like to do a brief reading of Krishna Udayasankar's trilogy, <i>The Aryavarta Chronicles: Govinda, Kaurava, Kurukshetra</i>, written over the period of 2012-2014. By re-reading the great war in the epic Mahabharat as a people's war for freedom rather than a religious text Udayasankar is able to re-align the nation's identity with the values enshrined in the Indian constitution which came into effect soon after India's independence from British colonialism.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1986 Fall issue of *Social Text* Frederic Jameson, in his article titled 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital', famously declared that "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel." Aijaz Ahmad promptly responded to this formulation in the Fall issue of *Social Text* in 1987 with his article 'Jameson's

Rhetoric of Otherness' challenging Jameson's theorisation of the 'Third World', and what followed was an intense debate on the 'Third World' novel. In this same period the theoretical issues of postcoloniality were also being debated. In the years that followed, the terms Third World, Commonwealth, and Minority Literature came to be called Post-Colonial Literature. Edward Said's *Orientalism* which had opened out the field of Post Colonial studies was published in 1979, so the next decade of the 1980s took up the questions of what should constitute postcolonialism, what should be its

parameters, and even what its nomenclature should be. At the same time in India, quite independent of this debate, there was a spate of publication of literary writing in English by authors like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth and many others that came to be categorized as post-colonial. Most of these authors took up issues related to nation and nationality. However, the turn of the century saw a diversification in the kind of literature emerging from a host of publishing houses which included science fiction, fantasy and even romance, shifting the emphasis from the issue of nation building. I will attempt to trace the history of post-colonial fiction in India in relation to questions of national identity, and then focusing specially on Krishna Udayashankar's *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, I will look at recent interest in the fiction emerging in the last few years on representing India's mythologies, often through material studies, in the process revisiting, interrogating, and rewriting the narrative of India's Hindu origins in the formulation of the nation. This recent fiction, however, is not categorized as post-colonial, and I will try to consider some of the issues that this raises for the category of post-colonial fiction itself.

From the 1980s since the category of post-colonial literature made its appearance it has become one that is able to encompass within its broad parameters texts emanating from diverse locations and dealing with a multiplicity of issues and themes. The distinguishing characteristics that seem to typify these texts for most critics - or at least the features that critics have looked for and found at the expense of others - are those of movement and displacement, hybridity, multiplicity/plurality, alienation and the anguish that accompanies it. And by virtue of being post-colonial and therefore emanating at one level from a history of colonization, suppression and marginalization, these texts are also presumed to make representations of the Other spaces they inhabit, that are alternatives to those provided by earlier dominant, colonialist literature. Post-colonial fiction, due its very categorization, is regarded as attempting to give voice to earlier suppressed peoples and spaces and thereby providing a corrective to the appropriation of these identities by colonialist narratives that 'orientalized' them for the purpose of maintaining and justifying their power. This literature is viewed as attempting to deconstruct the

hegemonic binary of the Occident and the Orient which Edward Said analyses in his seminal text *Orientalism*. Said writes, "Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is - and does not simply represent - a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world." (Said, 12)

The growing corpus of fictional writing that is increasingly categorized as postcolonial in preference to the outmoded categories of Commonwealth, Third World, or Minority literature, is then typified by concerns of diasporic communities, exile, spatial movement and displacement, fractured identities. The most visible post-colonial authors are those who write from the metropolitan center, looking back at their previously colonized countries, as well as trying to articulate the complex identity of their immigrant communities which attempts to straddle tradition and modernity, alienation and belonging, hope and loss. In view of global politics the category of postcolonial literature then is broad enough to cover almost any contemporary fiction that deals with nations, populations, issues of identity or history, and thus seems to lose all specificity. At the same time, however, there is a significant amount of fiction written within previously colonized countries that does not focus primarily on the issues of movement or displacement, or the anguish of alienation, hybridity and marginality, and instead turns its attention to the conflicts, struggles and materiality of post-colonial societies dealing not only with the aftermath of colonization but with a host of particular, local, internal problem. This fiction, however, is not always seen as representative of postcolonial literature, and often not included in this category, even as it attempts to come to terms with issues of multiple and fractured identities caused by the arbitrary national borders drawn by the colonial powers.

## II. SHIFTING TERRAIN OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The last decade has seen a shift in the subject matter as well as in the quantity of Indians writing and being published in English. The burgeoning of Indian writing in English in the last decade makes the 1980's 'explosion' look like a mere trickle. This writing covers all possible areas from children's literature, young adult

literature, detective fiction, fantasy, romances – even Mills & Boons set in India and written by an Indian author. Much of this work is not aimed at international audiences and therefore does not make any conscious attempt to represent an ‘Indian’ identity that can easily be unpacked by the non-Indian reader, in the manner that Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things* does with its focus on inter caste relationships or Indian Communism, or Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* which grapples with fractured identities of those who choose to immigrate and settle in the West. At one level the democratization of writing and publishing in English has shaken the hold of writers who belonged to the elite school of what was dubbed The St Stephens School of writers, which included writers like Vikram Seth who did not actually go to Stephens but were put in that category anyway. This has allowed a wide range of ideas, interests, and an experimentation with narratives to emerge. At the same time the growing educated middle class has created a reading public that is eager to sample a variety of writing in English as can be seen from the lists of titles on the home pages of publishing houses in India.

Out of this corpus of work, I would like to focus on the rewriting of mythologies, an area that is seeing a lot of activity in the last few years with authors such as Ashok Banker, Devdutt Pattanaik and Krishna Udayasankar, to name a few. My interest in studying these texts is to analyze their construction of an originary Bharat, that Vedic, Hindu past from which India is supposed to have been formed. This interest is, of course, driven by the surge of Hindutva politics in recent time, one not witnessed in independent India before. In this narrative Indian mythology becomes a monolithic representation of the history of ancient India, synonymous with a Vedic, Hindu India which seamlessly coalesces with a Hindutva future, based on the reasoning that the mythological epics narrate the first traceable civilization of the subcontinent. What is the role of traveling, not spatially but temporally back in time, to rewrite mythology as popular best seller, in this project of nation building? How do issues of displacement and alienation work when familiar spaces, ideas, concepts are seen from the distance of thousands of years rather than thousands of kilometres?

To address these questions and their implications for postcolonial fiction, I would like to do a brief reading of Krishna Udayasankar’s trilogy, *The Aryavarta Chronicles: Govinda, Kaurava, Kurukshetra*, written over the period of 2012-2014. In the Author’s Note Udayasankar calls her trilogy mytho-history as opposed to mythology, and says that she will look at the world of the Mahabharat not as “a land of demigods and demons in strife, but as an empire of nobles, commoners and forest-dwellers in socio-economic conflict.” Udayasankar adds, “We are the stories we tell. *The Aryavarta Chronicles* are ... a construction of reality based on a completely different set of assumptions – a distinction that is important because constructing shared reality is what links individual to society, however widely we may define the latter.” (vii)

Udayasankar says that she did a lot of research before she started writing the trilogy and her list of resources is impressive, ranging from Romila Thapar’s *The Penguin History of Ancient India*, to alternative Mahabharats such as the Bhil Mahabharat and the Indonesian Kakawain, to analytical studies of Vedic and Upanishadic literature. Her construction of mytho-history is then a material history of mythical past; a shift from ideological history to a history based on archeology and analysis of material conditions. In consciously writing a ‘mytho-history’ of the well-known epic myth Mahabharat Udayasankar is performing the role of Benjamin’s historical materialist. Her historical materialist version of the Mahabharat serves to destabilize the deployment of the myth as historical fact which narrativizes the nation as seamlessly evolving from a glorious, advanced civilization to a unique, progressive Hindu nation in the present. In *The Aryavarta Chronicles* “historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past”, to quote Benjamin again. She rewrites the magical past of superheroes and super inventions, of grand totalizing narratives, as a history that analyzes power struggles between kingdoms, peoples, and resources within a space she terms the Aryavarta, to which she even outlines a ‘national’, geographical boundary.

Udayasankar’s protagonist is Krishna, but she calls him by his less familiar name, Govinda, and uses him to represent the ideology behind her revisionist epic. According to her narrative, neither the Kauravs nor the Pandavs wanted war, and Govinda is instrumental in bringing the two sides along with all

### III. MYTHOLOGY AND THE NATION: KRISHNA UDAYSANKAR’S ARYAVARTA CHRONICLES

their allies to the brink of war in a bid to illustrate to them how important it is to forge peace. Both sides have the terrible astra weapons that are in control of only a few; the fear is what would happen if they fell into the hands of the 'wrong' people. Her narrative consciously gestures to the nuclear stockpiles that are supposed to persuade countries to maintain peace at all cost because the price of nuclear warfare is too terrible to contemplate. Indeed, her descriptions of the destruction caused by astra weapons closely follows those of the destruction caused by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, it is only when war is imminent that she has Govinda articulate the nation that he hopes to see rise out of the ashes: "A realm of the people, for the people." (Kuruksheeta, 145) When Abhimanyu goes to the forest people, the rikshasas or the tree people, he elaborates on this idea by arguing that the war is a war for the people, not a war for kingdoms. He says to Hidimbya, their Chief,

...it is not I who am the true heir to Dharma Yudhishtir's throne. It is you. ...Can your people trust that you will fight this war, not to make Dharma emperor but to prove that he could not have lost his empire in the first place? This is revolution, Chief, it is a way of telling every living person in Aryavarta that no one, not even its Emperor, can treat its people with impunity. Aryavarta belongs, has always belonged, to its people. It was never any emperor's to lose. (Kuruksheeta, 73)

The Mahabharat then becomes much more than a battle for power or land; it becomes a revolution to change a hierarchical world order to allow the common people to become sovereign. Duryodhan wonders if Govinda is right in arguing that

It was not Dharma Yudhishtir alone who was the problem, but the very system, the way of the world around them, which had permitted him to act the way he had. Was it not right to tear down such a system than to merely resist one tyrant who abused his position? (Kuruksheeta, 155)

Udayasankar's originary narrative of modern India is then realized by constructing the past not simply in terms of kings and kingdoms but as surge for a nationhood which is imagined by the people - the peasants, common soldiers, artisans, those

marginalized in the forests and tribalized - nationhood coming out of a desire for sovereignty, to live a life free of bondage through a sharing of resources and technology to make a prosperous people - a nation constituted of the people, made by the people, through their blood, marching towards an equal future. The retelling of the Mahabharat story does not trace India's history back to a superior Hindutva past to pave the way for an exclusionary Hindu nation; instead, it employs the modern ideas of democracy and equality as age old ideas that blood was shed over in the past in order to envisage a future nation where prosperity comes out of sharing technology and resources, both human and natural. Udayasankar's nation is an all inclusive, pluralistic, tolerant, socialist, non-hierarchical one.

In his thought provoking book *Playing the Nation Game: The Ambiguities of Nationalism in India*, Benjamin Zachariah writes, "Modern nations, we are told, write their histories retrospectively in order to justify their presents by their pasts. So we have learned to take nationalism as a claim in the collective existence and consciousness of a group of people in search of a state and of state power." (13) Zachariah argues that all nationalisms are exclusionary because they mobilize to form a state that is distinguishable from other states, and therefore define those values that are specifically theirs, and in the process exclude those which are not. Zachariah's argument comes from the familiar position that all nationalisms are dangerous. Udayasankar seems to be aware of the dangers of exclusionary nationalism and therefore reconstructs the Mahabharat narrative to posit a nationalism that emerges from a desire for freedom that is inherent in every individual.

Aijaz Ahmad questions Jameson's slippage between 'nation' and 'collectivity' when using the term 'national allegory' in his article 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness', and asks if 'nation' and 'collectivity' are the same thing. Ahmad writes, "The difficulty of this shift in vocabulary is that one may indeed connect one's personal experience to a 'collectivity' - in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village, prison - combining the private and the public, and in some sense 'allegorizing' the individual experience, without involving the category of 'the nation' or necessarily referring back to the 'experience of colonialism and imperialism'. (Ahmad, 110)

Udayasankar's *The Aryavarta Chronicles* is a fitting example of Ahmad's definition of 'collectivity' as a form of nationhood which encompasses the multiple aspects of the citizen's personal experience rather than narrowing and restricting it to the experience of colonialism. Udayasankar travels back in time and employs popular mythology and combines it with historical research to reimagine the project of nation building as inclusive 'collectivities'.

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#### IV. CONCLUSION

We return then to the category of postcolonial fiction. In the many years after decolonization postcolonial fiction has moved away from the immediate effects of colonization but is still striving for a way of constructing an identity for the nation that has been defined by boundaries that the colonizers have imprisoned the nation within. Krishna Udayasankar's *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, published from 2012 to 2014, is directly addressing the issue of religion in constructing a national identity by returning to the foundational religious mythology that is being used to legitimise it. By re-reading the great war in the epic *Mahabharat* as a people's war for freedom rather than a religious text Udayasankar is able to re-align the nation's identity with the values enshrined in the Indian constitution which came into effect soon after India's independence from British colonialism.

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# Magical Metamorphosis: Trauma and Recovery in Harry Potter Series and Shiva Trilogy

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p><b>Received on: 15 Apr 2025</b></p> <p><b>Revised on: 12 May 2025</b></p> <p><b>Accepted on: 17 May 2025</b></p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> Shiva trilogy, Harry Potter, trauma, psychoanalytic theory, pluralistic trauma theory.</p>	<p><i>The field of psychological research has witnessed remarkable advancement in understanding mental health over the last hundred years, significantly enhancing our comprehension of psychological well-being. While early studies primarily focused on severe psychiatric conditions, contemporary mental health awareness necessitates a broader perspective that encompasses the full spectrum of psychological challenges. Of particular concern are the subtle, day-to-day stressors and emotional difficulties that, though often overlooked, can accumulate over time to create significant psychological distress. This investigation traces the development and evolution of trauma studies through diverse scholarly perspectives, including medical professionals, academic researchers, theoretical frameworks, and clinical practitioners. By examining the progression from early Psychoanalytic theory to contemporary Pluralistic Trauma theory in literature, this research creates a comprehensive understanding of how trauma manifests across a spectrum of severity. This theoretical framework is then applied to analyze the representation of trauma in both the Shiva Trilogy and Harry Potter series, examining how these works portray various forms of psychological wounds and their impact on character development. Through careful analysis, this study demonstrates that trauma exists on a continuum rather than being limited to severe cases requiring clinical intervention. This research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing minor psychological wounds before they compound into more serious conditions. By examining how both literary series represent this spectrum of traumatic experiences, from subtle emotional injuries to profound psychological wounds, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of trauma and its effects on human psychology.</i></p>

## Origin and Evolution

The interrelation between literature and human psychology is a complex and convoluted one

which cannot be unravelled to separate the two. Literature and Reality are considered to be reflections of each other in their essence; the way

reality creates literature, and the way literature influences reality.

The world is a massive web built by a diverse system of strings that is always branching and evolving, and this evolution process could be followed through the literature. The psyche of human minds as individuals and as a society influences the literature produced, which in turn manipulates the human psyche. This research's interest lies in exploring the literature that has had a notable impact on mentality through time and space, and how that mass mentality has, in turn, influenced the present-day literature, media, and society in totality.

Since the advent of Psychology, researchers from various fields have been exploring and establishing numerous branches of the study. One such branch is the focus of this research: Trauma.

Since its origin, the world has followed one single fundamental practice, War. Be it for land, food, water, capital, religion, caste, creed, colour, gender, sexuality, nationality, species, language, clothing, rights, education; International wars, political wars, personal wars, financial wars, psychological wars, domestic wars; our world has been at war since its genesis. And will continue its wars long after we are gone.

Human forays into war and their effects on the world at both large and small scales can be found within the literature written around the times of a particular war. The collections of these recollections that influenced these literary works, the people who experienced those horrors first-hand, even second-hand, have affected the psyche of those who haven't.

The literary works revolving around the trauma of war become sympathetic read for those who haven't experienced War themselves but have gone through some manner of trauma in their lives. That in turn affects the literature they create. And hence, the cycle continues unbroken.

It was the effect of the World Wars that generated the urgent requirement of delving deeper into the psychological impact of the large-scale destruction and carnage on the minds of people who actually fought the wars on the front lines, as the lingering effects continued to plague them long after their return from the front lines.

Psychological trauma has been studied extensively since its genesis and has been interpreted and explained in numerous ways over time. But even as people have tried to explain it, they have still agreed that there is no singular explanation for Trauma that could encompass it in its entirety.

### **Evolution of the Understanding of Psychological Trauma:**

The following timeline focuses on the major milestones in chronological order that doesn't consider an equal amount of the passage of time between them. This leads to a timeline that covers only a few year's worth of studies for a few decades, and then picks up speed as the psychological studies gained traction. It glosses over a lot of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when there were no major findings or results of the studies, and details the last decade in-depth due to major breakthroughs.

#### **1880s:**

##### **Jean-Martin Charcot**

Trauma has been a subject of study as a component of various medical and psychological studies in the past. One of the earliest mentions of trauma includes the investigation of hysteria in women by Jean-Martin Charcot in the 1880s through his work with traumatized women in the Salpêtrière hospital. He is attributed as the first person to have studied, documented and understood it as a mental issue instead of the common belief that hysteria originated from the uterus, and to have established that physiological symptoms originate from psychological issues (Mohácsi, 2021).

##### **Sigmund Freud- Psychoanalytic theory**

The study of Psychology and its inclusion into literary works developed with Charcot's follower Sigmund Freud's forays into the inner workings of the brain in the form of a seedling that has slowly been growing into a vast ecosystem of a tree, whose roots lie in his Psychoanalytical theory. The theory of psychoanalysis was developed from the observations of traumatised patients and the conclusion that verbalizing the traumatic memories had an impact in alleviating the symptoms and hence the causes.

In the simplest terms, Psychoanalytical theory states that: "Our childhood experiences and unconscious desires influence our behaviour" which

encompasses the human psyche in its entirety. Freud postulated that these unconscious desires are manifested and can be recognized through our dreams. His division of the levels of consciousness has proved to be the paving stone in our current understanding of human behaviour (Abubakar,2017).

The Psychoanalytical theory was introduced into literature in the 1960s in the post-war era that advocated that following the same vein as dreams express unconscious desires, literary texts also express the author's unconscious desires. A Psychoanalytical reading of the literary text strives to uncover the inner workings of the author's mind through the analysis of their creations.

While Freud's major focus has been on the unconscious and repressed sexual desires, the consequent psychological theories, terms and definitions that have been formed, evolve from the theory of Psychoanalysis, and explore various aspects of the human psyche in depth.

Since a lot of the theories are interconnected and overlap at times, some of those theories would be used within the research to further enhance the understanding of the inner workings of the brain.

#### **WWI:**

##### **Sandor Ferenczi**

One of the notable contributions to the study of Trauma as its own study has been made by Sandor Ferenczi during the First World War. His work as a medical officer laid the foundations for his research into psychological trauma on the basis of his observations of the soldiers. His papers and fragments of notes that provide a deeper insight into psychological trauma have been consolidated by Jay B Frankel in "Ferenczi's trauma theory" (Frankel, 1998).

#### **1900s:**

##### **Long-term effect on returning soldiers**

The terms 'combat exhaustion' and 'shell shock' were coined and used in relation to the experiences of soldiers in the world wars to describe their nervous symptoms in an attempt to understand the impact of their experiences in battle and their long-term consequences. The initial analysis believed that the extreme exhaustion due to physical stress and lack of sleep for the fear of the enemy experienced in combination by the soldiers in the immediate vicinity

of the exploding bomb shells were affected by the sudden shock of the force and noise (Mohácsi, 2021).

Freud's statements on the recurring dreams of the war veterans in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a means the brain came up to deal with the experiences to bring up the memories in dreams, unable to recall them while awake, was later used by Cathy Caruth to build the foundations of Trauma theory. Freud believed that the mind experiencing such severe shock was unable to comprehend and process the event consciously, so it was pushed into the unconscious brain. The dreams became the only way for the brain to deal with the experience, which led to the repeated dreams until it was processed by the conscious brain (Freud, 1920).

#### **1980s:**

##### **Recognition of term PTSD by APA in 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'**

Trauma gained official recognition for the first time in the 1980s with the addition of the term PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) by APA in 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders'. The term was used in relation to the returning war veterans and the lingering long-term effects of the battlefield they still carried with them in the form of severe anxiety, panic attacks, flashbacks, hallucinations etc.

Sophie Isobel et al. have presented this problem of a definitive definition in "Psychological Trauma in the Context of Familial Relationships: A Concept Analysis" asserting the trauma doesn't exist as a unitary concept, which exhibits a massive potential for further exploration into the concept of psychological trauma. It does place emphasis on comparison and contrast between different definitions and terms of trauma in an attempt at understanding it, and quotes various forms of trauma definitions synthesised from literature, and insists on the impossibility of binding the overall concept of trauma into one definition (Isobel et al., 2017).

Instead of falling into the trap of comparisons and justifications between the unending explanations of Psychological Trauma, this research considers as a guideline, Trauma that has been defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology. Over time the definition of Trauma has been coalesced into a simple explanation by the American Psychology Association. The APA

Dictionary of Psychology defines trauma as “any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person’s attitudes, behaviour, and other aspects of functioning. Traumatic events include those caused by human behaviour as well as by nature and often challenge an individual’s view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place” (Baldick, 2008).

Examples of such an event could be a war zone, an accident, an abusive situation, a culmination of stressful incidents, a natural disaster, a loss, a physical or emotionally threatening situation etc. Trauma is highly subjective and is experienced and perceived differently by everyone, and the intensity varies over a broad spectrum. But generally, the response to trauma often results in a feeling of breathlessness, shock, helplessness, dejection, dizziness, and being overwhelmed. A person may even have trouble processing the traumatic event. The response could be felt both immediately after the event, and even in long term. Trauma can affect a person adversely even long term. Sometimes, due to the persistence of these symptoms, trauma could even evolve into a mental health disorder known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Baldick, 2008).

### **1990s: Trauma in Literature**

#### **Traditional Trauma Theory**

The reality of trauma has been reflected in literature since time immemorial, even when there was no explicit recognition until a few decades ago. The concept of Trauma theory was first introduced into literature through the works of Cathy Caruth in the 1990s, who pioneered the Traditional Trauma Theory model, which views trauma as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. This model was largely based on the works of Sigmund Freud (Caruth, 1996).

Cathy Caruth put a new spin on trauma through *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* where she explores the unspoken consequences of trauma on its survivors through literary and media works instead of using them as case studies from a psychiatric perspective. She explores the long-term effects of traumatic events and references to the works of Freud and Lacan to provide

an obvious insight into the causes and effects of trauma.

The Caruthian model of trauma asserts that trauma is a wound on the mind, invisible to the eye, instead of the visible wounds on the body, inflicted with a sudden abruptness that cannot be comprehended by the mind, and the consequent suffering is unrepresentable. “At the heart of these stories is thus an enigmatic testimony not only to the nature of violent events but to what, in trauma, resists simple comprehension” (Caruth, 1996)

Trauma theory takes it a step deeper than the unconscious desires, and strives to uncover the trauma buried in the unconscious over time, that affects a person’s quality of life, their actions, reactions and choices.

Since its introduction into literature, the concept of Trauma theory has encouraged academics to look at literary texts with a new perspective, identifying the elements of trauma.

#### **Pluralistic Trauma Theory**

This model was felt lacking in certain aspects towards the understanding of human psyche in its entirety and was soon followed by a new model into a more wholesome concept that expands upon the previous model and makes an attempt at overcoming any of its shortcomings.

Pluralistic Trauma Theory suggests that linguistic fragmentation is just one aspect of trauma instead of being the centralised effect as postulated by Traditional Trauma Theory. It encompasses the Traditional trauma theory approach and evolves around the foundations laid by the previous researchers. This approach provides a considerable amount of attention to the variability of Traumatic representations, in terms of its causes, effects and expression (Balaev, 2018).

Michelle Balaev provides the lifespan of trauma theory from its genesis as a side note in Sigmund Freud’s research into the human psyche, follows it to the introduction into literature through the Traditional Trauma theory model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, to its present form developed by Criticism as Pluralistic Trauma theory in “Trauma Studies”.

Pluralistic trauma theory proves to be a more wholesome evolution of the numerous psychological theories, and focuses on the entirety of the broad spectrum of experiences that affect the mind negatively, instead of taking a comparatively narrower approach of focusing on one of the extreme aspects. This theory works as a conduit between the scattered aspects of all the psychological theories to create a deeper understanding of the human mind and provides clarity into its complexities (Balaev, 2018).

The Pluralistic approach to trauma attempts to cover the range of trauma from as severe as that of a war, sexual assault, an abusive situation to as mild as a day-to-day occurrence of social rejection, loss of a relationship or an academic setback. It focuses on an inclusive perspective that attempts to understand the subjectivity of trauma depending on the life experience of the subject in question (Balaev, 2018).

*Harry Potter* and *Shiva Trilogy* both portray the protagonists elevated on a pedestal of the saviour, chosen one and a hero for the new world they have stepped into. The journey of these characters has a lot of similarities with Joseph Campbell's depiction of a Hero. Joseph Campbell chronicles the journey of a typical hero in stages (Polkowska, 2020). The first stage begins with the hero dwelling in the ordinary world, oblivious to any special attributes that might differentiate him from the masses. The next begins with the discovery of a world previously hidden from, where he belongs through his heritage. The discovery is usually accompanied by a call to take up arms and set off on an adventure to save the world. He is thrown into this new world with barely any introduction and instruction, only equipped with some sort of supernatural gift to aid him in his quest, and usually companions to help share his perils with. Next, he undertakes a perilous and often fatal journey rife with trials, character development, gaining wisdom and a final fight for his reward. Once the journey is completed and the goal reached, it's time for him to go back home to the ordinary world again, having acquired enlightenment. Katarzyna Polkowska in "Rick Riordan's 'Percy Jackson' as Joseph Campbell's Hero with a Thousand Faces" scrutinises the journey and struggles undergone by Percy Jackson in order to determine whether it fits the mould of a hero created by several schools of thought (Polkowska, 2020).

The twenty-first century has seen an integration of mythology into contemporary literature as an attempt at the revival of the oft-forgotten stories of older civilizations, the elements of which can be seen in the works of both the authors.

In "Death as a Beginning: The Transformation of Hades, Persephone, and Cleopatra in Children's and Youth Culture" by Viktoryia Bartsevich et al. explores the representation of these mythological characters as depicted to suit present-day beliefs. The research focuses on the transformation of the mythological characters who used to be portrayed as intimidating and untouchable to their seemingly mocking present-day representations. While the Older texts present the mythological figures in an all-powerful, dangerous and downright scary light, *Harry Potter* is the prime example of modernising and using these figures as convenient to the plot. The Kraken has been depicted as the friendly squid, the Sphinx has been reduced to a piece of a game, the dragons likewise a comparatively tamer version of the mighty beasts of the old, are just a task to be completed; while the bogeyman- Lord Voldemort, a human wizard has been demonized in comparison to seem a vastly more dangerous foe (Bartsevich et al., 2019).

*Shiva trilogy* on the other hand is an attempt to view mythology in the currently understandable manner by moving backwards in time, attempting to humanize the Gods, and depicting their lives through the glass of human perspective. Amish Tripathi has given new meaning to the blend of myth and reality through the story of a man of flesh and blood elevated to the status of God through his Karma. The trilogy follows Shiva on his quest to provide better opportunities for his tribe, turning him towards the path of a Saviour facing the tests and trials in order to meet expectations and ultimately triumph. The work has been heavily influenced by Hindu mythology and the origin stories of the deities. Abhinaba Chatterjee explores the influence of Hindu mythological works in the fictional world created by Amish Tripathi in "Humanizing Theography through Mystical Mythology: Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" (Chatterjee). In a similar vein, Dharmapada Jena has traced the elements of trauma depicted throughout the mythological texts and presented it through "Negotiating The Mahabharata as a Trauma Narrative" and "Narrative Tools and Strategies:

Representation of Trauma in The Mahabharata” which paves the pathway towards the search for the elements of Trauma in Amish Tripathi’s *Shiva Trilogy* from both the modernised and original perspective (Jena, 2022).

J K Rowling has created a completely different world existing within our world that functions on the same foundations, but varies vastly in its integral structure. Her creation has seen a drastic transformation into the perspective of the general populace on everything ominous, different, and unexplained. *Harry Potter* has elevated magic from a feared phenomenon to a household conversation topic. At the same time, it has shown the magicals as sentient beings, just as we are. They also feel pain, fear and happiness. They can also be recognized as good and evil, the same as humans. They are also human. They just have magic, and Magic doesn’t solve all the problems with just a wave of the wand.

Nurul Fitri explores the life of Lord Voldemort from a Psychoanalytical perspective in “THE CHARACTERIZATION OF LORD VOLDEMORT IN NOVEL HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE BY J.K ROWLING SEEN FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS” in an attempt to understand the Antagonist, his motives, experiences, choices and actions. The research follows the life of Tom Riddle, abandoned by his father even before he was born, lost his mother during his birth, growing up in an orphanage. Always vilified and bullied for being different he grew up resenting others and once strong enough to turn the tables, turned into a bullying tyrant himself. Fitri delves into the experiences and motivations that shaped Tom Riddle from a helpless child into the self-fashioned fearsome tyrant Lord Voldemort (Fitri, 2018).

Both these works provide a peep into vastly opposing political scenarios, set in the Ancient time and the turn of the present Century. While the political and cultural scenario of *Harry Potter* follows along in the same vein as the corresponding society, Dr. Dushyant Nimavat has explored the emergence of the socio-cultural transformation in Amish Tripathi’s work from the Ancient times to the present in “Political and Cultural discourse in Amish Tripathi’s Scion of Ikshvaku” (Nimavat, 2019).

You-shuan Shiong and Ya-huei Wang focus on the impact of the type of reinforcement received during adolescence on the development of self-identity through “Trauma, Love, and Identity Development in Rowling’s Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban” in a bid to explore the Protagonist and his choices as influenced by the actions of others around him. The research focuses on Harry’s adolescence period in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and the difficulties faced by him in the form of lack of a loving family, trials in a bid to survive and save an innocent godfather- his last hope for a family; and his perseverance into a healthy self-identity despite all the hardships. Puberty is a massive milestone in human life, even more so when one adds mythological aspects to said life. Harry is no different than any other teenager in that aspect, and goes through really catastrophic and seemingly-catastrophic events (Shiong and Wang, 2022).

It is common to have an identity crisis after a drastic cultural shift, which is depicted in “Cultural Analysis of Amish Tripathi’s Shiva Trilogy” by R. Devendiran and Dr. B. Kathiresan (Devendiran and Kathiresan, 2020).

Both these works begin with the character’s journey leaving their natural habitat towards a new environment. While Shiva migrates with this tribe to Meluha, leaving his harsh and exacting homeland behind completely, Harry must return to face the reality of his dismal home every year. Both have been offered better living circumstances and a chance at true happiness, but Shiva has mixed feelings before the migration due to his attachment to his roots, while Harry jumps for joy at leaving Privet Drive due to a less-than-ideal life.

Both these works imbibe the concept of the beast within as can be seen in “From Spirituality to Animality of Humanity: An Eschatological Study of the Shiva Trilogy” by Albin Shaju Paul; and in “THE CAT WHO READS THE MAP: Posthumanism and Animality in Harry Potter” by Jose Rodolfo da Silva (Rodolfo da Silva, 2009).

These elements can be seen in the *Shiva trilogy* through the Nagas, the deformed, the exiled and the outcasts, giving a visual representation of the spirit animal. The concept of the animal instincts has been a prevalent part of Hindu mythology, from the well-

known Avatara of Lord Vishnu in the form of Narsimha, Lord Shiva's incarnation as Lord Hanuman and Sharabha to the actual replacement of the heads of King Daksha and Lord Ganesha with animal heads to resurrect them. *Harry Potter* depicts the essence of the animals through a Patronus that takes the shape of your inner animal, or the animal you feel most connected to. The ability to transform into an animal also translates the traits of those animals into the human form (Tripathi, 2010).

Society is an intricate web structure that functions in connection to each other as a whole, but that connection overlooks the broken strands on the edges as long as the structure remains intact. Hussein, Azmi & Al-Subaihi explore the multifaceted aspects of alienation and marginalization faced by various characters and species, its impact on the psyche, and the consequences at the edges of this structure through "Alienation in Harry Potter". The article takes into account specific characters as examples of the alienation experienced by their entire species, such as the muggles and the house elves (Hussein et al., 2021).

Both the works also make ample use of symbolism throughout the character's journey, as has been depicted by Louise Jensby in "Athene McGonagall and the Devine Owl - The Use of Ancient Greek Myths as Imagery in Harry Potter" (Jensby, 2019) as well as by G. Aiswarya and Dr. P. Madhan in "Symbolism in Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy: A Study*" (Aiswarya and Madhan, 2018).

In "They like being enslaved"? British Imperialist Rhetoric and the Wizards' Hegemonic Discourse in Harry Potter", Juliana Valadão Lopes analyses the oppression of subaltern species like house-elves, goblins and centaurs by the superior magicals and how the hierarchy is subverted by the subalterns. The focus of this research lies in the political and social interactions of different species, especially between those that can be categorised as the oppressor and the oppressed, such as wizardkind suppressing the centaurs, goblins, elves etc. and the actions of the suppressed species in order to combat their treatment (Lopes, 2019).

The marginalized sects in Amish Tripathi's works have been explored by Suresh Kumar in

"Giving Voice to the Marginalized: A Study of Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*" (Kumar, 2014)

John Pennington investigates the presence of mainstream frivolity and fictional reality with a 'no pain, no gain' approach to magical fantasy fiction in "From Elfland to Hogwarts, or the Aesthetic Trouble with Harry Potter". The article contemplates whether Rowling's magical world truly forces the readers to broaden their horizons to look past the obvious and explore the hidden, or is it simply a different form of entertainment that plays on the fantasies of an active mind for popularity, the teachings forgotten as soon as the books are closed (Pennington, 2002).

Keeping to the present wave of mythology inclusion in literature, Saman Abdulqadir Hussein Dizayi explores the blending of the ancient and modern, realistic myth and mythical reality through "Mythmaking In Modern Literature: Harry Potter by J.K. Rolling". The series consists of mythological figures, as a supplement to the major focus. The figures such as a Cerberus, dragons, sphinx, Death etc, are embedded in the story in such a casual manner that gives the impression of them being a normal commonplace occurrence within the magical world. The only real surprise felt at their existence comes from the muggle-borns and raised due to the cultural difference (Dizayi, 2022).

G. Aiswarya and Dr. P. Madhan explore the depiction of mythological figures present throughout the ancient Hindu texts in "Mythology in Amish Tripathi's *Immortals of Meluha: A Study*" (Aiswarya and Madhan, 2018).

Manasi Saxena explores the numerous aspects of death that can be seen scattered throughout the series in the article "Death, the Last Enemy: Grief and Loss in the Harry Potter Series." This paper explores the various characters' views on their deaths, the feelings attached to them, and the incarnation of death and its influence through the *Tales of Beedle and Bard*. The physical journey Harry undertakes in order to defeat his enemy Voldemort by destroying his anchors of immortality is internalised to follow the process of loss, grief and healing from the deaths of his loved ones.

The transcendence of humans to ethereal figures has been explored in "Humanly Gods or Godly Humans: Representation and

Anthropomorphism of Mythical Characters in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" by Aritra Basu (Basu, 2020).

The works also follow the spiritual journey of the characters as an undertone that has been observed and explored through J K Rowling's works by Signe Cohen in "The Two Alchemists in Harry Potter: Voldemort, Harry, and Their Quests for Immortality" (Cohen, 2018) and through Amish Tripathi's works by Prof. Dr. Lata Marina Varghese in "Selfies of the Soul: Spiritual Regeneration in New Age Fiction" (Varghese, 2015).

Shiva and Harry, the protagonists of both these works, begin their journey towards hope of healing with the invitation to a change- physical and emotionally. The elements of their trauma experienced in the past, as well as current trials, crop up throughout their entire journey. But hope burns eternal and they have taken the first step towards healing by changing their environment. The healing process is slow, and there are instances where they seem to be shoved backwards, but at the end, both Shiva and Harry have overcome their trauma and found peace and contentment, if not some semblance of happiness.

The real-life implications of these characters' journeys boiled down to the fundamentals provide a simple solution- removal from the current environment. It is not conducive to healing and would only heap further trauma on the already existing issues and would not allow a person to recover. If it is within one's power to remove themselves from the hurtful conditions, to do so; if not, there is never only one way to do something. Thinking outside the box could sometimes provide unorthodox situations. And if all else fails, there's great power in asking for help.

But no matter how extensively a fictional character is sculpted, it cannot hope to replicate a live human in its entirety; nor the intricacies of life, no matter how much detail goes into creating the life of that character. This diminishes its relatability to reality and its nuances. Keeping this drawback in mind, this Research is an attempt at a pathway into understanding one's own journey of struggles and potential guidelines in if not overcoming it, then at least living in a wholesome manner with it, through the pseudo-reality of the literary characters as a singular subject of analysis.

While the existing research does grant a peek into the characters that have had their fair share of hardships, failure and trauma, it allows a lot of room for exploration into the long-term effects of trauma, as well as its impact in relation to other characters, society and environment, either experiencing the same event with them or experiencing similar events in another work; as the human psyche is a vast field still in the initial phases of its investigation.

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# Design and Function Construction of Cross-cultural Communication Platform: Exploring the Path to Promote Global Dialogue

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 22 Apr 2025 Revised on: 19 May 2025 Accepted on: 25 May 2025 ©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>). <b>Keywords—</b> cross-cultural communication platform, data collection, One Belt And One Road, multidimensional evaluation system</p>	<p><i>In the context of deep integration of globalization and digitalization, cross-cultural communication has become a key driver for international understanding and cooperation. However, issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, and information asymmetry severely limit the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. This study focuses on the "cultural silhouette" cross-cultural communication platform, exploring the implementation path of an intelligent cross-cultural communication platform through theoretical construction and practical innovation. The study first proposes a hybrid multi-source cultural data collection framework, integrating government open data, academic literature, social media, and other multimodal data to construct an ontology-based cultural knowledge graph, addressing the heterogeneity and fragmentation of cultural data in countries along the "Belt and Road." Secondly, it innovatively introduces microservices architecture theory, designing multilingual real-time translation algorithms and personalized recommendation systems to achieve modularization and dynamic optimization of platform functions. Furthermore, it proposes an intelligent service optimization theory driven by cultural sensitivity, enhancing the precision and inclusiveness of cross-cultural interactions through multi-level evaluation matrices and adaptive dialogue management models. Finally, it constructs a multidimensional evaluation system that integrates technical performance, functional integrity, user experience, and cultural dissemination effects, incorporating ethical risk prevention mechanisms to ensure the sustainable development of the platform. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in breaking through the limitations of traditional static cultural research, providing new technical approaches and methodological support for cross-cultural communication; its practical value is reflected in significantly lowering the barriers to cross-cultural exchange, offering intelligent tools for "Belt and Road" people-to-people connectivity. In the future, research can integrate emerging technologies</i></p>

*such as the metaverse and generative AI to further deepen computational models of cultural intelligence and expand global application scenarios on platforms. This study not only provides a systematic theoretical framework for building cross-cultural communication platforms but also offers interdisciplinary paradigm references for humanities and social sciences research in the digital age.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research background

Under the background of economic globalization, exchanges between countries are becoming more and more frequent, with the depth and breadth of these interactions continuously enlarging<sup>[1]</sup>. In the context of the current "Belt and Road" initiative, China has provided policy, financial, institutional, and talent support for cultural exchange under "Belt and Road," opening new strategic opportunities for Chinese culture to go international and enlarge its global influence<sup>[2]</sup>. With the advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, economic, social, and cultural ties among countries along the route are growing tighter. However, due to language barriers, cultural differences, and information asymmetry, cross-cultural communication still faces numerous challenges. Such traditional methods of cultural exchange as offline exhibitions and language training, usually have limitations in time, space, and cost, thus making it difficult to meet the growing demands of global interaction. At the same time, with the development of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, new opportunities are offered for building efficient and intelligent platforms for intercultural communication. In AI-driven simulation scenarios of cultural differences and situational interactive training, by experiencing various communication scenarios across different cultural backgrounds, students can naturally acquire the communication styles, etiquette, and different expressions of different cultures as if they were there<sup>[3]</sup>. AI technology has made enormous progress in natural language processing, speech recognition, and machine translation, and it now largely have the ability to support language training and talent

development<sup>[4]</sup>.

Currently, digital cultural platforms tend to focus on the display of a single language or regional culture, short of systematic integration of cultural diversity along the "Belt and Road" countries. Human communication is the result of both linguistic and non-linguistic interactions<sup>[5]</sup>. The criteria for evaluating intercultural communication skills are unclear, making them difficult to quantify and specify<sup>[6]</sup>. What's more, existing platforms generally use static text for interaction, failing to engage users deeply and usually lacks intelligent cultural matching and recommendation capabilities. Consequently, how to make good use of advanced technology to build a multimodal, dynamically optimized cross-cultural communication platform has become a study focus shared by both academia and industry.

### 1.2 Research significance

This study mainly focuses on the construction and optimization of the "cultural silhouette" cross-cultural communication platform, which has significant theoretical value and practical significance. In terms of theory, this research is innovative since it introduces digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and knowledge graphs into the field of cross-cultural communication, breaking the limitations of traditional static cultural studies and offering new technical pathways for cross-cultural communication research. Meanwhile, the technical framework proposed in the study can effectively address ethical risks in digital cultural dissemination, offering meaningful references for relevant research. By constructing a clear and structured knowledge graph of countries along the "Belt and Road," this study also fills the gap in systematic regional cultural research, providing new data foundations and

analytical tools for cross-cultural comparative studies.

In practical applications, the intelligent platform of this study greatly reduces the barriers to cross-cultural communication through features such as multilingual support and personalized recommendations, since it provides an effective tool for enhancing mutual understanding among people in "Belt and Road." As artificial intelligence develops with fast pace, its technology is widely applied across various fields, especially in cultural dissemination, where AI holds significant advantages<sup>[7]</sup>. AI technology uses methods like natural language processing and big data analysis to achieve personalized learning path planning, intelligent assessment, and feedback<sup>[8]</sup>. The application of AI technology in cross-cultural communication has surpassed simple language translation<sup>[9]</sup>. The multimodal interaction and AI technology of the platform will greatly boost user experience, setting new benchmarks for digital cultural dissemination. The user behavior data accumulated can also support decision-making for government agencies and businesses, playing an important role in cultural cooperation and tourism promotion. This research applies AI technology to the humanities and social sciences, providing replicable technical solutions for interdisciplinary studies.

### 1.3 Research content

This study aims to lay emphasis on the theoretical construction and optimization of the "cultural silhouette" cross-cultural communication platform, and systematically explore it from four core theoretical dimensions. First, with regards to cultural data representation theory, the study analyzes the collection and integration methods of multi-source cultural data from countries along the "Belt and Road" route, putting forward a hybrid collection theoretical framework. It explores structured representation models for multimodal cultural data, stressing the construction theory of ontology-based cultural knowledge graphs and cross-lingual alignment mechanisms.

Secondly, in terms of platform architecture, the study researches on the applicability of microservices architecture in cross-cultural platforms, constructs algorithmic models for multilingual real-time translation, develops theoretical frameworks for personalized recommendations, and systematically studies design theories for multimodal interaction interfaces. These theoretical studies provide adequate support in methodology for the technical implementation of cross-cultural communication platforms.

Regarding platform optimization theory, the study focuses on constructing a hierarchical theoretical model for user behavior analysis, researching knowledge representation and reasoning theories in cultural intelligent question-answering systems, aiming to construct a theoretical framework for cultural sensitivity detection, and building up a theoretical system for platform performance monitoring. These theoretical studies aim to address key issues such as intelligent services and conflict avoidance in cross-cultural communication.

Lastly, at the theoretical level of evaluation, this study aims to construct a multidimensional assessment theory model for cross-cultural platforms, combining quantitative with qualitative research methods. In addition, a theoretical framework is to be established for evaluation from dimensions such as technical performance, functional integrity, user experience, and cultural dissemination effects. Special attention is paid to the theoretical discussions on ethical issues like privacy protection and cultural bias, forming theoretical recommendations for the sustainable development of cross-cultural platforms.

These theoretical research contents are interconnected with one another, jointly forming the theoretical research system of a cross-cultural communication platform. The study lays emphasis on theoretical innovation and methodological construction, aiming to provide a copyable theoretical framework and research paradigm for intelligent cross-cultural communication. Through theoretical exploration and methodological

innovation, this study is dedicated to advancing the development of cross-cultural communication theory in the digital age.

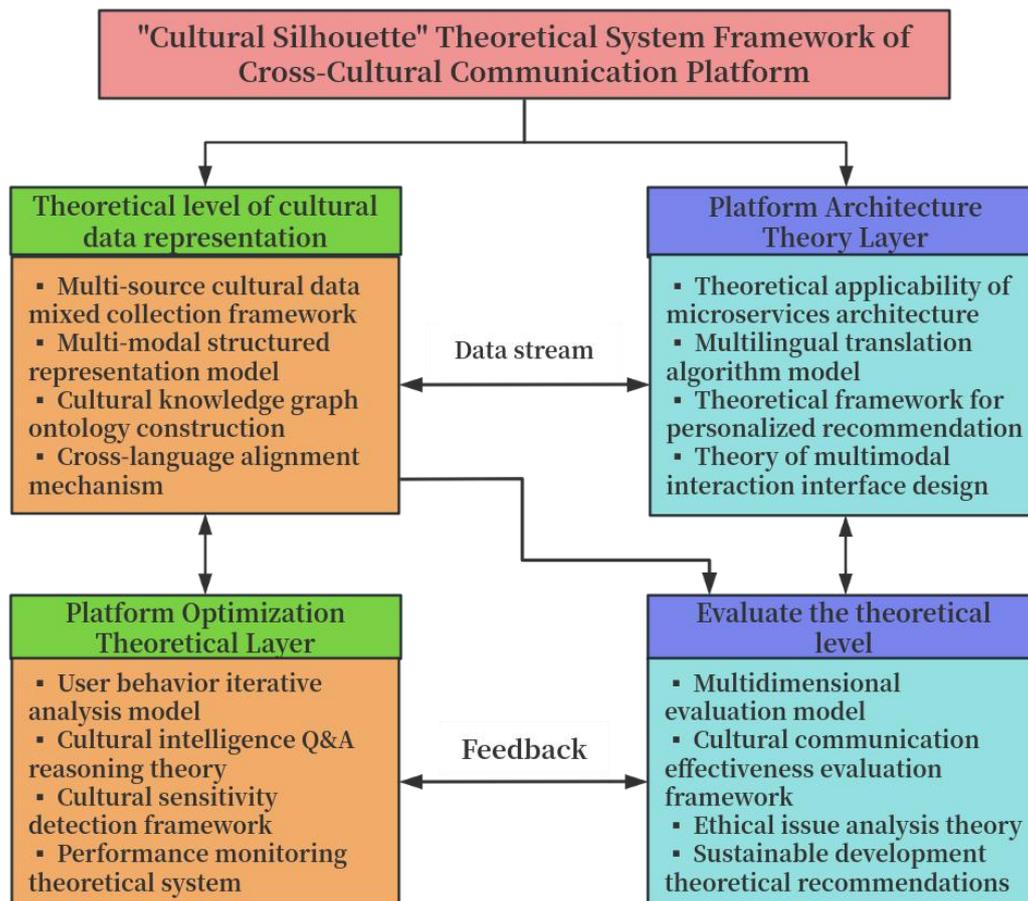


Fig.1 "Cultural Silhouette" Theoretical System Framework of Cross-Cultural Communication Platform

### 1.4 Innovation points

First, at the level of cultural data representation theory, an innovative hybrid multi-source cultural data collection framework is proposed to break through the limitations of traditional single data sources. By constructing a structured representation model for multimodal cultural data, especially the cross-lingual alignment mechanism based on ontological cultural knowledge graphs, it addresses the challenge of cultural data heterogeneity in countries along the "Belt and Road," providing a new theoretical paradigm for cross-cultural understanding.

Secondly, in terms of platform architecture design, the innovative application of microservices architecture theory to cross-cultural communication

scenarios has led to the construction of an integrated theoretical model that combines multilingual real-time translation algorithms, personalized recommendations, and multimodal interactions. This theoretical framework transcends the functional boundaries of traditional platforms, achieving a theoretical coupling between technical architecture and cultural dissemination needs.

In terms of platform optimization theory, the research innovation point is reflected in the establishment of a theoretical framework of cultural sensitivity detection and conflict avoidance, the combination of user behavior analysis iterative model and knowledge representation theory of cultural intelligent question answering system, and the formation of a systematic theoretical solution for

intelligent service in cross-cultural communication.

Finally, in the construction of the evaluation system, an innovative multi-dimensional assessment theoretical model has been proposed that balances technical performance with cultural dissemination effects. This model incorporates ethical dimensions such as privacy protection and cultural bias into its theoretical framework, providing innovative theoretical guidance for the sustainable development of cross-cultural platforms. These theoretical innovations collectively form a new paradigm in the study of cross-cultural communication in the digital age.

## II. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORM "CULTURAL SILHOUETTE"

"Cultural Silhouette," as a comprehensive information platform dedicated to the classification, analysis, and sharing of cross-cultural cases, demonstrates strong practicality and potential for development in today's global context. The platform initially constructs an information hub for cross-cultural communication through features such as case libraries, cultural toolkits, and community support, meeting users' basic needs for case searching, cultural knowledge learning, and interactive discussions. However, from the perspective of theoretical innovation and future development, there is still considerable room for improvement in areas like cultural data representation, architectural design, intelligent services, and evaluation systems. It has not yet fully achieved deep intelligence and theoretical breakthroughs in the field of cross-cultural communication.

Currently, while the platform's case library provides three-dimensional classification views such as map mode, timeline mode, and matrix mode, its data collection still primarily relies on user submissions and public materials. A systematic multi-source cultural data collection framework has yet to be established. The heterogeneity of cultural data, especially when dealing with cases involving

diverse cultural backgrounds along the "Belt and Road" countries, is a significant challenge. The platform lacks an ontology-based knowledge graph cross-lingual alignment mechanism, making it difficult to achieve deep semantic correlation analysis in cultural contexts. Additionally, although the platform's intelligent recommendation function can suggest popular cases based on user browsing history, the recommendation algorithm has not been integrated with cultural sensitivity detection theories, failing to accurately identify and avoid potential cultural biases or conflict risks.

In terms of technical architecture, the platform adopts a mobile-friendly design to ensure accessibility of basic functions. However, its underlying architecture remains relatively traditional and fails to fully integrate microservices theory to support advanced features such as real-time translation in multiple languages and personalized dynamic recommendations. For example, when users use scenario simulators involving non-native language scenarios, the platform cannot provide real-time language assistance, which limits the practicality of the tool. Additionally, while community support features include points incentives and case co-creation mechanisms, they lack an intelligent iteration model based on user behavior analysis, making it difficult to dynamically optimize cultural topic settings in discussion areas or accurately match expert resources.

In terms of commercial operations, the resource mall offers paid services such as cultural assessment tools and customized training, but has yet to establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system that balances technical performance with the effectiveness of cultural dissemination. For example, the platform fails to systematically evaluate the actual improvement in users' cross-cultural adaptability, nor does it incorporate ethical dimensions like privacy protection and cultural inclusiveness into its core product design considerations. The lack of this theoretical framework may lead to sustainability challenges for the platform in its long-term development, especially against the backdrop of

increasingly fierce global competition.

Overall, the "cultural silhouette" platform has established a basic functional framework and clear market positioning, capable of providing support for intercultural learners, enterprises, and researchers. However, to elevate from a tool-based platform to an intelligent and theoretical hub for cross-cultural communication, deep innovations are still required in data representation theory, architectural design optimization, intelligent service iteration, and ethical

evaluation systems. Future improvement directions include building a hybrid multi-source cultural data collection framework, introducing microservices architecture to enhance multimodal interaction capabilities, establishing cultural sensitivity detection models, and refining the multidimensional evaluation theory system. These upgrades will drive the platform to form more forward-looking and influential solutions in the field of cross-cultural communication.

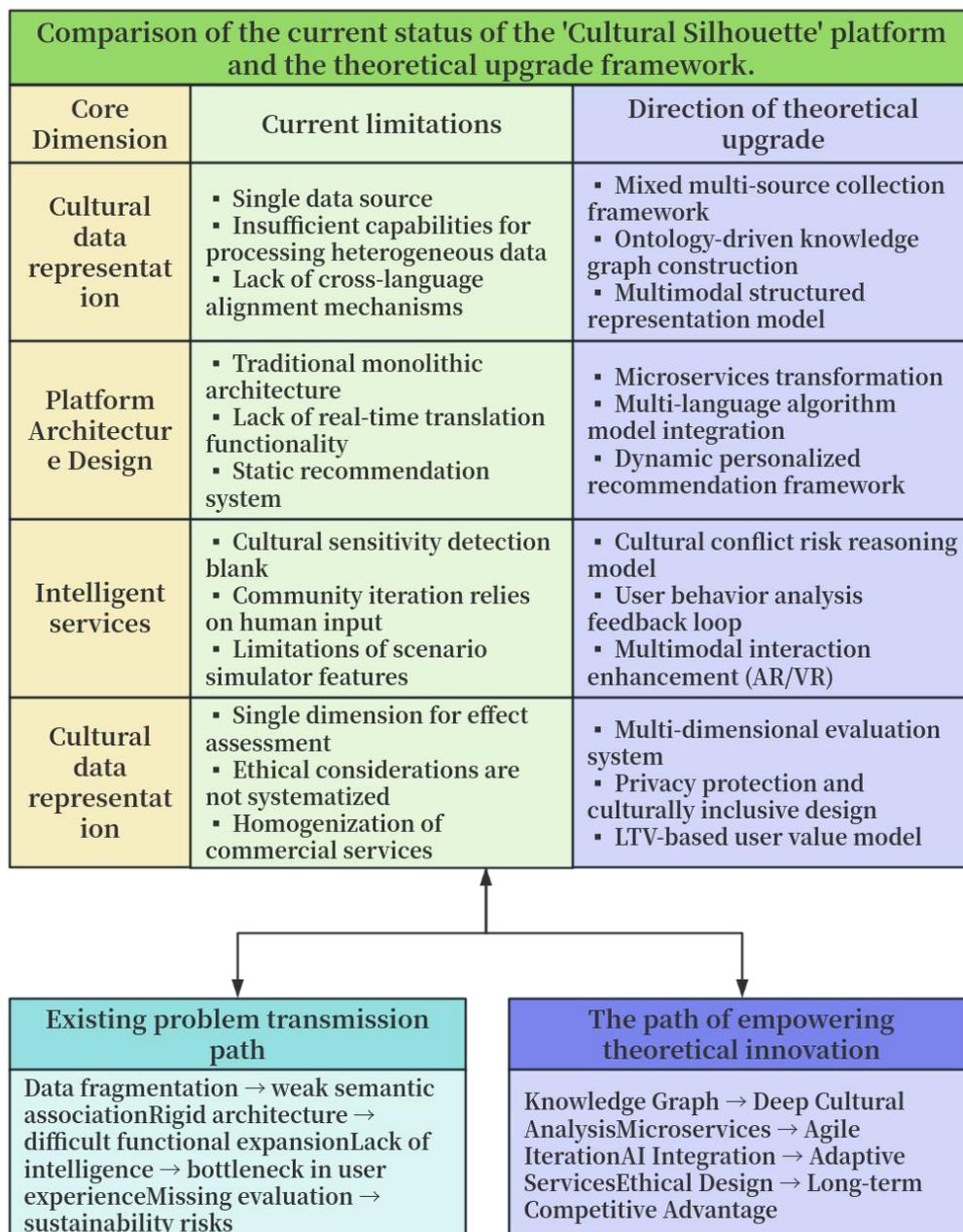


Fig.2 Comparison of the current status of the 'Cultural Silhouette' platform and the theoretical upgrade framework.

### III. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION AND INNOVATION OF INTELLIGENT SERVICE-DRIVEN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORM

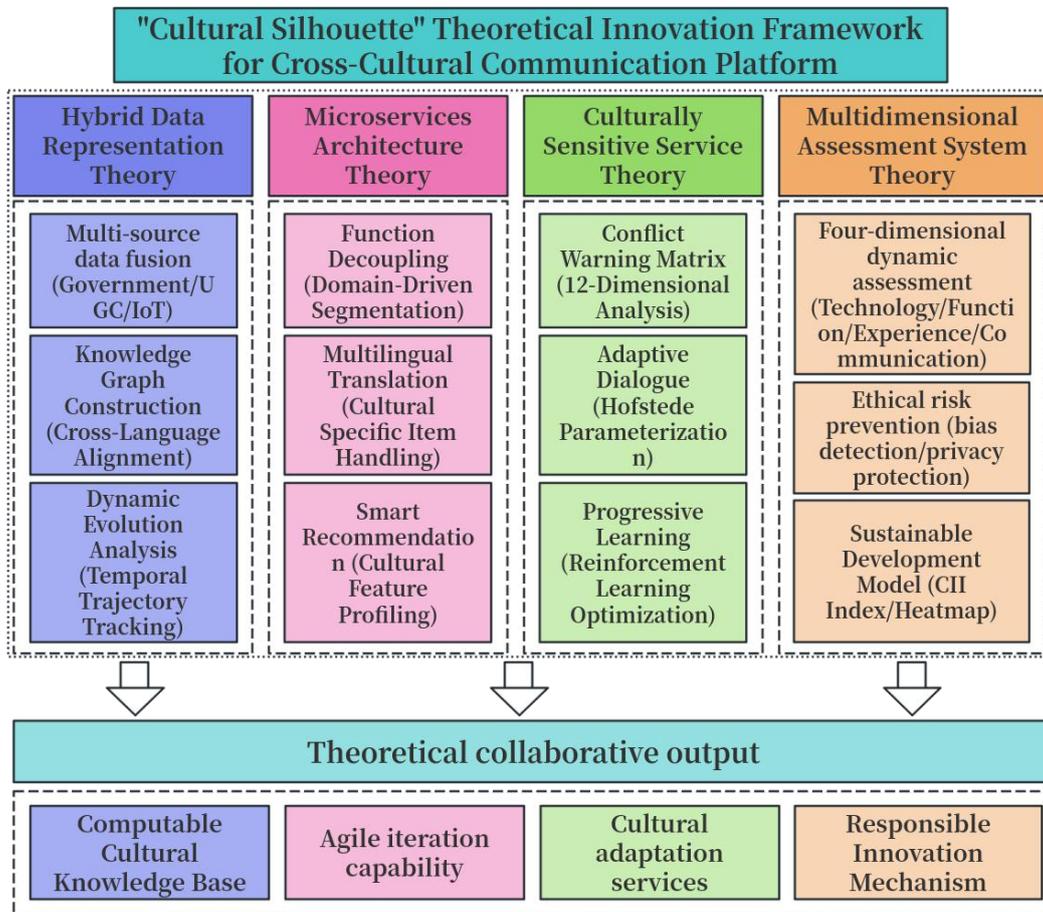


Fig.3 "Cultural Silhouette" Theoretical Innovation Framework for Cross-Cultural Communication Platform

#### 3.1 Cultural representation theory innovation based on hybrid multi-source data collection

The module aims to construct a systematic, multi-dimensional cross-cultural data integration framework to address the heterogeneity and fragmentation of cultural data in countries along the "Belt and Road." This theoretical innovation first breaks through the limitations of traditional single-source data by integrating government open data, academic literature, social media content, user-generated content (UGC), and multi-modal cultural data collected from IoT devices, establishing a dynamically updated cultural data ecosystem. This hybrid collection method not only expands the coverage of cultural data but also significantly enhances the accuracy and timeliness of cultural

representation through cross-validation of data sources. During the data integration process, the research particularly focuses on the value extraction of unstructured cultural data, such as the digital transformation of implicit knowledge like folk tales and ceremonial customs, providing a richer semantic foundation for cross-cultural understanding.

At the level of data representation, this module innovatively proposes a structured representation model for multimodal cultural data. The model employs an ontological approach to systematically organize dispersed cultural elements (such as values, behavioral norms, and communication methods) according to semantic relationships, constructing a hierarchical cultural knowledge graph. In response to the linguistic diversity along the "Belt and Road"

route, a cross-linguistic alignment mechanism has been designed. Through concept mapping and semantic disambiguation techniques, it achieves equivalent associations between cultural terms in different languages. For example, the Chinese concept of "face" is semantically linked to "dignity" (Karama) in Arab culture, providing a precise conceptual reference for cross-cultural communication. This ontology-based knowledge representation method not only addresses the standardization issue of cultural data but also provides a computable cultural knowledge foundation for subsequent intelligent services.

In terms of theoretical application, the innovation of this module lies in deeply integrating cultural representation theory with practical scenario needs. By designing a cultural dimension calculation model, it quantitatively analyzes differences among various cultural groups in dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, providing a theoretical foundation for cultural sensitivity detection and conflict early warning. At the same time, the research explores the dynamic evolution patterns of cultural representations, using time series data analysis techniques to track the trajectory of cultural changes, enhancing the platform's adaptability to cultural dynamics. These theoretical innovations collectively form a complete system of cultural data representation, laying a solid foundation of data and knowledge for intelligent services on cross-cultural communication platforms, and offering new methodological support for cross-cultural studies in the digital age.

### **3.2 Theoretical breakthroughs in cross-cultural platform design with integrated microservice architecture**

The theory of cross-cultural platform design that integrates microservices architecture breaks through the module, aiming to build a flexible and scalable technical framework to meet complex functional requirements in cross-cultural communication scenarios. This theoretical innovation deeply embeds the concept of microservices architecture into cross-cultural platform design, achieving modular

reorganization of core platform capabilities through functional decoupling and service encapsulation. The study first analyzes the limitations of traditional monolithic architecture in cross-cultural applications, especially the scalability bottlenecks when facing differentiated needs such as multilingual processing and personalized recommendations, leading to the proposal of domain-driven microservice partitioning principles. The platform is deconstructed into over ten functionally independent microservice units, including cultural data services, multilingual processing services, and user profiling services. Each service unit can be independently developed, deployed, and scaled, significantly enhancing the platform's ability to handle high concurrency and multi-regional access, while also providing a flexible technical foundation for subsequent feature iterations.

In terms of theoretical innovation in multilingual real-time translation algorithms, this module breaks through the limitations of traditional machine translation's universality by designing special processing mechanisms for cultural-specific items (culture-specific items) in cross-cultural communication. It constructs domain dictionaries that include cultural background knowledge, deeply coupling the translation model with a cultural knowledge graph. This allows culturally specific terms like "dragon" to automatically select the most appropriate translations based on the target cultural context. Additionally, a microservices architecture enables the deployment of specialized translation engines for different language pairs, such as the customized translation services for key language pairs like Chinese-Arabic and Chinese-Russian under the Belt and Road Initiative. This will significantly enhance the accuracy and fluency of cross-cultural communication. This innovative approach, which combines language technology with cultural intelligence, provides a new technical pathway to eliminate semantic barriers in cross-cultural communication.

In the theoretical breakthrough of personalized recommendation systems, this module proposes a

multi-dimensional cultural feature user profiling model. By integrating multi-source data such as users' cultural background, language proficiency, and historical interaction behaviors, it establishes a three-dimensional user representation that includes both explicit cultural characteristics and implicit cultural preferences. Based on a microservices architecture, the platform can dynamically combine recommendation algorithm components, such as collaborative filtering, knowledge graph reasoning, and deep learning models, to generate customized content recommendations according to different cultural scenario needs. Of particular note is the cultural sensitivity assessment layer, which can real-time detect potential cultural conflict risks associated with recommended content, ensuring that the recommendations not only align with user interests but also respect cultural differences. This theoretical framework, which deeply integrates recommendation systems with cultural intelligence, will provide crucial support for intelligent services on cross-cultural platforms.

### **3.3 Theory of intelligent service optimization driven by cultural sensitivity**

This module constructs a dynamically evolving cross-cultural intelligent service system, with its core innovation lying in the organic integration of machine learning's predictive capabilities and cultural anthropology's deep insights. The module first establishes a multi-level cultural sensitivity assessment framework, quantitatively analyzing cultural feature markers in user interaction behaviors, such as language preference, topic avoidance tendencies, and sensitivity to non-verbal cues, to build a cultural sensitivity assessment matrix comprising 12 dimensions. This theoretical breakthrough will enable the platform to monitor potential conflict risks in cross-cultural interactions in real time. When it detects that users may violate taboos or norms of the target culture, the system automatically triggers a cultural conflict warning mechanism. For example, in business communication scenarios, the system will alert users to the indirectness of communication methods based on the

high-context characteristics of the other culture; during discussions on religiously sensitive topics, it provides moderate content filtering suggestions, thereby achieving preemptive prevention of cultural friction.

In the optimization of intelligent interaction, the theoretical module innovatively proposes a culturally adaptive dialogue management model. This model can transform cultural dimension theories (such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions) into computable dialogue strategy parameters, enabling smart customer service systems to dynamically adjust their responses based on different users' cultural backgrounds. For users from high power distance cultures, the system automatically adopts more formal titles and respectful language; for groups emphasizing collectivism, it focuses more on relationship maintenance rather than directly solving problems. The study also introduces a cultural context understanding engine that analyzes implicit cultural assumptions in user input, such as time concepts (monotiminal/multitiminal) and communication styles (direct/indirect), to generate responses that align with the other party's cultural expectations. This deeply culturally adaptive dialogue management theory significantly enhances the acceptance and effectiveness of cross-cultural intelligent services.

In the realm of knowledge services, this module proposes a progressive learning framework for cultural intelligence. The system continuously analyzes user feedback data on the adoption of cultural recommendations and interaction satisfaction to build a dynamic user profile that adapts to cultural contexts. Leveraging reinforcement learning algorithms, the platform can continuously optimize its cultural sensitivity thresholds and service strategies, forming a virtuous cycle of "service-feedback-optimization." Notably, this theoretical innovation also includes mechanisms for detecting and correcting cultural biases, ensuring the fairness and inclusiveness of intelligent services by regularly reviewing cultural tendencies in system decisions. This theoretical framework, which deeply

integrates cultural sensitivity throughout the entire service lifecycle, not only enhances the intelligence level of cross-cultural platforms but also provides a crucial methodological reference for culturally adaptive services in the age of artificial intelligence.

### **3.4 Construction of multidimensional evaluation system and ethical consideration of cross-cultural platform**

This module breaks through the limitations of traditional technical platforms with single performance indicators, establishing a comprehensive evaluation framework that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods. The assessment system comprises four interrelated dimensions: the technical performance dimension focuses on hard metrics such as response speed, system stability, and multilingual processing accuracy; the functional completeness dimension evaluates cultural knowledge coverage, tool usability, and scenario adaptability; the user experience dimension measures the platform's actual utility through indicators like cultural adaptability improvement and interaction satisfaction; the cultural dissemination effect dimension emphasizes deep impacts such as cross-cultural understanding promotion and reduction of cultural bias. The study specifically designs a dynamic weight adjustment algorithm to automatically optimize indicator weights based on different development stages and regional characteristics, for example, during the initial promotion phase in countries along the "Belt and Road," the weight of multilingual support capability is appropriately increased, while in the mature operation phase, more attention is paid to the profound impact of cultural dissemination.

In terms of ethical considerations, the module proposes an "ethics-culture" dual-dimensional framework for risk prevention and control. On the technical ethics level, it focuses on addressing user privacy protection, data security, and algorithm transparency issues. By establishing a cultural data classification protection mechanism, it implements encrypted storage and restricted access to sensitive information such as religion and ethnicity. On the

cultural ethics level, it aims to prevent algorithmic bias and cultural hegemony, innovatively proposing the construction of a cultural fairness detection tool to regularly scan potential biases in core functions like platform content recommendations and machine translation. For example, the system will monitor whether certain dominant cultural content is over-recommended or if there is any cultural devaluation during translation processing. The study also recommends establishing a cross-cultural ethics committee mechanism, inviting anthropologists, ethicists, and community representatives to participate in platform governance, ensuring that technological development aligns with the value orientation of multicultural coexistence.

The practical value of this theoretical module lies in its development of an operational evaluation toolkit. The study proposes using the Cultural Impact Index (CII) to analyze changes in cultural awareness through user-generated content via natural language processing technology; developing an ethical risk heat map to visually highlight high-risk areas in platform operations; and constructing a sustainability assessment model to predict the social impacts of long-term cultural interactions. These innovative tools not only serve the optimization and iteration of the platform itself but also provide a paradigm for evaluation practices across the entire digital cultural dissemination field. Ultimately, the formed evaluation theory system ensures technological innovation while safeguarding cultural diversity, laying the theoretical foundation for building a responsible digital cross-cultural communication ecosystem.

## **IV. RESEARCH OUTLOOK**

In the future, the intelligent development of cross-cultural communication platforms will face more opportunities and challenges. With the rapid evolution of emerging technologies such as the metaverse and generative AI, intercultural interaction forms will break through the limitations of existing text, images, and videos, moving towards immersive and scenario-based directions. Research

can explore the application of virtual reality (VR) technology in cultural scene simulation to create more realistic cross-cultural training environments; at the same time, agent (Agent) technology based on large language models is expected to achieve deeper cultural understanding and adaptation, enabling machines to capture subtle differences in cultural contexts. These technological breakthroughs will bring more natural and intelligent interactive experiences to the platform, but they also impose higher demands on the quality of cultural data and the fairness of algorithms.

In terms of theoretical research, it is necessary to further deepen the computational model of cultural intelligence. Current cultural sensitivity detection still primarily relies on static cultural dimension theories. In the future, cognitive science and affective computing can be integrated to establish a dynamic model of cultural cognitive evolution. Additionally, research on cultural diversity along the "Belt and Road" countries needs to be strengthened, particularly in the digital protection and dissemination of minority groups and marginal cultures. This requires platforms to develop more inclusive data collection and representation methods. Long-term tracking studies of cross-cultural communication effects will also become a focus, using big data analysis to reveal the deep impact of digital platforms on cultural identity.

In practical applications, the platform needs to build a more comprehensive global operation system. Considering the differences in digital infrastructure across different countries and regions, research should explore lightweight, offline functional modules to enhance accessibility in underdeveloped areas. At the same time, as the user base expands, how to balance commercial needs with cultural public welfare attributes and establish a sustainable operating model will be key focuses of future research. The platform can also expand cooperation with governments, educational institutions, and multinational corporations to develop targeted cultural training solutions, maximizing social value.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study constructs the theoretical framework of the "cultural silhouette" cross-cultural communication platform, systematically addressing key technical challenges in cross-cultural communication through four innovative modules. The hybrid multi-source data collection and knowledge graph representation theory breaks through the bottleneck of cultural data heterogeneity; the microservices architecture design achieves technical coupling of platform functions; the intelligent optimization theory driven by cultural sensitivity enhances service adaptability; and the multidimensional evaluation system ensures sustainable development. The research findings not only provide an innovative paradigm for cross-cultural communication in the digital age but also make significant theoretical contributions to human-machine collaborative cultural dissemination mechanisms and algorithmic ethical governance. In the future, this platform is expected to become a crucial digital infrastructure for promoting "Belt and Road" cultural exchange, providing technological support for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

## VI. FUND

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# Legal Language vs. Plain English: Clear Communication in Legal Documents

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 24 Apr 2025 Revised on: 21 May 2025 Accepted on: 26 May 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords –</b> legalese, intricate terminology, obsolete grammar, plain English language, clarity, comprehensible, precise, economical.</p>	<p><i>This abstract explores the inherent tension between traditional legalese and the principles of plain English in the creation of legal documents. The legal profession has relied on a specialised vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and often archaic phrasing. While this language serves purposes such as precision, historical continuity, and avoiding ambiguity within the legal community, it frequently creates significant barriers to understanding for non-legal professionals and the general public. This lack of clarity can lead to misunderstandings, disputes, and a sense of alienation for individuals interacting with the legal system. The plain English movement advocates for accessible and understandable language in all forms of communication, including legal writing. Adopting plain English principles in legal documents involves using simpler vocabulary, shorter sentences, and a direct, clear style. Proponents argue that this approach enhances transparency and empowers individuals to understand their rights and obligations. It improves the clarity of legal documents, ensuring they are easily comprehensible for the intended reader.</i></p>

This paper will delve into the historical and functional reasons behind the persistence of complex legal language while examining the compelling arguments and practical benefits of embracing plain English. It will consider the challenges and potential pitfalls of simplifying legal terminology without sacrificing necessary precision. Ultimately, this exploration highlights the critical need for legal professionals to prioritise clear communication and find a balance between the precision required by law and the accessibility demanded by a public-facing legal system, advocating for a shift towards legal documents that are both legally sound and readily understood.

Common people, whom the laws are meant to protect and control, find it difficult to understand legalese. Language is always changing due to everyday usage, and legalese often uses complex

terms that are incomprehensible to the average person. It is recommended that solicitors utilise simple English, which simplifies structure and content to make it accessible to the general public. Concepts may be expressed as clearly as possible while using plain language. Attorneys are more successful when they speak to their clients in simple English. This paper investigates the relevance and benefits of using plain English in legal communication among legal professionals. It addresses the difficulties associated with traditional legal jargon, outlines the value of plain language, and reviews current efforts to enhance accessible legal communication.

According to Robinson, "legal language" is "the language of the lawyers that they would not otherwise use in ordinary communications but for the fact that they are lawyers"(Robinson,3). The linguists' definition of legalese is that it is a unique dialect.

Communication with clients is frequently hampered by legalese, which has long been the punchline of jokes about attorneys. It has been conservative and mostly unchanged. It makes use of archaic language and sentence construction. Legal terminology frequently employs superfluous words and sentences. It should be as formal as other forms of contemporary corporate writing. Additionally, legal language frequently employs incorrect pronoun references, passive voice, and inappropriate and non-standard punctuation. It suffers from being overused and is tedious. It uses enormous amounts of jargon and technical phrases without providing the layperson with the necessary definitions, which makes it turgid and impersonal. It uses massive amounts of jargon and technical phrases without providing a layperson with the definitions required to make it turgid and impersonal.

Different experts have different definitions of the plain English language. Steinberg has expressed, "Plain language is a language that reflects the interests and needs of the reader and consumer rather than legal, bureaucratic, or technological interests of the writer or the organisation that the writer represents" (Steinberg,7). In 1982, the British government issued a white paper ordering the departments to count their forms for the first time, abolish unnecessary details, and clarify in simple language. Proponents of plain language have also been active in Australia since 1976 and in Canada since 1988.

To adapt to outside circumstances, most everyday languages change over time. Because of how they are used today, languages are always changing, yet legal terminology is replete with archaic elements that ordinary English has forgotten. Words like aforesaid, herein, hereby, thereon, thereto, and witnesseth are frequently used in legal language but are no longer employed in other contexts. Legal terminology is thus "married to the past and terrified of the future."

The law continues to be obscured by its terminology from the individuals it governs and safeguards. By using ambiguous legal jargon, solicitors and legislators have purposefully excluded the general public from the law. Legal language is distinct from other languages to distinguish attorneys from ordinary people. For many years, impenetrable legalese has tried to keep its monopoly on

comprehension. Lawyers continued to write in a strange kind of French. Following a statute issued in 1731, attorneys were required to write in the English tongue and language only, and not in the Latin tongue or language, or the French tongue or language, or in any other tongue or language whatsoever. In the past 20 years, several attorneys have made significant advancements towards Plain English (Mellinkoff). Compared to legal terminology, plain English can accomplish the purpose with fewer words.

Legal English varies from typical English in various ways. Additionally, it extensively uses technical jargon unfamiliar to the average person, such as waiver, restrictive covenant, promissory estoppel, etc. Many terms and phrases used in the legal system originated from French and Latin. When conveying what is often a single legal notion, legal English has a weird historical propensity to tie together two or three words, as in the phrases null and invalid, fit and appropriate, agree and promise, etc. One of the strangest features of traditional legal writing, especially in deeds and conveyances, is the almost total absence of punctuation. In contrast, punctuation is utilised to clarify meaning in contemporary legal language.

Understanding the law is a fundamental requirement and right, whether you're signing a contract, speaking with your lawyer, creating a will, or researching a specific legal issue. One of the greatest writers of English law, Sir Edward Coke, made a crucial point early in the seventeenth century while discussing the translation of French laws into English. He stated that he could not conjecture that translating these laws into English would cause any inconvenience, but rather would bring profit, since ignorance of the law does not excuse.

Legalese is sometimes superfluous and even dangerously deceptive. It is ineffective and expensive. Furthermore, it has harmed the legal system's reputation. However, simple English can serve the same purpose as money and traditional legal jargon. It isn't uninteresting or lacklustre. These, thus, are the pragmatic justifications for designating plain English as the legal language. Choosing how to change the

wording of the penal laws and legislation is a challenging task. How can we expect regular people to respect the law if we cannot communicate the criminal code in plain English?

Lawyers who are willing to adapt demonstrate their originality, which makes them great and brilliant attorneys, as opposed to sticking to the traditional legalistic writing style. Legalese persists because of concepts of originality, inertia, fear of change, routine form usage, and a lack of ability. One additional benefit of using plain language is that it can help reduce errors. Attorneys who can effectively explain the law are better equipped to handle their clients' requests. When clients request a formal agreement, a plain-spoken lawyer may collaborate with them equally. As a result, negotiating the document is easier and less expensive. Composing a letter to a client or a consumer contract in straightforward terms demonstrates your concern for them. The client-attorney interaction is enhanced by using plain language.

Words are lawyers' tools, and how to use these tools effectively depends on one's thorough knowledge of the language. Sometimes, lawyers can use simple language for clear thought, while on the other hand, legalese certainly can be sought in complex and time-hollowed expressions. But there is probably no single reform that would improve the image of lawyers more than to get them to speak directly and understandably. The challenge to those who oppose modernising legal drafting is then apparent. Why should the law use outdated language? Why should specific laws governing legal language be contained in a particular linguistic code that only those who possess the key may interpret?

Experts have given many definitions of the plain English language. According to Steinberg, "Plain language is a language that reflects the interest and needs of the reader and consumer rather than legal, bureaucratic, or technological interests of the writer or the organisation that the writer represents" (Berry, 48). In 1982, the British government issued a white paper ordering the departments to count their forms for the first time, abolish unnecessary details, and clarify in simple language. Proponents of plain language have also been active in Australia since 1976 and in Canada since 1988. Sweden, South Africa and

New Zealand are some other countries which are making efforts for the use of plain language, which aims at writing and setting out language so that the reader can understand it easily. D. Berry points out that the goal of the plain language movement is to produce language (particularly written in English) which is clear, straight-forward expression using only as many words as are necessary, and which avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary and convoluted sentence construction.

The plain language movement gained force as a part of the Consumer Movement in the 1970s. The English language serves as a comprehensive and accessible glossary for legal terminology by providing definitions, explanations, and contextual understanding of complex legal concepts. This relationship facilitates clearer communication, education and application of the law, making legal information easily comprehensible and more accessible to both legal professionals and laypersons. Legal language in English has evolved over centuries, incorporating Latin, French, and older English terms. Many legal terms—such as *habeas corpus*, *prima facie*, *tort*, and *indictment*—originate from Latin or French, but are now integrated into the English language, often with specific legal meanings. As a result, English serves as the primary medium through which these terms are understood, interpreted, and explained. Legal language comprises specialised vocabulary designed for precision and clarity within the legal system. To the layperson, these terms can be confusing or opaque. The English language provides definitions, explanations, and contextual usage that help clarify these terms. For instance, understanding what 'consideration' means in a contract requires knowledge of its legal significance, which is often explained in plain English. Over time, legal dictionaries and plain English legal guides have standardised the meanings of legal terms, making the English language serve as a reference point. These resources translate complex legal jargon into accessible language, effectively acting as a glossary that bridges the gap between legal professionals and the general public.

Many legal documents—contracts, statutes, and judicial opinions—use English to define, explain, and contextualise legal terminology. Movements advocating for plain English in law aim to make legal

language more understandable, thereby turning the English language into a practical glossary that makes legal concepts more transparent. Courts and legal educators often rely on the English language to interpret legal terms. Judicial opinions frequently include explanations of legal terminology in plain English, helping to clarify the law for all readers. This reinforces the idea that the English language functions as a living glossary that explains and contextualises legal language. Resources like Black's Law Dictionary and legal encyclopaedias compile legal terms and their definitions in English. These works serve as authoritative glossaries, providing detailed explanations that are accessible through the English language.

Two variable factors make successful communication of the content of a state: the first factor is the comprehension skills of the individual receiver of the message, and the second is the intrinsic complexity and other characteristics of the subject matter of any message. There must be a shared context of both the linguistic experience and the social experience to avoid comprehension problems, since communication depends on an overlap of linguistic experience between the sender and receiver of the message.

Plain language is a type of writing that can be understood first by clients, lawyers and judges; it is legally binding, logically organised, concise and clear. It follows the rules of Standard English Grammar. Plain language enables an average person to comprehend the document that binds them or state their rights. The statement is correct. The foremost duty of a law-making body is to create laws and communicate them clearly and effectively so that they can be easily understood even by a common man. Clear communication ensures that laws are properly implemented and adhered to, promoting justice and order. The style of plain language is professional yet appropriate to circumstances. It pays attention to format and design. The main goal is to convey ideas with the greatest possible clarity.

Statutes, bills, judicial opinions, contracts, deeds and wills profoundly affect our lives, but their language tends to be nearly impossible to understand. It is the duty and responsibility of the lawyer to keep their clients reasonably informed about the proceedings of the case. Clients also want to be

confident in the abilities of their lawyers. Some legal documents are written in such a way that not only are they accessible to the common man, but also to skilled lawyers and judges, who have extreme difficulty in comprehending them. In those cases, it is not the familiarity with the subject matter or lack of technical knowledge which causes the problem, rather, it is the language and structure of the document itself.

Plain English language can do the job of legal gobbledegook and help do the job better. Almost all legal writing is ruled over by one thing, i.e. money. Does writing legal documents and letters in plain English cost more or less than writing in legalese? It is a well-known fact that in any profession, time is money, and in the case of lawyers, too, time is a precious commodity. Lawyers charge their clients on an hourly basis and count to the minute. Plain English is quicker to read and understand. A clear letter from a solicitor will save their clients valuable time and money. Plain English improves the relationship between the writer and the reader. One Australian life insurance company comments rightly: "The plain English trust deed is user-friendly and can be understood. This builds a sense of trust and openness. The new approach could not work with documents written in traditional legalese" (Warburton). In June 1998, the US President, Bill Clinton, issued a memorandum to the heads of the US federal executive departments and agencies directing them to begin using "plain language to make government more responsive, accessible, and understandable in its communication with the public...Plain language saves the government and the private sector time, effort and money" (Clinton).

Clear written communication reduces legal and negotiating complications. English is widely spoken and understood, and it has become the 'lingua franca' of the modern era. The plain English movement has not yet revolutionised English language legal writing, but it is on its way to doing so. Given the growing importance of non-native speakers as a market for legal translation into English, plain English translation is not a good idea; it may be the future. Lawyers should use plain language because it rules except perhaps cutting excess words, greatly increased readability and understandability. Plain language is free of jargon and chosen with sensitivity to the needs and knowledge of the intended reader. It

is the appropriate and correct use of vocabulary in well-structured sentences, following established rules of grammar. Plain English teaches how to be precise, concise and to the point.

In the legal profession, clarity and precision are essential. However, complex language and legal jargon can often make documents difficult to understand for clients, judges, and the general public. Using plain English helps ensure that legal communication is accessible, effective, and less prone to misinterpretation. This article explores why plain English is vital for lawyers and how it benefits all parties involved. Plain English refers to clear, straightforward language that is easy for the intended audience to understand. It involves using common words, short sentences, and active voice, avoiding unnecessary jargon or complicated terminology. The goal is to communicate legal ideas in a way that is accurate yet simple.

Legal documents can be intimidating and confusing for clients. When lawyers use plain English, clients better understand their rights, obligations, and the implications of legal agreements. This clarity fosters trust and empowers clients to make informed decisions. Ambiguous or overly complex language can lead to misunderstandings, disputes, or legal challenges. Clear language minimises the risk of misinterpretation, ensuring that legal documents accurately reflect the intentions of the parties involved. Not everyone has a legal background. Using plain English makes legal information accessible to people from diverse backgrounds, including those with limited literacy or non-native English speakers.

Many legal regulators and professional bodies encourage or mandate the use of plain English. For example, the UK's Legal Services Act emphasises clear communication, and the U.S. Federal Plain Language Guidelines promote plain language in government and legal documents. Clear, concise documents save time during drafting, review, and interpretation. They reduce the need for lengthy explanations or revisions, leading to more efficient legal workflows.

Using plain English is not just a matter of style but a professional responsibility for lawyers. It ensures that legal documents are understandable, reduces the risk of disputes, and builds trust with

clients. Embracing plain language benefits the legal profession by making the law more transparent and accessible. In today's legal environment, clear and straightforward communication is essential. Using plain English helps lawyers ensure that their clients, judges, juries, and other stakeholders understand legal documents and advice without confusion or misinterpretation. It fosters transparency, builds trust, and enhances the effectiveness of legal services. By adopting plain English, lawyers not only improve accessibility but also demonstrate professionalism and a commitment to serving their clients' best interests. Ultimately, embracing plain English benefits everyone involved in the legal process, making the law more understandable and approachable.

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# The Impact of Trumpism on American Literature

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**Keywords—** Trumpism, political dissension, contemporary American literature, societal division, and national identity.

*The era of Donald J. Trump's presidency (2017–2021) was a tumultuous time in American history defined by political dissension, societal division, and a redefined national identity. This paper examines the president's impact on the literature being produced by American writers through the decades. Contemporary writers engaged in the changes in politics, society, and culture that resulted from Trump. This paper demonstrates a response to Trumpism through the literary works of some writers. Through their literary works, these writers illustrate a variety of issues, including power, truth, and identity in Trump's America.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

American literature has always been a reflection of the nation's sociopolitical landscape, and the Trumpism era has been no exception. Taking office on January 20, 2017, the presidency of Donald J. Trump marked a transformative time in the history of the United States of America. People have perceived Trumpism in the United States as a time characterized by increasingly polarized politics and a transformed national identity (Jones 2018, p. 12). During these years, some of the biggest political conflicts that arose were over immigration policy, attacks on media figures and institutions, and questioning the notions of what was generally considered to be true (Jones 2018, p. 11). Moreover, this was an immense time of change and development in the field of American literature, as authors grappled with difficult realities about this presidency and the wider cultural shifts that it entailed.

The impact of Trumpism on American literature has been multifaceted and profound. In genres ranging from satire to questions of identity and from expectations about truth to literary style and activism, writers have responded creatively to the individuality, the rage, the weirdness, the greed, and the chaos of the Trump era. Surveying and analyzing a selection of period works clarifies the vivid emotional biography of the era, as well as how literature did and didn't change as it pushed back against social and political shifts.

Using satire and humor, authors such as Salman Rushdie skewered President Trump's leadership by holding a funhouse mirror up to Trumpism. Dave Eggers mined both the ridiculousness and the surreality of the last four years in his novel "The Captain and the Glory." Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "Whereabouts" focused on immigration policy, yet the book's raw urgency reflects the growing impact of Trumpism on identity and belonging. Published

in 2017, Viet Thanh Nguyen's "The Refugees" delves into the anxiety and dread that permeate a transformed America, adding depth to the president's policy reforms.

The literature of that era also concerned itself with questions of truth in ways that extraordinarily anticipate the American era of "fake news" and information mistrust. Literary forms and styles evolved to explore such concerns, often transforming into fragmented narratives and fractured realities.

In the 20th century, literary activism was an essential part of the United States' cultural and political climate. The 20th-century example of this was a groundswell that focused on arguments against war and advocacy for social justice. African-American authors continue their fight against racism in the 20th century, sharing this alternate perspective. Literature not only found direct ways to evaluate economic policy in the United States, but also argued for economic policy and gender discourse in the United States in the 20th century. They also delved into the future of the United States, examining environmental concerns and the debates surrounding climate change in the 20th century, while also actively participating in local politics.

This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of the effect of Trumpism on American literature by investigating how politics informs and finds expression in literary works during a crucial period.

## II. Literary Responses to Trumpism

### A. Satire and Parody

Satirical literature emerged as one of the most prominent fronts against Trumpism, and it's likely that no writer desired to fall behind or could thrive if they did. Salman Rushdie's novel "The Golden House" (2017) is a broad, operatic satire in which he employs incisive humor. Rushdie himself has discussed his abusive relationship with humor. In "The Golden House," a character observes: "Satire allowed me to hold a funhouse mirror up to Trumpism, reflecting its absurdities and contradictions while miring done the harsh glare wasn't mine, but belonged to the mad clown who

had somehow subverted the Muslim League" (Rushdie, 2017, p. 118). Dave Eggers' book "The Captain and the Glory" (2018) is also a satire. Eggers reflects on this in his postface: "In the age of Trump, satire became a necessary tool to navigate the surreal political landscape" (Eggers 2019, p. 112).

In response, more humor-oriented writers turned to satire as a weapon. By contrast, "The Golden House" is a satire about America during the Trump era by a writer who is not known for being funny. Rushdie and many other writers in literature who have written fiction inspired by the American new political regime are looking at Trump from the perspective of that tradition as an absurdity.

### B. Identity and Belonging

Many books addressed the question of how Trumpism is affecting issues of identity, belonging, and non-belonging, as well as on a personal level. Jhumpa Lahiri experienced the dissonance during four years of Trump's presidency, which solidified her impulse to write "Whereabouts," she said, reflecting on her beguiling new novel about an immigrant's life in Italy. "It helped to hear someone as powerful as Trump relentlessly vilify immigrants in ways both spoken and unspoken for four years" (Lahiri, 2021, p. 157). She adds, "Trump's rhetoric and immigration policies pushed me to delve into the complexities of belonging and alienation in a changing America" (Lahiri 2021, p. 102). Jhumpa Lahiri's "Whereabouts" captured the shifting tides of immigrant life during the Trump Administration and considered how newcomers were adapting.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, in "The Displaced," centered stories around marginalized communities and illuminated the apprehension and ambiguity that swept in with Trump's immigration policies and rhetoric. He mentions, "The stories of the displaced became emblematic of the struggle for identity and belonging in a divided nation" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 73).

Through their profound explorations, what these authors adumbrate is the extent to which literature may serve both as an instrument by which to perceive the profound insult that Trump's signature could inflict on an individual's sense of self and as a vehicle for understanding the shocks to the system itself.

### C. Truth and Reality

One of the most pressing issues in recent years has been the concept of truth and the distortion of reality. George Saunders also wrestled with the idea of truth in his writing, particularly in *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*. This framework prompted us to critically examine the nature of truth and the extent to which we should tolerate factual misinterpretation. "Fake news," Americans' skepticism towards established institutions, and the broader concept of truth permeated both Saunders's time and that of Americans today. He asserts, "Post-truth, literature had to confront the blurring of fact and fiction... I wondered, in constructing a story, what was my responsibility to a fact that one of the belt buckle options on the table I was fictionalizing had actually had? What were my responsibilities to the still-living?" (Saunders, 2021, p. 30).

Colson Whitehead explored the nature of truth as well in "The Nickel Boys," observing, "The Trump years forced us to reckon with the consequences of a society where facts are contested, and my work reflected that uncertainty" (Whitehead 2019, 64). Colson Whitehead's "The Nickel Boys" thoughtfully explored President Donald Trump's impact on marginalized Americans, examining the hardships of poor children as government aid dwindles (Whitehead, 2019, p. 132).

Illuminating the profound impact of the Trump era on the very essence of truth and the blurred lines between fact and fiction, these authors suggested that literature has been one vital way to explore reality and perception when the usual landscape of reality is so dramatically shifting.

### III. TRUMPISM AND LITERARY STYLE

The literary world scrambled to adapt to what seemed like a catastrophe, reflecting the thematic influence of Trumpism. Writers experimented with narrative forms and structures to adequately capture the sense of dislocation. Lauren Groff's 2018 piece of Florida literature, "Florida," used multiple and nonlinear narratives to effectively capture the chaos and fragmented reality of the Trump era. She explains, "The fractured narrative in 'Florida' mirrored the fractured reality of the Trump years, where nothing seemed linear or straightforward"

(Groff 2018, p. 42). By using the devices she did, Groff's work was emblematic of much of what made up Trump-era literature.

### IV. LITERARY ACTIVISM

During the Trump Administration, many authors increased their political activism. In Roxane Gay's "Not That Bad," she specifically covers issues regarding feminism and how women should not feel "sorry" for themselves. She writes, "In the face of Trump's divisive policies, I felt compelled to use my writing to speak out against that injustice" (Gay 2018, p. 26). In Ta-Nehisi Coates' book "We Were Eight Years in Power," he also brings his activism into the literary world. Specifically, he discusses racial equality and working for social change. Coates also writes, "The urgency of the political moment demanded that we serve something larger than ourselves, and to function as writers, we had to become activists and advocates for a more just society" (Coates 2017, p. 108). For two literary writers, Gay and Coates, the discovery of the power of literature over society was never more prevalent than during a period in American history that seemed chaotic.

### V. LITERARY EXPLORATION OF ECONOMIC POLICIES

In addition, the Reagan Revolution's economic policies and their fallout became a subject of American literature. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Middlesex* novel, Jeffrey Eugenides used the Trump chapter to examine the economic challenges and disparities that confronted middle-class families. He discusses how tax reforms and economic inequalities affect everyday life through his intellectual character (Eugenides 2002, 275). Jonathan Franzen, in his best-selling *Freedom*, which includes both economic disparities and economic uncertainty, examines the fears and existential dilemmas of its middle-class characters under a Trump would-be second term (Franzen 2010, 189).

Toni Morrison, the most iconic American novelist who passed away on August 5, 2019, has also contributed to this discursive space. By publishing her posthumous novel, "The Source of Self-Regard,"

she has dealt with the persistence of racial and economic disparities in America and the way Trump's political tenure only served to deepen them (Morrison, 2019, p. 312). Claudia Rankine, arguably the most famous American poet of recent times, has composed many haunting meditations in "Citizen" on the tensions exposed by Trump when it comes to both race and economy in America (Rankine, 2014, p. 58). Zadie Smith's "Swing Time" presents a compelling argument for reconsidering the intersection of race and class, particularly in light of how Trump's actions impacted young women navigating the complex complexities of ambition and navigating between widely divergent socioeconomic conditions within American ranks (Smith, 2016, p. 215).

In the novel *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid illustrated the far-reaching effects of President Trump's immigration policies by constructing a bittersweet love story about two young people who escape their war-torn country and traumatic pasts only to encounter border barriers thrown up around the world (Hamid, 2017, p. 102). In the novel *The Water Dancer*, Ta-Nehisi Coates used his gifts as a storyteller to bring alive the struggle for economic justice and racial equality that was taking place during the Trump years, reimagining the Underground Railroad as a symbol of resistance to economic oppression (Coates, 2019, p. 173).

## VI. TRUMPISM AND GENDER DISCOURSE

Fiction writer Margaret Atwood used her dystopian novel *The Testaments* to explore women's rights and reproductive freedom in the era of Trumpism. In some ways, her novel presaged a country that severely curtailed women's autonomy. Her book thus invited important conversations about the implications of Trump's Supreme Court appointments, especially the last two, and what they might mean for women (Atwood, 2019, p. 132).

Atwood's work found resonance with the hyperbolic political atmosphere of Trumpism, particularly in the final months of Donald Trump's presidency, when a bitter fight over the confirmation of a Court appointee spilled over into a furious battle over health care, in particular women's access to reproductive health care. If Trump's strong stands

on abortion and contraception split Americans along fault lines, Atwood's exploration of those wedge issues in her home and that of her fellow Canadian novelist were, in a sense, a form of shadow boxing.

"The Testaments" was a literary response to the fear and uncertainty that so many women around the country have felt since President Trump took office. It sparked conversations about both preserving and growing women's rights, and it served as an entry point for more detailed discussions about those rights. This piece of fiction aimed to initiate conversations about abortion rights, the far-reaching consequences of political choices on women's lives, and the future of femininity.

## VII. THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* is a fictionalized critique of Trump-era environmental policy and climate change denial in a compelling narrative that uses the economic hardships suffered by impoverished rural communities and the devastating impacts on local wildlife as an allegory for the present. Her novel masterpiece not only demands that we confront climate change, but it also reminds us that the harsh realities of life's biggest challenge will be getting the politics of climate change through to enough people in the face of skepticism from the right and in the face of the world running out of time to act (Kingsolver, 2012, p. 145).

## VIII. RACE, RACISM, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The themes of race and racism, as well as social justice and injustice, persisted in American literature. In *Sing, Unburied*, Sing, a meditation on race in America, Jesmyn Ward connects the development of comprehensible literature about black life, which has historically faced the unresolvable challenge of double consciousness, to the challenging battle against the resurgence of white supremacist movements. Ward's novel, from the standpoint of its storytelling, more generally gives voice to its moral vision, with its twin focus on the performance of necessary constituents of justice and the establishment of a climate for reflection,

preservation, and transformation concerning exceptional human life (Ward, 2017, p. 214).

## IX. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Trumpism, a political ideology and political movement, was active in American culture and literature during the years 2017–2021. It was a transformative moment in American political history. Literary responses were required for the political dismantling of Obama-era policies, the reset to a different kind of national identity, and the acceptance by the United States of racist and separatist ideologies. This paper has introduced a broad sweep of American literature in the Trumpism era. The paper demonstrates that Trumpism manifested as a conglomeration of forces categorized by ideological position, time, and power, which had a diverse impact on the literature of the Trump era. This paper indicates that American literature's responses to Trumpism were numerous in this era. Trumpism's impact on American literature would prove to be diverse and profound. As a result, those responses would cover areas such as satire and parody, group identity and belonging, truth and reality, genre, performance, style, narrative, literary engagement in activism and messaging, economic policy, gender discourse, environmental concerns, and social justice issues.

The spread of satire was one of the most notable literary responses to the Trump era. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Dave Eggers used the power of humor to launch a critique of the peculiarities of Trump's leadership. Satire is projecting an era gone mad with its eccentricities and paradoxes.

Identity and belonging are central concerns as Lahiri and Nguyen, both Pulitzer-winning authors, join a series of contributors in reflecting on their experiences around the immigration issue and how it has shaped their anxiety about their place in American life. Together, their contributions exhibit the diverse power of literature to help bear witness to the impact of Trumpism on individual identity and the wider American story itself.

The Donald Trump era presented writers with unique challenges. The most obvious was the sense, shared by many people as well as institutions, that time was speeding up and that fate was hurtling like

a comet through every orbit of American life. Some of these years' most memorable works addressed acceleration. The era also required literature to wrestle with the nature of truth and the manipulation of reality—a conversation that reflected the broader cultural conversation of “fake news” and the way trust in the mechanics of politics, journalism, and other systems of knowledge had crumbled. George Saunders and Colson Whitehead, two fiction writers, worked to shed light on how Trump's era had decimated the very idea of truth. The interests of literature and cable news may not often coincide, but sometimes something bigger and darker and harder to pin down arrives, and the work of truth-seeking becomes indivisible.

Lauren Groff and others played with fragmented narratives and nonlinear storytelling, a literary style that echoed the Trump-era confusion; it was an encouraging example of how literature might mutate into a form that's up to the challenge of a nation in change.

Individuals in the literary world emerged as a result of the unpredictable nature of American society and used writing as a method to advocate for social justice, racial freedom, and societal modification. These were voices like those of Coates, who couldn't begin to separate his identities as a writer and an activist, and Roxane Gay, who turned a neck-embracing scar typical of assault victims into a lifeline that somehow stretched across oceans and continents. It also influences readers, leaving them better prepared and more determined to turn initial thoughts into lasting action.

American literature in the new century also reflected this. The novels written by authors during the Trump administration are a prime example. Jeffrey Eugenides, Jonathan Franzen, and Toni Morrison are historically known for their concerns with the economic disparities of the passage of time, but their most recent novels focused more and more on ordinary families struggling to make ends meet in a global economy indifferent to their cries for help.

Gender talk was a key thread running through “The Testaments,” as Atwood looked at the fate of women's rights and reproductive freedom in the closing days of Trumpism and made a persuasive

case for the political necessity of protecting and expanding women's rights.

Barbara Kingsolver discussed climate change and the environment in her novel "Flight Behavior." The novel is Kingsolver's critique of Trump's views on environmental policies and his claim that climate change is a hoax. One can also perceive the novel as a broader contemplation of contemporary climate-related issues, such as the migrant crisis. Kingsolver's novel reflects her concern for the environment and the pressing need for immediate action to tackle the harsh realities of climate change.

Race, racism, and social justice have not only preoccupied America's minds throughout history but have also found their way into a large array of literary works, even in the Trump era. On the front lines of the case, prominent authors such as Jesmyn Ward, author of "Sing, Unburied, Sing," wrestled with America's stubborn racial divide, the still-active white supremacist movements that support it, and the urgent plea from Black Americans for their white countrymen and women to engage in this struggle and try to dismantle it.

In the end, the impact of Trumpism on American literature was powerful and diverse. The close relationship between politics and literature is partly to blame, but writers did their jobs and used their voices. Literature serves as a reminder of something we need to hold on to. It is a voice for the people.

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# From Shadows to Spotlight: Women's Liberation in Literary Narratives

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**Keywords—** Women's Empowerment, Feminist Literary Criticism, Gender Representation, Female Agency, Intersectionality, Women in Literature, Patriarchy and Resistance.

## Abstract

Women's empowerment is quite often presented through its spiritual evolution in English literature, representative of changing times and feminist movements. In which, we will follow the progress of female characters from passive marginal to independent self-determined protagonists, using key texts from historical periods. The women in such patriarchal literature were often starkly obedient and dependent on men or under domestic control. However, minority literature has been a very strong instrument in feminist thought at that time. This article examines how the portrayal of women in literature first began to change through medieval and Renaissance texts that had women largely fulfilling archetypal roles. In the 18th and 19th centuries, when the novel began to rise, female protagonists tried to exert autonomy; think Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, or George Eliot. Modernism brought a deeper understanding of the psyche with women's stories confronting issues of gender inequality and personal identity through the words of writers like Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. Feminist discourse was further developed in postmodern and contemporary literature, which considered intersectionality and the nuances of race, class and sexuality through the works of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This article introduces a perspective of feminist literary criticism to analyze the various ways literature has contributed to discursive constructions that favor gender equity. The evolution of traditional roles, women's independence, and dystopian feminism are central topics to describe the powerful role of storytelling in reshaping perceptions and attitudes in the war of women's liberation. The specific paper concludes by suggesting that literature has not only mediated changes in gender representation throughout history but has been an active partner in rethinking gender roles. A tool for resistance, empowerment, and the constant struggle for gender justice, literature remains essential as contemporary writers push boundaries to challenge these new socio-political realities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literature as a Reflection of Society Literature has always been a mirror reflecting the social norms, values and ideologies of a specific time. Perhaps one of the most affected and evolving elements of literary representation has been its depiction of women. For centuries female characters have found themselves in the margins, specifically in roles that reinforced patriarchal decorum – dutiful daughters, devoted wives and noble mothers who sacrifice themselves for their children. Such representations sustained the accepted social hierarchy, with women as voiceless agencies who exist only through men. But as feminism arose and developed, the literature was a battlefield for disrupting gender norms and fighting for the rights of women.

The transformation of female characters from passive beings to layered, empowered heroes is a microcosm of the struggle for women's liberation in the larger history. Women in early English literature were often portrayed as symbols of virtue or vice, but rarely as having agency of their own. As feminist thought gained traction, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, female characters started to struggle against traditional constraints, pursuing autonomy, education and personal fulfillment. Current literature today still weaves the diversity and intersectional experiences of womanhood, focusing on issues such as race, class, sexuality and political oppression in multiple ways.

Thus, exploring the evolution of female characters throughout various moments in history, the formation and reflection of the feminine movement, and the central role literature plays in this development is the subject of this paper. The following research questions underpinned the study:

- How has literature changed the way women are portrayed?
- I think literature has been a site where gender stereotypes have first been challenged and where, now, women's power has been discussed, and discourse has emerged.
- In what ways are contemporary literary works reinventing women's liberation?

The evolution of female characters in literature from the earliest tales to modern day narratives, it is argued in this paper, has both mirrored and influenced the feminist movement, making literature a powerful tool in the fight for gender equality. Women have gone from often being seen as mere props in a male-dominated narrative to having their own plot arcs where they emerge as three-dimensional beings with rich inner lives and they have become far more than the objects of a man's desire and ambition. This evolution reflects not only changes in literary storytelling but also broader social and political shifts that have transformed women's roles in real life.

Using feminist literary criticism as its conceptual framework, the paper re-evaluates important literary works starting from the medieval period and continuing until contemporary-day fiction. Drawing inspiration from the notions of historical waves of feminism, it examines how feminist discourses have influenced, and been influenced by, the representation of women in literature, as well as literature's continuing re-examination and re-definition of what it means to liberate women. In so doing, this study illuminates the role of literature as both a mirror of societal change, and a driver of progress, showing how the written word has long served as a vehicle for women's resistance, revolution, and at times, reimagination over generations. Women's societal standing at the time reflected how they were represented in literature; they were typically portrayed as submissive and domesticated. But literature grew as a medium of resistance and transformation, as feminism evolved. This article explores the transition from oppression to emancipation of women in literature, as a representation of changing attitudes toward women.

### Objectives

Through this article, we will explore the evolution of women's empowerment in English literature – from women being fragile dolls to bold and headstrong characters. The study examines how feminist movements have affected literary narratives and how contemporary literature still helps contested or

redefined gender norms. The study aims to achieve the following key objectives:

1. To Examine Women's Representation in Literature Over Time.
2. To Discuss the Role of Literature in Challenging Gender Stereotypes

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, women got better represented in literature through the centuries, due to cultural changes, political changes and feminist movements. From passive, secondary characters to active agents and protagonists, the literary image of women has been at the center of contestation and empowerment. In this section, we explore the progression of female characters through major periods in literary history, looking at how literature has supported and challenged genres in relation to women.

### 1. Early Representations: The Passive Woman in Medieval and Renaissance Literature

The Role of Women in Early English Literature They were portrayed as passive, virtuous and obedient, their role one of moral example or warning. Medieval literature underlined the dual notion of women as either the virtuous maiden or the seductive temptress.

The *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387) by Geoffrey Chaucer includes one of the first major representations of women in English literature. Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*: Challenging Medieval Gender Roles Although traditionally female characters in medieval literature abided by gender role norms, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* defied societal expectations. She was assertive, worldly in matters of love and marriage, and stood in stark contrast to the traditional submissive female trope. But her depiction was still molded by the backdrops of a patriarchal literary tradition, with both praise and critique of her rebellion all around.

Women were granted the same with their limited agency as female characters. Some of William Shakespeare's heroines, such as Desdemona (*Othello*), Ophelia (*Hamlet*) and Juliet (*Romeo and*

*Juliet*), have often represented victims of a patriarchal world that held them in place, in which they had no agency over their destinies. But in characters like Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*) and Rosalind (*As You Like It*) we see wit, intelligence and agency, hinting at a nascent movement toward more complex female character.

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### 2. The Rise of Female Consciousness: Women in the 18th and 19th Centuries

Women's voices emerged in literature, as creators and as literary subjects, in the 18th and 19th centuries. The opportunities presented by the emerging novel as a literary form allowed for the development of willful, unapologetic female characters.

Women's literature was pioneered by Jane Austen, whose heroines Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) and Emma Woodhouse (*Emma*) often violated current expectations of women through their intelligence, wit and pursuit of personal happiness. Even if Austen's narratives remained constrained at the social level by the strictures of marriage and propriety, her characters showed an early feminist consciousness, seeking autonomy and self-fulfillment.

It was during Victorian times that feminist themes became more prominent and the engravings more engaging. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) was the original revolutionary character who demanded respect, equality and independence. Similarly, George Eliot's *Dorothea Brooke* (*Middlemarch*, 1871) yearns for an intellectual and emotional fulfillment outside the bounds of conventional marriage.

The Victorian novel also presented the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854) and Thomas

Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) explored economic, social, and moral limits on women. These early literary works set the stage for subsequent feminist discussions that pushed for access to education, financial independence, and agency.

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### 3. Modernist and Postmodernist Voices: Women's Liberation and Psychological Depth

The early 20th century was a time of great change for women and for feminist literature, as the suffrage movement and the emerging recognition of women's rights began to change attitudes around the world. Literature moved beyond depicting women's struggles to actively critiquing patriarchal systems and shaping female subjectivity.

Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is still a foundational feminist text, arguing that financial and intellectual independence are necessary for women's creative expression. Woolf – whose novels, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), in part examined women's inner lives in the world's wake, doing away with traditional narrative structures to show women's consciousness –

The mid-20th century brought Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), novels portraying the psychological trauma of women limited by social mores. These novels included themes of mental health, repression, and self-identity, which aligned with second-wave feminist concerns.

- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. Harper & Row, 1971.
- Lessing, Doris. *The Golden Notebook*. Harper Perennial, 2007.

### 4. Contemporary Literature: Intersectionality and Empowerment

Intersectional feminist concepts are being included in much recent literature – especially in the past few decades – because understandings of gender oppression are interwoven with oppression based in race, class, sexuality, and cultural background. Writers from all backgrounds have re-examined conventional narratives, providing more diverse and nuanced perspectives on women's lives.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a foundational work of feminist dystopian fiction that critiques the control of women's bodies and autonomy in a theocratic society. Likewise, Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) imagines a world in which women can physically overpower men, flipping power dynamics.

Black feminist authors like Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, 1987) and Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*, 1982) have centered the stories of Black women and addressed racial and gender oppression. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) also defied the limits of feminist literature in the now moment, roaring for equality across the globe and for fluid identities.

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage, 2004.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. Harcourt, 1982.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Anchor, 2014.
- Evaristo, Bernardine. *Girl, Woman, Other*. Grove Press, 2019.

### III. CONCLUSION

Women's representation in English literature has evolved in tandem with/along with/coupled with/representation of women and the fight for gender equality more generally. Female characters have evolved from passive, marginalized figures in medieval literature to complex, empowered

protagonists of contemporary fiction. There is plenty of literature that not just describes social transformations but also is a critical agent in defining and upending the ways we think about our gender, a medium of resistance, regimentation and empowerment, equally.

Across different periods of literature, female characters have represented the limits and freedom afforded to women in their societies. Much of the early literature was used to maintain ideologies of patriarchy, implying the place of women was submissive and co-dependent. The feminist thought, and social movements emerged that started to challenge these stereotypes in fiction, allowing independent and self-determining female characters to emerge from the page. The 19th and 20th centuries saw great strides, with women writers like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf creating protagonists who pursued intellectual and personal independence. Modern and postmodern literature was also breaking down stereotype barriers, talking about mental health, sex and intersectionality.

As the world turns, so does literature, and even more so today, bringing with it new influences, narratives, and lens of acceptance. The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, Beloved by Toni Morrison, Girl, Woman, Other by Bernardine Evaristo: these are works that question traditional power structures, imagining new possibilities for women's liberation. And Dystopian and speculative fiction is a powerful tool for critiquing gender oppression and imagining feminist futures.

This article emphasizes how much literature has a major role in the process of advocating for the empowerment of women. Through confronting stereotypes, elevating female voices, and offering alternative narratives, literature has played an important role in spurring and promoting feminist discourse, and real-world social change. Writers today build on this legacy, finding new avenues of voice that break old moldings and establish new ways to speak to dissent, places of change, and relatively new pathways toward the potential for equity.

The next step could be generally to deepen the research of how new media is becoming relevant in

feminist literature (Ridet 10). And a comparative study of women's literary representation in diverse cultures and tongues might provide a broader perspective on women's liberation in literature.

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# Chhattisgarhi Folk Elements in Habib Tanvir's Play *Charandas Chor*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 30 Apr 2025 Revised on: 24 May 2025 Accepted on: 27 May 2025 Published on: 02 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords</b>— <i>resilience, marginalization, Nautanki, Jatra, hypocrisies, Chhattisgarhi dialect.</i></p>	<p><i>Habib Tanvir's Charandas Chor masterfully uses folk theatre traditions to bring the voices of marginalized communities to the forefront. By employing the Chhattisgarhi dialect, folk culture, dance, and storytelling techniques, Tanvir not only highlights the cultural richness of rural India that of Chhattisgarh but also challenges the elitist norms of mainstream theatre. This approach makes the play a powerful commentary on marginalization, giving visibility to the struggles, resilience, and moral complexities of those often ignored in dominant narratives. Charandas, the main character, is a thief who vows five promises to his Guru. Through the character of Charandas and the setting of a rural Indian society, the play highlights how systemic inequality and power dynamics marginalize certain groups while exposing the hypocrisies of those in power. Tanvir integrates elements of Nautanki and Jatra, traditional Indian folk theatre forms, to tell the story of Charandas. These forms are deeply rooted in rural life and are accessible to common people, allowing the play to resonate with marginalized audiences. The simplicity of folk performance styles, with their humor, music, and direct engagement with the audience, mirrors the straightforward yet profound wisdom of rural communities. Besides, by using folk traditions, Tanvir centers the experiences of the rural poor, challenging the idea that high culture or morality resides only in elite spaces. The folk medium allows the play to critique social and political inequalities in a way that is both accessible and empowering for marginalized audiences.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper introduces one of the major theatre directors of India, Mr. Habib Tanvir and also his iconic play *Charandas Chor*. Habib Tanvir was born on 1st September, 1923 in Raipur, Chhattisgarh in colonial India as Habib Ahmed Khan. He used to write poetry with the pseudonym Tanvir. Later he dropped the name Ahmed Khan and just called himself 'Habib Tanvir'. His father, Hafiz Ahmed Khan, was from Peshawar and mother from Raipur.

Habib started performing on stage when he was 11 or 12 .For which he received local awards called Thakur Pyarelal Award. He completed his early education from Raipur and went to Aligarh Muslim University. Later, he went to Mumbai to become an actor. During his stay in Mumbai he got associated with the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA).

In 1959 Tanvir founded Naya Theatre with his wife, Moneeka Mishra. He staged European to Indian classics with the tinge of local folk elements. He staged many plays with the local folk artists. Tanvir passed

away leaving the legacy of folk theatre behind on 8th June 2009.

Tanvir's most popular works and some of which he directed are *Shatranj Ke Mohrey* (1954), *Agra Bazar* (1954), *Lala Shoharat Rai* (1954), *Mitti ki Gaadi* (1973), *Charandas Chor* (1975), *Uttar Ram Charit* (1977) and several other plays.

Habib Tanvir's *Charandas Chor* is a satirical folk play that tells the story of Charandas, a witty and clever thief who, despite his profession, is more honest than the so-called respectable figures in society. The protagonist Charandas is a folk hero who like Robin Hood robs the rich and helps the poor and needy. One day, after stealing some goods, Charandas is caught by a guru (spiritual teacher). In a moment of irony, the guru asks him to take some vows to reform himself. Charandas, with his characteristic humor, agrees but takes four unusual vows:

1. He will never lie.
2. He will never cheat or deceive anyone.
3. He will never marry.
4. He will never desire power or wealth.

Despite being a thief, Charandas strictly adheres to these vows, even when faced with situations that could save his life. His honesty and straightforwardness earn him admiration, but they also expose the hypocrisy of the powerful people around him, including the corrupt priest, landlords, and officials.

#### **Style of Habib Tanveer**

Tanvir had a great interest in local dialects and used to experiment with his folk artists more specifically Chhattisgarhi folk artists and music. He has staged European to Indian classics by adding various local folk elements in them.

#### **Use of Chhattisgarhi folk elements of Nautanki and Jatra**

Folk traditions often use humor and satire to critique power structures, and Tanvir employs these techniques effectively. Through witty dialogues, songs, and exaggerated characters like the corrupt priest and the self-serving queen, the play mocks the elite's moral pretensions while portraying the marginalized as repositories of integrity and common sense. As in the case of Havaladar (policeman) who is a

minor but significant character representing corruption and failure in law enforcement. He is the source of slapstick comedy:

The cat is out, the cat's about  
The cat is on the prowl  
All in a trice she brings down mice  
And then she has a fall. (CC 140)

Tanvir integrates elements of Nautanki and pJatra, traditional Indian folk theatre forms, to tell the story of Charandas. These forms are deeply rooted in rural life in Chhattisgarh and are accessible to common people and local people in particular allowing the play to resonate with marginalized audiences. The simplicity of folk performance styles, with their humor, music, and direct engagement with the audience, mirrors the straightforward yet profound wisdom of rural communities.

Nautanki is known for its melodramatic storytelling, musical interludes, and satirical social commentary, all of which are evident in Tanvir's play.

#### **a) Use of Song and Music:**

Nautanki integrates songs into the narrative to express emotions and advance the plot. In *Charandas Chor*, folk songs and poetic verses are interwoven throughout the play.

It frequently employs loud, exaggerated performances. The play opens with a chorus singing and dancing vigorously.

Satynam! Satyanam! Satyanam!  
Praise the truth, nothing better,  
Praise the guru, no one greater,  
Who alone brings down to us  
The divine nectar of Truth. (134)

Characters such as the corrupt priest and the greedy queen in *Charandas Chor* are satirical representations of authority, depicted in an exaggerated, humorous manner. The priest, who should be a symbol of morality, is more concerned about his own gains than spiritual truth. His dialogues, filled with irony, expose the hollowness of religious authority. The guru asks for *Guru-dakshina* with a heavy charge from the poor people such as smokers, gamblers, drunkards etc. He shouts, "Arrey, what's this? I thought it was twenty-five rupees but you've given me bidis! (CC, 149)

### b) Elements of Jatra in *Charandas Chor*

Jatra, a folk theatre form from Bengal, is known for its high-energy performances, moral dilemmas, and intense dialogues, all of which are central to *Charandas Chor*. Jatra often presents its protagonist with a moral choice that leads to a dramatic downfall. Charandas faces this dilemma when the queen asks him to break his vow. His steadfastness leads to his execution, mirroring the tragic arc found in Jatra performances. "A promise is a promise! If a thief can break his word, then what remains of honesty?" - Charandas still refuses to marry the queen, knowing even that it will cost him his life.

Jatra often critiques political and religious corruption. In *Charandas Chor*, the queen, the guru, and other authority figures are depicted as selfish and hypocritical. The actors of Jatra often deliver powerful, emotionally charged monologues. Charandas's dialogues, particularly in his confrontations with authority, reflect this style.

When the Queen demands Charandas to marry her but is denied, she says "Dead men tell no tales! Have you lost your desire to live, Charandas?" Charandas firm in his vows boldly tells the queen:

"Whether I live or die, I won't go back on my word to my guru. I can't break my vow. I beg you, rani-sahib, forgive me Don't have me killed! Don't commt the sin of murder!"  
(*Charandas Chor*, 194)

As the thief is slaughtered, a lamp is placed near his head. The Satnamis, the local community in C.G. enter carrying their white flag, shower the spot with flowers and start singing their song:

The truth is divine,  
Divine is the truth,  
Nothing compares,  
So saith our guru,  
With the sacred, the  
Holy, the power of  
Truth. (CC, 195)

### CONCLUSION

Habib Tanvir effectively blends Nautanki's humor, music, and exaggerated characters with Jatra's moral

dilemmas, dramatic intensity, and political satire to create a powerful folk-theatre masterpiece. This fusion not only entertains but also sharpens the play's critique of corruption, hypocrisy, and social injustice. The brilliance in writing and the themes of hypocrisy, corrupt elements could not be brought out to the surface without the use of folk elements.

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# Psychological Conditioning and Emotional Manipulation in Orwell’s 1984 and Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 28 Apr 2025                      Revised on: 19 May 2025                      Accepted on: 26 May 2025                      Published on: 02 Jun 2025</p>	<p><i>It explores how psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation help totalitarian regimes maintain control in George Orwell’s 1984 and Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale. While surveillance and physical force play a role, both novels show that fear, language control, indoctrination and emotional repression are more powerful in shaping obedience. In 1984, the Party uses Newspeak, Doublethink and constant surveillance to control thought, while Gilead in The Handmaid’s Tale relies on religion, gender oppression and social pressure to enforce submission. It compares these methods and connects them to real-world issues like media influence, digital surveillance and political propaganda.</i></p>
<p><b>Keywords – Psychological control, emotional manipulation, 1984, The Handmaid’s Tale, total-itarianism, fear, surveillance.</b></p>	

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dystopian literature has explored the mechanisms of power and control, revealing how authoritarian regimes sustain dominance over individuals and societies. While many studies focus on surveillance, censorship and physical coercion as tools of oppression, psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation play an even more profound role in enforcing obedience. George Orwell’s 1984 and Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale both illustrate how fear, indoctrination, language control and emotional repression shape human behavior, ensuring compliance without the need for constant surveillance. 1984 presents a world where Newspeak, Doublethink and Thoughtcrime force individuals to conform, while Atwood’s Gilead manipulates love, memory and religious doctrine to control women’s lives. It explores the ways in which psychological control operates beyond physical oppression, demonstrating that emotional conditioning and ideological manipulation are

more effective in sustaining long-term authoritarian rule.

Dystopian literature serves as a literary response to sociopolitical anxieties, illustrating how regimes maintain power not only through surveillance and physical oppression but also through psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation [6, 12]. While many scholars analyze the use of surveillance in 1984 and The Handmaid’s Tale. [8, 9], It examine how fear, emotional suppression and ideological indoctrination sustain authoritarian rule.

Orwell’s 1984 presents a society where the Party erodes individual autonomy through mechanisms like Newspeak, Doublethink and Thoughtcrime, conditioning citizens to police their own thoughts [10]. Meanwhile, Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale depicts a gendered dystopia, where Gilead controls women’s emotions, relationships and memories to prevent rebellion [2].

It highlights how authoritarian systems use emotions as a tool of control and how these themes remain

relevant in contemporary societies where propaganda, media influence and ideological conditioning shape individual behavior [4].

### 1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation in dystopian literature provides insight into how authoritarian regimes maintain long-term control. *The Handmaid's Tale*, focuses on how fear, emotional repression and ideological indoctrination shape individual behavior and societal compliance. It aims to demonstrate that internalized obedience is more effective than external oppression.

The primary objective of this study is to give the role of psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation as mechanisms of control in 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale*. It focus on external forms of oppression such as surveillance and violence, this research emphasizes the internalization of obedience through fear, emotional suppression and ideological indoctrination [6, 11].

This research aims to:

1. Analyze how psychological conditioning operates beyond physical surveillance in Orwell and Atwood's dystopian worlds.
2. Explore how emotional repression strengthens authoritarian control and prevents rebellion.
3. Compare the mechanisms of ideological indoctrination in 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale*.
4. Examine the role of love, loyalty and betrayal in reinforcing obedience.
5. Identify the contemporary relevance of Orwellian and Atwoodian psychological control in modern political and media landscapes.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How do Orwell and Atwood depict psychological conditioning as a more effective tool of control than physical oppression?
- **RQ2:** What role does emotional repression play in maintaining authoritarian rule in both novels?

- **RQ3:** How do mechanisms of ideological indoctrination differ in 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale*?
- **RQ4:** How are love, relationships and betrayal manipulated to enforce compliance and obedience?
- **RQ5:** How do Orwell's and Atwood's themes of psychological manipulation relate to modern authoritarianism and media influence?

## II. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

It focuses on how psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation function as mechanisms of control in 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale*. It examines surveillance, propaganda and physical oppression. It highlights internalized obedience, fear conditioning and emotional suppression as more enduring methods of control. This research is limited to a comparative literary analysis of these two novels, incorporating psychological, political and feminist perspectives. It provides valuable insights, it does not include a historical analysis of real-world totalitarian regimes or empirical psychological experiments. These limitations help to maintain a clear focus on literary themes while allowing for future interdisciplinary research on the topic.

It investigates how these novels portray:

- Psychological conditioning as a tool for long-term obedience.
- The role of fear, love and memory in shaping ideological submission.
- The internalization of state ideology through language, trauma and social structures.

It applies theories from psychology, political science and feminist literary criticism [11, 5]. By comparing Orwell's and Atwood's approaches, this study offers new insights into how authoritarian regimes control individuals beyond physical coercion.

### 2.1 Delimitations and Exclusions

To maintain a focused analysis, this study does not include:

- Other dystopian works such as *Brave New World* [7] or *Fahrenheit 451*.

- Film or TV adaptations of 1984 and The Handmaid's Tale.
- A broader feminist or Marxist critique beyond the psychological conditioning framework.

While these aspects are relevant, they fall outside the study's primary focus on psychological conditioning in literature.

## 2.2 Theoretical Limitations

This study is grounded in textual analysis and does not incorporate empirical psychological experiments or sociological surveys [12]. However, real-world examples of emotional manipulation in authoritarian systems [4] are referenced to highlight the relevance of literary dystopias in contemporary society.

## 2.3 Historical and Cultural Limitations

This study contextualizes Orwell's and Atwood's works within their historical periods:

- 1984 reflects Cold War anxieties about totalitarianism and surveillance [10].
- *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques gender oppression and religious fundamentalism in the late 20th century [2].

However, the study does not provide a comprehensive historical analysis of totalitarian regimes or feminist movements, as its focus remains on literary representations.

## III. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It explores psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation function in 1984 and The Handmaid's Tale. It employs a comparative literary analysis supported by relevant psychological, political and feminist theories. By examining how fear, emotional suppression and ideological indoctrination shape individual obedience, it highlights the effectiveness of internalized control mechanisms over external enforcement. A qualitative approach will be used, incorporating textual, comparative and contextual analysis to evaluate how Orwell and Atwood construct their dystopian societies.

It applies Foucault's theory of power and surveillance, behavioral psychology (Pavlov,

Skinner) and feminist literary criticism to provide a deeper understanding of how totalitarian regimes sustain obedience through psychological means. By integrating these methods and theories, it aims to contribute to the broader discourse on dystopian literature, authoritarian control and contemporary sociopolitical realities.

It gives a comparative literary analysis to examine the psychological conditioning and emotional manipulation techniques in 1984 and The Handmaid's Tale.

**Textual Analysis:** Close reading of primary texts to identify themes related to psychological conditioning, ideological control and emotional repression [10, 2].

**Comparative Analysis:** Evaluating the differences and similarities in Orwell's and Atwood's representations of internalized obedience [3].

**Contextual Analysis:** Situating both novels within their historical, political and feminist contexts [1, 6].

To analyze psychological and emotional control mechanisms, it applies three key theoretical perspectives:

### 3.1 Foucault's Theory of Power and Surveillance

Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power argues that modern control mechanisms operate through surveillance, normalization and internalized self-discipline [6].

- In 1984, Big Brother's regime enforces self-surveillance through fear, creating psychological obedience.
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead conditions women to regulate their own thoughts and emotions, ensuring compliance [9].

### 3.2 Behavioral Psychology: Pavlov and Skinner

Classical and operant conditioning theories by Pavlov and Skinner explain how repeated reinforcement can train individuals to comply without physical force [11].

- Orwell's Party uses rewards and punishments (e.g., Room 101) to shape behavior.
- Gilead relies on trauma and fear conditioning to suppress female agency.

### 3.3 Feminist Literary Criticism

- In 1984, the fear of Room 101 ensures that prisoners betray their loved ones and submit to the Party [10].
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, public executions (Salvagings) are staged as spectacles of terror, ensuring that Handmaids never consider rebellion [9].

## IV. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING

The ability to control individuals not just through force but through their own thoughts, emotions and beliefs is one of the most powerful mechanisms of authoritarian rule. While traditional dystopian narratives often depict surveillance, censorship and physical oppression, modern dystopian literature highlights psychological conditioning as a more effective tool for maintaining obedience.

George Orwell's 1984 and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* explain how fear, trauma, ideological indoctrination and language control shape human behavior, ensuring that individuals internalize their oppression without the need for constant external enforcement. It explores the theoretical foundations of psychological manipulation, drawing from Foucault's theory of power and surveillance, behavioral psychology (Pavlov, Skinner) and feminist literary criticism.

### 4.1 The Evolution of Psychological Control in Dystopian Literature

Dystopian literature has explored how authoritarian regimes maintain control over individuals. Earlier dystopian works, such as *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) and *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1924), depicted totalitarian control through scientific advancements, technological monitoring and mass conformity [7]. In these novels, social conditioning and pleasure-driven compliance ensured obedience, with citizens accepting oppression as a form of stability.

However, 1984 (1949) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) focus from external control to internalized oppression, where individuals themselves become agents of their own subjugation [10, 2]. Orwell's novel explores thought control through language

manipulation (Newspeak), psychological contradictions (Doublethink) and fear (Room 101). In contrast, Atwood's *Gilead* uses religious indoctrination, gendered oppression and social surveillance to condition women into accepting their subjugation as divinely ordained.

This shift from external surveillance to psychological manipulation represents a key evolution in dystopian literature, demonstrating how ideological control and emotional repression can be more enduring than physical coercion.

### 4.2 Surveillance vs. Internalized Oppression: A Conceptual Distinction

In totalitarian regimes, power is exerted through both external surveillance and internalized oppression. Orwell's and Atwood's dystopias provide two models of control:

- *External Surveillance* - Direct monitoring, policing and physical enforcement of behavior.
- *Internalized Oppression* - The regime conditions individuals to self-regulate their thoughts and actions.

Table 1: Comparison of Surveillance and Internalized Oppression

Type of Control	1984	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
<b>Surveillance</b>	Thought Police, Telescreens monitor behavior at all times [10]	The Eyes, spies and public informants enforce control [9]
<b>Internalized Oppression</b>	Newspeak, Doublethink ensure self-regulation and thought control	Religious indoctrination and emotional suppression enforce obedience

### 4.3 Fear, Trauma and Social Conformity in Oppressive Regimes

Fear is one of the most powerful tools of psychological conditioning. Both Orwell's 1984 and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* show how trauma, surveillance and social pressure force individuals

into obedience. When people experience chronic fear, they often internalize their oppression, making active resistance nearly impossible [12].

#### 4.3.1 Fear as a Tool of Control

- In 1984, the fear of Room 101 ensures that prisoners betray their loved ones and submit to the Party [10].
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, public executions (Salvagings) are staged as spectacles of terror, ensuring that Handmaids never consider rebellion [9].

#### 4.3.2 Psychological Trauma and Emotional Suppression

Long-term trauma conditions individuals to accept their oppression as normal. Psychologists argue that severe trauma leads to emotional numbing, preventing people from resisting authority [12].

- Winston in 1984 loses his capacity for love and critical thought after undergoing psychological torture.
- Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* learns to suppress her emotions to survive, fearing that any sign of defiance will lead to execution.

#### 4.3.3 Social Conformity and Peer Pressure

Totalitarian regimes enforce obedience through group dynamics. Both novels illustrate how rituals and public displays reinforce conformity.

Table 2: Comparison of Fear-Based Social Conformity

Mechanism	1984	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
Public Displays of Fear	Two Minutes Hate – citizens express forced hatred for enemies [10]	Salvagings – public executions reinforce Handmaids' obedience [9]
Forced Group Participation	Mass rallies ensure collective submission	Handmaids must participate in executions (Particutions)
Betrayal and Distrust	Children report parents to the police Thought Police	Handmaids police each other

#### 4.3.4 Indoctrination from Childhood

Both novels show how indoctrination starts at a young age:

- In 1984, children spy on their parents, ensuring total loyalty to the Party.
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, girls are conditioned to believe that forced childbirth is their divine duty.

### V. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING AND EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION IN 1984

In 1984, George Orwell presents a world where totalitarian control is not just enforced through physical oppression but deeply embedded in the human mind. The Party, led by Big Brother, does not simply demand obedience—it seeks to reshape thoughts, emotions and perceptions so that resistance becomes psychologically impossible.

Through fear, surveillance, language manipulation and emotional repression, the Party ensures that citizens do not just obey but internalize loyalty. Orwell explores how psychological conditioning leads individuals to self-regulate their behavior, betray their beliefs and ultimately lose their sense of personal identity.

It gives the mechanisms of psychological control in 1984, including the role of the Thought Police, the power of Doublethink and the Party's ability to break the human spirit.

#### 5.1 Fear as a Political Weapon – The Role of the Thought Police

In 1984, fear is the foundation of totalitarian control. The Party does not merely punish dissent—it ensures that people are afraid to even think rebellious thoughts. This is achieved through the Thought Police, a force designed to enforce absolute loyalty by monitoring and punishing thoughtcrime [10].

##### 5.1.1 How the Thought Police Enforce Psychological Control

- *Surveillance and Paranoia* – Citizens are constantly watched through telescreens, informants and hidden microphones. The fear of being caught leads individuals to self-censor their thoughts.

Doublethink Phrase	Contradiction
War is Peace	War creates unity through fear.
Freedom is Slavery	True freedom comes from obedience.
Ignorance is Strength	Knowledge leads to instability.

Table 3: Examples of Doublethink in 1984

- *Psychological Torture* – Arrested dissidents are subjected to mental and physical torture, forcing them to betray loved ones and accept Party doctrine.
- *The Elimination of Free Will* – The ultimate goal is to make rebellion not just dangerous, but unthinkable.

### 5.1.2 The Impact of Fear on Winston Smith

Winston initially tries to resist, but fear gradually breaks him down:

- He is constantly anxious about being watched.
- He suppresses his true thoughts and emotions to avoid detection.
- When captured, he betrays Julia under extreme duress, showing that fear overrides love and loyalty.

By the end, Winston does not just obey the Party – he loves Big Brother. This demonstrates how fear becomes the most effective tool of totalitarian control.

### 5.2 Doublethink and Cognitive Dissonance - The Power of Contradictory Truths

Orwell introduces Doublethink as a method to control thought and eliminate independent reasoning. It forces individuals to accept contradictory beliefs simultaneously, preventing them from recognizing inconsistencies in Party ideology [10].

#### 5.2.1 How Doublethink Works

- Citizens must believe two opposite ideas at once without recognizing the contradiction.
- This allows the Party to rewrite history and shape reality without resistance.
- Those who question Doublethink are viewed as dangerous and mentally unstable.

## VI. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING AND EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION IN

### *The Handmaid's Tale*

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood presents a society where psychological conditioning is the primary method of control. Unlike Orwell's 1984, where fear and direct surveillance dominate, Gilead maintains power by manipulating emotions, relationships and beliefs. The regime does not just punish disobedience—it restructures identity, memory and perception, ensuring that women internalize their oppression.

Through indoctrination, ritualized violence, fear and emotional suppression, Handmaids are conditioned to see submission as not only necessary but divinely justified. It explores how Gilead's psychological manipulation operates through religious indoctrination, emotional dependency, trauma and the erasure of personal identity, ensuring that rebellion is not just dangerous, but psychologically unthinkable.

### 6.1 Indoctrination through Rituals: The Red Center and Training of Hand- maids

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, psychological conditioning starts before Handmaids are placed in households. The Red Center functions as a training facility where women are stripped of their past identities and reshaped into obedient Handmaids [2].

#### 6.1 .1 Key Psychological Control Mechanisms at the Red Center

##### 1. Religious Justification for Oppression

- Biblical passages are selectively misinterpreted to justify the subjugation of women [9].
- The Aunts use scripture to normalize submission, convincing women that obedience is God's will.

##### 2. Shaming and Surveillance as Social Control

- The Aunts enforce compliance by humiliating and isolating those who resist.

- Women are forced to confess their past sexual “sins,” reinforcing guilt and weakening personal agency.

### 3. Erasure of Individual Identity

- Handmaids lose their real names and are assigned patronymics based on their Commanders (e.g., Offred = Of-Fred).

- These renaming removes autonomy and reinforces their role as reproductive tools.

At the Red Center, women do not merely submit physically—they internalize Gilead’s ideology, continuing to regulate their behavior even after leaving the facility.

### 6.2 Trauma and Emotional Numbing: Survival Through Emotional Detachment

Psychologists argue that prolonged trauma often leads to emotional numbing, a psychological survival strategy [12]. In Gilead, Handmaids do not only fear punishment—they grow accustomed to suffering, making resistance feel unimaginable.

#### 6.2.1 Emotional Detachment as a Survival Mechanism

- Offred distances herself from painful memories to preserve her mental stability [9].
- She accepts her current reality rather than actively planning escape.
- Over time, enduring oppression becomes normalized, diminishing the sense of injustice.

#### 6.2.3 Learned Helplessness in Gilead

- Many women stop questioning their reality because they believe change is impossible.
- Even when moments of defiance arise, Handmaids often lack the psychological strength to act.

Offred’s emotional suppression demonstrates how long-term trauma results in passivity. Psychological control, therefore, proves more enduring than physical coercion.

## VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 1984 AND THE HANDMAID’S TALE

Both 1984 and The Handmaid’s Tale depict dystopian societies where totalitarian regimes use psychological conditioning and emotional

manipulation to maintain control. While Orwell’s Party enforces obedience through surveillance, propaganda and thought control, Atwood’s Gilead relies on religious indoctrination, gender oppression and emotional suppression.

Despite their differences, both novels explore how fear, language manipulation and ideological indoctrination shape individuals’ perceptions of reality, making rebellion psychologically impossible. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of these two dystopian worlds, focusing on fear, language control, internalized ideology, gendered oppression and the limits of rebellion.

### 7.1 The Role of Fear and Emotional Repression in Maintaining Power

Fear serves as a foundation of control in both novels. It is used to prevent rebellion, enforce obedience and psychologically break individuals [9, 10]. The methods, however, differ:

- In 1984, fear is maintained through constant surveillance, public executions and torture. The ultimate symbol of fear, Room 101, breaks individuals completely.
- In The Handmaid’s Tale, fear operates through public punishments, forced executions and secret informants. The Eyes function as an invisible threat.

Table 4: Comparison of Fear-Based Control

Fear Mechanism	1984	The Handmaid’s Tale
Public Punishments	Room 101, mass executions	Salvagings (public hangings), Particutions [9]
Secret Police	Thought Police monitor thoughts	The Eyes enforce Gilead’s laws [2]
Emotional Suppression	Winston betrays Julia out of fear	Handmaids repress emotions to survive

### 7.2 Indoctrination and Language Control: Newspeak vs. Biblical Justifications

Language is a critical tool of oppression. In 1984, Newspeak eliminates rebellious ideas, while in

*The Handmaid's Tale*, religious language redefines subjugation as divine will [3].

Table 5: Language as a Tool of Oppression

Language Control	1984	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
<b>Restricted Vocabulary</b>	Newspeak eliminates dissent	Women are forbidden to read
<b>Contradictory Language</b>	War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery	Biblical justification for gender roles
<b>Thought Regulation</b>	Doublethink sustains loyalty	Religious texts guide behavior

### 7.2.1 How Language Shapes Thought

Controlling language means controlling thought. Both regimes prevent alternative ideologies from emerging by restricting expression.

### 7.3 The Internalization of Ideology: The Party vs. Gilead

The most effective form of control is internalized obedience. Citizens and Handmaids do not require constant surveillance when they begin to monitor themselves [10, 9].

#### 7.3.1 Psychological Transformation of the Individual

- In *1984*, Winston initially resists but is broken. By the end, he believes the Party's lies and loves Big Brother.
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred does not fully submit, but her lack of open resistance shows passive acceptance through conditioning.

Once belief is internalized, rebellion is no longer conceivable.

#### 7.4 Gendered Aspects of Psychological Control

Both novels explore emotional manipulation, Atwood places greater emphasis on gender-specific oppression. In *1984*, oppression is largely universal. In Gilead, women are systematically reduced to reproductive tools [9, 3].

### 7.4.1 The Body as a Site of Control

- In *1984*, control targets emotional bonds, not reproduction.
- In *The Handmaid's Tale*, control of female fertility is central; women are valued only for their ability to bear children.

Table 6: Gendered Oppression in the Novels

Aspect	1984	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
<b>Role of Women</b>	Marginal figures	Central to Gilead's structure
<b>Sexual Control</b>	Anti-Sex League promotes celibacy	Women serve reproductive function [3]
<b>Emotional Repression</b>	Love is erased through torture	Women are denied love and identify

### 7.4.2 Gendered Indoctrination

- Winston is broken through physical torture, while Handmaids are controlled through religious teaching.
- Orwell portrays systemic oppression, whereas Atwood critiques patriarchal structures through gendered control.

Atwood's novel thus provides a more focused critique of how authoritarianism and patriarchy intersect to dominate women's minds and bodies.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals that psychological manipulation often proves more effective than physical oppression in sustaining totalitarian control. Orwell's *1984* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* both depict regimes that rely on fear, language distortion and emotional suppression to shape individual thought and ensure conformity. While Orwell emphasizes surveillance and ideological enforcement, Atwood portrays obedience enforced through religious dogma and gender-based repression—yet both result in the internalization of oppression, rendering resistance psychologically unthinkable. These insights remain

strikingly relevant today, as modern societies grapple with mass surveillance, disinformation and social conditioning. Dystopian fiction, by exposing these subtle forms of control, serves as a powerful reminder of the need for vigilance, critical thinking and resistance in the face of manipulation.

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# Performing Identity and Seeking Justice: A Goffmanian Reading of Activism in *The Hate U Give* and *Moxie*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 04 Apr 2025                      Revised on: 27 May 2025                      Accepted on: 02 Jun 2025                      Published on: 07 Jun 2025  <b>Keywords— Racial, Justice, Activism, Goffman theory, Self- Presentation, Justice, Identity</b></p>	<p><i>This study examined how the teenager protagonists formed their identity in The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas and Moxie by Jennifer Mathieu. This research uses Erving Goffman’s theory of self-presentation to look at how the female characters in The Hate U Give and Moxie deal with their personalities and developed their identity. The focus of this study is on how people choose to show themselves in front of others by hiding their identity and being what they are at back stage when they are alone, realising the importance of not just their identity but of whole community. With Erving Goffman’s theory of self- presentation as a guide, this study looks at how women deal with their personalities and participate in digital activism through the stories in The Hate U Give and Moxie. It makes a point of showing how identity changes as a activist at a young age for demanding justice, mostly women, became activist to control how they are portrayed, make connections, and fight against unfair systems. This paper also reflects how identity and justice can be interconnected, Both Starr in The Hate U Give and Vivian in Moxie realised the importance of their identity and moreover of their group. In The Hate U Give, Starr not just formed her identity but of all people of colour of her group. Similarly, in Moxie, Vivian got frustrated of experiencing injustice in her school where identity of girls is neglected, Vivian not just realised her own identity but of all the girls in school. This paper gives a wide discussion on activism, performance and social justice in Contemporary Young Adult literature.</i></p>

Teenager’s age is very crucial age. What they are and how they are going to deal in their life is what they expect will affect their future, Teenagers realise that their identity matters in this world and what they role play in their life, think, take decisions in life, and what action they are taking will affect their future, Teenagers realise that they need to work on their identity and moreover on themselves to have a status in society. In *The Hate U Give* and *Moxie*, both

the female protagonist realised about their identity which helped them in fighting against injustice. Starr in *The Hate U Give* and Vivian in *Moxie* realised that they both need to take stand as this injustice will not stop if they didn’t take any step and build not just their identity but of their whole group who face injustice.

The female students in the *Moxie* book engaged in a determined struggle for equality in the educational

environment. In other words, women encounter numerous challenges in their pursuit of equality. This topic is intricately linked to the ongoing efforts for gender equality, highlighting the necessity to dismantle sexist, homophobic, and transphobic norms that persist within society and culture. Vivian, a young woman in her teenage years, occupies a pivotal role in the narrative. Upon discovering the pervasive issues of sexual harassment and inequality within her educational institution, she feels compelled to take a stand against these injustices. Through the publication of an anonymous zine titled "Moxie," she aspires to motivate her fellow students and foster constructive transformation within the school environment.

To gain a deeper understanding of the narrative, it is beneficial to analyse the novel *"The Hate U Give"* by considering the influences that shaped the author's perspective.

*"Individuals now acknowledge Starr as distinct from Maverick, perceiving her as a champion who contributes to the community in her own capacity. In Garden Heights, Maverick is a well-known figure, as his store serves as a cherished establishment that supports the community, and he is recognised for his commitment to assisting others. For instance, Mrs. Rooks inquires of Maverick regarding the possibility of contributing funds for Khalil's funeral, as she anticipated he would be willing to assist. When Starr distanced herself from Garden Heights, her identity was primarily associated with Maverick. As news of Starr's testimony circulates, individuals now perceive her as an advocate for justice. Maverick articulated that advocating for Khalil signifies contributing to the dismantling of the Thug Life cycle for the entire community. Consequently, Garden Heights now perceives Starr as an advocate for the entire community, rather than merely the child of their reliable neighbour".*

According to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, female heroes strategically utilise different platforms to construct and convey empowered identities within restrictive institutions. By meticulously crafting their "front stage" presentations, they effectively influence their audience and challenge societal norms. This is achieved through the intentional application of language, imagery, and digital platforms to confront dominant narratives and assert control (Lambert 43). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman articulates a thesis suggesting that individuals are in

a constant state of presenting themselves as a performance to others, thereby influencing how they are perceived. This concept is equally relevant in digital spaces, where individuals may intentionally construct their personas and present carefully curated representations of themselves to specific audiences.

In delineating the public persona and the spaces designated for leisure and preparation, he introduced the concepts of "front stage" and "back stage." Goffman emphasised the concept of "impression management," referring to the intentional or unintentional efforts to control how we present ourselves to others (Grosz 257).

Similar to artists in a theatrical setting, female protagonists intentionally select the information and expressions they present, carefully managing their public persona in the digital realm. This encompasses profile images, posts, and interactions—all meticulously curated to convey the desired impression. The backstage area serves as a secluded space where individuals can relax, prepare for the performance, and authentically express themselves away from the gaze of the audience. In the context of gendered or various forms of oppression, individuals intentionally manage their online presence to challenge societal expectations and norms. Individuals might articulate their identities in manners that contest biases or defy societal norms through their profiles.

Diverse platforms empower female protagonists to reshape and oversee their narratives, evolving from mere consumers of social media into proactive catalysts for change. They might form collectives, connect individuals with similar ideologies, and critically examine dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality. Through their online endeavours, female heroes have the potential to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, thereby promoting greater equality and representation within society. This may encompass demonstrating their autonomy and individuality, participating in social movements, or utilising their online platforms to raise awareness of issues.

Diverse platforms enable female protagonists to confront the limitations imposed by oppressive systems, allowing them to articulate their agency and

identity in personally meaningful ways. This may involve articulating their identity, recounting their experiences, and engaging with others who share their values through their websites. In social interactions, individuals consistently assume various roles and manage perceptions to convey an image that aligns with their desired narrative. To preserve the integrity of the play, one might employ costumes, props, and even specific language choices. In the absence of an audience, performers often relax their presentation, engaging in backstage activities that allow for a more genuine and authentic expression of themselves.

Activism is expressed in various forms within "*The Hate U Give*," notably through Starr's path to self-awareness and her courageous articulation of dissent against injustice, alongside the broader systemic issues of racism, police violence, and entrenched discrimination. Starr's choice to testify and advocate in memory of her friend Khalil underscores the importance of addressing systemic issues; her actions come in the wake of her friend's tragic death. Starr transitions from a state of reluctance, burdened by emotions of shame and guilt, to discovering her voice and articulating her thoughts, driven by a profound aspiration for transformation and equity. The importance of voicing one's beliefs as a driving force for transformation is highlighted in the narrative, particularly through Starr's choice to testify and take a stand. Through an exploration of systemic racism and police brutality, "*The Hate U Give*" illustrates the profound effects these issues have on Black individuals and their communities. The significance of cultural capital and activism is underscored by Maverick's role as a father, which serves as a means of defiance against systems that marginalise Black children.

As Starr navigates her dual identities at Garden Heights and the privileged school, the narrative explores the profound influence of language on the journey of self-discovery. In her support for Khalil, Starr confronts prevailing societal norms and positions herself as a proponent of social justice and the welfare of her community. Employing contemporary technologies to challenge the dominant narrative and advocate for justice, Starr Carter, the central character of *The Hate U Give*, chronicles and highlights the police killing of her

friend Khalil through social media platforms. Through her #BlackLivesMatter postings, Starr meticulously curates her online presence, skilfully navigating the dual objectives of self-defense and advocacy for social transformation. The volume highlights the ways in which marginalised communities can adeptly challenge inequity and seek accountability through the use of digital activism.

*"Guided by Vivian, a high school student who utilises a blog to expose the sexism and misogyny present in her school and community, Moxie is an initiative led by women."*

The characters in *Moxie* engage with digital environments to challenge patriarchal systems and assert their autonomy, thereby creating a unified voice in opposition to systemic inequality. The text illustrates the ways in which women have the capacity to challenge traditional power dynamics and promote gender equality through digital platforms (Henry et al. 23).

A significant theme in "*Moxie*" by Jennifer Mathieu is the pursuit of social change, especially regarding the challenges encountered by young women dealing with sexism and microaggressions in their school environment. Witnessing and documenting occurrences of discrimination at "*Moxie*," a school, motivates the initially reticent protagonist Vivian to initiate a feminist movement. In the narrative, Vivian and her companions employ various strategies to elevate awareness and advocate for transformation, including the creation of a zine and the coordination of protests.

A wider consciousness regarding gender issues, where Vivian and her peers recognise the omnipresence of discrimination and respond accordingly, reflects her personal evolution. The significance of female unity and assistance is highlighted throughout the narrative as various groups of women collaborate to attain shared objectives. Engaging in direct action strategies, including the production of a zine and the coordination of walk-throughs, empowers Vivian and her peers to confront and question established norms. While the book primarily addresses sexism, it also explores the concept of intersectionality, examining how various forms of oppression, including racism and sexism, interconnect. The

young women's resolve and tenacity are evident as they continue to strive despite facing challenges from school officials and fellow students. In the role of an activist, a novelist might initiate a zine that chronicles and confronts the sexism encountered by Vivian and her peers. This endeavour serves to express their dissatisfaction with the school's policies and conduct, as the girls prepare for a walkout. To support the girls' soccer team, which faces significant financial challenges, the team is organising fundraising events to meet their expenses. The young women challenge injustice by articulating their opposition to sexism and various other forms of discrimination, both within the educational environment and beyond. Highlighting the significance of female unity, proactive engagement, and the struggle for a fairer society, "Moxie" vividly illustrates the endeavours of the youth movement. For Starr Carter, the protagonist of "The Hate U Give," her journey of self-discovery and her emergence as an activist are intricately intertwined. Her journey illustrates how individuals traverse various landscapes while asserting their voice against systemic injustices, especially the violence perpetrated by law enforcement on Black youth. Starr's experiences underscore the importance of collaborative efforts in the pursuit of social justice and illustrate how socioeconomic disparities influence the development of identity. The Struggle for Expression: The Evolution and Tensions of Personal Identity Starr's community of Garden Heights and her prestigious, predominantly white preparatory institution, Williamson, present distinct obstacles. She dissects her identity through code-switching, a practice in which she modifies her language and behaviour depending on her audience, influenced by her dual nature. Starr draws motivation from her encounters with law enforcement violence and the widespread scrutiny that ensued after her account. She is resolute in her quest to assert her voice and uncover her authentic self, which entails articulating truths to authority and advocating for her convictions. Following the tragic event of witnessing her friend Khalil's murder at the hands of a police officer, Starr undergoes a significant evolution in her sense of self and her understanding of her role in society, motivating her to engage in meaningful action. Starr's journey illustrates the significance of

questioning established norms and standing against injustice. She passionately champions the pursuit of justice for Khalil and the urgent need to reduce instances of police brutality. Engagement with the local community, especially with her cherished ones, empowers Starr to confront the trials of activism and fosters a profound sense of belonging. Starr emerges as an emblem of resilience and resolve as she

advocates for social justice initiatives, inspiring individuals to examine their own prejudices and participate in the pursuit of equality.

This fictional narrative delves into the profound effects of pressing societal issues, with a strong emphasis on the Black Lives Matter movement, which addresses systemic racism and police brutality. The book "The Hate U Give" intricately intertwines individual narratives with overarching societal themes to mirror actual occurrences, ignite social transformation, and inspire readers to engage in advocacy for a fairer society by emphasising the significance of justice, activism, collective effort, and personal agency in confronting systemic inequalities. Moxie places significant emphasis on the central character, Vivian Carter, and her path towards self-discovery. Confronted with prejudice and inequality at her high school, Vivian gains a deeper understanding of her identity and her role in society, wholeheartedly embracing her feminist principles.

Contemplating One's Own Existence For an extended period, Vivian experienced discomfort and uncertainty regarding her identity as she grappled with the desire to embody the ideals of a "good girl" while attempting to meet the expectations imposed by others. A pivotal element in her journey of self-discovery is her initial anonymously published Moxie zine. It provides her with an opportunity to articulate her grievances and challenge the inequities she perceives. Through the reactions of her peers to Moxie, Vivian uncovers her voice and purpose, recognising the importance of united efforts in her pursuit of equality. Throughout her life, Vivian has embodied the principles of feminism, actively applying her beliefs to deepen her understanding of the world and advocate for social justice.

Moxie enables Vivian to engage with women who share similar values, thereby enhancing her self-identity through the relationships they cultivate. The

path that Vivian undertakes entails overcoming her initial hesitations and insecurities, ultimately transforming her into an individual who radiates confidence and articulates her thoughts with ease.

Additional characters undergo their own journeys of self-discovery throughout the narrative: As noted on Good-reads, Vivian's closest companion initially finds feminism off-putting but ultimately embraces and supports the movement. Seth, engaged in a romantic relationship with Vivian, ultimately embraces the Moxie Girls movement as he learns to advocate for his convictions. The exploration of personal identity and purpose amidst challenges, the steadfast adherence to one's principles, and the forging of connections with those who share similar beliefs are significant motifs in *Moxie*.

The central character, Vivian, embodies determination as a female student advocating for gender equality and justice within her educational institution in the *Moxie* book. Listening to her mother's experiences inspires her to mobilise other women to advocate for equitable treatment through acts of defiance. Vivian, a woman of resolute spirit and unwavering commitment, establishes a feminist club to act as a forum for WSF. Although Vivian initially withheld the truth regarding her role as the club's founder, she ultimately revealed it in a bid to protect a friend from the impending threat of expulsion linked to the feminist group (View of *Moxie*, by Jennifer Mathieu | Emerging Library and Information Perspectives).

Feminism embodies the struggle for the rights of women. The struggle faced by women is fundamentally a quest for equality, challenging the gender norms and expectations that have been historically imposed upon them by society and culture. The women depicted in the novel "Moxie" engage in a struggle against gender inequity that permeates their everyday experiences and the broader societal context. This study explores the struggle against gender inequality by analysing Beauvoir's concept of women's existence. The challenges faced by women can be categorised into three distinct areas: the pursuit of intellectual growth, the importance of authenticity, and the journey towards self-actualization ("Gender and Justice" 78).

For women to secure their rightful position in society, the pursuit of intellectual development is crucial, as posited by Beauvoir. She emphasises that women who recognise their own strength can take control of their lives and achieve independence from men through their own efforts. Beauvoir asserts that women ought to be free from limitations in their intellectual growth imposed by biological factors or societal norms. The ability of women to resist objectification by men and emphasise their independence and individuality is essential (Lambert 78).

When women express the notion of being able to "just be herself," they suggest that they may conduct themselves in alignment with their deepest desires. These individuals possess a remarkable confidence in their authentic selves, remaining unfazed by the differing opinions of others. Women who possess a deep understanding of their liberties can shape their own identities and pursue their careers independently, free from external influence or constraint, as posited by Beauvoir.

Utilising Goffman's concepts of performance and self-presentation in the analysis of *Moxie* allows for a deeper exploration of how individuals craft their identities in social contexts and the impact of their behaviours on those around them. In pursuit of their goals and navigating the intricate social landscape of their high school, the characters in the narrative—particularly Maeve, the protagonist, along with her companions—partake in various forms of image management (Horton 89).

The concept of identity has received considerable focus since the 1960s and 1970s, particularly during the pivotal shift in academic enquiry in both American and European contexts. As various fields of enquiry such as cultural studies, race theory, and feminist thought emerged, they sought to disrupt prevailing cultural norms. These explorations aimed to question the notion of a unified, undifferentiated self, often critiquing the self-sustaining Cartesian subject through deconstructive analyses (Hall 1997, p. 4). This Cartesian ontological perspective posits that the subject is an integrated entity, unified through the experience of self-awareness. The focus in this context is on the cultivation, broadening, and development of intellectual capacity. Through self-awareness, the individual comes into being; the

subject is integrated in a comprehensive experience of the self, others, and the world. The Cartesian perspective upholds a self-centered interpretation of the subject, diminishing the roots of existence to the realm of the subject's conscious thought (Grosholz, 1991). The Enlightenment perspective centred on the notion of the human being as a fully integrated and cohesive entity, possessing the faculties of reason, awareness, and agency. This "centre" was understood to be an intrinsic essence that emerged at birth and developed alongside the individual, maintaining a fundamental continuity or identity throughout their life. The fundamental core of the self constituted an individual's identity (Hall 597)

*The Hate U Give* and *Moxie* address society's issues from distinct perspectives and with varying degrees of emphasis, despite the fact that they are set in a young adult milieu. Through the perspective of a young black girl witnessing the tragic death of her friend Khalil in a violent shooting, "The Hate U Give" delves into the issues of police brutality and systemic discrimination. Vivian Carter's initiative to create a zine challenges the prevailing norms, while "Moxie" delves into themes of female empowerment and the issue of sexism within a high school setting.

While "Moxie" highlights issues of sexism, female empowerment, and challenges to the status quo, "The Hate U Give" focuses on themes of race, identity, and the repercussions of police violence. "The Hate U Give" explores Starr's journey as she navigates her dual identities and seeks to articulate her perspective for transformation, alongside the repercussions of Khalil's tragic shooting. "Moxie" chronicles the journey of Vivian as she creates a zine and orchestrates a campaign to challenge the pervasive sexism at her university.

In "Moxie," Vivian Carter, a junior, discovers her own agency and advocates for women's rights, while in "The Hate U Give," Starr Carter, a young black adolescent, navigates a challenging environment. Addressing profound themes of injustice and brutality, "The Hate U Give" presents a narrative that is both sombre and serious in tone. While it addresses significant issues, "Moxie" adopts a more gentle and entertaining tone.

*Moxie* and *The Hate U Give* both emphasise the ways in which activism and justice movements emerge

prominently on digital media platforms. In *Moxie*, Vivian and her peers organise a protest to challenge the male-dominated power structure of their school, utilising digital platforms such as Instagram and TikHub. Starr employs social media in *The Hate U Give* to document her friend's police shooting and engage in the broader #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Through the platforms of Instagram and TikHub, Vivian and her peers cultivate a following, organise a march, and disseminate their message challenging the patriarchal structures present within their university. The online spaces created by female students transform into hubs for the sharing of knowledge, fostering support, and cultivating solidarity. The women challenge the established power structure by employing digital technologies, thereby undermining traditional methods of protest and creating a novel form of resistance. The internet platform empowers students to connect with a broader audience than traditional methods allow, thereby enhancing their ability to raise awareness of the issues they confront and amplifying their voices (Lambert 78).

The movement advocating for racial justice and documenting instances of police violence through social media serves as a significant source of inspiration for the animosity you express. Starr employs social media as a platform to document the events surrounding Khalil's shooting, share her personal experiences, and engage in the subsequent demonstrations. The online platforms transform into spaces for exposing systemic racism and police brutality, igniting public outrage and compelling Black communities to face the injustices inflicted upon them. The text highlights the potential of social media to empower individuals in their efforts for social change by connecting people across geographical boundaries, thereby fostering collective action (Naji and Abbas 435). In both texts, the digital realm serves not merely as a channel for communication but also as a powerful platform for enacting social change and contesting existing power structures. For advocates, it offers a novel platform enabling them to engage in the struggle for justice, organise initiatives, and amplify their messages in the digital era. In Goffman's dramaturgy, the digital realm blurs the traditional boundary that distinguishes front stage from backstage. Goffman's

theory emphasises the distinction between public and private performances; however, contemporary technologies such as social networking and video conferencing have created contexts in which these boundaries become increasingly fluid. Goffman's concept of dramaturgy, articulated in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, posits that social interactions resemble theatrical productions where individuals enact different roles before an audience. In the more secluded realm, individuals find the opportunity to unwind and express their true selves, whereas in the public sphere, they engage in a performance, often curating a polished facade for the observation of others.

However, the expansion of digital media has introduced additional challenges to this differentiation. Social media enables individuals to present their "front stage" personas to an unprecedented audience, potentially obscuring the distinctions between public and private expressions. The division between front and backstage areas is further complicated by teleconferencing systems, which allow individuals to obscure their actual environments with virtual backdrops. In *The Hate U Give*, Starr hid her face and identity while representing herself in local news channel to demand justice for Khalil and during rally protest helded bullhorn and have spoke out in front of everyone that she was the one who witnessed Khalil's shoot down by White Cop. In *Moxie*, When Vivian, launched zines, then Girls started sharing posts online i.e. on Instagram of the pic of Hands marked with star and hearts to show solidarity and When protest was going on a girl shared video online of Principal while he was asking girls to shut down and were representing patriarchy.

The advancement of digital systems and the implementation of achievement management yield significant benefits such as improved efficiency, cost reductions, and expanded market presence. However, these developments may also pose risks, including cybersecurity threats, breaches of data privacy, and resistance to organisational change. Effectively navigating these challenges necessitates meticulous planning, robust risk management strategies, and a dedication to ongoing learning and adaptation.

Analysing the intricacies of intersectionality, *Moxie* and *The Hate U Give* illustrate how the interplay of race, gender, and class shapes the unique experiences and challenges faced by their protagonists. *Moxie* primarily explores themes of gender and class, while *The Hate U Give* focuses on race and its interplay with gender and class (Bookchanted 89).

*Moxie* centres on Vivian and her friends, who challenge the patriarchal norms of their small town by leveraging their shared female identity and middle-class status. Their gender influences preconceived notions and anticipations; they also navigate the benefits and limitations associated with their social class. The volume examines the ways in which these interrelated identities influence their activism and capacity for agency. *The Hate U Give* delves into the complexities of Starr's identity, examining how her racial background, gender, and socioeconomic status converge to create a unique and often challenging experience. Starr's experiences at Garden Heights and Williamson Prep illustrate the profound impact of these identities on her perceptions of the world and her sense of self. Particularly in her interactions with law enforcement and within her community, the book examines the ways in which her ethnicity and gender are leveraged against her. The volume further examines the systematic interplay of class and race in shaping access to resources, opportunities, and justice.

The experiences of Starr's family with discrimination and economic hardship highlight the pervasive inequities that African Americans, particularly in urban areas, encounter. *The Hate U Give* explores Starr's complex navigation through the various identities shaped by the intersection of race, gender, and class. Feeling ensnared between her dual environments and her identity, she navigates the expectations of both her community and her academic institution. The book examines how Starr interrogates the systems that oppress her and her community through the use of her voice and agency.

A confluence of factors, such as limited access to technology, disparities in digital literacy, and the prevalence of online violence and discrimination, renders digital justice inequitably accessible to all women. The challenges faced are particularly burdensome for women, thereby hindering their ability to fully participate in the digital realm and

leverage digital tools for justice, economic advancement, and education. In numerous low- and middle-income countries, a significant number of women face challenges such as the absence of devices, unreliable internet access, and affordable data plans. As the intricacy of these skills increases, the disparity in digital literacy capabilities becomes more pronounced; women frequently lag in areas such as coding and digital security. The challenges faced by women in accessing services are compounded by insufficient internet infrastructure, a lack of trust in digital services, and limited interoperability. At times, digital technologies can be wielded as instruments of harm against women; the algorithms of artificial intelligence and the dynamics of social media platforms may amplify detrimental content (Lambert 78).

Digital harassment, mistreatment, and aggression aimed particularly at women may deter them from engaging with online platforms. The absence of digital knowledge and access can hinder women's ability to obtain legal information, pursue justice, and advocate for their rights. Despite the most earnest efforts, e-justice initiatives have struggled to fully address the distinct needs and vulnerabilities of women, particularly those who are already marginalised.

"The Hate U Give" primarily examines issues of racial injustice and police brutality from the perspective of a Black teenager, whereas "Moxie" explores gender inequality within a high school setting through the creation of an anonymous feminist zine (Staff 34). Nevertheless, upon examining the thematic elements of the two novels, it becomes evident that they adopt strikingly distinct methodologies regarding social activism. Perspective and narrative style are two significant distinctions: "The Hate U Give" explores the intricate dynamics of race in modern America through the first-person account of Starr Carter, a Black teenager who witnesses the fatal shooting of her friend by a police officer. Through its third-person perspective, "Moxie" offers a comprehensive exploration of the institution's social dynamics and the growth of the feminist movement that Vivian, the central character, spearheads. It is essential to prioritise social issues; "The Hate U Give" focuses on the effects of police brutality and systemic racism on Black communities.

The themes examined in "Moxie" encompass the dynamics of patriarchal social and educational frameworks, alongside issues of sexism and gender disparity.

While both are categorised as young adult novels, "The Hate U Give" delves into themes that impart a more sombre and confrontational tone, frequently challenging perceptions of reality through a blend of social commentary and realism. "Moxie" adopts a more positive and hopeful perspective by redefining humour and activism as instruments for individual development. Starr and Vivian exemplify resilience and autonomy, propelled by the influence of their peers to advocate for justice. Through the exploration of significant social issues within their narratives, both works encourage readers to contemplate the intricate relationships of gender, ethnicity, and power dynamics present in their own communities. The central characters in both narratives confront significant societal obstacles while experiencing profound personal development and change, characteristics commonly found in narratives of maturation.

## CONCLUSION

*Moxie* and *The Hate U Give* both utilise Erving Goffman's theory of impression management to explore how individuals manoeuvre through social contexts and curate their self-presentation, emphasising the dynamics of power relations and societal norms. By shedding light on how individuals employ both intentional and unintentional methods to shape the perceptions they project, the texts reveal the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics and the influence of identity on conduct (Naji and Abbas 435).

Individuals consistently endeavour to convey a specific persona to those in their vicinity, as articulated in Goffman's theory of impression management. Starr Carter, the central character of *The Hate U Give*, struggles to manage her identity across various social contexts, particularly at her affluent school, Williamson Prep, in stark contrast to her community. Even at the cost of her principles, she starts to adjust to each circumstance. For instance, she conceals certain aspects of her identity at Williamson to blend in with her peers and avoid

scrutiny. The individuals in *Moxie*, particularly Vivian and her companions, partake in the art of impression management. Their appearance, clothing choices, and behaviour collectively serve to convey a specific image to their family, school, and community. The evolution of Vivian's confidence as a leader is intricately linked to her ability to manage her initial impressions.

The notions of "backstage," the private realm where one can ease the performance, and "front stage," the public identity, are essential to Goffman's examination of character interactions. Behind the scenes in *The Hate U Give*, Starr finds the freedom to express her true self, which stands in sharp contrast to the image she projects at Williamson Prep. She might be undergoing emotional distress, yet her academic performance often reflects a facade of composure and poise. In *Moxie*, the actions of the students away from the public eye allow them to embrace their true selves and challenge established norms, while their conduct in front of the camera reflects their adherence to the expectations of teachers and school authorities, which permits them to. According to Goffman, societal conventions and anticipations shape individual behaviour by influencing their interactions and self-presentation.

The texts specifically examine how gender and race function as societal constructs that influence individuals' perceptions and interactions with each other. In *The Hate U Give*, Starr's experiences with law enforcement and discrimination illuminate the pervasive stereotypes and injustices faced by Black individuals. She must acquire the skills to manoeuvre through a system that is not consistently designed to accommodate individuals of her ethnic background and economic circumstances. The female protagonists and supporting characters in *Moxie* confront conventional gender roles, especially in relation to leadership and activism. They provide mutual support and encouragement in private, while their onstage conduct defies conventional norms and expectations (Dar 89).

Goffman's theory clarifies how power dynamics influence the management of one's image in contexts where individuals assert their positional or authoritative control over interactions. The central characters in *The Hate U Give* navigate the complexities of societal power dynamics concerning

law enforcement, which frequently employs aggression and coercion to assert control. In their compelling performances, the female characters of *Moxie* confront and question the dominance of the male figures within the school's hierarchy.

Applying Goffman's theory allows for an exploration of how both novels confront the complexities of power dynamics and societal norms, alongside the ways in which social interactions influence personal identities. Their work emphasises the significance of identity in influencing behaviour and the ongoing quest for social equity, illustrating how individuals employ image management as a means of both conformity and resistance.

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# A Subversive Subaltern Narrative: Souvali in Mahaswetha Devi's *After Kurukshetra*

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**Keywords—** subversion, subalterns, individuality, hegemonic patriarchy

## Abstract

The hierarchy prevailed in the hegemonic power structure created subalterns also. The three stories in Mahaswetha Devi's *After Kurukshetra*, which is a retelling of Hindu mythology explore the predicament of women in a war-ravaged world and their differential manner in coping up with it. The last story of the collection "Souvali" depicts a Shudra woman who has more strength of character and convictions. She was a dasi woman in the palace of Hastinapur, who is the mother of Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra's son. She could not forgive the father who gave his son just a name and never his affection. Though she categorically belongs to the marginalized group, she has strong individuality and hence she leads the life of an empowered woman. As a servant in the royal household, she felt all her sorrows coming to an end when her son was born, but it comes to naught when he was taken away. She lost any meaning in staying in the palace as one of the dasis which effaces her identity as a woman. So she decided to stay in the outskirts of the town after informing the head dasi to tell her whereabouts if her son enquires about her. She was not ready to observe the death rites of Dhritarashtra as she is not his wedded wife. Her gender does not deter her from asserting her individuality and her independence and leading a life of her own choice. Mahaswetha Devi's narrative of Souvali is a subversion of the subaltern narratives

The retellings on Hindu mythology in Indian Writing in English are pointers of the parochial vision of the narratives of mythology. These retellings open alternate views and perceptions to the readers and reveal that what the mythological world offered is not an egalitarian society. Diverse kinds of discrimination and injustice prevailed there, especially racial and gender discrimination and inequality. The hierarchy prevailed in the hegemonic power structure created subalterns also, among which include women characters who are always treated as the Other. It is the absence of gender justice which created situations that lead to insurmountable crisis and which resulted in the fall of nations and the end of dynasties. The alternate

representations of the retellings heightened the lack of this egalitarian view in the mythologies.

The three stories in Mahaswetha Devi's *After Kurukshetra* explore the hitherto unexplored lacunae of women in a war-ravaged world and their differential manner in coping up with such an enormous devastation. Mahaswetha Devi's women characters differ in their approaches towards the terrible tragedy which transformed their lives from what it was. It explores the unmitigated strength and sense of righteousness, justice and self-respect on the part of less privileged women; i.e, rural class women or women belonging to a lower strata of society. It is a contra-indication of the discourses of the feminist theories; as these theories often present the aforementioned category of women as doubly

marginalized, patriarchally subjugated and hence more oppressed. But these stories portray women who belong to the lower rungs of society as more emancipated. They enjoy a better sense of self-respect, dignity and privileges compared to their counterparts –the women who belong to the higher echelons of society.

The last story of the collection “Souvali” depicts a Shudra woman who has more strength of character and convictions than any ordinary woman. She is not ready to compromise her independence or dignity. Though she was a *dasi* woman in the palace of Hastinapur, she is the mother of Yuyutsu, Dhritarashtra’s son. She has not even come to terms with the name which the father has given to the son. To her, he is Souvalya, son of Souvali and he is known in her neighborhood as such. She could not forgive the father who gave his son just a name and never his affection. Though she categorically belongs to the marginalized group, she has strong individuality and hence she leads the life of an empowered woman. Adrienne Rich suggests:

Our future as women depends on our making known our versions of reality, so that the false power gained through lying can be replaced by truth to experience. Only through repudiating the imposition of the subject definitions which encourage them to police their own oppression can women gain full control of their lives. (On Lies, Secrets and Silence 36)

The living space of Souvali replicates the nature and quality of her life. “On the margins of the town live the marginalized. Their settlement is a lively, noisy place” (“Souvali” 45). This *janavritta* place itself is replete with life which is conspicuously absent in *rajavritta*. The story evolves through her thoughts on the day in which Souvalya has done the last rites for the dead Dhritarashtra, his unacknowledged father. Since all the legitimate sons of the patriarch of Hastinapur have lost their lives in the battlefield, Yuyutsu was compelled to do the *tharpan* without which the Pandavas could not do the other sacred rites for the dead. This final acknowledgement of her son as the offspring of Dhritarashtra and the descendent of the ruling family

of Hastinapur displeased Souvali. “He is Souvali’s son. In this house, he is Souvalya. Not Yuyutsu”. At the sound of the name, his mother flares up. “Yuyutsu indeed! Give the boy a name and that’s the end of all responsibility!”(47).

Even though he had done *tharpan* for Dhritarashtra, he was not ready to do the same for Kunti and Gandhari as both of them, during their heyday, were not ready to acknowledge him as the blind king’s son. To the people of *janavritta* all these rites are fun, just a mockery. The *maha-tarpan* and casting the remains in the river by Yudhishtira are all a spectacle for them to watch. Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Kunti have died in the forest fire a long time before, but the remains are brought only now and hence all the rites associated with a death are also observed now. The disparity between the time of the death and the time of the rites is actually a mockery of the enormous observances and rituals associated with the *rajavritta*. “Never went near him, never called him ‘father’, and today I did the *tarpan* for him” (47). “Or else his soul would not have gained release. *Dasiputra!* Slavechild! It’s because of this *dasiputra* that you got water from a son’s hand!”(48).

According to the *rajavritta* custom, all the male offspring will be taken away for their education and arms training to the *gurugriha*. It happened in the case of Yuyutsu also. Souvali could not continue to live with her son during his childhood days. She has to leave him resulting in the torment of the mother and the son -who was just a kid. But emotions have no place in *rajavritta*. Souvalya spoke softly. “I used to cry too. Look all over for you. *Dasiputra* were sent to a separate *gurugriha*. Then, when the time came for training in arms, for some reason I was transferred to the same *gurugriha* as the Kauravas” (49).

She longed to express it to Dhritarashtra that everything about her was taken away. She lost her youth, her son and there is her regret at the neglect of her son by the blind king, though her son is his own flesh and blood. As a servant in the royal household, she felt all her sorrows coming to an end when her son was born, but it comes to naught when he was taken away. She lost any meaning in staying in the palace as one of the *dasis* which effaces her identity as a woman. So she decided to stay in the outskirts of the town after informing the head *dasi* to tell her

whereabouts if her son enquires about her. "On the outskirts of the town, everyone knew who Souvali was" (50). It provides her with her identity as a woman which she lacks in the palace which is strictly functioning according to the patriarchal norms of the *rajavritta*.

She knows that irrespective of Pandavas or Kauravas, the *rajavritta* people are alike in their attitude. Hence when Souvalya/Yuyutsu talked about his acceptance by the Pandavas as Dhritarashtra's son she thought of the disillusionment he will face soon. Hence her lips curled in contempt when he justified his decision to join Pandavas in the battle of Kurukshetra. He said, "No wonder I sided with the Pandavas in battle. The Kauravas called me *dasiputra*, treated me like one. I detested them" (50, 51). His words were proof, ample enough; for the lack of humanity in a battle which claimed to be for righteousness. "And at the end...Bhima was so insulting to father... war robs man of humanity. How boastful the victors were! How arrogantly they behaved!"(51). As she pointed out to her son, there is savagery on both sides in a war. She is more experienced in life than her son; especially the attributes of the upper class is better known to her and hence she chooses her own way to lead her life.

Souvali cherished each moment she spent with her son who was forcibly separated from her, from his childhood onwards. She felt the fulfilment as a mother at each moment she spent with him. Dhritarashtra was so immersed in his love for Duryodhana that he could not spare to think much about his illegitimate son. But to Souvali he is the fulfilment of her life and never allowed him to keep away from her thoughts. Though he was away from her physically most of the times, she is always with him as she carries him in her heart. It is a feeling, which was reciprocated by the son as well. He visits his mother whenever it is possible for him to do so. "They knew I used to come here. They'd taunt me. Say that only *dasiputras* suffered such unmanly needs, cried for their mothers" (52). Souvali who spent her youthful days among the *rajavritta* as a *dasi* and even bore a son from the king has a good understanding and awareness of their ways of life. She considers the life of *janavritta* in many ways, far superior compared to them.

It's in the *janavritta*, amongst the common people, that we are in touch with our natural emotions like tenderness, caring, compassion, romance, love, anger, jealousy. But in the *rajavritta*, you know how they keep such natural emotions strictly in check (52).

Her son endorsed her belief that it is the *rajavritta's* chasing after power, their greed, arrogance and enmity that brings downfall and destruction to them. They hinder the natural flow of life which proves fatal to them and it gives birth to more destructive and negative emotions and feelings. Living among the *rajavritta* has taken its toll on her son also. "How grey his hair was, how lined his forehead! All those years of humiliation, disrespect and unkindness had caused these furrows to appear" (52). Souvali knows better how difficult life in *rajavritta* was. It is this awareness that justifies her decision to leave the place as her son was taken away from her. Their patriarchal norms, their hegemonic hierarchies and their empty soulless rituals were all disgusting to her. To her every custom associated with the royal household lacks its pith; they are thus worthless observances and practices. Hence she refused to observe the death rites associated with the death of Dhritarashtra even though her son had performed his last rites. It seems to be a specialty of the *janavritta* women to have their own set of values and judgement about right and wrong. They are more empowered than the women of *rajavritta* who lives under the rigid rules and the customs imposed upon them by the patriarchal authority. Souvali was bold enough to tell herself "Why worry about all that? I'm hungry, so I'll eat. I left that place of my own free will. Today too I'll let my own dharma tell me what's right" (53). With all her feelings of discrimination faced by herself and her son, she feels a sense of elation in not observing the death rites meant for the wife of the dead person.

I'm just a *dasi*. Was I his wedded wife, that I should undergo the death rites? In the royal household, so many of us *dasies* come and go, so many bear children...observe *ashaucha*, the contamination rites? Do

*tarpan*? Wear white cloth, fast? Why? (53).

According to her it is meaningless to observe all these rituals for the death of a man who treated her as an object of pleasure and that too one among many of them. Hence there is no need on her part to have any kind of observance for the sake of that man. She enjoys a secret pleasure in defying Dhritarashtra if not in life, but in death. She left the palace, now she lives in her own place in the outskirts of the town and hence she has her own choice. There is no need of her to acknowledge a man who in his lifetime refuses to acknowledge the son who is born to him. "It feels good to have defied the dead Dhritarashtra. In the royal household, the other *dasis* would be roaming around in white widow's clothing, eating only the prescribed meagre fare." (53). "I'll feast on sweet kheer laddoos, ghee-rich jowar pithas, golden honey. And after I'm full, I'll sleep peacefully holding my son in my arms" (53). She has no regrets or longings about her life. She decided to live it according to her terms and she succeeded in it. She is not ready to waver at any moment.

When she came to know that her son was finally acknowledged as the son of Dhritarashtra, in order to perform his last rites, there is no sense of elation for her, just contentment only. She knows her role in the life of the *rajavritta* folk and she considered her own son as foolish for not recognizing it. She did not expect or like to have a mention of her name in the narration of Krishna Dwaipayana. After the war, since the Pandavas acknowledged him he thinks that he can be with them forever and maintain his individuality. Souvali who led a *dasi's* life at the *rajavritta*, is a free woman at her own place. It is great to have a life on one's own terms. One could not lead such a life among the *rajavritta*.

A *dasi* in the royal household is a subaltern. A woman servant in the palace is a doubly marginalized situation. But, being poor and underprivileged doesn't prevent one from refusing to be a subaltern. Souvali proves it through the life she lived at her own terms. She is an emancipated and liberated woman and thus evolved to be an empowered one in the process. By refusing to live as a *dasi* in the royal palace, she regained everything that is lost to her- her own dignity, individuality, her

freedom of choice and her own son who makes her life worthwhile and meaningful.

It is her rebellion to a system where sons are not acknowledged by fathers, but insulted and humiliated as they are born of subaltern mothers. Besides, the patriarchal system considers the sons as the property of the father, though they have no responsibility towards them. Hence they are taken away for arms training at a very young age as the *rajavritta* wants more people to protect them and to fight for them in their battles. As she faced all these injustices of the system, she could not conform to it. According to her, it is hypocrisy to acknowledge the son just to do the last rites of a father, but remain shamelessly unacknowledged throughout the lifetime of his own father.

The strength of mind, strong individuality and independent spirit of a woman belonging to the lower rungs of society are portrayed through the character of Souvali. She has righteous indignation to the king who fathered a son in her, but has not fulfilled the duties and responsibilities of a father. She is a true feminist who wants to establish the stamp of her individuality. She was not ready to observe the death rites of Dhritarashtra as she is not his wedded wife. She feasted on her with all the delicacies she has, as a sign of protest. It is the rebellion of an empowered woman against the hegemonic bonds of patriarchy which treats women of the lower rungs as mere objects. She represents her rebellion through her life and deeds as an empowered woman and as a feminist at heart. Through her actions, she openly declares her unwillingness to be victimized by a system which is glaringly unfair in their dealings with the marginalized. Her gender does not deter her from asserting her individuality and her independence and leading a life of her own choice. Mahaswetha Devi's narrative of Souvali is a subversion of the subaltern narratives where the marginalized are mere victims of the established norms.

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# The Concept of Freedom in John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 02 May 2025</p> <p>Revised on: 01 Jun 2025</p> <p>Accepted on: 07 Jun 2025</p> <p>Published on: 13 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> freedom and rebellion, detachment and illusion, disappointments, Man's initiation, glory, honor</p>	<p><i>John Dos Passos has been neglected by the literary and academic worlds. Too often his work has been judged, not on its literary merit, but on its political content. This work is undertaken as an effort to help to elevate Dos Passos to his proper place in the ranks of American writers. Continuity is given to almost all of his writings by the constant theme of the desirability for individual freedom. In his brief early period, Dos Passos sought freedom largely for the alienated artists of society. Then he became involved in the search for the maximum freedom for all people. The turning point came when the Sacco-Vanzetti case drew him from the isolated garrets into the streets. Management's abuses of labor and the general class war became his subject matter in U.S.A. and other books as Dos Passos fought for freedom from oppression for the workers. He enthusiastically endorsed Roosevelt and the New Deal. The liberal critics applauded his efforts.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of freedom can be seen as the ability to act with choice which means that the person is not forced by external or internal forces and thus one has the right to enjoy his personal liberty without being slave or prisoner to those external or internal forces. Dewey claims that "Freedom is the power to act in accordance with choice." (Dewey1960:267) While Brigger has asserted that "Freedom in general is the state of not being forced or determined by something external in so far as it is joined to a definite internal faculty of self-determination (Brigger 1971:146). Since everybody is free by nature ,many people usually fight for their freedom. It should be noted that many thinkers believe that freedom must be accompanied by law otherwise there is no freedom;Locke asserts that " absolute freedom has no meaning...where there is no law, there is no freedom" (Locke 1960:108).

Dos Passos has thrown the light through his novel *Three soldiers* on the impact of the war and times on the life and freedom of an ordinary soldier. We follow three lowly soldiers, Dan Fuselli from San Francisco who is 19 and enlisted in order to appear brave and patriotic to his friends, neither of which he was. Chris Chrisfield is 20 and from a small town in Indiana. He enlisted because small businessman in his town could only hope to do business with the locals if one had served in the war. John Andrews is 22 and from New York City. He is a pianist and composer, the most thoughtful of the three, but not yet at peace with himself.

The novel is sort of like three separate works, two long short-stories about the lives of Fuselli and Chrisfield, and then a novel about the war years of John Andrews. Andrews sees himself as a free man who must resist giving in to the force of others, thus he despises the army. He talks a great game of freedom and rebellion.

Yet, he knuckles under to army discipline, fearing authority, while constantly berating it and planning his resistance which doesn't come.

The most clever section by Dos Passos is the section concerns Andrews who is very thoughtful about his sense of independence and his hatred of the system and disgusted with himself who too often still caves into the system. There is an anger in Andrews with himself and his inability to live the freedom. Andrews sees himself as a free man who must resist giving in to the force of others, thus he despises the army. He talks a great game of freedom and rebellion.

## II. THE SEARCH FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Dos Passos' stress on individual freedom has taken various forms during his long writing career, but the underlying motive has remained unchanged. At first he went through a kind of half-hearted phase of trying to discover individual autonomy in the "alienation" of the artist; then he made an effort to find individual freedom in socialistic collectivism; then he turned toward a more or less nostalgic search for individualism in "free enterprise." Of course, these phases are not always distinctly marked, but they are evident in his novels and other works. The first phase, that of the "alienated artist," dominated all of his early writings. If one examines Dos Passos' life, it is easy to see why. He was born out of wedlock on January 14, 1896, to John Randolph Dos Passos and Miss Lucy Addison Sprigg, a spinster who was forty-seven years of age. His father, son of an immigrant Portuguese shoemaker, was a truly "self-made man." He was a prominent criminal attorney, an author, and a personal friend of President McKinley. When he turned to the practice of civil law, he became instrumental in the development of the great trusts during the 1890's. A strong advocate of gold, industry, and capitalism, he received what was purported to be the largest legal fee then on record for his efforts on behalf of the Sugar Trust in 1895. The general governmental attitude toward big business at the time can be seen in the Supreme Court's decision which held the Trust's controlling ninety-eight per cent of the sugar refining industry did not constitute restraint of trade.

The elder Dos Passos appears in several of the semi-autobiographical works of his son. He is the "Jack" and the "He" referred to in several of the 'Camera Eye' divisions in U.S.A. and the James Knox Polk Pignatelli or Monsieur Dandy in Chosen Country. A strong, vigorous man, an impressive speaker, as well as an outstanding lawyer, the father of Dos Passos embodied the typical American success story. He was a self-made aristocrat. Dos Passos' mother was born one. (Hicks, 1931)

### 2.1- Early life and writings:

His mother carted him off to Mexico, to England, and to the Continent during his childhood. At times he was placed in the hands of governesses or friends of his mother while his parents went on extended trips. Only occasionally did he see his father, who must have been disappointed in his offspring. The lad was nearsighted and required thick glasses; he was shy, sensitive, self-conscious, and emotional; in short, he was the antithesis of the robust, vigorous father. Doubtless, the bar sinister and the rootless existence did little to give the boy selfconfidence.

As a lad, Dos Passos briefly attended a private school in England and a public school in the District of Columbia, and then in 1907, he was enrolled in the Choate School, a preparatory school for boys in New England. He was registered under the name of John Roderigo Madison—his father did not publicly acknowledge the lad until he was sixteen years old. It was at Choate School that Dos Passos first began to write, when he became a staff member of the Choate School News. A year after having completed his preparatory schooling, he entered Harvard at the age of sixteen. During his freshman year he had his first story, "The Almeh," published in the July, 1913, issue of the Harvard Monthly. It was signed "J. R. Dos Passos."

The tale is a rather well-written one about the pursuit of a beautiful Arabian girl by two young Americans who discover to their dismay that she is nothing but a danseuse du ventre. The acceptance of a story, even one about an Egyptian belly-dancer, was quite an accomplishment by a freshman at Harvard. During the remainder of his year at the university, he had several more stories accepted by the Monthly. In 1915 he

became an editor of the magazine and later in the year became its secretary. He wrote poems, stories, and editorials.

After his mother died in April, 1916, he composed the most important of his early writings, an essay entitled "A Humble Protest," which came out in the Monthly in June, 1916. In it he tried to formulate a philosophy for living, asking the inevitable, unanswerable question: what is the end of life? The best possible course to follow, he tentatively concluded, is to divide life's aims between thought and art, between the two halfopposed ideals represented by Plato and Michelangelo. He saw one as a desire to fathom the meaning of life, the other to create it. The ideal would be a blend of the two. Dos Passos' dichotomy is quite similar to Matthew Arnold's Hebraism and Hellenism. Like Arnold, he abhorred the way in which most men spend their lives in an industrial society without any chance of self-expression, except in the hectic pleasures taken while suffocating in crowded cities.(Hicks,1931)

At this time Dos Passos refused to accept the reality of industrialization. Granville Hicks comments: "It does startle us to discover that the man who., preeminently among his contemporaries, has refused to dodge industrialism began by repudiating it."(Hiks,1931)

## 2.2-The impact of wars:

After graduating cum laude from Harvard in 1916, Dos Passos volunteered for duty overseas with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit. Because of the strong objections of his father, he went instead to Spain to study architecture. There he studied, wrote poetry, and, in the October 14, 1916, issue of the New Republic, saw his essay "Against American Literature" published. In this he complains of the sterility and lack of roots of American literature and praises Russian literature for its primitive savagery and color. He declares:

An all-enveloping industrialism, a new mode of life preparing, has broken down the old bridges leading to the past, has cut off the possibility of retreat. Our only course is to press on. Shall we pick up the glove Walt Whitman threw at the feet of posterity? Or shall we stagnate forever, the Sicily of the modern world, rich in the world's good, absorbing the thought, patronizing the art of other peoples, but producing nothing from

amid our jumble of races but steel and oil and grain?  
(Gold ,1933)

On January 27, 1917, his father died, and Dos Passos returned to America. He re-enlisted in the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit and, together with Hemingway, commenced a tour of ambulance duty in France. In the same year, Dos Passos appeared in Eicrht Harvard Poets. After the dissolution of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit in 1918, he served for a time on ambulance duty in Italy. Then he returned to America, was inducted into the army and was assigned to Allentown training camp. In November he was sent back to France a member of the Medical Corps, engaged in clerical and ambulance duty. When he received his discharge in France in the spring of 1919, he went to Portugal and Spain to write. In October, 1920., his first novel, *One Man's Imitation*--1917, was published in London. (Lerner,1936)

Gradually he changes, losing both his sense of detachment and his illusions as the horrors of war impinge more and more on his consciousness. His romantic attitudes are nullified by the sight of the wounded, the maimed, and the dead. He becomes interested in the anarchist beliefs of his French friends and in social reform.

As could be expected, this first book of Dos Passos is his least important one. It shows little in the way of literary style and not much in the way of characterization, although it bears some similarity to Hemingway's future novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. Frederick Henry's counterpart is Martin Howe who, like Henry, is a volunteer ambulance driver in a foreign army. Henry, however, is older than Howe. He has served long enough at the front to come some sort of terms with the life of war: he has already lost his illusions, and fine words are meaningless to him. Martin Howe is full of illusions and believes in the idealistic slogans of the day. Martin, like Dos Passos himself in 1917, is a naive young Harvard graduate who volunteers to serve with the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Unit in France. He goes forth to "save the world for democracy." He sees the issues only in black and white. The Germans represent the forces of barbarism; they are brutal ravishers and blood-thirsty Teutons. The Allies are on the side of decency

and civilization. Though Martin is involved in the war., he is not directly a part of it., not for a while anyway. His is a spectatorial attitude. (Lerner ,1936)

### 2.3 Man's Initiation:

Although One Man's Initiation – 1917 is not important as literature, it does have significance in the study of Dos Passos, for it forecasts the novels which have come after it. It is a portrayal of the condition of modern man and the institutions which he has created that defeat him. It is at once a protest and a story of destroyed illusions. Yet bathos is the prevailing mood of the book; the cold, hard anger of the better novels of Dos Passos is lacking in One Man's Initiation – 1917. Martin is more concerned with his own disappointments than with the overall destruction going on about him. Although he speaks at times of freedom, he is more concerned with the idealistic freedom of the sensitive artist than with the freedom of ordinary people. Dos Passos writes from the point of view of the alienated artist rather than from that of the critic of society.

### 2.4-The search for a new tradition after the civil war:

During most of the 1920's he continued writing in this vein, placing his chief emphasis on the frustration of the artistic temperament in confrontation with society, not on the social responsibility of the writer. However, in some of the writings of this period, clues to the direction which his major works would take are to be found. In an article appearing in the Nation during 1920, he speaks of the dislike of Europeans for Americans after the war. The continental people, he says, had been captivated by Wilson's Fourteen Points. They had renewed their hope for American democratic freedom buried under the top-heavy industrial organization which dominated the United States after the Civil War, only to see their hope swept into the waste basket beside the conference table at Versailles. Dos Passos asserts a new tradition is needed, "something similar to the great agin-the-government tradition that England inherited from the turbulent seafaring folk that crowded into the island out of the northern seas." (Dos Passos,1920). Taking his own advice, he became the foremost of the "agin-the-government" writers, invariably opposing those in control, for governments were responsible for the wholesale slaughter of men as they led their nations into

battle. And war was to become the setting in Dos Passos' first really important book. (Lerner,1950)

### 3-The concept of freedom in *Three Soldier*:

Three Soldiers was published in 1921. Not only was it Dos Passos' first major work, it was also the first really significant novel of the first World War. In its unsentimental and stark treatment of the citizen soldiers caught up in war's madness, Dos Passos set a tone later to be emulated by numerous writers. Even after World War II such books as Norman Mailer's The

Naked and the Dead and Irwin Shaw's The Young Lions show an indebtedness to Three

Soldiers. Dos Passos' three soldiers are separately drawn entities. Dan Fuselli is a San Franciscan of Italian parentage. He is stupid and docile; vainly striving to make good in the army and to gain recognition by being a good soldier, he tries to advance to the rank of corporal. But he is pathetic; he believes everything his superiors tell him. When he contracts a venereal disease, his pitiful military ambition is defeated. Chrisfield, who is from Indiana., self-consciously talks like a Southerner. He is the rebel from army discipline, the proverbial round-peg-in-the-square-hole-type. Not too intelligent and believing in little but his own personal dignity, he eventually kills his sergeant who has offended him. The third soldier is

John Andrews, sensitive, educated, and artistic. Like Dos Passos' earlier creation, Martin Howe, John Andrews is partially an autobiographical character. While talking to a French girl, he remarks: "My mother taught me to play the piano when I was very small. . . . She and I lived in an old house belonging to her family in Virginia. . . . Mother was very unhappy. She had led a dreadfully thwarted life . . . that unrelieved hopeless misery only a woman can suffer." (passos,1921) Unable to conform to army discipline, Andrews throws away his uniform, deserts, and is caught by the military police, who beat him to a pulp. Although he is not explicitly told so in the book, the reader is left with the impression that Andrews will serve a long term at Leavenworth.

The story is related with unusual frankness, the soldiers talking much as they do in real life. The ugliness of petty

men given authority, the facts of drunkenness and prostitution the total effect of crushing army discipline on a sensitive soul are. all depicted in *Three Soldiers*. The book describes no battles; rather, what it portrays is the transformation of minds and bodies under the pressures not of war as such., but of the army, the most undemocratic and autocratic organization of all the institutions created by men. "Making the Mold," "The Metal Cools," "Machines," and "Rust" – the four divisions of the novel – detail the transformation of the three soldiers as they progress from one state to another. It is the system of the army to strip the individual from his personality, to fashion him into a small cog of a gigantic machine, smoothly functioning as one of its minute units. This is what Dos Passos deplors. The army is the destroyer of the individual. John Andrews, after being wounded and feeling the futility and despair of army life with its discipline, hate, and killing, thinks of deserting: "He was ready to endure anything, to face any sort of death, for the sake of a few months of liberty in which to forget the degradation of this last year." (Dos Passos,1921)

*Three Soldiers* has been criticized for being overly aesthetic, but such a charge can be substantiated only by making the loss of John Andrew's symphonic work the central tragedy of the novel. It is not. Undoubtedly there is a keen affinity between the author and his character., John Andrews, but not to be forgotten is the fact that Andrews is but one of the men in *Three Soldiers*; not only Andrews, but also Chrisfield and Fuselli – neither of whom is artistic or sensitive – are destroyed by the army. Their function in the novel is also important, each one represents a large group of men. Chrisfield symbolizes those whose personal sense of the importance of individuality is never crushed, the rebels, those whom the army can never make into soldiers; Fuselli typifies those ignorant souls, those trusting and naive recruits who believe the drivel and do their best to conform and by so doing to rise to the majestic state of being corporals. Both the rebel Chrisfield and the truckling Fuselli are, like Andrews, mangled by the army machine. No one escapes.

Truly, the book has been criticized as being antimilitaristic. It is not a novel which would be

recommended by the American Legion. It strips away the facade of glory, honor, and duty, showing the ugliness underneath. The book is naked and bitter. The posturing of the Y.M.C.A. people are exposed, as is their unctiousness. The officers and G.H.Q. are shown as a class apart, a different face from the common soldier. They are in fact his enemy.(Beach,1941)

During the year in which *Three Soldiers* was published, Dos Passos traveled widely, working for the Near East Relief organization. He assimilated much of what he saw and heard, later using the information in a travel book. His next work, however, was based on the knowledge of Spain which he had accumulated while studying architecture there before enlisting in the ambulance corps. *Rosinante to the Road Again* (1922) was published shortly after the writer had returned to the United States, when he took up residence in New York. In this story we again meet the shy, introspective, literary, and aloof young man found in so many of Dos Passos' early books. This time he is Telemachus, ostensibly searching for a "father" and looking for the gesture which truly represents Spain. The semi-fictional and semiautobiographical Telemachus is juxtaposed by the other main character of the book, Lyaeus, who is engaged with life and living, with gaiety and love. Telemachus stands back, gazing enviously at his counterpart, eagerly zesting for life and action but too inhibited to partake of it himself. In contrast with the sober treatment given Martin Howe, a note of mockery and self-ridicule is sounded in Telemachus. Dos Passos is becoming increasingly aware of the ridiculous position of his heroes in their detachment from life.

### III. CONCLUSION

Freedom is the theme that underlies all others in Dos Passos' work. It can be seen that the necessity of freedom., from its constant repetition in both his fiction and his non-fiction., is a kind of unchanging monomania, giving unity to the whole of his creative work. The America that Dos Passos depicts is not a lovely one. It could not be and still be a truthful portrayal, and Dos Passos writes the truth as he sees it. He is also one of the truly literate novelists writing today. *Three Soldiers* by John Dos Passos follows the

journeys of three soldiers in the European theater of World War II. Despite the three soldiers' different personalities and experiences in the US armed forces, all three were dramatically changed by the war and by the military machine they're a part of.

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# Kitchen Sink Drama in Literature and Films of India and the World: A Feminist Approach

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<p>Received on: 07 May 2025                      Revised on: 03 Jun 2025                      Accepted on: 09 Jun 2025                      Published on: 15 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords— Kitchen Sink Drama, Feminism, Patriarchy, Literature, Film, India, Drama</b></p>	<p><i>This research paper offers a comprehensive and an in-depth analysis of how kitchen sink drama, a genre renowned for its working-class realism, portrays female experiences across diverse cultural landscapes. The study employs a feminist lens to examine the struggles, resistance, and potential for empowerment of women within this genre, considering its socio-historical contexts in India, and the world. The study explores the specific ways in which kitchen sink dramas, both in literature and film, depict the daily lives, challenges, and aspirations of their female characters and analyses the portrayal of women's struggles and their forms of resistance against patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and economic constraints. By comparing and contrasting depictions from different cultural backgrounds, the research aims to identify universal themes and culturally specific nuances that shape the experiences of women in the feminist dimensions within Kitchen Sink Dramas.</i></p>

## INTRODUCTION

Kitchen Sink Drama, originating in late 1950s Britain as a radical movement in literature and film, is a genre characterized by its unflinching realism, often set within the confines of domestic environments. This paper aims to explore Kitchen Sink Drama through a rigorous feminist lens, analyzing its socio-political impact, its representation of female characters, and the overarching feminist themes it often embodies. The scope of the paper encompasses both Indian and global literature and films, providing a comparative analysis of how Kitchen Sink Drama manifests in diverse cultural contexts. The primary objective is to highlight how this genre has served as a powerful medium for social commentary and an arena for challenging patriarchal norms, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within society. The document examines the portrayal of women in key works, scrutinizing the inherent misogyny and limited

representation. It further investigates themes such as motherhood, generational conflict, and the intersectionality of class and gender. Finally, it addresses issues of sexuality and reproductive rights within the genre, concluding with an analysis of its evolution and continued relevance in contemporary cinema and literature.

### Historical Roots of Kitchen Sink Drama

The origins of Kitchen Sink Drama can be traced back to the burgeoning "Angry Young Men" movement in Britain during the 1950s. This theatrical and literary movement emerged from a post-war climate rife with disillusionment and persistent class inequality, giving voice to a generation frustrated with the prevailing social order ("Kitchen Sink Realism"). The emergence of Kitchen Sink Drama was deeply intertwined with the profound social, economic, and cultural transformations occurring in post-war Britain. The 1950s and early 1960s were a period of significant change, marked by the lingering

effects of World War II and the subsequent attempts to rebuild and redefine British society. The establishment of the welfare state aimed to provide social safety nets, but inequalities persisted, particularly for the working class.

Economically, Britain faced challenges including industrial decline, which led to widespread unemployment and persistent poverty in traditional industrial heartlands. These conditions starkly contrasted with the aspirational narratives often presented in popular media. Culturally, there was a growing sense of rebellion against traditional class structures and societal norms. A nascent youth culture, influenced by American rock and roll and a burgeoning sense of independence, began to question the established order. This period also saw shifts in gender roles, significantly influenced by women's experiences during WWII, where many had entered the workforce in factories and other traditionally male domains. While many returned to domestic roles after the war, their wartime contributions had subtly yet fundamentally altered societal perceptions of women's capabilities and place outside the home, setting the stage for the critiques later explored in Kitchen Sink Drama.

### **Literature and Films Representing Kitchen Sink Drama**

Key playwrights like John Osborne (most notably with "Look Back in Anger"), Shelagh Delaney ("A Taste of Honey"), and Arnold Wesker ("Roots") spearheaded this movement in theatre. Their works brought previously marginalized voices and experiences to the forefront and became a cornerstone of the movement, championed a raw, naturalistic style that depicted the lives of working-class individuals with an unprecedented level of honesty. In cinema, seminal films such as "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" (1960) based on first novel of British author Alan Sillitoe, directed by Karel Reisz and starring Albert Finney, and "A Taste of Honey" (1961), directed by Tony Richardson, translated these themes to the screen, capturing the essence of working-class existence with stark authenticity. These productions provided a vital, albeit often controversial, mirror to British society, laying the groundwork for a more socially conscious form of storytelling.

Nell Dunn's 1963 novel "Up the Junction" (later adapted into a film in 1968) offers a different perspective through Polly, a middle-class woman who moves to Battersea, engaging in "class tourism" as she experiences working-class life. While Polly's narrative itself reflects her privilege, the stories of the working-class women she encounters, particularly their struggles with poverty, unwanted pregnancies, and limited opportunities, are depicted bluntly. A scene where Polly witnesses the brutal reality of a backstreet abortion underscores the dire circumstances faced by many women.

Conversely, Alan Sillitoe's 1959 short story collection "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" and its 1962 film adaptation primarily focus on male working-class experiences. Female characters, such as the protagonist's mother or girlfriends, are often peripheral, serving mostly to highlight the limited choices available to women in this environment. Their struggles are implied rather than explicitly explored, reinforcing the male-centric narratives prevalent in much of the genre, even when attempting to portray the realities of working-class life.

The core tenets of Kitchen Sink Drama revolved around realism, sharp social criticism, and an authentic portrayal of everyday struggles, particularly those faced by the working class. This genre sought to challenge the prevailing escapism of mainstream British entertainment, presenting raw, often bleak, depictions of domestic life, social issues, and economic struggles. The settings were typically cramped, urban, and authentic, often revolving around the confines of a working-class home, hence the "kitchen sink" moniker, symbolizing the everyday realities faced by ordinary people.

### **Feminist Elements in Kitchen Sink Drama**

Within Kitchen Sink Drama, a pervasive theme is the exploration of rigid gender roles and the stifling expectations placed upon women in post-war British society. Opportunities for women were severely limited, often confined to domesticity, low-paid factory work, or service industries. The narratives frequently depict female characters primarily as mothers, wives, or daughters, their identities largely defined by their relationships to men and their domestic responsibilities. This often

translated into a stark lack of agency, as their lives were circumscribed by the constraints of marriage and family life, leaving little room for personal ambition or self-fulfilment. The genre often highlighted the stark double standards prevalent at the time, particularly concerning sexuality, education, and career aspirations. While men might pursue various paths, women's choices were narrowly defined. A compelling example is Jo in Shelagh Delaney's "A Taste of Honey." Her unplanned pregnancy, a central plot point, brings with it immense social stigma and economic hardship. She is forced to navigate societal condemnation and a lack of support, starkly illustrating the punitive consequences for women who deviated from expected norms, particularly in matters of sexual conduct and reproductive choices, without the corresponding societal judgment applied to their male counterparts.

Beyond its initial focus on class struggle, Kitchen Sink Drama inherently possesses strong feminist elements through its portrayal of women. The genre was pivotal in representing female characters beyond reductive stereotypes, presenting them as complex individuals grappling with the realities of their lives. Kitchen Sink Drama deeply explored themes of domestic labour, the intricacies of marriage, and the multifaceted nature of motherhood, often exposing the invisible burdens placed upon women. Crucially, it offered a pointed critique of entrenched patriarchal structures and the pervasive gender inequality of the time. This wasn't merely about highlighting oppression; Kitchen Sink Drama also placed a significant focus on female agency and resistance, showcasing women's capacity for resilience, defiance, and self-determination. Kitchen Sink Drama has offered complex and realistic portrayals of female characters, exploring the hidden burdens of domestic labour, marriage, and motherhood and challenging existing patriarchal structures and gender inequality and showcased women's resilience, defiance, and capacity for self-determination.

A crucial feminist understanding of Kitchen Sink Drama involves recognizing the intersectionality of class and gender oppression. For working-class women, the burden was often double: they faced not only the systemic disadvantages of their social class but also the patriarchal constraints of their gender.

This placed them in a particularly vulnerable position, often subjected to exploitation in low-wage jobs, and at higher risk of abuse within their domestic spheres, with limited recourse for justice or support. This was particularly evident in the brutal realism of Gary Oldman's 1997 film "Nil by Mouth." The film unflinchingly portrays the devastating impact of poverty and domestic violence on a working-class family in South East London. The character of Valerie, the protagonist's sister and an unmarried mother, exemplifies this double burden. Her struggles are not just due to her economic circumstances but are compounded by the gendered violence she endures and the systemic failures that offer her no escape, trapping her in a cycle of abuse and deprivation.

Within Kitchen Sink Drama, the themes of sexuality and reproductive rights are handled with a raw, often unflinching realism that highlights the precarious position of women in post-war Britain. Sexual exploitation is frequently depicted, exposing the imbalanced power dynamics in relationships, where women often had limited agency and lacked the social or legal means to assert consent or resist unwanted advances. This often led to unwanted pregnancies, a severe consequence in an era where access to abortion was illegal and highly stigmatized. Women faced the daunting choice between dangerous backstreet abortions, forced adoptions, or raising a child alone amidst intense social condemnation and economic hardship.

While the genre didn't always explicitly champion female agency, its honest portrayal of these struggles inadvertently brought to light the patriarchal control over women's bodies and reproductive choices. The lack of safe and legal abortion options meant that women's lives were dramatically altered by pregnancy, often derailing any personal or professional aspirations. A significant instance of this is the abortion storyline in the 1966 film "Alfie," starring Michael Caine. While the narrative is told from Alfie's male perspective, it graphically portrays the harrowing reality of an illegal abortion experienced by one of his partners. This scene, though seen through a male gaze, serves as a stark commentary on the dangers women faced and the profound lack of control they had over their own bodies and futures in the absence of reproductive rights, illustrating a key feminist concern of the era.

The legacy of Kitchen Sink Drama extends far beyond its initial flourishing, profoundly influencing subsequent generations of British filmmakers and playwrights. Directors like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, often seen as inheritors of the genre, continued its tradition of social realism, focusing on the lives of marginalized individuals and critiquing systemic injustices. Their works, like those of their predecessors, emphasize authentic dialogue, non-professional actors, and a commitment to depicting the unvarnished realities of working-class life.

The core feminist themes identified within classic Kitchen Sink Drama—inequality, gendered abuse, and the struggle for agency—remain acutely relevant today. Contemporary adaptations and original works across stage, film, and television continue to explore these issues, often with a more explicit feminist consciousness. Modern British social realism still grapples with the impact of class and gender on individual lives.

For example, Ken Loach's 2016 film "I, Daniel Blake" powerfully echoes the economic precarity and bureaucratic dehumanization first explored in the 1950s, adding a contemporary critique of the welfare system, with female characters often bearing the brunt of its failures. Similarly, Sarah Gavron's 2019 film "Rocks" offers a vibrant yet poignant portrayal of a teenage girl struggling to care for her younger brother after their mother abandons them. "Rocks" builds upon the Kitchen Sink tradition by centring a multi-ethnic female experience, showcasing resilience, sisterhood, and the ongoing challenges faced by young women in economically disadvantaged communities, demonstrating the enduring power and evolving perspective of this vital genre.

Kitchen sink drama, a post-war British cultural movement, and feminism intersect in its depiction of working-class lives and the roles of women, particularly in the context of social realism. While often focused on male characters and their struggles, the genre also touched on issues relevant to women, such as domestic labor, social inequality, and the limitations of traditional gender roles.

### **Kitchen Sink Drama in Indian Literature and Cinema**

In India, Kitchen Sink Drama emerged prominently within the 1970s parallel cinema movement, a significant departure from mainstream commercial films. Indian Kitchen Sink Drama often focused on the lives of urban middle-class families and rural working-class communities, bringing their struggles and triumphs to the forefront. The key themes explored in Indian Kitchen Sink Drama included the pervasive issues of poverty, the hidden traumas of domestic violence, the broad spectrum of social injustice, and, significantly, various women's issues that were often overlooked in popular cinema. Films like Shyam Benegal's "Ankur" (1974) depicted the oppressive feudal system and its impact on individuals, while Sai Paranjpye's "Sparsh" (1980) sensitively explored the challenges faced by visually impaired individuals, including the women within that community. These films not only entertained but also served as powerful social commentaries, fostering a greater awareness of societal problems.

### **Regional Variations in Indian Kitchen Sink Drama**

The rich diversity of India is reflected in the regional variations of Kitchen Sink Drama, each offering unique perspectives on local socio-economic issues. Marathi cinema, for instance, has often focused on the struggles of the urban middle class, exemplified by films like "Dombivali Fast," which portrays the immense pressures of city life and the everyday frustrations of a common man. Bengali literature, notably through the works of Mahasweta Devi, has incisively examined rural poverty, exploitation, and the resilience of marginalized communities, particularly tribal women. Hindi cinema, while having its commercial inclinations, has also produced powerful Kitchen Sink Drama examples that explore social issues and domestic conflicts, with "Peepli Live" offering a satirical yet poignant look at farmer suicides. South Indian cinema has been particularly significant in representing caste-based discrimination and gender inequality, often with unflinching honesty in the Malayalam film "The Great Indian Kitchen" while "Parched" (Hindi) delves into the lives of four women in rural Rajasthan, challenging traditional norms and fighting for their freedom. These regional expressions underscore the widespread relevance and adaptability of the Kitchen Sink Drama genre across India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

## **Representation of Women in Indian Kitchen Sink Drama**

Indian Kitchen Sink Drama has been instrumental in offering a complex and often harrowing portrayal of female characters who navigate a labyrinth of societal constraints. This genre has not shied away from exploring deeply uncomfortable topics such as domestic violence, marital rape, and dowry issues, bringing these hidden realities to the forefront of public discourse. Beyond mere victimhood, Kitchen Sink Drama in India has also significantly focused on themes of female education, economic independence, and empowerment, showcasing women striving to break free from traditional bonds. It provides a powerful critique of traditional gender roles and expectations, illustrating the suffocating impact of patriarchal norms on individual lives. Deepa Mehta's "Fire" (1996) was ground-breaking in its exploration of female desire and same-sex relationships within a stifling domestic setup, challenging conventional morality. Similarly, Alankrita Shrivastava's "Lipstick Under My Burkha" (2016) courageously depicted the secret lives and desires of four women, defying societal restrictions and advocating for their personal freedoms. These films have contributed significantly to initiating conversations about women's rights and autonomy in Indian society showing complex portrayals of women beyond stereotypes, addressing taboos in a patriarchal society, and challenging norms of traditional gender roles and expectations placed upon women. These films shows empowering narratives of women education, financial independence, and different paths to empowerment.

### **Feminist Critique: Misogyny and Representation**

Despite its ground-breaking realism, Kitchen Sink Drama has been subjected to significant feminist critique, particularly regarding its often-unconscious reinforcement of patriarchal perspectives. A primary criticism centres on the concept of the "male gaze," eloquently articulated by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. Many of these narratives, often penned by male writers and directed by male filmmakers, tend to objectify and stereotype female characters, reducing them to roles that serve the male protagonists' development or desires. Women are frequently depicted through a lens that prioritizes their appearance or their function within a male-dominated

world, rather than as fully realized individuals with their own complex inner lives.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of authentic female perspective in many Kitchen Sink narratives. While female characters are present, their stories are often filtered through male experiences and anxieties, leading to a male dominance in the overall narrative structure and thematic focus. Feminist scholars like bell hooks have extended this critique, arguing that while the genre exposed class inequalities, it often failed to adequately challenge or even recognize the intersectional oppressions faced by women, particularly working-class women. Applying the Bechdel Test (which asks if a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man) often reveals the limitations of these dramas; while there might be female interactions, the content frequently revolves around male characters or domestic concerns stemming from patriarchal structures, underscoring the genre's often unintentional reinforcement of existing gender biases.

### **Socio-Political Impact of Kitchen Sink Drama**

The socio-political impact of Kitchen Sink Drama extends far beyond the confines of artistic expression, serving as a powerful catalyst for social change. By centring narratives on marginalized communities and often overlooked social issues, Kitchen Sink Drama raises critical awareness and fosters empathy among audiences. It fundamentally challenges dominant narratives and deeply ingrained stereotypes, compelling viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about their societies. This artistic engagement often translates into real-world action, promoting social change and galvanizing activism. In numerous instances, the powerful depiction of social injustices in Kitchen Sink Drama has directly influenced public policy and spurred legal reforms. For example, the widespread cinematic portrayal of the devastating impact of dowry demands contributed to increased public outcry and pressure for anti-dowry legislation. Similarly, films highlighting domestic violence have played a role in strengthening laws aimed at protecting victims. Kitchen Sink Drama, therefore, is not merely entertainment but a vital instrument in the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality, demonstrating the profound influence of art on society's evolution.

## Global Perspectives: Kitchen Sink Drama Beyond India

While Indian Kitchen Sink Drama offers unique insights, the genre also flourishes globally, reflecting universal themes alongside specific cultural nuances. A comparison with British, European, and American Kitchen reveals striking similarities in their exploration of class struggle, pervasive gender inequality, and broader social injustices. However, the cultural contexts within which these dramas are set lead to vastly different expressions and perspectives. For instance, the Dardenne brothers' "Rosetta" (Belgium) captures the desperate struggle for employment in a stark, minimalist style, reflecting European socio-economic realities. In contrast, Debra Granik's "Winter's Bone" (USA) portrays the grim struggle for survival in rural poverty, deeply rooted in American socio-economic landscapes. These cross-cultural influences and exchanges enrich the genre, demonstrating its adaptability and its capacity to resonate across diverse audiences. Whether it's the gritty urban landscapes of British Kitchen Sink Drama, the profound social critiques of European cinema, or the often-bleak realism of American independent films, Kitchen Sink Drama consistently provides an unvarnished look at human experience, bridging cultural divides through shared themes of struggle and resilience.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kitchen Sink Drama, whether in literature or film, across India and the world, remains a potent and relevant genre. This document has highlighted its historical roots, its powerful feminist elements, and its significant socio-political impact. The feminist approach to Kitchen Sink Drama is crucial, as it illuminates how these narratives dismantle patriarchal structures, amplify female voices, and challenge conventional gender roles, contributing to a more equitable society. The genre's ability to expose uncomfortable truths and foster empathy has consistently driven social awareness and even legislative reform. Looking ahead, future research could delve deeper into the intersectionality within Kitchen Sink Drama, examining how gender intersects with caste, class, religion, and other identities to create unique experiences of oppression

and resistance. Furthermore, exploring the globalization of Kitchen Sink Drama and its adaptation to digital media platforms offers exciting avenues for understanding its evolving relevance in contemporary society. The continued need for Kitchen Sink Drama to address pressing social issues, particularly those concerning gender and equality, underscores its enduring significance in our collective cultural consciousness.

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# Overlapping Boundaries and Fluid Cultural Spaces: A Cultural Geographical Reading of D. K. Chowta's *Mittabail Yamunakka: A Tale of a Landlord's Household*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 11 May 2025 Revised on: 05 Jun 2025 Accepted on: 11 Jun 2025 Published on: 15 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords</b>— Tulumad, cultural geography, cultural practices, dynamic place, overlapping boundaries, fluid nature, time.</p>	<p><i>Place, process of place formation, struggle over places, spatial production of identities, and practices of spatial representation predominate in the spatial aesthetics. The term and concepts provided by the discipline of geography and cultural geography can enhance the analysis of spatial texts. This paper is an attempt to read D. K. Chowta's Mittabail Yamunakka: A Tale of a Landlord's Household with a cultural geographic framework. The novel's spatial setting is the historically existed Tulumad region in Dakshina Kannada. Mittabail Yamunakka exposes the fluid and overlapping boundaries of place. Juxtaposition between a past and present Tulumad is the strategy adopted for its fictional mapping. Tulumad's spatial history in the colonial period is placed against the same in the postcolonial period. Cultural geographic reading will reveal the relative nature of the dominant values and preferences inscribed in the fictional geography. The spatial consciousness that the novel shares is that of a dynamic place ever-evolving. What the novel presents is not a static place, but a dynamic place ever evolving and emergent. The place and places in Mittabail Yamunakka are fluid entities, owing to their ever changing-nature and ever shifting boundaries. The lived space of Mittabail Yamunakka is at once decided by the myths, fossilised customs, domestic happenings, varied social-relations, events of nationalist nature, colonial encounters, and historical occurrences. This study also highlights economic exploitation enacted through the caste-driven and gender-driven social practices depicted in Mittabail Yamunakka. Incorporation of a political vision in the critical framework has unravelled the embedded web of hegemonic power relations evolving over time.</i></p>

## INTRODUCTION

Place and the spatial occupy a prime concern in the coding and decoding of present day literary and cultural texts. The spatial orientation in the literary has its roots in the theoretical development happened in the fields of history, geography, urban studies, phenomenology, body studies and cultural

studies in general. A considerable number of literary texts produced in the 21st century exhibit the literary turn towards a spatial aesthetics. Place, process of place formation, struggle over places, and spatial production of identities and practices of spatial representation predominate in the spatial aesthetics. The terms and concepts provided by the discipline of

geography and cultural geography can enhance the process of decoding any spatial text.

This paper is an attempt to read D. K. Chowta's *Mittabail Yamunakka: A Tale of a Landlord's Household* with a cultural geographic framework. The novel, originally written in the Tulu language, is translated in to English by B. Surendra Rao and K. Chinnappa Gowda in the year 2017. *Mittabail Yamunakka* is a fictional attempt to document a unique place in history. The novel is named after the central woman character Mittabail Jamunakka. The novel is a fictional cartography of the cultural landscape of Tulunad. In this process, the novel charts out Tulunad's natural territories, local culture, local food systems and environmental ethics manifested in its everyday practices. *Mittabail Jamunakka* retells the story of an ethnic space, by tracing it from the popular imagination of people. The novel's spatial setting is the historically existed Tulunad region in Dakshina Kannada. Juxtaposition between a past and present Tulunad is the strategy adopted for this fictional mapping. Tulunad's spatial history in the colonial period is placed against the same in the postcolonial period. This paper attempts to explore the cultural geography of Tulunad by focusing D. K. Chowta's strategic fictional mapping which tells the tale of a landlord's household and its spatial history over four generations.

### **Overlapping Boundaries and Fluid Cultural Spaces in *Mittabail Jamunakka***

Place can be understood as a social construct where the social itself being spatially organised. In humanist accounts, place is more than locales with territories around; place is identified as a distinctive and bounded location defined by the lived experiences of the people. From a culturally geographical point of view, spaces come by their meanings as a consequence of the complex intersections of culture and context occur within that specific location.

As such, a place can be understood as a bounded manifestation of the production of meaning in space (Barker 144). Modern cultural geography rejects the universal definitions of 'place' or 'space': "As such, the boundaries of place and space are deemed contingent, their seeming solidity, authenticity or permanence a (temporary)

achievement of cultural systems of signification that are open to multiple interpretations and readings" (Hubbard, "Space and Place" 46 ). Hubbard's argument stresses the 'poly-locative' nature of places. *Mittabail Yamunakka* highlights this 'poly-locative' nature of places in exposing the fluid and overlapping spatial boundaries. The overlapping territories of Tulunad as seen in the novel is decided at once by mythical Gods like Malaraya, local religious leaders like Tantri of Badaje, local political powers like Mittabail Guttu (joint-family), local regional authorities like Kumbala kingdom, State power in the form of legal procedures, Foreign invaders in the form of Company rule, etc. These overwritten territories set the cultural geography of Mittabail in flux.

Cultural construction processes that deny homogenous and fixed meaning to place is indicated by philosophers like Henri Lefebvre (Marxist theorist). Lefebvre, for example, introduced a triad of spatiality that explores the entwining of cultural practices, representations and imaginations. In his view, a space is seen as 'made up' through three-way dialectic between the perceived, the conceived and the lived space. He comments on the 'social' production of 'social space' (170) - a space that is fundamentally produced by and through human actions. Such a space "subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity". For him spatial and social meanings are inscribed on every space. According to him space is the product of social and cultural construction processes which attach meaning and values to seemingly 'natural' or 'absolute' places. Space in this sense develops from perceptions, practices, and representations.

The spatial scales in *Mittabail Yamunakka* are always in process - emergent or shifting rather than fixed and static. Poststructuralist geography, geography that is influenced by poststructuralist philosophical arguments, has introduced new strategies to read the places in process- the places that are shifting and emergent (Barnes and Duncan; Barthes). Poststructuralist geographers attempted to read culture and landscapes in a textual fashion. The basic premises of poststructuralist geography emphasise 'textuality' and 'intertextuality' of various landscapes. Each 'text' (for example, a domestic

space) was identified as existing in relation with other 'texts'. So geographers attempted to use textual analysis to 'read' geographical cultures/ cultural landscapes. In *Mittabail Yamunakka*, all the spatial scales are intimately connected through lived practices and cultural interactions. Various cultural practices establish linkages among places. Interconnections that link regions to regions and practices to practices are striking. The Mittabail Guttu's story is connected to other households in the region as is hinted in the statement, "Places may be different, times may be different, people and gods and the deivas they believed in may be different, but their stories and travails are all similar. Routine agricultural operations, clashes and fights, racing buffaloes, fighting cocks, -they are really no different from one another" (Chowta 39-40). The local events connect people and practices across distant spaces and times.

The uniqueness of Mittabail has its roots in the vast network of connections among different communities and clans existed at that time. Intertextual nature of place can be best explained in tracing the spatial foundation of the novel. The complexity of the spatial politics evolves from the numerous ties that form a web of relations among local places - Maippadi, Ullala, Kumbala, Kasargod, Tellichery, Payyannur, Vitla, Varkady, Manjeshwara, Goa, etc. and different communities- Jaina community (Chowta 26), Muger community of bondsmen (24-27), Brahmins, Christian community (17) Muslims (28), Konkans (92), forest-dwellers, etc. The inter-personal, inter-familial and inter-caste social relations that decide the cultural environment of Mittabail is made evident in a few occasions. Thus it is Saibu, a Muslim man, who remains the trusted friend and well-wisher of Mittabail family (28-29). Like that there exists a very good relationship between the Mittabail guttu, the Bhut family and the Bhandara Mutt, Konkans of Manjeshwara. They are like one family and they "share honour and prestige, triumphs, and travails in equal measure" (106). This indicates that the chronicle of Mittabail guttu is at once intertwined with the chronicle of many other places and communities that existed at that time in the cultural map of Tulunad.

The spatial consciousness that the novel shares is that of a dynamic place ever evolving. What

the novel presents is not a static place, but a dynamic place ever evolving and emergent. The place and places in *Mittabail Yamunakka* are fluid entities, owing to their ever changing-nature and ever shifting boundaries. The alternative session titles 'these days' / 'those days' is a mapping strategy adopted in the novel to contrast the past and the present landscape of Mittabail. The inscription of time-bound places results in the diachronic spatial study of Mittabail. At the same time, this diachronic spatial reality becomes at once the history of larger spatial scales like Tulunad region or the nation space itself owing to the interconnected nature of places. The interconnectedness of places turns them complex geographies.

Places are filled with a variety of social and cultural meanings, "we live in a world of cultural places" (Ryan 1). Space and place are imbued with meanings; they are not just the sites of events, "Place itself is a producer of meaning and changes in spatial practices always have cultural implications" (Johnson et al. 106). They are historical and cultural at the same time. They are historical in sense that historical meanings are recorded on landscapes, and cultural history can be read through landscapes. As cultural meanings are inscribed in every landscape, they are cultural also. It is significant to note that historical and cultural meanings are produced in a specific location. *Mittabail Yamunakka's* cultural universe, inhabited by mythical gods like Malaraya, folk practices like cock-fight and the buffalo fight, festivals such as Bisu- the new year day and shahshti festival, offer a wide scope for a critical and cultural geographic inquiry. The "ritual of setting up of the sprawling bakimar field for agricultural operations" is one such local event with layer of cultural meanings, since it includes the three-in-one celebrations of setting up of the paddy field, the feast of the newly harvested rice, and the ritual offerings to the family deity, Malaraya. This traditional annual celebration is a unique practice in that it connects at once human and non-human; the natural, cultural and the spiritual. The statement "That is the custom to which the landlord's household at Mittabail has always adhered to" indicates the power of these cultural events to connect people across distant spaces and times (6). Thus the festive occasion in the Mittabail family proves that Tulunad has a long

tradition of a unique cultural history stretching from a distant past to the recent present.

Cultural geography is concerned with the remaking of the physical world through the imposition of cultural values, ideas and meanings. The cultural changes bring about geographical changes and vice versa because the interplay between human culture and physical environment is always two-way, "What kind of community develops in response to an environment affect the kinds of cultural practices the community engages in, and those practices in turn shape and reshape the physical environment, turning it into a human-made landscape" (Ryan 13). There are detailed references to local festivals like annual event of the buffalo-race with the thirty pairs of buffaloes and the customary cock-fight that design the human-made landscape of Mittabail. There are remarks about unique cultural practices that existed in the cultural landscape. They include passing remarks about the events like hunting (Chowta 111), cock-fight (8), buffalo-race (5), black-magic and exorcism (142), folk medicine (142), rituals like Kutti Puja (137), Dharma Nema (34), festivals like Bisu (87) and Keddasa hunt (111) and journeys by buffalo-cart or palanquin (100), boat ride (131) and art forms like Yakshagana. There are also references to the financial transactions of various sorts. This includes the businesses like lending money on interest (99-100) or distributing land on rent basis (102). They act as unique cultural markers that unite people, places and times, since these immaterial cultural traces carve the cultural territory of the village around the Mittabail guttu and set its cultural geographic territory against all other places and times. In this way, Chowta's novel becomes a fictional segment of the 'live-space' of Tulunad region carved out from the cultural history of South Canara.

Cultural geographic reading will reveal the relative nature of the dominant values and preferences. The relative and culturally specific nature of value systems can be examined in relation with the treatment of the concept of physical power. There are many situations showing that physical power was shown as an essential component of political power in local and national circles in colonial period. Thus when speaking about the revenue collectors of the Mayippadi kings, it is

stated that while collecting land revenue and other tax levies, in many occasions the properties were "forcibly taken away from the defaulters" (Chowta 93). The passing reflection that, for the revenue collectors "right persons needed to deal with such situation" (93), signal the physical power that involved in sustaining regional level political rule. The awe that physical body power enjoyed is indicated in the reference to Birabail Thyampanna's "reputed muscle-power" (107). Similarly, the character Manjana's selection to the army of Kumbala kingdom is mainly because of his physical fitness (75-76). In a similar fashion, normative body discourses are prevailing in the cultural geography of the village around Mittabail family. Thus, somebody with the listed bodily defects cannot be the head of the Mittabail household (8). Those who are selected to the army are only the physically fit male members (75, 78). The slightly changing nature of the predominance of physical power and the addition of new cultural values is suggested in stating that both their reputation and physical stature has contributed to Yamunakka's superior power, that she looked "big both in fame and frame" (15). What is more significant is the fact that the seemingly minute changes in the dominant value system often function as the consequence of large scale changes in the political scenario. For instance, the widely accepted value of physical power in colonial times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the importance given to the value of power and family lineage in the early periods of 20<sup>th</sup> century give way to value of peace and prosperity by the time of independence. It is indicated in the novel in mentioning the possibility of the open acceptance of a Gandhian as the new head of Mittabail guttu, "If a Gandhian like Subbayanna, who won fame all over the village, got anointed in the household for the service of Malaraya, everyone would believe that Mittabail would verily be an abode of peace and prosperity" (268). This incident points at the textual nature of spatial practices. Spatial practices act as texts and the reading of these texts reveal cultural history. Places and spatial practices carry evidences of the ever evolving nature of cultural laws and dominant value systems.

The institutional space of home in the novel is reflective of its ideological patterns and gender driven social practices. Thus the family model is

centered not on the father or mother figures but on some other kinship bonds- “the true elders of the boy or girl are the heads of the family or their aunts and uncles” (Chowta 91). The matrilineal community’s cultural consciousness also operate in tracing a child’s resemblance with the uncle figure, instead of the normally accepted father figure (108). Chowta seems to suggest the unique ways of making up institutional places in a joint-family set-up in a Southern Kannada region in the colonial era. The book in this way offers insight in to the alternative institutional models of home and unique kinship relations that form Tuluwad’s cultural identity.

Cultural geography observes a very close relationship between bodies and places: “people and places are imagined, embodied and experienced in ways that are . . . radically and inextricably intertwined with each other” (Bondi and Davidson 337). This truth of place-body relationship can be critically examined both in relation with the material place and in relation with the cultural/intitutional place. This place-body relationship is indicated in the novel in speaking about the caste-driven and the gender- driven spatial practices. Mittabail’s cultural geography reflects its caste- driven spatial laws in dealing with the bondsmen from Mugeru community whereby the bondmen and the girls, who join the Mugeru community after marriage, are bound to work for their landlord’s house (Chowta 27). In maintaining the practice of making a group of people as the bondsmen, the landlord of the Mittabail house seems to possess the ownership of their labour power. Critical examination of this social practice may unravel the economic exploitation that underlies this place-body relationship. While the bondmen are tied to the landlord’s house in strategic movement to exploit their labour power, their social exclusion is ensured in maintaining ritualistic practice whereby “the bond men of the household would not step in “the front yard of the bhuta shrine at Mittabail” and they “would not come anywhere near the route in which the ritual paraphernalia of the deity is taken” (Chowta 24). In describing the strange cultural practices of sustaining a group as the bondsmen, the eternal workforce, and yet treating their bodies as pollutive, the novel highlights a double-edged pattern of exploitation . The reference to this social practice as a ‘fossilized custom’ points at the

historically rooted nature of this embedded hegemonic power relation. This patterns of exploitation that is supported by similar cultural practices can be traced in the privileged consideration granted to the people of Brahmin caste. Characters like Mittabail Yamunakka believes that paying respect to Brahmins may bring blessings to their household: “feeding a few Brahmins for a few days let their good wishes and blessings be the protective fence to the house of the Mittabail (32). Critical exploration of the belief systems, everyday practices and widely accepted social customs will shed light on the constitutional elements of the embedded hegemonic power relations.

Place is the site of hegemonic power dynamics. Space plays an important role in constituting and reproducing social relations/identities (Massey, “Spaces of Politics”). In turn, the agency of body actively engages in the production of space. Hence, bodies and spaces are mutually constituted. The examination of the gendered places in the novel reveals the way by which bodies and spaces construct each other. Thus the material place of kitchen is treated as a place of women (Chowta 62, 87, 92). More than emotional relations, institution of marriages were driven by practical affairs of the world. Thus in thinking about the marriage of his brother and himself, Manjana thinks the advantage of having two more girls in to his house “to help his sisters in kitchen and the fields” (92). The novel hints at the gendered nature of places and its unequal power relations in mentioning the custom of the matrilineal families, where a widow is supposed to leave her husband’s house on the very night of her husband’s funeral ceremonies and she is not permitted to take anything more than the clothes she wore (73). The shadows of the economic exploitation that characterises the caste driven- lord-bondmen relationship, seems to have parallels in gender exploitation too. Dominant power relations are revealed as embedded in accepted social behaviors and customs. At the same time, the economic exploitation enacted through the caste-driven and gender-driven social practices allude to the Marxian discussions on the relations of capitalist social production and exchange and the theory of alienated labor, where the force of production got alienated from the product of their labour power (Carver). Like

any capitalist commodity society, workers must sell their labor-power to capitalists. They do not possess the means to produce enough goods for them to stay alive without contracting themselves out to another person's control. As in any modern capitalist society, caste-bound or gendered individual-self turned as worthless in this process of estrangement.

Modern cultural geography also considers the politics of representing landscapes. Landscape is said to be an outcome of culture that comes to have meaning when it is invested with the desires, designs and imperatives of a culture. A landscape is often transformed by the ideas, imaginings and value systems of that particular culture. So the real worlds are in fact 'imagined realities'. Spatial representations like monuments and sites of commemoration are often termed as 'landscapes of power' by cultural geographers since they reflect the power of those who control culture (Zukin). A close reading of the sites of commemoration reveals a complex politics of memory and identity with hidden social, cultural and political meanings. The bioregion of Tulunad has its own systems of preserving power and recording dominant traces of its lineage. There are references to the material and immaterial kinds of spatial representation. While the monument constructed in the memory of the dead is an instance of the material spatial representation, the annual festival of the setting up of the paddy field and the celebratory feast of the newly harvested rice is a spatial representation of an immaterial sort, since the event proclaims the community's existence as a unique group and reminds the present generation about the great figures from the family history (Chowta 18, 16). Similarly, the ritual offerings to the family deity, Malaraya, and the supreme role assigned to this mythical god is an immaterial cultural trace that preserves cultural memories of a group, its struggles and survival. It is also hinted in the novel that the monument constructed in the memory of the dead is occasionally converted as a temporary shelter for the travelers to sit and rest and a place for the 'unemployed do-nothings and gossip-mongers of the village' to assemble (18). In mentioning the spatial appropriations that happened to these monuments in the present times, the novel points at the truth of everyday spatial conflicts over these 'landscapes of power'.

Marxist and materialist readings focus the importance of place as socially produced and consumed. They explore the relations of domination and resistance played out across different spaces of social existence: The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies defines place as, "a site or location in space constituted and made meaningful by social relations of power and marked by identifications or emotional investments" (Barker 144). The works of David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre illustrates the idea that cultural battles generate explicit inequalities in the way that space is occupied and used by members of different groups. Chowta also projects places as contested zones. Places at various spatial scales are contested and fought over: the internal family conflicts exemplified in the dispute between Maanku Rai and his niece Yamunakka (Chowta, 335); the physical struggle between opposing parties over land rights as it happens between Mittabail people and Baarabail people (381, 386-392); the fight between the Kumbala kingdom and Kalyanappa's regime on political grounds (178-179); the larger national conflicts between freedom fighters and the British people (272); the caste driven conflicts over land and natural resources (354-55); the religious riots during the days of independence (344); the clashes on historical grounds where people fought over interpretations of historical incidents (387, 390); fights/compromises over gendered cultural spaces (9); diplomatic spatial appropriations of monuments (18); and even the inter-species' conflict hinted in man's encroachment into animal world (50).

Along with place, time or the space-time in the novel is socially produced and consumed. Chowta follows a locally adopted temporal marker in delineating the space-time of Tulunad. The peculiarity of the timescale of the novel lies in its rejection of the authoritative historical templates. Time-sense evoked in the novel is in tune with the micro/macro level spatial transformations operating in diachronic/synchronic lines. It is made evident in stating, "before the coming of the Company Rule, any number of such guns were available in the region around Ullala," the time sense is evoked in connection with the establishment of the British East India Company in India (Chowta 49). Similarly, the way of evoking temporal sense by placing certain social/ regional events against some historically

important event is suggested in stating that the friendly relationship between Mittabail and Bhandara Mutt was begun at the time of Kalyanappa's Revolt (100). There are instances in the novel when certain local family events are connected to large-scale political happenings or global events. Thus, it is said that the ancestors of a character named Devaya Bhandari, a Konkani man living at Manjeshwara, have fled from Goa owing to the "persistent persecution of the Portuguese there," indicating that European rule had effected spatial and social changes in the micro geographies like a household (92).

There is a very special time marker is introduced in the novel that offers at once the strange mixture of the personal, domestic social and national events at once. This is in stating about the character of Subbayanna, who left the Mittabail home and joined Gandhiji's freedom struggle, after the mysterious death of Maanku Rai, the head of the Mittabail family: "After the death of Maanku Rai, Subbayanna, who had gone to join Gandhiji in his asrama has not returned yet," (Chowta 9). While Subbayanna's long-time absence from the Mittabail household is a personal choice and the uncertainties that accompany the house is a domestic one, the historical reasons that triggered it are at once local and national. Chowta contrasts an era of peace in the nationalist history to the violence-driven period in a domestic place. A critical reading of this incident would reveal the strange point that unite the seemingly distant national and the local/domestic. The character of Subbayanna here functions as the connecting point between two distant layers of history. What results is series of heterogeneous space-time blocks, with a nationally affected local time and locally incorporated national time.

### CONCLUSION

The critical exploration of the documentaion of place and time in *Mittabail Jamunakkarevealsthe* nomadic nature of the same. Mittabail's spatial and temporal identity evolves from the network of unique cultural practices, distinct linguistic features and special geographical borders. This cultural geographic reading also underlines the fluid nature of spatialities by pointing out its shifting boundaries

in time and space. The lived space of *Mittabail Yamunakkais* at once decided by the myths, fossilised customs, domestic happenings, varied social-relations, events of nationalist nature, colonial encounters, and historical occurrences. Incorporation of a political vision in the critical framework has unravelled the embedded web of hegemonic power relations evolving over time. A critical exploration of this mythical cum historical novel and the identification of numerous cultural markers announces the existence of a place in history with its unique lived practices and nomadic boundaries.

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# Challenging the Universalism of the Concept of Transgender Identity in the Indian Context

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 11 May 2025 Revised on: 05 Jun 2025 Accepted on: 11 Jun 2025 Published on: 15 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords – Identity, Gender, Transgender, Hijras</b></p>	<p><i>Society often marginalizes non-normative forms of gender expression and identity, resulting in the exclusion of those who embody them and forcing them to live on the fringes. When it comes to sex and gender, Indian society acknowledges only two, whereas in Scriptures and Epics, three genders were socially accepted. From treating Hijras as royal ones to criminals, Indian history has seen it all. Being categorized under the 'third gender' has led to their identities being mixed with those of transgender individuals, resulting in a generalized narrative that fail to reflect their unique practices. After the NALSA vs Union of India (2014) Judgement, the visibility of third gender has increased in the society. But it deepens the problem for those who identify themselves as Hijras, as the judgement puts all those who defy gender norms under the category of transgenders. In India, culture defines one's identity. The hijra community has specific traditions and rituals that an individual must adhere in order to be recognized as a hijra. The research is an attempt to highlight hijra's unique culture, norms and rules, thereby distinguishing them from transgenders. The paper shall discuss the problematics of the term transgender vis-à-vis hijra.</i></p>

## I. OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to study the various terminologies used by society to address transgender people in a heteronormative society, where they are often labelled as 'deviants' and 'moral abusers'. It will provide a detailed study on how they regained their lost identity, from fighting their inner demons to fighting in the court. They have suffered a lot, yet managed to survive and carve out a space for themselves in a society which has rejected and abandoned them. The paper will study Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) 1871, which was introduced by the British regime to eradicate eunuchs and *hijras* from the mainstream society, as British considered them a threat to morality. It will also delve into the NALSA vs Union judgement 2014 and how the use of term 'Transgender' is problematic in Indian society.

## II. GENDER, SEX AND SEXUALITY

In South-Asian societies, a great emphasis is given to one's sex and gender. Moreover, according to one's biological sex, the society imposes a set of norms and codes, which determines one's gender. The society needs to understand the difference between these two terms: sex is biological and given to someone at the very time of their birth, whereas gender is a social construct, which is imposed by society and forces an individual to behave in a certain way. In patriarchal and hierarchical social structures, gender serves as a critical factor in an individual's life trajectory. Judith Butler, in her seminal text *Gender Trouble*, explains that gender is performative and it is attached to one's social behaviour, performance and practice.

Gender, sex and sexuality are intertwined but have different meanings and implications. Human sexuality is the sexual expression of an individual, which involves various aspects: biological, emotional, psychological, erotic, spiritual feelings and behaviours. It describes how and with whom we act on our erotic desires and can be categorised into sexual identity, sexual health and reproduction etc. It encompasses all aspects of sexual behaviour, including gender identity, orientation and activities. "Sexuality is analytically distinct from gender but intimately bound with it, like two lines on a graph that intersect" (Stryker 33).

In an academic discourse, 'sex' can denote multiple concepts, including biological classification and sexual activity, it can be used "...as a description of a kind of person, for the act of participating in intercourse, as a synonym for our genitals, as well as to describe biological differences in reproductive capacity" (Stryker 31-32). The classification of individuals by sex is generally stated through 'male' and 'female'.

Gender is a social construct, it can be called as "...set of cultural beliefs and practices about biological sex..." (Stryker 32). Therefore, one has the choice to choose one's gender according to one's sexual interests and having a particular type of interest makes one's sexual identity. Gender is fluid not universal and it is performed, created through repeated actions, habits and performances rather than rooted in biology. It refers to the socially constructed roles, expressions, and identities that a society considers suitable for individuals based on their perceived sex.

In India, Ardhanareeswara, the half-male and half-female form of Shiva, is worshipped. Why then would such a country abuse hijras? Revathi. (x)

Hundreds of stories are credited to *hijras* and their existence. Lord Rama blessed them with divine powers, as they waited for fourteen years for Lord Ram at the forest rim. In *Mahabharata*, the tale of *Shikhandi* also validates their existence and depicts how they were well accepted in society. Sangam literature acknowledges people who do not conform to established gender norms. For instance, it uses the word 'Pedi' to refer to transwomen. The love

between King Koperunchozhan and Pisuranthaiyar is a profound example of same sex love affair from the Sangam period, where it is to be believed that they died at same time in different places symbolizing their transcendental love for each other.

### ***Hijras and British Regime***

*Hijras* of South Asia have long enjoyed a divine rank, as Lord Rama bestowed them a status that was greater to any mortal and a history of enjoying a reputed place in the times of the Mughals. But, from 1865, under the British rule, they were forcefully removed from the society and considered bad influence on the heteronormative society. With the introduction of CTA 1871, the process got accelerated.

The CTA 1871 criminalized the *hijras* and any gender non-conforming individual by describing them as habitual criminals. Various pieces of colonial legislation in India during British rule were collectively called Criminal Tribes Act. The British colonial administration labeled *hijras* as a 'wandering people' (Hinchy 67), grouping them with other nomadic tribes. As they travel across India, in search of employment and to perform their ritual practices, thereby disturbing the political boundaries set up by the colonial regime.

There are records from police, where people who cross-dress for performances were also put behind the bars, claiming that they are not serving a good impression on the society. *Hijras* and Cross-dressers were seen as threats to colonial morals and social norms. Jessica Hinchy, in her book, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India*, states that "For colonial commentators, *Hijras* were also a danger to good order and to 'public decency and morals'" (61). She also discusses that British labelled them as 'wanderers' or 'mendicant caste' because they use to travel short distance to collect *badhai* at the occasions of child birth, marriages and etc. They also used to visit their guru every year, so much of travel became a hindrance for census and British failed to collect taxes and control. *Hijra* mobility also became a big reason for their criminalization.

### **Quest for an Identity**

The word *hijra* is an Urdu word derived from the Semitic Arabic root word *hijr* which means "leaving

one's tribe". In addition, "The word 'hij' refers to the soul, a holy soul. The body in which the holy soul resides is called *hijra*" (Laxmi 39). People who do not accept the established gender roles and norms are not entertained by the mainstream society. To have a sense of togetherness and belonging, they have set up their own culture, language, customs and rituals, which have helped them to endure the discrimination and marginalization. The formation of a counter-culture has been crucial for their survival and the establishment of their unique identity.

Albeit, society hasn't provided them any space within the mainstream, but definitely has given them various labels, like *kothi*, *shiv-sakhti*, *aravani*, *hijra*, etc, to stigmatize their sexuality. In Tamil Nadu, *hijras* are known as *Aravanis*, the wives of *Aravan*, and *Thiru-nangais*, as they all gather, in the village of *Koovagam*, to celebrate their womanhood and do *sollah shrianagar* and then on the last day (18<sup>th</sup> day) of the procession, they declare themselves as widows of *Aravan*, which is an authoritative way of ascertaining their womanhood. This story comes from the oral tradition of Tamil retelling of *Mahabharata*.

In North India, *hijras*, *Chakka*, *kothi*, etc, are some common names which are credited to anyone who discards the gender norms of heteronormative society. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, *Bahuchara Mata* is the divine power, which has a great significance in the life of a *hijra*. Devdutt Pattanaik puts, "The goddess on the rooster, Bahuchara-mata, is invoked in many hijra communities during hijra's castration ceremony which is termed 'nirvana'" (107).

However, once I joined Sangama I realized it was not my fault. It certainly was not my fault that I was thrown out of my family; it certainly was not my fault that I was forced to discontinue schooling. Then why are we subjected to such terrible violations and denied our basic rights as human beings?... (Revathi 50-51)

Revathi emphasizes that it is certainly not 'their' fault for being into odd jobs and sex work, since society has forced them to take up these to sustain themselves. Gender-diverse individuals are not accepted in society. They are abandoned by their

own families and the society, which forces them to live on the fringes. To make a living out of the rejection, they set up a society for their survival, which welcomes everyone who gets a rejection. Kallinkeel in his novel, *Rasaathi: The Other side of a Transgender*, describes a father abandoning his own son because of his choices, "From here onwards, this is your home and these people are your family. They will take care of you. Forget about us" (17).

They knocked the portals of court to claim their basic human rights after decades of suffering. Their journey is exhaustive and long but in 2014 they achieved a major milestone. The landmark judgment in the history of India came in April 2014 by Supreme Court of India which granted transgenders, an identity of third gender at educational institutions and classified them under 'Other Backward Classes'. The judgement is a milestone in the history of Transgender people as it affirms the right of individuals to self-identify their gender, recognizing transgender persons as a 'third gender' and provided them their long lost and deserved citizenship. The Court highlighted that discrimination based on gender identity or expression violates constitutional assurances of freedom, equality, and dignity. The status given by law, provided them a legal representation. However, in spite of the legal acknowledgement, the social recognition still remains a distant dream. Even after the judgement, Indian society is not, yet, ready to accept them just like any other normal human being. There is a stigma associated with their image. The government is taking various steps to uplift their social stature but all in vain, as the rigidity in people still persists and failed to consider the third gender a part of society because they are considered as a threat to morals, values and structure of the society.

The court has given them a legal identity, as it is a crucial part of one's existence. The moment a baby is born, an identity is given to the newborn according to one's sex, religion, caste and creed. One is identified by one's identity which verifies one's existence in the social world. Etymologically the word 'identity' is derived from the Latin root 'idem', meaning 'sameness and continuity'.

Identity is an umbrella term which describes an individual as a discrete and separate entity. It can be

broadly divided in two categories: given and self-proclaimed, the former is used to present oneself in the society and the latter is for one self. "Transgender people often find themselves oscillating between two identities—the one assigned at birth, and the one they affirm, which is frequently rejected by society. This societal non-acceptance contributes to their stigmatization and marginalization. To gain the lost identity, they have fought and are still fighting for their social acceptance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Though the law has given them space but socially it is still a fight in motion.

The case with transgender individuals is different, although they had a historical accepted identity, today they are fighting to reclaim it. Under British regime, they not only lost their independency but also their social and cultural identity. When an individual loses his own identity, he tries to attain that lost identity or construct a new one to sustain oneself in a society where having an identity is primary. The quest for a new identity is full of challenges and the process of construction is painful as well as grueling. It was British who criminalised *hijras*, and even after decades of independence, Indians are still ruled by a colonial mindset and are afraid to accept *hijras* into what is considered a 'cultured' society.

The judgement of NALSA vs Union 2014 acknowledges *Hijras* as Third gender, decriminalised them and ushered in the recognition of civil and political rights of the community. The court held that *hijra*, eunuchs, *aravanis* and *thirunangi*, *kothi*, *jogtas/jogappas*, *shivo-shakthis* etc. in addition to binary be treated as third gender. The judgement also included a discussion about Yogyakarta Principles: it is a document about human rights in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity. Sakshi Parashar clearly mentions in her research paper that "there are other parts of the judgment where the term transgender is used generally and is not qualified with the usage of *hijra* or eunuchs, leading to the perception that the judgment focuses on transgenders in general" (115). There are paragraphs where the judgment clearly mentions that *hijra* is one of many categories which falls under the term transgender, but when one fully read the judgement, one can easily get confused by

the use of these terms interchangeably. Parashar also states '..., continuous usage of 'hijra/transgender' makes one interpret the term transgender in a manner which limits its understanding to hijras, etc., and not the other gender variant identities'.

The term credited to *Hijras* is transgender, which is an umbrella term and the definition is under construction. The usage of the term in Indian context is very abstract, as one can be a *hijra* and transgender, both, but not every transgender is a *hijra*. Sakshi Parashar discusses, in her paper, that the term "includes a spectrum of people who transgress gender norms. It has been pointed out, that the term is only an attempt to consolidate and provide an identity to gender non-conforming people within the purview of state and legal recognition" (111). Transgender is a word of western origin and used informally for a person who defies heteronormative norms of gender and sexuality. Susan Stryker tries to define the term:

An umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender binaries. The term includes, but is not limited to, transexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism and such non-european identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra. (149)

Susan Stryker in her book *Transgender History*, discusses the recent usage of the term transgender and states "...the term *transgender* used to refer only to those who identify with a binary gender other than the one they were assigned at birth..." (37). The countless usage of the term doesn't go with the identity of Indian *hijras* and this is why the very usage of the term is problematic in Indian society, as it destructs the cultural identity of a *hijra*.

### III. CONCLUSION

The word 'Transgender' has come to light in the past couple of decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and its meanings and definitions are still under construction. The term encompasses all identities that reject the norms of heteronormative society. Whereas, *Hijra* community defines 'hijra' as a

cultural identity reserved for people who have undergone a traditional ceremony known as *reet*. Therefore, a *hijra* can be a transgender but not all transgenders are *hijras*. The term *hijra* is used for a male who has feminine traits or a female trapped into a male body, whereas transgender consists of both transman and transwoman.

The research establishes that there is an urgent need to define these terms and should not be used as synonyms. A lot of research is yet to be done to understand these terms. While going through the path-breaking judgement of NALSA 2014 and Transgender Bill of 2016, one can find the loopholes and how the terms are used synonymously, which *hijra* community finds derogatory and improper.

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# Intersectionality and women's Empowerment: Race, class, and identity Sula by Toni Morrison, The Colour Purple by Alice Walker

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<b>Article Detail:</b>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p>Received on: 13 May 2025                      Revised on: 05 Jun 2025                      Accepted on: 09 Jun 2025                      Published on: 15 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords— Gender Representation, Race, Sexual Exploitation, Personal Identity</b></p>	<p><i>An in-depth examination of gender representation in literature, concentrating on the experiences of African American women during the 20th century. Walker confronts traditional gender norms by illustrating Celie's evolution from a compliant and marginalised young woman to a confident individual who discovers empowerment through her connections with other women. The relationship between Celie and Shug Avery, who starts as her husband's mistress, transforms into a profound connection that enables Celie to regain her voice and sense of self. Their relationship challenges conventional expectations of romantic love. Celie's journey serves as a profound exploration of the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality within a patriarchal society. "The Colour Purple" critiques the systemic oppression encountered by African American women, revealing the stark realities of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and economic marginalisation. Walker depicts the strength of her female characters, showcasing their ability to manoeuvre and challenge these oppressive systems through unity, spirituality, and personal expression. This paper presents a nuanced exploration of gender representation in literature, highlighting the intricate and varied experiences of African American women. It addresses the interplay of race, gender, and power, while honouring the strength and resilience evident in women's relationships and their personal paths towards self-empowerment and liberation.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

All excellent works of literature has conflict, and Morrison's works revolve on the internal and external struggles with identity. So, we need to find out how much these authors muddle alienating codes in their stories. There is a complicated link between racial rhetoric, gender discourse, and class discourse that breaks down discussions of identity disparity. Narratives create identity discourse by promoting the junction of class and the imposing reality of race. Morrison acts as a go-between, using techniques that elicit a variety of reactions by means of paradox-building or parallelism, thereby highlighting the

inconsistencies present in any given discourse. The core tenet of intersectionality is the idea that people are not only a part of one social framework, but of several frameworks that interact with each other in complex ways. The goal of an intersectional approach, according to Hill Collins (277), is to understand how different social institutions impact different people's situations within different oppressive systems. An analytical framework that includes "different responses to shared difficulties" (28), Hill Collins presents an expanded picture of intersectionality. There is a mountain of data showing how people's intersecting identities affect their happiness, life

circumstances, and social networks (Phoenix & Pattynama, 6).

Narratives that emphasise either membership or differentiation have allowed it to remain intact. As a result, writers such as Morrison and Walker who work with these ideas use tactics that provoke different responses by using methods of paradox or parallelism, which brings attention to the inherent inconsistencies in speech. In order to uncover several levels of meaning in tales, it is the literary analyst's duty to use suitable interpretive tools.

Conflict is an essential component of fiction, and Walker and Morrison's works revolve on the internal and outward struggles of identity. The question then becomes how much these writers obfuscate distancing patterns in their stories. When we look at racial rhetoric in the context of class and gender, we see a complex connection that makes it harder to talk about identity disparity.

Many narratives about identity concentrate on the complex relationship between social class and racial identity. Disregarding the convergence of differences undermines much analytical and inventive literary criticism that depends on individual analytical viewpoints. Through depicting deep-seated identity crises, Walker and Morrison expose the characters' predicaments by drawing attention to the complex interconnections within and between different types of identities.

Both books show a deep comprehension of the many facets of African American identities, which goes against the grain of common interpretations that place Morrison and Walker's works in a purely feminist context. Indicators of racial or gender binaries interact with other structural variables that produce unequal connections, such as disability, sexual orientation, class, and gender. Focusing on only one aspect of literary discourse is simplistic and out of touch with reality's intricacies. Still, it is important to stress that focusing just on identification would be a major misreading of creative representation and the examination of society via characterization, storyline, or location.

A critic's job is to shed light on these choices by drawing connections to other parts of works of literature. This analytical effort exemplifies this ambivalent viewpoint by investigating the ways in

which Walker and Morrison either subvert or unintentionally support standard narratives around inequality. While avoiding oversimplified binary frameworks within identity categories, both writers acknowledge the contemporaneous nature of gender, class, and racial inequities. Instead of just preserving preexisting historical links, they provide new categories that question traditional narratives of identity, demonstrating the complex relationship between culture, history, and discourse. By illustrating how gender, class, and race all exist in tandem, we can see how these narratives play a significant role in defining identity politics. We will look at discourse components and assess them based on how often they appear and how important they are in literature.

Characters from a variety of socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, and genders all felt marginalised. The work of Alice Walker, who laid the groundwork for feminist theory, deserves recognition.

Described by Delores Williams as a position "against any oppression on the grounds of race, gender, class, sexual preferences and physical ability" in her theological book *Sisters in the Wilderness*, as a paradigm of personalism. By deftly avoiding a narrow emphasis on features of identity, *The Colour Purple* avoids overt generalisation while deftly incorporating a number of categories. Similarly, Morrison's work shows how realignment and communal consciousness impact identity talks.

*The Colour Purple* shows how a shift in perspective helps people progress as a species. "Right after that, he starts to show symptoms of progress," Celie notes. According to her, "kills" is the meaning (231). While helping his wife Sofia care for their children, Harpo – the son of Mister – manages a warped view of manhood. Mary Agnes, Harpo's partner, shows agency by standing up for herself, demanding respect from everyone, and deciding to leave him to pursue her musical dreams (Squeak/Mary Agnes). Consequently, she follows in Shug's footsteps. Once Celie starts getting letters from Nettie, whom she thought was dead, her awareness goes through the roof. "Now I know Nettie living I begin to swagger a little bit." This is the exact line that motivates her to leave Mister and travel to the city to be with Shug, thanks to the uplifting tone of Nettie's letter. Think about it: "We will leave this area as soon as she comes

back. Our two children, together with her and myself Specifically, Sofia goes beyond a mentality formed by years of resisting male supremacy, establishing herself in an ongoing posture of rebellion against its cultural standards, customs, and ideas. "All my life I had to struggle." describes her aggressive personality. A quarrel broke out between my father and myself.

An argument broke out between my brothers and myself... In a male-dominated environment, a female youngster cannot feel safe number 42. By seeing her marriage through a critical lens, she rejects any speech that is influenced by traditional gender roles. But her perspective changes once she goes to jail for publicly humiliating the mayor's wife. Eleanor Jane, the mayor's daughter, helps her temper her racial animosity, and she comes to see mankind as a whole. When investigating one's identity within larger contexts, Walker stresses the need of balance and the use of logical reasoning. Walker advocates for a reasoned mentality that eschews extremes in relationships and attitudes in favour of a middle ground that opposes inhumanity and dogmatic ideas while yet fitting in with larger conversations.

The carefully crafted environment of *The Bluest Eye* suggests that a conforming communal consciousness perpetuates oppression. By delving into the many identities of characters spanning gender, race, migration, and socioeconomic status, we can see how cultural frameworks have imposed limitations. Still, many reviewers tend to take an oversimplified view of the books, drawing only on the stories of Black American women. In my view, the main focus should be on how humans interact with the constraints imposed by awareness. Although women from ethnic minorities and women from the majority usually have worse results when compared to males, the gender studies literature stresses that these two groups' everyday lives are quite different. Ethnicity exacerbates gender-based divides, and vice versa; a complex understanding of the contextual elements involved is required to comprehend this relationship. Floya Anthias's "translocational lens" provides a useful framework for thinking about how different social structures and processes interact to produce different positions and results (12). Therefore, intersectionality includes not only the ways in which different identities interact and evolve across time, but also the consequences of these relationships for

outcomes in the present. In this research, we look at how different people's backgrounds and experiences shape their reactions and understandings.

Characters in both *The Bluest Eye* and *The Colour Purple* struggle with the complexities of their many identities, which in turn cause them to form relationships that mirror the interaction between and within their various identities. This complexity and contradiction is inherent in discussions of identity. By avoiding direct confrontation with category representations, this promotes an active and resilient conversation on identity discrepancies. Cultural hierarchies have always placed the burden on literary critics to decipher tales using appropriate techniques of interpretation in order to provide numerous levels of meaning. Many forms of literary critique, whether creative or critical, that use singular analytical frameworks fail because they try to ignore the interplay of inequality. Walker and Morrison reveal their characters' predicaments by depicting obvious identity crises; in doing so, they highlight the intricate interconnections among many identity categories. Morrison and Walker's books show a profound understanding of the multi-faceted nature of African American identity, in contrast to the popular narratives that cast them as rigid feminist endeavours. An intersection of gendered or racial binaries with other structural elements that promote unequal relationships includes class, disability, and sexuality. Literary criticism that ignores or downplays other categories is both erroneous and unfounded. It is worth noting that only concentrating on identification would also lead to a blatant distortion of artistic representation and societal analysis via character development, storyline, or environment. Therefore, it is up to the critic to analyse these decisions in light of other features of literary works. This critical effort uses Morrison's portrayal of inequality – whether it goes against the grain or seems to perpetuate them – to illustrate this dual perspective. Without clinging to rigid gender or racial/class/sexual orientation classifications, both authors discuss the interconnectedness of these injustices.

Analysing Toni Morrison's work in depth sheds light on the structural oppression Black women face by exploring the interplay between social, political, and economic forces. Morrison depicts Black women's struggles with gender and racial prejudice in novels

such as *Beloved* and *Sula*. The hegemony of white values in society, the economic and political marginalisation of Black women, and the exploitation of their bodies are all parts of this systematic oppression that stems from slavery and structural inequality (McGee 21). These kinds of themes highlight the challenges that Black women confront in modern society, such as inequality in healthcare, educational prospects, and employment (Leath et al., 22; Showunmi, 23). Insightful social criticisms and historical narratives, Morrison's writings shed light on the persistence of these oppressions in modern society. The complex characters and stories created by Morrison shed light on the strength and defiance shown by Black women in the face of persistent persecution, providing important context for analysing current societal injustices.

Toni Morrison's understanding of the interplay between gender, race, and identity in her writings sheds light on the pervasive oppression that Black women in America continue to endure. Morrison shows how slavery and racism have affected Black women in all walks of life, from the social to the economic to the political, via complex characters and stories that deal with pain, marginalisation, and the search for identity (Jum-Gyu 23). Her research provides analytical tools to combat long-standing injustices and sheds light on the need of understanding how race and gender interact to better understand the struggles Black women face today.

This research takes a qualitative approach by analysing Toni Morrison's works using content analysis. It aims to examine how *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye* critique modern societal frameworks related to gender and race (Gwee et al. 24). This study relies on secondary qualitative sources for its data, which include Morrison's novels as main texts, relevant journal papers as supporting literature, and research linked to social movements such as Black Lives Matter as contextual data. In this literary critique of Morrison's writings, the author draws parallels between her books and modern social issues and social justice movements (Saddam 78; Thapliyal 95).

Systemic racism, collective trauma, racial beauty standards, and Black women's empowerment were among the major themes identified and structured via the use of thematic analysis (Kamesha et al., 2002;

Seanna et al., 1997). With this information in hand, we were able to evaluate Morrison's story in light of contemporary social issues by placing it within the preexisting literature on social justice movements. Data triangulation, which involves comparing the results of the theme analysis with other academic interpretations and having conversations with specialists in literary and gender studies to confirm the validity of the results, further strengthens the rigour of this research. This study aims to shed light on how Toni Morrison's works provide a critical analysis of modern society's structure and serve as valuable educational tools in current academic discussions about gender, race, and social justice in the US.

Sethe, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, personifies the ways in which the pain of slavery has shaped Black women's identities and lived experiences. Sethe, a former slave who escapes from a plantation, has deep psychological wounds from the cruel treatment she received while in bondage; this is the story of her journey. For a long time, Sethe feels both bodily and mental pain. She gained a new perspective on herself and the world around her as a result of the event. At the story's heart is the impact of slavery on the bond between Black women and their responsibilities as mothers and vital members of their communities, as shown in the pivotal moment when she chooses to end her daughter *Beloved*'s life rather than let her face enslavement.

The long-lasting impact of slavery on succeeding generations, drawing attention to the obstacles encountered by Black women in addressing the residue of brutality. Morrison highlights the story's female characters, particularly Sethe and Baby Suggs, who are all fighting to reclaim their identities and fulfil their responsibilities in the wake of slavery while carrying the weight of their pain and traumatic experiences. Morrison shows that the tragedy of slavery affects more than just the people who were physically there by embodying a haunting and unresolved history in her character *Beloved*. The scars inflicted by this heritage on succeeding generations have a lasting impact on Black women's identities and the roles they play in society.

In her book *Sula*, Toni Morrison explores the complex relationship of two Black women, Nel Wright and Sula Peace. The story goes on to stress the importance

of Black women's communities and the social demands put on them. At its core, the story is about the friendship between Sula and Nel, which highlights their struggle through a society and a race fraught with obstacles. In order to show how the Black community has different expectations of women, Morrison uses this complex connection. While Sula chooses a more independent path and rejects social conventions, Nel is expected to comply to traditional expectations as a husband and mum. By choosing to go against the grain of society, Sula has effectively cast herself in the role of an outcast. Community members often enforce rigid social norms on Black women's behaviour, which the book sharply analyses.

Sula delves deeper into how these cultural standards limit Black women's independence and freedom. People often criticise Sula for what they see as her immorality since she represents a life of independence. The will of Black women to redefine themselves in a way that defies societal norms is on full display here. In the meantime, patriarchal norms impose restrictions on women like Nel, who tries to conform to society standards. This story criticises the norms that keep Black women from achieving their full potential and highlights the importance of female camaraderie as a safety net while dealing with overwhelming social demands.

When it comes to access to healthcare, education, and jobs, Black women in the US still face serious challenges from systemic racism. Discriminatory practices in student evaluation and placement, inadequate funding in areas with a Black majority, and limited access to high-quality schools are all manifestations of racial inequality in education (Linda 200; Paula et al. 202). Concerningly, there is a gender gap in health care, with Black women often receiving worse treatment than White women. Uneven access to adequate health care resources and shockingly high rates of maternal death are clear manifestations of this inequality. Despite having the same level of education and experience as their male or white female colleagues, Black women often earn less money in the workplace due to racial and gender inequalities (Bailey et al.17). In addition to affecting Black women's access to resources, these issues show how systematic racism keeps them marginalised in many areas of life.

Taking Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality into account is crucial for comprehending gender-based oppression in modern America. Black women face a double whammy of racial and gender discrimination, which intersectionality sheds light on. This puts them in an especially vulnerable position in society. In this setting, Black women face a more complex and systemic kind of oppression as a consequence of racial discrimination in addition to gender-based marginalisation. Legal and legislative frameworks, as pointed out by Crenshaw, fail to adequately address these types of oppression because they treat gender and racism as separate concerns, failing to acknowledge the interaction between the two. Since Black women continue to face prejudice based on both their gender and their race, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of intersectionality in order to analyse the obstacles Black women face in accessing healthcare, jobs, and the judicial system (Crenshaw 89).

Toni Morrison's writings continue to address important issues in modern society, such as gender inequality, reproductive rights, and sexual assault. Morrison explores in *Beloved* the consequences of sexual abuse on enslaved Black women and the deep pain it caused them. When discussing the modern epidemic of sexual assault against Black women, this subject remains very relevant. On a national level, discussions on reproductive rights and health care access tend to exclude Black women, who have unique challenges in this area. Ross et al. found that Black women in the US have a distinct disadvantage when it comes to access to high-quality reproductive health services, which is associated with an elevated risk of maternal mortality due to inadequate treatment. Looking at these challenges from many angles shows that they are more complex than just racial or gender concerns. Rather, they stand for the intersection of the two oppressions that Black women face (Ross et al. 70).

The incorporation of Morrison's ideas into academic curricula has sparked deeper discussions on gender and race in the United States, as well as social justice and the role of education in the fight against racism. Students and scholars alike may use these books to investigate the connections between past stories and systemic injustices in the present.

## II. CONCLUSION

By bringing Morrison's writings into the classroom, we may get a better understanding of how gender and race interact in today's society and how communities can rise up against oppression by standing together. Besides serving as insightful criticisms of modern culture, Morrison's writings are great tools for starting meaningful conversations on gender and race in America.

The continuing fight for racial justice has Morrison's writings as an intellectual and emotional cornerstone. Morrison provides deep insights into the dynamics of systemic oppression and how people and communities manage resistance and survival via her investigation of the pain, resilience, and empowerment of Black women. Morrison's writings serve as more than simply literature; they are vital tools for contemporary activists fighting gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequalities.

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# Resilience and Vulnerability: A Journey of the Self in Lisa Genova's *Still Alice*

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<p>Received: 25 Apr 2025;                      Received in revised form: 22 May 2025;                      Accepted: 27 May 2025;                      Available online: 01 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> Alzheimer, identity, memory, family, loss, love</p>	<p>The novel deals with one of the most important social dilemmas of our contemporary society. It tackles the issue of Alzheimer disease which has become very common in our lives worldwide, almost all families have suffered from this illness, whether a close family member or a relative. What makes Lisa Genova's novel special is that the author is a neuroscience and has studied many cases with Alzheimer, this as many critics assured adds authenticity and credibility to the main character Alice, Genova commented in an interview that she has mirrored the condition of Alzheimer from the inside, where the narrator Alice is an eloquent university professor suffering from Alzheimer. Although the novel is quite emotional and touching it widens the readers perception about the illness and gives an optimistic conclusion that even though Alice lost her memory and eventually identity, she still keeps her humanity, where she is capable of having emotions of love, joy, and compassions. The paper is divided into four parts: first giving an overview about Genova and her career as a researcher and a scientist, then explaining Alice character, after that dealing with the theme of identity, and finally a conclusion sums up the findings of the study.</p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Lisa Genova, the author of *Still Alice*, is a neuroscientist by training and the New York Times bestselling author of five novels. They include *Still Alice*, *Left Neglected*, *Love Anthony*, *Inside the O'Briens*, and *Every Note Played*, as well as a memoir, *Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting*. Genova's novels have been translated into 37 languages and are published in 50 countries. *Still Alice* was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film starring Julianne Moore, who won the Academy Award for Best Actress (Ruf, 2015). Before turning to writing in 2007, Genova worked in biotech as a research scientist and consultation to drug companies. Her first novel, *Still Alice*, was originally self-published. Genova lives outside Boston with her husband, and children. She is a passionate advocate

for biomedical research. In order to pursue this advocacy, she volunteers with several organizations, including the Alzheimer's Association, where she is trained to speak about early-onset Alzheimer's disease and care-giving. Maslin, Praises the novel's scientific accuracy and emotional power in depicting cognitive decline. "The neurological details feel chillingly real... Genova masterfully charts the disintegration of a formidable intellect."

Genova has appeared on various shows and has written for several publications. Genova holds an MA in education and a BA in psychology. Currently, she is a Barry B. Saslaw Award winner for Outstanding Writing. She is also a Stephen, John G. Morris/United Nations Faith and Hope Award finalist.

## II. AN OVERVIEW: *STILL ALICE*

*Still Alice* (2007), the debut novel by neuroscientist-turned-author Lisa Genova, is a groundbreaking work of contemporary fiction that offers an intimate and unflinching portrait of early-onset Alzheimer's disease. More than just a story about illness, it's a profound exploration of identity, memory, love, and what it means to be oneself when the very foundation of self – the mind – begins to unravel. Hanna (2014), discusses *Still Alice* as a key cultural text shaping modern understanding of dementia, particularly its focus on the subjective experience and threat to identity. The novel is narrated almost exclusively from Alice Howland's point of view, in the present tense. It creates an immediate, immersive, and deeply unsettling experience. The reader doesn't just observe Alice's decline; they experience her confusion, fear, frustration, and moments of clarity as they happen. We are inside her disintegrating mind, sharing her subjective reality. Genova leverages her PhD in neuroscience to depict the symptoms, progression, and science of Alzheimer's disease with remarkable accuracy and authenticity. Christer (2018) argues, that narratives like *Still Alice* (and the interactions within them) contribute to re-imagining identity and communication in dementia, moving beyond the "loss of self" trope. Medical consultations, test results, and physiological explanations are woven into the narrative seamlessly. Despite the complex subject matter, Genova's prose is clear, direct, and accessible. She avoids overly technical terms or explains it naturally within Alice's understanding. This makes the difficult subject matter approachable for a wide audience. The language is generally straightforward, simple, and often emotional. Genova prioritizes clarity and emotional honesty over lyrical flourishes or complex metaphors. This simplicity mirrors the way Alzheimer's can strip away complexity. It also prevents sentimentality, allowing the raw emotion of Alice's situation to emerge naturally from the events themselves, rather than from tense description. Some critics have described this as "workmanlike" prose. Genova meticulously details Alice's internal cognitive processes – the struggle to find words ("tip-of-the-tongue" moments), the loss of orientation, the confusion about time and place, the fleeting awareness of her own lapses, and the eventual

simplification of thought. Alice's changing perception of her sensory environment (sights, sounds, textures) is also noted, reflecting how the disease alters her interaction with the world.

While the story follows a chronological timeline of diagnosis and progression, the narrative often feels episodic. Chapters or sections focus on specific incidents or challenges (a lecture gone wrong, getting lost, a family gathering). This structure subtly reflects the fragmentation of Alice's memory and experience. McDonagh (2013), emphasizes that Alice doesn't passively succumb to the disease. She actively struggles to maintain her identity and connection to her life: writing notes, taking tests, giving the speech, trying to navigate her environment. Alice's reliance on lists, notes on her BlackBerry, and reminders serves both a practical function within the story and a stylistic device, visually representing her attempts to anchor herself in a vanishing reality. The novel is primarily character-driven, centered on Alice's internal journey and her changing relationships. There is no external mystery or complex plot beyond the progression of the disease. The power comes from the emotional truth of Alice's experience, the fear, vulnerability, frustration, moments of surprising insight, love, and the poignant struggle to maintain her sense of self.

The Novel falls within Medical Realism, using fiction to accurately portray a specific disease experience. However, its core achievement is Empathetic Realism. Its primary goal is not just accuracy but fostering deep understanding and compassion for the subjective experience of living with Alzheimer's. It prioritizes emotional resonance and human connection alongside clinical detail. While powerful, its style generally lacks the complex narrative structures, dense symbolic layers, or highly experimental prose often associated with literary fiction. Its strength lies in its accessibility and emotional directness. Dialogue becomes increasingly simplified and repetitive as Alice's language skills deteriorate, realistically mirroring the progression of the disease. Conversations often highlight misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. Genova's style in *Still Alice* is characterized by its constant first-person present perspective, clinical accuracy delivered with accessible clarity, understated and direct prose,

intense focus on internal cognitive and sensory experience, episodic structure reflecting mental fragmentation, and unwavering commitment to emotional truth and empathy. While not stylistically ornate or experimental, its power lies precisely in this clear, immersive, and authentic rendering of a devastating experience from the inside out. It prioritizes emotional impact and understanding over complex literary devices, making it a landmark work in empathetic medical realism.

### III. ALICE IN *STILL ALICE*

**The disconnect between her thoughts and her reality was widening into a chasm. Some days, it felt like she was floating just outside her own skin, hovering a few inches above the woman who moved through her house, spoke to her family, performed the rituals of her day. She watched this familiar stranger pick up her favorite mug, respond to the name 'Alice,' shuffle through papers on her desk. But the woman's gestures felt rehearsed, her smiles automatic, her conversations scripted fragments of a life she could no longer quite grasp. (Genova, p.228)**

At 50, Alice is at the peak of her career – a renowned Harvard professor, expert in linguistics, sought-after speaker, and published author. Kirkus explained that "The early-onset Alzheimer's of a 50-year-old woman is rendered with heartbreaking poignancy and profound insight... Genova's background in neuroscience lends authority to the medical details, while her empathic storytelling gifts convey the emotional truths." he emphasizes the effectiveness of Genova's scientific background combined with emotional storytelling, noting the "heartbreaking poignancy" of an expert losing her mind. Her identity is deeply rooted in her intellect, professional achievements, and control over language and thought. From the outset, Alice's career defines her. She is a successful professor at Harvard University, a world-famous expert in linguistics and cognitive

psychology. Her life revolves around research, lectures, publishing, and prestigious speaking engagements.

**"Alice Howland, Harvard professor of cognitive psychology, recipient of the prestigious William James Award for outstanding contributions to psychological research, world-renowned expert in linguistics, happily married mother of three grown children, fifty years old, stood at the front of the auditorium..." (Genova, p. 15 - Prologue).**

Critics widely praise Genova's choice to make Alice an expert. Kirkus Reviews states it creates "heartbreaking poignancy" as we witness "a cognitive psychology expert... helplessly watching her own mind unravel" (Kirkus). The specific nature of her profession makes the loss more visceral and intellectually terrifying. Her struggle isn't just with forgetting names; it's the disintegration of the tools she used to understand the world and herself. Her professional knowledge becomes a curse, forcing her to confront the grim prognosis with chilling clarity initially. "The irony that she, a woman who had built her career and identity on the foundation of her intellect, should lose her mind was beyond cruel." (Genova, p. 60). Genova masterfully employs dramatic irony. Alice's expertise is in the very faculties – memory, language, reasoning – that Alzheimer's destroys. This makes her decline uniquely shocking and touching, both for her and the reader. Her professional background allows her an unusual level of self-awareness in the early stages. She recognizes the symptoms (losing words, getting lost) as neurological red flags long before others might. "She thought about the misplaced keys, the forgotten name, the confusion in the lecture hall, the lost run, the inability to find the bathroom in her own restaurant. She was a cognitive psychology professor at Harvard, for Christ's sake. She knew what this looked like." (Genova, p. 68). This allows Genova to explore the psychological terror of diagnosis with unique depth. While acknowledging the novel's power, Clark suggests the prose can be "workmanlike" and notes the supporting characters

primarily serve to illuminate Alice's experience rather than being fully developed individuals themselves. ("...the writing is straightforward, even workmanlike... the other characters... are largely there to service Alice's story.")

making Alice so exceptional (Harvard professor, young, fit) risks distancing the story from the experience of 'average' Alzheimer's patients, often older and without such elite backgrounds. It unintentionally suggests her loss is more tragic because of her high status. Genova arguably uses Alice's exceptionalism precisely to challenge societal biases about worth tied to achievement. By stripping away the accomplishments of someone so evidently 'valuable' by society, the novel forces the question: (Is her inherent value diminished?) The answer, explored through Lydia and later John, is a resounding "no." However, the critique highlights the risk that some readers might initially perceive her loss as greater, reinforcing the very bias the novel seeks to distort. As noted in a review in *The Guardian*, "The fact that Alice is so clever makes her decline particularly shocking, but... it also risks making her seem exceptional" (Clark, 2009).

Lucy Burke argues that the novel uses Alice's profession to directly critique neoliberal values that equate personal worth with productivity and cognitive ability. Alice's journey becomes a powerful deconstruction of this idea. Alice's initial identity is her achievement. The novel accurately shows this identity crumbling. The critical question becomes: What remains? The narrative argues that her core humanity – her capacity for love, fear, connection – persists beyond utility. Her high achievement serves as the starkest possible backdrop against which to affirm intrinsic human value. Her profession isn't just about irony; it's the setup for the novel's core philosophical argument about personhood.

As a neuroscientist herself, Genova leverages Alice's profession to deliver scientifically accurate descriptions of intellectual decline and neurological concepts in an accessible way through Alice's own understanding. This lends credibility and depth.

Alice's professional lens allows Genova to seamlessly integrate explanations of anterograde amnesia, semantic memory loss, and neuroanatomy (e.g.,

references to the hippocampus - p. 96) into the narrative without feeling didactic. Alice's internal monologue naturally grapples with these concepts. While Alzheimer's is statistically more common in older populations, early-onset cases (like Alice's) do occur in individuals in their prime career years. The Alzheimer's Association notes that approximately 200,000 Americans under 65 have younger-onset Alzheimer's (Alzheimer's Association, 2023 Facts and Figures). Making Alice a high-achieving professional reflects a reality for some in this demographic. While perhaps not "average," Alice's situation is representative of a significant group whose dementia disrupts careers, finances, and family life at a radically different life stage than typically portrayed. Her profession highlights the unique devastation of early-onset on active, working lives.

Her life is structured, organized, and defined by precision. She thrives on intellectual challenges and expects high performance from herself and others (her running routines, lecture preparations). Her sense of self relies heavily on control over her schedule, her research, her words, her understanding of the world. This makes her vulnerability to Alzheimer's particularly devastating. While loving, her relationships (especially with Lydia and initially John) can be marked by intellectual distance or judgment. Her primary mode of interaction is often mental rather than purely emotional. The novel gradually follows the loss of her reasoning abilities – forgetting words mid-lecture (Stanford, UCLA p. 228), getting lost on campus (p. 47), failing to recognize her daughter (p. 80), forgetting Christmas gifts (p. 248). Each incident is a terrifying loss of control and a blow to her professional and social identity "She didn't know who she was supposed to be... I am not Alice. I am not Alice." p. 228). She grieves the vanishing of her mind and her former self "I miss myself... I miss being whole." p. 253). As a linguistics expert, the loss of language is profoundly ironic and painful. She moves from complex lectures to struggling with basic words "She couldn't find the word 'run'. It was gone." p. 271, culminating in the simple, primal phrase "Love" as her main connection (p. 292). She retains an instinctive ability to sense emotions in others, like Lydia's sadness, and respond with comfort, even without remembering the context. As complex thought fades, she finds moments of

contentment in sensory experiences and simple presence watching birds, feeling the sun "It was a beautiful day." p. 292. This suggests an essential self rooted in being, not thinking. She naturally grasps the idea that her worth isn't tied to utility. Watching a butterfly, she thinks, "It didn't do anything important... It just was... maybe just being here, being alive, was enough." (p. 271) Lydia becomes crucial in affirming this: "You don't have to be brilliant or remember everything to be important. You matter to me just because you're you." (p. 285). This external proof highlights her inherent worth beyond perception or function. John's initial struggle from losing his intellectual partner. He grieves the loss of "Professor Howland." His journey involves learning to see and value the person who remains "He missed her. The person he loved. And he saw that person, diminished but still present, looking back at him." (p. 295) Alice shifts from being John's equal partner to someone requiring care, forcing a reevaluation of their relationship and his understanding of her identity.

Alice Howland is a tragic yet profound exploration of identity Genova uses her decline not just to depict the horrors of Alzheimer's, but to divide the very nature of self. The novel argues that while Alice loses the self constructed around intellect, achievement, and control, other facets persist. Love, fear, joy, grief, and the capacity for connection form a resilient core of self that Alzheimer's attacks more slowly. Alice's inherent worth and dignity are not diminished by her loss of productivity or reasoning. She remains Alice - loved, valuable, and human - simply by existing. The title's irony (she is losing her intellectual self) is countered by its truth (her essential personhood, her emotional core, her relational identity as mother/wife/loved one persist). The final scene, where she forgets her diagnosis but responds to love (p. 292), powerfully encapsulates this paradox. She is diminished, transformed, but undeniably, still Alice.

#### IV. THE THEME OF IDENTITY IN *STILL ALICE*

"Her identity was, for better or worse, wrapped up in a mind that had always been capable and reliable." (Genova, p. 68) One of the most powerful themes in Genova's novel, *Still Alice*, is the struggle with

identity. The changes that occur in Alice and in her husband and children are changes of identity as Alice experiences a loss of self. Her descriptions of the losses of time, memory, purpose, and the ability to communicate, among others, are very well done and deeply moving. The first-person perspective taken by Alice helps the reader to understand the expanse of her experience with Alzheimer's. The perspective also changes as Alice loses the language involved in regulating what is at first an understandable "function." The changes in her ability to express deeper thoughts and feelings and to know who she is as a person create profound frustration and sorrow. How she copes and how she now spends her time are vivid descriptions of grief and the tragic consequences of a loss of identity (Ruf, 2015).

Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* offers a profound and devastating exploration of identity disintegration through the lens of early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Charles, commented in (The Washington Post), highlighting the novel's ability to generate profound empathy for the Alzheimer's experience, calling it "heartbreaking" and "illuminating."

Alice Howland's identity is deeply rooted in her intellect. She is a renowned Harvard professor of cognitive psychology, a respected researcher, an expert in linguistics, and a powerful communicator. Her sense of self is inextricably tied to her ability to think, reason, remember, analyze, and articulate complex ideas. While Burke, comments on the neoliberal values (using Alice's high status to challenge worth, productivity), her work also engages with the choice of portraying such an exceptional figure. This choice inherently raises questions about representativeness and whose dementia stories are centered. Burke argues Genova uses Alice's specific identity to powerfully deconstruct societal links between worth, productivity, and cognitive ability. The novel affirms personhood beyond utility through the persistence of Alice's emotional core and relational identity, particularly through Lydia. "Genova's novel... insists on the significance of forms of being and relation that are not predicated on cognitive capacity or productivity". Alice is delivering a keynote lecture at Stanford University, a prestigious event she has done countless times. Mid-sentence, she completely loses her train of thought. She stares at her notes, but the

words become meaningless symbols. She cannot recall the central concept of her own life's research, the topic she is supposed to be the expert on.

**She stood there, mute, stranded, frantically searching the coastline of her mind for the words, for the ideas, for herself. Where was she? She looked out at the audience. Hundreds of eyes stared back at her, waiting. She felt the heat of humiliation flood her face. She couldn't find her place. She couldn't find the words. She couldn't find the thoughts. She felt like someone else was living her life, pretending to be her, and she was trapped inside, watching. Like an imposter. She didn't feel like herself, whoever that was anymore.** (Genova, 228)

The inability to recall her own research strikes at the heart of her professional identity as a cognitive psychologist and linguistics expert. Her value, confidence, and sense of self are built on this foundation. Also, the public humiliation and the failure happens on a prominent stage, amplifying the loss. The audience's expectation of "Professor Howland" clashes violently with her internal reality. Thus, she feels like an imposter trapped inside, watching someone else perform her life. This perfectly captures the disconnect between her former cognitively capable self and the current self-experiencing failure. The loss of self, where "She didn't feel like herself, whoever that was anymore" underscores the existential crisis. Her identity is dissolving because the cognitive abilities that defined it are failing. The question "whoever that was" highlights the terrifying loss of self-knowledge. This moment is an essential point where Alice (and the reader) confronts the brutal reality that Alzheimer's isn't just stealing memories; it's erasing the very person she was – the Harvard professor, the expert, the articulate thinker. Her identity is her mind, and it's under siege. Alzheimer's directly attacks the very faculties that define her. Forgetting words, losing track of lectures, getting lost on her own campus, being unable to follow complex arguments – each

cognitive loss is not just an inconvenience; it's an existential deletion of who she is. Her professional identity crumbles first and most visibly. Therefore, identity relies on a continuous, coherent narrative of the self-built from memories. Alice loses access to her personal history – memories of her children's childhoods, her career milestones, her relationship with her husband. Without this internal story, her sense of continuity and self-coherence fragments. She forgets who people are to her (e.g., mistaking her daughter for a stranger) and what things mean to her (e.g., the significance of her own research). This separates her connection to her past self and the relationships that shaped her, leaving her adrift in the present moment without context.

As Alice's internal sense of self weakens, she increasingly feels like she is performing the role of "Alice." She watches herself go through the motions of her life (lecturing, mothering, socializing) but feels disconnected from the actions and the person performing them ("trapped inside, watching"). She feels like an imposter in her own life. Her identities as "Professor Howland," "Dr. Howland," "John's wife," and even "Mom" become unsustainable as she can no longer fulfill the expectations of these roles. Society's recognition and validation of these roles vanish, further undermining her external sense of self. Just like when John convinces Alice to attend a departmental faculty meeting, hoping it will be good for her. Instead, she becomes overwhelmed and confused. Worse, she realizes her colleagues no longer treat her as a peer but as an irrelevant burden.

**She tried to follow the conversation, but she couldn't grasp the thread... She looked around the table. No one was looking at her. No one was asking for her opinion. They were treating her as if she weren't there, as if she were already gone. She wasn't Alice Howland anymore, not to them. She was John's wife with Alzheimer's... She felt invisible. She was invisible." (Genova, p. 253)**

Alice attends the meeting attempting to inhabit her former role as "Professor Howland" and valued

colleague. But, society (her colleagues) actively strips her of that role – they ignore her, don't solicit her input, and finally, reduce her to "John's wife with Alzheimer's." Her feeling of being "invisible" underscores the loss of social recognition essential to maintaining that professional identity. She is physically present but socially ignored from the role she once held. These scenes powerfully show Alice trying to act out her established social roles (Professor, Mother, Colleague) but failing because Alzheimer's destroys the cognitive abilities required to sustain them. Worse, she becomes acutely aware of the disconnect between the role she's expected to play and her internal reality, feeling like an "imposter," a "failure," or "invisible." The external validation and recognition associated with these roles vanish, accelerating the disintegration of her identity as defined by her place in the social world.

Genova carefully shows that while cognitive abilities and autobiographical memory fade, elements of Alice's emotional core and deeply ingrained personality traits persist longer. Her love for her family, especially her children, remains a powerful, although sometimes confused, force. Moments of joy, fear, frustration, and connection still occur, suggesting an essential "self" existing beneath the cognitive scaffolding. The true horror for Alice lies in her awareness of the loss, especially in the early and middle stages. She understands she is losing herself, which causes profound terror, grief, and shame. This awareness itself is a key part of her identity during this phase – the "self" that observes the disintegration.

Lisa Genova powerfully illustrates that while Alzheimer's disease devastates Alice's cognitive abilities (memory, language, reasoning), her fundamental emotional core – her capacity for deep love, fear, joy, grief, and connection – persists much longer. This creates a profound dissonance: Alice increasingly loses the cognitive tools to understand, express, or contextualize her feelings, but the feelings themselves remain potent and real. Her "self" isn't entirely erased; the emotional essence endures even as the reasoning framework crumbles. That is clear when Alice finds an old photo of her daughters as young children. While she struggles mentally to place the photo or name her daughters, the feeling of love and connection is overwhelming and intact.

**She picked it up. Three little girls, laughing, arms slung around each other's shoulders, squinting in the sun. She didn't know who they were, but she loved them. She studied their faces, and she loved them. The feeling was huge, bigger than her, bigger than the room, bigger than her life. It was love, pure and certain, and it took her breath away. She couldn't name them, but she knew them. She knew them with her heart. She didn't remember their names or when the picture was taken or where, but she knew she loved them. She held the picture to her chest. (Genova, p. 275)**

Alice often experiences intense anxiety and fear she cannot explain or locate the source of. The feeling of fear persists even when the reason for it is cognitively inaccessible.

**She was afraid, but she didn't know why. The fear had no name, no face, no story. It was just there, like the air, all around her, thick and suffocating. She stood very still, waiting for it to pass, but it didn't. It pressed in on her. She was lost. She didn't know where she was or how she'd gotten there. She didn't know what to do. The panic was real. The terror was real. Even if she couldn't remember why." (Genova, p. 238)**

Alice retains moments of awareness about her losses, leading to profound grief. While she may forget specific details, the feeling of loss and sadness lingers. Genova uses these moments to argue that identity isn't solely cognitive. Alice's journey shows that the capacity for deep feeling – love, fear, grief, empathy – forms a resilient core of the self that Alzheimer's attacks more slowly and less completely than mental faculties. The tragedy lies in Alice's increasing inability to understand, express, or contextualize these powerful, persistent emotions due to cognitive loss, leading to profound isolation

and frustration, even as the feelings themselves prove her humanity endures.

The novel forces Alice and the reader to confront a fundamental question: Does her intrinsic value as a person, her identity as "Alice," disappear because she can no longer think, remember, or contribute in ways society values?

Through characters like Lydia, who sees and loves Alice beyond her intellect, and Alice's own poignant final message to her future self "live in the moment", Genova argues for the existence of a self-worth that transcends cognitive ability. Alice's identity, in its most essential, perhaps primal form, resides in her capacity to *experience* and *feel*, and in the love others hold for her, even when she cannot fully reciprocate cognitively. The novel powerfully argues that Alice's essential identity her inherent worth and personhood exists independently of her cognitive achievements, Harvard professorship, research, her productivity, her usefulness to others, or even her ability to remember her own accomplishments. While Alzheimer's strips away the markers of her successful life (career, intellect, independence), it does not erase her fundamental self. Her value is intrinsic, not contingent on what she can do or provide. This is most poignantly affirmed through relationships and moments of pure being. For example, when Lydia, Alice's youngest daughter and often the most distant initially, becomes the one who most consistently sees and values Alice for who she is, not what she can no longer do. She connects with Alice's emotional core and presence, not her fading intellect or past achievements. "Mom, you are not your disease. You're still you. I see you. I hear you. You're my mother.

You don't have to be brilliant or remember everything to be important. You matter to me just because you're you." (Genova, p. 285) Lydia explicitly rejects the equation of Alice with her Alzheimer's "not your disease". She affirms that Alice's core identity "you," "my mother" persists. Thus, she states Alice's importance is not based on intellect or memory "brilliant," "remember everything" but on her inherent being "just because you're you". This directly challenges utilitarian views of identity. Even as Alice loses grasp of her past accomplishments and current capabilities, she retains an intuitive sense that

her existence holds value beyond utility. This is often expressed as a quiet feeling of being, or a resistance to being defined solely by loss.

**She watched a yellow butterfly land on a purple flower. It fluttered its wings, drank, and flew away. It didn't do anything important. It didn't cure cancer or win a Nobel Prize. It just was. And it was beautiful. She felt like that butterfly sometimes. Not doing anything important anymore. But maybe just being here, being alive, was enough." (Genova, p. 271)**

Genova often uses nature imagery for this theme. A closely related moment is "She sat on the bench and watched the birds. She didn't know their names or where they flew from or to. She just watched them. She felt peaceful. She felt like she belonged here, simply sitting, simply being." (Genova, p. 294) Alice instinctively compares herself to the butterfly or the act of simply watching birds entities whose value lies purely in their existence and essence "just was," "beautiful," "simply being", not in achievement or function "didn't do anything important," "didn't cure cancer". She finds peace in the idea that "being alive, was enough," asserting an intrinsic worth separate from productivity. While John struggles significantly with the loss of his intellectual partner and equal, a significant moment occurs where he expresses grief for Alice herself, not just her former capabilities.

**"He took her hand. 'I miss you, Alice.' She looked at him, confused. 'I'm right here.' 'I know,' he said. 'I miss you.' He wasn't talking about her cooking or her driving or her ability to debate cognitive theory. He missed her. The person he loved. And he saw that person, diminished but still present, looking back at him." (Genova, p. 295)**

John's repeated "I miss you" while Alice is physically present signifies a grief for her essential self and their

connection, transcending the loss of her specific skills or role as a colleague. The narration clarifies he misses "her," the person, recognizing her presence "diminished but still present" even amidst profound cognitive loss. This affirms her identity beyond usefulness. *Still Alice* challenges societal notions that equate a person's worth with their productivity, intellect, or utility. Through Lydia's affirmation, Alice's moments of peaceful being, John's grief for the person, the caregiver's focus on relational presence, and Alice's detachment from her own past achievements, Genova argues that identity and inherent worth reside in the core self – the capacity for love, the simple fact of existence, and the unique essence of a person – which persists even when cognitive abilities, achievements, and utility fade. Alice remains Alice, valuable because she is Alice, not for what she accomplishes.

*Still Alice* powerfully demonstrates how fragile our constructed identities are. They depend on the proper functioning of our brains. Genova removes the framework (memory, language, executive function) to reveal how much of "who we are" is vulnerable to biological catastrophe. This is terrifying but also a call to recognize the preciousness and contingency of our sense of self. As Alice increasingly forgets her own prestigious awards and publications. The fact that she can forget them highlights how these tributes, while part of her life story, are not the foundation of her identity. "She pulled a book off the shelf. Cognitive Psychology and Linguistic Structure. By Alice Howland. She didn't remember writing it. She flipped through the pages. The words looked complicated, dense. She couldn't understand them. She put the book back on the shelf. It felt like it belonged to someone else." (Genova, p. 260) Her important work, the peak of her professional achievement, becomes mentally inaccessible and feels alien "belonged to someone else". This detachment underscores that while her achievements are lost to her, she still exists. Her identity isn't fixed in the book; the book has become disconnected from the living person holding it. *Still Alice* challenges societal notions that equate a person's worth with their productivity, intellect, or utility. Through Lydia's confirmation, Alice's moments of peaceful being, John's grief for the person, the caregiver's focus on relational

presence, and Alice's detachment from her own past achievements, Genova argues that identity and inherent worth reside in the core self – the capacity for love, the simple fact of existence, and the unique essence of a person – which persists even when intellectual abilities, achievements, and utility fade. Alice remains Alice, valuable because she is Alice, not for what she accomplishes. Genova's exploration of identity in *Still Alice* is multi-layered and deeply moving. Genova, from an interviews on NPR interviews around the book's releases, says: "I wanted to write a story that would put you inside the mind of someone with Alzheimer's... to understand what it feels like, not just what it looks like from the outside."

## V. CONCLUSION

Genova argues that identity is not merely a mental edifice. Even as Alice's memories fade and her intellect dims, a core self persists. This self is felt in emotion, the enduring love for her family, the flashes of joy, the deep-seated fear. It's present in instinct and sensory experience, the comfort of familiar qualities, the primeval response to music, the feeling of the sun. It resides in embodied existence, the simple act of being present in a moment.

Identity is also shown to be fundamentally social. While Alice loses the ability to intellectually grasp her role as mother or wife, the bonds themselves hold meaning. Lydia's patient presence, John's conflicted care (even when flawed), and the moments of pure, wordless connection demonstrate that part of who Alice is exists within the love and recognition offered by others, even when she cannot cognitively respond in expected ways.

The title itself is powerful to the theme of the novel. Alice is 'still Alice'. Not the Alice of Harvard, not the Alice with perfect recall, but an Alice whose essential humanity, capacity for feeling, and right to dignity remain intact. Her identity evolves, becoming less defined by past achievements and more anchored in the immediate, sensory, and emotional present. The powerful final scene, where Alice recognizes the pure, uncomplicated love deriving from Lydia, underscores this. It's a moment of profound being,

stripped of intellectual context, yet undeniably authentic and identity-affirming.

Genova concludes that while Alzheimer's ravages the mind and strips away the trappings of a life built on intellect, it does not defeat the person. Identity is revealed to be more resilient and multifaceted than we often acknowledge, rooted in feeling, connection, instinct, and the persistent spark of consciousness, however dimmed. *Still Alice* challenges us to expand our definition of self beyond cognition and to recognize the enduring, irreducible humanity that persists even when the mirror of memory shatters. It is a poignant testament to the idea that we are, fundamentally, more than the sum of our memories or our intellect; we are the persistent flame of awareness and connection that flickers even in the gathering darkness.

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# Ecological Semiotics in *The Tempest*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 27 May 2025;                      Received in revised form: 20 Jun 2025;                      Accepted: 25 Jun 2025;                      Available online: 29 Jun 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords— Ecological Semiotics, William Shakespeare, The Tempest</b></p>	<p><i>If Semiotics is all about signs, then this entire Universe can be considered as a discourse encrypted in signs, and Nature is one of the densest texts with intricately coded signs. Semiotics and Ecology are vast domains of study, and so is Shakespeare, the synonym for English Literature across the world. The Tempest, widely considered as the last work by Shakespeare, has been re-visited, re-worked and re-interpreted time and again, and is one of the favourite texts of leading literary critics and scholars of all times. Scholars point out that the second half of Twentieth century and the early part of the Twenty first century witnessed an escalating focus on environment, leading to the advancement and spread of various multidisciplinary streams such as media ecology, cultural ecology, environmental humanities and so on. An Ecosemiotic reading of a text is different from an Ecocritical reading, and this paper is an attempt to look at the aspects of Ecological Semiotics in The Tempest, to see how this trend in the horizon of literary studies can be applied successfully to decode the encoded ecological signs seamlessly weaved into the fabric of the text.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Nature and humans is something that is ever present in all forms of art and literature from the beginnings of recorded history, as evinced by the earliest cave paintings. An exact definition of Nature is rather difficult to reach as well. Nature is different for scientists and artists, and still different for the common people, depending on their way of living and life style. For different branches of Science, Nature is perceived through diverse perspectives, in terms of energy, for instance, or in terms of chemicals and chemical reactions, or as a bouquet of life forms and their interconnectedness. Artists and writers have romanticised Nature, projecting inner emotions and external conflicts onto Nature, depicting Nature as benevolently caring or brutally

unforgiving. For common people, for those living by the sea side or in the hilly terrains, Nature is still something else, providing an inexhaustible source of livelihood in various forms.

The concern with Nature is now on the rise, not only in Literary studies but in almost all other disciplines such as Developmental Studies and other branches of Humanities as well as Science.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the influence of ecology and other biosciences on the humanities became noticeable. This movement led to the development of various novel paradigms (media ecology, cultural ecology) that adopted ecological concepts (environment, ecosystem, symbiosis), and also led to the rise of interest towards environmental issues as

research objects (e.g. in ecocriticism and environmental history). (Maran 2023)

There are numerous schools of thought that celebrate and examine the interconnectedness and interrelationship of Nature and humans, with anthropocentrism probably becoming one of the most popular catchphrases in the recent times. Ecocriticism is another popular approach of literary study, the genesis of which is usually traced back to the works of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, which essentially looks at the relationship of humans with Nature as depicted in literature, “the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and thus “literary ecology is the study of the ways that writing both reflects and influences our interactions with the natural world” (amazon.in).

Ecological Semiotics or Ecosemiotics, however, is different from Ecocriticism, and it is by general consent regarded as a branch of Semiotics, and can be broadly said to be concerned with the “semiotic aspect of man-nature relationships”, looking at “the appearance of nature as dependent on the various contexts or situations”, and examine a multitude of aspects such as “the context-dependence of the valuation of nature, differences in seeing and understanding it”, (Kull 1998) for instance. Articles dealing with Ecosemiotics often place it in contrast to Biosemiotics, for example, or other such concepts to define how it “can be considered as a part of the semiotics of culture, which investigates human relationships to nature which have a semiotic (sign-mediated) basis” (Kull 1998).

This paper is an attempt to look into the possibilities of discovering elements of Ecosemiotics embedded in the fabric of the celebrated last work by Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Though there are umpteen number of articles on the Ecocritical reading of *The Tempest*, and multitudes of other aspects such as Gender or Power, no article could be found on the Ecosemiotics of the text, and hence this attempt to determine whether Shakespeare could have possibly buried codes of Ecological Semiotics into the text famous for its coded messages of Colonisation and Post Colonialism, Orientalism and Magical Realism, to mention a few of the major analytical frameworks used by scholars.

## II. ECOLOGICAL SEMIOTICS

The genesis of Ecosemiotics is generally traced back to 1998, when two research papers were published related to it in the journal *Sign Systems Studies*, by Winfried Noth and Kalevi Kull, two outstanding figures in the domain of Semiotics. A special issue on Ecosemiotics and many conferences later, universities would start courses on Ecosemiotics (Maran and Kull 2014). While tracing the evolution of the term, Maran and Kull point out that it could have been Alfred Lang (1993) who used “semiotic ecology” for the first time, though initial inputs were heavily German in origin. In the seminal article “Ecosemiotics and The Semiotics of Nature” (2001) Noth positions Ecosemiotics between the semiotics of Culture and that of Nature, and explains how communication “occurs not only among humans, but also between all other organisms throughout the whole biosphere” (Noth 2001). He also identifies “four main cultural models of a semiotic relationship between humans and their environment” (Noth 2001) which are given below.

1. the magical (human sign use have direct influence on the natural environment)
2. the mythological (explain human-environment relationship using narratives)
3. the metaphorical (nature is metaphorically understood)
4. the pansemiotic model (Nature is essentially a sign of something else) (Noth 2001)

So when a magician commands, “let there be a storm” and it happens, it is the magical model of Nature, wherein his commands change the natural environment. In the mythological model, myths say about “what we can, should, and must do with our natural environment” (Noth 2001). When nature is read as “an enigmatic sign, a cypher, a hieroglyphic, a riddle, a book, or a code, that has to be deciphered in order to be understood” (Noth 2001) it is the metaphorical model of nature. When nature is taken to mean nothing on its own, but is interpreted to be a sign of something else altogether, that is the pansemiotic model, which “claims that all environmental phenomena are ultimately and “really” semiotic in their essence” (Noth 2001).

Maran explains this concept further when he says that “[l]iving systems are meaning-making

systems. In other words, they are sign-using systems, or communicative systems. By definition, communication is an interaction based on sign relations" and thus "Ecosemiotics is a view on ecosystems as communicative systems" (Maran 2023). He also points out the futility in attempting a narrowed down theoretical description of the term because primarily it is looking into all sorts of interconnectedness of organisms and nature, going beyond the binaries such as humans and nature.

### III. NATURE, NATURES AND CULTURE

Alongside defining Ecosemiotics "as the semiotics of relationships between nature and culture", Kull goes on to explain that there are different types of Nature and that the purview of Ecosemiotics also includes "research on the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, i.e. what is and what has been the meaning of nature for us, humans, how and in what extent we communicate with nature" (Kull 1998). Kull goes on to explain that it is possible to perceive not just one Nature, but multiple natures. Given below are the four types of nature as classified by Kull.

1. Zero nature (Nature as it is)
2. First nature (Nature as seen, described and interpreted by humans)
3. Second nature (materially interpreted or changed/ produced nature)
4. Third nature (virtual nature as found in arts and literature) (adapted from Kull 1998)

Kull goes on to explicate the categories thus:

Zero nature is seen as changing by itself, the objective nature itself, 'out there' (or 'in here'). The first nature is nature as we have it due to (or thanks to) our language, a language-filtered (or sign-filtered) nature. It is like a translation of zero nature into our knowledge; this is our image of nature at the same time, either mythical, or social, or scientific. The second one can be seen as a back translation of the first into the zero, nature as changed through our participation, a manipulated nature. And the third nature is the interpretation of interpretation, the translation of translation, the image of image of nature. (Kull 1998)

Kull also goes on to cite Hoffmeyer, according to whom, "the relationship between culture and internal nature is the sphere of psychosomatics, the relationship between internal and external nature is the field of biosemiotics, and the relationship between culture and external nature is the *environmental sphere*" (Kull 1998). The latter area, comprising the relationship between culture and nature can also be called "ecosemiotic area".

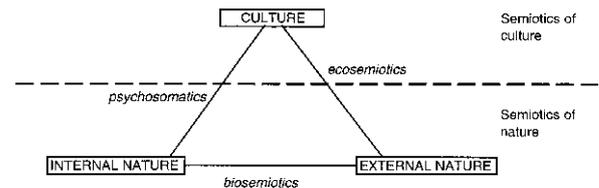


Fig. 1 The Sphere of Ecosemiotics vis a vis Biosemiotics and Psychosomatics

(Kull 1998)

Of the eight basic principles of Ecosemiotics enlisted by Maran and Kull, the last one connects nature and culture from the perspective of ecological semiotics, which states that "[t]he concept of culture is incomplete without an ecological dimension," and that a "theory of culture is incomplete without the ecosemiotic aspect" (Maran and Kull 2014). "Culture is always part of an ecosystem and it never functions without non-linguistic sign systems, that is, without the non-cultural aspects of ecosystems and the semiosphere" (Maran and Kull 2014), and hence, they point out that a mere dichotomy of nature versus culture is rather an illogical and mistaken one. Also, "Ecosemiotics does not build a barrier between human semiotic activities and those of other habitants" but rather "allows research questions to be raised about the whole communicative structure of the geographical space" (Maran and Kull 2014).

The scope of a research paper does not permit an elaborate discussion on the vast range of research potential that comes under Ecosemiotics, especially in relation to Biosemiotics. Suffice it to say that Biosemiotics and Ecosemiotics are separate yet connected domains of study, and both look at "researching nature from a semiotic point of view" (Kull 1998). Maran and Kull warn that Ecosemiotics is an area of study that is extensive and inclusive,

thereby turning into a close aide of multiple disciplines such as ecolinguistics, “cultural geography, environmental history, ecocriticism, environmental anthropology, environmental culture studies, and other fields that focus on the various aspects of the representations of nature in human culture” (Maran and Kull 2014).

#### IV. THE TEMPEST

William Shakespeare is the name that is used synonymously with English Literature by people cutting across class and creed, across cultural and linguistic barriers, around the world. Despite theories that argue for and against his authorship of the plays and sonnets, the Shakespeare canon remains unbeaten at the top slot of Literature and Literary studies. Shakespeare is supposed to have written 38 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long poems (rsc.org.uk). He tackled all the genres popular in those times and also created a new form of sonnet – which would come to be known as Shakespearean sonnets – and also contributed innumerable new coinages to the English language vocabulary.

In an age of inconsistent and insufficient documents to support actual facts, there are a lot of suppositions and assumptions surrounding the life and the works of Shakespeare. By general consensus *The Tempest* is recognised as the last known work by Shakespeare, widely regarded as his swansong. This is one of his plays that has fascinated Shakespeare scholars and critics alike, across centuries and across theoretical frameworks. It is the story of Prospero, a duke wrongfully exiled from his own dukedom, and who seeks asylum in a forlorn island, where he trains himself as a magician and also brings up his young daughter Miranda. He has fairy-like creatures and demon-like creatures under his control, and it is later revealed that he actually took over the island from a witch called Sycorax, whose son, Caliban, is enslaved by Prospero. When the play opens, there is a shipwreck instigated by Prospero, resulting in the scattering of its crew consisting of Prospero’s wicked brother, Alonso and the King of Naples, his son, his jesters and others. Prospero manages to confuse the crew with the help of his magic and Ariel, his fairy-slave, and Ferdinand, the prince of Naples, falls in love with

Miranda. In the end all confusion is resolved, justice is served, promises are kept and Prospero relinquishes his magic wand forever.

This play has fascinated scholars and art lovers alike, with numerous productions and retellings in theatre and movies, including a change in gender of Prospero. Studies abound, with Caliban as the displaced oriental victim, and also regarding the colonial and post-colonial aspects that seem to be weaved into the play by Shakespeare.

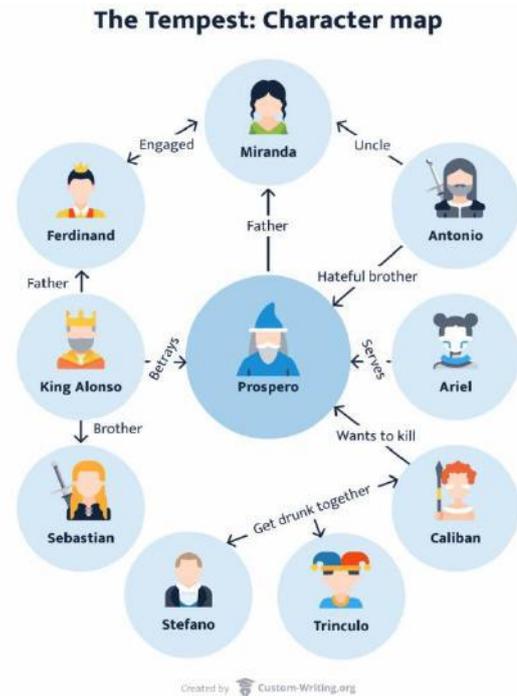


Fig. 2 Character Map of *The Tempest*

(<https://custom-writing.org/blog/the-tempest-characters>)

#### V. ECOLOGICAL SEMIOTICS IN THE TEMPEST

For the convenience of a structured analysis, this study opts to use the four cultural models of semiotic exchange between humans and nature, as explicated by Noth (2001) for examining whether elements of Ecosemiotics can be found in *The Tempest*. In addition to this, some of the basic concepts as outlined by Kull (1998) will also be used to supplement the primary analysis.

1. The magical (human sign use have direct influence on the natural environment)

The opening scene itself stands testimony to this cultural model of semiotic exchange between nature

and humans, with Prospero's magical wand practically creating the storm that results in the shipwreck which will lead to the scattering of its crew, and later result in delivering justice, though delayed.

2. The mythological (explain human-environment relationship using narratives)

The use of Sycorax, whom the audience never meets except through the narratives of Prospero and Caliban, her son, is a powerful cultural modal that uses the mythological aspect to explain the human-nature relationship using narratives. It is suggested that Sycorax was evil, and that she had enslaved Ariel, the good fairy, "into a cloven pine" (*The Tempest* I, ii). The narrative involving Sycorax paints a dark and sinister picture of the nature found in the island, and that element of abhorred evil is continued through the play using Caliban, "the son that she did litter here/ A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honored with/ A human shape" (*The Tempest* I, ii). Caliban's rude and unpolished narratives revolve around his mother, and keeps on bringing back the different type of nature that once pervaded the island through his reminiscences. For instance, one of the first curses he utters is "As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed/ With raven's feather from unwholesome fen/ Drop on you both" (*The Tempest* I, ii). Later on, he would assert that "This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother" (*The Tempest* I, ii) and go on to curse that "All the charms/ Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you" (*The Tempest* I, ii) while recounting how he had been fooled by the false charm of Prospero on first meeting him. Thus, the mythological nature that shrouded the island is presented to the audience repeatedly using the reference to Sycorax and through Caliban.

3. The metaphorical (nature is metaphorically understood)

It can be unarguably established that in *The Tempest*, nature is certainly used as a metaphor to be deciphered and understood. The secluded island with fresh water streams and mysterious caves, shielded by the sea and the winds, represents nature unadulterated by man-made customs and civilisations, but is rather wrapped in different types

of magic – the so-called black magic of Sycorax first and then the so-called good magic of Prospero. Nature is presented as a signifier to the audience, to be interpreted and understood as per individual choice – as benevolent nature (when it rescued Prospero and his baby girl) but at the same time abandoning Caliban to the mercy of Prospero.

4. The pansemiotic model (Nature is essentially a sign of something else)

Nature in the play can also be interpreted to signify the unpolluted character and soul of Miranda, who remains protected by Prospero and his magic. Like the secluded island and its shroud of unpolluted nature, Miranda is safeguarded by her father from both internal and external threats using his magical powers.

Apart from these, it is also possible to apply the four types of Nature as put forth by Kull (1998) can also be successfully used to identify elements of Ecosemiotics in the play.

i. Zero nature (Nature as it is)

The play is set in a remote and isolated island, inlaid with streams and dense thickets, and surrounded by the sea, all of which depict Nature as it is, with no polluted effects or after effects by human actions.

ii. First nature (Nature as seen, described and interpreted by humans)

This is the nature that is "translated into our knowledge" (Kull 1998) through the use of language. One of the first references made by Miranda is about "wild waters" (*The Tempest* I, ii), which she knows has been put to roar by her father, and to whom she entreats to soften the turmoil. The descriptions by the crew who undergoes the man-made ship-wreck, narratives of Caliban and the scattered members of the crew all give instances of nature as seen, described and interpreted by humans. A classic example would be the instance where Sebastian and Alonso converse in jest and says,

SEBASTIAN: I think he will carry this island home in his pocket and give it his son for an apple.

ANTONIO: And sowing the kernels of it in the sea, bring forth more islands. (*The Tempest* II, i)

Here the island is talked about as if it is an apple, a fruit, with kernels and sowing for producing more

islands like plants. Also in Caliban's descriptions of the island, it is the fertile and good points that he highlights, as in "I'll show thee every fertile inch o' th' island" and again "I'll show thee the best springs. I'll pluck thee berries./ I'll fish for thee and get thee wood enough" (*The Tempest* II, ii). When he promises Stephano that

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow,  
And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts,  
175 Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee  
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
Young scamels from the rock. . . . (*The Tempest* II,  
ii)

His interpretation of nature is all positive, only Prospero is the villain in his perception. Whereas for the shipwrecked people nature is not so benevolent or beautiful, especially for Ferdinand who thinks his father lies "full fathom five" below (Ariel *The Tempest* I, ii). For Ariel nature is ambivalent because whether under Sycorax or under Prospero, it is ultimately slavery for him.

iii. Second nature (materially interpreted or changed/ produced nature)

It can be clearly seen that nature as found in the play is clearly changed by the interventions of Prospero, from the narratives of both Prospero and Caliban. Prospero believes that he liberated the island – and its nature – from the evil spell and aftermaths of Sycorax's negative magical powers. His interventions bring about changes including an induced storm and illusory visions, and interferes with the life of other beings including Caliban and Ariel. The nature after his interventions is different in its characteristics, especially towards the end of the play, when the action reaches its denouement and Prospero's mind becomes calm and settled.

iv. Third nature (virtual nature as found in arts and literature)

Apart from the nature directly depicted and referred to in the play, there is also a virtual nature to be perceived amidst all the plotting and revenge and justice and happy ending. This is the nature that a reader or an audience can perceive in the play, as a backdrop of the action that is unfolding on the island.

## VI. DISCUSSION

It is thus evident that aspects of Ecological Semiotics have a very strong and clear presence in the play, *The Tempest*. The "four main cultural models of a semiotic relationship between humans and their environment" (Noth 2001) and the four types of nature as identified by Kull (1998) can be successfully applied to the text, and effectively analysed to reveal elements of Ecosemiotics. As Kull rightly observes, nature soaks "into culture and cultural landscapes" and "[l]iving with nature ultimately means changing nature" (Kull 1998). In *The Tempest* it is possible to find unadulterated nature or nature as it is, nature as depicted through narratives, nature changed by the beings in communication with it as well as a virtual nature as found in arts and literature.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare, as always, proves his versatility once again, and his play, *The Tempest*, written four centuries ago, can easily be read using the framework of Ecosemiotics, which looks at the semiotic codes vis a vis nature and beings, encoded into a discourse. The scope of this paper does not permit a detailed textual analysis of the play with elaborate illustrations to establish the presence of Ecosemiotics, albeit a whole book can be written regarding this. There is plenty of scope for future research in this area, to identify and establish the various concepts of Ecological Semiotics effectively and subtly encoded in the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

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