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Praxis

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The Department of English
University of Rajshahi

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writting.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed

Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication

Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Conrad's Western Women in Exotic Space: A Reading of "Because of the Dollars"

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Abstract

Debates on Conrad's intention in writing stories in Eastern settings never get exhausted, yet never offer enough consummated insights. Amidst his Malay stories, he often portrays the East with Eastern characters, leaving himself in the predicament of being labelled as a manifest Orientalist. The short story, "Because of the Dollars", almost resonating with the same notion, presents Western characters in an Eastern space where irrationality takes place, colonial greed soars, and Western women become victims of colonial desires; but still, the idealistic foundation of imperialism remains largely unchallenged. This paper examines whether Conrad intentionally exoticizes his Western women characters in the exotic land of the East to justify its presupposed irrationality, and emboldens, in turn, the western self-proclaimed notion of superiority, or whether the Eastern landscape functions solely as a dramatic backdrop. As this story depicts a falling woman, Laughing Anne, Conrad's disposal of her in a far Eastern land becomes symbolic, redefining the parameters with which narratives of both East and West are measured. Observing the incessant brutality of colonialism, the paper adopting an ecofeminist lens also harps on how women and nature intersect, sharing a history of subjugation and oppression fueled by imperialism.

Keywords: ecofeminism, empire, exoticism, female resistance, gender, orientalism.

Conrad's fictions, in several exegeses, are already framed through Said's notion of Orientalism, where the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is shaped by power and domination. Keeping that in mind, this paper particularly focuses on the story – "Because of the Dollars", which Conrad employs in an Eastern setting – to speculate if his performance is one like the potboilers who condones to the imperialistic ideology or he simply tries to neutrally hint at the precarious condition that colonialism brings forth on people's life – especially, on women's life. In the story, Conrad tacitly points out internal colonial clashes that serve the fates of the major characters tragically with melodramatic effects as if the convolution of the colonial relationship is hard to unentangle. Imperialism and its obstinate evil child colonialism cannot be deciphered in simple terms remaining within the text only, as to derive its overarching motive, one has to recognize the concealed internal intricacies of the Western people who help colonization take a prodigious form with a prospect of profiting themselves. "Because of the Dollars" does not offer any prominent indigenous community or any native of that sort for conducting an investigation on them, yet the absence of these elements in an Eastern landscape marks it sinister, opening new doors for numerous probable interpretations. Along with it, Said's way of reading a text "contrapuntally" is important, since it offers a counter-narrative that can be projected on the textual and contextual history of a canonical text to reveal the author's Eurocentric view of the Oriental (Said 78). Conrad's Eastern setting-related texts offer a bizarre experience when analysed considering, to use Said's words, "what went into it" and "what its author excluded" (Said 79). His portrayal of

western women in the story further sparks the notion that women are never recognized as individuals or equal to men, no matter what superior country they belong to, as evidenced by characters like Laughing Anne or Davidson's wife here. Since this paper aspires to incorporate the strands of ecofeminism to realize the intersection between colonial destruction of the environment and the oppression of women, deciphering the psychological attachment of women to nature is a great part of concern here. Besides, Conrad's attitude towards endowing the female characters with agency and resistance signals his empathic quality, which this paper also acknowledges.

The fact, that Conrad's narrative style embeds an abundance of hints to scrutinize whether the impression of imperialism drives his writerly moves or not, is evident in his short story "Because of the Dollars". The story, with the exotic setting in "gorgeous East" ("BD" 169)[1] and with a frame narrative style, proceeds with White traders and revolves around them, and yet, a critical reader can pull out the effects that imperialism imposes subtly on crafting the characters. Davidson, the protagonist of whose story the outer narrator's friend Hollis narrates as the second narrator, is generally identified as a victim at the end of the story despite being portrayed as a "*good* man" ("BD" 169), and "thoroughly humane" ("BD" 171). With the honest intention of trading with old dollars, Davidson started his journey to the remote island – "Mirrah" ("BD" 180), but encounters an unexpected blow of a grotesque situation on his return by some loathsome thugs, who plan to rob him of the old dollars. These thugs who are four in number, taking a hostage of the abode of Laughing Anne – a friend of Davidson from long ago – and her husband, Bamtz – a rather cheap opportunist and fearful lowly White creature – wait for Davidson's crossing of the island, revealing their ill intention to the couple who cannot help but is compelled to comply with the thugs out of fright. Even though Laughing Anne admonishes the protagonist secretly, especially about the murderous tendency of the handless Frenchman among the four, Davidson, in his disbelief, lingers to take reasonable precautions, imagining the absurdity of this whole setup and therefore, acts cowardly, procrastinating at the most crucial moment, resembling the Hamletian dilemma[2]. As a grave consequence, Laughing Anne falls victim to the most terrible play of fate by being accidentally murdered by the Frenchman. The ironic death of Laughing Anne is not simply a matter of cathartic arousal, for it is deeply embedded in the logic of imperial greed and its malignant, distorted outgrowth –coloniality. With extreme trading in dollars, the time of this story offers the zenith where imperialist covetousness almost ensnares every creature, especially the traders, from the West to some of the East. Perceiving from this angle, it is quite problematic to still hold Davidson as a good Davidson and not a devil Davidson.

Underneath the story, there lie layers of imperialist techniques – like spatial othering, exoticization, moral dualism, and gendered silencing – that gear the destinies of the characters that revolve around the story, which cannot be sorted without a meta-critical study of Conrad's own positionality within the imperial discourse. As a person, Conrad is enigmatic, skeptical, and language, for him, is a fragile form of conveying meaning, which immensely affected his writing,

[1] Henceforth, "Because of the Dollars" will appear in short form "BD" in parentheses along with the page numbers.

[2] The enigmatic character Hamlet – Prince of Dutch, is best known for his procrastination in avenging his father's death, which he is assigned by the apparition of his father. Breaking the wall of the underworld, the ghost reveals his tragic murder at the hands of his own brother, yet Hamlet cannot take any immediate measures due to his split personality and excessively wrong way of thinking. His prolonged way of committing an actual action causes the deaths of several with a sheer melodramatic effect.

and therefore, that he is one of the well-wishers of imperialism is only obscurely deciphered. An article of Aisha Dauda Daura argues that "for Conrad, imperialism, despite its moral questions, is a concrete incarnation of the positive values of work, duty and loyalty, and stoical submission (to the Empire) – values which the uncivilized world must be taught by the European adventurer" (161). Deploying this ethos in his work, it can initially be assumed that Conrad is less shocked by the proliferation of empire; rather he romanticizes the very idea of it; that is why commercialism is seen as a normal practice worldwide by him in his stories. But there is always a tension that lurks in Conrad's way of expressing, which sets him apart from established imperialists like Kipling.

However, colonialists like Bamtz or the Frenchman in the story bring the worst image for imperialism's intention, no matter if the intention is honest or not. While the former operates a moderate taming of the East by his "unique beard" in the "wilderness" to make himself less obnoxious to "large communities of people" in "towns" (BD 177), the latter is overtly exposed to act grievously to achieve his means. Thus, these two – Bamtz and the Frenchman – offer two different types of colonizers who simultaneously contribute to a malfunction to occur, one with his impaired courage that restrains him from taking a moral action, while the other with a vicious tendency to satiate his greed by meeting any grim means respectively. Bamtz is more inclined to trick people in the "wilderness" – "the outskirts of virgin forest" (BD 177) – so that he cannot be suspected of committing swindles among the town people who are generally considered more progressive than the people in the outskirts. The reason Bamtz lives in the quiet Mirrah is because he can loaf on by cadging without losing the slightest impression that he gains by showing off his crafted beard to the people of the mainland in the East. "You know how impressed Orientals are by a fine beard" (BD 177) is Hollis's remark while pulling Bamtz's traits into words, characterizing him as resembling an Orientalist himself. This certainly reveals how the psychology of an opportunist like Bamtz works as a means to misuse the imperialist idea of settlement, making the East a place where moral compromise, duality in nature, and decline in ethicality are a regular and normal phenomenon.

Conrad even brings Abdullah, an Arab trader of Sambir in the East, from his novel *Almayer's Folly*, just to make the narrator reliable while making the narrative not entirely alienated from the natives. Abdullah, playing a shrewd character there, is amused and falls under the cast of a white loafer, Bamtz, just because of the mysterious coiffure of the beard he carries, which makes the collaboration fit to embolden an Orientalist view. This incident acutely resembles the last famous drama of Shakespeare – *The Tempest,* where the exotic creature – Caliban, of the unnamed island easily becomes a subject to the fop and boisterous Stephano when he offers liquor to him presenting it as holy grail for his ailment caused by the colonizer, Prospero. Many critics have contextualized the drama with the adventurous Victorian journey towards the breeding of imperialism and their representation of wine as an instrument to subdue exotic people for colonial activities. Not only does Bamtz's disposition resemble Stephano's, but it seems Conrad's illustration of the story has also been majorly influenced by Act 2, Scene 2 of the drama. When the heartbroken and prostitute Laughing Anne is upheld to be the wife of the idle Bamtz, she is interpreted in the manner that "despair, like misfortune, makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows" (BD 180) which resonates with the dialogue of Trinculo, the jester and friend of Stephano, who ends up escaping from the brewing storm by taking shelter with a "strange fish", actually Caliban, and utters with his dismay that "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows" (*Tempest* 2.2.38 –39). The influence of *The Tempest* is evident in the making of "Because of the Dollars", and Conrad perhaps, chose the Eastern setting to exoticize and make his story dramatically real in the eyes of Europeans.

The “maimed Frenchman” (BD 187), on the contrary, has the most malicious quality, for whom the story takes a melodramatic turn. What is more appalling is the hunger for money that leads him to take an abominably hideous measure of an act. But like the Frenchman, the idea of imperialism is “maimed” with the thought of profit and wealth, which eventually leads to imperialism’s irretrievable dungeon of the diseased. That the distrust of French-English colonies was in the mind of the writer while writing this story could be a self-evident proof to point the finger at the causes of internal colonial clashes. Davidson’s disposition can be critically analysed to sum up the English-French rivalry of that time. Even though the Dutch-English mistrust is more prominent in most of Conrad’s Eastern settings, he intentionally seems to bring a Frenchman this time to give us some ideas about the whole political enterprises that gradually devour the vast independence of the Malay Archipelago. We have seen the influence of Dutch men in *Almayer’s Folly* and ubiquity of Dutch “authorities” in “Freya of the Seven Isles” of whom Freya’s father Nelson (Old Nielson) has a perilous feeling, as he believes that the Dutch are – “capable of “playing any ugly trick on a man”” (Conrad 9). The Dutch lieutenant, Heemskirk, from the latter story, gets infuriated because Freya, the female protagonist, is certainly not inclined to his obnoxious traits and instead deeply in love with Jasper Allen, a rather naïve English trader. This culminates in a melodramatic scene where the light-hearted story starts to sink into a traumatic end. Conrad’s “Because of the Dollar” almost has the same style as the story gives off a vibe not so ominous in the first place, but ends with the most malicious and unfortunate note. Adopting a French villain to design a grim murder makes Davidson, as an Englishman, an archetype for all the benevolent Englishmen out there. This representation of Dutch and Frenchmen further solidifies the stereotypical idea that the English are the one who comes with a moral intention only. If seen from Said’s methodology of “strategic location” (*Orientalism* 20), Conrad’s ulterior motive might indicate to several interpretations, considering how empire, readership, and institutions of his time have shaped his view of the Orientals. Again, some analytics, scrutinizing his autobiography, believe that Conrad barely holds any positive or romantic notion about imperialism and still offers, as Marialuisa Bignami states, “no remedy to suggest, no way to point to, but keeps fondly and single-mindedly going back to a world of jungle unvanquished by European governments” (210). This suggests that he himself was perhaps bewildered and baffled about the rampant soaring of imperialism and its offshoot colonialism, yet he escapes from being the reason of sparking trouble in the way of it, which makes Conrad even more of a problematic author. Perhaps, he was neither a supporter of wholesale rejection of imperialism nor promoted its unchecked proliferation. But that does not make Conrad any better a critic of imperialism either, since taking no side is also an implicit form of taking the side of the dominants.

Then again, from a broader perspective, the authorship and his acute feeling of not belonging to a root have merged in the case of Conrad, culminating in his flinching attitude towards imperialism and its outgrowth, colonialism. Thereby, his actions of writing in a country which is not his own, using the language which is also distant from his mother tongue, and for a readership who is again not akin to him by nationality, already weigh heavily on him to earn a reputation in an array like this. In such circumstances, an aspiring writer sometimes acquiesces in being a potboiler, yet Conrad perhaps has marked himself safe from that label because he also strived to portray the authenticity of different non-European cultures and even was successful in producing stories or novels like *Heart of Darkness,* where he defamed the activities of colonialism and colonizers with a sheer sense of courage. Even though critics like Chinua Achebe flatly acknowledge him as a “bloody racist” (257) in “An Image of Africa” for his way of illustrating Africans as savages, Conrad’s denouncement of colonialism, even though partially, reveals him to

be a perspicacious and astute observer of imperial power. This suggests that Conrad's ambivalence stems not from ignorance but from a belief that imperialism could have brought about global progress if restrained and guided by moral purpose. Therefore, he seems to denounce the greed and corruption behind imperial ideals rather than the concept of imperialism itself, imagining a more balanced form that might have benefited human beings by transcending the limits of boundaries and national identities.

Again, women, undeniably, have always been the worst victims, making the maxim even stronger that they, along with their children, bear the precarious effects of deplorable warfare, and not only during war but also in the wavering political turmoil of a region where imperialism and colonialism notoriously contribute in full force. Even though Conrad did not put any native female characters in this story, we can still perceive European women who were deeply injured by body and mind with the uprising of colonies and settlements in the land of the unknown. Conrad's novel *Victory* also dramatizes the same kind of setting where there is also Davidson as a traveller who attempts to rescue his friend Heyst who flees with Lena to a remote island in the East. Both of Heyst and Lena are Westerners and meet a tragic end like that of Anne in "Because of the Dollars". However, in *Victory* there is the presence of a native woman with a very limited role, but in this short story there is none; and the reason Conrad avoids picking up any native woman character in an Eastern setting perhaps because he is simply not equipped with proper knowledge about native women, their culture, custom, or psychology, and that is why he might have had to struggle to imagine how a native woman would have acted if she had been in the shoes of Laughing Anne while being chased by the Frenchman. In the Malay trilogy that comprises *Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Rescue,* Conrad delineates native women to some extent successfully, though some critics often bring the charge of incompleteness or partiality in depiction that seems to be the European image of Eastern women, rather than the true picture. Florence Clements, examining this lack in Conrad, states that "when it is studied for information on the difficult matter of native psychology can doubts arise as to Conrad's preparedness for handling his subject with complete mastery.… Conrad himself was fully aware of his own lack of training along this line" (343). Yet, if not at least as a substitute for Laughing Anne, a native woman could have been casted in the story autonomously, but Conrad completely made the story dominated by white male figures who defy native women assuming their moral-depravity.

Nevertheless, though the story does not come with any significant native woman, delving into whom an ecofeminist light can be projected, it offers European women in the Eastern setting with lots of opportunities to examine it through the strands of ecofeminism. As a theory, ecofeminism shows affinity with radical ecology and feminism, and thus comes up with an overlapping interconnection of these two. Carolyn Merchant argues that even if women do not identify themselves as ecofeminists, "they nevertheless assume or act on the connections between women and nature" (193). Structuring ecofeminism in this Eastern tale of Conrad shows how nature and women in the hands of patriarchal and masculine ideologies get detrimentally exoticized and become continuous objects of oppression and violation, and therefore, it needs an immediate recognition to eradicate male domination of resources. As Conrad is witnessed to limit the skills, capabilities, capacities, and aspirations of women by his seemingly masculine narratives, it is worth a reading of his texts through the lens of ecofeminism. The presence of an Englishwoman, Laughing Anne, seems best suited for the Eastern setting to Conrad, as it is likely to provide him with the license to exoticize her in the light of something desirable, seductive, and sensual. This tendency reinforces gender stereotypes and environmental pressure, and also

provides scope for connecting these exotic women with ecofeminist analysis as ecofeminism probes into the objectification of nature and women both. When Daphna critiques: "for Conrad … the aesthetic containment of the other is a safe method of self-constitution", she also believes that Conrad's consciousness evolves with a more self-critical view about colonialism (6). Her comment might also represent how Conrad exoticizes and yet, through his double narrative structure, remains distant to avoid labelling himself as an Orientalist.

In the fiery mouth of colonialism, women, regardless of Eastern or Western setting, had to face uncomfortable, unimaginable, and unmanageable situations, even sacrificing their lives in the most unexpected way to feed the voracious appetite of colonialism. Laughing Anne is the most miserable character who possesses an image of a prostitute that a western society already abhors and the patriarchal society within it readily condemns. Because colonialism is termed "transhistorical and global phenomenon", its harsh milieu withers away with the sophistication of heavy wording, and as a result, the perpetuation of colonial discourse continues with the idea of its "homogenizing vision" (Yegenoglu 30). This, in turn, helps create stories like "Because of the Dollars", which in effect promotes colonial discourse, unaffected by the fact that it is colonialism that extends the range of atrocity and many like Laughing Anne have to fall prey to it too.

The two significant women here – Mr. Davidson's wife, Mrs. Davidson, and his old friend, Laughing Anne – are marginalized and doubly become helpless after stepping into the Oriental setting. As if it is the space of the East that restructures the fate of these two women, making it more fatalistic – at least, that is what Conrad seemingly tries to establish here to vilify the exotic setting contingently, as Gayatri Spivak opines, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world women' caught between tradition and modernization" (102). Similarly, even though both the women in Conrad's story are European, they actually experience a similar fate to a woman from a third-world country who not only endures the irrationality of the dreadful imperialism but also becomes objectified, first for their sex and second for their voicelessness. This however conforms to one of the imperial tropes that exploits the East as a site of unbridled romance, be it between Eastern women and Western men or between Western women and Western men. Mrs. Davidson here is represented in a very dubious manner, as she "never had much to say for herself" ("BD" 176), known as "meek, shy little thing" ("BD" 176); therefore, Hollis takes upon the duty on his shoulder out of the patriarchal responsibility to talk extravagantly about her on her behalf and readily and actively starts to vilify Mrs. Davidson in an abominably subtle way. Especially, he points out her natural disposition as her idiosyncrasies saying, "under the superficial aspect of vapid sweetness was her convex, obstinate forehead, and her small, red, pretty, ungenerous mouth" ("BD" 176). But what is more intriguing is the lascivious gaze of these colonizers on Davidson's wife, as Hollis continues, "most of us were fetched by her white, swan-like neck, by that drooping, innocent profile" ("BD" 176), making the objectification of the female body more manifest.

The natural patriarchal inclination to trivialize a woman without considering the context is a thing an Orientalist does with fine craftsmanship. In turn, when Mrs. Davidson shows "profound suspicion" and "mistrust" ("BD" 176) to the males in the story, she is considered an obnoxious woman – "a very stupidly obstinate girl" ("BD" 189). She certainly hurts the patriarchal "solitarist approach"[3] (xii), a term coined by Amartya Sen, and instead of remaining silent and

[3] The term "solitarist approach" signifies the tendency of human beings who think people have only one identity, discarding the fact that they are also related to other groups of affiliations, which make their identity "robustly plural" depending on the various contexts. From the perspective, the male also

tabooed, she makes “a fuss” (“BD” 176) and tries to stop Davidson from executing his expedition to a rare land of the Malay Archipelago. Her natural female instinct about “some danger on account of the dollars” (“BD” 174) is obviously discarded by the supposedly rational, intellectual, and adventurous patriarch, Mr. Davidson, who instead “laughed at her fears” (“BD” 174), and even after her pleading, he cannot acquiesce with her presentiment, and a detrimental fate awaits as a result. From the ecofeminist view, Mrs. Davidson’s instinct can be intersected with nature, as nature experiences patronization, oppression, devaluation, and exploitation in the same manner from a capitalist male body.

Laughing Anne, on the other hand, is an archetype of the subjugated woman who accepts her fate without going against the grain and becomes the tragic victim of patriarchy-inspired colonialism. She is the ultimate symbol of nurturance, which the ecofeminists claim to have gotten through a close proximity with nature, because she complies to live with an imposter, Bamtz, in a rare land of the East only to provide for and nurture her son, Tony. Her tragedy knows no bounds since she was “dropped” by the person she loved so dearly, Harry the Pearler, and later she had to choose the profession of “paint and dyes” (“BD” 183) for her prostitution career. The traditional image of this particular profession carries taints of reprimand and abhorrence from society. But even facing shame, Laughing Anne is not cynical, rather a frank, open-minded, light-hearted creature with an amiable heart ready to help any human being; she is even seen helping the devil Frenchman to tie up a “seven-pound iron weight to his right stump” (“BD” 197), though she could assume the sinister and immoral intention of the man. Ironically, she is an embarrassment to the patriarchy for her profession and therefore, “the less said of her early history, the better” (“BD” 178), and yet, the profession she chooses exists partly as a means for superior man to boast of the strength and licentious desire of their manhood. Being characterized as a pushover, Laughing Anne, conjures up the historical narrative carved by dominant men to demonstrate women and nature as inferior, yet her innate nature of helping anyone in crisis, even at the stake of her own life, remains undervalued.

Conrad technically sets his story in the land that is notoriously supposed to be a land steeped in sexual desires, and Yegenoglu points out –

> An obsession with a "hidden" and "concealed" Oriental life and with the woman behind the veil and in the harem has led to an overrepresentation of Oriental women in an effort to evade the lack posed by a closed ''inner" space. It is this trope of concealment which has led many male travellers to denounce the hateful mystery of the harem and the veil. However, despite this overrepresentation, the Orientalist's desire is always left unsatisfied. (73)

The fact that Conrad’s Western characters meet in the exotic land, depicting a harem-like situation through Laughing Anne’s profession, offers a colonial discourse that caters to the popular taste of Western culture. He even carefully sculpts Bamtz’s sunk character, marking him safe from “native women,” implying the note that native women suggest coyness or coquettishness, and something lustrous which compels the White man to deviate and become deprived of “moral delicacy” (“BD” 180). Eventually, it reflects, to a certain extent, the author’s extreme dualistic measurement of East and West, which in no way can be considered in a light manner. This homogenization of native women with a dichotomic view of East and West or nature and culture is condemned by ecofeminists, as they ask for an integrated, holistic version of nature, women, and culture.

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approaches the female in a solitarist way, thinking she is inferior, thus, suitable for objectifying, when actually, a woman has capabilities that prove her to be equally intelligent as all human beings.

Otherwise, we cannot get the proper ecosystem, as the process of dichotomization is "simply standing in for the explicit hegemony of the human in an ongoing process of domination" (Hawkins 170).

Again, both Laughing Anne and Mrs. Davidson fall in the setting of the Eastern Malay archipelagos that is notorious for their teeming description of exoticism, like in the stereotypical discourses. On one hand, the oppression and domination of women and the exploitation of nature through colonial urgencies, on the other hand, the actions taken by female characters to restrain the patriarchal falsity make this short story a suitable study for ecofeminism. That Laughing Anne serves her life for the sake of the obliteration of colonial expansion and Mrs. Davidson's separation from Mr. Davidson and leaving the Archipelago in the end of the novel, where she feels her husband's morality is affected and corrupted by his profession, are some emblazing agencies taken by women to engulf the patriarchal ideologies with strong resistance.

Laughing Anne, who has an image of a fallen woman in the eyes of Victorian society, works here almost as a martyr against some bandits without even fearing for her own life. When the impure woman comes with pure courage, the patriarchal apparatus shakes, sensing a threat to their ideology. In the case of Mrs. Davidson, she is a prototype of a haughty European lady who, falling under the Malay setting, gets constantly otherized both by the male gaze and her husband's unequal treatment of her. Conrad's intention of framing Laughing Anne in an Eastern setting might seem as a deliberate action, stemming from the mainstream thought that all fallen women with sensual activities reside in the bosom of the East only. Harrington's harsh criticism on Laughing Anne resonates with the thought of majority that hails the patriarchy-driven society without realizing its venomous consequences, as she states that Anne "goes from man to man, getting "dropped" each time after a year or two … Except for the generous Davidson, the men around her see her as spent, lacking the sexual attractiveness that can be bartered for security, and she knows her days using herself as a commodity to support her child are over" (85).

Laughing Anne's characterization is a cathartic experience for the reader, as she encounters casualty. Her resistance in order to survive in a place unknown to her with her only son, Tony, is remarkable. It does not matter how she earns the position in the East, for it is how she carries her sanity for the welfare of her surroundings matters the most here. From being loyal to the disgusting Bamtz to taking her agency in order to protect good Davidson, Laughing Anne stands as an independently brave character, securing her life and only companion, that is her son, at any cost. Nevertheless, her caregiving mentality and nurturance to protect the good from the evil are in close connection with nature, which sets the idea in motion that Laughing Anne unconsciously participates in a protest where women and nature are given priority and stand hand in hand against the belligerent patriarchy. This also parallels the idea of cultural ecofeminism, which celebrates women's visceral or emotional inclination to take care of possessions close to their hearts.

Though she is the salient victim of patriarchal structure in this story, Laughing Anne leaves no stone unturned to protect her good sense with a pure heart. The environment and men's condescension could have filled her heart with hatred; she could have been tired of living a Sisyphus-like lifestyle – being adopted and then dumped again by one man after another; she could have given up her life, but she shows that she is not a cowardly woman. Her exploitation by men is equivalent to the exploitation of nature for the extraction of surplus value. In this sense, Laughing Anne appears as the most empathic character that overarches nature on Earth and the nature of human beings as well. She is spiritually more capable of being a mediator between

nature and human beings, as it is deeply ingrained within her that nonhuman beings and human beings are part of nature. Thus, she is a protector who feels the necessity of rescuing any lives that exist on earth. These spiritual ideologies are perhaps subconsciously embedded in Laughing Anne, but the ecofeminists, who are inclined to merge lines of women's affinity with nature and spirituality, come up with characterizations that Anne possesses. She becomes the bloody victim of the "maimed Frenchman" ("BD" 187) and is still able to save Mr. Davidson, her son, and Bamtz – all three who supported her throughout her life. In a sense, she is a victim of Mr. Davidson's capitalistic priority too, for Mr. Davidson is so engrossed with the profits he earns from going to the rarest places that he does not pay sufficient attention to the serious premonition of Anne. The result of it is the incongruous death of the good-hearted woman.

The problem that Mr. Davidson gives little ear to the women in this story arises from his deeply rooted patriarchal values. Because of his patronizing thought, he "underestimated naturally the driving power of the Frenchman's character and the force of the actuating motive" ("BD" 195), and as a matter of course, the action that is supposed to be taken by him is delayed; consequently, Anne has to sacrifice her life. Her being the degraded woman and later facing such a cruel death by the Frenchman might loom as a "cautionary tale for the fallen woman", but this kind of interpretation simply embodies the preexisting ideas of male chauvinists who wait for moments to criminalize and homogenize women without acknowledging their diversity (Harrington 86). Ecofeminism sharply protests this type of sortation and seeks to provide women with their own individuality, detaching them from all the patriarchal blasphemies. Therefore, Laughing Anne hardly is a fallen woman, for she only falls into the prey of patriarchy, which is also solely responsible for her misery as a repercussion. Her settling down in the Orient, being an Englishwoman, is a brave agency that she takes part in, since in the colonial rising, the capitalistic patriarchy both from East and West, perceives a woman only as a source of sexual gratification.

Nevertheless, the agency Mrs. Davidson adopts in restraining her personality partly arises as a defence mechanism to save herself from being trampled by the weight of the male gaze and patriarchal supremacy. The effect she went through no sooner had she landed on the tropical East transformed her personality as something mysterious – like the Eastern women is perceived through the eyes of the white – which is worth exploration, speculation, and investigation to come to a conclusion as to decide whether Mrs. Davidson is a "meek, shy little thing" ("BD" 176) or not. The sensuousness of her arrival crams the Malay-based story, proving the notion that the East is a land of endless desire and seduction. The "bachelor crowd" ("BD" 175) of that area finds her as a source of entertainment and unhesitatingly bestows their male gaze on Davidson's wife, which the second narrator himself assures, saying "there was a lot of latent devotion to Davidson's wife hereabouts" ("BD" 176). Now, even from the English comrades, Mrs. Davidson is not spared from peculiar patriarchal judgment; moreover, she works as a sensual catalyst who provides a bit of amusement to the monotonous colonial lifestyle of those capitalist men. The men's urge to be near Mrs. Davidson exposes their sexual frustration and repressed desires, developed first from prolonged physical and mental investment in colonial administration, and second from their prejudices against native women, which prohibit them from engaging in physical intimacy with them, even as those same biases allow them to judge the women harshly from afar.

At one point, the second narrator, Hollis, subtly reveals his yearning for intimacy with Mrs. Davidson, but because his desire remains unfulfilled, he instantly redirects his frustration into moral judgment, dismissing her as "being silly" ("BD" 176). This act of denigrating women, who are unattainable and have their own agency with an unyielding trait, masks the threatened sense

of masculinity of men, exemplifying how patriarchal insecurity manifests in the disparagement of women to obfuscate male vulnerability and failure. Again, when she takes charge of saving her own dignity by going away from the East, she is accused of disliking the "tropics and [detesting] secretly the people she had to live amongst as Davidson's wife" ("BD" 210). Her "profound suspicion" and "mistrust" ("BD" 176) for the European people who hover around her might rise from their desperate gaze, which definitely, as a female, puts her into the dire situation of uncomfortableness. Again, when Davidson brings Anne's orphaned son home to bring him up as a gesture of gratitude for her sacrifice done for his sake, Mrs. Davidson flatly refuses to share the house with the boy, disbelieving the backstory, thinking it is fabricated. She begins to suspect that Tony is the byproduct of an affair between Davidson and Anne. Even in this perilous condition, Davidson fails to communicate effectively with his wife or express his good intentions. Again, it represents Davidson's lack of self-assertion, prioritization, and communication both with his wife and Anne. His failure in the broader spectrum also reflects his ignorance of the complexities of gendered power dynamics and the unintended consequences of imperial domination. In contrast, Mrs. Davidson, with her strong sense of self-assurance, prioritizes her dignity and integrity, deciding to leave – symbolically slamming the door on patriarchal control and resisting the process of otherization.

Her decision to leave Mr. Davidson might make her an extremist, but if she had stayed, allowing Davidson's patriarchy to soar, she would never have restored her dignity of self-respect ever. It can also be perceived as a movement to protect Eastern nature, as, unlike Mr. Davidson, the domination of colonization is spared by Mrs. Davidson through her attempt to go back to her Western heritage, leaving nature as it is without the thought of exploiting it or assuming it as the Other. She is unconsciously invoking an egalitarian[4] society that is not centred around profit-making or overvaluing the "Self" that is involved in capitalist patriarchy; and that is how resistance of ecofeminism ensues through the agency she takes, going against her husband. Parallelly, Laughing Anne, as the most pitied character, also subsumes with the unfathomable nature after sacrificing herself for the welfare, proving the notion of coexistence between nature and human beings through the lens of ecofeminism.

To conclude, in "Because of the Dollars", Conrad crafts a story where the intertwining situation of imperialism, gender, and space is worth an inspection since colonial greed with patriarchal dominance carves the lives – and deaths – of women entangled in the periphery of empire. Western women in colonized space become objects for exploitation, reinforcing the notion of the East as irrational, chaotic, and morally compromised – a setting where Western characters suffer from decline and doom. Yet, resistance of Laughing Anne, through ecofeminism, underscores her martyrdom as a form of moral agency, while resistance of Mrs. Davidson to her husband's imperial pursuits foregrounds a critique of patriarchal connivance of colonial violence. Though Conrad's stance towards imperialism is contradictory, his representation of violence caused by imperial greed suggests both his denunciation of the corrupt implementation of imperialism and his belief in the potentiality of imperialism if executed with an apt intention. Besides, his portrayal of the resistance of the two women indicates a latent critique of the dire

[4] Egalitarianism promotes equality of social resources and considers every being as equal and necessary for the sustaining of an ethical world. Ecofeminism also asks for revaluation of women's position in connection with nature under the patriarchal construction whose intention is to create an egalitarian society that offers equal social advantage to everyone regardless of their gender and to nature as well.

patriarchy that renders both nature and women voiceless. Ultimately, the Eastern setting in the story works more than a mere backdrop, entwining exploitations of land and women, prompting readers to question the moral legacies of colonial domination and the inexplicable silenced experiences of women and nature within it.

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The Prospects and Challenges of Developing Learners' Speaking Skill in English at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) concerns teaching a second or foreign language for the ultimate goal of communication with other speakers of the target language. English education at the secondary level in Bangladesh is based on a Communicative curriculum. Teaching English at the secondary level is expected to concentrate on enabling the learners to acquire 'communicative competence' in English through constant and regular practice of the four basic skills. Accordingly, practice and development of Bangladeshi secondary level learners' speaking skill is vital. However, the speaking skill as well as the listening skill is often neglected in the language learning process and under-represented in the testing system. Consequently, the students mostly fail to acquire the speaking skill in English satisfactorily. Hence, the purposes of the study were to explore the prospect of development of learners' speaking skill in English, and to identify the challenges of teaching and learning the speaking skill in Bangladeshi secondary schools. A mixed-method research design was used for this study. Concisely, the findings of this research paper reveal the challenges of developing the speaking skill in the secondary schools of Bangladesh and consolidate the significance and necessity of developing the speaking skill of Bangladeshi secondary level learners through utilization of proper and suitable teaching techniques, language learning tasks and activities, teaching materials, and modern teaching-learning aids.

Keywords: CLT, the speaking skill, the secondary level learners, the learner-centred approach, interactive teaching, skill-practice

1. Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental language skill. "Speaking skill consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning" (Nunan, 2003, p. 48). Speaking skill comprises a number of sub-skills. To acquire speaking competence in a second or foreign language, learners need to master these sub-skills. Johnson assumes speaking as a "combinatorial skill" that "involves doing various things at the same time" (1996, p. 155). Speaking in the target language, according to Lightbown and Spada (2006), generally necessitates more than one mental task at one time like choosing suitable words, pronouncing them intelligibly, weaving them together with the appropriate grammatical markers, and so on. Spoken communication is essentially interactional. We speak a language for various purposes. We may speak to express ideas and opinion, wish or desire, to negotiate or apologize, and to establish and maintain personal and social relationships. The selection of words, expression, language form, formal or informal, and statement depends on the purpose and situation of speaking. Hence, learners are required to learn wide range of expressions to be able to choose and use the appropriate expression for a particular purpose in a particular situation. The spoken form of any language usually differs from its written form. In this connection, Hughes (2017) argues that speaking is not 'a discrete skill'. She expounds that although the speaking skill and the writing skill are productive skills, speaking is different from writing. She assumes, "Everyday talk has its own rules and systematics, which are different from written language use" (2017, p.5). According to her, speaking is "transient, unplanned, context

dependent, oral/aural, and dynamic", whereas writing is "non-transient, planned, decontextualized visual/motoric, and static" (2017, p.8). She deduces, "In order to speak meaningfully in real-world conversations, humans not only need to be able to pronounce sounds, words, and sentences correctly according to the comparatively static rules of a given language, but they need to be able to do so in the socially appropriate manner at the time of speaking" (2017, p.5). Accordingly, speaking is generally guided by certain distinct patterns, strategies and rules of conversation, which we need to follow while speaking a language. Therefore, learners should know and learn these strategies, rules and patterns to become competent speakers of a target language.

Bueno et al. (2006) identify speaking as a difficult skill to acquire because even the learners who have been studying English for many years frequently face difficulty in speaking properly and intelligibly. "All this apparent difficulty arises from our utter neglect of examining and regulating our speech; as nothing has hitherto been done, either by individuals, or societies, towards a right method of teaching it" (Sheridan, 1781, p. v-vi, Cited in Hughes, 2017, p. 4). In this context, Jung (1995) observes that developing the speaking skill is challenging because it usually requires a set of physical and mental activities more than mastery of grammar and semantics of English. Moreover, Leonita et al posit "Lack of knowledge, fear of making mistakes, lack of word use and grammar practice, low motivation, fear of criticism, shyness, nervousness, and pronunciation of foreign words are some challenges for students in mastering speaking ability" (2023, p.623). Adem and Berkessa further explicate, "The challenges EFL learners encounter in their mastery of speaking are twofold: the difficult nature of the skill itself and contextual factors. Obviously, the lack of speaking community exerts a major problem as it makes the classroom the only place where the learners learn and practice the language" (2023, p. 7).

Real success in teaching and learning English is determined by the prospect that the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom competently (Davies and Pearse, 2000). "In an EFL context, mastery of speaking is greatly dependent on the approaches to teaching speaking as the classroom is the decisive place where students learn and practice the language" (Adem & Berkessa, 2023, p. 7). "It is also vital to discover students' perceptions and challenges they might face during speaking courses" (Leonita et al, 2023, p. 615). However, "Regardless of its importance, teaching speaking skills have been undervalued and most of the teachers have been continuing their teaching of speaking skills just as memorization of dialogues or repetition of drills" (Malavika & MuthuKrishnan, 2021, p. 2).

2. Statement of the Problem

While using a language we usually employ several language skills. Our success in using the language, therefore, principally depends on our competence in these language skills. Hence, the aim of English education specified in the secondary curriculum is to enable the students to acquire 'communicative competence' in English through the cultivation of the four basic language skills – listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill. So, the teachers are required to teach the students to develop these four basic skills in English by involving them in regular and constant skill-practice activities in the classroom. Nonetheless, Bangladeshi secondary level teachers usually concentrate on teaching the reading skill and writing skill and often neglect the other two essential skills, the speaking skill and the listening skill. But the ability to communicate effectively and successfully cannot be developed without the development of the speaking and listening skills and their integration with the reading and the writing skills. As a result, teachers fail to develop the speaking skill of the secondary level students. Hence, the techniques, approaches and procedures currently used to teach the speaking skill demand careful reconsideration, research

and further positive and useful transformation. In addition, the issues and challenges related to teaching of the speaking skill deserve proper attention of Bangladeshi educationalists, education policy makers, syllabus designers, the secondary English language teachers, and other stake holders. Therefore, the scenario and prospect of teaching the speaking skill, and the drawbacks and challenges related to teaching and learning the speaking skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh require thorough investigation and analysis. In view of that, the present study sought to explore the challenges of teaching and learning the speaking skill in the secondary schools of Bangladesh and discern the necessity and prospect of cultivating the speaking skill of Bangladeshi secondary level learners.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research paper are:

- to examine and identify the drawbacks and challenges related to teaching and learning of the English language speaking skill to Bangladeshi secondary level learners;
- to explore the necessity, prospect, and techniques and procedures of developing Bangladeshi secondary level learners' speaking skill in English.

4. Theoretical Developments

Hymes (1972), one of the proponents of the Communicative Approach, argues that learning a new language is not simply a matter of knowing its rules of grammar. It is essentially more concerned with acquiring 'Communicative Competence' in the language. Communicative competence, according to Hymes, is that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts. It encompasses 'knowledge' and 'ability for use'. So, foreign or second language learning, he suggests, should concentrate on developing the communicative competence of the learners through the cultivation and integration of the basic language skills. In this connection, Littlewood expounds,

> The most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always a person who is best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and the listener, taking account of what knowledge is already shared between them and selecting items, which will communicate his message effectively. (1981, p.4)

Additionally, in this learner-centred approach, teacher and students are expected to work closely together. Proper implementation of this teaching system, unlike the previously used methods like the Grammar-translation method and the Audio-lingual method, does not force the student to memorize without understanding the contents of the textbooks to meet the requirements of the language test. In the Communicative Approach, a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning is stressed. The communicative language learners, as Breen and Candlin (1980) suggest while describing the role of the learners in CLT, should contribute as much as they gain, and thereby learn in an interdependent way. The Communicative Approach treats the learners as communicators. The students are expected to interact a great deal with one another. They are required to do this in various configurations, such as in pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group.

4.1 Development of the Basic Language Skills in CLT

According to the Communicative Approach, language learning involves developing the ability to produce the target language naturally, spontaneously and creatively for communication. Obviously, this ability cannot be fully cultivated by mere acquiring knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, or translation exercises, or mechanical drilling in the basic structures of English. The

learners also need to practise using the language creatively and freely. Hence, the exponents of the Communicative Approach emphasize that the students need to undergo extensive speaking and listening practice along with reading and writing practice to be able to integrate them according to their need while communicating in English. Thus, the teachers are required to develop all the four basic language skills by making the students practise these skills through learner-based activities that must be useful, interesting and effective. Continuous and successful practice in different skills will gradually increase the efficiency of the students to manipulate those essential language skills and, ultimately, transform them into competent users of English. Accordingly, the teaching techniques and procedures should be directed towards encouraging the students to acquire communicative competence through regular practice of the basic skills in the language class. The language teaching procedures are expected to concern lively active practice by the students because "communication practice in the classroom" Alwright thinks, "represents a necessary and productive stage in the transfer of classroom learning to the outside world" (1984, p.156). Therefore, the students should be regularly engaged in practice so that they can develop their language skills to acquire communicative competence in English and give up the practice of memorizing the contents of their textbooks or any supportive materials just to meet the requirements of the language test. The students need to practise using English to communicate in different social situations for various purposes. For this purpose, teachers are required to provide the students with sufficient opportunity and time to practise using English in the classroom. They are expected to promote English language learning through various enjoyable and lively skill-practice activities.

4.2 Teaching of the Speaking Skill

"To teach speaking holistically and comprehensively, it is valuable for teachers to be knowledgeable about what speaking competence involves and how different aspects of speaking competence relate to each other" (Burns, 2019, p.2). To acquire speaking competence in a target language, learners need to learn to speak and interact in a multiplicity of situations through the language. In addition, to actively use the spoken form of a language learners are required to have some general knowledge about oral-aural interaction as well as knowledge about the forms and functions of the target language. Besides, Richards (2008) points out that the two speech activities may involve use of different micro-skills. Hence, he recommends that the approach to teaching speaking should aim at helping students develop the micro-skills of speaking. So, the learners need to learn the various micro-skills or strategies of speaking. They should be taught such speaking strategies like turn taking, changing the topic of conversation, anticipating and inferring what would follow next, leaving pauses where necessary, holding the attention of the listener and so on.

Additionally, Byrne (1991) speculates that the speaking and listening skills are generally integrated in real life communication. As the speaking skill is very closely associated with the listening skill and both of these skills are interdependent and interactive, it is considered important that learners should be exposed to and should practice the reciprocal exchange pattern by participating in oral/aural interaction. Therefore, "These two skills should be taught in integration to guide learners to develop their oral communicative competencies" (Komila, 2019, p.99).

Concerning teaching the speaking skill to EFL learners, Ur (996) maintains that learners' feeling of inhibition, lack of motivation, low or uneven participation, and preference for using the mother tongue often hinder the process of developing learners' speaking skill. Specifically, he highlights, "Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention

that their speech attracts" (1996, p. 121). He further asserts, "In classes where all, or a number of learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it, because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language, and because they feel less 'exposed' if they are speaking their mother tongue" (1996, p. 121). Thus, he propounds that sufficient production of speech, even participation in the speaking tasks and activities, high motivation of the learners, and use of acceptable language are some of the basic requirements of successful speaking activity in the classroom. Teachers need to ensure them to teach speaking effectively in the EFL classroom.

Furthermore, a basic requirement of successful and effective teaching of the speaking skill is that teachers themselves should be good at speaking the target language. They must have some idea about the spoken form of the language. They also should have the dexterity to get learners practise and improve their speaking skill. They need to provide their students with sufficient time and opportunity to practise speaking the language with their classmates in pairs or groups. These activities may require the teachers to delimit their own speech and to serve as attentive audience sometimes. Moreover, during the practice teachers should be careful to maintain the spontaneity of the flow of speaking of learners. Spontaneity should not be sacrificed for accuracy. Comment or criticism of teachers should be positive. Besides, they are required to retain the interest of the students and make lessons enjoyable. In fact, success in developing the speaking skill largely depends on speaking practice in using the target language as a means of communication. For this purpose, careful organization and supervision by teachers are most needed.

5. Research Methodology

The study necessitated empirical investigation of the current English teaching and learning techniques and procedures used for developing learners' speaking skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh, role of the teachers, role of the learners, function and impact of the testing system, and features, facilities and constrictions of the academic setting. Considering the nature and purpose of this study, the Questionnaire survey method, the Interview method, and the Observation method have been selected for the empirical study. So, the methods of data collection employed for the study are – 1) Students' Questionnaire Survey, 2) Teachers' Questionnaire Survey, 3) Students' Interview, 4) Teachers' Interview, and 5) Classroom Observation. A five-point rating scale has been used in the survey. The sample of the empirical study consisted of 250 participants. For Questionnaire survey, 220 students and 30 teachers of the secondary level were selected from Rajshahi district. Moreover, 25 students and 14 teachers were randomly selected from the same sample for interviews. In addition, twenty classes from ten secondary schools were observed. Thus, data have been collected from various sources through the use of different methods to corroborate the findings, and to ensure the accuracy, authenticity and reliability of the data.

6. Findings

For empirical study, data collected from various sources were, ultimately, analyzed and interpreted. On the basis of that results of i) Students' questionnaire survey, ii) Students' interview, iii) Teachers' questionnaire survey, iv) Teachers' Interview, and v) Classroom observation are prepared and presented below:

6.1 Results of Students' Questionnaire Survey

The results of the students' questionnaire, the Mean scores and SDs, are presented in the table 6.1.

Table- 6.1

Results of Students' Questionnaire Survey

No	Statements	Questionnaire Survey	
		Mean	SD
1	You use English while interacting with your teachers in English language classes	3.49	1.02
2	You use English while interacting with other students in English language classes	3.99	0.89
3	Your teachers tell the meaning of unknown and difficult English words in Bengali to you	1.74	1.04
4	You learn English through skill-practice in the classroom	3.87	0.94
5	You use Bengali while interacting with your teachers in English language classes	1.89	1.04
6	You use Bengali while interacting with other students in English language classes	1.49	0.83
7	You learn English by memorizing the rules of grammar and vocabulary of the language	1.22	0.54
8	You learn English by participating in various language learning tasks and activities in the classroom	3.43	1.13
9	You listen to your teachers in the classroom and speak only when you are asked	1.24	0.59
10	You learn English only to meet the requirements of the examination	1.14	0.48
11	You learn English to be able to communicate with other people in English in real life situations	3.93	1.19
12	You can communicate competently in English	3.83	0.99
13	You can speak correctly in English	3.17	1.02
14	You can speak freely and fluently in English	4.21	0.92

The above table illustrates the results of the students' questionnaire survey. The results of the students' questionnaire survey show that statement 14 concerning efficiency of the students in the speaking skill, has 'very high' (above 4) Mean score which indicates that the students can hardly speak freely and fluently in English. Statements 1, 2, 4, 8, 11, 12 and 13 on the medium of interaction between students and teacher and among the students in the classroom, on practicing language skills in the classroom, on the use of various tasks and activities to teach English in the classroom, on the purpose of English learning at the secondary level, on the acquirement of communicative competence of the students, and on the competence of the students in speaking correctly in English, have 'considerably high' (between 3 and 3.99) Mean scores which suggest that the secondary students usually do not use English while interacting with their teachers and with other students in the classroom; that they very rarely learn English through skill-practice in the classroom; that they sometimes learn English by doing various language learning tasks and activities in the classroom; that they very rarely feel free to ask their teachers questions about their lessons and discuss their problems with their teachers in the classroom; that they rarely learn English to be able to communicate with other people in the language in real life situations;

that the students sometimes receive positive feedback from their teachers in the classroom; that they can barely achieve communicative competence by learning through the commonly used traditional method and naturally they can rarely become competent users of English and that they can considerably speak correctly in English. Statements 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 on teaching English vocabulary through translation technique, on the use of Bengali as the medium of instruction and interaction in the classroom, on the trend of memorizing the rules of grammar and English vocabulary, on the role of the students in the classroom, and on learners' objectives of learning English have 'very low' (between 1 and 1.99) Mean scores, which imply that the teachers usually tell the meaning of unknown and difficult English words to the students; that the students generally use Bengali while interacting with their teachers as well as with other students in the classroom; that they usually learn English by memorizing the rules of grammar and English vocabulary; that they most often listen to their teachers in the class and speak only when they are asked to speak, and they generally learn English to meet the requirements of the examination.

6.2 Results of Teachers' Questionnaire Survey

The results of the teachers' questionnaire survey, the Mean scores and SDs, are presented in the table no 6.2.

Table- 6.2
The Results of Teachers' Questionnaire Survey

No	Statements	Questionnaire Survey	
		Mean	SD
1	You use Bengali as the medium of instruction in the classroom	1.84	0.93
2	You emphasize on learning English by memorizing the rules of grammar and vocabulary of English	1.91	1.33
3	You involve your students in various language learning tasks and activities in the classroom	3.52	0.93
4	You use English as the medium of instruction in the classroom	4.20	1.23
5	You speak alone in English Language classes and your students silently listen to you	1.47	0.70
6	You interact with students in English in the classroom	3.70	1.25
7	You can use English efficiently in the classroom	3.27	1.12
8	You teach your students to be able to communicate with other people in English in real life situations	4.09	0.95
9	You speak correctly in English	2.32	1.00
10	You can speak spontaneously and fluently in English	3.67	1.11
11	You help your students to develop their basic language skills in English by involving them in pair works and group works	4.08	1.01
12	You teach your students so that they can meet the requirements of the examination successfully	1.29	0.58
13	You do not feel the need to develop the speaking skill of the students in English as it is not tested directly in the examination	1.77	1.13
14	You focus on teaching the speaking skill though it is given insignificant importance in the examination	4.15	0.96

The above table elucidates the results of the teachers' questionnaire survey. The results of the teachers' Questionnaire survey reveal that statements 4, 8, 11, and 14 concerning the medium of instruction in the classroom, the objectives of teaching English at the secondary level, the role of the students in the learning process, skill-practice through pair work and group work, and the backwash effect of the testing system on teaching of the speaking skill have 'very high' (above 4) Mean scores which indicate that the secondary level English language teachers generally use Bengali as the medium of instruction in the classroom; that the teachers very rarely teach their students to be able to communicate with other people in English in real life situations; they very occasionally help their students to develop their basic language skills in English by involving them in pair works and group works, and that they very rarely focus on teaching the speaking skill as it is given insignificant importance in the examination. Statements 3, 6, 7 and 10 on the use of various tasks and activities to teach English in the classroom, on the medium of interaction between the teachers and the students, on the efficiency of the teachers in using English in the classroom, and on the efficiency of the teachers in speaking English spontaneously and fluently have 'considerably high' (between 3 and 3.99) Mean scores, which suggest that the teachers sometimes engage their students in various language learning tasks and activities in the classroom; that the teachers rarely interact with their students in English in the classroom; that a number of the teachers can use English efficiently in the classroom, and that only some teachers can speak spontaneously and fluently in English. Statement 9 on the ability to speak correctly of the teachers has 'considerably low' (between 2 and 2.99) Mean score which shows that the teachers can speak considerably correctly in English. Statements 1, 2, 5, 12 and 13 concerning the use of Bengali as the medium of instruction and interaction in the classroom, the trend of memorizing the rules of grammar and English vocabulary which is related to the traditional method of teaching, the nature of teacher-student interaction and role of the students in the classroom, on the nature of teacher student relationship and interactions in the classroom, on the purpose of teaching English at the secondary level, and on the backwash effect of the testing system on teaching the speaking skill have 'very low' (between 1 and 1.99) Mean scores which imply that the teachers generally use Bengali while instructing their students in the classroom; that the students usually learn English by memorizing the rules of grammar and English vocabulary; that the students most often listen to their teachers in the class and speak only when they are asked any question; that they very rarely teach their students English to be able to communicate with other people in English in real life situations, and that they very rarely feel the need to develop the speaking skill of the students in English as it is not tested in the examination.

6.3 Findings of the Interviews

Findings of the Students' interview and teachers' interview indicate that the secondary school teachers as well as the students concur that the students rarely practise speaking in English in the classroom. Secondary school teachers assert that if any English language teacher intending to follow the techniques of CLT engages the students in pair or group practice, "they mostly do not utilize the opportunity to develop their efficiency in speaking English" (Secondary School Teacher 1 and 8). They hardly speak among themselves or with the teachers in English. As noted by a teacher, "They mostly waste the time given to them for speaking practice by preferring to remain inactive in the classroom" (Secondary School Teacher 3).

Another secondary school teacher explained "The dominant reason behind the negligence of this skill is obviously that this skill is not given proper and sufficient importance in the S.S.C. examination" (Secondary School Teacher 14). As this skill is not directly tested in the test and the test item intended to measure the speaking skill of the students (Test item no. 12 of 'Part B-

Writing Test' in Paper-I) carries comparatively very insignificant marks (10 marks), the students are not really required to use their ability to speak English. So, instead of developing the speaking skill by interacting in English with other students and the teacher, both the teacher and the students direct their effort, very ironically, to the practice and development of the ability to write dialogues. Secondary level student 5 expressed, "the test item requires us to write a dialogue to measure our competence in speaking English. We do not face any oral test of speaking". In the class, it is often emphasized that the students have to write a dialogue in conversational English instead of developing their skill in oral communication in English.

Likewise, a secondary school teacher also mentioned extensive use of Bengali in the classroom both by the teachers and the learners as a significant barrier to developing the speaking skill. According to this teacher, "A major drawback to teaching and learning the speaking skill in English is that in almost all the secondary schools, our first language Bengali is used as the medium of instruction and interaction" (Secondary School Teacher 5). Moreover, Secondary School Teacher 12 clarified that even when some of the teachers are familiar with the proper techniques and procedures of teaching the students to speak in English, they scarcely find "the students equally motivated and prepared to practise and develop this skill mainly because of the negative backwash effect of the test".

Another noticeable problem in teaching speaking in English is that the teachers have learned and the students are also taught English largely from textbooks. Consequently, some secondary level learners stated, "our teachers often sound bookish when they speak the language they have learned from the textbooks" (Secondary Student 2, 9 and 16).

Furthermore, Secondary Level Learner 23 disclosed, "we barely get the opportunity to learn to communicate in English by practising using it in the classroom with our classmates and teachers". As a result, the main objectives of English education at the secondary level are frustrated as the students mostly fail to achieve communicative competence in English.

In addition, the currently used testing system hardly supports the Communicative English education system as it mainly focuses on the test of the reading and writing skills with a little attention to assessment of the speaking skill and no attention to the measurement of the listening skill. Conversely, it delimits the procedures of language teaching and learning only to the practice and development of reading and writing skills to the exclusion and neglect of the listening and speaking skills, which are also very essential to achieve communicative competence in English. In this connection, Secondary School Teacher 9 revealed, "the system of using exclusively written test discourages speaking practice in the classroom and devastates the possibility of development of the speaking skill as well as listening skill". Thus, the teachers as well as the students do not feel the need to develop this vital skill as the testing system neglects and under represents the skill.

6.4 Results of Classroom Observation

Twenty classes from ten schools were observed. Results of these observations are presented below.

i) Size of the Classrooms

The number of students in 85% classes observed for this study was more than 60. Only in 15% classes, the number of students was below 60. Significantly, in 50% classes, the number of students was above 100.

ii) Medium of Instruction

According to my class observation, 20% teachers have used English as the medium of instruction in the language class. These teachers, however, are seen to use Bengali to clarify meaning of difficult and unknown English words or phrases only when they thought it would facilitate language learning. Whereas, about 80% teachers were found to use Bengali as the sole medium of instruction in the classroom.

iii) Medium of Interactions of the Students

Only 25% students have used English as the medium of interaction with their teachers in the classroom. On the other hand, 75% students preferred to use Bengali as the medium of interaction with their teachers in the classroom. In addition, majority of the students were found to use Bengali as the sole medium of interaction with their co-learners in the classroom.

iv) Teaching-learning Practices

It is very hard to find any learner-centred English language class at our secondary schools. 70% English language classes were found to be completely teacher-centred or teacher dominated, while 30% classes, though basically teacher dominated and directed, were seen to use such learner-centred learning activities as pair and group work.

v) Classroom Interactions

20% classes were found be interactive. In the English language class, 20% teachers interacted with their students and vice versa. On the other hand, in 80% classes students did not interact with their teachers. They remained passive throughout the class and spoke or responded only when their teacher asks them to do. Though in 30% classes students were given the opportunity to learn English through interaction among themselves, 10% students chose to learn English through practising using it among themselves in the classroom. Others did not utilize the opportunity provided by their teachers.

vi) Teaching Speaking

To teach speaking in English, 20% teachers engaged their students to directly participate in speaking practice with their co-learners as well as teacher. But, in harmony with the testing system, 20% teachers chose to involve their students in writing dialogues as the students are required to do so in the test. On the other hand, 60% teachers ignored the development of the speaking skill of the students in the classroom. They neither spoke in English nor bothered about teaching their students to speak English.

vii) Standard of the Teachers' Own English

In maximum classes, teachers, who used English as the medium of instruction and interaction in the classroom, have spoken mostly correctly in English. However, some of them could not use English very accurately. Unfortunately, most of the teachers are found to use bookish English with imperfect pronunciation. And very few teachers are found to speak the language fluently.

viii) Standard of the Students' English

It has been found that like their teachers the students also spoke English, whenever they were required to use it, almost accurately in the classroom. However, they rarely used conversational English. Very few of them spoke English fluently in the classroom. Their English pronunciation often sounded bookish and imperfect.

ix) Availability and Use of Teaching-learning Aids

In all the 20 classes observed, no modern teaching-learning aid was present or used. Moreover, there is no language laboratory present in any of the schools selected for class observation.

7. Discussion

The secondary students are expected to learn speaking by directly speaking in English. Hence, they need the opportunity to practise speaking English in the classroom. But, in maximum secondary schools of Bangladesh there is very little scope and facility for the cultivation of the speaking skill of the students in English in the classroom. Students get little opportunity to practise and develop their speaking skill. They are given the least time to practise speaking. In the classroom, majority of the teachers prefer to speak Bengali or make a curious mixture of English and Bengali in the classroom. On the other side, students generally speak their first language, Bengali, except while answering to any question asked by the teacher on the lessons, they use English. Thus, learners frequently face first language barrier in learning the speaking skill. Moreover, discernibly they speak only when they are asked any question in the classroom. On the other hand, they rarely ask any question to their teacher. Besides, they hardly get the opportunity to participate in communicative interaction with their teacher or their classmates. Additionally, majority of the students confront contextual drawbacks because English is rarely used for real-life communication outside the classroom in Bangladesh. So, the lack of English speaking community often begets a massive challenge for developing the secondary level learners' speaking skill. Likewise, English language classes in Bangladeshi secondary schools are rarely found to be communicative in practice, though the textbooks, curriculum and the testing system have been changed and modified to bring about a radical improvement particularly in the teaching method and to ensure proper implementation of the recently introduced teaching system, the Communicative Approach. Though CLT is expected to be used by the secondary English language teachers in general, only a handful of the teachers who have adequate efficiency and expertise have properly adopted the newly implemented teaching system. Whereas, most of them stick to their early teaching practices. In addition, lack of efficiency of the teachers in using English, which is a basic requirement for the Communicative language teachers, also compels them to use the traditional method. Even those teachers, who are trained and informed of the principles and techniques of this approach, rarely apply their experience of training to change and improve their method of teaching by adjusting their classroom techniques and procedures to the principles of the Communicative Approach. The learners are hardly trained to make any effort to build their speaking skill to be able to use English for communicative purposes. As a result, the students being taught in the traditional method usually fail to develop their basic skills, particularly the speaking skill, in English and use the language for communicative purposes. Therefore, the use of the traditional techniques and procedures of teaching is a blatant challenge for nurturing learners' speaking skill in English. Moreover, English has been found to be mostly treated and taught like other content-based subjects in the secondary curriculum. Teachers usually teach the grammatical rules, basic structural patterns and vocabulary of English. Students are taught to memorize the contents of the textbooks or supportive materials. Thus, the techniques and procedures of teaching are generally considered most suitable for preparing the learners to meet the requirements of the currently used test of English language. Nonetheless, English is not a content-based subject like most other subjects incorporated in the curriculum. Hence, it deserves to be treated as a skill-based subject.

8. Recommendations

This study has led to some valuable insights into the present practices, procedures, challenges and hindrances in the teaching the speaking skill at the secondary level in Bangladesh. From the theoretical discussions and findings of the empirical study, the following means and measures, which would be helpful in bringing about beneficial changes and improvements in the teaching the speaking skill to Bangladeshi secondary level learners, are recommended:

Firstly, the Communicative Language Teaching system must be systematically implemented to improve the standard of English teaching and, thereby, to ensure successful learning of English by Bangladeshi secondary level students. For this purpose, the teachers should be properly acquainted to the techniques and procedures of CLT through appropriate and adequate training programmes. Through required training the teachers can be made efficient and skilled. Besides, they must be able to speak English efficiently and fluently to develop the learners' speaking skill in English in a communicative classroom.

Furthermore, the present English curriculum is based on the Communicative Approach. It aims to focus on practice and development of the four basic skills in English. Hence, English, as it has been proposed by the educationalists, needs to be taught as combination of the four language skills to be used in real life.

Additionally, the secondary level teachers are required to teach the students English through the extensive practice of the speaking skill. Practice in the classroom is more essential for Bangladeshi secondary level students because they are rarely required to use this foreign language for communication in practical life. They rarely get any opportunity to use English outside the classroom. Hence, the teachers have to ensure regular practice in the classroom.

Moreover, the teachers are required to play a vital and dynamic role in the teaching and learning procedures. the teachers should engage students in various types of language tasks and activities in groups or pairs to help them learn English through constant skill-practice. They should also encourage the students to actively participate in the learning process. They should monitor and assist the students while they are engaged in skill-practice.

Likewise, the learners should be trained to play an active role in the learning process. They should be allowed required freedom to develop autonomy and to build self-confidence in practice and cultivation of the speaking skill. They have to participate actively in the language learning tasks and activities in the classroom.

Besides, the teachers should give proportionate emphasis on both accuracy and fluency while teaching English. They must also follow the proper techniques suggested in the Communicative Approach in doing error correction in the classroom and giving feedback to the students.

Furthermore, the teachers need to devise interesting tasks and activities for the students to facilitate their successful acquisition of English speaking skill. The speaking tasks and activities can be in the form of either what the students should produce, such as presentations, debates, descriptions, or what they should do, like discussion, narration, role play, and so on (Burns, 2019).

In addition, the students get very limited opportunity to learn in the classroom which often leaves negative effect on their learning as well as test performance. The teachers need to provide the students with sufficient opportunity and encouragement to learn English in the classroom.

Moreover, most of the students fear or neglect the subject. "Most students also lack motivation and are ashamed of making mistakes" (Leonita et al, 2023, p. 615). Hence, the teachers should attempt to dispel learners' fear and anxiety in the learning process. They should make the students aware of the necessities and utilities of communicating in English – that the ability to interact in English is necessary for job, study, international communication and so on. They need to make the language learning process interesting through the use of various learning activities and language games and through the proper use of modern audio-visual aids.

Additionally, Bangladeshi secondary level learners frequently encounter the first language barrier in the learning process. The teachers need to help the learners to overcome their first language barrier. Therefore, the teachers should speak English in the classroom to make the language practice of the students effective all through the class. While teaching in the classroom, they should avoid using translation technique and use English instead of Bengali both in presentation and practice continuously. Taught in this way students might initially face difficulty in understanding their teacher but gradually they will become accustomed to it and, thereby, acquire the speaking skill effectively.

Besides, the teachers should use suitable and interesting teaching materials for the learners to cultivate their speaking skill. The teaching materials should be relevant, culture-sensitive, and cognitively engaging and challenging for learners. For this purpose, the teachers may either prefer to select or adapt and use ready-made teaching materials which are suitable, appropriate and effective for the learners, or prepare their own teaching materials according to the requirements of the learners. Accordingly, materials designers and textbook writers should devise texts, games, exercises, simulations, and other learning activities which can furnish the context for successful teaching and learning of the speaking skill at the secondary level.

Similarly, the testing system should be modified to overcome the challenges of lack of learners' motivation in practicing and grooming the speaking skill, and negative backwash effect of the English language tests. Specifically, direct test of the speaking skill should be included in the testing system. It will exert positive backwash effect of the test on teaching and learning of the speaking skill and ensure valid and reliable measurement of the actual speaking ability of the learners.

Finally, teachers should use all possible means to make their English instructions comprehensible to their students. They should use simple and clear English for the better understanding of the students. They may explain any difficult point or part of the language lesson by demonstration.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper an endeavor has been made to explore the importance and prospect of developing the speaking skill of Bangladeshi secondary level learners and to discern the drawbacks and challenges concerned with teaching and learning the speaking skill in the EFL context of Bangladesh. Findings of the study show that the recent changes and modifications in the secondary English curriculum, which are particularly intended to bring about a radical transformation in the teaching methodology, in reality, as it has been found, have resulted in little change or improvement in the English teaching practices in secondary schools. The teachers are extensively using Bengali as their medium of instruction and interaction in the classroom. Their main focus is on the teaching and learning of the contents of the textbook and other supportive materials than on the practice and development of the four language skills. Precisely, the use of the traditional techniques and procedures, which are largely inappropriate, ineffective and non-communicative, in the secondary classrooms, hardly help the students to acquire English speaking skill successfully. Besides, unfavourable contextual factors of Bangladeshi learners can be identified as a substantial challenge in acquiring the speaking skill through interactions outside the classroom. Findings of the study validate the necessity and expediency of teaching and learning of the speaking skill in the classrooms. This paper also includes recommendations for overcoming the major drawbacks in teaching speaking at the secondary level and, thereby, accelerating successful English education of the secondary level learners. The study suggests that decisive changes and improvements should be made in the curriculum, the teaching techniques and learning procedures, the teaching materials, the testing system, and the academic setting to develop Bangladeshi secondary level learners' English speaking skill properly and effectively.

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Challenges Faced by Early-Career EFL Teachers at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Novice teachers often encounter challenges that hinder their professional growth in the early stages of their academic careers. The barriers faced by these teachers are further complicated by socio-cultural and political issues related to learning a foreign language in a country like Bangladesh. This study aims to explore and assess the primary factors hindering the early development and advancement of Bangladeshi novice teachers teaching English as a foreign language at the tertiary level. Based on qualitative and quantitative insights, this study sheds light on the challenges related to classroom practices, collegial relations, and institutional contexts. The findings reveal that challenges such as managing chaotic classrooms, engaging students, the lack of mentorship, and limited collaborative support from colleagues are major obstacles for early career EFL teachers, whose professional growth is further hindered by the lack of proper teacher training facilities. Considering all these hurdles, this study emphasizes the importance of introducing structured mentorship and teacher training programs alongside collaborative teaching environments for novice teachers' professional development, which will ultimately contribute to enhanced EFL teaching and learning practices at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

Keywords: novice teachers, classroom management, collaborative practice, mentorship, practicum

Introduction

"Teachers are often overworked and underpaid"
"Senior colleagues often try to dominate"
"Teaching often becomes secondary as we are bombarded with other administrative or similar tasks"
"Lacking scopes for self-development as a teacher"

Such statements are often used in reference to the teaching profession. Indeed, teaching is an ongoing and dynamic endeavour that requires an educator to manage a complex set of responsibilities. These responsibilities go far beyond the sole performance of teaching, encompassing a myriad of covert activities. For most teachers, the workdays never truly end. Early career teachers are required to manage a variety of instructional, administrative, and classroom management responsibilities, in addition to planning and assessment. Besides these tasks, they are also required to give academic guidance and emotional support to their students, and at the same time, they should maintain professionalism and commitment as their institutions' full-time employees. Considering these demands, the teaching profession poses even more demands for

novice educators. Given this, early-career teachers (those with between 0 and 3 years of full-time teaching experience and a teacher education degree) often find themselves in a high-stakes "sink or swim" situation (Varah et al., 1986).

On the other hand, novice teachers enter the profession with new energy and knowledge and understanding, not knowing what the teaching scenario looks like and that would lead to a reality shock. According to Kozicoglu (2017), the early years of the teaching profession are often referred to as 'on-the-job training'. As a result, chaos, confusion and tension are predominant factors in the initial years of their teaching careers (Farrell, 2003; Farrell, 2006; Loughran, et al., 2001; Veenman, 1984). Veenman (1984) outlines the main areas of challenges faced by novice teachers, including classroom management, assessment, relationships with parents, administrators, and colleagues, heavy teaching loads, inadequate guidance and support, and large class sizes (Sali & Kechik, 2018). Both Faez & Valeo (2012) and Farrell (2019) claim that early career teachers struggle to eradicate the immense gap between their expectations and the reality that greets them once they begin teaching, causing them to undergo emotional stress and burnout in their teaching practice.

There has been a great deal of research on the problems encountered by novice teachers. Despite this, relatively little attention has been paid to the unique challenges faced by early career English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. In addition to sociocultural barriers and the pressure to overcompensate for their non-native status, teaching English in non-native contexts presents significant challenges. Horwitz (1996) found that non-native ESL instructors often feel inadequate and uncomfortable even though they are relatively proficient in the target language. Likewise, Farrell (2003) identified that novice teachers face challenges such as increased teaching load, more responsibilities outside the classroom, marking exam scripts, and a lack of collegial support. Farrell (2006) also mentioned that novice teachers face internal conflicts between their preferred teaching methods and institutional demands. Therefore, targeted support systems to assist early career EFL teachers in adapting and flourishing in their professional roles should be emphasized.

Although the challenges of early career EFL teachers have been neglected for a long time, recent research has begun to shed light on this underexplored issue in recent times. In Turkey, a study was conducted to investigate the challenges of novice EFL teachers, revealing major concerns such as managing the classroom, planning lessons, and motivating learners (Korukçu, 1996). Similarly, a study by Akcan (2016) found that implementing a communicative approach in the classroom presents challenges for teachers, particularly when working with students who lack motivation and necessary language skills.

Unfortunately, the condition in Bangladesh is even more concerning due to the absence of quality teacher-education programs, a lack of structured mentoring, overcrowded classrooms, poor institutional management, and inadequate budget allocation for the educational sector. Therefore, the challenges of Bangladeshi early career EFL teachers at the university level should be examined more closely. Specifically, two research questions guided this study:

1. What are the major challenges faced by novice EFL teachers at the tertiary level in Bangladesh?

2. How do novice teachers address these challenges?

Background of the Study

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Bangladesh has evolved significantly over the years, transitioning from the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and more recently to blended learning, technology-enhanced learning, and plurilingual approaches. However, despite these developments, many educators who lack

training in advanced methodologies still depend on GTM, emphasizing translation over and above communication. Teachers with diverse educational, cultural, and social backgrounds bring different teaching styles, expectations, and levels of adaptability, which ultimately influence the overall education system.

Therefore, the absence of skills training programs deprives new teachers of the opportunity to prepare themselves to use the advanced and engaging teaching methods. Reflective teaching practice is often absent, and when combined with social and administrative challenges within institutions, the situation becomes even more difficult for the novice teachers. As a result, they may lack confidence and motivation, and students may fall behind despite their teachers' efforts. This, in turn, makes both teachers and students less competitive in regional and global contexts.

The declining quality of English language teaching still persists as untrained teachers continue to teach students who may themselves become educators in the future. These systemic issues are closely connected with the challenges novice teachers encounter. Novice teachers often lack support from institutions, colleagues, students, and even their families, which hinders their professional development. However, with proper guidance and encouragement, these teachers can gradually become competent educators, much like saplings growing into strong trees, capable of overcoming challenges and nurturing future generations of learners.

Literature Review

Global and Local Challenges

In the early years, teaching is often marked by confusion, challenges, and tension (Farrell, 1999, 2006; Loughran et al., 2001). Korukcu (1996) mentioned that classroom management, lesson planning, and student motivation are important challenges for pre-service and novice EFL teachers. Veenman (1984) reviewed eighty-three studies and identified several problems faced by novice teachers, including classroom management, assessment, relationships with parents, administrators and colleagues, heavy teaching workloads, inadequate subject knowledge, poor school resources, lack of guidance, and large class sizes. Bureaucratic policies, the absence of mentorship, and social dynamics in academic institutions also obstruct novice teachers' professional development to the extent that they may become frustrated and experience burnout (Horwitz, 1996; Korukcu, 1996).

Similar challenges exist in Bangladesh where, despite having academic expertise and pedagogical training, novice teachers encounter institutional constraints, classroom management difficulties, and a lack of professional support, which complicate their transition into teaching. According to Côté and Levine (2002, as cited in Krzywacki, 2009), novice teachers struggle with identity, ego, and personal beliefs during their early careers. As they question "Who am I as a teacher?", challenges arise due to the gap between their beliefs and their teaching practices. When teachers in Bangladesh shift from educational studies to real-life teaching (Senom et al., 2013), they often reinterpret or doubt their previous experiences (Beijaard et al., 2000; Thompson, 1992), reflecting that the relationship between beliefs and practice is often dialectical.

Institutional Regulations Related Challenges

Despite the increasing demand for qualified EFL instructors in Bangladesh, the challenges faced by novice teachers have not yet been adequately addressed. Unlike experienced teachers, they often struggle to balance institutional expectations with classroom realities. Moreover, administrative barriers restrict their autonomy and impede their capacity to develop effective teaching practices (Richards & Pennington, 1998). Early career educators are often expected to perform at the level

of experienced professionals despite being new to administrative systems, diverse student populations, and evolving curricula.

When there is no structured guidance, many novice teachers feel uncertain, isolated, and unable to adjust to institutional expectations (Farrell, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Warford & Reeves, 2003). Caspersen and Raaen (2014) conclude that if novice teachers are unable to cope with these pressures, they may experience burnout, increased stress (Karprovich et al., 2020; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008), or attrition (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010), which may ultimately affect both the individual and the institution.

Classroom Management Related Challenges

Effective classroom management is a major concern for novice teachers, especially in large and diverse EFL classrooms. Horwitz (1996) mentioned that non-native language teachers often feel pressurized when teaching the target language and that, despite their qualifications, non-native teachers often perceive themselves as continual learners. Takahashi (2014) pointed out that teaching anxiety is often related to teachers' self-perceived language ability and anxiety levels. Managing student behaviour, fostering engagement, and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment require experience and confidence that many early career teachers have yet to develop (Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Richards & Pennington, 1998).

Novice teachers in Bangladesh often find it difficult to implement differentiated instruction and manage classroom disruptions due to differences in student proficiency levels and learning styles (Farooq, 2016). According to Richards and Pennington (1998), common challenges include large class sizes, low proficiency learners, and misbehaving students. Further studies reveal that lack of classroom authority, limited experience with classroom management, and difficulty sustaining student motivation are major factors causing difficulty in classroom management for novice teachers (Ahmed & Julius, 2015; Ali, 2011; Desouky & Allam, 2017; Horwitz, 1996; Parsons, 1973; Robinson & Clay, 2005; Wang, & Wang, 2019; Yazıcı & Altun, 2013).

Social Relations Related Challenges

Novice ELT teachers face several hurdles to improve their professional social relationships within academic institutions. Social dynamics in a new academic environment involve complex relationships with colleagues, senior faculty members, and students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As a result, many novice teachers feel professionally isolated due to the absence of mentorship and peer support (Tran, 2021). Early-career teachers in hierarchical institutions often struggle to assert their own ideas or seek guidance from senior colleagues (Rahman et al., 2019). Moreover, teachers who are close in age to their students sometimes find it difficult to maintain professional boundaries while building positive relations. According to Farrell (2016), new teachers need support from colleagues and mentors to improve professionally and feel satisfied in their roles.

Administrative Support Related Challenges

Administrative support is significantly important in shaping the professional lives of novice teachers. According to Richards and Pennington (1998), the excessive workload assigned to new educators, including both teaching and administrative responsibilities, inhibits their professional growth. Unfortunately, many teachers feel unsupported and overwhelmed due to insufficient institutional support, limited opportunities for professional development, and the absence of structured feedback (Korukcu, 1996). Many tertiary institutions in Bangladesh tend to place more emphasis on student performance metrics than on teacher development, which often leads to unrealistic expectations for early career educators (Rahman et al., 2019).

Research shows that institutions that provide strong administrative support, including orientation programs, pedagogical training, and regular feedback, are more likely to retain novice teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). On the contrary, without such support, new educators face difficulties in meeting institutional demands and often experience reduced job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

The challenges faced by early-career EFL teachers in Bangladeshi tertiary institutions are examined using a combination of theoretical perspectives. Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory explains how novice teachers develop classroom management and teaching skills through observation, imitation, and interaction, emphasizing the importance of mentorship and peer collaboration. Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) explains how teachers' confidence influences their teaching effectiveness, stress management, and motivation, as teachers with lower self-efficacy may find it more difficult to adapt to classroom environments. Additionally, Sweller's (1988) Cognitive Load Theory explains how the burden of diverse institutional responsibilities can affect teachers' performance and well-being. Furthermore, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) supports the need for mentorship, as novice teachers need guidance to transition from theoretical knowledge to practical teaching skills. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges faced by early-career EFL teachers in Bangladesh, and suggest ways to improve teacher training, support, and professional development.

Methodology

To examine the array of hurdles encountered by early-career teachers during the onset of their teaching careers, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire, including three demographic questions, fourteen Likert-scale questions, and two open-ended questions.[5] For data analysis, both descriptive and statistical methods were used to identify the most common and recurring challenges faced by novice teachers.

Participants

The participants in this study were early career teachers with teaching experience ranging from less than one year to five years. The participants reflected on their early career experiences through the questionnaire used in this study. The variation in teaching experience provided a comprehensive understanding of the patterns and changes in the challenges faced during the early-teaching years. *Table 1* presents the range of teaching experience of the participants.

In total, fifty teachers from different public and private universities responded to the online survey questionnaire, including participants from six public universities and nine private universities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met the early-career teaching experience criteria and could provide relevant insights for the study.

N	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Variation	Range
50	3.20	2.00	3.06	9.34	12.5

Table 1: Duration of Teaching

[5] The questionnaire is given in the Appendix.

The sample consisted of N = 50 teachers. On average, they had been teaching for 3.2 years (M = 3.20), with a median teaching experience of 2 years (Md = 2) years. This means that half of the teachers had taught for two years or less, while the other half had taught for two years or more. Teaching experience varied considerably, with a standard deviation of 3.06 years (SD = 3.06), indicating a relatively wide spread of data around the mean. The variance (9.34) also indicates a considerable amount of variability in the given teaching durations among the participants. The range of teaching experience was 12.5 years, indicating that the difference between the teacher with the least experience and the teacher with the most experience was 12.5 years. Overall, most teachers had relatively few years of experience (around 2 to 3 years on average), but a small number of teachers had considerably more experience, contributing to the increase of the overall variability of the data and resulting in a larger SD and range.

Data Collection

To measure novice EFL teachers' challenges faced in academia, a questionnaire was developed based on Lory Olafson and Gregory Schraw's (2006) article "Teachers' beliefs and practices within and across domains". By exploring teachers' beliefs, challenges and practices, the basic probable challenges were traced and adapted into the questionnaire, which was categorized into three sections: classroom-related challenges, collegial relationship-related challenges, and practicum-related challenges.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, firstly, the questionnaire was sent to three English language teaching experts, who were asked to review the items to identify any inconsistencies or ambiguities in the items. According to the experts' feedback and suggestions, the questionnaire was revised and refined. After revision, fourteen (14) items were finalized and approved for the study.

The reliability of the final version of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha value for the questionnaire was 0.741, indicating acceptable internal consistency. According to Cortina (1993), a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability of the scale. Therefore, the Cronbach's alpha value of this questionnaire shows a good interrater reliability of the items in this study.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected through the questionnaire, they were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were retrieved by descriptive statistical analysis. Here, the three (3) categories of questions were dealt separately with distinct interpretations and implications. The challenges were classified into three (3) categories based on their mean scores: major, moderate, and minor challenges.

Findings on Classroom Related Challenges

Classroom Management Related Challenges	**Mean**	**SD**
I find it difficult to manage class during pair/group activity	2.90	1.389
Administering testing and evaluation is difficult for me	2.82	1.335
It is difficult to manage disruptive classes	3.82	0.941
It is difficult to address students' problematic behaviour	3.74	1.121
It is difficult to choose between a teacher-cantered or a student-cantered class	3.10	1.474

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Classroom Management Related Challenges

Interpretation of the Data

The descriptive statistics indicate that early-career lecturers in Bangladeshi universities face varying levels of difficulty in managing classroom-related challenges. Overall, the results highlight that discipline-related challenges, such as handling disruptive behaviour and addressing student-related issues, are the most pressing concerns for early-career lecturers. In contrast, instructional and assessment-related challenges, such as group activity management and evaluation, appear to be comparatively less problematic, although they still vary across individuals. Therefore, professional training programs focusing on classroom discipline strategies, student engagement techniques, and flexible pedagogical approaches should be introduced for novice tertiary-level educators in Bangladesh.

Major Challenges: Discipline and Student Behaviour

According to the data, *managing disruptive classes* (M = 3.82, SD = 0.941); is the most frequently reported challenge. Thus, it is obvious that maintaining classroom order to ensure a suitable learning environment is a major struggle for novice teachers. The second highest challenge for new teachers is *addressing students' problematic behaviour* (M = 3.74, SD = 1.121), while the relatively higher standard deviation (SD = 1.121) suggests that though many teachers find these issues challenging, some may have developed strategies to manage such behaviour more effectively. In fact, institutional differences may also influence the level of difficulty experienced by teachers. Therefore, these findings indicate the need for training in classroom discipline techniques.

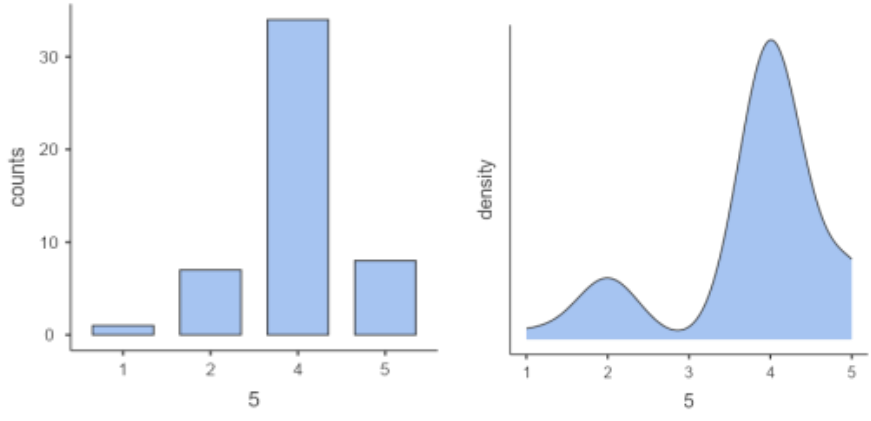

Figure 1

Difficulty in Managing Disruptive Classes

Moderate Challenges: Pedagogical Approaches

Many early-career lecturers struggle with deciding on the appropriate teaching approaches for their classes, especially whether to adopt a teacher-centered or a student- cantered approach. The findings for this challenge show a mean score of M = 3.10 (SD = 1.474). The relatively high standard deviation (SD = 1.474) indicates variations among lecturers; some may have clear preferences regarding teaching approaches, while others may feel uncertain about balancing teacher authority with structured instruction and student participation in the class. Thus, it is necessary to arrange pedagogical training programs that help new teachers adapt their teaching styles to different learning environments.

Lowest Challenges: Classroom Activities and Evaluation

Novice lecturers face fewer difficulties in *managing classes during pair/group activities* (M = 2.90, SD = 1.389) and in *administering testing and evaluation* (M = 2.82, SD = 1.335) However, the relatively high standard deviations indicate significant differences in respondents' experiences, possibly due to factors such as class size, subject matter, or institutional assessment policies.

Findings on Collegial Relation Related Challenges

Collegial Relation Related Challenges	Mean	SD
I do not get enough mental support from my colleagues	2.94	1.476
I feel I am not accepted properly by my colleagues	2.72	1.471
My senior colleagues rarely share their experience of their early years	3.10	1.389
I do not get enough help from my colleagues to prepare lesson plans and materials	2.96	1.456
There is barely any collaborative work among colleagues	3.22	1.502

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Collegial Relation Related Challenges

This section presents the descriptive analysis of collegial relation-related challenges faced by early-career EFL lecturers in Bangladeshi universities. According to *Table 3,* the mean scores and standard deviations for each item in this category are based on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

Interpretation and Implications

The statistical findings suggest that collegial relation-related challenges among early-career lecturers in Bangladesh primarily stem from limited collaboration and mentorship rather than outright rejection by colleagues.

Major Challenges:

Lack of faculty collaboration

As shown in the results, the mean (M) score for *lack of faculty collaboration* is 3.22 and standard deviation (SD) is 1.502. Thus, it indicates that novice lecturers mostly experience a lack of cooperative environment in academic work. It is needless to say that to enhance professional growth and job satisfaction, collaboration of faculty members is essential. However, the relatively high standard deviation indicates that institutional policies and departmental cultures have varying impact to support collaborative environments. Some universities may encourage teamwork and peer collaboration, while others may lack faculty engagement initiatives.

Limited Mentorship from Senior Faculty

The challenge of *limited mentorship from senior faculties* (M = 3.10, SD = 1.389) demonstrates how novice lecturers rarely have both formal and informal mentorship opportunities. Without guidance from experienced faculty members, new lecturers may struggle with classroom management, pedagogical strategies, and professional development. Creating structured mentorship programs could solve this problem, where experienced teachers could share their knowledge and provide professional support to new lecturers.

Moderate Challenge: Professional and Emotional Support

Insufficient help with lesson planning and materials (M = 2.96, SD = 1.456) and *lack of mental support from colleagues* (M = 2.94, SD = 1.476) were found to be moderate concerns among young teaching professionals. These results imply that while some lecturers have access to

supportive colleagues, others may find themselves isolated in their teaching responsibilities. Therefore, to reduce this problem, a culture of shared resources and peer assistance must be maintained.

Lowest Challenge: Acceptance by Colleagues

Compared to other "collegial relation related challenges," *feeling not properly accepted by colleagues* has the lowest mean score (M = 2.72). It suggests that novice teachers mostly feel accepted and integrated with their colleagues. Nevertheless, as the standard deviation is high (SD = 1.471), it suggests the experiences to be quite different among institutions. Some universities with a supportive and welcoming faculty culture may be more inclusive, while others may make fewer efforts to integrate new lecturers into the academic community.

Findings on Practicum-Related Challenges

The data show that novice lecturers face issues concerning mentorship, resource availability and the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Practicum Related Challenges	**Mean**	**SD**
Mentoring session for new teachers is neglected	4.08	1.192
Inadequacy of resources and materials put me at difficulty	3.88	1.256
Teacher training programs put too much attention on theory neglecting practice	4.54	0.788
I find discrepancy between my belief and real-time practice	3.96	1.087

Table 4: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Practicum Related Challenges

Interpretation and Implications

The findings highlight critical issues in the preparation and professional development of early-career lecturers, particularly regarding the lack of practical training, mentorship, and resource availability.

Major Challenges

Inadequate Practical Training in Teacher Education

Inadequacy of practical training is the highest rated challenge (M = 4.54, SD = 0.788) here. This result suggests that teacher training programs may place greater attention to theoretical knowledge than practical application. Thus, in real life teaching-learning situations, such as managing disruptive students, handling diverse classrooms, and preparing effective lesson plans, early-career lecturers may find themselves unprepared. To support novice lecturers in real-life teaching experiences, teacher training curricula in higher education institutions should include more practicum-based learning, teaching simulations, and classroom observations.

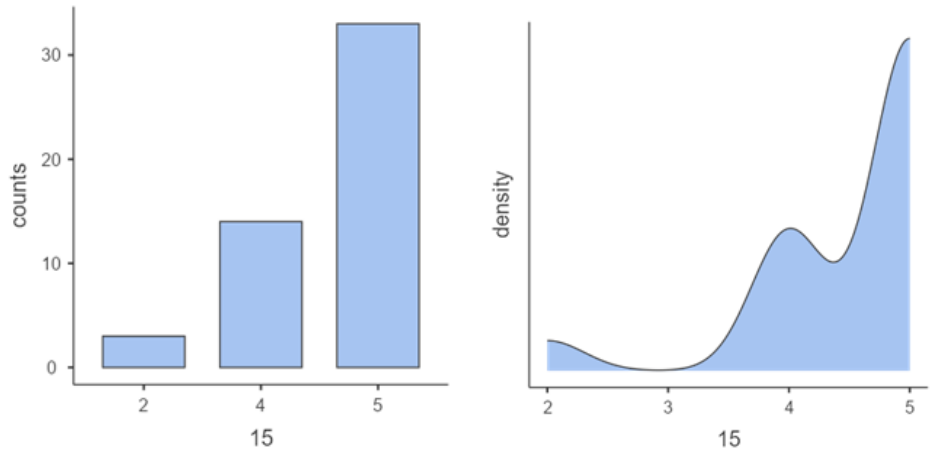

Figure 2 *Emphasis on Theory over Practical Training*

Lack of Mentorship for New Teachers

The statistics show that the *neglect of mentoring sessions* (*M = 4.08, SD = 1.192*) is one of the highest-rated challenges, which suggests that many institutions fail to provide structured guidance to new lecturers. Without formal or informal mentorship, early-career lecturers may struggle with pedagogical challenges, professional development, or institutional expectations. Also, guidance and support of experienced faculty members towards new lecturers in their first years of teaching is a great support. Besides, formal mentoring and teacher guidance sessions should be introduced in tertiary-level educational institutions.

Moderate Challenge: Discrepancy Between Teaching Beliefs and Real-World Practice

There is a mismatch between early-career lecturers' theoretical beliefs and practical teaching constraints (M = 3.96, SD = 1.087). Institutional policies, students' expectations, or the rigid structure of traditional education systems may contribute to the issue. Workshops on adaptable teaching strategies could be useful to meet the gap between lecturers' beliefs and classroom realities. Reflective teaching practices (e.g., self-assessment, peer reviews) should also be encouraged to help the new teachers better understand teaching realities so that they can adapt their teaching beliefs to practical classroom contexts.

Lowest Challenge: Inadequate Teaching Resources and Materials

Inadequate teaching resources and materials has received the lowest mean score (M = 3.88, SD = 1.256). Still, the relatively high SD indicates that some lecturers may not have well-equipped classrooms, technological tools or books. This problem may inhibit the effectiveness of lesson delivery and affect teaching quality. Therefore, institutions should invest in better resources, digital tools and updated materials for teaching, especially for novice lecturers. Most importantly, open educational resources (OER) and resource-sharing initiatives among faculty members could be promoted to address resource limitations.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In addition to the previously identified challenges, early-career lecturers in Bangladesh face several other difficulties. These include excessive administrative workload, lack of technology-based training, outdated library resources, pressure to publish, and difficulties managing large and diverse classrooms. Discriminatory dynamics in the workplace, salary inequity, and institutional

politics make the list longer. On the other hand, some students face financial and psychological struggles that affect their academic performance, tactical struggles resulting in rote learning etc., which further complicates the teaching environment. As one participant opined, "Teachers are often overworked and underpaid. Even after sacrificing their personal lives for professional responsibilities, they are not appreciated enough."

To face the challenges, the participants suggested defined mentorship programs, effective teacher training, and balanced workload distribution. They also suggested that administrative staff should handle clerical tasks to help the teachers focus on pedagogy. Institutions should encourage spontaneous communication and collaborative work environments, and also address teachers' roles to reinforce positively. One participant emphasized the need for a supportive work culture saying, "Positive reinforcement should be better internalized. At times the incentives don't suffice either, so that could also be considered." To create a more sustainable and supportive academic environment, issues such as salary imbalances, heavy research workloads, and stagnant professional growth should be properly addressed to ensure a sustainable and encouraging academic environment.

Overall Implications

As per the findings, early career lecturers in Bangladesh are deprived of hands-on training, lack of guidance, and insufficient practicum-resources. To address such issues, it is a must to reform curriculum, develop mentoring programs and provide institutional support to reshape and support novice teachers in their professional journeys.

Discussion

The findings of this study reflect on the early-career EFL teachers' challenges in Bangladesh, particularly in classroom management, collegial dynamics, and practicum experiences. The quantitative data indicate that disruptive classroom management is the most significant challenge, with a high mean of 3.82. Aligning with Wilkins and Lee (2011), it shows that novice teachers often struggle with classroom discipline and management related issues. Additionally, handling students' problematic behaviour (M = 3.74) is also particularly challenging for novice teachers (Bates & Morgan, 2017). Thus, they face significant challenges to establish authority and address diverse student behaviour. These findings show classroom management to be particularly difficult for novice teachers in Bangladesh, aligning with challenges faced by novice teachers worldwide.

Balancing teacher-centered and student-centered teaching approaches (M = 3.10) is also a significant challenge, as these teachers may not yet have sufficient experience to confidently apply different teaching strategies. This outcome is in contrast with Smith and Ingersoll (2004), who found that more experienced teachers eventually adopt more flexible teaching methods. Thus, a lack of experience and the need for additional professional development for improved pedagogical skills could be connected to the challenges Bangladeshi early-career teachers face in this field.

Regarding collegial relationships, the study showed that novice teachers reported feeling marginalized by their colleagues (M = 2.94), aligning with earlier findings by Ingersoll (2001) and Williams and Lawson (2001) that new teachers often experience loneliness and a lack of cooperation during their initial years. However, according to Kim and Lee (2014), new teachers faced many difficulties in receiving support from their institutions—which is quite different from the responses of the participants regarding getting help from colleagues to prepare lesson plans and materials (M = 2.96). However, this difference may be due to variations in institutional culture or availability of resources in different places.

The practicum-related challenges stood out from the rest of the findings in this study, with *mentoring sessions for new teachers being neglected* receiving the highest mean score (M = 4.08). Hennessy et al. (2016) addressed the importance of mentorship for novice teachers to grow effectively, which contradicts the finding and highlights the need to support new teachers during their initial years. Additionally, there is a lack of practical teacher training programs (M = 4.54) which indicates the need for it, aligning with the study of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). Real-time classroom practice and teachers' beliefs (M = 3.96) also appear to conflict with each other, reflecting on the inherent gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching, aligning with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where new teachers need guidance and support to overcome the gap.

Therefore, the findings of this study align with previous literature on novice teachers' challenges, especially in classroom management, collegial support, and practical teaching experience. However, the results also reveal some differences, particularly regarding collegial support and the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching. These findings highlight the importance of targeted professional development programs to support novice ELT teachers in Bangladesh, particularly through mentorship, peer collaboration, and increased opportunities for practical teaching experience.

Limitations

Despite providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by early-career EFL teachers in Bangladesh, this study has several limitations that should be considered to have an extensive understanding of the problems faced by novice teachers. First, the study may not be the total representation of the novice EFL teachers across Bangladesh, as it investigated a relatively small sample of 50 early-career lecturers from both public and private universities. Additionally, the study may be subject to response bias, such as social desirability bias or inaccurate self-assessment, affecting the reliability of the responses, since the data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire.

Another limitation is that the study primarily focused on three main categories of challenges: classroom management, collegial relationships, and practicum-related challenges, disregarding other possible challenges, such as, the impact of institutional support or cultural factors, that could also influence novice teachers' experiences. Furthermore, the study did not provide scope for a longitudinal examination of how these challenges evolve as teachers gain more experience. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse sample, adopting a longitudinal approach to capture a more comprehensive and nuanced view of the challenges faced by early-career EFL teachers over time.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to facilitate early-career EFL teachers in Bangladesh. To begin with, strengthening mentorship programs can play a crucial role in supporting new teachers who often feel isolated and unsupported in their professional development. Challenges related to classroom management and pedagogical skills could also be alleviated by pairing novice teachers with experienced colleagues under structured, long-term mentoring systems.

Additionally, teacher training programs should be designed to give practical, hands-on experiences rather than focusing solely on theoretical insights. This training would prepare novice teachers for real classroom challenges by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, institutions should also endorse collaborative practices to improve collegial relationships where teachers can

easily share lesson plans, teaching strategies, and classroom management techniques among themselves.

Furthermore, teachers should be provided with sufficient teaching materials and technological tools for better and less stressful teaching experiences. Finally, future research should explore the role of institutional support and cultural factors to determine better interventions and support systems to the unique needs of novice EFL teachers in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the challenges related to classroom management, collegial relationships, and practicum-related difficulties faced by early-career EFL teachers in Bangladesh. According to the findings, managing learners' disruptive behaviours, maintaining student engagement, and balancing different teaching strategies in the classroom pose major obstacles for novice teachers. In addition, they often deal with limited collegial support and inadequate mentoring programs, which further complicate their professional experiences.

The study suggests that well-designed mentorship programs, collaborative teaching environments, and practical teacher training can facilitate the professional growth of early-career teachers. Educational institutions can better support novice EFL teachers and improve teaching outcomes by providing such facilities. Future research should consider the varying challenges faced by early-career teachers and develop strategies to create a more supportive and effective teaching environment.

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Appendix

Demographic Questions

1. Duration of Teaching Profession
2. What level do you teach?
3. In which type of institutions do you teach?
    - Private
    - Public
    - other

Likert -Type Questions

Classroom Management Related Challenges

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.I find it difficult to manage class during pair/group activity					
2.Testing and evaluation is difficult to administer for me					
3.It is difficult to manage disruptive classes					
4.It is difficult to address students' problematic behavior					
5.It is difficult to choose either a teacher centered or student centered class					

Social Relations Related Challenges

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1.I do not get enough mental support from my colleagues					
2. I feel I am not accepted properly by my colleagues					
3.My senior colleagues rarely share their experience of their early years					
4.I do not get enough help from my colleagues to prepare lesson plan and materials					
5.There is barely any collaborative work among colleagues					

Administrative Support Related Challenges

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.Mentoring session for new teachers are neglected					
2.Inadequacy of resources and materials put me at difficulty					
3.Teacher training programs put too much attention on theory neglecting practice					
4.I find discrepancy between my belief and real-time practice					

- The question's response scale is 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree.

Open-ended Questions

1. Is there any other challenge you faced but not mentioned above? If yes, please mention it and describe it in your own words.
2. How can these challenges be addressed according to your perspective? (60-80 words)

When Meals Become Manifestos:
Narrating Power and Resistance through Food

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate literary representations of food function as narrative strategies across four diverse literary texts spanning from Renaissance to contemporary literature— Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener," George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*. Though distinct in genre and era, what unites these works is the way they illustrate how the consumption or refraining of food operate as narrative devices through which structures of authority, social hierarchy, and resistance are articulated across different historical and cultural contexts. Whether it is Bartleby's refusal to food and Yeong-hye's vegetal transformation, or the overindulgence of the pigs, the extravagant banquets of the Pope and the gluttony of Faustus, the paper argues how these very different works reveal one persistent literary motif which is the politics of food. Adopting a comparative framework grounded in close textual analysis, the study examines how food moves beyond sustenance and becomes a contested terrain through which relations of power are enacted, resisted, and exposed.

Keywords: Food, resistance, power, capitalism, Marxism, vegetarianism

I. Introduction

Throughout literature, food has long been used as a focal point around which themes of morality, power, control, or resistance have been built. From ancient classics to contemporary works, food has become a means of illustrating cultural values, sociopolitical structures, and tensions, thereby shaping identities and social hierarchies. Therefore, an inextricable link is found between food and literature where food ceases to remain a mere biological necessity and instead emerges as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon.

The objective of this study is to examine how food functions as a symbolic and political device in four literary works from different historical and cultural contexts. The texts analyzed here, selected for the prominence and significance of food and consumption in their plots, include: *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1856), *The Vegetarian* (2007), *Animal Farm* (1945) and *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* (1604). In *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, we discover how Herman Melville employs Bartleby's growing refusal of food as a symbolic, embodied protest against the industrialized, bureaucratic norms of the nineteenth-century America, while Han Kang reimagines food in *The Vegetarian* as a site of resistance and an exertion of autonomy and defiance of social and patriarchal standards. On the other hand, the pigs' manipulation of food distribution as means of ideological control, is a key political tactic used in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* to exhibit how the ruling class makes use of the basic resources to consolidate their power. Power is also displayed through the metaphor of food in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, where the opulence of the feast reveals a church more invested in indulgence than salvation. By placing these texts within a shared thematic framework, an attempt has been made to unravel how each of these narratives transform the acts of consuming food or refraining from it into forms of political expression. The article first examines food refusal as embodied resistance in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and *The*

Vegetarian, and then analyzes how food functions as an instrument of institutional authority and ideological control in *Animal Farm* and *Doctor Faustus*. It reveals how food is relegated not merely to a background detail but is brought to the foreground, operating as mechanisms of institutional authority, capitalist discipline, patriarchal control, and individual defiance.

II. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative textual analysis to examine the symbolic and political significance of food in the selected literary works. Drawing on close textual exegesis as a methodological tool, it allows for a nuanced exploration of diverse texts within a shared thematic framework. The paper engages with critical insights such as Marxist notions of class and labour, Foucauldian perspectives on discipline and bodily control as well as Feminist views on sexual politics in order to achieve an in-depth and interpretative understanding of how the thematic use of food reveals deeper ideological structures within society.

III. Food as Embodied Refusal in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and *The Vegetarian*

Both "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1856) and *The Vegetarian* (2007) embody acts of resistance through refusal to food with their protagonists turning their bodies into sites of dissent. Written across different time periods and in foregrounding completely different societal contexts, these two texts draw the readers' attention towards how their common theme of the refusal of food becomes more than a personal choice, and a direct indictment of social norms and expectations.

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener", a central text of what we now call the American Renaissance, is undoubtedly one of the finest works of fiction in literature. But the voluminous criticism and scholarship devoted to this work mostly focuses on psychoanalytical interpretation, Marxist analysis, and so on. For instance, David Kuebrich's article "Melville's Doctrine of Assumptions" focuses on a Marxist interpretation of Melville's "Bartleby," emphasizing how the story reflects the economic conditions and class conflicts of its time. It further reveals the hidden ideologies of capitalist production and the profound effects of economic conditions on individual behavior and societal structures. Moreover, Sheila Post-Lauria takes a similar critical approach to the short story, aligning her reading of the text with Marxist themes of class struggle and the individual's plight in a commodified society. Conversely, works like "Melville's Lost Self" and "Bartleby the Scrivener": Language as Wall" reveal deeper existential struggles within both the characters of Bartleby and the narrator while exploring themes of isolation, the search for meaning, and the complexities of human relationships within the framework of psychoanalysis. This article's focus on the short story steers away from the traditional approach taken towards the text to a more pragmatic one. It focuses on something as simple as food, how it is embedded into the structure of the capitalist society, and how its refusal corresponds to the protagonist's way of resisting the capitalist system.

To understand the radical weight of Bartleby's resistance, it is necessary to place him within the machinery he resists. Originally published in 1853, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" emerged at the height of American industrial expansion, where human labor was increasingly mechanized, and individuality dissolved into office routines. The lawyer's sterile chambers on Wall Street, filled with clerks copying ceaselessly, became a microcosm of a society obsessed with order, output, and obedience. It was a space where the value of a person was increasingly defined by their productivity. Melville, writing just before the Civil War, captures a society in transition from rural labor to urban industry, from craftsman to clerk, from voice to silence. In this world, the scrivener, once a symbol of literacy and skill, is simply expected to perform the same mechanical task day after day. Inside the lawyer's chambers, clerks spend their days copying legal documents in a space

"deficient in what landscape painters call 'life'" (Melville 3). The narrator frequently comments on the eating habits of his clerks as food is part of the workday's rhythm. Turkey works briskly before lunch but becomes reckless in the latter part of the day as seen from his blotchy documents; Nippers is irritable in the morning and steady by noon after he had had his meal. Ginger Nut, the twelve-year-old office boy, earns his name fetching 'oysters, ginger-cakes, and other dainties' for the older clerks. The snacks are so common that one day Turkey even "moisten[ed] a ginger-cake between his lips, and clap[ped] it on to a mortgage for a seal" (Melville 9). The tedious job of copying means the workers are in constant need of refreshments. Eating is folded into the ritual of the work day—fuel for labor, a reward for surviving the morning.

A closer look reveals how these characters are themselves named after food items: 'Turkey' (festive bird), 'Nippers' (lobster claws), and 'Ginger Nut' (ginger cakes). As Marvin Fisher has rightfully pointed out, by giving them "demeaning nicknames which turn them into things", the lawyer has stripped them of their humanity and reduced their bodies to the food they consume through "a functional reduction of the body" as defined by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (164). The office is welded around the characters' appetites and their workplace personas are inextricably linked to their capacities to produce. Even Bartleby is typified to be the opposite of the food which he eats, as the lawyer acutely observes that the hot and spicy ginger nuts, the only food he lives on, are unable to change his temperament or behaviour in any way. The lawyer's attempts to understand the apparently distant Bartleby also involves the metaphor of food as he characterizes Bartleby's initial industry in terms of consuming food: "as if long *famishing* for something to copy, he seemed to *gorge* himself," with "no pause for *digestion*" (Melville 10; emphasis mine). This reveals how the lawyer-narrator associates the productivity of his employees with their habits of eating, suggesting the capitalist mindset of how food is the driving factor behind human labor and hence how by keeping a close watch of their food intake, the lawyer can monitor the productivity of his employees. He applies the same strategy to tackle the 'eccentricities' of Turkey and Nippers. Turkey's overeating after lunch makes his face blaze "like a grate full of Christmas coals" which "continued blazing — but, as it were, with a gradual wane — till 6 o'clock, p.m. or thereabouts" (Melville 5). This also affected his temper and caused his work to suffer post lunch as it was usually full of mistakes. The reverse happened with Nippers; his indigestion accounted for his irritable mood in the morning and he can only work efficiently "after lunch possibly because his stomach is more at ease over time" (Melville 7). The narrator noticing this direct correlation that food has with his employees' capacity to work found it convenient that Turkey's reckless blunders happened in the morning and Nippers' restlessness was only witnessed during the day since "their fits relieved each other like guards" (Melville 8). This is how he, in Foucault's words, tried to "establish an equilibrium" (246) in the office where humans are reduced to units of labor and profits are derived from their resultant efficiency. Amidst this, Bartleby's rebellion single handedly disrupts these equilibria that hold the office together and forces the lawyer, albeit momentarily, to question the calculable, rational, orderly system.

The final pages of the story reveal how Bartleby "neither eats nor hungers any more" and at last "lives without dining" (Melville 34). It is his way of not letting the capitalist system feed his laboring body but it is also a refusal that does not outright attack the system but quietly steps outside its grammar by refusing to operate in America's capitalist society. The lawyer, who easily manipulates the food consumption of his other employees, finds himself helpless against Bartleby's absolute refusal to eat. Thus, Bartleby tries to claim his subjectivity through his self-imposed starvation and resolutely refuses the mechanism of capitalism. In the middle of Wall Street's restless energy, Bartleby chooses to fade. His withdrawal, culminating in his refusal to eat,

mirrors a deeper form of resistance to a system that sees people as a mere cog in the larger machinery of capitalism, not as individuals. Marvin Hunt has explained how, over the course of the story, Bartleby is increasingly depersonalized by making him function less as an individual and more as a mere "symbolic presence" (281).

Bartleby's recalcitrance is directed both to the capitalist order and the person who embodies it, the lawyer. The lawyer establishes himself as a megalomaniac when he condescendingly says that his patience and kindness towards Bartleby is a "sweet morsel for his conscience" (Melville 14) and if he gives up on him, then Bartleby would be "driven forth miserably to starve" (Melville 13). Even here the narrator uses the language of food to express his desire of exerting his control over Bartleby which he does when he arranges for Bartleby's dinner in prison. Speaking to the grub man the narrator says, "I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get" (Melville 32). Bartleby's refusal to food, seen under the light of such occurrences, becomes an inevitable refusal to cater to the mechanism of capitalism. This is exactly how hunger-based protests in history—suffragette fasts, Gandhi's hunger strikes—have opposed the existing social structure: "It is true that hunger depends upon its context for its meaning, but it is also true that self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself."[6] Bartleby's fasting operates as his resistance to the way the lawyer's office and the broader capitalist society function. He acts out his passive resistance through his body by first refusing to eat and then refusing to work altogether, a refusal deemed to be absolute rejection of capitalist society as Ellmann puts it, "To fast is to create a dungeon of the body by rejecting any influx from the outer world" (93). In the bustling Wall Street, Bartleby's starving self itself acts as a disturbance. As he becomes one of those dead bodies who neither "[eat] nor [hunger] any more" (Melville 34), Bartleby's silence becomes as loud and impactful as any other hunger strikers who declare their intention.

Bartleby, was "singularly sedate in aspect"; he copied with "incessant industry," and to his employer's questions he answered, "I would prefer not to" (Melville 14). We are told that "the young man's countenance was shaded with constitutional or habitual melancholy," and he "declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world." Bartleby's "morbid state of mind" is also reflected in his author. When Nathaniel Hawthorne writes about Herman Melville, he mentions how his friend "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated" (432-33). It was in this state of mind that Melville composed and wrote "Bartleby, The Scrivener." Hence what we find in the story is a complicated synergy of psychic damage and creative insight in the mere wasteland that is Wall Street. What started as a consequent emotional trauma from working in the Dead Letter Office (Bartleby's former work place) finally reaches its culmination in the capitalist workplace of Wall Street and shoves Bartleby into the void he had already been staring at. This is the reason why Bartleby's final lapse—deemed as a political act—seems a perfectly natural reaction to his dehumanizing occupation both in the Dead Letter and the lawyer's office and necessary for conveying the extent of Bartleby's impact. Through his silent and gradual withdrawal from food that also parallels his withdrawal from the capitalist labour industry, Bartleby makes evident his indifference to a system that equates consumption with participation and survival with compliance. Similarly, Yeong-hye's vegetarianism in *The Vegetarian* directly opposes a patriarchal society that normalizes bodily control and masculine authority.

[6] According to Freud, an anorectic understands consumption of food as "danger to the ego" as it is "being eaten from within by the very objects it is trying to engorge" (qtd. from Ellmann 30).

Written more than a century later, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* unravels through three fragmented perspectives and centers on the unsettling choice of the protagonist's eating (or non-eating). Yoeng-hye's decision not to eat meat stems from a recurring nightmare and is a consequence of a lifetime of domestic violence and patriarchal oppression. It's a common trope in art for meat to represent masculinity. Yeong-he's disgust towards meat could be because she unconsciously likened it to something primal. Her refusal to eat meat goes against her husband's wishes and is an exercise in control on her part. This writer tries to examine the protagonist's transformation from meat-eater to vegetarian and eventually to a tree, drawing on the connection between refusal to meat and resistance to patriarchy on the protagonist's part.

Critical works like Hayley Singer's "The Art of Carnism," brings to the forefront the cultural intertextuality between meat-eating and masculinity in the novel, others like Caitlin E. Stobie's essay "The Good Wife? Sibling Species in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*" draw on a small body of ecocritical scholarship and critical animal studies to examine vegetarianism as a feminist movement. On the other hand, expressing her own views about the novel, the author states in an interview: "If I could say one thing, [*The Vegetarian*] isn't a singular indictment of the Korean patriarchy. I wanted to deal with my long-lasting questions about the possibility/impossibility of innocence in this world, which is mingled with such violence and beauty. These were universal questions that occupied me as I wrote it" (Han Kang qtd. in Patrick). While her comments do not endorse prioritizing one interpretation over the other, *The Vegetarian* nonetheless depicts a world embedded in which individual desire and resistance are intermingled with the overarching structures of gender-based violence. Narrated from the perspectives of Yeong-hye's ex-husband, her brother-in-law, and her elder sister, the novel leaves little space for the protagonist Yeong-hye's voice to be heard, and eventually, with the progress of the novel, her voice recedes, and silence takes over. Therefore, *The Vegetarian* is a novel that raises complex questions not just about consumption and the mere fact of turning vegetarian, but the notions of identity, speech, subjectivity, power, and resistance that are so closely intertwined with it.

The novel, despite being about Yeong-hye's journey, opens with her husband Mr. Cheong's strikingly indifferent statement: "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 3). Just like Han Kang's short story "The Fruit of My Woman", here too the husband takes Yeong-hye's vegetarianism as a personal insult, finding it to be privately irritating and socially embarrassing. His unsympathetic attitude towards Yeong-hye point towards his inherent 'phallocentric' valuation of traditional patriarchal culture, whose only expectation from his life partner is that she continues playing the humble role of a submissive wife. This is why we never see him calling Yeong-hye by her name but only referring to her merely as a 'wife,' a term which neatly condenses his understanding and expectations of her. Through his descriptions, Yeong-hye appears remote and incomprehensible to the readers as well. Despite this, there are moments when Yeong-hye's voice pushes through her husband's patriarchal gaze, and we get a glimpse into her own mind through her interior monologue:

> Barbecuing meat, the sounds of singing and happy laughter.
>
> But the fear. My clothes still wet with blood. Hide, hide behind the trees. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of my mouth, slick with crimson blood. (Han, *The Vegetarian* 19–20)

The grotesque image of consumption that she witnesses in her dream is what makes Yeong-hye forgo meat altogether, a decision which befuddles her entire family, including her husband, who

complains about her wife's "odd" behaviors. In her husband's eyes, Yoeng-hye's avowed refusal to eat meat is tantamount to "sheer obstinacy" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 14). In an interview, Han Kang stated how, for her, "eating meat, cooking meat, all these daily activities embody a violence that has been normalized". *The Vegetarian* is her attempt to "depict a woman who rejects an omnipresent and precarious violence even at the cost to herself" (Han, "Interview with Han Kang"). In Han's opinion, this 'omnipresent and precarious violence' is the violence against all animals, which Yeong-hye rejects by refusing to consume meat altogether. Yeong-hye condemns the act of meat-eating, realizing its complicity in violence and describing the physical sensations of pain she experiences, she says: "Something is stuck in my solar plexus….The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 49). She longs for a kind of redemption, a purging of the carnist or patriarchal violence. However, Yeong-hye is met by masculine opposition when her father brings together the other male members in the family – Mr. Cheong and Yeong-hye's brother Yeong-ho – to force-feed his daughter after she disobeys his command to eat meat. This act of violence brings to Yeong-hye's mind the memory of her father torturing a dog to death, thus explicitly associating violence against animals with violence perpetrated against women. This association echoes Carol Adams' assertion in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that the virility endorsed by a meat-consuming culture is linked to the formation of masculinity under a patriarchal framework. By imposing carnism on the female Other, the meat-imposing male is associated with the "*carnophallocentric*"[7] subjectivity, which Derrida refers to as "a quintessentially *human, animal-flesh-eating* subject" (Derrida 112). Moreover, we see how Yeong-hye's body itself becomes the site of consumption by her husband when he forcefully asserts himself on her and views it not as an act of spousal rape but rather compared to a Japanese soldier's forced advances towards a comfort woman, linking the modern-day domestic violence to colonial history.[8] Again, we see Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, who, after filming her naked, thinks aloud, "I want to swallow you, have you melt into me and flow through my veins" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 121). Here again Yeong-hye is objectified, seen as something to be consumed both in flesh and in images, through the male lens. Nevertheless, while interpreting Han Kang's novel as a "patriarchal text of meat," it should also be noted that this 'patriarchal culture' doesn't only encompass meat-eating male figures, as even the feminine presence in Yeong-hye's life, her mother and her sister, remain unempathetic towards her. Her mother tries to reenact the same force-feeding scene carried out by her father when she brings lamb soup disguised as herbal medicine to Yoeng-hye in the hospital. "Stop eating meat, and the world will devour you whole", her mother threatens (Han, *The Vegetarian* 55–56). Her sister, too, is shown as a carnivore throughout who takes her husband's side and tries to persuade Yeong-hye to eat meat. Just as Yeong-hye appears incomprehensible to her family, the lawyer also had a difficult time understanding Bartleby only because he did not neatly fit into the box society forced to put him into. Yeong-hye's defiance shown by her refusal to prepare meat for her husband and throwing it away is reflected in Bartleby's outright refusal to dine at all.

[7] "Carno-phallocentrism" has since been explored in recent studies on feminism and food politics to denote a hegemonic culture premised on the sexual politics of meat.

[8] Comfort women, or military comfort women, were women and girls forced to provide sexual services to Japanese Imperial Army troops before and during World War II. Comfort women were held captive in brothels called "comfort stations" that were systematically installed and maintained by the Japanese government from 1932 to the end of World War II in 1945 all over Japanese-occupied areas.

Towards the end of the novel, Yeong-hye's refusal of meat turns into her refusal to take in food altogether. We see her telling her brother-in-law: "I thought it was all because of eating meat [. . .]. I thought all I had to do was to stop eating meat and then the faces [in my nightmares] wouldn't come back. But it didn't work. And so . . . now I know. The face is inside my stomach" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 178). Hence, it is only by depriving herself of food altogether that she can fully liberate herself from her haunting nightmares, such is the price she has to pay. Since her refusal to 'be' is, in Singer's words, "a refusal to be *othered* by a system that demands her subjugation" (Singer 273), her first step towards 'not-being' becomes that of 'not-eating.' Ironically, it is through her vegetal transformation that we see Yeong-hye attempting to reclaim her marginal identity and embody some agency. When In-hye visits the psychiatric hospital, she is astonished to find her sister Yeong-hye doing a handstand under the belief that she is no longer an animal: "Yeong-hye moved her emaciated face closer to her sister. "I'm not an animal anymore, sister," she said, first scanning the empty ward as if about to disclose a momentous secret. "I don't need to eat, not now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight" (Han, *The Vegetarian* 37). Luce Irigaray explains how the vegetal world "[gives] authority back to [her,]" how it proves to Yeong-hye that she is "dependent upon no one to live: breathing suffices for living, . . . with the help of the vegetal world" (Irigaray 45). Yeong-hye's transformation from vegetarianism to becoming vegetal is a radical political act through the performative politics of silence and starvation. As Susan Bordo rightfully points out, her body becomes the site of "embodied protest – unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest without an effective language, voice, or politics, but protest nonetheless" (Bordo 189). Yeong-hye's body, through its rejection of edible food, love of sunlight, and attempts to take roots by way of headstands, now becomes a performative indictment against human institutions of power and oppression. Her body, aptly painted florally, by her brother-in-law becomes a graphic text that demands to be read as a cultural statement about gender on the one hand and humanity on the other. One critic argues how Yeong-hye's "transformation into a gendered vegetal being metaphorizes an 'escape-impulse' that captures the irreducible desire to overcome, move beyond, or step over one's physical or social limits" (Zolkos 104).[9] But for Yeong-hye, it is not the 'escaping from' but the 'escaping into' a world of plants that defines her resistance. She seeks to escape from humanity altogether, whose predisposition to violence is inherent and inescapable.

Yeong-hye's insistence on vegetarianism and Bartleby's quiet refusal to eat, though operating under different regimes of power, are acts of political dissent that transform their bodies into sites of resistance. It is the renunciation of food coupled with the resistance of these characters that shape the narrative arcs of these two texts. Through self-starvation both of them assert their agencies as individuals and are able to challenge and defy the patriarchal and capitalist ideologies deeply rooted in their respective societies. Bartleby's abstention embodies negation of capitalist society and Yeong-hye's vegetarianism confronts the violent and patriarchal domestic order. Both texts reveal how refusal of food ceases to be a personal choice of the characters and becomes something of greater significance: a radical interruption of social expectations and a terrain through which society itself is challenged.

IV. Food as Spectacle and Institutional Hypocrisy in *Animal Farm* and *Doctor Faustus*

If Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* showcase food as a domain of personal resistance, George Orwell's political satire *Animal Farm* and Chritopher

[9] The dramatization of women's inner world is a commonly used trope in literature and is seen in famous works like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), and many others.

Marlowe's Elizabethan tragedy *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* expose it as a tool of institutional hypocrisy and manipulation. In both works, authority consolidates itself through control over consumption. Food becomes a language through which institutions naturalize inequality across Renaissance and the twentieth century allegory.

George Orwell's intention behind writing *Animal Farm* was "to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole" (Orwell, *The Collected Essays* 29). While Orwell's allegory had the possibility of meaning 'very different things to different readers' as warned by critics, he makes his stance quite clear in his essay "Why I Write" in which he states: "Every line of serious work I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism" (Orwell, *The Collected Essays* 440). Through the novella *Animal Farm*, Orwell reveals how totalitarianism in socialist clothing is doomed when Old Major parodies Marxist notion of a utopian society by calling forth a rebellion which only leads to the emerging of a tyrant governing class. As George Woodcock later discovers, it shows "the identity of governing class interests everywhere" (Woodcock 158-59) and this article examines how the ruling class uses food as one of its means of oppression. Ultimately, it makes a point that Orwell uses the politics of food allocation in the novel to address how those in power consolidate their authority, manipulate ideologies and establish inequalities, disguised as collective progress.

From the very onset of the story, Orwell uses food to represent the establishment of distinctions in class in the novella. Before the Rebellion, Mr. Jones exploits the animals not only for their labor but also for their produce. Old Major reminds the hens, "how many eggs have you laid in this last year, and how many of those eggs ever hatched into chickens? The rest have all gone to market to bring in money for Jones and his men" (Orwell, *Animal Farm* 7). This sharp reminder reveals the extraction at the heart of Jones's ownership- the animals' food and reproductive labor are diverted to human profit, not animal survival. Marx and Engels describe this same exploitation in *The Communist Manifesto*, where they write, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto* 1). On Manor Farm, food is already implicated in this struggle, as the animals labor to produce nourishment they themselves are denied. Later, all the animals in the farm revolt against and overthrow Mr. Jones to establish their own society. Initially, the animals are promised equal rations of food and the freedom to enjoy the fruits of their own labour. However, the situation quickly worsens as is seen in the case of the mystery of the missing milk which is later discovered to be "mixed every day into the pigs' mash" (Orwell, *Animal Farm* 30). When met with protests from the other animals, Squealer, the spokesperson for the pigs, justifies this by saying: "Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health…We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us" (Orwell, *Animal Farm* 30). The rhetoric is highly ideological for the reason that it encompasses the idea of how basic food like milk and apples are no longer seen as resources accessible to every animal in the farm, but markers of intellectual privilege. While this statement masks the exploitation of the other animals by the pigs with benevolence, it also sows the initial seeds of inequality and the emergence of a hierarchy. It shows how, even the language involving food becomes more weaponized, as the pigs can control not just the food, but the narratives around it too. Thus, a new class system emerges based on biological inequality.

In *Das Kapital*, Marx defines class in terms of the relationship to the means of production, i.e., the bourgeoisie who are in charge of them and the proletariat who must put in their labour to survive. The same principle can be applied here to the pigs who do not labour physically, but consume

rather disproportionately. Food works as both a material resource and an ideological tool, symbolizing a class structure where consumption reflects a social standing. As the pigs progressively gain power, the illusion of equality is maintained even as the disparities grow between them and the other animals. While the pigs enjoy themselves with the luxuries of milk and apples, and even beer at one point, the rest of the animals suffer. The line "The animals were always cold, and usually hungry too" (Orwell, *Animal Farm* 37) goes to show the effects of the inequalities faced by the animals in a normalized manner. According to Marxist theory, it is suggested that capitalism is often perpetuated by making inequalities appear to be quite natural. Marx explains, "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (*The German Ideology* 42). In other words, ideology grows out of material conditions, and Orwell manages to mirror this through the pigs' privileged access to food, which reshapes the very consciousness of the other animals, who come to believe that inequality is logical and even necessary. The animals not only work harder for less food, but they are also conditioned to accept this inequality as natural, even righteous for a "just" cause, showing the power of ideology in maintaining a class distinction. By the end of the novella, the pigs monopolise food while the other animals suffer and live in a state of depravity. This disparity between the living conditions of the pigs and the other animals' parallels Marx's critique of capitalism, where the worker "becomes all the poorer, the more wealth he produces" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 71*). Food in the farm is thus not just sustenance, but capital as well. Those who control its distribution control power. As the pigs slowly become the very oppressors they overthrew once, it shows the betrayal of revolutionary ideals and the re-emergence of class hierarchy under a new leader. The novella ends by showing the pigs' feasting with humans which is not an indicator of their fellowship but rather proof of the business-like relationship that the two parties have. Pilkington, one of the neighboring farmers, very aptly tells Napoleon that "If you have your lower animals to contend with, we have our lower classes!" (Orwell, *Animal Farm* 115)—revealing how the exploitation of food by the upper-class pigs in the novella mirrors the exploitation of lower-class workers in human society. A similar criticism of institutional hypocrisy is also seen in *Doctor Faustus* where Marlowe parodies the papal banquet revealing how gluttony dramatizes moral decay.

In *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe paints a satiric portrait of Pope Adrian by showing his greed for everything, ranging from power to food. The Pope is cruel, power-hungry, and the farthest thing from holy. In the scene of the papal banquet, food is not just there for nourishment— it is also a display of power and dominance. The holy man sits at a table of grandeur and indulgence, where power and appetite intersect.

The character of Pope Adrian from *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* can be examined in the context of his gluttony and overindulgence using a Freudian lens of repression. Through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, it can be analyzed that the Pope's gluttony is an eruption of his repressed desires. Keeping this theory in mind, the author tries to answer the question: What does it signify when the desire to consume consumes a holy man? Freud argues that repression "simply turns something away, keeping it at a distance from the conscious" (Freud 147). But when the superego censors these unconscious desires don't just simply vanish but "return in distorted or excessive forms" (Freud 147). Hence, even though Pope's superego enforces discipline and restraint, his gluttony emerges as the eruption of his repressed desires. A similar incident is also seen in the case of the minister Arthur Dimmesdale in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* when he lets the

blasphemous thoughts reign free in his mind after a meeting with Hester Prynne in the forest. Both these priests are well aware of how they should always conceal their lust, violence, and ambition. Food then becomes one of the few socially permissible outlets where the hidden urges of these holy men can find expression.

The papal office demands the suppression of bodily and worldly desires, yet those urges reappear through excessive appetite. Duxfield observes that Doctor Faustus continually oscillates between depicting “a morally barren scholar” and “a celebration of Renaissance humanism” (Duxfield 33) through its titular character. This oscillation is mirrored in Pope Adrian as well: he is at once the supreme image of sanctity and a man enslaved to appetite. His outrage: “How now! Who snatched the meat from me? Villains, why speak you not?” (iii.i.100–101) shows his inability to tolerate even the smallest intrusion on his plate. Again, his anger is very much evident when the invisible Faustus, by means of his magical powers, makes the Pope’s food vanish: “What, again? My wine gone too? — Faustus, I’ll be paid!” (iii.i.125–26). The fury shown by him is quite disproportionate to the offense, but it reveals how fragile the papal façade is. Freud would interpret Adrian’s violent reaction as the collapse of his superego and the surfacing of his repressed desire in the form of rage. The Pope’s loss of composure shows how precariously his power rests upon ritual consumption. It is such kinds of excess that the critics like A. Bartlett Giamatti describe as Marlowe’s exposure of “the grotesque marriage of appetite and authority” (104). The Pope’s appetite has become inseparable from his identity, and by depriving him of his feast, Faustus is undermining not just the appetite of the Pope but his authority as well. From this scene with the Pope to the one which ends with Faustus and Mephistophilis tossing fireworks and chanting Friars amidst the ruins of the feast and the Pope’s exit, a display of pure slapstick is visible and shows the degeneration of both the Pope and Faustus alike. Along with the Pope, the titular character’s physical and sexual gluttony is also shown where Faustus is fed by a feast brought by the devils, a feast of "such belly- cheer” which “Wagner in his life ne'er saw the like" (v.i.7-8). When visiting the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt, Faustus demonstrates his eagerness to fulfill a fantasy he expressed in Act 1, Scene 1: “I’ll have them … / search all corners of the newfound world / For pleasant fruits and princely delicates” (i.i.84-87). He ranks ‘pleasant fruits’ with gold and ‘orient pearl’ as rare and sought-after objects which can only be procured through magic. Again, when Helen of Troy is brought in to him as per his demands, Faustus asks her to "To glut the longing of [his] heart's desire” (v.i.91). Both the scenes with the female characters living and dead point towards Faustus’s repressed libidinal desire and show how his sexual appetite is manifested through his hidden desire for the opposite sex. Finally, Mephistophilis and the Bad Angel torment him with the sight of Hell and of gluttons being fed with “sops of flaming fire,” which acts a brutal reminder of the feast the devils had served him for his enjoyment, a parody of the last supper.

Animal Farm and *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus* thus represent two sides of the same mechanism: how the authority uses food to mask institutional hypocrisy and moral corruption.

V. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that the above discussion makes it explicitly clear that literature spread across centuries can be united in their recognition of universal themes which in this case is how the idea of consumption is never ideologically neutral. Whether through self-imposed vegetarianism or starvation, or through the spectacle of gluttony and power, food becomes the medium through which power is reinforced or systems of authority are resisted. Taken together,

these texts, thus, serve as reminders of how the politics of food extends far beyond the plate and become narratives that reveal how meanings can be ascribed onto the simplest of human acts.

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Examining Linda Loman's Idealization and Gender Roles in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

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Abstract

This article revisits Linda Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, in response to critical readings that tend to view her as passive, marginal, or blindly complicit with patriarchal values. Too often, critics reduce Linda to a stereotypical "supportive wife" and miss the complexity of what she actually does in the play. Drawing on feminist arguments about the situatedness of women's choices, critiques of essentialist femininity, and challenges to homogenizing Western frameworks, this paper uses close textual reading to argue that Linda's apparent quietness is its own kind of strategic agency. By looking closely at how she speaks, when she falls silent, and how she mediates between her husband and sons, the article shows Linda actively navigating emotional, economic, and ideological pressures — not just absorbing them. Her labor, whether affective, moral, or rhetorical, turns out to be central to the play's tragic machinery. Foregrounding Linda's constrained agency helps us move past reductive feminist binaries of oppression versus resistance and offers a more nuanced, transnationally aware feminist reading of the play.

Key Words: Willy Loman, Linda Loman, ideal woman, individual choice, marginalization

"Is *The Handmaid's Tale* a feminist novel?" Margaret Atwood answers this question of a reader thus:

> If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings—with all the variety of character and behavior that implies—and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure, and plot of the book, then yes. In that sense, many books are "feminist". (xii)

According to Atwood, a reader should judge a text or a writer, mainly on the basis of the roles of characters and the portrayal of them with their true worth and attention, and if these characters are an integral part of the whole or marginal to the plot. Of course, female characters in *Death of a Salesman* in this study will be examined within the rubric of this idea of Atwood that really attempts to evaluate female characters of a text by its presentation of women characters on the basis of their relation to the theme, structure and plot of the text. Atwood's position here aligns with the third wave feminism's ideology that supports bodily autonomy, intersection of gender with socioeconomic and political realities, and independent freewill against doctrinaire philosophy. Linda's character thus needs reassessment with regard to the ideas of womanhood in light of Atwood, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Toril Moi. In the case of women, Mohanty states, "The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. . . in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared

oppression" (53). Thus, the main problem of interpreting a text lies in our attempts to homogenize every group of people, ideas or things within a single framework, and in most cases, oppression has been the yardstick for feminist critics or critics in general to analyze women characters in any given social context, and it is usually thought that all women are oppressed women. The objections raised by Mohanty are that this kind of stereotyped critical representation of women by even mainstream modern feminists gives rise to a "sexist discourse", which misrepresents women as "the other", as "an already constituted group" as "powerless, exploited, sexually harassed" (Mohanty 53). But the world outside this preconceived notion is much larger for women who should be judged by the standard she wants to follow rather than those of society that imposes the ideology of the dominant White Western elite and middleclass educated working women. So, we draw on a few key ideas: Margaret Atwood reminds us that women's choices always happen within real-life limits; Toril Moi warns against assuming there's one "right" way to be a woman; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty pushes back against feminist theories that treat all women the same. Using these ideas, we do a close reading of the play to show that Linda's quietness isn't weakness — it's a smart, strategic way of acting under pressure.

Thus, "what is a woman or womanhood" must not necessarily have a definite answer that can satisfy all. Toril Moi states, "The answer to the question of what a woman is, is not one. To say this is to deny that the answer is that woman is not one…. Too many forms of contemporary feminism appear unable to understand women who do not conform to their own more or less narrow vision of what a woman is or ought to be" (*Sex, Gender and the Body*, 9). Trying to discuss the subject of woman in relation to or without the idea of sex, gender and the body however does not give any final answer either. Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (5); "woman is like man, a human being" (8). A woman is, first and foremost, a complete human being, alongside being a mother, sister, wife, and a professional. Thus, there is not one woman but there are many, and so there is no singular womanhood, but a multitude. However, the woman under study, Linda Loman, is not like other dominant group of middleclass women of her time in the USA who were trying to erode the patriarchal structure of the previous time for better or for worse. She is thus, though a culturally different woman than a Bangladeshi or an Afghan woman, very like an Asian woman, who is a devoted wife. Rather, she is different from the many American radical feminists who try to impose their own ideas of womanhood on other women who do not think like them. Even, to get back to Mohanty's idea, Linda Loman is not an abused woman at the hands of the male members directly, and thus, the traditional notion of womanhood that has been questioned by the mainstream white feminists applies to her. She must not be judged by what other women think of her regarding her motivations, actions and relations with her husband and her sons. Rather she must be judged by her own feelings and situations. The way she has lived her life is her own choice. Whatever her actions are, whether those be influenced or forced or imposed by the society or any male members, those are her own actions, and she has the right to choose what course of action she would follow; she must have the right to exercise her choice as to what foods she will eat, what dress she would put on and how she will treat anybody, be it male or female, husband or child. While her actions conforming to traditional gender roles are grossly criticized by modern feminists, and contemporary readers as they consider these antithetical to modern practices of feminists, this essay attempts to reassess Linda's role in the context of her own society where traditional family-bonding was shifting towards individual self-centredness, and when the concept of parenthood based on marriage and family was gradually changing into a non-Christian and single parent institution. In the rising trend of same sex marriages and childless families, Linda's

role appears as a complex one inviting rethinking and offering optimistic visions on the subverted ideas of marriage, parenthood and family.

In the early nineteenth century, women were considered unfit for intellectual work, sports, public jobs whereas in today's American society women occupy almost all the public spaces men occupy, and hence avoid traditional female roles considering them as humiliating and oppressively patriarchal. Women characters in literature reflect these changing roles, and feminist criticism also reflects on these issues that guide women in a society. Feminist criticism as such has an evolving history divided into different waves. The first wave of feminism[10] starting around 1900 advocated for the Western women's matrimonial, educational and voting rights. When women won these rights gradually by 1950 in most of the major Western countries, the second wave of feminism is considered to have started following the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) from the 1960s and continued till 1980s. This wave particularly questioned the gender inequality and gender roles in the society offering new thoughts on marriage, family and motherhood. Working women demanded autonomy to live their own lives and control their own bodies and wages, and make laws to stop sexual harassment in workplaces. "The personal is political" became one of their slogans to criticize sexism and patriarchy, and the activists brought in different political and social ideas to shift their peaceful movements into radical ones demanding women's liberation for both white and black Americans. However, this radicalism was less exploited by Third Wave feminism as it was more inclusive and fluid about gender roles and sexuality, and primarily focused on individual experiences rather than a group. The personal choice of a woman or girl is prioritized above any ideological or group credence, and so femininity or girl power is considered one of the advantages that help them live a better and freer life than that of the exclusionist and essentialist political ideology of the Second Wave. Amidst this evolving landscape of feminism, this essay applying the lens of Third Wave feminism offers an alternative view of Linda Loman – as a figure not of striking submission and of a devoted wife and mother under patriarchy but as a woman consciously playing those roles embodying the spirit of the individual liberty in order to save her family from disintegration. She rather emerges not as an exploited lady but as a rebel against a capitalist consumer culture where selfishness and egotism rule over fellow-feeling and family bonding.

Despite her awareness of her husband's flaws – his irrationality, egoism, and challenging demeanor – Linda continues supporting her husband's spirits with unwavering encouragement and counsel. Critics, such as Guerin Bliquez, have castigated Linda's role, incriminating her in Willy's gradual deterioration from self-deception to unstoppable old age dementia and eventual suicide. Many contemporary feminists find fault with her adherence to traditional gender norms, viewing her excessive devotion to her husband as incompatible with feminist principles. Nevertheless, this article questions the authenticity of such criticisms, and drawing on some of the principles of Third Wave feminism, it views Linda Loman not as a marginal character but as a central one that sheds light on the nature of womanhood in a world where radical Second Wave feminism complicated women's lives more than it was before the early twentieth century and imposed highly educated middle class white Western values on common women against their will.

To a general feminist reader, Death *of a Salesman* is a sexist text. Most critics consider the play as a text on Willy Loman and his two sons. In fact, the relation between the father and his sons

[10] First wave is believed to have started with the first formal Women's Rights Convention in New York in 1848 run by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

constitutes the main plot. Critics often try to relate the incidents of the text to Arthur Miller's own life. A salesman's struggle to be successful in life and find his own worth in his society and his failure or the sense of failure reflect the socio-economic context of Miller's time and the failure of the American Dream. The paradoxical effect of this dream is not only questioned but also is demonstrated following the tradition of realistic drama of Ibsen. That is why social realism and the tragic mode are combined to produce a modern tragedy by Miller. In fact, the American tragedy after Eugene O' Neil gets a perfect treatment at the hands of Miller who presents a contrast to Aristotelian tragedy of the upper class. Tahar Bayouli and Imed Sammali point out:

> The fact is that well before Death of a Salesman, the tragic vision of American reality had marked American drama as it grew to maturity and shaped its distinctive styles and themes. With Miller however, this drama became even more concentrated on the theme of the social condition of the contemporary American individual living the paradoxes of the so-called 'American Dream. (40)

This American Dream, however, was closely associated with a successful career and a happy family. In both cases though the male is the focal point, the female is not absent altogether as the success myth also demanded a family with children which is impossible without the mother. During Miller's time women entered the workforce and outside space but not all women had the opportunity. Thus, women as a homemaker played a pivotal role.

Judged from these thematic concerns, *Death of a Salesman* is on the surface a male text, as Robert C. Evans states in "Linda Loman and Cognitive Psychology in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*": "Linda Loman, the wife of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, often receives much less attention than the many male characters who mostly populate the drama. Her husband and sons, of course, are the three most prominent characters, but most of the important secondary characters are also males" (n.pag). Truly, most of the characters are male with the exception of the unnamed woman and reference to some unnamed girls, and their significance is negligible. Critical anthologies also do not have any separate criticism on the women characters of the play. Whatever criticism is directed towards women is found as supporting ideas in some works related to other social, political and masculine themes except the one by Evans. Harold Bloom's Modern Critical Edition of *Death of Salesman* contains eleven different essays by diverse hands, but none of them is on the woman question. Bloom in his introduction to the volume considers Willy as a tragic character, whose suffering and striving to have an identity links him with the Jewish sense of being permanently in exile. Bloom says, "Miller has caught an American kind of suffering that is also a universal mode of pain, quite possibly because his hidden paradigm for his American tragedy is an ancient Jewish one" (3). Bloom finds pathos in the play, and like many other Jewish critics, he finds a link between Willy's suicide and the Jewish history of exile rather than the American common people's struggle for success in career. Willy surely wanted to see his sons' successful career and his own successful end, but his struggle transcends the Jewish exilic experiences if there is any representing all salesmen not only in America but also the whole world. But how is that success measured? Of course, a man is measured by the judgment of others and his family members, especially his children and his wife. This gives rise to the gender study of masculinity in *Death of a salesman* as some critics point out. In fact, Willy's sense of masculinity always gives him the feeling of inferiority when he compares himself with Charley, Ben, Howard and old Wagner. Grant Williams states, "Miller reveals that while Willy leads a life of quiet desperation, all of the male cultural archetypes around him appear to be succeeding" (55). Willy sometimes remembers his past when he was welcomed by his sons and wife as a champion. He tells Linda of his success on the road: "five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston" (35). But this income gradually falls down to two

hundred gross. He judges his own failure because of his sense of masculinity, as he knows that Linda and his sons would compare him with other successful husbands and fathers. He defends himself to his wife thus: “You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me”(36). He says that people laugh at him, "…they just pass me by. I'm not noticed" (36). Being enraged by a buyer’s derogatory remarks he “cracked him right across the face” (37). This violence and the whole exchange with Linda display his confusion about the masculine identity. Only it is Linda who never questions her masculinity and who is not deviled by the American dream.

But he is not alone; his wife Linda is always with him. Linda’s speech in response to her son Biff is full of pathos and compassion for her husband: “Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He’s not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So, attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog” (40). Bloom says that it is the most famous speech of Linda in the text which he considers as “Linda’s pre-elegy for her husband” (4). Therefore, a character’s worth should not be judged by how much space he or she is given in the text but by the significance of the role played, and from this perspective, Linda is not only given enough space to flourish as an individual character but also given the central focus as well.

Evans also considers Linda Loman a significant character and states that “Linda, however, is clearly a central figure, and she is arguably far more sensible, intelligent, grounded, selfless, and levelheaded than either her husband or her two sons. By contrast with her, the major male figures seem far less emotionally mature” (n.pag). Thus, this critic considers Linda as one of the major characters who outshines her male associates regarding emotional maturity and displaying the integrity of character. Truly, as the Willy and his sons and other male characters seem to represent the traditional patriarchal values that betray their self-centredness and selfishness as we see that Willy and his sons never think of Linda’s concerns or happiness. On the other hand, Linda always thinks of her family members and so she is different from other ambitious women who were more individual and self-centred; therefore, she deserves not only attention but also admiration even from, as Evans thinks, from feminists.

Evans presents Linda as a more central figure than even Willy Loman and shows the mistakes she has done regarding Willy’s dreams and decisions based on the common mistakes people do according to cognitive psychology. However, Linda is deemed as a more stoic character and so she can reason properly with the sense of failure in life when her husband fails. Therefore, Linda is as significant a character as Willy is. Though most of the time all other characters either talk about Willy or about Happy and Biff, Willy’s wife Linda plays the most important role in the play. Guerin Bliquez directly talks about the significant role of Linda but in a pejorative way. Bliquez writes: “Mrs. Willy Loman has a more forceful role… than most commentators have thus far noted. To overlook the part she plays in her husband’s pathetic downfall is to miss one of the most profound levels in Arthur Miller’s subtle structuring of his tragedy. Linda’s facility for prodding Willy to his doom is what gives the play its direction and its impetus” (383). This critic rather unjustly condemns Linda and thinks that Linda’s support to Willy in every single case accelerated his self-deceptions and doom. The charge against this character is also supported by some critics as Eric J. Sterling mentions and provides some textual evidence:

> …some scholars consider Linda an enabler who blames Willy’s emotional and psychological decline on his glasses, Angelo (the car mechanic), and the lack of a vacation that would rest his mind. It is disturbing, perhaps, that Linda realizes that Willy is thinking about committing suicide with the aid of the rubber pipe, yet she chooses to return it to the cellar where he can find it. (Introduction, 2)

The volume he edits contains twelve essays and among them only two focus on the role of women. Terry Otten in "Attention Must Be Paid" displays the controversies regarding Miller's portrayal of the female characters and the role of Linda Loman. When Miller is held sexist for the portrayal of women characters, Linda's character somewhat receives opposing reactions. Like most critics, Otten contends that Linda subscribes to Loman's downfall: "Even granting that she is essentially unconscious of her own participation and complicity in the tragic movement of the play, she cannot be declared free of responsibility any more than any other Miller character" (15). She also mentions that Miller himself acknowledges that fact. Janet N. Balakian states that the play is "accurately depicting a post-war American culture that subordinates women. . . ." (qtd. in Otten, 13). Similarly, L. Bailey McDaniel considers Linda's role as a marginal one: "Linda's presence within broader criticism of the play occupies a space similar to that which she occupies on stage: peripheral and unimportant, with the exception of (and relative to) her interactions with the more important male protagonist" (24). This exactly is not the case as this essay demonstrates that Linda is neither unimportant nor peripheral.

Willy's character is mostly judged from the perspective of the modern capitalist consumerism culture that defines success by the standard of material prosperity which ultimately causes Willy's death by suicide. Whether it was an authentic choice or not, his decision was not expected or demanded by any of his family members. Thus, in no way, Linda can be blamed for Willy's death nor is she remotely connected with his violent end. The charge Bliquez brings against her is that she is not intelligent enough to correct Willy's mistakes and misconceptions in life; rather her indulgence or too much love and support for her husband drives the latter towards self-destruction. She is considered gullible and indifferent to what would happen to Willy as long as he can remain as a bread earner. But what could Linda do to change the wrong vision of Willy? Can one change the psychology of another by arguments? Willy's ego and self-esteem is what prompted him to live like a hero. He does not think that he is not successful but he laments the approaching old age which makes him gradually inactive. He is pricked more by the failure of Biff as Biff has not been established yet with a good career. This is the anxiety of most of the parents of the lower middle-class families in the world, especially in the Third World countries. He often rebukes his son and makes him leave his house not to punish him but to make him find a suitable career. Finally, when his eyesight becomes poor and when he could foresee that because of his old age he would not get a decent job anymore and so he would not be able to help Biff or his family anymore, he wants to prove his love for Biff and the family by sacrificing his life by committing suicide without considering the ethical, legal or religious aspects.

In the rising trend of capitalism and modernism, there is no place for spiritual thinking. People always run after success forgetting that it is relative and that everybody cannot get the desired success in life. Ben understands his plan of suicide and so he wants to thwart this plan of Willy's but he fails. So, how could Linda save him? Linda most often tells him that they are happy and that he is not unsuccessful, and does not need to worry about Biff. But is she happy? And what do readers think of her? She never considers her own happiness. When in the funeral she sees only a small number of people, she exclaims to Charley, "Where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him" (Miller110). Linda argues that Willy always cares for other people's opinions about him, and wants to be liked by all. But in truth he does not have many friends outside his home and so in the funeral only his neighbours and family members come. Linda thinks that everybody cares for her husband, but in reality, only a few do. She can now realize the irony that a salesman who has a direct contact with so many people dies alone. Only his wife Linda stands by him till the end and cries for him. Irving Jacobson writes about Linda that despite Willy's

unknown infidelity to Linda, "Linda remained loyal, but her constancy cannot help Loman. She can play no significant role in her husband's dreams; and although she proves occasionally capable of dramatic outburst, she lacks the imagination and strength to hold her family together or to help Loman define a new life" (257) But what could Linda do more? Willy is not a type that, to use Jacobson's words again, "would tolerate a less acquiescent wife. He calls her 'my foundation and support' but her stability cannot prevent his collapse. (257) But the fact that she tried to deal with such a man consciously making a choice for her family. Jacobson thinks that Linda is loyal but her loyalty cannot save Loman, and it is not possible for her to dissuade him from his pursuit of dream and success leading to his doom. Why critics cannot approve of Linda's submissive and caring nature is perhaps due to the change of social values wrought by capitalistic and individualistic modern culture that has a fractured vision of family which is deemed oppressive. These critics do not point to the real problems in life – lack of contentment with the status quo, spiritual barrenness and lack of family solidarity due to radical individualism and radical feminism.

That is why rather than accepting her as the epitome of a woman who tries to remain satisfied with her present condition, they consider her as a traditional and failed woman. While the other members are living and suffering acutely for not attaining the so-called American dream, Linda remains satisfied and confined serving her male members, as to her nothing in the world holds any value other than Willy, Biff and Happy. As Evans thinks about Linda: "She tries to defend her husband to and from her sons, and she tries to defend her sons to and from her husband. Dealing with men who cannot control their passions, she tries to use reason. Dealing with men who constantly overgeneralize, she tries to be logical and to put things into perspective" (n.pag).

However, she is not like the wife of Ivan Illyich or those who feel relieved after the death of their old husbands and become concerned with wealth they leave for them. Rather Linda feels a kind of loneliness and emptiness. Bigsby states, "The man who feared he meant so little and whose ending is attended by so few, was, we see, central after all. Why else do these people feel a sense of loss, regret and, in Linda's case, desolation? Tomorrow she will live in an empty house.…That very emptiness is a measure of the man" (122). As Bigsby thinks, without Willy, the house will be empty to Linda. But the fact is what we consider is not the case; rather it is Linda's feeling that matters. Willy makes the sacrifice by committing suicide for the insurance money, but who suffers after his death. It is Linda who remains and thus suffers as Walt Whitman says in his poem "Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" "They [the dead] themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,/

The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd, / And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd" (Stanza 15, Lines 206-208). Therefore, Linda's character is of no less importance than Willy and her two sons or other male members. Why Miller begins and ends the play with Linda directs our thoughts to the significance of this character otherwise overshadowed by the masculine traits of the play. Maybe, it is so because only the wife, a woman who has lived for about thirty-five years with a man, can truly understand her man. Every other person would be an outsider but a wife who is in a harmonious relationship with her husband and who always stands by her husband as a shadow can judge her husband accurately. This is exemplified in the Requiem just before the end when she says that they are now free, "I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. We're free and clear. We're free. We're free . . . We're free . . ." (Miller 112). She sobs for her husband who has given her and their children a home and now by committing suicide he ensures a fortune for his sons. Linda rightly says that they were free now as they had a home now and all payment was made for that. But she regrets that there will be nobody home now. Thus, the home without its active member and owner is not a

home at all. This is Linda's gratefulness and also faithfulness to Willy. What more a husband can demand from his wife? Linda's description by the author in the beginning demonstrates it:

> Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to willy's behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end. (8)

She wants to defend Willy against his own self-criticism and self-judgment. When Willy returns from Florida and complains about his tiredness, she says to him, "Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way". She is also aware of Willy's psychological exhaustion as she also says, "But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is over-active, and the mind is what counts, dear" (Miller 9). Thus, Arthur Miller has created a woman who might misfit her age, but who is an ideal one who represents all those women who care for their families and remain content with what they are and what they have, and also with everything with regard to their husbands and families.

As we cannot confine a modern woman to the household activities only, so, to some critics, the role of Linda misfits her age. She rather represents the Victorian women, who cook, sew, and fail to connect themselves to the dilemma and depression of the male members of their family. She has been presented as a good woman, good mother and a good wife, and hence her character remains flat and underdeveloped. Matthew C. Roudane states, "For many feminist critics ... the play stages "a nostalgic view of the plot of the universalized masculine protagonist of the Poetics"; it presents a grammar of space that marginalizes Linda Loman and, by extension, all women, who seem othered, banished to the periphery of a patriarchal world" (60)". It happens because her role does not demand much progress to relate with the central theme of the drama as it deals with the theme of unattainable American Dream, which had devastated so many families that failed to cope up with its high demand. But, I still think, the role of Linda is neither submissive nor limited. Though the author has stuck her in the household, he has not made her any less the centre of attention. Miller skillfully presents Linda as a very enlightening character; nobody is perfect in the family; Willy is haughty, vain, rude and jealous and despite having a faithful wife and two sons, is involved with a prostitute and being caught by Biff; Biff is lazy, tactless, hot-headed and disrespectful; and Happy is playful and characterless flirting with many girls and sleeping with executives' wives, without any consideration of marriage. And in this men's world Linda's cooking, serving and sewing are not just household activities; these are very significant for the stability and peace of a family and society in general. She may not earn but she is the cause of her family's earning. Considering her obedience and faithfulness to her husband, Linda Loman is a very good woman in a society driven by materialism and the myth of success. Everybody in the family likes Linda. For finding a good life partner, Happy, the younger boy of the Loman family, tells his brother that the girl should be "somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know" (Miller 19). Thus, Linda is not a marginal one as all other male members always talk to her, and return to her in the end. The play starts with Linda's speech, a woman's voice. She calls out "Willy", her husband's name upon the latter's return to their house. And when the play ends, we hear her voice "No" just before her son Biff's "Pop" and we see her carry a "bunch of roses" in her mourning dress, move towards Willy's grave with other characters, kneel down and sit back on her heels staring at the grave.

This structure of the play that starts with Linda and ends with Linda gives us ample reasons to think that Linda is the most significant character. Moreover, the play does not end with Willy's death but the Requiem in which we see that it ends with Linda talking to her dead husband

alone. She does not have any complaints against her husband. Rather she regrets that she could not understand him. Christopher Bigsby says, "Linda Loman, lies on Willy's grave, arms outstretched like a nun prostrating herself before a mystery, and the truth is that, for all her everyday common sense, life does remain a mystery to her. Husband and sons are like strangers whose lives she can never fully grasp" (114-115). This critic considers Linda Loman as a nun who is very simple and so cannot understand her husband and two sons. But I think she really understood them, especially her husband Willy. As she says in the end in front of Willy's grave, "It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you" (Miller 112). To Linda, death is just another life or journey from where her husband will return one day. The longing for her husband's return arguably puts Linda above all women as the greatest ideal wife a man can have, and she should be judged by her choice that aligns with individual choice feminism that is often championed by Margaret Atwood's emphasis on women's agency as historically and contextually embedded. It also connects with Toril Moi's critique on essentialist models of femininity, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's disapproval of universal categories of oppression thrust upon women in general by the mainstream western feminists.

Therefore, Linda Loman's role in *Death of a Salesman* resists reductive categorization as merely passive or conventional. Situated within a domestic space often dismissed by critics, her emotional, ethical, and relational visions emerge as central to the fragile foundation of the Loman family. Rather than reading her obedience and loyalty as signs of submission, this study has shown that they can be understood as forms of conscious negotiation within the constraints imposed by a materialist and success-driven culture. Significantly, the structural framing of the play, the opening and closing with Linda, subtly reinforces her narrative centrality and moral presence. Linda's refusal to pursue an overtly individualistic or self-assertive path does not diminish her agency; instead, it points to a different mode of strength grounded in care, responsibility, and endurance. In this sense, her character complicates binary oppositions between conformity and resistance, suggesting that agency may also operate through preservation, mediation, and ethical commitment. Her enduring attachment to Willy, despite his failures, is not simply idealization but a reflection of a deeply internalized value system that sustains the emotional core of the play. Consequently, Linda emerges not as a marginal figure but as one whose quiet resilience and moral steadiness are integral to the tragic vision of the drama.

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Nature's Resistance to Industrialization: An Eco-critical Reading of *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence

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Abstract

For D.H. Lawrence, writing functioned as a crucial form of resistance against the suffocating and infectious spread of industrialization. Whenever nature is degraded, eco-critical lens becomes an utmost vocal against the derogatory treatment of nature. Hence, this paper explores *Sons and Lovers* by D.H. Lawrence from the theoretical framework of eco-criticism. This paper will show the connection of man with nature along with nature's healing power and its influence on the growth of both physicality and morality with its responsive capacity not like a passive setting but like an active participant on molding human lives. As a whole, the total work of this paper is bestowed upon depicting the role of nature on the lives of human beings.

Keywords: D.H. Lawrence, Eco-criticism, Industrialization, Moral and Physical Growth, Nature's Healing Power, Role of Nature

Introduction

The rise of industrialization led to alienation from nature. This detachment created manifold abnormalities. D.H. Lawrence meticulously framed this issue in his novel named *Sons and Lovers*. How nature can bring harmony in the midst of chaos is gorgeously portrayed in this novel. Thus, putting Eco-criticism into perspective to discuss *Sons and Lovers* will unveil new dimensions between natural world and human society.

Discussion

Literary Ecology in *Sons and Lovers*

In his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," William Rueckert introduces the concept of literary ecology as a way to examine the relationship between literature and the natural world. By exploring how literature can engage with ecological ideas, Rueckert suggests that stories, poems, and other literary works are not isolated from the environment but instead interact with it in meaningful ways. He describes literary ecology as a study of how literature "functions in the biosphere," (108) highlighting the idea that just as ecosystems are interconnected, so too are literature and the environment, each shaping and influencing the other.

Rueckert also introduces a compelling metaphor, viewing literature as "stored energy" (108). He believes that every literary work holds a potential energy, much like a battery, which can be released through the act of reading. When readers engage with literature, there's an exchange, an "energy transfer" (109) where the ideas and emotions contained within the work inspire and inform readers, potentially motivating them to consider ecological issues in a new light. This perspective underlines the idea that literature is not static rather it has the power to spark awareness and action, creating a ripple effect that extends into the real world. *Sons and Lovers* perfectly holds this concept while showing the role of nature in the life of different characters. This

novel perfectly acts as a mediating device between man and nature with the suggestions to the readers to grow a harmonious interconnection and interdependence with nature.

Therapeutic role of Nature in *Sons and Lovers*

"There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still" (Thoreau 176).

Lawrence showed the interconnection between nature and human beings. He showed the healing power of nature in its manifold forms. Because of the therapeutic role of nature, it can be called "a lunatic hopefulness, the optimism of the amateur" (Turner 45). This therapeutic representation of nature aligns with the romantic tradition but differs from the Victorian, naturalist and modernist traditions.

Healing Power of Nature

Nature is like a panacea that heals all the scars and spots on human heart inflicted by other human beings. Whoever is tormented by the excessive traumas and pains of reality can use nature as a source of heavenly haven where one can take solace however ephemeral or transient it may be. It gives one to retreat from the "annoyances and trivialities of the human world" (Slovic 354). In *Sons and Lovers*, this escapist tendency of both Mrs Morel and her son, Paul Morel is very much evident. On the contrary, Miriam and Clara represent nature's spiritual, restorative and independent presence which healed them in different manners.

Dismantled by the emotional breakdown and suffocated by the fabricated version of illusion, throughout the whole novel there is a competition; who can surpass whom in terms of emotional hollowness but, nature simultaneously heals and consequently, withers away all the fumes of regret, sadness, and unfulfilled desires.

Mrs Morel and Nature: an Idealized Alter Universe

For Mrs Morel, nature was "the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging" (Thoreau 176) place. There are abundant instances of nature's therapeutic role in Mrs Morel's suffocating industrialized life. Firstly, She unbearably coiled due to "the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness" (Lawrence 8) while "looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive" (Lawrence 8). This vicious circle continuously pained her, so nature acts as that refreshing substance. As soon as she was weighed heavily down by reality, she rushed to nature's lapse knowing that nature never betrays any human souls who are betrayed by other fellow beings. Nature not only heals a depressed human soul but it is a great companion during the time of solitude. Graveyard like loneliness of Mrs Morel was compensated by nature's companionship. So, when she felt the necessity to unload her unbearable traumas, she used to appear into the front garden where she had a "private hedge" (Lawrence 8), there "she stood, trying to soothe herself with the scent of flowers, and the fading, beautiful evening" (Lawrence 8).

Secondly, Mrs Morel's failed romantic ideals and subsequent disillusionment with her husband drive her to seek solace in nature, which emerges as an alternative source of fulfilment. The clash between appearance and reality puzzled Mrs Morel in such a huge scale that she could not believe that her introspection regarding Mr Morel both as an ideal lover and as an ideal husband would mismatch into a horrific nightmare. The relentless grind of poverty and industrial labor stripped Mr Morel of his capacity for empathy , resulting in repeated and brutal resulting in frequent and brutal outbursts directed at his wife throughout the novel. For example, before Paul's birth, Mr Morel arrived home drunk one evening; Mrs Morel confronted him, and in response, the senseless drunkard physically assaulted her and threw her outside like useless trash to spend the entire

night, despite knowing that she was pregnant at that time. Her panicked and tumultuous psychological state was perfectly depicted by Lawrence, “trembling in every limb” (Lawrence 29), “mechanically she went over the last scene” (Lawrence 29*)* as if she were burning inside her memory. Therefore, she was in need of immediate urgency to erase her memory with an alternative option. This alternative must have been a sufficiently powerful factor, one capable of defeating or replacing her present melancholic moment, so nature here rushes to soothe one of its finest devotees, Mrs Morel. While roaming outside hopelessly, she noticed some “tall white lilies” (Lawrence 30) suddenly, which “were reeling in the moonlight, and the air was charged with their perfume” (Lawrence 30). This celestial scene under the moonlight night hypnotized her. Eventually, she seeped the “deep draught of the scent” (Lawrence 30). These lilies’ aromatic scent was like a welcoming garland for entering into the trajectory of nature and seeping of its droplets was like drinking the water of Greek mythological river, Lethe, by which one could forget the tormented past because, memory of a traumatic event is more painful and demolish it with nature’s irreplaceable healing capacity. Water in Christianity is the symbol of baptism that leads one into a pure and regenerative stage as a result, the seeping of the “deep draught of the scent” (Lawrence 30) can also be interpreted as the alleviation of Mrs Morel into a mystical stage, unscarred and unaffected by the perverted and deformed reality. It proves how nature plays that alleviating role of baptism by squeezing out all the nauseous or repugnant spots by replacing a baptized soul with absolute refreshment.

Thirdly, Mrs Morel's desire to own the Willey Farm reveals her dissatisfaction with life in the Bottoms, where industrial horrors and natural blessings uneasily coexist. This very tension mirrors her disgust at the continuous strife between nature and culture. When “she went into the front garden,” (Lawrence 8) then, the “heat suffocated her” (Lawrence 8), so this unusual and paradoxical coexistence were no more tolerable for her as it did not allow her to immerse herself fully into nature. So, for the first time when she went to the Willey Farm, her impression was like the impression of Adam mesmerized by the first encounter of heaven’s dazzling view. Therefore, she desired internally, “if I were his [Mr Leiver’s] wife, the farm would be run, I know. - But there, she [Mrs Leiver] hasn’t the strength – she simply hasn’t the strength” (Lawrence 159, 160). This internal monologue proves how desperate she was to get rid of the divided life under infernal horror and heavenly pleasure that she was simultaneously experiencing in her life in the Bottoms. So, the pain she was going through was stronger. Consequently, for the complete extinction and replacement of these mental horrors, she needed a totally secluded natural setting devoid of any mechanical instruments like the Wiley Farm. This repressed wish was substituted, hence, compensated later when the whole Morel family shifted near the Scargill street home where they had “a long garden that ran to a field” (Lawrence 202). This garden filled Mrs Morel with “excitement and elation” (Lawrence 203) and it was “an endless joy to her” (Lawrence 203).

Nature as a blessing

For Paul, nature evolved through distinct stages: initially, a childhood companion offering escape from parental trauma; then, a source of emotional fulfillment; later, a wellspring of creative imagination; and ultimately, a medium of fulfilling all his suppressed desires. Thus, nature healed Paul in multiple ways depending on the demand of the situations.

Paul as a child had no authority to stop the violence that his father ceaselessly practiced on his mother, so this helpless boy developed an unusual harmony with nature which relieved him at least for a while to forget all the inerasable scenes accidentally created on his psyche. Nevertheless, he used natural elements as a gift for his mother knowing that his mother intensely hated any artificial things. Nature became a source of instrument by which he could impress his

mother. For instance, Paul with his other siblings, used to go outside to collect mushrooms. As the son of a miner, Paul experienced the misery of poverty, so he knew that any elements collected from nature would redouble his joy as it would make his depressed mother jubilant and his family members would get at least something to eat however trivial it might have been. This sense of ecstatic jubilation is perfectly depicted by the narrator, "there was the joy of finding something, the joy of accepting something straight from the hand of nature, and the joy of contributing to the family exchequer." (Lawrence 91). Paul knew that among all the natural elements, which one was the most lovable one for his mother, was the blackberry; so Paul collected blackberries with Arthur because he knew that on Saturdays Mrs Morel used to make puddings, "So Paul and Arthur scoured the coppices and woods and old quarries, so long as a blackberry was to be found, every week end going on their church." (Lawrence 91). Through nature, Paul found the source of oedipal advancement because he knew that his father's industrial identity displaced his passionate existence from the heart of Mrs Morel. As a result, Paul perceived this opportunity as a chance to replace his father. Therefore, nature for Paul during his early stage was also a source of growing a possible oedipal connection with his mother which he successfully achieved.

In terms of imaginative supremacy, no one can surpass the romantic poets. Their extraordinary imaginative capacity was the result of their attachment to nature. Likewise, Paul's capacity as a painter resonates the romantic poets because, any forms of arts are the products of imagination. Paul's closeness to nature inspired his creative identity. If Paul would lead a purely mechanized life by keeping complete distance from nature then he would have led the same monotonous life that his father led. His extraordinary creative faculty was the ultimate result of his connection with natural landscapes. This imaginative practice was also a source of retreating into a comfortable space.

Finally, Paul's dichotomized illusion regarding body and soul affected his relationships. Miriam's spiritual intensity offered Paul the pure soul he sought, but her simultaneous abhorrence of physicality created an imbalance he could not sustain, forcing him to leave her. So, he abandoned Miriam for Clara in whom he found what he missed in Miriam, the body. But this sensual connection lasted ephemerally, as he missed the soul in Clara, of which Miriam was abundantly filled, so he rejected her, too. Therefore, in this emotional hollowness , nature perfectly healed him, proving that such a tumultuous vacuum in the emotional faculty can be truly healed only by nature.

Healing through Nature

In *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam and Clara are contrasted through their relationships with nature, as each seeks and finds a unique form of healing and fulfilment absent from their lives within an industrialized setting. For Miriam, nature is a place of quiet contemplation and spiritual depth. It offers her a retreat from the emotional turbulence of her relationship with Paul and the limitations of her everyday life. She is deeply attuned to nature's beauty and mystery, finding a sense of inner peace in its landscapes. Miriam doesn't just observe nature; she feels connected to it on a spiritual level, as though it reflected her own inner life. Lawrence finely described this spiritual connection of Miriam- "And she was cut off from ordinary life, by her religious intensity, which made the world for her either a nunnery garden, or a paradise where sin and knowledge were not, or else an ugly cruel thing" (Lawrence 182). Her connection with nature as a spiritual entity resonates with the Wordsworth's pantheistic belief regarding nature. Her communion with nature gives her resilience and allows her to cultivate a reflective, soulful strength. This deep and contemplative relationship with nature fills an emotional and spiritual void for Miriam, giving her

something that human relationships alone do not provide. Through her connection with nature, she finds solace, beauty, and a kind of fulfillment that sustains her.

In contrast, Clara finds in nature an outlet for her desire for freedom and vitality. The natural world allows her to break free from the constraints of her industrialized, routine life. With Paul, Clara finds herself drawn to wild and open spaces, like the riverside, where she feels the energy that nature provides. For her, nature becomes a space for self-expression and an escape from societal restrictions, allowing her to embrace a fuller, more passionate side of herself. The moments spent outdoors represent Clara's longing for a life unbound by her past and her responsibilities. For Clara, nature is not just a scenic backdrop; it is a force that rekindles her sense of freedom, helping her reconnect with parts of herself that have been subdued by the demands of industrial life.

In Lawrence's portrayal, nature offers Miriam and Clara distinct forms of healing that are attuned to their individual personalities. Miriam's connection is reflective and spiritual, while Clara's is passionate and liberating. Through these contrasting relationships, Lawrence emphasizes how nature can restore and rejuvenate individuals, particularly women, offering them what their structured, industrial lives cannot provide. Nature, in essence, serves as a mirror to their souls, revealing different facets of healing and self-realization.

The Imapct of Industrialization on Mr Morel

To define Mr Morel, he matches with the description of Thoreau's idea of laboring men which he defined in *Walden*- "Their fingers from excessive toil are too clumsy" (Thoreau 48) who do not

have "leisure for true integrity" and who "cannot sustain the manliest relations to men" whose "labor would be depreciated in the market" and who do not have "time to be anything but a machine" (Thoreau 48).

Mr Morel's existence revolves around the rigid and unyielding patterns of his mining job, preventing him from establishing a meaningful connection with nature. Working as a miner, he spends his days immersed in a world defined by darkness, soot, and machinery, a setting that stands in stark contrast to the natural landscape. This industrial environment doesn't just estrange him physically from nature; it also disconnects him from the sense of serenity and self-reflection that a connection with nature might offer. Lawrence uses Mr Morel's character to define how the demands of industrial life can sever individuals from the natural world, cutting them off from the restorative and healing qualities that nature provides. The harsh reality of mining becomes a central force shaping Mr Morel's outlook on life. He's become accustomed to cramped, claustrophobic, and exhausting conditions, leaving him hardened and callous to any potential serenity in the world outside the mines. When he does find himself in nature, he doesn't experience it as a place of stability or renewal; instead, he remains rigid and unresponsive, conditioned by the grueling demands of his daily labor.

The industrial setting of the mines traps Mr Morel, denying him the opportunity for a harmonious relationship with nature. Mr Morel, locked into his repetitive labor, has no such sanctuary; his life is entirely shaped by the harsh mechanics of the mining industry. The taxing nature of his work seeps into his character, making him more aggressive and volatile. Through Mr Morel's character, Lawrence critiques the isolating effects of industrialization on both the land and human spirit. The exhausting demands of mining damage not only the physical landscape but also any chance for inner reflection or healing. Lawrence implies that industrial life creates an emotional and spiritual wall, leaving people like Mr Morel empty and disconnected. As a result, his aggression and lack of

self-awareness stem from this separation from nature, compounded by the relentless pressures of industrial life.

The Role of Nature in Physicality and Morality in *Sons and Lovers*

"What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented?" (Thoreau 183). It was the rhetorical question raised by Henry David Thoreau which he answered- " For my panacea, […] let me have a drought of undiluted morning air" (Thoreau 183) even he prescribed in a satirical manner for those who cannot wake up early in the morning to "bottle up some and sell it in the shops" (Thoreau 183-184). To Thoreau, nature itself was the panacea for any sorts of diseases. Lawrence also depicts the same thing in *Sons and Lovers*. The rapid industrialization of the 19th and early 20th centuries disrupted humanity's bond with nature, leading to profound social, psychological, and physical consequences. Even, many contemporary psychologists are also "exploring the linkages between environmental conditions and mental health" (Glotfelty xxi) and they too, are trying to assert that "modern estrangement from nature" (Glotfelty xxi) is "the basis of our social and psychological ills" (Glotfelty xxi). Gregory Bateson, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, emphasizes that a healthy relationship with the environment is essential for human well-being. His work underscores the interdependence between humans and their surroundings, arguing that disconnection from nature has far-reaching repercussions for mental and physical health. This alienation from natural systems was particularly acute during the industrial era, a concern mirrored in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Through William Morel's untimely death and Paul Morel's illness, the novel highlights the physical toll of industrial life. Additionally, Lawrence critiques migration as a destabilizing force for both humans and other species.

On the contrary, Nature has long been seen as a moral force in literature, nurturing empathy, emotional balance, and ethical sensitivity. In *Sons and Lovers*, D.H. Lawrence portrays this idea vividly, showing how proximity to nature shapes characters' moral integrity and emotional resilience. Conversely, detachment from the natural world often results in alienation, cruelty, and moral decline. This dichotomy is evident in the contrast between characters like Mr Morel and Lily, who are estranged from nature, and others like Mrs Morel, Paul, Miriam, and Clara, whose connection to the natural world nurtures their inner lives. By drawing on these perspectives, this portion explores the physical and moral influence of nature in *Sons and Lovers* and its broader implications for eco-critical studies.

William's Decline

William's journey from the tranquil countryside to the polluted urban environment underscores the harmful consequences of estrangement from nature. His migration to the city, emblematic of industrial progress, is not merely a backdrop but a catalyst for his physical and emotional decline. William's death is not a simple consequence of neglect; rather, it reflects the toxicity of an industrialized world. The chaotic, strained relationship he experiences with Lily in the city contrasts sharply with the ease and harmony he previously enjoyed in the countryside. This shift suggests that urban life fosters instability in human connections, amplifying William's vulnerability and leading to his premature demise. His fate symbolizes the broader dangers of abandoning nature for the mechanical and artificial realities of industrial cities.

Paul's Struggle

Paul Morel's childhood, deeply rooted in the natural world, provides a stark contrast to his adult experiences in the bleak urban environment of Nottingham. His role as a clerk introduces a sudden and jarring disconnection from nature, which manifests in his physical health. Paul's pneumonia, a direct consequence of prolonged exposure to the dreary cityscape and its

exhausting demands, highlights the toll of industrial life on the human body. Unlike William, however, Paul's recovery is tied to his ability to reconnect with nature. The Willey Farm becomes a sanctuary, offering him physical and emotional rejuvenation. This connection is poignantly illustrated when his father brings him a pot of scarlet and gold tulips during his illness. Even the often-detached Mr Morel seems to recognize nature's therapeutic power, "Paul was in bed for seven weeks. He got up white and fragile. His father had brought him a pot of scarlet and gold tulips. They used to flame in the window," (Lawrence 174). The tulips symbolize life and vitality, underscoring the restorative influence of the natural world on Paul's fragile health.

The extreme toll that nature takes on human physicality due to the alienation from nature can be connected with another Victorian novel, *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. In *Hard Times,* Dickens presents Coketown like Nottingham as an archetype of industrial society, where natural landscapes are suffocated by smoke and soot. This tainted environment inverts the nurturing role of nature, transforming it into an oppressive force. Stephen Blackpool, a laborer in this mechanical world, embodies the physical and emotional toll of industrialization. His relentless toil in factory conditions leaves him physically frail and emotionally exhausted. Dickens portrays this degradation as a natural consequence of disconnection from nature, paralleling the struggles of William and Paul Morel. Louisa Gradgrind, although not a factory worker, suffers psychological erosion due to her sterile, utilitarian upbringing. Deprived of meaningful exposure to nature, she represents another facet of industrial society's neglect of the human need for natural connection. Like Lily in *Sons and Lovers*, Louisa's alienation underscores the holistic damage wrought by industrialization, affecting both the body and the mind. This shared plight across Dickens's and Lawrence's characters reveals the universality of suffering in an industrialized world.

Migration and Extinction

The theme of migration in *Sons and Lovers* parallels ecological patterns of displacement and extinction, reflecting the consequences of habitat loss. William and Paul's experiences in Nottingham mirror the struggles of species forced to adapt to changing environments. Modern ecological studies show how urbanization leads to habitat destruction and species extinction, emphasizing the fragility of life when uprooted from its natural environment. William's death can be likened to the fate of species unable to adapt to new habitats, while Paul's recovery illustrates the resilience of those who manage to reestablish their connection to nature. These parallel narratives illustrate the broader ecological crisis of disconnection, urging a reevaluation of humanity's relationship with the environment.

Moral Degeneration from Nature's Absence

Mr Morel's character epitomizes the moral decay resulting from estrangement from nature. As a miner, his life is confined to the suffocating industrial world, devoid of natural beauty or vitality. His emotional detachment from his family and his propensity for violence and neglect can be seen as consequences of this disconnection. His compassionate portion was devoured by the constant attachment to the industrial devices. He lacked minimum level of moral decency. His behavior with his wife like a ferocious monster forced Mrs Morel to abandon him. This person always tortured his wife both physically and emotionally. This traumatic aggression of Mr Morel created within all his sons an image which demanded utter hatred. The total imbalance of the Morel family, the growing injection of aggression on innocent children's psyches are the credits that solely belong to him. The failure of Mr Morel both as a husband and as a father broadly, as a human being proves how the industrial world snatches one's moral self where one finally is forced to embrace the annihilation of one's complete humanistic identity.

Similarly, Lily embodies the emotional desensitization associated with urban industrial life. Unlike characters like Miriam and Clara, who find meaning in their connection to nature, Lily's immersion in an urban environment fosters selfishness and cruelty. Her strained relationship with William reflects the moral barrenness of her surroundings. Through these characters, Lawrence critiques the moral cost of industrialization and urban alienation.

Moral Nourishment through Nature

In contrast, characters who maintain a connection to nature, Mrs Morel, Paul, Miriam, and Clara, demonstrate the nurturing power of the natural world. Mrs Morel, for instance, finds solace in her garden, which serves as both a literal and symbolic refuge. Her bond with nature sustains her role as a moral anchor within the family, embodying the nurturing qualities that Lawrence associates with natural beauty. Paul's character further illustrates this theme. His emotional and moral development is deeply tied to his experiences in natural landscapes, which provide him with a sense of clarity and purpose. Lawrence's descriptions of Paul's moments in nature, such as his contemplations at Willey Farm, highlight how these environments nurture his empathy and artistic sensibilities. Similarly, Miriam's spiritual connection to nature deepens her emotional bond with Paul and reinforces her compassionate outlook. Clara, while less overtly connected to nature, finds moments of moral clarity and emotional growth through her interactions in natural settings.

In *Sons and Lovers*, D.H. Lawrence explores the profound moral influence of nature, contrasting the ethical and emotional decline of characters like Mr Morel and Lily with the nurturing experiences of Mrs Morel, Paul, Miriam, and Clara. Through this ecocritical lens, Lawrence critiques the alienation wrought by industrialism while celebrating the moral clarity and emotional resilience that nature provides. Drawing on Romantic ideals and ecocritical scholarship, the novel reminds that the connection to nature is essential not only for physical sustenance but also for the integrity of our moral and emotional lives.

Responsive Attitude of Nature in *Sons and Lovers*

Lawrence used nature not as a backdrop or setting but as an actively reactionary being. The way expressionist painters used different devices to mean different philosophy, so here nature is that device which carries different meanings. According to Bakhtin, "nature itself ceased to be a living participant in the events of life" (217) and "it was fragmented into metaphors and comparisons serving to sublimate individual and private affairs and adventures not connected in any real or intrinsic way with nature itself" (217). Thoreau, in *Walden*, wished that if nature was added with mankind then it "would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve" (Thoreau 183). This wish of Thoreau is fulfilled in *Sons and Lovers* where nature responds simultaneously with the lives of the characters. Nature responds according to the demand of the situations. This portion of the paper is a subtle description of nature's identity as an active agent to respond simultaneously to define human life.

Nature as an Expressive Device of Human Passion

Nature is used as an expression of sexual unfulfillment and a place of fulfilling the repressed desires. The desired romance of which Mrs Morel was desperately seeking, could not receive it from her husband. Therefore, nature transforms into an open interpretation for her repressed sexual wishes. For instance, when Mr Morel left her outside, the encounter of nature by Mrs Morel perfectly matches with her repressed sexual desires; denied and discarded by her husband but attuned and regained through nature. When she saw some "tall white lilies" (Lawrence 28) then it aroused her as if she were witnessing the phallic organ right before the penetration. When

she touched the “big, pallid flowers” (Lawrence 28), she shivered. This shivering resonates with the sensations after penetration. When “she drank a deep draught of the scent” (Lawrence 28) then “it almost made her dizzy” (Lawrence 28). This dizziness carries the sexual overtone of female orgasm. The whole scene completely carries the sexual interpretation. The passionate orgasm that Mrs Morel desperately sought, found it at last in nature. This implicit sexual tone reflects how nature allows one to fulfill one’s repressed wishes which are either concealed or forbidden by society. Society allows males to be expressive of sexuality whereas, feminine sexuality is always a prohibited discussion as if females were the senseless objects, having no desires at all. Nature here allows Mrs Morel, a female, to exercise her freedom that is buried under the curtain of social norms. So, it is found that nature simultaneously responds to the expected human passions and desires as if it were a responsive being.

Nature responded in two different ways for Paul. When he engaged with Miriam then it was colorless; burning with unfulfilled passion. But when Paul engaged with Clara then nature responded very organically to infuse the physical passion that Paul carried for Clara. At one moment, Paul, while roaming with Miriam, saw some crimson berries then he instantly pulled out a bunch. Here, crimson berries indicates Miriam’s sexual fruition and Paul’s picking out of bunches indicates his wish to involve in the sexual union.

But nature appeared very distinctly for Miriam. When she saw “the moon rise big and misty. She felt something was fulfilled in her” (Lawrence 211). She saw the moon as an expression of her emotional fulfillment. The first impression of Miriam regarding Paul was filled with contentment. Here the moon properly carries that sense of emotional completion though, for a fleeting time frame.

Although, for Paul, the same moon responds in a different manner. His constant attempt to insinuate Miriam for involving in the sexual attachment sank into oblivion. The absolute anticlimax from the height of emotional and physical intensity has perfectly carried by nature, “The whole of his blood seemed to burst into flame, and he could scarcely breathe. An enormous orange moon was staring at them from the rim of the sand hills” (Lawrence 220). The staring of the orange moon illustrates Paul’s intolerable torments due to Miriam’s rejection of Paul’s physical advance. The orange color symbolizes sexual passion but its enormous expansion reflects the explosion and burning because of the unfulfilled sexual attachment.

Finally, nature recreates the whole journey between Paul and Miriam from climax to anticlimax just before their separation, “She (Miriam) went to the fence and sat there, watching the gold clouds fall to pieces, and go in immense, rose colored ruin towards the darkness. Gold flamed to scarlet, like pain in its intense brightness. Then the scarlet sank to rose, and rose to crimson and quickly the passion went out of the sky. All the world was dark grey” (Lawrence 339). Miriam’s watching of golden clouds carries her reflection on the golden times with Paul when they explored the countryside. The heading of the cloud toward darkness indicates the disappearance of their golden time into the labyrinth of forgetfulness through their separation. The changing of the colors indicates the constant stages that they trespassed through this relationship, specially, the last color, crimson, reflects how Paul got what he wanted from Miriam but like a martyred saint, Miriam sacrificed herself which finally, instigated Paul’s awakening sense. So, Paul completely abandoned her as if memories of Miriam were like shadows, unreal and non-existent nightmares.

Paul's relationship with Clara is intensely connected with physical passions. Nature fully carries the physical passion. Instances are- Paul “bought her (Clara) a bunch of scarlet, brick red carnations” (Lawrence 363) indicating how Paul was adamant to cross the sexual trajectory. Then, beneath the

“growing elms” (Lawrence 363), Paul and Clara heard “the gurgle of the river” (Lawrence 363). The growing elm trees indicate the growing sensual passion within Paul for Clara’s body. The gurgling of the river again echoes the same apex of passionate intensity. This agony of physical passion, later, finds its fulfilment. Paul, at one occasion, saw “many scarlet carnation petals” (Lawrence 366) were sprinkling “on the black wet beech roots” (Lawrence 366) which foreshadowed the scenes that he and Clara were going to exhibit. The beech root symbolizes male sexual organ and scarlet carnations indicate feminine sexual organ, so the enmeshing of petals with roots very clearly evokes the image of copulation for which Paul crazily craved for.

Ash Tree

This is a very important responsive natural entity that carries the total emotional depth of the whole Morel family. The response of the tree can be interpreted in manifold ways. When “The tree shrieked again. Morel liked it. But Paul and Arthur and Annie hated it” (Lawrence 82). Here, shrieking of the ash tree asserts the disharmony and chaos of the Morel household. Even, it metaphorically shrieks like Mrs Morel. When Mrs Morel is whinnying and coiling, how nature can calmly go on! So, nature expresses the internal ongoing agony battled by Mrs Morel. Mr Morel's liking of the shriek proves his sadist nature. He seeks pleasure by torturing both women and nature. So, when nature empathizes with the lamentations of Mrs Morel, he becomes puzzled to discover nature’s responsive capacity to reflect the feminine agony. The children’s hatred, however, stems from the fear that their father instills in them, a fear directed both toward their mother and toward nature itself.

When William was about to arrive from London, everyone was mad with excitement, so they were anxiously waiting. Their anxious hours were fully immersed by the ash-tree, “[t]he ash-tree moaned outside in a cold, raw wind” (Lawrence 105). The moaning of the ash-tree perfectly matches with the tumultuous psychological states of all the family members, desperately waiting and suffering.

When Paul set for Nottingham for the first time with a view to abolishing the material scarcity that he witnessed then, the ash-tree sparkled the light of optimism within the heart of Mrs Morel. As it would mean the farewell to the economic hardships in which the whole family was subjected to. This sense of optimism was perfectly delineated by the ash-tree as if it were as jubilant like the whole Morel family- “It was a perfect morning. From the ash-tree the slender green fruits that the children call ‘pigeons’ were twinkling gaily down on a little breeze, into the front gardens of the house” (Lawrence 127). This explosive response of the ash-tree illustrates the ongoing psychical explosion of jubilations among all the Morel family members.

The ash-tree which once intimidated the children by its shrieking, was transformed into a friend. This metamorphosis of the ash-tree embodies the psychical transformation of Mrs Morel. The shadow and the oppressive force of her husband caused her to shriek but her children's growth and participation in the economic machineries dazzled her tormented psyche. “The ash tree seemed a friend now” (Lawrence 141). This transformation of the ash-tree from an awe-instigating force to a jubilation-exploding mechanism, perfectly matches with the transformation of Mrs Morel from an unhappy wife to a satisfied mother.

When William died of Pneumonia, the ash-tree perfectly infused the internal pains. “The ash-tree stood monstrous and black, in front of the wide darkness. It was faintly luminous night” (Lawrence 171). Death is a monster, so here monstrous erection of the ash-tree symbolizes the despotic stubbornness of death where human strength remains a fragile being, unable to defeat it. The

black color is the symbol of mourning, representing the ongoing dark scar on the hearts of all the members of the Morel family. The darkness of the night seems feeble in front of the darkness of the ash-tree indicating the inner pains that overshadow and swallow all the outer bleak, dark images. Besides, the disappearance of the glitter emphasizes the tragedy that was unfolding in the Morel family. Here, the phrase, 'faintly luminous light' illustrates the fainting of a premature life, William. The disappearance of ash-tree's twinkling to darkness portrays the aftermath of the tragic event that drains all the colorful substances. The ash-tree represents the emotional hollowness experienced by all the family members after the death of William.

Response of Nature in Separate Occasions

Right before the birth of Paul, one day, Mrs Morel imagined some corns standing as if alive. "She imagined them bowing: perhaps her son would be a joseph" (Lawrence 47). This bowing of the corns indicates how nature was welcoming the birth of a new comer, however denied and unwanted by the society as Paul was the unwanted child of his parents. Nature, here, hints at the connection of Paul with nature which will be inseparable.

The day when Mrs Morel was buried, there was "furious storm of rain and wind" (Lawrence 461). The storm scene recreates the turbulent moment depicted by William Shakespeare in King

Lear, where nature responds with fury after Lear, first a father and then a king, is plunged into utter wretchedness. In both works, nature's rage mirrors the injustice inflicted upon its subjects. Here, Paul's abnormal attempt to unburden his mother to relieve her from pain, breaks the natural order, hence, nature responds with "storm of rain and wind" (Lawrence 461). Moreover, it is proved that nature and human lives are simultaneously shifting although, nature and human life are interconnected. Therefore, nature, like a conscious being, responds based on the demands of the situations.

Conclusion

This discussion ultimately reveals a profound truth that the manner in which humanity treats nature, whether with sympathy or antipathy, inevitably shapes and determines the course of human lives. Besides, nature can act as a catalyst that transfuses the hidden emotions of the human subconscious, so reactionary role of nature may reshape the traditional perception regarding nature. Thus, this paper will question traditional thought process regarding the relationship between man and nature from a non-conformist lens.

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Understanding Assignment Culture in Tertiary Education: A Review of Key Variables and Learning Impacts

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Abstract

The number of studies on the topic under discussion that identify the variables that hinder the assignment culture in educational institutions is still insufficient. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to identify the most commonly studied assignment elements that influence student performance. These assignment elements were examined based on a systematic review of research publications released primarily in the recent two decades. The findings show that creating and providing students with assignments improve their learning when done appropriately. Findings also suggest that home assignments serve a range of purposes, such as supporting students in their learning, offering opportunities for them to practice language skills, acquire factual knowledge, develop self-learning habits, and time management skills. Based on the outcomes of this study, four recommendations for further research investigations have been made. Firstly, achievement tests related to home assignment practice should be used to evaluate pupils' learning progress. Secondly, teachers should pay attention to their students' views on tasks and ensure that the tasks are motivating rather than demotivating. Thirdly, more research in this field is needed because our study demonstrated that assignment feedback has a major impact on students' learning. Finally, a specific assignment study should be conducted to see how it influences the learning of students.

Keywords: effective teaching, assignment-based pedagogy, learning impacts, tertiary education

Introduction

At the tertiary level of education, assignments are a standard component of both teaching and learning practices. They serve as a commonly adopted instructional method that integrates guided learning, independent study, writing skills, and the preparation of reports—benefiting both educators and learners. An assignment is a task assigned by a teacher that students must complete within a specified timeframe. As an academic activity, it supports learning by allowing students to practice, reflect on, and demonstrate achievement of specific learning objectives.

Assignments help teachers assess whether students have met instructional goals. For this reason, it is essential that students understand the purpose of each task and the outcomes it aims to achieve. Clear objectives guide learners' thought processes and actions, ensuring deeper comprehension of course materials. Assignments are not confined to particular subjects or academic levels—they are used throughout a student's educational journey as a reliable tool to evaluate understanding and skill development (Cottrell, 2013, p. 432).

From early education, children are introduced to homework in various forms—typically involving reading and writing activities that reinforce classroom learning. As students progress, assignments become more complex, often involving journal writing or subject-specific tasks that

measure comprehension and critical thinking. At the undergraduate level, assignments vary depending on the nature of the topic and may require well-organized, research-based writing supported by examples or case studies.

Assignments offer additional benefits: they improve focus, foster a sense of responsibility, and encourage time management due to deadlines (Gregory & Garcia-Moron, 2009). They also enhance teamwork when students are assigned individual or group tasks. Ultimately, assignments are a powerful pedagogical tool for measuring student performance and supporting academic development (Race, 2007, p. 264). This essay aims to explore the characteristics, types, and functions of assignments within undergraduate teaching and learning practices

Importance of assignments

Assigning students academic tasks outside the classroom is a vital aspect of the learning process. It serves as an effective means of reinforcing and deepening students' understanding of concepts introduced during class. Through assignments, learners are encouraged to construct their own interpretations of the material, which contributes to their overall academic success (Cooper et al., 2006; Vatterott, 2009).

Li et al. (2018) suggest that having students complete assignments actively supports their comprehension of course content and enhances their performance in final examinations. Referring to the work of Vatterott (2009), Maltese et al. (2012), Arasasingham et al. (2011), and Rawson & Stahovich (2013), they argue that the correlation between assignment completion and academic achievement is consistently positive across elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.

Richards-Babb et al. (2011) emphasize that the benefits of completing assignments extend beyond immediate classroom performance. Students who regularly complete assigned tasks for a particular course tend to develop more effective study habits, which also prove beneficial in subsequent courses. Thus, the practice of assigning homework is a recurring pedagogical strategy through which students acquire the skills and expertise necessary for academic growth. This acquired proficiency, in turn, enhances their ability to approach future assignments with increased confidence and competence.

Rationale for research

Although the role of assignments or homework has been extensively discussed and debated in the context of pre-tertiary education for over five decades, relatively few studies have examined their impact on teaching and learning at the tertiary level (Songsirisak & Jitpranee, 2019). The limited research available indicates that incorporating assignments into higher education pedagogy has meaningful implications for both teachers and students.

Given the scarcity of studies on this issue, it is reasonable to assume that significant aspects of assignment-based learning at the tertiary level remain unexplored. Therefore, the present researchers believe that this study will contribute to identifying these under-researched areas and encourage stakeholders to uncover new insights beneficial to higher education teaching and learning practices.

Theoretical base

A systematic review is a scientific document that compiles the most recent information on a topic. It typically includes contributions to a particular subject in terms of theory and methodology as well as substantive discoveries (Hart, 2018, p. xiii). However, both reviews and research are carried out for a significant purpose - reviews to ascertain what is known about a

phenomenon, subject, or topic as a result of prior study and new primary research to address issues for which prior research does not offer clear and/or comprehensive answers.

Researchers are paying more attention to the contextual and methodological limitations of the research evidence from single studies as the emphasis on using research evidence to inform policy and practice decision-making in Evidence Informed Education (Hargreaves, 1996; Nelson & Campbell, 2017) increases. Research reviews may be able to assist in overcoming these challenges provided they are conducted in a methodical, exacting, and open manner. The significance of "how" reviews are conducted is therefore once again underlined.

The justification for systematic reviews is that they are a class of study that can profit from the application of suitable and outlined techniques. The variety of systematic review types has increased as systematic review techniques have been used to a wider range of research issues. As a result, a range of research techniques that are a sort of secondary level analysis (using secondary data) and incorporate the results of primary research to address a research question are referred to as "systematic reviews." The current review article is an example of a systematic review, which is defined as "an analysis of existing research using explicit, transparent, and rigorous research methodologies" (Gough et al., 2017, p. 4).

Method

This research paper is based on a systematic review utilizing secondary data. It examines and critically analyzes peer-reviewed articles, primarily published over the past two decades. These articles were retrieved from a range of academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, and other peer-reviewed journals, using keywords such as *importance of assignments*, *types of assignments*, *the role of assignments in teaching*, and *the role of assignments in learning*, among others. All secondary sources cited in this review have been appropriately referenced.

This study synthesizes the perspectives, findings, and recommendations of various scholars concerning the role of assignments in the teaching and learning processes at the tertiary level. It adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, which does not aim to produce fixed or generalized results. Instead, it emphasizes lived experiences, illustrative examples, and interpretive insights that aid readers in better understanding the phenomenon under investigation (Yildrim & Şimşek, 2005). As Creswell (2007) notes, phenomenological research seeks to capture how individuals experience a particular concept or phenomenon.

The authors of this study each bring over two decades of teaching experience to the research. As such, they deemed this methodology most suitable for their work. Throughout the process, they engaged in extensive discussions and reflections on the sources and findings, drawing upon their professional expertise to guide and enrich the analysis.

Literature Review

Nearly all seasoned teachers are aware of the importance of assignments in helping students comprehend course material and improve their performance on summative tests (Li et al., 2018). There was a consistent positive correlation between students' completion of home assignments and their academic success from elementary school (Vatterott, 2009), high school (Maltese et al., 2012), and college (Vatterott, 2009; Arasasingham et al., 2011; Rawson & Stahovich, 2013). Researchers have also found that students learn differently when focusing on homework than when studying for class exams (Leinhardt et al., 2007).

This is because working on assignments over the course of a semester has a more spaced effect than cramming for examinations right before an examination, which has a more condensed effect. Beyond academic success, there are other benefits to finishing assignments. According to Richards-Babb et al. (2011), students who finish a course's required assignments improve their study habits, making them more valuable in subsequent classes. Additionally, an improvement in study abilities has been linked to an improvement in the caliber of the assignments that students submit (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).

As a result, encouraging students to complete their assignments can be seen as a cycle in which they develop new skills as they work on them, which then enhance their ability to finish them effectively.

Previous studies have shown that assignments help students learn and may even enhance their academic performance (Cooper, 1989, 1994; Cooper et al., 2006; Bembenutty & White, 2013; Keith & Cool, 1992; Trautwein et al., 2002). As a result, assignments are regularly given as a way to gauge students' understanding and growth.

Cooper (1994) carried out a meta-analysis of three types of assignments' effects on student achievement: research comparing achievement between two groups of students who received assignments and two groups of students who did not; research contrasting assignments with in-class supervised study; and research relating the amount of time students spent on assignments to their achievement. The results showed that assignments become more important to students' success as they advance in their education. According to Nunez et al. (2015), teachers can utilize effective assignments to predict students' academic progress, inspire them to learn, and improve self-regulation. The more time students spend on assignments, the higher their academic results are (Cooper, 2008; Krashen, 2005).

Additionally, graded tasks are thought to benefit students' learning and help them achieve higher grades (Latif & Miles, 2011). In addition to these results, university students view homework as a cost and a benefit, and those who think their class's task is difficult would ask their teacher for help (Letterman, 2013).

The academic goals of assignments, according to Cooper (1989), are to aid students in acquiring factual knowledge, enhancing academic study skills, developing positive attitudes about assignments, and realizing that learning may happen anywhere, not only in the classroom. Assignments can also be used to evaluate students' learning progress, strengthen independent study skills, and get students ready for more difficult classroom lessons (Muijs & Reynolds, 2011). According to Cooper (1994), out-of-class assignments can aid students in gaining greater independence, self-direction, self-control, and time management skills.

According to Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011), assignments help students become more self-reliant, which enhances their motivation, cognitive, and metacognitive skills when learning a language. This encourages students to monitor their development and come up with efficient strategies to complete assignments and meet learning goals.

Characteristics of Assignment

One of the key aspects of the assignment problem is that each project has only one task assigned to it. There are certain key elements of a good assignment that can help students improve their writing and time management abilities while also alleviating instructor aggravation.

Teachers should create tasks that are directly related to the course's goal. An assignment has a clear goal that leads to the achievement of a course goal. Course's goals for any learners are

more concerned with practical ways for day-to-day use or career advancement than theory or original research. Teachers do not assume that students would understand the goal of the project because students come from a variety of backgrounds. They should be prepared to inform students about the expectations they have for their students, such as word count, citation format, and some sources.

While assigning an assignment, the teacher concerned should give the students a clear outline for them for ensuring the most effective assignments possible. The teacher needs to clarify the purpose of the assignment without guessing that the students will understand the purpose themselves. If the purpose is explained, the students will understand how the assignment is relevant to the main goals of the course, and they will appreciate for being informed of what they will learn from the assignment process (Hass & Osborn, 2007). If the teacher is transparent with the students about the aim of the assignment, and the teacher interprets why he is giving the assignment, the students will feel motivated to accomplish the assignment more enthusiastically.

Teachers should assign due dates in stages. Large, thorough tasks due at the end of the course result in unfocused, if not plagiarized, writing. They must divide a huge work into multiple smaller assignments that are due at different times throughout the semester. As a result, students receive helpful feedback as they advance through the course.

Teachers should encourage students to come up with ideas for themes. They should allow students to use the Moodle Discussion Board Form to brainstorm themes or share with other students (Kim et al., 2019). Teachers should provide students with the option of three to four essay questions, case scenarios, or case studies. Students will find a stronger connection in their writing if they are given an option, which will result in better final submissions. Teachers should provide a good example. Students value a visual representation of the outcome in addition to clear instructions. If a teacher decides to use students' assigned tasks, they must first obtain permission from their students. Model assignments will be posted by teachers on their Moodle course shells. They will share students' evaluation tools, as well as rubrics or other forms of evaluation, early in the task rather than at the conclusion, so that students can clarify expectations firsthand. Students will put rubrics or evaluation tools on the Moodle course shells of their teachers so that they can refer to them as needed.

Teachers can use internet, hyper textual nature to pique students' interest, promote research, and foster critical thinking by incorporating its data, services, and tools into assignments. There is no need to be constrained by the limitations of certain learning platforms when generating online projects. The first assignment can indicate whether a student will complete the course or not. Provocative assignments early in the course draw students in, familiarize them with the type of course that teachers create, and actively engage students for the task. Teachers discuss why they choose a certain project and why they think it is important for the students. This is often the most successful method for persuading students to attempt a task.

Assignments and exercises can assist students to integrate what they have learned and want to create a deeper knowledge of the content by connecting different areas of the course. Students typically benefit from knowing how their work will be evaluated because grading and evaluation techniques vary greatly from course to course. Students can focus on the most important components of the task if teachers provide clear grading rubrics and other formal evaluation criteria in advance. When working on an assignment, clear directions assist students to comprehend what they need to complete. Instructions should not assume that all learners comprehend the goal of the assignment or know how to complete it. The need for detailed

instructions cannot be overstated; nonetheless, teachers must be concise enough for students to read them. When teachers need to convey information about an assignment, they may consider employing video prompts or directions (Stevens & Levi, 2013).

Flexibility and variety permit students to have greater say in the decisions they make in class. As a result, assignments may become more interesting. One technique to add flexibility is for teachers to provide different options for completing tasks; another is for teachers to design assignments that allow for multiple sorts of replies or learning approaches. Students can use examples as models to assist them to develop their thoughts or reactions and think more creatively. Students who are unfamiliar with the requirements or methods for specific sorts of assignments can benefit from examples. Online environments are appropriate for assignments that are designed from the start to be accessible. Some online students will not be natural English speakers, while others may be unable to do so due to language limitations. Teachers should use universal design principles to ensure that assignments reach the widest potential audience (Burgstahler, 2020).

Types of Assignments

Students are given a variety of assignments as part of undergraduate and graduate teaching and learning, each with its structure and features. The following are examples of these types of assignments (George et al, 2017).

Essay

An essay is a common type of assignment, particularly at the undergraduate level. Students are assigned specified topics to write about, and their essays must respond to a question. that other people have published and presented in summarized form (Younger et al., 2004). This assignment is appropriate for undergraduate and graduate students who want to learn about current thinking and research gaps in a specific field.

Critical Review

A critical review is comparable to a peer review. Like peer reviewers, students are required to critically assess certain model research publications and present a report. This is helpful for assessing or criticizing the data, research strategies, and conclusions of an article.

Analytical Assignments

Analytical assignments typically include a background discussion of the topic's pertinent theory, scenario, problem, case, image, and so on. Analytical thinking requires students to look at various components or aspects of their issue systematically and logically to gain comprehension. Analytical assignments are intended to demonstrate students' abilities to carry out a thesis thoroughly. This requires them to go beyond description and evaluate numerous facets of the scenario, as well as compare and contrast various points of view and the topic's benefits and drawbacks (Zuana, 2004). Although their opinions on an any topic may be obvious in an analytical assignment, it is not necessarily required to formalize this with a thesis statement, as it is in an argumentative essay. It is essential to consult with the teachers if they are unsure whether they are expected to adopt a position and present a thesis statement.

Argumentative Assignments

Argumentative assignments ask students to take a stand on the issue of the assignment. This is reflected in their thesis statement, which appears in the introduction section. Students must then present and develop their arguments throughout the body of the assignment using logically structured paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs should have a topic sentence that

relates to the thesis statement. In an argumentative essay, students must draw a conclusion based on the data they have presented (Bacha, 2010).

Case Study

It is appropriate to examine a situation and weigh benefits and drawbacks before offering suggestions. Any instructor or student who wants a thorough background understanding of a particular instance or phenomenon should conduct a case study. It could be a person, animal, group of people, process, illness, occurrence, community, or any other similar unit.

Reflective Journals

Reflective Journals are personal journals in which students reflect on their learning experiences. Students keep track of learning-related situations, such as who was involved, what the event was about, what they thought about it, how they felt, and so on. Reflective journals assist researchers in identifying their understanding, reflecting on their thoughts, and recognizing how and what they have learned.

Report

Reports are a common type of assignment at universities, and they are also used in a range of vocations. In the fields of business, government, science, and technology, it is a common subject of writing. Reports can be formatted in a number of different ways. A report is usually created to show structured facts, such as laboratory results, technical data, or a business case. Clients, managers, technical employees, and senior management can benefit from them. They can have a number of structures, so it is important to consider what format learners expect. The format used will be determined by professional criteria as well as the report's final goals.

Insect Collection

In entomology classes, students gather a variety of insects and display them in specially constructed insect boxes after identification. Additionally, some areas may require students to create models, posters, popular articles, booklets, processed goods, or visual aids as part of their tasks. Each of these projects has a unique structure, set of traits, and writing style. Depending on the learning environment and training objectives, any of these tasks may be made available.

Contract Assignment

Contract assignment is often utilized in individualized methods of training to tailor the job to students' abilities and interests.

Unit Assignment

The mastery plan and the cycle plan of instruction are linked to unit assignments. It works best with subjects that are separated into units. With the unit assignment plan, the so-called flexible assignment is used.

Group Assignment

A socialized recitation or a project mode of instruction is the most common use for group assignments. This assignment encourages students to think critically and organize their materials. They may be involved in defining desirable goals and determining what needs to be done to achieve them. At the undergraduate level of education, this type of project can be beneficial to teachers and students.

Drill Assignment

The goal of the drill assignment is to enhance the connections made during the development of mental motor abilities. Drill assignments include assigned tasks like memorizing a

poem or mastering facts or simple combination facts in mathematics. It should be motivated, just like any other form of a task (Muratori et al., 2013).

Role of Assignments in the Process of Learning

Assignments allow students to concentrate on the most important aspects of their study rather than becoming bogged down in the technicalities. Transparency about the actual needs of tasks from the beginning of the course is an important technique for teachers to assist their students in time management. Assignments also allow teachers to provide customized feedback to students. Teachers' comments assist students in gauging their progress throughout the course and program, and they will play a key part in inspiring or demotivating students as they continue their studies. Assignments can assist teachers in determining what components of their course are working and which need to be improved. If students struggle with a specific task or a specific portion of an assignment, it will be possible that teachers need to revisit the relevant segment of the course and add more support for their learners. It may also be a sign that the assignment needs to be rewritten.

According to Damasio (1994), it might be challenging to provide support or comments to pupils when they become stuck or confused in order to advance their learning. Humans have a particularly strong inclination to react emotionally to those around them. However, we are aware that confusion is frequently experienced by children, and teachers are able to identify and effectively address the confusion with their assistance (Lehman et al., 2008). Thus, it is quite simple for experienced teachers to identify, understand, and react to student misunderstanding (Woolfolk & Brooks, 1983; Woolf et al., 2009; Mainhard et al., 2018). Therefore, if pupils are unsure of what to do or how to complete the assigned task, the teachers concerned should scaffold their learning.

A well-crafted assignment can lead students on an exciting journey into unfamiliar terrain while also giving signposts and pit stops precisely where they are needed. Each completed assignment should help students gain confidence in themselves as professionals in the field in which they are learning. The assignments worked as a framework for the learning to take place. An assignment allows students to study, practice, and demonstrate that they have met the learning objectives (Rubens, 2004, p.427).

Students should strive to build the entire course around a series of assignments, each one building on the previous. If learners understand how the first assignment helps students in grasping the principles that may be applied in the second assignment, they are more likely to devote a significant amount of time to it. In this sense, it is more important than ever to provide learners with timely feedback on their assignments so that any ambiguities can be cleared up before they go on to the next one. Students and teachers must collaborate to develop staged tasks. Each level must be completed before the next can begin, and at the end of each stage, learners receive feedback – either from other learners or from teachers – to help them assess their progress toward the desired results. Students and teachers can include a requirement that learners work together on a portion of the assignment. Using online communication platforms like discussion forums and wikis allow students to participate at times that are convenient for them over a long period while also providing a permanent record for both students and teachers (Greetham, 2001, p.285).

Role of Assignment in the Process of Teaching

Teaching students excellent study techniques is one of the tasks objectives. Due to the correlation between assignment quality and other indicators of teaching quality, the assignment

should significantly advance the knowledge of the students (Clare, 2000; Clare & Aschbacher, 2001; Clare et al., 2001; Matsumura & Pascal, 2003; Matsumura et al., 2008). Teacher quality is described as "the quality of those components of interactions that can be attributed to the teacher, whereas teaching quality is defined as the quality of those interactions between students and teachers" (Bell et al., 2012, pp. 63e64).

It is believed that assignments don't always accurately reflect the teacher's choices regarding how to teach. Assignments could be a component of a curriculum created by an institution. Assignments can therefore disclose how the authorities view effective instruction, with the instructor acting as "a crucial connection between policy and practice" (Cohen & Hill, 2000, p. 329).

Students should be precise and concise when explaining to other students what needs to be done or what they are expected to do. They need to understand the reasons behind the duties that have been assigned to them. The assignment enables them to comprehend the purpose of their research as well as the precise objectives that must be met. With regard to giving the pupils' ideas and actions direction and clarity, its objectives are crucial.

To make the study period productive, teachers must describe the procedure to be followed by pupils in completing the work assigned. Practically, teachers regard the primary job of the assignment to be the provision of explicit and sufficiently thorough instructions to enable students to approach difficulties intelligently in the preceding lesson. The aim of the assigned task must be communicated to students and recognized by them for their interest to be piqued. Motivation is an important aspect of an assignment. It is not a good educational technique to make students do something they do not want to do.

To ensure that students have a thorough comprehension of the subject, teachers should connect the current lesson to the prior one. This refers to the principles of appreciative learning or the integration of prior and new teachings. The psychological principle of apperception is thus fully recognized in the role of assignment. Teachers must educate students on how to employ enjoying experience features for interpretation purposes when they are present. When the required activity is completed successfully, students often find that mastering the other components is a relatively simple procedure.

Teachers can establish the proper attitude toward accomplishing the assigned task. Students must establish a desire to finish the task. They should be aware of the assignment's importance and appreciate the value of the advanced effort. This is simply one of the various methods for providing rewards. Teachers and students should plan ahead of time for any special challenges that occur in the advanced session and provide solutions to overcome them. Each new lesson necessitates the knowledge of new concepts. When confronted with unforeseen challenges, students face a challenge. If the task does not equip them with both knowledge of the challenges and suggestions for how to overcome them, it is entirely unsatisfying. To effectively use the role of assignment, mastery of the components of getting involved in any phase of learning and teaching is essential. Another important characteristic of assignments is the awareness of individual differences. According to all studies of mental assessments, there are significant differences in intelligence, aptitudes, and temperaments among students. Even their interests are shown to be substantially different. They work with greater passion, ease, and pleasure when the tasks they execute correspond with their interests. As a result, the assignment must take into account learners' interests, aptitudes, and abilities (Davis, 2009, p. 608).

Discussion

Many students and teachers consider assignments to be a complete waste of time and that they have no bearing on academics. This is why they feel irritated anytime their teachers mention submitting an assignment. The task of writing an assignment is something that practically students in the teaching and writing process get annoyed. However, this notion absolutely is wrong. Students are given particular assignments and homework from the start of the teaching and learning process to enhance students critical and analytical skills. The complexity level of such assignments remains modest in the early stages of elementary education, but as a student develops through high school and into college or university, tasks get increasingly complicated and sophisticated. (Thomas, 2015, p. 531)

Teachers provide students with the required knowledge and information to assist them in comprehending issues connected to numerous subjects. It is not appropriate behavior for a teacher to present everything to their students and to pamper them. As a result, their learning abilities are harmed, and education becomes useless to them. As a result, students are expected to learn on their own at home or university with the support of assignments and homework. A good number of students assume that educational assignments are insignificant, yet they are offered to help students in self-study and to explain any misconceptions or ambiguities they may have about a subject. They think it is the teachers' duty to teach students and that it is not their responsibility to learn on their own. However, it is unavoidable that a teacher will not be able to provide every learner with all of the information they require on any given subject. This type of spoon-feeding is likely to harm learners' learning abilities and future academic prospects. At college or university, teachers educate and clarify the concepts of a subject, and students are expected to learn or explore it on their own.

Conclusion

In conclusion, assignments serve multiple purposes, including supporting student learning, offering opportunities to practice language skills, internalizing knowledge, fostering independent study habits, and developing time management abilities. Homework should be used not only as a means for students to extend their educational experience beyond the classroom but also as a valuable tool for teachers to provide constructive guidance.

To help students reach their full learning potential and strengthen their language proficiency, teachers should offer timely and meaningful feedback. Such support encourages students to seek out interaction with teachers and cultivate positive academic relationships that enhance ongoing learning.

However, excessive homework can diminish students' motivation and cause feelings of stress and overload. It may also lead some to resort to plagiarism—copying from peers or the internet. To mitigate this, the present study recommends that teachers remain attentive to students' social contexts, assist them in managing their time effectively, provide targeted feedback, and align the complexity of assignments with the time and abilities available to students.

Based on the findings of this study, four recommendations are proposed for future research. First, student achievement assessments linked to homework practices should be used to evaluate learning outcomes. Second, teachers should consider students' perspectives on homework to ensure that assignments remain motivating rather than discouraging. Third, given the significant impact of assignment feedback on learning, further exploration into feedback

strategies is encouraged. Finally, focused studies on specific types of assignments should be conducted to examine their influence on student learning.

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The Limits of Women's Potential in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*

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Abstract

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain explores in her writings: *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*, the multifaceted limitations faced by women. She has meticulously presented the aspects of not only her contemporary society but also prescribed solutions to the existing problems making the texts relevant even in our times. Rokeya is depicting a world in both the works where women introspect and transcend their limits by transforming themselves and as a result transforming their society. This paper, using diverse feminist perspectives, attempts to explore the limits or circulated setbacks for women in gender biased societies as well as studies the female characters to analyse the limits of their potentials. This study also attaches importance to Rokeya's life who was herself an embodiment of her own philosophy. She envisions in the texts a possibility for women by fulfilling their duty towards themselves. However, the texts are more about women's potentials than their performance in reality due to the prevalent restrictions which the texts defy.

Key words: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Awareness**,** Limits, Duty, Subjugation, Dignified Human Existence.

Introduction

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born in an era when education for women was discouraged. Despite being born in a zamindar family, she had to struggle to get education. Her father invested in his sons' formal education over his daughters because of the prevalent taboos in the society (Quayum, "Rokeya" 2). Rafiuddin Ahmed explains that the elite Muslims back then saw "Arab and Persian traditions authentic Islamic culture" (Quayum, "Rokeya" 4). And they looked down upon local traditions and languages. That is why, Rokeya had to struggle to learn Bangla. On the other hand, Yasmin Hossain mentions that, "girls with education were regarded as being as abominable and shameless as those without purdah" (qtd. in Hasan, "Marginalisation" 209). Memorizing only a few verses from the holy book was considered enough education for Muslim women. Whether they understood it or not was not a concern. Rokeya has criticized such mentalities in her works. In *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* she has presented similar criticism as well.

Rokeya learnt Bangla from her sister Karimunnesa Khanam who had a thirst for knowledge. She learnt English from her elder brother Ibrahim Saber who once told her that, "Sister, if you learn this English language, then the world's treasure will be open for you." (Quayum, "Rokeya" 6) Rokeya also worked collectively with other women and established organizations such as, Anjuman-i-Khawatin- i-Islam (The Islamic Women's Association) and was also the president of Narishilpa Vidyalaya (Women's Art and Industry School) and Naritirtha (Women's Institution). Her involvements in these affairs for women have a reflection in her novel *Padmarag.* Apart from her social works she is mainly known for her polemical writings. Rokeya

was married off to Khan Bahadur Syed Sakhawat Hossain, who supported Rokeya in her endeavours.

After her husband's death she established a girls' school after his name; however, she faced criticisms and insults for her initiatives that are again reflected in her novel *Padmarag*. According to Barnita Bagchi, "[i]f one reads *Padmarag* through to the end . . . the feminist narrative's many autobiographical elements become apparent" (Bagchi, "Introduction" ix). Kaykobad said that, "We are lamenting the death of Begum Rokeya but how many of us came forward to help her during her lifetime" (qtd in Dil 21). Shamsun Nahar Mahmud has used the term "Mother spider" to describe Rokeya, who has sacrificed her life to empower other women just like a spider-mother sacrifices herself to give life to her children. Rokeya even on the eve of her demise was working on an unfinished work, "Narir Adhikar" ("Rights of Women") proving Shamsun Nahar's statement.

Therefore, her own life is an example of an educated woman who brought massive changes despite obstacles. For instance, in a letter written in 1931 Rokeya mentions her personal struggles starting from her deprivation of her father's love in childhood to the events circulating her responsibilities of taking care of her husband when he was ill, losing infants and enduring the painful experiences of widowhood (Bagchi, "Introduction" viii). Her personal life and its problems did not stop her from her goals and establishing her vision regarding female education. Even while Rokeya was working for her school or was engaged in other social welfare activities especially related to Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam (The Islamic Women's Association) she and her companions had to encounter vilifying and disparaging remarks (Bagchi, "Introduction" x). Rokeya also reflected this philosophy into her writings that waiting for some saviour will not solve the issues for women overnight rather, they themselves have to take their own responsibilities to save them from their dire condition in society.

Rokeya is the first South Asian female utopian writer in English. Her *Sultana's Dream* was published in *The Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905 that was even before Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote her novel *Her Land* (1915) (Quayum, "Rokeya" 9). After reading the draft of *Sultana's Dream* her husband uttered the phrase, "A terrible revenge". He sent the writing to McPherson, the then Divisional Commisioner of Bhagalpur for review who commented that, "The ideas in it are quite delightful and full of originality and they are written in perfect English" (Quayum, "Rokeya" 10). In an essay, "Bayujaney Panchas Mile" ("Fifty Miles on an Aircraft") Rokeya recalls this incident on top of that she also mentions that in *Sultana's Dream* she has talked about different inventions and one of them was an "air -car". These futuristic visions on advanced technologies and her expertise in English and Bangla reveals her foresight and intelligence. In addition to *Sultana's Dream*, she wrote a few letters and essays in English.

Later on, she also translated, *Sultana's Dream* in Bangla preserved in *Motichur*'s second volume (*A String of Sweet Pearls, Second Volume*). However, she produced another modified version in Bangla much later with diluted satirical remarks. Similar to *Sultana's Dream* most of her works were published in several magazines and newspapers except *Padmarag* (1924). In the preface she mentions that she wrote the manuscript for *Padmarag* twenty-two years before it was modified and published.

The time when she was writing is also known as Tagore Era (Quayum, "Inspired" 45). There are some similarities that can be traced in Kalyani's story from Rabindranath Tagore's "Aparachita" ("The Unfamiliar Lady") and Siddika or Zainab's from *Padmarag*, both of them suffered from patriarchal evils. Both are educated individuals dedicating their lives for others

betterment. They discredited the notion that marriage is the only purpose of life for a woman. As well as, they had supportive people in their lives. For instance, Kalyani had her father and for Siddika it was her brother. However, there is no such evidence of Rokeya being influenced by Tagore's writings. Abdul Mannan Syed have also said that Rokeya is not known to have sent any writings to Tagore for his "comments or appreciations" (Hasan, "Commemorating" 53). Therefore, it can be said that the contemporary social conditions may have shaped an archetype of unconventional women characters as a resistance against injustices. In short, this similitude may only represent the similar patterns of thinking in both Tagore and Rokeya.

Again, coming back to *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* it can be said that, though these texts may not be the documentation of actual women who has walked on this earth but nonetheless, it is a record of the realities of women in that society.

By internalizing the prevalent biased views on women, a woman may remain in her self-made mental cage. Louis Tyson states,

> By patriarchal woman I mean, of course, a woman who has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, which can be defined, in short, as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive (85).

Rokeya has sketched some women characters in these writings who have instilled these biased opinions in themselves to some extent. For instance, the protagonist Sultana herself from *Sultana's Dream* initially appears to inculcate biased views as normal but is enlightened later on. However, Rokeya in her two works has demonstrated a world where women can be free from this slavish mindset. She has suggested that despite the limits or obstacles a woman face, the limits or the extent of women's potentials is incalculable.

Rokeya's Feminism in *Sultana's Dream*: A Confrontation with Gendered Constraints

Sultana's Dream is a satire on social and cultural norms of Rokeya's society. Satire as a tool has a purpose usually written to produce shock by pointing out the ridiculousness of things or people. It aims to correct specific issues. Here, in *Sultana's Dream* the shock is created only when the roles are reversed. Roushan Jahan also calls this reversal a "shock therapy" (qtd. in Hasan, "Marginalisation 208). Anisuzzaman states that, "Begum Rokeya came into the field of literature with her sharp whiplash of satire and did not attack any individual but the sentiment of society" (qtd. in Alam 29). Md. Mahmudul Hasan also mentions that, "It is true that Rokeya castigated men who stood in the way of women's education and emancipation. But she never overgeneralised and put all men together as women's inveterate enemy" (Hasan, "Rokeya's Attitude").

In *Sultana's Dream* as stated earlier, Rokeya blames women for their deplorable conditions that originated from their slavish mindset. Sister Sara, a significant character in *Sultana's Dream* puts similar accusations against women of Sultana's society. She says that, "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interest" (Hossain 5).

The Ladyland and the society of Sultana are contrastive significantly for women's performance in the intellectual and public domain. In *Sultana's Dream*, during threat of invasion in Ladyland, women came forward to fend off the enemies with their intellect. If they did not do so they would have to face miserable consequences.

Sultana's Dream starts with Sultana on her easy chair contemplating on "Indian Womanhood" (Hossain 3). This commencement of the story characterizes Sultana as a woman

who to some extent is aware about the condition of her fellow women. But the story both begins and ends with Sultana sitting on her easy chair, this detailing represents that the reality she lives in is still unchanged after her journey. Fayeza Hasanat remarks that,

> . . . the abrupt ending of the dream and the awakening of the dreamer function as a warning signal to remind the readers that women's empowerment was nothing but a dream for the Muslim women in colonial Bengal, that the whole utopian structure of a perfect society was also stained by the essentialist patriarchal ideology, that such dream episodes would continuously recur and vanish until the awakened female consciousness reinvented the method and tool of her own discourse; after all, as Audrey Lorde said, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow [her] temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable [her] to bring about genuine change'. One Sister Sara's westernised reformist utopian tool was therefore not strong enough to awaken the Sultanas of the third world (123-124).

However, Sultana gets a chance to explore a different realm being out of her cocoon and the journey unravels to her the latent possibilities a woman may have inside of her. On the other hand, women in Sultana's society are not given the chance to explore the qualities that is inside them like the women of Ladyland. They also lack the chance of introspection that Sultana receives in her dream.

The dream may also indicate an urgency to stop the discriminations against women. Ayesha Tarannum points out that, "Islamic dream and Islamic Migration are historically a call for action" (21). Mohammad Kamran Ahsan states that, the easy chair and Sultana's bedroom represent the "mental and physical confinement" of the protagonist (qtd. in Tarannum 50). The rigid set up has constricted Sultana not only physically but also mentally. She can only move freely and question the happenings in Ladyland. Rokeya was not dead against the system of purdah; however, she was critical about the extremity and artificiality of it as also shown in her other works such as "Burqa" (Haq, 50). Being secluded, women could not get a chance to broaden their outlook. Tarannum remarks that,

> Rokeya was a critic of the isolation women experienced through purdah and highlighted the mental, physical and emotional impact of being perpetually housebound in many of her Bengali language essays, such as "Stri Jatir Abanati", "Ordhangi" and "Burqa". In "Burqa" Rokeya observes that 'in many families the women do not visit any other women and thus grow into the proverbial frog in the well. The interaction between women should be increased.' Eagle-eyed readers will notice that Rokeya makes a similar statement in *Sultana's Dream*: Sultana admits that she is 'no better than a frog in a well.' In Ladyland, conversations between women are paramount to personal and societal advancement (48).

Sultana naively questions the possibility of all the affairs of society to go indoors with men if men are kept indoors. This suggestion has emerged from the embedded thinking in women of both Sultana and Rokeya's society who are yet to believe the possibilities of women in conducting such matters. Nevertheless, after comprehending her limits, Sultana eventually calls herself a person who is similar to a frog confined in a well. Amzed Hossain states that, "It is interesting to note that in *Sultana's Dream* the narrator's name 'Sultana' means a female sovereign, but ironically, she lacks autonomy and has to live in virtual confinement" (22).

Sultana becomes curious to discover the advancements in Ladyland. She learns that the educated women and their initiatives played a huge role behind such changes. In the course of events Sultana becomes a spokesperson on behalf of her fellow women living in her society. She claims that in India the men are the masters who have taken all powers and advantages to themselves.

However, if we shed light on the attitudes of most of the women in Ladyland towards men, then we will notice that the women of Ladyland support the system of 'Mardana' which is an equally oppressive system similar to 'Zenana" but for men. The major characters such as the Queen and Sara utter some stereotypical comments against men. For instance, the Queen said to the men when they wanted to come out from seclusion; that they will be released from that system if ever their works are needed.

These comments enforce readers to think about the similar opinions like the following by Yousufji that were prevalent but reserved for women in the contemporary society of Rokeya;

> "It is you who were the initiators of our fall from the garden of paradise; it is you who were the *femme fatales* of the Trojan War; it is you who caused the Lanka affair; it is you who were the prime cause of the dreadful event at Karbala. Hence the fear, what terrible things might happen when you rise again! It's good you become free, but it is desirable that you don't misuse freedom (qtd. in Haque 103)."

Even in Ladyland, before the advancement of Mardana system when the women of Ladyland were engaged with experiments and education they were mocked at by the men of Ladyland who termed their works as "sentimental nightmares". Therefore, Sultana's Dream counters all such notions used against women by this reversal.

The women were also able to take control over nature by the means of technologies. The Queen remarks that they enjoy the nature's bounty as much as they can. The Lady Principals of the Ladyland were also successful to take control over cloud and the sun.

The Queen also says that they do not trade with the countries in which women face injustices and are kept in rigid seclusion. This also shows that by doing this they are inadvertently remaining secluded from others and the system of seclusion thus ironically prevails in Ladyland. Hasanat remarks, "[The Queen's] speech makes it clear that the Ladyland has no connection with the outer world. Like the men who live in seclusion in Ladyland, and like Sultana who lives in a secluded household in India, women in Ladyland live a communal life of perfected seclusion, in a stagnant, utopic world" (123).

Apart from being secluded from other countries and maintaining the reversed views that are similar to patriarchy, the women of Ladyland earned tremendous success through their hard work and education. The comments and initiatives of the Queen also show her trust in the womenfolk's capabilities. Regarding the Ladyland, Bagchi remarks that "Ladyland embodies the triumph of the virtuous, enquiring, scientific, enlightened and welfare-oriented spirit in women. And its heroines are women educators" (Bagchi, 'Introduction xiii). She also says that the "driving force behind the success of the utopian feminist country is women's education" (Bagchi, 'Introduction xii).

In a later modified and moderated translation of *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya is less harsh in criticizing the attitude of some men. Amzed Hossein brings forward that,

> [I]n the Bengali translation rendered nearly two decades later, Rokeya appears to tone down her satire against male dominance, perhaps more matured and balanced in her view of the gender roles; consequently, some contradictions creep in the text. A little earlier in the English text (as also in Bengali version) Sister Sara says men are not fit for doing any good job properly; they are the fountain-head of all crime and sin. But now in this passage they are represented as 'not inferior to

> women in any way—whether in learning, intellect and proper education', and as two limbs of the same body politic — with equally important but necessarily different social functions (51).

In the Ladyland the access to education solved several social ills including early deaths. In another work titled "Shishu Palon" ("Rearing a Child") (Haq 170). Rokeya links child marriage to the early deaths of infants. In *Sultana's Dream*, child marriage has been demolished after education is made compulsory in Ladyland. And it was made compulsory by a woman leader, the Queen of Ladyland. This shows her belief that women by coming out of constricted mindsets can help other women as well as become leaders. A line from Sukhendu Ray's extracted translation of her another writing "Istrijatir Abanati" ("Women's Downfall") presents a similar idea: "Perhaps fifty years down the road, we may see a woman as the Viceroy, thus elevating the status of all women" (qtd. in Ray 69).

Moreover, in *Sultana's Dream,* technologies are invented by women to ease their lives. For example, their use of sun heat makes the work of cooking less hectic. The astonishment and amazement of Sultana regarding the kitchen described in the story can also be a mark of women's position in society prescribed by patriarchal ideology. Lloyd Prince says that "Rokeya deploys the tropes of dreaming, history and modernity in order to argue that gender norms are constructions" (1). Both Sultana and Rokeya belonged to a colonised country or the third world having issues that are particular to their subaltern positions. Here, however, it can be found that Rokeya's portrayal of the Ladyland re-establishes Simone de Beauvoir's statement, "One is not born, rather, becomes a woman" (qtd. in Butler 35). Sultana was also accustomed to the traditional gender roles that is why she is amazed with everything she experiences in the Ladyland.

Sultana only claims that she will go back to her land and let everyone know about the far away place where women can exhibit their strengths and capabilities but she does not move. Only the break of her dream makes her leave the land. This can imply that she wanted to be in a place where women are given freedom to use fully their potentials and be important part of society. According to Tarannum, this reluctance of hers shows her "refugee status" in Ladyland (51). In short, despite her claims and her enlightenment, Sultana is reluctant to take the responsibilities as a purveyor of change in her society because in reality her society was not yet flexible enough to adopt such measures for women's education unlike the society of Ladyland where the women exert a certain emphasis on truth and justice. It is also said that "Virtue herself rules [t]here" (Hossain 4). Similar thinking can be found in Mary Wollstonecraft's statement in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), "Perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual and direct the laws which bind the society" (qtd. in Taylor 58). Moreover, Similar to Wollstonecraft, in the story Rokeya also focuses on the use of intellect, brain power, and knowledge that ultimately lead these women in Ladyland to bring tremendous transformations in easing their lives (qtd. in Quayum and Hasan, "Introduction", *Feminist* xii-xiii). Therefore, *Sultana's Dream* represents that, gendered constraints imposed upon women restrain their capability to show the extent of women's potentials. It also implies that these potentials can be tested not only by the withdrawal of the obstructions that women may face but also by their active participation that will make them capable and help them improve their lives and societies. To sum up, the text emphasizes that women have to come forward to improve their situation as well as the path to empowerment may smoothen if they are given opportunities to education.

Female Agency in *Padmarag*: A Resistance Against Social Ills

"Is there no treatment for these suppurating sores of society? . . ." (Hossain 104). asked Siddika in *Padmarag*. Siddika is the protagonist of this novel. She compares the evils and wrongdoings done to women with suppurating sores. As Srimati Mukherjee suggests, that the ideas and images of illness in both Rokeya's fiction and nonfiction works "help to mobilise thoughts of something seriously wrong and rotten in the state of masculinist oppression" (88). Siddika's question also highlights that the social evils just like a disease has spread unchecked and surpassed the borders of social position, religion and language.

The characters in the novel, *Padmarag* are mainly women who have been abandoned by their families and society or became destitutes. The characters Siddika, Saudamini and women like them are members of an institution named "Tarini Bhavan". According to Saudamini, Tarini Bhavan is a redress for the oppressed and helpless women. She dreams of a figurative war where Tarini Bhavan would serve as their fortress. Her call for a war also depicts the urgency to solve these problems as well as invites women to stand for themselves against injustices. The invitation also denotes the collective notion of women working together. Caroline Sweetman says that,

> Both feminist activities and progressive development draw on ideas about challenging inequality through mobilisation and solidarity. They emphasize the need to draw on collective power- 'power-with'—to overcome the 'power over' of domination by elites. Social, economic and political change can come from individuals realising their common interest in challenging unequal power relations, and asserting their full and equal rights as members of society (217).

These women with their unity along with their individual strength are making the cure for these "suppurating sores". They are literally portrayed to nurse the patients that come to their doors. For instance, they nursed a kid named Sarat who was on the verge of death; they also rescue a man named Latif Almas, whom they found wounded. Later on, however in the course of events it is revealed that Latif Almas is related to Siddika.

Other such examples include Usharani helping Bibha's mother who had been ill. Usharani and Bibha both are members of Tarini Bhavan. Tarini Bhavan as an institution stands for its school, workshop, the "Home for the Ailing and the Needy" and the "Society for the Upliftment of Downtrodden Women". In Tarini Bhavan, women of different religions and classes work together in harmony. In the workshop these women are given training on the practical skills that will help them to be self-independent. They also take part in some philanthropic activities such as, helping people who are affected by floods, famine or epidemics; distributing rice, clothes and medicine to the people in need and many more. Some are engaged in girls' education. The purpose of such education is to shape the girls as capable human beings with a dignified human existence, not as puppets. Hasna Begum states that, "the light of knowledge would drive away the darkness of ignorance and evil" (22-23). Therefore, education is in itself a resistance to the evils of society and paves path towards liberty.

Md. Rezaul Haque states that,

> [Rokeya's] early works tend to envisage the liberation of women as contributing to the building of a strong community of nation. Empowerment of women through education does not appear to have been conceived (of) as an end in itself; rather it is imagined as a means to an end which is to serve the nation. In other words, the woman question remains tied to the national question. The position begins to shift in her later writings which one can see as enacting a gradual delinking of the woman question from the national one. The separation of the two agendas finally enables Rokeya (especially in *Padmarag*, 1924) to envision her fight for the rights of the women of India as one

> meriting independent treatment. With the national issue put on hold, the question of the rights of women now becomes the number one agenda, enabling in the process a critique not only of the age-old patriarchy but also of its then newer manifestation, that is, nationalism (98).

But in the novel, these women educators are not letting the students learn the "misleading versions of history and end up despising themselves and their fellow Indians" (Hossain 31). The type of education also helps them become "good daughters", "housewives" and "mothers" inspired by high morals and ideals. Moreover, they are taught to love their country and religion. Therefore, it may be said that, the country and the love for country is not totally obliterated here. Nevertheless, the utmost priority relies on teaching them in a way that they become "self-reliant". In the novel the necessity of women's education is represented by Siddika's story as well. Siddika or Zainab (Zainab is her original name in the novel, she was in disguise and hiding her identity from others)) initially gets her education from her brother. As a result, Mr. Robinson, a white character representing the colonisers fails to trick her. He realizes that in her presence he cannot cultivate indigo in their land. There are also two minor characters Banu and Shahida who are manifestations of Tarini Bhavan's education programme. After successfully completing their education one of them comes to enrol her daughter. Even the celebration of the jubilee of the institution asserts the resilience of Dina Tarini, the founder of Tarini Bhavan and her fellow women working there relentlessly. Dina Tarini did not wait for someone to create an institution she felt necessary to be created for women. She as a woman herself took the project in her hands and no matter what taunts or invective came her way, she stood firm with determination and conviction. Thus, Rokeya re-establishes her philosophy once again through Dina Tarini that women should take their charge in improving their condition. The women in Tarini Bhavan also have a workshop where all kinds of women are found ranging from spinsters to widows; acquiring skills to have an earning source and become an asset for society. Most of the money for running this institution is also managed by their "Society for the Upliftment of Downtrodden Women".

Therefore, in *Padmarag,* Rokeya prescribes paths for women's earning in order to make her readers aware of the necessity for women's financial independence. The focus however, is not limited to money but in all the dimensions of women's liberation. As Shipra Mondal claims that Rokeya "campaigned . . . for real education… education which makes someone both internally and externally capable and strong" (70). The protagonist of this novel also finds her shelter in Tarini Bhavan and grows into a more capable human being. Similar to Rokeya, Siddika is a subaltern. As Hasan puts it, Rokeya is a subaltern because of "her marginalised status as a woman in Indian patriarchal society . . . [and her] subject position as a member of the colonised" (Hasan, 178). Both the subjection and subjugation are fought by characters like Siddika who stand against the sole dependency on marriage as well as the tortures of a colonizer like Mr. Robinson. Therefore, the socials evils prevailed on both patriarchal and colonial structures in that time of Rokeya that is confronted through such characters in the novel.

Rokeya's concern is not limited to Muslim women as suggested by critics such as Chaitra Dev. Moushumi Bhowmik says that Rokeya's efforts are not limited to the women in her community (Akhter and Bhowmik 37). It is projected throughout this novel that no women, despite of her caste or religion, is exempted from the injustices present in society. Rokeya's concern was even transnational. She showed that western women were also not free from unfair treatment. For this she has portrayed the character of Mrs. Helen Mary Horace, who even after being a white English woman is a victim of patriarchal evils. In another work, Rokeya has translated Marie Corelli's *Murder of Delicia* and compared the protagonist to her Bengali counterpart, Majluma.

Now coming back to the novel, it is evident that the novel is about those women who amidst dangers and several oppressions do not give in rather fight for themselves. These women who are victims of different oppressions are called "evil" and are slandered with derogatory terms such as prostitutes (Hasan, "Intimate revelations" 83-101). For instance, Dina Tarini Sen even after dedicating twenty-two years of her life in helping others and working for society's betterment receives insults as a return. These insults are coming from other women living in the same society and benefitting from their works. This attitude asserts that, imbibing the patriarchal mindset of treating women as inferiors or "the other" some women can go against the women who do not participate in such limited narratives. "Woman is riveted into a lop-sided relationship with man: he is the 'One', she the 'Other'. Man's dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance . . . have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth', . . . the assumption of woman as 'Other' is further internalized by women themselves" (Selden et al. 118). Even in the case of Saudamini and Usharani there were some women creating certain impediments in their life but it was again women like Dina Traini who came forward to help them. Another such example is of the female relative forcing Latif Almas for a second marriage, who was already betrothed to the protagonist of this novel.

There is a trope in this novel. All the significant characters go through certain ordeals in life that were externally caused by society. The situation was so harsh that most of them thought about committing suicide or were on the verge of being totally insane. Bagchi also says that, "Rokeya presents an indictment of society where institutionalized familial, marital, and sexual practices either drive women literally to madness or the brink of death or suicide" (Bagchi "Introduction" xiv). They were basically "social castrates" as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar state it. However, even after going through such extremities they do no give up at the end. Rather the harsh realities transform them into determined individuals working in improving women's position in society.

A fundamental part of the novel is Siddika's refusal to go with Latif Almas. After coming to Tarini Bhavan, Siddika meets Latif and recognizes him later from her pendant where she had a picture of him. However, even when Latif learns that she is Zainab, Siddika does not go with him despite being connected to him in 'spirit' (Bagchi, "Introduction" xxiii). This shows that she is an unconventional character who challenges the idea that marriage is the only goal for women. The reason why Siddika does not want to go with Latif is in her own words as follows, "I wish to prove that married life alone is not a woman's ultimate quest" (Hossain 117). She does not give in to the humiliation she has suffered from. This attitude has a similarity in Nora's character from "Ibsen's *The Doll's House*" (Syed 95). Siddika then reveals her further plan about her life she says that she will look after her young eight-year-old nephew and the state, until he becomes an adult. She will also try her best to awake "the women of decadent Muslim society to their real purposes in life" (Hossain 117). Therefore, we see Siddika to be determined in her will, she withstands all the problems that came in front of her, she helps herself to get out of the danger she was in and makes herself more skilled in social welfare activities. She is also keen to change the condition of women's lives after realizing the duty women have towards themselves.

Siddika as well as her companions in Tarini Bhavan are victims of the social ills. But they have healed themselves from the torments that they went through and along with that helped other women and their society to heal as well. They are resilient and use education as a healing ointment to those suppurating sores of society. They are aware of the issues a woman may encounter in a society; that is why, apart from being self-reliant and demonstrating their potentials they are working together to ensure similar facilities for other women as well.

Conclusion

Rokeya was a visionary of women's rights. In her writings *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* she has presented the models of women who are aware and conscious of the issues they face and work into bettering their lives. The socio-political background of Rokeya as well as her life experiences have played a huge role behind her two significant writings, *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*. She has presented the issues of her contemporary society where women are not given enough opportunities to enhance their potentials, she has also demonstrated how women are portrayed as limited beings in society by both male and female. However, she has asserted that women can overcome any obstacle with the power of education, awareness and their performance in intellectual and public spheres. Women can also help one another to transcend the limits imposed by society after understanding their duty towards themselves.

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Beyond the Picturesque:
Ecological Consciousness in Wordsworth's Poetry

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Abstract

This study investigates the ecological consciousness embedded in William Wordsworth's poetry, moving beyond the aesthetic category of the picturesque to uncover a deeper environmental ethic. Positioned within an ecocritical framework, this research explores how Wordsworth's representations of nature challenge anthropocentric attitudes and propose a symbiotic relationship between human beings and the natural world. In English literature, writers from different eras, especially those of the Romantic era, have given special focus to mankind's relationship with nature in their writing. While the picturesque tradition often emphasized nature as an object of visual delight, Wordsworth reconfigures it as a moral, spiritual, and pedagogical force. Through an ecocritical approach, the concentration of this paper will be on William Wordsworth's belief regarding nature as a possible solution to the current environmental problems and natural calamities. Through close readings of selected poems, this paper analyzes how Wordsworth anticipates modern concerns about ecological crisis, industrialization, and alienation from nature. By bridging literature and environmental ethics, this study argues that Wordsworth's vision offers a proto-environmentalist blueprint for rethinking humanity's role within ecological systems, making his work deeply relevant to contemporary debates on climate change, sustainability, and environmental justice.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Man and Nature, Nature Poetry, Romanticism, Environmental Consciousness

Introduction

Literature has long served as a crucial repository for documenting the evolution of human civilization, reflecting not only the intellectual and cultural aspirations of an era but also its anxieties, crises, and potential resolutions. Romanticism, emerging at the cusp of the nineteenth century, was deeply responsive to the rapid transformations brought about by the First Industrial Revolution—urbanization, mechanization, and the alienation of humankind from the natural world (Bate, 1991). In this context, William Wordsworth's poetry can be seen as a counter-narrative to industrial modernity, one that not only celebrates the beauty of the natural world but also advocates for a profound ethical and spiritual engagement with it. Far from mere aesthetic exercises in the "picturesque," Wordsworth's poems encourage readers to cultivate what Lawrence Buell (1995) calls an "environmental imagination," prompting reflection on human responsibility toward the natural world.

The urgency of revisiting Wordsworth's ecological vision is particularly relevant today, as humanity confronts the socio-environmental repercussions of what Klaus Schwab (2016) identifies as the Fourth Industrial Revolution—a paradigm defined by automation, artificial intelligence, and a blurred boundary between physical and digital realities. These technological advances, while promising unprecedented progress, also raise critical questions about sustainability, resource exploitation, and climate change. In such a moment of global ecological crisis, a return to the

ethical and spiritual teachings embedded in Wordsworth's poetry can serve as a means of rebalancing the fractured relationship between humanity and nature.

Eco-criticism provides a compelling theoretical lens for this exploration, as it emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human life, advocating a shift from anthropocentric worldviews to ecocentric ones (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996; Garrard 2012). Yet, this approach does not demand the rejection of scientific or technological advancement; instead, it calls for a recalibration of human progress in harmony with ecological limits. Wordsworth's assurance that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her" (Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, line 122) encapsulates this vision of reciprocity, where human flourishing is inseparable from the health of the natural world.

This paper, therefore, aims to move beyond the picturesque to uncover the ecological consciousness that underpins Wordsworth's poetry. It will investigate the causes and consequences of the conflict between humankind and nature, explore Wordsworth's reimagining of nature as teacher, healer, and moral guide, and argue for the continuing relevance of his work as a proto-environmentalist response to both the industrial crises of his age and the ecological emergencies of our own. As such, this study proposes to investigate the reasons and effects of the conflict between humanity and nature. Furthermore, it will focus on William Wordsworth's view of nature as a potential remedy for today's environmental issues through an ecocritical lens. In summary, the paper emphasizes that eco-criticism and related literary works act as vital calls to action, highlighting the delicate balance between humanity and the natural world and stressing the urgent need for environmental preservation.

In light of these concerns, this paper sets out to explore Wordsworth's ecological consciousness in a way that moves beyond the picturesque and engages with the ethical and philosophical implications of his work for today's world.

The following research questions and objectives frame the scope and direction of this study, based on a close reading of these selections: "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", *The Prelude*, and "The World is Too Much with Us", "Lucy Poems", "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802,", "Lines Written in Early Spring".

Research Questions

- How does Wordsworth's poetry move beyond the aesthetic picturesque to articulate an ethical, ecocentric vision of nature?
- In what ways do Wordsworth's key poems reflect and resist the industrial modernity of his age, anticipating contemporary ecological concerns such as climate crisis and alienation from nature?
- What insights does Wordsworth's ecological consciousness offer for reconciling technological progress with environmental stewardship in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

These research questions outline the main concerns of this study, guiding the analysis from Wordsworth's poetic vision to its resonance in today's ecological discourse. To address these questions systematically, the study adopts the following research objectives, which outline the methodological and thematic focus of the paper.

Research Objectives

- To contextualize Wordsworth's poetry within the Romantic-era response to industrialization and show how this context helps explain his ecological vision (Bate, 1991).

- To apply an ecocritical lens to selected poems in order to trace Wordsworth's shift from scenic representation to moral-ecological engagement.
- To highlight Wordsworth's contribution to proto-environmental thought, demonstrating how his work prefigures key concerns of modern environmental ethics, such as sustainability, biocentrism, and ecological grief.
- To argue for the relevance of Wordsworth's poetry in today's ecological and technological age, proposing that his vision can help cultivate ecological consciousness in readers and foster a sense of stewardship toward the natural world.
- To examine the tension between progress and preservation, suggesting that Wordsworth's ideal of harmony offers a framework for navigating the ethical dilemmas of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Literature Review

Contours of Ecocriticism

Also known as "green criticism," eco-criticism is a relatively new critical approach that examines the connection between literature and the natural world. Cheryll Glotfelty, a leading figure in the field, defined eco-criticism as "the study of how literature relates to the physical environment" (Glotfelty xxii). This deceptively simple definition paves the way for a wide range of inquiry, exploring not only how nature is portrayed in literature but also how literary works influence, challenge, or reinforce human attitudes toward the environment.

In his essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," William Rueckert (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world" (107). Eco-critics see nature as a living entity and reject the idea of human superiority over nature. In this regard, Lawrence Buell's seminal work *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) further broadened eco-criticism's scope by arguing that literature can develop what he called an "environmental imagination"—a skill to perceive and feel the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. Buell proposed that literature could act as a catalyst for ecological awareness, shifting readers from anthropocentric perspectives (where human needs take precedence) to eco-centric ones (where all forms of life are valued intrinsically). Greg Garrard, whose *Ecocriticism* (2012) remains a key textbook, outlined core concepts in the field: "nature" as a cultural idea, "wilderness" as a debated ideal, and "deep ecology" as a philosophical view that promotes the intrinsic worth of non-human beings regardless of their usefulness to humans.

Thus, eco-criticism is not merely a celebration of nature writing or pastoral literature; it is an inherently ethical and political mode of reading. It questions the anthropocentric narratives that have historically placed humans at the center of the cosmos and seeks to decenter human authority in favor of a more distributed, biocentric model. As such, eco-criticism is not only descriptive but prescriptive: it aims to raise ecological consciousness and to promote sustainable attitudes toward the environment.

Romantic Ecology

Jonathan Bate's Romantic Ecology (1991) was pivotal in linking eco-criticism with Romantic studies. Bate argued that Romanticism was not simply an escapist or nostalgic reaction to modernity but rather a profound intellectual and ethical engagement with the consequences of

industrialization. He described Romanticism as "a form of ecological consciousness," (Bate 2–3) emphasizing that poets like Wordsworth anticipated many of the environmental concerns of later centuries.

The Romantic movement, emerging during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, coincided with the Industrial Revolution's dramatic transformations: the enclosure of common lands, the growth of urban centers, and the mechanization of production. These developments alienated people from direct contact with the natural world, a shift that Romantic writers sought to counteract. In this context, Wordsworth's poetry becomes a form of cultural resistance—an attempt to restore balance between humanity and nature. By foregrounding the moral and spiritual dimensions of nature, Wordsworth encouraged readers to see the natural world not merely as a backdrop for human action but as a living, dynamic presence with intrinsic value.

Bate's concept of "Romantic ecology" positions Wordsworth as an early environmental thinker. His poetry does not merely describe landscapes; it interrogates humanity's place within them and offers a model for ethical coexistence. This approach moves well beyond the sentimental or decorative portrayal of nature and toward an ecological vision that invites responsibility and care.

The Picturesque and Its Limits

Central to understanding Wordsworth's ecological vision is the aesthetic tradition of the picturesque, which dominated eighteenth-century landscape appreciation. The picturesque emphasized the visual pleasure of irregular, rustic scenes—those that could be composed as though they were paintings. William Gilpin's Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty (1794) codified the principles of this aesthetic, encouraging viewers to treat nature as a spectacle framed for human enjoyment.

Wordsworth, however, found this purely aesthetic engagement with nature insufficient. While his early work does employ picturesque elements, his mature poetry moves beyond the surface appreciation of scenery to explore the deeper ethical, emotional, and spiritual significance of nature. As Bate observes, Wordsworth's genius lay in transforming the picturesque into a "poetry of dwelling," (39) in which humans are not passive spectators but active participants in the natural world.

For example, in "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth does not merely describe a landscape; he reflects on how the memory of this landscape has shaped his moral development and his capacity for sympathy. The poem suggests that nature possesses a pedagogical power: it can teach, heal, and morally guide those who are attentive to it. This is a decisive move away from the picturesque, which often objectified nature as a scene to be consumed, toward a more reciprocal relationship in which nature is acknowledged as an agent in human life.

Interdisciplinary Relevance

Eco-criticism and Romantic ecology are not confined to literary studies but intersect with a range of disciplines, including philosophy, environmental science, and ethics. As Buell notes, eco-criticism is "a study of the environment as represented in literature and of literature as an agent in shaping attitudes toward the environment" (430). This dual function—representation and agency—makes eco-criticism particularly valuable for the environmental humanities, a field that seeks to understand how cultural narratives shape ecological thought and behavior.

Wordsworth's poetry exemplifies this interdisciplinary potential. His work invites philosophical inquiry into questions of value (What is nature worth beyond its utility?), psychological exploration

of memory and perception, and even pedagogical application in encouraging environmental stewardship. In the age of climate crisis, Wordsworth's ecologically conscious vision offers a framework for rethinking human responsibility: rather than viewing nature as a resource to be exploited, we might see it as a community to which we belong.

This theoretical framework thus establishes the foundation for the present study: by reading Wordsworth through the lens of eco-criticism and Romantic ecology, the paper seeks to uncover the ways in which his poetry moves beyond the picturesque toward a moral and ecological vision of human-nature relations. Such an approach not only enhances our understanding of Romantic literature but also demonstrates its continuing relevance for contemporary environmental debates.

From time immemorial, man has maintained an affectionate relationship with nature. But with the development of civilization, the industry-based society started to flourish. With the rapid growth of industrial organization, man started to disregard the man-nature affinity, and thus affected the ecological balance adversely. This shift began with the Industrial Revolution in 18th century England. Ahmed et al. (2002) conducted extensive research on the consequences of industrialization in the Asia-Pacific region, entitled "The environmental impact of industrialization and foreign direct investment: empirical evidence from Asia-Pacific region", where the 18th-century Industrial Revolution has been mentioned as the catalyst of climate change. According to the article, "Carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions are significantly lower than before the onset of industrialization" (29778). Extensive research has been conducted and is still being done on the human hostility towards nature and the after effects of these on the environment. Kamboj et al., in the article "Human: A Destroyer of Nature", have specifically referred to how men are destroying nature and its harmful consequences. According to this article, numerous human activities, including overpopulation, pollution, the burning of fossil fuels, and deforestation, have an adverse effect on the physical environment. Climate change, soil erosion, poor air quality, and undrinkable water have all been brought on by changes like these" (Kamboj et al.1). In the article, "Wildfire, Smoke Exposure, Human Health, and Environmental Justice Need to be Integrated into Forest Restoration and Management", it is stated that, "Climate change contributes to increased burned area in seasonally dry forests through warmer seasonal temperatures, longer and drier summers, below-average winter precipitation, and earlier snowmelt" (D'Evelyn, Savannah M., et al. 367). This article basically focuses on the environmental and social crisis created by the increasing wildfire size and severity across the western United States and the trans-disciplinary approach to address the problems. Thus, significant efforts have been made to address humanity's destructive approach to nature, which disrupts the ecological balance. In this condition, the man-nature unity that has been focused on by Wordsworth, as a pioneer of the Romantic era, is urgently needed. Geoffrey H. Hartman sees Wordsworth's poetry as looking back for a better life (104). In Wordsworth's poems, the poet reflects deeply on human actions involving the pillaging of natural resources and environmental destruction.

The Necessity of an Ecocritical Lens

While an ecocritical reading highlights the interconnection between humans and nature, it does not necessarily advocate for the cessation of technological advancements. Instead, it reinforces the idea that "nature never did betray the heart that loved her" (Wordsworth 12). It celebrates the existence and stewardship of nature, emphasizing that the current wave of industrialization can augment human progress without compromising the well-being of nature. According to Peter Barry, the tone of the British tradition of eco-criticism is often admonitory, seeking to warn us of

environmental threats emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial, and neocolonial forces (242). This is corroborated by Bates, "who explores the politics of poetry and argues that as the first truly ecological poet, Wordsworth articulated a powerful and enduring vision of human integration with nature…and is of immediate relevance to great environmental issues today." (1) Just as Wordsworth took solace in the presence of nature and offered its preservation as a solution to the imbalances created in society by the 1st industrial revolution, inequality created by the latest wave of industrialization also stands to be removed by the acknowledgement and protection of the symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

In contrast to other literary theories' emphasis on the social and linguistic constructions of different notions, ecocriticism supports the very physical reality of nature- "[It] really exists, out there beyond ourselves…present as an entity which affects us and which we can affect, perhaps fatally if we mistreat it" (Barry 242)—a fact vehemently supported by Kate Sopper (1995) who exclaims, "it isn't language…a hole in its ozone layer" (151); in other words, human beings constitute a significant portion of the vast, dynamic entity that is nature. As such, our actions play an integral role in shaping its future, just as global natural changes impact the prognosis of mankind in general, thus resulting in a mutually reciprocal relationship.

Thus, research is needed to explore whether Wordsworth's writing can serve as a means of addressing the recent acute environmental problems. Hence, this paper aims to explore Wordsworth's representative poems in an attempt to find a solution to the environmental crisis, focusing on his concept of a harmonious relationship between man and nature. And, in this regard, ecocriticism can be a bridge between these two, as ecocriticism is "one of the responses from literary criticism to the various consequences caused by capitalist modernity. For it has been a tradition for literature to deal with the relations between man and nature, both in the West and East" (Wang 290).

Analysis

Wordsworth's Poetry of Ecological Crisis and Responsibility

Although industrialization brought remarkable technological advancements across the Western world, many historians now contend that it also led to significant declines in living standards for workers, both in the United Kingdom and other industrialized Western countries. Nonetheless, the rise of new middle and working classes fostered urbanization in industrialized societies, a sharp increase in populations, and the emergence of capitalism as a novel economic system. Industrialization seemed to showcase humanity's capacity to dominate and harness nature by comprehending its laws through science.

Romanticism arose in the United Kingdom as a response to the Industrial Revolution. In the early 19th century, numerous English intellectuals and artists deemed industrialism cruel and unnatural, often reacting—sometimes violently—against what they perceived as the increasingly dehumanizing mechanization of daily life. In the sonnet "The World Is Too Much with Us," Wordsworth highlights the modern estrangement from nature; he notes that while he does not pinpoint the exact reasons, it remains clear that "we are out of tune" (8) with the natural world because "The world is too much with us" (1), causing us to "waste our power" on "Getting and spending" (2). We transform nature into a mere tool for economic gain rather than maintaining a spiritual connection with it. Although the poem does not explicitly discuss industrialization, it encapsulates a Romantic critique of the materialistic and instrumentally rational mindset that characterized this era.

Wordsworth's Poems: An Artistic Response to the Industrial Revolution

Wordsworth's sonnet, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," also written in the early 19th century, offers a different perspective on London. It highlights the potential for renewal and a reconnection with the divine aspects of nature, even within the bustling city. However, this connection is only possible at this particular moment in the morning when the city appears harmonized with nature: its "Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie / Open unto the fields, and to the sky" (6–7). At this time, everything is described as "bright and glittering in the smokeless air" (8). The stark contrast to the city's typical state amplifies the experience, as Wordsworth notes that nothing, not even the wild landscapes with which he is typically associated, can compare: "Earth has not anything to show more fair" (1); "Never did sun more beautifully steep / in his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill" (10); "Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!" (11). "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" exemplifies the potential to restore our connection to nature within the heart of the emerging industrial capitalist era. This sonnet implies that Romanticism, while reacting against industrialization and urbanization, did not merely advocate a return to earlier ways of living but emphasized the importance of reshaping our relationship with the world—an equilibrium many Romantics felt industrialization had disrupted.

Wordsworth's Conception of Nature

Literature gives us the lessons of a healthy earth and, in turn, a healthy life. A friendly relationship between man and nature is urgently needed to save the Earth. For this, humanity must rethink its thoughtless attitude towards nature, as it has taken too long for modern society to comprehend the adverse consequences of mistreating nature. But Wordsworth understood this long ago and presented, in his writing, the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature as the solution for restoring the lost equilibrium. Literature has prophetic value. Thus, Wordsworth found a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature that we can call upon to remedy the current environmental imbalance.

William Wordsworth had been a worshipper of nature. To him, nature has an extraordinary importance. Wordsworth's target in endowing nature with a such superior place was an effort to broaden man's ecological horizon and highlight the Romantic view of nature, which suggested "a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth" (Worster 82). Actually, he was highly disturbed by the impact of the industrial revolution in 18th century England and thus, in reaction to this, he especially focused on reestablishing a close affinity between man and nature in his writings. He never liked the artificiality of city life. For this, again and again he went to nature for mental and spiritual tranquility. He believed that nature is a living being: nature has a soul of its own. According to, Wordsworth, "beneath the matter of universe there was a soul, a living principle, acting, even thinking. Wordsworth believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of nature" (Anjali 352). Thus, as a pantheist, he could see the presence of God in nature. He further said that there is a prearranged harmony between the soul of human being and the soul of nature. That means nature and human beings do have a communion of souls. Wordsworth, in his poems, presents nature with healing power. He viewed nature as the best teacher, nurse, moral guide and guardian to man. For Wordsworth, an individual who is brought up amidst nature is a perfect human being.

The poem "Lines Written in Early Spring" highlights nature's inherent harmony while underscoring humanity's failure to uphold it. Here, "Wordsworth places the speaker in the middle of Nature and shows that Nature is right and loyal to human being in its turn and it is man who should take the

blame for the broken bond between him/her and Nature" (Ramazani and Bazregarzadeh 5). The poem begins with the declaration of the all-pervasive presence of nature. Nature, in this poem, appears to be a personality, a divine spirit intermingled with each other and with every creation. Actually, the poem emphasizes the spiritual connection of nature with humans. So, the "link" (Wordsworth 5) is the link of soul- similarly, Ecocriticism advocates for the intimate association between man and nature. "Humans should understand the intricate and intimate relationship among plants, animals, humans and environment and develop an eco-friendly approach in order to maintain them in a state of dynamic equilibrium" (Sethi and Sangeeta 46). And, just like the ecocritics, the poet is aggrieved as men are denying this interconnectivity. Nature is presented as a living being, here. Trailing of "periwinkle" (Wordsworth, line 10) and breathing of flowers, all contribute to present nature as a living thing. "What man has made of man" (8) implies man's direct involvement in destroying the pre-established interconnectivity. This can be seen as a reaction of the poet against man's fight with each other and destruction of nature during the time of industrial revolution. And, the intensity of his mourning regarding this is noticeably expressed, when he reasserts the line, "What man has made of man?" (24). Industrialization caused the rapid spreading of mills and factories over the rural areas. Thus, in, **"**Lines Written in Early Spring**",** **"**Wordsworth further emphasized the symbolic and spiritual role of 'Nature' in the concluding lines of the poem when he referred to its 'holy plan'and lamented the course of human destiny"(Squire 240).

Wordsworth, similar to ecocritics, focuses on the preservation of natural world and thus, to preserve man –nature connectivity. Man should not be hostile rather be friendly with nature, says Wordsworth. Thus the question, "What man has made of man?" (Wordsworth, line 24) from "Lines Written in Early Spring" directs to the question, 'what man should do?' Or rather, 'how should man deal with nature?' In "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth suggested Dorothy to expose herself as much as possible to the effect of nature, and said, "Therefore let the moon/Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;/And let the misty mountain-winds be free/To blow against thee…" Wordsworth, lines 134-137). In this poem, the writer advocates on man's close bonding with nature and the ennobling effect of this bond on human mind and soul. According to William Christie, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" is "a poem of emancipation and enlightenment, discovering and celebrating the harmony—indeed, unity—of man and nature" (72). Nature, here, as a living entity, plays a vital role in restoring the peacefulness of his mind, as a teacher, nature flourished his humanity. Furthermore, finally, his soul flourishes when he gets the touch of nature. A "blessed mood" (41) is a gift from nature to him. With this awakening, guided by nature, he can "see into the life of things" (49) and discover the harmony among all the creations.

Wordsworth's preference for nature and rejection of culture has been vividly stated in "Tintern Abbey". Wordsworth clearly draws contrast between city life and country life. He exposes the fact that a man can find peace only in the lap of nature. The rejection of urbanization and the acceptance of rural and pastoral life makes this poem "Tintern Abbey" an ecocritical writing. Thus, he mentioned in "Tintern Abbey", "But off in lonely rooms and 'mid the din / of towns and cities, I have owed to them / In hours of weariness, sensation sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt among the heart;" (Wordsworth, lines 25-28)). And, being disturbed by the city life, in his imagination, he used to go to the bank of the river, Wye. Wordsworth had been inseparably connected with nature from his childhood. He has moved beyond youth and is now experiencing the richness of adulthood in close connection with nature. He is deeply emotionally connected to nature in every phase of his life. Nature is "The anchor" (109) of his "purest thoughts" (109); the "guardian" (110) of his "heart, and soul" (110) and of all his "moral being" (111). His intimate association with

nature makes his soul noble and, thus he can feel a “sense sublime” (95) that has got intermixed with nature. It is nature’s influence that he can hear the “still sad music of humanity” (91). With the touch of nature, his sense of fellow feeling flourishes. According to him, if nature takes care of his “genial spirit” (113), then it will never be affected or destroyed. So, the speaker passes his whole life in intimate contact with nature. Nature prepares him as a hood human being. Thus, maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature will make an individual a genuine human being.

Wordsworth said that nature never betrays its lover. (12) Nature’s companionship and teaching ennobles the inner mind of an individual. Thus, nature, in “Tintern Abbey,” plays the role of a living being: nature is personified here. Harmonious relationships between the souls of human beings and nature is the main focus of this poem, a major concern of ecocriticism as well. But modern men are destroying this valuable man-nature relationship. Therefore, “nature, instead of becoming a source of healing power [as stated in “Tintern Abbey”] is becoming a token of terror and destruction” (Jannat et al. 49)

Then, Wordsworth’s “Lucy poems” also “reflect the idea that humankind and the natural world are intricately intertwined with one another” (Sethi and Sangeeta 49). In “Lucy Poems,” Lucy is portrayed as a child of nature. She is being brought up amidst nature. In “Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower”, Nature is personified as the Headmistress and, the other forces of nature are the teachers of her. Being in intimate touch with nature her education goes on.

So, in “Lucy poems”, also, nature, is not presented just as a vegetation over there rather as a living being, and as a teacher, directly contributed to the life of Lucy. Thus, a very close link between Lucy, and nature is being presented in these poems. Eco criticism, always, gives priority on both nature’s living entity and this harmonized man- nature relationship. Lucy's formative years were spent in close contact to, and instruction from, the natural environment, as the poem "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" illustrates” (Sethi and Sangeeta 46). Nature, as a mother, has adopted Lucy as her own child and promised to educate her according to her own way. In the poem, nature declared, “She shall be mine, and I will make/A Lady of my Own” (Wordsworth, lines-5-6) As a teacher, nature will teach Lucy both “law and impulse” (8). And, nature gives the assurance of the guardianship and care to Lucy, wherever she wanders amidst nature. She will learn calmness and peace from the “mute insensate things” (18). The gracefulness of the wild storm will shape her body silently. Lucy will lean to hear the murmuring sound of the “rivulet” (28), and the beauty of the music makes her face beautiful. Nature’s intimate touch makes her, a calm, beautiful, graceful, and wise lady. And, Lucy died very soon leaving the speaker alone in the nature. Being a part of nature, Lucy is also a part of the life and death cycle. Lucy can be a glaring example of how nature’s guidance can shape an individual’s inner capabilities.

Beyond the Picturesque: Wordsworth’s Proto-Environmentalism

Ecologists have strictly, rejected the concept of man’s domination over nature. According to them, Anthropogenic behavior destroys nature and thus, kills man-nature harmony. Man’s superiority over nature is the main reason for the destruction of ecological balance.

“Anthropogenic activities such as demographic increase, huge and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, urbanization, widespread industrialization, deforestation, climate change, global warming, modern over busy life style, unhygienic living conditions, improper disposal of waste products, unsustainable development etc. are mainly responsible for the disturbance to the ecological balance of the environment” (Verma 408).

Human actions can influence the equilibrium of an ecosystem positively or negatively. On the positive side, individuals can help maintain or restore ecological balance by implementing sustainable practices that honor and protect nature. Examples include reforestation, utilizing biofuels, conserving water, decreasing fossil fuel dependency, and harnessing renewable energy sources. Conversely, human activities can destabilize or damage ecosystem balance through detrimental practices that exploit natural resources. Examples of such negative actions include deforestation, overfishing, hunting, mining, pollution, climate change, the introduction of invasive species, habitat destruction, and a decline in biodiversity. (Edwin) A balanced ecosystem arises from various factors that collaborate to establish a harmonious relationship between living and non-living elements within an environment. Key components include natural cycles, food chains, biodiversity, and human activities. By recognizing these elements and their impact on ecosystems, we gain a deeper appreciation for the value of nature and can take steps to preserve or restore its balance. So, man's harmonious relationship with nature can benefit the individual with peace and gracefulness. In this regard, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* also focuses on a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature. According to him, an individual's immersion in nature, can serve as a moral and spiritual cure for a materialistic society. Wordsworth advocates a return to Nature amid the rise of industrialization and urbanization. As an autobiographical poem, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* portrays how his personal growth intertwines with ecological insight.

Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as an exploration of the integrated relationship between nature and culture, particularly through the cultural artifacts of language and literature (Glotfelty xix). In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth challenges the anthropocentric separation of nature and culture by depicting nature as a dynamic, active force that shapes human consciousness. The poem's ecological vision is vividly illustrated in Book 1, where Wordsworth describes a moment of communion with the landscape: "—With brisk and eager steps and came, at length, / To a green shady place, where down I sate / Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice,/ And settling into gentler happiness". (1.61-64). These lines indicate the term by Jonathan Bate, Romantic ecology, that emphasizes reinstating humanity's bond with the natural world (Bate 40). Then, in Book 2, he describes his early education, outside the classroom, in close contact with nature. Here, he specifies the role of nature in shaping the human mind. In fact, he expresses his thankfulness to nature for having kept him innocent of the feelings of egotism and greed so widespread at the time.

Book 8 of *The Prelude*, titled "Retrospect—Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind,**"** presents a retrospective analysis of his past and explores how his deep early love for nature eventually transforms into a love for humanity. Here, the close association between nature and human beings is shown by describing the joy offered by the pastoral festival in the Lake District. He also reflects his city life in London, which is totally contrastive to his life when he is in close contact with nature. So, Book 8 highlights the idea that appreciating nature can be the entry point to understanding humanity.

The historical context of *The Prelude*, written during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, is essential for interpreting its ecological significance. The Industrial Revolution brought deforestation, pollution, and the enclosure of common lands, disrupting rural communities and alienating them from their environments. Wordsworth, residing in the Lake District, observed these changes firsthand, prompting his critique of industrial values. In Book 12, Wordsworth reflects on nature's refuge as a source of moral guidance. He focuses on "a sentiment that resonates with modern environmentalist movements advocating for cooperation over exploitation. This eco-dialogue is crucial in an era where anthropocentric policies threaten

ecological balance" (Rizvi 108). Thus, Wordsworth always emphasizes the pre-arranged man-nature companionship. A person brought up in close association with nature can never harm it. Nature becomes vindictive only when men hurt nature, when man tries to supersede nature. Wordsworth had always been against man's superiority over nature, and so are the eco-critics.

Implications for Ecological Humanities and Education

Today, during the 4th wave of the industrial revolution, there has never been a time of greater promise or one of greater potential peril. Neither technology nor the disruption that accompanies it is an exogenous force over which humans have no control. We are all responsible for guiding its evolution through the decisions we make daily as citizens, consumers, and investors. Therefore, we should seize the opportunity and power we possess to shape the Fourth Industrial Revolution and direct it toward a future that reflects our common objectives and values. To achieve this, we need to cultivate a comprehensive, globally shared understanding of how technology is transforming our lives and reconfiguring our economic, social, cultural, and human landscapes.

Conclusion

Beyond its aesthetic function, literature provides precisely such a space for reflection and reorientation, holding up a mirror to society and enabling individuals to see themselves and their world with greater clarity (Kenneth 293). In this context, an ecocritical reading of William Wordsworth's poetry reveals how his work not only celebrates the restorative power of nature but also critiques humanity's growing disconnection from the natural world, urging a return to ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. His vision resists the alienation of humanity from nature, offering instead a model of symbiotic coexistence in which nature becomes a source of moral guidance, spiritual restoration, and emotional grounding.

Ultimately, to move beyond the picturesque is to move toward stewardship. If we are to shape the Fourth Industrial Revolution into a force that elevates rather than diminishes humanity, we must reimagine our relationship with the natural world—seeing it not as a backdrop for human activity but as a co-creator of meaning and well-being. By revisiting Wordsworth's ecological imagination, we can cultivate the creativity, empathy, and moral responsibility needed to ensure that the technological future remains aligned with human values and planetary health. The challenge, and the opportunity, is ours.

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Resonance of Resistance:
Reading Selected Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto

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Abstract

Amidst the chaos during the days of partition, stories of Saadat Hasan Manto unveil the hypocrisies of the elitist historiography of the Indian subcontinent. His stories not only show a complete roadmap to the horrors of partition but also give a statement about his skill to find instances of resistance even among the lowest of classes of society. Despite all the critical comments and charges of obscenity, Manto did not relent but rather continued to tell stories with an unbiased tone. He gave voice to those whose very existence got the treatment of exclusion, and by doing so, he de-subalternized the eternal subalterns. His turn to resistance speaks against the criminalization of differences where he points out the politics of identity formation. The focus of this paper is a detailed thematic exploration of the resistance shown by Manto's characters, especially during the days of partition where the author shows how he merges himself with these characters by choosing to tell their stories from an unbiased point of view. It also offers an in-depth discussion that examines the theoretical perspectives of Manto's stories by reevaluating the discourses of Subaltern Studies and Postcolonialism.

Keywords: *resistance, historiography, subaltern, storytelling, identity formation*

The long history of the Indian subcontinent takes a massive turn in 1947. The Great Divide, popularly known as the Partition of India, not only gave birth to two new nations, India and Pakistan, but also became a great domain of discussion where the subcontinent's paradigm shift in the political sphere, the politics of historiography, the situation after independence, etc., can be studied critically. These issues have been meticulously discussed and theorized throughout the years in the writings of great scholars and thinkers, but literature offers an alternative route to interpret these issues in harsher, sharper and grimmer manner. Among many writers of that chaotic time, it was Saadat Hasan Manto who chose to unveil the nakedness of society by writing short stories where he uses, in Gopi Chand Narang's words, "the note of sorrow" (12) as the dominant note. While telling tales about "the sorrow of existence, the loneliness of the soul, and that unfathomable suffering, *dukha*" (Narang 12), he has created such characters who rise above this note of sorrow with their strong acts of resistance. Despite the unimaginable brutality committed upon them, they break the chains and develop a strong form of resistance. This paper aims to analyze Manto's resistance stories, and at the same time, how Manto innovatively merges himself with their resistance by writing for them is also in the domain of discussion. Manto's characters are not just mere characters of stories. Rather, they become larger-than-life characters by putting up a display of resistance during the days of partition and transcending their "sordid existence" (Narang 2).

In *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, a compilation of articles on Manto's works, edited by Alok Bhalla, the characters are analyzed from different angles and perspectives, but in

those articles, there is a subtle knowledge gap that can be traced regarding discussing the domain of subaltern people and their identities. This paper aims to fill the gap by analyzing the process of *Othering* of the subaltern. He tells stories about the fixed identities of the subaltern and the struggles of women who were doubly oppressed in a colonial setup, and at the same time, he goes into the minds of the lunatics who were considered to be mindless to capture their in-betweenness. He stretches the spectrum to such a point where the process of *Othering* has grown to the extreme. That is why this paper focuses on those stories where women and the mindless have something to say or feel.

The significance of Manto's storytelling becomes very important when it comes to the topic of the historiography of the Partition of India. It is very problematic and inaccurate. What history tells about the partition is not actually the real picture; the real picture is hidden in the silent screams of the survivors. To support this claim, Urvashi Butalia's interviews are relevant. When Urvashi Butalia tries to interview the survivors of the partition of India, she, too, is astonished to see that almost all of them do not say anything at all. She writes, "I realized then that in this silence lay the many hidden histories of partition, the histories that have always hovered at the edges of those that have been told, the histories that describe the dark side of freedom" (Butalia 106).

The arguments of Ranajit Guha broaden the scope of constructive criticism regarding historiography even further. He traces that the elitist nature of this subcontinent's historiography has prevailed even after the partition. According to him, because of this elitist nature, the historiography of this subcontinent is controlled by both "colonialist" and "bourgeois-nationalist elitism" where there is no place for the subaltern (Guha 37). Thus, the subaltern cannot be heard or read through the domain of historiography. Likewise, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak talks about the subaltern's inability to speak and criticizes the privileged intellectual's inability to represent them. Her very notable essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" traces the history of silencing the subalterns. She walks through a complete itinerary and argues that no one can represent "those who act and struggle" (Spivak 27). In her essay, Spivak does not conform to the established notion of the term subaltern, but rather, she expands it by pointing to the exclusion of subaltern women from the discourses of national independence. In this essay, she focuses on the subaltern woman's agency to speak. She points out that the subaltern woman cannot speak, even if she does, then she is intercepted. Her act of speaking is a kind of "distanced decipherment by another" (Spivak 64).

The possible way out of this situation is to discard the sources of historiography from "elite institutions" and focus on "local, popular expressions" (Gottschalk 18). This can be done with the help of storytelling. Hannah Arendt is very relevant in this argument as she focuses on storytelling which "brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are (Arendt 105). According to her, storytelling can be "a tool for coping with history" as well as "an important tool for resisting the evils of the modern world" (Swift 3). Storytellers like Manto are the narrators who can trace the silence of marginalized people and represent their horrors in front of the world. He, without directly denouncing Spivak's arguments (as he was way before her time), has written such stories which are the testimonies of his becoming the spokesperson of the subaltern. His stories are the testimonies of this claim, and the narrative technique speaks volumes about his resistance against the atrocities of that time.

The Partition of India engraved a permanent mark on Manto's mind. This historical event of 1947 gave birth to two different independent dominions named India and Pakistan, but the comprehension of the concept of partition is not that simple, but rather a complex and deceptive

one. In the naked eye, there were the births of two separate countries, but on a deeper level, there was the perpetuation of unimaginable acts of monstrosity. Manto masterfully captured these illusions of independence in his stories where he spoke for the fallen people of society in a unique style, a style of his own. He was against the elitist conventions of society and always tried to unmask the real face of the same society which gave people false hopes and fake promises to his readers through his stories. He felt the "profane desires" of a writer to expose the flaws of the so-called moral society and to talk about the perpetuation of violence and the process of silencing the downtrodden people because all the monstrosities during and after the partition form a kind of "anthology of incidents in an awful and inexorable tragedy of a degenerate society" (Bhalla 52). Thus, his stories attain, in Shashi Joshi's words, "anti-heroic, anti-salvationist" status where there is "the end of all ideologies" (157).

Manto's storytelling capability reaches another level as his stories are not just the tales of the subaltern people; they can also be analyzed through the lens of identity formation. Identity formation also played a huge role in perpetuating violence during the time of partition. How the perpetuation of violence is closely connected with issues of identity, and the process of *Othering* is traced by Amartya Sen. In his *Identity & Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Sen has identified a correlation between identity and violence. He has traced out the root causes which are responsible for the creation and perpetuation of violence in this world. He has placed his discussion of identity and violence into the classic discourse of war and peace and talked about the illusion of destiny, the *pure* identity. In reality, there is no, in Paul du Gay's words, "pure moment of identity" (qtd. in Jones 58). He points out that the "reductionist" (Sen 41) approach to identity formation is one of the reasons that creates a kind of hindrance to achieving the plurality of identity.

Rejecting the Huntington thesis, Sen finds this "solitarist" (Sen, "Prologue" *xii*) nature of identity formation very problematic. According to him, seeing human beings as members of exactly one group can be a good way of creating misunderstanding in this world. This deprives humans of the richness of leading an abundant life. He finds out that prioritizing communitarian or community-based identity is highly dangerous and can lead to numerous wars. He says that human identities are "robustly plural" (Sen 19) in terms of caste, class, complexion, politics, profession, nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, and so on, and he advises that they should not neglect these plural affiliations to which they may simultaneously belong.

This reductionist or binarist approach to identity led the Hindus, the Sikhs, and the Muslims to think that everyone outside their respective communities was the *Other* during the time of partition. This *Othering* in terms of communal identity further led them to commit violence against those whom they considered outcasts, away from their very own community. They tried to wipe out the existence of the *Other*. They wanted the appropriation of power over the *Other*. Also, patriarchy, colonialism, and elitism never allowed women to have their own identity from the very beginning of human history. Their existence had barely been felt because of the reductionist nature of identity formation. Thus, women, in actuality, had become the *Other* within the society, the vessel for appropriating the lust and power of the perpetrators. Amidst all of these, Manto's stories talk about those who are considered to be different from normal human beings and thus fall heavily under the *Othering* of society. Anyone who was not of a Hindu-Muslim-Sikh background was considered almost a non-existent creature in the days of partition. If she were a woman, the list of turmoil would grow bigger. Manto's Mozail is such a woman who never has a recognized identity for being a Jew but never chooses to be a part of any of the three

major religions amidst the communal riots, and thus, shows her resistance against the brutality committed in the name of religion.

While portraying his female characters, Manto shows how they display their acts of resistance even though they have suffered the most during the days of partition. He shows that some of his female characters have the agency to speak for themselves long before Spivak who is in denial of the subaltern women's ability to speak. Manto goes one step further by telling tales about the prostitutes. He never digs deep to find the root cause of their condition or tries to find any solution for them but tells stories about those who, at some point, stop being the victim and put up a kind of resistance. He has never seen them as prostitutes; rather, he has seen them with unbiased eyes where they are just as normal as everyone else, who are the most afflicted class of people in society. That is why a woman like Saugandhi feels humiliated, just like any normal human being with feelings. Manto's humane portrayal of the prostitutes raises humanitarian concerns about them.

Manto's humane attitude towards victims of partition violence goes to another level when he considers even the "mindless" people of the society to have the ability to put up a resistance of their own. His masterpiece, "Toba Tek Singh," deals with the resistance the lunatics put up against the authority. The story mainly focuses on the protagonist Bishen Singh's act of resistance and expresses a deep woe to the readers about the creation of a geopolitical boundary. His resistance echoes that of Mozail as they never choose any of the community or country. These two occasions show Manto's very own view of the Partition of India. He never chooses sides; rather, he only mentions the follies of riots, borders, religious extremism, and hatred prevailing in society. Thus, Alok Bhalla writes:

> Manto makes no attempt to offer any historical explanations for the hatred and the carnage. He blames no one, but he also forgives no one. Without sentimentality or illusions, without pious postures or ideological blinkers, he describes a perverse and a corrupt time in which the sustaining norms of a society as it had existed are erased, and no moral or political reason is available. (Bhalla 28)

It was very difficult for anyone to remain neutral during those days of massacre. That is why Manto's strength in staying in a neutral position has been the reason for critics like Bhalla to give such compliments.

Manto does not compromise his realism with the nationalist discourses that glorify the Partition of India. Indian history always tells stories about the elites, omitting the subaltern completely. Even in terms of resistance, the efforts of the marginalized class have been ignored from the beginning of time. Manto's writings are against this conformity and show that stances of resistance can also be found among the fallen. His stories also show that their resistance is more of an ideological resistance where they stand against patriarchy, religious extremism, and the reductionist approach toward identity. Manto does not ignore what Guha defines as "the politics of the people" (Childs and Williams 37). Rather, he chooses to be the voice of the resistance of Kalwant Kaur, Mozail, Saugandhi, Bishen Singh and so many others who are at the bottom of the class hierarchy of the society.

Manto's female characters from his short stories show great strength against the conventions of society when no one is expecting any form of resistance from them. In "Colder than Ice," Manto introduces a strong female character named Kalwant Kaur who does not lower his head in front of his husband, Ishwar Singh, due to his infidelity. As Ishwar Singh returns from

looting the Muslims, both husband and wife try hard to make love but miserably fail because of the necrophilic action of Ishwar. Kalwant pokes her husband till the end to make him confess everything, but she does not remain silent when she comes to know the actual truth about his husband. Here, Manto juxtaposes Kalwant with Sakina, the female character from "The Return." Though he captures the silent screams of Sakina in "The Return," in actuality, she does not utter a single word. The essence of incommunicability is there, but here in "Colder than Ice," Kalwant can speak. She does not remain silent. Manto subverts the idea that the subaltern woman cannot speak. Here, Kalwant has an agency to speak to. She even has the agency to accuse her husband of adultery and to squeeze out the truth from him. She goes even further when she stabs her husband with his own kirpan "[l]ike a wild and demented creature" (Manto, "Colder than" 22). Such a violent act is never expected from a woman because of the social constitution. A lot can be argued for and against this violent deed of Kalwant, but that is a different discussion. Another thing that should be noticed here, though she addresses herself with her father's identity at the beginning of the story, she is able to speak against her husband now. She rises above the meek and soft behavior of an average woman and does not conform to the notion of a silent wife who accepts all the infidelities of her husband. She puts up a strong resistance against the stereotypes of society. Her resistance questions Spivak's claim of the inability of the subaltern, especially women, to speak. Manto gives voice to all strong women out there who speak up for themselves despite the tendency of their existential denial. History may have omitted the tales of their resistance, but this merchant of realism, Manto, never fails to illustrate their valiant efforts.

In "Mozail," Manto shows the contrast between the present and past lovers of Tarlochan. Kirpal Kaur, current lover of Tarlochan, is a meek and soft Sikh girl who strictly abides by all the Sikh rules and regulations. In contrast, Mozail is a strong, eccentric, Jewish woman who lives as an outcast within the society. She directly juxtaposes Kirpal in every manner. Manto has shown in this story that women of both kinds can coexist in the same society. Because of her Jewish identity, Mozail is treated like an outsider inside society. Singular affiliation to identity is the main reason behind the shaping of her *Othering*. She has already been considered as a person of the *Other* as she is a woman, but at the same time, she has to face further ill-treatment and discrimination from every Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. Despite all of these setbacks, Manto portrays her as one of the most humane characters in his literary works as she puts others before herself and makes sacrifices for them. Mozail has accepted her outcast identity from the beginning but that never holds her to being the torchbearer of humanity. Because of her different religious identity, she dresses and socializes with everyone differently. Due to her negligible existence, she has known from the beginning that she cannot marry a Sikh like Tirlochan. She is treated and touched badly by everyone. Despite all of these, the "vulgar girl," Mozail, comes to the rescue of both Tirlochan and Kirpal Kaur (Manto, "Mozail" 40).

In this story, Manto has shown that women like Mozail exist with a very strong presence among the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. They are forgotten by everyone as they have no place in the national history of this subcontinent, but they have also contributed a lot to society. Manto here goes even further by depicting a Jewish woman's resistance to bowing down to the majority in society. He has portrayed Mozail in such a fashion that her mere existence turns into an act of resistance. It is very difficult for her to survive among the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. People from these three major religions constantly spread panic and fear among the minorities. The communal riots among them have turned this subcontinent into a pandemonium. Despite all of these, Mozail never converts to those religions and always seeks comfort in her own identity. She embraces her own religious identity, lifestyle and dresses with an accepting nod, and

refuses to be exactly like the perpetrators who quench thirst with blood. Thus, she puts up tremendous resistance where no other identity is as great as the identity of a human being. Mozail is a human first, not a Jew. Religious identities should be considered as secondary recognition in this cruel world where monsters lurk in the shadows of everything.

Mozail reaches the peak of her humane character when she saves the lives of Tarlochan and Kirpal Kaur before her own. Her dress becomes very significant in the last portion of the story. The dress for which she is damned becomes a lifesaver for Kirpal. In contrast, the turban of Tarlochan is not enough to hide the nakedness of Mozail, let alone to save her life. By denouncing the turban, Mozail shows her strength and resistance even on her deathbed. Manto, by portraying Mozail, shows his own stance about the atrocities committed in the name of religion. He does not take any side and remains strong with unflinching poise to write stories about the horrors of Partition.

In "A Woman's Life," Manto depicts an act of resistance by a prostitute. The story begins with a vivid description of Saugandhi's condition after having sex with the city's sanitary inspector. A prostitute's tale begins by describing what has happened just after the sex is quite a style from Manto. There is also a detailed description of Saugandhi's kholi, her dwelling place. Manto feels that it is necessary to describe the room of a prostitute as it is the world for her from where she continuously struggles to survive. The main noticeable thing about the *kholi* is that there are four pictures of Saugandhi's favorite clients hanging on the wall. Madhu's picture is to be found among the four of them. Madhu is her customer, but Saugandhi feels something more about him. She likes him and she thinks that Madhu does the same. That is why she gives away all the money she earns to Madhu. Ram Lal, the owner of the brothel, has warned her many times but there is no use in those warnings. She knows that he is right but does not want to believe it because she finds comfort in Madhu.

Manto describes all the details of Saugandhi's life in this story. Her room, her customers and experience with them, the owner of the brothel, her fellow mates in this business, and even her childhood—all of these have been illustrated with great skill by Manto. Despite describing a prostitute's life cycle, he has created a sense of comfort among the readers where they find Saugandhi as a fallen woman. Her identity as a woman becomes greater than that of a prostitute by showing her feelings and attitudes toward different incidents in her life. Manto captures her feelings about her life which has been like "a game of hide-and-seek" for the last five years (Manto, "A Woman's" 57). She sometimes thinks of spending her entire life in a box just like in her childhood days where she can be "hidden from view yet dying to be found" (Manto, "A Woman's" 57). Her deep sighs, agonies, feelings of all kinds—every human aspect is illustrated masterfully by Manto in this story. He even illustrates why Saugandhi feels comfortable with Madhu. Madhu has given her what she has been craving since joining this profession: a feeling of having a family. Whenever Madhu returns from Poona, he says comforting sentences to her. He acts like he really cares for her and tells her to quit her job. Though he does not give or send her anything for her price, she never complains. She even allows him to take away her hard-earned money despite Ram Lal's warnings. Though she pretends to be a know-it-all to others, she falls for him. She always remains off guard in front of him, but all of these get shattered in an incident of humiliation.

When Saugandhi is presented to the Seth sahib in the car, he leaves immediately with a groan, "[u]gh" (Manto, "A Woman's" 61). This remark of disgust hits her so hard that she keeps thinking about that until she bursts out. That groan has given her great psychological pain that she

cannot bear. She is incapable of recovering from that blow and cannot repress the feeling of insult. Thus, she reacts to Madhu whom she likes very much. All her frustrations come out as a stance of resistance because here she breaks out from her identity as a prostitute. She comes back to reality and confronts Madhu with great courage. It is very unusual for a prostitute to speak like this. She pokes to know the truth about his troubles back in Poona. She starts to throw away all four pictures from her room. She makes fun of Madhu and makes some racist remarks about him. She continues to mock him. He tries to get some authority over her by reminding her of the identity of a prostitute but miserably fails. She does not let him finish and continues to insult him. When he screams at her, she "scream[s] right back" (Manto, "A Woman's" 67). He becomes scared, and the dog living in her room chases him out of the kholi. The ending suggests that a socially accepted person like Madhu can never be a family to a prostitute like Saugandhi. Rather, the dog in her room, an innocent creature who does not make any distinction between men and prostitutes, can become her actual family because it has stayed by her side when everyone else only comes in to fulfill their needs and then leaves without thinking of her as a woman who can also have feelings.

All the rebellious actions mentioned in the previous paragraph can be considered as Saugandhi's acts of resistance. Manto here subverts the whole situation. The mockery, the taken-for-granted attitude, the racist remarks—all of these that a prostitute daily confronts have been transferred right back to a socially accepted person. Madhu represents the whole of society where there is no place for prostitutes. Every time, it is the prostitutes who suffer from immense pain both physically and mentally. They have no place in the nationalistic discourses of India and Pakistan. Thus, Spivak raises the question of their agency to speak, but Manto shows in this story that they indeed can speak. Saugandhi is a subaltern woman who can speak just like Kalwant Kaur in "Colder than Ice." She rises above her identity as a prostitute by putting up great resistance against the reductionist approach to identity. She is not just a mere prostitute; she is also a woman who has feelings just like any other living creature. Society tends to forget this, but Manto, with sheer realism, shows that even the prostitutes can put up resistance against the society where they live like the *Other*. They, too, have feelings of shame and insult. It is the feeling of humiliation that triggered Saugandhi's act of resistance. Manto has shown her as a woman, not as a prostitute in this story and his "concern is not the commodity, but the pain, the suffering, and the loneliness of the human soul that sells it" (Narang 6). Thus, he justifies the translator's translation of the title of this story as "A Woman's Life."

In his stories, the damned get the special attention of Manto. Among them, women living in the lowest labyrinth of society have been portrayed in a different manner that has never been thought of by anyone. People tend to disregard their whole existence, let alone consider them as motherly figures. They never believe that those fallen women can also be someone's mothers, sisters, and wives. Their very existence is considered obscene, and their commodification has veiled their feelings of pain and love. Despite giving erotic descriptions of female bodies, Manto has always shown the brighter sides of them. He finds motherly affection even in characters like Mozail and Saugandhi. He has built her damned women around "the archetypal mother-image of woman" (Narang 8). That is why in "A Woman's Life," he has presented Saugandhi as a woman, not as a prostitute. In "Mozail", Mozail has already been considered as an outcast in society because of her religious identity. She may not take prostitution as her profession but leads an eccentric, promiscuous life. This sinks her even further into the abyss of *Othering*, but despite all of these, it is Mozail who stands against religious extremism and hoists the flag of humanity by saving innocent lives while sacrificing her own. This is where Manto becomes extraordinary in his storytelling.

In the realm of Manto, the insane make more sense than the sane. "Toba Tek Singh" depicts the very essence of this claim. In this story, Manto shows different incidents of resistance from different lunatic inmates, but Bishen Singh rises above everything and dies one of the most meaningful deaths in the whole of Manto's literary works. Through skillful play with the words, Manto masterfully veils the lunatics' resistance and gives it a whole new angle to be looked at. The story begins with the news of a religion-based lunatic exchange between the newly independent states, India and Pakistan. Manto expresses his ambivalent attitude towards the Partition of India when the narrator of this story says, "Whether this was a reasonable or an unreasonable idea is difficult to say" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 9). The news of Partition has shaken the minds of the mindless as their already inflicted minds cannot make any sense of the creation of two newly formed countries. The whole asylum gets divided into many opinions of its dwellers. All of them have different opinions about India and Pakistan. When one lunatic speaks ill of Pakistan, then another speaks ill of India. When one considers himself as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, another emerges as Master Tara Singh. Thus, Manto shows the underlying chaotic situation of the subcontinent where the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs were at one another's throats back then.

The very first instance of resistance in this story can be traced when one inmate climbs up the nearest tree and installs himself on a branch. Then he speaks on the delicate problem of India and Pakistan for two hours. It is not normal for a madman to give a speech on the delicate matter of the newly formed states while sitting high up there. Interestingly, he climbs up even higher when the guards come and ask him to get down. His reluctance to get down portrays his version of resistance. His resistance takes another level when he declares after being threatened with punishment, "I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live here in this tree" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 11). Apparently, this weird act of madness seems like a very comical example of the inmate's insanity, but here, it underlies a deeper meaning. By mentioning the spot from where the inmate has been speaking, Manto can possibly refer to the position of God. God is seeing the whole process of dividing the two countries with arbitrary borders from above and now is unwilling to go to either of the two countries because of the atrocities that prevailed at that time. The situation was so hellish back then as if God had left this subcontinent. He does not want to go where the devils dwell and commit violence in the name of religion. This is highly suggestive of a godless society where, in Nietzsche's words, "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" (Nietzsche 120). Manto's reference to Nietzsche shows the intensity of this great chaos in this subcontinent.

The young Hindu lawyer, one of the inmates of the asylum, also puts up his version of resistance hearing the news of the exchange. He has gone mad after an unhappy love affair. At first, he became very depressed when he came to know that Amritsar, where his beloved lives, was to become a part of India, but his dwelling place, this asylum, falls in Pakistan. He had abused all the major and minor political leaders of India and Pakistan that day, but now, he hears the news of the exchange. Everyone congratulates him as he is going to his beloved's country, but he is now reluctant to go to India as "he [has] no intention of leaving Lahore" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 12). He thinks like this because he believes that "his practice would not flourish in Amritsar" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 12). He has given a terrible excuse, but his reluctance turns out to be a form of resistance with the hint of ambivalence.

Manto takes this hint further by introducing the protagonist of this story, Bishen Singh. Bishen Singh is a Sikh lunatic who has been in the asylum for fifteen years. He is from Toba Tek Singh and that is why everyone calls him Toba Tek Singh. There is a sense of unification with the motherland expressed here by Manto. Occasionally, Bishen Singh is found leaning against the wall,

but the rest of the time, everyone sees him standing. No one has seen him sitting down and that is why he has permanently swollen legs. He is also to be found saying mysterious gibberish. These instances of standing and speaking gibberish become meaningful towards the end of this story. When Bishen Singh hears the news of the exchange, there is only one question on his mind. He wants to know where Toba Tek Singh, his homeland, is, but nobody can answer properly. There is confusion all around the asylum about the exact location of Toba Tek Singh. When an inmate declares himself as God, he asks him if it is in India or Pakistan. The inmate chuckles and says, "Neither in India nor in Pakistan, because so far we have issued no orders in this respect" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 14). Bishen Singh shows his desperation as he begs that inmate to issue the necessary orders for locating Toba Tek Singh accurately, but becomes very disappointed, as that self-proclaimed God "appear[s] to be preoccupied with more pressing matters" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 14). Then he gives a religious identity to that inmate and accuses him of being a Muslim God and thus not listening to his pleadings. The reply of the inmate about the location of Toba Tek Singh is very important because it gives birth to ambivalence in Bishen Singh's unconscious. His ambivalent attitude turns into a form of resistance when he shows his reluctance to cross the border. On the other hand, Bishen Singh's accusation echoes the frenzied situation of this subcontinent due to the communal conflicts. In the name of religion, there are bloodbaths everywhere. When Fazal Din comes to visit Bishen Singh, he, too, cannot locate Toba Tek Singh accurately. This makes Bishen Singh walk away without uttering a single word. His disappointment is clearly visible here as he is never interested in knowing the condition of his daughter and the buffaloes; the only thing he has wanted to know from the beginning is where his motherland is.

Then the day of exchange arrives and there prevails a "complete confusion" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 16). Some simply refuse to cross the border, some run to and fro, some become stark naked, some start to abuse or sing, and female lunatics have created havoc by being "even nosier" (Manto, "Toba Tek" 16). This chaotic situation refers to their own version of resistance. Even in the form of the weirdest insanity, Manto's lunatics put up resistance against the authority. The main resistance is yet to be found in the actions of Bishen Singh who straight away asks the official about the exact location of Toba Tek Singh and gets the correct answer this time. He comes to know that it is in Pakistan. This news acts like a traumatic experience for him, and he tries to run away. He does not want to go to India, away from his homeland, which is now in Pakistan. The officials try their best to persuade him falsely that Toba Tek Singh is in India and that is why he is going to India, but all their efforts go in vain, and they soon give up. Whether Bishen Singh believes the lies told by the officials, the readers cannot know, but what they can see is that he does not feel comfortable knowing that his motherland is now in India either because it is an unknown place to him just like Pakistan. What he pictures as Toba Tek Singh in his mind does not exist anymore. His condition is like the condition of the mythical king Trishanku who was neither accepted in heaven nor could go back to earth. He is mentally nowhere—neither India nor Pakistan can give comfort to his conflicted mind as Toba Tek Singh does not remain what it used to be. He suffers from a kind of statelessness and in-betweenness. He finds himself mentally in a place that does not belong to either of the countries. His mental ambivalence echoes his physical resistance against dwelling either in India or Pakistan. He collapses to the ground that belonged to no one, and finally, his swollen legs get rest after fifteen years. Thus, he embraces "no man's land" as his *mulk*.

Muhammad Asim Siddiqui finds the gibberish of Bishen Singh quite significant. According to his research paper titled "Saadat Hasan Manto's Poetics of Resistance," the use of English in Bishen Singh's gibberish "acquires some significance in his rejection of the colonial arrangement of

dividing the country" (21). He further illustrates Bishen Singh as Manto's mimic man mimicking that of Homi K. Bhabha (Siddiqui 21). When the colonized mimic the colonizers, the latter feel the threat of being replicated. Thus, the speaking of English articulated from the colonized's mouths can present a form of anti-colonial resistance. The use of English in Bishen Singh's gibberish presents "a second order of mimic men mimicking not only the English, but also the English-speaking Indians who are at the forefront of the nationalist movement but are not beyond suspicion, and who, in his view, have accepted the colonial arrangement of dividing the country too meekly" (Siddiqui 21). Manto has given his critics the scope to extract powerful meanings even from the most nonsensical gibberish of a madman. He has created such a strong character like the lunatic Bishen Singh who puts up a great resistance against the authority and finds a place to rest where no one will force him to go to India and Pakistan. Manto's poetic expressions turn the no man's land into Bishen Singh's new Toba Tek Singh.

It is not a surprise that Manto's stories are still relevant in these modern times. The darkness that prevailed in the days of Partition has not left yet. It is still consuming the innocence of humankind. Though not a reformist, Manto has shown the world the follies of war, religious extremism, aggressive nationalism, and the creation of borders in his stories. These themes are still relevant as the perpetuation of violence and war has shaken world peace. The false hopes and myths do not affect the heart of Manto as he has made his craftsmanship a weapon for subverting the stereotypes and made a life out of a graveyard. All of this he achieved by depicting the stories of the subaltern with sheer realism. Representing the subaltern people is always a debatable matter. Great scholars like Spivak have doubts about their representability, but that does not mean that an author must not try. In this sense, the author should stay true to the actual description of the reality of the subaltern people. Thus, even their silent actions prove to be louder than screaming in full voice. That is exactly what Manto depicted in these short stories. By showing the actual scenario of brutality, atrocity, *Othering,* and racial abuse faced by the marginalized people, he becomes one of them. Thus, Manto gets unified with his character. I finish my paper with his own suggestion of engravings on his epitaph. He suggests, "Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto and with him lie buried all the secrets and mysteries of short-story writing. Under tons of earth he lies, still wondering who among the two is the greater short-story writer: God or he" (Hasan ix). His storytelling has given him such grandeur that he himself ends up questioning the whole world whether he is a great storyteller or God. This is not just a boastful self-claim; it is backed up by the renowned critics of Manto, and that is why his stories "become the embodiment of something more pervasive, more universal; that is, of benevolence or compassion incarnate" (Narang 12).

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Racial Segregation in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: A Post-Structural Rereading

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Abstract

This paper discusses the contemporary circumstances regarding the segregation between White and Black people in the southern part of America, which are manifested especially through the eyes of the children: Scout, Jem, and Dill from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Marguerite (Maya Angelou's nickname) and Bailey from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. If Scout and the other children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are recorded with a presumably easy and happy upbringing with an invulnerable position in a prejudiced white society, Maya and her brother in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are noted for a rather harsh childhood without the affection and secure placement in the same southern part of the country. The two narrating voices account for their experiences separately, being distinct as to races and occurrences, denoting their distinct positions in society. Nevertheless, several parallel phenomena observed in the two books suggest some common issues that every human being raised in the mid-nineteenth century underwent. The goal of this study is to compare them from the viewpoints of Black and White children. Therefore, this paper aims to explore social behaviour with the implications of apparent binary oppositions, which will be later deconstructed, concurring with Derrida's idea of 'inconsistent meaning' within texts and language. In doing so, this paper juxtaposes the two aforementioned texts to identify the similarities in light of intertextuality, a poststructuralist theory that seeks to understand a text and its meaning through its relationship with other texts.

Keywords: Segregation, races, Southern America, children, social behaviour, prejudice, binary oppositions, deconstruction, intertextuality, poststructuralist theory.

Introduction:

Racial segregation has always been an institutionalized social organization of the United States, especially in the southern states where strictly defined racial relations regulated social interactions, cultural beliefs, and daily activities. As a continuation of the slavery tradition and solidified by the systematic implementation of the Jim Crow laws, segregation resulted in the social system where racial disparity was institutionalized through the legal constraints, economic marginalization, and territorial segregation. American literature in this historical setting has been a critical cultural archive that has created documentary, challenging materials of racial inequality ideological underpinnings.

To Kill a Mockingbird and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are among the texts that best describe the experience that racial segregation entails in the American South. In spite of the fact that the texts of Harper Lee and Maya Angelou are characterized by different genres, as the former is a fictional narrative whereas the latter is an autobiographical one, both works present the social, moral, and psychological outcomes of racial discrimination in the most delicate way. Both stories are mediated by a child narrator Scout Finch in the novel by Lee and Marguerite (Maya) Johnson in the memoir of Angelou. These child-based views make the texts so clear on how racial ideologies

are experienced, learned, and bargained in the day-to-day life of the segregated populations in the American South. Supporting the fact that all human beings are born with the same innocence, irrespective of race, sex, country, time, environment, culture, and so forth, this paper intends to first locate the 'factors'' that initially compel the children to put each other on edge, then release the children from the binary-based society by deconstructing them.

The trial of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* reveals the inconsistencies that are inherent in the moral self-image of the white southern community and the ethical position of Atticus Finch predicts the conflict between law and the deeply rooted racial bias. In comparison, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* offers a very personal story on the psychological and social conflicts that African Americans went through due to the oppressive environment of the segregation. The story that Angelou tells is a foreground of the convergence of race and trauma and identity formation and resilience, thus exposing the micro impacts of systemic racial exclusion. The texts present a complementary and different view of the arrangements of racial ideology that informed the American society of the middle of the 20th century. The two works reveal the ways that racial hierarchies are replicated in the routine social practices and also reveal instances where these ideological formations are being put into question or disrupted.

The themes of racial injustice, childhood subjectivity, trauma, and resistance by the African Americans have been sought exhaustively in the existing scholarship on these texts. Nevertheless, numerous critical readings are implicitly based on unchanging conceptual oppositions, white/black, dominant/marginalized, civilized/savage, powerful/powerless, which, at some historical stage, supported the ideological justification of segregation. The post structuralist theory offers a critical approach to questioning these seemingly set binary structures. To be more precise, the deconstruction philosophy of Jacques Derrida disputes the notion that binary oppositions have stable and hierarchical signification. According to Derrida, the oppositions of this sort are internalized unstable in that the privileged term in the binary is often reliant upon the non-prevailing term in order to establish conceptual coherence and power. To deconstruction thus reveals that the underlying structures are actually unstable though they seem to be logically arranged and ideologically safe.

In agreement with this point of view, the notion of intertextuality that was created by Julia Kristeva serves as another theoretical prism that can be used to study the process of interconnection between literary works and the wider cultural discourses. To suggest that a literary work is not an autonomous or independent phenomenon, Kristeva proposes that it is constructed inside a web of textual and ideological relations that tie it to other cultural stories and discourses of history. In this sense, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird* Sings can be interpreted not only as separate texts but also as textual reactions to a common historic fact of racial segregation in the American South.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, the current study employs comparative post-structural analysis of both texts in an attempt to analyse how discourses of race are formed using binary oppositions and how the binary structures are disturbed in the texts. In the end, this paper seeks to suggest that reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* through the prismatic approaches of deconstruction and intertextuality can help better understand how literary narratives reproduce and challenge the racial ideologies of their historical time.

Research Questions:
This paper will consider the following questions to decipher its objectives:

1. How has racial segregation impacted the children regardless of race, sex, and upbringing?
2. To what extent do *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* resemble each other?
3. What factors lead one to contempt the 'Other' in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
4. How does Derrida's theory of deconstruction reshape the functions of binary terms in the two novels?

Research Objectives:
This paper evaluates the adverse effects of the prevailing racial segregation on the emotional and mental development of both white and black children. The study also determines the level of racial persecution that leads individuals to choose between two diametrically opposite viewpoints. In addition to these, it analogizes subjects like courage, racial injustice, prejudices, black powerlessness, and human dignity to justify the correspondence between *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the light of Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. Finally, this essay seeks to analyse people's dialectical interactions in society as seen via the deconstruction theory of Derrida.

Literature Review:
This study finds that most of the present studies have been conducted individually, and neither of the texts has yet been investigated under binary or deconstructive reading. However, there remain numerous studies focusing on racial segregation that help shed light on the work. Other research on deconstructing binary oppositions can be cited as references to support this one, although they vary in their honourable ideas. In their "Critical Discourse Analysis of Oppression in To Kill a Mockingbird," Salih Al-Mamoory and Masoumah Abathar Witwit have described the concept of racism using multiple dimensions to find out the methods the author herself has presented in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Furthermore, in their paper, the researchers have brought forward a hypothesis that explains the oppression of Maycomb's black people at the description, interpretation, and explanation levels, respectively. Supporting W. E. B. Du Bois' thoughts, Faeze Rezazade, and Esmaeil Zohdi explain in their research, "The Power of Being Colour-Blind in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," how colour blindness in racism can alone fix most of the issues in white communities, e.g., prejudice, discrimination, inequality, and injustice towards the coloured people. In their work, "Literary Testimonials of Racism and Oppression in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," Mr. Abderrahmane Benkoider, Mrs. Nassima Amirouche, and Miss Bouchra Nouara have detailed the history and background of black slavery, the period of black literature, along with all the possible themes engrained in Angelou's first autobiography. In "Racism and Displacement in Maya Angelou's autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," Malek Chergui, Hadjer Benatmane, and Zina Zerrouki deal with Freud's notion of defence mechanism, which explains the fundamental changes Angelou had gone through, from being a vulnerable, meek black girl to a self-reliant, mature girl. In "Deconstructive Analysis of Main Character in Frankenstein Novel by Mary Shelly," Femilia Bowta and Yulan Puluhulawa reread the novel by describing Victor's character, finding binary oppositions in the character, and then deconstructing Victor's character. With the purpose of finding the hidden meaning in the text, they deconstruct the main character and establish Victor himself as the cause of all the chaos caused by his creatures. In "Binary Oppositions as the Result of Deconstruction Analysis in the Goldfinch Novel by Donna Tartt," Christine Aprilia and Tomi Arianto explore the binary themes in the text to find the opposite understandings. The study shows the text's indefinite and

inconsistent meanings by deconstructing the core ideas that the novel initially offers. Although the abovementioned last two researchers do not share the subject matters with this paper, their deconstructive methods play a vital role in embodying this study.

Conceptual Framework:

This study initially discusses racial segregation and its effects on the children, as well as the Southern people in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Taking the settings of the two books (both in the southern part of Alabama), this paper proposes to see the two distinct places as a whole: an individual society where Scout experiences segregation from the white part and Angelou from the black part. Although there is no reference to an interconnection between these books, this study hypothesizes that they are inadvertently connected. Both of the novels have a similar setting and bildungsroman structure, share many common themes, and mention the Great Depression and its impacts on the American people, which tends to remind the readers of one another to some extent.

A French philosopher and poststructuralist, Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality that vindicates Derrida's textual view: "There is no outside text" (Nayar 43). This elucidates that all texts are interconnected with other texts since a complete work "cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole and so does not function as a closed system" (Worton and Still 1). Therefore, every text follows and leaves some traces of other texts. A writer cannot write anything outside the text because they have lived through "ongoing socio-cultural processes" (Raj 78). This does not suggest they do it deliberately; they do it because no one can go beyond the context. In Raj's words,

A novelist, [thus], performs two oppositional roles: the narrative role and the textual role. The two-fold creative dynamics of an author can be understood as the working pattern or the structuration that defines textual meaning involving word and sign, elements that have liquidity relying on the interconnection with other functional elements within the text. (79)

Deconstruction is considered a separate approach to poststructuralism, which was pioneered by the French philosopher in 1976. Ferdinand de Saussure saw the concept of binary opposition as a system in linguistics that "existed about each other" (Nayar 4). The idea was that to understand a text, a reader only needs to focus on the language pattern, grammar, signs, and remaining other structures. The meaning of a text lies within, is predictable, and suggests a text to be always close-natured. In the pair of binary contrasts, if one acts positively, the other will surely be negative, and they will never coexist. For example, good is only understood as 'not bad', and vice versa; similarly, dark is the absence of light; black is the lack of whiteness; and likewise, there would be no concept of man without the linking concept of woman. This justifies the existence of paired opposites as positive and negative, and thus, they are related to each other. But poststructuralism opposes these fixed principles and opts for unpredictable meanings and findings in a text and a pair of opposites. As Barry states,

Structuralism derives ultimately from linguistics. Linguistics is a discipline which has always been inherently confident about the possibility of establishing objective knowledge . . . By contrast, post-structuralism derives ultimately from philosophy. Philosophy is a discipline which has always tended to emphasize the difficulty of achieving secure knowledge about things . . . After all, language is an orderly system, not a chaotic one, so realizing our dependence upon it need not induce intelligent despair. (62-63)

That is to say, poststructuralism has a more vital role in literature that allows it to dive into the sea of knowledge rather than focusing merely on the discipline of words and framing structure. Therefore, with the approach of deconstruction, readers can find more than just one existing meaning based on their knowledge and comprehension. Unlike structuralism, post-structuralism does not undermine the polar characteristics of the characters; rather, "Deconstruction is interested in the hierarchic binaries set up within texts" (Nayar 46). In a separate pair, one becomes dominant over the other, and the latter is contrarily pushed over the boundaries, so the former acquires the illegitimate supremacy. Similarly, in this study, white Americans in Southern society are initially seen as being more privileged than black Americans, but this deconstructive reading once more establishes that the situation may reverse because "with the text's rhetoric logic…reveals that there can be no inside without the outside" (46). Thus, Julia's intertextuality and Derrida's deconstruction theory help to understand the purpose of this paper: to trace the diverse functions of the same terms (words) in two individual books. For instance, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the white society and its values and norms seem to stand out as the dominant theme in contrast to the black society. As time passes, the reader finds that the latter plays a crucial role in fabricating the whole story. In the same manner, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the hardships of the black people seem to serve as the primary concern of the writer, but in reality, the white community remains, although invisible, in the book's heart and shapes the entire composition.

Research Methodology:

This paper uses a qualitative interpretive research design that is based on post structural analysis of literature. The authors use textual analysis to find how racial segregation and ideological structures surrounding it are destabilized and depicted to represent the elements in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

The theoretical basis of analytical framework of the study is Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. The defamiliarization of hierarchical binary oppositions inherent in the stories is achieved through deconstruction and the critical interrogation of the hierarchical binary oppositions in the narratives. The analysis does not merely claim to identify these oppositions but it explores the way the texts destabilize or invert the hierarchical relations between the texts like Derrida did. In this process, the contradictions of the racial discourse within are unveiled and we can see how dominant meanings are dependent on the marginalized terms in the binary system.

The comparative aspect of the study is also guided by the concept of intertextuality proposed by Kristeva. Instead of looking at the two texts as two literary works in their own right, the study considers them as mutually dependent cultural stories that arose out of the same historical and socio-political condition of racial segregation of the American South at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The two works of literature, i.e., *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee *and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Angelou, are the central sources of information of this paper. The chosen extracts, plot events, and character dialogue that describe racial hierarchy, social marginalization, and moral dilemma are carefully discussed in an attempt to define how racial difference is discursively created.

There is also the use of secondary scholarly sources as the study is based on critical works on post-structuralism, deconstruction, intertextuality, and racial discourse in American literature, outside of primary texts. These sources offer the theoretical and critical context that is required to place the analysis in the frames of the wider debates in the literature and cultural studies.

Discussion:

Racial Segregation in the Contemporary Period:

Racial segregation is an arbitrary 'separating system' among the races in a particular area or country that may prevail in every sphere of the lives of some groups. In this classification of groups, the privileged, which in this case is the white group, used to exercise tremendous power over the so-called lower class people, such as the African-Americans as well as other minorities from all over the world. For hundreds of years, black people were enslaved and oppressed in many corners of the world. Situations were expected to change after the abolition of slavery in 1865, but in many parts of the United States as well as other countries, the situation remained the same, and people continued to stay segregated from each other. To make their condition even worse, Jim Crow Laws were legalized, which officially allowed discrimination in every aspect of American life. Although Harper Lee and Maya Angelou belonged to two different areas—the former lived in Monroeville, Alabama, and the latter in Stamps, Arkansas—they faced acute segregation, which has been exposed in their epochal works. The Jim Crow Laws were enacted after the era of the Civil War to marginalize the Afro-Americans by depriving them of every remaining right to a better lifestyle that could uphold them on the path of progression. This lasted for about 100 years until the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Institutional racial laws were legalized particularly for the southern parts, i.e., Blacks were not allowed to live side by side, had different churches for prayers, had a different transportation system, kids could not go to the same schools and colleges, had separate economy (mostly assigned to have degrading jobs), and different facilities, e.g., restrooms, parks, medical services, restaurants, and so on.

Racial segregation started to circumscribe the black community by escalating residential, social, economic, educational, and other institutional restrictions in every way possible, which led to deep psychological damage as well. Children growing up in the situation often saw themselves as inherently inferior to the dominant white group and bought into their hopelessness as either misfortune or the social norm from which they could never be disengaged. As a result, they are forced to live a certain type of life that lacks aspects of amenities to which white people are accustomed, and thus both groups came to regard themselves in a binary dimension.

Calpurnia, the Black housekeeper, almost like a mother figure to scout and Jem, operates as a bridge between the Black community and the Finch household. She addresses the children as 'sir' and 'ma'am' from the very beginning of the story, pointing to the white supremacy over the coloured, be it a child or an adult. Although Calpurnia's situation in the Finch family is quite different under the shadow of Atticus, Calpurnia chooses to be at her limit anyway. Another example of racial segregation in this book is the school that Scout and Jem go to. Given the account of the narrator, there seem to be no coloured children in their school. That is because there were separate schools for the coloured ones. As in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou reflects while describing how worn-out her school is,

Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy. Its two buildings (main classrooms, the grade school and home economics) were set on a dirt hill with no fence to limit either its boundaries or those of bordering farm …Rusty hoops on the swaying poles represented the permanent recreational equipment, although bats and balls could be borrowed from the P.E. teacher if the borrower was qualified and if the diamond wasn't occupied. (148-49)

Segregation in churches is another common scenario where a shortage of facilities adds another level of discrimination by not allowing African Americans to pray in the same church. In the

southern parts, the entrance of black folks into the white churches was forbidden, and for the white folks, if not forbidden, they were more or less frowned upon. It is noted that many black churches were used as a hub to talk about and deal with their predicament. As Reverend Sykes is seen to collect charity to help Tom's family in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the church is concentrated as a sanctuary. W.E.B Du Bois has given a complete picture of this. He writes,

At the same time this social, intellectual, and economic centre is a religious centre of great power. Depravity, Sin, Redemption, Heaven, Hell, and Damnation are preached twice a Sunday after the crops are laid by; and few indeed of the community have the hardihood to withstand conversion. Back of this more formal religion, the Church often stands as a real conserver of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right. (131)

Calpurnia speaks with the children in the colloquial language of the 1930s Alabama dialect, but she is notably seen to speak in a different language —a vernacular of the black community. Here, her use of other dialects places her as a representative of another cultural context. Unlike her, most of the other black folks speak their only dialect. This is because Calpurnia is one of the few members of the community who has learned to read and adapt to the white culture. Atticus lets her fit into his household because he wants to have the best influence on his children, but to other blacks, it would simply be an act of wanting to be one of the whites. As Calpurnia comments, "they've got to want themselves, and when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language" (Lee 143). Thus, black people's indifference to the white folk's language determines them to employ binary thinking on their part.

Binary Oppositions in Criticism and Their Prominence in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and

***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:**

Unlike structuralism, in texts, Derrida's theory of deconstruction searches for different possible meanings and concealed illustrations drawn by a writer. He further argued with the notion of Saussure that since the connection between the thing (signified) and the addressed word (signifier) is arbitrary, the meaning, core, or essence changes from one signifier to another. Therefore, this suggests that the absorption of information by several readers varies based on their background, society, and culture. To him, writing and speaking are commenced through 'différence,' a complex theory by Derrida that combines difference and deference and tries to illuminate the way words are used and how their specific meaning is derived. A word's or concept's meaning is something that is always deferred until other words complete it and differ from other words to differentiate some specific words. In Nayar's words,

Derrida's chief contribution has been to show how language is fundamentally slippery, based on self-contradictory, unfinalizable conditions of difference and deference. His arguments have focused on the need to pay closer attention to the way in which meanings are produced temporarily rather than with any finality, through conditions and ambivalence, and have consistently rebelled against any 'authoritative' or authoritarian meaning. (39)

Derrida's other contribution is his transition of binary oppositions. Binary opposition explains that a text or concept can be read or viewed from two contrary sides, and according to Derrida, there always remains a side more privileged than the other, and Western philosophy always tends to "search for a core meaning in its privilege of presence and rejection of absence and difference" (42). He rejects this application of binary thinking that suggests the existence of one core meaning or truth. He proposed the dismantling of the function by a reversal technique. First, it traces

classical structuralism concepts to their roots and overhauls them with new insights. Reversing the hierarchy in a binary pair, a text can be easily reconstructed with numerous findings that may contradict its earlier results. As earlier discussed, Derrida opposes any kind of binary implication; reversing hierarchy is only the first step to opening the door for many possibilities, but it doesn't wish to establish the newfound additional meanings. Rather, it destabilizes the new hierarchical relationships and again leaves them in a situation called "aporia"(47), where there will be no dominant or dominated term. So the main purpose is to explore the areas of the texts that have been mostly unnoticed and bring them into sight as an unavoidable part of the texts.

Central-Peripheral:

To Kill a Mockingbird and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* have shared many elements that the deconstructionist eye sees as presented from contradictory angles. The narratives are told by the voices of two little girls, and they start with a prejudiced point of view because they have no actual knowledge of the outer world. Children's first school is their surroundings; they learn from and absorb the perspectives of the people they are with. From the very beginning of these two books, Scout and Marguerite start as the representatives of their community. As a white child, Scout seems to be shocked at one of Calpurnia's scornful remarks toward a white man. She goes as, ""There goes the meanest man ever God blew breath into," murmured Calpurnia […], and she spat meditatively into the yard. We looked at her in surprise, for Calpurnia rarely commented on the ways of white people"" (Lee 13).

Given the characteristics of her father, Atticus, it is very unlikely for her to adopt this kind of attitude from the family. It is naturally associated with her being a part of the white community. In the beginning, Scout is not only prejudiced regarding race; she is noticeably partial to anybody who lacks the traits of her usual community, such as Boo Radley, the Cunningham family, and the Ewell family. They are all white folks, yet the children are not ready to accept their differences. From the binary point of view, in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the whites seem to be mostly privileged, not in the way of their societal position, economy, or power, but privileged in the way the writer mostly concentrates on the white groups and their interactions with the coloured people. Being a child, she couldn't explore the whole town of Maycomb by herself. She is only narrating as much as she has seen and learned. A general reading may take the white society and its norms as the author's primal preference to focus on. But if it is to be seen through the deconstructive lens, it is the black people who are: their ways, the oppression, and the systematic racial segregation that destablises the central focus from the white community to the Black people's social and legal marginalisation. In the trial scene where Atticus seems to be presented as the moral hero, saving a helpless Black man; instead, Tom Robinson's suffering becomes the core of the text in a deconstructive reading. The position of white society as the moral and justified judge is now being questioned due to the wrongful conviction of Tom Robinson and the criticism directed at Atticus for defending a Black man. Among many others, such as socioeconomic status, community pressure, moral duty, and gender norms, racism functions as one of the major concepts explored by the narrator's usual readers. Deeply internalized, this attitude shapes the daily conversations, establishes social identity, dictates suitable jobs for the individuals, and determines guilt irrespective of all the evidence in the people of Maycomb. However, when it comes to acknowledging the children's personality development, these experiences, along with Tom Robinson's trial, give them a strong platform for accepting 'others' with their 'odds and differences'. They experience how the two opposite groups interact with each other, and in the meantime, Atticus takes the situation as a perfect opportunity for his children to draw an example—the example of triumphing over humanity.

Similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou keeps her attention on the conditions of black people during the period of Jim Crow Laws. The white folks tend to be peripheral in her description, yet they seem to have a continuous influence over the black community. Once intersected with the formation of the writing, the lives of the black people are seen to be established as the 'preference' for values that strengthen the existing social structure and perpetuate their status in it. Race categorizes people into groups based on their distinctive physical characteristics and appearances that are associated with biological origin. Angelou came to the southern part of Arkansas at the age of three and spent most of her childhood in Stamps, a separate part of the town for black people. Given her account, they did not have that much confrontation with the white people, as she wrote:

In Stamps, the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what white looked like. Other than that they were different, to be dreaded, and in that dread included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed.

I remember never believing that whites were really real. (Angelou 23)

Here, the writer is putting herself as well as the black people in a binary-based society, where white folks are the "powerful" (23), privileged with all the blessings of life. She is living in a society where all the members look like her, with the same hair texture, facial formation, and other physical characteristics, yet she is unable to accept herself for not looking like a white kid. Just like Scout, as a child, Maya is also seen to be prejudiced because she is not comfortable with her own skin (colour). Scout here represents the unenlightened white children, who are yet to learn to accept all with their odds and peculiarities in addition to their colours, and Maya is of the black children, who are forced in ways to see themselves as the inferior people, or as she felt "only little higher than the apes" (Angelou 118), who is to learn to accept herself and get her out of the shackles of imposed social standards.

Tolerant-Intolerant:

In a racist setting from the contemporary era, if it is questioned which group is to be regarded as more intolerant between the blacks and whites, most of the answers might come as 'the whites'. This is mostly true because it is the lack of tolerance that has forced many black people to meet a distressing fate or, if the cases were worse, accept the death penalty. The Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, was a group of white supremacists and was notorious for its hatred towards other races. One demonstration is given in chapter three of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* when Angelou's uncle Willie had to hide in a bin to save his life from the attack of the KKK group. The reason behind this was that "a crazy nigger messed with a white lady" (Angelou 17), and to give her justice, they were going to wipe out all the Negro boys that night. Another example of their extreme intolerance is portrayed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Tom Robinson is imprisoned for raping a white girl, which, according to Atticus, is a false allegation. Tom Robinson is expected to receive the death sentence in the view of the whites because his crime was, firstly, being a coloured man; whether he had committed the heinous crime, in reality, comes later. Atticus put it this way: "In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins; they are ugly, but those are the facts of life" (Lee 252).

But there are always some exceptions, and that applies to this part too. Not all white people are the same; not all are prejudiced. People are always remembered for the kindness that they show in their hearts. Atticus, a central character of the text, is remarkably noted for his patience and wisdom. All people, from the rich to the poor, from blacks to whites, from children to adults,

respect him. Atticus reminds the readers of the existing moral backbone of the white community. He knows from the very beginning that he is going to lose the case, but that does not stop him from doing what is 'right', which is to defend an innocent man from getting the unjustified death penalty. It is Atticus who plays a vital role in structuring his children's personalities. He does not want his children to be prejudiced, racist, or affected by "Maycomb's usual disease" (100). Likewise, Miss Kirwin, "a rare educator" (Angelou 188), who seems to have had a great impact on Angelou in her school days and who speaks to her with respect, neither too nice nor "liberal" (189), nor completely indifferent, views her as a student to whom she thinks to pass as much knowledge as possible.

Cultured-Savage:

The lives of black people started as slaves in the 16th century with people from West Africa, who "were forcibly taken to Spanish America and, in the 17th century, to English colonies in North America" (Mariappan 3). They had been forced into slavery until 1865, when, after the Civil War, they were declared liberated. Still, they were segregated as second-class human beings for almost a century and treated as the descendants of 'apes,' who are never to be trusted or to be around, as the countrymen remarked, "They c'n go loose and rape up the countryside for all'em who this county care" (Lee 153). Like this, stereotypical beliefs that white people were the pioneers of their civilized culture and black people were the descendants of the apes were instilled from a very young age, which they tended to carry (if not enlightened in the midway) for the rest of their lives. Unlike Scout, Jem, and Dill, the remaining white children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are shown to have this belief system that they have learned from the adults they live with. Francis believes, along with her Grandma, that they "will never be able to walk the streets of Maycomb again" (94), and Cecil Jacobs announced in front of the whole school, "My folks said your daddy was a disgrace an' that nigger oughta hang from the water tank" (87). To protect their white culture from the non-whites, the white folks made it a norm to stay away from them. In Maycomb, people demand that black people's inherent barbarism is what motivates them to have the desire to rape white women. But everyone in the trial seems to already know, including the children, that Tom Robinson was unable to do so because of his physical disability. Therefore, it is the cultural problem that triggers every black person into a fight with a white person. Lee specifically gives a vivid description of the Ewell household and their deportment: a poverty-stricken, drunken father, abusive in character, who never sends his children to school. Nevertheless, he wins the case. Tom Robinson, on the other hand, appears to Scout to be a "respectable Negro"(219), because he seems to know his limitations in a white-dominant society. It is he who stands as morally and culturally superior to many of the white characters from Maycomb, knowing and acting like a kind human being towards Mayella despite knowing that being in the house of Bob Ewell was not the safest place in the world for a black man.

Similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya's illustration of Afro-American people's living in Arkansas is done in such a way that the readers find how culturally and morally they were equally progressed. In many situations, white people are more biased. One event is the white dentist who never treats the black folks; a San Franciscan white matron who refused to sit beside a black civilian on the streetcar; the white ladies who imposed Maya with a different name; the "powhitetrash kids"(Angelou 27) aping her grandmother. The white teenagers represent the white brusqueness, suggesting only one thing; their families did not care to educate them to have respect for, at least, the black elderly people. They call her by name, mock her, and try everything to agitate her. Angelou feels humiliated and weeps seeing the occurrence. She wants to protect

herself from all the insults those impolite girls are imposing, but Momma teaches her on the contrary; to remain calm and brave while tackling a situation like this. As Walker puts it,

The scene with the "powhitetrash" girls causes Maya to react with the same helpless anger and humiliation, but through the response of her grandmother Henderson (whom she calls Momma) to the girls' rudeness and crudity, Maya learns there can be a better and more effective way to respond. (94)

Destitute-Solvent:

One of the major resemblances between Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the reference to the Great Depression and its impact on American life. The lives of the white folks were told to be 'enviable', since there was no scarcity of jobs for the white Americans, whereas, on the contrary, coloured folks were left with few options: either to pick cotton in the white men's land, which seemed never "enough" (Angelou 9) or to attend their households, like Miss Glory and the writer herself were appointed as maidservants in Mrs. Cullinan's house in this book, and Calpurnia and Jessie, Mrs. Dubose's black maids in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

However, being materially solvent cannot always guarantee one's ethical richness. While Lee does not directly dedicate any chapters to describing the suffering of black people during the great crisis, as she does with the white neighborhood, their hardship is still implied through the contextual references. Her book describes farmers like Cunninghum having to pay the daily bills with what they had. He offers a load of "stove wood," "a sack of hickory nuts," and "a croaker-sack full of turnip greens" (Lee 23) on several occasions to show his gratitude towards Atticus. Similarly, Dr. Reynolds receives "a bushel of potatoes" (23) from the country folk in exchange for service. Scout remembers, "There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy, and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County" (06). This implies it to everyone, including the Black residents, who have supposedly faced the consequences of the drastic fall of the economy more than the socially privileged ones. A deconstructive reading of the book traces the destabilisation of the expected correlation between races and financial power. White residents like the Ewells, although socially disadvantaged, still maintain racial privilege, receiving the support of the jury. The jury, a group of white men who are expected to establish justice in society, ironically lacks moral integrity. They prove themselves morally bankrupt by embodying institutionalised racial bias. On the other hand, those who are evidently marginalised, both racially and socially, show great examples of resilience, as is seen in Calpurnia in the Finch family, the communal support for each other in the church, and Tom Robinson helping Mayella, not for money but as a gesture of kindness. Unlike his white neighbourhood, they express their respect and gratitude towards Atticus by sending him food, indicating they are grateful enough to give away what little they have. This reinforces the idea that social and material power cannot always ensure moral solvency.

Furthermore, as Angelou notes, the economic crisis could not initially hit black Americans with the same blow. The condition of their lives used to be so poverty-stricken that they were unable to get out of debt with the wages they got long before the crisis. She opines that it took a couple of years before they understood the grave impact of the economic fall: "It was when the owners of cotton fields dropped the payment of ten cents for a pound of cotton to eight, seven, and finally five that the Negro community realized that the Depression, at least, did not discriminate" (Angelou 44). Nonetheless, Anny Handerson (Momma) has a crucial role in terms of shifting the role of being destitute as a black woman. She is one of the few black people who successfully managed to

escape the economic shock, keeping the store going, whereas some highbrows had to borrow money from her, such as the white dentist who later refused to give any treatment to Maya. As the writer remembers the demonstration of open racism, ""Annie, my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's"" (165). Unlike most, a black family with financial strength still faces the continuous dehumanizing treatment from someone who holds both professional and social status. However, this discussion, by no means, aims to imply that all whites or wealthy people lack empathy and ethics, whereas the black people are morally superior. Instead, it deconstructs the societal categorizations and substantiates the fact that those who appear to be destitute in all forms can be deciphered as the most charitable, inverting the hierarchy with their generosity and kindness.

Conclusion:

Thus, this paper shows how the deconstruction of a text can take its readers several steps forward in finding what is silenced and overlooked by the authors themselves. While looking for the otherness of the books, one is a memoir and the other is a fiction; the paper identifies all the given manners of one being the mirror of the other. In other words, intertextuality emerges from the very titles that center upon birds: symbolic representations of the harmless individuals. Sheltered by two compassionate older brothers and guided by commanding personalities, both narrators beautifully sketch a separate yet one racially segregated world. These two texts suggest that people are not born prejudiced. Regardless of races, ethnicities, and cultures, individuals absorb their surroundings and are then influenced by the social conditions, essentially playing a vital role in forming future demeanors. Thus, in the end, Scout is able to let herself get into other people's skin, and Maya learns to accept herself as she is, placing humanity above everything. Furthermore, in the process of extracting the essence of these two novels, this analysis redefines and reexamines the labels that have been imposed on the people: white being the highbrow and black the lowbrow for hundreds of years. When examined closely, it is to be found that no particular label can ascertain a group of people. This is because there is no society without a liar, no race without a criminal, and no country that does not need a judicial system. Deconstructing the binary characters: central-peripheral, tolerant-intolerant, cultured-savage, and destitute-solvent—this paper concludes that words are inconsistent and relative based on the situations in which they are articulated.

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Ecological Consciousness and Indigenous Wisdom in Bengali Literature: A Deep Ecological Study of Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*

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Abstract

This paper examines the ecological narratives in *Aranyer Adhikar* by Mahasweta Devi and *Aranyak* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay through the lens of Arne Næss's deep ecology framework. Both novels challenge anthropocentric worldviews and emphasize the intrinsic value of nature, interconnectedness, and ecological egalitarianism. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi depicts the collective struggle for the rights of the Munda tribe and how the colonial and capitalist exploitation of Indigenous communities and natural resources upsets the ecological balance. On the other hand, *Aranyak* narrates the transformation of the protagonist, Satyacharan from an urbanite into someone concerned with ecological well-being, being influenced by the Indigenous Santhal philosophy of life's interconnectedness with nature. The paper discusses how these novels engage in a critique of the 'commodification' of nature and plead for an ecological and harmonious mode of existence. Further, it looks at how Bengali literature, represented by these works, has been concerned with themes of deep ecology, and the Indigenous symbiotic lifestyle long before contemporary environmental movements. The paper places the Indigenous contexts within the broad ecological discourse and asserts their pertinence to contemporary ecological and social crises.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Indigenous Wisdom, Deep Ecology, Ecological Egalitarianism, Nature Relatedness.

Introduction

Ecocriticism has been largely missing from serious literary narratives. For this reason, in *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh criticizes contemporary literature for its failure to engage with the pressing reality of climate change, stating, "climate change casts a much smaller shadow within the landscape of literary fiction than it does even in the public arena. It is not hard to establish ... novels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon" (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement,* 2016, 13). It can be pointed out that writings on climate change are often relegated to nonfiction or "science fiction", genres that are either seen as 'didactic' or as having limited audiences (*The Great Derangement*, 2016, 13). As a result, the mainstream 'literary imagination' fails to engage with the enormity and immediacy of the "climate crisis" (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 2016, 14).

Ghosh (2016) also argues that climate change is an "inconceivably vast" phenomenon that defies conventional narrative structures (*The Great Derangement,* 2016, 64). He compares this phenomenon to a 'cultural crisis', wherein humanity grapples with the challenge of reevaluating its position in a world that is progressively shaped by environmental instability. Therefore, Ghosh calls for a thorough transformation of fictional narratives. According to him, dealing effectively with the climate crisis is not possible through just technocratic innovation or

policy change; it needs a whole reevaluation of the human relationship with the environment in which very old desires and values are questioned and faced head-on (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 2016, 150). Ghosh (2016) emphasizes the need for literature and art to take on climate change, not as some distant possibility, but as an urgent, immediate reality. Only in this way can these forms of expression help affect the cultural transformation necessary for dealing with what he terms the most "powerful challenge" of our time (*The Great Derangement*, 2016, 118).

Though Ghosh's perspective on ecological awareness diverges from the principles of deep ecology in several respects, he criticizes literature for its inadequacy in addressing the crisis. However, much of the critique continues to operate within an anthropocentric framework. Deep ecology, conceptualized by such thinkers as Arne Næss (1986), rejects 'anthropocentrism' by emphasizing the "intrinsic value" of all living creatures and ecosystems, regardless of their usefulness to human beings (Næss, 1986, 4). It calls for biocentrism instead of the presently dominant, human centric view of the world. In contrast, Ghosh's critique of 'cultural imagination', though revolutionary, seems to put human concerns and human agency at the forefront. Ghosh puts forth climate change as the great question of our time, not only because it affects the very fabric of nature but also because it threatens the very existence of human civilization. From this perspective, it may be argued that he views nature mainly from an anthropocentric viewpoint. His appeal for such a cultural transformation, one that places literature, imagination, and storytelling at the forefront in confronting the climate crisis, while persuasive, is framed within a human-centered understanding of nature's value. As a resource it is to be protected for future generations, or as something humanity must conserve to ensure its own survival. This contrasts with the deep ecological perspective, which emphasizes the need to save nature for its intrinsic value, regardless of "human interests" (Naess, 1986, 16).

Bengali literature has often looked at the strong connections between people and nature, something that resonates with the ideas of deep ecology. Over time, this body of literature has changed to reflect the shifting social, political, and environmental situation in India. In his article, Sambhu Nath Banerjee (2024) notes that the mindset of the Bengali authors is now different from that of the authors who lived and wrote during Tagore's times (Banerjee, 2024, 39). The earlier literature in Bengali frequently portrayed serene rural or natural scenarios. After the industrial developments and independence, the contemporary Bengali authors reacted to the "vicious shift" in urban existence brought on by industrialization (Banerjee, 2024, 39). Forests and rural landscapes emerge as soothing locations for escape and adventure for the Bengali middle and elite classes. Banerjee (2024) notes that Bengalis often "cast aside the monotony of the city life and quotidian boredom; Bengali middle or elite class people enjoy taking a fancy to go out into forest areas to breathe fresh air" by visiting forests in areas like "undivided Bihar, Central India" and the "hilly parts of North Bengal" (Banerjee, 2024, 39). These places give not just a feeling of escape but also a strong basis for literature that deals with environmental problems and the complicated connection between people and nature.

Bengali writers have created a large body of novels and stories reflecting this deep ecology concern of connectedness and how things interrelate with each other. In most of them, forests are not a mere backdrop but have important roles in the story line, depicting the diversity of ecological systems. Banerjee (2024) points out that people who go to these areas "tend to get entangled with adventures and incidents," which writers use to make "spicy and entertaining" plots while also touching on environmental and human problems (Banerjee, 2024, 39). This growing style of writing shows a greater understanding of how important nature is, connecting with deep ecology's call for a deeper understanding of the values of nature.

Two prominent Bengali novels of the 20th century that take ecology as their pivotal theme are Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979) and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* (1939). The paper establishes a connection between these works' ecological concern, indigenous contexts, and the ideas of Arne Naess on deep ecology. Because both books criticize anthropocentric ways of thinking and present the relationship between humans and nature, they also deal with complex issues like social stratification, colonialism, and exploitation, which make them integral works in the study of ecology.

The ecological and sociopolitical narratives of *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar* are grounded in the landscapes they describe, as well as gesturing toward larger battles against exploitation and environmental degradation. Though separated by many decades, these Bengali novels explore deeply complicated relationships binding humans, nature, and systems of power. *Aranyer Adhikar* depicts the development of collective resistance by the Munda people, under the leadership of Birsa Munda, against the colonial and capitalist exploitation of land and identity. *Aranyak* tells the story of Satyacharan, a young man who was accustomed to city life. It chronicles his struggles with isolation after becoming the estate manager of a forested area in Purnia, and his gradual embrace of ecological harmony.

The article has used concepts of deep ecology to create a framework for understanding both novels. Deep ecology, coined by Arne Næss (1972), a Norwegian philosopher, emphasises how every living thing is important on its own and has "intrinsic values" (1986, 12). This ecocritical theory connects people with everything else in nature. More specifically, it emphasizes placing the world in a perspective not for our gain or exploitation of nature. Næss (1986) criticizes "shallow ecological" views that narrow nature down to a resource for human use, instead of promoting a holistic approach and what he terms "ecological egalitarianism" when it comes to the environment (1986, 7). These two novels contain a plethora of ecocritical themes and they challenge ideas that come from colonial times and capitalistic systems. Instead, both books describe the forest as a living entity. It is sacred, and precious all on its own. In doing so, they are going beyond the usual idea that nature is just something to use.

Additionally, this article also goes over the historical and cultural realities of the time the novels deal with to contextualize the narratives. The forests of Purnia in *Aranyak* represent ecological devastation brought about by capitalist exploiters; in *Aranyer Adhikar*, the symbolic forests of Chotanagpur rise against colonialist intrusion. The latter especially brings to light the sufferings of the Munda, whose 'symbiotic' existence with their lands was disrupted by the exploitative practices of the British Raj. As records would say, it is from this exploitation of natural resources and marginalization of Indigenous communities that movements such as the Jharkhand rebellion emerged to reclaim their ecological identity.

Overall, this research analyses how these two novels reflect the precepts of deep ecology as a method for tackling climate change and other ecological disasters. One of the main purposes is to show how the novels contest anthropocentric and colonial frameworks and highlight the meaningfulness of the indigenous way of living amidst nature. The research also strives to show how two novels written in the 20th century, mirror many of the contemporary concerns about sustainability, biodiversity, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This research underlines not only the ecological and social knowledge hidden in Bengali literature but also how remarkably applicable that Indigenous knowledge is within the context of contemporary debates over ecological harmony and social justice. By giving an account of the forests and their dwellers in minute detail, Bandyopadhyay and Devi urge readers to reimagine the position that humanity has with nature, and to choose for a more inclusive and equitable coexistence.

Despite such richness of environmental themes, not many studies have been done on Bengali literature from a deep ecology perspective. Sambhu Nath Banerjee points out that the viewpoints of Bengali writers have undergone tremendous changes in the course of history, reflecting the 'socio-economic' and 'environmental' changes initiated by 'industrialization' and 'urbanization'.Therefore, applying the principles of deep ecology to Bengali literature, particularly in Indigenous contexts, opens a new avenue for understanding how these texts engage with broader ecological concerns. This research analyzes how the selected novels embody Arne Næss's concepts of the intrinsic value of nature, ecological interconnectedness, and egalitarianism. It further examines how these narratives critique colonial and capitalist exploitation of both natural resources and Indigenous communities, revealing the inseparable link between social justice and ecological balance. By tracing the movement from anthropocentric to biocentric worldviews, the study highlights the profound ecological consciousness within Bengali literature—an aspect often overlooked in favor of its socio-political interpretations.

Timeless Wisdom and Nature: Exploring Deep Ecology in Indigenous Contexts

Deep ecology, at its core, deals with the intrinsic value of all living beings. Næss (1986) says, "all organisms are knots in the biospherical net" (1). In *Aranyak*, this is voiced through the transformation of Satyacharan, who at first sees the forest in capitalistic terms but later is fascinated with the Santhal community's appreciation for the intrinsic value of life. He says, "For the sake of my job, and in serving the interests of my employer, I had leased out almost all the land in the estate, but I had not been able to bring myself to let the virgin forests of Saraswati Kundi—with its hundreds of varieties of flowers, plants, trees and vines" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 252). The transformation recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human entities independent of their use value for human beings.

This is presented similarly in Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar*, which deals with the trials and tribulations of the tribal leader Birsa Munda, who sources his life from the forests of Jharkhand. She presents the forest as more than a backdrop to the action going on but as an active element in the story deeply related to the culture and survival of the Mundas. The Mundas viewed the forest as their "mother" then wanted to protect it from the Zamindars (Devi, 1975, 2). The quote, therefore, has its association with Næss's call for local self-government recognition and power diffusion since the Munda fight against colonizing forces that attempt to relocate these people from their lands.

Additionally, the deep ecology movement supports local autonomy and decentralization. Næss (1986) in his article "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement: A summary" states:

> The vulnerability of a form of life is roughly proportional to the weight of influences from afar, from outside the local region in which that form has obtained an ecological equilibrium. This understanding lends support to our efforts to strengthen local self-government and material and mental self-sufficiency (1986, 3).

From that viewpoint, the forest is more than an entity containing different flora and fauna but also culturally and spiritually relevant in describing the 'interdependence' of human beings and nature. Diversity and interconnectedness are the core elements that stand out in both *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar*, in direct relation to Næss's (1986) remark that "diversity enhances the potentialities of survival" (Næss, 1986, 2). While these novels reflect the philosophical tenets of deep ecology, they also discuss the sociopolitical dimensions of ecological disasters. Both Bandyopadhyay and Devi engage with the exploitative structure of colonialism and capitalism, which exploits natural resources and subaltern communities in a manner that interweaves

environmental and social injustice. For example, in *Aranyer Adhikar*, the forest becomes a site of resistance, where Birsa and his companions try to regain their rightful claims over the land and resources.

Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* contains vivid depictions of the forest, an ecosystem imbued with life, diversity, and sacredness. In the novel, Devi depicted the native people as one with nature, where they addressed nature as up above them, not an object or resource, but a holy, nurturing mother whom they must respect and pay devotion to (Devi, 1975, 2). Their respect for the forest stemmed from the fact that their existence depended upon it. Take away the forest, and their lifestyle would be at risk. Devi, in her novel, has emphasized how the Mundas were living in relative concord with their surrounding natural environment until the British Raj forcibly usurped their lands. Devi narrates how, before colonial land expropriation, life was uncomplicated and mainly linked with the forest, people hunted in the jungle for their food, grazed their cattle in the jungles, and cleared small tracts of land to till for crops (Devi, 1975, 24).

It was not a relationship of utilitarian intent but one which was all the more deep-rooted, being cultural and spiritual (Devi, 1975, 179). The forest for the Mundas meant a living, life-giving mother, who answered to their every need. For them, this sanctity cultivated an eco-friendly lifestyle whereby the resources of the forest are garnered with great discretion so as to preserve it for generations to come. Then comes the colonial force to break the rhythm. The British started claiming vast expanses of forest land for commercial purposes, dislodging the Mundas from their age-old lifestyle (Devi, 1975, 88). Before the 21st century, Bengali literature was covering ideas about the "intrinsic value" of "nonhuman life" on our planet, concepts that align with deep ecology (Naess 4). Bengali authors like Mahasweta Devi portrayed a nuanced understanding of the environment in their works. They stress how Indigenous people are closely connected to other forms of life and stand against humans who use nature only for their own gain. Even before the world started paying attention to global environmental causes in the late 1900s, these works were dealing with topics closely related to deep environmental understanding. Current environmental talks about how to maintain our natural surroundings, the variety of life and the rights of other creatures were foreseen in these works. Moreover, the novel highlights that admiring nature is not just an ideal for how to behave, but an important part of living and preserving cultures. With her book *Aranyer Adhikar*, Devi highlights how necessary forests are to the Mundas' way of living, besides being a place they hold sacred. This work shows that environmental ethics have been deeply rooted in Indigenous literature.

According to Andersson et al. (2021) there is a fundamental contrast between the indigenous worldview and the Western worldview (1). This fundamental variation is based on how nature is regarded and treated across cultures. As Andersson et al. reflected, "most Indigenous societies do not routinely differentiate between the realms of humans and the immediate environment in which humans live" (2021, 1). It is the inbred link between people and environment in most Indigenous communities that propels such communities toward treating nature not merely as a resource to be exploited but as something integral to their life. Such a perspective runs 'diametrically' opposite to the currently dominant Western framework, which generally has the tendency to commoditize nature.

The authors believe that this difference is reflected even at a linguistic level. For most Indigenous languages, there are no words regarding "nature" in the way it is defined in English, showing that the very conception of nature apart from humanity is foreign to these cultures (Andersson et al., 2021, 1). In contrast, in colonial and neocolonial practices of land management, nature is notionally opposed to humans in such a way that it has to be conserved or exploited.

This culture manifests in the establishment of national parks and protected areas. Andersson et al. cite that national parks and protected areas are “Often carved out of the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, national parks have come to represent tragic loci of cultural loss and social marginalization for many Indigenous peoples who previously inhabited these now bordered spaces of nature” (Andersson et al., 2021, 3). These parks, taken from Indigenous lands, often rob communities of the right to hunt, fish, and practice their cultural and spiritual custom.

Similarly, the pain of the Mundas, when their holy bond with nature got broken, has been powerfully portrayed by Devi. Colonial commodification of the forest reduced the Munda’s jungle to a commodity to be used rather than a home to be loved. This upheaval threatened the very physical survival of the Mundas and the entirety of their cultural and spiritual being. In *Aranyer Adhikar*, the Jharkhand movement has its roots deeply embedded in the land, people, and culture of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas, regions richly endowed with natural wealth and for this very reason historically subjected to colonialist and capitalist exploitation. For the development of Jharkhand, three major factors can be identified as central to the mobilization of indigenous communities towards resistance: "administrative unity", exploitation by "outsiders", and "ethnic difference" (Sharma, 1976, 37). Mahasweta Devi’s *Aranyer Adhikar* dramatizes this resistance through an account of Birsa Munda and the Munda rebellion, a critique of the colonial and capitalist system for disrupting the ecological and social accord of the region. The book is a historical and cultural record of how these factors culminated in shaping the rebellion and the identity with which Jharkhand today continues to be identified.

Sharma (1976) identifies “the administrative unity of the region” as one of the main causes for the Jharkhand movement, tradition has it that Jharkhand included the "Chotanagpur plateau", the "Santhal Parganas", and parts of modern-day "Orissa", "Bengal", and "Madhya Pradesh" (1976, 37-38). This centuries-old administrative unity was systematically destroyed by the British rulers. Thereby, the disintegration of unity and cohesion amongst the Indigenous people and the exploitation of their resources were furthered. Mahashweta Devi depicts this disintegration through her *Aranyer Adhikar*. This novel delineates how the British destroyed the traditional landholding system of the Mundas and replaced it with the zamindari system, in which all the power was centralized within the hands of the landlords, often outsiders (Devi, 1975, 316). The administrative change did not merely take away their home from the Mundas, it also made way for the lands that they lived in to become grounds for capitalistic expansion and natural destruction.

Devi's portrayal of the Mundas' struggle against these changes consolidates the aspect of administrative integrity. In the novel, Birsa Munda is the unifying figure who tries to regain the unity of his people by struggling against the systems imposed by the British. In his effort to protect this sacred home from colonial forces, Birsa, strives to rouse his people, declaring, "অরণ্যের অধিকার কৃষ্ণ-ভারতের আদি অধিকার। যখন সাদা মানুষের দেশ সমুদ্রের অতলে ঘুমোচ্ছিল, তখন থেকেই কৃষ্ণ-ভারতের কালো মানুষরা জঙ্গলকে মা বলে জানে" (“The right to the forest is the ancient right of the dark-skinned Indians. While the lands of the white man slept in the depths of the ocean, the dark people of ancient India have known the forest as their mother”; Devi, 1975, 84, Self-translated).

This is the second component factor mentioned in Sharma's (1976) article "exploitation of the resources and people from Jharkhand by outsiders", is also one of the central themes in *Aranyer Adhikar* (1976, 37). Richly endowed with forests, minerals, and fertile lands, the Chotanagpur plateau suffered massive exploitation during the period of colonial rule. The British and their intermediaries, the North Bihari zamindars, "businessmen, moneylenders, bureaucrats

and leaders and some of the Punjabi and Marwari businessmen are included in the category of 'dikku' in the Chhotanagpur division" and this exact class of people took possession of large tracts of land, dispossessing the native communities and commercializing their natural resources to themselves for profit (Sharma, 1976, 39).

On the topic of outsiders damaging the lives of natives, Devi (1975) writes, "চারদিক থেকে মানুষ এসেছিল। যারা এসেছিল, তারাই দিকু। ধানী জানত যারা এলে মুণ্ডাদের প্রাচীন খুটকাটি গ্রামবাবস্থা ভেঙে গেল, যারা মুন্ডাদের উচ্ছেদ করে জমি-জেরাত দখল করে নিল, তারাই দিকু। ... বিনা মজুনিতে বেগার খাটতে হত" ("People came from all directions. Those who came were all *Dikus*. Dhani knew that those who destroyed the Mundas' ancient Khutkati village system, evicted the Mundas, and seized their lands and property were the *Dikus*. ... The Mundas were made to work without any wages"; 1975, 26).

In this way, colonial forces have always been drawn to natural resources. When a powerful nation tries to colonize a weaker one they will usually justify their actions in a way that makes them seem noble. Religion and biological rhetoric are frequently used to make imperial ambitions appear justifiable. However, economic incentives are always present in the colonizers' minds. It was no different in, 1621, when Martijn Sonck and his troops arrived in Selamon, "a village in the Banda archipelago", as part of the Dutch mission to control the Banda Islands (Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021, 13). The villagers resisted the Dutch control at first, but Sonck threatened to destroy their village and force the people to leave (*The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021, 15). He and his troops would then take over the village's mosque and homes, intimidating the locals into obedience. The condition got worse and "while some villagers ... fled into the neighboring forests, a good many … stayed on, perhaps hoping that a mistake has been made", furthermore those that did decide to stay, many of whom were "women and children" had to care not to "give the Dutchmen any excuse for violence" (*The Nutmeg's Curse,* 2021, 15).

Birsa's rebellion, as articulated by Devi, could be nothing but an answer to this exploitative process. He calls upon his people to fight against the "repressive measures of the British" and to reclaim their lands as part of the basic charter of demands of the Jharkhand movement (Sharma, 1976, 39). The fact that this resistance was not essentially an issue of material survival but the right of the Mundas to survive in coherence with nature. The Sámi of Northern Finland, for example, have herded reindeer through the region's forests for generations, thereby creating precisely the wilderness that policymakers today seek to protect (Andersson et al., 2021, 4). However, Sámi herders are excluded from continuing these practices on the Finnish side of the Malla Strict Nature Preserve under the guise of maintaining "pristine wilderness" (Andersson et al., 2021, 4). This, Andersson et al. argue, creates a paradox in which tourism is allowed, yet the very Indigenous Communities responsible for creating the wilderness are kept out (2021, 4). Such policies reflect a lack of comprehension of the integrated relationship Indigenous peoples have with their environment and demonstrate the negative consequences of excluding voices of Indigenous peoples from nature conservation.

Due attention has been paid to these injustices, and the induction of the Indigenous perspective in environmental management has been sought. Drawing on experiences from Aotearoa (New Zealand), the work of Andersson et al. (2021) points to the Te Urewera Act of 2014, which accorded Te Urewera-that earlier in history had been gazetted as a national park-legal personality (2). This piece of legislation recognized the long association of the "Tūhoe people" with the land by recognizing the forest as a "living system" and, thus, not "Crown" property (Andersson et al., 2021, 2) . In this context, in 2017, the Whanganui River was given "rights of a person", enacting the Māori belief in the identity of the river (2021, 2-3). As seen in the following lines:

> For the Māori, Te Awa Tupua has always had its own identity, and, like so many other non-human entities in nature, it has been respected and acknowledged in ceremonies for centuries. And as a result of this historic agreement, now, for the first time, a settler nation's government, operating through a Western legal system and worldviews, found a way to officially accept another way of understanding the world. (Andersson et al. 2021, 2-3)

These are, however, exceptions rather than the rule. Across the world, many Indigenous communities remain excluded and marginalized in land management decisions. The authors note that despite the rhetoric of collaboration, systemic change often does not follow: "The rhetoric of 'collaboration' and 'co-management' are often deployed, but systemic change is not realized" (5). This shows the need for substantial engagement with Indigenous conceptions of nature and for the recognition of their rights.

Devi, in her novel, shows the indigenous Munda movement of not only trying to reclaim the resources but also the cultural and ethnic identity of the area. From Social to Political Movements, Sharma's article points out how the movements in South Bihar and Santhal Parganas were basically social and economic, oriented towards tribal awakening and upliftment. But gradually, the realization arose that one cannot achieve salvation without critically questioning the structures of power and authority dictated by outsiders. This transition has been poignantly captured in *Aranyer Adhikar*. Devi depicts the Munda rebellion as one that begins with social and economic grievances but assumes a political character under the leadership of Birsa. The realization that true freedom for the Mundas cannot be achieved without challenging the British and their lackeys is the larger trajectory of the movement.

The knowledge Indigenous peoples around the world have acquired through centuries of observation and interaction with the environment can provide crucial alternatives to the extractive practices typical of modern industrial civilization. As traditional ecological knowledge among the Indigenous Peoples underlines sustainability, balance, and respect for the interrelation among all life forms. Such wisdom could contrast with the dominant view of nature as something to be exploited. Naess claims (1986) that "Some have worried that the mixture of religion and environmentalism could prove a source of dogmatism, intolerance, and "mysticism" (in the sense of obscurantism). So far, there is no evidence that this is happening" (1986, 13).

At the heart of Indigenous ways of life lies an evolved knowledge system, stemming from intimate relationships with the land, plants, animals, and elements, honed over many generations (Devi, 1975, 24). That knowledge is anything but empiric; it falls squarely within a spiritual and cultural framework that underpins a sense of respect for nature. Many Indigenous peoples think of themselves as stewards or caretakers of the land rather than owners or exploiters of it. Such a worldview sharply contrasts with the exploitative mentality underpinning industrial capitalism, where natural resources are extracted without consideration of long-term consequences.

Traditional Indigenous knowledge systems are often holistic in that they consider not just the immediate surrounding environment but also the social and spiritual dimensions of human existence. Seasonal migration, agricultural practices, and the sustainable gathering and hunting of foodstuffs emanate from an informed understanding of natural cycles and rhythms within the environment. By doing so, these approaches make sure that ecosystems are left intact, with the balance of the land minimally disturbed. It is 'land-based education,' for example, where knowledge has been passed on mainly by oral traditions and through direct contact with the environment. For many indigenous cultures, knowledge of medicinal plants, forests, and animals is unwritten and passed through direct experience, storytelling, rituals, and songs. The kind of transmission of knowledge described means close contact between the person and their

surroundings, developing respect for the land as a living, dynamic entity. As seen in the following passage MacDonald (2023) states:

> Relationship with the land as a central feature or concept rooted in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. Land-based implies a deep connection with and non-separation between human beings and the natural world. A reference to land includes all aspects of the natural world: plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, natural features, and environment (air, water, earth, minerals). The term can also be used in reference to a physical location or geographical concept. (MacDonald, 2023, 7)

For many indigenous cultures, knowledge of medicinal plants, forests, and animals is unwritten and passed through direct experience, storytelling, rituals, and songs. The kind of transmission of knowledge described means close contact between the person and their surroundings, developing respect for the land as a living, dynamic entity. Næss uses the term "Fourth world," referring to the marginalized people whose way of life is threatened by forces such as globalization, colonialism, and industrialization (7). He acknowledges the environmental harm the “First and Second worlds” are perpetuating on the “Third and Fourth worlds” and how they “cannot afford to pay the total cost of the war against pollution in their regions” (Næss 7).

Næss's view is in line with the general philosophy of deep ecology, in which deep changes in human values are called for. Instead of looking at nature as a collection of resource pools to be drawn upon for human benefit, it should be held that all living things and their ecosystems possess value in themselves. The survival of Indigenous cultures is not only an issue in the ongoing struggle against cultural extinction but is crucial to the preservation of ‘biological diversity’. The knowledge concerning the natural world developed by these societies provides concrete solutions to pressing ecological dilemmas, such as global warming, the devastation of forests, and the disappearance of species.

Furthermore, one of the leading ideas in Næss's (1986) philosophy is that there is an internal connection between ecological and cultural diversity, even those he “personally detest[s]” or finds “nonsensical” (1986, 15). In my opinion, the extinction of indigenous cultures is akin to the extinction of various species. While species are mutually interacting within ecosystems, so too are cultures of humans and their natural environments. The destruction of one influences the other, and the loss of either diminishes the richness and balance of the world as a whole. Because, the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, on the other hand, confer value on maintaining local ecosystems—crop production in agroecological systems and controlled burning in forests. These livelihood practices, developed over millennia, had allowed indigenous peoples to survive without depleting resources and thereby causing long-term harm to their environment. It is industrialization that disrupted these delicate systems, and often, the result is the destruction of the environment and the removal of indigenous peoples from their homes.

In Badnyopadhay’s *Aranyak,* he also deals with themes of indigenous cultures' bond with nature. The protagonist-narrator, Satyacharan, is faced with the jarring contradictions between the world of so-called civilization that he represents and that of the tribal folk who dwell in the forests, as seen in these lines, "I myself, Banwarilal, Buddhu Singh—we were all representatives of that ruthless and vainglorious Aryan civilization. And King Dobru Panna, princess Bhanumati, and prince Jogru Panna represented the ancient, vanquished, primitive people of this beautiful land" (Badnyopadhay, 2022, 187).

Satyacharan muses on the annihilation of the history of Indigenous peoples and their culture in India, in the face of Aryan conquest. He says: “Aryans traversing the perilous mountain passes of the north-west, making their way like an unstoppable torrent into an ancient India hitherto ruled by primitive tribes and clans. The subsequent history of India was composed

entirely of the history of this Aryan civilization. The history of the vanquished non-Aryans was conveniently and promptly erased from human memory" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 187). This proves how the histories of the Indigenous people were systematically suppressed, driven into obscurity through the forces of dominant civilizations. Bandyopadhyay, by having Satyacharan acknowledge this reality, foreshadows his own complicity in the destruction of his once beloved forest.

Furthermore, Bandyopadhyay (2022) brings out the spiritual attachment of the Indigenous people to nature, as preserved in their respect for the god "Tyandbaro" (188). Thus, on coming across a holy site inside the forest, Satyacharan learns of Tyandbaro's role as the guardian of the wild buffaloes: "Tyandbaro watches over us. Had it not been for him, hunters and poachers would have killed every single buffalo in the forest for their hides and horns" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). It is, therefore, representative of a worldview where nature and spirituality are wedded to each other, representing a belief system that preserves ecology. Satyacharan contemplated, "What if Tyandbaro really did exist? What if the legend was true?", an afterthought that marked a change in his thinking, and became receptive to the values and beliefs of the very Indigenous people with a low opinion of (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). Næss advocates considering religion and spirituality while promoting ecological egalitarianism. According to him, spiritual practice interrelated with ecological values may inspire harmony between human beings and nature. In his terms the "deep ecology movement tries to clarify the fundamental presuppositions underlying ... philosophy, and religion. In the shallow movement, argument comes to a halt long before this. The deep ecology movement is therefore 'the ecology movement that questions deeper'" (Næss, 1986, 10).

Therefore, it can be said religion has a part to play in environment preservation. For instance, Tyandbaro, the god of wild buffaloes, in the indigenous religion was helpful in the conservation of the buffalo and ecological balance. The buffaloes in the streets of Kolkata suffer at the hands of people due to a lack of these belief systems. Bandyopadhyay (2022) writes, "Oh Tyandbaro, I wish these were the forests of Chota Nagpur and Madhya Pradesh; I wish you would come and free these mute animals from their plight" (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 188). The following lament by Satyacharn indicates the moral decline in the civilized people, to whom compassion and harmony with nature are absolutely irrelevant.

Bandyopadhyay's novel explores how the capitalist mindset is bound to cause environmental degradation. Through the eyes and interactions of its protagonist Satyacharan, Bandyopadhyay, paints an image of Purnia's gradual decimation, and a general loss of ecosystem. This is most pronounced in Satyacharan's passage through the forests of Narha Baihar and Mahalikharup, as there he saw most clearly what human settlement and exploitation of nature amounted to, and what his work as estate manager enabled. The chapter starts with Satyacharan and Jugalprasad, with the two embarking on an expedition to the Mahalikharup hill in search of rare plants and vines (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 259). Bandyopadhyay (2022) writes how en route, they traveled through the Narha Bihar slums, which had supplanted what once had been thick forestland. Bandyopadhyay writes: "the sound of maize being ground in the mortars," "smoke billowing out of mud houses," and "naked children rolling around in the dirt and dust" (2022, 259). All these images speak of the deforestation and environmental degradation that the human settlements had brought with them. As Satyacharn further remaks, "three-fourths of the jungles of Narha Baihar had disappeared,"thereby facing him with only a fragment of forest in the northern reaches, a far cry to a time when greenery stretched as far as the eye could see (2022, 259). Jugalprasad's lament over the destruction, saying, "These Gangotas ruined it all, Huzoor. These people never stick to a spot, they keep moving around from place to place. Such a beautiful forest, and they had to come and ruin it" (2022, 259). On the other hand, Satyacharan is better

able to get to the heart of the problem, stating that the economic and systemic compulsions may have contributed to such ravaging: “It is the landlords who have leased the land to these subjects, I don’t think we can blame the poor Gangotas for what happened”, And hereby, Bandyopadhyay (2022) points his critiquing pen not only at the settlers but at the big socio-economic structure that puts profit above conservation (2022, 259-260).

Bandyopadhyay also depicts how the indigenous become the first casualty in the case of deforestation and the entry of outsiders. He took great detail in telling the story of a simple forest girl, Bhanumati, along with her family to capture their condition and their link with the forest. Her family is in extremely bad shape financially. They had borrowed money from moneylenders who after their reneging had seized their cattle (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 294). Furthermore, due to their dependence on the forest, its destruction threatened their ability to survive greatly. This is reflected in the scene where a trader used to come to them to buy ghee but no longer does, showing how a breakdown in local ecosystems has an immediate effect on the traditional economies of indigenous peoples. As seen in the following lines by Bandyopadhyay (2022), "A trader from Gaya used to come and buy ghee from them, but even he had not been coming for the last three to four months" (293).

Bandyopadhyay pits the serene beauty of the forest against its approaching disappearance. Bhanumati putting flowers on her head and the group strewing flowers on King Dobru Panna’s grave symbolizes the importance indigenous people place in nature. The narrative encapsulates the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the forest for the indigenous people. Bandyopadhyay hints that the "Tyandbaro tree", a sacred place of the buffalo god, will also one day disappear (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 292). Satyacharan contemplates that one-day people may “crave to see a forest” but will find only “factories, chimneys, cars, roads, houses, and buildings” (Bandyopadhyay, 2022, 292). These lines clearly show Bandyopadhyay understands the effects of deforestation and its impact on the Indigenous people most closely connected to the land. Through these vivid descriptions, Bandyopadhyay brings attention to the marginalization of indigenous communities and their last bit of resistance in the face of deforestation and the encroachment of outsiders upon their lands.

However, it does not always need to be this way. Andersson et al. (2021) argue that it is necessary to move beyond the conflict and antagonism in order to enable real collaboration, “The legacy of conflict, dispossession, and marginalization must not be forgotten, but it need not dictate our future” (Andersson et al., 2021, 6-7). Societies can create more holistic and sustainable approaches to environmental protection by incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into conservation efforts. This will require not only administrative and legal changes but also a reframing of the very concept of nature, that should not be seen as something separate but as a deeply connected system that includes humanity.

Conclusion

Aranyak and *Aranyer Adhikar* both comprehensively critique the colonial and capitalistic systems that have been responsible for the exploitation of natural and human resources. Further, they inspire an imagination of an alternative future in which the values of ecological harmony, Indigenous wisdom, and social justice are deeply ingrained. Engaging with both individual transformation and collective resistance, the texts bridge the personal and the political by showing that ecological awareness and action necessarily involve both aspects.

Their relevance is far from being confined to their respective historical and cultural contexts. As the world hurtles toward ever-worsening environmental crises, these stories provide lessons of enduring relevance to ecological and social regeneration. Their indictment of

anthropocentrism and advocacy of ecological egalitarianism align with contemporary voices calling for sustainability and environmental justice. These Bengali works call for indigenous knowledge and perspectives to enter the global environmentalist discourse.

The novels *Aranyak* and *Aranyer Adhikar* thus demonstrate ways in which literature can explain complex ecological and socio-political issues. By analyzing them through deep ecology, the research has tried to demonstrate not only how their continuing relevance works but also points strongly toward an ecological conservation approach that would be holistically indivisible for human and nonhuman life and foster an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable world.

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"Almost the Same, but Not Quite": Navigating Hybridity and the Third Space in *Othello*

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's *Othello* dramatizes the violent consequences of colonial discourse on the hybrid subject. In this analysis, Homi K. Bhabha's theories on hybridity, mimicry, and the third space are used to argue that Othello's tragic downfall results from Venetian society's inability to support the hybrid identity it simultaneously produces and depends upon. By examining Othello's final speech as a failure in the third space rather than a negotiation within it, this analysis illustrates how colonial discourse, through Iago's mimicry and racial stereotyping, forces Othello to internalize the very otherness he perceives in Venice, leading to a self-annihilating act that re-establishes the racial binary he has disrupted in his existence. Furthermore, this analysis expands on Othello's racial identity by examining how the handkerchief is a hybrid piece of culture that Iago works through in his plan for Othello's downfall, as well as how Desdemona and Emilia's gender places them in a third space similar yet different from Othello's, one formed by performativity instead of embodiment. This essay reveals a limitation in Bhabha's theories of hybridity that the third space is available only to certain hybrid subjects, while others remain trapped in a binary opposition from which they cannot escape.

Keywords: Identity, Violence, Third space, Hybridity, Ambivalence, Mimicry.

Introduction

Shakespeare's tragedy of *Othello* portrays the divisions and contradictions that emerge when a racialized stranger is at once accepted and rejected in the society they serve — a phenomenon which, as Mark Matheson suggests, "complicates the ongoing process of cultural exchange" within Venice's expanding mercantile world (123). Venice emerged as a mercantile power during the colonial period due to trade, as depicted in plays like Othello, where government institutions are seen to be "shaping interaction among private interests" (Chojnacki 28), indicating a vast formation of multicultural societies accommodating diversified identities that erupted based on race, economy, and military power. The Empire's growing wealth camouflaged the identity and power conflicts beneath it, as Edward Said describes the "imperial imaginary" in which empires forge a false narrative of cultural supremacy to cloak their subjugation (Said 71). Through Othello, Shakespeare goes beyond personal conflict to demonstrate cultural disintegration caused by systemic forces. Venice in Othello is not a nineteenth-century colonial empire but a bustling trading hub with early colonial contacts with the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, reflecting what Loomba describes as the usefulness of thinking about the "early modern" as the "early colonial" (*Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* 16).

Following the arguments of race studies scholars such as Loomba, Hall, and Vitkus, it is evident that colonial conversation is a system that precedes colonialism. Bhabha's theories, though intended for a different period, help us understand the logic behind these proto-colonial contacts, and the play does this in a surprisingly clear fashion. The main argument of this paper is not that Venice is a colony, but that the play illustrates the emergence of (post)colonial racial thought.

Othello's existence is paradoxical. On the one hand, his identity shatters the system. On the other hand, his military service underlies it. His suicide is an attempt to reclaim the "justice" forced upon him. This act is juxtaposed with colonial violence: Othello shatters the "Turk" within himself. His destruction comes from his assimilation to Western values — the very values Venice demanded of him — which traps the colonized subject in a system that both *affirms and negates*[11] his identity. In this bitterly ironic fashion, the play indicts the very colonial logic that produces and then destroys the hybrid subject it depends upon. It captures and seeks to *civilize* the elements they consider *barbaric*. This proto-colonial racial logic operates on what Jones et al. identify as the monoracial master narrative, under which "racial groups are seen as firmly bounded and mutually exclusive," making it structurally impossible for hybrid identity to be recognized as legitimate within the dominant social order (39). The colonial construction of Othello's identity serves deeper purposes than mere representation in a colonial narrative. Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space are fundamental for analyzing Othello's struggle in Venetian society. The third space, as Bhabha theorizes it, is a liminal and unstable discursive site where the colonizer and the colonized encounter one another, producing hybrid identities that destabilize the self/other binaries colonial power depends upon (53-55). Crucially, this space does not simply blend two cultures — it unsettles both, revealing that cultural identities are not fixed or monolithic but constituted through ongoing negotiation and conflict. From a hybridity perspective, identity includes features from both colonizers and colonized with rigid boundaries (145). Moreover, mimicry is defined as "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 122). It is the colonized subject impersonating the colonizer and reveals the weaker side of colonial rule. Crucially, Bhabha insists that this Third Space is "though unrepresentable in itself" — a precondition for enunciation rather than a stable location — and this unrepresentability is precisely what renders Othello's position in Venice so structurally volatile (55). As Bhabha further elaborates, it is "the 'inter' — the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture," enabling us to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (56). This formulation is essential to reading Othello's tragedy: it is not who he is, but what the irresolvable interstitial space between cultures does to selfhood. Furthermore, Bhabha specifies that mimicry is not mere imitation but "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" — and simultaneously "the sign of the inappropriate," a "difference or recalcitrance" that "poses an immanent threat" to normalized colonial authority (123). Othello's mimicry of Venetian civility thus functions in both directions: it is the condition of his acceptance and the source of Venice's terror of him. Othello, the Moor, undergoes these transformations as an outsider in Venice. He is caught between admiration and disdain because of his race. He is celebrated as a military hero. His existence forces him into a dualistic position. He straddles a powerful and powerless third space. However, this unsettling space finally leads him to destruction. If observed closely, Venetian society is responsible for failing to embrace its national hero. As Istiak and Karim argue in their analysis of alterity in

[11] This paper uses italics to emphasize ideas that the authors consider especially significant.

Shakespeare, “It is not the characters but the system running through the society is the culprit. The system has created the very evil it condemns” (51). Othello’s tragedy is not a personal failure. It is the product of Venetian society’s refusal to accept his hybrid identity. This paper utilizes Bhabha’s theories to analyze the colonial forces at work in Othello’s identity and demise. It examines Othello’s hybrid identity and his inclusion and exclusion from Venetian society. Next, it focuses on the meaning of the handkerchief, viewing it as a mark of cultural hybridity that both transcends and collapses colonial borders, amplifying racial tension. Finally, it explores how women in Venetian society are excluded from cultural involvement and power, find themselves in a hybrid “third space,” and are used as tools by male dominance.

Othello's Identity in the Third Space

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha notes that power within colonialism is always in a state of tension or relatively unstable because the subjugated subject attempts to do the act of the colonizer, which is mentioned as "almost the same, but not quite" (122). Similarly, Othello, as an outsider, seeks to establish himself in multiple ways to balance his unsettling identity in Venice. One way is storytelling, through which he shapes how Venetian society accepts him despite his outsider status. Building on this, Susan Arndt argues that Othello’s speech about "the battles, sieges, fortunes / That I have passed" (Shakespeare 1.3.151-152) shows "strategic mimicry" because he tells his story in a way that fits Venetian expectations while also subtly questioning them (Arndt 409). Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of autoethnography—a practice where a marginalized subject produces a self-authored account that responds to and reframes the dominant group's representations—Arndt explains that Othello "practices 'strategic mimicry' in Bhabha's sense, of both disrupting their very inner Self as well as the mainstream discourse about their being the Other" (409). In this sense, Othello's speech serves as a kind of ethnographic counter-narrative, recasting himself not just as an object of Venetian curiosity but as an agent who participates in defining his own story within the contact zone of cross-cultural encounter. For example, although he tells exotic stories like "the cannibals that each other eat" (Shakespeare 1.3.144), he also describes "being taken by the insolent foe / And sold to slavery; of…redemption thence" (1.3.138-139), which, as Arndt notes, showed sympathy for enslaved people that "was not compatible with the mainstream plans of Elizabethan England for joining the business of enslaving Africans" (409-410). This structural anxiety about narrative ownership finds a broader theoretical frame in Said, who argues that the dominant culture's power to speak *for* the racialized subject — rather than allowing them to speak for themselves — is not incidental but constitutive of colonial discourse itself (Said 6). Vanessa Corredera argues that Othello's plea to “Speak of me as I am” (Shakespeare 5.2.402) exposes "his fear over the fate of his story," rooted in the anxiety that Venetian storytellers will "lessen in representation" the singular Black figure in their midst (Corredera 3–4); and, crucially, that no reanimation of this play — past or present — is "ever ideologically neutral when it comes to race" (27).

Bhabha explains the third space as a discursive space where “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 55). Moosavinia and Hosseini argue accordingly that Othello, caught between Moorish heritage and Venetian expectations, inhabits precisely this “in-between” space that “belongs to neither of the poles” (336). This condition finds empirical resonance in Huang and Degner's study of mixed-race social identity, which identifies an "invalidated border type" — individuals who self-categorize as hybrid but are socially treated as monoracial (9). Such individuals demonstrate weakened identification with the dominant group and heightened identification with the minoritized group, a pattern that maps directly onto

Othello's experience: Venice continuously refuses his self-categorization as Venetian, driving him toward the singular racial "other" that Iago constructs for him (11). This 'in-between' space takes a heavy toll on the identity in several ways. Othello's identity is initially "translated" through his preoccupation with his conversion to Christianity and his military service, which allows him to serve the Venetian society. This transformation is not merely superficial; it is the foundation of his belonging. In Act 1, Othello actively translates his exotic past into a language that the Venetians can admire and even fall in love with. He recounts his adventures to Desdemona, who would *seriously incline* to listen, and she loved him for the dangers he had passed through. This narrative act translates his *otherness* into a form of heroic value that the Venetian state can use. However, this translation is always precarious. Iago, the play's primary agent of destabilization, threatens to undo Othello's Christian identity. He cynically suggests that Desdemona could make Othello "renounce his baptism, / All seals and symbols of redeemed sin" (Shakespeare 2.3.363-364). This statement is crucial because it confirms that Othello is a convert, and it exposes the early modern anxiety that such conversions might not be absolute or permanent. His Christian identity is thus, on one hand, a "translation" that can be reversed, and, on the other hand, an unsettling hybrid one. As the play progresses, Iago successfully works to "rehistoricize" Othello, pulling him out of his Venetian present and re-associating him with the Islamic world he was once meant to fight against. This process is most powerfully realized in Othello's final speech. Before killing himself, Othello tells a story about a time in Aleppo where he saw "a malignant and a turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state" (5.2.414-415). In a shocking turn, he reveals that he "took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him—thus" (416-417), at which point he stabs himself. In this moment, Othello rehistoricizes his own hybrid identity, fracturing it into three parts. He is simultaneously the Venetian defending the state, the "turbaned Turk" who "threatens it from within, and an othered "figure of blackness" who although a Christianized Moor,…retains traces of Islamic identity and serves as a focal point for anxieties about how converts to Christianity might betray their new faith and become an internal threat to Christendom (Vitkus 218). This act demonstrates how the "Third Space" he inhabits can collapse, forcing him to see himself through the racist lens that Iago has constructed. He has internalized the identity of the outsider, the enemy of the state he once served. Jones et al. theorize that "push and pull factors" — racialized experiences shaped by macrosystem race dynamics — directly determine "how individuals choose to identify at the microlevel" (40). Iago functions precisely as this external "push" factor: through relentless racial destabilization, he dismantles Othello's hybrid self-categorization until the only identity available is the one Venice assigned him from the beginning.

The act of mimicry positions the strongly unified 'top' in a very ambivalent light and makes the subordinate 'bottom' hierarchy very fragile. This tension between assimilation and difference resonates with Othello's duality as both a black Moor and a Venetian military leader. These identities are so different and complex that they can barely coexist simultaneously in Venetian society. Thus, the society that relies on Othello is also seen to be full of hatred towards him. Bhabha's preoccupation with these issues mirrors Fanon's concern, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, with race, and is the core of the phrase 'the gaze' the mechanism through which colonized people experience the dispossession of the self (89). The 'gaze' disproves the self; like Fanon, Bhabha argues that cultural dislocation inflicts psychological violence and racial tension where the black Moor's intimacy with the Venetian white girl is widely considered as the binary of "barbarism and civility", and it is pretty apparent and evident that Othello falls under "barbarism" (59). In Othello's case, the perpetual fluctuation between self-hatred as a racialized 'other' and his identity as a Venetian military leader exemplifies the destructive effects of cultural dislocation.

Bhabha's work is in dialogue with Said's *Orientalism*, which argues that colonial discourse does not merely describe the racialized Other but actively *produces* them — constructing identities through representation in ways that serve the interests of the dominant culture (Said 5–6). Where Said, however, tends to fix the colonizer/colonized binary as relatively stable, Bhabha's third space introduces slippage and ambivalence into that structure, revealing colonial authority as always incomplete. However, while Said focuses on fixed colonial opposites, Bhabha's third space shifts these divides, showing identity as more complex and causal. The 'barbaric' identity is not always othered, rather it is embraced and valued when it comes to the sovereignty of Venice, indicating a negotiation that both Othello and the Venetians have to rely on to balance and make sure everything is in order. Therefore, the self-other binary is not functioning as expected. For Othello, this contributes to hyper agency and hyper vulnerability simultaneously. His military skills allow him to access the Venetian society, but his Blackness others him. Brown et al. document how the intertwining of racial and social oppression produces "microaggressive actions that negate and diminish" the racialized subject's sense of self-worth and self-efficacy (988). The slurs directed at Othello — "thicklips," "old black ram," "sooty bosom" — are not isolated insults but expressions of precisely this systemic discourse: a colonial apparatus designed to structurally undermine the psychological foundations of racialized identity, no matter how high the subject's institutional standing. The handkerchief that represents his hybrid identity of African and European origins embodies Bhabha's concept of the "ambivalent" cultural object (145). In the same way, Othello's insecurities are manipulated by Iago, which is what Bhabha calls the "menace of mimicry," where the subjugated Other, partially adopting the norms of the colonizer, becomes a threat to the colonizer's rule (126). More precisely, Bhabha explains that "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126) — so the threat runs in both directions. Additionally, Bhabha's account of mimicry fixes the colonial subject as a "partial presence" — meaning simultaneously "incomplete and virtual" — a formulation that maps precisely onto Othello's status in Venice: he is always provisionally there, his belonging contingent and revocable (123). This partial presence is compounded by what Bhabha, in the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, calls the "unhomely" — a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition in which "the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (13). The unhomely maps with precision onto Othello's domestic tragedy: the bedchamber in Cyprus — the most intimate private space — becomes the theater of colonial violence. Iago's entire plot operates through the domestic realm: the handkerchief, marital fidelity, and the marriage bed. When Othello cries "O, now, for ever / Farewell the tranquil mind" (Shakespeare 3.3.399–400), it is the unhomely moment — the collapse of any distinction between his private self and the racial discourse that surrounds him — that marks the beginning of his annihilation. The third space is created at the intersection of cultures, where narratives of masters and enslaved people come into contact and hybrid identities are formed through negotiation. As Shalini and Batta argue in their 2024 analysis of Bhabha's framework, the third space is "the very arena where identities are actively constructed and negotiated," producing "hybrid identities that defy the rigid categories of colonizer and colonized" (65-67). Othello's identity, forged in the intersection of Moorish heritage and Venetian service, exemplifies this dynamic negotiation—yet Venetian society refuses to recognize it. As Abbas and Hamad argue in their 2025 analysis, the third Space functions as "a postcolonial liminal zone" where identity is shaped by "colonial trauma" and becomes "inexorably linked" to both the past and the present, and the self and the other (8-11). Othello, caught between his Moorish heritage and Venetian service, occupies precisely this unstable space. The

climax of this traumatic identity crisis is in Act 5, Scene 2. After murdering Desdemona and learning of Iago's treachery, Othello is left with a fragmented self. He delivers a final monologue that attempts to piece together his life for the Venetian officials who have come to arrest him. He begins by asking them to speak of him as one that loved not wisely but too well. This is the present self—the loving, if tragically flawed, husband. He then reaches into his past, recalling a specific moment of service to the Venetian state:

> ...of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him, thus. (Shakespeare 5.2.407-417)

This speech is an example of what Bhabha called the "third space," but here it is a collapse rather than a negotiation. Note the grammar: "one whose hand / I took," then "I took my eye out too," then he acts out the killing of himself. The past, present, and "thus" of the stage action all blend together into a single moment. This is not a creative cultural mixing; this is a hybridity of collapse. The Venetian self and the Turkish other do not coexist; one of them has to die. Othello plays the role of the one who kills and the one who is killed; he has taken in the racial thinking of Venice. The third space here is not a space but a trap from which there is no exit. In this moment, the "colonial trauma" Abbas and Hamad describe becomes violently literal (196). Othello's identity splits. He is no longer just the Venetian general, the "self." He has been so thoroughly poisoned by Iago's insinuations and his own internalized otherness that he now sees the "Turk"—the enemy, the infidel, the racial and religious "other"—within himself. He collapses his own history by conflating the heroic act of his past (killing a Turk who threatened a Venetian) with the "malignant" act of his present (killing Desdemona, a Venetian). By stabbing himself as he says "thus," he simultaneously enacts the roles of both the Venetian (the righteous defender of the state) and the Turk (the "circumcisèd dog" who must be executed). The self and the other become one and the same, destroyed in a single, traumatic act. He uses a foundational memory from his past—a moment that once defined his loyalty to Venice—to execute judgment on his present self. This is the ultimate tragedy of his liminal position: he has been so destabilized that the only way to resolve the conflict between his two identities is to annihilate them both. Bhabha describes these spaces as the “in-between” as new identities are formed through the conflict of cultures and ambivalence (37). Such hybridity is apparent in Othello, where the main character simultaneously identifies as a blend of an insider and an outsider in the ethnically exclusive Venetian society. Even though Othello is considered “valiant” (Shakespeare 1.3.56) and is appreciated for his militaristic endeavors, he suffers racial disparagement by being called “thick-lips” and “an old black ram” (1.1.72-97). Both sides of the stereotypes are true and reveal the contradiction found in colonialism, where the racialized subject is simultaneously needed and unwanted. They are relied upon to serve society but are not fully welcomed in the social structure. As Loomba argues, Othello moves from being a colonized subject on the terms of white Venetian society until he occupies his "true" position as its other (Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance* 48) — a paradox of being simultaneously indispensable and inadmissible. Inherent in this paradox is a colonial condition that constitutes racialized subjects suspended in a perpetual

state of being recognized and excluded. Such contradictions render it impossible for societies premised on racial hierarchies to either fully accept or completely deny people from socially marginalized groups. Othello is a liminal being caught in the middle of binary oppositions, and without this ascribed third space, he is susceptible to a tragic identity crisis. His sociopolitical ambiguity, integration, or self-definition within a well-defined social system is the essence of his demise. Bhabha provides a critique by saying that alienation and aggression are not external faults but rather built within the system of civil power (62). Othello's alienation is not only a case of lack of recognition on the part of the Venetian society; it is also one of its systemic contradictions: an aporia that both honors and dehumanizes him as a racial other. Being a black man, he is an esteemed military servant and a racialized Other at the same time. This duality creates an inner conflict. The following quote clearly shows this self-inflicted weakness:

> Haply, for I am black
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have (Shakespeare 3.3.304-306).

Othello here concedes a social polish deficit that, to him, corresponds to his race and invites rejection. Both self-loathing and the weight of the Venetian expectations lead him to his tragic end. The imposed violence is directed toward the self – first onto Desdemona and ultimately onto his eyes. The madness and self-destruction are not of external origin but rather internal, stemming from a civil society's inability to balance the individual with the collective. Othello's tragedy illustrates the aftermath of colonial powers dismantling the self through a lack of national identity; the unresolved identity conflicts, coupled with self and societal acceptance, lead to violence, both within and outside.

Othello's hybrid identity becomes even more complex with his marriage to Desdemona, a white Venetian noblewoman. When Othello says, "I won his daughter" (Shakespeare 1.3.111) from the tales of "disastrous chances" (1.3.155), it illustrates his struggle to integrate colonialism through the construction of dangerous narratives, which Bhabha sees as essential in colonial identity negotiation (Bhabha 162). However, this narration power is taken from Iago, who commands Othello's Otherness through his xenophobic language, making him a "Barbary horse" (Shakespeare 1.1.125). Iago's plan exacerbates Othello's subservience as it belies the weakness of Othello's place within the third space; even in victory, one is overshadowed by racially based assumptions of failure. In the words of C. Bartels, under the influence of Iago's racist rhetoric, Othello comes to see that difference as a burden and begins to view himself in a negative and categorical way as a Moor (181). Desdemona's part in this scenario demonstrates the intersection of gender and hybridity. On the one hand, her affection for Othello, which is initially framed as liberating and transgressive, reinforces Venetian customs by leaving her to serve as a token of "civilizing" chastity. Her promise to "trumpet to the world" (Shakespeare 1.3.285) and her affection for him embody an interracial utopia, but tragically, her death by his hand confirms the lack of harmony that exists in a social order built upon racial domination. This ambiguity is very much what Frantz Fanon's account of colonial neurosis suggests: that interracial intimacy is a space of "recognition and subjugation" (63). Thus, Desdemona's death illustrates the violence of the third space, indicting the obliteration of hybrid potential by a world that cannot entertain the notion of ambiguity.

Cultural Hybridity and the Racial Tensions

Othello presents a paradoxical negative effect of mixed culture as it strives to depict the constant and incessant conflict between good and evil, black and white, boon and bane, truth and falsehood–so many concepts juxtaposed to each other by race, gender, and physical features.

These contradictions result from specific conditions and are the outcomes of the challenges resulting from a mixed culture, as Othello, the most significant and mightiest general of the Venetians, falls victim to alterity on account of his color and racial identity, as Innes terms Othello as "an untamed savage at heart [who] has to be civilised and uncivilized" (81-82). Then, the violence-laden personality and otherness continue to develop with the progression of the play. Othello, the noble and gallant general, is the target of vicious criticisms purely on the racial credentials of being a Moor and, more precisely, a black Moor. In addition, Othello suffers at the hands of his compatriots because of his race, as his compatriots regard him as a stranger. While collaborating with the rest of the world, Othello adopts the culture and norms of Venetian society, which he strives to serve. Such a collision signifies the breaking apart of the binary opposition self-other, leading toward hybridity.

Colonial discourse focuses on encouraging obedience to the colonizer's behavioral patterns while hoping for a difference that's nearly impossible to eliminate; the subject is expected to be "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Othello's duality oscillation is also evident; he attempts to integrate into Venetian society by accepting its language and values, but his foreignness stems mainly from his race. This duality creates a rupture in the cultivation of the dominant narrative, enabling hybrid identities to surface in the third space. Othello's vivid description of his life to the Venetian Senate, "She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd, And I loved her that she did pity them" (Shakespeare 1.3.193-194), showcases the Venetian rhetorical norms. Othello's storytelling conforms to the Venetian nobles' order of speaking as an effort to claim his identity from the colonizer. Notably, however, this "identity" is lost in times of crisis, which occurs frequently in Othello's case. For instance, his frantic declaration, "O, blood, blood, blood!' (3.3.512) exposes the extreme vulnerability of his identity. Bhabha comments that when cultural difference is expressed but not entirely resolved, it constitutes an ambivalent space. Thus, he refers to it as "the third space" (112). Othello's militaristic history contributes to his already complex hybrid identity. Being a Moorish general earns him some respect - "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman" (Shakespeare 1.3.56-57). However, his acceptance of his functionality is always circumstantial. His stories of "battles, sieges, fortunes" (151) are a cocktail of Moorish and Venetian elements that create a hybrid identity. This makes Desdemona fall in love with him, but it is still insufficient for her to belong to society. Once his military function is a resource in Cyprus, Othello's racial identity becomes more of a liability than an asset. Iago's scoffs show that "an old black ram / Is topping your white ewe" (1.1.97-98). This change highlights Bhabha's view of hybridity as something that is joyous and, at other times, threatening, where the colonized individual's worth is meaningless and can be taken away without any warning (Bhabha 159) not to mention the fact that Othello's "Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely but too well" (Shakespeare 5.2.403-405) signifies that he understands his 'othered' state of being caught up and torn between Moorish love and passion and Venetian discipline. This is how Othello can dwell within this "third space" by using the language and culture of Venetians, but his skin color and the fact that he is black mean that he is treated as a migrant, more precisely, as the other. Othello's hybridity acts as a double-edged sword. It temporarily grants him acceptance but also exposes him to racial discrimination, which drives the tragedy.

The shaded structures of identity and otherness are not limited to racial separations, as the rigid boundaries also apply to relations among members of the same culture. The dangers of ethnocentrism are far-reaching. Iago's elaborate scheming against Cassio reveals how notions of alterity can be internalized and break bonds within the group, eventually causing Cassio to clash

with those in power. As Iago manipulates Cassio's reputation, he plants suspicion in Othello's mind, saying, "Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio; / Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure" (3.3.228-229). In the same way, the women, Desdemona, Bianca, and Emilia, are not homogeneous as they share a gender category. Instead, they are defined and differentiated by more subtle, salient boundaries and social expectations. For instance, Emilia challenges gendered norms when she asserts, "But I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall" (4.3.85-86), contrasting with Desdemona's more submissive stance. These differences illustrate and manifest the degree to which the issue of mixed cultures poses a challenge, even for communities that appear unitary. Even so, in the face of these contradictions, each character attempts to reclaim control over themselves and, in so doing, shatter the rigid structures of identity constructed by society. Desdemona's defiance shines through when she declares, "I do perceive here a divided duty" (1.3.209), signaling her struggle to reconcile societal expectations with personal agency. This narrative captures what Bhabha evokes in mimicry and the "third space" where the self and others become margins of the incessant fluidity of becoming (Bhabha 127). Desdemona's rejection of Venetian suitors in favor of Othello exemplifies a horizontal relationship (mutual, egalitarian) emerging within a vertical power structure (hierarchical, colonial), thereby embodying Bhabha's "third space" as a site of subversion. In her defiance of racial and gendered hierarchies, Desdemona reconfigures her agency through a bond that transcends the Venetian patriarchy's rigid binaries. While the vertical axis of power in Othello—rooted in colonial and patriarchal domination—positions Othello as an outsider and Desdemona as a subordinate woman, their marriage disrupts these hierarchies by asserting a horizontal, reciprocal connection. As Anne McClintock argues, colonial societies enforce vertical relationships of power that racialize and gender subjects to maintain imperial order (5). Desdemona's choice to consecrate herself to Othello's mind and "valiant parts" (Shakespeare 1.3.288) rejects the vertical logic of Venetian society, which privileges whiteness and patriarchal authority. Instead, her agency fosters a horizontal intimacy that challenges what bell hooks terms the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" by centering mutual recognition over domination (72).

Desdemona's interracial marriage, though ultimately contained by the tragedy's violent conclusion, momentarily destabilizes colonial and gendered norms by positing a relationality outside sanctioned hierarchies (Singh 291). Bhabha's "third space" thus emerges as a hybrid identity and a relational mode that horizontalizes power. This subversion is inherently fragile, as the play's vertical structures reassert control through Othello's internalized racism and Desdemona's death. However, their relationship's fleeting existence underscores the radical potential of horizontal bonds to unsettle oppressive systems, even as they constrain them. Desdemona's valiant defense of her love demonstrates her disregard for culture as she states, "That I did love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world" (Shakespeare 1.3.283-285). This challenge to her father, Brabantio, "A maiden never bold" (1.3.112), and Venetian customs show an openness to embrace Othello's mixed world. However, this straying from boundaries elicits a negative response as Brabantio blames Othello for using magic: "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted / By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.73-74). Instead, this response illustrates the discomfort hybrid identities create within society, as her marriage to Othello crosses the boundaries of race and gender. Kim Hall's analysis asserts that Desdemona's decision indicates a "dangerous intimacy" that colonial societies tend to fear and quash (180). Her later statement, "Banish me, my lord, but kill me not!" (Shakespeare 5.2.98), shows that she is trapped in this impossible hybrid space of power and victimization. While Desdemona's complex marriage to Othello helps

challenge the boundaries set around race and gender, it places her in the sight of patriarchal and racial vengeance. She exists in the troubled position of the hybrid victim, which is both a liberating and dangerous state. This position illustrates how power can be resisted yet remains deeply embedded within the dominant structures of power.

Cassio, who is referred to as “a soldier fit to stand by Caesar / And give direction,” is polished (2.3.126-127). Othello wishes to achieve this image of civility but is never able to achieve it because he is racially othered. This part of Bhabha’s description of hybrid identity deals with power relations (86). Cassio’s role as “Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello" (Shakespeare 2.1.30) reinforces his alignment with Venetian ideals of discipline and propriety, contrasting with Othello’s exoticized military prowess. However, his drunken fall—"Do not think, gentlemen. I am drunk" (2.3.117)—exposes his instability, paralleling Othello’s unraveling. Iago exploits this vulnerability, noting, "He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly" (5.1.20-21), revealing Cassio’s idealized status as a threat even within Venetian ranks. This moment suggests that the "third space" destabilizes all identities, not just the racially Othered. Scholar Stephen Greenblatt argues that Cassio’s lapse reflects the fragility of colonial hierarchies, where even the exemplar can falter (68). Cassio’s embodiment of Venetian norms contrasts with Othello’s hybridity, yet his flaws reveal the instability inherent in the "third space." This comparison clarifies how hybridity affects the colonizer and colonized, undermining rigid cultural distinctions. The Duke's praise, "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black," (Shakespeare 1.3.330-331) on face value appears to incorporate Othello, but the racial nuance demonstrates Bhabha's colonial ambivalence. His attitude is best captured in Hall's “concealed exclusion” (179). Accepting the Senate is always instrumental; in this case, Othello's military value is that "[t]he Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus" (Shakespeare 1.3.254-255). The Duke's compliment suggests Othello's merit might redeem his black skin, but only in part, and with the expectation that he will be helpful. This tension is repeated in the Cyprus setting, where Othello's command diminishes, giving birth to slurs like the Moor. Said notes that this is a colonial perspective in which the Other is appreciated for their servitude (101). In conjunction with the “We are very sorry for't” (Shakespeare 1.3.88) dismissal of Brabantio’s complaints, the Senate demonstrates this applicable tolerance devoid of nationalistic notions of race. The Senate’s partial acceptance of Othello clarifies the hybrid identity that the colonizer accepts in the third space, revealing the deeper forces that govern the flexibility of this “space” and explaining Othello’s rejection. Cassio’s place also illuminates Othello’s, by way of contrast. Cassio, a Florentine in Venice, like Othello, is an outsider, but he is able to fit in, whereas Othello is not. By Iago’s comment that Cassio is “a soldier fit to stand by Caesar” (2.3.126), we see that Cassio can be understood within Venetian society. What’s different, of course, is that Cassio is a white man, Othello is a black man. Cassio’s lapse as a drunkard can be overlooked, but Othello’s racial difference cannot. This comparison also underscores a side of Bhabha’s argument that he plays down: that hybridity may not be equally distributed. Some outsiders can become Venetian, but others, who are physically different, are “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 122), not because of their actions, but because of how others perceive them. But again, that’s based on bodily differences.

Although Venice uses Othello’s Moorish martial abilities, there is still fear behind the power, as shown through Brabantio's phrase, "Thou hast practiced on her with foul charms" (Shakespeare 1.2.92). He is afraid that he has manipulated her through treacherous means. As Bhabha puts it, hybridity is linked to colonial usefulness (Bhabha 159), whereas Said interprets this as the West viewing the other as both useful and dangerous to them simultaneously (Said

101). Othello, being employed as "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you" (Shakespeare 1.3.58), takes full advantage of his outsider identity as a warrior, which simultaneously exoticizes him. His description of “Cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi” (1.3.166-167) enchants the Venetians. He commands, “To th’ platform, masters; come, let’s set the watch” (2.1.124) while in Cyprus, and even though it asserts power, it fails alongside Iago’s undermining of it, making his already fragile position more difficult to bear. Critic Michael Neill observes that the military office that *Othello* is a play full of racial feeling — perhaps the first work in English to explore the roots of such feeling." (394). Othello’s military hybridity is indeed empowering, but it also sets him apart. It is now clearer how colonial societies exploited and feared each other to create Othello's tragic loneliness. Iago’s background is a strange mixture. He is a Moor’s man, he is commanded by an outsider, and he hates it. This is demonstrated by his statement, “I follow him to serve my turn upon him” (Shakespeare 1.1.45). This is a strange mixture of loyalty and deceit. However, Iago’s mixture is one he chooses. He can choose to end it at any time. This is very different from Othello’s mixture, which is literally written on his body as a symbol of the privileged position in Venetian society. A resentful servant remains within the world's boundaries, while the loyal general exists outside. Iago is not the source of Othello’s tragedy. He is a symbol of it. He is a symbol of the monsters that Venetian society created.

The handkerchief in Shakespeare's Othello is a striking blend of artifacts that reveals the combination of Moorish and Venetian cultures while also displaying the fragility of those cultures. Othello introduced it as a gift of exotic origin, saying, “That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give” (Shakespeare 3.4.65-66), associating it with his Moorish roots and saying it is “dyed in mummy which the skilful / Conserved of maidens' hearts” (3.4.86-87). This gives it a mystical value deeply embedded in his identity. He notes casually that he will “have the work ta’en out” (3.3.340), showing her side of the pendant, which is purely domestic. Those are Venetian norms. This duality situates the handkerchief as a “third space” (Bhaba 53). Still, its hybrid nature makes it susceptible to reinterpretation. Iago manipulates this incoherence when he claims, "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong" (Shakespeare 3.3.370-371), where he metamorphoses the handkerchief from a love token into a proof of betrayal. As scholar Dympna Callaghan points out, its exotic origins only strengthen its function as a site of cultural collision, further aggravating the tragedy (89). What starts as a link between Othello and Desdemona transforms into a tool that separates them while symbolizing broader integration issues. The handkerchief illustrates the sad idea of blending cultures. It is a thing that blends Egyptian magic with Venetian domesticity. It should symbolize blending cultures. But it shows that blending cultures cannot be done. Something as light as air becomes heavy enough to destroy two people. Iago recognizes that blending cultures means that cultures can be read in two different ways. Iago does not make Othello jealous. Iago exploits the fear that Othello’s Moorish background instilled in his Venetian background. The handkerchief represents a third place that becomes reality. And like Othello, it cannot handle how Venetians read it.

Mimicry and Colonial Ambivalence

Bhabha presents his view on mimicry as how the colonized subject replicates their colonizer, resulting in a “reformed, recognizable Other” that is both assuring and antagonistic (86). Bhabha is precise that mimicry is “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” but simultaneously “the sign of the inappropriate,” intensifying surveillance while posing “an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (123). This double motion makes mimicry the perfect weapon for Iago: he exploits both sides of Othello’s mimicry —

his adoption of Venetian speech and command, and the very difference that mimicry can never fully mask. This ambivalence is a driving force behind the tragedy in Othello as it sustains Othello's exchanges that parody his exploitation. While Othello's command, "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them" (Shakespeare 1.2.76-77), masks an attempt to exercise Venetian civility, Bhabha would argue that his racial otherness makes such imitation impossible. Any attempt at such imitation produces what Bhabha calls "slippage, its excess, its difference" — a disturbance that undermines the normative order Othello strives to inhabit (Bhabha 122) — and more precisely fixes the colonial subject as a "partial presence," both "incomplete and virtual," never fully inhabiting the world of the colonizer (122–123). Neill argues that Othello occupies a paradoxical position, being viewed simultaneously as both fair and black, a "Christian general and erring barbarian" (411). This split identity reflects the *incomplete and virtual* nature of the colonial subject who can mimic but never fully assimilate the dominant culture. As such, this limitation sharply contrasts the simplistic stereotype of a barbarous Moor, showing that Othello's power manifests in violence precisely because he lacks control. His speech further imitates Venetian decorum: "My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (Shakespeare 1.2.21-22). Nevertheless, Iago's sarcastic epithet of Othello as "His Moorship's ancient" (1.1.35) ridicules Othello and his mimicry, revealing the absurdity and emptiness of his attempt. Frantz Fanon relates this to a broader case of voluntary bondage in which participants in colonization attempt to hide themselves through mimicry (109). This conflict intensifies in Cyprus in Othello's command, "Hold your hands, / Both you of my inclining, and the rest" (Shakespeare 1.2.82-83), where, at best, he can exercise some power only as an alien. In this way, Othello's partial imitation adds to his feelings of empowerment only to foreshadow destruction, which is the other side of colonial mimicry. Turning mimicry to his advantage, Iago uses Othello's mimicry to slowly tear him apart, which shifts impersonation into a form of warfare. His command, "Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure" (3.3.229), employs Othello's adopted Venetian mannerisms in a harmful way. This is an example of Bhabha's colonial ambivalence in which mimicry functions to undermine power (86). One of the terrifying things about *Othello* is that its racial poisons seem so casually concocted, as if racism were just something that Iago, drawing in his improvisational way on a gallimaufry of quite unsystematic prejudices and superstitions, made up as he went along" (Neill 395). Iago's dismissive comment, "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy" (3.3.195), transforms Othello's trust into a jealous, bitter, cynical Venetian. This transformation deepens when Othello exclaims, "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore" (3.3.411), which is Iago's words said bitterly. In the words of Iago, "I know our country disposition well" (3.3.232), he inflates Othello's foreignness and, in doing so, exposes his weaknesses. Iago transforms Othello's mimicry into an object of colonial subjugation, thereby revealing the limits of enslaved selves within a racially defined order. In Desdemona's admiration for Othello, the colonized are fetishized as objects of desire, capturing the inclination to imitate. The line, "devour up my discourse" (1.3.174), has a Venetian appreciation towards the exotic, yet her affection intensifies: "My heart's subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord" (1.3.285-286). This is Bhabha's model of the other, where the colonizer takes on the other, in this case, more like a reversal (86). On the contrary, Dympna Callaghan interprets it as a perverse feminine colonial desire to shift the balance of power (92). This grants Othello power but also risks turning him into a caricature, as Brabantio's fury implies: "To fall in love with what she feared to look on" (Shakespeare 1.3.116). Jyotsna G. Singh makes the case that Desdemona's attraction flips the center and periphery, along with the existing order of power (Singh 290). By imitating Othello, the colonized is paradoxically raised by the colonizer's gaze. This bond, however, is tragic because Othello's otherness cannot fully connect with Venetian anticipation.

Venetian Women and Vulnerable Hybrid Identity in the Third Space

Othello shows Venetian women as politically, legally, and socially sidelined and stripped of formal education and economic self-sufficiency, which indicates patterns seen across early modern Europe. Stanley Chojnacki has commented on Venetian legislation regarding women's subjugation, especially in inheritance cases where male heirs were favored, "legal codes gave men privileges, for example, precedence to male heirs in inheritance of real estate" (15), and this is echoed in the mosaic Venetians of the play. The 'privilege' goes beyond the law. Instead, its implication is premised upon power, which subjugates women, establishing an all-encompassing "male noble identity" (Chojnacki 16). When Desdemona marries Othello against her father's wishes, Brabantio expresses his bewilderment in "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted / By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (Shakespeare 1.3.73-74), demonstrating the social attitude which declines women's essential intellect and human agency by reinforcing the fact that women are to be abused, to be stolen, to be corrupted, and so on. Venetian women are, therefore, categorized into an identity that is neither Venetian nor alien but a wholly unique hybrid identity residing in the third space, where they lose all their human agency and rights and are only bound to serve the male who dominantly controls them, irrespective of domesticity, society, or nationality. Iago's manipulation leverages these customs, highlighting the Venetian women's duplicitousness: "In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands. Their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.233-236). This stereotype strengthens the tension regarding women's conduct in society and at home, which resonates with Joan Scott's argument that gender served as a "primary way of signifying relationships of power" (42), legitimizing the subjugation of women. Her efforts to influence such as advocating for Cassio, "Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn; On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn: I prithee, name the time, but let it not / Exceed three days: in faith, he's penitent" (Shakespeare 3.3.68-71) is a tragic misinterpretation that culminates her demise. Even with Venetian women formally excluded in Othello, courtesans and noblewomen had parallel channels through which they could exercise power and influence, which Bhabha describes as 'horizontal relationships' within power. This also applies to Bianca, who stands as a bridge between two worlds. Although she is a courtesan, she faces social stigma but still manages to hold some emotional influence. In her defense, she states: "I am no strumpet; but of life as honest / As you that thus abuse me" (5.1.143-144), claiming dignity, which in her case is a denial of the label. On the other hand, Desdemona's attendant, Emilia, exercises agency in her own right along these lines by confronting socially accepted gender roles, as she argues: "Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell / And have their palates both for sweet and sour, / As husbands have," (4.3.104-108) and questions the prevalence of women's subordination and double standards. Like other women, she struggles to escape domination, as shown in her unmasking of Iago's plans, "I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known, / Though I lost twenty lives" (5.2.201-202). Having merited her title as a noblewoman, Desdemona wields some form of power through her advocacy and infidelity, as seen in her plea for Cassio. Her loyalty allows her to speak or act on someone's behalf. Even so, this power is limited, as the identity is hybrid. Koleva argues that Othello "foregrounds female characters behaving in unruly ways to complicate and critique ideas concerning women's behavior and their duties as daughters and wives that were prevalent during Shakespeare's time" (446). The play does not just reflect these rules—it "destabilizes the very discourse that aimed to regulate" women's behavior (Koleva 465).

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity helps trace the complexity of Venetian women's roles; as Butler states, "gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin" (175).

The dutiful wife Desdemona performs her role with, “I have not deserved this” and, “I will not stay to offend you” (4.1.271-279), paying respect whilst subversively contesting Othello’s abuse. This aligns with the idea that through rituals such as dowry negotiations, women reproduce societal structures yet have the agency to negotiate power. This ambivalence is showcased further in Emilia’s conversation with Desdemona in Act 4, Scene 3. Desdemona questions, “Dost thou in conscience think--tell me, Emilia-- / That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?” (4.3.67-69) to which Emilia replies,

> But I do think it is their husbands' faults
> If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties,
> And pour our treasures into foreign laps,
> Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
> Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
> Or scant our former having in despite;
> Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
> Yet have we some revenge. (Shakespeare 4.3.97–104)

Emilia’s response reveals the contradictions within patriarchal systems and carves out a domain for self-determining women, reclaiming agency operating within the bounds of societal expectation. She shifts the blame to men’s actions, arguing that female transgression is a response rather than a punishment for some moral failing. In this regard, she supports Butler’s claim that gender is performative, albeit one that can be performed with resistance, and it indicates Bhabha’s ambivalent ‘negotiation,’ which ultimately empowers and reestablishes male domination within a patriarchal society. Othello demonstrates the migration of gender boundaries by exposing how women, upholding hybrid identity, even when enacting subservience, capture agency to expose these systems of oppression and critique the structures that seek to silence them still. The way it is being done sometimes strengthens the subservience itself. The concept of the woman’s third space differs significantly from Othello’s. Desdemona and Emilia are both capable of being both submissive and rebellious, as when Desdemona has her “divided duty” (1.3.209) and Emilia rebels at the end, because their otherness is enacted, not simply their bodies. She is capable of enacting the roles that patriarchal society has defined for her, and still retaining a sense of self that is not defined by those roles. Othello, however, is not. His blackness is always visible, always readable, and always proof of his otherness. This is perhaps the play's hardest lesson: that hybridity is a choice for some, a prison for others.

Conclusion

Shakespeare’s Othello functions not only as a tragedy of individual vices, such as jealousy, but also as a multitude of identity issues, hybridity, power politics, and cultural alienation. Applying Homi K. Bhabha’s theoretical lenses of hybridity, mimicry, and third space, this play becomes part of the narrative through which the Venetian culture is seen to have tried to impose self-other dichotomies but is constantly subverted by the contradictions embedded in its discourse. A prominent outcome of the analysis is that Othello’s tragic downfall stems from Venetian society's failure to adapt to hybrid identities. Othello represents the classic case of a Moor, a military general who is both an asset and an alien simultaneously. He tries to assimilate into society by speaking the Venetian language, adopting their culture, and even taking up the military’s way of life, yet he is incapacitated by the racial markers placed on him that prevent his existence from being humanly recognized. Iago’s slurs like “old black ram” (1.1.96) and the suggestion that Desdemona’s worth is only proportional to her whiteness reveal the dominance of white supremacist ideology. These depictions not only ridicule Othello but also suggest the existence of

a culture within which mimics are treated as a mark of ambivalence: Othello is forced to mimic the unquestionable standards of society, and yet, because of his difference, he can never belong fully; he always remains "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). In addition, the worship of English cultural traits, such as the glorification of drinking when assessing one's superiority, deepens the whiteness of the global dominance pyramid. Iago's juxtaposing of cultural skills is yet another feature of a society that does not just stereotype but also rigidly maintains racial and cultural stereotypes. This sort of external alienation sets up an automatic system in which even those who are celebrated in the mainstream, Othello, for instance, in reality, suffer from the overwhelming impact of racial discrimination. Othello's tragedy is a consequence of societal unwillingness to accept the existence of a hybrid identity. As Fagehi argues, the third space is not merely a site of cultural hybridity but "a psychological arena itself," marked by "significant psychological burdens" that postcolonial criticism has often overlooked (5). The willful repetition of racism does not allow for any meaningful change or culture re-negotiation. This self-imposed limbo, somewhere between accepting and rejecting the Other, creates a volatile space that ultimately leads to the demise of Othello and all those caught up in his tragic web. Thus, Shakespearean tragedy goes beyond the confines of the Elizabethan era and accurately portrays the realities of multicultural societies, realities many face today. As Molla explains in her study of racial Othering, the act of "portraying the Other as essentially different" and "translating difference into stigma" destroys a person's ability to "appear in public without fear or shame" and undermines their "sense of belonging" (3-4). Venetian society does precisely this to Othello—not through personal malice alone, but through a systemic discourse that "creates, essentializes and targets" him as the racial Other (4). His tragedy is that he cannot escape this frame. Moreover, the paper argues that rigid binaries cross the racial divide to include gender and cultural ownership. The image of women, as in Desdemona's case, demonstrates how women in Venetian society shape the exercise of power within patriarchal structures. In a struggle between her will and her status as an object of male fantasy, Desdemona's position reflects the more significant conflict within the third space, and the same can be said of the other girls' situation in the play. The third space, meant for negotiating and reconstructing identities, is limited and controlled by the prevailing culture, which demands purity and rigid exclusion. As such, the combination of mimicry and hybridity shows how Othello and Desdemona are trapped in a system that controls identity through ascription to a singular, all-encompassing identity and decisive negation of any form of amalgamation or divergence (Gaydo 45–67). In reading *Othello* as an edge case for postcolonialism's central concepts, we need to rethink the concept of hybridity. Bhabha's third space is productive and free. However, *Othello* poses the question: Does hybridity, in certain circumstances, produce new forms of violence rather than new forms of possibility? Othello's tragedy is not one of being in between worlds; it is that the worlds cannot be in between. In fact, Bhabha himself acknowledges in the "Commitment to Theory" chapter that the productive capacities of the third space have "a colonial or postcolonial provenance" — the space is not neutral but always already marked by power (56). Yet what *Othello* reveals is that this very origin can turn the third space from a place of liberation into one of confinement: the productive ambiguity Bhabha describes becomes, for a subject whose hybridity is inscribed physically rather than performed discursively, a mechanism of entrapment. Bhabha's theory aims to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (56), but Othello demonstrates that when the body itself is the legible text of racial difference — when no discursive maneuver is available to escape it — the politics of polarity can never be fully eluded. This is the critical gap between Bhabha's theory and its Shakespearean application: the third space liberates identity from essentialism in language and performance, but Venetian society reads Othello's body as the

final, irrevocable sign that no cultural translation can override. Othello cautions against the easy celebration of hybridity and suggests that the third space is not necessarily one of growth but of destruction.

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Colonial Intelligibility and the Politics of Literacy: Language, Power, and the Making of the "Other" in *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*

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Abstract

The portrayals of Friday and Caliban in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* have both been extensively analysed through the lens of postcolonialism, especially in terms of colonial power, slavery and identity. However, this study shifts the attention to a less explored but equally important dimension, the strategic denial to acknowledge their intellectual agency and literacy as a means of imposing colonial authority. Both texts illustrate how colonial subjugation is established not through physical domination, but through epistemic violence— silencing and misrepresenting the knowledge of the "Other" as unintelligible within the colonial discourses. In *The Tempest,* Prospero seizes authority by appropriating the island, displacing Sycorax and reducing Caliban to a symbol of savagery, despite his faculty for language and resistance. In *Robinson Crusoe,* Crusoe emphasises his dominion over Friday by refusing to engage with his indigenous identity or knowledge, deliberately framing him as innately inferior. This paper aims to expose that such eliminations are nothing but deliberate instruments of imperial politics, where only the coloniser's language, reason and literacy are validated. This study, through a postcolonial interpretation, discloses how the construction of colonial intelligibility operates to dehumanise and intellectually reject the colonised subject in canonical English literature.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; Colonial Intelligibility; Epistemic Violence; Orality; Colonial Discourse.

Introduction

Over the course of human history, imperial powers have imposed their languages, values, and systems of knowledge upon the colonised peoples as a strategy of domination. Such imposition is often justified as a 'civilising mission,' specifically in the domain of literacy and education, which serves not only to control but also to delegitimise the intellectual capacities of the colonised. The West has long constructed its identity as the sole custodian of reason, literacy, and knowledge, portraying the colonised 'Other' as irrational, illiterate, and inferior. As Edward Said argues in his text, *Orientalism,* that "Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12). In other words, colonial representations of the Other are less about the reality of colonised people than about the ideological needs of the colonisers themselves. Studying from this point of view, it becomes clear that early modern and Enlightenment literature often reflects these same power dynamics, even when presented as mere storytelling. Precisely in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) offer valuable insights and engage with important ideological strategies that reflect their respective historical contexts.

William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* narrates the story of Prospero, an exiled Duke of Milan, who takes shelter on a remote island with his daughter. Through the strategic use of knowledge, he takes over control of the island, which was ruled by the witch Sycorax and inhabited by her son, Caliban. Even though Prospero gains his magical knowledge from Sycorax, he frames Caliban, son of Sycorax, as an uncivilised and intellectually deficient native, who is unworthy of education or autonomy. Similarly, in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* Crusoe rescues the native Friday but reduces him to a mere servant, refusing to acknowledge his orality or cultural knowledge. Instead, Crusoe imposes a limited form of communication intended to reinforce his own superiority.

This paper intends to study how *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* use ideological strategies by stripping their non-European figures—Caliban and Friday—of intellectual recognition. Each character, in different ways, demonstrates the consequences of colonial domination, especially through the obligation of European literacy and cultural frameworks. In *The Tempest*, Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, seizes control of the island once ruled by Sycorax, while simultaneously portraying her son Caliban as a savage, incapable of reason or autonomy. Even though Prospero relies on the residual power and knowledge expropriated from Sycorax's, he renders Caliban as inherently unfit for education, reducing his voice and cultural identity under the language of civilisation. A parallel dynamic is at work in *Robinson Crusoe*: Crusoe rescues Friday, but the gesture of salvation quickly turns into an act of silencing. Rather than valuing Friday's oral traditions or cultural knowledge, Crusoe confines him to servitude and introduces a limited vocabulary that keeps him permanently in a subordinate position, reinforcing the hierarchy of European superiority.

By examining these texts through the lens of Orientalism and postcolonial theory, this study argues that the denial of indigenous literacy and intellectual capacity manoeuvres as a fundamental mechanism of colonial subjugation. Both texts reveal how colonial intelligibility—what can and cannot be recognised as "knowledge"—is strategically constructed to maintain imperial authority. This authorises the empire's freedom to act however it wishes, free from worrying about being judged or critiqued by the rest of the world. In doing so, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* contribute to an established literary tradition that reflects, reinforces, and rationalises the epistemic hierarchies of empire.

Orientalism and Beyond

Edward W. Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) critically examines how Western discourse has constructed a biased and distorted image of the Orient through the lens of print media and literature. Said has termed the East as the "Orient" and the West as the "Occident" in his writing. His writing tends to criticise how Western representation of the East in their literature always undermines the intellectual appreciation of the "Other". Said argues that, by relying on biased accounts, travelogues and other scholarly works, Western media is always trying to demonstrate the "Other" as backward, exotic and inferior in comparison to the "We". By doing so, they are taking advantage of dominating the "Orient" in the name of civilisation: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said 01). The oral traditions of many Eastern societies, which were prevalent, were often dismissed due to the focus on the written print culture of the West. Said criticises the Western emphasis on such literacy as a marker of civilisation and progress. Such a one-sided perception exhibits the Orient as inferior, both culturally and intellectually. Said notes, "The nexus of knowledge and power creating 'the oriental'

and in a sense obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance" (27).

Devaluation of the indigenous knowledge or education system suggests how Westerners determine the "Other" as primitive and permissible to rule over. The oral tradition, local languages and cultural practices of the "Other" were either repressed or changed to conform to Western educational frameworks, which expedited the decline of conventional cultures and languages. Said points out the fact that these efforts were not to enlighten them but to control them: "the goal of Orientalizing the Orient again and again is to be avoided, with consequences that cannot help but refine knowledge and reduce the scholar's conceit" (328). Said's work allows us to examine how Western Literature constructs the colonised "Other" as an intellectually inferior and culturally illegible. He challenges that Orientalism is not merely a body of knowledge, but a political tool of domination, supporting the central argument of this paper.

On the contrary, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" (Spivak), which refers to how knowledge of the subalterns is rendered below a certain scientific standard, illuminates that the voices of the East have been systematically silenced by the empire in order to legitimise its own, highlighting the complexities of the colonial identity formation. In this way, colonial discourse not only silenced but also actively distorted the subjectivities of colonised peoples, resulting in what Spivak describes as the impossibility of the subaltern "speaking" on their own terms.

Such theoretical insights hone our understanding of colonial texts like *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe,* reinforcing a hierarchy of understanding that serves to legitimise imperial power. Both works contribute to what Edward Said refers to as the discursive construction of the Orient. By illustrating Caliban and Friday as cultural stereotypes, they highlight the need to challenge and rethink the hierarchy that often prioritises European norms and knowledge. This interpretation invites a deeper exploration of identity and perspective, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of post-colonial narratives and the diverse experiences they encompass. At the same time, denying their agency and autonomy highlights the epistemic violence that Spivak critiques, where indigenous voices are represented through the authority of Prospero and Crusoe. This interpretation underscores how canonical works emphasise cultural domination, making the empire's influence seem natural, inevitable, and even benevolent.

Literature Review

Postcolonial criticism has long investigated the ideological foundations of European literary canons, revealing how texts such as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* underpin colonial hierarchies through language, education, and representation. This critique strongly highlights the colonial construction of the "Other" as linguistically and intellectually inferior, an approach that justifies imperial domination in the guise of civilisation.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has garnered sustained attention from postcolonial scholars as a quintessential narrative of linguistic domination, embodying the strategies by which colonial authority is imposed and normalised. In postcolonial analyses of *The Tempest*, Caliban is frequently studied as representing the colonised "Other." Scholars have extensively examined the play's narrative through the lens of colonial ideologies, focusing particularly on how language and literacy serve as tools for control and dominance. Stephen Greenblatt, in *Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century*, identifies Prospero's imposition of language upon Caliban as an act of epistemic colonisation, where the gift of speech becomes a mechanism of control. His examination of "linguistic colonialism" connects the two texts by

depicting language as a medium of coercive education. In Learning to Curse, Greenblatt characterises Caliban's compelled literacy as "a dramatization of the European will to dominate through discourse" (21). He applies this notion to Friday, contending that Crusoe's teaching of restricted English serves as "an epistemological quarantine," allowing only statements that affirm Crusoe's superiority (27).

Building upon Greenblatt, Ania Loomba, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism,* extends the discussion by linking literacy to the colonial ideology of civility, suggesting that the denial of the colonised subject's linguistic autonomy maintains a racial and cultural hierarchy. She claims that Caliban and Friday are literary progeny of a singular colonial lineage. Loomba notes that both characters are deprived of subjectivity due to the imposition of European rationality and belief. For her, "Prospero and Crusoe are not merely individuals but embodiments of an entire epistemological order that equates civilization with domination" (118). She also points out that education and religion, which are supposed to be used to make people more moral, are rather utilised as ways to make sure people follow the rules. Loomba's reading shows how the language of kindness hides systemic erasure by putting both texts in what she terms the "moral economy of empire. Such readings interpret Caliban's resistance — encapsulated in his declaration, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (I.ii.364–65) — as a linguistic rebellion that exposes the limits of colonial intelligibility. The colonial ideology that equates literacy and intellect with the coloniser is emphasised by this distinction, which portrays the colonised as inherently inferior either because of their illiteracy or their resistance to the coloniser's language.

Yet, as McDonald (2005) argues, the denial of the intelligibility of the others is indicative of the difficulties associated with articulation. Within such a volatile political environment, employing a sardonic and elliptical perspective in characterisation and representation can serve as a subversive strategy of understatement. Recent studies, such as Chisty's (2023), reconsider Caliban's colonial education and the traumatic experience of being colonised, worked as a catalyst to uphold the intelligibility of Caliban and proved him to be intellectual enough to counter Prospero's authority. Inspiring rebellion against socio-semiotic violence and linguistic manipulation, the character Caliban ultimately asserts that the sole method of escaping colonialism is using colonial education (77). These interpretations shift from portraying Caliban as a victim to acknowledging him as a subject negotiating linguistic agency within coercive structures.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) provides a critical foundation for understanding the psychological and epistemological violence embedded in colonial education. For Fanon, colonial education forcibly removes colonised people from their native learning systems and pulls them toward those of the colonisers. Colonial education plays a critical role here as it dictates the others and deprives them of their own insight and intellectual growth. Similarly, found in Orgel, Caliban's colonial education had a detrimental effect on him, and contrary to Prospero's expectations, it backfired in numerous ways. Prospero's endeavours to educate and civilise him have only succeeded in corrupting him (23). Paul Brown (1985) furthers this political perspective, arguing that *The Tempest* "reproduces and mystifies colonial authority" through its dramaturgical form, which presents insurrection as chaos and capitulation as natural order (59). Brown's Marxist perspective elucidates how the play's conclusion—where Caliban is seemingly pardoned yet remains unfree—symbolically constrains subaltern agency. This interpretation diverges from other humanist analyses that perceived Prospero's rejection of magic as a form of moral enlightenment; Brown elucidates it instead as an act of narrative closure that silences the colonial subject.

This dynamic locates a compelling echo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where linguistic tutelage becomes a means of domination. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism,* vividly identifies *Robinson Crusoe* as "a work whose protagonist is the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England" (70). It is a well-known fact that British success is measured by its trading reputation, and for that, the English people took the opportunity to expand their rule to those remote places where their so-called "civilisation" had not yet reached. And it helped them in promoting their colonial education to take over the culture of the "Other" and subjugate them. Gliserman (1990) and McInelly (2003) both note that Defoe's narrative transforms colonial expansion into a personal adventure narrative, normalising the exploitation of the "Other" as a form of self-fulfilment. According to Martin Gliserman, "*Robinson Crusoe* sets up a new male hero, one that develops at the edge of the industrial period of capitalism and colonial expansion" (Gliserman 198). Gliserman further criticises Defoe for introducing such an arrogant character who celebrates his injustice to Friday as success and takes the audacity to justify such autonomous efforts. And as Brett C. McInelly shares, "In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe transforms colonialism through the power of fictional representation into the adventures of a single man who masters an island, his native companion, and himself. His formal realism works to enfold the myths of psychological and economic self-sufficiency in a texture of convincing detail" (03). This fictional adventure reminds us of the colonial expedition of the British Empire to expand its sphere of influence and establish its authoritative dominance over the harmonious non-Europeans. Robinson Crusoe, the fictitious British hero, individually represents the remarkable features of colonial liberty.

Critical studies, including Afri Meldam (2009) and Ghaforian and Gholi (2015), exhibit how both of the texts contribute to the constructions of the "Other" through the orientalist discourse, sustaining a binary opposition of civilisation and savagery. Afri Meldam, in his discourse, "Primitiveness of the Caribbean as an Orientalism Discourse: A Post-Colonial Study on Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*," characterises Crusoe as follows,

> Crusoe wants to tell the reader that the people who lived in the Caribbean island were cannibals, very primitive and uncivilized people. Crusoe, the major character who is also an Englishman, feels to have responsibility to civilize the people there. As the time passes, he succeeded in civilizing some of the cannibals. He taught them English and Christian beliefs. (05)

It is apparent that colonisers also used a similar strategy. They approached the East with the same mindset, and their acts were rationalised with their illustrated extreme disbelief in the world. Such post-truth arrogance permitted them to conduct their inhuman business and defend it. Ghaforian and Gholi (2015) further argue that expansionism, exploration, and settlement are inextricably linked with European knowledge of the East. The "Other" is constructed and represented through the binary opposition, positioning the Orient in contrast to the Occident. In this epistemic framework, the Orient is often perceived as the Occident's cultural counterpart by European values, assumptions, and cultural codes. This is how the Occident perceives the Orient through the lens of its own culturally determined segment, which restricts its historical knowledge and education.

Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks (1967) provides a compelling comparative framework, especially in examining linguistic adjustment as an indicator of colonial oppression. Fanon asserts that "to speak is to assume a culture" (17), clarifying both Caliban's coerced acquisition of Prospero's language and Friday's tutelage under Crusoe. In every instance, language dependency parallels psychological dependency, diminishing the colonised to a mere reflection of

the coloniser's authority. Fanon's approach elucidates the common psychological violence that underpins the silence of both characters—a violence executed not through the whip but through language. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) also offers a postcolonial perspective by promoting linguistic decolonisation. He sees people like Caliban and Friday as "victims of linguistic expropriation," whose languages are taken over long before their lands (12). According to Ngũgĩ (14), Caliban's cursing and Friday's silence are both acts of defiance—forms of "linguistic resistance that signal the refusal to be fully absorbed into the master's speech." His theory reframes these figures not only as victims but as early prototypes of postcolonial resistance, recovering the subversive force inherent in language itself.

Critics such as John Thieme (2001) and Ashcroft et al. (2002) have built upon this comparative tradition by arguing that Caliban and Friday remain important figures in postcolonial literature, serving as symbols of cultural hybridity and resistance. Thieme asserts that "Caliban's rage and Friday's silence converge in a shared refusal of European intelligibility" (29), whereas Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) indicate that both have been reinterpreted by Caribbean, African, and South Asian authors as instruments of linguistic reclamation rather than oppression.

Crusoe's paternalistic tutelage toward Friday and Prospero's domination over Caliban indicate the broader colonial assumption that the European subject alone holds the right to define humanity, knowledge, and morality. Though extensive study has examined Caliban and Friday, comparative inquiries into their linguistic subjugation and resistance within a shared framework of colonial intelligibility remain underexplored. Most of the existing criticism deals with *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* in isolation, overlooking how both texts expose the Enlightenment's epistemological drive to transforming the colonised into governable subjects.

This study intervenes in this critical gap by re-examining *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* together through the intersecting lenses of postcolonial linguistics and epistemic domination. It explores how both texts dramatise the colonial tendency to legitimise injustice by disguising domination as a civilising mission, thereby producing the "Other" as both an object of pedagogy and a threat to intelligibility.

Silencing Caliban: Literacy and Power in The Tempest

William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* constructs an intricate dynamic of colonial supremacy through the relationship of Prospero and Caliban, foregrounding a discursive struggle over language, identity and epistemic recognition. The systematic cancellation of Caliban's voice and the invalidation of his orality and cultural heritage reveal the larger prospect of colonial domination. Prospero's treatment of Caliban directly aligns with Edward Said's "Orientalistic" logic, where Prospero, as a representation of the West, deliberately neglects Caliban's indigenous existence and frames him as an uncivilised "Other", in need of reintegration or domestication.

From the onset of this play, instead of portraying Caliban as a native inhabitant of this island, he is portrayed as someone who is robbed of his rightful sovereignty by Prospero, an exiled Duke of Milan, who arrives seeking shelter and imposes his rule. Although Caliban recurrently tries to protest and claim his rightful possession over the island, proclaiming, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou takest from me" (Shakespeare 1.2.331-32), Prospero strategically dismisses his assertions, positioning him as an incoherent savage. Such acts of linguistic suppression and false implications align with Spivak's discussion of how colonised subjects are denied recognition of their knowledge systems.

Prospero's hatred for Caliban is not only visible through his political authority but through his cultural and linguistic hegemony as well. Prospero's statement regarding Caliban, "a born devil,

on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (Shakespeare 4.1.188-89), justifies the colonial belief that he comprises in himself towards Caliban. This reinforces the inherent inferiority and supposed incivility that Prospero seeks to affirm in Caliban through his assumed supremacy of Western knowledge. Such heinous acts empower him to usurp the land and impose the values and language of the coloniser. Instead of acting as a means of communication, language is used as an instrument of control and domination here.

Said's colonial logic becomes much clearer and explicit in the statement, where Prospero, in his attempt to teach Caliban the language of his own claims, "I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour / One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish" (1.2.354-58). Here, Prospero places himself as a civilising force, assuming the paternalistic duty of spreading his education to figures like Caliban, as though it were a divine mandate, only to deny Caliban's pre-existing linguistic agency. Such acts are not acts of benevolence, but rather strategic manoeuvres aimed at consolidating dominance through cultural assimilation. The coloniser's instruction thereby becomes a tool for eroding the indigenous epistemologies.

Although Prospero maintains a domineering posture, Caliban consistently responds and resists his imposed authority. Caliban's defiant remark, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (Shakespeare 1.2.363-64), signifies a moment of linguistic subversion. With this, he defies the imposed authority and turns the tool of colonial instruction against the coloniser. The act of defiant speech challenges the ideological foundations of colonial authority and reflects Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "mimicry", where the colonised subject reappropriates the coloniser's discourse in a manner that subverts its intended influence.

Despite Caliban's continuous resistance, Prospero remains indifferent to his suffering, embodying the colonial leaning to dehumanise and silence native voices. As Ryan notes, this indifference reflects the clear colonial mindset of Prospero, where he refuses to acknowledge the indigenous side of Caliban (43). Hulme observes that Prospero's dominance over Caliban is not limited to the mere intention of territorial conquest; it involves epistemological control as well (93). Prospero's treatment of Caliban, as dramatised in The Tempest, marked by epistemic violence, narrates how imperial power focuses on silencing the indigenous identity as part of its civilising mission.

Denying Friday's Voice: Colonial Intelligibility in Robinson Crusoe

Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* constructs a subtle yet pervasive narrative of colonial subjugation through the protagonist Crusoe, who is being exhibited, both as a Christian civiliser and a benevolent master. While Crusoe persistently presents himself as a humble Westerner, his treatment of Friday, however, describes a different story. Crusoe's so-called "rescue" of the native Friday and educating him under his supervision reveal a greater structure of ideological and linguistic domination. By asserting an assumed right to cultural and epistemological superiority—rooted in race, religion and language—Crusoe claims authority over Friday, representing him as the racialised "Other." Although Crusoe attempts to portray himself as the quintessential Englishman throughout his journey, *Robinson Crusoe* subtly reveals his failure to embody this identity completely. The opening lines of the novel already hint at Crusoe's ambiguous identity and his underlying desire for self-representation,

> I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a Foreigner of Bremen who settled first at Hull… he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good Family in that country, and from whom I was called

> Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay, we call ourselves and write our name Crusoe, and so my companions always called me. (Defoe 13)

The struggle over naming reflects a deeper colonial impulse of this novel—the urge to rename or redefine indicates the means of altering identity. Here, Crusoe's own reflections on identity formation reveal his urge to redefine others based on their native origins. Thereby, it justifies his colonial authoritative mindset to establish his dominance over them.

The naming process, devoid of consent, functions as an affirmation of imperial imposition. The process of naming or speaking on behalf of the colonised is a form of epistemic violence, wherein the colonised subject is denied and silenced from his or her self-representation. Crusoe's remark, "I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life. I also taught him to say Master, and then let him know that was to be my name; I likewise taught him to say Yes and No, and to know the meaning of them (Defoe 277)," reflects his colonial dynamic through his selection of linguistic instruction. The reflection illustrates how Crusoe suppresses Friday's linguistic capacity in order to maintain his authority over him.

Not only does Crusoe name Friday, but he also begins stating his dominance by introducing himself as Friday's "Master." Friday's limited access to knowledge implies Crusoe's underlying fear of being challenged or overthrown by Friday in the future. The minimal knowledge is sufficient in order to sustain Crusoe's ascendancy. The act of naming a native man and prescribing him the language of a different culture effectively denies his individuality and his fundamental existence. Many scholars argue that Crusoe's considering of Friday as a son-like figure to him permits him to justify his authoritative behaviour. However, examining the dynamics of language teaching and learning between them, this parental framing falls short. As Pearlman in his essay notes that "Crusoe thinks of himself as a kind of all-powerful father… for Friday is dealt with not as a child, but as an infant. Crusoe strips him of all personality; he is a zero, a cipher, and the characteristics attributed to him merely projections of Crusoe's own needs" (43). Crusoe interprets his act of rescuing Friday as a justification, granting him absolute authority to control and subordinate Friday. Though Crusoe occasionally defines the relationship as parental, his remarks on Friday's affections are, "like those of a child to a father" (Defoe 280). This analogy is deeply flawed. As Pearlman has explained in his essay, the "all-powerful father", Crusoe, never appreciated Friday as he would have dealt with his own kind but denied Friday's orality and cultural existence by treating him as an infant. The metaphor of fatherhood allows Crusoe to strategically obscure the fundamentally exploitative nature of his relationship with Friday. Even though Friday never shows any signs of resistance towards Crusoe, Crusoe remains unwilling to grant him any opportunity to do so. The fear is evident in the way Crusoe educates him, restricting his instruction to only such an extent as to maintain the necessary communication between them. Mostly to understand Crusoe's commands and requirements. The first word Friday learns after being renamed is "Master" and not "Father", portraying Crusoe's colonial mindset and his attempt to rationalise his domination. Throughout the novel, Friday's limited access to and use of the English language signify his position of subjugation. He is taught only to the extent of understanding Crusoe's commands, but not enough to get engaged in meaningful conversations. His obedience exemplifies the language-based power hierarchy rooted in their relationship. As observed in Crusoe's description, "my man Friday accompanying me very honestly in all these ramblings, and proving a most faithful servant upon all occasions" (370).

This hierarchy extends to religious instruction. Crusoe's Orientalist attitude is evident in his imposition of Christianity on Friday, convincing him to adopt the religion without any effort to

understand his cultural background. Crusoe describes his effort: "I began to instruct him in the knowledge of the true God… He listened with great attention, and received with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us, and of the manner of making our prayers to God" (290). Here, the idea aligns with Edward Said's observation in *Orientalism* that "To colonize meant at first the identification-indeed, the creation-of interests; these could be commercial, communicational, religious, military, cultural" (100). Crusoe's attempt to convert Friday to Christianity represents an extension of his colonial behaviour. While Crusoe claims to be civilising Friday through Western thoughts and education, the act serves more to secure his dominance. Friday's eventual acceptance of Crusoe's religious belief reinforces Crusoe's authority under the guise of spiritual salvation.

The language barrier between Crusoe and Friday, ensuring Friday's dependence on Crusoe in terms of communication with the wider world, underpins Crusoe's sense of superiority. Similar to many historical tyrants such as Joseph Stalin and Joseph Goebbels, Defoe's hero, Robinson Crusoe, supports the ideology that those who control language wield power over others. Like Orwell's *1984,* Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* also suggests that the voice and agency of an individual are innately linked to his or her linguistic freedom. By keeping Friday as his subordinate, Crusoe consolidates his authority through language and religion as tools of control. Such has been possible due to Friday's limited grasp of English, since it is not his native language to begin with, allowing Crusoe to establish his mastery. While Friday's inner thoughts remain inaccessible due to his fictional status, it is possible to interpret how Defoe constructs his character. Friday's representation is completely filtered through Crusoe's perspective, as he remarks: "He was the aptest Scholar that ever was; and particularly was so merry, so constantly diligent, and so pleased when he could but understand me, or make me understand him, that it was very pleasant to me to talk to him" (Defoe 282). This description presents Friday as an obedient and keen subject, ideally suited to Crusoe's performance of mastery.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, there is no indication that Friday attempts to introduce any of his indigenous cultural principles, let alone his orality. The absence of Friday's voice implies that Defoe is hardly concerned about legitimising Friday's identity or the voice of the "Other." Defoe's sole intention is to promote the colonial authority through the illusion of Crusoe's benevolence and superiority. It is typical of Western scholars, who often write or speak on behalf of the "Other", overlook their lived realities, treating them more as symbols than as individuals with voices of their own. They often play the roles of passive subjects in their narratives. The linguistic and communication gap between Crusoe and Friday enables Crusoe to exploit histories unfamiliar to Friday, presenting them in altered and self-serving form. Due to Friday's limited understanding of English, he remains dependent on Crusoe for interpreting the world. Crusoe's declaration, "and thus, by degrees, I opened his eyes" (Defoe 290), exemplifies the Orientalist impulse to dominate the "Other" under the mask of enlightenment. Crusoe's manipulation on Friday in the name of civilisation through the process of naming, linguistic instruction, religious conversion and cultural subjugation turns out to be a systemic denial of Friday's subjectivity.

Expectation vs Reality

Revisiting *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* through the lens of colonial discourse reveals an alternative critical perspective for analysing the way early modern and Enlightenment literature promotes imperialist ideologies. The fictional islands presented in both texts, along with their self-fashioned European heroes—Prospero and Crusoe—mirror the logic of colonial expansion, in the guise of progress and civilisation. Both characters, taking refuge in unfamiliar territories, feel entitled to establish their authority, promoting their dominance as a noble

endeavour undertaken in the name of enlightenment. This self-authorised domination is presented not as a subjugation, but as the burden of civilisational duty. However, the outcomes for the indigenous figures like Caliban and Friday are silencing and subjugation, and not empowerment. Both Prospero and Crusoe narrate their control as acts of benevolence and necessity. In both narratives, power is disguised as benevolence: Prospero justifies linguistic control, and Crusoe narrates mastery as necessity. The supposed path toward civilisation never truly arrives for the colonised.

Daniel Defoe's writings outside of *Robinson Crusoe,* particularly in *The Complete English Tradesman,* openly celebrate British colonial expansion through trade and settlement, legitimising it as a patriotic gesture in support of national growth. He writes,

> It is owing to trade, that new discoveries have been made in lands unknown, and new settlements and plantations made, new colonies planted, and new governments formed… and those plantings and settlements have again enlarged and increased the trade, and thereby the wealth and power of the nation by whom they were discovered and planted… and, excepting the negroes, which we transport from Africa to America, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our colonies, as well in the islands… the natives having either removed further up into the country, or, by their own folly and treachery raising war against us, been destroyed and cut off. (Defoe 249-250)

Such statements show the predominant mercantile mindset of the Occident, where colonial expansion was portrayed as a purely economic enterprise, relying on the moral justification based on the alleged failure of indigenous populations. In this light, neither Prospero nor Crusoe can be regarded as genuine agents of enlightenment. Their imposition of language, religion, and other structures on Caliban and Friday serves solely as tools of subjugation and not a gesture of liberation. The invocation of terms like 'civilisation,' 'enlightenment,' and 'development' serves within a broader colonial discourse that hides such manipulations beneath the mask of generosity.

The islands themselves operate almost as laboratories of imperial modernity. For Prospero, the control of knowledge and magic mirrors the disciplinary structures of early modern Europe; for Crusoe, the careful ordering of labour and language reproduces the mercantile logic of colonial capitalism. The colonies are spaces where power is reorganised and normalised through language, education, and religion. The Enlightenment promise of universal improvement, loudly proclaimed in Europe, proves to be selectively applied, leaving colonised peoples outside the category of the fully human.

Ultimately, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* do not offer examples of cultural exchange, but rather the study of the strategic denial of native agency. When re-examined in the light of postcolonial theory, the veneer of progress gives way to a troubling reality: empire thrived as much on stories, symbols, and literary imagination as on material conquest. Literature, then, is never innocent. It can legitimise empire, but it can also, when revisited critically, expose the fault lines of colonial ideology and point toward spaces of resistance, hybridity, and reimagined identities.

Conclusion

In light of the Orientalist theory, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* embody the way Western colonial discourses employ cultural and intellectual domination to dehumanise, silence, and regulate the "Other." Both texts establish the structure of colonial power through linguistic suppression, the imposition of Western norms, and the expurgation of indigenous identity.

Prospero's coercive control over Caliban's orality and originality epitomises the epistemic violence Edward Said identifies in *Orientalism*, where knowledge functions as a device of empire. Correspondingly, Crusoe's treatment of Friday as a silent subject who must adopt the master's language, religion, and servitude highlights the systematic denial of native agency and intellectual recognition.

These works are not isolated narratives but rather part of a larger literary tradition that standardised imperial ideologies and justified colonial authority. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasise that language, hybridity, and cultural negotiation are essential to both the edifice of colonial subjectivities and the possibilities of resistance. In this context, Caliban and Friday transcend their roles as subjugated subjects, serving as symbolic loci for exploring cultural displacement, identity, and the politics of representation.

In the end, both texts interpret how literature has historically served as a vehicle for imperial power while simultaneously providing critical spaces for reimagining and resisting domination. Recognising the persistence of these dynamics highlights the ongoing importance of engaging with canonical works. They keep reminding us that the struggle over language, representation, and identity is central to understanding the legacies of colonialism in both literature and contemporary cultural discourse.

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Gothic Fiction and the Racist Binary: Reevaluating the Feminist Aspects of *Jane Eyre* from a Postcolonial Lens

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the manifestation of gothic elements in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), examines the connection between the gothic and the novel's feminism, and analyzes the author's use of women of "color" to induce horror/terror and symbolize violence. Considering the details of the dark-skinned Bertha Mason and others contributing to the gothic theme of the novel, this research questions Brontë's stance on racism. To what extent is the gothic differentiated from the black-white binary in *Jane Eyre*? How essential is having a distinct idea and consciousness about the knowledge of other types of binaries when an author attempts to write a feminist text? A qualitative content analysis method follows Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and the Black feminist theory to review the justification of such a binary in advocating women's empowerment. The findings indicate that the racism in *Jane Eyre* is merely another kind of sexism. To sum up, the novel is an example of feminine resistance, only to women who share the whiteness of the protagonist, Jane, and it is not an ideal feminist text because of its discriminating and dehumanizing way of looking at people of color.

Keywords: Binary, Feminism, Gothic, Racism, Resistance

Introduction

Gothic literature, first introduced in the Western literary culture at the hands of Horace Walpole through his medieval novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is a genre primarily known for its popularity among female readership due to the delicate blend of romance and horror/terror contained in the stories. After Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, the gothic theme got a whole new dimension in certain Victorian novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and more. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë associated this theme of the gothic with feminism. The text functioned as a voice, an agency for women of her age, and a spokesperson for gender equality. Through the portrayal of the protagonist Jane Eyre, the main character, and her strong and independent personality, which was unique at that time, the author suggested to her readers (who were mostly females) a way of protest, resistance, and rebellion against the male subjugation and domination over women. Brontë turned the journey of Jane's search for identity into a traditional Victorian gothic romance by adding dark and mysterious details to the environment of the abusive and dehumanizing household of Jane's aunt and the haunted and decaying Thornfield Hall owned by Mr. Rochester, by presenting 'disturbing' characters like Mrs. Reed and Bertha Mason, by suggesting forbidden knowledge, untold truths, and dark secrets. However, to infuse horror and terror in her novel, she used a variety of literary and sociocultural elements that are associated with the concept of light

and dark, which, in another way, can be identified as a racist binary because the fear of darkness among the Victorian European readers was not merely limited to a dark environment or dark humor. Instead, this unwelcoming feeling was also prominent in them toward dark skin. Bertha Mason, the key 'element' of gothic in the novel, was the Jamaican Creole wife of Edward Fairfax Rochester, not pure English, nor even of another European race. So why would an author need to depict something dark and shady (reminding us of the color black, as opposed to white) to express negativity? This paper argues that from the perspective of postcolonial studies, such dichotomy between colors makes *Jane Eyre* an exclusive narrative meant for white European (or of European ancestry) readers only and that the purpose of reading the novel as a feminist text is not fully accomplished for others, instead they feel inferior because the dark-skinned readers are triggered by the racial discrimination imposed in the book through different remarks and character details.

Jane Eyre has been "translated into at least 57 languages, at least 593 times," and it is taught at many schools and higher education levels, not only as a classic that provides details of Victorian society from a historical point of view but also as a revolutionary feminist text, for its focus on women's empowerment (Reynolds). Bell Hooks, the American author, theorist, and critic, says, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression," and another American feminist writer and activist, Kate Millett, defines sexism as "a system of oppression that privileges men at the expense of women" (Hooks 26) (Kate Millett 20). So, both feminism and sexism speak against male domination and oppression against women in association with the concept of the binary of inferiority and superiority. Racism is a belief based on such assumptions as well. Nevertheless, binary is visibly created among different races, instead of genders, in this novel. According to the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict, racism is "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority" (Benedict 98). Now, suppose an author speaks for awareness and equality of one kind. In that case, he/she should be aware of every other type of discrimination, inequality, and injustice practiced on people or any living being to show respect and sincerity to the victims. However, in *Jane Eyre*, not only was Brontë indifferent to the racial discrimination of the white against the non-white, but she also used some racist notions through her gothic elements to strengthen her voice for gender equality, whether consciously or unconsciously. From the postcolonial reader's point of view, we question the success of *Jane Eyre* as a feminist text.

Literature Review

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is well recognized as a novel with female agency and gothic elements. This review examines a place where gothic, feminist, and postcolonial scholarship meet in the unexplored connection between gothic conventions, such as the light-dark binary, and the text's racial constructs.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar influenced the early talk with "The Madwoman in the Attic" (1979) in which they read Bertha Mason as Jane's "dark double", an embodiment of stifled rage. Their review of the "rebellious feminism" of the novel continues to be very influential (Plasa 353). On the other hand, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1985 essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", argued that this reading ignored "the novel's complicity with the imperial history encrypted in its margins" and that it repeated the text's "conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth" (Plasa 353). Recent scholarship sees the text in a mixed way; it shows "a genuine protest against patriarchal society," but it is also "perceived as a pre-feminist work" (Vyrupaeva 52).

The gothic elements of the novel, such as "terror, horror, and the uncanny," are usually interpreted in the context of the Romantic Victorian traditions (Tine 245). The 'uncanny' is an important tool in analysing race (Akman 41-46). Brontë's light-dark binary replicates imperialist ideologies of racial others as dangerous (Griesinger 29). Scholarship is aware of the "interplay of dark and light binary" and the ways in which Bertha's madness is a result of a "cultural narrative of representation" (Sinha 111), relating colonial motifs to intersectional gender and race relations (Mandal et al. 192-201).

Creative adaptations are more explicit in their approach to these dynamics than the academic ones. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) discusses "connections between race and gender" (Pollanen 9), and Lauren Blackwood's *Within These Wicked Walls* (2021) offers "an explicitly Black and anti-racist rewriting of the Victorian novel" (Dobbins 198). Yet, there is still a gap when it comes to the intersection of gothic conventions and race in terms of the original text in terms of non-European readers' responses towards the text's feminist politics (Gao 45). Bertha is still at the heart of these readings, where the "gendering of madness" reveals the objectification of Bertha by gothic elements (Sinha 111-112). The gothic structure reveals the legacies of violent colonialism (Rudd 71), which presents a challenge to its feminist label when gothic elements racialize the 'Other'. Reimagining *Jane Eyre* through racist binaries fills this important gap in the scholarship.

Research Objectives and Questions

This research has two objectives–

1. To review Brontë's use of the gothic in light of the binary opposition of black and white.
2. To evaluate the importance of awareness of binary and discrimination in different forms for an author as an advocate for feminism.

Following the objective of the research, our study seeks answers to two questions, which are–

1. To what extent is the gothic differentiated from the black-white binary in *Jane Eyre*?
2. How essential is having a distinct idea and consciousness about the knowledge of other types of binaries when an author attempts to write a feminist text?

Theoretical Framework

Frantz Fanon, by birth a French Afro-Caribbean, wrote about his observations on his Black patients, the effects on their psychology of racism and colonialism, in his professional life as a psychiatrist in the book *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952). There, he discussed the impact of racism on the psychology of a person of color, their desire for whiteness (white partner), the "othering" process where the white European men are "Self" and anyone else, including non-white European men, men of color, any women, animals are "Other", etc. We applied these concepts in this paper to explain how racism works intentionally or unintentionally in a writer and how a reader of an inferior race decodes and feels about the messages he/she may receive from literature.

In his foundational text in postcolonial studies, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said became a critic of Western writers' portrayal of the East. Although *Jane Eyre* does not have many Eastern characters, North American Jamaica, a British colony in that period, and home to Bertha Mason, was a land of "color". So, following Fanon's definition of the superior Self and the inferior Other, Said's Orientalist theory is applicable in analyzing the representation of darkness in the novel.

Black feminist theory, which, according to Sherie Randolph, in her book *Florynce "Flo" Kennedy: The Life of a Black Feminist Radical*, challenges assumptions and norms at the intersection of sexism and racism, will be a crucial cornerstone in building a framework for the biased feminism in *Jane Eyre*.

A key methodological tool derived from Edward Said's work is the concept of contrapuntal reading. Said argues that texts from the imperial era should be read not just for their primary narrative but also with an awareness of the suppressed or silenced histories of colonialism that are intertwined with them. This method involves analyzing the "dominant melody" of the metropolitan story alongside the "counterpoint" of the colonial experience it depends upon but often obscures. In a novel like *Jane Eyre*, a contrapuntal reading shows how the celebrated narrative of the English heroine's self-realization is inextricably linked to the colonial exploitation and dehumanization represented by Bertha Mason. It exposes how the freedom and prosperity of the imperial "Self" are built upon the subjugation of the colonial "Other," revealing them as two parts of a single, interconnected history.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis to explore the feminist and postcolonial dimensions in *Jane Eyre*. The analysis focuses on key quotes from the novel, comparing them with similar gothic and contemporary literary works. It also reviews academic articles and papers on *Jane Eyre* to identify postcolonial critiques and feminist interpretations. By rereading the text and examining the intersection of race and gender within the narrative, this research reevaluates how the novel engages with these issues. The methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of the text from a feminist and postcolonial perspective.

Findings and Analysis

The Interplay between Light and Darkness

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's image as a protagonist is the antithesis of gothic. This bildungsroman novel shows Jane's growth at different stages. It starts with her life at Gateshead Hall, her uncle's house, where she was brought after her parents' death. There, her aunt, Mrs. Reed, frequently punished her by keeping her locked in the "Red Room", after Mr. Reed's death (Brontë 76). It was a small room with no window, dark red wallpaper, and even darker curtains. In Jane's description, the Red Room "looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality" (Brontë 16). Such fashion aimed to induce fear in the person locked up inside. Now, where does the fear of darkness come from? Historically, it is connected to our ancestry, when human beings still had not learned the use of fire and were almost entirely helpless in front of the danger of predators in the utter darkness of night. However, this darkness has become symbolic now. We fear the dark and give it a negative connotation. On the other hand, we celebrate light. Dark is evil, light is angelic. Dark symbolizes the medieval period because this period lacked advancement. Light is the classical era, the Renaissance, because of the renewal of progress. The problem is, when we are introduced to one darkness as terrible and unacceptable, we cannot overlook this mentality in other cases. Intentionally or not, we usually see dark skin as awful and inferior. Even in non-white communities, people try to name the colors in their skin as "yellow", "tan", "golden", "brown", etc., but not black. However, in the eyes of a Victorian white European, every shade would be the same: dark and 'not white'. People of color are not beyond racism themselves. So, when an author uses darkness (the gothic) to induce horror and terror, it automatically gains a racist dimension.

The Lowood Institution, where Jane was sent away, had a reference to the scripture, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works" (Brontë 53). This message not only highlights the angelic light, but the statement itself is almost ironic because the boarding school, in reality, gives instead a very dark and disturbed image, unlike its inspirational verse. So, the light-dark contrast is two-fold here. Wherever Jane went, it would be murky, disturbing, and distorting. The environments were always suspenseful and mysterious, often suggesting something supernatural. She stood out in those places because she had that spirit, confidence, and charming personality, all coming straight from the positivity of her heart and her "Englishness".

Jane met Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's first wife and the key figure of the novel, at Thornfield Hall. The manor's name alone can make someone feel uneasy, as if the place is ominous. Who names his precious home after such a gloomy image? However, metaphorically, that place was like a field of thorns to Jane because she met her one true love there, and she also felt betrayed, disgraced, and humiliated at the same place by that true love. Everything about the manor was 'not fascinating' (if not gothic)– its appearance, history, and the people dwelling in it. It appeared like the whole architecture was wrapped in a sheet of darkness. Jane described the features of the house as "the silent hall", "the darksome staircase", etc. (Brontë 123). The most gothic of them all was the attic where Bertha was locked up.

> "the long passageway to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third story: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle." (Brontë 113)

Besides comparing the place with Bluebeard's castle (a character from French folklore notoriously known for his habit of marrying, confining, and murdering his wives, the allusion foretelling the presence of Bertha Mason in the attic), another gothic element, the author used three words from Jane's point of view to describe Bertha's living space in the manor, "narrow, low, and dim" (Brontë 109). As much as they can be the most random words to describe a dark and gloomy place, these words are also perfect for generalizing a non-European man or a whole society– a lowly lifestyle, a narrowed culture/mentality, and a dim wit. This is how light and darkness contrast against each other, light being the 'best culture' (Arnold 17) and darkness the symbol of the savage, respectively. Besides, we must remember that 'gothic' was first used to address a barbaric German group who ruined the classic Roman culture (Heather 623). So, the word already has a negative connotation.

Self, and the Otherization Process

We can replace the binary opposition of light and dark with Fanon's concept of 'self' and 'other'. Let us reread Jane's point of view about the appearance of Bertha when Mr. Briggs had just exposed that Mr. Rochester's first wife, Bertha, was still alive and not divorced from her husband yet, and as a consequence, Mr. Rochester had to show the wedding guests (of Jane and Mr. Rochester) the actual condition of his mad wife.

> "In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face." (Brontë 305)

Here, not only is the description of the woman "unwomanly", but she is also animalized, following the concept of self (European men) and other (in this case, non-human creatures) (17-18). It also

suggests that Bertha Mason had been possessed by a demon ("dark" entity) for which she was acting like a savage, mad animal.

Bertha Mason's race (the binary "other") and her mental illness are not a coincidence either. About Thomas Day's "Five Years in the West Indies", Keunjung Cho says, "Day's pseudo-scientific analysis of 'Negro inferiority,' like statements by the later Social Darwinists, attributes this supposed inferiority to both genetic and environmental conditions" (Cho). Mr. Rochester said, "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through the generations!" (Brontë 304). Gilbert and Gubar already doubt whether Bertha was confined because she was mad or lost her sanity due to prolonged confinement. Also, in Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which is a prequel to the story of Bertha, we can find the tale of Antoinette Cosway (the author of this novel changed Bertha's name). This novel retells Bertha Mason's life, but it explains how she descended into madness (due to neglect, alienation, etc.) instead of suggesting she inherited it from her black ancestors. In short, Bertha's Creole heritage, a gene that contains mental illness (as believed by the Victorian English society), as well as her other family members' medical history, urged Mr. Rochester to think that his wife had the same properties. Later, he confined her to the attic, maybe after receiving the faintest, unusual reaction from her, because he was already somewhat convinced Bertha would turn mad someday.

Confronting the Partial Representation of Feminism

Brontë depicts Jane as a feminist thinker who believed in women's social and economic independence. Her stance is repeatedly revealed in her words dedicated to Mr. Rochester. For example, she told him, "I can live alone, if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss." (Brontë 210). This speech demonstrates her determination to prioritize her dignity over the happiness she would have to sacrifice her freedom for. According to Virginia Woolf, a woman must possess her own money and room if she wants to write fiction (Woolf 4). Here, writing fiction is symbolic of the liberty of autonomy and creativity. As a voice for the dignity of women, Jane would not compromise her liberty to live a luxurious life and be a submissive mistress. This is why she prioritized what she had and could have had on her own over the privilege Mr. Rochester would offer. Her attitude is the epitome of Victorian feminism, a movement which promoted "women's emancipation" and influenced educational reform in England (Schwartz 669). As Jane also claimed her sovereignty saying, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." (Brontë 264) and "I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress." (Brontë 453) to Mr. Rochester, if there were only the two of them in the picture, her words would be admirably bold and inspiring in securing women's rights and dignity. However, these expressed thoughts hint that she could be comparing herself to Bertha Mason, desperately trying to prove to herself that she was not Bertha's substitute in Mr. Rochester's life, in Thornfield Hall, that she was better than being confined in a cage. This is where Brontë fails to portray the character of true feminism. As Jane did not know the story of Bertha, she should not have judged the locked woman based on her appearance and the current situation. Jane said Bertha was "fearful and ghastly to me…It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face…the foul German spectre—the Vampyre" (Brontë 295). Jane could quickly compare Bertha to a German vampire, but it did not cross her mind once that there might have been a reason behind Bertha's insane behavior. Again, Jane could easily draw the conclusion that Bertha willingly submitted herself to Mr. Rochester for the materialistic comfort he had to offer her. Jane barely had any sympathy for Bertha because Bertha was not a refined British lady to suit the aristocracy of Thornfield Hall, although, after what Jane experienced in confinement in the Red Room, she should have been the first person to understand the violation

of Bertha's human rights and its possible circumstances. Instead, Jane accepted Mr. Rochester's description of Bertha as a "clothed hyena" (Brontë 305).

Brontë sketched Jane as sensible, emotional, and compassionate in the novel. She became one of a kind for her kindness to every good soul around her. So, why was she so harsh with Bertha? When she first saw Bertha, she did not even know who that woman was, so jealousy must not be the primary reason behind her arrogance. Bertha Mason, who gained her Creole heritage from her mother's side (as assumed), had dark hair and a discolored complexion, and became purple instead of pale white due to being locked up for so long in the attic, was not a blonde woman. Jane is not described as very pretty in the novel either. Interestingly, Bertha Mason was once known for her unique beauty, although the question remains as to whether the author could imagine Bertha Mason as a beautiful lady only because she was still half English, whereas Jane had very plain features. Jane once addressed Mr. Rochester's ignorant attitude towards her (Brontë 264). It was Brontë's way of pointing out the disrespect, neglect, and indifference women in that era would receive from the patriarchal society. Ironically, Bertha Mason received similar disregarding treatment from the author herself. Could Bertha Mason be only a mindless, soulless beast, but not a woman as powerful, as capable of speaking against inequality and protesting le biases as Jane, because Bertha's impure Englishness did not qualify her to be a standard? As Jane lacked beauty and wealth, Bertha's inferiority in 19th-century England was her sociocultural identity. The feminist in Brontë could sketch the former as a rebellion against set standards but missed the opportunity for the latter. In Payette's opinion, *Jane Eyre* as a bildungsroman is not very strong in terms of compatibility for women with distinct racial and cultural identities (Payette 1). This is how Brontë's feminism fails to be a haven for any woman regardless of her colour, origin, or background.

Was Brontë consciously being racist? In response to Tyrese L. Coleman's "Reading *Jane Eyre* While Black", Cathy Young says that if Brontë were indeed a racist, she would not portray her male protagonist with 'Arabic' features (Young). Mr. Rochester had a swarthy (dusky) complexion, and "he looked the very model of an Eastern emir" (Bronte 191). Not only that, according to Young, despite looking exotic, there is no concrete proof that Bertha was of mixed race. Young explains, "Historically, the term Creole was used in the West Indies and Spanish America for all locally born people of European descent" (Young). However, whether Bertha was a full White or not, it does not change the fact that Brontë associates the concept of horror and evil with the darkness of physical appearance. It can be the embedded racism; Brontë's writings can be influenced by the system and structure of her time. However, these examples of white feminism weaken the feminist stance of the author and her text because of the exclusivity.

Discussion

From a Postcolonial Reader Perspective

Almost every text undergoes the process of postcolonial criticism because it "asks readers to consider the way colonialist and anti-colonialist messages are presented in literary texts", the domains being human psychology, ideology, society, politics, intellect, and aesthetics (Hendriani 880). Therefore, a postcolonial reading of *Jane Eyre* is crucial in understanding the colonialist goals of the novel. As mentioned before, female-authored novels like *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), etc., are usually meant for female readers. In her paper, Sun explains how crucial the role of a reader is in "engagement and interpretation" (Sun 100). So, consciously or unconsciously, when an author portrays her characters in these novels, she creates a standard for her readers. In the case of *Jane*

Eyre, the details of the main characters, both male and female, are interpreted as the standards for ideal personalities of a reader and their partner. A character like Jane, who is white and, although not very attractive, is strong, intelligent, sincere, and compassionate, will become the idol, the inspiration of a young female reader. The reader will cherish developing herself like Jane to achieve an outstanding personality amid the ordinary. However, suppose the same reader is non-white. In that case, there is a fair possibility she will feel insecure and inferior because, in most Eastern countries, white skin is the first condition to call a woman "pretty".

> "It is probably easier to compartmentalize language like this if you are not of the cultural make-up Bronte describes in such abhorrent terms: if you are white. But when reading *Jane Eyre* as a person of color, these accusations segregate the black and white lines of the page; they become bold and glaring; they point a finger at you." (Coleman)

Although Brontë never described Jane as "white", by the absence of her racial details (unlike Bertha), readers can assume her whiteness; omitting explicit detailing for one colour (what is usual) while feeling the need to mention the other for the purpose of the reader's understanding is another kind of racist discrimination that Brontë did in her novel. Brownlee explains this perspective with the example of the design of stationery products (Brownlee). Generally, right-handed people do not notice that desks, notebooks, scissors, etc., are mostly designed for right-handed people. They do not think about it because that is what is usual to them, so they do not realize the need to point it out for left-handed people. In the same way, white people sometimes do not mention their whiteness in conversation, which they would do for black people because, to them, their colour is not unusual enough to voice.

Besides colour, the idea of 'cultured' differs greatly in Eastern countries. There, girls do not learn various arts or get appreciation for their good communication and storytelling skills. Society expects them to be good cooks for their husbands; they cannot even choose on their own most of the time. On the contrary, having skills in the mentioned arts was so crucial in Victorian England that even Adele Varens, Jane's spoiled pupil from France, and her mother Celine Varens, who claimed that Adele was Mr. Rochester's daughter, were not civil enough; Adele needed an English education to correct her "French defect" in Jane and others' eyes. About reading *Pride and Prejudice*, Sun says, "The feminist elements in the text interact with the reader's gender consciousness, cultural background, and emotional responses to create a rich reading experience, enabling this classic novel to continue to stimulate discussion and reflection on feminism (Sun 103). However, for the interaction, readers have to resonate with the text first, which is almost impossible when the culture, norms, and values vastly differ between the textual characters and real-life readers.

However, to contradict, Ria Hendriani says, "Brontë equates the subjugation of dark-skinned colonials with the domination of women and the lower-middle-class whites in England" (Hendriani 881). According to her, through Bertha and other oppressed people of India and Jamaica mentioned in the novel, Brontë criticized the British Empire as a colonialist tyrant and implied that non-higher-class English people like Jane were just as victimized as the colonized ones. Nicole A. Diederich claims Jane to be Bertha's alter ego, a doppelganger, where even if it was Bertha who was Jane's "dark double", her "postcolonial other", the climax and the conclusion would remain the same ("Diederich").

Some postcolonial female authors addressed the gap in universality and incorporated it in their writings. About *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Payette says, "Rhys's novel not only succeeds as a 'reply' to Brontë's silencing of Bertha Rochester, but it also uses its innovative structure to create a

brilliant critique of the English imperialist mission in the West Indies" (Payette 27). The author describes how *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, and *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid are more appropriate as bildungsroman for women with colour instead of *Jane Eyre,* as they mention the role of colour in the discrimination and inequality towards women.

A Contrapuntal Reading of *Jane Eyre*

Applying a contrapuntal reading to *Jane Eyre* allows us to move beyond simply labeling Bertha Mason as a racist caricature and instead see her as part of an intertwined, yet unequal, narrative with Jane. The novel presents two distinct but inseparable stories: Jane's story of feminist self-realization and Bertha's story of colonial dehumanization.

The dominant melody is, without question, Jane's. It is a powerful narrative of a poor, plain, but fiercely intelligent Englishwoman's struggle for agency and love in a restrictive patriarchal society. The novel charts her moral and spiritual growth, culminating in a marriage of equals, a union made possible by her newfound financial independence. This is the narrative celebrated by feminist criticism, the story of a woman who achieves selfhood independently.

However, playing simultaneously is a suppressed, subaltern melody: the story of Bertha Mason. This narrative is almost entirely silenced, relayed only through the biased accounts of Mr. Rochester. Bertha was the Creole heiress from Jamaica, a figure whose colonial origins are the source of her "tainted" bloodline and, crucially, her immense wealth. It was her fortune (£30,000) that first enticed Mr. Rochester and sustained his lifestyle as a gentleman at Thornfield Hall. Her story was of displacement, confinement, and a descent into what the text labels 'madness'. She was not a character but a plot device, an obstacle to be overcome so that the primary narrative could reach its happy conclusion.

Contrapuntal reading makes us recognize that these two melodies are not independent. Bertha's captivity purchased Jane's freedom. The space of Thornfield Hall, where Jane began to find love and a sense of belonging, was made possible by colonial exploitation, funded by Bertha's dowry from the West Indies. The ultimate resolution of the novel depended entirely on this colonial figure: Bertha must be violently erased so that Jane can return and marry Mr. Rochester. Furthermore, the inheritance that granted Jane the independence to return to Mr. Rochester as his 'equal' also came from the colonies, via her uncle in Madeira (Bronte 453).

Thus, the 'feminist' triumph of the novel is revealed to be a specifically imperial feminism. It champions the freedom and empowerment of the white Englishwoman while standing on the foundation of the wealth, subjugation, and ultimate destruction of the colonized woman of color. Reading contrapuntally, we see that Bertha was not just Jane's 'dark double'; she was the silenced economic and racial counterpart whose tragedy is necessary for Jane's success. This exposes the profound limits of Brontë's vision, demonstrating that the celebrated feminist narrative is so deeply intertwined with the racist, imperialist one that they are, in fact, two parts of the same, unsettling song.

There is another layer to the silencing of Bertha Mason by Brontë. The reputation of Bertha's beauty among the White male community of Jamaica can be compared with Edward Said's interpretation of the portrayal of Kuchuk Hanem, the Egyptian dancer and courtesan, in the writings of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, in *Orientalism* (Said 6). Gustave Flaubert was a European narrator, and Kuchuk Hanem was the Oriental woman in his narratives. Said pointed out

how the woman was silenced in her representation, and only Flaubert spoke for her the entire time. Similarly, Bertha was a marginalized exotic woman in *Jane Eyre*, whom the author silenced, too. Bertha had her own history, but it is a matter of sorrow that readers can never learn about her point of view on the whole situation. Only the central characters, specifically the White characters, could speak about what happened to Bertha before and how she was doing in Thornfield Hall.

Following Fanon's theory, men exoticized Bertha's beauty, and Mr. Rochester fell for the charm and popularity (Fanon 200). Later, after marrying Bertha, his initial attraction and curiosity for Bertha gradually faded, and finally, he started seeing his wife as a monster, like anyone else. "Concealing the mad-woman's neighbourhood from you, however, was something like covering a child with a cloak and laying it down near a upas-tree: that demon's vicinage is poisoned, and always was" (Brontë 313) was Mr. Rochester's comment on his once beloved wife, whom he thought he loved but was wrong.

The 'madwoman in the attic' burned down Thornfield Hall, tried to ruin the potential happy ending of Jane and Mr. Rochester, and died a pathetic death in her own arson while the main characters still managed to reunite and find happiness with each other in the end (Gilbert and Gubar 425-534). So, Bertha, and women with a colonial identity like her will be the side characters, a Kuchuk Hanem, in the Western eyes. Like the darkness in their portrayals, they will live in the shadows of the protagonists without a voice.

Conclusion

Would *Jane Eyre* still be *Jane Eyre* without its gothic? Brontë's association of dark and light as images for gothic and its opposite, bright and positive, is the first sign of binary in the literary elements in her novel. Moreover, the consciousness of "us and others" is also evident in the description of events by the protagonist, Jane. Finally, the feminism in the novel is biased towards the white, towards the English, to be more specific. Therefore, the high tension between binaries of colour and ethnic identity makes the "othered" readers anxious instead of empowered. Especially, the contrapuntal reading of the novel highlights how the coloured identity of Bertha Mason actually paved the way for Jane's unexpected accomplishment in getting the love of her life.

Our argument comes to a decision that Jane could stand out as one of a kind because of the contrast Charlotte Brontë created by portraying her as the light to the darkness of all the gothic elements used in the novel. For this very kind of portrayal, neither Jane had to feel guilty about her emotional barrenness for Bertha Mason, nor did the readers consider Jane a harsh, arrogant woman who lacked remorse. The author's purpose was to insist that Bertha Mason deserved what she got; her own actions led to her tragic downfall, and we do not have to pity her. In this way, no one blames Jane for stealing the husband of a helpless woman, someone who lost the ability to speak, to raise her voice against the injustice caused to her. Such racism in *Jane Eyre* is merely another kind of sexism, the novel being a failed attempt to become an inclusive feminist text. Therefore, the text is an example of feminine resistance, only to women who share the whiteness of the protagonist, Jane. Overall, the feminism in the novel is questionable because of its discriminatory and dehumanizing way of looking at people of color.

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Of Memory, Trauma, and Embodiment: Exploring Sexual Violence in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search*

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Abstract

Bangladeshi novelist Shaheen Akhtar's novel *The Search* (translated from the original Bangla novel *Talaash* into English by Ella Datta) explores some of the darkest truths of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Revolving mainly around Mariam, a Birangana (literally, a war heroine), the novel delineates the turbulent and excruciating journey of the rape victims of the Bangladesh Liberation War. While Biranganas embody the scars, ignominy, trauma, and painful memories of humiliation in the hands of the Pakistani army and its local collaborators, they are forced to encounter further ordeals in their free motherland. Many have become vulnerable to exploitation, insecurity, petty politics, and social boycott in an unwelcoming society. As they have lost autonomy and agency over their bodies, they become embodiments of bodily shame, social discomfort, and traumatizing memories. Virtually silenced by a patriarchal society itself loudly silent about their existence except for rhetorical purposes, political expediency, and national/historical narrativization, the Biranganas are a poignant reminder of patriarchy's own insecurities and contradictions. Applying insights from feminist theories, Memory Studies and Trauma Studies, this qualitative paper endeavors to excavate the traumatic depths of harrowing memories of the Biranganas and expose patriarchy in the light of *The Search*.

Keywords: Birangana, trauma, memory, rape, feminism

Introduction

In her fictional and non-fictional works, Shaheen Akhtar "consistently attempts to provide a viewpoint that challenges norms, resulting in insightful renditions of common, but unnoticed or ignored, social experiences" (Rahman). Her *The Search* (translated from the original Bangla novel *Talaash* into English by Ella Datta) brings into literary discourse the unimaginable scale of human tragedy suffered by thousands of women and girls in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Centered around Mariam and other Biranganas such as Anuradha, Parul, Tuki, and Shyamali, the text seeks to articulate the (nearly) muted or silent agonies and struggles of the tragic victims of the Liberation War. Thanks to Mukti (born at the beginning of the Liberation War) who has laboriously interviewed a few Biranganas, a long hushed-up history came to the surface throughout the novel. Ironically, the unending humiliation and dehumanization of the Biranganas have not been amply expressed, authentically represented, and creatively imagined in the Bangladeshi literary domain. This is perhaps due to the fact that wartime rape is intended to "destroy female bodies as an expression of male chauvinism on the part of the masculinized military" willing to render their enemy communities effeminate (Mithun 136). *The Search,* hence, unsettles the collective embarrassment of the Bengali nation emanating from rape and various other forms of sexual assault of thousands of their women whose bodies "became the theater on which to exercise power by the Pakistani servicemen and their Bengali collaborators" (137). In addition, the text also exposes the many cracks and crevices in Bangladesh's history that simultaneously glorifies and nullifies/downplays (Birangana) women's contribution to the nation's political liberation from Pakistan. This ambivalent attitude toward the Biranganas leads to a virtual

denial and selective silence on the part of the mainly patriarchal Bangladeshi/Bengali society with regards to the traumatic and tragic experience of the former.

Applying an interdisciplinary approach drawing upon theoretical and critical insights from Trauma Studies, Memory Studies and Feminism, this paper aims to (a) explore the patriarchal politics regarding the female body as portrayed in Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search,* and (b) scrutinize the traumatic experiences and memories of the Biranganas. The qualitative study is conducted by using a content analysis method where the novel *The Search* serves as the primary text while a few selected review articles, research papers, academic essays, theory-related books, and history books have been used as crucial and useful secondary texts. Textual analysis of *The Search* has been complemented by theoretical discussion pertaining to both Trauma Studies and Memory Studies. In addition, feminist perspectives are applied to understand the patriarchal politics underlying the female body-centric discourses, which are also responsible for enhancing trauma and creating painful memories among female war victims in general and Bangladeshi ones in particular.

Memory Studies and Trauma Studies: A Brief Discussion

Memory Studies seeks to investigate how memory performs, evolves, changes, gets erased, distorted, edited, modified, promoted, valued, and devalued. It "examines how memorialization can happen, what shapes it takes, and what it means." (Kaplan 7). It also excavates "literature, art, music, and many other forms to find out how memory matters" (7). Memories have deep social roots since it is in society where people "normally acquire, … recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). Indeed, memory can be both individual and collective.

The process and method of remembering is not always innocent or apolitical. In effect, memorization, memorialization, and commemoration are intrinsically political. Remembering cannot be thought of without taking into account the act of forgetting. Esposito says, "remembering and forgetting always proceed together…. There must be something that can be remembered, but one must forget almost everything" (182). The very process of remembering and forgetting is, hence, mutually constitutive. Manipulation of memory is an undeniable fact as the "past is not destroyed or relegated to oblivion but rather undergoes selection and a complex coding process by which it is placed in storage so that under certain conditions it may resurface" (Tamm 140). Certain memories are privileged at certain times while others are systematically hidden or obfuscated. Even the memories occluded once may get revived if occasions demand so. There is, of course, a nexus between power and remembering/forgetting. Hence, the process of remembering and forgetting is intrinsically political.

Trauma Studies, on the other hand, intends to explore how trauma operates in different stages of a traumatic event and long after it. It also seeks to understand what qualifies as trauma and why it needs to be taken seriously. Trauma is "clinically understood as overwhelming emotional experiences that cannot be coped with and integrated into the person's existing inner world" (Maček 4). Caruth opines in *Unclaimed Experience* that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In effect, as Caruth says, "the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it" (92). Trauma is difficult to pin down, explain, and recognize at the initial stage of occurrence only to manifest itself later as a horrifying and haunting phenomenon battering the victim psychologically and emotionally. Initial denial and eventual articulation are a trademark of trauma for many a survivor as his/her predicament is underscored

by “a conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud” (Herman 1). This contradictory urge to suppress and accentuate the experience characterizes trauma as a paradoxical sort of drama played out in the life of the survivor.

Despite preliminary silence, trauma intends to assert itself in multidirectional ways and manners as “traumatization need not necessarily conclude in a state of involuntary, deeply conflicted silence” (Stampfl 16). Trauma has a long-term effect and is a multi-phase event. In her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992), Judith Lewis Herman classifies Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 3 categories, which are: (1) Hyperarousal (which involves sudden startling, irritable reaction to small instigation, sleep deprivation, etc.); (2) Intrusion (when memory of the traumatic incident appears as flashbacks during waking states and traumatic nightmares while asleep); and (3) Constriction or numbness (which is underscored by a detached calm, indifference, emotional detachment, and a detached situation of consciousness (qtd. in Berk 201). A traumatized person undergoes a certain amount of cognitive dissonance as PTSD “causes hyper and irrational responses to situations or “signs”—responses, which seem unmerited in a given context—as the normative population would experience it” (Harper 378). Trauma Studies discusses all these manifestations of trauma and more.

Memory Studies and Trauma Studies in Conversation with Feminism: Textual Analysis

Shaheen Akhtar’s *The Search* offers a complex interplay between memories, trauma, and feminist resilience. As a piece of fiction, it demonstrates how memory performs. Kaplan says, “Fiction… is also theory, also theorizes memory, and makes its readers grasp in profound ways how sticky memory can be” (3). *The Search* deals with the most inconvenient of public and individual memories with regards to the Bangladesh Liberation War because the “simultaneously embedded and extended quality of literature… is uniquely suited to represent memories that lie outside the official records of recollection” (Parui 96). Being a literary text, *The Search* is best poised to touch upon those memories often overlooked either through chance or choice. The very excavatory power of literature with its focus on the imaginary and intersubjectivity makes it the best route and medium through which even the uncomfortable and uneasy pasts could be articulated and made relevant. Fiction articulates “the presentness of the past, the struggle many of us have to move beyond certain pasts and the contradictory need to dwell in those memories while simultaneously living in the present” (Kaplan 3). As “the liminal landscape between reality and fantasy, between actuality and possibility,” fiction provides a unique opportunity to scrutinize and experience “the entanglement of remembering and forgetting, between what really happened and what gets left behind” (Parui 93-94). These exceptional capacities of fiction/literature enable Shaheen Akhtar to bring forth the sensitive historical truths by combining imagination and factuality in such a way that inspires empathy for the Biranganas.

In *The Search* Shaheen Akhtar does exactly the same as that of the African-American novelist Toni Morrison, who in her novels including *Beloved* addresses the lacunae in historical documents, records and archives, and “the gaps that she discovers are the wounds in memory itself, the scar of a trauma that resisted representation and can only belatedly, long after the deeply destructive events, become articulated in the framework of a literary text” (Assmann 106). *The Search* negotiates “the gaps in historical records and archives” (106) by intermingling hard facts with imagination, opening up the possibilities of expressing the inexpressible traumatic incidents of rape, molestation, humiliation, and bloody murders. This testifies to literature’s expressive capacity since literature, in its multifarious expressions and theoretical manifestations, has “played an important role in the representation, the transmission, and the critical (or

mystifying) elaboration of traumatic events" (Fortunati and Lamberti 130). *The Search*, likewise, foregrounds how memory and trauma intertwine in shaping the identity of the protagonist Mariam and other Biranganas, exposing how historical memories and traumatic events are politicized in the national(ist) discourses of Bangladesh, and illustrating how patriarchy remains a powerful tool in the almost-perpetual subjugation of the Biranganas. In an interview with Sarah Anjum Bari, Shaheen Akhtar says that *Talaash* (the Bengali original of *The Search*) "demanded reconstruction of post-war memories, and for them to break and expand beyond the shackles of the war. Otherwise, many stories of oppression would be discarded and erased" (Akhtar, Daily Star). Hence, the insights of Memory Studies, Trauma Studies and Feminism will be combined in analyzing *The Search* to see to what extent it has played its role in expressing historical truths.

The agonizing memories of the Liberation War days and beyond haunt Mariam as well as numerous other Biranganas in multifarious ways. Mariam/Mary was born into a conservative Muslim family from an East Pakistani village. As a teenager, she became a topic of scandal as she went to a cinema hall with her beloved Jashim. Later, she was sent to Dhaka for pursuing higher education and also to ensure her scandal got erased from public memory. In her Dhaka days, she got involved in a relationship with Abed Jahangir, a student leader who actively participated in the Bengali nationalist movement. Abed abandoned Mariam, whom he had impregnated, and joined the Liberation War as a Freedom Fighter. In a tragic turn of events, Mariam ended up in the hands of the Pakistani military as the Liberation War began in 1971. All through the war, she underwent brutal rape and all sorts of humiliation in the Pakistani military camps. After the war, her dilemma exponentially increased as she encountered further rejection, betrayal, subjugation, and dehumanization from her family, friends, and others.

The storyline of the novel revolves around Mariam's life trajectories and those of other Biranganas. Memories of trauma and traumatic memories arise in Mariam's mind "like clumps of water hyacinth caught in the eddies of murky waters" (Akhtar 3). As Faulkner says, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (qtd. in Clapton 1). The stickiness of traumatic memories revolves around her bodily suppression and subjugation underpinned by politicization of the female body as a site for masculinized military power play. The compromise of her bodily agency and autonomy through rape is conspicuously palpable as she survives "with her body squeezed and pounded like meat in a mortar and pestle or with a life which is portioned out like the sacrificial flesh of the qurbani. After that moment, her body is never her own. She can never lay claim to her life again" (Akhtar 4). As "a victim of history" (5), her identity in the annals of national history is forged by the experience and memory of the war days and beyond. As Jan Assmann points out, the faculty of memory helps us "form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time" (109). Mariam's memories of the war and beyond and her presence in (or absence from) the collective memories of the nation are simultaneously crucial to her identity as well as the national identity of Bangladesh.

Nation-building in Bangladesh remains by and large a male project, and women only play a secondary role as sacrificing mothers, sexual victims, caregivers, and motivators. Women are at best viewed "as a national symbol ... the guardian of continuity and immutability of the nation, the embodiment of its respectability" (Mosse; qtd. in Ray 5). This is emblematic of the traditional equation of "the nation with the mother" (Nayar 105) as articulated in the term "motherland". Ahead of the war, Mariam went up to her boyfriend Abed Jahangir, who was a political activist and a future Freedom Fighter. He undermined her capacity as an individual who could fight alongside her male counterparts in the battleground, especially when she was pregnant with his child. Angry Abed fumed at Mariam: "Fight! You plan to fight? War is not a child's play. Instead of going to the

hospital, you've come here to join the war?"' (Akhtar 26). The mentality of a university graduate like Abed Jahangir signifies the core of the nationalist project as embedded in patriarchy and male chauvinism. In this context, Cynthia Enloe rightly considers nationalism as a "masculine construct" (qtd. in Nayar 106). Moreover, "Historically, the great wars have always been uber-focused on a very masculine narrative" (Naz et al. 87). Contrarily, women are considered as the "repository of tradition" (Sen 231), and "motherland or nation as women" must be "protected by brave citizen warriors" (Banerjee 12). The "brave citizen warriors" are almost exclusively men.

The Pakistani soldiers maltreated the captive women and girls as animals to be exploited as "the female body serve[s] as a site of patriarchal domination" (Mithun 136). The narrator conveys that some women, in apprehension of losing their chastity, used the sari to commit suicide in many Pakistani army camps and military stations, forcing the soldiers to disrobe them (Akhtar 82-83). The denuding of Bengali women is, however, tantamount to the denuding of the Bengali nation. The sense of shame attached to disrobing women of their saris and the loss of chastity is tangible. As D'Costa opines that systematic rape in times of violent conflicts and confrontations exposes an enemy community's inability to safeguard its women, hence "'feminizing' the enemy's land, which is also depicted as 'motherland'. Moreover, forced impregnation of an enemy's women during wartime is designed to disrupt the so-called purity of the enemy's national identity (23)." Such feminization and humiliation ripped the psyche of the Bengali nation asunder. In fact, the Pakistani military used rape as a systemic weapon to destroy the self-dignity of the Bengali people.

The national narrative of the Bengali nation with regards to the experience of the Biranganas is myopic, selective and marked by denial of details, mostly focusing on rape as the only tool of torture of the Biranganas. Mariam told Mukti, "It was not just that they made us wear rags or raped us, for me each kick of the boot, each prod of the bayonet, each cigarette burn was equally dreadful" (84). She dismissed the Bengali nation's monomaniacal obsession with regards to the Biranganas' experience as to how many times they were raped day and night. The nation ignores the other types of tortures as tortures, Mariam claimed (85). Simply put, there is a tendency within the mainstream Birangana discourse to downplay or ignore all sorts of inhuman torture suffered by the Biranganas apart from sexual ones. As memory is "always inherently shaped by collective contexts" (Erll 5), certain aspects of the Birangana travails are collectively ignored or forgotten. The post-Liberated Bengali nation, unfortunately, has not acknowledged the multiple dimensions to the infernal experience the Biranganas navigated through.

However, the Biranganas had to endure various aspects of trauma in different phases of their experience starting with their capture. As they tried to hide themselves or escape the army and their cohorts, they lived in utmost anxiety in anticipation of any fateful experience such as death and rape. As Krauss diagnoses the initial process of a traumatic event as a subject being "unfortunately absent—too distracted or decentered to defend him- or herself properly at the time of the attack. The life story of the traumatic subject is thus the account of a fundamental absence and lack of preparation" (32). By delving into Mariam's life gleaned through interviews, Mukti pieces together the harrowing details of her life following the capture. Mariam told Mukti, "I don't know what happened to me after that. I could not understand, could not feel a thing" (Akhtar 88). The sheer helplessness and loss of partial cognitive capacity to process reality is a mark of trauma that Mariam demonstrates. The inability of language as a mode of expression in the context of traumatic incidents cannot be overlooked. Mariam's inability to express her experience is part of her traumatization since for "history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs" (Caruth 18). Her trouble

with articulation is a sign of trauma, which challenges "the capacities of narrative knowledge" (Luckhurst 79). While trauma is "anti-narrative" in its shock value, it also "generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (79). Indeed, the limit of language gets exposed when it comes to grappling with traumatic experiences, especially in the initial phase. That said, trauma could be articulated to an extent retrospectively.

Parading naked Bengali women in broad daylight is a Pakistani military tactic to inflict trauma upon captive women and render the Bengali nation effeminate as "women's bodies were perceived as the battle ground and as a tool to offend the enemy's masculinity and honor, which was also at stake" (De Felipe Urueña 21). The brutality of the event cannot remain unnoticed in *The Search*. As the Biranganas were paraded naked along busy streets, "Mariam hid her face with her hands. Clad only in underclothes, her body cringed in a corner of the truck like a beaten animal. It was not strangers that she feared, but people who she knew" (Akhtar 91). The cheering of the crowd around is a signal to what was to follow if they could somehow survive the war. The Biranganas are traumatized as they recollect such events since "social, semantic, political, and economic factors are present in the experience and recollection of trauma" (Balaev 7). The double-standard of the patriarchal Bengali society toward the victims of the Liberation War is conspicuous here.

A great cause of trauma for the Biranganas stems from the denial of their identity and existence by their families and friends. In post-War Bangladesh, families and relatives were–generally speaking–more concerned about their missing male relatives rather than female ones. Sensing that the missing girls and women might have fallen in the hands of the Pakistani servicemen or their loyalists and hence violated, they viewed them as disgrace to family/clan status. While in a hospital bed, Mariam felt deeply wounded since her parents refused to acknowledge her existence. She also denied her parents' existence and did not permit her case history to be recorded at the time of registration in the rehabilitation center. In fact, her parents denied "the existence of their child, but she was merely obscuring her past. Indeed, she can no longer live with that past identity" (Akhtar 113). While her parents were concerned about the life of their son Montu, a Freedom Fighter, they seemed to be indifferent to their daughter's whereabouts. For the Biranganas, the wartime "plight had been beyond measure" and that "amounted to trauma after the independence of the country, because as though they had committed sin. The sorrows of these women knew no bounds when their family members denied to accept them in fear of social stigma" (Islam 165). Such a double-standard proved devastating for many Biranganas, who had to carry the "spectral wound" (Mookherjee 26) of the war forever.

Similarly, the experience of the rape victims was worse in the post-Liberated Bangladesh. The narrator quotes a Birangana thinking that "wars end, this war will also end. But they would never be able to go back to their old identities, never regain their former addresses. Their place would be in the whorehouses of their own land and in foreign lands" (119). Anuradha, another Birangana, had a clear foresight. She told Mariam during their captivity that the countrymen would not welcome them after the war. She added that as the war ends, the men are celebrated as heroes while the women are viewed as fallen. She said: "they will turn us into whores" (136-37). Indeed, Anuradha and Shyamali ended up in prostitution. The Biranganas, who were sheltered by the post-Liberation War government under Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in different shelter/rehabilitation centers, became a matter of undue public attention. The narrator reports a young Birangana as asking whether they were zoo animals put on display for visitors to watch (140). Many Biranganas felt like exhibition items up for public consumption. Rehabilitation was a far cry for most of them. Many people offering to help them by shelter or through marriage did so

to get government rewards rather than out of altruistic motives. Since the stigma associated with rape was deeply ingrained in society, the Biranganas mainly tried to evade public attention. They "began to live in their newborn country under a shadow of shame" (Sharma and Ratnawat 33) and the *Birangana* title itself turned out to be "a double-edged sword for those wronged women" (Huq 198). Another critic comments that the stories of the Biranganas would have fallen into oblivion if books like *Talaash* had not been published. The nation's "collective amnesia towards this topic," she argues, needs to be discussed (Esha 23). Since memory is "central to individual and collective identity" (Eyerman 24), books like *The Search* play a pivotal role in keeping alive the memories of the Biranganas.

The treatment of the Biranganas by even many fellow male Freedom Fighters is deeply influenced by the latter's patriarchal worldview. Whereas the "unique display of emotion and risk-taking tendencies and unwillingness to compromise" (Dipa 41) manifested in Bengali masculinity in the course of the war is appreciable, the attitude of many men toward the rape survivors has not always been savory. As nationalism "typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (Enloe 44), such negligence toward the Biranganas became possible. In an interview, Akhtar shares that her inspiration behind writing *Talaash* emanated from the Oral History Project of 71, which introduced her to some courageous women. She says, "Not only did they narrate the torture they went through in 1971, but also what they faced afterwards. Sometimes, that overshadowed the ghoulish experiences of war" (Akhtar). Indeed, post-War experience remains the bigger ordeal for the Biranganas in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh. The remembrance of those days of inexplicable torture traumatizes the Biranganas since rape "leaves huge and maybe irreversible scars, wounds and trauma" with the survivors "feeling their lives ruined" and rebuilding impossible (De Felipe Urueña 26). The narrator reveals that Mariam underwent severe panic while remembering her brutal treatment at the hand of Major Ishtiaque. She was thrown at the feet of the army officer, who had been drunk since evening. The soldier assigned to escort her raped her twice in the car and sodomized her once. He was about to rape her a third time when the car entered the venue (127). Memories of such ignominious days have a spectral presence in the Biranganas' lives. Remembering those excruciatingly painful days is itself traumatic. Mukti reports Birangana Baby reminiscing about those horrible times by singing a Bangla song: "'Remembrance is painful.' …[She] chirps like a bird, "My feelings are like caged birds so I have to hide them here (191)." As Aleida Assmann says, "The dynamics of individual memory consists in a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting" (97). The Biranganas like Baby are to oscillate between remembering and forgetting. They try to avoid painful memories but hardly succeed in the bid.

As a matter of fact, "A traumatic event, by definition, breaks down the accepted social and personal structures and belief systems of the individual" (Hunt 10). The commodification of Birangana Shyamali's body that had "become public property" (Akhtar 130) remains a constant source of her agonies. In this context, Mookherjee comments, "Trauma memory here is expressed as encoded not only in the body but also in social and everyday relations with objects and with the world around them" (125). The conditions of the Biranganas were unimaginable as Lentin finds that wars and conflicts are often rendered feminized through turning women "not only as sexual trophies exchangeable between male enemies, not only as markers of collective boundaries, but also as the symbolic representations of national and ethnic collectivities" (qtd. in Sen 6). Many of these dehumanized, ghostly-looking, exchangeable "sexual trophies" manifested signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in addition to physical emaciation.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) came into play immediately after the release of the Biranganas. Applying Herman's formulation of PTSD, Berk observes among the Biranganas of *The Search* "[t]he shock of being made only a powerless, unresponsive instrument of pleasure in the hands of the perpetrators continue even after [being] set free in the case of the rape victims" (202). She also notices in the behavior of Mariam and other Biranganas traits of robotization, trauma bonding, dissociation or doublethink, and loss of identity or changes in personality–which are secondary aspects of PTSD as outlined by Herman (202). For instance, as a matter of dissociation and loss of identity, Mariam "was (merely) obscuring her past. Indeed, she can no longer live with that past identity" (Akhtar 113). Critic Esha observes that she was "without a scope to express grief – it seems like she has little or no outlet for pain at times…. The concatenation of trauma never seems to end…(22)." Indeed, the Biranganas were "subaltern" beings having "metaphorical disability" and hence "treated as disabled or defective by their own society" (Oishe et al. 4). As pregnant Biranganas portrayed in Dilruba Z. Ara's *Blame* were denied access by their compatriots in independent Bangladesh, they realized they are "living in a society devoid of justice. Women are born here only to be blamed" (Biswas and Tripathi 55). Life was far worse for the justice-denied Biranganas in their liberated homeland.

However, many Biranganas embody resilience, women empowerment and self-respect against all odds. For instance, Mariam "stood up like a phoenix" and her "entire life is a testament to her bravery, serving as an inspiration to women across the nation and the globe" (Nitu and Ali 43). She searched for a job, married a man, opened a "Ma Meye Tailor Shop," sheltered another Birangana named Tuki. She fought till the end. Throughout the process, she had been betrayed by her friends, family, and fellow countrymen. She had to endure a series of insults, injustice, and maltreatment in the post-Liberated Bangladesh. Many Biranganas were resilient although they "have largely been looked upon as passive victims who unfortunately came under the wheel of history" (Sen 3). Unfortunately, though, none of the Biranganas as depicted in *The Search* could live a decent life in their independent country. Still, many of them displayed incredible courage, agency and determination.

The legacy of the Biranganas, therefore, should be duly acknowledged. The contention of the paper is that the Biranganas should not be forgotten, but celebrated for their rightful contribution to the Liberation efforts. In addition, the deafening silence around them should be broken and the political expediency with which they are used in national narratives should be rejected. This is because "...it is especially the accusation of remaining silent about the atrocities done to certain groups that can have a scandalizing effect and shatter hegemonic memory narratives" (Langenohl 171). The paper also acknowledges Shaheen Akhtar's *The Search* as one of those key fictional endeavors that document the Biranganas' "often unremembered contributions to the 1971 war, as well as the narratives of violence that are frequently shadowed, truncated, and stifled by engineered national histories" (Rakshit and Gaur 1-2). It also stresses the need for preservation of the memories of the Biranganas, ensuring their rightful place in history and guaranteeing human rights to war survivors. It concurs with Milan Kundera as he says, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (1). It also advocates for better and more humane treatment of trauma victims and all other sufferers in society.

Conclusion

To conclude, the paper has analyzed the unfathomable sufferings of the Biranganas depicted in *The Search* in the light of Memory Studies, Trauma studies, and Feminism. It demonstrates how the Biranganas' ordeal multiplied in their free homeland as they are "a collective trauma-cum-taboo subject in post-war Bangladesh" (Huq 197). The amount of agonies, this study shows,

Mariam and fellow Biranganas have endured is outrageous and calls for rethinking about their experience and contribution. The paper also illustrates how patriarchal mindset is predominantly responsible for the ongoing sufferings of the Biranganas, who otherwise deserve humane treatment and due recognition. It also questions the silence around the Birangana issue and tries to draw attention of the relevant stakeholders to ensure the welfare of the Biranganas who are still alive and the proper acknowledgement of all Biranganas. This article demands that all forms of gender-based violence be stopped and a better world for all of humanity be built. Finally, it stresses that more research should be conducted on violence against women in armed conflict, especially with regards to the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971.

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Beyond the Binary of Utopia/Dystopia: Exploring Alternatives and Ambiguity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays a dystopic world born not only of individuals' extremist positionalities but their lack of intelligence to engage with alterity. This paper asks how the novel negotiates the tension between utopian aspirations and dystopian realities within the fractured terrain of cultural belonging, while also asking what possibilities emerge beyond such binary configurations. Through exegesis informed by a focused engagement with dystopian discourse, it argues that Desai neither prophesises nor attempts to preach a new utopian vision to counter the radical visions already in place; rather, she offers various alternatives, possibilities, choices, and counter-narratives that emerge throughout the novel, accessible only to those willing to look beyond a binary mindset. This paper thus addresses these alternatives and the potentiality they offer for achieving a balanced reality beyond the extremes of hyper centralization and endless fragmentation in cultural belonging; and contends that the dialectic between utopian visions and dystopian outcomes does not lead to cynicism, but instead creates an optimistic equilibrium, grounded in ambiguity as a fertile space where contradictions generate new possibilities that paves the way forward not to a brave new world but towards a harmoniously emergent one.

Keywords: Alternatives, Ambiguity, Hegemony, Cultural Belonging, Extreme Positionality.

The Inheritance of Loss portrays the emergence of a dystopian reality in which the utopian promise of cultural homogeneity comes to normalise systemic oppression, particularly when individuals fail to cultivate informed discernment and remain oblivious to the workings of cultural hegemony. Through her representation of the contemporary globalised world, the dystopian portrayal feels not so appalling for the use of horrifying sketches of violence and dilapidation; rather, the dystopicity aroused by the dissonance amongst human beings and their inability to communicate with each other is what makes it "waste-landish," seeming to hint at distant prospects for a more hopeful existence. However, I contend that Desai's worldview is never monolithic, generalised, or deterministic. Desai, in her portrayal, has not only foregrounded the already "meshed" multicultural reality, but also unearthed the policies that give birth to the dystopia of radicalism and absolutism, not totalitarian in characteristic as Orwell's or Huxley's, but hegemonic in relation to cultures being practiced in the world, resonating Edward Said's observation that, "In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others… It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work" (07). This cultural hegemony can give birth to what Desai conceptualises in the novel as the "habit of hate" (82)—the perfect umbrella term to capture the antagonistic reality of a world haunted by ethnocentrism, xenophobia, belligerent nationalism, classism, religious bigotry, and other diverse chauvinistic ideologies. These dynamics results in a politicised identity, evident in the novel's characters, which leaves individuals fragmented, conflicted, and vulnerable to acts of violence. This dystopian world unravels these contradictions lying within the sociocultural and economic reality; it echoes what Francis Fukuyama has mentioned in his book: "Our present world is simultaneously moving towards the opposing

dystopias of hyper-centralisation and endless fragmentation" (146), revealing how most of the characters captured within this centralised "gyre" fails to cultivate balanced alternatives.

Many critics have portrayed Desai's worldview as predominantly miserable and chaotic, with her dystopia overcrowded by multiple tensions. Among them, Babli Sinha observes, "Desai has a rather bleaker world-view in which the characters refuse to acknowledge interdependence or equality" (07), which, to some extent, does carry the partial essence of Desai's perspective. But this study addresses the paradox of utopic visions in the pitfalls of dystopic realities in these pluralistic realities of the world, where a person's perfect "imagined community"[12] can lead to another's hell. This study stands on the argument that Desai in her novel never turns extreme in her vision of a better world; rather, she exposes the fatality of "larger questions" through her characters' descent, reasoning, conscious choices of life, and the method of contrasting characters, which together let readers perceive the alternatives available in any dire situation, if only one remains aware of the binary mindset in play. Her intricate depiction illustrates that moving beyond the paradoxical "utopian-dystopian" dialectic necessitates a holistic perspective, which entails not solely envisioning the future nor dwelling solely on the past but also embracing the significance of the present moment— the "here and now."[13]

To adequately explore the novel's proposed alternatives, it is essential to grasp the intricate interplay between these seemingly opposing concepts of utopia and dystopia. Utopia, as Michael D. Gordin et al. state, "always comes with its implied dystopia—whether the dystopia of the status quo, which the utopia is engineered to address, or a dystopia found in the way this specific utopia corrupts itself in practice" (02). This concept is evident in Kiran Desai's novel, which depicts a pervasive status quo of systemic violence against marginalised people by state apparatuses and the exploitation of developing countries by Western powers. Additionally, it illustrates the degeneration of the GNLF's utopian vision into terrorism and extremism in the novel. Yet, to go beyond this aporia of paradox, it is essential to understand their co-existence and shared characteristics; as Gordin et al. note, "utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, [while] dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognise and treat its symptoms in the here and now. Thus, the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare, also beg for inclusion together" (02). This highlights the persistent "impulse or desire for a better future" inherent in each. Therefore, to cultivate any meaningful alternative, utopia and dystopia should not be treated as binary opposites, but rather as analytic categories that help us understand how individuals conceive their present with an aspiration for a better future, with an eye for the alternative choices.

Now, the concept of "beyond" is neither a complete departure from the past, nor a simple new beginning. Rather, it functions as a transitional space involving a complex interplay between time, space, identity, inclusion, and exclusion. As Bhabha states, the "beyond" is a moment of transit where these elements intersect, producing complex figures of difference and identity (02-03). Moreover, this transitional point does not equate to cancelling the past but represents a space where different ideas clash and interact, leading to a deeper understanding

[12] Benedict Anderson describes imagined communities as social constructs where people envision collective belonging without truly knowing or understanding one another.

[13] Walter Benjamin extends this idea to history and lived experience, arguing that rather than being confined to a linear sense of progress (past to future), the present moment holds a critical, transformative potential.

and the prospect of building a better reality. So, to walk in the path of effective change, utopia and dystopia should be considered as indicators of broader societal conditions and cultural formations. This will help to understand the crowded nexus of policies depicted in the novel that work behind to form ideas in individuals' minds. This inclusion of the opposites will reflect deeper societal concerns and cultural dynamics; and by treating them as markers of "conditions of possibilities,"[14] that is to analyse these concepts within the context of the conditions that gave rise to them, rather than viewing them in isolation, one can actually understand the possibilities for change available in societal structure.

Desai's portrayal of the world urges us to navigate through ambiguity, a condition born out of postmodern realities marked by violence, centralisation, and extremism. Although ambiguity is often dismissed as disorder or chaos, it is in fact inseparable from order itself: there can be no order without chaos, just as there can be no stability without the potential for disruption. What Desai reveals is that chaos is not an anomaly but the very texture of our world — a texture that systems of power seek to eradicate, for without it they would lose the enemies and oppositions that sustain their dominance. As Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), systems of power perceive ambiguity as their greatest threat. Anything — whether people, ideas, or identities, that refuses to fit neatly "inside" or "outside" destabilises the coherence such orders depend on. To maintain control, political and intellectual regimes alike attempt to purge ambivalence by drawing sharp boundaries, excluding the "middle," making friends and fighting enemies, and above all "purging ambivalence." Yet if ambiguity were truly purged, people would almost cease to have enemies at all, since enmity depends on exclusion and the rigid separation of self from other and discrediting whatever resists absolute categorisation (Bauman 25). This impulse to suppress ambiguity resonates with the hegemonic projects Desai critiques in *The Inheritance of Loss*, where cultural and political formations seek to impose purity and uniformity. Yet Desai diverges from this logic: instead of treating ambiguity as a danger, she reclaims it as a fertile ground for alternatives that resist binary reductions and open possibilities for coexistence.

Now, this threat posed by ambiguity and difference is often suppressed by powerful forces through the imposition of ideological frameworks that ostensibly function to maintain order in the world. Desai's exploration of the bias ideologies working behind the "habit of hate" prompts introspection regarding the similarities between utopia and ideology. Although ideologies are typically upheld by the powerful to preserve the status quo, and a utopian mindset seeks to challenge and transform it, there exists an inherent common ground between these seemingly opposing concepts. Both ideology and a utopian mindset can make individuals oblivious to the conditions of possibilities available to them in society which was first mentioned by Karl Mannheim in his book *Ideology and Utopia*. He observes, utopian thought draws its force not from social reality itself but from "symbols, fantasies and dreams," and such constructs can take two forms: they are ideological when they merely "gloss power or stabilize the existing social reality," and utopian when they inspire "collective activity which aims to change such reality to conform with their goals" (Mannheim 200-201). In Desai's depiction of dystopia, ideologies such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, globalization, segregationism, and classism endeavour to "gloss" over their inherent norms and absolutism. What is intriguing is that these very ideologies, originally conceived as utopian aspirations, have paradoxically contributed to the dystopian reality

[14] The term refers to the fundamental factors or circumstances that enable or make conceivable a particular event, idea, or phenomenon.

characterised by fragmentation and centralization. But Desai brings forth the alternative choices available to characters through this dialectic of utopia/dystopia, where one can still strive for not a radical change but a realistic one.

Desai has captured this sense of enslavement in Gyan's character arc and proposed the alternative life of individualism, where everyone has their own choices and own solidarities and is not confined into any trap named "a life of meaning and pride" that prerequisites violence and the sacrifice of individualism. Gyan's love for Sai, his sole source of joy, is shattered in the name of "solidarity" with his ethnic community, giving rise to the corrosive "habit of hate," a sentiment acknowledged by Sai as she laments, "You hate me... for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren't being fair" (Desai 265). Thus, such "big reasons" represents the hegemony at work that is glossed with the shine of nationalism, his emotions for his own community that leads to insurgency. Desai has proposed the notion of peace and happiness over the utopian aspirations of radical changes, which she demonstrates when Gyan's family forces him to withdraw from the movement, and the narrator describes Gyan's mental state:

> An enormous decision removed, Gyan, after the initial protest, felt sweet peace settle on him, and though he pretended frustration, he was very relieved by this reprieve into childhood… Let the world carry on outside for a bit, and then when it was safe, he'd visit Sai and cajole her into being friends again. He wasn't a bad person. He didn't want to fight. The trouble was that he'd tried to be part of the larger questions, tried to become part of politics and history. Happiness had a smaller location, though this wasn't something to flaunt. (277)

Through this arc of Gyan's character, Desai establishes how an individual's innocence and personal happiness are more preferable in the face of utter destruction. This preference of human emotions or love for closed ones over any "bigger question" has been echoed by E.M Forster, who declares, "[If] I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (qtd. in Sen 48). If collective ethos, unconscious of their radicalised activities demands sacrifices, Desai has shown an alternative gateway where human emotions like love, peace, and happiness of an individual should be prioritised and one should make a *conscious choice* of them.

Desai's suggestions for alternatives are not limited to the insurgents alone; she also focuses on the other side of the story, exploring how privileged individuals in society, who benefit from their position, can exercise *scepticism* and *relativism* regarding the existing order, potentially paving the way for new possibilities. In the novel, Noni, representing the elite class, emerges as the conduit for Desai's perspective as she engages in a conflict with Lola over the Nepali movement, her empathetic plea, "But you have to take it from their point of view" (Desai 133), serving as a rare beacon of understanding amidst the prevailing dystopian atmosphere characterised by a lack of empathy and mutual comprehension. She challenges the prevailing status quo that oppresses marginalised communities by inquiring, "They've been here, most of them, several generations. Why shouldn't Nepali be taught in schools?" This exemplifies her capacity for self-criticism, her capacity of zooming out to understand others points of view, and being still part of the retainers of the existing order. This is what Mannheim has also suggested for better understanding of the reality, in his words, "this relativism and skepticism compel self-criticism and self-control and lead to a new conception of objectivity" (42).Noni's objectivity leads her near the truth, she acknowledges, "But if we forget there is some truth to what they are saying the problems will keep coming" (Desai 251), and finally to her awakening, as the narrator describes, "Noni tried to rouse herself. Maybe everyone felt this way at some point when one recognised there was a depth to one's life and emotions beyond one's own significance." Through

the depiction of Noni's awakening, Desai suggests the prospect of penetrating through one's blind idealistic vision which prevents one from bringing effective change in society.

In the dystopian landscape of the "habit of hate," Desai skillfully reveals characters' disregard for cultural diversity, their ignorance regarding the reality of "inescapable plurality" (Sen 174), thus presenting *acknowledgment of multicultural reality* as a transformative suggestion for a better society. Biju's epiphanic moment regarding his hegemonic views towards Saeed , the representative of different races, cultures, and ethnicities poignantly illustrates the deceptive nature of ideologies, whether political, cultural, or religious. The narrator captures the dilemma inside Biju's head:

> Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK?
> The cow was not an Indian cow; therefore it was not holy?
> Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis?
> Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims?
> Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it
> was all wrong and hand over Kashmir?
> No, no, how could that be… (Desai 81)

This dilemma surpasses the paradigm of religion and nation to the race, where he becomes trapped in the prejudice against black people and realises the hypocrisy of her ideologies, as the narrator illustrates:

> Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed?
> Therefore there was nothing wrong with black people and Saeed?
> Or Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or anyone else…???
> This habit of hate had accompanied Biju, and he found that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India (Desai 81-82).

Thus this realization enables Biju to comprehend the world with better judgement as he has realised the existing policy and understood the importance of seeing beyond superficial distinctions and embracing a shared humanity.

Though Desai showcases the necessity of multicultural acknowledgement in the novel, she has never promoted what many critiques of multiculturalism have complained about: the essentialist and separatist approach to cultural difference, where individuals' priority of their cultural identity is absolute and superior to others. This issue, we can best understand by Ali Rattansi's words: "Multiculturalism has succumbed too easily to an interpretation of ethnic cultures as having strictly definable boundaries, having unchanging essential components, and lacking quite fundamental internal dissent. Multiculturalism, in other words, has been too prone to essentialism, although it does not necessarily entail it" (152). He also mentions another notion called "interculturalism," which undercuts this essentialist tendency by building in a conception of connectedness, interaction, and interweaving between the beliefs, practices, and lifestyles of different (not separate) ethnic groups (Rattansi 152). Desai, through her novel, has also showcased the intermingling of different cultures and the ability of characters to dissent according to their choices and reasons. For instance, the narrator describes a beautiful and poignant moment when communal atmosphere inspires Cook to take part in Buddhist culture, though he is portrayed as a superstitious Hindu individual, sacrificing goats for his son's betterment. The narrator describes: "He was not Buddhist, of course, but had gone in a secular spirit. The muffled thunder of prayer rumbled down the mountain… bells singing, prayer flags flying from the saddles.

The cook had prayed for Biju and gone to bed feeling pious, so sparkily so that he felt clean although he knew he was dirty" (Desai 89). This feeling of "pious" and "cleanliness" triumphs over any definable boundaries in the novel, and I surmise that Desai has always strived for this *triumph of mutuality* over any definite absolutism.

Desai's focus on the societal context, where the cook practices his choice amidst Nepali women with golden nose rings, Tibetan women with braids and prayer beads, and Lepcha medicine men with their traditional remedies coming together in the bustling haat market, helps to understand how recognition of cultural diversity is crucial for a better, more breathable society. Also, though the celebration of Christmas by Sai and her friends has been portrayed by Desai as satirical of the hegemony they are subjected to, the result of the policies of the "convent school," the author has also denounced Gyan's anger towards Sai for celebrating Christmas, as the narrator mentions this anger as "unexpected venom" and "anti-secular" (Desai 168). Moreover, Desai puts forth the *fluid notion of culture* through the celebration of Christmas, where the celebration of Christian religion is being practiced with gifts of Tibetan and Nepali culture (157). Here, Desai has highlighted the necessity of understanding the false notion of "purity" in any culture—the notion that any culture is autonomous and homogenous in its own. Regarding this false notion, Bhikhu Parekh reminds us that "it is difficult to think of any culture save perhaps the most primitive and isolated that is not influenced by others," since "every cultural community exists in the midst of others and is inescapably influenced by them" (163). A culture might "borrow their technology," which is never "culturally neutral," and it may be "consciously and unconsciously influenced by their beliefs and practices;" thus, other cultures are never simply "a mute external fact" but rather "shape its self-definition" and remain "a silent and unacknowledged presence within it" (Parekh 163).

Thus, understanding the fluidity of any belief, whether culture, nationalism, or ethnicity, usually perceived as absolute, is crucial for negotiating in a dystopian world and sustaining hope for a better future. Only then can any utopic vision avoid beginning with "false consciousness." If utopic ventures tend to collapse into dystopia, where violence and fragmentation persist, the question arises: should we abandon the very act of envisioning a better future? Desai's portrayal of dystopia addresses this dilemma by exposing both the wreckage of the past utopic project of colonization and the disillusionment of the present utopic drive of globalization, where most characters experience contradictions and fractures, a distinctly postmodern reality. Yet her narrative resists falling into the kind of paralysis that Fredric Jameson calls the "cynical reason," which he describes as "scepticism about the possibilities of change" (13). As Jameson further explains, "It knows everything about our own society… all the structural toxicities of the system, and yet it declines indignation in a kind of impotent lucidity that may not even be bad faith. It cannot be shocked or scandalised" (23). Desai's nuanced depiction pushes back against this "impotent lucidity" by refusing resignation and instead drawing attention to the inherent objective "*conditions of possibilities*" that exist within the dystopic circumstances of globalization and postcolonialism. In doing so, her fiction unsettles the cynicism Jameson diagnoses and insists on keeping alive the imaginative work of envisioning alternative futures.

Even, Jameson has mentioned how globalization with its "so-called-free-market-fundamentalism" has been "the last gasp of a properly utopian vision," but a "perverse one." Yet he has also warned about how its dystopian consequences can lead to a "political apathy" (Jameson 22-23). Desai's point of view, as we can see, is in alignment with Jameson's, as she has shown that this phenomenon of globalization is not a one-way traffic, and there lies the dialectic of opposites, where the good can never be separated from the evil. When Noni says to Lola that,

"chicken tikka masala has replaced fish and chips as the number one take-out dinner in Britain. It was just reported in the Indian Express," (Desai 51) this signifies how globalization is affecting both sides, where the cultures of developing countries are getting integrated with the western ones. The daughters of Lola and Noni are shown working in global news networks, where they are flourishing in their respective organizations. Chris Barker and Emma A Jane has also mentioned this notion of globalization in their book: "Globalization is not constituted by a monolithic one-way flow from the West to the rest" (191).

Desai's through this novel has raised the issue of "colonial neurosis," which was first mentioned by Octave Mannoni in his book to conceptualise the psychological disturbances experienced by both colonisers and the colonised as a result of the colonial situation. Mannoni argues that the coloniser and the colonised develop a dependent relationship that fosters psychological conflicts and neuroses. Later on, Fanon used this concept to justify counter-violence against the systematic violence of the colonisers. As Sartre explains in his preface to Fanon's work, "no indulgence can erase the marks of violence: violence alone can eliminate them," and the colonised are "cured of colonial neurosis by driving the colonist out by force." Once their rage "explodes," they "recover their lost coherence" and "experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves," though from a distance such wars might appear as "the triumph of barbarity" (Sartre lv).

But Desai has tried to question this justification in a subtle way in this novel, and suggested an alternative way of doing postcolonialism. Her point of view aligns with the fact that one should not be obsessed with taking revenge on the coloniser; rather, one can write about it and present the truth to the world through narrative means. Noni mentions the book *A Bend in the River*, by V.S. Naipul and says, "Superb writer… First-class. One of the best books I've ever read." And Lola replies to her, "I think he's strange. Stuck in the past…. He has not progressed. Colonial neurosis, he's never freed himself from it. Quite a different thing now" (Desai 51). Desai ironically uses Lola's reply to suggest that in the postcolonial present, what one can do is use the instrument of dominant culture, appropriate it, and write about the present scenario, which is done by the mentioned author Naipul through his novel. Instead of drowning in the paradigm of resentment and hate, one has to use one's position as a writer and deal with one's psychological fragmentation without being radically hateful. This way out from colonial neurosis suggested by Desai can be best understood by Maswood Akhter's words, as he writes in his book: "while we must have the knowledge of [postcolonialism's] hegemonic capacities, while we must have introspections about our own self-contradictions, we should not be bitter, contentious, or be engulfed with negative emotion, rather, we should use its available advantages for working towards a kind of greater self-autonomy" (41-42).

Also, it is important to note that what Lola has said, though Desai has satirised her through that comment, is not completely in contrast with Desai's suggestion, which is later hinted by Noni's comment on writing, as she says, "Well, I don't like to agree with you, but maybe you have a point… After all, why isn't he writing of where he lives now? Why isn't he taking up, say, race riots in Manchester?" (Desai 51) The exchange between the two sisters sheds light on a common concern: the lingering fixation of the colonised on their colonial history, leading to a cycle of ongoing suffering. Desai's viewpoint suggests the possibility of directing attention towards present-day circumstances, advocating for a balanced perspective that moves beyond a singular focus on the colonial past. Maswood Akhter's recommendation resonates with this perspective, as he emphasizes the need to develop "*a modus vivendi*," an ability to live with "more than one culture," privileging "coexistence, extension, accumulation" rather than "substitution, rejection, or

suppression." Only then, he argues, will postcolonials cease to be "torn between two cultures" and overcome the "crises of identity" that have so often plagued the English-educated (44). Thus, Desai, through her subtle yet effective narrative technique, implies the alternative of a shift away from a rigid mindset solely centred on historical grievances towards a more *nuanced understanding of current realities*.

Now, in the dystopian reality inhabited by the characters of this novel, the narrative continues to grapple with various contradictions, largely stemming from the cultural collision within the multicultural society depicted. Despite these tensions, the author advocates for unifying sentiments of humanity—generosity and love—as the remedy, which would bring about "flexibility and adaptability that would lead to the aspired "lack of contradictions." The prevalence of the issue of contradiction is noticeable as different characters go through this sentiment. The interaction with people of different cultures and nations has led to the dilemma of Biju, mentioned earlier. But Desai juxtaposes this dilemma with Saeed's sentiment of contradiction, as the narrator describes, "Presumably Saeed Saeed had encountered the same dilemma regarding Biju… Presumably Saeed had been warned of Indians…" and adds his capability of dealing with the situation, which is what Desai's suggestion as a coping mechanism, "but he didn't seem wracked by contradictions; a generosity buoyed him and dangled him above such dilemmas" (Desai 82). On the other hand, Sai's learning is influenced by insights from various cultures, as the narrator observes, "Any sense that Sai was taught had fallen between the contradictions, and the contradictions themselves had been absorbed" (Desai 35). Both she and Gyan are described as a "composite of contradictions" (Desai 264) due to their diverse cultural identities, engaging in "arguing about what they half believed in or even what they didn't believe in at all, desiring comfort as much as raw austerity, authenticity as much as playacting, desiring coziness of family as much as to abandon it forever." Despite their contradictions, they both yearn for a "lack of contradictions." The reason for these contradictions lies in the characters' fixation with "solid knowledge;" This form of extremism is contrasted with Saeed and Sai's flexibility. This issue can be best understood in Spielman's words:

> Desai demonstrates that those who insist upon solid knowledge suffer repeated misery and misfortune, while those unbothered by contradictions do not. Saeed and Sai, the two characters least interested in solid knowledge, pursue what they want without worrying about how doing so might violate their beliefs. Both tend to reinterpret broad defining categories in ways that suit them. Saeed does not consider himself disloyal to Islam because of his marriage of convenience any more than Sai thinks of herself as western for celebrating Christmas. (87)

Now, the narrator suggests an alternative path in their "shared commonality" when some characters do not focus on their differences; as about Gyan and Sai's interactions, the narrator comments, "They were falling back into familiarity, into common ground," characterised by "a wild daring love to bicycle them into the sky, but also a rice and dal love blessed by the unexciting feel of everyday" (Desai 264). The narrative suggests that transcending contradictions requires embracing both the extraordinary and the mundane aspects of life, symbolised by the contrasting images of "bicycling into the sky" and the "rice and dal love." This sense of synthesis is what Fredrich Jameson has called, "A true dialectic; a true unity of opposites!" (21) Desai's suggestion remains that, when this world is wracked upside down with violence and contradiction, a sense of love and generosity helps individuals *find common ground* and helps them approach a better future. Only then will the duality reflect the characters' journey towards a more integrated and harmonious existence, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural integration and personal identity.

Desai's suggestions of understanding shared human value across cultures demand individuals to look beyond a material perspective; as she has said through Biju's words, "money wasn't everything. There was that simple happiness of looking after someone and having someone look after you" (Desai 91) Even she highlights how Saeed Saeed's cultural upbringing helps him to deal with contradictions, as he says, "In Zanzibar what one person have he have to share with everyone, that is good, that is the right way" (Desai 103). Though this generosity can lead to one's lack of material wealth, yet this sense of kindness may help in other aspects of life as well. Barnita Bagchi associates the importance of human emotions in this violent dystopia with Hanna Ardent's notion of "oasis of survival" in her book, where she mentions, "the oases of friendship and love which scraped through after the destruction of politics seem to have disappeared today. They have been swept out by the yellow sand of liquid capitalism" (Bagchi 200). In the novel, instances of genuine love emerge, untainted by the barriers of capitalism, cultural divides, or colonial legacies. One such example is Sai's paternal bond with the Cook, which transcends the limitations of classism and cultural norms. Moreover, a poignant illustration of genuine affection within the coloniser's domain arises when a woman, the proprietor of a shop in England, exhibits maternal "casual affection" towards the judge (Desai 45), highlighting the presence of individuals capable of warmth and empathy despite their affiliation with the colonising power. The possibility of a parallel life against the life of hate and violence is depicted through the judge and Nimi's first bicycle ride, during which they shared a transformative moment, symbolising a temporary escape from societal constraints through the freedom and joy of cycling. This fleeting connection between two individuals from disparate backgrounds is vividly portrayed by the narrator: "the ground sloped, and as they flew down the incline, their hearts were left behind for an instant, levitating amid green leaves, blue sky" (Desai 97). Desai's suggestion lies in finding a common ground and a lack of contradiction in this diverse world through these humane values, which can be traced across many cultures, as R. Kidder argues in his book that, because problems are increasingly global, solutions must incorporate values from many different cultures to allow for effective responses into humanity's future. He interviewed ethical standard-bearers from the fields of politics, religion, business, education and literature from around the world and found eight values that cross boundaries. They include love, truthfulness, fairness, freedom, community and tolerance. The approach is pragmatic but it makes a case for shared global ethics in an increasingly shrinking and multicultural world.

Desai's subtle suggestions in her narrative technique also occur through *natural intervention*, where nature blurs the differences between borders, hierarchies of culture, and class. The delineation of class hierarchy, evident between the so-called "elites" and the impoverished, is eroded by the monsoon season, symbolised by the relentless rain. As the narrator poignantly describes, "No way to telephone, no way for letters to get through. She and the cook, running into each other," (Desai 128), their social disparities dissolve into the common experience of navigating the challenges brought forth by nature's fury. Also, the narrator describes in the very first chapter, "it had always been a messy map. The papers sounded resigned. A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there—despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (Desai 14). Here, the portrayal of mist dissolving borders should not be misunderstood as a "homogenization process," rather Desai here invokes past history when there were no borders and people used to live without any sense of a limited space. This aspect is also ingrained in many utopian philosophy, as Gordin et al. also mention, "The core interest for many of those who have

already written about utopia and dystopia emphasises the intellectual coherence (or incoherence) of the idea of specially planned space(s)" and also add that, "When one hears the word "utopia," one usually thinks of a space—typically a city, but not necessarily so—that has been organised and mapped out geographically" (Gordin et al. 04). Thus, this utopian impulse of creating borders leads to more divisive policies and more excuses for dividing the world than it already is. Desai also criticises the human urge to establish ownership of a place, the impulse that led to the first colonisation of America by Englanders and later on to other colonisations. This impulse is aptly scrutinised by the author through the metaphorical lens of mountain climbing, wherein humans seek to establish dominance over nature, as the narrator contemplates: "Should humans conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without glory, without claim of ownership…"(Desai 160) As such, Desai's critique resonates with broader discussions surrounding the relationship between humanity and the natural world, urging a reevaluation of our collective attitudes towards ownership and dominance.

The narrative of the novel, woven through subtle glimpses of potentialities, alternative viewpoints, and symbolic representations of events, constructs a prism through which we may discern the spectrum of our options and rationale. This lens aids in navigating the complexities of our dystopian reality. By portraying the upheaval wrought by individuals steadfast in their ideologies, she unveils the inherent constraints of human nature, where personal relationships fail in the face of cultural, nationalistic, and other societal ideologies because of the refined vision one has of the future that leads to fragmentation and ambiguity. Bloch's concept of the Not-Yet-Conscious helps illuminate ambiguity found in Desai's world as the space where future possibilities take shape. He argues that history is never complete but always charged with potential, containing within it what he calls a "forward dawning" and "preappearance". This anticipatory element becomes visible, he writes, when the "Not-Yet-Conscious flows when the block of static and regressive thinking is lifted" (Bloch xxix). Such moments do not arrive as fully formed utopias; rather, they appear in fragments, as "images, archetypes and symbols of the Not-Yet-Conscious" preserved most vividly in art and imagination (Bloch xxix). Desai's narrative, with its fleeting recognitions of love, solidarity, and self-criticism amidst violence and fragmentation, embodies such anticipatory gestures. The fractured epiphanies of characters like Biju, Cook, Noni or Sai are not final resolutions but intimations of a different way of being, glimpses of what Bloch calls a "shining ahead." Biju's father's refusal to be guided by lofty notions of nationalism, as well as the modest "rice-daal" love between the Judge and his wife, represent moments in the novel that offer an alternative perspective. These instances break away from the romanticism often attached to ideologies such as nationalism, ethnocentrism, and monoculturalism, rendering the portrayal more complex and ambiguous. By staging ambiguity in this sense, *The Inheritance of Loss* refuses both utopian determinism and dystopian paralysis, instead locating in the ambivalent present the conditions of possibility for futures still in the making. Desai only asks for a better, balanced positioning of individuals who believe in shared values across cultures, freedom of choice within this ambiguity. When Gordin et al. say, to "move beyond the limits of utopian/dystopian politics," we have to "strike a balance between our inner and outer realities," and "take into account those things that sustain life—and even to reject the ethos that humans can live beyond limits us" (14), it harmonises with Desai's perspective for building a better reality where individuals will not remain blinded by their ideological chauvinisms, embracing the ambiguity through responding to the outer reality of diversity, recognising human limitations of building any radical utopia, and also restraining themselves from exploiting any lives breathing out there. What Desai really asks for is

the recognition of *Concordia res parvae crescent*, to navigate with this aporetic dystopian reality.

When Richar A. Slaughter says, one of the "feature of our time is ambiguity. One can find examples of 'good' and 'bad' news everywhere… They overlook the processes of selection, exclusion and cultural editing that occur within human minds and all social institutions. It is only by having due regard for inner and outer realities that we can begin to get anywhere near the truth" (02), we understand why Desai's alternative possibilities always rely on an individual's decision, his position, and his navigating capacity; because if one fails to balance himself in this world, one realises that the foundation on which his ideologies were built has always been a lie, and the inevitability of dystopia becomes unescapable. Desai's exploration of the dialectic between utopia and dystopia culminates in a profound reflection on the nature of truth. As articulated by the narrator, "When you build on lies, you build strong and solid. It was the truth that undid you" (Desai 215). This acknowledgement underscores the transformative potential inherent in confronting and embracing the truth amidst uncertainty. Indeed, ambiguity emerges not merely as a challenge but as an opportunity for growth and adaptation, recognising that amidst the ruins lies the possibility of discovering truth anew. The narrator concludes the story with a glimmer of optimism, describing the golden peaks of Kanchenjunga illuminated by a luminous light. We are reminded that truth, though elusive, remains within reach, and when truth appears to you in that transitory moment, "All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it" (Desai 329). Therefore, Desai's work not only illuminates the paradoxes of our existence but also inspires us to embrace uncertainty as a pathway to deeper understanding and enlightenment. Desai's vision unsettles the rigid binaries of utopia and dystopia, showing instead how their tension opens a space for choice, for seeing the "conditions of possibility" embedded in the present. Her characters remind us that alternatives do not arrive in grand revolutions but in small recognitions—in choosing empathy over hate, dialogue over silence, tenderness over power. To look beyond the binary is to embrace ambiguity as fertile ground, where contradictions need not paralyze but invite new ways of living. In this fragile space, human beings rediscover their capacity to imagine, and to choose, differently.

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Digital Eyes, Dystopian Lies: *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Politics of Modern Surveillance

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Abstract

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood portrays Gilead as a gendered regime characterized by ritualized visibility. The fundamental principles of this system of control are scarily similar to those that stalk the world of digital surveillance today. The paper analyzes Gilead as a panoptic architecture, a blueprint for the engineered invisibility of contemporary surveillance by providing a gender-conscious synthesis of Foucault's theory of panopticism and Zuboff's conception of surveillance capitalism. It suggests that surveillance is a hybrid process, one which occurs at once through an explicit, ritualized surveillance (uniforms, shaming in public, "The Eyes") and an implicit, computational surveillance (data mining, profiling, predictive nudging), and supports this argument with a close textual reading of the novel and an interdisciplinary interest in surveillance studies. By so doing, it discovers that both have similar detrimental effects: they lead to self-censorship, destroy privacy, and disproportionately affect women and other marginalized communities. The paper also examines how today's encryption wars, obfuscation tactics, and collective legal and technological activism can be better perceived and interpreted in alignment with the resistance patterns in Offred's coded speech, clandestine acts, and other such micro-resistances. Lastly, the paper contends that we need to work out an ethics of limits that should help determine purposes in such a way that will guarantee fair and open approval of individuals and improve fairness in the use of surveillance technology, and thus, it transforms the literary critique into a prescriptive intervention into the current debates on privacy, power, and digital justice, instead of a descriptive account of them.

Keywords: Surveillance, Surveillance Capitalism, Panopticism, Feminist Critique, Ethics, Privacy and Autonomy

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) portrays a dystopian society that perpetually needs to prescribe the totalitarian control based on religious notions and omnipresent surveillance. Surveillance in Gilead is employed in both the physical and psychological realms of the people to keep them under the rulers' thumbs and thus perpetuate their power. The handmaids are at the center of a surveillance state that defines nearly every aspect of their lives and restrains them in just as many ways. This might just be the ultimate surveillance society, with "The Eyes", Gilead's secret police, watching virtually every move, word, and even thought one makes within the social world of Gilead. Power is understood in the novel in relation to their means of government surveillance, which denies individual agency, especially that of women.

Such an idea of Gileadean surveillance culture can be employed rather effectively as a caution against totalitarianism. As Offred navigates this heavily policed landscape, she wonders how even the most minimal acts of rebellion would be extremely dangerous. Inevitably such a background would set the reader thinking about how today's surveillance works, not just in totalitarian states but also in everyday society with all its developed digital monitoring, face recognition and data

collection of our own private lives. This is also highlighted by Ivan Manokha: modern means of surveillance through fast communication and information technologies increases the self-discipline and self-censorship of individuals, which promote the power inequalities in society (219).

1.2 Research Rationale

A great deal of critical work about *The Handmaid's Tale* has by far examined Gilead's panoptic surveillance in a Foucauldian or a state-power framework only. But less attention has been paid to the connection between Gilead's ritualized visibility—its uniforms, scripted and manipulated language, as well as public shaming—and today's engineered invisibility built right into the digital mode of surveillance, where data extraction, predictive profiling and subtle "nudges" take place without overt coercion. This paper for the first time attends to this gap by placing Atwood's dystopia in the context of surveillance capitalism and feminist surveillance studies, demonstrating how control transfers from architectural attention to computational inference, differentially and disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups on the basis of their sex.

Based on the visibility and concealment as depicted by Atwood, we find a deeper reflection of the modern digital surveillance systems: both systems create self-censorship, both turn people into discrete bits of information, and both operate on the internalized discipline of their subjects. The contemporary iterations of it, such as algorithmic recruitment platforms, psychographic political ads, and so on, prove that the Gilead of today no longer requires any uniformed enforcers, "The Eyes", or even any concrete walls; now it can work just as well with code and data streams instead. This is what qualifies Atwood's novel as not only a politically futuristic anticipation of potential models of surveillance, but also a normative resource that enables us to challenge the ethics of surveillance and develop modes resistance tailored to fit our contemporary assemblages of states and platforms.

1.3 Research Questions

In this paper, we will discuss how Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* forecasts and critiques contemporary surveillance. The following questions will guide this study:

1. In what ways does the novel represent surveillance as a visible ritual and a psychologically oppressive act, and how does this foreshadow digital logics of surveillance?
2. How do Gilead's methods of surveillance resemble, differ from, and shed light on modern algorithmic surveillance in surveillance capitalism?
3. In what ways do surveillance practices in Gilead and digital contexts target women and other minorities differentially, and what kind of gendered harms result from these systems of control?
4. In what ways do types of resistance in the novel have bearing on current discussions about ethics and regulations related to surveillance?

1.4 Research Significance

This paper makes the following contributions to literature and surveillance studies:

1. Hybrid surveillance and comparative lens: *The Handmaid's Tale* is reimagined as template for the emergent state–platform hybrid surveillance; the ritualized visibility of Gilead's totalitarian regime is overlaid with engineered invisibility of data extraction today. In doing so, it creates a comparative apparatus through which the two disparate forms of

surveillance—one overt and ritualistic, the other covert and algorithmic—each go about enacting their own normalisation of compliance in different yet convergent manners.

2. Interdisciplinary and gender-oriented synthesis: The work attempts a synthesis of Foucault's notion of panopticism, feminist critiques of monitoring, and Zuboff's conception of surveillance capitalism in order to offer a rich interdisciplinary explanation that not only records the structures of control but also highlights how they differ in the lived experiences of marginalized groups, especially women. Therefore, it proposes to extend the feminist critique of contemporary methods of surveillance.
3. Modes of resistance: It identifies the modes of resistance of *The Handmaid's Tale*—code speech, silence, secrecy—and positions them in a dialectical relation with such contemporary internet practices as encryption, obfuscation, and data defence technologies.
4. Ethical implications: The paper's last section claims that the novel can help to develop a certain ethics of limits—ethics marked by the restriction of purposes, meaningful consent, and protection from discrimination. Practically, this then positions literary analysis as a comment on culture and as an intervention in ongoing debates about how surveillance technologies should be governed and managed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* describes a world where surveillance has evolved from just a means to control the population to a means to create an individual's identity, and therefore dictates the rules and norms of society. In the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian society ruled entirely by men, they have developed networks of overt and covert surveillance systems, "The Eyes", to monitor and discipline its citizenry—especially women. As Offred reflects upon the constant observation of herself and her fellow Handmaids she states, "Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an eye" (Atwood 28). Consequently, this widespread surveillance creates a climate of paranoia and encourages self-censorship among the populace, which ultimately sustains the totalitarian rule of Gilead.

Foucault's concepts of panopticism and biopower provide the theoretical lens to understand the nature of the surveillance of the people of Gilead. According to Foucault, "[d]isciplinary power […] is exercised through its invisibility," and it is the visibility of the subject (in this case the body) that ensures the continuation of the power structure (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 187). In Gilead, this is achieved through the constant observation of the women, making their bodies "docile bodies" that are completely obedient to the needs of the state for reproduction (Khan 426). This is consistent with David Lyon's definition of surveillance as "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purpose of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered" (2).

Furthermore, the feminist critique of surveillance in *The Handmaid's Tale*, demonstrates how the totalitarian regime utilizes the female body as a site of control. For example, scholars like Chahinez Messlem, contend that Gilead constructs new forms of bodily identities creating a hierarchical system of visual representation and function based on sex and class (38). Handmaids are fertile women that are used for the sole purpose of reproduction, while the Marthas are women that serve the household functions of the Commander and his wife, and the Aunts are older women that serve as the enforcers of the regime's ideologies. In addition to visualizing the hierarchy of the

three groups through their uniforms, their subordination is reinforced by the fact that they wear uniforms of different colors.

The surveillance system that governs the lives of women in Gilead produces suspicion among people who are subjected to it and destroys relationships. In her account of going on a walk with a woman, Offred states, "the truth is she is my spy, as I am hers" (Atwood 29). This example illustrates the panoptic model where individuals internalize the gaze and participate in their own surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 204). The same type of surveillance is observable in the public sphere as well, such as when the Japanese tourists and Offred and Ofglen encounter each other, one of the translators for the tourists asks if he can take a photograph of them. Offred refuses to be photographed as a reminder of Aunt Lydia's cautionary words: "Modesty is invisibility, […] Never forget it" (Atwood 38-39). Again we see how Gilead has embedded surveillance into a moral code, using invisibility as a means of control.

Anyone who has lived through the era of digital technology can recognize the similarities in the methods employed by Gilead to monitor the population, and the methods being used today. As Becker observes "[t]he digital age is characterized by the omnipresence of hidden cameras and other surveillance devices," significantly altering our perception of our right to privacy (309). Here we see the parallels between the way Gilead eliminated the private domain of the citizenry, with the all-knowing eye of the regime, and the contemporary debate regarding the influence of surveillance capitalism and how it threatens personal autonomy; as explored by Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. Furthermore, Debasish Nandy indicates a tenuous equilibrium between national security and the rights of the individual to privacy: "The delicate equilibrium between security imperatives and the protection of individual privacy is under intense scrutiny" (13), and just like Gilead promised social order by monitoring every move of the citizenry, the conversations about surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, have brought the same consequences of losing individual autonomy as were experienced by the residents of Gilead.

In conclusion, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a thought-provoking critique of how surveillance can shape an individual into a subject of control and manipulate their behavior, identity and relationships. Through the comparison of Gilead's dystopian surveillance mechanisms to modern digital surveillance, the novel highlights the relevance of surveillance studies in analyzing the power structures and erosion of privacy that occur in both fictional and real-world contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper applies a comparative qualitative method using a theoretical lens that is composed of three distinct components: Foucault's theory of panopticism and biopower, feminist surveillance Studies, and Zuboff's conception of surveillance capitalism. These concepts provide a basis for comparing and contrasting the visible rituals of Gilead with the invisible engineering of digital surveillance systems. Together, these concepts enable us to analyze how both systems achieve compliance through fear and violence toward individuals and also facilitate resistance. *The Handmaid's Tale* itself will be used as the primary source of this paper, whereas different influential books, scholarly papers, etc. surrounding surveillance, power, and gender will be used as the secondary sources. A comparison will be made of Gilead's use of psychological and political types of surveillance to those that exist today including data tracking, facial recognition, and algorithmic profiling and to the specific experiences of women and other marginalized groups in society. The combination of all this information will be an attempt to show where the line is drawn around what constitutes ethical surveillance and its effect on an individual's autonomy. All aspects

of the research have taken into account ethical considerations, and thus, all sources will be properly cited, and the social impacts of surveillance will be critically examined.

4. DISCUSSION: Surveillance in Gilead: A Tool of Control

4.1 The Role of "The Eyes"

In Gilead, "The eyes" represent both visible and invisible manifestations of fear; they symbolize the totalitarian regime's pervasive and all-knowing control over the populace. They utilize two forms of enforcement – both openly and secretly – to maintain their control by always watching. In Offred's paranoia—and thus the impact on her mental state due to the way such systems affect the human psyche—she thinks Nick, the Commander's chauffeur, could be an eye: "Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an Eye" (Atwood 28). This demonstrates how being perceived as under observation affects behavior which creates self-censorship and an internalized form of discipline—both critical components of Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism. As Foucault states: "visibility is a trap," because simply the potential for being observed will produce a society of conformists (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200). The open power of "The Eyes" is especially evident when they punish in front of everyone:

> There must have been a Men's Salvaging early this morning. I didn't hear the bells. Perhaps I've become used to them.
>
> We stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies. It doesn't matter if we look. We're supposed to look: this is what they are there for, hanging on the Wall. Sometimes they'll be there for days, until there's a new batch, so as many people as possible will have the chance to see them. (Atwood 41-42)

The above example illustrates how "The Eyes" utilize the power of sight to induce compliance using both psychological manipulation and public punishment. Their omnipresence along with the utilization of both apparent and hidden tactics makes "The Eyes" a powerful representation of Gilead's oppressive power structure.

4.2 Public and Private Surveillance

Surveillance in Gilead is both public and private, so much so that there is no part of one's life left unmonitored. Women, specifically the Handmaids, have the added burden of being monitored for their adherence to the regime's reproductive goals. An example of this is demonstrated in the relationship between Offred and her walk partner, Ofglen: "The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (Atwood 29). This pervasive distrust, which is instilled into the subjects of Gilead through constant monitoring, is the reason why there cannot be any solidarity amongst the women in opposition to Gilead.

This monitoring is further reinforced through the work of the Guardians and the Aunts, who serve as additional examples of surveillance as a mechanism of control. As Marcel Becker states regarding the surveillance in modern society: "hidden cameras and other surveillance devices" change people's perception of privacy (309). Gilead exemplifies this loss of privacy as women are always seen and held accountable and, most importantly, the loss of their autonomy to make their own judgments as they become submissive. Additionally, the monitoring does not stop at the boundaries of the public domain, but extends to what would be considered private domains of individual lives as well. Offred describes her living space as follows: "The door of the room […] is not locked. In fact it doesn't shut properly" (Atwood 18). It is these intentional violations of individuals' personal space that emphasize the dual mechanisms of surveillance in the public and

private realms that Gilead employs to monitor all aspects of the lives of women, and thereby sustain the regimes hold over them.

4.3 Language and Surveillance

In Gilead language is employed as an instrument of surveillance, and of ideological constraint. Through its employment of codified speech, the regime restricts communication; therefore, dissent. Terms like “Mayday,” represent codes for covert dissident signals; acts of speech which demonstrate how language may function to be both subversive and monitored. Silences function as the means of survival for Offred, as taught to her by Aunt Lydia: “Modesty is invisibility, […] Never forget it” (Atwood 38-39); and illustrate how the regime uses language to control women's actions and thought processes.

The notion that discourse “transmits and produces power; it reinforces it” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 101) illustrates how the regime utilizes the enforcement of women's silence to conform to Foucault's theory of discourse. By limiting women's ability to express themselves linguistically, the regime takes away their ability to resist. As Nazish Khan notes, the linguistic restrictions imposed upon women in Gilead enable the regime to take “control of knowledge, discourse and language” in order to retain power (426). The regime's imposition of rigid regulation upon language provides a framework for the regime's ideology to remain unchallenged and strengthens the regime's control.

5. Modern Surveillance: Echoes of Gilead

5.1 Digital Panopticons

Michel Foucault's original theory of panopticism has been revitalized in the modern digital world; it has also migrated from the confines of the physical realm to the digital realm. Ivan Manokha indicates that whereas for Foucault, traditional panopticon represented an architecture of surveillance, today's version represents a regime of “ubiquitous observation” and utilizes digital surveillance to discipline people through collection and profiling of data on them. Facial recognition software, predictive tracking systems, and algorithms/data analysis are examples of how technology is changing people's behaviors—often with no knowledge or input from the person being monitored (227-234).

This digital panopticon is in tune with mechanisms of control in Gilead, where the citizens are always under watch to ensure their compliance. Among the most striking descriptions of what it feels like to be watched by “The Eyes”, Offred describes, “[A] pier-glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something” (Atwood 19). Similarly, Marcel Becker puts it, “[T]he digital age is characterized by the omnipresence of hidden cameras and other surveillance devices” that make the individuals internalize the watchful gaze of authority, eliminating their autonomy (309). Shoshana Zuboff further explores how digital technologies are using behavioral data to develop predictive products (65).

A real-life implementation of this digital panopticon is the Social Credit System in China, where through a web of networks, monitoring would include facial recognition and digital activity tracking technologies to monitor the actions of its citizens. It rewards points for behaviors like timely bill payments or follow-through on social conventions. Those who exhibit low-scoring behaviors face punishment like being denied air travel and even intercity railway journeys, less access to loans, and exclusion from certain privileges of society. For instance, over 12 million people have been deprived of the right to fly owing to low-scoring social credit, demonstrating

surveillance's function in ensuring compliance and refiguring behavior in the form of punishment (Fullerton; Kobie).

5.2 Loss of Privacy

The erosion of privacy is one of the primary characteristics of both Gilead and the digital world. In the instance of Gilead, surveillance abolishes the notion of a private sphere, replacing it with a state-controlled gaze that enforces compliance. Offred's private moments are always shadowed by the regime's gaze, even in seemingly mundane activities: "The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (Atwood 18). Moreover, as Marcel Becker illustrates, the new monitoring technologies "temp, nudge, seduce, and convince individuals to participate for reasons that are advantageous to the institution" (309).

Zuboff underlines it is on the erosion of privacy that surveillance capitalism thrives: "surveillance capitalists asserted their right to invade at will, usurping individual decision rights in favor of unilateral surveillance and the self-authorized extraction of human experience for others' profit" (19). The loss of autonomy, Becker adds, is exceedingly augmented by the use of algorithms to influence behavior, wherein the mere awareness of such surveillance methods has a potential effect on human behavior, even in the absence of a direct observer (309).

An excellent illustration of an actual world event is the fact that demonstrates a loss of privacy exposed by the Cambridge Analytica scandal; during this incident, it was discovered that Facebook collected user data and used the data for political purposes (without getting permission from the users) including the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Millions of Facebook users had their personal data extracted by Cambridge Analytica for the purpose of creating psychographic profiles, then these profiles were used by Cambridge Analytica to create targeted advertisements for political campaigns, to manipulate public opinion, or to manipulate users' behavior based upon the information provided in those profiles. The use of personal data by Cambridge Analytica brought into question how government control can undermine individuals' ability to make autonomous decisions and demonstrate how weak personal data is in today's digital environment and raises ethical issues concerning users' privacy and exploitation (Guetta, Lapowsky).

5.3 Intersection with Gender

The focus of interest on women is significant in both Gilead and today's digital surveillance environments. In Gilead, women are seen as instruments of the state as the state is able to govern them through its direct control over their capability of reproduction. As Offred states, "I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, … [Now] the flesh arranges itself differently" (Atwood 83), these views are similar to those made by feminists concerning how surveillance capitalism has taken hold of online actions of women and used them for commercial purposes to exploit their consumer behavior (Maowad). Gendered surveillance is used to reinforce and expand upon gender-based social prejudices using technologies of surveillance and to limit women's opportunities.

As an example of the application of gendered surveillance in real life, we can talk about gendered surveillance through the use of algorithms from companies like Amazon. In 2014, Amazon developed an Artificial Intelligence (AI) recruitment tool designed to automatically review resumes submitted by job applicants with the goal of reducing time spent on the hiring process. The AI tool, however, automatically downgraded resumes that contained terms referencing women (i.e., "women's") or referenced women-only schools, based upon the biases present in the male-dominant data set the AI tool had been trained on. Although Amazon attempted to mitigate the

gender-bias within the AI tool, the company ultimately abandoned the project in 2017 due to the difficulty of creating an algorithmically neutral approach to decision making (Winick; Hamilton).

Zuboff expands on these themes by identifying the shift in the locus of control in the digital age, where surveillance capitalism relies on modifying human behavior rather than relying on labor. Zuboff states, "Instead of labor, surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of every human's experience" (9). Becker notes, in his analysis of autonomy and its loss, that surveillance capitalism is particularly invasive for marginalized populations, including women, who are regularly targeted for both consumer profiling and nudging across all of society (309). Therefore, surveillance capitalism continues to promote and perpetuate gender-based inequality in both physical and digital environments as a means of both ideologically and economically controlling women.

6. The Implications of Surveillance: Resistance and Subversion

The Handmaid's Tale depicts a totalitarian regime where power is maintained by omnipresent surveillance and control. In order to resist this system, Offred uses small, quiet acts of rebellion and subversive actions. These actions have great importance as they allow Offred to maintain some sense of individuality, or what little is left of it, while still living in a state of hyper-surveillance. Offred secretly talks to Ofglen in code and says, "We learned to whisper almost without sound" (Atwood 14), showing how simple, yet powerful acts of defiance can occur in a totalitarian regime where there is a strong emphasis on carefulness when taking risks and being visible.

While Offred does use secret communication as one of the primary ways of resisting the totalitarian regime, it is not the only method used. Small, everyday decisions can be viewed as acts of defiance against the oppressive regime. When Offred chooses to play Scrabble with the commander, she is making a statement of independence and self-worth in a time when those values are supposed to be taken from her. This view of resistance through small acts and everyday choices supports Ivan Manokha's views on panoptic systems. Panoptic systems do not simply control an individual by watching them, but rather they create a space where the individual must negotiate power with the controlling body, creating opportunities for resistance to arise in a space of oppression (220-221, 226, 233). These acts of resistance help to show how people find ways to resist even in oppressive regimes of surveillance.

These examples of resistance will continue to resonate into the digital age. Shoshana Zuboff identifies how surveillance capitalism helps to maintain control by hiding its influence on our choices: "The goal is now to automate us", not just watch us (8). This further emphasizes why it is so important to understand and expose such systems of control. The many activist groups today who are fighting digital surveillance use tactics like encryption, anonymization and decentralized communication to bypass digital surveillance. These methods of activism are similar to the many small acts of resistance that were shown throughout Gilead.

7. Lessons for Contemporary Resistance to Digital Surveillance

There is another connection of interest between the examples of surveillance in Gilead and those in today's digital surveillance systems in terms of the forms of resistance employed to counteract these systems. In both, as Offred silently resists the oppressive forces she faces, so too do the members of society in our time employ various technologies (such as VPN) as means to declare their right to privacy and autonomy. It is primarily through acts of resistance against the pervasive surveillance systems that independence will be achieved and regained. According to Marcel Becker, the first step toward undermining or degrading a surveillance system is to identify its

mechanisms (309). This clearly illustrates Becker's idea in the manner that Offred has attempted to distort her monitored existence as a form of creating pockets of resistance.

In addition to the general notion of resistance against surveillance, as suggested by feminist critiques of surveillance as seen in Simone Browne's *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, there exists a significant importance in collective action. Both in the context of Gilead and in today's digital world, surveillance is felt disproportionately by women and minority groups. A form of collective action that would aid in resisting the effects of surveillance would be through some form of a collective network of solidarity, as exemplified in the Mayday resistance movement in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The current forms of resistance in today's digital age are focused upon reclaiming control over one's own personal information. Throughout the entirety of her book, especially in chapters 11, 17 and 18 of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Zuboff repeatedly advocates for an infrastructure to regulate data collection based upon the principles of user autonomy rather than corporate profits. To Zuboff, data rights are equivalent to human rights and as such should be enshrined in law (54, 479). Presently, digital resistance seeks to combine both legal activism and technological innovation as a means to disrupt the control structures utilized by systems of surveillance to maintain their dominance.

8.1 Ethical Considerations and Implications

The Handmaid's Tale can serve as a warning for the extent to which surveillance practices can be taken, as well as the extent of their devastating implications. Unchecked surveillance, as seen in Gilead, can lead to the destruction of the two fundamental aspects of democracy—personal freedom and dignity. As described in previous sections, surveillance has been used as an instrument of power in Gilead, forcing its citizens to follow the rules established by society through the use of power, force, fear, and control. Every form of power, whether it be in a regime or otherwise, carries inherent risks of being abusive to others based upon unchecked surveillance; therefore, the mechanisms of surveillance, such as "The Eyes", that have been utilized in regimes throughout history demonstrate the great lengths to which absolutism can go when the use of power takes precedence over ethics and accountability. The consistent presence of "The Eyes" as a means of surveillance exemplifies the reduction of a citizen's rights to merely the right of being observed, thus removing the status of human beings with inherent rights and freedoms as citizens.

The same type of atmosphere of oppression that exists in Gilead today also exists in modern society—specifically in the U.S., where mass surveillance has caused many authors to self-censor. A 2013 survey of writers, conducted by PEN America, found that almost one in six of the surveyed authors had chosen not to write on certain topics out of fear that their work may have been subject to some level of government surveillance (PEN America). The omnipresence of surveillance creates a climate of distrust similar to the environment experienced by Offred in Gilead, causing individuals to limit their expression. Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts the loss of agency: an ethical crisis born of invisible, all-encompassing control. Therefore, the practice of surveillance in both physical and non-physical forms over the psychological and digital spaces has challenged the concept of individual autonomy in and of itself, creating moral concerns that require further ethical discussion.

8.2 Surveillance Without Consent

Shoshana Zuboff points out how surveillance capitalism thrives by claiming ownership of individuals' personal data and converting their experiences into data points, and also by

controlling these data points via manipulation (8). The same can be said of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The state takes ownership of women's reproductive systems, and thus, converts them into "two-legged wombs", i.e., "ambulatory chalices"—essentially, as Offred contemplates, they are converted into mere reproductive tools with no identity (Atwood 146). Therefore, they become mere commodities. We could see this example as an ethical violation where surveillance is utilized to extract benefits for institutions from specific people for the purpose of exploitation or commodity production.

This concept is applicable to today's world as well. Tech giants, including Google and Facebook, collect large amounts of personal data, usually without the consent of the users, to develop user profiles that are then sold to advertisers. An actual example is Facebook's method of obtaining data not only from registered users but also from non-users (e.g., through their web browser history or friends) to enable it to create "shadow profiles" that improve its ability to deliver targeted advertisements (Wagner). Additionally, Zeynep Tufekci illustrates that Facebook's use of targeted advertising through user data demonstrates how personal data is collected and exploited to alter consumer behavior while furthering existing power inequalities (156). Zuboff states that "[s]urveillance capitalism operates through unprecedented asymmetries in knowledge and the power that accrues to knowledge" (11). Essentially, surveillance capitalism represents an exploitation of human behavior for profit—the manipulation of individuals for financial gain, not as active participants with control over their own desires, but as commodity items of data. Algorithms used on websites like Amazon and YouTube illustrate another example of this concept where individuals are reduced to their footprint – their previous behaviors – and those past behaviors are utilized to provide personalized content and advertisements, thus creating profit for the corporation.

8.3 The Necessity of Ethical Boundaries

The dystopian setting of Atwood's novel emphasizes the necessity of ethical constraints to defend an individual's right to privacy and personal freedom. That Offred is able to resist the surveillance of the totalitarian regime in Gilead through small but deliberate acts, indicates that humans have a strong desire to regain their ability to act independently of those in power. Offred's recollections and her private thoughts represent an act of defiance and demonstrate the ethical obligation to safeguard individual rights even in the face of oppressive regimes. Ajiga et al. contend that technology developers should create standards for ethical use of surveillance technologies to promote trust among users and to reduce the potential for misuse of these technologies (57).

This point of view is reinforced by Zuboff and Browne on surveillance capitalism. Zuboff emphasizes that there is a disproportionate effect upon already marginalized groups when it comes to unfair monitoring by those with access to surveillance technologies (172). This can be seen today—Black and Muslim communities have been disproportionately monitored by law enforcement agencies through race-based profiling or other discriminatory practices. For example, in the U.S., the surveillance of Muslim communities by the FBI has created a negative impact upon the Muslim community creating a climate of fear and mistrust within the community as a result of post-9/11 actions (Alimahomed-Wilson 874). Furthermore, Simone Browne describes how Black people are subjected to greater levels of surveillance than other populations in both physical and digital spaces in her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (162). Thus, it becomes important for us to place a commitment to ethical principles based upon equity and justice as a response to these inequalities, because otherwise surveillance technology may exacerbate existing systemic biases, and create an atmosphere of distrust toward institutions.

9. Suggestions for Further Research

The study provides a number of potential pathways to be followed in subsequent studies, highlighting that surveillance remains relevant today in literature and in modern society. Subsequent studies can follow the pathways below:

1. **Comparative Studies:**
   Subsequent studies may expand upon this paper's comparative analysis by evaluating *The Handmaid's Tale* in comparison to surveillance-based dystopian novels such as Orwell's *1984* and Forster's "The Machine Stops". Comparative analyses could illustrate the differences in how different periods of literature conceptualized control and how different authors conceptualized resistance through differing societal and technological environments.

2. **Gendered Dimensions of Surveillance:**
   Additionally, subsequent studies will need to be conducted on the impacts of surveillance on individuals based on gender and specifically examine how women and other marginalized groups are disproportionally targeted by digital surveillance. A feminist and/or postcolonial approach would provide additional insight into how power, identity, and surveillance are interconnected and how they operate in Gilead and in contemporary digital society.

3. **Impact of New Technologies:**
   Given the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and biometric technologies, subsequent studies need to evaluate how these emerging technologies are changing norms surrounding privacy, consent, and agency. Additionally, examining predictive algorithms and data-driven monitoring will assist researchers in illustrating how emerging surveillance technologies are influencing individual behavior and institutional authority.

Investigating the subject matter as stated above can provide researchers with a greater comprehension of how surveillance affects the dynamics of power, resistance, and individual freedom in fiction and reality.

10. CONCLUSION

With the analysis now laid out throughout this paper, it has become impossible to see *The Handmaid's Tale* as simply another dystopian narrative; it is more of an unsettling interpretive mirror reflecting the degree of digital surveillance present in society today. As the argument deepens between what we allow to happen to us and how those choices are quietly taken away from us through a calculated and subtle manipulation, we can see that the mechanisms of discipline that Foucault described have not disappeared but have migrated into other subtler channels—such as predictive algorithms, behavioral nudges and the trail of digital footprints that each of us leaves behind. This is also when the feminist critiques serve as a reminder that the forces of surveillance and oppression are never equally distributed—that is, they disproportionately affect those on the margins and specifically women who have historically had their bodies and behavior scrutinized. Along with the growing list of increasingly invasive and tyrannical practices and systems, Offred's small acts of defiance—the thoughtfulness of her actions, the small refusals to be submissive, the fact that she cannot completely forget her own name—evoke emotional responses and remind us that most likely people will resist in small and everyday ways, through the act of keeping one's inner self intact. Accordingly, literature calls for an ethics of limits and urges some form of restriction on the degree to which visibility or algorithmic

inference can affect one's dignity—so that one's dignity is not compromised for efficiency or convenience. Literature—with its uncanny ability to make visible the parts of ourselves and our world that we would like to have buried deep underneath the ground—allows us to address these unsettling questions while it is still possible to do so—before the systems we create define the limits of our freedom beyond our intent.

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Patriarchal Oppression and Female Resistance in *Desire Under the Elms*

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of female characters in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) through feminist literary criticism, addressing an underexplored dimension of the play. Despite the prominence of feminist critique in literary studies, O'Neill's female characters have not been closely analyzed. This study conducts a detailed textual analysis of their roles, language, and resistance to patriarchal dominance. The findings reveal that female characters are portrayed solely in a negative light -- depicted as manipulative, morally corrupt, murderous, and exploiters of their own sexuality. They are denied major roles, their virtues are overlooked, and they are subjected to demeaning language that is often exaggerated beyond proportion. However, the study also explores moments of female resistance, particularly through Maw's haunting presence and Abbie's defiance, which challenge patriarchal authority in significant ways. Despite these acts of rebellion, the women ultimately remain confined within oppressive structures that govern their lives and choices. Ultimately, the study highlights O'Neill's biased and unsympathetic depiction of women, reinforcing gender stereotypes rather than challenging them, while also revealing the limitations of female agency in a male-dominated society.

Keywords: Feminist Literary Criticism, Gender Norms, Misogyny, Patriarchy, Societal Power Dynamics.

Introduction

Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* has been a focus of scholarly discussions since its first publication in 1924. Rooted in the complexities of family dynamics and personal ambition, the play has been critically examined from various perspectives, including its depiction of American rural life and its inspiration from classical Greek tragedies. Set in 19th-century rural New England, O'Neill's work explores gender-based power structures through the portrayal of female characters, whose struggles with male dominance and societal expectations reveal the far-reaching implications of patriarchy. However, the critical examination of O'Neill's female characters is limited in comparison to the focus given to his male figures (Barlow). Despite this marginalization, the female characters, who navigate "a golgotha of pain" (Kolin 24), show a degree of agency and cunning in shaping their destinies. This makes a close and rigorous examination of their roles in this oppressive landscape imperative.

This paper employs feminist literary criticism to analyze the layers of female experiences in *Desire Under the Elms*. It examines how the female characters navigate, are constrained by and resist social standards and power dynamics, questioning whether their portrayals are multi-dimensional

or extensional projections of the desires of male characters. Through this lens, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of O'Neill's work and its relevance to contemporary feminist discourse.

Literature Review & Research Gap

Critical work on Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* has usually emphasized tragedy, passion, guilt, and formal design rather than the sustained question of how the play imagines women. Earlier criticism often reads the drama as a serious tragic work shaped by haunting, inheritance, and moral conflict. Horst Frenz, for example, compares the play with Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and argues that both texts stage a struggle with guilt, the power of place, and the search for inner integrity (Frenz). This line of reading is important because it established the play as more than a rural melodrama, yet it also tended to privilege the tragic structure of the work over the gendered conditions inside the Cabot household.

Later studies elaborated the discussion, but most of them still concentrated on a single dominant issue. Safi Mahmoud Mahfouz reads the play through "tragic passion," incestuous desire, romantic rhetoric, and betrayal, focusing especially on the erotic tension between Abbie and Eben and on the language through which that desire is dramatized (Mahfouz). Sarif Syamsu Rizal, in contrast, approaches the play through a structural study of character, conflict, setting, and theme in order to explain the motives behind Abbie's infanticide. Gupta and Mahal place the play within a broader Anglo-American literary history of infanticide and treat it as one example among several texts that explore the social, psychological, and moral pressures surrounding the killing of infants. These studies remain useful, but they keep returning to passion, incest, and infanticide as central explanatory frames.

The most direct feminist intervention comes from Gilda Pacheco, whose essay is especially important for this study. Pacheco argues that criticism has repeatedly condemned, devalued, or even sidelined Abbie by focusing instead on the male characters and their conflicts. More importantly, she shows that O'Neill's female figures are denied a stable identity of their own. Her sharp formulation that "Abbie has never had her true self" (58) captures how the character is repeatedly made to stand for land, desire, maternity, or male fantasy rather than autonomous personhood. Pacheco thus shifts the conversation from plot to representation and makes visible the gender bias embedded in much earlier criticism. Lee adds another important dimension by reading the play through gothic domesticity, arguing that the farmhouse, kitchen, parlor, and walls become oppressive domestic spaces shaped by patriarchal violence and exploitation, while the dead mother's presence unsettles Cabot's authority (Lee). This approach helps explain how gender oppression in the play is built not only through dialogue and action but also through space, property, and atmosphere. Still, even Lee's rich reading is not primarily centered on a full feminist account of female characterization.

The gap, then, is clear. Existing scholarship has examined tragedy, incestuous passion, betrayal, infanticide, and gothic domesticity in detail, but it has not fully brought these strands together to show how the play systematically constructs women as dispossessed, sexualized, and instrumentalized figures within a patriarchal order. This article addresses that gap by offering a feminist reading of Maw, Abbie, and Minnie together, arguing that O'Neill's drama not only exposes women's suffering but also reveals their limited, unstable, and deeply costly forms of resistance.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist literary theory asserts that literature, primarily authored by men within patriarchal contexts, has systematically marginalized and misrepresented women. It aims to dismantle

patriarchal systems that equate femininity with passivity, inferiority, and self-erasure. Tyson emphasizes that this critical framework "examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (83). Hooks echoes this view, arguing that by "dismantl[ing] a system of oppression" (15) this theoretical approach seeks to make literature a site of resistance against patriarchal ideologies. Similarly, Hesse-Biber et al. assert that "research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice" (3). Collectively, feminist perspectives reclaim women's narratives, challenge their exclusion, and advocate for their inclusion in literary discourse.

The following section of the paper undertakes a comprehensive textual analysis of the portrayal of female characters in relation to their male counterparts within an overarching patriarchal structure in *Desire Under the Elms*, drawing on the key principles of feminist literary criticism outlined earlier. Here, it explores how women are portrayed with many negative attributes such as immorality, greed, manipulation and sexual deviance. These characters are also described using derogatory language, subjected to menial labour, denied ownership of property and sexually objectified--phenomena perpetuated by a deep-seated patriarchal hegemony. Subsequently, the analysis highlights the female resistance, uncovering the layers of their identities beyond oppression.

Women Portrayed as Morally Corrupt

In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill depicts women as morally compromised and driven by selfish motives. Abbie, the central female character, shows no remorse in pursuing an illicit relationship with Eben, her stepson. Critics describe her as a vamp "with perverse sexual tendencies and confused distorted ideas about love" (Wells 30). Her first meeting with Eben highlights her calculating nature: "Her eyes take him penetratingly with a calculating appraisal of his strength as against hers. But under this her desire is dimly awakened by his youth and good looks" (O'Neill 54). She is portrayed as a femme fatale whose overpowering sexual desire and manipulative tendencies lead her to exploit Eben in order to bear a son and secure the family farm. Eben eventually becomes disillusioned with Abbie's actions, particularly the infanticide, which he interprets as her prioritizing land ownership over the life of her child.

However, while Abbie's moral failings—manipulation, infanticide, and prioritizing property—are deeply disturbing, they reflect her desperation to gain independence and financial security in a patriarchal society. Owning land or marrying into wealth is her only path to stability, forcing her into morally questionable actions. Her frustration is caused by a failed marriage to an older husband who cannot fulfil her physical and emotional needs. Ultimately, her tragic fate can be seen as a direct consequence of the societal restrictions placed on women. As Goldman observes, "Abbie murders her and Eben's child to prove her love for him, to prove she did not want a child to steal the farm Eben has so stolidly (and greedily) maintained was his by right" (48).

Although Abbie initiates the relationship, Eben's complicity in it cannot be overlooked. Critics argue that his motivations are based on lust, greed, and revenge rather than love. Falk claims: "Eben is drawn to Abbie not by love but by lust, greed, and the desire for revenge" (96). His justification for their affair as retribution for his mother shows his own moral failure.

Women Painted as Lustful

In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill delineates women as overtly licentious, fuelled by unrestrained sexual desires. Abbie, the female protagonist, embodies this characterization through her dissatisfaction with her older husband and her pursuit of Eben. O'Neill emphasizes her lustful

nature: “ABBIE stands for a second staring at him [Eben], her eyes burning with desire. Then with a little cry she runs over and throws her arms about his neck, she pulls his head back and covers his mouth with kisses” (O’Neill 78). Abbie’s brazen affair with her stepson reveals her violations of physical norms/boundaries; her willingness to betray her husband mirrors the playwright's portrayal of the woman who is too lustful to remain faithful to one partner.

This depiction, however, overlooks the role of the men in marital discord. Abbie’s behaviour is due to the lovelessness of her marriage and the gender-based power relations that reduce her to a lifeless puppet in Ephraim’s household. Ephraim’s neglect of marital responsibilities leaves Abbie feeling unloved and unfulfilled, creating an environment that encourages infidelity. O’Neill fixates on Abbie’s culpability, disregarding the male-dominated structures that influence her decisions. Abbie’s desperate efforts to secure Eben’s love and not be abandoned are evident when she pleads for his loyalty and sacrifices everything, including her son, to prove her devotion. The infanticide she commits represents the tragic climax of her lust and misguided affection. Clerk states that in “arousing the repressed passion of Eben, she has forgotten or never known that the sex instinct cannot be easily controlled... she finds herself caught in her own trap” (152).

Through the climactic scene of infanticide, the playwright, like a moralist, condemns female passions and suggests that love born in sin inevitably leads to ruin; he implies that women’s natural passions and desires are inherently dangerous and should remain suppressed. By portraying women’s emotions as defiled and disruptive, O’Neill’s work manifests a patriarchal worldview that circumscribes female subjectivity and prevents the articulation of her impulses and instincts.

Victims of Sexual Objectification

O’Neill’s sexual objectification of women in *Desire Under the Elms* reveals his deep-rooted sexism. Early in the play, Eben visits a prostitute, Minnie, which prompts his brothers to humorously recount their shared sexual encounters with her: “Ay-eh! We air his heirs in everythin’!” (O’Neill 30). Eben’s possessive declaration, “I jest grabbed holt and an’ took her! Yes, sirree! I took her! She may’ve been his’n-an’ your’n too—but she’s mine now!” (O’Neill 35), transforms Minnie into a transactional object bartered among men.

This objectification also extends to Abbie through Ephraim’s hypersexualized language: “Behold, yew air fair; yer eyes air doves; yer lips air like scarlet; yer two breasts air like two fawns; yer belly be like a heap o’ wheat.” (O’Neill 66). By breaking her body down into separate, objectified parts, Ephraim dehumanizes Abbie and reduces her value to physical attributes that serve to satisfy male desires. Such poetic yet demeaning language reinforces the idea that a woman’s worth lies in her ability to gratify men.

In *Desire Under the Elms*, women are reduced to their reproductive and sexual roles, stripping them of agency and individuality. Ephraim’s description of Abbie, “yer belly be like a heap o’ wheat” (O’Neill 66), underscores her worth as a vessel for procreation, particularly for producing a male heir. Eben takes this dehumanization even further by referring to Abbie as “any other old whore” (O’Neill 63), exposing his fear of her potentially taking over of the family farm and his misogynistic disdain. Similarly, Simon and Peter sexually abuse Abbie upon her arrival, reflecting the deep-seated hostility pervasive in the narrative. Hussein aptly labels the male characters as “egocentric manipulative, Machiavellian objectifier[s]” (874), who view women as commodities rather than individuals.

Abbie is described as “buxom” and with “gross sensuality” (O’Neill 47) which demonstrate her eroticization. These descriptions laden with overtly sexual implications deny women their

humanity and legitimize harmful gender stereotypes that equate femininity with sexual availability. Women's portrayal as one-dimensional beings who are used, controlled and abused by men, makes cruelty and exploitation appear justified. Feminist critics strongly condemn this phenomenon, arguing that such depictions reduce women to mere visual spectacles and lead to societal pressures that compel them to conform to false ideals (Szymanski).

Women Compared to Animals

In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill portrays women as inferior by equating them with animals. Abbie is bestialized through comparisons to a "cow," "skunk," "snake," and "sow" (O'Neill 36, 50). Similarly, Ephraim uses bovine imagery to mock Eben's perceived softness, likening him to his mother, whom he derides as frail and mediocre. Ephraim declares Eben will "never be more'n half a man!" (O'Neill 58), highlighting the disdain for femininity in his rocky kingdom. Ephraim's comparisons undermine Eben's masculinity and implicate his inherited maternal traits as weaknesses.

This belittling of women also extends to other female characters. He recalls his ex-wife who, he believes, has no intellectual capacity. Jenn, a minor character, is referred to by Simeon as "My woman" and her physical features are likened to those of livestock: "she'd hair long's a hoss' tail—an' yaller like gold!" (O'Neill 18). Even the term "Maw" has a pejorative connotation, symbolizing a predatory, devouring beast. These comparisons reflect a deep-rooted misogyny that reduces women to irrational or domesticated animals with no emotional depth. This view justifies their exploitation, control, and subjugation. Baker (quoted in Dunayer 15) critiques these analogies, arguing that they portray women as "mindless servants" which normalizes contempt for women, and institutionalizes gender-based hierarchies. Such views contradict feminist ideals of empowerment and equality and validate a system that legitimizes male dominance.

Women Denied Ownership of Property and Employment

In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill portrays women as incapable of owning property or participating in paid work, emphasizing the notion that they are the weaker sex, both physically and intellectually. Women are confined to domestic tasks such as bearing children, raising them, and serving their husbands, while economic independence remains unattainable. This lack of agency forces Abbie to marry Cabot, a man twice her age, for survival. O'Neill's depiction reflects a rigid patriarchal order in which women's worth is determined solely by their relationships with men.

Ephraim's patriarchal worldview ensures that his rocky kingdom remains under male control, as he explicitly states:

> CABOT: "Ye're on'y a woman."
> ABBIE: "I'm yewr wife."
> CABOT: "That hain't me. A son is me—my blood—mine. Mine ought to t'git mine. An' then it's still mine—even though I be six foot under." (O'Neill 70)

Cabot's outright rejection of Abbie's identity and autonomy shows his deeply ingrained belief that only a son can carry on his legacy and that women are insignificant beyond their reproductive role.

Women Portrayed as Manipulators

Abbie is portrayed as a cunning and self-serving woman, willing to use any means necessary to secure the farm and her future. Her statement, "I'd most give up hope o' ever doin' my own wuk in my own hum, an' then your Paw come…" (O'Neill 56), underlines her pragmatic approach to marriage. Her union with Cabot, a man more than twice her age with two previous marriages, is not driven by love but by her need for a home and security. Abbie recognizes Eben's outward

hostility as a defence mechanism to mask his unresolved attachment to his deceased mother. With this insight, she slyly manipulates both Eben and Ephraim. Her calculated seduction of Eben serves her ambition to bear a son and thus secure her claim to the family fortune.

O'Neill's stage directions emphasize Abbie's manipulative tendencies, noting that she uses "seductive tones" (O'Neill 54) to gain Eben's trust. She promises to influence Ephraim in Eben's favour, reinforcing her psychological hold over him. When she flatters him by saying, "too big an' too strong," (O'Neill 54), she exploits his ego and creates the illusion that he is the one in control, while she consolidates her own dominance. Her "scornful sense of power" (O'Neill 54) reveals her relentless pursuit of authority and control.

Women are shown to use motherhood as a tool of manipulation. Abbie capitalizes on Eben's longing for his deceased mother by assuming a maternal guise to exploit his feelings. Her plea, "Don't cry, Eben! I will take yer Maw's place! Let me kiss ye, Eben! Don't be affeered! I'll kiss ya pure, Eben, -same's if I was a Maw t' ye-an' ye kiss me back's if ye was my son– my boy" (O'Neill 85), feigns sincerity, but is a calculated move. By positioning herself as a motherly figure, she deepens Eben's emotional dependence and steers their relationship towards seduction. Abbie further manipulates Eben by luring him into his mother's parlour, a space imbued with Maw's spectral presence, creating an environment of emotional vulnerability. She remarks, "They seemed somethin' here…I kin still feel—somethin'," (O'Neill 82), deliberately creating an eerie atmosphere to further entrap him.

O'Neill emphasizes her calculated nature during her seduction of Eben, describing her as a "horrible frank mixture of lust and mother love" (O'Neill 85). By entering Eben's room and "cover[ing] his mouth with kisses" (O'Neill 78), she shows her assertiveness in initiating the incestuous relationship. Chabrowe suggests that Abbie exploits Eben's deep-seated longing for his mother and argues that her seduction of him serves as a substitute for his maternal attachment and ultimately triggers his incestuous desires. However, Wells critiques O'Neill's portrayal of Abbie, stating that he blurs the lines between maternal and romantic love, creating a morally ambiguous figure that departs from traditional depictions of both maternal and romantic figures.

Maw's Maternity Misinterpreted as the Cause of Infanticide

In *Desire Under the Elms*, maternal influence is closely tied to morally reprehensible actions, including infanticide. Maw's lingering presence, despite her death, is interpreted as shaping Abbie's dark desires. Hutchison argues that Maw transcends her role as a deceased character to become a supernatural force responsible for the central tragedy of the play. He suggests that "While Maw represents the past sinister maternity, which haunts the present, Abbie embodies the present sinister maternity whose actions are influenced by Maw's manipulation" (26). This view is echoed by Eben's accusation: "Oh, God A'mighty! A'mighty God! Maw, what was ya, why didn't ya stop her?" (O'Neill 114). The incestuous episode between Abbie and Eben is also framed as unfolding under Maw's spectral influence, as Abbie remarks, "When I fust came in–in the dark–they seemed somethin' here" (O'Neill 82), to which Eben replies, "Maw." This highlights the destructive and manipulative maternal power that pervades the play. The ghostly presence blurs the boundaries between maternal love and forbidden desire, culminating in tragedy.

Eben's rejection of the maternal and feminine is also linked to his selfish desire to secure ownership of the farm (Aziz and Sarfraz, 2018). His rejection of these aspects reflects his relentless pursuit of control. Yet, his hypocritical cries of "Maw! Maw!" (O'Neill 85) reveal his contradictory longing for the feminine while simultaneously rejecting it. One critic argues that Eben's attraction to Abbie, an older woman, stems from his deep attachment to his mother, whom he

subconsciously seeks to replace (Rizal, 2010). This dynamic highlights the play's complex exploration of maternal influence and its psychological repercussions, with Maw's motherhood ultimately portrayed as a destructive force that reverberates through the characters' lives.

Dawson condemns Abbie as a ruthless monster and labels her act as murder. However, such a judgment fails to consider the social and emotional forces surrounding her actions. While the baby is undeniably the result of an incestuous relationship between stepmother and stepson—a union condemned as immoral—the child itself represents more than an individual. The baby, conceived in a moment of "animal passion" (Poulard 104), symbolizes Eben's vengeful desires against his father and Abbie's struggle for validation and security in a patriarchal society. Poulard elaborates:

> The baby died because he was conceived in a moment of animal passion. He was at first a means of gaining possession of the farm and revenge and later on became a possession to Eben. He was not born through the desire to create overhuman…and died in Abbie's attempt to prove all too human love for Eben. (104)

This perspective does not portray Abbie's act as cold-blooded murder, but as a desperate and misguided attempt to secure her place in a world that denies her agency and autonomy. Her actions cannot therefore be dismissed as premeditated or barbaric murder. Her impulsive nature, evident throughout the play, reflects a desperate reaction to economic insecurity; her culpability therefore must be understood in the broader context of her victimhood, shaped by a patriarchal system that links her identity and choices to male desires and conflicts.

Women Described Using Harmful Language

Throughout the play, language is wielded as a weapon to dismantle female agency and negate female personhood. Eben's first interaction with Abbie is characterized by crude insults; he calls her a "whore" to humiliate and devalue her. Even in moments of emotional conflict, he diminishes her identity to her sexuality, shouting, "I do hate ye! Ye're whore—a damn trickin' whore!" (O'Neill 107). His derogatory language reveals his threatened sense of entitlement, particularly in relation to the farm, which he sees as his rightful inheritance. His claim to the farm is rooted in a patriarchal belief system that ties land ownership and legacy to male lineage.

Again, Eben compares his father's new bride to an old prostitute, saying, "And Min isn't such a bad one… Just wait until we see this cow the Old Man's married to!" Moreover, Eben's description of Minnie --"She's like t'night, she's soft 'n' wa'm… she smells like a wa'm plowed field" (O'Neill 31) -- diminishes her personality to a set of sensual qualities, framed entirely by the male gaze. Such a depiction of women as a collection of clichéd, one-dimensional female tropes reduces them to objects to be observed and consumed, rather than portraying them as multifaceted and holistic individuals who encompass both physical and psychological dimensions. The use of foul expressions, Cameron contends, promotes sexism and misogynistic stereotypes.

Maw Subjected to Endless Labour

In the play, O'Neill poignantly illustrates the gruelling domestic responsibilities of women in a bleak patriarchal environment that forces them to live a life of servitude. A woman's identity is reduced to her role as caretakers, as epitomized by the late Maw, who is a victim of relentless, backbreaking labour and emotional exhaustion. Eben reflects on his mother's restless spirit and her inability to find peace even in death:

> She'd come back to help—come back to bile potatoes—come back to fry bacon—come back to bake biscuits—come back all cramped up to shake the fire, an' carry ashes, her eyes weepin' an' bloody with smoke an' cinders same's they used t' be. She still comes back—stands by the stove

> thar in the evenin'—she can't find it nateral sleepin' en' restin' in peace. She can't git used to bein' free—even in her grave. (O'Neill 26-27)

These images vividly depict Maw's plight, characterized by ceaseless domestic labour. Even in death, her spirit is trapped in the cycle of servitude and cannot "rest in peace" (O'Neill 88). Maw's endless labour, including cooking, cleaning, and farming, underlines her role as an invisible, undervalued entity in Cabot's life, treated as a labourer rather than a partner.

O'Neill's stage directions amplify this dynamic by describing the elms as "exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on [the house's] roof" (O'Neill 16) whose tears rot the shingles when it rains. Prateek rightly observes that the elms embody not only Maw's oppression, but also her selfless love and the unkindness of Cabot and his sons. This resonates with the assertion that "if there is any 'property of women', it is paradoxically her capacity to depropriate unselfishly" (Cixous et al. 889). Maw's sacrifices underscore this notion as she embodies selfless love trapped in an exploitative system.

Cabot's utilitarian view of women is evident when he remarks, "A hum's got t' hev a woman." (O'Neill 48), signalling that Abbie, like Maw, is destined to serve as both a domestic servant and a reproductive vessel. Maw's fate also illustrates the patriarchal obsession with inheritance, as Ephraim is keen to bequeath his land to a male heir. Maw's efforts are devalued, while her children, particularly her sons, inherit the fruits of her labour.

The spectral presence of Eben's mother further emphasizes her oppression. She lingers as a tormented soul, haunting the house even after her death. This preternatural atmosphere encapsulates the prolonged suffering she has endured and Eben's unresolved guilt over her death amplify her ghostly presence:

> ABBIE. When I fust come in—in the dark—they seemed somethin' here.
> EBEN. (simply) Maw.
> ABBIE. I kin still feel—somethin'.
> EBEN. It's Maw.
> ABBIE. At fust I was feered o' it. I wanted t' yell an' run. Now—since yew come—seems like it's growin' soft an' kind t' me. (Addressing the air—queerly) Thank yew.
> EBEN. Maw allus loved me. (O'Neill 82-83)

Even in death, Maw's spirit is burdened by the roles imposed on her. Her inability to rest symbolizes the inescapable legacy of maternal labour, extending her oppression even beyond the grave. Burr succinctly captures this tragedy: "Even death does not provide [Maw] peace or freedom. Trained to be a slave to her husband, she remains in perpetual bondage as a relentless ghost" (40).

Despite the bleakness of her portrayal, Maw is occasionally described as "kind to everyone" (Gupta & Mahal 199) and a "woman of loving nature" (Xie 21), who embodies "altruistic love and benevolence" (Xie 21). However, Xie notes, this praise only comes posthumously, as O'Neill seems to have reserved admiration solely for the deceased women.

Women Treated as Property

In *Desire Under the Elms*, the male characters often treat women as mere possessions, which is reflected in Cabot's assertion that Abbie is "my Rose o' Sharon" (O'Neill 66). The metaphor of Abbie's belly as a "heap o' wheat" (O'Neill 66) further emphasizes this objectification by portraying her as an extension of Cabot's property. Ephraim also indirectly insults his deceased wife, disparagingly referring to her as a "dumb fool" (O'Neill 49). In a conversation with Abbie, Cabot reveals his condescending attitude:

> CABOT. It's warm down the barn—nice smellin' an' warm—with the cows. [A pause.] Cows are queer.
> ABBIE. Like you?
> CABOT. Like Eben. [A pause.] I am getting to feel resigned to Eben—just as I got to feel 'bout his Maw. I'm gettin' to learn b'ar his softness—jest like her. I calculate I'd almost take t' him—if he wasn't such a dumb fool! (O'Neill 65-66)

This dialogue shows that Ephraim views women as inferior or worthless beings; his pejorative comparisons belittle women and their feminine qualities and strip them of their dignity. Feminists argue that such insults are not just casual remarks but part of a continuum that can lead to more serious acts of violence against women (Cervone et al.). However, this ironically shows that there is no room for compassion or emotional sensitivity in Ephraim's character.

Women Shown to Engage in Debasing Professions

In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill portrays women through a reductive lens, often defining them by their usefulness to men. The presence of prostitutes in the play highlights this, suggesting that women's value lies in their ability to satisfy men's sexual desires. Minnie, the "Scarlet Woman" (O' Neill 29) of the village, epitomizes this trope as her identity is restricted to her sexual availability to the Cabot men and others. Reduced to physical descriptions like "purty—but soft" and a "plowed field" (O'Neill 76), Minnie exemplifies the role of women as instruments of male desire or as commodities in sex markets, bought and sold to satisfy men. The appropriation of their bodies positions men as consumers and women as consumables, erasing women's inherent humanity. Such depictions emphasize a patriarchal hierarchy in which women's worth is contingent on their ability to gratify men's lust. Feminist critics strongly condemn this portrayal as an affront to women's dignity and a violation of their human rights, as it perpetuates male domination and intensify misogyny.

Women Portrayed as Greedy

Abbie's first appearance paints her as motivated by greed rather than love. Upon seeing the farmhouse, she exclaims, "Purty– Purty! I can't believe it's r'ally mine" (O'Neill 48), exposing her materialistic intentions. She considers Eben, the rightful heir, a rival and tries to usurp his inheritance. O'Neill shows Abbie as a disruptive force, driven by self-interest, creating family discord and promoting the stereotype of women as greedy manipulators.

However, Abbie's apparent greed for the farm is rooted in her tragic backstory, which reveals the struggles she faced as an orphan and destitute woman. She explains, "...my maw died afore I'd growed. I don't remember her none... I kin tell that by lookin' at ye. Waal – I've had a hard life, too…I was an orphan early an' had t' wuk fur others in other folks' hums." (O'Neill 55). After marrying a drunken man who abandoned her, she endured a life of hardship and menial labour. For Abbie, the farm stands for a stable, independent life -- something she has always longed for. Owning a farm is her only means of attaining autonomy and identity in a society that denies women these opportunities.

The precariousness of her position becomes clear when she learns that Ephraim plans to bequeath the farm to Eben, despite his animosity toward him. Motherhood becomes the only way for Abbie to secure her future. In O'Neill's puritanical world, women's worth is tied to their ability to bear male heirs, which reduces motherhood to a survival strategy rather than a natural expression of love. Abbie's shrewdness and ambition, a desperate reaction to societal constraints, are not expressions of greed but necessary adaptations in a world that values women for their sexual desirability. This contrasts sharply with Simone and Peter's pursuit of wealth in California,

which is depicted without the same moral scrutiny, highlighting the gender bias in the judgement of ambition.

Women Painted Negatively through Symbols

In *Desire Under the Elms,* women are portrayed negatively from the outset, symbolized by the "sinister maternity" (O'Neill 16) and the "crushing, jealous absorption" (O'Neill 16) of the giant elms. These elms evoke a suffocating maternal influence, primarily associated with Eben's deceased mother "Maw". They also embody the oppressive maternal energy of both Maw and Abbie, which is invisible but exerts a strong influence on the male characters. Alternatively, the elms also can be interpreted as representing Cabot's two deceased wives, driven into graves early by his tyranny (Lee 73). The elms serve as a foreboding symbol of dysfunction and oppression, undermining the traditional idealized image of motherhood. Not only do they highlight the dark and destructive maternal force, but they also metaphorically reflect Maw's prolonged suffering under her oppressive husband, making her appear both a victim and a source of discord. Regardless of interpretation, the depiction of Maw through the elms remains negative.

Although Maw passed away years before the play begins, her oppressive maternal energy permeates the household, much like the brooding elms that cast an eternal gloom over the farm. This stifling atmosphere drives Ephraim to seek refuge in the barn, symbolizing his rejection of domesticity and Maw's spectral influence. The farmhouse is transformed into a gothic prison, imbued with the weight of her enduring legacy, as her insatiable soul seeks to resist the formidable male authority. Furthermore, the parlour, associated with to Abbie's pregnancy, serves as a symbolic "conflated womb" (Lee 81) which embodies both maternal influence and the inescapable control of patriarchal power.

Kitchen: A Symbol of Patriarchal Control and Gendered Labor

In the play, O'Neill describes the kitchen as "a men's camp kitchen rather than that of a home" (O'Neill 22), emphasizing its untidiness and neglect due to the absence of women. This description implies that the maintenance of domestic spaces is inherently the responsibility of women and reinforces outdated stereotypes that associate femininity with domestic space in which men do not belong. Despite being a modern playwright, O'Neill perpetuates the notion that men are apathetic to or incapable of domestic chores. The implicit expectation is that women should confine themselves to the private world of domesticity, while men should engage in the public sphere of professional and political activities. This dichotomy underscores a gendered division of work that diminishes the value of women's contribution to the household. This concept echoes the 19th-century ideology known as the "Cult of Domesticity" or "Separate Spheres", which envisaged distinct roles for men and women.

Ironically, even the kitchen, an archetypal feminine space often idealized as a sanctuary, is depicted as a site of oppression and suffering. Lee notes that the kitchen, "which should be a place of comfort, sustenance, and familial community, instead... resonates with traumatic memories of oppression" (77), conjuring the ghost of Eben's mother. This haunted space reveals the devastating psychological toll of patriarchal control, transforming the kitchen from a place of solace into a symbol of relentless labour and suffering.

Resistance of the Female Characters

Although Eben's mother dies long before the events of *Desire Under the Elms*, her powerful maternal presence continues to influence the characters, signifying resistance to patriarchal oppression. Her ghostly influence mirrors the elms that "brood oppressively over the house" (O'Neill 16) and haunt Ephraim with feelings of guilt and unease. Ephraim confesses his discomfort

in the house to Abbie, saying, “The house got so lonesome–and cold–drivin’ me down t’ the barn–t’ beasts o’ the field… Ay-eh. I must’ve suspicioned somethin’” (O’Neill 121). His retreat to the barn reveals his inability to confront the ghostly presence that reminds him of his emotional and spiritual betrayal of his wife.

Maw's baleful influence transforms the farmhouse into a repressive space where patriarchal authority is undermined. The “grim, repressed room” (O’Neill 82), characterised by her spectral presence, becomes a place where androcentric patriarchal authority is symbolically challenged. Lee suggests that Ephraim’s vengeful wife aims to subvert patriarchal power and create a woman-centered domestic set-up, even a social order, by turning Ephraim into a cuckold through “incest-by-proxy” (81). Her ghostly enactment “serves the dual aim of exacting vengeance on the fallen father and consummating a type of surrogate incest with Abbie in the maternal role” (Lee 82), leading to Abbie’s empowered declaration: “I’m goin’ t’ leave the shutters open and let in the sun ‘n’ air...Now it’s goin’ t’ be my room!” (O'Neill 88). Subsequently, the “festivity” (O’Neill 91) intended to celebrate Ephraim’s fatherhood turns into “the old skunk gettin’ fooled” publicly (O’Neill 101) as his guests are cognizant of his inability to be the child’s father, which is made clear by fiddler’s mocking compliment: “Ye’re the spryest seventy-six ever I sees, Ephraim! Now if ye’d on’y good eyesight . . .!” (O’Neill 96).

Again, one of the most direct confrontations with patriarchal dominance occurs in the following conversation between Eben and Abbie:

> ABBIE: (savagely seizing on his weak point) Your’n? Yew mean—my farm?
> EBEN: I mean the farm yew sold yerself fur like any other old whore—my farm!
> ABBIE: (stung—fiercely) Ye’ll never live t’ see the day when ever a stinkin’ weed on it’ll belong t’ ye!... Git out o’ my sight! (O’Neill 63)

This exchange highlights Abbie’s resistance to male dominance, as she challenges the deeply entrenched gender hierarchy within the Cabot family by claiming ownership of the farm. Her refusal to be reduced to a mere “whore” is a powerful act of defiance against the systemic oppression that aims to erase her individuality and rights.

Abbie emerges as a character who defies gender expectations and embodies a progressive challenge to the existing power structure. Her “scornful sense of power” (O’Neill 54) allows her to navigate male-dominated spaces with confidence; her willingness to sacrifice her newborn to prove her love for Eben, a subversion of traditional maternal ideals, shows her gradually assuming a dominant position, albeit at a devastating cost. Through this act, she claims power over life and death, granting her a “god-like quality” (Wells 30). Her strength becomes even more apparent when she responds to Eben’s insults -- being called a harlot and accused of marrying Ephriam for material gain -- by retorting: “Waal…What else’d I marry an old man like him fur?” (O’Neill 56). This candid acknowledgment of her pragmatic motives underscores her rejection of traditional notions of female submissiveness dictated by social expectations.

Abbie’s psychological dominance over Eben becomes clear as she fills the void left by his mother. Eben’s remark, “Maw’s gone back t’ her grave. She kin sleep now” (O’Neill 88), reflects Abbie’s ability to replace the maternal figure in his psyche through a combination of sensuality and emotional manipulation. Her assertion “I’ll take yer Maw’s place!” (O’Neill 85), terrifies Eben, who fears the wrath of the maternal soul when Abbie assumes her role. By embodying both maternal and seductive qualities, Abbie exerts a complex agency and defies male supremacy in unconventional ways.

Although Abbie displays remarkable agency, her resistance is constrained by the pervasive patriarchy in the play. Her pursuit of the Cabot farm proves unattainable due to the legal and social restrictions of the 1850s, the period in which the play is set. Shammas explains that women at the time had no marital property rights which makes Abbie's aspirations to an illusory dream. Behind her confident assertions lies a fragile façade enforced by the systemic restrictions of a male-dominated society. What is more, Abbie's defiance comes at a high price. Her manipulation of Eben and her willingness to commit infanticide show the tragic consequences of her struggle for power in an oppressive system. Although she momentarily disrupts the male-controlled order of the Cabot family, her rebellion ends in her ruin, demonstrating the futility of female resistance. O'Neill's portrayal therefore offers no real escape from androcentric oppression, as both Abbie and Maw remain trapped within its confines, literally and symbolically.

Maw's haunting influence challenges Ephraim's authority, while Abbie's bold actions assert her agency in the face of systemic oppression. However, both characters ultimately remain constrained by social norms, reflecting the limited scope of female resistance within a rigidly patriarchal order.

Conclusion

A feminist reading of O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* reveals the profound realities of patriarchal oppression that shape the lives of the female characters: Maw, Abbie, and Minnie. These women endure relentless suffering, largely stemming from societal expectations that require them to sacrifice their identity and individuality to family obligations. However, the playwright refrains from questioning the patriarchal structures responsible for this; instead, he normalizes women's oppression and portrays their sacrifice as inevitable and unworthy of recognition. This narrative choice reflects his complicity in the perpetuation of anti-feminist/gendered ideologies and ultimately constructs a male-centered vision that diminishes female subjectivity.

O'Neill portrays women as confined to roles defined by reproductive function and domestic labour, reducing their existence to servitude and self-denial. The character of Maw illustrates how women, despite their multiple roles such as housewives, mothers, menial labourers and above all as sex workers find no recognition and their identity is thus obliterated. Fuelled by deep-rooted chauvinism, the male characters in the play treat women as disposable commodities as they measure women's worth by their sexual desirability. Their vitriolic insults reveal a toxic environment and the normalization of women's ordeals and gender discrimination. Marriage, which should provide women with security and companionship, becomes a prison that forces them into a life of despair and exploitation. This depiction validates the notion that their lives are inherently subordinate to those of men's.

Nelson and Pacheco critique O'Neill for constructing women without psychological depth, stressing that their existence is largely defined by their relationships with men. Maw is never granted a name or identity beyond her role as wife and mother, while Minnie functions as a symbol of promiscuity and embodies a stereotype rather than a character. Even Abbie, who exhibits moments of agency, ultimately becomes an instrument in male-centred conflicts. Pacheco aptly remarks, "Abbie has never had her true self; she is the farm, the elms, and finally Eben's mother, never herself" (58). The playwright's vision thus is limited in that it does not acknowledge women as independent individuals with complex feelings and aspirations.

From a feminist standpoint, *Desire Under the Elms* adheres to stereotypes that undermines the moral standing of women by portraying them as murderers, betrayers, deceivers, and exploiters of

their own sexuality. O'Neill frames Abbie as a femme fatale and Maw as a ghostly martyr, thus stressing the extremes of female representation, which oscillates between moral depravity and sacrificial victimhood. The paucity of wholesome images of women in the play points to a critical underrepresentation, compounded by instances of misrepresentation. Such characterizations reflect a misogynistic worldview that negates women's intrinsic worth and reinforces their subjugation.

While the female characters occasionally challenge male hegemony, they ultimately remain subservient to pervasive patriarchal authority, demonstrating their ultimate ineffectiveness. Abbie outwits her stepson with cunning and wits, and Maw's intimidating presence suggests defiance, but these actions are futile against the inescapable nature of patriarchal power which is designed to disempower them. The female characters are cast as victims of circumstance, as labourers, and recipients of violence which paints a regressive and pessimistic picture of womanhood and indicates that their suffering is inevitable. Their tragic destinies serve as a chilling reminder that any quest for autonomy within oppressive structures is doomed to failure. O'Neill's dramaturgy, therefore, does not foreground female empowerment, but its illusion, since the measure of vengeance these wronged characters seek is "incomplete and unsatisfactory" (Lee 73).

In *Desire Under the Elms,* the playwright offers not a critique of patriarchy but a male-centric narrative. Far from challenging the enduring legacy of gender inequality, the play clearly reproduces it. O'Neill attempted to modernize Greek tragedy, but his vision remains entrenched in outdated gender roles and phallocentric values and offers no positive change in the representation of women. The following insight form one study confirms the persistence of the playwright's antiquated ideal and his inability to envision genuine female autonomy:

> Although O'Neill wanted to imbue modern American theater with the poignancy of Greek drama and…substituted the role of fate and Gods with modern psychological theories to make his tragedies resonate with contemporary milieu, yet the portrayal of women did not change much…while much has changed in over two millennia, yet virginity, motherhood and self-efficacy are the qualities that men seek in women. Men feel betrayed when women do not conform to the stereotypical gender roles of mother, wife or daughter. Inability of women to meet the criteria of self-denial, sacrifice and chastity as per the expectations of the male protagonists has been a major cause of tragedy in Greek drama as well as in [*Desire Under the Elms*]. Just like [the] Greek period, O'Neill cannot conceptualize women as mentally and socially independent human beings. ("The Role of Women")

O'Neill's attempt to modernize the tragic essence of Greek drama for modern audiences continues to reflect archaic stereotypes and the enduring patriarchal order. The play's inability to embody a truly progressive representation of women consequently reveals a critical gap between contemporary feminist theory and its practical application in the creation of female characters.

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