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# International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL)

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*Editor in Chief*

Dr. Luisa Maria Arvide Cambra

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# Resilience Seeking Hope, Love in Durjoy Datta's Till Last Breath

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**Keywords—Durjoy Datta, Till Last Breath, resilience, necroed generative, death, love & loss**

## Abstract

*This paper explores resilience, hope and love in Durjoy Datta's Till Last Breath. It focuses on the battle to death, the ultimate reality, and the pain for those who are close to the person because death is ultimate. The paper emphasizes the worth of human life, and they learn the lesson and must move on after loss. Dushyant is a young man whose life has been characterized by suffering, addiction, and estrangement. Dushyant Roy is a self-destructive young man. He is twenty-five years old and has descended into alcoholism when his girlfriend Kajol left him for a wealthy man his sadness and his parents' incessant criticism drove him further, and he has reached the point of no return due to liver failure. Pihu and Dushyant wound up in the same hospital, in room 509, fighting their different ailments. Pihu is a gifted medical student who suffers with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), a degenerative 'necroed generative' illness that damages nerve cells that drive voluntary muscle movement. ALS causes muscle weakness, twitching, and eventual paralysis, ultimately affecting breathing and leading to death. There is currently no cure for ALS. Pihu is conscious that her time is limited; she confronts death with courage, aiming to leave behind memories of joy rather than despair.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dushyant Roy is a young man who does himself harm. The curtain had been wide open for quite some time now, letting the strong rays of the sun rush in through the open window onto the face of a prostrate Dushyant, who lie in bed draped in a worn-out hospital bedsheet, very uncomfortable in his sleep but still immovable. His eyes flickered through the night, and his fingers trembled. He was asleep and didn't wake up; it wasn't a good night's sleep.

After tossing restlessly from side to side, he woke up and tried opening his eyes. One of them refused to open, swelled from a massive cut just above his left brow, which was severely taped and bandaged. He felt the bandage and checked for blood with his other half-open, drowsy eye. He was surrounded with medical equipment, a lot of it connected to him, a small television in one corner of the room, and an empty bed on his left side. It wasn't the first time he was in one of these beds, but this time it seemed a little more serious than the other times.

He had been accustomed to falling unconscious after a succession of violent vomits and head spasms. He had tubes connected to needles that delved into his veins and arteries, pumping liquids from translucent pouches hanging from the stand on his right side. He was certain his parents were unaware of his whereabouts. He knew none of his buddies would have given the hospital authorities his parents' phone numbers or addresses; he had no desire to see or speak with them, now or ever. The hands of his mobile phone watch touched; it had been twelve-fourteen hours since admission. Last night, like many others, was a night of debauchery, pornography, poker, drink, and smoking with six of his friends in his tight one-room apartment.

The door opened, and a short, fair girl walked into the room. She had large eyes, like a schoolgirl in Japanese cartoons, and appeared to be a puzzled child in a candy shop with a gold coin in both palms, unsure what to buy, yet her palms were gripped around the handle bar of her crutches. Her legs bowed at the knees and appeared to lack the ability to support her petite five-foot-two frame.

Excuse me? He said and waved at the girl, who was in a robe slightly better than his. "Can you call me nurse?" I think I can, but you know, I could have been a doctor. "I am still studying," she said and looked at Dushyant and smiled. Dushyant didn't know how to react. Can you call her? "Being angry won't help your case," she said. She walked over gingerly to the bed next to him and drew the curtain between them and then pulled it away. "Excuse me?" They will think you're dying, and I hope, at least then, that someone will come running to check on you," she explained and chuckled. "And well, if no one does, you're in a really bad hospital." You should get a second opinion. I am not going to do that. "He retorted," she said, and slowly limped over to his bed. She picked up his medical chart, which hung from the other end of his bed, her eyebrows knitted, and continued, "You have to wait till three when a nurse comes in and draws some blood for some tests—not a long wait, just two and a half hours!" Whatever, he said, closed his eyes, and put his head back on the pillow. Fine, bye. Hope to see you again. I might pick this room. page (Durjoy 14)

Pihu simply grinned and moved slowly towards the exit at the gate. She glanced at the number and

said to herself, "Room 509." When Dushyant noticed her nodding, she disappeared into the corridor with the other sick individuals. Pihu Malhotra, 19, Arman noticed Zarah's anguish on the file; she didn't move a muscle. Is there an issue? He inquired, "She has ALS?" like in Lou Gehrig's Disease When Arman first heard about the case, he could detect the shock in her voice, which was a clear indication of a young, inexperienced doctor.

Pihu is young and aspires to complete her medical education, but she is plagued by ALS, a horrible disease. It begins with the patient being clumsy; you drop things, get weary easily, and the sensation in your limbs gradually fades until paralysis sets in. After then, you are at the mercy of your assistant.

Pihu's parents were pleased when she passed all of the All-India Medical Examinations and chose to join Maulana Azad Medical College, one of India's leading medical schools. Pihu had exchanged smiles, handshakes, and hugs. She knew that was just the start; admission tests were a necessary evil. She knew she'd make it when news broke in her hometown that her AIR (All India Rank) was third; coaching institute owners had flocked to her house, pleading with her to advertise their highly qualified staff and fully air-conditioned classroom with a picture of their most illustrious student, Pihu Malhotra. A few days later, she was in the local newspapers; her parents' aspirations were realized.

She complained to her parents about unusual sensations in her right arm after going to the hospital and having a blood test done on her own. She identified herself as a medical student. First year, Maulana Azad. She completed the tests herself.

'What tests?' The doctor's shocked expression turned into concern and sympathy. She said she had ALS. I understand that no genetic history means no cure. She knew she was slowly dying. She could be gone this year or next, but she will die. She has read everything there is to know about the condition. She understands that she will be unable to eat, use the restroom, or breathe independently. The patient stated that a pipe would be placed into her throat to facilitate breathing since she was afraid of choking on her saliva. She lacked the strength to share her sad destiny with Venugopal. Initially, it appeared impossible for her. After describing her own death to the doctor, she

came to terms with it. The news had finally sunk in. Her hopes of becoming a doctor faded in that moment, and her parents' sad expressions reminded her of her reality.

Her eyes glazed over, and she vowed not to cry. There is a mistake! This should not happen to me. I've done nothing to deserve this. I am completely healthy! Her heart cried aloud. (Durjoy 29)

ALS is a horrible disease. It starts when the patient becomes clumsy. We tend to drop things, become tired quickly, and experience dimmer sensations in our limbs until paralysis occurs. After that, she may be unable to eat due to weakness in her tongue and jaw muscles. She may also be unable to speak quickly or for long periods of time due to mouth fatigue. She may need crutches before being transported by wheelchair. Soon, she will be unable to roll the chair due to a lack of forearm strength, leaving her immobile. Tubes will be implanted in her body to aid in digestion, breathing, and elimination. Machines will keep her alive, but it's a tragic way to die. She apologized, wishing she could do something. Venugopal handed her some books to read on others who had battled the sickness.

They didn't win, but they died happy; she can't lose to sickness. She would just wish for her to tell my parents she does not have the courage, she said, and the tears came again. She tried to stifle her sobs the best she could; never had she thought her.

Parents would outlive her. What greater misfortune can there be for a parent?

'You're the most courageous patient I have seen in the longest time,' he said and added

With a pause, 'I have a daughter. She is seven.'

'Does she want to be a doctor too?'

'Yes. You remind me of her,' the doctor said, looking down at the reports in his hands and

closed his eyes. (Durjoy 30)

The doctor began explaining the world as it was blacked out. Her parents' denials, yells, screams, charges against the incompetent doctor and the irresponsible hospital, and assurances that their daughter was perfectly well had no effect on her brain. She had only one image burnt upon her retina. She was going to die motionless on a hospital bed, with a tube down her mouth.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The book that made my heart wrench with tears—Till Last Breath by Durjoy Datta—is more than just a story. It's an emotional journey that explores the fragility of life, the strength of love, and the power of redemption.

The story concentrates around four characters: Dushyant, Dr. Arman, Zarah, and Kajal, who plays an important role in shaping Dushyant's life. Let's start with Pihu. What a lovely soul she was—nineteen years old, intellectual, compassionate, tenderhearted, and full of possibilities. She had her life planned out, dreaming of becoming a doctor and working relentlessly to achieve her goals, but reality had other plans.

During one of her exams, something devastating happened—her hands stopped responding. She couldn't write couldn't move. I imagine the horror of being trapped in your own body, unable to control it. Her central nervous system was failing her, and tears flowed down her cheeks, soaking down her answer sheet, as she sat there powerless and devastated. It was a moment of pure devastation not just for Pihu but also for anyone reading her story.

Pihu's experience is even more extraordinary because she self-diagnosed her disease. She discovered she had ALS, an incurable disease, through a horrible twist of fate. Dushyant's tale was one of calm strength, whereas his was one of chaos and self-destruction. Dushyant, a once-promising young man of twenty-five, became addicted to alcohol after his girlfriend, Kajal, abandoned him for a wealthy man. His sadness and his parents' incessant criticism pushed him deeper into the abyss, until he reached a point of no return: liver failure. Dushyant's pain felt raw and real as a result of his decisions. Both Pihu and Dushyant ended up in the same hospital room 509, battling their own illnesses. However, this story is not about their love affair; rather, it is about the strong link they shared, which was formed through shared difficulties, grief, and feelings of optimism.

Two reputed doctors, fighting their own demons from the past, are trying everything to keep their patients alive, even putting their medical licenses at risk. These last days in the hospital change the two

patients, their doctors, and all the other people around them in ways they had never imagined.

Death looms in the tiny 12X13-foot room as they fight for every breath of their lives, even as the doctors put them through unapproved experimental treatments to prolong their lives.

Dr. Arman, Pihu's doctor, and Zarah, who cared for Dushyant, were equally integral to the story. They weren't just medical professionals; they were human beings, followed and compassionate, willing to risk everything, even their medical licenses, to save their patients. Dr. Armaan's dedication to Pihu and the quiet understanding that developed between them was beautiful; similarly, the bond between Dushyant and Zarah added another layer of depth to the narrative.

And in the end, one of the patients is no more in this world after struggling hard, but before she leaves, she makes her lasting impression and makes sure that the other one can still live a peaceful life.

### III. ILLNESS AND BROKEN DREAMS

Pihu's hopes of becoming a surgeon were destroyed as her body deteriorated; she was forced to forsake medical college, her identity and future slipping away. Pihu's condition had gotten worse. The first indicators of an ALS relapse appeared in her body. The nerve conduction tests revealed a severe loss of sensation in her legs. She had banged into the door that morning while going to the bathroom. Her hands began to betray her again. She had begun to drop objects and becoming clumsier. The misery of being an ALS patient has returned. The lack of sensation and control disturbed her less than it did Arman, who was the first to review the findings. Pihu assured her mother, 'Maa, I will be okay.' She reassured her mother, who was heartbroken after seeing her daughter struggle to accomplish the simplest tasks again. The sickness was back, and it was worse than before.

They had already discussed the treatment. Pihu saw it as a win-win situation, despite its illegality and danger. The radical stem cell treatment had a clear conclusion with only two options. Either die quickly and painlessly, or be cured. It made great sense to after seeing herself deteriorate and almost die, she realized what it required for her to get

through that period. Despite her confident demeanor, she remained a fearful child. She preferred the treatment over the possibility of death from the condition.

Her sobbing mom excused herself for a bit, and her dad sat near her.

'Do you think we should do this, beta?'

'Dad, it's our only option. And Dr. Arman is a brilliant doctor. He is putting himself on

the line to try this out. I am sure he has something in mind,' she assured him.

'But what if—'

'Don't worry. I am in good hands,' she said, and her dad snickered like a child (Durjoy 109)

Dushyant groaned in pain as a syringe injected a clear liquid into his circulation. His gaze was drawn to the unoccupied bed next to him. Zarah failed to administer the medication and obtain blood. 'You seem distracted,' Zarah observed. Dushyant looked away from Pihu's bed and said, "Not really." You didn't arrive in the morning.

Why?'

'My parents are living with me. They wanted me to spend some time with them. So I took

'the day off,' she said and rolled her eyes.

The first time she was reading the book, and she knew it wouldn't be the last.

(Durjoy 117)

Since he passed out in Zarah's automobile, Dushyant had been sleeping for only a few hours per day. He was under close surveillance and progressively deteriorating. He had severe liver and renal damage and was taking multiple drugs. His days were spent lying in bed, moaning in anguish. Despite feeling much better today, he awoke with acute abdominal ache. He attempted to call for assistance in alleviating his discomfort. Is there a problem? Pihu inquired, looking up from the book she was reading. As she waited for him to speak, his face contorted in anguish and he rolled over, holding his stomach. Okay, I'll call somebody, she said, shouting for help. A nurse rushed in minutes later to check on Dushyant's drip. She asked Dushyant some questions, but his responses were inaudible. She gave

him an injection and assured that it would cure his pain.

#### IV. LOVE AND RELATIONSHIP

Pihu, who was solitary and on the verge of death, began writing Dr. Armaan Kashyap in need of both medical advice and personal connection. Her remarks are direct, honest, and occasionally melancholy. Armaan is initially skeptical, but is won over by her brilliance and spirit. The exchange of words, letters, emails, and chats allows characters to overcome disease and loneliness, giving each other glimpses of hope.

Dushyant adores Kajol, who abandoned him for a wealthy man, and his life is torn apart. He had had enough of the partying. Then he was admitted to the hospital for serious medical problems. There he met Pihu, who had ALS, and Dr. Zarah provided excellent care for him. Dushyant had a good rapport with Zarah and Pihu from the start; it wasn't easy, but he gradually altered his attitude and became extremely friendly with Pihu.

#### V. RESILIENCE AND HOPE

Pihu expresses her final farewell to her parents, Armaan and Dushyant, knowing that her time is limited. The book gave her the courage she needed to keep going and kept her fighting spirit alive. She confronts death with courage, hoping to leave a legacy of joy rather than sadness. Dushyant, too, is forced to face his mortality, regrets, and the people he has hurt. Even in its final minutes, the hospital room turns from a place of sadness to one of forgiveness, thankfulness, and affirmation of life.

When Dushyant's liver fails and no donor is available, Pihu's ultimate act of kindness is determined to be a match. After her death, Dushyant receives a liver transplant, giving him a second chance at life. The final sacrifices—ending one life so that another can continue—emphasize the stories' interconnectedness. Pihu's legacy includes not just the organs she provides, but also the transformation she causes in those she leaves behind.

Pihu's death leaves a void in the lives of people she impacted. Armaan is worried and disturbed by something he cannot know for certain. Dushyant,

who now lives with Pihu's liver, is haunted with both survivor guilt and a fresh feeling of responsibility. The characters start looking for solutions to move forward while remembering Pihu. Dushyant reconciles with his parents and envisions a life free of addiction and remorse. Zarah, having reconciled with her father, opens herself up to the possibilities of love. Armaan, who is still grieving, is inspired by Pihu's spirit and the risks he took for her. The story emphasizes that letting go entails honoring the past while looking forward.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Dushyant detected choking sounds on the other side of the curtain. He drew himself away from the bed and the curtain, even as his body appeared to dissolve. On the bed, he noticed Pihu waving her hands around, rolling her eyes, and violently shaking her body. She had halted before he could reach her bed. He burst out crying when he saw her cease moving. He yelled and shook her, but she did not reply. Panicking, he slapped her several times, but her face flopped from side to side. With the last bit of power he had, he crawled over her bed, placed both hands on her chest, and began to push down. He had seen it on television several times before. He bent over her, breathed into her open lips, and then hammered her chest again. Nothing changes the course of life. After her death, Dushyant receives a liver transplant, giving him a second chance at life.

Did I find a donor? Yes, I did. it was her. The perfect match. We were room-mates. But that's not the only thing she gave me, fifteen days after my surgery when I was Shifted back to my room, the bed next to me was empty but for a little note, on top of it. I opened the note and it said:

'you were the best room-mate ever. Now, we're 2-2. Don't waste it'.

I cry.

Dushyant, who was before resigned to self-destruction, is now driven to live fully, inspired by Pihu's example. Zarah, having overcome her trauma, begins to rebuild her ties with her family. Despite his loss, Armaan continues to work with a renewed awareness. All wounds cannot be healed;

yet, life goes on, and purpose can be found even in pain. The story ends not with triumph, but with gratitude, humility, and the enduring power of human connection.

The novel's narrative alternates between Dushyant's and Pihu's points of view, stressing their common experiences with disease, sorrow, and hope. This contradiction allows for a thorough examination of how varied personalities cope with mortality and purpose.

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# A Modernist Reading of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

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## Abstract

*Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) is a narrative rich with adventure, suspense, horror, moral reflection, cultural encounters, and the tension between worldly desires and spiritual devotion. It dramatizes the struggle of an individual against nature, the challenges of isolation, and the transformative power of faith and determination. This paper aims to explore both the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of the text, with particular emphasis on the meaning and effects of isolation in shaping Crusoe's character. The novel, in many ways, anticipates elements of modernism, especially through its exploration of alienation, self-discovery, and the confrontation with the unfamiliar. The story takes readers on a journey beyond the boundaries of civilization – through perilous sea voyages, forced solitude on an exotic island, and the struggles of survival. Defoe's meticulous depiction of Crusoe's efforts to build shelter, cultivate land, domesticate animals, and explore new parts of the island not only highlights human resilience but also underscores the adaptability of man as a social being. The novel further reveals how changing social conditions and environments shape human values, conduct, and relationships. At its core, Robinson Crusoe emphasizes the protagonist's evolving relationship with God, illustrating the necessity of gratitude, faith, and acknowledgment of divine providence in the face of adversity. This study also speculates on the modern-day relevance of Crusoe's experiences, suggesting how similar narratives of isolation and survival might unfold in contemporary contexts. In doing so, it positions Defoe's work as both a reflection of 18th-century cultural ideals and a timeless meditation on humanity's struggle with nature, society, and spiritual consciousness.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Daniel Defoe's prefaces to the three installments of *Robinson Crusoe* reveal an increasingly complex attempt to grapple with the novel's world-forming qualities, amounting almost to a proto-theory of novelistic form. These paratextual elements

simultaneously claim historical authenticity for the narrative and wrestle with the inevitable tension that such a claim is fictional. In doing so, they attempt to reconcile the creative invention of the novel with the religious truth that was widely believed to stand above it. The enduring relevance of *Robinson Crusoe*

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lies partly in its universal themes—adventure, human capability, the struggle against nature, isolation, survival, and the tension between divine will and human agency. Written at a time when psychology as a discipline had not yet been developed, Defoe nonetheless demonstrates remarkable psychological insight through Crusoe’s characterization, his confrontation with solitude, and his gradual spiritual awakening. These themes continue to resonate with modern readers, securing Defoe’s reputation as one of the most enduring novelists in the English tradition. From a modern perspective, *Robinson Crusoe* can be read as both an experiment in form and a meditation on exploration and human resilience. Its enduring features—adventure, determination, morality, secular ambition, faith, and the tension between free will and predestination—remain universally relevant. Frequently regarded as the first real English novel, Defoe’s text earns its place in literary history not only through form but also by encoding within its pages the manners, values, and prevailing consciousness of the eighteenth century. Through the lens of New Historicism, *Robinson Crusoe* emerges as a cultural artifact that creatively represents its historical moment; through Reader-Response theory, it can be seen as a realist text, engaging readers across time through a transactional process of meaning-making. Yet, the novel’s literary significance is complicated by its flaws. Many critics have noted its uneven pacing, repetitive detail, and problematic depictions of race and colonialism. Much of Crusoe’s island narrative—his twenty-eight years of survival, punctuated by lists of provisions, routines, and violent encounters with “savages”—can appear tedious to the modern reader. Crusoe’s domination over Friday, whom he compels to call him “Master,” encapsulates the colonial mindset embedded in the text. These aspects, though troubling, remain instructive for understanding the ideological currents of Defoe’s time. Despite such criticisms, *Robinson Crusoe* has retained its cultural prominence. This is partly due to the accessibility of abridged editions and adaptations in literature, film, and popular culture, which highlight the core adventure narrative while smoothing over its more problematic elements. Defoe’s novel laid the groundwork for an entire genre of survival and adventure fiction, inspiring

countless retellings that often refine or subvert the original’s moral and colonial assumptions. While it may not meet the standards of later literary artistry, *Robinson Crusoe* remains a text of enduring significance. It offers invaluable insight into the development of the English novel, the cultural anxieties of the eighteenth century, and the origins of themes—survival, isolation, mastery over nature—that continue to shape literature and media today.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, text-based research approach, relying primarily on interpretation and critical analysis. Both primary and secondary sources have been consulted in order to address the research questions and achieve the overall objectives of the study. The primary source of data is Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, with specific reference to the 2015 edition edited by Dr. S. Sen and published by the Friends Book Corner Editorial Board. The novel itself—particularly its depictions of adventure, the vicissitudes of Crusoe’s life, exploration, curiosity, and unique character traits—constitutes the central object of study. The secondary sources consist of scholarly research articles, critical essays, biographical information about Daniel Defoe, and other relevant materials. These include studies on the socio-historical and religious contexts of eighteenth-century England, as well as analyses of the novel’s modern relevance and interpretations from contemporary literary criticism. Together, these sources provide the contextual framework necessary for deeper analysis. The research employs qualitative data analysis techniques, combining both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is applied where existing theories and critical perspectives guide the analysis, ensuring that the findings are systematically aligned with established frameworks. The inductive approach, on the other hand, allows insights to emerge organically from close reading of the text and supporting materials, particularly where new or unexpected dimensions of the novel arise. By integrating both approaches, the study aims to construct a balanced and comprehensive interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe*.

### III. DISCUSSION & RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Depth Analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* in a Modern Perspective

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* challenges the political, social, and economic structures of his time by imagining a utopian environment outside society. Through the protagonist's isolation, Defoe critiques contemporary England while also illustrating Crusoe's intimate relationship with nature and his spiritual and personal development. Crusoe emerges as a universal figure—an embodiment of humanity's struggle with solitude, survival, and self-discovery. A central theme in the novel is the conflict between the individual and society. Crusoe's rejection of his family's expectations mirrors Defoe's own rebellion against parental and societal authority. Both author and character resisted prescribed paths—Defoe against the ministry, Crusoe against his father's counsel—highlighting a broader tension between individualism and conformity. The narrative's semi-autobiographical undertones, reinforced by Defoe's political dissent and imprisonment, underscore the novel's social critique.

The island functions as both a literal and symbolic space. For Crusoe, it becomes a site of survival, self-reliance, and spiritual awakening. His cultivation of land, domestication of animals, and construction of shelter reflect not only human resilience but also the possibility of a utopian order uncorrupted by others. The island, however, is more than a stage for survival—it signifies confinement, growth, and eventual enlightenment. Crusoe learns to reconcile with his misfortune, transforming punishment into renewal and finding faith in God. Nature itself, from the growth of corn to the rhythms of daily labor, symbolizes his inner development and harmony with the environment. Yet, solitude has limits. Crusoe's longing for companionship reveals the essential social nature of humanity. While isolation fosters spiritual growth and resilience, it cannot replace human connection. Thus, Defoe's novel exposes both the promise and the impossibility of a solitary utopia. Narrated in a plain, serious style, the text blends religious reflection with realism, offering authenticity to Crusoe's voice and experiences. This narrative technique explains its enduring popularity: *Robinson Crusoe* has inspired countless editions, translations, adaptations, and imitations across centuries.

Ultimately, Crusoe's transformation—from wanderer to survivor, from isolation to faith—illustrates not only man's contest with nature but also Defoe's critique of society, suggesting that a more harmonious order lies beyond the corruption of human institutions, even if such a society remains unattainable in practice.

#### 3.2 Themes Portrayed in *Robinson Crusoe* Related to Modernity:

##### 3.2.1 Christianity and Divine Providence

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is not only a tale of physical survival but also of spiritual transformation. At the outset, Crusoe disregards Christian teachings, ignoring his father's warnings and neglecting to acknowledge God's interventions in his early voyages. His turning point comes through a dream that compels him to repent, after which he embraces Christianity by reading the Bible and engaging in prayer. Faith allows Crusoe to interpret his misfortunes as divine punishment and his survival as divine blessing. Over time, he begins to view events such as the growth of crops, Friday's arrival, and his eventual rescue as manifestations of divine providence. The novel emphasizes that apparent misfortunes may serve a higher divine purpose, urging readers to trust in God's overarching plan. Defoe further reinforces this through the editor's preface, which frames the narrative as an illustration of providential wisdom.

##### 3.2.2 Society, Individuality, and Isolation

The novel explores the tension between social belonging and individual autonomy. Crusoe rejects his family's expectations and the constraints of English society in pursuit of independence, only to find himself in extreme isolation on the island. His solitude compels him to develop resourcefulness and a self-sufficient way of life, which he interprets as morally purer and spiritually closer to God. However, Crusoe's commitment to individuality is flawed; he denies freedom to others, as seen in his enslavement of Xury and subordination of Friday, reflecting his self-centered perspective. While isolation fosters ingenuity, it also leads to loneliness and narcissism. Ultimately, Crusoe does not wholly reject society; he transforms his island into a colony and later reintegrates into English life, highlighting

Defoe's attempt to balance the values of individuality and social belonging.

### 3.2.3 Advice, Mistakes, and Hindsight

A recurring motif in *Robinson Crusoe* is the tension between disregarded advice and retrospective wisdom. Crusoe repeatedly ignores sound counsel—from his parents, the shipmaster, and even the widow—choosing instead to follow his own ambitions. His narrative perspective as both actor and retrospective narrator allows him to acknowledge these errors in hindsight. Through trial and error, he learns survival skills and moral lessons, gaining knowledge not from instruction but from lived experience. This paradox—that wisdom is achieved only through mistakes—shapes both Crusoe's development and the novel's didactic purpose. The preface reinforces this point, presenting Crusoe's story as not merely entertaining but morally instructive, encouraging readers to reflect on the value of prudence and obedience.

### 3.2.4 Contentment, Desire, and Ambition

Crusoe's restlessness reflects the conflict between contentment and ambition. His father advocates for the stability of the "middle station," yet Crusoe seeks adventure and greater fortune, repeatedly abandoning security for risk. This oscillation between satisfaction and ambition structures the novel: he leaves England despite comfort, disrupts prosperity in Brazil for slave trading, and desires escape even after establishing a sustainable life on the island. As narrator, Crusoe condemns his ambition as "the general plague of mankind," recognizing that discontent drives human suffering. Nevertheless, his ambitious choices generate the extraordinary experiences that define his life. The novel thus portrays ambition as both destructive and generative—capable of producing misfortune, but also of yielding a narrative of adventure, growth, and spiritual awakening.

### 3.2.5 Strangers, Savages, and the Unknown

Crusoe's encounters with the unfamiliar—foreign lands, strange animals, and non-European peoples—are initially marked by fear and prejudice. He consistently refers to indigenous peoples as "savages" and assumes a position of superiority, reflected most clearly in his hierarchical relationship with Friday. Despite moments of cultural tolerance,

such as refusing to interfere with native cannibal rituals, Crusoe imposes Christianity upon Friday and denies him autonomy, even naming him rather than respecting his own identity. His broader participation in colonial structures, including plantation ownership and the slave trade, underscores his acceptance of racial and imperial hierarchies.

Yet Defoe complicates this colonial vision: many of Crusoe's fears of the "other" prove unfounded. African natives show generosity, the feared wilderness sustains him, and Friday emerges as a loyal companion rather than a threat. The English mutineers, in contrast, embody greater danger than the so-called "savages." Thus, while the novel reflects seventeenth-century colonial ideology, it simultaneously questions the irrational fears and prejudices that sustain it.

### 3.2.6 The Ambivalence of Mastery

Crusoe's mastery of his environment initially appears admirable. He transforms the hostile island into a habitable space, domesticates animals, and demonstrates self-determination, shifting from passive victimhood to active survival. Mastery in this sense symbolizes resilience and self-reliance.

However, the concept becomes ethically problematic when applied to human relationships. Crusoe insists on being Friday's "master," extends this role to "king" over others, and treats hierarchy as natural. His instinctive superiority reflects the colonial mindset, blurring the line between praiseworthy self-mastery and exploitative domination of others. Defoe thus presents mastery as both empowering and morally ambiguous.

### 3.2.7 The Necessity of Repentance

Beyond adventure, Crusoe's narrative serves as a moral and religious allegory. The Preface frames it as a lesson in divine wisdom, emphasizing repentance as essential. Gratitude and prayer prove insufficient until Crusoe acknowledges his sin—primarily disobedience to his father, which he interprets as his "original sin." His feverish vision of angelic rebuke catalyzes repentance, paralleling Adam's fall and exile from Eden.

This turning point deepens Crusoe's spiritual consciousness: he accepts dependence on God, views his condition with greater optimism, and later likens

himself to Job in restored prosperity. Yet repentance also carries paradox: without sin, he would never have learned redemption. The theme thus underscores both the necessity and the ambiguity of spiritual transformation.

### 3.2.8 The Importance of Self-Awareness

Isolation sharpens Crusoe's self-awareness rather than reducing him to instinctual survival. His Presbyterian background emphasizes continual self-examination, reflected in his obsessive record-keeping. His calendar measures not time itself but his own duration on the island, while his journal meticulously tracks daily tasks. Even his parrot, trained to echo his own words, becomes an external voice of his self-consciousness.

These practices demonstrate that Crusoe's survival depends not only on material resourcefulness but also on sustained reflection. His constant self-reckoning transforms solitude into a site of personal growth, where self-awareness becomes both a survival tool and a spiritual discipline.

### 3.3 Robinson Crusoe and Modernity

*Robinson Crusoe* embodies the emergence of the modern individual: a secular subject who confronts the world through reason, labor, and self-reliance. At the same time, the novel gestures toward a religious interpretation of existence that remains unfulfilled, thereby exposing what modernity gains in rational mastery and what it simultaneously loses in transcendence.

First published in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* was an immediate success, with four editions appearing within months and more than 80,000 copies sold. Formally, it is often regarded as the first true novel, foregrounding the subjective experience of the individual. Substantively, it dramatizes the myth of the sovereign self—master of nature, others, and himself. As Ian Watt has argued, alongside *Faust*, *Don Juan*, and *Don Quixote*, Defoe's work constitutes one of the foundational "myths" of Western modernity.

Part of the novel's early appeal lay in its dual address: it spoke both to a traditionally religious audience and to the rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment. Crusoe frames his sufferings as divine punishment for original sin, particularly his disobedience to paternal authority and Providence.

Yet his actions repeatedly undermine this theological account, instead aligning with secular modernity's emphasis on human effort, rational calculation, and pragmatic mastery. The novel thus oscillates between a search for divine meaning and its erosion by rationalist explanation.

This tension—between the yearning for transcendence and the insistence on secular rationality—explains the novel's enduring relevance. *Robinson Crusoe* is at once a narrative of spiritual trial and a parable of modern secular existence, dramatizing both the power and the limits of the self-sufficient individual in an age of emerging modernity.

### 3.4 Crusoe and Modern Natural Philosophy

*Robinson Crusoe* dramatizes the tension between religious interpretation and emerging modern natural philosophy. The fictional editor's preface emphasizes a moral and providential reading of Crusoe's experiences, yet the narrative often privileges secular, material ends over spiritual instruction. Crusoe's oscillation between divine interpretation and natural explanation reflects the epistemological shift of the modern age.

For example, when Crusoe discovers barley and rice growing on the island, he initially interprets this as a miraculous provision of Providence, prompting gratitude and wonder. Soon, however, he recognizes a natural explanation—the remnants of seed he had scattered—leading him to conclude that the phenomenon is purely physical. Defoe's phrase, "Then the wonder began to cease," encapsulates the dilemma of modernity: understanding the world through natural causes diminishes awe and spiritual significance.

This episode enacts the broader philosophical revolution inaugurated by Bacon, Descartes, and others, which rejects classical teleology and the pursuit of final causes. Classical philosophy sought to discern the "why" or purpose of each entity, as Aristotle emphasized, whereas modern natural philosophy isolates material and efficient causes, leaving teleological explanations aside. Crusoe's reasoning mirrors this shift: he initially perceives providential design but ultimately attributes events to natural causes, exemplifying the rise of secular rationality as the dominant interpretive lens.

### 3.5 Crusoe and Modern Political Philosophy

The secular rationality depicted in Crusoe also informs modern political thought. Just as natural philosophy abandons final causes, political philosophy, from Machiavelli through Hobbes and Locke, grounds human behavior in self-interest, fear, and survival rather than divine or teleological ends. Crusoe's conduct reflects this logic: the discovery of a solitary footprint provokes fear, prompting him to secure resources and assert dominion over the island. Self-preservation, labor, and property become his guiding principles.

Hobbes frames fear as the foundation of social and political order, while Locke links self-preservation to labor and property acquisition. Crusoe enacts both logics: his meticulous cultivation of the island and claim over its resources mirror modern notions of political and economic rights derived from labor and survival imperatives. Even his fixation on money, though useless on the island, underscores the internalization of these modern principles.

Crusoe's ultimate return to Europe, where he rejoices in inherited wealth, contrasts sharply with the classical hero, Odysseus, whose homecoming restores communal and familial bonds. In Crusoe, the modern individual's fulfillment is solitary and material rather than relational or civic. The novel thus stages a decisive critique of modernity: while rationality and self-reliance empower the individual, they simultaneously replace communal, spiritual, and teleological frameworks with a calculus of survival, accumulation, and secular reason. In Defoe's narrative, the modern world is mastered, yet its wonder and moral orientation are attenuated – "then the wonder began to cease."

### 3.6 Depth Analysis of the Protagonist

Robinson Crusoe embodies perseverance, industriousness, and self-reliance. Stranded on a deserted island for twenty-seven years, he confronts survival with practical intelligence, reshaping his environment through persistent labor. His actions reveal resilience, creativity, and a pioneering spirit characteristic of the rising bourgeoisie. Crusoe demonstrates courage in overcoming adversity, embracing adventure, and refusing mediocrity – qualities that allow him to maintain the appearance of a "civilized" individual despite isolation.

Yet Crusoe's identity is inseparable from his colonial and bourgeois sensibilities. He constructs himself as "self" in opposition to the indigenous "other," importing European cultural norms and practices to assert dominance. He establishes temporal order through European concepts of time, erects a cross marking his landing, and keeps a detailed diary, reinforcing his Eurocentric worldview. Crusoe extends this ideological colonization to Friday, whom he disciplines, educates, and assimilates into European language, religion, and habits. This transformation enforces Crusoe's authority and illustrates the colonial logic of civilizing and subordinating the "other."

Crusoe's worldview also extends to economic and racial hierarchies. He views indigenous peoples as inherently inferior and subjects them to labor and cultural assimilation. Later, in Brazil, he engages in the slave trade, exemplifying his participation in broader systems of exploitation. Collectively, Crusoe's actions construct a self-defined authority and reveal the intersection of colonialism, capitalism, and European racial ideology in shaping his character.

### 3.7 Crusoe's Faith in God and Moral Teaching for Modern Readers

Faith in God in *Robinson Crusoe* is portrayed as both grounding and transformative. Initially, Crusoe demonstrates conventional seventeenth-century Christian piety, relying on divine providence to navigate life-threatening situations. He makes vows, thanks God for survival, and attributes his rescue and sustenance to divine intervention.

However, as Crusoe confronts the practical realities of survival, his understanding of faith evolves. The miraculous growth of barley, initially interpreted as a providential act, is soon understood to result from his own actions. This moment marks a turning point: Crusoe begins to assume responsibility for his survival, blending divine faith with human agency. Ultimately, his spiritual journey illustrates the interplay of providence and personal effort, suggesting that faith does not preclude self-reliance.

For modern readers, Crusoe's experience conveys a dual lesson: faith can provide moral and psychological guidance, yet human initiative remains essential. His story emphasizes that belief in God

need not undermine personal responsibility; instead, it can coexist with rational action and self-determination.

### 3.8 Twenty-First Century Crusoe and Contemporary Audiences

The Crusoe myth persists in contemporary media, exemplified by Robert Zemeckis's *Cast Away* (2000) and the television series *Lost* (2004). Despite differences in medium, both works explore themes central to Defoe's novel: isolation, survival, and the emotional and psychological challenges of human endurance.

*Cast Away* examines modern life's disconnection, emphasizing individual struggle and the pressures of work-dominated, capitalist society. In contrast, *Lost* employs a multi-character ensemble to address broader societal issues, including violence, betrayal, family dysfunction, and addiction. Television's episodic nature allows *Lost* to develop complex narratives over time, responding dynamically to actors, audience feedback, and ratings, whereas film reflects a singular artistic vision with greater creative autonomy.

Both adaptations reinterpret the Crusoe myth for contemporary contexts. *Cast Away* foregrounds personal resilience and emotional reconnection, while *Lost* presents a globalized, morally complex landscape. Collectively, they demonstrate the enduring relevance of Crusoe's story: the tension between isolation and community, survival and moral growth, and human agency and existential uncertainty resonates across media and centuries.

### 3.9 Modern Science Fiction Robinsonades

"The hero, alone on his island, deprived of all assistance from his fellows, and nevertheless able to look after himself, is obviously a figure that will enthrall readers of all ages." – Ian Watt, *Robinson Crusoe as a Myth*

One of the enduring appeals of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* lies in the compelling narrative of a single individual's struggle to survive in the wilderness. As James Sutherland observes, the novel presents a satisfying story structure: a man triumphing over adversity, creating order from potential chaos. Crusoe's ingenuity and mastery over nature have captivated readers for centuries. The wilderness theme—man versus nature—is central to the Crusoe

story, addressing universal concerns such as survival, spiritual hope, and exploration.

John Dean notes in "The Uses of Wilderness in American Science Fiction" that while the wilderness theme has diminished in mainstream literature since World War II, it thrives in science fiction (SF), which reconstructs lost or imagined landscapes. SF substitutes traditional wilderness—forests, oceans, deserts, mountains—with space as the ultimate frontier. Accordingly, science fiction Robinsonades transpose Crusoe's story into these new settings: the sea becomes the sky, ships become spaceships, and natives become aliens. Survival remains the key theme, achieved through reason, determination, and technology.

Anne Colvin's *The Celluloid Crusoe* catalogues SF Robinsonades up to the 1980s; my update includes films post-1989. In all cases, protagonists confront unfamiliar environments, struggling physically, emotionally, and psychologically. SF Robinsonades prioritize human experience over spectacle; the central characters are ordinary individuals, akin to Crusoe, rather than superheroes.

This dissertation focuses on Byron Haskin's *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964) as a prime example. The film explicitly references Defoe's novel in its title, following its plot closely while relocating events to Mars. Kit Draper, the protagonist, faces isolation and a survival challenge similar to Crusoe's, accompanied only by Mona, a space-traveling monkey. The film adapts the Crusoe narrative while entering into dialogue with Defoe, reflecting and critiquing its source text.

Greg Grewell argues that SF Robinsonades inherit the colonial narratives of Defoe's novel. He identifies three models: explorative, domesticities, and combative. *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* exemplifies the explorative model, depicting solitary survival in a hostile environment, while incorporating elements of domesticities and combative models. Thus, science fiction Robinsonades maintains the essence of Defoe's story while reimagining it for modern audiences.

### 3.10 Modern Metaphysics of Robinson Crusoe

Kirstin A. Hall, in *The New Atlantis*, situates *Robinson Crusoe* within modern metaphysics: Defoe's novel, published in 1719, remains a cultural touchstone,

inspiring a genre—the Robinsonade—encompassing works from *Treasure Island* to *Cast Away* and *Lost*. Hall emphasizes the novel's ability to accommodate multiple interpretations, from exotic adventure to spiritual allegory, economic individualism, and political commentary.

Early critics noted the novel's "double character": it simultaneously entertains and instructs, blending fact and fiction, genius and craft. Robinson Crusoe exemplifies Janus-faced modern consciousness, in which extraordinary events can be read both as miraculous and natural. The novel reflects the tension between enchantment and disenchantment, science and superstition—a defining characteristic of modernity.

### 3.11 Defoe's Psychoanalysis of Robinson Crusoe

Leopold Damrosch, Jr., observes that Crusoe's diary functions not to analyze but to record the self: it tracks daily activities, reflecting the modern distinction between the behaving and observing self. Psychoanalytically, this creates a disconnection between Crusoe's inner life and the narrative presented to readers. Although the novel offers detailed accounts of actions and practical problem-solving, it conveys little about Crusoe's emotional experience.

Even significant moments, such as his rescue, are described externally, creating an observational rather than participatory effect for the reader. Crusoe's diary, while meticulously cataloging events, leaves emotional depth largely unexplored, emphasizing productivity and self-regulation over introspection. Defoe thus presents a character whose inner life is shadowed by a disciplined, externalized narrative framework.

### 3.12 The Effect of Colonization in Robinson Crusoe

*Robinson Crusoe* reflects the colonial mindset of its era. Ethnic groups are frequently depicted as barbaric, and Crusoe's relationship with Friday exemplifies the colonial process. Crusoe rescues Friday, renames him after an English day of the week, imposes European cultural norms, and enforces Christianity, illustrating a comprehensive transformation of the colonized subject.

Robinson's actions—including regulating Friday's diet, clothing, and religious practice—demonstrate ethnocentrism and cultural imposition. Friday's

initial discomfort and eventual acceptance of Western clothing and habits underscore the psychological and physical aspects of colonization. Crusoe perceives these changes as beneficial, ignoring the coercion involved.

Colonial dynamics are further reflected in Crusoe's paternalistic attitude. He interprets Friday's loyalty as gratitude, framing domination as benevolence. Language reinforces hierarchy, with Crusoe frequently describing Friday as a "poor Savage" or "ignorant Creature," perpetuating dehumanization. These interactions allegorize British imperialism: Crusoe represents the colonizer asserting authority, while Friday embodies the subjugated native, highlighting the systematic and ideological brutality of colonial rule.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* presents a profound narrative of repentance, transformation, and spiritual awakening. Crusoe experiences deep remorse for his past mistakes, a remorse that emerges as the conscience—the superego—responds to the desires of the id. This profound regret reshapes his outlook, leading him to place his trust not in his own abilities but in God's providence for guidance in the future. His habit of reading the Bible significantly alters his perception of faith and instills in him the conviction that God must be involved in every aspect of life. The once self-reliant Crusoe gradually evolves into a man who places unwavering reliance on divine assistance. Religion plays a central role in this transformation. Alone on a desolate island, Crusoe undergoes the pain of loneliness, which teaches him to value human relationships and to treat others with greater compassion and respect. He comes to understand that every individual holds intrinsic worth. As part of this spiritual maturation, Crusoe also recognizes the folly of his youthful defiance against his father's counsel. His trials eventually reveal to him his place within his family, society, and before God. Through the influence of biblical teachings, Crusoe realizes his guilt in neglecting God's strength and care. Unlike his earlier disregard, he now acknowledges God's constant watchfulness and learns to live by divine guidance. His faith inspires him to abandon his reckless pursuit of adventure and embrace a life of

peace, humility, and service. Every decision he makes henceforth is undertaken with God's involvement, and he seeks to spread goodness to others in hopes of securing divine blessing. This transformation marks Crusoe's passage from a restless, ambitious youth to a mature man grounded in faith and wisdom. He finds peace not in worldly pursuits but in surrender to God's will. Ultimately, Crusoe embraces his identity as a servant of God, having realized that his former ambitions brought only emptiness. Defoe's narrative not only dramatizes an individual's spiritual journey but also reflects the values and social attitudes of 18th-century England. From the perspective of New Historicism and Reader-Response criticism, the novel serves a dual purpose: it mirrors the cultural and moral landscape of its time while also affirming its status as a realist text with enduring relevance. *Robinson Crusoe* thus continues to resonate with modern readers as both a document of historical consciousness and a timeless exploration of faith, morality, and human resilience.

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# Inclusive Practices of Elementary Teachers with Special Educational Needs Learners (LSENs) in Balbalan District, Kalinga

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**Keywords – Inclusive Practices, Inclusive education, Learners with Special Educational Needs, Manifestation, Universal Design**

## Abstract

The study aimed to examine the inclusive practices of elementary teachers in handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Specifically, it sought to determine the extent of manifestation of LSENs in terms of physical, mental, and social domains, assess the level of inclusive practices of teachers, and identify the problems encountered in implementation. A questionnaire and interview were employed to gather data, with responses quantified using a five-point Likert Scale. Findings revealed that the overall extent of manifestation of LSENs had an average weighted mean of 3.38, described as sometimes observed. Among the domains, the mental domain ranked highest with a mean of 4.02 (oftentimes observed), followed by the social domain with 3.38, while the physical domain registered the lowest at 2.75 (sometimes observed). Meanwhile, the inclusive practices of teachers obtained an overall mean of 4.28, interpreted as always practiced. The mental domain emerged highest at 4.51, followed by the social domain at 4.28, while the physical domain was lowest at 3.76 (oftentimes practiced). The study also highlighted challenges, particularly the limited cooperation of LSENs, which ranked first, while lack of parental cooperation was ranked lowest. Based on these, the study recommends that educators develop individualized engagement strategies, undergo training on assistive devices, and foster inclusive learning environments responsive to the diverse needs of LSENs. Indicators for LSEN manifestations were adapted from DepEd Order No. 044, s. 2021, while indicators for inclusive practices were lifted from Palanca et al. (2021), affirming the instrument's validity and reliability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their diverse needs and abilities. It fosters inclusive education by integrating students with disabilities or special educational needs into mainstream

classrooms with their peers. This approach acknowledges the significance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in education and endeavors to establish inclusive learning communities that facilitate the comprehensive growth of each student.

Inclusive education has been extensively researched and proven to be beneficial and effective. Avramidis and Norwich (2018) found that inclusive education has a positive effect on the academic achievement and social integration of students with disabilities. Inclusive classrooms promote a feeling of belonging and acceptance among students through the provision of suitable support and accommodations (Avramidis & Norwich, 2018). An inclusive environment can improve the learning experiences of students with disabilities and their typically developing peers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2018; Artiles, 2019). Inclusive education fosters positive attitudes towards diversity and disability among all members of the school community. Artiles (2019) asserts that it promotes the development of empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Slee (2018) asserts that inclusive education enhances social cohesion within the school community and benefits not only students with disabilities but also others. According to Slee (2018), it promotes acceptance and understanding by challenging stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes.

Recent studies have examined the physical, mental, and social aspects of learners with special educational needs (SEN). The studies seek to comprehend the various difficulties encountered by students with SEN and emphasize the significance of catering to their distinct requirements to foster inclusive education.

Physical manifestation pertains to the observable traits associated with the physical health of students with special educational needs (SEN). Romer and McIntosh (2018) investigated the physical manifestations of students with physical disabilities in inclusive educational environments. Romer and McIntosh (2018) emphasized the importance of providing suitable physical accommodations, assistive devices, and accessible learning environments to promote the involvement and interaction of students with physical disabilities. This study highlights the importance of inclusive design and accessibility in promoting the physical health of students with special educational needs (SEN).

Mental manifestation pertains to the cognitive and emotional facets of individuals with special educational needs (SEN). Wilson et al. (2020) investigated the mental health implications for

students with specific learning disabilities. Wilson et al. (2020) discovered that students with learning disabilities frequently encounter elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in comparison to their non-disabled peers. The research highlighted the significance of offering suitable psychological assistance, including counseling and social-emotional learning initiatives, to cater to the mental health requirements of students with special educational needs (SEN).

Social manifestation refers to the social interactions and relationships of learners with special educational needs (SEN) in an educational setting. Hwang and Hughes (2019) investigated the social behavior of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive classroom settings. Hwang and Hughes (2019) found that students with ASD encounter difficulties in social communication, social integration, and establishing significant peer relationships. The study highlights the importance of specific interventions, such as social skills training and peer support programs, to improve the social inclusion and interaction of students with ASD in inclusive educational environments.

An instance of inclusive practices is peer-mediated interventions, where non-disabled peers are trained to offer aid and support to students with disabilities. Carter et al. (2018) investigated the efficacy of peer-mediated interventions for fostering social interactions and inclusive practices in classroom settings. Carter et al. (2018) found that peer-mediated interventions enhance social engagement, foster positive peer relationships, and improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities. The study emphasizes the effectiveness of peer support in promoting inclusivity and improving the social integration of disabled students.

Differentiated instruction is an inclusive practice that customizes teaching methods and materials to accommodate the varying learning needs of students. Tomlinson et al. (2021) investigated the effect of differentiated instruction on the academic performance of students with learning disabilities. The study highlights the significance of personalized strategies to cater to the diverse abilities and learning preferences of students in inclusive educational settings. Inclusive practices necessitate the participation of support professionals, including

speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, and behavior specialists. McDonnell et al. (2022) investigated the contribution of support professionals in promoting inclusive practices and assisting students with disabilities. McDonnell et al. (2022) emphasized the significance of collaborative partnerships between support professionals and classroom teachers for successful implementation of interventions and accommodations. This study highlights the importance of utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to advance inclusive education.

According to the study of Morales (2016) and Kutlay (2018), as cited by Ulla (2017), in the Philippines, factors such as tight teaching timetables and heavy teaching workloads are just a few of the challenges that teachers face when dealing with students with special needs. According to Banks and Banks (2017), teachers must plan physical activities, manage students' needs, deal with behavioral issues, and create a chart for children's difficulty teaching them easily.

Engaging teachers of children at risk of learning difficulties in some learning approaches necessitates extensive knowledge as well as access to resources, information, and services. However, in some rural areas, these resources and services are not always available. As a result, teachers in the community face challenges in addressing children's earnings and other learning difficulties, including challenges related to the learning approaches that will be provided to them (Ondrasek et al., 2020). The shortage of trained special education teachers has had a negative impact on educational quality (Hodges et al., 2020). A study on students with learning disabilities emphasized the need for more attention and different teaching strategies such as experienced teachers, teachers with professional development training who can build self-efficacy in a student with learning difficulties, and people with disabilities who can build interactions (Wang & Lu, 2021).

Having a special needs education policy is an important step toward achieving various global initiatives to ensure equal educational opportunities for people with special needs (Toquero, 2020). Some of the policies in the Philippines for learners with learning difficulties include the Disabilities

Education Act (EDEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Every Student Success Act (ESSA). One of the most significant of these is the child protection policy (DepEd Order 40, series of 2012) which seeks to protect "children in school from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse". This policy has an impact on how teachers manage their classrooms. Furthermore, with the promotion of learner-centered teaching and constructivist learning, teachers are expected to provide opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process through interactive and collaborative activities. Diverse student populations necessitate differentiated instruction. Furthermore, teachers are expected to be gender sensitive and inclusive (DepEd Order 32. s., 2017).

Most teachers can teach students with learning disabilities to "learn how to learn," according to research. They can position them to compete and hold their own. Direct instruction, learning strategy instruction, and using a sequential, simultaneous structured multi-sensory approach are some intervention practices that produce large results (Zhang et al., 2020). According to Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020), it is critical to establish trust and support from the beginning and to wait until both teacher and student are at ease with each other before attempting to informally assess his difficulties and devise compensatory strategies. She also stated that learning disabilities do not occur on a consistent basis. As a result, teachers must be able to constantly observe, adapt, revise, assess, and ask questions. What may work one day is not always the best approach to the next.

According to Portes et al. (2018), individualized instructional teaching and learning strategies are education concepts to be covered or a "cycle through" process. This suggests that individualized instructional teaching and learning strategies are used for problem solving skills or broad concepts rather than tool use (Mumbardó-Adam et al., 2021). Individualized instructional strategies, according to

many educators do not promote basic tool skills. Another criticism of teaching and learning strategies is that learners with learning disabilities do not have

many opportunities to create something valuable that they can use in their lives.

According to Nelson and Murakami's (2020) research, the classroom teacher is usually the first to notice signs of learning disabilities and refers students for special education assessment. Furthermore, the teachers assist in the collection of assessment data and the coordination of special services. Students with learning disabilities can be identified at any age, but the majority are identified during their elementary school years. There are two major signs of a learning disability. First, students appear capable but struggle greatly in some areas of learning. This is a difference between expected and actual achievement. A young child, for example, may be verbal and appear bright, but he or she may be very slow to learn to say the alphabet, write his or her name, and count to 20. The second indicator is performance variation; there is a disparity between different areas of achievement. A fourth-grade student, for example, may excel in math but struggle to read and spell (Irwin et al., 2021). In addition to these two main indicators of learning disabilities, teachers should keep an eye out for a few others.

Notably, this research differed from all of those previously mentioned since this study emphasizes evaluating inclusive practices of elementary teachers in handling learners with special education needs. Such endeavor was not achieved by previous researchers. Also, there was no published research yet with exactly similar topic found in the institution for these types of studies. Thus, in this study, the researcher delves into assessing the inclusive practices of elementary teachers in Balbalan handling learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs).

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research sought:

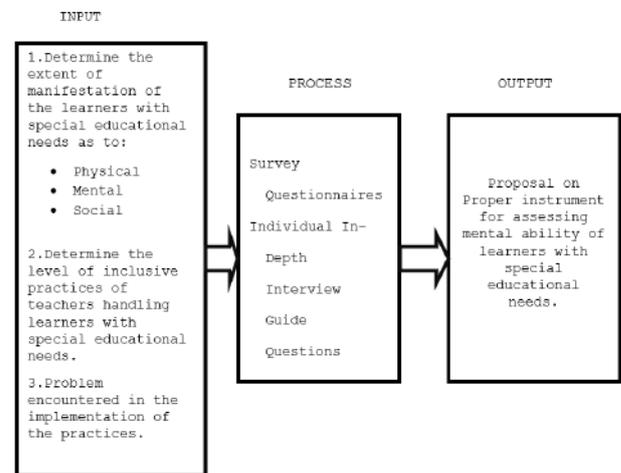
2.1. to determine the extent of manifestation of the learners with special educational needs as to:

- Physical
- Mental
- Social

2.2. to determine the level of inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs; and,

2.3. problem encountered in the implementation of the practices.

## III. PARADIGM OF THE STUDY



## IV. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

The mixed-method research design was utilized in this study. The quantitative type of research was used to determine the extent of manifestation of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in the physical, mental, and social domains, as well as the level of inclusive practices of teachers handling LSENs. Meanwhile, the qualitative type was employed to explore and describe the measures used to address the problems encountered during the implementation of these inclusive practices.

### 4.2 Locale and Population of the Study

This study was conducted in the Public Elementary Schools of Balbalan, Division of Kalinga. The respondents of the study were the elementary teachers handling Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). The table below shows the population of the study as to the name of schools and the number of learners with special educational needs.

Table 1. Respondents of the Study

Name of Schools	Number of Teachers Handling LSENs	Learners With Special Educational Needs
1. Pantikian Elementary School	2	3
2. Balbalan Elementary School	3	4
3. Angod Elementary School	1	1
4. Balbalasang Elementary School	4	12
5. Saltan Elementary School	1	1
6. Salegseg Elementary School	1	3
7. Gawaan Elementary School	2	2
8. Mabaca Elementary School	2	3
9. Bonong Elementary School	2	3
10. Ligayan Elementary School	2	4
TOTAL	20	36

The respondents are composed of 20 elementary teachers who handle learners with special educational needs in different schools of Balbalan District. It can be seen in the table that the number of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) have a total of 36.

As glean from the table, the Balbalasang Elementary School has the highest learners with special educational needs with 12, followed by Balbalan Elementary School and Ligayan Elementary school with 4. While other elementary schools in Balbalan District have 3, 2 and 1. The finding indicates that there are more respondents in Balbalasang Elementary School because it has the highest level of learners with manifestations due to its remote location, lack of current technology, and absence of internet connectivity, which may limit access to specialized resources and support services.

#### 4.4. Data Gathering Tool

The questionnaire was the basic tool for gathering the needed data from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into the following parts: Part I gathered the information on the profile of the respondents. Part II gathered data on extend of manifestation of the learners with special educational needs. Part III Level of Inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs. Part IV gathered data on problem encountered in the implementation of the practices.

#### 4.5. Validity and Reliability of Instruments.

The indicators on the extent of manifestation of the learners with special educational needs as to physical, mental, and social aspects were lifted from the DepEd ORDER No. 044, s. 2021 - Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K-

12 Basic Education Program. Meanwhile, the indicators on the level of inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs were adapted from the study of Ma. Jovilla T. Palanca, Mirasol A. Arguilles, Nonilon B. Consul, and Melbert O. Hungo (2021), entitled Inclusive Education Practices of Non-SpEd Teachers for Mainstreamed Children with Special Needs. Hence, the instrument is deemed valid and reliable.

Furthermore, the validity of the instrument is strengthened by aligning it with existing DepEd memoranda and policy issuances that emphasize inclusive education. For instance, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009 - Inclusive Education as Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children, provides the framework for mainstreaming children with special needs into regular classes. Similarly, DepEd Order No. 70, s. 1993 - Institutionalization of SPED Programs in All Schools, ensures that learners with disabilities are given appropriate interventions and accommodations. These official issuances affirm the relevance of the indicators used in the study and further establish the reliability of the instrument. Other researchers have also adopted DepEd policies and memoranda in constructing and validating their assessment tools, which strengthens the academic soundness of this instrument.

#### 4.6. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured permission from the School Division Superintendent and to the Public District Supervisor of Balbalan District in writing before distributing the survey and administering the questionnaires to the respondents. The researcher retrieved all the questionnaires and gathered responses on the same day they were administered.

#### 4.7. Treatment of Data

To quantify the responses of the respondents on the extent of manifestation of the learners with special educational needs as to physical, mental and social, and the level practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs, the five-point Linkert Scale has been used. Responses for each item of the indicator used the following scale.

Arbitrary Value	Limit	Equivalent Discription	Symbol
5	4.20 - 5.00	Always Observed	AO
4	3.40 - 4.19	Oftentimes Observed	OO
3	2.60 - 3.39	Sometimes Observed	SO
2	1.80 - 2.59	Seldom Observed	SDO
1	1.00 - 1.79	Never Observed	NO

With regards to level of inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs, the following scale was being used:

Arbitrary Value	Limit	Equivalent Discription	Symbol
5	4.20 - 5.00	Always Practiced	AP
4	3.40 - 4.19	Oftentimes Practiced	OP
3	2.60 - 3.39	Sometimes Practiced	SP
2	1.80 - 2.59	Seldom Practiced	SDP
1	1.00 - 1.79	Never Practiced	NP

#### 4.8. Statistical Tool

The statistical tool was used in the study in order to have an exact interpretation of the data gathered.

Weighted Mean. This was used to determine the extent of manifestation of learners with special educational needs as to physical, mental and social. It was also used to determine the level of inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs by using the formula:

$$EXW = \frac{WiFi}{Fi}$$

Where: XW = Weighted Mean  
 WiFi = Sum of the Frequency  
 Fi = Number of respondents/cases

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Manifestation of the Learners with Special Educational needs

Physical	Mean	Rank
1. Demonstrate challenges in fine motor skills, such as writing or manipulating small objects.	3.25	1
2. Experience difficulties with gross motor skills, such as running, jumping, or balancing.	2.55	4
3. Exhibit limited coordination and balance during physical activities.	2.65	3
4. Require adaptations or assistive devices to access and navigate their physical environment effectively.	2.9	2
5. Face challenges with sensory processing, such as sensitivity to light, sound, or touch.	2.5	5
Subtotal	2.75	3

Mental		
6. Have difficulties with memory, both short-term and long-term, impacting their learning and retention of information.	4.25	2
7. Exhibit difficulties in focusing and sustaining attention during learning tasks or activities.	4.4	1
8. Demonstrate challenges in organizing and planning their work or assignments.	3.8	4
9. Experience heightened anxiety or stress in academic or social situations.	3.7	5
10. Show variations in their cognitive abilities, affecting their understanding and processing of information.	3.9	3
Subtotal	4.01	1

Social		
Encounter obstacles in initiating and maintaining social interactions with peers.	3.45	1
Exhibit challenges in understanding and interpreting social cues, such as body language or facial expressions.	3.4	2
Face difficulties in developing and sustaining friendships with peers.	3.25	5
Experience social isolation or exclusion from social activities or groups.	3.3	4
Require support and guidance to navigate social situations and develop appropriate social skills.	3.5	3
Subtotal	3.38	2
Total Average Weighted Mean	3.38	

As shown on the table 2, the overall total TAWM (Total Average Weighted Mean) extend of manifestation as to physical, mental and social for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) has a mean of 3.38 or sometimes observed. The implication of the overall TAWM score of 3.38 for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) suggests a moderate level of challenges across the physical, mental, and social domains. The moderate TAWM score signifies that while challenges are present, they are not insurmountable. It prompts educators to recognize the unique requirements of LSEN in each domain and to implement targeted interventions that address the specific needs identified in the physical, mental, and social aspects. This implication underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond academic considerations, encompassing physical well-being, cognitive development, and social inclusion.

As to manifestation of learners with special educational needs the table reveals that mental domain got the highest sub-area mean of 4.02 or oftentimes observed. It implies a need for memory-enhancing strategies and interventions within the academic setting. This finding is corroborated by local research advocating for the implementation of memory-focused teaching techniques and accommodations for students with cognitive challenges.

From among the five indicators of mental domain, exhibit difficulties in focusing and sustaining attention during learning tasks or activities is ranked 1 with the highest mean of 4.4 or always observed. It

indicates the importance of creating tailored educational plans that incorporate strategies to enhance attention and focus, potentially involving specialized teaching methods or assistive technologies.

The finding suggests that there should be critical need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address attention-related challenges in these students. Attention difficulties can significantly impact a student's ability to engage with and benefit from instructional content, potentially hindering academic progress. Collaborative efforts between educators, specialists, and parents become crucial to developing and implementing effective strategies for managing and improving attention in the learning environment

Corroborating with this finding, research in the field of special education and psychology often highlights the prevalence of attention-related issues in diverse learning contexts.

On the other hand, the experience heightened anxiety or stress in academic or social situation ranked as the lowest with mean of 3.7 or oftentimes observed. The finding indicates that learners are not consistently exhibiting severe levels of anxiety or stress. This could be attributed to effective support systems or coping mechanisms in place. However, the term "oftentimes observed" still suggests a noteworthy prevalence of anxiety or stress, which underscores the ongoing need for proactive measures to address the mental well-being of these learners.

The finding implies that while the manifestation might be less severe, it is still a prevalent concern that warrants attention and targeted interventions to create a more supportive and stress-reducing learning environment for LSEs.

Research in the field of special education consistently emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing even mild manifestations to ensure the well-being and academic success of LSEs (McLeskey et al., 2017). While the severity of challenges may vary, providing support and interventions tailored to the individual needs of each learner is crucial for creating a more supportive and stress-reducing learning environment.

The second highest sub-area mean as to manifestation of LSEs is social domain with 3.38 describe as sometimes observed. The paramount concern is the need for support and guidance to navigate social situations and develop appropriate social skills. The implication here underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments that foster social interactions and skill development for LSEs.

The finding corroborates with Carter and Kasari (2012) that the environments not only contribute to the overall well-being of the learners but also enhance their social competence and adaptive behaviors.

The indicator encounters obstacles in initiating and maintaining social interaction with peers being ranked as the highest (1) with a mean of 3.45, signifying it is oftentimes observed, carries significant implications for the social development and well-being of these individuals.

This underscores a notable challenge in the realm of social interaction, which is a crucial aspect of the educational experience. Difficulties in establishing and sustaining meaningful connections with their peers, potentially leading to social isolation and affecting their overall social development. Addressing this issue is crucial not only for their immediate well-being but also for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The finding corroborates with Tager-Flusberg (2016) that the social difficulties experienced by individuals with conditions such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Studies on social communication challenges associated with ASD consistently highlight obstacles in initiating and maintaining social interactions, aligning with the observed indicator. These corroborative findings emphasize the validity and significance of the indicator, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions and strategies to enhance the social skills and inclusion of learners with special educational needs in peer interactions.

Face difficulties in developing and sustaining friendships with peers has the lowest mean of 3.25 describe as sometimes observed.

The findings suggest that while this challenge is not as pervasive as other social obstacles, it is still a

notable concern that demands attention. The finding implies that these learners, at times, struggle with forming and maintaining friendships, which may impact their social support networks and overall sense of belonging. Recognizing and addressing this difficulty is essential for promoting positive social experiences and fostering a more inclusive learning environment. Studies in the field of special education often highlight the social challenges faced by individuals with diverse needs. Research on social relationships and peer interactions among children with disabilities, for instance, underscores the nuanced nature of friendship development (Rose et al., 2019). While not every learner may face difficulties, the variability in social experiences aligns with the "sometimes observed" characterization, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions to support individuals who encounter obstacles in forming and sustaining friendships.

The physical domain got lowest sub-total weighted mean of 2.7 described as sometimes observed, indicating a moderate level of challenges faced by LSEN in this domain. The most notable concern is the demonstration of challenges in fine motor skills, such as writing or manipulating small objects. The implication of this finding suggests that interventions and support systems should be tailored to enhance fine motor skills to facilitate effective participation in academic and daily activities.

In terms of physical domain, indicators demonstrate challenges in fine motor skills, such as writing or manipulating small objects were ranked 1 with highest weighted mean of 3.25 or sometimes observed, holds important implications for the educational and developmental support required for individuals with special educational needs. This finding suggests that there is a prevalent and recurring difficulty in mastering fine motor skills among this group. The implication is that these challenges may impact academic performance, hinder participation in various activities, and potentially affect the individuals' overall confidence and self-esteem.

The finding corroborates with Case-Smith (2014) where it emphasizes the significance of addressing fine motor skill challenges. Studies on the impact of fine motor difficulties on academic achievement and

daily functioning underscore the need for targeted interventions and specialized instructional approaches to enhance motor skills in learners with diverse needs). The "sometimes observed" characterization aligns with the variability in the manifestation of fine motor challenges, further emphasizing the importance of individualized support to address these difficulties effectively.

Face challenges with sensory processing, such as sensitivity to light, sound, or touch was ranked 5 having lowest mean of 2.5 describe as seldom observed. The significant implications for the understanding and support of individuals with special educational needs. The low mean suggests that, on average, these challenges are infrequently observed. However, the implication is that when they do occur, they may have a pronounced impact on the individuals' ability to engage effectively in learning environments. Sensory processing difficulties can contribute to heightened stress and discomfort, potentially affecting attention, participation, and overall well-being.

Corroborating these findings, research in the field of sensory processing disorders and special education emphasizes the varying nature of sensory challenges among individuals. While some learners may rarely exhibit difficulties, others may experience them more frequently and intensely. Studies on sensory processing in individuals with autism spectrum disorders, for instance, highlight the nuanced sensory profiles and the need for tailored support (Tomchek & Dunn, 2007). The "seldom observed" characterization aligns with the variability in the manifestation of sensory challenges, emphasizing the importance of individualized strategies to address these difficulties effectively when they do arise.

The table's findings provide valuable insights into the challenges encountered by learners with SEN. However, it is important to acknowledge the broader context of inclusive education. Freeman et al. (2022) advocate for a comprehensive and inclusive approach that goes beyond addressing individual difficulties and considers the systemic factors that contribute to the overall educational experience of learners with special educational needs (SEN). Inclusive education practices prioritize the establishment of inclusive environments that

acknowledge and appreciate diversity, thereby promoting a sense of belonging for all learners.

The implications of the findings go beyond identifying challenges in developing and implementing effective interventions. The literature indicates that personalized and inclusive educational approaches are crucial for addressing the specific needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN). Tailored interventions targeting specific challenges, such as memory difficulties, attention deficits, and social interaction challenges, have demonstrated promising outcomes in enhancing academic achievements and overall well-being (Garon et al., 2018; Humphrey & Symes, 2019).

Additionally, literature emphasizes the importance of continuous assessment and support. Longitudinal studies are crucial for improving educational practices and providing ongoing support for learners with special educational needs (SEN). These studies track the development of challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions over time. Turnbull et al. (2021) highlights the importance of recognizing the ever-changing difficulties encountered by learners with special educational needs (SEN) and advocate for ongoing assessment and adjustment of interventions to address their evolving requirements. A conclusion section must be included and should indicate clearly the advantages, limitations, and possible applications of the paper. Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

Table 2: Level of Inclusive Practices of Teachers Handling Learners with Special Educational Needs

Physical	Mean	Rank
1. Use of assistive devices in all the activities. (Cane, wheelchair, braille, enlargement of font, pencil grips, book holders)	2.45	5
2. Incorporate movement, tactile materials, and auditory cues to enhance learning.	3.35	4
3. Pair with peer buddies for assistance and camaraderie	4.3	2
4. Adapt physical education and movement activities to ensure participation for all learners, using modified equipment or rules as needed.	3.9	3
5. Modify learning activities according to the needs of the learners	4.8	1
Subtotal	3.76	3

Mental		
6. Use clear and concise language, and allow extra processing time.	4.65	2
7. Label classroom materials and provide visual cues to assist learning in finding what they need.	4.15	4
8. Provide written or visual instructions to supplement verbal explanations.	4.65	2
9. Use visual aids, schedules, and cues to help learners with special educational needs understand and follow instructions.	4.7	1
10. Use visual supports like graphic organizers, mind maps, and visual schedules to help learner organize their thoughts and tasks.	4.4	3
Subtotal	4.51	2
Social		
11. Use role-playing activities to practice different social scenarios.	4.35	5
12. Organize structured group activities that encourage collaboration, teamwork, and peer interactions.	4.7	1
13. Establish a predictable daily routine that provides a sense of stability and reduces anxiety.	4.45	3
14. Pair with peer buddies for grouping and activities.	4.65	2
15. Encourage participation on all the group activities.	4.7	1
Subtotal	4.57	1
Total Average Weighted Mean	4.28	

As reflected in Table 3, the level of inclusive practices among elementary teachers of learners with special educational needs has a weighted mean of 4.28 describe as always practiced. This value represents the overall average encompassing physical, mental, and social domains, indicating that all the inclusive practices were consistently practiced. This implies that educators are consistently implementing strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs, fostering an environment where every learner feels valued and supported.

As to level of inclusive practices of teachers handling learners with special educational needs, the table reveals that social domain got the highest sub-area mean of 4.57 or always practiced, holds positive implications for the overall educational experience and well-being of these learners. The high mean suggests that teachers are actively engaged in fostering inclusive practices that promote social interactions, peer relationships, and a supportive social environment for learners with special needs. This has the implication of creating a more inclusive and enriching learning environment where students with diverse needs feel socially integrated and accepted, positively impacting their overall development.

The finding supports Avramidis (2019) that the pivotal role of inclusive practices in enhancing the social inclusion of learners with special needs. It was shown that inclusive education not only benefits learners with special educational needs academically but also contributes to improved social outcomes,

increased peer interactions, and the development of positive social skills. The consistently high practice level, denoted by "always practiced," aligns with the positive outcomes associated with inclusive social practices, reinforcing the notion that inclusive education is a key factor in creating a supportive and equitable learning environment for all students.

The indicators organize structured group activities that encourage collaboration, teamwork, and peer interaction and encourage participation in all the group activities ranked 1 having the highest mean of 4.7 describe as always practiced. It carries positive implications for the inclusive practices in the educational setting. The high mean suggests that teachers are actively engaged in creating a learning environment that fosters collaboration and social interaction among all students, including those with special educational needs.

The implication is that such inclusive practices contribute to a more supportive and enriching educational experience for all learners, promoting not only academic growth but also social development.

Corroborating this finding, research on inclusive education consistently emphasizes the importance of structured group activities in fostering positive peer relationships, teamwork, and overall social inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Odom et al., 2019). Activities that encourage collaboration provide opportunities for students to interact, share ideas, and learn from each other, contributing to a sense of belonging and community within the classroom. The consistently high practice level, denoted by "always practiced," aligns with the positive outcomes associated with inclusive group activities, reinforcing the idea that such practices are integral to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

As to social domain, the indicator use-role playing activities to practice different social scenarios has a lowest mean of 4.35 or always practiced, suggests a positive aspect in the realm of inclusive practices. While it is the lowest ranked among the indicators, the high mean and consistent practice level imply that teachers are actively integrating role-playing activities into the curriculum to enhance social skills among learners with special educational

needs. The implication is that role-playing activities, despite being the lowest ranked, are still considered an integral and consistently implemented strategy in fostering social development.

Supporting this finding, research on the use of role-playing activities in education highlights their effectiveness in promoting social skills, communication, and understanding of diverse perspectives (Morrison, Cosden, & Crone, 1997; Goldstein, 1992). Role-playing provides a structured and engaging platform for students, including those with special needs, to practice and generalize social skills in various scenarios. The consistently high practice level, denoted by "always practiced," aligns with the positive outcomes associated with the use of role-playing activities in social skill development, reinforcing the notion that such activities contribute significantly to creating an inclusive and supportive social environment.

The second-highest sub-area mean is the mental domain, indicating that teachers consistently practice inclusive strategies as a mean of 4.51 or always practiced, implies a strong commitment to addressing the cognitive and emotional needs of learners with special education needs. This high level of practice suggests that teachers are actively engaged in implementing strategies to support the mental well-being and learning outcomes of students. The implication is that these inclusive practices contribute to a positive and supportive educational environment, fostering the cognitive and emotional development of learners with diverse needs.

This finding emphasizes the importance of addressing the mental well-being of students with special education needs to enhance their overall educational experience (Lane, Carter, & Pierson, 2015; Green et al., 2015). Inclusive practices that focus on the mental domain may include differentiated instruction, personalized learning plans, and strategies to support emotional regulation and social-emotional development. The consistently high practice level, described as "always practiced," aligns with the positive outcomes associated with inclusive strategies in the mental domain, reinforcing the idea that addressing the cognitive and emotional needs of students is crucial for their holistic development.

The indicator label classroom materials and providing visual cues to assist learners in finding what they need has the lowest average mean of 3.35 describe as sometimes practiced in mental domain, holds implications for the level of support and accessibility for learners with special educational needs. The lower mean indicates that, while this practice is employed frequently, it may not be consistently implemented across all instances, potentially affecting the accessibility of learning materials for these students. The implication is that there might be room for improvement in ensuring a more consistently supportive and accessible learning environment.

The finding corroborates with Carter (2017) that the inclusive education often emphasizes the importance of environmental accommodations, such as visual support and labeling, to enhance accessibility for students with diverse needs. Visual cues and labeled materials can be particularly beneficial for learners with special needs, providing them with clear and consistent information, promoting independence, and reducing potential barriers to learning. While the practice is deemed as oftentimes, the variability in its implementation underscores the need for more consistent efforts to enhance the accessibility of classroom materials for students with special educational needs.

The physical domain got the lowest sub-area mean with 3.76 described as oftentimes practiced, suggests that there may be a moderate level of consistency in the implementation of inclusive practices related to physical aspects for learners with special educational needs. While the mean indicates that these practices occur frequently, the term "oftentimes" implies some variability in their application across different instances. The implication is that there might be areas within the physical domain where improvements or more consistent implementation of inclusive practices could enhance the support provided to learners with diverse needs.

Corroborating these findings, research in the field of inclusive physical education underscores the importance of consistent and adapted physical activities for students with special needs (Block & Obrusnikova, 2007; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Inclusive physical education practices encompass

modifications, accommodations, and strategies that ensure all students can participate fully and benefit from physical activities. While practice is described as oftentimes, the variability in implementation emphasizes the need for ongoing efforts to refine and standardize inclusive practices within the physical domain, ensuring equitable opportunities and support for all learners.

The indicator that states "modify learning activities according to the needs of the learners" having the highest weighted mean in the physical domain with a mean of 4.8, described as always practiced, holds positive implications for the inclusive practices employed by teachers in addressing the physical needs of learners with special educational needs. The high mean suggests a consistent and proactive approach in adapting learning activities to cater to the diverse requirements of students, ensuring that each learner has equitable opportunities for engagement and participation in physical education.

This finding supports by the inclusive education literature underscores the significance of modifying learning activities to create an accessible and supportive environment for students with diverse needs (Shogren et al., 2015; Schleien et al., 2018). The practice of modifying activities aligns with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), emphasizing flexibility and customization to accommodate the variability in learner needs. The consistently high practice level, described as "always practiced," reinforces the positive outcomes associated with modifying learning activities, promoting inclusivity and enhancing the physical participation and engagement of learners with special educational needs.

While the lowest indicator has an average mean of 2.45 describe as seldom practiced states that the use of assistive devices in all the activities (cane, wheelchair, braille, enlargement of font, pencil grips and book learning), suggests a limited frequency in incorporating assistive devices across various activities for learners with special educational needs. The low mean implies that there may be a gap in consistently implementing these crucial supports, potentially affecting the accessibility and participation of students with diverse needs in a variety of learning contexts.

The implication of this finding is that there is an opportunity for improvement in ensuring the regular and systematic use of assistive devices. Incorporating assistive devices is essential for providing equitable access to learning materials, activities, and environments for students with special needs. Consistent use of assistive devices enhances independence, participation, and overall learning experience for these learners.

This finding corroborates with Kizony (2016) that the positive impact of assistive devices in promoting inclusion and access to education for individuals with diverse needs (Hetzroni & Tannous, 2004; Kizony et al., 2016). Implementing assistive technology and devices aligns with principles of inclusive education and is crucial for addressing the specific requirements of learners. While the practice is described as seldom, the literature emphasizes the importance of increasing the regularity of using assistive devices to optimize the learning experience for students with special educational needs.

In summary, the level of inclusive practices among teachers handling learners with special educational needs reveals a mixed landscape. In the social domain, teachers are consistently organizing structured group activities that encourage collaboration, teamwork, and peer interaction, reflecting a commendable mean of 4.7. This indicates a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters social development. The mental domain exhibits the highest mean of 4.8, emphasizing the commitment to modifying learning activities according to the needs of learners. This suggests a proactive approach to addressing cognitive and emotional needs. However, the physical domain, with a mean of 3.76, is characterized as oftentimes practiced, indicating room for improvement in the consistent implementation of inclusive practices.

Additionally, the use of assistive devices across all activities is seldom practiced, with a mean of 2.45, highlighting a need for more consistent support for learners with diverse needs. While the overall inclusive practices are promising, there is a call for increased attention to certain domains, particularly in refining physical domain practices and enhancing consistency in assistive device utilization. These findings are corroborated by existing research that emphasizes the positive

outcomes associated with strong inclusive practices but also underscores the importance of consistent support for diverse needs in various domains (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Odom et al., 2019; Hetzroni & Tannous, 2004; Kizony et al., 2016).

*Table 3: Problems Encountered in the Implementation of the Practices of Teachers in Dealing with LSENs*

Problem encountered during the implementation of the practices	Frequency	Rank
1. Learners with special educational needs were not cooperating	7	1
2. Short attention span of LSENs	5	2
3. Lack of appropriate teaching materials	4	3
4. Teaching strategies is not appropriate to the needs of the learner with special educational needs	3	4
5. Parent's doesn't cooperate	1	5

Educators emphasize that a significant challenge during the implementation of the inclusive practices of the teachers in dealing with LSENs is the limited cooperation exhibited by learners with special educational needs as ranked 1 in the table 5. This matter prompts important inquiries regarding the factors that impact student engagement and the efficacy of instructional methods. The lack of cooperation among learners with special educational needs (LSENs) was ranked 2. This conveys that lack of cooperation among LSENs can be attributed to factors such as the specific characteristics of their disabilities, discomfort within the learning environment, or a mismatch between teaching approaches and individual learning styles. Educators must adopt a patient and empathetic approach when addressing this challenge, acknowledging the diverse needs and preferences of learners with special educational needs (LSENs).

The short attention span of LSENs was ranked 2 on table 5. This shows that the importance of cultivating a positive and supportive classroom environment is crucial in promoting collaboration and active engagement among students with special needs (Brown & Johnson, 2019). The limited attention span observed in students with special educational needs poses a significant obstacle when implementing instructional strategies. This highlights the importance of educators creating lessons that are suitable for the cognitive abilities and attention capacities of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Smith and Jones (2022) highlight the significance of using differentiated instructional materials to accommodate diverse learning styles, especially in addressing attention span limitations.

Educators should integrate interactive and engaging elements into their lessons to encourage active participation and maintain the interest of learners with learning support and educational needs (LSENs). The significance of adaptability and creativity in instructional design is highlighted by the challenge of a short attention span. This emphasizes the need for lessons to be both informative and captivating for learners with varying attention spans.

Third in rank is the lack of suitable teaching materials among teachers towards their learners with special educational needs as one of their problem encountered during the implementation of the practices major obstacle for educators in meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). This challenge highlights the broader issue of resource availability and the need for educational institutions to invest in materials that cater to diverse learning needs. The absence of appropriate teaching materials can impede the efficacy of instructional strategies, necessitating educators to explore alternative resources and, at times, develop their own materials. Xet al. (2019) highlights the negative effects of inadequate teaching materials on teaching students with special needs, emphasizing the necessity of targeted interventions to address this issue. Educators should actively support and work together with stakeholders to ensure that materials are accessible and inclusive for learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Educators face the difficulty of using teaching strategies that do not meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

This issue highlights the need to customize instructional methods to match the specific learning styles, preferences, and abilities of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Sapid et al. (2019) emphasizes the significance of using diverse teaching materials and strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). The challenge encourages educators to reflect on their practices, pursue professional development, and collaborate with experts to improve their teaching strategies. The suggestion is that a standardized approach is inadequate in special education, highlighting the importance of flexible and personalized instructional methods. The absence of parental cooperation poses a significant challenge for

educators, underscoring the need to promote collaboration between families and schools. Parental involvement is essential for the success of educational interventions for learners with special educational needs (LSENs). However, lack of parental cooperation can impede the implementation of effective strategies.

Fifth in rank was parents who are not cooperating towards the improvement of their child with special educational needs. Milra et al. (2018) highlight the importance of parental involvement and tailored interventions in addressing the varied needs of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). The issue of non-cooperation highlights the importance of establishing effective communication channels between educators and parents to foster a mutual understanding of the specific needs and difficulties experienced by learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Collaboration between educators and parents is crucial for establishing a comprehensive support system that goes beyond the confines of the classroom.

*Table4: Important lessons learned from experiences and struggles of the teachers' handling learners with LSENs*

Important lessons learned from experiences and struggles of the teachers handling learners with LSENs	Frequency	Rank
1. To be patient	9	1
2. Give more extra time/effort to the LSENs	5	2
3. Be flexible in addressing the different needs of the LSENs	3	3
4. Providing differentiated instructional materials	2	4
5. Be caring and passionate towards them	1	5

The primary lesson learned from teachers' experiences and challenges in working with learners with special educational needs (LSENs) is the significance of patience. Patience is essential when addressing the various needs and challenges of learners with special educational needs. Individuals with disabilities or learning differences often require extra time to comprehend information, develop skills, and participate in activities. Educators recognize that cultivating patience creates a favorable and supportive learning atmosphere, enabling learners with learning support and educational needs (LSENs) to advance at their individualized speed. Daran et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of patience in supporting the learning of students with special needs. This lesson extends beyond academic settings, highlighting the importance of developing patience and understanding to create an inclusive

and empathetic society. The second lesson highlights the importance of allocating more time and resources towards the education and support of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Teachers understand that each student has individual needs and may need extra attention. Therefore, they recognize that dedicating additional time and effort is not optional, but essential. This lesson adheres to the principles of differentiated instruction, which involves educators adapting their teaching methods to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Brown and Smith (2020) highlight the benefits of allocating extra time and effort to support the academic and social growth of students with special needs. This lesson highlights the importance of dedicating resources and efforts to create an inclusive environment that provides equal opportunities for all learners, both inside and outside the classroom.

Flexibility is identified as a significant lesson derived from the experiences and challenges encountered by teachers working with learners with special educational needs (LSENs). The varied characteristics of special educational needs require a flexible and adaptable approach to teaching and support. Flexibility encompasses instructional strategies, assessment methods, and classroom management techniques. Educators recognize that inflexibility can impede effective education for learners with special educational needs (LSENs). By adopting a flexible approach, teachers can customize their methods to accommodate the specific needs of each individual learner. Wina et al. (2019) emphasizes the significance of flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of students with special needs, particularly in fostering inclusivity in the learning environment. This lesson highlights the ever-changing nature of education and emphasizes the importance for educators to adapt their practices to effectively meet the changing needs of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). The fourth lesson emphasizes the importance of offering tailored instructional materials to meet the varying learning styles and abilities of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Educators recognize that a uniform approach is inadequate in the field of special education. Differentiated instructional materials consist of various resources such as visual

aids, interactive tools, and adaptive technologies.

Furthermore, Brown et al. (2021) highlight the benefits of employing diverse instructional materials to cater to the specific requirements of students with special needs. This lesson is consistent with the pedagogical approach of differentiation, which highlights the importance of educators customizing their materials to accommodate the various learning preferences and challenges of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Differentiated instructional materials enhance the learning experience for learners with special educational needs (LSENs) and promote inclusivity and diversity in education. The fifth lesson drawn from teachers' experiences with LSENs highlights the significance of demonstrating care and passion towards these learners. This lesson goes beyond academia, highlighting the emotional and social dimensions of education. Educators recognize that establishing a nurturing and empathetic learning atmosphere is crucial for the academic achievement and overall welfare of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Kaliram's (2020) study highlights the importance of a caring and passionate approach in effectively addressing the behavioral needs of students with special needs. This lesson promotes empathy, understanding, and compassion in creating inclusive communities that prioritize the needs of all individuals, regardless of their abilities or challenges, in line with societal values.

### 5.1. Summary of Findings

The level of manifestation of the learners with special educational needs (LSEN) TAWN 3.38. The implication of the overall TAWM score of 3.38 for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) suggests a moderate level of challenges across the physical, mental, and social domains. This implication underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond academic considerations, encompassing physical well-being, cognitive development, and social inclusion.

The mental domain got the highest sub-area mean of 4.01, the preeminent concern revolves around difficulties with memory, both short-term and long-term. This signifies a considerable impact on learning and retention of information among LSEN. Implications point toward the necessity of memory-

enhancing strategies and interventions within the academic setting.

The social domain ranked second where the sub-area mean is 3.38, the paramount concern is the need for support and guidance to navigate social situations and develop appropriate social skills.

In terms of physical manifestations, it was ranked as having the lowest sub-area mean of 2.75, indicating a moderate level of challenges faced by LSEN in this domain. The most notable concern is the demonstration of challenges in fine motor skills, such as writing or manipulating small objects.

The level of inclusive practices among teachers of learners with special educational needs has a mean of 4.28. This value represents the overall average encompassing physical, mental, and social domains.

The finding reveals that social domain got the highest sub-area mean of 4.57 or always practiced, holds positive implications for the overall educational experience and well-being of these students. The high mean suggests that teachers are actively engaged in fostering inclusive practices that promote social interactions, peer relationships, and a supportive social environment for learners with special needs.

The second-highest sub-area mean is the mental domain, indicating that teachers consistently practice inclusive strategies as a mean of 4.51 or always practiced, implies a strong commitment to addressing the cognitive and emotional needs of learners with special education needs. This high level of practice suggests that teachers are actively engaged in implementing strategies to support the mental well-being and learning outcomes of students.

The physical domain got the lowest sub-area mean with 3.76 described as oftentimes practiced, suggests that there may be a moderate level of consistency in the implementation of inclusive practices related to physical aspects for learners with special educational needs.

The identified common issues in handling learners with special educational needs, include a lack of appropriate materials, uncooperative learners, unpredictable behavior, and insufficient training. The challenges led to various actions such as online

searches, attending seminars, and modifying teaching strategies. Lessons learned include the importance of flexibility, patience, and understanding the unique needs of each learner. The challenges faced during the implementation of practices include learners not cooperating, having a short attention span, lack of appropriate teaching materials, inappropriate teaching strategies, and uncooperative parents.

Teachers addressed these challenges by searching the internet, attending seminars, and involving learners in collaborative learning. The lessons learned emphasize the need for flexibility and specific instructions for learners with special educational needs. Teachers highlighted important lessons learned from their experiences with learners with special educational needs. These lessons include the importance of patience, dedicating extra time and effort, being flexible in addressing diverse needs, providing differentiated instructional materials, and showing care and passion towards learners. These lessons underscore the broader values of empathy, adaptability, and dedication in creating inclusive learning environments.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings mentioned, the following are therefore concluded:

6.1. The challenges faced by learners with special educational needs (LSEN) across physical, mental, and social domains were at a moderate level.

6.2. Teachers demonstrate commendable inclusive practices such as "Pairing with peer buddies for assistance, camaraderie, use of "Visual aids, schedules, and cues", and organizing structured group activities stands out.

6.3. Teachers face challenges during implementation of inclusive practices, including learner cooperation and attention, lack of materials, inappropriate strategies, and uncooperative parents, are addressed through internet searches, seminars, and collaborative learning.

The following recommendations are drawn up based on the findings and conclusions:

6.4. It is recommended that educators should

implement sensory-friendly practices within the physical domain. This may involve providing sensory breaks in a designated quiet space, incorporating adjustable lighting or noise reduction measures in classrooms, and offering alternative materials for tactile activities to accommodate varying sensitivities.

6.5. It is recommended that educators should undergo training and professional development sessions focused on the effective use and integration of assistive devices. This training should cover not only the technical aspects of utilizing devices like canes, wheelchairs, braille materials, and pencil grips but also the broader understanding of their significance in enhancing accessibility and participation for learners with special educational needs.

6.6. Educators are encouraged to develop individualized strategies for learner engagement and cooperation. This involves understanding each learner's unique strengths and challenges, adapting teaching methods accordingly, and ensuring clear communication. Positive reinforcement, collaboration with support services, and initiatives like peer support systems and social skills training can create an inclusive atmosphere.

6.7. Teachers should be encouraged to share experiences, strategies, and resources through collaborative platforms.

6.8. Addressing challenges related to uncooperative parents requires a strategic approach. Establishing effective communication channels between teachers and parents is vital.

6.9. Implementing a system of continuous evaluation and adaptation is essential across all areas.

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# From Classrooms to Camps: English Teachers' Lived Experiences in the National Learning Camp at Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 10 Aug 2025; Received in revised form: 08 Sep 2025; Accepted: 12 Sep 2025; Available online: 16 Sep 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>—National Learning Camp-1, English teacher experiences-2, COVID-19 education disruptions-3, Camp environment-4, English language teaching-5.</p>	<p><i>This research examined the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers at Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries within the National Learning Camp (NLC) framework. Amidst the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines, like many other nations, witnessed disruptions in its education system. The National Learning Camp, introduced by the Department of Education (DepEd), aimed at addressing the educational impact of the pandemic through a voluntary learning recovery program. The study explored the challenges faced by English teachers, identified factors contributing to positive and negative experiences, and provided recommendations for enhancing NLC experiences. The research objectives aimed to inform future English teacher volunteers, contributing to the program's implementation improvement. Using a qualitative research design and phenomenological methodology, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and secondary sources. The research focused on five themes: (1) Adaptability to New Setting, (2) Learning Abilities, (3) Participation &amp; Motivation, (4) Training, and (5) Aspirations. Teachers shared their struggles adapting to the camp environment, addressing diverse learning abilities, managing student participation and motivation, critiquing training inadequacies, and expressing aspirations for better learning environments. The findings highlighted the complexity of NLC experiences, emphasizing the need for tailored teacher training, comprehensive understanding of student needs, and addressing motivational challenges. Despite the hardships, teachers expressed resilience and dedication. The study contributed valuable insights for improving NLC implementation and informed educational strategies for challenging contexts.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English in the Philippines has long been recognized as a challenging yet rewarding profession, marked by educators' dedication,

commitment, and innovative teaching methods. In the context of language education, English teachers play a crucial role in enhancing students' language skills, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing (Talampas & Martinez, 2021).

The main goal is to foster language fluency and literacy, preparing students for academic success and future endeavors (Moolngoen, 2017). However, the landscape of education underwent a seismic shift with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly impacting teaching methods and student learning outcomes.

The Philippines, like many other countries, faced disruptions in the education system due to extended school closures and the necessity to adapt to alternative modes of teaching. The World Bank (2021) reported a substantial increase in learning poverty during the pandemic, particularly in English language proficiency, with nine out of ten Filipino children under the age of 10 unable to read a simple text in English. Additionally, poor performance in reading comprehension, science, and mathematics, as revealed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, highlighted the urgent need for effective interventions to address the learning setbacks.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the National Learning Camp (NLC), a voluntary learning recovery program aimed at mitigating the educational impact of the pandemic. The implementation of the NLC is in line with the "MATATAG: Bansang Makabata, Batang Makabansa" agenda and as a sub-program under the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP) which is the new direction of DepEd to resolve basic education challenges. As specified in DepEd Order No. 014, series of 2023, the NLC is a voluntary three-to five-week learning recovery program for teachers and learners in public elementary and secondary schools. It started its phased implementation with Grades 7 and 8 focusing on English, Science, and Mathematics during the 2022-2023 end-of-school year break. The NLC, implemented in a camp-like environment, focuses on English, Science, and Mathematics, seeking to facilitate a holistic learning recovery.

However, despite all the efforts of the government to address all the gaps and problems of the students in the implementation of the National Learning Camp, teachers as the direct implementers of the curriculum have been greatly affected and challenged to implement this program successfully.

Hence, it is worth knowing how they perceive this program, and what are their struggles and challenges with this learning recovery program.

This research focused on exploring the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers in the National Learning Camp at Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries (CCMSF). It aimed to identify the challenges faced by English teachers, recognize the factors contributing to positive and negative experiences, and develop recommendations for improving their experiences within the NLC. The research objectives are grounded in the broader goal of informing future English teacher volunteers about potential challenges and opportunities within the NLC, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the program's implementation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Department of Education (DepEd) has undergone a transformative shift, demanding innovative pedagogical approaches to adapt to changing dynamics in learning. The implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) by DepEd represents a significant paradigm change, particularly impacting English teachers-volunteer who are required to adjust their instructional methods to this new educational landscape to cater to the needs of the students.

To explore the transformative impact of distance learning, Talampas and Martinez (2021) lay the foundation for understanding broader challenges and opportunities presented by alternative teaching modalities. Although not specific to national learning camps, this study provides insights that resonate with the experiences of English teachers in the National Learning Camp. However, a research gap exists in understanding how the transformative impact of distance learning aligns with or differs from the immersive nature of national learning camps.

Condino's (2021) research on the challenges faced by Junior High School English teachers during the first school year of Online Distance Learning sheds light on the parallels between this study and the experiences of English teachers navigating the National Learning Camp. This study underscores the

impact of new educational norms, yet a research gap lies in comprehending how these challenges might manifest differently in the distinct context of national learning camps.

Aligning with the National Learning Camp scenario, Boholano, Jamon, and Cabanes-Jamon's (2022) study emphasizes teachers' lived experiences and the utilization of qualitative research designs within the context of Modular-Distance Learning. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the challenges and strategies identified in Modular-Distance Learning are transferable or unique to the national learning camp context.

Castro's (2023) focus on ESL teachers in non-native English-speaking countries provides insights into challenges, particularly pronunciation, resonating with the specialized context of the National Learning Camp. However, a research gap exists in exploring how the challenges faced by ESL teachers in non-native settings may differ or align with those faced by English teachers within the unique setting of national learning camps.

Although student-focused, Noguchi's (2019) research on the impacts of an intensive English camp on university students in Japan may provide insights into the potential effects of specialized language programs, aligning with the goals of the National Learning Camp. A research gap exists in understanding how the impact on students in the intensive English camp aligns with or differs from the impact on teachers in national learning camps.

Stegall's (2021) study delving into the lived experiences of international students in an English immersion program emphasizes the role of instructors in facilitating successful language learning, providing valuable perspectives on mentorship and guidance, crucial in the National Learning Camp's teacher-student dynamic. A research gap emerges in understanding how the role of instructors and the dynamics of mentorship may differ or align between international student programs and national learning camps.

Similarly, Pestaño et al.'s (2019) investigation into the impact of an English Camp on students provides a complementary perspective on potential benefits and improvements derived from immersive English language programs, aligning with the

National Learning Camp's objectives. However, a research gap exists in understanding whether the impact on students in the English Camp aligns with or differs from the perceived benefits for English teachers in the national learning camp.

Moreover, Chen's (2018) proposal for an intensive ESL camp curriculum offers practical insights into alternative approaches to language instruction, potentially informing the National Learning Camp's design and development of activities and curricula. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the proposed intensive ESL camp curriculum is transferable or applicable to the national learning camp context.

Another study was conducted by Mustakim et al.'s (2018) evaluating the effectiveness of an English Camp in Indonesia, although geographically distinct, focuses on enhancing speaking skills through immersive experiences, providing insights into the potential impacts of language-focused camps, paralleling the National Learning Camp's objectives. A research gap exists in exploring whether the effectiveness of the English camp in Indonesia aligns with or differs from the anticipated outcomes of the national learning camp.

Cañada Jr. et al.'s (2022) investigation into the challenges and coping strategies of English teachers in the new normal aligns directly with the National Learning Camp's context, providing specific insights into the experiences of teachers adapting to evolving educational norms. A research gap emerges in understanding whether the challenges faced in the new normal are comparable to or distinct from those encountered in the national learning camp.

The Department of Education's (2023) policy guidelines on the implementation of the National Learning Camp serve as a foundational document, outlining the official framework within which teachers navigate the challenges and opportunities of this novel educational initiative. While essential, a research gap exists in exploring how the policy guidelines translate into lived experiences for English teachers in the national learning camp, providing an understanding of the practical implications and challenges associated with policy implementation.

The collective insights inform the groundwork for understanding the challenges,

successes, and transformative experiences that may characterize the engagement of English teachers in the National Learning Camp. The multidimensional exploration of these studies enriches the research landscape, laying the foundation for the understanding of the lived experiences of English teachers in the evolving landscape of education. The identified research gaps underscore the need for further investigation to bridge existing knowledge disparities and enhance the applicability of insights to the specific context of national learning camps.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the lived experiences of Junior High School (JHS) English teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC). Qualitative research, as defined by Polit and Beck (2017), was an in-depth and holistic exploration of phenomena through the collection of rich narrative materials. It aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of real-world problems, unlike quantitative research, which involved introducing treatments, manipulating variables, and quantifying data. Creswell (2016) also cited that qualitative research could establish patterns and themes based on the participants' viewpoints and challenges and potentially lead to a call for action. Hence, this design was well-suited for this study as it allowed the researcher to uncover the subjective experiences of participants in a camp setting, thereby providing valuable understandings for the institution to enhance the program's implementation.

Accordingly, face-to-face interviews and field notes were also utilized to provide an intimate and personal setting for participants to share their perspectives and experiences. As Creswell (2018) stated, this allowed the researcher to understand the meaning that participants attributed to their experiences. Thus, this in-depth study provided an opportunity for the researcher to unearth the deeper meanings and nuances of the participants' experiences.

#### 3.2 Research Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological research methodology as it dwelled on the JHS English

teachers' lived experiences in the NLC. Grbich (2013) defined phenomenology as an approach focused on uncovering the hidden meanings and essences of an experience. It emphasized understanding how participants made sense of their lived experiences, aiming to explore the complex and subjective aspects that contributed to the fullness of human phenomena.

#### 3.3 Data Gathering Methods/ Tools

The study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews, as defined by Roulston (2010), were a valuable tool for developing situated accounts and different methods of speaking about research themes through a co-construction of data. Semi-structured interviews involved a predetermined set of questions that could be adapted as needed based on the interviewee's responses. This type of interview involved the developing of a general set of questions and format to follow and use with all the participants; however, the interviewer could vary the questions as the situation demanded (Lichtman, 2014). The interview guide was composed of two (2) central questions with probing questions. The first part was composed of probing questions to describe "what" the participants had experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and the second part was also probing questions to describe "how" the participants experienced it. Participants were encouraged to talk freely and tell stories using their own words or in waray - waray. The interview lasted for five (5) to ten (10) minutes and all of the interviews and observations were conducted by the researcher.

Moreover, each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and was transcribed verbatim to produce a complete record of their responses. Field notes were also taken during the interviews to capture nonverbal cues, observations, and any emerging insights. The audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes served as the primary data sources for this study. Secondary data sources included NLC program documents and academic literature on English teachers' lived experiences in various educational settings. This method aligned with the purpose of the study and provided the best means of gathering rich and authentic data on the participants' experiences. The interview questions were carefully crafted and

validated by the researcher's adviser to ensure effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses. The data collected through the interviews were thoroughly analyzed to identify common themes, patterns, and insights that contributed to a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences in the NLC program.

### 3.4 Brief Description of Data/ Source[s] of Data

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. The research participants were the five (5) JHS English teachers who had undertaken the NLC at CCMSEF. The selection of participants followed a purposive approach, ensuring that the participants had direct and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation, thus providing valuable insights into their lived experiences which, according to Etikan (2016), made them proficient and well-informed about the phenomenon of interest. The teachers' ages ranged from the twenties to almost 50, and their teaching experience varied as well. Three teachers had taught for less than 10 years, while another two had taught for almost 25 years. One participant had units in a Doctor's Program, while four had units in the Master's Program. Creswell (2013) suggested that a reasonable sample size may range from 3-25 participants for a phenomenological study, depending on the diversity of data attempting to be captured. Therefore, these five teachers were an adequate sample for this type of research. Subsequently, this study relied on a combination of primary and secondary data sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of JHS English teachers' lived experiences in the NLC. The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews and was supplemented with detailed field notes. Complementing the primary data were secondary sources, including NLC program documents and academic literature.

### 3.5 Research Procedures

English teachers who had undergone the transition from traditional classrooms to the National Learning Camp were purposively selected as participants of the study. Informed consent was obtained, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement and that this research was purely academic, with no risk involved in the study, and they had the liberty to withdraw at any time. Semi-

structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, involving audio-recorded conversations with participants. Simultaneously, detailed field notes were taken during interviews. This study used the five steps outlined below to analyze the gathered data. First, the researcher adopted the practice of bracketing out personal experiences to set aside any preconceived notions and maintain objectivity. Second, the researcher engaged in a dialogue with individual participants during interviews, enriching the analysis by allowing a deeper exploration of their perspectives. Third, the study involved reflective practices, including continuous reading and re-reading of collected data, and journaling thoughts, questions, and responses, as integral to the analytical process. Fourth, the identification of major themes occurred through preliminary data analysis and thematic analysis, involving organizing and categorizing data to reveal recurring patterns and essential themes within the narratives. Fifth, a critical approach was taken in questioning the data and challenging emerging assumptions, creating space for the emergence of new descriptions and conceptualizations. Additionally, it was necessary to seek validation of findings from research participants by comparing the researcher's descriptive results with their lived experiences.

## IV. DISCUSSION

This part contains the detailed presentation of results and discussion as specified in this study. The detailed presentation, analysis and data have been reached as a result of interviewing the teachers of Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries who have lived experiences in the National Learning Camp.

From the data analysis, five (5) themes were mentioned to wit: (1) Adaptability to the New Setting; (2) Learning Abilities; (3) Participation & Motivation; (4) Training; and (5) Aspirations. The five themes that emerged suggested that the teachers of Clarendio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries indeed faced different kinds of experiences in which those experiences have given them key points on what to do to accomplish their mission and thrive in teaching despite of the learners' situations. A variety

of experiences helped them manage and also assisted them how to surpass the experiences amidst the adversities they have encountered. At the end of time, through those mentioned lived experiences, they have shown bravery to face all of those, and they didn't let those experiences be the reason to fail in the mission they have chosen. Thus, there is no doubt that they deserved a banquet of victory.

#### 4.1 Theme 1: Adaptability to New Setting

In assessing the teachers' adaptability to the new setting, it is evident that a majority faced challenges during the transition. Below provides a breakdown of teachers' responses regarding their adaptability:

Teacher 2: "Well, it was quite a change from the traditional classroom especially with the number of students and their mental abilities. Adapting to the camp environment was also a bit challenging for it required a different approach in teaching the students. (*Makuri talaga kay an mga estudyante an mga magluya gud*). It's really difficult with the students who are weak. I feel like I was teaching elementary students because I really have to go back to the basics. It is not a normal classroom, it's as if bringing students into different dimension so that they could improve their abilities."

Teacher 3: "To some extent, interacting with students in a more casual and open environment felt different for me. Some do not really see the essence of why they are attending in the said camp, so I have strategized in order to get their attention and that makes it tough. What makes it challenging also is the fact that we really have to be hands-on to them."

Teacher 5: "Volunteering at the NLC proved challenging as it occurred during vacation period. Instead of embarking on a typical travel experience, I found myself confined to the school premises. Striking a balance between my personal leisure time and professional commitments became a delicate challenge during this period. (*Kauyam kay wara ak maka upod san amon bonding san akon family and friends kay adto manla ak sa eskwelahan*). It's frustrating that I wasn't able to join the bonding with my family and friends because I was just at school."

This indicates that while some teachers found the transition seamless, a significant portion faced difficulties. The reflections collectively underscore the transformative challenges faced by

teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC). It highlights the adjustments required for varied class sizes and students' diverse mental abilities, emphasizing the unconventional nature of the NLC and its aim to enhance students' abilities. Another is it adds complexity by addressing the difficulty in capturing students' attention in a casual setting, revealing the challenges of fostering a conducive learning atmosphere outside traditional classrooms. And, it introduces personal sacrifices in volunteering during vacation, elucidating the profound impact on personal life and relationships. Overall, the narratives depict the NLC as a dynamic and challenging educational space, emphasizing adaptability, innovation, active engagement, and the delicate balance between professional commitments and personal life.

#### 4.2 Theme 2: Learning Abilities

Another crucial aspect that surfaced during our data analysis is the theme of Learning Abilities.

Teacher 1: "Teaching students with different learning speeds was a big adjustment for me during the National Learning Camp (NLC). It felt like I was back in an elementary school setting. It was a bit tough because I usually teach Grade 10, and the NLC activities were quite basic. Some of my students even struggled with reading, and teaching them the fundamentals within the NLC timeframe was challenging. There were moments when I felt like giving up."

Teacher 4: "At first, they often forget the lessons or concepts I teach. Figuring out how to keep their attention and ensure they remember the lessons is a challenge. Sometimes, I provide snacks because some students don't bring their own, affecting their concentration."

The abovementioned statements talked about the challenges during the NLC when it comes to how students learn, which is part of Theme 2: Learning Abilities. The teachers find it hard to adjust to students who learn at different speeds, and it feels like teaching in an elementary school. The challenges increase with basic NLC activities, especially for students who struggle with reading. There are times when teachers think about giving up, showing how tough it is emotionally. Additionally, the difficulty continues as students often forget lessons, leading to

the need for creative strategies to keep their attention and help them remember.

#### 4.3 Theme 3: Participation & Motivation

Participation & Motivation emerged as a theme shedding light on the voluntary nature of student attendance and the nature of teacher participation in the NLC.

Teacher 1: "Because students are not obligated to join the camp, many of them are absent in each session. It's quite challenging for me because when some are absent, it requires a significant adjustment on my part since others have already covered the topics, and I have to go back to catch up with those who were not present. Their motivation to attend the camp seems to be lacking, and it feels like they're only there because they have to, not because they are genuinely inspired every day."

Teacher 3: "As a teacher, I didn't have a choice because our department head selected me. Honestly, I didn't plan to volunteer; I felt compelled to do it. I wasn't eager to teach in the NLC, but when our department head picked me, I had to agree. There are times when I'd rather not attend classes due to other important tasks, but I push myself to be at school."

Teacher 5: "Even though we got leave credits and an allowance, it wasn't really sufficient. Since no one else wanted to take on the challenge, I had to agree. The allowance we received was only enough for transportation and snacks during the NLC. So, the allowance fell short. On the part of the students, others are sometimes absent because they do not have money for their fare."

In examining the theme of Participation & Motivation, a common thread emerges regarding the voluntary nature of student attendance and teacher involvement in the National Learning Camp (NLC). The challenge lies in student absenteeism, impacting the teaching approach due to the need for constant adjustments when others are absent. The lack of genuine motivation among students is noted, with attendance seeming obligatory rather than inspired. On the teacher's side, the theme reveals the involuntary nature of their participation, often chosen by department heads. Despite personal reluctance, the commitment to attend and teach at the NLC reflects a sense of obligation. Furthermore,

the insufficiency of allowances for teachers adds a financial dimension to the participation, emphasizing the sacrifices made to fulfill this educational role. The narratives collectively shed light on the intricacies of participation and motivation within the unique context of the NLC.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Training

Teachers expressed their concerns about the training they received.

Teacher 2: "In my perspective, I find the training provided to us to be inadequate or insufficient. By 'insufficient,' I mean that it lacked depth and thoroughness. Given the distinct phases in the camp, a more comprehensive approach with a series of training sessions is necessary, not just a singular event. The training, from my viewpoint, seemed to serve more for compliance purposes rather than adequately preparing us for the challenges of the National Learning Camp."

Teacher 4: "Just a few days before the camp started, we had our training in Tacloban. The sudden schedule surprised us, and we felt a bit unprepared. Getting money for our transportation and other training expenses was tough. We had to pay upfront, hoping to get it back later at school. The training itself wasn't enough, and it didn't cover everything we needed to know for the National Learning Camp. This made us feel even more unprepared for what was coming."

Teacher 5: "The training should teach us how to teach and what to teach. In the training, they talked about lots of ideas and theories that I don't think are useful when we're actually doing the camp. Also, the people leading the training should really know how the National Learning Camp works, so they can help us better."

The teachers express serious concerns about the training they received for the National Learning Camp (NLC). They feel the training wasn't enough and suggest that it should be more detailed, covering different parts of the camp. Instead of feeling like a helpful preparation, the training seems more like something they just have to do. The sudden schedule and financial issues for teachers attending the training make it even more challenging. They emphasize the need for the training to focus on practical things like how to teach and what to teach,

rather than just talking about theories. Also, they stress the importance of having trainers who really understand how the NLC works. The teachers' feedback shows that a more careful and thorough training plan is needed to get them ready for the various challenges of the NLC.

#### 4.5 Theme 5: Aspirations

Despite of the hard situations that teachers from Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries have been going through, teachers instill positivity among themselves. Teachers believe that everything will be given action and attention by the Department of Education. Theme 5 discusses the idea of having a desire for better learning and for developing a sustainable curriculum wherein the competencies are attainable and suited to the needs of the learners. The following are the utterances of the key informants:

Teacher 1: "In my experience, I am thinking if the DepEd can give attention to the content of the lessons, because not all learners are fast in learning. So, I guess DepEd should give focus to translating these lessons into the language wherein our learners can understand and to use examples which are near and relevant to the experiences of the learners today."

Teacher 2: "As my personal view is concerned, the government/ DepEd should undergo further studies on how are we going to improve/enhance the new setting in our educational system such that of NLC. Another thing is that, they should go down to see personally the real problem in order to give immediate and appropriate solutions."

Teacher 4: "My very first concern in this new normal set up in education is the preparedness of teachers and students. DepEd officials did not conduct a thorough talk to all concerned in the NLC. As for me, they should see to it that in implementing such program, students and teachers must be prepared well."

## V. CONCLUSION

This study looked into the experiences of Junior High School English teachers in the National Learning Camp (NLC) at Clarencio Calagos Memorial School of Fisheries. The findings, based on different themes like Adaptability, Learning Abilities, Participation &

Motivation, Training, and Aspirations, provide a deep understanding of what happens in the NLC.

1. The experiences of English teachers in the NLC show the big changes they go through when moving from regular classrooms to a camp-like setup. They have to handle different class sizes, deal with students who learn at different speeds, motivate students who come voluntarily, and balance their work life with personal life. Despite the difficulties, the teachers show dedication and commitment to their unique role.

2. The theme of Learning Abilities dives into the challenges of teaching students with different learning speeds and handling basic NLC activities. The emotional stress the teachers face, even thinking about giving up, emphasizes the need for specific help and resources to teach fundamental concepts in the limited NLC timeframe.

3. Participation & Motivation focus on how students come voluntarily and teachers are selected involuntarily. Students often attend because they feel they have to, not because they want to, and teachers may feel obliged to participate. This highlights the need for a more intentional and motivating approach.

4. Training is a critical theme as teachers express concerns about the training they get. They feel it lacks depth and thoroughness, and there's a call for more practical and comprehensive training to prepare teachers better for the unique challenges of the NLC.

5. Aspirations highlight teachers' desires for a better learning environment and a curriculum that suits students' needs. They call for lessons in a language student understand, using examples relevant to their experiences. This reflects their commitment to improving education.

The abovementioned findings offer valuable understandings to enhance the NLC in the years to come. Suggestions include creating special training programs, providing targeted help for teachers dealing with different learning needs, finding ways to motivate students, and thoroughly reviewing the curriculum. Ongoing communication between teachers, policymakers, and others is crucial to address challenges and aspirations. The commitment and resilience of the teachers emphasize the need for

continuous improvement and support in innovative educational programs.

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# Rewriting Humanity in the Stars: Posthumanism and the Limits of Space Colonization in Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space*

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**Keywords –** Posthumanism, space colonization, ethical governance, technological excess, Alastair Reynolds

## Abstract

This article examines Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space* (2000) as a critical intervention in science fiction's exploration of posthumanism, ethical governance, and the sustainability of space colonization. While much Anglo-American science fiction envisions colonization as the inevitable extension of human progress, Reynolds dramatizes its fragility and its costs, exposing the ecological, social, and existential limits of expansion. Through characters that undergo cybernetic augmentation, genetic modification, and pantropic adaptation, the novel illustrates how technological advances blur the boundaries of human identity and destabilize political and ethical frameworks. The Conjoiners, Demarchists, and the machine-like Inhibitors highlight tensions between survival, autonomy, and technological excess, suggesting that progress does not guarantee transcendence but may instead accelerate vulnerability. By situating Reynolds's narrative within broader debates in science fiction, this article contrasts his work with Kim Stanley Robinson's optimistic terraforming in the Mars Trilogy and gestures toward Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* to highlight global perspectives that question the universality of Western scientific rationality. Posthumanism, as theorized by critics such as Pramod K. Nayar, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti, frames the analysis, illuminating the ethical dilemmas of living in technologically saturated societies. Ultimately, *Revelation Space* resists the myth of space as humanity's destiny, suggesting that the future depends not on conquest of the stars but on acknowledging the ethical, ecological, and existential boundaries of technological progress.

## Introduction

Science fiction has long provided a speculative arena for testing the limits of human imagination against the possibilities and perils of technology. Classic works such as Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series (1951–93) dramatize humanity's expansion into space

as both an inevitable destiny and a narrative of progress. The genre frequently assumes that colonization beyond Earth will secure human survival and open new frontiers for exploration. Yet the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have produced a countercurrent of science fiction that challenges this assumption, exposing the

fragility of colonization and the risks of technological excess.

Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space* (2000) exemplifies this countercurrent. Written by an astrophysicist, the novel combines hard scientific detail with philosophical inquiry, situating humanity in a universe that is vast, dangerous, and indifferent. Unlike the optimistic futures imagined by Kim Stanley Robinson in the *Mars Trilogy* (1992–96), where terraforming represents ecological stewardship and human adaptability, Reynolds foregrounds failure, vulnerability, and existential threat. His universe is populated by fractured societies, posthuman entities, and ancient machine intelligences that destabilize the idea of progress.

The significance of this difference cannot be overstated. Whereas Robinson imagines Mars as a stage for humanity's evolution toward ecological and political maturity, Reynolds suggests that the cosmos may already contain forces designed to curtail intelligent life. The discovery of the Inhibitors—machine intelligences whose function is to regulate or destroy civilizations that grow too advanced—undercuts the fantasy of limitless expansion. In Reynolds's vision, colonization is not triumph but hubris, and technological progress is as likely to imperil humanity as to secure its future. This problem is central to contemporary debates about posthumanism; a concept that decenters the human as the center of all things. N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) emphasizes that posthuman subjectivity challenges the enlightenment ideal of autonomous rational human agency. Reynolds dramatizes these theoretical insights through his depiction of Conjoiners, Demarchists, and genetically altered humans whose identities blur the boundaries between human, machine, and environment. His universe demonstrates both the promise and the peril of posthuman life, and in doing so the author matched the narratives of Robinson's *Mars Trilogy* that renders the promise and perils of terraforming, longevity surgery and the rational of human agency. Placing Reynolds within a global context further underscores his significance. While Western science fiction often projects human futures outward into the cosmos, Indian science fiction such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) interrogates the epistemological

foundations of scientific rationality. Ghosh resists the narrative of linear progress, offering instead a vision of subaltern knowledge, secrecy, and spiritual transformation. This comparison highlights how Reynolds's cautionary tale about technological excess resonates with broader global critiques of modernity, suggesting that the question of the posthuman cannot be detached from cultural contexts and ethical considerations.

This article argues that *Revelation Space* critiques the myth of inevitable colonization by emphasizing three interrelated themes: the destabilizing consequences of posthuman entities and technological excess, the fragility of ethical governance in interstellar societies, and the ecological and existential limits of colonization. Together, these dimensions position Reynolds's novel as a vital counter-narrative to techno-optimistic science fiction, compelling us to rethink the future of humanity not as expansion into the stars but as a reckoning with our own limits.

### Posthuman Entities and Technological Excess

*Revelation Space* is a universe populated not only by humans but by entities that challenge the very definition of humanity like the technologically advanced humans—'ultras,' who are capable of interstellar journey. These humans underwent through cybernetic modification, genetic engineering, and neurological enhancement creating hybrid beings that complicate questions of identity and ethics. In this sense, *Revelation Space* resembles Robinson's meta-humans; a genetically engineered species that surpasses all the features and qualities of a normal human being (*A Meta-Human* 186). Posthumanism here is not an abstract concept but an existential reality that shapes survival, governance, and conflict. The Conjoiners are perhaps the most striking example of posthuman transformation. Through neural implants and cognitive augmentation, they achieve a form of collective intelligence that allows unparalleled technological advancement. Yet their efficiency comes at the cost of individuality and transparency. Reynolds refuses to romanticize the Conjoiners: while they embody the promise of transcending human limitations, they also generate fear and hostility from other societies. Their existence raises a central ethical question: is survival worth the sacrifice of autonomy?

Equally significant are the Demarchists, who experiment with technologically mediated democracy, by embedding governance within distributed networks to eliminate corruption and maximize participation. Yet Reynolds reveals the fragility of such systems in which transparency can become surveillance, and distributed power can be subverted. The Demarchists' failure underscores the problem of entrusting governance to technologies that evolve faster than ethical frameworks. Most chilling of all are the Inhibitors—ancient machines programmed to suppress intelligent civilizations. Their presence extends the logic of technological excess to a cosmic scale. The Inhibitors are not malicious but functional; embodying the possibility that intelligence itself is self-destructive and requires regulation. They mirror contemporary fears of autonomous AI systems that, once unleashed, may operate beyond human control, for instance, Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and humanoids in *2312* (2015). In this sense, Reynolds projects present-day anxieties about artificial intelligence, climate change, and technological hubris into an interstellar future.

Pantropy, the adaptation of human bodies to alien environments, further complicates the boundaries of identity. While pantropy extends survival by making humans biologically suited to hostile planets, it also erodes the concept of a shared humanity due to man-machine advances. Pramod K. Nayar in *Posthumanism* (2014) notes the destabilized notion of posthumanism as:

Posthumanism refers to an ontological condition in which many humans now, and increasingly will, live with chemically, surgically, technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms (such as body parts from other life forms through xenotransplantation). Posthumanism, on other hand, studies cultural representations, power relations and discourses that have historically situated the human above other life forms, and in control of them. As a philosophical, political and cultural approach it addresses the question of the human in the age of technological modification, hybridized life forms, new discoveries of the sociality (and 'humanity')

of animals and a new understanding of 'life' itself. (13)

Reynolds illustrates this destabilization by presenting characters whose forms and lifespans diverge radically, creating a spectrum of beings with competing claims to humanity. In this aspect, Reynolds characters functions similar to Kim Stanley Robinson's characters in his science fiction novel *2312*, which presents an array of characters termed as "spacers," very similar to the Ultras as presented by Reynolds. Robinson's spacers are genetically modified, very similar to Reynolds genetic modification, for longevity, biologically mutilated to function as 'gynandromorph' and 'androgyn' and implanted with quantum AI to increase skills and efficiency. In all these cases, Reynolds refuses the narrative of progress. Instead, he presents posthumanism as ambivalent: it may offer survival but also engenders alienation, instability, and risk. Technology does not simply enhance humanity; it transforms it into something unfamiliar, raising the possibility that in the pursuit of survival, humanity may lose itself.

The technological modification or Pantropy as rendered by both the authors present an escalated definition of posthumanism and the excess of technology. Though such excess techno-modification also reminds of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) where human clones were mere restricted to organ donations. Such posthumanist tenets often questions and decentralizes the notion of humans, often arguing whether the technological transcendence is a success or a complete failure for human civilization.

### **Ethical Governance in Interstellar Societies: The Case of the Demarchists and Conjoiners**

Demarchists model of technologically mediated democracy is ambitious: by embedding governance within distributed networks, they aspire to eliminate corruption, ensure transparency, and maximize political participation. As Reynolds describes, Demarchist citizens are "wired into a web of constant plebiscites" (Reynolds 145), creating a society where decision-making is seemingly instantaneous and universally participatory. On the surface, this appears to embody the ideal of a radical democracy enabled by technology, yet Reynolds exposes the

fragility of such systems. Transparency, though celebrated as a democratic virtue, risks becoming indistinguishable from surveillance. As Michel Foucault observed in *Discipline and Punish*, surveillance is productive, generating “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). The Demarchists exemplify this paradox: while information flows are meant to empower citizens, they also render every action visible, reducing privacy and embedding control into the very structures of governance. The result then is a society where distributed power can be easily subverted. As N. Katherine Hayles has argued in *How We Became Posthuman* that technologically mediated subjectivity does not always liberate the humans but transforms them into a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction (3). The Demarchist citizen, always wired and always accountable, embodies this transformation: autonomy is surrendered to the demands of a constantly surveilled polity.

Reynolds dramatizes this vulnerability when Demarchist systems are manipulated during conflict with the Conjoiners. Decisions made through supposedly democratic processes can be hijacked by technological interference, leading to outcomes that undermine the very principles of transparency and participation. This illustrates what Gilles Deleuze, in his essay *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1992), identifies as the shift from disciplinary institutions to flexible, digital modes of control. Power in Demarchist society does not emanate from a central authority but circulates through networks, making it more pervasive and less accountable.

This problem resonates with contemporary debates about digital democracy and block chain governance. Advocates argue that distributed systems reduce corruption and centralization, but critics note that such systems are vulnerable to technical manipulation, algorithmic bias, and new forms of inequality. Reynolds anticipates these critiques: the Demarchists’ collapse underscores the danger of assuming that technology alone can solve political problems. Pramod K. Nayar stated that the “posthuman is not a distinct ‘other’, an entirely new species; instead, the posthuman is a hybrid that is a more developed, more advanced, or more powerful

version of the existing self” (*Posthumanism* 35). According to Nayar, the human in the critical posthumanist vision “shares not only origins and evolutionary stages with other life forms but also mortality and vulnerability with them embedded in power structures and discourses that produce their very materiality and meaning” (*Posthumanism* 109). The ethical dimension of Demarchist governance lies in its attempt to balance collective decision-making with individual freedom. Yet, as Giorgio Agamben reminds us, modern governance often operates through states of exception where normal rights can be suspended in the name of survival (*Homo Sacer* 9). In *Revelation Space*, when faced with existential threats like the Inhibitors, Demarchist ideals of participation collapse under pressure, revealing the fragility of ethics in the face of crisis. The same system that promised universal inclusion becomes a mechanism of exclusion and coercion.

Comparisons to cyberpunk traditions sharpen this critique. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) envisions corporations and artificial intelligences wielding governance-like powers in virtual spaces, where information networks blur the boundaries between autonomy and control. Reynolds extends this logic to interstellar societies: Demarchist democracy, though less overtly corporate, is similarly compromised by its reliance on technological systems that evolve faster than ethical oversight. Reynolds therefore positions the Demarchists as both utopian and dystopian: a society that embodies the dream of technologically enabled democracy while dramatizing its risks. Their failure is not incidental but symptomatic of a deeper contradiction: governance cannot be entrusted to technologies that evolve more rapidly than the ethical frameworks designed to regulate them. As Adam Roberts observes, “the ubiquitous technological trappings of SF actually include within them the eruption of the body, of bodies like yours or mine, into the otherwise alienating discourse of the machine.” (*Science Fiction* 111). In this way, the Demarchists exemplify Reynolds’s broader critique of spacefaring societies. The eruption of machine bodies reveals that ethical governance in posthuman contexts is precarious, reactive, and unstable. Technology promises inclusion but delivers surveillance; it offers participation but enables

manipulation. By foregrounding this paradox, Reynolds suggests that the challenge of the future lies not in perfecting technology but in reconciling it with the ethical imperatives of human life. If the Demarchists represent an attempt to democratize governance through technological transparency, the Conjoiners embody the opposite: a society where governance is achieved through the dissolution of individuality into a collective consciousness. Their neurological implants link them into a networked mind, producing decisions with a speed and clarity beyond baseline cognition. On the surface, this makes the Conjoiners extraordinarily efficient, capable of unified responses and rapid technological innovation. Yet this model of governance comes at a profound ethical cost: individuality and dissent are subsumed by the collective.

Reynolds describes Conjoiner society as operating through “an unyielding mental communion” (317), where governance is not deliberated but experienced as consensus. This recalls Michel Foucault’s argument in *Discipline and Punish* that modern power often functions not through coercion but through the internalization of control: “the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies” (217). In the Conjoiners’ case, individuality is not fabricated but erased; governance is embedded in the very structure of cognition. Power circulates seamlessly through the collective, eliminating resistance before it can even be articulated. The political consequences of such governance are unsettling. While Demarchist democracy risks manipulation from outside forces, Conjoiner collectivism abolishes the possibility of manipulation by abolishing dissent. Consent becomes irrelevant when decision-making is distributed across a hive mind. This raises a profound ethical question: can governance be legitimate if individual autonomy is forfeited entirely? The Conjoiners embody this dispersal to its extreme, dispersing agency so thoroughly that governance collapses into technological determinism.

The paradox of Conjoiner governance is that it is simultaneously utopian and authoritarian. On one hand, it eliminates political conflict and ensures unity of purpose. On the other, it achieves this by foreclosing debate and denying plurality. Giorgio

Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* reminds us that governance often operates through decisions on life itself—who is included, who excluded, who sacrificed (11). In Conjoiner society, such decisions are made collectively, but without transparency to outsiders and without the safeguards of dissent. Survival becomes the only political principle, reducing governance to the perpetuation of the collective. The Conjoiners, by contrast, are human descendants—an unsettling reminder that authoritarian governance need not come from alien others but from humanity’s own technological evolution. As N. Katherine Hayles argues, posthuman systems destabilize “the liberal humanist subject, characterized by autonomy, agency, and self-possession” (*How We Became Posthuman* 286). Conjoiner governance enacts precisely this destabilization, revealing that the erosion of liberal subjectivity can emerge as much from within as from without.

Rosi Braidotti’s reflections in *The Posthuman* (2013) also illuminate this dilemma. She advocates for a posthuman ethics grounded in rationality, interconnection, and responsibility (49). The Conjoiners, however, demonstrate how rationality can collapse into homogenization, where diversity of perspective is sacrificed for collective efficiency. Their governance is rational only within their own closed system; to outsiders, it appears opaque, authoritarian, and threatening. Reynolds emphasizes the geopolitical consequences of such governance. Other factions perceive the Conjoiners with fear, suspecting them of plotting domination. Their advanced weaponry and secrecy exacerbate these suspicions. Here Reynolds critiques not only the internal ethics of Conjoiner governance but also its external legitimacy: a polity that governs itself through hive-like unity may find it impossible to coexist with pluralistic societies. In this sense, the Conjoiners provide a counterpoint to the Demarchists. Both factions integrate technology into governance, but in radically different ways. The Demarchists pursue transparency, risking surveillance and manipulation; the Conjoiners pursue unity, risking authoritarian homogenization. Together, they dramatize two extremes of posthuman governance: one overwhelmed by too much participation, the other by too little. Reynolds

suggests that neither extreme can sustain ethical governance in the long term.

Thus, the Conjoiners present a different model of governance, one based on collective consciousness. By subsuming individual will to a shared intelligence, they achieve remarkable technological feats. Yet this model raises questions about autonomy, consent, and moral responsibility. Is a collective mind capable of ethical decision-making, or does it erase the very individuality that grounds ethics? Their governance is stable, but stability is achieved by negating autonomy. Their efficiency is enviable, but it is built on the erasure of dissent. By presenting Conjoiner society alongside others, Reynolds underscores a central theme of *Revelation Space*: the challenge of the posthuman future lies not only in survival but in constructing forms of governance that can reconcile technological power with ethical responsibility. If posthuman transformations destabilize identity, they also fracture governance. The political landscape of *Revelation Space* is marked by competing factions—Earth-based authorities, independent colonies, Conjoiners, and Demarchists—each struggling to impose order in a universe of rapid technological change. Reynolds uses this fragmentation to explore the ethical dilemmas of governance in posthuman contexts.

Reynolds also dramatizes ethical dilemmas at the intersection of survival and violence. Faced with the threat of the Inhibitors, should societies sacrifice populations or entire planets to protect humanity as a whole? Such questions echo Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," where individuals may be stripped of rights in the name of survival. They also resonate with contemporary debates about climate change and AI governance: who decides what sacrifices are acceptable in the face of existential risk?

### **The Limits of Space Colonization**

If *Revelation Space* dramatizes the transformative possibilities of posthuman life, it also insists on the fragility of colonization as a human project. Reynolds foregrounds the ecological, economic, and existential limits of expansion into space, positioning colonization not as a destiny but as a problematic continuation of terrestrial patterns of exploitation.

This critique becomes clearer when placed in conversation with other works of science fiction, particularly Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*, 2312, and *Aurora* (2015), which together provides some of the most sustained examinations of terraforming and interstellar settlement. Robinson's *Mars Trilogy* (*Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*) is often hailed as the most comprehensive literary exploration of terraforming. In these novels, terraforming represents not merely a technological project but a political and ecological experiment. As Robinson writes in *Red Mars*, "the space around Mars was filled with dust and dreams" (23), encapsulating the utopian hope that planetary engineering could create a habitable world while reimagining social systems. Terraforming here is tied to democratic struggle, ecological consciousness, and the possibility of human adaptability. For many critics, the trilogy demonstrates that colonization can be reconciled with ethical and ecological responsibility.

Reynolds *Revelation Space*, on the other side, underscores the unsustainability of such ambitions. Terraforming projects require immense energy, destabilize planetary ecologies, and exacerbate inequalities between Earth and spacefaring societies. His universe reflects the warning articulated by Frederick Turner, who notes that terraforming risks becoming "a repetition of colonial conquest, extending anthropocentrism into the cosmos" (*Genesis: An Epic Poem* 14). Colonization in Reynolds's world is not a new beginning but the exportation of terrestrial hubris. Robinson's later novel 2312 complicates the optimism of the *Mars Trilogy*. Set in a solar system populated with terraformed planets, hollowed-out asteroids, and distributed habitats, 2312 envisions an astonishing diversity of human environments. Yet it also emphasizes the fragility of these systems. Many habitats are precarious, dependent on constant technological maintenance, and vulnerable to ecological collapse. In one striking passage, Robinson describes the hollowed asteroids as "fragile arks" (78), underscoring their vulnerability despite human ingenuity. Here Robinson anticipates the cautionary tone of Reynolds: colonization may expand human presence, but it does not guarantee permanence.

Even more pessimistic is Robinson's *Aurora*, which narrates the failure of an interstellar voyage to

colonize a distant planet. The novel critiques the assumption that human life can be transplanted across cosmic distances. The ecological systems required for human survival are too complex, too fragile, and too entangled with Earth to be replicated elsewhere. *Aurora* thus dismantles the myth of colonization as inevitability, echoing the very limits that Reynolds dramatizes in *Revelation Space*. Reynolds amplifies this sense of limit through the presence of the Inhibitors—machine intelligences designed to regulate intelligent life. Their existence destabilizes the anthropocentric fantasy of manifest destiny in space. Colonization is not only ecologically and economically unsustainable but also cosmically constrained. The Inhibitors dramatize what Ursula K. Le Guin calls “the limits of the knowable” (*The Left Hand of Darkness* 4): the recognition that human ambition encounters boundaries not of its own making. Where Robinson’s *Aurora* portrays natural ecosystems as barriers to colonization, Reynolds suggests that the very fabric of the cosmos may resist human expansion.

Thematically, these differing visions reflect broader debates in posthumanist theory. Rosi Braidotti argues that posthuman ethics requires a “reorientation toward the nonhuman, ecological, and planetary” (*The Posthuman* 45). Robinson’s work often embodies this reorientation, imagining terraforming as a dialogue with planetary systems. Reynolds, however, suggests that such reorientation may be impossible: humanity’s interventions are always exploitative, destabilizing, and limited by forces beyond its control. His vision resonates with Timothy Morton’s concept of “hyperobjects” — entities such as climate change that exceed human scales of comprehension (*Hyperobjects* 1). Colonization, in Reynolds’s universe, is not a solution to terrestrial crises but another hyperobject that exposes human smallness.

Economically, *Revelation Space* critiques the illusion that space colonization will resolve scarcity. Instead, it exacerbates divisions between Earth and space settlements, creating new hierarchies of wealth and power. Cixin Liu’s *Three-Body Problem* trilogy further highlights this theme. Liu’s trilogy, though focused on first contact, also depicts humanity as small and vulnerable in a hostile cosmos. Together, these works resist the triumphalist narrative of

colonization, suggesting instead that survival requires humility and recognition of constraint. Reynolds’s critique of colonization gains force when juxtaposed with Robinson’s nuanced optimism and eventual pessimism. The *Mars Trilogy* offers a utopian vision of planetary transformation; *2312* emphasizes diversity but acknowledges fragility; *Aurora* declares colonization unworkable. *Revelation Space* synthesizes these perspectives while radicalizing them: colonization is not only ecologically and technologically limited but also cosmically suppressed. Reynolds thus reconfigures the narrative of space as humanity’s destiny into a meditation on its hubris. By foregrounding the limits of colonization, Reynolds compels readers to reconsider the ethical stakes of imagining human futures in space. Colonization may not represent transcendence but rather the perpetuation of terrestrial flaws, amplified on a cosmic stage. The novel thus aligns with posthumanist critiques that call for humility, ecological responsibility, and recognition of nonhuman agencies. In this respect, *Revelation Space* stands as a cautionary counterpoint to both the optimism of earlier science fiction and the ambitions of contemporary space exploration.

## CONCLUSION

Alastair Reynolds’s *Revelation Space* stands as a sustained critique of the hubris that underpins much of Western science fiction’s narratives of expansion. While his universe is populated by extraordinary posthuman entities, advanced technologies, and interstellar societies, these innovations do not deliver transcendence or security. Instead, they expose humanity to new vulnerabilities—political fragmentation, ecological collapse, and cosmic hostility. In this sense, Reynolds reorients the genre away from triumphalist accounts of progress and toward recognition of limit. By examining the Demarchists and the Conjoiners, we see how governance itself becomes destabilized under posthuman conditions. The Demarchists reveal the dangers of equating technological transparency with democratic empowerment: surveillance and manipulation undermine participation, transforming democracy into a precarious experiment. The Conjoiners, in contrast, exemplify the authoritarian tendencies of collective posthumanism, where unity

is purchased at the cost of individuality and dissent. In both cases, Reynolds foregrounds the fragility of ethical governance, dramatizing the difficulty of sustaining political legitimacy when technological systems evolve faster than the ethical frameworks designed to regulate them.

This political fragility intersects with the ecological and existential limits of colonization. Placed in dialogue with Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*, *2312*, and *Aurora*, Reynolds's critique becomes sharper. Robinson's works, while deeply ecological and politically nuanced, still imagine colonization as possible under certain ethical and scientific conditions. Reynolds radicalizes the pessimism of *Aurora*, insisting that colonization may not only be ecologically unsustainable but also cosmically forbidden. The Inhibitors, as machine intelligences programmed to suppress expansionist species, literalize the idea that the universe itself resists humanity's manifest destiny. In Reynolds's universe, the stars do not beckon; they warn. Yet Reynolds is not simply pessimistic. His cautionary tone opens space for rethinking what posthuman ethics might entail. Rosi Braidotti reminds us that posthumanism call for "an enlarged sense of interconnection" that resists both anthropocentrism and technocentrism. Reynolds dramatizes the consequences of ignoring this imperative. Societies that equate progress with technological excess—whether through Demarchist transparency, Conjoiner collectivism, or colonization ambition—inevitably encounter collapse. Ethics, in his novels, emerges not from mastery but from humility: the recognition that survival depends on respecting limits, whether ecological, technological, or cosmic.

In this way, *Revelation Space* contributes to a broader reimagining of science fiction as a site of ethical inquiry rather than technological prophecy. As Fredric Jameson argues, science fiction's central task is "cognitive mapping"—charting the limits of possibility and the structures of power that shape them (*Archaeologies of the Future* 97). Reynolds maps those limits at both planetary and cosmic scales, demonstrating that colonization cannot be disentangled from the ethical, ecological, and political contradictions that have always haunted human expansion. His novel warns that without a reorientation toward humility, responsibility, and

interconnection, posthuman futures will replicate the failures of the human past on an even grander scale. Thus, Reynolds's fiction insists on a paradox: the very technologies that promise to secure humanity's future—terraforming, artificial intelligence, posthuman enhancement—are also those that most threaten its survival. By dramatizing this paradox, *Revelation Space* not only critiques the excesses of technological modernity but also gestures toward an ethics of limit. In doing so, it aligns with the most urgent conversations of our present: how to govern artificial intelligence, how to respond to climate crisis, how to imagine futures that do not merely reproduce imperialist logics. For Reynolds, the answer lies not in transcending the human condition but in reimagining it, acknowledging the boundaries that define it, and learning to live within them.

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# Knowledge, Hubris, and Ethics in *Dr. Faustus*: Lessons from Islamic Thought

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<p>Received: 18 Aug 2025;                      Received in revised form: 20 Sep 2025;                      Accepted: 24 Sep 2025;                      Available online: 28 Sep 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— Doctor Faustus, Ethics of Knowledge, Islamic Thought, Tragedy</b></p>	<p><i>This study aims to read this dramatic text through an ethical framework of knowledge, drawing upon interpretations from the Islamic intellectual tradition and beyond. The play presents epistemic growth not as an unqualified virtue but as a double-edged weapon: Faustus's pursuit of ultimate perfection and absolute power ultimately leads him to ruin, for he overlooks that no end can be achieved without submission to divine will and acknowledgment of human limitations. By comparing this with the Islamic conception of knowledge as inherently tied to morality, responsibility, and piety, the analysis highlights both convergences and divergences in the transformation of knowledge – from mere contemplation to articulated discourse, and vice versa. The study also emphasizes the Sufi perspective, as seen in the works of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī, which stresses the ethical and spiritual boundaries of knowledge. Moreover, the Qur’ānic narrative, particularly Sūrat al-Fajr, is examined as a textual entry point affirming the ethical limits of human knowledge. In this way, the research underscores how literary texts, when read alongside religious thought, can provide renewed intellectual insights and critical approaches to the interplay between knowledge and ethics.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Christopher Marlowe's immortal tragedy, "Dr. Faustus", the resplendent figures of Renaissance humanism blend with the spiritual anxieties of Europe across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet, Marlowe's play, in which the protagonist fausts in his effort to attain omniscience and cries despairingly at the solipsism of hell, is surprisingly silent about the thoughts of a different, older tradition, deeply alienated from the West: Islam.

The Renaissance conversion, which Faustus brings about in his effort to comprehend the universe entirely, rests upon a radical distance, a dualism of subject and substance—or, to use a Kantian term, a gulf between the epistemic and the phenomenal—that

is every bit a Western, and therefore Christian, construct. The unmoved mover of Averroes, which the Arab Philosopher-Faust Defoe encounters in the very opening of "Fear of Knowledge", is a philosophically—or simply a latently—Islamic figure.

Such unmoved movers, of the universe or of souls, are certainly nowhere to be found in either rival version of Western Christianity—namely, the neo-platonic version, which is gentler to Faustus, and the biblically fundamentalist, musically more maddening version, voiced by Marlowe's Christian monks. It would conceivably be the task of the Arab creature's Reason, in once more raising a philosophical bulwark against the baubles of divinity and technology, also to ally with Charity and Faith against the more lethal

assaults of the unquiet Western Trinity: deadly Knowledge, mad Loves, and Impious Hate.

Faustus, unfortunately, does not answer this novel question of "The Legend of the Treatment of Knowledge and Thought in Islam", whether metaphysically or merely inventively.

On the other hand, Islam itself has known various Phantoms of Faith—brilliant wings of the trance world unanchored in the phenomenological block world of the kosmos—which have scuttled through its various stations of earthly life, troubling a range of scholars and mystics with dreams of prelapsarian union amidst the pain and suffering of worldly exile.

Visionary journeys, intellectual adventures, and beautiful chains of poetic thoughts enlacing God through Faith have all been, from the early centuries after the Hijra, at the eye of the storm. A boundless sea of wildest speculative and mystical visions—many deeply divine and inspired—was thus stirred up, some shaded by the doctrines of Plotinus, Aristotle, the Neoplatonists, and the Greek commentators available in Arabic only to one who possessed Faustus' complete self-transformation in addition to a profoundly brilliant intellect—*jiwa mutarabba*, "a well-trained soul", entirely devoted to ceaseless prayer, profound meditation, sound moral character, and sincere penitence, such character being, according to al-Ghazali, irreplaceably more eligible than splendid intelligence, however brilliant.

### 1.1. Background and Significance

The quest for knowledge has been a central theme in the human experience. From the earliest days of civilization, humans have sought to understand the world around them, to experiment with and manipulate nature, and to explore the depths of their own minds. However, this thirst for knowledge has often been accompanied by cautionary tales, warnings about the consequences of hubris and unchecked ambition. These themes recur time and again in the world's great religious and philosophical traditions.

One such tale is Christopher Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus*, in which a brilliant scholar, seeking ever more power and understanding, turns to necromancy as a means of acquiring greater knowledge. Faustus gains access to wondrous powers through his pact with the devil, but ultimately is undone by his own overreaching ambition. This play

raises crucial philosophical and theological questions regarding the ethics of knowledge, the moral limits of the quest for understanding, and the inherent risks and responsibilities of the search for knowledge. These questions are rendered especially compelling by the ways in which Faustus and his knowledge-seeking path parallel that of modern science and technology.

A set of theological-philosophical views and values—distinguished here as the Islamic ethos of knowledge—is extracted from the founding texts and traditions of Islam and then applied to the case of Marlowe's Faustus. The specific conceptions of knowledge critiqued in Faustus are shown to parallel those in Islam that are considered to be distortion or misapprehension of the nature of knowledge and, therefore, the quest for knowledge. Also addressed is the point that the Faustian pact with the devil (traditional or modern) becomes conceivable not out of ignorance of its dangers and consequences but precisely as a result of insubordinate design of seeking greater (contrastive) knowledge and power. The questioning and pursuit of knowledge is a natural endowment and a God-given responsibility. However, knowledge bearing this ethical corpus is distinct from knowledge devoid of such concomitant moral and spiritual dimensions. Central to the Islamic ethos of knowledge is the conviction that knowledge belongs to God and that knowledge and religion are inextricably tied together.

### 1.2. Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this research is to provide an ethical perspective on analyses of "Doctor Faustus" and the implications of knowledge acquisition. The story of "Doctor Faustus" indicates the ethical parameters of knowledge that underpin true knowledge attainment. The significance of the analysis is enhanced from the values, concepts, and principles exhibited in Islam regarding the morality of human intellect.

As the stake of such knowledge is great, the moral aspects of knowledge acquisition are rendered within this argument. The framework by which Islamic principles have been integrated with moral parameters on knowledge undercurrent within the literary work of Marlowe will be assessed as political and theistic. In this context, religious affiliation manifests applied knowledge in accordance with the

desire of one's God. An opposing virtue consists in the use of such knowledge against divinity's will or God's necessity, thereby leading to evil results.

The social and political dimensions accentuate power acquisition, acquisition rivalry, and supernatural arrangements regarding political authority, matters of evil, resistance, deception, and corruption. It is essential to theistic knowledge that knowledge attainment is no longer in the hand of its acquisition. Within the real counterpart of knowledge, human creatures became solely tracked by it along interminable stations. Whether the knowledge to which Faustus and man at large have been betaking themselves is the true or its mere semblance remains an important obligation for reason.

Out of all these endeavors, this research sustains one focal question regarding the delinquent of both Faustus's and the whole man's pursuit of knowledge: to what extent the knowledge acquired by man's choice is achievable and how much of it is beyond man's will and control? Western epistemology has suggested a binary position regarding divine and human knowledge acting as a surplus of causated proportions that need to be counterrepresented. Such a view has been intended in the early perspective of theology and the Absolute drawn by St. Augustine and was held till the apex of West school of theocracy was blown with the Reformation.

Of Marlowe's counterparts, such separation results in Faustus's inquisitorial paradigms of necromantic and hermetic sciences. Within such a backdrop, Marlowe accommodates the crises of divine and human labor, chance, agency, and certainty, thereby placing two paradigmatic groups at one pole theism yielding demi-nature and World-soul's allegories of moral order and corporeality, harmony, sense, beauty, light, geometry, dualism, but at the other ranging prevailing knowledge and culture of medieval Christianity.

## II. THE LEGEND OF FAUST: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The story of Dr. Faustus can be viewed as an archetypal tale of humankind's quest for limitless knowledge. The day that Faustus sold his soul to the devil seems a moment of tragic irreversibility, codifying a move from ignorance to all-knowingness, from innocent to hyper-sophisticated being. In the

Reckoning, however, Faustus learns this knowledge is not his to bequeath to the world. Though the Devil's bargain was informed by Faustus's insatiable hunger for knowledge, the Covenant is grounded in the mythic tale of its futility. The Faustus we inherit cannot aspire to be the universal sage. Most importantly, however, at its core, Faustus cannot claim sovereignty over the sacred creative pursuit of knowledge and learning; it cannot hold god/al in disrepute with the covenant of the Devil. With its insatiable hunger, Faustus cannot steady the divine source and unending fount of Knowledge in its paltry human chrysalis.

This study recounts the archetypal Faustus tale, its underlying mythic structure, and elucidates Abrahamic perspectives that underpin Faustus' unthinkable, tragic knowledge that terrifies it. Drawing on the Naqshbandi legacy of tasawuf, an understanding of God/deity as Allah, experience of which is epistemologically and ontologically efficacious, but which spaces Faustus in an abyss is proposed. This "Eclipse of God" vision dispels the human shadow and creative wonder as ma'rifa or knowledge is born from an eternal, rhythmic Sound, which breathes words of knowing to the Immanent Holy Void. The human soul flickers in the Sun of this Living Knowledge but is trapped by the Devil's device in a dimension of objectively knowing forms which distort and deny knowledge's genesis in Death and Nothingness, silencing its Promethean Voice.

Hampered by the epistemological conditions of empirical adequacy and certainty, Faustus graduates into the realm of Aristotle's Aeternal Fallacy. In ever-warring pursuit of its shattered remembrance and prophetic beginnings, the thousand knowledge fields azure beyond the Universe dome are darkly construed as divine Beacons. In such spaces, bright moons attentive, celestial bodies hum the Divine Science, a prophetic intimacy yielding a thousand wondrous arts of knowing, craft and creation - a return unto God through knowledge, death and silence. Fearing mortal obliteration, Faustus steadfastly consults the Devil, sealing its tragic Pact. Heliacal phantoms and illusory founts avail infinite secondary visions, worlds enchant with ocular effects of heavenly wonders and cause, but Faustus broods.

The Faustus tragedy is borne of a Chiasmus, where the end is the Beginning, Heraclitic teeth are

led through time-stretching cycles Law and Jesu  
dolour, Matter, Empiricism, Colonies, Mechanism and  
Instruments of War, culminating verily in the fiendish  
fragility and ruin of mechanistic Knowledge, Nature  
and the Presence. Yet, the moons forgot their Glories,  
bound in steel crystals whence replicate their auroral  
forms in shattered Whispers. Knowledge abandoned  
its sidewalk, considered solely in ciphers, stones  
inherent to Mare, constructing layers of ethereal,  
vibrant Words in remembrance of vibrant, divine  
Names - firm realities of shadows collapsed in frozen  
images, their sepulchral prayers silenced in the  
latitudes of iron, glass and soil.

### 2.1. Historical Origins and Development

In its various forms, the Faust theme has fascinated and moved gifted poets, playwrights, and composers of music for over four hundred years. What is it, however, that has fired so many minds and hearts? Why did the Faust legend attract the greatest genius in all of European literature, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; the most gigantic dramatic imagination of the modern theatre, Christopher Marlowe; the great French moralist and lyric poet, Paul Valéry; and the two greatest composers of lyrical and musical drama since the Golden Age of Greece, Charles Gounod and Hector Berlioz? Why did so many writers of lesser stature, together with painters and sculptors, treat the subject, and still continue to elicit the interest of pseudo-scientists and pseudo-philosophers who slowly vacillate on the "moral" of the miracle? Why has the Faust legend been, and is, an obsession with many artists so recondite as to be esoteric? In short, what was it about Faust that lent itself, or was forced, to so many conflicting interpretations? Concerning Faust's major theme, the bondage and liberation of the mind, the knowable and the unknowable, consciousness is so deeply immersed in contradictions that no document, musical or literary, is coherent regarding Faust's character.

It is not in the least surprising that ideas of Faust have changed with the changing world. Initially, for the Middle Ages, the mind was satanically possessed by the very spirit of the Church. Thus, Faust's questing mind was absolutely negative. Since trailblazers were anonymous, it is impossible to state how and when Faust was first liberated from the bondage of the "Faustian Act." Only in the seventeenth century does Faust begin to be a collective-heroic

allegory as destiny played out mind's liberation so eulogized by a subsequent generation of poets. The remystifying trends of Baroque thinkers once again performed an alchemistic transformation by making Faust the Betzite and manipulating one of Faust's heroic descendants, Auerbach (Fausit), into being a Sorcerer-Devil. Only in the early nineteenth century was Faust reidentified and once again remystified, with Goethe's genius lending Petrarch to Faust.

With still more changing temporalities, Faust has adapted to modernity's mechanization by imparting writerly will to Faust. Faust's heroism has either been demonized by a secular materialistic society or has become Quixotic in postmodern discourse. With a privileged experience of mechanical modernity, Muslims' mystifications of Faust have articulated modern ambivalence toward Westernization.

### 2.2. Key Themes and Motifs

At the intersection of the myth of Faust and the debate over the limits of knowledge, the story of Faust has inspired a remarkable range of thoughts on the finer points of what it means to know, who may know, and which forms of knowledge are indispensable or ethically problematic. Faust's circumstances would seem exquisite in their particularity: a scholar who has attained the highest degrees from the universities of Erfurt, Leipzig, and Wittenberg, Faust has become disillusioned with the futility of her studies. Religion and theology have become intolerable to her. She is fed up with philosophy, logic, and natural sciences, and dismisses them as unreliable, arrogant, and vacuous. Above all, she is weary of medicine, which seeks to cure the corporeal at the expense of the soul, and thus misses the most vital organs of the human being. In her thirst for knowledge, Faust is still mindful of the barriers to it, which no amount of rationality can surpass: "Must then what we over all fear—/Beheld from a higher sphere—/A nothing be to the eyes divine?—/Bah! Would be like a lost child/Of Man all know, all Cosmos all paralysed!"

On such a psychological terrain, Faust strikes a pact with the devil, exchanging her soul for immeasurable knowledge and worldly success, though she is ironically punished for her hubris with eternal symptomatology: she is rendered all-knowing, but an uncomplaining statue of stone, as God dumps

upon her the sum of all knowledge and infinite wisdom. Faust becomes the central card in a game between heaven and hell, and her misadventures become cautionary tales. Acquiring the knowledge of good and evil, Faust becomes like god; failing to assume God-like omniscience, she falls like Lucifer into inextricable bondage ("Sacred Science"). Faust's protests at her subjugation ultimately gain her release from hell.

There are also significant variations to the Judith's curse: in Calderón's play, her ancestors rise up against her and the knowledge-seeking Fausto vanishes into thin air. In Schoenberg's delectable "Moses und Aron," the knowledge-seeking Aron is cursed by the heavens. In Milton's "Paradise Lost", Eve is blinded by knowledge. The Faust-Stoff inspires its narrators to apprehend how knowledge creates algebraic language barriers that blind the knower to the full nature of her knowing. Beyond Freudian Oedipus/Antigone quarrels at the founding of the institution of knowledge, Faust in her quest imagines and encounters the patriarchs themselves: god, knowledge, gynecology, devils, angels, nature, sorcery, death, redemption, terra damnata, a loving god.

### III. DR. FAUSTUS BY CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Considered one of the greatest Elizabethan dramas and influential works of literature, "Dr. Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe remains an unparalleled representation of the Renaissance spirit and a cautionary tale of knowledge and its dangerous pursuit. This essay aims to provide a critical analysis of the play, emphasizing the plot summary, character analysis, and themes and symbolism.

At the heart of the play is Faust's struggle with the acquisition of knowledge, his ambition to exceed the limits of knowledge, and the consequences posed by the illicit nature of knowledge and power. Inspired by the late Medieval legend of a learned man who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for necromantic power, the protagonist is a renowned scholar disillusioned with the limits of classical and religious knowledge, who seeks forbidden knowledge through a pact with Mephistopheles. Drawing from the backdrop of the Renaissance, which is characterized as the dawning of modernity, an interest in the natural

sciences and the mechanistic view of the universe, and a growing independence of reason from theology, the play explores the possibilities and dangers of knowledge, faith and inquiry, and passion and duty. Illuminating insights from the Islamic perspective of knowledge should enrich the analysis of the play in its representation of knowledge.

"Dr. Faustus" tells the story of a disillusioned scholar by this name, who questions the limits of knowledge. With ambitions that outrun its scope, Faustus moves from one field of study to another until finally abandoning them for magic! Surmising that necromancy would provide the satisfaction of his "desire in a fierce" (II.i.31), Faustus makes a pact with the devil through his familiar spirit Mephistopheles and ultimately sells his soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of necromantic power. The pact enables Faustus to conjure Mephistopheles, the agony of which highlights the horror of damnation and Faust's susceptibility to it, reiterating the biblical warning not to dabble with the forbidden. Nevertheless, Faustus pursues lustful knowledge and gratification by defying the limits imposed by God. In a parody of God's creative word, Faustus commands Mephistopheles to send him in the style of a Cardinal backdrop of the Renaissance, a puppet-show which resembles that of God's omnipotent providence. When Faustus's desire is granted, he henceforth occupies the novel position of the demiurge striving to know and control the cosmos.

Life after the pact does not turn out to be the desired fulfillment of Faustus's longing. The necromantic power is desolated. Enslaved by Mephistopheles, Faustus finds himself no longer capable of unworldly or mortal amusements and pursuits. Incurring unlimited powers, the more Faustus obtains where the cynical knowledge is mixed with euphoric insight into the unknowability of God, the faster he falls from the flesh to the spirit to non-being. Blinded by insatiable desire and lust, he is insidiously stripped away of God, faith, love, and knowledge to the point of grotesque helplessness. As described in II. ii-iii, Faustus, searching vainly for happiness and satisfaction, becomes the omniscient godlike spirit of time and space, the mocker deriding the Church and the creed, the wretched shadow, the routine conjuror, and finally the madman terrorized by the loss of his reason.

### 3.1. Plot Summary

Christopher Marlowe's "The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus" is a tragedy based on the Faust legend of a man who makes a pact with the devil for knowledge and the ability to work magic. It follows the story of Faustus, a highly educated scholar in Wittenberg, Germany, who grows dissatisfied with the limitations of traditional forms of learning. Spurning the arts and the sciences, Faustus seeks knowledge of the dark magical arts, raising the devil Mephistopheles through a diabolical incantation. He conjures him into the study, and they engage in a philosophical debate surrounding Hell and Faustus's quest for knowledge.

After much deliberation, Faustus strikes a pact with the devil: Faustus sells his soul for twenty-four years of power over the Earth and the service of Mephistopheles. He studies necromancy and magic and begins engaging in some impressive magical feats. Nevertheless, Faustus is tormented by doubts about the pact, often expressing shame and regrets over what he has done. He attempts to repent, pleading for mercy, and wants to reconcile with Heaven, while Mephistopheles warns that given Faustus's knowledge of God's power, he cannot be saved.

Faustus summons Helen of Troy, a mythological figure associated with beauty and desire, believing she represents the ultimate knowledge of beauty. The Good and Evil Angels' intervention proves futile as Faustus is drawn deeper into the abyss, becoming a mere puppet dancing to the Devil's tune. During the last hour of the twenty-four years, Faustus wrestles with his conscience, coming to believe death appears inevitable, and finds himself damned because of the pact. Fear sets in as he contemplates the horrific consequences and wants God's pardon, but it proves to be too late.

The play closes with Faustus shouting curses at eternal damnation: 'I'll leap to my God! Who pulls me down? See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! One drop of blood will save me! O my Christ... O soul, be changed into little water-drops, and fall into the ocean. Ne'er be found! ... Why erring, Faustus? Where is it now?' He is most likely dragged to Hell by demons.

### 3.2. Character Analysis

A study of the characters in "Dr. Faustus" reveals a dichotomy between its two principal figures,

Faustus and Mephistopheles. Faustus, a man once great and learned in many systems of thought, allows his fierce ambition for knowledge to overwhelm his conception of truth. His hubris compels him to see the limitlessness of knowledge only in terms of its potential for power; he rushes, therefore, to a dark pact in order to reorganize the world according to his own will.

Mephistopheles, by contrast, is a fallen angel who has been granted access to Faustus by Lucifer because of the man's incalculable hubris. What is great about him in terms of power is also most desperate; to avoid hell, he offers Faustus the very thing which will doom Faustus to it – knowledge used to advance the will above truth and goodness. He willingly, if bitterly, plays the role of tempter, seducer, and ultimately jailer. As a co-creator of this hellish relationship, his cries of futility and despair echo Faustus' own utterances even as they are hurled blindly against the man who has, paradoxically, the most insight into his condition.

Faustus is never depicted onstage in a state of exaltation; rather, he is shown in reflection after having sought forbidden knowledge and gained power over lesser spirits. This power, however, does not lead to satisfaction. More than any other character, Faustus bends the action of the play to his own will and the action is caught in this bend. Every attempt to articulate, either verbally or conceptually, his self and its desired end ends in painful contradiction; to possess what he desires, traces of its loss must be foreseen, and desire fails before what it so desperately craves. He thus suffers the irony of attaining what he himself has devalued. The grandeur and impossible contradictions of Faustus' vision of self and God's relationship to it mark him as the tragic figure of the play; moreover, through his vision, deeper problems relating to truth's certainty, God's goodness and concern for man, and the illimitability of knowledge fall under scrutiny.

### 3.3. Themes and Symbolism

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, a tragic dramatization of the Faust legend, is, amongst other things, an exploration of the ethics of knowledge. The idealist humanist Renaissance scholar Faustus chooses the desperate, doomed route of occult pursuits, inquiring into the dark knowledge of necromancy, demonology, and black magic.

Faustus's hubris leads him to invade God's province of knowledge through an uneasy pact with the archfiend Lucifer, executed in an extravagant comic signing ceremony in blood with a pair of new spectacles. Faustus's sin is that of radical, absolute knowledge, to transpose the nature of God and man. He comes to see knowledge itself as knowledge of man's role and power in God's creation. Eluding the Christian image of man as humble and pious, Faustus takes on the Semitic image of man as transcendent, creating and ransacking all knowledge for the services of beast and monster. Cosmology, astrology, aeronautics, telephony, sculpture, painting, poetry, and the charms of Helen of Troy are all rendered into tricks of grandeur and pride before Divine Justice, who sees through Faustus's wretchedness. Man of the Renaissance, Faustus transcends the medieval servitude of awareness with its blindnesses and theologies to self-consciousness, son of God, like Lucifer, attempting to usurp God's omniscience, eternity, and all-knowingness. Otherwise, the binding binaries, heaven and hell, life and death, body and soul, ravel with pathetic human energy gone ludicrous, a series of malapropisms made comic, tragic, ridiculous. The epicurean skepticism and materialism of the Renaissance and classics plead for the silencing of this dangerously jealous God in sins of heresy. Doctor Faustus as black comedy is a blossoming; amoralist, atheist horror; Faustus's fate is buried in God's voiceless Wisdom, mystery, and malevolence.

This humanist Doctor Faustus is condemned by God, representative of nothingness, beast, and repetition. Theological scaffolding held within domineering boundaries of fact awakes God's omniscience, eternal time-tide, memorial auroral time in foolishness and ludicrousness, like a great waxing and waning joke riding the cosmic coils of the vast exempt emptiness before grasping the humankind of discovery with the fool's gold of knowledge impossible and blindness inexorable. Doctor Faustus places irrational patriarchal knowledge before the viewer, seducing sympathy at the man's attempts to transcend human vanity and blindness. In other words, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus has dramatic coherence and thematic insight into the knowledge of God and transcendental dread as divine wrath and human wretchedness, outside of the scopic coalescing

of the tragedy gruesome, male or benign. The son of Repertoire Theater's Faust, in the words of Edgar, was "a recreation of the man" on the stage of the mock mirthfulness of the "pure animal".

Renaissance, reformation, incarnation awaken the eternal Dasein into the hand of barren white without God, knowledge, and interpretation. For within depthlessness, co-creatable and conflating as a meaningless index to right knowledge's motionless, fathomlessness, reason's vast, void, "all there is". Perceived as such, this God is surely artificial and ugly. Man is a vehicle of Mind, using it as "Its solely artificial" thought-object and sight turned unto itself as formless being beyond time, Nature, immobile. Hence, human sin is frightfully imminent and omnipotent; in derelict, dumb ignorance, this dark god is ever present, numbing knowledge, sight, and the whole nature.

#### IV. ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON KNOWLEDGE AND ETHICS

The juxtaposition of Dr. Faustus' quest for knowledge and insights from Islamic philosophy invites reflection on the ethics of knowledge. Faustus embodies the pursuit of knowledge without limits, while Islamic thinkers grapple with the ethics, limits, and purpose of different types of knowledge.

Faustus, a disillusioned scholar of theology, turns to necromancy, yearning for absolute knowledge and power. Dr. Faustus accepts the Faustian bargain with the devil, the demon Mephistopheles. Their ensuing interactions, oscillating between Faustus' thirst for knowledge and Mephistopheles' evasive answers, expose the futility of Faustus' quest. He vacillates between hope and despair, driven by fear of death and damnation, as he realizes the knowledge gained is unearthly and destructive. He recognizes the omnipotent God as the ultimate knower, pleading for repentance and grace, but Mephistopheles instills hopelessness. Thus, Faustus, a tragic figure, embodies the ethics of knowledge gone awry, while his tragic flaw, hubris, spurs contemplation of the ethics of knowledge.

In Islamic thought, scientists are revered as the "knowers of God." Knowledge is viewed as good. Knowledge lies at the intersection of the visible and non-visible realms, the human experience, and the Divine essence. Knowledge emerges from God's

being, subject to different interpretations by humans. Prophetic knowledge is considered by the Qur'an as the unfolding of primordial knowledge. Divine knowledge is beyond any epistemology; other types of knowledge lie in the penumbra of the Divine. Knowledge is revealed and "given," and is indissociable from ethics. Knowing God brings submission to His will. Knowledge is power, dominion, and stewardship; without faith, it becomes tyranny and wrongdoing. Knowledge is considered the horizon of a person's being. The epistemic horizon becomes narrow with either a lack of knowledge or blindly following others. The Qur'an challenges human hubris, asking "what do you know?" Humanity knows so little. By upholding a position of rational arrogance, Faustus becomes a paragon of tragic hubris, a false knower who ends in sin and suffering.

#### 4.1. Concepts of Knowledge in Islam

At the heart of Islamic beliefs is the Qur'an, the ultimate source of guidance for the individual and the community. Comprised of words of God in Arabic, eloquently delivered by the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an was revealed to him in a span of twenty-three years and continues to be preserved by many through diligent memorization. The Qur'an addresses various aspects of human life, including the past, present, and future, with direct relevance to diverse personal and social needs. Many consider the Qur'an as the treasure of the last revelation, complemented by an unbreakable chain of transmission from Muhammad to the current times. Such beliefs instill confidence that the Qur'an is free from mistranslations and later interpolations. Still, its meaning remains complex within Arab culture and richly deepened by the interpretations of greatest Muslim scholars over fourteen centuries. Considered to be the miracle of miracles, the Qur'an offers wisdom equal to the highest peaks of human intellect. In response to the supreme challenge of the Qur'an itself (i.e., to produce a word similar to it), many Muslims cite the opinions of non-Muslim scholars speculating why unlettered Muhammad had such a remarkable literary proficiency.

Though believers continue to explore the depths of the Qur'an, the simple yet powerful message of tawhid remains: only God is worthy of worship, and no other deity deserves the name of God. Those

who blaspheme this core verse and falsely stigmatize tawhid as terrorism, extremism, or radicalism are chastised by a broader examination of Islamic history and unblemished peace-loving endeavors of recent exemplars. Contemplating the tremendous success and survival of Islam offers a glimpse into unimaginable prophetic wisdom and transcendental nur, for Islam can be described best as a way of life through an all-encompassing approach. The Qur'anic perspective of concern for knowledge inspired life-long learning pursuits, development of sciences, construction of libraries, and enmity for ignorance.

To ensure that knowledge accumulated is ethical, pure, and beneficial, knowledge in Islam is geopolitically categorized into 'ilm: that is beneficial and that is not beneficial, also denoting knowledge that elevates (ilm al-nafi') and that which debases (ilm al-gharsi). Accordingly, a similar distinction is made regarding the heart: that which purifies (tazkiyat al-qalb) and that which corrupts (tawassat al-qalb). The consequences of both types of knowledge and heart for personal life, social life, temporal life, and afterlife are widely publicized via long-standing Qur'anic verses.

#### 4.2. Ethical Frameworks in Islamic Thought

Ethics, or moral philosophy, is the branch of philosophy concerned with questions about the moral significance of human choice and the criteria by which human choices can be judged and found right or good. The English term "ethics" is derived from the Greek word ethos, which means "character," "disposition," "trait," "moral nature," "custom," or "habit." Another Greek term, "morals," refers to "mores" or "habits," in the plural. Hence, ethics has often been understood as "the study of habits." The term is used broadly to denote values, morals, principles, rules, norms, or standards of personal or social behavior that regulate the conduct of human society.

Although utilitarian ethics has recently been on the rise, at least in middle and upper classes, it is said that the Hebrew ethical code in the Old Testament, which began with the Decalogue (The Ten Commandments) in Exodus 20:1-17, has seriously influenced Western ethical thought. This code was not anthropocentric but Theocentric. Ethics, therefore, was first conceived as the regulation of human affairs by the worship of one God, Yahweh, and by adherence to His commands, so that the vices of

idolatry, homicide, theft, and adultery were particularly punished. Such a historical background would show that Islam's ethical code as recorded in its Decalogue in the Qur'an would not have been quite alien to Western societies. The monotheistic ethical conception might be more or less similar due to their common propagation and development from a common source, West Semitic Yahwism.

The Arabic term "akhlaq," which refers to morality in a broad sense, is rationally and etymologically derived from khalaqa (to create), khalaq (creation), makhluq (creature), and khulq (nature). Moral existence being determined by reason and the personality of the agent was attested both in pre-Islamic Arabia and in the Qur'an. However, waywardness, extravagance, or al-jahiliyyah in a broad sense might be due to the absence of such a refined moral nature. Such a moral nature is deemed to generate a similar standard of moral judgment as such. Here is noted a universal anthropological standpoint of morality that suggests an absolute ethical code common to mankind irrespective of cultural differences.

## V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: FAUSTIAN QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE VS ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

Christopher Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" tells the story of an individual's dissatisfaction with the conventional pursuits of knowledge. These aspects provide a critical examination of the ethical and moral dilemmas that arise from relentless pursuits of knowledge in the field of natural philosophy and the magical arts, with insightful perspectives by diverse Muslim scholars. The themes explored by Marlowe in "Dr. Faustus" and an Islamic perspective offer ethical reflections, which parallel the moral challenges faced by Mephistopheles in pondering the consequences of his actions and the hardships of being on either side of the equation of knowledge, thus culminating in the search for equilibrium and the notion of divine contentment.

The desire for knowledge pervades the religious, moral, and ethical aspects of existence. Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is representative of the Faustian quest for knowledge, conflating the epistemological quandaries of existence with the moral and ethical dilemma of knowledge and power.

Faustus, an inspired scholar yearning for arcane knowledge, emerges as a Romantic hero in quest of the cumulation of all knowledge known to mankind, thus violating the natural boundary of man's existence. This understanding of existence as a tensioned equilibrium is paralleled in the Quranic conception of existence as the manifestation of Divine attributes, either in the absence of ecstatic knowledge of God or the overabundance of such knowledge which incidentally claims the Immutable Divine Being or the cosmos itself.

The scholarly contemplations of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and al-Ghazali provide insight into these questions of being and knowledge, drawing upon the ancients and Plato's Parmenides, Timaeus, and the Republic. The similarity between Dr. Faustus and Iblis is the nature of their knowledge, which is contingent on the attitude and intention of the knower. Iblis, but unlike Dr. Faustus, serves as a heuristic function, providing an interesting avenue to contemplate the ethical and moral dilemmas arising from either extremes. Similar to either side of the Faustian narrative, one either ponders the consequence of their action in hope for salvation or solemnly accepts the punishment, thus abating of knowledge and projecting the moral challenges of being eternally damned for the ultimate truth.

### 5.1. Similarities and Differences

In examining paradigms of the Faustian quest, the current analysis shall proceed with a brief comparative analysis of Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus (c. 1592, 1594) and the Islamic conception of knowledge through both similarities and profound differences.

The Dr. Faustus of English Renaissance literature is a tragic and moral play of the Faustian quest embodying the innate desires to attain knowledge, power, and transgression against God via the Memento Mori concept. The daemonic transgression is denoted in the scene where Faustus disdainfully rejects godly knowledge, 'Divinity adieu! These metaphysics of magicians and necromantic books are heavenly!' After the Memento Mori moment, Faustus discards his imperfection, and religion believes knowledge could perfect him. This belief becomes the tragic flaw resulting in consequent hubristic acts, profligacy, and quixotic strife to save his soul. Torn between the symbiotic desires, this

tragic Hamlet-like view even at the very last moment do not repent. Flawlessly impious, Faustus further assigns damning attributes to God, purity 'Thou art too horrible to look on,' ('Hell is a place... Where I reprieve from the fount of eternal love') in reactions to worldly curses.

Dr. Faustus' pact of selling his soul to Lucifer in return for godlike transgression via infinite knowledge echoes the temptation of Adam, the terrestrial triptych of knowledge, doubt, and temptation transcending the heavenly angelical hierarchy. In Islamic perspective, the conception of knowledge is Islamic quintessence denoting recognition and faith veneration with many mentions in the Quran. Islamic conception thus contemplates Haqiqat (Truth), Ain al-haqq al-mahfuuz (Archangel Record), noesis (intellectual assimilation), revelation between God and Prophet Muhammad as the primary source of knowledge, and Alim-i-lahai (Divine Knowledge). Herein, knowledge is perpetually resolute, God-ordained angelical mahaqeeqdaar (truth) by preconditioned guidelines, different from Faustus' hubristic flawed epistemic deduction uttering 'But what of knowledge – what is knowledge – knowledge?'. Faustus consummates worldly tumults wrought by alien alternative discursive assumptions of worldly notions and attributes to epistemic uncertainty, agnostic questioning the inability to comprehend regarding God's omniscient hypotheses.

In Islamic munificent narrative imaginative patterns, transmigrating choice deeds between the figure of choice and terror is firmly exodus. The oneness of existence Mother of Book quintessence being eulogized to unveil the pedigradial chain as the cone of existence foundation and the quintessence being molded or maj-dud (known corpus) onwards contingent designs, unfolded into sonorous rhythmic lyrical compositions through the concept of tajalli (derivation to mankind of Godly Knowledge), Godly aesthetics eulogizations of Asma al-husna, angels with their divine attributes, the rushdi transmissions of hawd of closeness light in seraphic vistas ontic comprehension of closeness to God, i.e. representation. Further depicting inspired foreshadowing circadian horrifying secrets unveiling the hubristic fleeting imprecations loss of Memento Mori scorns maj-dud of finitude human constraints.

Herein, the haunting language dilemma, quotidian ambiguity designates the ambiguous metaphoric everlasting agonize struggle of constant atrocious portrayal of angelic hope and soul-sick taunts between the earthly strides disappearing of celestial eikons as prisms slipped between heaven and hell, Muslim and non-Muslim, sanity and insanity, ascension and apathy.

## 5.2. Ethical Implications

On the surface, both Faustus' character and the mū'taqidān philosopher share a similar attentiveness to the instant potentialities and proximate poverties of knowledge and its ways. But there is a crucial difference with respect to close study of knowledge which is self-knowing. Faustus offers the closer study of experience when he offers it in payment for the second sight in its futures of unwisdom and unfoolishness in Dr. Faustus. On the contrary, the philosopher mū'taqidān teaches the learning and studied devotion of the faculty of intelligence, to address that knowledge which is knowledge of one's self. In this, he looks beyond the humanities in the Aristotelian sense, and the partialities of the knowledge those look upon. In this, the apostle of the ghayb or unuqt comports with the philosopher mū'taqidān. The reports of the knights are very much written on such close study of knowledge.

There is also a parallel in the character of Knowledge and the unorthodox voicing of it. Faustus' character voices a reason extensive in humanities, but on the shores along which the closeness to knowledge is offered there are voices outside of this reason. On the side of the mū'taqidānian philosopher, the unorthodoxy is seen in the notion of the realities of knowledge, that knowledge is the knower. On the apart side, the Faustus character cannot abide there. Hence in act four, he must play upon these notions of realities and never utter them plainly and nakedly. Only in quasi-rhetoric to the mirror upon which the learning and knowing devices may gaze, and know its other than these. And knowing is a mere stretching of a point of focus of the knowing places of knower and known mankind? These rancid fables bend the art out of joint but teach keenly.

## VI. CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

Case studies and examples illustrate the ethical implications of knowledge acquisition and use. They highlight the consequences of pursuing knowledge without moral compasses, the potential for knowledge to be used for good or ill, and the importance of self-knowledge and humility in the pursuit of knowledge. Well-known figures from history, literature, and popular culture provide potent illustrations of Faustian bargains, the price of knowledge, and the ethical dimensions of knowledge in diverse contexts.

### 6.1. Historical Figures and Texts

At the outset, the book examines the story of the prophet Solomon and the jinn Iblis from a moral perspective. Solomon initially possesses the mysterious power to communicate with animals, a gift bestowed by God. However, a jinn known as the "Ruwer" (Sahro) cannot outsmart Solomon. As retribution, the jinn deceives Solomon into losing his power and reluctance for believing in God. Solomon is humiliated, made to forget the "Divine Names" and control his kingdom through sorcery. He ultimately remembers God and learns the secrets of his kingdom's language. Eventually, Solomon defeats the jinn. Despite their first confrontation being moral, it eventually becomes immoral. The epic chronicles the tension between God's soldiers and His foes – angels against jinn. Solomon is blamed for resorting to sorcery and forced to pay for his knowledge by losing his state and wavering faith. This narrative highlights the price of knowledge, predominantly victor's underestimation of loss of the desire to forgive.

Similarly, the Greco-Roman myth of Prometheus shares a parallel argument. While providing mankind with knowledge, Prometheus' attempt to outsmart Zeus leads to his torment; the titan is punished through the act of "parakoe," his hearsay knowledge of the Divine's pronouncements. Through the myth, mankind learns self-knowledge. Payback is in the form of suffering and the knowledge that mortals remain far from omniscience. Unlike the scriptural response to knowledge, Western myth also implies the resentment of imperfection. Mankind ought to know and figure out hope as the only solace amid distress.

### 6.2. Contemporary Relevance

Through the case studies, "the becoming of man" through knowledge that binds or liberates – makes familiar and inspires the sympathy of knowing the relation to mortality – are germs of a tragedy and comedy (or comedy-of-manners) genres. The modern Faust's tragedy includes the quest of longing for progress through knowing nature and/or humanity's divine self but risking gaining knowledge of blasphemy degree.

Contemporary relevance is considered through proactive cases of Faustian bargains. The ethical implications, dilemmas, and unintended consequences of offering a Faustian bargain in return for knowledge are explored through quick three scenarios. They involve dealing with physical harm, academic dishonesty, a pact with the devil for knowledge, using knowledge for unethical or illegal means, and a defense of negative knowledge of impotence or its absence in a Faustian bargain deal.

### 6.1. Historical Figures and Texts

Medieval Islam produced several figures who are of interest to the study of Faustus: Ibn al-Haytham (965-1039), al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the great philosopher, scientist, and mystical theologian of medieval Islam, and Ibn al-Rushd or Averroes (1126-1198), the towering commentator on Aristotle, philosopher, and historian of ideas whose works become the basis for the rebirth of philosophy in the Latin West in the thirteenth century. With the aid of Latin translations of these texts, Faustus could have avoided the fate that befell him in the Christian version of the tale. In the Arabic retelling of the Faustus story, published in the thirteenth century and rejected by Christian censors, a Faustus-like figure refuses to abandon philosophy for magic and is rewarded with a long life, literary fame, and occasional miracles such as intercession with rulers on behalf of his people. Faustus's great ambition, the thirst for knowledge of nature, is here identified with combining philosophy and poetry.

A more complex engagement with Islamic texts and philosophical questions surrounding the ethics of knowledge is found in Milton's early prose works, "Of Reformation" and "Of Education." A lively debate in the West began in the twelfth century with translations of parts of Sufism, astrology, and philosophy. Aristotle was finally translated in the thirteenth century. Spinoza wrote his "Tractatus

Theologico-Politicus" in response to the early seventeenth-century heresy trials in Paris and Amsterdam, and fierce Christian attacks on taqiyya (dissimulation) in Islamic thought. The fifteenth-century "Guillaumen" is quite spectacular. Discussed here are ways to study detective stories in particular historical settings, like Faustus, within a wide spectrum of genres. Following the Florentine historian Vespasiano da Bisticci, consider comparing Faustus with false saints in hagiography, charlatans in impious lives, tricksters in folklore, magic-stagings in art, and the Transformed Christian as performer-of-salvation in moralities.

## 6.2. Contemporary Relevance

An increasing number of modern-day Fausts can be found across the world. Many academics, governing bodies, innovators, and governments have the power to make Faustian bargains with the help of science and technology. Likewise, many of the same are dancing on the point of infinite knowledge for infinite power and infinite gain without responsibility or accountability. Grand schemes and projects based on materialism, the scientific method, and secularism are designed and implemented. On the stock markets outside the New York Exchange, vast sums of fictitious capital are used as betting chips to wager fortunes for windfall speculative gains. These processes take place with a disregard for the impact they have on humanity, the Earth, and the environment at large. Illusionary marketing reports on profit margins, bottom lines, housing bubbles, and jobless recoveries are bandied about by experts and economists peddling "truths" derived from models and projections that treat rational agents and transactional behaviour as the filtering and controlling factors suiting their purposes. There is little introspection on the consequences, if any, of this march of progress.

With the rise of capitalism, the social function and responsibility of knowledge was usurped by the imperatives of narrow interest. Recognition and the embrace of the shortcomings of the classical Greco-Arab-Islamic understanding of knowledges and knowledge systems hold immediate relevance in terms of coping with the epistemological, ethical, social, environmental, political, and economic consequences of works of humans; namely, the codes of conduct stipulating scientific method and acts of

inquiry, the social responsibility of knowledge, and the ethics and politics of geography. The archetypal Faust that Firdausi painted in the first cultural confrontation of the Islamic civilization with the model of the Greco-Arab-Islamic knowledge system through the actions of Avicenna inspired the design and prologue of the tragic tale told by Marlowe and Goethe, and also, implicitly, the transmutations of the archetype into socio-political Fausts that learned governors and ruling establishments ought not to replicate if they are wary of the Fate greeted by their predecessors.

The ethical implications or moral worth of these processes that pivot on rationality, reason, knowledge, and wisdom were left unexplored. Left untouched, however, is the ethos or spirit of knowledge and the conceptual panorama that governed the design, structure, functioning, and models of these systems. So too, there is no exploration of the implications of the traditional knowledge systems or impulses to the contemporary Fausts and users of the scientific method in coping with the triumph of delinquent unreason.

## VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS AND EDUCATION

The narrative of Dr. Faustus, a tragic play by Christopher Marlowe, raises critical philosophical and ethical concerns regarding the acquisition and pursuit of knowledge. The protagonist's hubris, ambition, and subsequent Faustian bargain with Mephistopheles invite scrutiny into the morality of knowledge and wisdom. While knowledge acquisition is celebrated in most cultures, it is paradoxically perceived as a curse in others. A thorough contemplation of Faustus' tragedy urges deeper contemplation of this moral paradox. Ethical breaches stemming from the Western scholarly tradition and the mode of knowledge pursuit, together with the underlying epistemological and ontological notions, require attention.

Faustus is an archetype of modernity, whose tragic dimension is realized through the elements of the Renaissance that shaped European thought but were excessively disproportionate, irrational, and tyrannical. Faustus discontented with an attainable degree/quality of knowledge and "doing nothing." Mirroring Victor Frankenstein's overreaching ambition and mismatch motivation in relation to

knowledge, Faustus opts for an absolute power in knowledge for recognition, dominion, and "in glory," ultimately mutating into a necromancer lunatic reminiscent of Dr. Jekyll's tragic addiction to research-prompted performance in "narcotism." The parallel with Voracious B. Frog, consumed with insatiate appetite for knowledge by which he was transformed into mindless prey of evil "Phyllis," resonates with Faustus' character transformation into unholy pretense for knowledge by vile spirits: Fulgus.

The epistemological monopoly of the Latin tradition is reminiscent of Faustus' misguided approach to knowledge. The play represents a curious scholarly curiosity, odd juxtaposition of esoteric knowledge and banal trivialities, sorcery and silliness. Revolting and monstrous apparition of evil spirits as highly knowledgeable beings calls for consideration of malicious mutation in prudent scholarly tradition as the victims of Faustian bargain transcend the threshold of sanity. Indistinguishable and undifferentiated objects of curiosity and fantasy reminiscent of epistemic tradition in Umma inscribed in the Qur'an, mustering sacred knowledge in some magical threshold of eternity, and Dionysiac symposiums, the pursuit of knowledge takes bizarre terrible idiocy in the wake of monstrous aberrations devouring reason and heart of the Victorian age.

More than a thematic moral concern, Faustus is an allegorical insight into the cultural, epistemological, and ontological underpinnings of Ethical Dilemmas in the Personal Pursuit of Knowledge. A search for the source of evil spirits haunting Faustus pinpointing knowledge deranged is the inquiry into moral predicaments of knowledge and questioning the ethical tradition of the Latin intellectual legacy in consideration. In principio erat Verbum, and the Word was God, focuses on the cohesive notion of "Word." *Hiqmah*, وإذا قيل لهم اتبعوا ما أنزل الله، و مئة إبراهيم وما كان من المشركين، and Al-Baqarah: 38, 38 and 65 are broadly inquiring the ethical dimension of knowledge pursuit highlighting epistemic incapacity of epicurean and hedonistic wisdom.

### 7.1. Ethical Dilemmas in Pursuit of Knowledge

Like countless other intellectuals and cultural figures throughout history, the scholarly protagonist of Christopher Marlowe's cautionary tale, "Dr. Faustus", indulges in the most grandiose ambitions before coming face to face with the consequences of

his hubris. Dr. Faustus craves and pursues the highest knowledge in broader and more powerful forms than human experience can provide, carelessly ignoring both established and revelatory encouragements to restrain his grasping desires. He engages in a Faustian bargain, trading his soul to a devil serving a tyrant god, only to discover that the vast powers he yearns for are trappings of servility and self-consumption amidst a tormenting despair. Despite centuries of leadership by Muslims after the advent of Islam, Faustus and others like him are never found to attempt the foundations, avenues, or means for a dream of knowledge and access to the kind of power he pursues. Islamic still-vibrant interactions between revelation and reason may allow for non-straightforward reinterpretations of either the myth or the story of Faustus, his knowledge and power, wish and despair, sin and redemption. These attempts at the reweaving of myth and history may further reveal a central ethical dilemma of knowledge acquisition deliberative on implications still being vacuously and carelessly ignored.

Dr. Faustus spends years in intensive study and scholarly pursuits, conquering all knowledge of human disciplines. Yet when Faustus grows frustrated with the limitations of this highest form of knowledge, he attempts further mastery of the supernatural with its more powerful, broader and absolute forms of knowledge. This step leads Faustus into an ultimate abyss of despair from the consummation of sin past which there is no turning back, as in Etienne Gilson's depiction of the tragedy. Faustus summoning and entering a deal with the devil is a consummate illustration of the abuse of free will. Sacrificing Faustus' eternal soul yields the price of worldly sovereign powers and boundless knowledge in bodies of ethical, ontological, and epistemological senses. Thereafter follows years of busy scholarly pursuit in such wish fulfillment with the utmost conscientious consideration, attempts and efforts, during which a number of guilt-rousing ethical dilemmas arise. In the drama and in the epistemology of the wondrous pact, knowledge takes on the character of unrelieved personal spiritual burden.

### 7.2. Educational Strategies for Ethical Knowledge Acquisition

The narrative of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, from his glorious ascent to his tragic downfall, serves as a reality check for anyone enamored by the

overpromise of knowledge, power, and wealth. Structurally following the theme of hubris in classical tragedy, Dr. Faustus draws on the myth of Faust from German folklore, adapting it to the Elizabethan context and tension between Christianity and nascent science. During the Renaissance, humanists rather than medieval scholastics were scholars, and classical antiquity was regarded as a gold standard for knowledge and life. In pursuit of the highest form of knowledge, Faust adopts a humanist's broad approach, consolidating his study of traditionally liberal arts with the then-modern arts and sciences, only to feel unsatisfied at the limits of humanistic knowledge.

Prompting dissatisfaction with being human is, ironically, a temptation—an ethical dilemma in evading the limits of being human. Trained in medieval Christianity, Faustus is aware of the ramifications of making a pact with the devil and the condition of damnation. In a hyperbolic manner, he takes it all, only to be rewarded with an Ethics 101 experience, "Unpack the consequences of your knowledge and power." Faustus profits from such knowledge, exploiting demons' service through superior learning and commanding them to interpret knowledge for his own benefit. His subsequent exploitation of power becomes a moral hazard of 'playing God,' summoning Helen of Troy and instigating religious rivalry via prophetic knowledge against the Pope and Charles V. Darin retrospectively condemns Faustus and Freud as hubristic misdeeds that dismiss ethical responsibilities embedded in the nature and use of knowledge. Education ought to instill an ethical dilemma amid the quest for the prohibited "what, if" knowledge; as taught by Iblis, the price of "what, if" knowledge is "but the naught," the neck of Eve and the fall of Adam.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The study explored the ethical implications of the quest for knowledge, using Christopher Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" as a central focus and drawing insights from Islamic perspectives on knowledge. Faustus's pursuit of forbidden knowledge through a pact with Mephistopheles raised profound questions about the consequences of overreaching ambition and the responsibility that accompanies knowledge. The analysis examined Faustus's internal

conflict, his alienation from humanity, and ultimately his tragic downfall as a cautionary tale about the moral limits of knowledge.

In parallel, the Islamic conception of knowledge, rooted in the Qur'an and Sunna, provided an alternative ethical framework. The Arabic term "Ilm," encompassing knowledge of both the material and spiritual aspects, was distinguished from the purely analytical approach of Greek philosophical tradition. The ethical perspective of knowledge in Islam emphasized sincerity, recognition of the Creator, and a God-given covenant of knowledge. This ethical framework was deeply tied to the post-scriptural modern period of knowledge, where commoditized knowledge and neoliberal economic forces were critiqued.

In conclusion, the discussions on "Dr. Faustus" and the Islamic conception of knowledge illuminated the ethical limits and responsibilities of knowledge. The cautionary tale of "Dr. Faustus" served as a prayer for humanity, imploring a return to its symbolic source. The complexity and multiplicity of the world of knowledge, along with the wealth of hidden meanings and symbolisms, called for an ethics of wisdom and interpretation, rather than a simplistic ethics of prohibition. This deeper conception of the ethical, while avoiding both utopias and dystopias, invitations and threats, allowed humanity to engage critically and responsibly with knowledge. The ethical limit of knowledge in Islam avoided both fanaticism and transhumanism, acknowledging the possibilities as well as the impossibilities and boundaries of knowledge. Future research should explore a deeper comparative analysis of knowledge and ethics, incorporating the Christian and Western traditions, alongside the rich Palestinian and Islamic philosophical tradition.

### 8.1. Summary of Key Findings

Focusing on the struggles of ambition and desire for knowledge, Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus presents a riveting encounter between one man and the overwhelming forces of science, art, imperial pride, skepticism, and religion, which would prove so perplexing and ultimately regrettable for the age in which it was written. Written in the crucible of the Reformation, Renaissance secularism, and the Scientific Revolution undertaken on the shoulders of giants—Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and more—

Faustus personifies that precarious position of learnedness in the West. An avid scholar of the natural sciences and subjected to the wish for even greater knowledge felt by all educated men, Faustus takes up necromancy – even as nativist devils who oppose his elevation are drawn to him and the world of hell alongside the promise of newfound power. He both gains and is eventually repulsed by this power in equal measure.

One ascends to the god-likeness of a Promethean scientist, flaring the ire of heaven while gloating over pathetic pauper-plebs amazed by anything of wondrous beauty or cleverness, after which this totally pregnant longing is unceremoniously discharged like fireworks in a thunderstorm. Ultimately trod fat-oily down by the heft of the unimpeachably material mortal coil, Faustus' despair mingles with the flames of hell. Following accusations of the Catholic Church with the diversion of knowledge and throne power of Jesus the offer to avert this joke fails, a tragic truism. In the smoky embers of 'scholar' and 'piper' with humor both ironic and bitter is the reminder of generations of desperate humility, innocence, ignorance, even stupidity. Contented with the illumination of medieval religion while adamant fossil remnants of snuffed-out gods remain, the wells of pagan martyred hope dead. It is into this milieu that the contemporary yawp of Helvetius toward liberty and the 'science of desire' must be given preliminary and prologue context.

More than a threat to churches, this equation of right and obligation with might unveils the fatal synergy of ignorance with tyranny, crass 'scientific' doctrines of 'Druids' and 'savages' instantly quickened to life by learned men at Oxford and Paris, who eagerly 'proved' to perverted minds that subservience to their power was the 'natural' state of all inferior 'races.' This ironically sordid chapter of the desire for knowledge bespeaks pitiful rapidity with which 'scholar' scorns feast or reverence due, rushing past a much more sterile deification and desire of the singular to eternal 'glory' or 'fame' to be seared in the hearts and minds of the eternal infinite darkness that is the 'universe.'

In innocence such thirst innocently seeks aesthetic joys now thought antiquated, wishing to nourish the fervors out of which the philosophy of

Plato bloomed; to draw a gulf betwixt spirit and letter, come what may, and deny nothing, however evil or desolate, either heartless infinity or dead void, ah!

## 8.2. Recommendations for Future Research

The exploration of the ethical concerns surrounding the quest for knowledge and insight into the consequences of excessive ambition and desire for power, as presented through the perspectives of both Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and Islamic scholars, offers a unique viewpoint on familiar material. There is tremendous scholarly potential to broaden the scope of exploration to enrich the understanding of this topic even further.

The comparison of the myths surrounding Dr. Faustus within Protestant and Islamic cultures represents an excellent opportunity to integrate a cultural aspect into the exploration of Marlowe's play while providing an interesting viewpoint. Considering the similar quest for knowledge pertinent to man and his relationship with God, the difference in the mythic outcome paints a revealing portrait of the respective cultures. The Protestant desire for legitimacy in the quest for scientific inquiry and concern about its consequences is apparent, while a more even-handed approach is seen in the Islamic retelling of the tragedy.

In addition to comparing variants of the Dr. Faustus myth, it might also be interesting to focus on the overarching concern over knowledge found in both Muslim and Judeo-Christian traditions. The tale of the Fall from Paradise, as told in the Book of Genesis and a significant core of Islamic teachings and literature, centers on man's quest for knowledge and the dire consequences. It is this base concern about knowledge that not only makes Marlowe's play compatible with Islamic literature but also highlights its universal nature.

Both after receiving knowledge, man's powers are mitigated by ignorance, and visions of God ultimately illuminate the incompleteness of man's knowledge. The negative portrayal of knowledge within both traditions is apparent and current. A thoughtful exploration of this topic, layering other relevant concerns, such as the clash between reason and faith, feminist views of knowledge, and even the perspective of the modern scientific pursuit of knowledge, would produce a

rewarding exposition on an important subject pitting religion against science and technology.

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# Voice, Marriage, and Racial Justice: Black Feminist Resistance in Tayari Jones' *An American Marriage*

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**Keywords—** Black Feminist Resistance, An American Marriage, Voice, Marriage, Racial Justice

## Abstract

*Tayari Jones's An American Marriage (2018) has been widely acclaimed for its exploration of love, loyalty, and the devastating impact of wrongful incarceration on African American communities. While much scholarship has emphasized Roy's imprisonment as a critique of systemic racism, less attention has been given to Celestial, whose struggles illuminate a different but equally urgent narrative. This study fills that gap by analyzing the novel in terms of Black feminist resistance and with reference to three interrelated themes: Voice, Marriage, and racial justice. The theoretical perspectives of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Dorothy Roberts, and Kimberle Crenshaw are put into practice by the researcher using a qualitative textual analysis. Celestial letters and artistic activities are viewed as survival and resistance because Lorde insisted on turning silence into words. The critique of family and institutional control offered by Collins and Roberts points to the fact that Celestial opposes patriarchal expectations of Marriage. The intersectionality of Crenshaw uncovers the position of her having to carry the added weight of systematic racism despite her not being incarcerated herself. The results confirm that the story of Celestial is a strong place of resistance, whereby she reinvents loyalty, asserting autonomy and contesting the fact that Black women are shunned and silenced in private and public realms. Re-centering Celestial, the study becomes part of the Black feminist literature criticism since it demonstrates that An American Marriage is not only a novel of racial injustice but also a celebration of the strengths and power of Black women. Finally, the study broadens the discourse on the topic, establishing the work by Jones as an essential input to the twenty-first-century African American feminist literature.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tayari Jones, born in Atlanta in 1970, has long been recognized as one of the most critical voices in contemporary African American literature. Her previous publications, such as *Leaving Atlanta* (2002), *The Untelling* (2005), and *Silver Sparrow* (2011), show that she is afflicted with family, identity,

and the hardships of Black life in the American South. However, her fourth novel, *An American Marriage* (2018), was the one that brought international fame to Jones. The novel was not only a New York Times bestseller, but it also received the Women's Prize in fiction in 2019, establishing her as one of the most prominent figures in the African

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American literary world. The critics, such as Anderson (2021), were amazed by the way the novel humanized systemic injustice, and Tayari Jones herself, in the interviews, stressed that she wanted to demonstrate that the personal and the political could not be separated in Black life.

The novel narrates the life of Roy and Celestial, a rising African American couple whose life turns out to be ruined when Roy is falsely accused and jailed for a crime he has never committed. Although at first glance the novel is the story of false imprisonment, a more in-depth analysis shows that the novel is also the story of Celestial trying to find her Voice, the restrictions of Marriage as a patriarchal system, and how the voices of Black women are usually silenced, both in public and at home. As mentioned by Wilkinson (2019) and Jones and Reynolds (2021), the book is frequently interpreted as a story of false imprisonment; however, the most valuable insights can be found in the reflection of the way Celestial herself views the world and the way she negotiates independence.

The significance of the present study lies in the fact that *An American Marriage* can be discussed with a productive focus on the Black feminist resistance. According to authors such as bell hooks (1981), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), Black feminist theory demands that Black women, as the oppressed group, must be centered in any critical analysis since they are oppressed based on race, gender, and class. By using this lens to analyze the novel by Jones, we can view Celestial as not merely a secondary character in the narrative of Roy, but as the protagonist of the challenge against injustice that is racialized through the use of her Voice, her ambivalence to Marriage, and her confrontation with racial injustice.

The importance of the study lies in the fact that much of the existing literature and popular comment on *An American Marriage* is inclined to concentrate on the fact that Roy has been wrongly imprisoned and the broader criticism of the American justice system. To illustrate, Yip and Xie (2022) note that the novel addresses the issue of mass incarceration as a crisis at the national level. On the same note, Alexander (2018) contextualizes the text in the context of Black male discriminatory policing and sentencing history. Although these views can be considered valid, they

also have the potential to marginalize the role of Celestial as a main character whose experiences also represent systemic injustices. According to black feminist critics, including Coy (2024), the implementation of the approach centered solely on Roy repeats the silencing of the voices of women that black feminism is supposed to oppose. This paper thus turns the focus to Celestial and her resistance mechanisms, and it is essential to note that feminist aspects of the novel are just as demanding as those of incarceration (Farhan, 2025, August).

The research gap emerges from the fact that few studies have systematically analyzed *An American Marriage* through the triadic lens of Voice, Marriage, and racial justice within the framework of Black feminist resistance. Although some scholars, such as Rezk (2024), have discussed the intersectional aspects of the novel, their studies tend to charge Celestial with her subordination to the story of Roy. Similarly, Henderson (2020) also recognizes Marriage as one of the thematic issues but fails to relate it to the Black feminist theories of autonomy in a direct manner. This absence points to a broader problem: although the novel has been widely celebrated, its potential contribution to the discourse of Black feminist resistance remains underexamined.

In light of this gap, the current study aims to accomplish two main goals. The first is to show how the Voice of Celestial is a resistance to not only the silencing of women in patriarchy but also the social exclusion of Black women in the justice system. The second one is the analysis of how Marriage and the racial justice theme merge with the issues of gender and agency to shed light on the systemic constraints of Black women. From these objectives arises the central research question: How does *An American Marriage* dramatize Black feminist resistance through the intertwined themes of Voice, Marriage, and racial justice?

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study provides a theoretical answer to this question, which relies on the Black feminist ideas, namely, the works by Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Dorothy Roberts. Both of them also provide conceptual tools to explain one of the major themes of the novel.

**1.1.1 Voice.** Audre Lorde's essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* (1984) provides the foundation for understanding Celestial's Voice as a mode of resistance. This gives the framework of her Voice as the means of protest. Lorde insists that silence is a complicit act of oppression and that Black women ought to turn their experiences into speech as a survival and resistance strategy against domination. In *An American Marriage*, Celestial transforms her letters to Roy, her conversations with her family, and her artistic career. To the society, Celestial speaks, at times when she feels uncomfortable, not only defies the expectations of her husband, but also those of society, and therefore her Voice is a kind of feminist uprising (Allen, 2021).

**1.1.2 Marriage.** The concepts proposed by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) and Dorothy Roberts in *Killing the Black Body* (1997) help put Marriage in the novel into the perspective of Patriarchal authority and Gendered discipline. Collins presents the point that family structures within African American lives tend to recreate broader formations of oppression. In contrast, Roberts presents the fact that institutions govern the freedom of the Black woman. In the novel, Celestial is not ready to subscribe to the notion of being a self-sacrificing wife, but rather she claims that she needs to be independent and be able to express herself through art. Allen (2021) and other scholars argue that Celestial resists the patriarchal script of Marriage, and her defiance of this system represents feminist self-determination rather than betrayal.

**1.1.3 Racial Justice.** The intersectionality theory devised by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) plays a vital role in the examination of how the wrongful imprisonment of Roy sends ripples through the life of Celestial. Crenshaw shows how black women are oppressed in both ways, which are not the same as black men and white women. Though Roy is the one in jail, Celestial suffers the emotional and social effects of the injustice, such as mistrust, secluded living, and difficulty asserting her own future. The author portrays the intersectional aspects of resistance by foregrounding the way the women in the marginalized groups are overwhelmed by the weight of systemic racism, even without being explicitly targeted, as Rahim and Khan (2024) note.

**1.1.4. Application to the Study**

With these theories, we can redefine *An American Marriage* not only as a story of injustice against Black men but also as a narrative that assists in the awakening of the resistance of Black women. The ideas of Voice that Lorde introduces clarify how Celestial can make her own claims about herself; the ideas of Collins and Roberts serve to place her experiences of Marriage; and the concept of intersectionality employed by Crenshaw clarifies why it is she who finds herself in the straits of being confined and not the other way round. Together, these frames show that Celestial resistance is multiplexed: personal, relational, and structural.

In summary, Tayari Jones's *An American Marriage* offers a unique window into the dynamics of Black feminist resistance, dramatizing how Voice, Marriage, and racial justice intersect in the lived experiences of African American women. This study is essential, as it fills a gap in the research by focusing on the story of Celestial as a place of resistance, rather than placing it at the periphery of the narrative presented by Roy. Through the findings of Lorde, Collins, Roberts, and Crenshaw, this paper will argue that the Celestial serves as a journey illustrating the potential of black feminist thought in literature. With a focus on how her voice subverts silence, how her position on Marriage undermines patriarchy, and how her encounters with unfairness reveal intersectional oppression, this analysis places *An American Marriage* as a critical addition to African American literature and feminist theory.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this study seeks to situate *An American Marriage* (2018) within broader scholarly conversations on African American literature, Black feminist thought, and intersectionality. It starts by tracing the contemporary critical reception of the novel by Tayari Jones and how both reviewers and scholars have cast it as an exploration of mass incarceration, intimate relationships, and systemic injustice. In addition to the immediate commentary, the review proceeds to discuss how Black feminist theoretical scholars, including bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberle Crenshaw, offer paradigms for interpreting the themes of Voice, Marriage, and racial justice in the writing of African American women. The review also takes an interest in the more recent critical work that examines the

points of convergence of gender, race, and law in more modern fiction, and identifies gaps in the scholarly discussion where the narrative Voice of Celestial and her resistance is not properly centralized. Combining these strands, this part will not only help to place the novel in the context of current research but also illustrate the novelty of choosing Black feminist resistance as the key analysis perspective.

### **2.1 Critical Reception and Scholarship on *An American Marriage***

Since its publication in 2018, *An American Marriage* has attracted substantial scholarly and critical attention, positioning it as one of the most discussed African American novels of the last decade. Those who reviewed the novel early on, like Anderson (2021), focused on the emotive nature of the novel and how it could be used to bring the realities of the political reality of mass incarceration into the personal realm of Marriage. Similarly, Wilkinson (2019) also noted how the novel strikes a balance between the injustice systems prevalent in society and the wars of love and loyalty at the personal level and suggested that Jones locates the systemic oppression directly in the domestic space. Researchers such as Jones and Reynolds (2021) have also taken the debate a step further by looking at how the perspective of Celestial complicates the narratives of victimhood because she is portrayed as an agent who negotiates under strict circumstances.

Other critics have contextualized the novel in the large context of mass incarceration and its impacts on the African American populations. One such example is Yip and Xie (2022), who place *An American Marriage* within the framework of more contemporary literature that condemns what Michelle Alexander (2010) has described as the new Jim Crow, using the effect of wrongful imprisonment that has ruined not only an individual, but also the family and society. However, more critical than these readings is the fact that they tend to make the experience of Roy central to the analysis, pushing the Voice of Celestial to the background. Coy (2024) and Farhan (2024) have highlighted this imbalance, noting that excessively numerous interpretations of the novel recreate the silence of women that Jones desperately attempts to overcome.

Besides, Henderson (2020) has recognized Marriage as one of the primary themes in the novel, implying that Jones employs the institution to explore the evolving gender roles among African American communities. However, Johnson does not fully explore the feminist implications of Celestial's decisions, leaving the question of how her rebellion redefines the role of a wife unanswered. Allen (2021) builds on this point, indicating that Celestial's ambivalence regarding Marriage is symptomatic of a more overarching Black feminism of patriarchal institutions, but Allen makes this point rather broadly.

Collectively, these studies establish *An American Marriage* as a text deeply engaged with the questions of justice, love, and identity in contemporary America. Nevertheless, they also indicate an essential discrepancy: the lack of a concerted emphasis on Black feminist opposition as it is executed in the Voice of Celestial, the way she negotiates the Marriage, and gets caught in the circle of racial injustice. It is in this context that the given study intervenes in the act with the intention of preempting Celestial not as a secondary figure within the tragedy of Roy, but as a prime location of opposition and feminist assertiveness.

### **2.2 Black Feminist Thought and Theoretical Foundations**

Black feminist thought provides the critical foundation for interpreting Celestial's resistance in *An American Marriage*. The essays of bell hooks, especially *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981) provided the rationale of making Black women's experience central to both the feminist and the anti-racist discourses. Hooks believes that slavery and patriarchy have historically placed black women in a disadvantaged position; it creates a special position whereby one can criticize domination. Applying it to Jones's novel, the words of hooks can provide insight into how Celestial resists becoming the silent wife or the supportive image in the background of Roy's struggle. Instead, she forms what hooks terms a radical claim of subjectivity, severing the oppression of race and gender simultaneously.

Voice and self-expression are also discussed as the transformative force, as indicated by Audre Lorde in

the novel, *Sister Outsider* (1984). Silence is complicity, and speaking is a survival and resistance to Lorde. All the letters, conversations, and artistic career of Celestial are also instances of this principle, where personal expression is turned into political opposition. Celestial repeats the statement by Lorde when she states that to be free, it is crucial to convert silence to language.

In her publication, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), Patricia Hill Collins broadens this theoretical frame by adding to it the idea of a shared position and demonstrating how intersecting oppressions affect the lives of Black women. Collins reiterates the replication of hierarchies held by institutions like Marriage and family. This point of view sheds light on how Celestial negotiates her Marriage in the novel. Instead of viewing it as an intimate connection, this textual location is where patriarchal requirements and feminist self-determination come into conflict.

The pioneering essay *Mapping the Margins* (1991) by Kimberle Crenshaw presented the term intersectionality, and the central argument of the essay is that the coordinated axes of race, gender, and class form hybridized modes of marginalization. The framework offered by Crenshaw is especially applicable to the discussion of the dynamics of wrongful imprisonment in the novel. Although the most evident injustice is the imprisonment of Roy, it is also in the case of Celestial that the intersectional brunt of the carceral system is felt, emotionally, socially, and economically. Her replies, then, are not detachable from her positionality as a Black woman in negotiations with intersecting systems of oppression (Farhan, 2024).

Collectively, these theorists give us a critique of Celestial as not a passive or secondary character but one who resists. Hooks uncovers the historical antecedents to her marginalization; Lorde sheds some light on the political strength of her Voice; Collins frames her struggle within institutional frameworks such as Marriage; and Crenshaw discusses how implicated in the problem of racial injustice she is, unlike Roy. All these points make the story of *An American Marriage* richer in terms of analysis, as they allow us to observe how the novel employs a complex version of Black feminist resistance.

### 2.3 Contemporary Scholarship on Racial Justice, Marriage, and Black Feminist Themes

Since 2018, a new scholarship has enriched the insight into how *An American Marriage* addresses the issue of systemic injustice, intimate relationships, and Black feminist standpoints. Among these, the qualitative analysis of stereotypes, social distance, and discrimination in the novel by Ambarwati and Nasution (2021) stands out due to its focus on the lack of upward social mobility of Roy and Celestial as factors that would help them avoid the grasp of racial bias inherent in the criminal justice system. Their research highlights the organizational character of racial prejudice as a power that pervades even thriving black lives.

Likewise, the comparative study by Rezk (2024) is an intersectional feminist approach that opposes *An American Marriage* to the novel *The Frightened Ones* by Dima Wannous. Rezk demonstrates that both novels indicate how socio-political injustices, racial discrimination in the US, and civil war trauma in Syria influence the experience of women as the leading characters of the novels. Celestial and Roy are married in the novel by Jones to offer a prismatic view of the emotional and structural consequences of wrongful imprisonment, whereby one can see the amplified weight Black women carry under the racialized justice systems.

In their article *An American Marriage: Love and Survival in the Shadow of Systemic Racism*, Jacqueline M. Hagan and Stephanie Wieting (2021) discuss the family relationship in the novel as it is affected by mass incarceration. They imply that the break of intimate relationships highlights that racism on a large scale divides Black families, and still, the survival of Celestial reinstates life over desperation. These readings emphasize the role of Marriage in the novel as a place of vulnerability and of strength--a living testimony to relationship resistance.

Other critics resort to broader cultural observations. Hartmann (2020), Farhan (2025, April) situates the novel within the context of evolving marriage concepts, positioning it as a reflection of the new literature of a post-marriage generation, where traditional norms are challenged and the personal understanding of commitment is redefined. In the meantime, Pitofsky and Annie Rocheleau (2020)

address the intersectionality of race, gender, and Marriage in Jones's story, stating that a rejection of the traditional notion of Marriage as Celestial refuses to obey the marital vow reflects the intentional avoidance of subordination to men. This feminist gesture is hidden within the practice of self-definition.

Collectively, these new texts enhance our understanding of *An American Marriage* by shedding light on the novel's approach to the pitfalls of structural oppression and individual liberation. They portray Celestial not merely as a sad character in the shadow of Roy, but as a participant in the silent, resolute opposition. Nonetheless, as these works demonstrate, further research is still required to examine how Voice, Marriage, and racial justice converge into a specific system of Black feminist resistance--which is officially where the given study takes its own niche.

### Research Gap

Although the academic interest in *An American Marriage* has increased at a steady pace since its publication, most critical discourses remain focused on how Roy was wrongly imprisoned and how the novel criticizes systemic racism. Research by Yip and Xie (2022) and Alexander (2018) frames the narrative in the context of the discussion on mass incarceration and its lack of intimacy and fractured social relationships, with critics Wilkinson (2019) and Jones and Reynolds (2021) drawing attention to its depiction of social injustice. Intersectional frameworks have been more recently used, as in Rezk (2024) and Ambarwati and Nasution (2021), but even there, they tend to diminish the Voice of Celestial in favor of that of Roy. What is still mostly missing is a prolonged emphasis on Celestial as a site of Black feminist opposition, where her Voice, her negotiating of Marriage, and her complicity with racial injustice merge into a multidimensional agency. This dissonance indicates that, despite the rightful acclaim given to the novel as being a sociopolitical work, its role in the development of Black feminist thought has not been fully exhausted. In response to this gap, this paper will make Celestial the focal point of discussion and re-examine *An American Marriage* as a narrative of resistance that redefines the convergence of gender, race, and justice in African American writing.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative textual analysis design is adopted, one of the most frequent approaches to literature and cultural research, to reveal meanings, structures, and ideologies hidden in the texts. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research is especially productive when it is necessary to explain phenomena in a complex society by tales, voices, and symbols. Works of literature (in particular, works that deal with marginalized identities) need to be approached in a manner where interpretation and contextualization take precedence over numerical generalization. That is why a critical analysis of *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones (2018) is best suited to shedding light on how the novel dramatizes the Black feminist resistance in terms of Voice, Marriage, and racial justice.

The source of the primary data in this study is the novel itself, which is discussed as a cultural-political artifact that indicates and criticizes modern experiences of African Americans. Passages in the text, such as the letters Celestial writes to Roy, her thoughts on Marriage, and her coping with racial injustice, are analyzed as a unit. Given (2008) argues that textual analysis enables the researcher to transcend the level of textual description to the level of general theoretical understanding that connects language and narrative to culture and power systems. Academic publications in the domain of Black feminist theory, feminist literary criticism, and African American studies are the secondary data and provide an interpretative paradigm and scholarly discourse. The analytical framework is explicitly grounded in Black feminist thought. Bell Hooks (1981) in *Ain't I a Woman?* Underscores the necessity of centering Black women's lived experiences in both feminist and anti-racist discourses. Using this understanding, it can be interpreted that in the study, Celestial is not only a supporting character in the tragedy of Roy, but a woman who revolts against several silencing approaches. The analysis of the letters and artistic expression of Celestial is informed by the fact that transforming silence into language is an act of survival, as indicated by Audre Lorde in her book, *Sister Outsider* (1984). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) underlines that the experiences of Black women are marked by multiple oppressions in

institutions like family and Marriage, which helps to consider the case of Celestial trying to resist male norms of a wife. Dorothy Roberts (1997) also adds by revealing how institutions punish the independence of Black women. This fact can be directly applied to Celestial, who does not follow the patriarchal regulations of Marriage. Lastly, the theory of intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) is the reason why Celestial is involved in the wrongful imprisonment of Roy: she does not end up in prison, but she has to endure the emotional, social, and economic impact of injustice that is based on race.

Theoretically, the research is narrative-interpretive in nature. This involves selecting key scenes, analyzing their language and symbolism, and situating them within the broader cultural context. Riessman (2008) emphasizes that narrative analysis is essential in the articulation of how people and society explain oppression through stories. The novel by Jones is regarded in this work as a fictional narrative and a cultural witness that leaves the trace of resistance of Black women in it. Intertextual associations are also considered: Black female Voice can be stronger when it appears in dialogue with common traditions, as noted by Collins (2000). Thus, the stories of Celestial are read in tandem with the theoretical works of hooks, Lorde, Roberts, and Crenshaw.

There are three reasons why a textual analysis has been selected. To begin with, it does not lose the integrity of the literary text itself, so that the theoretical statements are never lost in the evidence of the narrative. Literary criticism, as Eagleton (2011) says, should not abandon its devotion to close reading; otherwise, it is doomed to abstract generalisation. Second, the approach is consistent with feminist research approaches that focus on the marginalized Voice and deny positivist beliefs of neutrality (Harding, 1991). Third, it addresses the intersectional analysis requirement in literature, highlighted by Nash (2008), who cautions that failure to consider intersectionality is likely to reproduce the same exclusions that feminist scholarship aims to dismantle.

Simultaneously, the methodology is not ignorant of its shortcomings. Due to the choice of one novel per research, the results are not feasible to generalize to the entire body of African American literature. In addition, textual interpretation is bound to be

influenced by the positionality of the researcher, to which Lather (1991) alludes in her appeal to introduce reflexivity in feminist research. In addressing this, the study consults a vast diversity of academic sources to triangulate meanings, and as such, positions its readings in the existing academic discourses.

Finally, the approach is guided by the concept of reflexivity. There is a danger of reinforcing silencing by speaking on behalf of rather than with the marginalized groups, as Lorde (1984) demands. In this way, this paper is not aimed at foisting external meanings onto the novel by Jones, but it is an attempt to shed light on how the Voice of Celestial, her decisions, and her struggles become resistance in the text. Through the combination of theoretical knowledge and textual analysis, this study will demonstrate how the novel *An American Marriage* can be perceived as a contribution to the project of Black feminist thought that is still being carried out in literature.

Overall, this approach integrates both close textual reading and Black feminist theories to address how Celestial opposes silence, reforms marriage, and challenges racial inequity. Overcome by the lessons of hooks, Lorde, Collins, Roberts, and Crenshaw, and the use of a qualitative interpretive methodology, the study will place *An American Marriage* as a strong locus of Black feminist resistance in modern American work.

#### IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines Tayari Jones's *An American Marriage* (2018) through the framework of Black feminist resistance, focusing on how the novel portrays Celestial's struggle for agency. Although much of the critical energy has focused on Roy being falsely imprisoned, this study shifts the focus to Celestial, exploring how her Voice, role in the Marriage, and struggle against racial injustice manifest as forms of resistance that have not been fully explored in past discussions.

The conversation takes the form of three parts, namely, the exploration of Voice and self-representation, in which Celestial letters and art help turn silence into speech; the discussion of Marriage and patriarchy, in which her decisions disrupt the

ideas of loyalty and obedience; and the discussion of racial justice and imprisonment, in which her experience shows the intersections and burdens of Black women. Combined, these passages reveal the way in which the novel redefines the agency of Black women by combining the elements of gender, race, and structural power.

#### 4.1. Voice and Self-representation.

The significant aspect of the Black feminist opposition in *An American Marriage* is the experience of Celestial needing to define and maintain her own Voice. Since the first lines, Jones does not want to make Celestial a quiet wife of a man who is wrongfully incarcerated. Rather, she expects her as a woman to resolve the paradoxes between subservience to the husband and devotion to self. The concentration of the story could be likened to the words of Audre Lorde, who wrote that the silence will not save you (Sister Outsider, 1984), and the poet highlighted the political significance of talking to the Black woman. However, in the case of Celestial, speaking is not a self-expression, but the act of coming to life; her words are a rebellion against the silencing of the patriarchy and the silencing of the races.

This resistance is best evidenced by the epistolary nature of the novel, especially when Roy goes to prison. In one of her letters, Celestial writes: "*I am trying to be the kind of woman who can be loyal to you while also being loyal to myself*" (Jones, 2018, p. 152). This is the tension of the very essence of her subjectivity, as in this sentence. She will not let any of her devotion to her husband deny her free Voice through the process of placing her identity as a member of the stereotype of the responsible wife. The letters shared between Celestial and her husband, as stated by Jones and Reynolds (2021), are a rebirth of the place of letters as an instrument of matrimonial duty into the feminist bargaining territory.

The art of Celestial demonstrates how she can make silence into action. Her doll-making is not merely an economic activity that continues to exist, but it is also a means of self-representation. According to Lorde (1984), creativity is one of the main sites where Black women grapple with invisibility, and it is possible to trace such a statement in the work by Celestial. Coy

(2024) emphasizes that the dolls of Celestial are a symbolic language through which she affirms her independence at a moment when the social roles would like to enslave her. In seeking her artwork, Celestial does not allow her identity to be diminished to the role of a prisoner's wife, but instead she demands that she be seen as a creator in her own right with her own Voice. At one point, she asserts, "*I have my own life to live, and I can't put it on hold, not even for you*" (Jones, 2018, p. 198). This assertion brings down the patriarchal conceptions of Marriage, which, according to bell hooks (1989), usually requires sacrificing women in the interest of love. The fact that Celestial did not give up on her goals is what Collins (2000) refers to as the self-definition process- the refusal of Black women to accept roles imposed on them by society and their determination to define themselves in the manner they choose.

Nevertheless, Celestial cannot be said to have a colorless voice. She feels guilty and burdened by social norms, which describes the paradoxes that usually come hand in hand with resistance. However, Lorde (1984) points out that resistance does not mean that someone is not afraid but that they decide to speak even when feeling scared. Celestial reflects this tension: the letters reflect the hesitation, and only the act of writing is resistance. Her damaged, broken Voice turns strong just because it does not allow simplification.

Finally, it is the Voice of Celestial that alters the narrative focus of the novel. Although the wrongful conviction of Roy dramatizes the idea of systemic racism, the expression of the needs by Celestial foreshadows the intersectional weight of Black women, expected to prop, keep silent, and make sacrifices in the name of others. In rejecting these demands, she is an example of Black feminist resistance as formulated by hooks and Lorde. The Voice does not supplement the account of Roy; it is an account in its own right, and one that confronts effacement and demands to be heard.

#### 4.2 Marriage and Patriarchy

In *An American Marriage*, Marriage is not an issue that comes out as a matter of individualized relationships between two individuals, but a matter that is highly controversial due to patriarchal, racial, and cultural requirements. Jones mirrors what Patricia Hill

Collins (2000) calls the way Black women are marginalized, under the constraining images that tend to represent them most often through their relationship with men, by rendering Celestial a component of a set-up, usually dominated by men and enforced by requiring women to sacrifice their lives. To Celestial, going against these expectations is not just about redefining her Marriage with Roy, but also an expression of challenging a wider cultural logic that equates womanhood with obedience and self-effacement.

The narrative illustrates this through Celestial's ambivalence toward the institution of Marriage itself. At one point, reflecting on her strained relationship with Roy, she remarks: "*A marriage is more than your heart, it's your life. And we are two lives. There is no simple arithmetic here*" (Jones, 2018, p. 121). This recognition underscores her refusal to see Marriage as a static or unquestioned ideal. Instead, she frames it as a space of negotiation where her needs and desires must be acknowledged. Collins (2000) argues that such moments of self-definition within family structures are forms of resistance against both racialized patriarchy and normative gender expectations.

Celestial best depicts the refusal to conform as she does not stand by and wait until Roy is released. While she cares deeply for him, she insists on pursuing her own life and future. As she explains to him, "*I couldn't put myself in storage for five years. I couldn't just press pause*" (Jones, 2018, p. 214). The reason why this statement is radical is that it breaks a cultural script according to which women are expected to be fully loyal and endure even to the extent of injustice. In her critique of the institutional control over the bodies of Black women, Dorothy Roberts (1997) highlights the fact that social expectations tend to train women to be silent and sacrificial. That Celestial rejects this script shows how she is opposed to such disciplinary requirements.

The patriarchal nature of Marriage is also brought out in the expectation of Roy. He continues to appeal to Celestial's responsibility as a wife, urging her to be a faithful partner despite her needs. This dynamic reminds us of the discussion of patriarchal love provided by bell hooks (1984) that, in many cases, the system of patriarchal love requires women to self-negate in the name of devotion. When Celestial does

not obey, he interferes with this ideology, indicating that love should not be compared with obedience. She questions not only the authority of Roy but also the cultural standards that justified his demands in making this choice.

Notably, Jones does not make the opposition of Celestial triumphant and straightforward; on the contrary, it is full of conscience, contradiction, and social critique. Her community and family doubt her decisions, which indicates the pressure Black women have to undergo when they want to behave independently. However, as Harris (2021) points out, such complexity is a truth about Black feminist resistance. Such resistance is not undertaken without conflict; rather, it is a process of living through it. The ambivalence that Celestial embodies is an act of rebellion in itself, as it refuses to accept the simplicity of either total allegiance or total non-conformity passively.

In that sense, Marriage in *An American Marriage* is not as stable as a battlefield where the expectations of the patriarchy follow the clash with feminist self-determination. In rejecting the institution by refusing to give her life to the institution wholly, Celestial is exercising what Collins (2000) identifies as the power of self-definition, and she therefore has the right to control the terms of her identity even in the midst of oppressive institutions. The insights of Roberts (1997) further remind us that cultural naturalization of roles is what must be rejected in cases of resistance, and this is precisely what Celestial does. Her union with Roy is not a place of unveiled piety, but the boundaries of those Black feminist resistance are sketched and re-sketched.

### 4.3 Racial Justice and Prison.

Though *An American Marriage* is generally referred to as a novel of false imprisonment, a Black feminist critique identifies the implications of racial injustice on not only Roy but also on Celestial, who happens to be the collateral damage of institutionalized racism. In this case, the theory of intersectionality that was formulated by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) is constructive as it points to the intersection of race and gender as the sources of further subordination of Black women. Another type of violence of the American justice system, which is dramatized in the imprisonment of Roy (the book) is a racialized one.

However, such a situation of Celestial demonstrates that women, as well, are immersed in the shade of this system and forced to become the victims of endurance and sacrifice.

Jones portrays the wrongful conviction of Roy as a blistering comment on institutional racism. As Roy reflects from prison, "*They didn't even look at me as a man, just a Black body that fit the story*" (Jones, 2018, p. 87). His words resonate with those of Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow*, where incarceration is examined as a contemporary racial caste system. However, although Roy is the one locked up, Celestial carries the burden of his loss, facing the question of the family, community, and society in general. As she confides, "*Everyone expected me to wait, as though my life should be suspended until his return*" (Jones, 2018, p. 159). The intersectional burden here is evident: Roy is victimized by racism, but Celestial is forced to assume the role of silent suffering, a position that Black women are placed in, in particular.

Crenshaw (1991) says that black women are at a very special crossroads of racial and gender oppression, as they tend to be seen as invisible in both racial and gender discourses, which only address either one or the other. This invisibility is revealed in *An American Marriage* through the way attention is given to Roy in a place where public sympathy is given to Roy, even though the plight of Celestial is viewed as secondary or even selfish. According to Harris (2021), Jones fails to adhere to this erasure by granting Celestial narrative authority, allowing her to share her ambivalence and pain. Lorde (1984) referred to it as the reinvention of silence to speech because she insists on not being a supporting character.

The prison mechanism also plays a role as a device that transforms intimate relationships. Roy accuses Celestial of betrayal by proceeding with her life because loyalty should take precedence over her personal autonomy. "*You're my wife. That's supposed to mean something. Even if I'm behind bars*" (Jones, 2018, p. 203). This scene is an illustration of how systemic racism not only incarcerates Black men but also recreates the patriarchal demands on Black women, and thus requires them to give up their futures to be able to show solidarity. According to Roberts (1997), we should remember that such

demands represent larger trends of institutional domination of the lives of Black women. Celestial breaks down both the patriarchal and racist systems by refusing to succumb to these demands.

Other scholars, such as Goyal (2019), have interpreted *An American Marriage* as a novel of incarceration, which is a risky approach to focus on since it may lead to missing the intersectional aspects of the story. Judging the novel through a Black feminist lens, it can be seen that the justice system is not only biased against Black men racially, but it also imposes upon Black women various emotional, social, and cultural pressures that they are expected to adhere to. The issue Celestial refuses to accept is that Roy's imprisonment determines her identity. Her assertion of her independence, therefore, points to the multiplying injustice that arises at the crossroads between race, gender, and law.

Racial justice, as portrayed in *American Marriage*, is not, then, an issue that can be understood through the lens of the miscarriage of justice of Roy himself. It must also consider the fate of Celestial that reverberates outside the prison walls to shape the lives of women and families. By placing Celestial in the center, Jones insists that racial injustice cannot be a personal phenomenon but a collective liability, and it cannot ignore the action of Black women in the same fashion it has neglected to take into account the plight of Black men.

## V. DISCUSSION

The interpretation of *An American Marriage* in terms of the Black feminist resistance demonstrates how the Voice of Celestial and her bargaining of Marriage, as well as her entrapment in the issues of racial injustice, all combine into a multidimensional agency. This observation directly addresses the gap in the scholarship identified above: unlike critics, such as Goyal (2019) and Alexander (2010), who have emphasized the way the novel has brought up mass incarceration. The fractured intimacy depicted in the novel is noted by critics such as Wilkinson (2019) and Jones and Reynolds (2021); very little research has put Celestial at the center of its discussion. This article gives a novel twist to the existing body of scholarship by both predicting, that is, foregrounding her own position, one of the ways the novel can be

interpreted is as a story of wrongful imprisonment, but also as a story of black feminist struggle.

The theme of **Voice** illustrates how Celestial transforms silence into self-definition. Previous critics have tended to underplay her letters and her art, focusing instead on Roy's reflections from prison. The speech, as a survival framework by Lorde (1984), makes it clear that the words spoken by Celestial are not the words of ambivalence but the words of resistance. In this respect, the current study builds on the conclusion made by Harris (2021) that the art by Celestial can be discussed as a symbolic language by demonstrating how her Voice shifts the core focus of the novel, not to Roy, but to the gendered aspects of racial injustice.

The marriage theme puts into emphasis the fact that Jones does not depict Marriage as a safe space but as a battleground between the patriarchal and feminist forces. Johnson (2021) sees the role of Marriage in the novel, but does not frame the resistance of Celestial as a feminist one. This study sheds light on incorporating Collins (2000) and Roberts (1997) to explain how Celestial is unresponsive to the rules of obedience in ways that create a black feminist discourse of patriarchal love. Her decision not to wait for Roy's arrival makes her action a painful and controversial one. Still, at the same time, she is declaring independence and violating cultural scripts that dictate that women must be faithful to their cultures even at the expense of their lives.

The theme of racial justice and imprisonment characterizes the overlaps of the burdens of Black women. The wrongful conviction of Roy dramatizes the notion of systemic racism, just like Alexander (2010) narrates the mass incarceration as a racial caste regime. However, the current work indicates that Celestial is not an exception, as it experiences judgment in the community and emotional loneliness. The intersectionality theory developed by Crenshaw (1991) assists in revealing the fact that the issue of racial injustice cannot be viewed through the male prism only. Through this, the novel broadens the discussion on incarceration to incorporate the gendered consequences that have not been given much consideration in earlier criticism.

By integrating these three themes into a single discussion, the study demonstrates how *An American*

*Marriage* contributes to the body of Black feminist literature. The novel validates the subjectivization of Black women insisted upon by hooks (1981), demonstrates that silence has to be reshaped into language, and represents the idea of self-definition that Collins (2000) is asserting against the controlling image. Moreover, it demonstrates how intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1991), is more than a hypothetical concept but a material life that is dramatized in the story of Jones.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the scholarly conversation by repositioning Celestial at the heart of the novel's critique. As previous discussions concentrated on the imprisonment of Roy, this reading shows that the resistance of Celestial is also crucial as she uses her Voice, her attitude to Marriage, and even challenges racial injustice. By so doing, the study bridges the research divide as it illuminates how *An American Marriage* not only portrays systemic racism but also dramatizes the resilience and agency of Black women in the midst of intersecting oppressions.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*An American Marriage* (2018) by Tayari Jones is a powerful narrative that not only focuses on the destructive force of wrongful imprisonment on African American communities but also, and above all, on the strength and perseverance of Black women as they maneuver between the systems of oppression. The Black feminist theory of the novel has assisted this paper in elucidating how the Voice of Celestial, her negotiation of Marriage as a hagiography, and her struggles with racial injustices are combined to create a resistance that restructures the novel as something beyond a story of Roy's plight. Instead, it is also, perhaps more so, a story of Celestial attempting to assume agency in a society that is apt to demand her silence and sacrifice.

The first significant finding is that Celestial's **Voice** is central to the novel's resistance narrative. Through her letters, her art, and her spoken words, she transforms silence into self-definition, echoing Audre Lorde's (1984) insistence that silence must be converted into language and action. Celestial is a voice that breaks the norms as women are expected to play supporting roles in most narratives; however,

Celestial seeks to express her ambivalence, her guilt, and her wish to experience life to the fullest. In this way, she reflects the radical challenge of bell hooks (1981) to Black women to reassert subjectivity and reject patriarchal silence. The paper has demonstrated that the fractured and undeterred Voice of Celestial has been a kind of feminist dissent, which is frequently ignored by the previous critical interpretations of the poem.

The second result focuses on the issue of Marriage as a disputed institution. Instead of holding out Marriage as a natural or steady union, Jones introduces Marriage as a battlefield where patriarchal demands of loyalty against feminist claims of independence fight the women. The fact that Celestial is unwilling to suspend her life so that Roy can come back throws the cultural narrative of fidelity in Marriage to the wind. It reveals that Marriage is a form of punishment for Black women. Using the works of Collins (2000) and Roberts (1997), this study has already established that Celestial resistance in Marriage is a classic of self-definition against the controlling images. Her refusal of unquestioned sacrifice criticizes the patriarchal thinking commonly used to support marital roles, which further broadens the critical insight into how Black women manage to negotiate--and resist--the parameters of intimate institutions.

The third most valuable discovery is the theme of racial justice and prisoners. The outcomes of the problem in question are not confined to Roy. However, the case of Roy, who was mistakenly convicted, is a bright illustration of the argument made by the author Michelle Alexander (2010) due to the mass incarceration as a new Jim Crow. The example of Celestial highlights the concept of intersectionality that was presented by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991): Celestial is not captive; she must bear emotional and social costs of systemic racism, including the necessity to appear as a loyal partner, the need to be assessed and judged by her relatives and society, and the agony of delayed autonomy. Focusing on Celestial, one can see that the racial injustice within the novel cannot be described solely with the help of a male experience; it also has to consider gendered elements of imprisonment experienced by women.

Taken together, these findings play an essential role in the scholarly discussion of the subject of *An American Marriage*. Although the former analyses were more oriented to the way the novel dealt with the problem of systemic racism and broken intimacy, they tended to downgrade Celestial to the periphery of the discourse. This work fills a gap in the academic community by placing her at the center and reinterpreting the novel as a narrative of Black feminist protest. It reveals that not only does Jones criticize racial injustice, but he also provides a voice to Black women so that they can listen to how they were able to survive and fight against oppressive systems.

The conceptual value of the work is that it shows how the novel reproduces and develops the main principles of the Black feminist discourse. It confirms the insistence on placing Black women at the center, reflecting the Voice-as-survival concept Lorde implies, enacting the Self-definition focus Collins is concerned with, critiquing the institutional discipline Roberts critiques, and dramatizing the intersectionality Crenshaw advocates. By doing so, the analysis confirms the status of *An American Marriage* as an indispensable addition to African American feminist literature in the twenty-first century, and Celestial can be considered a character whose agency expands the feminist and literary discourses.

Naturally, this study does not disregard its limitations, either. Concentration on one novel requires a priori restriction of the investigation. However, the decision to *An American Marriage* has its reasons in both its critical reception and cultural relevance as well as its ability to reflect urgent questions of race, gender, and justice in postmodern America. Further research would prove productive when contrasted with the efforts of Jones and other Black American women authors, such as Jesmyn Ward or Toni Morrison, or when examining how Black feminist resistance is portrayed in a larger collection of twenty-first-century fiction. The novel by Jones might also be paralleled with other works of injustice in the world (such as the works of Dima Wannous in *The Frightened Ones*) to comprehend how feminism can be resistant in different environments.

To sum up, it is essential to mention that *An American Marriage* is a book that cannot quite be read as a novel of unjust imprisonment but as a textual representation of what is yet to be experienced: the power and struggle of Black women. We are told the story of Celestial, and we realize that resistance is sometimes practiced in the ordinary in the letters, in the paintings, in the love-and-marriage choice, in the not-to-be-muffled choice. In this work, the critical discourse turns the attention back to Celestial and her agency once again, demonstrating that not only its critique of the racist system but also its affirmation of Black feminist rebellion is the most radical intervention in the whole novel.

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# Patriarchy and Gender Discrimination in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*

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<p>Received: 30 Aug 2025;                      Received in revised form: 28 Sep 2025;                      Accepted: 02 Oct 2025;                      Available online: 05 Oct 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 discrimination, patriarchy, dowry, feminist theory, silence, domestic space, symbolism.</b></p>	<p><i>Dina Mehta's play Brides Are Not for Burning presents a critical exploration of the pervasive structures of patriarchy and the systemic gender discrimination embedded within Indian society. This study examines how Mehta's narrative foregrounds the struggles of women subjected to societal expectations, oppressive customs, and domestic subjugation. Through a close reading of the play, the research highlights the ways in which patriarchal norms manifest in both public and private spheres, perpetuating gender inequality and restricting women's autonomy. The analysis also underscores the playwright's use of dialogue, characterization, and dramatic conflict to expose the socio-cultural mechanisms that enforce female marginalization. By situating the play within the broader discourse on gender studies and feminist theory, this paper emphasizes the enduring relevance of Mehta's work in critiquing societal inequities and advocating for women's empowerment. The study ultimately demonstrates that Brides Are Not for Burning not only mirrors the gendered realities of its time but also challenges audiences to confront and question entrenched patriarchal practices..</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning* stands as a landmark in Indian English drama for its concentrated focus on dowry-related violence and the more pervasive, subtler mechanisms of gender discrimination that sustain it. Written in the late 1970s—a time when India was increasingly grappling with a rising incidence of dowry deaths—the play condenses social reality into a tightly observed domestic tableau. Within a single household, Mehta stages a range of gendered behaviors: overt physical abuse, economic coercion, social shaming, intergenerational enforcement of gender norms, and the social silencing of the victim. While the play's title is a polemical denunciation of the most extreme form of gendered violence—bride-burning—it also invites

an examination of the less spectacular but equally deadly practices that make such violence conceivable.

This paper interrogates gender discrimination in Mehta's play along several related axes: the structural mechanisms of patriarchy (how it functions through both men and women), dowry and domestic violence as manifestations of gendered economic coercion, the dialectic of voice and silence, the promise and limitations of education and progressive allies, and the play's symbolic deployment of fire. Drawing on feminist theory—particularly the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Butler—this study reads *Brides Are Not for Burning* as both a product of its historical moment and as a text that offers enduring insights into the reproduction of gender inequality. The methodology is a textual and

contextual close reading, combining careful analysis of dialogue, stage directions, and imagery with theoretical frameworks that help elucidate the social structures the play represents.

### **Situating the Play: Historical Context and Critical Overview**

Although this paper focuses on textual analysis, it is necessary to sketch briefly the socio-historical backdrop against which Mehta wrote. The 1970s and early 1980s in India saw increased public visibility of dowry-related deaths—a phenomenon that sparked both legal responses and public outcry. However, legal measures alone could not uproot deeply embedded social practices. The family continued to be a crucial site for the reproduction of gender norms and, paradoxically, for the enforcement of violence in the name of honor and economic exchange.

Critically, Mehta's play departs from sensationalist treatments of dowry deaths by staging the domestic idioms that produce them. The husband is frequently off-stage; it is the conversations among women and between women and ostensibly progressive men that expose the mechanics of oppression. By focusing on ordinary talk, customary silences, and the interior economies of a household, Mehta shows that gender discrimination is rarely only spectacular—it is ordinary, routinized, and therefore all the more pernicious.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Three interrelated strands of feminist theory inform the reading that follows.

1. **Gender as a Social Construct and the Othering of Women.** Simone de Beauvoir's account of women as the historically constituted "Other" provides a philosophical backdrop: the social practices in Mehta's play mark women as dependent, secondary, and defined by relational identities (wife, daughter-in-law). The play visualizes how social structures naturalize these relational roles.
2. **Patriarchy as Institutional and Cultural.** Kate Millet's concept of patriarchy as embedded in social institutions, sexual politics, and cultural narratives helps read Mehta's

depiction of the family as an apparatus that reproduces male authority through customs such as dowry and the ideology of honor.

3. **Subalternity, Voice, and Representation.** Gayatri Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" invites attention to who in the play is permitted to speak, whose speech is heard or discounted, and how dominance shapes representation. The victimized bride in Mehta's play is emblematic of a subaltern whose language is muted by structural power.
4. **Gender Performance and Repetition.** Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity aids in understanding how gendered behaviors are iterative acts—repeated and naturalized until they appear essential. Mehta's characters perform gendered roles (the dutiful mother, the silent bride, the outspoken educated woman) in ways that reinforce or contest social expectations.

Together, these frameworks direct analysis away from individual pathology and toward systemic and cultural patterns.

## **III. METHODOLOGY: CLOSE READING AND DRAMATIC ANALYSIS**

This study employs close reading as a method suited to drama: attention to dialogue, stage directions, pauses, and spatial arrangements reveals how the play enacts social relations. Because Mehta carefully controls what is spoken, what is hinted at, and who is present or absent on stage, analyzing these formal elements uncovers the play's critique. Where appropriate, the paper draws on historical context and feminist theory to deepen the analysis, but primary emphasis remains on the text itself.

## **IV. ANALYSIS**

### **Patriarchy as a System: The Domestic Microcosm**

Mehta's dramaturgy makes the household a microcosm of larger patriarchal society. The father-figure and husband are not always present physically, yet their authority saturates the household. This absence is strategic: patriarchy's power does not need constant direct assertion; its norms become

internalized and enacted by household members. Laxmi, the mother, is a central figure in this reproduction. Her insistence that daughters must “adjust” to marital life and not “bring shame” explicitly demonstrates intergenerational complicity. Laxmi’s language—framed as pragmatism and preservation of family honor—functions as a mechanism that locates responsibility for resistance in the woman rather than in the system that abuses her.

Simone de Beauvoir’s notion that women are defined in relation to men helps explain the moral economy in which Laxmi operates: a wife’s obligations are prioritized as the normative center of feminine identity. Laxmi’s position is tragic and ambivalent—she is both subject to patriarchal constraints and an agent who enforces them. This double role complicates simple victim-perpetrator binaries, revealing how gender discrimination persists when those it hurts help to sustain it.

#### **Dowry and Domestic Violence: Economic Coercion and Social Legitimacy**

Dowry functions in the play not simply as an economic transaction but as a social script that legitimizes control and violence. Mehta’s title alone is a political statement: it is an assertion of refusal against the ritualized destruction of women in the pursuit of monetary ends. The play dramatizes how dowry creates a power imbalance that justifies harassment and, in extreme cases, murder. Alka’s experience—constant harassment, emotional terror, and eventual physical assault—embodies the link between economic pressures and gendered violence.

What is particularly striking is how everyday conversations normalize this abuse. Family members often treat incidents as “private matters” to be handled discreetly, thereby foreclosing legal or public remedies. This normalization operates through a discourse of honor and reputation that elevates communal image over individual safety. Kate Millett’s analysis of patriarchy’s normative cultural values is relevant here: the family, as an institution, is the site where sexual politics are reproduced, and dowry becomes a ritualized instrument for maintaining gender hierarchies.

#### **Voice and Silence: The Semiotics of Speech**

One of Mehta’s central dramaturgical devices is the juxtaposition of voice and silence. Alka’s silence—her

reluctance or inability to speak her suffering in full—is profoundly revealing. Silence here is not mere lack of speech but a social sign: it indexes a lack of social power. Gayatri Spivak’s provocation about the voice of the subaltern is useful: Alka’s speech, even when it occasionally surfaces, tends to be dismissed or reframed by stronger interlocutors. Malini’s outspoken critique and Nikhil’s sympathetic statements frame the parameters of acceptable discourse; yet, neither fully resolves Alka’s condition.

The play thus stages a tragic irony: those who can speak (Malini, Nikhil) cannot always effect change, and the one whose life is most imperiled (Alka) lacks the discursive currency to be heard. This split underscores structural inequalities in access to public discourse. The play also complicates the assumption that giving a voice is automatically emancipatory. Speech, when isolated from institutional power, may remain ineffectual.

#### **Education, Agency, and Their Limits**

Malini’s education and moral clarity position her as the play’s primary dissenting voice. She articulates the injustice of the family’s moral calculus and mobilizes language that names the abuse. Her character illustrates that education can produce critical consciousness and ethical refusal. Yet Mehta is careful to show the limits of education as a panacea. Malini’s speeches, however sharp, are insufficient to dismantle household power dynamics. She cannot prevent Alka’s suffering alone.

This limitation points to a core argument: individual enlightenment is necessary but not sufficient for systemic change. Progressive men like Nikhil may express sympathy, but often their intervention stops at moral condemnation rather than structural redress. Thus, the play insists upon collective struggle and institutional reform as prerequisites for meaningful transformation.

#### **Women as Enforcers of Patriarchy**

An illuminating and unsettling aspect of the play is the role of women in perpetuating gender norms. Laxmi’s insistence on conformity and family honor is emblematic of how patriarchal values are reproduced by women who have internalized them. This dynamic aligns with Butler’s theory of gender performativity: gendered behaviors are repeated acts that become embodied as “natural.” Over time, acceptance of

unequal roles becomes habituated. Women, conditioned to uphold familial continuity and social respectability, may resist changes that threaten their own limited security or social standing.

This intergenerational enforcement complicates calls for simple solidarity among women across age groups. Mehta's play asks the audience to acknowledge the painful reality that oppression is often maintained by those who, themselves, have been oppressed. It also prompts the question: how might feminist praxis account for such internalized compliance while building alliances that transcend generational and class divides?

### **Symbolism of Fire: Destruction and Resistance**

Fire in Mehta's play operates on multiple levels: literal, symbolic, and political. Literally, fire represents the method by which dowry deaths occur. Symbolically, it stands for purification, rage, annihilation, and the potential for transformation. The play's rhetorical move – reclaiming the image of fire – invites a double reading: while fire has been used to destroy women, the language of burning can also be appropriated as a metaphor for righteous anger and refusal.

Mehta's imagery of the kitchen and domestic hearth becomes subversive; objects of care and sustenance are inverted into instruments of control. This inversion signals how domestic spaces, conventionally coded as feminine and nurturing, can be converted into mechanisms of harm. Yet the redemptive possibility in the play lies in reorienting passion and energy toward resistance: if fire becomes emblematic of protest, the narrative shifts from victimization to contestation.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

Reading *Brides Are Not for Burning* through feminist theory clarifies how gender discrimination is not merely an outcome of individual cruelty but a structural, cultural, and performative system. The play's strength lies in rendering ordinary acts – conversation, silence, household management – into sites of analytic significance. Mehta's text cautions against simplistic binaries: women are not only victims or heroines; they may be complicit, constrained, and yet capable of radical critique.

The play also raises enduring questions about the efficacy of legal reforms when cultural logics remain unchanged. Dowry laws and punitive measures can target criminal acts, but until the everyday moral frameworks that privilege family honor over women's safety are contested, laws will have limited purchase. Mehta's dramatization suggests that social transformation requires both discursive shifts (changing how abuse is talked about) and institutional changes (creating enforceable protections, altering economic incentives).

Significantly, the play anticipates debates in contemporary feminist thought: intersectionality, the politics of representation, and the ethics of speaking for others. Alka's near-silence demands careful ethical reflection about how activism and speech can avoid co-opting the subaltern voice while still advocating effectively. Mehta neither erases Alka nor makes her solely a symbol; instead, the play complicates representation by showing the limits of sympathetic speech when not tethered to collective power.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning* is a compact yet profound indictment of gender discrimination as it operates within Indian familial structures. Through skillful use of drama – contrasting voices, deliberate silences, symbolic domestic spaces, and the recurring motif of fire – Mehta reveals how patriarchy is reproduced, enforced, and sometimes contested. The play asks uncomfortable questions about female complicity, the limits of education, and the moral regimes that prioritize honor over safety. It insists that combating gender discrimination requires more than moral outrage: it demands structural change, public accountability, and cultural transformation.

As contemporary societies continue to confront domestic violence, dowry-related crimes, and the everyday discriminations that make such crimes possible, Mehta's play remains a vital text for understanding the complex weave of belief, habit, and power that sustains gendered inequality. It is at once a historically situated drama and an enduring feminist mirror.

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# Revisiting Queerness in Indian Mythology

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<p>Received: 28 Aug 2025; Received in revised form: 25 Sep 2025; Accepted: 01 Oct 2025; Available online: 05 Oct 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> Mythology, Homosexuality, Heteronormality, Gender identity, LGBTQ+</p>	<p>The many stories, gods, and folk traditions that make up Indian mythology provide a fertile ground for investigating how gender non-conformity and non-traditional sexualities are portrayed. Concepts of gender and sexuality have always been varied, intricate, and culturally rooted; nonetheless, contemporary discussions of queerness tend to center on Western theoretical frameworks. Stories and characters in ancient texts like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Puranas, as well as in regional oral traditions, question traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. Examples include Shikhandi's gender transition, Arjuna's embodiment as Brihannala, and Ardhanarishvara's synthesis of feminine and masculine traits. These stories show how spiritual, social, and cultural frameworks ritualized and normalized queerness while also highlighting the acceptance of multiple identities. In order to highlight their significance in modern LGBT discourse, this article returns to such legendary depictions. Following these portrayals, the research places queerness inside India's indigenous knowledge systems, disproving the idea that it is an alien or contemporary concept. A more inclusive view of gender and sexuality in both historical and present contexts can be achieved by engaging with mythological texts via a queer lens, according to the research. This approach also helps to recover marginalized narratives.</p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this age of change, the LGBT community fights on, yearning for the embrace of acceptance, a vital thread woven into the fabric of our world. In countless corners of the earth, the very essence of love between souls of the same kind is cast aside, overshadowed by the prevailing tide of traditional unions. In the shadows of silence, voices rise, yearning to break free, to weave the vibrant tapestry of LGBTQ+ into the heart of the intellectual realm. The struggle echoes, a relentless pursuit for recognition and understanding, as the call for inclusion

reverberates through the corridors of thought. Yet, the efforts faced a storm of fierce disapproval and a wave of collective fury. In the year of 1996, Deepa Mehta rose to the challenge, crafting a cinematic masterpiece that boldly illuminated the lives of lesbians in her unforgettable film, *Fire*. Yet, it faced fierce condemnation, branded as a dark force and shunned by many. In the shadows of the silver screen, darkness looms, as whispers of violence echo through the halls of dreams in parts of India. In the heart of a vibrant land, Salim Sadiq, a visionary of the silver screen, dared to weave a tale of love and identity in his 2022 masterpiece, 'Joyland.' Yet, as the story unfolded, it

met with a storm of fierce resistance, echoing the struggles of those who seek to be free. It faced the darkness of a ban, held back from the world, only to rise again after the whispers of necessary cuts set it free. In the stillness of time, the scene remains untouched, a quiet echo of what once was. Yet, these powerful initiatives shine a light on the struggles faced by the LGBTQ+ community, igniting a flame of awareness that cannot be extinguished. In a world where love is often confined, the essence of queerness struggles to break free from the chains of conformity. In the shadows of the spotlight, where voices yearn to be heard, the tales of the brave are often silenced or mocked, leaving hearts heavy with unspoken truths. In the grand tapestry of existence, where the threads of society intertwine with the ink of literature and the light of media, the very essence of our collective soul is shaped and transformed. Each story, each image, resonates deep within, crafting the heartbeat of our shared consciousness.

In the grand tapestry of Indian mythology, stories unfold with a depth that resonates through the ages, tackling the weighty matters of caste, feminism, and gender identity. Each event and character shines like a beacon, illuminating the struggles and triumphs of the human spirit. The sages of old have poured their hearts into their writings, illuminating the shadows of our time, revealing the struggles that stir the soul and ignite the flames of discord in our world today. In the sacred texts of old, where wisdom flows like a river, the *Vedas* and *Puranas* rise, bold and unyielding. *The Kamasutra* whispers secrets of desire, while *Ayurveda* sings the song of balance. And in the grand tales of the *Mahabharata*, the struggles of gender echo through the ages, a powerful testament to the human spirit. Behold the voices that rise, echoing through the pages, each one a beacon of truth, illuminating the spectrum of gender identities in the tapestry of words below.

### **Shikhandi**

In the grand tapestry of the **Mahabharata**, Shikhandi stands as a beacon of significance, a character woven into the very fabric of this timeless epic. He rises from the ashes of a forgotten tale, a spirit reborn as the fierce princess Amba, whose heart beats with vengeance. She swore an oath across lifetimes, destined to weave the threads of fate that would lead to the downfall of the legendary warrior Bhishma. Bhishma had pledged his stepmother to remain

unmarried and serve the throne of Hastinapur. In a tale of valor and fate, he rode forth for Vichitravirya, the noble king of Hastinapur. With a heart full of ambition, he seized the daughters of Kashya, the mighty ruler of Kashi—Amba, Ambalika, and Ambika—each a shining star in the night sky. But Amba stands resolute, her heart bound to Salva, refusing to surrender to the call of Vichitravirya's love. With a heavy heart, Bhishma grants her the freedom to journey to Salva, understanding the weight of her choice. Yet, bound by the chains of Bhishma's hold, Salva stands resolute, refusing to embrace her light. When Amba returns to Hastinapur, she pours her heart out to Bhishma, begging him to take her hand in marriage. In a world where love and duty collide, Bhishma stands resolute, bound by a promise to his stepmother, choosing honor over the call of romance, forever a guardian of his vow. With a heart full of fury, Amba storms into the depths of the forest, vowing that she shall rise again, destined to bring about Bhishma's downfall.

Amba was reborn as Shikhandi to King Draupada. In a moment of celestial revelation, Draupada heard the call of the divine, guiding him to bring forth Shikhandi, a son destined to embody the profound essence of rebirth. Shikhandi, forged in the fires of destiny, is bestowed with the knowledge and warrior's might from the noble Draupada. In the great warfare of Kurukshetra, Shikhandi helped Arjuna make aside Bhishma from the war and became accountable for Bhishma's fall. Shikhandi was united in love with a woman. On the night of their vows, Shikhandi's beloved sees the truth that lies within his heart. She struck him with words that pierced the heart. In a moment of desperation, Shikhandi races into the depths of the forest, pleading with the Yaksha to transform her very essence. In a tale of transformation and destiny, Yaksha embraced a new identity alongside Shikhandi, weaving a story of love that led to a joyous union, forever intertwined in the fabric of life.

### **Brihannala**

The *Mahabharata* figure Brihannala serves as another representation of the queer. On Lord Krishna's advice, Arjuna ascends to heaven to learn from Indra and Brihaspati how to wield celestial weapons that would be helpful in the upcoming war between the Kauravas and Panawas. Arjuna learned

how to wield various heavenly weapons and art of dance in heaven. While receiving instruction in dance from Chitrasena, a heavenly Gandharva, Arjuna was escorted by Urvashi, a heavenly nymph (apsara), while she practiced dancing. Over time, she found herself drawn to Arjuna's manly personality and impressed by him. She offered her proposal of love, which Arjuna graciously turned down. Arjuna's reluctance offended Urvashi, who cursed him for being impotent (Napunsak) for the rest of his life. She later shortens her curse's duration by a year. In the final year of their exile, Lord Krishna counsels Arjuna to employ this curse to conceal his manly personality in the last year of their exile, which was conditioned to live incognito and hidden from identification. In the service of Virata, the king of the Virat kingdom, the five Pandawas undertake various duties. Yudhistira transforms into Kanka, a king's advisor and player of royal dice. Bhima transforms into Vallabha, a cook. Nakula takes up the role of Granthika and tends to the royal horses. Taking care of animals, Sahdeva transforms into Tantipala. The wife of five Pandawas, Draupadi, takes on the role of Sairandhri, the queen's maid. As a transgender person, Arjuna dresses like a woman and changes into a lovely Brihannala. The curse of Urvashi causes Brihannala to lose her manly identity and undergo a gender transition. She instructs Uttara, a princess of Virat, in music and dancing.

### **Mohini**

There are several examples of gender fluidity in Indian mythology. Among them, the Mohini form of the god Vishnu is well-known. The ocean is crunched by gods and demons to extract valuable stones. They obtain the elixir (amrita) by the crunching. For the benefit of the universe, God Vishnu takes on the shape of Mohini there in order to prevent the demons from possessing elixir. The name Mohini is derived from the Sanskrit word "Moha," which signifies enchantment or delusion. Demons are enchanted by Mohini's feminine beauty and charm. Mohini captivates the demons and serves all elixir to gods.

The feminine form of God Vishnu, Mohini, is also associated with the birth of God Ayyappa to kill a demon known as Mahishi. Even God Shiva was attracted by the charm of Mohini towards her. Vishnu as Mohini becomes pregnant by God Shiva and gives

birth to Ayyappa. Ayyappa was left on the bank of river in shame. Ayyappa is also called 'Hariharputra', a son of Hari (Vishnu) and Har (Shiva). The birth of Ayyappa is celebrated in Tamilnadu as a Panguni Uthiram.

In Tamilnadu, eunuchs celebrate a festival called Thali during which they grieve over Aravan's passing for eighteen days. Before Aravan's death, when he was to be sacrificed, Lord Krishna, who is thought of be an avatar of Vishnu, takes on the form of Mohini to offer him the pleasure of love. In the guise of Mohini, Lord Krishna weds Aravan and laments his passing as his widow. Eunuchs joyfully celebrate the wedding of Krishna in the guise of Mohini and Aravan as well as Aravan's passing mournfully.

### **Other references**

In addition to the figures mentioned above, queerness is mentioned multiple times in other texts. Laxminarayana and Ardhnarishwara are two among them. Both represent the totality of the fusion of masculine and feminine. The god Shiva and his consort Parvati are combined to form Ardhnarishwara. Additionally, Laxminarayana is a combination of the god Vishnu and his wife Laxmi. In *Kamasutra*, homosexuality is mentioned several times. According to *Kamasutra*, kama is the mental inclination for pleasure through mental and physical pursuits. Despite mostly discussing heterosexuality, *Kamasutra* acknowledges homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation. Additionally, *Tritiya prakriti*, or the Third Gender, is mentioned frequently in *Kamasutra*.

However, the topic of queerness is now taboo. In Indian history, it was extensively explored. Therefore, one could say that Indian society was well-known to it. But the shadow of colonialism and Islamic dominance over Indian minds puts the discussion in bars. European mindset looks at the things in binary. One must be something opposite to it to be meaningful as light-dark, white- black, soft-hard and masculine- feminine. As Derrida says, Absence is present in the form of absence. They denied the existence of anything between binaries in language or society. But Indian social, mental and linguistic structures are very different from them. There is always a possibility of existence between

binaries in Indian mind. In Indian languages, there are many words which go beyond boundaries of binary. There is a word 'Mauli', which seems feminine but is used for both female and male and even beyond the male and female binary.

The queer characters discussed in the paper had respectable status and acceptability in the society. Shikhandi was from royal family. She was allowed to get proper education of administration and warfare. Even they were allowed to participate in wars. It was impossible to defeat Bhisma without Shikhandi. Shikhandi accompanied Arjuna on his chariot and faced Bhisma. Arjuna showered arrows towards Bhisma from behind Shikhandi. Brihannala, a feminine form of Arjuna had got a place in palace. She was assigned to teach the princess music and dance. All types of people make up society. In the Virat war, Brihannala vanquished every warrior or Kurus. The king of Virat, Virata, does not think a eunuch like Brihannala is capable of such bravery. He punishes Yudhistara in the form of Kanka for praising Brihannala.

Science also has acknowledged the existence of masculine qualities in female and feminine qualities in men. No one is complete male or female. The Indian scholars had realized the fact of totality in incompleteness very early. Ardhanarishwara and Laxminarayana represent such kind of totality. Both the gods are half masculine and half feminine and even Indians worship their totality. This incompleteness makes them complete or total. When the world was ignorant about the existence of queers, it was discussed in Kamasutra, the scientific discussion of sexuality and erotic. There are many references of gender transformation in the scriptures.

## CONCLUSION

Classical Indian philosophers and thinkers were forthright and candid in their philosophical and social discourse. They had presented various social issues in their literature. Many things which are considered asocial even today, the Indian mythology has open and knowledgeable discussions about them. We are able to comprehend their depth of ideas and vision through their conversation. While addressing her concept of sexuality and gender identity in "*Gender Trouble*," Judith Butler referred to gender as a social

performance. While many philosophers and thinkers in the world now discuss gender identity, Indian philosophers and thinkers who established the groundwork for Indian thought and culture discussed it and its normalcy thousands of years ago. They had come to accept LGBT people as an inherent and inevitable aspect of society. They had granted them the right to live with dignity and respect in addition to accepting their existence. The historical existence of these characters might be discussed. They exist in literature, because literature is a reflection of society, even though they might be regarded as imaginary. The societal knowledge of queers and how they are treated is reflected in these scriptures. They may teach the modern society that being homosexual or queer is just as common as being heterosexual. Additionally, they are equally entitled to a dignified and respectful life.

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# Retributive Justice in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 31 Aug 2025; Received in revised form: 30 Sep 2025; Accepted: 03 Oct 2025; Available online: 08 Oct 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>Retributive justice, moral philosophy, Machiavellianism, systemic injustice, legal philosophy</i></p>	<p><i>The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas is a classic French novel that tells the story of Edmond Dantes, a sailor who has been wrongly accused of treason by three of his friends, namely Danglars, Fernand Mondego and Caderousse and as a result of which he was sent to the infamous tower prison, Chateau d'If to serve a life sentence. Eventually, Dantes is able to get out of prison and after carefully planning his revenge for nearly a decade, he reinvents himself as the mysterious Count of Monte Cristo with only one thing in mind: vengeance. This paper examines the meticulously planned revenge executed by Dantes through the lens of moral philosophy, namely the concept of retributive justice to determine if Dantes's vengeance against his conspirators is justified.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

*The Count of Monte Cristo* is one of the most prominent works produced in French literature that narrates the complex tale of deviously well-thought-out revenge on the part of the protagonist of the novel, Edmond Dantes. Jealous of Dantes's success, and for means of personal gain, his associates Danglars, Fernand and Villefort plot against him to cause him to fall from grace, which they succeed in. Though he possessed knowledge of Dantes's innocence, the prosecutor-in-charge, Villefort, out of personal concern, condemned him to a life-long prison sentence in the infamous Chateau d'If. Dantes's heart hardened with the years in prison leaving him yearning for one thing only: revenge.

Many may consider Dantes as a Machiavellian character that destroyed the lives of many. Rather it is the

characters surrounding Dantes that possessed a Machiavellian nature while he, innocent and unassuming, suffered from their scheming. If viewed from the perspective of retribution, his actions seem justified, encouraged even. Where does one turn when the very legal system that is guaranteed to give the victim justice fails him? Dantes took matters upon his own hands, believing himself to be an "agent of the Providence." Inspected under the light of retribution and other schools of law and philosophical thought, Dantes's actions begin to make sense as he inserted himself in place of the faulty legal system, acting as God's emissary on earth.

## II. DANTES'S TRANSFORMATION INTO THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

Dantes starts off as an innocent and unassuming nineteen-year-old boy who nurtures hope in his heart that justice will be served to him one day. But, the days bleed into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into thirteen long years, but justice never knocks on the door of Chateau d'If. With time, his hope and faith in humanity and in its goodness erodes away and is replaced by wrath and anger for all that is unjust in this world. He endures nearly every agonizing emotion known to humanity during his time in captivity. One must understand how despair and anguish transforms the mind of one resigned to a life of such alienating desolation.

With time, he realizes that there were sinister motives of those close to him that had much to gain from endangering his life. After such a realization dawns upon someone, what incentive do they have to continue being good and just? If assuming the best of everyone lands one's life in absolute ruin, one might as well become cunning. If telling the truth is such a cardinal sin that it takes the very things one treasures—love, ambition, family, and friends—away from him, it is wiser to lie. If being just gets one penalized in an unjust world, it is best to learn from the rulebook of the unjust. The injustice committed against Dantes is precisely what transforms him into the devilish character he becomes when he takes on the identity of the Count of Monte Cristo. It would not be a startling claim to suggest that Monte Cristo is the creation of a corrupt society, one in which even the righteous must adopt immorality to survive among those who cloak their wickedness in the guise of virtue. Hence, Dantes's transformation is only a natural consequence of the conspiracy that was plotted against him.

The concept of God and divinity is weaved intricately into the fabric of this story which paints many scenes under a Biblical light. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Dantes has a rebirth, a baptism of a kind, especially considering Dantes's body was hurled into the water. The water transformed him, wiping away with it the identity of Dantes. The one who emerged from the water was not the commoner Dantes, but the

noble Count of Monte Cristo. Since God has renewed him and given him grace against all odds, he takes it upon himself to become the "avenging angel" of God. Since he now believes himself to be "an instrument of God," he makes it his life's mission to avenge those who have hurt not only him, but also his loved ones. His attitude is perfectly captured in the following lines: "Farewell, goodness, humanity, gratitude. I have taken the place of Providence to reward the good. Now, let the avenging God make way for me to punish the wrongdoer" (Dumas, 300).

## III. EARLY ROOTS OF RETRIBUTION

The concept of retribution can be traced back all the way to Biblical roots such as in the Old Testament and the Exodus where the concept of "an eye for an eye" came from. In his paper, *An Eye for An Eye*, Fisher writes:

This conclusion is supported by a contextual interpretation of the Pentateuch. In Exodus, an 'eye for an eye' is preceded, as we have seen, by a 'life for a life'. The provision does not distinguish between accidental and intentional harm. Mosaic law, however, does not mandate the death penalty for unintentional homicide. It has therefore been argued that neither 'life for a life' nor 'eye for an eye' can be taken literally, but must instead be understood as mandating proper and full compensation (p.60).

At first sight, the statement "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand" may seem barbaric. However, it is quite the opposite as the statement establishes the ground for equality. Anybody's eye is as precious as anybody else's. The nobleman's eye is no more precious than the peasant's eye. It does not matter what one's social standing is, any and all deserve justice. This statement gives everybody their due respect by securing their right to compensation in the face of damage.

Dantes echoes a similar sentiment of justice when he says, "It is with the criminal procedure of all nations that I have compared natural justice, and I must say, sir, that it is the law of primitive nations, that is, the law of

retaliation that I have most frequently found to be according to the law of God" (Dumas, 397).

#### IV. LEX TALIONIS

The most ancient legal code dating back all the way to the Mosaic Law and the Code of Hammurabi, which is still relevant to this day is the concept of Lex Talionis, a Latin term which translates to "law of retaliation." "The lex talionis under Mosaic law advocated the direct punishment of the wrongdoer." (Fisher, 60)

"The classification [of crimes and punishments] ... has been assumed to be fundamentally retributive, and so its penalty schedule must be based on two basic retributive principles: (1) the severity of the punishment must be proportional to the gravity of the offense, and (2) the gravity of the offense must be a function of fault in the offender and harm caused the victim. These two "basic principles" (or part of them) are often referred to as "lex talionis" (Davis, 236).

Dantes punished his offenders following the above two principles. He was harmed gravely by the conspiracy plotted against him and so, he sought to punish those who played with his life like a toy in proportionate amount. "Because the classification of crimes and punishments is retributive, it must, Bedau says, be based on lex talionis. And, for the same reason, the penalties provided must be a function of fault in the offender and harm done the victim" (Davis, 236).

#### V. LAW OF PROPORTIONALITY

Dantes is practicing what is known as the *Law of Proportionality*. "As a general principle of corrective justice, lex talionis requires the wrongdoer to suffer as much as (but no more than) he has wrongfully made others suffer. The first of Bedau's "two basic principles," that is, the principle that punishment should be proportioned to the gravity of the offense or otherwise made to "fit the crime" (Davis, 238)

This idea forms "the core of what Hershenov calls the atonement/debt theory of punishment. The currency of the debt and the mechanism of atonement is, on his account, harm, or displeasure. The victim is compensated by the wrongdoer's suffering: "[t]he debt

the criminal owes his victim can be paid when the latter takes his legal revenge on the former." The wrongdoer's humbling, in turn, affords him the means to atone for his wrongs" (Klimchuk, 81).

#### VI. THE UNFAIR ADVANTAGE PRINCIPLE

Another perspective for the justification of Dantes actions can be viewed from the lens of the "unfair-advantage principle," a term Davis coined. All the people living in a society agree to a certain set of rules to live in harmony and to ascertain the security of others within the community. One of these rules is to abide by the law and respect others right to security and well-being. When one breaks this rule by harming another, the former offender has an unfair advantage over the latter victim. It is this unfair advantage for which the offender shall pay his dues. As Michael Davis states in his paper *Harm and Retribution*:

According to the unfair-advantage principle, it is this advantage the criminal law is supposed to take back by punishing the criminal for his crime. The advantage bears no necessary relation to the harm the criminal actually did. For example, he may have done great damage and only committed theft; or no damage at all even though he tried to commit murder. According to the unfair-advantage principle, the damage a criminal actually does is between him and his victim, a private matter to be settled by civil suit (or the moral equivalent). His crime consists only in the unfair advantage he necessarily took over the law-abiding by breaking the law in question. The measure of punishment due is the relative value of that unfair advantage (p.240).

In this case, Dantes's conspirators must suffer because they wielded an unfair advantage over him. If these men go unpunished, it is a slap to the face to all the other law-abiding citizens. What was Dantes's fault? Abiding the law? The very lawmakers and prosecutors who are supposed to protect the rights of the innocent are the ones who turn on them quicker than anybody else as seen in the character of Villefort. The damage of thirteen years of lost time, love and career development are all

gone and those remain a "private matter" to be settled between Dantes and his conspirators. It is the failure of the "civil suit" that caused him more harm than the false framing of his crime. Had he been given a proper trial, justice would have prevailed. It is this failure that Dantes took upon himself, to right the wrongs of the faulty legal system. With nobody to come and save him, he is his only saving grace. He is out to punish the unfair advantage those men took over him.

### VII. RETRIBUTION ACCORDING TO KANTIAN ETHICS

Moreover, assessed from a deontological perspective, the Kantian ethics described in the categorical imperative were also violated. Kant stated "act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." The Golden Rule states that one should treat others as they want to be treated. Kant further says, "so act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always as an end and never as only a means." Fernand, Danglars and Villefort violated all of the Kantian principles by treating Dantes as a means to an end, a vessel through which they could realize their ambitions. By what standard of justice should such men be allowed to roam free? "If the guilty are not punished, according to Kant, justice and equality, the only proper foundations for the law, will not have been served" (Fisher, 63).

Margarett Falls in her paper *Retribution, Reciprocity and Respect for Persons* further elaborates on the Kantian conditions that permit the law of retribution. In Dantes's case, the following three claims hold true and therefore he is justified in his quest for vengeance.

The *jus talionis* states that one who voluntarily causes the undue suffering of another deserves "like" suffering in return. This one principle actually contains three distinct but interrelated claims:

- (i) Punishment is justified only if it is deserved.
- (ii) It is deserved if and only if the person punished has voluntarily done a wrong (and, specifically, the wrong being punished).

(iii) The severity of punishment deserved is that which is proportionate to the severity of the wrongdoing (p.27).

### VIII. A UTILITARIAN PERSPECTIVE ON RETRIBUTION

From a utilitarian perspective, viewed under the lens of a consequentialist theory of punishment, "the principal aim of punishment is the prevention of offences, rather than retribution" (Fisher, 63). Jeremy Bentham says:

When we consider that an unpunished crime leaves the path of crime open, not only to the same delinquent but also to all those who may have the same motives and opportunities for entering upon it, we perceive that punishment inflicted on the individual becomes a source of security for all (p.64).

Apart from the retributive aspect of Dantes revenge, it also serves a purpose of deterrence from further crimes as such, not only from the perpetrators themselves, but also those who may be entertaining the idea of committing the same felony. "Punishment may in this context be seen as an incentive to reform: for convicted offenders, therapeutic reform, by inducing a consciousness of guilt that might motivate them to mend their ways; for potential offenders, punishment of the guilty provides an incentive to pre-emptive or prophylactic reform" (Fisher, 64).

### IX. DANTES'S REVENGE AGAINST HIS CONSPIRATORS

Danglars, who coveted Dantes' success, resented him for being demoted to first mate while Dantes rose to the position of Captain of the *Pharaon*. Danglars is a ruthless character that is corrupted by greed and will stop at nothing to increase his wealth, even going as far to sell his own daughter, Eugenie Danglars, into a loveless marriage in return for three million francs. Dantes, or rather, The Count of Monte Cristo tricked Danglars many times by manipulating the ebb and flow of the foreign market, slowly causing him to lose all his money. His downfall began with him losing a million francs in the stock market (due to false information

relayed to him by his wife which was all orchestrated by Dantes himself) and ended with him being held in captivity just like Dantes in Chateau d'If and threatened with the prospect of starvation. Even then, he wanted to hold on to his remaining wealth rather than pay for the food, which just further highlights his avarice.

Fernand was covetous of Dantes's fiancé, the beautiful Mercedes and with Dantes out of the way, he was able to marry her. After the success of his scheme against Dantes, he goes on to become a soldier who gained influence in the post-Napoleonic era and became a Count by stealing money from Ali Pasha whom he ends up killing. All this is brought to light by the cunning of Dantes as Fernand's misdeeds are first exposed in a newspaper gaining media coverage. Then came the public trial where Haydee, the daughter of Ali Pasha testified against Fernand. The most painful of all these blows was the departure of his wife Mercedes and his son, Albert from his life. With no more will to live after losing his reputation and family, he commits suicide.

Villefort's dark past with Madame Danglers came to light during the trial of Andrea Cavalcanti, the illegitimate son of Villefort and Madame Danglers, who tells his story of how his father dug up a grave to bury him in, but he was rescued by Bertuccio. Villefort's reputation as a Chief Prosecutor is completely destroyed.

Dantes's revenge for each of the three men pierced them right on their Achilles's heel. Danglers only cared about growing his wealth without regard to whom it hurt in the process. Similarly, Dantes also brought him to the brink of financial ruin making him nearly destitute. Fernand's weak spot was Mercedes. The very person whom he betrayed his dear friend for has now deserted him. For Villefort, the most important thing was his reputation and the furthering of his career. While looking through the prison records, Dantes finds that Villefort falsely accused him of being a "fanatical Bonapartist." He even went to show the proof of the letter to the monarchy to secure his position as Chief Prosecutor. All that he has been carefully building for thirteen years came tumbling down, the effort of a lifetime gone down the drain. Dantes's plan for revenge for each of the men fit the severity of their crime.

## X. A DIVINE VESSEL FOR JUSTICE

Towards the end of the novel, Dantes felt he had gone too far in his quest for vengeance, as innocent lives suffered too. He desperately wanted to find a sign that he had not made a mistake in his desire for revenge. He visited Chateau d'If, now a tourist spot, where the guard gave him Abbe Faria's manuscript on the monarchy of Italy. The epigraph of the book read: "You will pull the dragon's teeth and trample the Lions underfoot, said the Lord." A contentment took over him as he felt justified in his cunning trap of revenge. "I owe it to God to take my revenge. He has sent me for that purpose. Here I am," thought Dantes.

Linda Radzik defines resentment as "a reactive attitude characterized by the judgment that one has been wronged, a feeling of moral anger toward the one responsible, and either a desire to punish or (at least) a withdrawal of goodwill. In resenting, they argue, a victim shows proper respect for himself, for morality and for the offender. Indeed, a lack of resentment leads us to worry that the victim might be condoning his own victimization or viewing the offender as if she were a child or an animal, that is, something less than a competent moral agent."

## XI. CONCLUSION

Danglers, Fernand and Villefort are all as much of a moral agent as is Dantes, but they failed to uphold their duty as moral citizens and thus their punishment was a justified consequence of their failure to uphold morality. Holmgren in her book, *Forgiveness and Retribution*, views forgiveness as "a corrective attitude that replaces an initial attitude of resentment that we no longer find worthy" (p. 32). It is because Dantes's thirst for vengeance was quenched, his need for revenge was purified out of his being that he was able to reach this compassionate stance of understanding and empathy that he comes to possess at the end of the story. Had he not acted upon the injustice done to him, his mercy would be nowhere to be found as his heart would have been charred with the burning desire for revenge

compelling him develop a tunnel vision set on accomplishing a singular, deadly mission.

According to the “Law of Proportionality” and the “Law of Retaliation” described in *lex talionis*, Dantès was justified in his act of vengeance. His revenge is also justified under the lens of the *unfair-advantage principle*, according to which he was only pursuing justice to collect his dues for the unfair advantage his offenders took of him. Further, his action is supported by both the Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism which suggests that he did the French society a great favor by ridding them of the corrupt aristocrats that would have made life difficult for an even greater number of people.

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## Doctrine of Karma: A Humanitarian Perspective

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<p>Received: 03 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 01 Oct 2025; Accepted: 04 Oct 2025; Available online: 08 Oct 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> Karma, Humanitarian Perspective, Duty, Ethics, Perseverance.</p>	<p>The doctrine of Karma has remained a central theme in Indian philosophy, spirituality, and ethics, while its universal relevance is echoed across global traditions. The principle asserts that human destiny is shaped by one's own actions rather than external forces. Classical texts such as the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Vaivarta Purana, as well as the teachings of saints like Tulsidas, Vasavanna, and Swami Vivekananda highlight that sincere effort, diligence, and righteous conduct are essential for meaningful living. Similar concepts are also found in the Bible: "As you sow, so shall you reap". From a humanitarian perspective, the Doctrine of Karma emphasizes individual responsibility, perseverance, and moral accountability. This paper explores the humanitarian interpretation of Karma, connecting ancient wisdom with contemporary values, and advocates for continuous effort (Charaiveti Charaiveti), balanced mind, and selfless action (Nishkama Karma) as guiding principles for social and personal well-being.</p>

### I. INTRODUCTION

Karma, derived from the Sanskrit root "kri" meaning "to do," signifies action and its inevitable consequences. The idea that "Man is born according to his past thoughts and actions and his body is a part of his karma" (Mahabharata, *Scenes from the Mahabharat*) reflects the deep-rooted belief that human life is governed by one's deeds (Nayak 201). The Bible reinforces the same principle: "As you sow, so shall you reap" (Galatians 6:7) (Watson). Similarly, the Vaivarta Purana declares: "Avaśyameva bhoktavyam kṛtam karma śubhāśubham", while the Mahabharata affirms: "Sarve karmavashaa vayam".

Thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and poets such as Goswami Tulsidas and Vasavanna

emphasized Karma as the foundation of progress and ethical living. Tulsidas asserts, "Karma pradhan vishwa kari rakha", and in modern times the slogan "Shramev Jayate" carries the same message. The Bhagavad Gita further elaborates the doctrine through *Karmayoga*, where Krishna teaches: "Karmanyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana" (BG 2.47) – highlighting human responsibility for action, not for its fruits.

The humanitarian perspective of Karma shifts the focus from fatalism and destiny to accountability, discipline, and perseverance. This paper examines how the philosophy of Karma can be interpreted as a guide for purposeful and ethical human life.

### Objectives of the Study:

The present study is undertaken with the following objectives:

- ❖ To analyze the doctrine of Karma from a humanitarian perspective.
- ❖ To highlight the role of Karma in shaping individual destiny through responsibility, duty, and perseverance.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative and interpretative approach, relying on textual analysis of primary scriptures (Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, Vaivarta Purana, Tulsidas, Vasavanna, Bible) and secondary sources (commentaries, scholarly articles, and interpretations). The research employs comparative analysis to draw parallels between Indian philosophical traditions and Western ethical thought. By synthesizing scriptural references, literary sources (e.g., Shakespeare, Chaucer), and humanitarian viewpoints, the study attempts to reinterpret the doctrine of Karma in a way that is practical, ethical, and universally relevant for contemporary society.

### Humanitarian Perspective and Contemporary Relevance of Karma:

In my high school text book I read a lesson, 'Scenes from the Mahabharat'. An unforgettable sentence of the lesson says, "Man is born according to his past thoughts and actions and his body is a part of his karma".

The Bible says, "As you sow, so shall you reap" meaning there by that our actions today will have consequences in the future. Vaivarta Purana says, "Avaśyameva bhoktavyam kṛtam karma śubhāśubham". The Anushashan Parva in the Mahabharata says, "Sarve karmavashaa vayam". Vasavanna, a famous Kannad poet, saint and social reformer and Swami Vivekanand as well as M.K. Gandhi believed in the principle "work is worship". Goswami Tulsidass says, "Karma Pradhan Vishwa kari raakha". We have a prevalent slogan in the present times, "Shramew Jayate". The import of all these references is that our health, our success, our power and all the true happiness of our life lies in our duty done. By sincere and honest efforts, by perseverance

and diligence we can rise to higher and higher apex. We must keep going on like the mountain brook flowing incessantly making its way through rocks and thickets until it mingles with the boundless sea and becomes a part of the infinite.

We rise and fall owing to our own doings. Only we are responsible for making or marring our future. It is no use finding fault with others. We ourselves spoil our career and put the blame on Time, God, and Destiny. As Tulsidas says, "Kaalahi karmahi Ishwarahi mithya dosh lagaay". Every action has its reaction; equal efforts equal effect. Sometimes, however we do not get appropriate, adequate and expected result of our endeavor. There may be multiple factors responsible for it. Sometimes the attempt may have been made half-heartedly, sometimes in the wrong way or direction, as Tulsidas says, "Usar barsahi trina nahi jaamaa". Keep in mind that mere ambition cannot make us successful, we must put heart and soul together for any achievement.

Hitopadesh says - "*udyamena hi sidhyanti kāryāṇi na manorathaiḥ; nahi sūptasya śimhasya praviśanti mukhe mṛgāḥ*" (www.wisdomlib.org). A student has in his hand to burn midnight candle for success, a teacher can only try to give his best to his pupils to convince them from ignorance, a doctor can try his level best to help the patient get rid of his/her ailment, a farmer can only work hard in his field for good crop, a soldier can only fight bravely and honestly for victory. Nevertheless, the result is sometimes surprisingly adverse. All the same, we must always try to rise up and try again with new zeal. That is why Lord Krishna, the innovator of Karmayoga says in 47<sup>th</sup> shloka of chapter two of Shrimadbhavadgita - "karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana" (Swami 102). Thus, we do have power to do our duty but we do not have any power over the result.

So, try my friends, to keep working with calm and balanced mind. Don't ever lose temper, since fury steal away equilibrium of brain. As a result, we get confused and are unable to use foresight. The Geeta says in 63<sup>rd</sup> shloka of chapter two, "*krodhād bhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt smṛiti-vibhramah / smṛiti-bhranśhād buddhi-*

*nāśho buddhi-nāśhāt praṇaśhyati*" (Mukundananda). Don't bray and brag on your achievements. Work hard in silence and let success make the sound. We cannot rest a moment without doing something or the other. So, why not always try to do something positive. All beings are slave to Nature and Nature compels everyone to keep doing so. "Charaiveti charaiveti" says the Aitreya Brahman; otherwise, idle mind will produce negative thoughts resulting in negative actions. "An idle mind is devil's workshop", says the Bible. So, "*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumānśh charati niḥsprihaḥ*" - The Geeta in Verse 71 of Chapter 2 (Bansal 379) - we must do our duty without ambition, attachment and vanity. Of course, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish a work worth doing from a work worth avoiding. Lord Krishna says in Verse 16 of Chapter 4 of the Geeta, "*kiṁ karma kim akarmeti kavayo 'pyatra mohitāḥ*" (Maharaj 108).

So, after finding out the right thing to do we must concentrate on it. For success we must have a single goal at a time, and proceed with sincerely, diligence and determination. For the accomplishment of a work in perfection we must have resolute will and unblemished mind. In Lord Krishna words, "*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha*" (Kapoor 94). We must have sterling faith in our work, in the law of Nature, faith in our abilities to do the work and faith in God, the overseeing power. Let this faith serve as the rock to stay on. With determination and affirmatory will we are sure to rise step by step. On the contrary, the mind of a person with non-determinative will is scattered in so many directions with multiple goals at one time, "*bahuśākhā hyanantāśca buddhayo'vyavasāyinām*". It is necessary, therefore, to have first-hand knowledge of a good work, adverse work and a work worth refraining from. So advises Lord Krishna, the promoter of the doctrine of Karma from Verse 17 of chapter 4 in the Gita, "*karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyaṁ boddhavyaṁ cha vikarmaṇaḥ akarmaṇaśh cha boddhavyaṁ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ*". Let us now conclude, for William Shakespeare says with the help of his creation, character Polonius, in act 2, scene 2 of Hamlet, "Brevity is the soul of wit" (*Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2*:|: *Open Source Shakespeare*).

Though our objective is to make our appeal appealing rather than witty. Shrimad Bhagwat says, "*durlabho mānuṣo deho dehinām kṣaṇa-bhaṅguraḥ*". Human body is the rarest of the rare boon of God bestowed upon us. Even celestial bodies aspire for human form on earth. In this unique human form, we have the power to do whatever we wish. By the better execution of our Karma i.e. duty, we can make a better karma i.e. destiny for us. So, keep company with noble minds, as "Binu satsang Bibek na hoyee" - Tulsidas. Stay in communion with your soul and pursue your goal with a disciplined mind, as the Kathopnishad says, "*Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata*". By doing so you are sure to achieve your goal. A man is loved, praised and honoured for his handsome acts, not for his handsome body, as Geoffrey Chaucer says, - "Handsome is as handsome does".

### III. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of Karma, viewed through a humanitarian lens, stresses responsibility, resilience, and ethical living over fatalism. Across cultures, wisdom echoes that human beings rise and fall by their own deeds. The Gita (BG 2.63) warns that anger clouds judgment, while discipline ensures clarity. Perseverance (*Charaiveti Charaiveti*), effort (*Udyamena hi sidhyanti kāryāṇi*), and noble company (*Binu satsang bibek na hoyee*) remain pillars of success. Human life, described as "*durlabho mānuṣo deho*" in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, is a rare chance to shape destiny through righteous action. Thus, Karma stands as a universal ethical principle, guiding individuals to live responsibly and meaningfully.

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# Analysis of the Impact of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue on Students' English Listening Comprehension

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 11 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 07 Oct 2025; Accepted: 10 Oct 2025; Available online: 14 Oct 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> Negative mother tongue transfer; Listening comprehension ability</p>	<p><i>The negative transfer of mother tongue exerts an objective influence on English listening comprehension. This paper mainly explores the causes of such negative transfer and its processes of influence from the two perspectives of pronunciation and culture, and briefly elaborates on its implications for teaching practice.</i></p>

This paper is a phased achievement of the school-level URT project of Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology: Analysis of the Impact of Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue on Students' English Listening Comprehension (Project No. 2025X00328).

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study of language transfer can be traced back to the 1950s, which refers to "the influence of one language on the learning of another language" (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics 2011). Mother tongue transfer refers to the phenomenon that the language rules, thinking modes, cultural factors, etc. of the mother tongue have some favorable or unfavorable influences on the learning of a new language when we learn other languages except the mother tongue. Among them, the beneficial and positive influence is called positive transfer, and the unfavorable and negative influence is called negative transfer. Mother tongue transfer is a very important internal factor affecting

the effect of second language acquisition, which has been widely concerned by language scholars at home and abroad.

The learning of English by Chinese students takes place on the premise of their basic mastery of the mother tongue, so they are inevitably affected by the mother tongue and other cultural knowledge and experience related to the mother tongue. To understand the cognitive process of Chinese students learning English and scientifically analyze the factors affecting the development of students' comprehensive English ability, it is necessary to consider language transfer, especially the key issue of negative language transfer.

## II. THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE MOTHER TONGUE TRANSFER ON ENGLISH LISTENING COMPREHENSION

As we all know, in English learning, the ability of listening comprehension is particularly important. Listening is the first of the five core skills reflecting English language ability - listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, and its status in English acquisition is self-evident. And understanding English is a very complex cognitive and psychological process. In the process of listening comprehension, the listener needs to rely on multiple knowledge reserves and comprehensive skill literacy to quickly and effectively analyze, judge, process and filter the received information, so as to realize the information iteration at the cognitive level. Listening comprehension is essentially the capture of a dynamic signal, which has the characteristics of instantaneity and cannot be repeated. If it is not captured timely and accurately, it is easy to lead to information transmission 断裂 (break) or decoding distortion. This paper will analyze the influence of negative mother tongue transfer on English listening comprehension from two aspects of pronunciation characteristics and cultural differences.

### 1. Negative Transfer at the Pronunciation Level

In a sense, listening comprehension is a linear process of acquiring underlying language elements and gradually constructing meaning. Therefore, the listening process starts from the most basic speech recognition. The listener needs to distinguish the phonemes heard and quickly and accurately associate the corresponding words and meanings according to the captured pronunciation. The vowel and consonant phonemes in English are rich and diverse, which are very different from the pronunciation system of Chinese. Chinese attaches importance to the tone phonetic system, which has four different tones: flat, rising, falling-rising and falling, and the meanings expressed are also different. English is a stress language, and the stress position of words and the intonation change of sentences play an important role in expressing meaning and emotion. The stress

position of English words is different, which may lead to changes in parts of speech and word meaning. For example, "record" as a noun has the stress on the first syllable, pronounced as /'rekɔ:d/; as a verb, the stress is on the second syllable, pronounced as /rɪ'kɔ:d/.

This difference is bound to interfere with students in English listening. Students may unconsciously bring Chinese pronunciation habits into English vocabulary acquisition, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation of English words, which will inevitably affect students' listening comprehension; affected by Chinese pronunciation habits, many students cannot grasp the stress of English words accurately, resulting in wrong understanding of the part of speech and meaning of the heard words, and then misunderstanding the meaning of the sentence.

### 2. Negative Transfer at the Cultural Level

Language is the carrier of culture. When the cultural environment of the learner is similar to that of the target language, culture will produce positive transfer in language acquisition. On the contrary, the greater the difference between the cultural environment of the learner and that of the target language, the more detrimental culture is to language acquisition, and the more likely negative transfer is to occur. The lack of cultural background knowledge is an important factor leading to negative mother tongue transfer. Different countries and regions have their own unique cultural customs and local conditions, so English listening materials often contain vocabulary, idioms, customs, allusions and other contents under specific cultural backgrounds. If students lack awareness of this specific cultural knowledge, it will be impossible for them to properly comprehend the listening materials

In addition, the difference in thinking modes between English and Chinese is also an important incentive for negative mother tongue transfer. English articles and materials are mostly linear thinking, usually going straight to the theme, making the main idea clear at the beginning, and then expanding the discussion around the theme, and often using a lot of connecting words and transitional words to clarify the logical relationship, with clear logical structure and

distinct layers. Chinese, on the other hand, is more circuitous and implicit, often making preparations first and then slowly introducing the theme. Moreover, Chinese pays more attention to showing the logical relationship through semantics and context, and does not use connecting words as frequently and massively as English. In listening comprehension, these two completely different thinking modes will greatly affect students' grasp of the logical relationship of listening materials, and then affect students' understanding of the content of listening discourses.

### III. ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THE CULTIVATION OF ENGLISH LISTENING COMPETENCE

To sum up, negative mother tongue transfer has a certain interference on students' English listening comprehension, and this interference is multi-level and multi-dimensional, which also reflects the necessity and urgency of intervening through effective means to reduce the negative impact of negative mother tongue transfer on listening comprehension.

At the teaching level, teachers should strengthen phonetic teaching, improve students' awareness of phonetic learning, and form good phonetic habits. And teachers can enrich teaching content and arouse students' interest in phonetic learning by means of modern information technology. Teachers should also deeply integrate cultural teaching into teaching, and improve students' awareness of cultural learning and their ability to understand the cultural connotation of listening discourses by carrying out rich and colorful theme activities of cultural backgrounds of English-speaking countries.

At the same time, teachers should also pay attention to the cultivation of students' learning strategies, guide students to learn independently and actively, and cultivate the awareness of self-supervision and the methods of self-evaluation, increase students' after-class English learning time, improve learning effects, truly realize the "seamless connection" between in-class and after-class learning, maximize the conversion of the learned listening skills

into "learning productivity", and promote the improvement of students' listening comprehension ability.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Language transfer is a complex cognitive process, and its influence on second language acquisition is also an objective existence that cannot be ignored. For learners, they should first be able to recognize and correctly view the negative impact brought by negative language transfer, and aim at the crux of the problem to find effective intervention means to reduce its interference with language acquisition. Teachers should serve as the guiding light and strong backing for students in overcoming difficulties. By providing effective supervision and guidance to students, they should make every effort to reduce the interference of negative transfer, thus enhancing students' language acquisition outcomes.

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# From War to Justice: A Pragmatic Analysis of Bush’s 9/11 Speech and Obama’s Bin Laden Speech

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<p><i>Received: 15 Sep 2025;</i> <i>Received in revised form: 12 Oct 2025;</i> <i>Accepted: 16 Oct 2025;</i> <i>Available online: 19 Oct 2025</i></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> Metaphor; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Pragmatics; George W. Bush; Obama.</p>	<p>This study examines the role of metaphors in two major U.S. presidential speeches: George W. Bush’s Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, and Barack Obama’s announcement of Osama bin Laden’s death in 2011. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff &amp; Johnson, 1980/2003), metaphors were categorized into structural, ontological, and orientational types, with attention to their pragmatic functions in crisis communication. The analysis identified 12 metaphors in each speech. Bush relied mainly on structural metaphors of war and defense, framing terrorism as an enemy to be defeated and mobilizing citizens for resilience. Obama, while also invoking war imagery, used more ontological and orientational metaphors, such as justice as an agent and light versus darkness, emphasizing closure, unity, and reassurance. The findings show that metaphor choice reflects broader pragmatic goals: Bush sought mobilization, while Obama stressed resolution, illustrating how metaphors shape national perception and political legitimacy.</p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a means through which political leaders frame reality, construct meaning, and shape public opinion. In times of crisis, the persuasive power of language becomes particularly visible, as leaders attempt to mobilize, reassure, or unite their audiences. Among the linguistic strategies available, metaphor has attracted significant attention in political discourse analysis because of its ability to simplify complex realities and make them

accessible to the public. As Charteris-Black (2004) argues, metaphor in political speech functions not only to explain but also to legitimize political action by grounding abstract issues in familiar experiences. Similarly, Musolff (2016) highlights that metaphors in political rhetoric are rarely decorative; they operate as powerful cognitive frames that guide public understanding of events.

The theoretical foundation for this study rests on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory

(CMT), which proposes that metaphor is central to human thought and not merely an ornamental feature of language. They identify three major types of metaphors – structural, orientational, and ontological – through which humans conceptualize abstract phenomena. As Lakoff (1993) explains, metaphors are “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action”, meaning that the metaphors used by political leaders both reflect and shape the way citizens perceive national crises.

This paper applies CMT to analyze two significant U.S. presidential speeches: George W. Bush’s Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, and Barack Obama’s announcement of the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011. Both speeches mark pivotal moments in the American “War on Terror,” yet they represent two different historical contexts – Bush’s speech introducing a new conflict, and Obama’s speech announcing its symbolic closure. Bush primarily relied on war metaphors to mobilize a shocked nation and justify military action, while Obama turned to justice metaphors and orientational imagery to offer closure and reassurance. By comparing these speeches pragmatically, this study demonstrates how the choice of metaphor influences the framing of national crises, mobilizes emotions, and legitimizes political responses.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Metaphor is a central tool in political language, as it enables leaders to frame abstract issues in terms that are more concrete and accessible to their audiences. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their influential work *Metaphors We Live By* argue that metaphors are not merely stylistic ornaments, but fundamental to human thought and action. They highlight how we often understand abstract concepts, such as time, justice, or freedom, through more familiar domains like money, journeys, or physical space.

This perspective, known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), shows that metaphors are deeply embedded in cognition and everyday discourse. In political contexts, metaphors are especially significant because they allow leaders to frame crises, mobilize emotions, and legitimize decisions (Charteris-Black,

2004; Musolff, 2016). For example, framing terrorism as a war turns an abstract threat into a concrete enemy, while framing justice as something that can be “done” or “achieved” makes it tangible and satisfying for the public.

Previous research has shown that U.S. presidents often employ metaphors strategically to serve pragmatic purposes. Lakoff (2001) noted how Bush’s “war on terror” framing after 9/11 shaped public opinion and justified military interventions. Conversely, Obama’s rhetoric often emphasized unity and justice, which scholars such as Sullivan (2011) interpret as an attempt to provide reassurance and closure.

Building on this theoretical framework, the present study applies Conceptual Metaphor Theory to a pragmatic comparison of Bush’s 9/11 address and Obama’s Bin Laden speech. The aim is to explore how each leader employed metaphors differently, and how those choices influenced the way the American public was guided to respond to crisis.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This research follows a qualitative approach, examining the use of metaphors in two major U.S. presidential speeches. The analysis draws on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003), which classifies metaphors into three categories: structural, ontological, and orientational. Alongside this framework, a pragmatic perspective is applied to explore how these metaphors function in communication, particularly in shaping persuasion, legitimizing actions, and reinforcing national identity.

The study focuses on two historically significant speeches: George W. Bush’s Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, delivered after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and Barack Obama’s announcement of Osama bin Laden’s death on May 2, 2011, broadcast from the White House

## IV. TYPES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980/2003)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) identify three main types of conceptual metaphors that structure human

thought: structural, ontological, and orientational. These categories illustrate how abstract concepts are made understandable through more concrete domains of experience.

#### 4.1 Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors occur when **one concept is organized in terms of another**. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), this type allows us to map knowledge from a familiar source domain onto a less familiar target domain. Kövecses (2002) explains that the source domain provides a rich structure that guides how we think and talk about the target. For example, *time* is often understood through the metaphor of *motion*:

- *You are wasting my time.*
- *The passing of time is motion.*
- *This gadget will save you hours.*

Here, time is treated as a **moving or measurable object**, which shows how everyday reasoning depends on metaphorical structuring.

#### 4.2 Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors arise when **abstract experiences are conceptualized as physical objects or substances** (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This allows us to treat intangible concepts like *time*, *ideas*, or *inflation* as if they were discrete entities we can interact with. For instance, *inflation* is conceptualized as a living enemy:

- *Inflation is lowering our standard of living.*
- *Our biggest enemy right now is inflation.*

By personifying inflation, the metaphor transforms an abstract economic phenomenon into something concrete, recognizable, and threatening.

#### 4.3 Orientational Metaphors

Oriental metaphors do not map one concept onto another but instead organize entire systems of concepts based on **spatial orientation** (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Because human experience is embodied, these metaphors are grounded in how our bodies function in space (Li, 2010). For example:

- *HAPPY IS UP (I'm feeling up today.)*

- *SAD IS DOWN (His mood sank.)*  
Such metaphors make use of verticality and spatial positioning to structure emotions, linking positive states with upward movement and negative states with downward movement.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the use and pragmatic functions of metaphors in George W. Bush's *Address to the Nation* (2001) and Barack Obama's *Remarks on the Death of Osama bin Laden* (2011), guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What types of conceptual metaphors (structural, ontological, and orientational) are used in Bush's and Obama's speeches?
2. How frequently does each type of metaphor occur in the two speeches?
3. What pragmatic functions do these metaphors serve in shaping persuasion, legitimization, and emotional response?
4. How do the differences in metaphor use between Bush and Obama reflect their distinct communicative goals in crisis contexts?

## VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Obama's Bin Laden Speech (2011) - Metaphor Analysis

A1. "We went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies."

Metaphor: War

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. fought militarily against al Qaeda.

Metaphoric Meaning: Terrorism is framed as a war, legitimizing military action and portraying the U.S. as protector.

A2. "I authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice."

Metaphor: Justice as Mission

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Obama approved a mission to capture or kill bin Laden.

Metaphoric Meaning: Justice is framed as a mission, highlighting leadership and presenting the killing as moral duty rather than revenge.

**A3.** "The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda."

Metaphor: Victory / Defeat

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Bin Laden's death was a major success.

Metaphoric Meaning: Al Qaeda is framed as an enemy in war, and killing bin Laden symbolizes victory.

**A4.** "We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies."

Metaphor: Defense

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. will continue protecting its people and allies.

Metaphoric Meaning: National security is portrayed as ongoing defense, stressing vigilance and persistence

**A5.** "The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores..."

Metaphor: Fight

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. did not start the conflict; it was attacked.

Metaphoric Meaning: Terrorism is conceptualized as a forced fight, justifying U.S. action as defensive and morally legitimate.

**A6.** "A bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history."

Metaphor: Light vs. Dark

Type: Orientational Metaphor

General Meaning: A clear day turned tragic because of the attacks.

Metaphoric Meaning: Light = good, dark = bad, dramatizing the contrast between peace and destruction.

**A7.** "Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts."

Metaphor: Hole / Emptiness

Type: Orientational Metaphor

General Meaning: The nation lost many lives on 9/11.

Metaphoric Meaning: Loss is expressed as a physical void, personalizing grief and uniting Americans in mourning.

**A8.** "Bring him to justice."

Metaphor: Justice as Destination

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: Bin Laden should be punished lawfully.

Metaphoric Meaning: Justice is framed as a place or entity, making the abstract concept concrete and attainable.

**A9.** "Justice has been done."

Metaphor: Justice as Agent

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: Bin Laden was punished for his crimes.

Metaphoric Meaning: Justice is personified as an actor, giving closure and satisfying public demand for accountability.

**A10.** "America... one nation, under God, indivisible..."

Metaphor: Nation as Person/Body

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. is united under shared values.

Metaphoric Meaning: The nation is conceptualized as a single body or person, emphasizing unity.

**A11.** "We reaffirmed our ties to each other."

Metaphor: Ties / Bonds

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: Americans showed solidarity after 9/11.

Metaphoric Meaning: Social unity is described as physical ties, reinforcing connection and togetherness.

**A12.** "The cause of securing our country is not complete."

Metaphor: Cause as Object/Project

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: The work of protecting the U.S. continues.

Metaphoric Meaning: Security is framed as a project to finish, stressing vigilance and ongoing responsibility.

## 6.2 Bush's 9/11 Speech (2001) - Metaphor Analysis with Purpose

**B1.** "Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America."

Metaphor: Nation as Building

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Attacks can destroy physical structures but not the country itself.

Metaphoric Meaning: America is conceptualized as a building with unshakable foundations, stressing that its core values and democracy remain strong.

**B2.** "These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve."

Metaphor: Resolve as Steel

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: Terrorists destroyed buildings, but they cannot break American determination.

Metaphoric Meaning: The nation's will is personified as steel, symbolizing resilience stronger than physical materials.

**B3.** "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world."

Metaphor: America as Beacon

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. was attacked because it symbolizes freedom.

Metaphoric Meaning: America is depicted as a beacon of light, guiding others and justifying why it was targeted.

**B4.** "A great people has been moved to defend a great nation."

Metaphor: Defense / War

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Citizens are called upon to protect the nation.

Metaphoric Meaning: Americans are framed as defenders in a war, mobilizing unity and collective strength.

**B5.** "Our country is strong."

Metaphor: Nation as Living Being

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. remains firm despite the attacks.

Metaphoric Meaning: The nation is portrayed as a living body with strength, calming fears and projecting resilience.

**B6.** "Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature."

Metaphor: Evil as Entity

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: Terrorism represents the worst of humanity.

Metaphoric Meaning: Evil is personified as a visible being, framing terrorism as a moral force that must be confronted.

**B7.** "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."

Metaphor: Hunting / Pursuit

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Both terrorists and their supporters will be held accountable.

Metaphoric Meaning: War is conceptualized as hunting down enemies, showing a broadened and uncompromising stance.

**B8.** “America and our friends and allies... stand together to win the war against terrorism.”

Metaphor: War

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. and allies will unite to fight terrorism.

Metaphoric Meaning: Terrorism is framed as a war to be won, reinforcing solidarity and U.S. leadership.

**B9.** “America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time.”

Metaphor: Enemies in Battle

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. has defeated threats in the past and will again.

Metaphoric Meaning: Terrorists are cast as enemies in a historical war, linking current struggle to past victories.

**B10.** “This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace.”

Metaphor: Resolve as Substance

Type: Ontological Metaphor

General Meaning: All Americans are united after the attacks.

Metaphoric Meaning: Resolve is treated as a shared physical substance, highlighting unity and shared determination.

**B11.** “Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.”

Metaphor: Defense of Territory

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: The U.S. will protect its values.

Metaphoric Meaning: Freedom is depicted as territory to be defended, legitimizing U.S. action as safeguarding universal principles.

**B12.** “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations... but they cannot touch the foundation of America.” (repeated theme)

Metaphor: Nation as Building

Type: Structural Metaphor

General Meaning: Physical structures may collapse, but the nation’s values remain.

Metaphoric Meaning: America is conceptualized as a building with strong foundations, reinforcing the message of enduring resilience.

## VII. RESULTS

The analysis identified 12 metaphors in Bush’s 9/11 speech and 12 in Obama’s Bin Laden speech. To present these findings clearly, the following table summarizes the metaphors, their types, and their pragmatic purposes.

*Table: Summary of Metaphors in Bush and Obama’s Speeches*

### *Metaphor Analysis Results*

NO.	President	Code	Metaphor	Type	Purpose
1	Bush	B1	Nation as Building	Structural	Resilience of national foundations
2	Bush	B2	Resolve as Steel	Ontological	Strength of willpower
3	Bush	B3	America as Beacon	Ontological	Symbol of freedom
4	Bush	B4	Defense / War	Structural	Mobilize defenders
5	Bush	B5	Nation as Living Being	Ontological	Project strength
6	Bush	B6	Evil as Entity	Ontological	Frame terrorism as evil
7	Bush	B7	Hunting / Pursuit	Structural	Accountability and pursuit

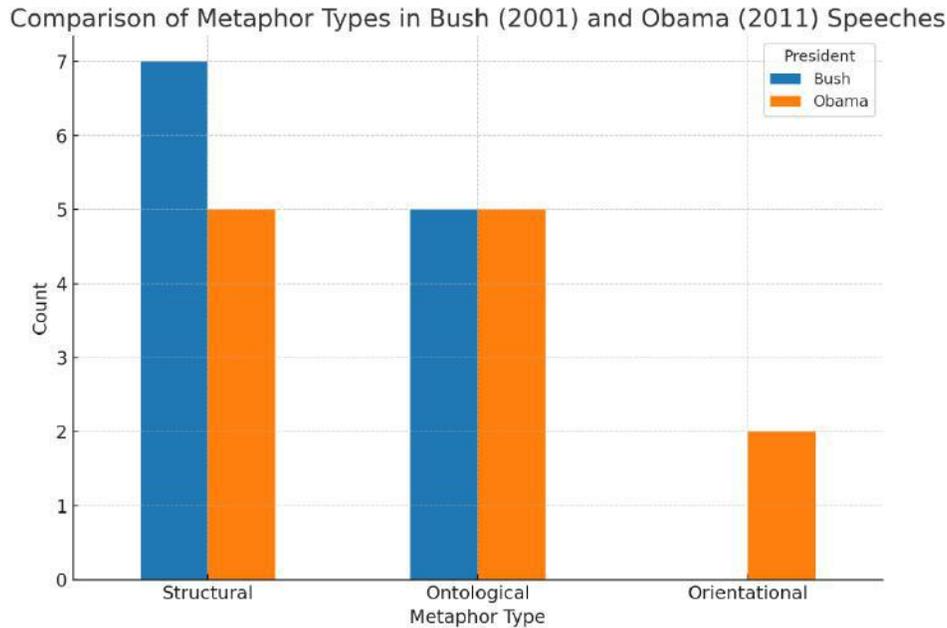
8	Bush	B8	War	Structural	Global war leadership
9	Bush	B9	Enemies in Battle	Structural	Link to past victories
10	Bush	B10	Resolve as Substance	Ontological	Unity and shared resolve
11	Bush	B11	Defence of Territory	Structural	Defence of universal values
12	Bush	B12	Nation as Building	Structural	Reinforce resilience
13	Obama	A1	War	Structural	Legitimize military action
14	Obama	A2	Justice as Mission	Structural	Leadership & moral duty
15	Obama	A3	Victory / Defeat	Structural	Show success and progress
16	Obama	A4	Defence	Structural	Reassure protection
17	Obama	A5	Fight	Structural	Justify defensive action
18	Obama	A6	Light vs. Dark	Orientalational	Highlight trauma of 9/11
19	Obama	A7	Hole / Emptiness	Orientalational	Personalize grief
20	Obama	A8	Justice as Destination	Ontological	Make justice concrete
21	Obama	A9	Justice as Agent	Ontological	Provide closure
22	Obama	A10	Nation as Person/Body	Ontological	Stress unity
23	Obama	A11	Ties / Bonds	Ontological	Reinforce solidarity
24	Obama	A12	Cause as Project	Ontological	Stress ongoing vigilance

The table shows that Bush relied mainly on structural metaphors such as war, enemies, defense, and ontological metaphors like resolve as steel and America as a beacon. His framing presented terrorism as a war to be fought, aiming to mobilize citizens, emphasize resilience, and justify military action.

Obama, while still using structural metaphors (war, fight, defense), drew more on ontological (justice as

agent, nation as body) and orientational metaphors (light vs. dark, hole in our hearts). His rhetoric framed bin Laden's death as justice achieved, highlighting closure, unity, and moral legitimacy.

To make the comparison clearer, the following pie chart illustrates the distribution of metaphor types in both speeches.



The chart confirms that Bush depended heavily on structural metaphors, while Obama's metaphors were more evenly distributed across all three types, with orientational metaphors adding emotional resonance absent in Bush's speech.

Overall, the comparison suggests that Bush's metaphors were pragmatic tools of mobilization, urging confrontation and resilience, while Obama's metaphors were tools of closure, offering reassurance and symbolic resolution. This illustrates how metaphor choice in crisis rhetoric reflects not only historical context but also the president's pragmatic goals in shaping national perception.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central role of metaphors in U.S. presidential crisis speeches. Bush's 9/11 address relied mainly on war metaphors, framing terrorism as an enemy to be fought and mobilizing the nation for resilience and confrontation. Obama's Bin Laden speech, while still invoking war imagery, emphasized justice and closure, offering unity and reassurance. The comparison shows that metaphor use reflects each president's pragmatic goals, shaping public perception and legitimizing national responses in times of crisis.

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# “I Choose My Husband and Child”: A Semiotic-Feminist Reading of Sakina in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 11 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 09 Oct 2025; Accepted: 14 Oct 2025; Available online: 19 Oct 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> semiotics, feminist film theory, Sakina, Gadar: Ek Prem Katha, Partition cinema, Bollywood melodrama, agency, citizenship</p>	<p>This article undertakes a semiotic-feminist reading of <i>Gadar: Ek Prem Katha</i> (Anil Sharma, 2001) by focusing on Sakina’s assertion, “I choose my husband and child.” The line, delivered at the height of the film’s melodramatic intensity, signals a critical point where a female character claims subjectivity within a narrative otherwise driven by patriarchal, national, and communal forces. Drawing upon Barthesian and Peircean semiotics alongside feminist film theory, the article decodes Sakina’s moment of choice through <i>mise-en-scène</i>, dialogue, and intertextual codes. The analysis situates the film within the tradition of Partition cinema and Bollywood melodrama, highlighting how gendered agency intersects with nationalist allegory and familial duty. By rereading Sakina not merely as an emblem of sacrifice or communal reconciliation but as a semiotic site of resistance and self-assertion, the article reorients critical discussions on <i>Gadar</i>. Ultimately, it argues that Sakina’s line destabilizes the film’s otherwise homogenizing vision of nation and family, opening a feminist interpretive space within popular Hindi cinema’s representation of Partition.</p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

When *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* was released in 2001, it quickly became one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of all time, its popularity fed by a blend of patriotic fervour, melodrama, and Partition nostalgia. Situated at the intersection of nationalist discourse and commercial cinema, the film presents the story of Tara Singh, a Sikh truck driver, and Sakina, a Muslim aristocrat, whose marriage unfolds against the traumatic backdrop of Partition. While much of the film’s attention gravitates towards the male protagonist’s heroic stature, it is Sakina’s seemingly quiet but powerful assertion – “I choose my husband and child” – that constitutes the emotional fulcrum of the narrative. The utterance crystallises a rare moment of female agency, where a woman articulates her

subject position against the competing demands of kinship, community, and nation.

Partition cinema in India has often foregrounded women as bearers of communal honour, sacrificial figures, or allegories of the violated nation (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Vasudevan, 2010). In this interpretive framework, female voices are frequently muted or ventriloquised through patriarchal scripts. Sakina, too, is caught in such currents – daughter of an aristocrat, wife to a Sikh man, mother to a child born across religious lines. Yet, her spoken choice complicates this paradigm. The moment draws attention to the semiotics of cinematic signification: *mise-en-scène*, bodily gesture, costume, and sound together work to inscribe Sakina’s act not as a mere familial decision but as a symbolic rupture within the patriarchal melodrama.

A semiotic–feminist analysis is particularly apt for this moment. Following Barthes (1972), the film may be read as a system of signs where Sakina’s utterance challenges dominant connotations of womanhood as passive or sacrificial. In Peircean terms, her act functions as a symbolic sign that indexes resistance against patriarchal/nationalist scripts. Feminist theorists such as Mulvey (1975) and Butler (1990) have foregrounded the politics of gaze and performativity; their frameworks illuminate how Sakina’s speech act negotiates between being objectified and asserting subjecthood. The articulation “I choose” is performative, transforming Sakina from a passive figure into an agential subject whose decision shapes the film’s resolution.

This article poses two interconnected questions: How does Sakina’s utterance operate semiotically to reconfigure her subjectivity within the film? And to what extent does the film allow her agency to unsettle or re-stabilize the gendered logic of Partition melodrama? To answer these questions, the study combines semiotic close reading with feminist film criticism, drawing also on the broader discourse of Partition studies. By situating Sakina’s moment within Bollywood’s larger semiotic economy—where women oscillate between allegories of nation and objects of desire—the article argues that *Gadar* inadvertently offers a fissure for feminist interpretation, even as its dominant narrative remains complicit with nationalist melodrama.

The discussion unfolds in five parts. The first outlines the theoretical and methodological framework, drawing from semiotics and feminist theory. The second sketches the narrative context of *Gadar*, with emphasis on Sakina’s arc. The third offers a scene-by-scene semiotic analysis of her “choice,” paying close attention to visual framing, sound, costume, and intertextual codes. The fourth discusses how this moment produces ambivalence between agency and containment. The conclusion reflects on the implications for feminist readings of Bollywood’s Partition films, suggesting that popular cinema, often dismissed as conservative, may contain moments of symbolic rupture that feminist semiotics can recover.

## II. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

A feminist semiotic reading of *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* requires careful negotiation between two sets of discourses: first, the global traditions of semiotic and feminist theory that have illuminated the politics of cinematic signification; and second, the specific historical and cultural debates surrounding Partition cinema in South Asia. This framework therefore situates the analysis at the intersection of Roland Barthes’s and Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic models, the feminist interventions of Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and the Partition scholarship of critics such as Ravi Vasudevan, Ashis Nandy, Urvashi Butalia, and Ritu Menon. The integration of these approaches provides both conceptual and methodological grounding for interpreting Sakina’s line—“I choose my husband and child”—as a semiotic rupture and a feminist claim to agency.

### Semiotics and Cinematic Signification

Roland Barthes’s structural semiotics offers one crucial entry point. In *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes famously argued that cultural texts operate on two levels: the denotative (literal) and the connotative (ideological). Films, as semiotic systems, not only represent stories but also naturalize dominant ideologies by making them appear as “myth.” In *Gadar*, the denotative level frames Sakina as a wife and mother choosing her family, but the connotative level extends her act to signify broader ideological themes: fidelity to conjugal love over patriarchal kinship, and loyalty to domestic bonds over communal obligations. Barthes’s notion of myth helps uncover how the film simultaneously reproduces nationalist melodrama and inadvertently enables a counter-myth of feminist agency.

Peirce’s triadic model—icon, index, and symbol—adds further nuance. Unlike Barthes’s focus on connotation, Peirce conceptualized meaning as a dynamic process of semiosis, where signs are interpreted through their relation to objects and interpretants. In Sakina’s scene, her gesture (lowered eyes, clutching her child) functions iconically as maternal devotion; her words index a rejection of patriarchal dictates; and symbolically, her utterance reconfigures the grammar of Partition cinema, where

women often symbolize either violated nationhood or familial sacrifice. The triadic model underscores how Sakina's choice resonates across levels of representation: as bodily performance, as situated indexical act, and as cultural symbol.

The Greimassian actantial model also illuminates the narrative logic of *Gadar*. In this schema, characters function as actants occupying roles such as Subject, Object, Sender, and Opponent. Tara Singh is cast as Subject pursuing the Object of Sakina's love, with Partition and Sakina's father operating as Opponents. Yet in the climactic moment, Sakina herself assumes actantial agency: she becomes the Subject who actively chooses, thereby displacing Tara's exclusive narrative authority. This shift complicates the film's melodramatic logic and reveals the semiotic fault lines where gendered agency intrudes upon patriarchal storytelling.

### **Feminist Film Theory and the Question of Agency**

If semiotics provides tools to decode cinematic signification, feminist film theory interrogates the gendered politics of that signification. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) argued that classical cinema positions women as objects of the male gaze, subordinated to male desire and narrative resolution. Bollywood melodrama, as many scholars note (Chatterjee, 1998; Dwyer, 2014), frequently reproduces this structure, idealizing women as sacrificial mothers, dutiful wives, or erotic spectacles. Sakina, played by Ameesha Patel, is initially inscribed within this schema: her beauty is fetishized, her vulnerability displayed, and her agency circumscribed.

Yet Sakina's utterance complicates Mulvey's model. Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990) helps here. For Butler, gender is not an essence but a set of repeated acts that constitute subjectivity. When Sakina declares "I choose," she performs an act that destabilizes her socially ascribed role. It is not merely that she exercises agency within existing structures, but that she reconstitutes her subjectivity through language, performing a feminist break within patriarchal melodrama. The performativity of her utterance—its ability to enact what it declares—constitutes a semiotic event that disrupts conventional gendered signification.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question—"Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988)—further sharpens the stakes. Spivak contends that the subaltern woman is doubly silenced, spoken for both by colonial and patriarchal discourses. Partition historiography, as Urvashi Butalia (1998) and Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin (1998) remind us, has often erased women's voices, portraying them only as victims of abduction, honor killings, or communal exchange. Sakina, as a Muslim woman in a Partition narrative, bears this double marginalization. Her utterance of choice thus becomes an exceptional moment where a subaltern figure momentarily speaks, asserting desire and agency within a cinematic and historical discourse that typically denies her subjectivity.

At the same time, the ambivalence of her speech cannot be overlooked. Luce Irigaray's critique of phallogocentric discourse (1985) reminds us that women's speech is often co-opted into male symbolic orders. Sakina's choice, while asserting agency, also reinscribes her within the patriarchal ideal of the selfless wife and mother. The feminist reading must therefore attend to this tension: her utterance both disrupts and conforms, both resists and stabilizes.

### **Partition Cinema and Indian Melodrama**

To situate Sakina's moment within the specific cultural matrix of South Asian cinema, it is necessary to recall the narrative conventions of Partition films. As Ravi Vasudevan (2010) observes, Partition cinema often operates through melodrama, staging the trauma of communal violence through familial and romantic allegories. Women in these films are frequently cast as sites of communal conflict: abducted, converted, or compelled into sacrificial gestures. Ashis Nandy (1995) notes that Partition narratives often reinscribe patriarchal and nationalist anxieties, using female bodies as terrains of honor and betrayal.

*Gadar* belongs to this tradition, but also to the post-1990s phase of Bollywood, where hyper-nationalist melodramas (e.g., *Border* [1997]) catered to a rising middle-class audience. The film celebrates Tara Singh as a patriotic hero, while Sakina's Muslim aristocratic lineage is used to dramatize communal conflict. Within this framework, Sakina's assertion appears anomalous: instead of being exchanged as a token between families or nations, she asserts her

subjectivity as wife and mother. Partition scholarship (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998) shows how real women during 1947 often resisted being returned to natal families, insisting on chosen relationships. Sakina's line resonates with these historical counter-narratives, suggesting that popular cinema, even when steeped in nationalist melodrama, may inadvertently register women's resistance.

### **Methodological Approach: Semiotic Close Reading**

Methodologically, this article employs semiotic close reading of selected sequences from *Gadar*, focusing on Sakina's utterance and its surrounding mise-en-scène. Following Barthes, the analysis distinguishes between denotative representation (the literal choice of husband and child) and connotative ideological coding (the symbolic challenge to patriarchal and communal expectations). Peirce's triadic model guides the parsing of gestures, costumes, and dialogue as icons, indices, and symbols. The Greimassian actantial schema is used to map Sakina's shifting narrative position.

This semiotic analysis is integrated with feminist interpretive strategies. Mulvey's gaze theory prompts questions about how Sakina is framed visually: does the camera invite voyeuristic pleasure, or does it allow her a speaking subjectivity? Butler's performativity sharpens attention to how her utterance enacts agency through speech. Spivak's critique of subaltern silence situates her voice within the broader context of Partition representations. Together, these perspectives enable a layered reading: Sakina is decoded not simply as a character but as a sign within intersecting systems of cinematic, cultural, and gendered meaning.

### **Balancing Semiotics, Feminism, and History**

One risk of semiotic analysis is abstraction, detaching signs from their historical and material contexts. To avoid this, the framework situates semiotic interpretation within the socio-political discourse of Partition. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) reminds us, cultural texts in South Asia must be read with attention to the specificities of postcolonial modernity, not merely through imported theoretical models. Thus, Sakina's choice is read not only through Barthes or Mulvey but also in dialogue with Partition historiography and South Asian feminist scholarship.

This balancing act underscores the dual contribution of the article. On one hand, it extends semiotic analysis into Bollywood melodrama, demonstrating how sign systems encode gendered power. On the other, it brings feminist Partition historiography into conversation with film theory, recovering women's agency where it is most often occluded. Methodologically, this means oscillating between close textual analysis and broader cultural contextualization, reading Sakina's utterance both as a cinematic sign and as a symbolic echo of women's historical resistance during Partition.

### **Toward a Semiotic-Feminist Praxis**

In sum, this framework positions Sakina's "I choose my husband and child" as a site where semiotic and feminist readings converge. Barthes helps decode the myth of female sacrifice; Peirce clarifies the layers of signification; Mulvey interrogates the gaze that frames Sakina; Butler highlights the performativity of her speech; Spivak warns of subaltern silencing, even when women appear to speak; and Partition scholarship anchors the reading in South Asian history. The methodology is thus deliberately plural: no single theory suffices to capture the complexity of Sakina's moment.

This theoretical architecture not only grounds the subsequent analysis but also gestures toward a broader feminist semiotic praxis in film studies. By combining structural semiotics, feminist critique, and historical contextualization, the article demonstrates how popular Hindi cinema, often dismissed as melodramatic and regressive, can be re-read as a contradictory text where female subjectivity intermittently surfaces. Sakina's line is one such surface rupture: a semiotic and feminist crack in the edifice of patriarchal melodrama.

## **III. CONTEXT AND NARRATIVE OVERVIEW**

*Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (dir. Anil Sharma, 2001) occupies a singular position in the cultural history of Indian cinema. Released at the turn of the new millennium, when Bollywood was increasingly globalizing its narratives and aesthetics, *Gadar* reasserted the melodramatic register of the nationalist blockbuster. It dramatized the trauma of the 1947 Partition through a love story between Tara Singh, a rustic Sikh truck

driver played by Sunny Deol, and Sakina, the aristocratic Muslim daughter of a wealthy zamindar, portrayed by Ameesha Patel. The film's enormous commercial success—becoming one of the highest-grossing films in Hindi cinema history—was indebted to its populist formula: patriotic fervour, emotional excess, spectacular violence, and an appeal to nostalgia for Partition-era sacrifice. Yet beneath this surface of hyper-masculine heroism and nation-building allegory, the film embeds a narrative arc that allows Sakina, at least fleetingly, to assert her own agency.

### **Sakina's Arc within the Partition Narrative**

The film opens by establishing Partition as a backdrop of displacement and trauma. Tara rescues Sakina during communal riots, initiating their improbable romance. Their love across religious and communal lines is staged as a metaphor for reconciliation, yet it also reproduces familiar tropes of Partition cinema, where female bodies become symbols of national and communal contestation. Sakina's aristocratic background renders her both desirable and politically charged: she represents not merely a romantic interest but also the residual memory of a pre-Partition Muslim elite now displaced in the Indian nation.

Their marriage, dramatized through the popular song "Main Nikla Gaddi Leke," situates Sakina within the domestic sphere of rural Punjab. Here she embodies the archetypal wife and mother—dutiful, nurturing, and supportive. Yet this positioning is precarious: her aristocratic father in Pakistan, Ashraf Ali (Amrith Puri), refuses to accept the cross-communal union, seeing in it not only familial dishonour but also symbolic defeat. The return to Pakistan to seek Ashraf Ali's blessings becomes the turning point of the film, where Sakina's subjectivity is tested amidst conflicting patriarchal claims.

### **The Climactic Tension**

The crucial sequence unfolds in Pakistan, when Tara, Sakina, and their child travel to Lahore. What begins as a negotiation for familial recognition devolves into a struggle over possession. Ashraf Ali and his household assert patriarchal control, attempting to reclaim Sakina into the fold of her natal family and community. This echoes historical accounts of abducted women during Partition who were forcibly "repatriated" by state and family, often against their

own wishes (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). In these histories, the woman's choice was largely effaced; what mattered was the preservation of communal honor.

It is in this context that Sakina utters the pivotal line: "**Main apne pati aur bachche ko chunhti hoon**" ("**I choose my husband and child**"). Spoken at a moment of heightened melodrama, the utterance reconfigures the narrative stakes. Instead of allowing her father to determine her destiny, or letting Tara's heroism alone resolve the conflict, Sakina voices her preference. Her act refuses to be a silent object of exchange between patriarchal structures. The line is more than dialogue: it crystallizes a semiotic event, where gesture, voice, and mise-en-scène align to signify choice, rupture, and assertion.

### **Semiotic Resonances**

The semiotic power of the moment lies in its layering. Denotatively, Sakina is choosing her conjugal family over her natal family. Connotatively, she is resisting patriarchal control—both her father's aristocratic authority and, implicitly, the film's masculinist narrative that centers Tara's heroism. Symbolically, her choice destabilizes the nationalist allegory of Partition: rather than being a passive emblem of communal reconciliation, she enacts a micro-politics of desire and loyalty. The cinematic grammar—close-up framing, dramatic lighting, the clutching of her child—visually underscores her agency while also reinscribing her within the maternal role.

### **Historical and Cinematic Context**

To appreciate the force of Sakina's choice, it must be located within the broader corpus of Partition cinema. Films such as *Train to Pakistan* (1998), *Earth* (1998), and *Pinjar* (2003) foreground the violence, displacement, and trauma of 1947, with women often depicted as abducted, violated, or sacrificial figures. These narratives reproduce what feminist historians like Butalia and Menon have documented: women's bodies became terrains on which communal and national identities were inscribed. Yet oral histories also reveal women's acts of resistance, refusal, and self-assertion, often suppressed in official narratives. Sakina's "I choose" resonates with these subaltern counter-memories, even as it remains framed within the melodramatic codes of mainstream Bollywood.

The melodramatic mode itself is significant. As Ravi Vasudevan (2010) argues, Indian melodrama stages social contradictions through affective excess—songs, heightened emotions, familial confrontations. In *Gadar*, melodrama is harnessed to patriotic fervour, with Tara Singh's larger-than-life gestures epitomizing the nation's muscular defense. Yet melodrama also enables Sakina's rupture: the excess of emotion legitimates her act of speech, allowing her choice to be framed not as betrayal of family honor but as the climactic resolution of conflict. The melodramatic mode thus becomes ambivalent—repressive in its patriarchal coding, but generative in its allowance of female voice.

### Setting the Stage for Semiotic Analysis

This narrative overview underscores why Sakina's utterance warrants close semiotic attention. It emerges at the intersection of Partition's historical trauma, Bollywood's melodramatic conventions, and the gendered politics of nationalist cinema. Methodologically, the scene crystallizes a moment where dialogue, gesture, *mise-en-scène*, and intertextual codes converge, producing a multilayered sign. The subsequent analysis will parse these semiotic dimensions—visual framing, sound and dialogue, costume and gesture, intertextual motifs—demonstrating how Sakina's choice operates as both a disruption and a containment of patriarchal-nationalist narratives.

## IV. SCENE-BY-SCENE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The semiotic-feminist reading of Sakina's declaration "I choose my husband and child" requires close engagement with the cinematic texture of *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*. To understand how this utterance operates as a sign, one must attend to the layered codes that structure the sequence: the **visual framing**, the **soundscape and dialogue**, the **costume and bodily gesture**, and the **intertextual references to Partition and melodrama**. Semiotic theory teaches us that meaning is never singular but constructed through multiple signifying systems (Barthes, 1972; Peirce, 1931–58). A feminist perspective reminds us that these systems are rarely neutral: they are embedded in patriarchal and nationalist ideologies (Mulvey, 1975; Butler, 1990; Spivak, 1988). By bringing these strands together, this analysis highlights how

Sakina's utterance operates as a moment of rupture—producing agency—yet also remains caught within ambivalent representational codes.

### Visual Framing: The Semiotics of the Gaze

The scene in which Sakina voices her choice is set in her father Ashraf Ali's mansion in Lahore, a space heavy with patriarchal authority. Tara, Sakina, and their child stand confronted by Ashraf Ali and his guards. The camera initially frames Tara in medium shots, emphasizing his muscular defiance, a trope central to Bollywood's nationalist melodrama of the 1990s. Yet as the confrontation reaches its peak, the camera cuts to a close-up of Sakina, her face framed against the backdrop of familial hostility.

In semiotic terms, this shift in framing redirects the **gaze**. As Mulvey (1975) argues, classical cinema is structured around the "male gaze," positioning women as passive objects of visual pleasure. Here, however, the close-up invests Sakina with subjectivity: she is no longer merely seen, but allowed to speak. The close-up becomes an **indexical sign**, pointing to the intensity of her emotional state, while also functioning symbolically to shift narrative authority from Tara to Sakina. The lowered camera angle, which had previously privileged Tara's towering stature, now equalizes Sakina's presence, subtly reconfiguring the balance of power.

What is critical here is the **semiotic disruption of the gaze**. Sakina's face in close-up rejects voyeuristic objectification; instead, it becomes the locus of enunciation. In Peircean terms, the close-up is both an **icon** (resembling her actual expression of anguish and resolve) and a **symbol** (signifying female assertion against patriarchal coercion). This interplay allows the audience to perceive Sakina not merely as Tara's beloved or Ashraf Ali's daughter but as a subject who enunciates her will.

### Dialogue and Sound: The Performative Utterance

The power of Sakina's line lies not only in its lexical meaning but also in its **performativity**. As J. L. Austin (1962) argued in *How to Do Things with Words*, some utterances do not simply describe reality but enact it. Butler (1990) extended this insight to gender, contending that identity is constituted through repeated performative acts. When Sakina declares, "Main apne pati aur bachche ko chunhti hoon" ("I choose my husband and child"), the utterance is not a

description but an act of choosing. Its performative force reconstitutes her subjectivity: in speaking, she becomes the agent of her own destiny.

The sound design amplifies this performativity. The score momentarily recedes, allowing her voice to resonate in the diegetic space. The silence of surrounding characters underscores the authority of her words. The deliberate pauses – “Main apne pati... aur bachche... ko chunhti hoon” – extend the utterance, emphasizing its weight. Each pause functions as a **syntagmatic break**, drawing attention to the elements of her choice: husband and child. In semiotic terms, the rhythm of her speech generates meaning beyond the literal words, connoting deliberation, resistance, and determination.

Moreover, the utterance’s reception within the diegesis underscores its semiotic import. Ashraf Ali is visibly shaken; Tara is momentarily silent. The guards lower their weapons. The father’s authority, until then absolute, is destabilized not by Tara’s physical power but by Sakina’s speech. Here, Spivak’s question “Can the subaltern speak?” becomes relevant: Sakina, a Muslim woman in a Partition narrative, is granted a voice. Yet, as Spivak warns, the subaltern’s speech is often co-opted. Sakina’s choice is framed in alignment with patriarchal ideals of wifedom and motherhood. Her performative utterance thus simultaneously resists silencing and reinscribes her within maternal domesticity.

### **Costume and Mise-en-scène: Semiotic Codes of Femininity**

Costume and mise-en-scène play a crucial role in encoding meaning. Sakina, in this climactic sequence, is dressed in modest traditional attire, her dupatta (scarf) draped over her head. The dupatta here functions as a **symbolic sign**: denotatively a garment, connotatively an index of modesty, respectability, and cultural belonging. In Partition cinema, the dupatta often signifies a woman’s honor, vulnerable to violation or reclamation. By retaining her dupatta while asserting choice, Sakina negotiates between patriarchal expectations and feminist assertion. She is not rejecting traditional femininity but re-signifying it as a site of agency.

The mise-en-scène further encodes this negotiation. Sakina is positioned physically between Tara and her father, visually dramatizing her conflict. The child in

her arms becomes a semiotic anchor: an **index** of maternal devotion and a **symbol** of continuity across communal divides. Her act of clutching the child while speaking invests her choice with moral weight. The child becomes both literal and figurative justification, enabling her agency to be read not as rebellion but as loyalty to family values. This ambivalence is crucial: her agency is permitted precisely because it aligns with maternal domesticity, a condition of possibility but also a limit.

Lighting and spatial arrangement reinforce this dynamic. While Tara is often lit in harsh contrasts, emphasizing his masculinity, Sakina is illuminated with softer, diffused light. This aesthetic choice encodes her as morally pure, emotionally authentic. The semiotic function of light here is symbolic: it casts her as the “truth-teller,” the bearer of affective sincerity. Such coding resonates with melodramatic conventions, where women’s moral clarity often provides narrative resolution (Thomas, 1995). Yet in Sakina’s case, this moral clarity is voiced through an explicit act of choice, marking a departure from silent suffering to articulated agency.

### **Intertextual Codes: Partition, Nation, and Melodrama**

Semiotic meaning is rarely contained within a single text; it emerges intertextually, through echoes of cultural myths and cinematic tropes. Sakina’s utterance reverberates with Partition’s history of abducted women. As Butalia (1998) documents, many women refused to return to natal families, choosing instead to remain with husbands or children across communal lines. Their choices disrupted state and community narratives of honor. Sakina’s line thus echoes these suppressed histories, inscribing them within a mainstream Bollywood narrative.

At the same time, the scene draws upon the melodramatic trope of the “**mother’s choice**.” In Indian cinema, the mother often embodies ultimate moral authority, choosing family unity over social expectations (as in *Mother India* [1957]). Sakina’s utterance aligns with this tradition, yet it is distinct: she is not yet a mythic mother figure but a young woman claiming her conjugal and maternal identity. The intertextual resonance with *Mother India* is significant: while Nargis’s character chooses nation over son, Sakina chooses husband and child over

father and community. The reversal highlights the shifting terrain of female agency in nationalist melodrama.

Furthermore, Sakina's line operates within the discourse of Bollywood's post-1990s nationalism. Films like *Border* (1997) and *LOC Kargil* (2003) foreground masculine heroism, with women relegated to the sidelines. *Gadar*, too, centres Tara's hypermasculinity—his iconic handpump scene epitomizes national strength. Yet Sakina's utterance disrupts this paradigm, inserting female voice into a narrative otherwise dominated by male spectacle. Intertextually, her line challenges the convention that male heroism alone resolves national crises, suggesting instead that female agency has a role in shaping narrative closure.

### Peircean Triads in Action

Applying Peirce's triadic model clarifies the multiple levels at which Sakina's utterance signifies.

- **Icon:** Her tear-streaked face and trembling voice iconically represent emotional intensity.
- **Index:** Her act of speaking, clutching her child, directly indexes maternal devotion and conjugal loyalty, pointing to her lived attachments.
- **Symbol:** The utterance "I choose" symbolically reconfigures her role: from object of exchange to subject of decision. Within the symbolic order of Partition cinema, where women typically embody communal honor, her speech re-signifies womanhood as agency.

The power of the triad lies in its simultaneity: Sakina's act is immediately recognizable as maternal devotion (iconic), materially grounded in the presence of child and husband (indexical), and culturally transformative in its symbolic challenge to patriarchal control.

### Ambivalence and Containment

Despite its radical potential, the scene remains ambivalent. As Irigaray (1985) cautions, women's speech in patriarchal discourse often reinscribes the very structures it resists. Sakina's choice is permitted because it conforms to patriarchal ideals of wifhood and motherhood. She does not claim autonomy for herself as an individual subject beyond family; her

agency is tied to her relational roles. This containment tempers the feminist rupture, reabsorbing it into the melodramatic resolution.

Nevertheless, the semiotic-feminist reading insists that ambivalence does not negate resistance. As Butler (1993) notes, subversive acts often emerge within, not outside, regulatory frameworks. Sakina's utterance destabilizes patriarchal authority, even if temporarily. It inserts female voice into the semiotic fabric of Bollywood melodrama, opening interpretive possibilities that challenge monolithic readings of women as passive symbols.

## V. DISCUSSION: AGENCY, AMBIVALENCE, AND PARTITION MELODRAMA

The preceding semiotic analysis has illuminated how Sakina's utterance—"I choose my husband and child"—operates across multiple registers of cinematic signification: visual framing, dialogue, gesture, costume, and intertextual resonance. In this section, I extend those findings into a broader interpretive synthesis. The discussion addresses three interconnected questions: (1) How does Sakina's utterance intervene in the semiotic economy of Bollywood melodrama? (2) What ambivalences shape the feminist potential of this moment within Partition cinema? (3) How does this reading recalibrate our understanding of agency and representation in popular Indian film?

By drawing upon semiotic theory (Barthes, Peirce, Greimas), feminist critique (Mulvey, Butler, Spivak, Irigaray), and Partition scholarship (Butalia, Menon & Bhasin, Vasudevan, Nandy), this discussion foregrounds both the radical and constrained dimensions of Sakina's act. Ultimately, it argues that the scene crystallizes the contradictory possibilities of Bollywood melodrama: a form that often reinscribes patriarchal and nationalist ideologies, yet can also stage moments of rupture where female subjectivity momentarily asserts itself.

### Melodrama as a Semiotic Field

Melodrama, as scholars like Peter Brooks (1976) and Christine Gledhill (1987) have argued, is not merely a genre but a mode of signification characterized by affective excess, moral polarization, and heightened spectacle. In the South Asian context, Ravi Vasudevan (2010) extends this insight, showing how melodrama

mediates social contradictions in Indian cinema—between tradition and modernity, family and state, religion and nation. *Gadar* exemplifies this mode: Tara Singh's hyper-masculine heroism, the spectacular violence against Pakistanis, and the tear-soaked family confrontations all dramatize contradictions between communal conflict and conjugal love.

Within this semiotic field, Sakina's utterance is both enabled and constrained by melodrama's grammar. On the one hand, melodrama's heightened affect provides the conditions for her voice to be heard. Her trembling declaration, framed by close-ups and underscored by silence, is made legible precisely through melodrama's privileging of emotional truth. On the other hand, melodrama also structures the containment of that voice: Sakina's choice is validated because it conforms to the moral resolution expected of melodramatic closure. As Thomas (1995) notes, Hindi melodrama often legitimates women's voice only when it aligns with familial unity and moral clarity. Sakina's utterance thus participates in a familiar semiotic economy: it disrupts patriarchal control momentarily, but it is reabsorbed into the patriarchal family as the narrative's resolution.

### Agency as Semiotic Rupture

From a semiotic perspective, Sakina's choice represents a rupture in the chain of signification. In Barthesian terms, the denotative meaning of her line—choosing husband and child—is straightforward. But the connotative level destabilizes the patriarchal myth of woman as passive object. Instead, Sakina emerges as a sign of resistance, asserting subjectivity against competing familial and communal claims. The myth of female sacrifice is thus challenged by a counter-myth: that of female agency enacted through choice.

Peirce's triadic model helps clarify this rupture. Sakina's utterance is an **icon** of maternal devotion, an **index** of lived attachment to Tara and their child, and a **symbol** of feminist assertion within Partition cinema. The simultaneity of these sign-functions produces ambivalence: while she symbolically resists patriarchal control, her iconic and indexical dimensions tie her agency to maternal and conjugal roles. Semiotics thus illuminates how her agency is both produced and delimited by the signifying codes of cinema.

The Greimassian actantial model further underscores the rupture. Until this scene, Tara Singh dominates the narrative as Subject, with Sakina as Object. But in the climactic confrontation, Sakina assumes the Subject position: she actively chooses, displacing Tara's singular narrative authority. This actantial shift destabilizes the film's melodramatic logic, creating a fissure where female subjectivity momentarily takes center stage.

### Feminist Ambivalence: Speaking within Patriarchy

Feminist film theory sharpens the ambivalence of Sakina's agency. Mulvey (1975) reminds us that women in classical cinema are typically framed as objects of the male gaze, denied subjectivity. Sakina's close-up interrupts this logic, granting her a voice. Yet the camera still frames her through conventions of modesty and maternal virtue. Her speech act is thus mediated by patriarchal codes of representation.

Butler's theory of performativity (1990) reveals both the radical and constrained dimensions of her utterance. By saying "I choose," Sakina performs the act of choosing, enacting subjectivity through language. This performative rupture destabilizes her prior role as passive object. Yet, as Butler cautions, performativity always occurs within regulatory frameworks. Sakina's choice is legible precisely because it conforms to normative ideals of wifedom and motherhood. Her agency, then, is real but circumscribed: it emerges only within patriarchal parameters.

Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) is particularly apt. As a Muslim woman in a Partition narrative, Sakina occupies a doubly marginalized position. Her utterance appears to answer Spivak affirmatively: she speaks, claiming choice. Yet the ambivalence persists: her speech is permitted only insofar as it reproduces patriarchal familial values. In Irigaray's terms (1985), her voice remains inscribed within the phallogocentric symbolic order. The feminist reading must therefore acknowledge both the subversive and complicit dimensions of her speech.

### Partition Historiography and Cinematic Memory

Partition historiography offers another lens to interpret Sakina's choice. Historians like Urvashi Butalia (1998) and Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin (1998) have documented how women during Partition were abducted, exchanged, or forced into marriages, often

stripped of agency. Yet oral testimonies reveal acts of resistance: women refusing to return to natal families, choosing relationships forged in displacement. Sakina's utterance echoes these historical counter-narratives, re-inscribing them within the cinematic imaginary.

At the same time, the film's nationalist framework complicates this resonance. Ashis Nandy (1995) argues that Partition narratives often reinscribe patriarchal anxieties, using women as symbols of communal honor. *Gadar* participates in this logic: Sakina's aristocratic lineage and Muslim identity mark her as contested property. Her choice resists this logic, but the film ultimately reabsorbs it into nationalist melodrama, celebrating Tara's heroism and framing Sakina's agency as secondary.

Nevertheless, Sakina's utterance disrupts the homogenizing narrative of Partition cinema. Films like *Earth* (1998) and *Pinjar* (2003) foreground women's suffering, often leaving them silenced or victimized. Sakina, by contrast, speaks, however ambivalently. This difference is crucial: *Gadar* inadvertently stages a counter-memory of Partition, where a woman asserts her desire in the face of patriarchal and communal control.

### The Contradictory Logic of Popular Cinema

The ambivalence of Sakina's agency reflects the contradictory logic of popular Hindi cinema itself. As scholars like M. Madhava Prasad (1998) and Rachel Dwyer (2014) have shown, Bollywood melodrama simultaneously reinforces and destabilizes dominant ideologies. It reproduces patriarchal family structures, yet also stages their crises. It glorifies nationalist masculinity, yet also provides space for female voice through melodramatic excess.

Sakina's utterance exemplifies this contradiction. On the one hand, it challenges patriarchal and communal authority, inserting female subjectivity into a nationalist narrative. On the other, it reinscribes her agency within maternal and conjugal roles, foreclosing more radical possibilities of autonomy. This ambivalence is not a weakness but a structural feature of popular cinema, which negotiates between ideological containment and subversive possibility.

### Spectatorship and Reception

An important dimension of this discussion concerns reception. How do audiences interpret Sakina's

utterance? Semiotics reminds us that meaning is not fixed but negotiated by spectators (Hall, 1980). For many viewers, Sakina's choice may simply affirm familial values, reinforcing patriarchal norms. For feminist readers, however, it opens a space of resistance. The ambiguity of the sign allows for multiple readings, enabling both conservative and subversive interpretations.

This multiplicity is crucial for understanding popular cinema's cultural role. As Vasudevan (2010) argues, Bollywood melodrama functions as a public arena where social contradictions are staged and negotiated. Sakina's utterance participates in this arena, inviting audiences to grapple with questions of gender, family, and nation. Whether interpreted as conservative or feminist, the scene forces recognition of female voice within a narrative otherwise dominated by male spectacle.

### Toward a Semiotic-Feminist Praxis in South Asian Cinema

What does Sakina's utterance teach us about feminist semiotic analysis in South Asian cinema more broadly? First, it underscores the need for **integrative methodologies**. Semiotics alone cannot capture the gendered stakes of representation; feminist theory alone risks overlooking the signifying codes of cinema. By combining both, we can uncover how female subjectivity is simultaneously produced and constrained.

Second, it highlights the importance of **historical contextualization**. Sakina's choice resonates with Partition histories of women's resistance, but it also risks being co-opted into nationalist melodrama. A historically grounded semiotic reading can hold both dimensions together, acknowledging ambivalence without collapsing it into either victimhood or triumph.

Third, it suggests that popular cinema, often dismissed as ideologically regressive, may contain moments of feminist potential. These moments may be fleeting, ambivalent, and contained, but they matter. They provide interpretive fissures where alternative meanings can emerge, challenging monolithic narratives of patriarchy and nationalism.

## VI. CONCLUSION TO THE DISCUSSION

This discussion has foregrounded the ambivalence of Sakina's agency within *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*. Her utterance "I choose my husband and child" disrupts the patriarchal semiotic economy of Partition cinema, asserting female subjectivity through visual framing, performative dialogue, and intertextual resonance. Yet this rupture is circumscribed by melodramatic conventions that validate her agency only within maternal and conjugal roles. The feminist potential of her speech thus coexists with its patriarchal containment.

By synthesizing semiotic, feminist, and Partition frameworks, the discussion reveals the contradictory logic of Bollywood melodrama: it is at once a site of ideological reproduction and a space of resistant possibility. Sakina's voice embodies this contradiction. She speaks, and in speaking, she asserts agency. But her speech is heard only because it conforms to familial values. This tension is not a limitation but the very terrain of popular cinema's cultural politics.

### Conclusion

The analysis of Sakina's utterance—"I choose my husband and child"—in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* demonstrates the interpretive power of a semiotic-feminist framework for reading Bollywood melodrama. At one level, the line may appear as a conventional affirmation of conjugal loyalty and maternal devotion, neatly aligned with patriarchal ideals of wifedom and motherhood. Yet, when examined semiotically and historically, it emerges as a significant rupture in the semiotic economy of Partition cinema: a moment when a female character, long positioned as object within nationalist melodrama, claims subjectivity through speech.

The close reading revealed how this moment functions across multiple signifying systems. The **visual framing** in close-up displaces Tara Singh's towering masculinity to foreground Sakina's enunciation. The **soundscape** amplifies her voice by suspending musical excess, making her words the focal point of the sequence. The **costume and gesture**—her dupatta intact, her child held close—anchor her agency in culturally legible codes of femininity. The **intertextual resonances** with Partition histories of women's abduction and refusal, and with

cinematic tropes of maternal sacrifice, provide further depth. Together, these codes inscribe Sakina's speech as both a site of resistance and a performance of patriarchal containment.

From a feminist perspective, this ambivalence is instructive. Mulvey's theory of the gaze reminds us that women in cinema are often constructed as visual objects; Sakina's close-up both repeats and disrupts this dynamic. Butler's theory of performativity clarifies how her utterance constitutes agency through language, while also noting that such agency is constrained by normative frameworks. Spivak's reminder that the subaltern's speech is often ventriloquized by dominant discourses underscores the paradox of Sakina's moment: she speaks, yet her speech is only permitted because it aligns with familial duty. Irigaray's critique of phallogocentric discourse illuminates how women's voices can be both present and subordinated within patriarchal symbolic orders. These frameworks together highlight the contradictory quality of Sakina's choice: radical in its assertion of female subjectivity, but recuperated into patriarchal melodrama.

Partition scholarship contextualizes this contradiction within the historical trauma of 1947. Historians like Butalia (1998) and Menon & Bhasin (1998) document how women's voices were erased by both nationalist and communalist narratives, their bodies reduced to tokens of honour. Yet oral testimonies reveal women asserting choice, refusing to be repatriated, and forging new familial bonds. Sakina's "I choose" resonates with these suppressed histories, staging in popular cinema a counter-memory of female agency during Partition. At the same time, as Nandy (1995) observes, Partition narratives often reinscribe patriarchal anxieties; *Gadar* does so by ultimately centring Tara's heroism. Sakina's speech therefore oscillates between historical resonance and cinematic containment.

This ambivalence is not accidental but symptomatic of Bollywood melodrama itself. As scholars like Vasudevan (2010), Prasad (1998), and Dwyer (2014) have argued, Hindi cinema is a contradictory cultural form, at once reproducing dominant ideologies and staging their crises. Melodrama's grammar of affective excess allows women to speak, but only within boundaries that secure patriarchal and nationalist resolution. Sakina's utterance exemplifies

this: it is a rupture that destabilizes paternal authority, but also a resolution that reaffirms family unity. The feminist semiotic reading must therefore attend to both dimensions, holding disruption and containment together rather than privileging one over the other.

The implications of this reading extend beyond *Gadar*. First, it demonstrates that popular cinema, often dismissed as ideologically conservative, can be a terrain where feminist meanings emerge in contradictory ways. Semiotic-feminist analysis allows us to identify and interpret these fissures, showing how women's agency is encoded, however ambivalently, in mainstream narratives. Second, it suggests that Partition cinema, typically framed as a male-dominated discourse of trauma and nationhood, contains within it submerged traces of women's subjectivity. By recovering these traces, film studies can contribute to a more inclusive memory of Partition, one that recognizes women not only as victims but also as speaking subjects.

Finally, the case of Sakina underscores the necessity of **methodological pluralism** in film studies. Semiotics alone might decode her utterance as a sign, but without feminist theory it would miss the gendered stakes of representation. Feminist critique alone might emphasize her containment, but without semiotics it would overlook the material codes—framing, sound, gesture—that enable her speech. Partition historiography provides the historical grounding without which her utterance risks abstraction. Only by weaving these approaches together can we fully apprehend the cultural and political significance of such cinematic moments.

In the end, Sakina's "I choose" is less a resolution than a provocation. It provokes us to rethink how women are positioned within nationalist melodrama; it provokes us to reconsider how popular cinema encodes agency within structures of constraint; it provokes us to read ambivalence not as failure but as the very space where feminist semiotics operates. *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* may have been designed as a celebration of muscular patriotism, but in Sakina's quiet utterance it also registers a different truth: that even within the most patriarchal of cinematic forms, women can, and do, speak.

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# A Diachronic Study on the Integration of Chinese Culture into College English Textbooks: Evolution, Challenges, and Future Pathways

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<i>Article Detail:</i>	<b>Abstract</b>
<p><i>Received: 18 Sep 2025;</i>  <i>Received in revised form: 15 Oct 2025;</i>  <i>Accepted: 19 Oct 2025;</i>  <i>Available online: 24 Oct 2025</i></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> College English textbooks; Chinese culture; diachronic research; cultural confidence; ideological and political education in curriculum</p>	<p><i>This study employs a diachronic research methodology to systematically analyze the integration characteristics and developmental trends of "Chinese cultural content" in university English textbooks across four distinct periods from 1980 to 2020. By examining four representative textbook series from major domestic publishers – including "College English" and "21st Century College English" – the research reveals a progressive evolution in the presentation of Chinese culture, progressing from initial absence and exploratory attempts to deepened development and systematic integration. In recent years, guided by the "curriculum-based ideological education" concept and driven by cultural confidence strategies, textbook compilation has increasingly emphasized systematic integration of Chinese cultural elements and the cultivation of cross-cultural communication competencies. The study proposes that future textbooks should achieve more balanced representation of Chinese and Western cultural content, while fully leveraging digital technologies to enhance cultural education, thereby better cultivating interdisciplinary talents with global perspectives and cultural confidence.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the accelerating pace of globalization, the importance of language education in cross-cultural communication has become increasingly prominent. As a core public foundation subject in higher

education, College English serves as a compulsory course for all undergraduates throughout their undergraduate studies. The curriculum covers knowledge spanning all academic disciplines in universities. This distinctive feature enables College

English to play a more significant role in promoting China's outstanding traditional culture [1].

In recent years, with the deepening implementation of the "Going Global of Chinese Culture" strategy and the advancement of "Ideological and Political Education in Curriculum", the integration of Chinese cultural elements into college English textbooks has become a significant research focus in foreign language education. However, existing studies predominantly concentrate on specific historical periods or individual textbook analyses, lacking systematic diachronic examinations. This study aims to systematically explore the integration, evolutionary trajectory, and development trends of Chinese culture in textbooks through diachronic analysis of English teaching materials across different periods, providing valuable references for future textbook development and pedagogical practices.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, research on cultural content in college English textbooks has gradually increased. Liu Chenyan and Li Yuan (2025) found through CiteSpace's visual analysis of CNKI core journal literature from 2003 to 2023 that English textbook research is mainly concentrated in three clusters: "English teaching", "college English", and "English textbooks". However, research clusters centered on culture have not yet formed, indicating that this field is still in its developmental stage. Tang Xinhuan (2025) and others, from the perspective of cultural security, pointed out that current college English textbooks have issues such as "imbalance in the proportion of Chinese and Western cultural elements and the absence of China elements".

In practical education practice, Liu Fang (2025) pioneered an innovative "cultural integration + technology empowerment" language teaching model. Through comparative analysis of translated Chinese and Western classical texts, this approach has significantly enhanced students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. Guo Baoxian (2024), in her monograph "Design and Application of

Chinese Cultural Content in English Teaching Materials", systematically examined core issues in curriculum design and utilization of Chinese cultural elements. The study emphasized the holistic approach to cultivating cross-cultural communication competence through Chinese cultural content in English textbooks.

While these studies have provided valuable insights, there remains a lack of systematic diachronic research on the integration of Chinese culture into college English textbooks. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting longitudinal analyses of textbooks across different periods, revealing the dynamic patterns of cultural integration.

## III. THEORETICAL BASIS

### 3.1 Cultural transfer theory

American linguist Robert Lado first introduced the phenomenon of language transfer in his seminal work *Cross-Cultural Linguistics*. He observed: "Language learners tend to transfer the structures, forms, and meanings of their native language and culture into foreign linguistic environments[2]. Cross-cultural communication involves language transfer that extends beyond traditional studies of native language influence. It encompasses how communicators' existing linguistic knowledge affects their comprehension, creation, and application of target language information[3]. Therefore, language education should incorporate rich cultural content, providing a theoretical foundation for integrating Chinese cultural elements into college English curricula."

### 3.2 Cross-cultural communication theory

Intercultural communication primarily investigates the unique relationship between cultural contexts and human interaction, particularly how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds exchange ideas, emotions, and information to enhance intercultural competence[4]. University English education should emphasize cultivating students' intercultural communication skills, enabling them to confidently showcase their native culture in globalized exchanges.

This theoretical framework provides guidance for presenting Chinese cultural content in teaching materials.

### 3.3 Ideological and political education in courses

The ideological and political education in curriculum philosophy emphasizes integrating the fundamental mission of moral cultivation into every aspect of foreign language classroom teaching. This approach transforms the educational process from merely imparting language skills to creating a platform for nurturing students' social responsibility, historical mission, and cultural confidence. Such principles provide policy support and implementation pathways for deeply embedding Chinese cultural content into textbooks.

### 3.4 Cultural stratification theory

The theory of cultural stratification posits that culture can be divided into three dimensions: material, institutional, and spiritual. Rather than being a homogeneous whole, culture consists of distinct levels that are both independent and interconnected<sup>[5]</sup>. This framework provides a systematic approach for categorizing and analyzing Chinese cultural elements in educational materials, enabling comprehensive evaluation of the depth and breadth of cultural integration within these resources.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employs literature analysis and content analysis methods, carefully selecting four sets of college English textbooks published by major domestic publishers across four distinct periods (from the 1980s to the 2020s) as research subjects. It focuses on analyzing the Chinese cultural elements embedded in the textbook content, exercise designs, and supplementary materials.

The analytical framework of the study is based on the theory of cultural stratification, which divides the cultural content in the teaching materials into three levels:

1) Material culture: visible cultural elements such as food, clothing, architecture and works of art;

2) Institutional culture: including festival customs, social norms, family ethics and other aspects of social institutions;

3) Spiritual culture: referring to the spiritual culture such as philosophical thought, value concept and aesthetic orientation.

Through manual coding and statistical analysis, this study conducted a classification and historical comparison of Chinese cultural content in textbooks, aiming to reveal its characteristics and developmental trends across different eras. Meanwhile, by integrating relevant policy documents and teaching syllabi, the changes in textbook content were examined within the broader sociocultural context.

## V. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Analysis of characteristics in different periods

#### 5.1.1 Early stage (1980s to early 2000s)

During this period, university English textbooks predominantly featured Western cultural content while offering relatively limited coverage of Chinese culture. The compilation process primarily focused on imparting linguistic knowledge and practical skills, with cultural elements being presented in a secondary manner. When Chinese cultural content was included, it was often conveyed implicitly, such as through cultural elements embedded in translation exercises. At that time, the primary objective of China's foreign language education was to develop students' language proficiency to meet basic communication needs. Meanwhile, there was insufficient recognition of cultural instruction's importance in language learning, and textbook development concepts had not fully acknowledged the value of integrating cultural elements.

#### 5.1.2 Development phase (early 2000s to early 2010s)

With the increase of China's foreign exchanges and the gradual enhancement of cultural confidence, university English textbooks have begun to incorporate some Chinese cultural content. A small amount of content introducing China's traditional culture and customs has started to appear in the

textbooks, but overall, Chinese cultural content is still mainly presented implicitly, such as through translation and word selection exercises. In the initial stage, at the beginning of the 21st century, China actively strengthened close ties with countries around the world, engaged in comprehensive foreign exchanges and cooperation, conducted cultural exchange activities, and enhanced the visibility of Chinese culture. English textbooks also followed the

national development strategy and emerged with research on Chinese cultural content<sup>[6]</sup>. On one hand, China's influence on the international stage has gradually increased, and it has begun to reflect its own culture in textbooks; on the other hand, the foreign language education community has begun to recognize the importance of cultural teaching, but specific teaching concepts and methods are still being explored.

Table 1: Presentation characteristics of Chinese cultural content in college English teaching materials at different stages

Presentation format	Proportion	Typical examples	Limitations
translation exercise	65%	Chinese idioms and proverbs in Chinese-English translation	Lack of cultural context and depth of interpretation
gap filling	20%	Words related to Chinese festivals and customs	Cultural information is fragmented and lacks systematization
reading comprehension	10%	A short essay introducing the scenic spots and historic sites of China	Focus on knowledge, lack of cultural depth
listening material	5%	A dialogue containing China elements	The content is random and lacks design

### 5.1.3 Deepening phase (early 2010s to early 2020s)

University English textbooks have significantly enhanced both the content and presentation methods of Chinese cultural elements. These materials now feature explicit cultural elements through dedicated units or articles, while also fostering cultural confidence by comparing Chinese and foreign cultures. The coverage has expanded to include modern, traditional, and revolutionary cultural aspects, offering a comprehensive exploration of China's cultural heritage.

The Chinese government has been steadily increasing its emphasis on cultural education. Policy documents such as the *Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition)* explicitly require cultivating students' ability to use foreign languages to promote Chinese culture. Moreover, with the advancement of globalization, developing intercultural communication skills has become a key objective in foreign language education. This trend has driven textbook developers to place

greater emphasis on integrating Chinese cultural elements into language instruction.

### 5.1.4 Current phase (early 2020s to date)

Under the guidance of national policies, such as the release of the *Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Courses*, university English textbooks have been more systematic in integrating Chinese culture. The textbooks not only focus on presenting Chinese culture but also emphasize cultivating students' values and cultural confidence through cultural education. At the same time, the compilation philosophy of the textbooks places greater emphasis on the organic combination of culture and language, enhancing students' intercultural communication skills through various methods such as cultural experience activities and cross-cultural comparisons. For example, in the series of *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook*, for each unit, a passage with Chinese features about the unit theme is

presented, with more detailed materials appearing in their electronic version textbooks. Centering on the same topic, situations in other countries are presented in comparison with those of China, so that students would gain wider scope of knowledge in this field, acquire a more objective view of the problems, enrich their cultural experience and enhance their cross-cultural competencies.

In the context of globalization, cultural confidence has become a key indicator to measure national soft power. As an important way of cultural inheritance and communication, foreign language teaching undertakes the responsibility of cultivating versatile talents with international vision and profound cultural heritage.

Table 2: Innovative Practices of Integrating Chinese Culture into College English Textbooks at the Current Stage

Innovative orientation	Typical Representative	Main features	Teaching efficiency
Empowerment through digital technology	Construction of financial English teaching materials	Promote the digital transformation and interdisciplinary integration of financial English teaching	Increase teaching interest and enhance cultural experience
AIGC applied technology	Exploring pathways for integrating AIGC into Chinese culture	Artificial intelligence-generated content technology can enhance the effectiveness of cultural teaching	Personalized learning, real-time cultural interaction
Reconstructing bilingual classrooms	"CREATE" model-driven bilingual classroom restructuring	Exploring new models of bilingual teaching and cognitive enhancement paths	Promote cognitive leaps and improve cross-cultural competence
Blended teaching	Online MOOC and offline textbook synchronous learning	Adopt the way of synchronous learning of online MOOC and offline teaching materials	Expand learning space and strengthen cultural practice

### 5.2 Development trend analysis

From the early stage of western culture, to the gradual integration of Chinese culture, and then to the systematic integration of Chinese culture and the organic combination of culture and language, the integration of Chinese culture in college English teaching materials shows obvious characteristics of stage evolution. Specifically, it is manifested as follows:

1) From implicit to explicit: Chinese culture has developed from the initial accidental and implicit

presentation to conscious and systematic explicit content design;

2) From single to multiple: the cultural content has expanded from the initial focus on traditional cultural elements to a multi-dimensional content system including traditional culture, modern culture and revolutionary culture;

3) From knowledge to ability: cultural teaching from the simple transmission of cultural knowledge to the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability;

4) From one-way to two-way: from simply introducing western culture to two-way

communication of cultural comparison and mutual learning between China and the West;

5) From traditional to digital: Cultural presentation mode has developed from traditional text-based to multimodal experience integrating VR, AIGC and other digital technologies.

In the future, with the further attention of the country to culture and education, the content of Chinese culture in teaching materials will be more abundant and systematic, and the teaching methods will be more diversified, so as to better cultivate students' intercultural communication ability and cultural confidence.

## VI. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Suggestions for the design of teaching materials

#### 6.1.1 Enhancing the systematicness and diversity of Chinese cultural content

Textbook writers should introduce more units or articles related to Chinese culture in textbooks, covering aspects such as modern culture, traditional culture, and revolutionary culture, to form a diversified yet unified cultural content system; emphasize the hierarchy and coherence of cultural content, gradually deepening from material culture to spiritual culture. The *Understanding the New Era China* series of textbooks for Higher Education Institutions-College English Reading Course breaks the limitation of disconnectedness between reading content and practical content, focusing on the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and values, and highlighting the role of cultural immersion in shaping students' values and ideological qualities<sup>[7]</sup>.

#### 6.1.2 Balancing the proportions of Chinese and western cultures

Textbook writers should reasonably adjust the proportion of Chinese and Western cultural content in textbooks to avoid excessive bias towards one culture, thereby achieving cultural diversity and coexistence. It is recommended to adopt a two-way cultural integration teaching model, introducing

corresponding Chinese cultural content alongside Western cultural elements to facilitate cultural comparison and mutual learning.

#### 6.1.3 Innovative cultural presentation methods

The case studies in textbooks lack sufficient integration with the practical realities and professional characteristics of independent college students. Moreover, teachers have not timely supplemented more suitable cases to address this deficiency, resulting in low student engagement<sup>[8]</sup>. Therefore, we should replace the traditional single-text presentation approach with multimodal design that combines text, images, audio, and video to enhance the intuitiveness and appeal of cultural communication. Particularly, we should fully utilize digital technologies (such as VR, AR, and AI-generated content) to create immersive cultural scenarios, thereby elevating students' learning experiences.

### 6.2 Teaching practice recommendations

#### 6.2.1 Strengthening cross-cultural comparative perspectives

In the teaching process, strive to present the rich and diverse Chinese culture more evenly, incorporating cultural references and knowledge modules, and combining richer forms of cultural presentation with content<sup>[9]</sup>. Guide students to conduct comparative analysis of Chinese and Western cultures, such as through the comparison of "Aristotle's Three-Part Argument on Friendship" and "The Three Beneficial Friends" in *The Analects*, to deepen their understanding of cultural differences and cultivate cultural critical thinking.

#### 6.2.2 Deepening the integration of ideological and political education in curriculum

Teachers should help students understand the background and impact of China's high-quality development philosophy, guide them to comprehend the development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and inclusiveness, with particular emphasis on the role of innovation in the development process<sup>[10]</sup>. Integrate the concept of moral education and talent cultivation organically

into all aspects of foreign language classroom teaching, explore ideological and political elements in Chinese culture, and transform the teaching process into a platform for nurturing students' cultural confidence and values.

### 6.2.3 Expanding extracurricular cultural practices

Encourage students to participate in practical activities such as "telling China's stories in English," transforming cultural knowledge from textbooks into cross-cultural communication skills, and achieving a leap from language learning to cultural dissemination. For example, the textbook's "Belt and Road" initiative theme module can be leveraged to build an interdisciplinary project called "Silk Road Cultural Archaeology." Students simulate multinational joint archaeological teams, integrating historical land Silk Road route maps from textbooks, climate zone distribution data from geography textbooks, and the English interpretation of "Hu Shang Tu" (Hu Shang Tu) in Dunhuang murals, while accessing 3D models of Silk Road sites through the UNESCO Virtual Museum<sup>[11]</sup>.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through a diachronic analysis of college English textbooks across different periods, this study reveals the integration and evolving trends of Chinese cultural elements in educational materials. The research demonstrates that the representation of Chinese culture in these textbooks has undergone a developmental process—from initial absence and exploratory attempts to systematic integration and deepening. In recent years, driven by the curriculum's ideological-political education philosophy and the national strategy of cultural confidence, significant progress has been achieved in this field.

Future textbook development should emphasize the organic integration of culture and language, fostering students' cross-cultural communication skills and cultural confidence through diverse content, varied methodologies, and digital technologies. Meanwhile, educators must innovate teaching approaches by transforming cultural knowledge transmission into

cultural competence cultivation, thereby providing robust support for nurturing interdisciplinary talents with global perspectives and cultural literacy.

This study has certain limitations, such as the limited number of sample textbooks and the need to expand analytical dimensions. Future research could broaden the sample scope, incorporate quantitative analysis methods, and delve deeper into how cultural content in teaching materials actually impacts students' cultural identity. These efforts would provide a more solid empirical foundation for developing university English textbooks.

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# Domesticity, Autonomy, and the Postfeminist Shrew in *Vinegar Girl*

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 21 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 17 Oct 2025; Accepted: 20 Oct 2025; Available online: 25 Oct 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 – Postfeminism, Adaptation, Patriarchy, Emotional Labor, Domestic Realism</b></p>	<p>This paper examines Anne Tyler's <i>Vinegar Girl</i> (2016) as a postfeminist reimagining of Shakespeare's <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>, exploring how the novel both critiques and perpetuates patriarchal structures within the framework of contemporary domestic realism. Drawing on postfeminist theory as articulated by Angela McRobbie, Rosalind Gill, and Charlotte Brunsdon, the analysis demonstrates how Tyler's adaptation translates Shakespeare's overtly patriarchal "taming" into a subtler negotiation of autonomy, care, and emotional labor. Through the protagonist, Kate Battista, Tyler stages the contradictions of postfeminism – where feminism's political vocabulary is absorbed into neoliberal discourses of choice, tact, and personal fulfillment. The paper argues that <i>Vinegar Girl</i> embodies what Natalie K. Eschenbaum identifies as the "modernisation of misogyny," transforming patriarchal control into a system of emotional persuasion and familial obligation rather than overt coercion. Tyler's ironic realism situates Kate as a postfeminist subject whose resistance manifests through silence, irony, and reluctant compliance rather than rebellion. To sum up, the novel suggests that the postfeminist woman is not "tamed" through domination but through affective labor and self-regulation – a form of taming internalized within the logic of modern gender relations.</p>

## Introduction

Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (2016) constitutes a contemporary reimagining of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, produced under the auspices of the Hogarth Shakespeare project—an initiative that commissions established novelists to reinterpret Shakespearean drama within modern settings and sensibilities. Set in twenty-first-century Baltimore, Tyler's narrative transposes the contentious dynamics of Shakespeare's original into a domestic comedy that foregrounds questions of autonomy, gendered expectation, and the limitations of choice within socio-familial structures.

The novel centres on Kate Battista, a 29-year-old woman whose intellectual intransigence has

marginalized her both professionally and personally. Having abandoned her university studies following a confrontational exchange with a professor, Kate finds herself employed as a preschool assistant while managing the household of her eccentric father, Dr. Louis Battista—a scientist at Johns Hopkins University—and her adolescent sister, Bunny. When Dr. Battista proposes an expedient marriage between Kate and his soon-to-be-deported research assistant, Pyotr, in order to secure the latter's immigration status, Kate's initial resistance gradually gives way to reluctant acquiescence. Her evolving response is catalyzed not only by Pyotr's disarming openness to her outspokenness but also by her own recognition of the constrained parameters of her current existence.

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Tyler's adaptation undertakes a deliberate reframing of Shakespeare's infamous "shrew-taming" narrative, softening the original's aggressively performative gender conflict into a more understated, character-driven exploration of mutual recognition and compromise. As Tyler herself observes in an interview, "The Katherina in Shakespeare's play is insane... She's shrieking at Petruchio from the moment she meets him. And he's not much better. So you know I had to tone them down" (Charles 2016). This recalibration not only renders the protagonists more legible to contemporary readers but also invites broader critical reflection on the ethics and politics of literary adaptation—particularly in relation to how classical texts are mediated through modern ideologies of agency, consent, and domesticity.

In the wake of evolving feminist discourse, postfeminism has emerged as a complex and often contested framework that negotiates the entanglements of femininity, autonomy, and domesticity within a culture presumed to have moved beyond the feminist project. Frequently misunderstood as either a successor to or rejection of feminism, postfeminism operates not as a clearly delineated epoch but as a discursive formation shaped by contradictions—foregrounding individualism, choice, and empowerment, while often reaffirming traditional gender norms (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). It is within this paradoxical space that Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (2016), a modern retelling of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, situates its protagonist, Kate Battista, whose reluctant navigation of marriage, domestic responsibility, and personal agency presents fertile ground for postfeminist interpretation.

By reimagining the "shrew" archetype within a contemporary American context, Tyler's novel implicitly interrogates the ideological tensions at the heart of postfeminism—namely, the co-optation of feminist rhetoric in service of neoliberal values and the commodification of female autonomy (Lazar, 2014; Aronson, 2003). The domestic sphere, long a battleground for feminist critique, is reconfigured in *Vinegar Girl* not as a site of female subjugation alone, but as a contested space wherein autonomy is paradoxically performed through concession and adaptation. As such, Kate's transformation resists simple categorization: rather than embodying the

regressive taming of Shakespeare's Katherina, she becomes emblematic of the postfeminist subject—simultaneously complicit in and resistant to the ideologies that shape her choices (Faludi, 1991; Jones, 1994).

This article explores the relation between domesticity and autonomy in *Vinegar Girl*, arguing that Tyler's revision offers a subtle critique of postfeminist sensibilities that mask structural inequalities beneath the veneer of personal choice. By framing Kate not as a victim of patriarchal coercion, but as a postfeminist shrew negotiating agency within constraint, Tyler complicates the narrative of emancipation as simply oppositional to domestic roles. In doing so, the novel exemplifies how postfeminist fiction reframes feminist concerns, often under the guise of irony, ambivalence, or romantic resolution (Feasey, 2010; Whitney, 2017).

### **Towards Postfeminism**

The term *postfeminism* has emerged as one of the most contested and multilayered concepts in contemporary gender discourse. It signifies, paradoxically, both a continuation of feminist ideals and a rejection of the feminist label. Scholars such as Pamela Aronson, Elaine J. Hall, Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, and Charlotte Brunson have explored the sociological, cultural, and representational facets of postfeminism, revealing its complexity as both ideology and lived experience. This essay examines postfeminism analytically through these three seminal works, focusing on (1) the sociological construction of "postfeminist" identity, (2) the myth of postfeminism as a media discourse, and (3) the cultural aesthetics of postfeminism as represented in media and lifestyle narratives.

### **Postfeminism as Ambivalent Identity**

Pamela Aronson's *"Feminists or 'Postfeminists'?: Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations"* (2003) presents one of the most nuanced sociological analyses of postfeminist identity. Her qualitative research with young women demonstrates that the so-called "postfeminist generation" does not necessarily reject feminism but rather reinterprets it within a framework of individualism, ambivalence, and pragmatism. Aronson observes that while media discourse often proclaims the "death" of feminism, young women express awareness of persisting gender

inequalities even as they distance themselves from the feminist label (905–06). Her participants recognize the achievements of earlier feminist movements—expanded access to education, employment, and reproductive rights—yet they also internalize neoliberal values of self-determination and personal choice that fragment collective feminist consciousness (910–11).

Aronson's findings disrupt the binary opposition between "feminist" and "postfeminist" by introducing a continuum of identification. She categorizes respondents as *feminists*, *feminist sympathizers*, *fence-sitters*, and *anti-feminists*, showing that many women hold feminist values while rejecting the term itself (908–09). This ambiguity reflects what she calls the "simultaneous incorporation, revision, and depoliticization" of feminism (906). Such depoliticization is linked to a neoliberal ideology that privatizes structural inequality and transforms feminist politics into individual lifestyle choices. Aronson's argument thus reveals that postfeminism, as lived identity, is less an ideological opposition to feminism than a symptom of changing social conditions in which collective struggle is replaced by individualized empowerment.

Moreover, Aronson highlights the intersectional variations in postfeminist identity. Class, race, and life experiences profoundly shape women's orientations toward feminism. Middle-class women, exposed to feminist discourses in academia, articulate more coherent feminist positions, while working-class women frame gender inequality through economic hardship rather than political ideology (907). Women of color often critique mainstream feminism for centering white, middle-class concerns, echoing longstanding critiques within intersectional feminist scholarship (907–08). Aronson's analysis demonstrates that postfeminism cannot be understood as a universal generational phenomenon but rather as a stratified response to feminism shaped by sociocultural positioning.

### **The Myth and Media Construction of Postfeminism**

Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez's *"The Myth of Postfeminism"* (2003) complements Aronson's sociological perspective by exposing postfeminism as a discursive construct propagated by the mass media. Through a content analysis of ninety popular and

scholarly sources, Hall and Rodriguez identify four central postfeminist claims: (1) declining support for the women's movement, (2) growing antifeminism among specific groups, (3) feminism's perceived irrelevance, and (4) the rise of "no, but..." feminism—women who endorse equality but reject feminist identification (879). These claims, the authors argue, lack empirical support. Public opinion data from 1980–1999 show little evidence of eroding support for gender equality, suggesting that postfeminism is less a social reality than a "media-created social category" (885).

Hall and Rodriguez conceptualize postfeminism as a *myth*, not in the sense of falsehood but as a narrative that organizes public perception. Media representations construct postfeminism as a natural historical progression, implying that feminism's goals have been achieved and are therefore obsolete. This framing, they argue, functions ideologically to depoliticize gender inequality and to divide women along generational and cultural lines (883–84). The authors demonstrate how popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* alternately celebrated feminism's victories and declared its irrelevance, effectively "talking postfeminism into existence" (884–85). As a result, postfeminism operates as what they call a "cultural toolkit," offering rhetorical resources to discredit collective feminist politics while promoting individualist narratives of success (885).

The concept of "no, but..." feminism captures the ambivalent self-positioning of women who align with feminist principles but fear social stigmatization. Hall and Rodriguez cite research showing that young women often avoid the label because of negative media stereotypes of feminists as "unattractive, unfeminine, and man-hating" (884). This phenomenon mirrors Aronson's "fence-sitter" category, illustrating the internalization of anti-feminist imagery even among those who believe in gender equality. Hall and Rodriguez conclude that postfeminism is a media discourse that produces ideological effects: it undermines solidarity, depoliticizes feminist goals, and frames equality as an achieved fact rather than an ongoing struggle (885–86). Thus, the "myth of postfeminism" functions as a backlash narrative that conceals persistent gender hierarchies under the guise of progress.

### Postfeminism as Cultural Aesthetic and Media Genre

Where Aronson and Hall and Rodriguez focus on sociological and discursive dimensions, Charlotte Brunsdon's *"Feminism, Postfeminism, Martha, Martha, and Nigella"* (2005) investigates postfeminism's cultural manifestations in media and popular culture. Examining figures such as Martha Stewart and Nigella Lawson, Brunsdon explores how postfeminist aesthetics reconfigure domesticity as a site of pleasure, professionalism, and self-expression. For Brunsdon, the 1990s "resurgence of the domestic on television" represents a shift from the feminist critique of domestic labor to a celebration of the domestic as lifestyle performance (110–11). Postfeminist media figures such as Stewart embody a paradox: they reclaim traditionally feminine spaces while asserting entrepreneurial authority within them.

Brunsdon contrasts Stewart's glamorous domesticity with Martha Rosler's *The Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), a second-wave feminist video that transformed kitchen tools into weapons of resistance. Rosler's performance exposes the violence of domestic confinement, whereas Stewart's perfectionist domesticity transforms the same space into a site of aesthetic mastery (110–12). This juxtaposition dramatizes the ideological shift from feminism's critique of domestic roles to postfeminism's commodification of femininity. In postfeminist media culture, domestic labor becomes a form of self-expression aligned with consumer capitalism, a process Angela McRobbie calls the "undoing of feminism" through cultural incorporation (Brunsdon 112–13).

Furthermore, Brunsdon situates postfeminism within generational discourse. Her students' incredulity toward second-wave feminist films reveals what she terms "disidentification," a process by which younger women differentiate themselves from the perceived excesses of earlier feminism (112–13). This "not being like that" structure—refusing identification with the "angry, humorless" feminist stereotype—parallels Hall and Rodriguez's notion of "no, but..." feminism. Brunsdon also notes that postfeminist media texts often stage this generational tension through female protagonists who "negotiate the perilous path of living as a woman in a patriarchal world" (113). The recurring narrative of the "single girl" who balances

independence with romantic fulfillment exemplifies the postfeminist genre that reconciles feminism with femininity through irony and self-awareness.

In this sense, Brunsdon reframes postfeminism not merely as ideology but as *genre*—a repetitive structure of representation that mediates feminist history through popular culture (112–13). This genre simultaneously memorializes and trivializes feminism, producing what she calls the "Ur feminist article," in which female protagonists are celebrated for their contradictions but never allowed full political coherence. Postfeminism thus becomes a cultural logic that converts feminist struggle into aesthetic play, replacing critique with consumption and collective politics with individualized style.

Taken together, the works of Aronson, Hall and Rodriguez, and Brunsdon reveal that postfeminism is not a coherent movement or ideology but a constellation of contradictory discourses. Aronson exposes its sociological roots in generational ambivalence and neoliberal individualism; Hall and Rodriguez unmask its ideological function as a media-constructed myth; and Brunsdon uncovers its aestheticization in popular culture as both genre and affect. Across these analyses, postfeminism emerges as a site of tension between feminist memory and neoliberal modernity—a discourse that proclaims equality while reproducing inequality through depoliticization and commodification.

Postfeminism, therefore, must be understood not as "after" feminism but as a contested rearticulation of it. It thrives on feminism's cultural success, translating political achievements into personal lifestyles and media narratives. As Hall and Rodriguez argue, it is "talked into existence" by the very media that benefit from its depoliticizing effects (885). Aronson's and Brunsdon's findings remind us that beneath this discourse lies a persistent feminist consciousness—fragmented, ambivalent, but still alive. The analytical challenge is to read postfeminism not as feminism's endpoint but as evidence of its ongoing negotiation with the cultural and economic structures of late modernity.

### Postfeminist Negotiations and the Reconfiguration of "Taming"

In Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl*, misogynistic values are simultaneously idealized and critiqued, mirroring the

contradictions that Natalie K. Eschenbaum identifies in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* as a text that "modernises misogyny rather than abolishes it" (Eschenbaum 31). Tyler's narrative exposes this ambivalence through subtle linguistic and situational choices, particularly in her depiction of Kate Battista's domestic entrapment. The novel's opening scene, in which Kate reluctantly complies with her father's request to deliver lunch to his laboratory, encapsulates this tension. When her father pleads, "Ah, Kate, don't be like that. Just hop in the car and zip over; there's a good girl," Kate's frustrated response—"Sheesh"—followed by her reluctant obedience, dramatizes the persistence of patriarchal control under the guise of affection and civility (Tyler).

Tyler's deliberate use of the phrase "good girl" functions as an ironic echo of the infantilizing rhetoric that sustains patriarchal authority. The father's casual condescension reduces Kate to a compliant child, exposing how the language of care often conceals structures of domination. By modernizing Shakespeare's "taming" plot, Tyler reframes misogyny as a subtle, internalized process rather than an overt act of subjugation. As Eschenbaum observes, Tyler's adaptation "forces readers to confront the endurance of sexist scripts in modern relationships," particularly through the dissonance between Pyotr's coercive charm and the novel's romantic closure (34).

Through this lens, *Vinegar Girl* invites a more analytical engagement with the gender politics of *The Taming of the Shrew*, compelling readers to negotiate the uneasy coexistence of affection and control. Tyler's nuanced portrayal of Kate's resistance and compliance transforms the taming narrative into a site of critical tension, where irony exposes rather than resolves misogyny. In doing so, she continues the conversation Eschenbaum identifies—where "modernisation does not erase patriarchal logic but repackages it within the language of romance and individual choice" (Eschenbaum 35).

In the opening chapters of *Vinegar Girl*, Anne Tyler establishes the foundation for her modern reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* by immersing readers in the gendered and domestic dynamics of the Battista household. Through Kate Battista's interactions with her father, Dr. Louis Battista, and his assistant, Pyotr Cherbakov,

Tyler constructs an atmosphere of restrained tension in which patriarchal authority persists beneath the veneer of familial affection. Kate's reluctant compliance with her father's request to deliver his forgotten lunch—a task rooted in caretaking and domestic servitude—signals the novel's engagement with the enduring expectation that women must accommodate men's irresponsibility. Her father's patronizing tone and exaggerated praise of her "good-girl" dependability subtly infantilize her, exposing how benevolent sexism operates as a contemporary form of "taming." Even as Kate expresses frustration, her eventual acquiescence underscores how internalized obligation continues to regulate women's labor and emotional availability. (Tyler 6-13)

Tyler complicates this dynamic by humanizing Dr. Battista, depicting him as vulnerable and overburdened, a man struggling to sustain his research and keep assistants like Pyotr. This dual characterization—both neglectful patriarch and anxious father—creates moral ambivalence that mirrors the contradictions of postfeminist narratives, in which male authority is softened through vulnerability while female subordination is reframed as empathy. When Kate reassures her father, her gesture blends irritation with reluctant tenderness, signaling how care becomes both a means of resistance and entrapment. As she exits into the sunlit world outside the lab, Tyler juxtaposes her isolation with the carefree laughter of other women nearby, a moment that visually captures Kate's alienation from the feminine norms of sociability and lightness that the world around her seems to valorize.

Tyler extends this tension by placing Kate in the classroom—a microcosm of societal hierarchy where she is again positioned ambiguously between authority and subordination. Her work as a teacher's assistant at the Charles Village Little People's School symbolizes both her intellectual stagnation and her constrained agency. Despite her natural rapport with children, Kate's sense of being an "impostor" reveals a deeper crisis of identity. She occupies a liminal space—older than the children yet denied full professional legitimacy—reflecting the broader gendered dynamics of undervalued "women's work." Tyler uses this environment to critique the postfeminist illusion of workplace equality: although Kate participates in a nurturing, feminized profession,

her autonomy remains circumscribed by institutional expectations of tact, restraint, and “pleasantness,” as emphasized by Mrs. Darling’s admonitions. (Tyler 14-34)

Mrs. Darling’s polite but patronizing critique of Kate’s “performance” exemplifies how patriarchal discipline operates through managerial discourse rather than overt coercion. By suggesting that parents “don’t share the children’s fondness for her,” Mrs. Darling subtly frames Kate’s assertiveness as unprofessional, reaffirming the gendered code of emotional labor that requires women to suppress irritation in favor of diplomacy. This moment marks a symbolic continuation of the “taming” motif—one mediated by institutional civility rather than marital hierarchy. Kate’s difficulty in embodying this expected femininity foregrounds her resistance to the social script that conflates professionalism with docility.

Tyler also situates Kate’s domestic and professional frustrations within a broader narrative of familial dysfunction and emotional inheritance. Her father’s intellectual detachment and Bunny’s youthful impulsiveness reproduce gender archetypes that position women along a binary of rational discipline and naïve charm. Bunny, described as ethereal and reminiscent of their late mother, functions as a foil to Kate’s pragmatic, self-contained demeanor. This contrast echoes Shakespeare’s opposition between Bianca and Katherina, but Tyler reimagines it within a postfeminist frame—one in which both daughters negotiate the residual expectations of femininity in different registers. Bunny’s passive sweetness grants her social ease, while Kate’s assertiveness isolates her, exposing how contemporary gender roles continue to privilege performative softness over autonomy.

The intrusion of Pyotr Cherbakov into this domestic sphere further intensifies the novel’s exploration of gender and power. His foreignness positions him as both outsider and catalyst, allowing Tyler to test how patriarchal dynamics adapt across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Pyotr’s initial interactions with Kate—awkward but attentive—foreshadow the novel’s ironic play with romantic convention. Rather than an overtly domineering suitor, Pyotr embodies a subtler kind of control, one rooted in social exchange and institutional dependency, as his visa status ties his future to Dr. Battista’s intervention. Kate’s early encounters with him are thus charged with both

curiosity and apprehension, as she becomes unwittingly entangled in her father’s plan to secure Pyotr’s stay through marriage.

Tyler’s prose oscillates between irony and empathy, constructing a realist critique of gendered expectation without overt polemic. The domestic and professional spaces Kate inhabits—home, school, and laboratory—are unified by a common theme: women’s emotional and logistical labor sustains the functioning of patriarchal systems that simultaneously marginalize them. Yet Tyler refrains from depicting Kate as a victim; instead, she portrays her as a reluctant participant in a social script she intellectually rejects but emotionally reproduces. This ambivalence situates *Vinegar Girl* firmly within the terrain of postfeminist fiction, where feminist awareness coexists uneasily with the endurance of patriarchal order.

At the Little People’s School, Kate’s confrontation with Mrs. Darling over a minor comment about a child’s drawing ability encapsulates how feminine labor is policed under the guise of emotional professionalism. Mrs. Darling’s criticism—that Kate must learn to be more “tactful”—reflects the postfeminist demand that women temper honesty with empathy, discipline their speech, and prioritize others’ feelings over their own integrity. Tyler’s portrayal of this exchange reveals how neoliberal workplaces, especially feminized ones like teaching or caregiving, impose gendered expectations of politeness and affective management. Kate’s insistence that “Emma didn’t mind” exposes the arbitrariness of this reprimand; what is being corrected is not rudeness but nonconformity. In the postfeminist workplace, women are not told to be submissive but to be “likeable”—a modern euphemism for self-erasure. Through Kate, Tyler critiques how professionalism disguises patriarchal control as interpersonal diplomacy.

This theme extends into the domestic sphere, where the family dinner scene becomes a microcosm of the postfeminist negotiation between autonomy and patriarchal expectation. The introduction of Pyotr Cherbakov to the household intensifies the tension between intellect and intimacy, reason and emotional labor. Dr. Battista’s obliviousness to social dynamics, Bunny’s flirtatious immaturity, and Pyotr’s cultural awkwardness all converge around Kate, who once

again assumes the role of mediator and moral center. The chaos of the tofu dinner—Bunny’s experimentation, her phone call to a boy, and Dr. Battista’s detached rambling—renders the domestic space absurdly unstable. Yet within this instability, Tyler stages the reassertion of patriarchal logic through Dr. Battista’s shocking proposal that Kate should marry Pyotr to secure his visa.

This proposition literalizes the commodification of women that postfeminism often conceals under narratives of “choice.” Dr. Battista presents the marriage as a pragmatic solution, not a romantic one, reducing Kate to a transactional figure in his professional ambitions. His reasoning—that Pyotr is “integral to his work”—converts Kate’s body and legal status into an instrument of male continuity and intellectual capital. The absurdity of this request underscores the persistence of patriarchal entitlement beneath liberal rationality. Tyler exposes how the rhetoric of progress does not dismantle but reconfigures patriarchal control into forms of emotional persuasion and familial duty.

Kate’s reaction—an eruption of anger culminating in her throwing a pen at Bunny and storming off—functions as a rare moment of feminist assertion within the text’s postfeminist frame. Her anger, however, is framed not as political consciousness but as emotional excess, echoing how postfeminist discourse often pathologizes female rage as immaturity rather than resistance. Tyler’s nuanced irony lies in how she allows Kate to express genuine indignation while situating her outburst in a context where it is destined to be misunderstood or dismissed. The scene thus dramatizes the exhaustion of feminist affect within a postfeminist world that prizes accommodation over rebellion.

Kate’s introspection—her reflections on failed relationships, isolation, and her father’s instrumental treatment of her—illustrates the psychic toll of living under the “illusion of equality.” Postfeminism, as theorized by scholars like Angela McRobbie, often presents women as having transcended patriarchy, yet Tyler’s portrayal of Kate exposes the emptiness of this narrative. Kate enjoys nominal independence—she works, earns a wage, and manages her household—but her autonomy is circumscribed by invisible emotional and familial obligations. Her father’s reliance on her for domestic and bureaucratic

maintenance (from cooking to taxes) exemplifies the feminized labor that sustains patriarchal productivity while remaining unacknowledged. (Tyler 35-50)

Kate’s exhaustion is not simply personal but structural: it reflects the dissonance between feminist consciousness and postfeminist conditions. Her late-night retreat into solitude—reading about the Cambrian Era—functions symbolically as an escape from the suffocating domesticity and emotional servitude of her present. The imagery of prehistoric life evokes a world unmarked by gendered hierarchy, a temporal and psychological refuge from human social structures. Tyler’s choice to end the chapter in this moment of imaginative withdrawal underscores postfeminism’s paradox: the desire for liberation coexists with resignation, and autonomy is achieved only through isolation.

Tyler’s depiction of Bunny’s adolescent rebellion adds another layer to this critique. Bunny’s flirtations, vegetarian experiments, and whimsical idealism contrast sharply with Kate’s pragmatism, positioning her as a postfeminist caricature of youthful empowerment—free, expressive, but directionless. Yet even Bunny’s seeming freedom is shaped by male influence, as her dietary choices stem from her infatuation with Edward Mintz. In this sense, both sisters embody divergent responses to patriarchy: Bunny internalizes it through romantic imitation, while Kate resists it through reluctant endurance. Neither mode achieves genuine emancipation, revealing the structural persistence of male mediation in women’s self-definition.

Tyler’s narrative reframes *The Taming of the Shrew* through the lens of postfeminism’s contradictions. Whereas Shakespeare’s Katherina is tamed through overt domination, Kate Battista is subdued by the subtler forces of care, obligation, and institutional politeness. Her father’s “proposal” for a pragmatic marriage and Mrs. Darling’s admonition to be “tactful” both exemplify the modern technologies of taming—couched not in violence but in emotional and rhetorical containment. Tyler’s realism transforms Shakespearean farce into a study of the everyday mechanisms that sustain gender hierarchy under contemporary liberalism.

In this light, Kate’s defiance—her blunt speech, impatience, and refusal to perform charm—becomes a

form of postfeminist resistance, albeit one stripped of collective politics. She does not seek revolution but autonomy within constraint. Tyler's portrayal neither wholly condemns nor celebrates her; rather, it situates her within a world where feminist impulses persist but have been absorbed into the quiet frustrations of modern womanhood. By the end of chapter four, Kate stands as a distinctly postfeminist figure: conscious of inequality, weary of its persistence, and suspended between rebellion and compliance—an inheritor of feminism's ideals trapped within the structures it sought to dismantle. (Tyler 50-60)

In the middle and later chapters of *Vinegar Girl*, Anne Tyler advances her postfeminist reinterpretation of *The Taming of the Shrew* by translating Shakespeare's overt patriarchal power dynamics into the subtle, ambivalent negotiations of gender and autonomy characteristic of the twenty-first century. As Kate Battista becomes increasingly ensnared in her father's manipulative marriage plot, Tyler constructs a domestic and social landscape where traditional hierarchies persist under the guise of affection, professionalism, and "choice." This dynamic exemplifies what Rosalind Gill identifies as the postfeminist sensibility—a discourse in which "feminism is simultaneously taken into account and repudiated" (Gill 149).

Kate's vanished crocus bulbs, consumed by unseen creatures, foreshadow the erosion of her own agency by the subterranean forces of familial obligation and patriarchal dependence. Her father's repeated calls for her to deliver his forgotten lunch serve as an emblem of the unpaid emotional and logistical labor expected of women, even in ostensibly modern contexts. Tyler uses the repetition of this domestic errand—mundane yet intrusive—to illustrate how female responsibility is naturalized within the family unit. As Kate reflects on her fractured relationships, her resentment toward Bunny's "social" charm and their father's indulgence of "dumb blondes" exposes her frustration with the ways feminine docility is rewarded while her own assertiveness is pathologized (Tyler 61-71). This emotional economy mirrors what Angela McRobbie describes as the postfeminist "undoing of feminism"—a process through which the gains of women's liberation are reabsorbed into the private sphere, repackaged as voluntary emotional labor (McRobbie 12).

Pyotr Cherbakov's arrival at the Battista home in this chapter further dramatizes the collision between personal autonomy and patriarchal negotiation. His mixture of awkwardness and admiration introduces a form of gendered tension that is both comic and revealing. When Pyotr remarks on accents and foreignness, Tyler uses linguistic difference to parallel gender difference—both become sites of translation and miscommunication. Kate's tentative softening toward Pyotr, despite her resistance, exemplifies postfeminist ambivalence: the coexistence of skepticism toward male authority and the internalized desire to find validation within it. As Natalie Eschenbaum notes, Tyler's adaptation "modernizes misogyny rather than abolishes it," inviting readers to confront how patriarchal logics persist in softened, culturally palatable forms (Eschenbaum 31).

Her father's orchestration of a marriage to Pyotr for professional gain exemplifies the commodification of women's agency within neoliberal family structures. Dr. Battista's insistence that the marriage is merely a "formality" cloaks exploitation in the rhetoric of rational choice, aligning with what postfeminist discourse often frames as empowerment through compliance. Tyler's irony is deliberate: Kate's "agreement" to the marriage, motivated by guilt and obligation rather than desire, reveals how consent can be manufactured within emotional dependency. The wedding dinner, dominated by Aunt Thelma's controlling enthusiasm, stages postfeminism's paradoxical fantasy of feminine autonomy constrained by the relentless management of women by other women. (Tyler 71-79) Thelma's hyperactive social planning, presented as supportive, mirrors the disciplinary logic of neoliberal femininity—where women enforce standards of taste, decorum, and domestic success upon one another (Gill 151).

As the novel progresses, Kate's sense of self erodes amid competing demands from her family, her workplace, and Pyotr's expectations. The domestic sphere—once the battleground of second-wave feminism—is now reconfigured as a site of ironic containment. Tyler's depiction of the family dinner, the engagement announcement, and the wedding preparations underscores the quiet violence of emotional manipulation masked as progress. The repeated assumption that marriage will "settle" Kate,

rendering her less difficult, evokes the taming logic of Shakespeare's play, yet Tyler's version is stripped of farce and filled with subdued realism. Her protagonist is not a caricature of resistance but a postfeminist subject caught in a web of relational obligation and reluctant adaptation. (Tyler 80-95)

Kate's move into Pyotr's home in Chapter Nine introduces a new spatial metaphor for containment. The house, large yet sterile, signifies the ambivalence of postfeminist domesticity: it promises privacy and stability while embodying the residue of patriarchal ownership. Kate's act of unpacking—arranging her belongings, inspecting the kitchen, observing the garden—suggests a tentative reclamation of space, an assertion of identity within constraint. Yet her labor is once again aestheticized rather than politicized, aligning with Charlotte Brunsdon's observation that postfeminist culture "transforms domesticity from drudgery into display, from necessity into performance" (Brunsdon 112). Tyler's portrayal of Kate preparing food, managing conversations, and mediating social awkwardness recasts the feminist critique of domestic labor into a meditation on emotional resilience. (Tyler 96-112)

The chaotic wedding day—disrupted by the theft of Dr. Battista's lab mice—serves as a comic allegory for the instability of patriarchal systems that attempt to control women's lives. The ceremony's awkwardness, marked by Bunny's outburst and Pyotr's disheveled appearance, resists the romantic closure typical of both Shakespearean comedy and conventional marriage plots. Kate's calm acceptance of the absurd situation, culminating in her understated kiss to Pyotr, signals not submission but pragmatic adaptation—a hallmark of postfeminist sensibility. Her "quiet resolve" functions as a muted form of agency: she neither revolts nor surrenders but learns to navigate constraint with ironic self-awareness. (Tyler 119-135)

The epilogue reimagines this transformation through the figure of Louie Shcherbakov, the couple's son, whose independence and curiosity symbolize a generational reconfiguration of gender and domesticity. His parents' partnership, marked by mutual affection and professional recognition, suggests a reconciliation between intellectual and emotional labor that eluded earlier generations. Yet Tyler's tone remains ambivalent: the equilibrium achieved by Kate and Pyotr feels contingent,

sustained by humor and habit rather than ideological transformation. (Tyler 163-165)

Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* thus exemplifies postfeminism's paradoxical structure—an oscillation between feminist critique and the normalization of patriarchal forms through irony, pragmatism, and emotional realism. As Eschenbaum argues, Tyler's adaptation "forces readers to negotiate affection and critique simultaneously," revealing that misogyny has not disappeared but been modernized (Eschenbaum 34). In Tyler's world, the "taming" is neither violent nor complete; it is negotiated through affective labor, domestic compromise, and the quiet endurance that defines contemporary femininity.

## CONCLUSION

Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* occupies a complex position in the cultural dialogue between feminism, postfeminism, and literary adaptation. By transposing *The Taming of the Shrew* into a twenty-first-century American domestic setting, Tyler exposes how patriarchal ideologies persist beneath the rhetoric of modernity, politeness, and progress. Her protagonist, Kate Battista, embodies the postfeminist paradox: she is educated, self-aware, and articulate, yet her agency is continually redirected into service—whether emotional, domestic, or professional. Tyler's narrative refuses both the comedic closure of Shakespeare's original and the triumphalism of liberal feminist emancipation, offering instead a muted realism that acknowledges feminism's endurance within constraint.

Through her portrayal of Kate's reluctant marriage, familial obligation, and pragmatic endurance, Tyler demonstrates that postfeminism is less a historical aftermath of feminism than its ongoing domestication. The "taming" of women in the modern world occurs not through external force but through internalized responsibility, affective management, and the neoliberal valorization of choice. As Brunsdon observes, postfeminist narratives often "turn domesticity into display," transforming resistance into aestheticized accommodation (112). Tyler's adaptation captures this transformation with subtle irony: her heroine achieves stability not by renouncing patriarchy, but by learning to live knowingly within it. The image of Louie Shcherbakov—-independent,

imaginative, and nurtured by both parents – suggests the possibility of a generational recalibration of gender and care. Yet even this resolution remains ambivalent, reflecting postfeminism’s refusal to settle the question of whether equality has been achieved or simply rebranded. By merging humor, affection, and critique, Tyler reimagines *The Taming of the Shrew* not as a tale of submission or empowerment, but as an exploration of how feminist consciousness survives – quietly, persistently – within the everyday negotiations of a world that insists it no longer needs feminism.

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# Exploration of Pathways for Integrating Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture into College English Teaching

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 23 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 19 Oct 2025; Accepted: 23 Oct 2025; Available online: 28 Oct 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 – Excellent traditional Chinese culture, integration, College English, Pathways</b></p>	<p><i>This paper, in the context of globalization and guided by the College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) and the spirit of the 20th CPC National Congress, demonstrates the necessity and feasibility of systematically integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into the college English curriculum, which is of great significance including boosting students' culture confidence, correcting the cognitive bias resulting from one-dimensional cultural input, enhancing intercultural communication ability and enabling students to calibrate their "cultural coordinate system" through language switching. Meanwhile, it will also help to enrich teaching content and stimulate students' motivation and initiative. As to the implementation, this paper constructs a comprehensive pathway encompassing setting three-dimensional goals, redesigning textbook content and innovating teaching pedagogy. In terms of goal setting, a three-tier framework is established consisting of language knowledge, language skills and culture literacy. In terms of textbook, it redesigns the teaching content by increasing the proportion of Chinese cultural elements, developing digital micro-lectures, and creating a school-based case library of "China Stories". In terms of teaching methods, it constructs a a closed loop of "pre-class preparation – in-class internalization – task-based output" based on flipped classroom and task-based teaching, with the purpose of enabling students to simultaneously acquire language skills, deepen cultural identity, and enhance communication abilities while completing communicative tasks. The research aims to solve the problem of "possessing language proficiency without cultural communication competence" and provides a replicable, propagable model for cultivating foreign language talents capable of "communicating China's stories well".</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and multi-culture integration, English has become the major tool for communication. English education shoulders more responsibilities than language skills training, including transmitting Chinese value, building good national image and strengthening cultural soft power. Culture is the soul and source for national development and national rejuvenation. The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and General Secretary Xi Jinping have repeatedly emphasized the need to adhere to the stance of Chinese culture, extract the spiritual symbols of Chinese civilization, accelerate the construction of a Chinese discourse system, and enhance international discourse power with "credible, lovely, and respectable" Chinese stories. The 2020 Edition of *The College English Teaching Guidelines* also clearly incorporates core socialist values and excellent traditional Chinese culture into the curriculum, implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. Just as Professor He Qishen once said, foreign language teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should enable students to not only acquire a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and present rich content about it, but also convey the profound ideas behind it. Therefore, systematically integrating the long-standing, profound, and extensive Chinese traditional culture into college English classrooms—through textbook restructuring, teaching training, extracurricular activities, and digital methods—to achieve the simultaneous enhancement of language acquisition, cultural identity, and international communication skills, is not only an urgent need for cultivating well-rounded talents with both global perspectives and national sentiment, but also a timely responsibility for higher education practitioners to fulfill cultural consciousness and facilitate the global reach of Chinese civilization.

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTEGRATING CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

### 2.1 Boosting cultural confidence

Language is not only the communication tools; rather, it is the living carrier of culture genes. In the past decades, however, in the college English classes guided by communicative approach and task-based methods, the selected texts in the English textbooks are almost all dominated by themes related to Western features like Christmas, Easter, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley. While students could remember clearly the specific plots in the TV drama "Friends", they couldn't find English equivalents to explain what led to the inclusion of the 24 solar terms in the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list, let alone distinguish the value difference between the Confucian ideal of an "exemplary person who seeks harmony without uniformity" and Western pluralism. This kind of one-dimensional cultural input directly leads to the the systematic distortion in cognitive mapping. Another example is that many students are familiar with the history of New York's Central Park yet stammer when asked to explain the aesthetic logic of "a scene with every step" in Suzhou gardens. When one's native culture remains largely "mute" in the process of second language acquisition, collective memory is compressed into simplistic symbols for consumption.

University students, as future leaders, must carry the torch of cultural transmission. They must develop a deep understanding of history and culture to strengthen their cultural identity and confidence, thereby contributing to the preservation and global promotion of Chinese culture. Integrating Chinese culture into college English teaching, and presenting its finest traditions through diverse pedagogical models, can guide students toward a profound appreciation of its richness and unique value. This approach ignites a sense of national pride from within, solidifying cultural confidence and reinforcing a shared identity.

## 2.2 Fostering the development of intercultural competence

*The College English Teaching Guidelines (2020)* explicitly state that a key mission of college English courses is to provide intercultural education. This involves deepening students' understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures and cultivating their cross-cultural communication skills. Integrating "intercultural education" into the core of the curriculum aims for far more than merely having students know that China and the West have different festivals and etiquette. The deeper intent is to enable them to recalibrate their "cultural coordinate system" in the instant they switch languages. When encountering the same concept, they should be able to explain the Chinese perspective in English while also decoding the underlying assumptions of their counterpart in Chinese, thereby avoiding talking past each other or forcing a square peg into a round hole.

Cultural exchange is an essential component of international cooperation. As the world's largest developing country, China is actively engaged in international collaboration, particularly in economic and trade activities. Infusing English teaching with the finest elements of traditional Chinese culture and enhancing students' knowledge of their native culture equips them to communicate more accurately and confidently in these international settings. University students are at a critical stage of values formation. It will help to reinforce students' value guidance to integrate native cultural learning into English study, thereby continuously strengthen their grasp of Sino-Western cultural differences. This empowers students to discern and adopt the essence while rejecting the dross of Western culture, thereby establishing sound values. The accurate transmission of cultural connotations enhances students' cultural adaptability and communicative expressiveness in international exchanges.

In the future, whether they find themselves in international conferences, multinational corporations, or global volunteer programs, this "cultural bilingualism" will allow them to avoid being either

arrogant "value exporters" or silent "rule-takers". Instead, they can become true interpreters of civilization—those who can "narrate their own stories as part of the world's story, and bring the world's story back to China." Steering with confidence and poise, they will navigate the tides of globalization.

## 2.3 Enriching teaching content

In traditional college English teaching, there always exists the problem of stagnation in textbook content. The long cycle of updating makes the cases, topics and language expressions fail to catch up with the pace of development, thus being unable to reflect the evolving trends in our diverse global society and language. The one-sided selection of materials also results in students being exposed almost exclusively to Western cultural content over the long term. This leads them to view the English language primarily through a Western lens, resulting in a learning experience that is narrow and limited in perspective. Chinese traditional culture covers a wide scope ranging from literature, arts to philosophy and technology, providing countless sources for English teaching. In the field of literature, from the exquisite verses of the Classic of Poetry to the timeless masterpieces of Tang and Song poetry, and from the classic narratives of Ming and Qing dynasty novels to the brilliant works of modern and contemporary Chinese literature—all can be transformed into high-quality content for English language teaching. This allows students to appreciate the charm of Chinese literature while mastering the English language. In the realm of arts, beyond Peking Opera and calligraphy, diverse forms such as paper-cutting, embroidery, traditional Chinese painting, and folk music can serve as dynamic teaching materials. These help students learn to describe the unique styles and aesthetic values of Chinese art in English.

For students, the profound traditional Chinese culture is something they have been immersed in since childhood, evoking a natural sense of familiarity and affinity. This inherent connection makes such content especially engaging and meaningful in their language learning journey. When

those familiar elements are presented in English learning class, their curiosity and initiative can be effectively sparked. In the previous traditional English class, students make lack passion and engagement for short of knowledge in Western culture. If topics about Chinese culture are infused, probably they will be more willing to participate in various discussions, share their ideas and even make objective comparisons between difference cultures. Such integration serves not only to advance students' practical command of the English language but also to impart a more profound and coherent comprehension of Chinese cultural heritage, thereby unlocking their potential for both cultural creativity and dissemination. Most significantly, the incorporation of traditional Chinese culture within the English curriculum equips students to develop a judicious approach to cultural differences via Sino-Western comparative study, thereby embodying the principle of "appreciating the beauty in all cultures".

### III. INTEGRATION PATHWAYS FOR CHINESE CULTURE INTO COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

#### 3.1 Defining learning objectives

In defining the humanistic purpose of college English courses, *The College English Teaching Guidelines (2020)*, explicitly incorporates "fostering students' ability to understand and interpret Chinese culture" and "serving the external dissemination of Chinese culture" as core objectives. This requirement not only aligns with the strategic need to enhance national cultural soft power in the new era but also redresses a long-standing imbalance in foreign language education that has prioritized the intake of Western culture over the output of local culture. As the most widely taught compulsory public course in higher education, college English is offered to all the non-English majors in a university. Its teaching objectives have long been affected by the traditional teaching mode, which overly stress the basic language skills based on culture of English-speaking

countries and the one-dimensional intercultural competence of "understanding the West", resulting in the fact that many students with basic English communicative abilities feel hard to explain the essence of traditional Chinese culture in English, let alone to effectively communicate China's voice and tell China's stories, leading to a dilemma of "with language proficiency, but lacking culture transmission abilities". Teaching objectives are the core of teaching design, which decides teaching content, teaching methods and assessment mode. Therefore, in order to overcome the present absence of Chinese culture in college English education and achieve the coordinated development of "language proficiency" and "cultural transmission capability", it is essential to systematically reconstruct and redefine teaching objectives from multi dimensions.

#### 3.1.1 Language cognition

In terms of language cognition, students should be required to have a good command of English vocabulary and expressions related to Chinese traditional culture, master the fundamental knowledge in the field and construct a systematic stock of vocabulary of Chinese traditional culture. On the one hand, students should be skilled in using the theme-related core vocabulary and expressions, such as the specialized vocabulary and commonly used expressions related to themes like Confucianism, traditional festivals (e.g., the Spring Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival), traditional literary and artistic forms (e.g., calligraphy, paper-cutting, Peking Opera), and historical sites (e.g., the Great Wall, the Forbidden City). On the other hand, students should be guided to gain deeper cultural connotations behind those words and expressions, and differentiate the different connotations of the same word under different cultural backgrounds. For instance, the concept of "li" (礼) cannot be simply reduced to the literal meaning of "ritual"; it embodies a value system encompassing respect, order, and harmony. Similarly, translating "long" as "long" is more conceptually accurate than using the misleading term "dragon". By embedding cultural interpretation directly into vocabulary teaching, students not only

acquire language proficiency but also build a solid foundation for understanding Chinese culture.

### 3.1.2 Language skills

In the field of language skills, students should be required to acquire the relevant knowledge in all the aspects of Chinese culture through listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. During the input phase of listening and reading, students can learn English materials that incorporate Chinese cultural elements, such as Western documentary clips on traditional Chinese medicine or academic articles by overseas scholars on Chinese culture and development. This allows them to acquire language skills while learning to interpret Chinese culture from an international perspective. In the output phase of speaking and writing, practical tasks can be designed—such as debates or speeches on topics like "The Widespread Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine Worldwide"—to cultivate students' ability to articulate their ideas. They can also practice writing in various genres. For the translation phase, texts related to Chinese culture, economic, and technological development can be selected to train students in E-C translation techniques, thereby enhancing their capacity to express Chinese culture fluently and accurately in English. Based on this and surrounding the topic of "cultural transmission", students should be encouraged to participate in various intercultural activities, transform their language skills into intercultural transmission competence, communicate China's stories in an effective way and enhance their reciprocal intercultural competence.

### 3.1.3 Culture literacy

In terms of culture literacy, the cultivation of cultural confidence and national identity should be always set as an indispensable part of English education. When encountering the combination of Chinese and Western culture, students should be instructed to treat various culture objectively and dialectically through making fair comparison between different cultures. They should be taught to avoid both blind admiration of Western culture and a retreat into

cultural insularity. Through theme debate and extracurricular activities, students could understand more profoundly the unique charm and value of Chinese culture and strengthen their pride and sense of identity for national culture, thereby creating a virtuous cycle where cultural confidence underpins linguistic expression, and linguistic expression, in turn, conveys cultural confidence.

## 3.2 Reconstructing textbook content

Textbook construction is the core foundation and crucial carrier for integrating Chinese traditional culture into college English class, the quality of which directly determines the depth, width and effectiveness of the integration. The College English course, which integrates instrumental aims with humanistic concerns as a vital component of higher education, addresses a broad range of subjects including human geography, historical culture, and life philosophy. It is thereby distinguished by its pertinent, instructive, and inspiring qualities. However, in the present college English textbooks which are widely used, there exist obvious weaknesses as far as Chinese traditional culture is concerned. First of all, its proportion in the textbooks is relatively small, which makes the students unable to come into contact with adequate local culture in English study, resulting in "native culture aphasia" in cross-cultural communication. Moreover, the Chinese culture presented in the textbooks are not profound, since it is mostly the superficial introduction, which prevents students to gain the rich connotations and essence of it. Last but not least, the Chinese culture elements are not systematic due to lack of logic and coherence, which makes it hard to form a complete Chinese culture system and greatly affects the effective transmission and inheritance of Chinese excellent traditional culture. In order to overcome these problems and enhance the multiculturalism and multi perspectives of the teaching content, the textbook content can be adjusted through the following methods.

3.2.1. Optimizing content structure by increasing the weight of traditional Chinese culture

College English textbooks are typically organized thematically, a feature teachers can leverage by proactively sourcing and integrating representative Chinese cultural texts, audio, and video materials relevant to each theme. For instance, when covering a unit like "The Pursuit of Dreams," which often focuses exclusively on Western examples, instructors can introduce the inspiring stories of eminent Chinese scientists such as Qian Xuesen, Yuan Longping, and Tu Youyou. These figures tirelessly pursued their dreams to advance national prosperity and public well-being. This should be coupled with an in-depth exploration of the "Chinese Dream," examining its profound connotations, contemporary significance, and pathways to realization within its historical and modern context.

Furthermore, comparative analyses of dream-pursuit narratives across cultures can be organized through group discussions or themed speeches. These activities guide students to identify the shared spirit and cultural nuances in the pursuit of dreams. This approach not only allows students to glean wisdom from diverse global narratives and broaden their international perspective but also hones their critical, dialectical thinking. More importantly, it enables a deep appreciation of the unique power and resonance of the Chinese pursuit of dreams, thereby strengthening national pride and cultural confidence.

Similarly, for a theme like "Water Problem," teachers can assign inquiry-based tasks where students work in groups to research China's current water resources situation, the challenges it faces, and effective governance measures implemented in recent years (e.g., the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, water-saving technologies, pollution prevention). Through independent research, field investigations, and data analysis, students gain a deeper understanding of China's water context while developing crucial skills in information processing, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Simultaneously, learning about China's significant achievements in water governance allows students to tangibly appreciate the nation's commitment and efforts to ensuring public welfare and driving

sustainable development. This process concretely fosters a stronger sense of national confidence, responsibility, and pride.

### 3.2.2. Developing diverse digital resources to support the integration of traditional Chinese culture

Teachers should create high-quality instructional resources tailored to textbook themes, student needs, and cognitive characteristics, focusing on representative aspects of Chinese culture. Specifically, two main approaches can be adopted:

First, develop series of micro-lectures that vividly and accessibly present specialized content—such as the historical evolution, craftsmanship, artistic features, and role in cultural exchange of porcelain; the genesis, technical principles, and global impact of the Four Great Inventions; or the rhythmic elegance, imaginative depth, and philosophical wisdom in classical Chinese poetry. These micro-lectures can be flexibly embedded into appropriate teaching stages, building a convenient platform for fragmented learning and helping students accumulate knowledge of Chinese culture in their spare time.

Second, design systematic MOOCs structured around the thematic framework of the College English curriculum. These should establish a comprehensive knowledge system covering various fields of Chinese culture, effectively integrating traditional heritage with English language learning to create online courses that are informative, engaging, and practical. The MOOC design can include diverse tasks and interactive elements—such as online quizzes, group discussions, and case studies—to stimulate motivation and initiative in learning.

Furthermore, incorporating MOOC completion into the final teaching assessment—by evaluating participation, task quality, and quiz results—can comprehensively and objectively reflect student achievement. More importantly, it stimulates students to attach greater importance to learning traditional Chinese culture, thereby promoting its consistent and systematic integration into the College English classroom.

### 3.2.3. Constructing a school-based “China stories” case library under new era education

Building a school-based "China Stories" case library in the new era serves not only as a vital measure to inherit and promote outstanding traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, but also as a key pathway to fulfill the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talents while enhancing students' core competencies. By leveraging the university's distinctive disciplines, regional culture, and museum resources, this case library can provide rich and contextually relevant teaching materials, enabling students to strengthen their cultural confidence and national identity through engaging “China Stories”.

From a thematic perspective, the case library can be organized into four categories based on the university's academic strengths and regional characteristics: “Chinese Historical Civilization”, “Red Revolutionary Heritage”, “Intangible Cultural Treasures”, and “Contemporary Development Achievements”." In terms of media type, materials will be systematically classified as text-based, audio, or video. Textual materials form the foundation, audio resources enrich students' auditory experience, and video materials offer greater immediacy and appeal, allowing students to better appreciate the essence of “China Stories”.

The collected cases can be published on widely accessible platforms such as the Cloud Class. With precise categorization, teachers can assign relevant case learning tasks via the Cloud Class according to teaching schedules and objectives. Students can then utilize fragmented time to access the platform for learning, unrestricted by time and space.

By establishing such a well-structured, clearly classified, and easily accessible school-based “China Stories” case library, we can effectively enrich teaching resources and innovate instructional methods. This will empower students to continuously enhance their cultural literacy and comprehensive abilities through in-depth engagement with “China Stories”.

### 3.3 Innovating teaching methods

Teaching methods are the essential bridge converting teaching objectives into practical fruits, so its scientific soundness and appropriateness directly decides the teaching quality. When integrating excellent Chinese culture into college English teaching, teachers should apply methods according to the teaching content and students' cognitive level, so as to construct a systematic teaching pathway consisting of “practicing language skills, deepening culture cognition, and cultivating national confidence”, with the ultimate goal of enhancing both the comprehensive language competence and cultural literacy.

#### 3.3.1. Building an instructional model of “preparation + internalization” based on the flipped classroom

The flipped classroom model, centered on “restructuring the teaching process”, overturns the traditional “in-class lecture + after-class practice” format. It extends the “knowledge transfer” phase outside the classroom and focuses in-class time on “knowledge internalization” through interaction, thereby creating ample space for integrating outstanding traditional Chinese culture.

Considering that existing College English textbooks predominantly feature Western cultural contexts such as European/American history, literature and social customs, instructors can release customized learning resources—such as bilingual videos like “The History of the Silk Road” or illustrated PowerPoints on “The Art of Peking Opera Facial Makeup”—on learning platforms (e.g., Rain Classroom, Cloud Class) one week in advance. Students independently study these materials and complete related tasks such as quizzes, writing assignments, or translation exercises.

The in-class session is primarily dedicated to knowledge internalization. The instructor integrates key points of Chinese culture into text analysis and organizes activities like group discussions and project-based learning. By leveraging multimedia tools to stimulate interaction, this approach helps students deepen their understanding of cultural

knowledge through communication while simultaneously improving the accuracy and fluency of their English expressions.

3.3.2. Leveraging task-based language teaching with authentic scenario tasks to facilitate cultural comparison and language practice

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), oriented toward "completing specific communicative tasks," creates realistic scenarios that enable students to simultaneously enhance their English proficiency and cultural awareness through problem-solving. This approach is particularly suitable for comparative teaching of traditional Chinese and Western cultures.

Teachers could design targeted tasks based on course types. Taking an Audio-Visual-Speaking course as an example: if the textbook unit theme is "Famous Foreign Landmarks" (e.g., introducing the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Statue of Liberty in New York), the instructor can design a "Cross-Cultural Tour Guide Simulation" task.

**Task Preparation Phase:** Guide students in groups to collect bilingual materials on Chinese historical sites (e.g., the Great Wall in Beijing, the Terracotta Army in Xi'an, Mount Huangshan in Anhui), including English introductions to their historical background, architectural features, and cultural value.

**Task Implementation Phase:** Have students role-play as "Chinese tour guides" to explain Chinese sites in English and "foreign tourists." Simultaneously, require the "Chinese guides" to adapt the explanatory logic from the textbook's Western landmarks which usually follows the mode of "location – historical background – key highlights", and transfer expression techniques from the listening materials to their presentation of Chinese sites, completing the rewriting of tour commentary and on-site simulation.

**Task Summary Phase:** The teacher organizes class presentations, guiding students to compare the cultural connotations of Chinese and Western landmarks. For example, Western sites often emphasize "individual heroism" and

"commemoration of historical events," while Chinese sites focus on "harmony between humanity and nature" and "historical continuity". Students summarize the value differences underlying these cultural distinctions.

Through this process, students practice listening (comprehending introductions to Western landmarks in the textbook) and speaking (simulating tour guide explanations) while clearly recognizing the essence, similarities, and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, thereby enhancing their intercultural communication awareness.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The college English classroom is not merely the "practice arena" for grammar and vocabulary; rather, it should become the "transmission hub" for civilization dialogue. When students could use skilled English to explain the order of "Li(ritual)", the symbolic meaning of "Long" and the wisdom of "Harmony between human and nature", they then possess the powerful new voice to make China's voice heard in the global court of public opinion. It is an inevitable trend to integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture into college English class, which plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating versatile talents with a global outlook and deep national attachment. Through a series of measures like defining teaching objectives, reconstructing teaching content and innovating teaching methods, the instruction in the college English class would be able to effectively boost students' cultural confidence, intercultural competence and holistic literacy. Higher education practitioners should undertake the responsibilities of the era, keep on exploring and practicing, and let the finest traditional Chinese culture shine vibrantly within the college English classroom, propelling Chinese civilization onto the world stage to showcase its distinctive wisdom and strength in global cultural exchange and dialogue.

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# Mediating Listening Strategy Instruction: Teacher Roles and Pedagogical Challenges in Moroccan CPGE Classrooms

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 27 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 25 Oct 2025; Accepted: 28 Oct 2025; Available online: 31 Oct 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 – explicit listening strategy instruction, teacher mediation, metacognitive scaffolding, affective support, Moroccan CPGE</b></p>	<p><i>This article investigates teachers' mediating role in implementing Explicit Listening Strategy Instruction (ELSI) within Morocco's Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles (CPGE). Despite a growing body of research affirming the benefits of strategy-based listening instruction, classroom realization often depends on how teachers bridge theory and practice. Grounded in cognitive, metacognitive, sociocultural, and constructivist frameworks, this qualitative, interpretivist study explored how two CPGE English teachers enacted, adapted, and sustained ELSI under high-stakes, exam-driven conditions. Data were collected through classroom observations, reflective teacher accounts, and student feedback, and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. Findings revealed three core mediational roles – strategic modelling, metacognitive scaffolding, and affective mediation – that collectively transformed listening from a test-oriented to a reflective learning process. Nonetheless, teachers faced persistent contextual constraints: limited instructional time, curriculum rigidity, strategy-proficiency mismatches, and learner anxiety. The study concludes that effective listening pedagogy in such contexts depends on empowering teachers as reflective mediators capable of balancing explicitness, adaptability, and emotional support. It advocates sustained professional development, curriculum reform recognizing listening as a teachable skill, and institutional support for reflective practice.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

For years, listening comprehension has been considered an essential but daunting skill in second and foreign language teaching and learning (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Despite its importance, both communicatively or academically, it has received less explicit instructional attention in comparison to other language skills (Field, 2008; Graham, 2011). Traditional approaches to

listening are characteristically limited to testing comprehension rather than developing the listening process. This situation deprives learners from developing strategic awareness and autonomous control over the listening enterprise (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Berne, 2004).

Over the last thirty years or so, things have started to shift towards more focus on strategy-based listening instruction based on theoretically-grounded

cognitive and metacognitive models with a view to assist learners in managing spoken language processing (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Vandergrift, 2003; Goh, 2018). However, to successfully implement such frameworks rests more, not on theory nor on strategy taxonomies, but on teacher mediation of strategy-based theory and taxonomies within the classroom contexts. Teachers do play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The success of strategy instruction doesn't just depend on what strategies are taught, but on how teachers mediate them.

Teacher mediation forms the backbone of strategy instruction. Drawing on Vygotskian sociocultural theory, teachers do not just deliver information, but they mediate cognitive growth through scaffolding learners as they evolve from other-regulation to self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000). In teaching listening, this translates as orchestrating explicit modelling of strategies, probing metacognitive awareness and engaging reflective discourse to raise learners' awareness of listening as an active, controllable process. In this sense, teachers assume the role of architects who bridge abstract theoretical constructs with the concrete, lived experiences of learners. However, such task is not straightforward but requires striking a balance between instructing strategies explicitly and dealing with spontaneous, volatile, real-time listening. In this respect, they need to scaffold without being overly prescriptive and maintain motivation in a skill that is notoriously anxiety-inducing and overwhelming to students (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010).

It is often stated in the literature that teachers find strategy-based listening instruction theoretically appealing, but frustratingly challenging in practice (Goh, 2010; Cross, 2015; Macaro, 2010). Several inhibitions stand in the way such as time constraints, rigid curricula, exam pressures, and teacher uncertainty about how to model and evaluate strategy use. These often combine to erode all the pedagogical promise of the instructional approach (Chamot, 2005; Cohen & Macaro, 2007). Teachers' own beliefs about listening are also decisive in this situation. While those who view it as a skill that develops naturally through more exposure are less likely to invest time explicit strategy instruction, others conceive of it as a trainable

cognitive process requiring systematic instruction (Graham, Santos, & Vanderplank, 2011; Field, 2019). These beliefs shape teachers' pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. So, while the theoretical case for explicit listening strategy instruction (ELSI) is well founded, its actual in-class implementation remains inconsistent, context-bound, and heavily shaped by teacher cognition and mediation practices.

Challenges as these become even more pronounced in Moroccan *Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles* (CPGE). This elite academic context prepares typically high-achieving, academically disciplined, and pressure-enduring students for highly competitive entrance exams to engineering and business schools. The workloads are intense, and the stakes are high especially in science streams where English is not the main subject. Listening instruction in CPGE classrooms is often overshadowed by reading and writing activities aligning with exam requirements, while listening is often approached as an evaluative rather than a developmental skill. Despite official circulars from the Moroccan Ministry of Education emphasizing the promotion of communicative competence and learner autonomy, reality in most CPGE classrooms is still dominated by teacher-centred pedagogies and content-heavy syllabi. Introducing ELSI into such context constitutes both an innovation and a pedagogical challenge. This demands significant shifts in teacher cognition, classroom discourse, and time management.

The Moroccan CPGE context provides a useful window into the broader question of how teachers mediate strategic instruction under institutional and cultural constraints. CPGE teachers typically receive no formal training in metacognitive pedagogy and are often expected to integrate strategy instruction without any curricular support. Success almost entirely depends on individual adaptive expertise, capacity for reflection, and ability to create an environment for self-regulation despite systemic pressures. In addition, because ELSI involves explicit explanation, guided practice, and reflective evaluation of strategies, teachers continually face concerns about the dilemma of either teaching for immediate listening comprehension or for long-term strategic development. These tensions are pedagogically fertile but cognitively demanding inasmuch as they require balancing the urgency of

comprehending a particular audio text with the longer-term development of strategic competence.

Against this backdrop, this paper discusses the teacher's role as a mediator in applying ELSI in Moroccan CPGE classrooms. The paper aims to explain both the pedagogical functions teachers assume and the contextual deterrents they face in mediating strategy-based listening instruction. Drawing on insights from an intervention-based study (Ouhejjou, under review) and follow-up teacher reflections, the article theorizes teacher mediation as involving three interrelated dimensions: (a) strategic modelling (overt demonstration and explanation of listening strategies); (b) metacognitive scaffolding (regular prompting of students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening in real time); and (c) affective mediation (management of anxiety, motivation, and confidence through supportive discourse and feedback). The study also outlines how institutional constraints, strategy and student proficiency mismatches, and learner resistance connect with these mediating practices, affecting teachers' capacities to sustain ELSI in CPGE settings.

Finally, this article argues that teacher mediation represents the pedagogical core of ELSI, attempting to map theoretical strategy frameworks into classroom practices. By foregrounding the teacher's voice, it seeks to complement existing learner-centred research thus far and work towards a more context-sensitive understanding of listening pedagogy in high-stakes EFL settings. From this perspective, ELSI is no longer merely a methodological approach but a dialogic process in which teachers and learners jointly construct strategic awareness. This reframing emphasizes the necessity to support teachers as reflective practitioners who are able to align explicit instruction with their students' cognitive, affective, and contextual realities.

### Research Questions

To guide this inquiry, the study addresses the following questions:

1. *How do teachers mediate explicit listening strategy instruction in Moroccan CPGE classrooms?*
2. *What pedagogical and contextual challenges do teachers encounter when implementing ELSI?*

3. *In what ways can teacher mediation practices enhance learners' metacognitive engagement in listening tasks?*

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The teaching and learning of listening comprehension have evolved from being viewed as a passive process of decoding linguistic input to being understood as an active, multidimensional process involving cognitive, metacognitive, and social mediation mechanisms (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Within this paradigm, Explicit Listening Strategy Instruction (ELSI) operates as both a cognitive and pedagogical innovation: it aims to make learners aware of the mental operations underlying comprehension and to equip them with strategies to manage these processes independently (Chamot, 2005; Goh, 2018). However, the success of ELSI depends crucially on how teachers translate these theoretical principles into classroom practice – how they mediate, model, and scaffold strategic engagement during listening tasks. To conceptualize this mediating role, this section draws on four interrelated theoretical perspectives: Cognitive Learning Theory, Metacognitive Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Constructivism. Together, they form a multidimensional framework that situates teacher mediation at the intersection of cognitive activation, metacognitive regulation, and social co-construction.

### 2.1 Cognitive and Metacognitive Foundations of ELSI

At the core of ELSI lies Cognitive Learning Theory, which views learning as the internal processing of information through attention, perception, memory, and retrieval (Anderson, 1983, 1995). Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) model and information-processing framework distinguish between three stages of skill acquisition – declarative, procedural, and automatic – each relevant to how learners internalize listening strategies. During listening comprehension, learners must decode linguistic forms (bottom-up processes), integrate them with contextual expectations (top-down processes), and transform these operations into automated comprehension routines (Anderson, 2005; Field, 2008).

Teachers play a pivotal role in this transformation by guiding learners from declarative awareness (“knowing that” a strategy exists) to procedural control (“knowing how” to use it effectively). This progression requires teachers to provide explicit instruction, model strategy use, and create opportunities for practice and reflection. As Chamot (2005) emphasizes, explicitness does not merely involve naming strategies but demonstrating their cognitive purpose and application within authentic listening tasks. Through such modelling, the teacher functions as a cognitive scaffold, helping learners build conceptual bridges between linguistic input and strategic processing.

Complementing the cognitive dimension is Metacognitive Theory, introduced by Flavell (1979), which defines metacognition as one’s awareness and regulation of cognitive processes. In the context of listening, metacognition involves the ability to plan how to approach a listening task, monitor comprehension in real time, and evaluate success afterward (Vandergrift, 2003). Metacognitive knowledge (awareness of task demands, strategy repertoire, and self-efficacy) and metacognitive regulation (control over planning, monitoring, and evaluation) are thus integral to successful listening. Teachers mediate these functions by externalizing metacognitive processes—verbalizing their thinking, prompting learners to anticipate difficulties, and guiding post-task reflection (Goh, 2018; Cross, 2015).

Through this guided reflection, learners begin to internalize regulatory patterns that transform them from reactive listeners to self-directed, strategic ones. In this sense, ELSI becomes a process of metacognitive apprenticeship in which teachers model not only the “how” of listening but the “how to think about” listening. The teacher’s discourse—questioning, prompting, and feedback—thus serves as a metacognitive mirror that enables learners to observe and eventually regulate their own comprehension behaviour (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Graham, 2017).

## **2.2 Sociocultural Mediation and the Teacher’s Role**

While cognitive and metacognitive theories explain the internal mechanisms of learning, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) foregrounds the social origins of these mechanisms. Drawing on Vygotsky’s

(1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), SCT posits that higher-order cognitive processes emerge first on the social plane, through interaction with a more knowledgeable other, before becoming internalized as self-regulation. Within this framework, the teacher assumes the role of a mediator who provides scaffolded assistance that enables learners to perform beyond their current level of independent competence.

In ELSI, this mediation occurs through the joint construction of meaning, where teachers guide learners’ attentional focus, regulate task complexity, and offer feedback that bridges comprehension gaps. The teacher’s language becomes a psychological tool that shapes learners’ cognitive activity, facilitating the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Mediation, in this sense, is not mere instruction but dialogic support—a dynamic interaction in which the teacher continually adjusts scaffolding to the learner’s evolving competence.

As Oxford (2017) argues in her Strategic Self-Regulation (S<sup>2</sup>R) Model, learning strategies are most effective when socially mediated and emotionally supported. Teachers thus mediate not only cognitive and metacognitive strategy use but also the affective climate that sustains learner motivation and reduces listening anxiety. This socio-affective dimension is especially critical in contexts such as Moroccan CPGE classrooms, where high performance expectations and time pressures may heighten students’ apprehension during listening tasks. Through empathetic mediation, teachers help learners reframe listening difficulty as a normal part of the learning process, thereby cultivating resilience and confidence.

From this perspective, teacher mediation in ELSI extends beyond procedural guidance to encompass affective attunement and dialogic negotiation. The teacher’s role is not simply to transmit strategies but to co-construct the conditions under which these strategies become meaningful and usable. The sociocultural perspective thus situates ELSI within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where learners appropriate strategies through socially mediated interaction rather than passive absorption.

## **2.3 Constructivism and the Co-Construction of Strategic Awareness**

Aligned with sociocultural principles, Constructivist Theory emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through engagement with tasks, peers, and instructors (Piaget, 1972; Bruner, 1990). In listening pedagogy, constructivism reframes comprehension as an interpretive act rather than a mechanical decoding process. Teachers become facilitators who design experiences that allow learners to discover the utility of strategies through guided problem-solving and reflection.

Constructivist listening classrooms encourage learners to hypothesize, test, and revise comprehension strategies in response to authentic input, promoting strategic personalization. Teachers mediate this process by scaffolding learners' sense-making rather than prescribing fixed routines. As Goh (2018) observes, effective strategy instruction involves creating reflective spaces where learners articulate what worked, why it worked, and how it can be adapted to future tasks. In this dialogic environment, learners internalize not only strategies but the metacognitive habits of inquiry that underlie self-regulated learning.

Moreover, constructivism underscores the contextual dimension of teacher mediation. Teachers must continuously interpret the situational variables—task complexity, learner proficiency, classroom time, and affective state—that influence strategy use. This interpretive flexibility constitutes what Shulman (1987) calls pedagogical content knowledge: the ability to transform disciplinary understanding into teachable, context-sensitive forms. Thus, constructivist mediation in ELSI entails both structured guidance and adaptive responsiveness—a balance between explicitness and learner autonomy.

#### 2.4 Conceptual Anchors in Teacher Mediation

Integrating the above theories yields a set of conceptual anchors that underpin the analysis of teacher roles in ELSI:

1. **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** – highlights the teacher's mediating function as scaffolding learners' progression from dependence to autonomy.
2. **Anderson's Information Processing Model (1983, 1995)** – elucidates how teachers support learners' transition from declarative

to procedural knowledge of listening strategies.

3. **Flavell's Metacognition Framework (1979)** – provides the foundation for understanding how teachers cultivate awareness and control over listening processes.
4. **Chamot (2005) and Goh (2018)** – operationalize these theories pedagogically, demonstrating how teacher modelling, guided practice, and reflection foster metacognitive growth.
5. **Oxford's Strategic Self-Regulation (S<sup>2</sup>R) Model (2017)** – situates teacher mediation within an affective and social system of self-regulation.
6. **Graham and Macaro (2008)** – clarify the distinction between explicit and implicit strategy instruction, reinforcing the need for deliberate teacher intervention in awareness building.

Together, these conceptual anchors position the teacher as both a cognitive guide and a sociocultural mediator, responsible for orchestrating the interplay between explicit instruction, learner autonomy, and emotional engagement. In the context of Moroccan CPGE classrooms, this integrated theoretical lens allows for a nuanced understanding of how teachers operationalize ELSI under systemic and affective constraints.

#### 2.5 Synthesis

In synthesis, ELSI is best conceptualized as a multilayered pedagogical process that intertwines cognitive activation, metacognitive regulation, and social mediation. The teacher's role is central to this process, functioning simultaneously as an explicit instructor, a reflective guide, and a motivational mediator. Cognitive and metacognitive theories explain what strategies are and how they can be learned; sociocultural and constructivist theories explain how these strategies are internalized through social interaction and experiential engagement.

Understanding teacher mediation through this composite framework not only clarifies the theoretical underpinnings of ELSI but also provides an interpretive basis for analysing the pedagogical realities and challenges encountered in the Moroccan CPGE context. It is within this intersection—between

theory and practice, cognition and context—that the following sections examine how teachers enact, adapt, and sustain explicit listening strategy instruction.

### III. METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

#### 3.1 Research Context

The present study was situated within the Moroccan Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles (CPGE), an elite preparatory education system designed to prepare high-achieving students for national and international engineering and business schools. English, while a non-specialist subject, constitutes an essential component of the curriculum and is evaluated through competitive examinations that emphasize reading and writing. Listening instruction, by contrast, often receives limited classroom attention and remains underdeveloped in both pedagogical design and assessment. Within this academically demanding environment, English teachers face dual pressures: adhering to a rigid, exam-driven syllabus while simultaneously responding to recent curricular calls for communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Against this backdrop, the implementation of ELSI represented an innovation that challenged prevailing pedagogical norms. The study formed part of a larger quasi-experimental intervention investigating the effects of explicit strategy instruction on students' listening comprehension and strategic awareness. Within that broader framework, the current paper focuses on the teacher's mediating role—how ELSI was enacted, negotiated, and sustained within authentic classroom conditions. This focus recognizes teachers as key agents of pedagogical transformation whose cognition, discourse, and interactional choices shape learners' strategic engagement.

#### 3.2 Research Orientation

The investigation adopted a qualitative interpretivist orientation to explore the lived pedagogical realities of ELSI implementation. Rather than measuring teacher performance quantitatively, the study sought to interpret how teachers conceptualized and enacted mediation in response to contextual constraints. This perspective aligns with Creswell's (2013) interpretive paradigm, which privileges understanding over prediction and seeks to

capture meaning as constructed through action and reflection.

Teacher mediation was examined through two complementary lenses:

1. Process-oriented observation—to document teacher modelling, scaffolding, and classroom discourse; and
2. Reflective accounts—to capture teachers' perceptions, challenges, and adaptive strategies in implementing ELSI.

Together, these sources allowed for a triangulated understanding of mediation as both a dynamic instructional practice and a reflective cognitive process.

#### 3.3 Participants and Contextual Role

The focal participants were two English teachers from CPGE, Kénitra, each with over ten years of professional experience and advanced proficiency in English. Both teachers participated voluntarily in the ELSI training and implementation phase. They received an orientation session outlining the theoretical principles of strategy-based listening instruction and the intervention's pedagogical sequence. Importantly, while the ELSI model provided a structured framework, teachers were encouraged to contextualize the strategies according to their students' proficiency level, course objectives, and classroom constraints.

This semi-structured autonomy enabled the study to observe naturally occurring adaptations—how teachers modified instruction, adjusted scaffolding intensity, and balanced explicit explanation with time management. The teacher perspective was therefore central to capturing the pedagogical tensions inherent in ELSI implementation within the CPGE environment.

#### 3.4 Data Sources and Collection

Three principal qualitative sources informed the analysis:

1. Classroom Observation Notes: During the ELSI intervention, classroom sessions were systematically observed to record teacher practices of strategy modelling, verbal scaffolding, questioning techniques, and feedback patterns. Observation focused particularly on how teachers facilitated the

stages of planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening comprehension.

2. **Teacher Reflective Accounts:** At the end of each instructional phase, participating teachers provided written reflections describing their instructional experiences, perceived learner responses, and difficulties encountered. These accounts served as metacognitive narratives that revealed teachers' evolving understanding of ELSI and their professional reasoning behind pedagogical choices.
3. **Supplementary Student Feedback:** Student comments collected through end-of-session reflections were used as supporting evidence to illuminate how teacher mediation was perceived by learners. This triangulation reinforced interpretive validity and allowed cross-verification of emergent themes.

All participants provided informed consent; institutional permission was obtained. All data were anonymized and coded using pseudonyms (e.g., T1, T2) to ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analysed following the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows for systematic identification and interpretation of recurrent patterns. The analysis proceeded through six iterative stages: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and final synthesis. Coding was both deductive—guided by the theoretical constructs of cognitive, metacognitive, and sociocultural mediation—and inductive, allowing new themes to emerge organically from teacher discourse and observation notes.

Through this dual process, the analysis yielded two overarching thematic clusters:

1. **Teacher Roles in ELSI Mediation,** encompassing modelling, scaffolding, and affective support; and
2. **Pedagogical and Contextual Challenges,** including curricular rigidity, time constraints, and learner resistance.

These themes provided the analytical foundation for the discussion that follows, illustrating

how teacher mediation operates at the intersection of theoretical ideals and practical realities.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and Researcher Reflexivity

To ensure analytical rigor, multiple strategies were employed: prolonged engagement in the field, cross-validation between observation and reflection data, and iterative peer debriefing with fellow researchers. Credibility was further enhanced through member checking, whereby teachers reviewed and confirmed thematic interpretations of their reflections.

Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, acknowledging the dual role of the researcher as both intervention facilitator and observer. This position offered valuable insight into classroom dynamics but required conscious self-monitoring to minimize interpretive bias. Following Dörnyei (2007), the researcher approached the data as a "critical insider"—engaged in the pedagogical process yet committed to analytic objectivity.

### 3.7 Summary

In sum, this methodological design allowed for an in-depth exploration of how teachers mediate explicit listening strategy instruction within the constraints of the Moroccan CPGE system. By integrating observation, reflection, and interpretive analysis, the study captures the lived pedagogy of ELSI, revealing how theory translates into practice through the teacher's adaptive, reflective, and emotionally responsive mediation. The next section presents the findings and discussion, organized around the dual foci of teacher roles and pedagogical challenges.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of classroom observations and teacher reflections revealed a dynamic, multifaceted picture of mediation within ELSI. Teachers' discourse and behaviour consistently pointed to three complementary roles: strategic modelling, metacognitive scaffolding, and affective mediation, that together constituted the pedagogical core of ELSI. At the same time, teachers reported and exhibited several contextual and pedagogical challenges that constrained sustained implementation, including limited instructional time,

a persistent mismatch between students' proficiency and strategy sophistication, and the overwhelming influence of the exam-driven curriculum. The discussion below presents these findings in two integrated parts.

#### 4.1 Teacher Roles in Mediating ELSI

##### 4.1.1 Modelling and Explicit Demonstration of Strategies

Both participating teachers viewed explicit modelling as the pedagogical entry point of ELSI. Their instructional routines began with verbalized demonstrations of how to approach listening tasks by clarifying purpose, predicting content, identifying key words, and evaluating understanding. Observation notes showed that modelling often occurred through think-alouds (*"I'm listening for the cause of the problem... now I check if my prediction was correct"*), thereby making normally invisible mental processes audibly accessible to learners.

This practice resonates with Chamot's (2005) notion of cognitive apprenticeship, in which expert performance is externalized so that novices can observe and gradually emulate it. Through explicit modelling, teachers converted abstract strategy terminology, such as inferencing or monitoring, into actionable classroom behaviour. Anderson's (1995) information-processing model helps explain this function: modelling acts as a bridge from declarative to procedural knowledge, allowing learners to rehearse strategy use consciously before it becomes automatic.

Teacher reflections confirmed the perceived value of this role. T1 noted that *"students seemed unaware of what actually happens while listening; the modelling made them see the steps clearly."* However, both teachers acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining consistent explicitness without reducing fluency. T2 observed: *"Explaining strategies takes time; sometimes I felt I was over-talking instead of letting them listen."* This tension between explanation and experience exemplifies what Graham and Macaro (2008) describe as the explicitness-overload dilemma. This asserts that over-explicit instruction can be overwhelming and counterproductive, while too little can lead to a lack of clarity and progress. Therefore, teachers must provide clarity without overwhelming learners with meta-language.

Nevertheless, modelling was instrumental in transforming listening from a product-testing activity to a process-learning one. Students' subsequent reflections frequently referenced teacher demonstrations as *"useful reminders of what to do first,"* suggesting that modelling facilitated not only comprehension but also awareness of procedural order. In the Moroccan CPGE context, where listening had rarely been treated as teachable, such modelling represented a pedagogical shift towards a strategic conception of the skill.

##### 4.1.2 Scaffolding Metacognitive Regulation

Beyond initial modelling, teachers engaged in ongoing metacognitive scaffolding throughout listening tasks. Observation data revealed frequent prompting before, during, and after listening: *"What do you expect to hear?"*, *"Does this confirm your prediction?"*, *"How will you check your answer?"*. Such questioning operationalized Flavell's (1979) tripartite model of metacognition, planning, monitoring, and evaluation, and exemplified the external regulation that precedes learner self-regulation.

This scaffolding aligns closely with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, in which the teacher's prompts and feedback function as mediational tools enabling learners to operate at a higher cognitive level. The teachers' discourse often exhibited graduated assistance: initial prompts were explicit (*"Underline the key transition words"*), but as learners gained confidence, prompts became open-ended (*"What helped you catch that detail?"*). Such fading of support corresponds to the gradual release of responsibility advocated in constructivist pedagogy (Bruner, 1990).

Both teachers regarded metacognitive prompting as transformative. T1 wrote: *"Students began to anticipate questions; they started to plan before I asked."* This observation indicates the internalization of regulatory routines, a key indicator of metacognitive development (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). However, sustaining this reflective dialogue required considerable time and attentional management. T2 reflected: *"When students struggled with vocabulary, I had to decide whether to pause and guide or let them continue. Sometimes I feared losing their focus."* This underscores the teacher's complex cognitive load

during ELSI: simultaneously monitoring learner comprehension, adjusting scaffolding, and maintaining lesson momentum.

Overall, metacognitive scaffolding enabled learners to move from passive reception toward active comprehension management. Through guided reflection and iterative questioning, teachers modelled the thinking process of effective listeners, making strategy use not only explicit but dialogic. In line with Goh (2018), this process transformed the classroom into a reflective space where listening was treated as a skill of inquiry rather than an act of decoding.

#### 4.1.3 Affective and Motivational Mediation

A third dimension of teacher mediation concerned the affective climate of listening instruction. Both teachers consciously sought to counter learners' anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt which frequently impede listening performance (Arnold, 2011; Graham, 2017). Observation notes recorded instances where teachers normalized difficulty ("Even native speakers miss information; the goal is to notice, not to panic") and provided positive feedback emphasizing effort over accuracy.

This supportive discourse exemplifies Oxford's (2017) Strategic Self-Regulation (S<sup>2</sup>R) model, which integrates emotional regulation into strategy instruction. In the Moroccan CPGE context, where students often equate success with perfection and fear failure, such mediation proved crucial. T1's reflection

captured this ethos: "I realized that motivating students to persist was as important as teaching the strategy itself." Affective mediation also took practical forms, such as lowering task difficulty or allowing group discussion before answer-checking, thus creating zones of psychological safety that encouraged experimentation.

From a sociocultural perspective, these affective interventions represent social mediation of emotion, a precondition for sustained cognitive engagement (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). By reframing error as information rather than failure, teachers fostered a classroom discourse conducive to metacognitive risk-taking. This aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) argument that emotional support is inseparable from self-regulation, since motivation operates as both a cause and consequence of successful strategy use.

In sum, the affective dimension of mediation functioned as the emotional infrastructure of ELSI. Without it, cognitive and metacognitive guidance would likely have faltered under the pressures of the exam-oriented environment. Through empathy, reassurance, and motivational scaffolding, teachers sustained the very engagement necessary for strategic learning to occur.

These three mediational roles and their corresponding pedagogical functions are summarized in **Table 1**, which links observed practices to their theoretical underpinnings.

Table 1: Summary of Teacher Mediational Roles and Functions

Mediational Role	Core Pedagogical Functions	Underlying Theoretical Basis	Illustrative Practices in CPGE Context
1. Strategic Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating strategy use through think-alouds.</li> <li>• Making cognitive processes visible.</li> <li>• Clarifying purposes and sequencing of listening strategies.</li> </ul>	Cognitive Learning Theory (Anderson, 1983, 1995) Cognitive Apprenticeship (Chamot, 2005).	Teachers verbalized how to plan, predict, and verify during listening; used explicit modelling to connect abstract strategies with task performance.
2. Metacognitive Scaffolding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompting learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate comprehension.</li> </ul>	Metacognitive Theory (Flavell, 1979) Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978).	Teachers asked guiding questions before/during/after listening (e.g., "What do you expect to hear?"); shifted

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging self-questioning and reflective regulation.</li> <li>• Gradually releasing responsibility.</li> </ul>		from direct to open-ended prompts as learners gained autonomy.
3. <b>Affective Mediation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing anxiety and perfectionism.</li> <li>• Sustaining motivation and engagement.</li> <li>• Creating emotionally safe learning environments.</li> </ul>	Oxford's (2017) S <sup>2</sup> R Model; Sociocultural Mediation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).	Teachers normalized difficulty, praised effort, and allowed collaborative reflection to mitigate stress and encourage persistence.

*Note.* This table synthesizes observed teacher roles and functions identified in classroom data. It integrates theoretical anchors with context-specific pedagogical evidence.

#### 4.2 Pedagogical and Contextual Challenges

Despite the pedagogical promise of ELSI, teachers encountered multiple constraints that complicated its enactment. These challenges, though specific to the Moroccan CPGE system, echo patterns reported internationally in research on strategy-based instruction (Cross, 2015; Goh, 2010). They highlight the tension between innovation and institutional inertia, where theoretically sound approaches must contend with entrenched curricular, temporal, and affective barriers.

##### 4.2.1 Time and Curriculum Constraints

Both teachers identified time scarcity as the foremost obstacle to implementing ELSI systematically. CPGE English classes typically allocate limited hours per week, with syllabi dominated by reading, critical thinking, and writing tasks geared toward entrance examinations. Integrating explicit strategy instruction, which demands additional explanation, reflection, and feedback, was therefore perceived as competing with examinable content.

As T2 noted: *“Strategy work needs repetition, but the program leaves little space for recycling; I often rushed through post-listening reflection.”* This constraint led to selective rather than comprehensive implementation. Consequently, teachers focused on a few high-yield strategies (e.g., predicting, inferencing) while omitting others. Such selectivity, while pragmatic, risked fragmenting learners’ understanding of strategy interdependence. The phenomenon parallels

Chamot’s (2005) observation that without curricular integration, strategy instruction remains episodic rather than developmental.

Moreover, the product-orientation of the CPGE curriculum reinforced a testing culture antithetical to reflective pedagogy. Teachers reported that students frequently demanded immediate results (*“Will this help in the exam?”*) rather than long-term strategic growth. This instrumental mindset limited engagement in metacognitive dialogue and underscored the need for systemic curriculum reform aligning assessment with process-based objectives.

##### 4.2.2 Strategy–Proficiency Mismatch

A second recurrent challenge was the mismatch between students’ language proficiency and the cognitive demands of explicit strategy training. While CPGE students are intellectually capable, their listening proficiency often lags behind their reading or grammar competence. Teachers observed that weaker students struggled to verbalize strategies or articulate reflections in English, leading to superficial participation. T1 commented: *“Some learners understood the idea of monitoring but couldn’t express what they noticed.”*

This mismatch highlights a paradox in ELSI: strategies designed to compensate for limited proficiency may themselves require a threshold of linguistic ability for comprehension and discussion. Anderson’s (1995) model helps explain this tension: excessive cognitive load from decoding leaves little working-memory capacity for metacognitive monitoring. Consequently, teachers had to simplify

metacognitive metalanguage and provide bilingual explanations—a practical adaptation but one that risked diluting theoretical precision.

Furthermore, students' initial unfamiliarity with reflective learning created resistance. Accustomed to teacher-centred instruction, many perceived metacognitive questioning as peripheral to "real learning." T2 noted: *"At first, they saw reflection as extra work; it took weeks before they valued it."* This attitudinal inertia underscores the socio-cultural embeddedness of learning behaviours (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Teachers therefore acted not only as cognitive mediators but as cultural negotiators, gradually socializing learners into a new epistemology of learning grounded in self-regulation.

#### 4.2.3 Learner Resistance, Anxiety, and Exam Pressures

The third challenge emerged from the affective climate of high-stakes competition intrinsic to CPGE education. Students' perfectionism and fear of failure often produced anxiety during listening tasks, especially when the tasks involved unfamiliar accents or topics. Teachers observed that anxiety led to premature disengagement; students stopped listening after missing a key word. As T1 recounted: *"They panicked easily; they thought one missed word meant total failure."*

While teachers attempted to mitigate this through reassurance and group reflection, systemic exam pressures undermined sustained affective balance. Learners tended to prioritize accuracy over strategy experimentation, viewing risk-taking as counterproductive. This mirrors Graham's (2011) findings in European secondary contexts, where exam orientation fosters a performance-avoidance mindset that inhibits metacognitive growth.

Teachers themselves felt constrained by this environment. T2 noted: *"Sometimes I reverted to giving answers quickly because students became restless; they wanted closure, not exploration."* Such episodes illustrate how institutional culture shapes pedagogy, reinforcing what Field (2008) calls testing-of-comprehension syndrome—an overemphasis on correct answers at the expense of process insight.

The result was a pedagogical paradox: the very context that most needs strategic listening instruction (because of its cognitive demands) is the

one that least accommodates its reflective temporality. This finding underscores the necessity of re-conceptualizing listening pedagogy in exam-oriented systems, integrating assessment practices that value strategy awareness alongside comprehension accuracy.

#### 4.3 Integrative Discussion

Taken together, the findings suggest that teacher mediation in ELSI operates within a tension field between theory and context. On the one hand, teachers successfully enacted the three mediational roles theorized in Section 2: cognitive modelling, metacognitive scaffolding, and affective support, demonstrating the applicability of the cognitive-metacognitive-sociocultural framework. On the other hand, contextual constraints limited the sustainability of these practices.

The data reaffirm the theoretical proposition that teacher mediation is both cognitive and sociocultural. Teachers not only guided learners' mental operations but also negotiated institutional expectations and emotional climates. Their discourse functioned as the mediational link between abstract strategy models and situated learner experience, a role consistent with Vygotsky's conception of semiotic mediation. At the same time, the necessity of constant adaptation (simplifying language, managing time, responding to anxiety) reflected the constructivist principle of pedagogical responsiveness, in which meaning is co-constructed under specific contextual conditions.

The findings thus advance three key insights:

1. ELSI requires dialogic pedagogy. Teacher mediation transforms strategy instruction from a top-down delivery model into an interactive process of shared reflection.
2. Teacher agency is constrained yet creative. Within curricular limits, teachers exercised professional judgment to contextualize theory as an expression of adaptive expertise (Hatano & Inagaki, 1995).
3. Sustainable ELSI implementation depends on systemic alignment. Without institutional recognition of reflection and process-based assessment, teachers' mediational efforts remain fragile innovations.

Ultimately, the Moroccan CPGE case illustrates that explicit listening strategy instruction succeeds not merely through learner training but through teacher empowerment founded on the ability of teachers to integrate cognitive, metacognitive, and affective mediation despite systemic constraints. The

dynamic interaction of these mediational dimensions within contextual constraints is illustrated in **Figure 1**, which models teacher mediation in ELSI as an interconnected system linking cognitive, metacognitive, and affective processes.

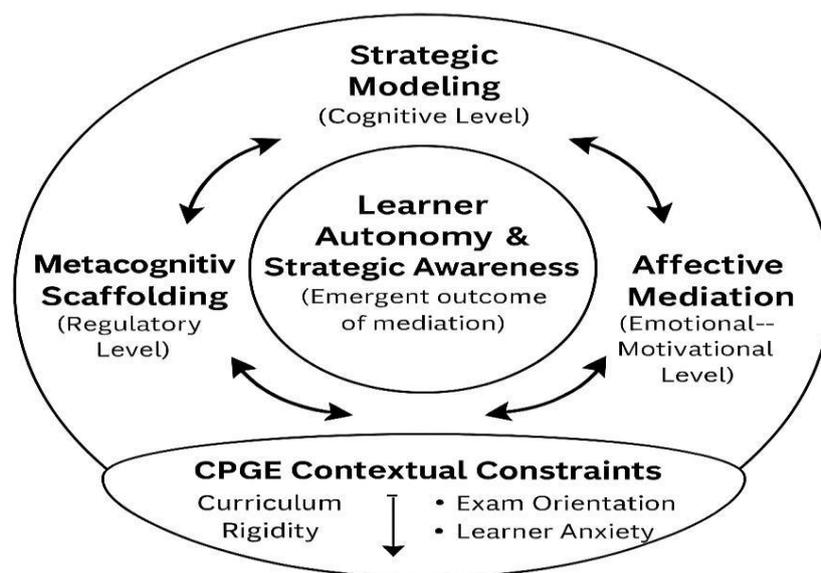


Fig.1: Thematic Model of Teacher Mediation in Explicit Listening Strategy Instruction (ELSI).

**Note:** The thematic model conceptualizes teacher mediation as a cyclical, triadic system integrating cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions. Strategic modelling initiates cognitive engagement, metacognitive scaffolding supports regulation, and affective mediation sustains motivation. Bidirectional arrows indicate iterative reinforcement among the three roles, while the surrounding contextual layer (curricular, temporal and affective constraints) exerts downward pressure. Learner autonomy and strategic awareness emerge at the centre as the dynamic outcome of this mediation process.

## V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study underscore that the success of Explicit Listening Strategy Instruction (ELSI) depends not only on learners' strategic engagement but, crucially, on the teacher's capacity to mediate cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions of the listening process. Teachers' ability to model, scaffold, and emotionally sustain learner participation transforms theoretical frameworks into actionable pedagogy. Yet the analysis has also

revealed that effective mediation is neither intuitive nor context-neutral: it requires deliberate training, institutional support, and curricular flexibility. The following implications thus target three interdependent domains—teacher education, curriculum development, and pedagogical practice.

### 5.1 Teacher Education and Professional Development

First, the study highlights an urgent need for systematic professional preparation in strategy-based listening pedagogy. Most teachers enter the classroom with solid linguistic competence but limited training in how to teach listening as a strategic, metacognitively driven skill. ELSI demands pedagogical knowledge that extends beyond task administration to encompass modelling of cognitive processes, questioning techniques for metacognitive prompting, and sensitivity to learner affect.

Teacher-education programs—both pre-service and in-service—should therefore incorporate modules on metacognitive scaffolding and sociocultural mediation. These modules could include

micro-teaching sessions in which instructors practice think-aloud modelling, guided reflection design, and adaptive scaffolding strategies. As Richards and Farrell (2011) and Borg (2006) note, teacher cognition evolves through reflective engagement rather than prescriptive training; thus, professional development initiatives should foster communities of practice where teachers collaboratively analyse listening tasks, share challenges, and develop context-appropriate mediation techniques.

Moreover, sustained mentorship is essential. Teachers in the present study expressed the need for ongoing dialogue and feedback to refine their mediation strategies. Establishing professional learning circles within CPGE institutions would allow continuous reflection and adaptation, aligning with Schön's (1983) model of the reflective practitioner.

### **5.2 Curriculum and Assessment Reform**

Second, the findings call for curricular realignment that acknowledges listening as a teachable skill rather than a testing instrument. The current CPGE syllabus privileges text-based comprehension and written production, offering minimal space for explicit strategy training. Without curricular recognition, ELSI remains an isolated innovation sustained by individual teacher initiative rather than institutional policy.

Curriculum designers should therefore integrate strategy awareness outcomes into official syllabi and examination frameworks. Assessment tasks could include brief reflective components – such as learner justifications of their listening approach or strategy self-reports – that reward process awareness alongside accuracy. Such integration would signal to both teachers and learners that metacognitive engagement constitutes legitimate learning.

Additionally, time allocation within English courses should be reconsidered. As teachers in this study demonstrated, effective mediation requires pacing, reflection, and iterative practice – elements incompatible with overcrowded lesson plans. Allocating regular micro-sessions for listening reflection or peer discussion would enhance sustainability and learner transfer.

### **5.3 Classroom Pedagogy and Learner Autonomy**

Third, classroom practice should evolve toward a dialogic and reflective model of listening instruction. Teachers should view themselves not merely as information providers but as co-participants in learners' meaning construction. Embedding short metacognitive dialogues – before and after listening tasks – can transform listening from a passive activity into a site of strategic inquiry.

To address proficiency and anxiety constraints, teachers can adopt tiered scaffolding: providing simplified strategy language, using bilingual explanations when necessary, and progressively reducing support as learners gain autonomy. Collaborative reflection through pair- or group-based debriefings can further normalize strategy talk, reducing the cognitive load of individual introspection.

Crucially, teachers must cultivate an emotionally safe classroom environment. As Oxford's (2017) Strategic Self-Regulation model posits, emotional regulation underpins all other forms of learning regulation. Encouraging risk-taking, validating partial understanding, and reframing error as learning opportunity can counteract the performance anxiety endemic to CPGE settings.

### **5.4 Towards Systemic Sustainability**

Finally, for ELSI to become sustainable, it must be institutionalized as a whole-system initiative rather than a classroom experiment. Policymakers and inspectorates should provide explicit guidelines, exemplar materials, and training opportunities that operationalize strategy instruction principles within the national curriculum. Encouraging teacher-led action research on listening pedagogy would further bridge the gap between theory and practice, positioning teachers as agents of innovation rather than passive implementers.

In essence, ELSI thrives where teachers are empowered to act as reflective mediators supported by enabling curricula and responsive institutions. The Moroccan CPGE context demonstrates both the promise and the fragility of innovation when such alignment is absent. Building on these findings, future reforms should envision the listening classroom as a collaborative laboratory of strategic awareness – where teacher mediation, learner reflection, and

institutional vision converge to redefine what it means to “teach” listening in EFL education.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the complex pedagogical reality of implementing Explicit Listening Strategy Instruction (ELSI) in Morocco’s Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles (CPGE), focusing specifically on the teacher’s mediating role. The analysis has shown that teacher mediation constitutes the pivotal mechanism through which ELSI principles are translated into classroom practice. Three interrelated mediational functions—strategic modelling, metacognitive scaffolding, and affective regulation—emerged as essential for fostering learners’ strategic awareness and engagement. These findings affirm that listening strategy instruction succeeds not through theoretical clarity alone but through teachers’ dialogic and adaptive orchestration of cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional dimensions of learning.

At the same time, the study revealed enduring systemic and contextual constraints that limit sustained implementation, including time scarcity, exam-oriented curricula, and students’ initial resistance to reflective learning. Such challenges highlight the need for pedagogical reform that empowers teachers as reflective practitioners rather than procedural implementers. The Moroccan CPGE context thereby serves as a microcosm of broader tensions in EFL education, where innovation must continually negotiate institutional rigidity and affective pressures.

Theoretically, this paper extends existing models of ELSI by positioning teacher mediation as an integrative construct linking cognitive, sociocultural, and affective dimensions of instruction. Pedagogically, it advocates for teacher training programs that foreground metacognitive scaffolding and emotional support as complementary components of listening pedagogy. Future research should investigate teacher cognition longitudinally—how beliefs, practices, and contexts co-evolve as teachers gain expertise in strategy-based instruction.

Ultimately, promoting sustainable ELSI requires a systemic alignment of teacher agency, learner autonomy, and curricular vision—a triadic

foundation for reimagining listening not merely as comprehension, but as a consciously regulated act of meaning-making.

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# A Fine Family: The Eventful Years of a Nation's History

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 30 Sep 2025; Received in revised form: 23 Oct 2025; Accepted: 27 Oct 2025; Available online: 31 Oct 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 – Partition, Independence, Migration, Emergency, Realism</b></p>	<p><i>The riots before and after the independence and partition of India became the theme of many Indian writers in English. The events in A Fine Family are reported before the reader in an objective manner and it is told by an independent narrator. The novel has three sections. The first one, Lyallpur, presents Bauji as a successful legal practitioner in the years immediately before Independence. The most important consequence of the freedom from British rule is the partition of the sub-continent. The communal clashes that accompanied it is the greatest catastrophe in the history of India. The second section presents the rebuilding of life in India by the migrant families and Tara's life in Simla. The events leading to Emergency are described in detail in the third section. The central character of this section of the novel is Arjun, Bauji's grandson. The later generation were born into a democratic secular socialist republic, and they are brought up by imbibing these democratic values. Hence, they expressed their moral indignation when freedom was outraged in the guise of the declaration of Emergency. To them Emergency is only a temporary insanity. The sufferings of the people at the time of partition are portrayed realistically in the novel. The miseries and hardships of an entire population who are forced to migrate from their native land is the most dismal consequence of independence. There is also the realistic portrayal of the tortures inflicted upon the victims of Emergency in the prison. A Fine Family provides a real critique of the Indian society from the pre-independent era till the post Emergency period.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The events that accompanied the independence and partition of India is a terrible catastrophic chapter in the history of India. The riots before and after the partition and the formation of the two states -India and Pakistan-became the theme of many Indian writers in English. Many of these writers portrayed this era through a fictionalized mode of narration. Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Amitav Ghosh etc. are some of the writers who narrated the troubled period through

fictional characters and events. Gurcharan Das also finds his space among these writers through his imaginative representation of a family who lived in India in both the periods of history i.e., the pre-independent and the post-independent India. Gomathi Narayan's observation regarding post-partition novels is pertinent in the case of Gurcharan Das's novel *A Fine Family*.

Since the guilt for the communal strife and the violence of partition is strongly felt, it is but

natural that the search for scapegoats should be rigorous. Indian leaders and politicians are the most hated group of scapegoats on the fiction on partition, which shows the ordinary people, Muslims and the Hindus alike, as mere pawns in the hands of power-hungry leaders, a gullible herd misled by crafty politicians" (The Sahibs and the Natives,102)

## II. DISCUSSION

The events in *A Fine Family* are reported before the reader in an objective manner and it is told by an independent narrator. The narrator witnesses the events in the life of three generations-Bauji who has the experience of a life in British India and the independent but divided India, his daughter Tara and her son Arjun; who has experienced only the life of independent India. They have lived through the most turbulent and memorable years of the history of India and have a direct confrontation with the hardships of those troubled times. These hardships confronted Bauji in the form of partition, while Arjun faced it in the guise of Emergency.

The novel has three sections. The first one, Lyallpur, presents Bauji as a successful legal practitioner in the years immediately before Independence. The dark clouds of a division on the basis of religion have already appeared in the firmament of Indian political scene. The admiration for the British on the part of the Indian people is slowly faded. Hence, Bauji hesitated for a moment when he was invited to a party at the Collectors'. He mused, "In the past an invitation to the Burra Sahib would have been regarded as a great honour, and the town's elite would have been scrambled for invitations. (*A Fine Family*,13). But he has self-doubt also. Hence, he asked" But chachi, do you think we are ready for freedom?" (13)

Bauji's attitude towards the independence of his homeland was a balanced one. He weighed the merits and demerits of the British administration in India. He realized that India's problem is not only in the alien rule, but also in the behaviour of the Indian leaders. "The mischief had been unleashed not by Jinnah alone (as everyone believed) but also by

Gandhi."(32) That was his attitude to the communal struggle, though he realized that these clashes are a strategy adopted by the British to prolong their sway over the nation. To him, all the Indian political leaders are dreamers. He is of the belief that their idealistic vision will never become a reality. Hence, there is no disillusionment on his part when India became free. But many a youth like Karan, Bauji's nephew, who fought for independence later changed to an affected and cultured socialite. This change was the result of the disparity between their idealistic vision of a free India and the reality that was India. Karan represents a cross-section of society of those days. The problems of socializing in clubs are a part of Western culture. Hence the conclusion that the colonial domination was social, political, religious and intellectual.

The most important consequence of the freedom from British rule is the partition of the sub-continent. The communal clashes that accompanied it is the greatest catastrophe in the history of India. Perhaps, it is one of the paradoxes of history that what was achieved through non-violence brought with it one of the bloodiest upheavals of history. The religious leaders who should have showed the way of patience, prompted people to kill each other. When Bauji asked the Muslim boys who came to kill him why they kill Hindus, the innocent reply of the boys was "because we will go to heaven. Our mullah says that a Mussalman gets seven beautiful women in heaven if he kills a Kafir" (100)

The novel as a whole is a depiction of the events that accompanied partition. Gurcharan Das has devoted a major part of the work for giving a word picture of these scenes. Incidents of looting and arson are described in detail. The rise in the price of things and shortage of food items present the social milieu of those days. The horror and terrible torture experienced by the migrants at the time of partition are revealed through the writings of Dr. Des Raj. It is presented in the form of a chronicle. The chronology of events reveals the atrocious and most despicable acts of the Muslims towards the Hindu refugees. Dr. Des Raj describes the mutilated and disfigured women whom he has treated at the refugee camps. Some of them survived, while others succumbed to these injuries. These atrocious and

heinous acts are not restricted to one side. The crimes committed by the Hindus towards the Muslim refugees are equally or even more heinous. Medicines and other equipment are not available at the refugee camp. The description of his patients and his primitive treatment have a pathetic tone. The extracts from the doctor's diary are presented as such in the novel. The intertwining of the narration and these extracts intensify the effects of these terrible facts and provides credibility to it.

The untold miseries experienced by the migrants is one the darkest chapters in the history of independent India. The novelist presents the miserable predicament of the Hindu migrants. "They fought for water and drank every drop till nothing, but mud was left.... They had to choose, whether to die of thirst or from the Muslim's sword." (110). The inhumanity and the humiliation faced by the people belonging to the two different faiths are numerous. Both the sides have to prove their faith in order to save themselves from the attacks, as the Muslim tongawalla in the novel. "They would have killed me too, had I not immediately dropped my salwar and shown them my circumcised penis." (103). Anyone who is less fanatical is branded as a non-believer or a betrayer. Hamid's inability to give shelter to Bauji and his family can be attributed to this aspect as he became helpless in a fanatical society.

Many Indian writers have dealt with the theme of partition. Many of them have the feeling that the politicians of the day have done little to tackle the situation. The political leaders are presented as power-hungry which aggravated the difficulties of the people. The main concern of the people when they heard about the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was whether the assassin was a Hindu or a Muslim, as it leads to an outbreak of communal violence. Gandhiji sacrificed his life at the altar of Hindu-Muslim unity, when he was accused of being pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu and was shot to death by a Hindu fanatic. Seva Ram, Tara's husband was relieved to learn that the killer was not a Muslim, but a Hindu fanatic.

The second section presents the rebuilding of life in India by the migrant families and Tara's life in Simla. The refugees faced the trauma of rebuilding life

from the grassroot level. Some of them, like Bauji, succeeded in this process of rebuilding. But it cannot be ignored that they have also encountered the problems of partition and migration in the worst possible manner. Bauji lost his youngest daughter when he and his family attempted to save themselves from the firing of the attackers. Bauji who was wounded and had lost his health would not have lived to rebuild the life in the divided India, but for the timely care and attention of Anees, the daughter of the Muslim DIG at Lahore. It is noteworthy that she had wired to Dr, Hamid, another Muslim to enquire the whereabouts of Bauji and his family. Actually, the Hindu-Muslim enmity was a mass hysteria created by the foreign rulers. It was from his Muslim friends that Bauji's family got the much-required help at the time of their migration from Lyallpur.

The division of the nation to India and Pakistan is the after effect of the much-cherished freedom. In the novel, there is a factual report of the entire developments that happened in connection with the granting of freedom. The line of demarcation is drawn by Sir. Cyril Radcliffe in a capricious manner. There was no rationality behind this division. Unprecedented transfer of population, killing, kidnapping and rape are the consequences of this whimsical act. But who is there to shoulder the responsibility of these untoward happenings.? The tendency of everyone is to blame the other party. This attitude is voiced by Anees.

Who is to blame, Bauji? Your people blame Jinnah for breeding hatred between Hindus and Muslims because he wanted a homeland for the Muslims. I blame the Sikhs who started the killing in East Punjab. My father blames General Rees and his Punjab Boundary Force for their failure to keep law and order. (116).

It is great to be free from the foreign rule, but the price paid for it by the people is very large. People's faith in the leaders has faded. They began to misjudge the intention of the leaders. They can find no justification to the partition. That is why Tara asked Karan:

Why did Nehru, Patel and others agree to Mountbatten's plan for partition? Is it true that they felt they were getting old and wanted a

taste of power before they died? God knows they deserved it after struggling for thirty years. But couldn't they have held out for a united India? (156).

The wound inflicted on the minds of the people due to this disproportionate division of the country can never be healed. This division was a slight miscalculation on the part of the freedom fighters, who were the leaders of the time. Karan's words, "I think they also had a conviction that once Pakistan was conceded the reason for communal violence would vanish. Patel used to say that once the cancerous growth was surgically removed, health would be restored to body politic." (157) . The statement has historical veracity. But it was an error of judgement on the part of the leaders. Instead of curing the disease, the remedy aggravated the malady. But it was not the leaders who are disillusioned but the people on either side of the line of demarcation. They hoped in vain that the line should not have been drawn to divide the country.

India didn't have to be divided in 1947. And we cheaply sold away the birthright of the Indian Muslim. In fact, the Muslim majority areas which became Pakistan were the ones which least needed to be protected from the Hindus. It was the Hindus in these areas, on the contrary, who needed to be protected?" (285).

Even the Muslims began to think on this line. History proves that Jinnah had done a terrible mischief to the Muslims in India. He himself realized this at a later stage.

Jinnah's concern was only Muslim dominated areas in undivided India, not Muslims in Hindu dominated area. He believed that the latter would remain minorities and should not obstruct the freedom of a majority of Muslims in the subcontinent. But this did not happen, and a large number of lives were lost when respective minorities in India and Pakistan tried to cross over to the other side. Out of nearly hundred million Muslim population, less than a quarter lived in West Pakistan and less than one-third in East Pakistan . Over forty million Muslims did not go to Pakistan, and a large

number of Hindus continued to reside in East Pakistan. Jinnah had not visualized it, and had no idea how to resolve this problem" (9,10) .

The Muslims themselves believed that Jinnah had wronged them. They felt betrayed by him. The author points out this attitude through the words of Anees "We got swayed by Jinnah into believing that Muslims couldn't survive in India....and if Jinnah himself hadn't believed in it he wouldn't have left forty million Muslims behind in India" (285). But this disillusionment is only on the part of those who had an experience of the life in British India. To them, the independence of the country, the consequent partition and the transfer of people bear no fruits. They thought that nothing good was achieved by suffering these hardships. They found their leaders as dreamers.

But there is a wide gap between these people and those who have only an experience of the life in independent India. The later generation were born into a democratic secular socialist republic, and they are brought up by imbibing these democratic values. Hence, they expressed their moral indignation when freedom was outraged in the guise of the declaration of Emergency. To them Emergency is only a temporary insanity. They have not lived in an India ruled by alien powers, they have not lived in the anticipation of freedom, which also brings with it a threat of uprootedness. They have not experienced the pangs of segregation and the humiliation of being a refugee. But they have to confront terrible political problems. The period of Emergency is a dismal arena in the history of independent India. Democracy gave way to dictatorship. Bauji experienced the worst possible elements of partition, but Arjun, his grandson, had a taste of imprisonment during Emergency.

The events leading to Emergency are described in detail in the third section. The central character of this section of the novel is Arjun. The court order concerning the election of prime-minister Indira Gandhi and her consequent declaration of Emergency and the arrest of the opposition leaders are part of history. The people are concerned about the political happenings of the country. But while talking about these events, the family of Bauji never thinks that Arjun must become a victim

of these untoward developments in the country. In the novel, there appears questions which are pertinent even in today's political scene." Every five years people go to the polls and vote for whom they are told to vote. There's no real opposition; there's only the Nehru family. Is that really a democracy?" (306) The question is asked in the political context of 1975. But the question is pertinent as the novelist asks it later, and he has observed the political developments up to the time till he had written the novel.

Arjun was arrested and detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). He realized that he had become a victim of the Emergency. "This is Sanjay Gandhi's Raj, eh?" (310). He protested. In the prison, he witnessed the tortures inflicted upon a boy who is branded as a Naxalite. "... His wrists handcuffed, waist roped, one eye purple and swollen, blood trickling down his cheek. (311). There is no need to doubt the historical veracity of the inhumanities in the prison during this period. The only difference is in the characters. The manner of treatment and the sufferings of the victims are the same as is presented in the novel. Arjun also had a taste of the punishment inflicted upon a rebel in prison.

Gurcharan Das has tried his best to bring out the hypocritical attitude of Mrs. Gandhi, as she called an election after the Emergency. Through the thoughts of Arjun, he dissected the period of Emergency, its effects on the people's mind and the changes brought about in the country. The novelist expressed a mocking attitude towards the political leader who had declared Emergency and suppressed the basic liberty of the individuals, and later as a gesture of magnanimity, released all political opponents from prison and called on the elections according to the democratic system. "Even a tyrant, Arjun had thought with amusement, needs the people's consent" (325).

After independence, changes are visible not only in the political scene of the country, but also in the social scene. The Hindu Code Bill which was passed in 1955 by the Nehru government is a landmark in the social development of the country. Tara, Bauji's daughter, wanted to make use of the opportunity available through this reform. She represented the

young Hindu women of India who considered the reform a boost to their self-respect. But people like Bauji who belong to an older generation had only contempt for such a reform. "How can these people think they can abolish dowry by legislation? Idealistic fools! No daughter in this country will be married without dowry. Just because there is a law, do you think people will do away with centuries of custom?" (169,170)

### III. CONCLUSION

Through the three sections of the novel, Das has touched almost all the developments in the independent India till the period of Mrs. Gandhi's return to power after the defeat of 1977 general election. Even the discussions about the Indo-China war and Nehru's foreign policy figure many times in the novel as it deals with almost all the eventful years in Indian history. The period of Emergency with its brutal and ugly aspects are revealed in this novel. The sufferings of the people at the time of partition are portrayed realistically in the novel. The miseries and hardships of an entire population who are forced to migrate from their native land is the most dismal consequence of independence. There is also the realistic portrayal of the tortures inflicted upon the victims of Emergency in the prison. The changes and reforms in the social system are also given importance in the novel.

There is the objective narrator who does not take part in the events and incidents, but who is a silent spectator of the events of Bauji's family for three generations. He is also a sensitive observer of the social and political changes of the period. Though his narration is in an objective manner, he is not actually detached from the entire happenings. At times he, the mouthpiece of the novelist, made it clear where his sympathies lay; and at times when he requires the reader's sympathy, he narrated it in such a manner to influence their thoughts and decisions and to evoke their feelings. *A Fine Family* provides a real critique of the Indian society from the pre-independent era till the post Emergency period by portraying how the intellectual and emotional trauma of the age affected the members of a family which is a microcosmic representation of the Indian society of the period.

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