

En-Scripta-24

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

International Conference on

**Multifaceted Role of SDGs in Fostering
Socio-Cultural Fabric and Economic Development**

17 January 2024



PG Department of English

**NAIPUNNYA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (NIMIT)**

En_Scripta 24
Conference Proceedings

International Conference On
Multifaceted Role of SDGs in Fostering Socio-Cultural Fabric and
Economic Development

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PG DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
NAIPUNNYA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY

En_Scripta 24

The conference proceedings on
Multifaceted Role of SDGs in Fostering Socio-Cultural Fabric and Economic Development

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FOREWORD

En_Scripta 24 is the ISBN proceedings publishing as part of the International Conference conducted by the PG Department of English. The book encompasses articles on English literary research as well as multidisciplinary areas. En_Scripta 24 focuses on giving a deeper insight into the emerging trends in literary studies and it will help as a reference tool to the generations to come.

Let me thank all the contributors across India for the successful publication of the journal. Also I would like to thank the faculties of the PG Department of English and management team members. Every word is less to appreciate Mr. Shaju P. M. Head of the IT Department for the perfect cover design.

Chief Editor – En_Scripta 24

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Nimisha Sajayan's Performances: Challenging Beauty Standards in *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*

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Nimisha Sajayan's performances and characters in both *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* stand as compelling examples of a paradigm shift within Indian cinema, challenging entrenched beauty standards. In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, Sajayan authentically portrays the character of the newlywed bride with remarkable power. The film meticulously deconstructs traditional gender roles, with Sajayan's character rejecting the customary cinematic depictions of a radiant bride. Especially noteworthy is the scene where she unceremoniously discards the Mangalsutra, symbolising a departure from the cinematic trope that frequently links a woman's worth with marital symbols (Dir: Jeo Baby). The nuanced expressions on Sajayan's face during moments of domestic labor and emotional conflict serve to deconstruct the conventional portrayal of female characters in mainstream Indian cinema. To portray her formidable character, she eschews clichéd female portrayals, opting instead for raw emotions complemented by her natural costume and minimal makeup.

Similarly, in *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, Nimisha's performance challenges beauty norms through her role as a young woman entangled in a theft incident. The film defies expectations by presenting her character devoid of the conventional glamour typically associated with female leads in such narratives. In films with similar dramatic scenes, the female character would be presented as the fair skinned beautiful woman with innocent face who goes through the harsh realities of social life whereby the audience may feel more sympathy towards the character, not solely because of the predicaments she is in as victim of theft but as a beautiful and pure lady who doesn't deserve this harsh reality. Nimisha's character challenges this notion by presenting her as an ordinary rural woman who we see everyday on our streets. A pivotal scene where Sajayan's character confronts the thief showcases her raw emotional depth without the embellishments of cinematic glamor (Dir: Dileesh Pothan). This departure challenges the prevalent notion that female characters in distress must adhere to traditional beauty standards to evoke empathy or engagement from the audience.

The dialogue delivery in both films adds an additional layer to Sajayan's challenge to conventional beauty norms. The emphasis is on natural, unpolished dialogue, devoid of theatricality. This deliberate choice underscores the commitment to portraying authentic characters rather than conforming to stylized and conventional representations. Nimisha Sajayan's performances, marked

by their authenticity and departure from conventional beauty norms, contribute significantly to the evolving landscape of Malayalam cinema. Her characters in both films embody ordinary daughter-in-law or wife roles, and her decision to forgo makeup and heavy costumes is a testament to the authenticity of her portrayal; it aligns with the evolving trends in Malayalam cinema, where female characters transcend traditional ideals associated with their gender. Both these films work as a representation of the newly found trends in Malayalam cinema where female characters and representation goes beyond the traditionally set ideals associated with this gender.

A conspicuous divergence becomes evident when juxtaposing Nimisha Sajayan's portrayals in Malayalam cinema with prevalent trends in other Indian film industries, particularly Bollywood. In the period spanning 2017 to 2021, coinciding with the release of the aforementioned films, Bollywood has witnessed a sustained continuation of traditional portrayals of female characters. These portrayals frequently relegate female leads to roles confined to romantic subplots or serving as visual embellishments, lacking agency or depth within the main narrative. In stark contrast to the emerging wave in Malayalam cinema, characterised by female leads breaking away from stereotypical roles (Gopinath and Raj 2015), Bollywood remains entrenched in conventional beauty norms. Female characters in Bollywood films released during this temporal span predominantly adhere to a conventional fair-skinned aesthetic, aligning with a narrow definition of beauty that prioritises aesthetics over authenticity. The industry's recurrent reliance on item songs, featuring female actors specifically brought in for seductive performances, serves as a tangible manifestation of Bollywood's steadfast adherence to standardised beauty ideals (Pandian 2021). These songs, often detached from the film's overarching narrative, accentuate the industry's resistance to deviate from established norms, emphasising the commodification of female beauty for commercial appeal.

The resistance or acceptance of changing beauty norms in different film cultures can be attributed to entrenched societal expectations, industry commercialisation, and the perpetuation of long-standing stereotypes (Pandian 2021). Bollywood, being a significant player in the Indian film landscape, has been slower to embrace the transformative narrative witnessed in South Indian cinema, especially Malayalam and Tamil industries. Societal pressures, coupled with a commercial focus on established beauty standards, contribute to the resistance observed in Bollywood. In contrast, the Malayalam film industry's willingness to challenge norms reflects a more progressive stance, driven by a desire to portray authentic characters and narratives that resonate with changing societal values (Gopinath and Raj 2015). The divergent paths of Malayalam and Bollywood cinema highlight the complex interplay between industry dynamics, societal expectations, and the evolving definition of beauty in Indian cinema.

This contrast in industry approaches lays the groundwork for understanding the audience reception of Nimisha Sajayan's performances in *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Thondimuthalum*

Driksakshiyum. These responses were monitored through an analysis of social media comments and reviews. The systematic collection of comments, primarily sourced from posts made by reputable news channels and interviews featuring Nimisha Sajayan immediately following the film releases, offered valuable insights into the diverse spectrum of audience reactions. Before delving into the detailed analysis of audience responses, it is essential to consider Nimisha Sajayan's own perspective on going without makeup on screen. In a candid reflection, she shared,

After *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, I was once approached for a makeover for my look. However, such things never impressed me, unless it is for a character. I believe our flaws make us beautiful, and we should flaunt them enough for people to get used to them and accept them. Even my film characters have been relatable, closer to life women. In daily life, when a girl goes out, she doesn't wear the kind of makeup shown in films. Moreover, people don't know who I really am in real life. They need to like me only based on my film characters, which have all been relatable and closer to life. They can comment on my work for sure, but anything beyond that is my life. I have often wondered why anyone should ever take the baggage of others' expectations on our looks, anyway (Jayaram 2019).

Nimisha Sajayan's articulation provides a contextual foundation for the subsequent examination of audience responses. Positive comments, lauding her decision to eschew makeup, resonate with the authenticity she endeavours to infuse into her characters. Audiences commend the films for their realistic portrayal of women, expressing appreciation for the departure from conventional beauty norms. Specific references to the emotional impact in scenes devoid of traditional glamorized portrayals underscore the alignment of Nimisha's approach with audience sentiments and the broader discourse surrounding the redefinition of beauty standards in mainstream cinema.

Illustratively, a viewer's comment attests to the reception of Nimisha Sajayan's performances: "I find her really attractive and I think she is a commendable actor. At just 25, she has already undertaken multiple significant roles and received accolades. Her relevance in the Malayalam industry is contingent on the creation of female characters endowed with depth. I believe that as long as the Malayalam industry refrains from emulating the patterns seen in other Indian film industries, where female leads are often relegated to ornamental roles, she will continue to be a prominent figure". This perspective underscores the audience's recognition of her worth, emphasising her exceptional performances rather than mere considerations of appearance or attire.

Conversely, negative comments often reflected deeply ingrained societal expectations, with some viewers expressing discomfort or disapproval regarding Sajayan's departure from established beauty standards. Criticisms sometimes focused on the perceived deviation from conventional portrayals, revealing the resistance to change in audience expectations. "A heroine's smile should be

something that makes us want to bite and eat it," a user posted on Nimisha's social media page. Some of the comments also gives out unsolicited advice that Nimisha should take up sister or friend roles since she doesn't look like the stereotypical fair skinned, ultra slim leading ladies we see on the big screen or even in magazine illustrations (TNM Staff). YouTuber Gayatri remarks that our notions of beauty come from caste and class bias, referring to the story of PK Rosy, the first woman actor in Malayalam cinema, who was hounded because she was a woman and of a Dalit caste. Even now, the image acceptable of a woman actor is someone who has 'eye candy' qualifications (Gayatri). However, it is crucial to note that the prevalence of positive comments outweighed the negative, indicating a significant level of acceptance and appreciation for non-traditional depictions of beauty in cinema.

The societal implications derived from audience reactions are profound. Favourable responses indicate a growing receptivity to diverse and authentic portrayals of women in cinema, signalling a potential evolution in broader societal perceptions of beauty. Meanwhile, negative comments unveil enduring resistance to change and the persistent challenges cinematic representations encounter in diverging from established norms. In navigating the convergence of audience reception and societal expectations, this research highlights cinema's potential as a catalyst for societal transformation (Gogoi 2022). Positive audience reactions contribute to the ongoing discourse on redefining beauty standards, emphasising the imperative for more inclusive and authentic portrayals aligned with contemporary societal values.

The role of social media in shaping and reflecting public opinion on beauty standards is pivotal, serving as an influential platform for disseminating diverse perspectives (Henriques and Patnaik 2021). In the context of Nimisha Sajayan's performances in *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, social media comments serve as a microcosm of audience reception, providing a dynamic space for viewers to express their thoughts and contribute to the ongoing discourse on beauty in cinema.

Beyond individual reactions, social media comments collectively contribute to a broader discourse on beauty in cinema. The platform provides a space for nuanced discussions, allowing audiences to engage in conversations about the evolving standards of beauty and the role of cinema in influencing societal perceptions (Henriques and Patnaik 2021). This discourse, amplified by social media, has the potential to shape industry practices and influence filmmakers, encouraging a more inclusive and authentic representation of beauty on screen. Moreover, the immediacy and accessibility of social media make it a significant driver in the evolution of societal norms (Rüdiger 2022). Positive comments endorsing unconventional beauties challenge ingrained stereotypes and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of beauty. Simultaneously, negative comments shed

light on the entrenched resistance to change, illustrating the complexities involved in challenging traditional standards.

Social media serves as a dynamic mirror reflecting public opinion on beauty standards (Rüdig 2022). The impact of comments on Nimisha Sajayan's image exemplifies the dual role of social media in both shaping and reflecting societal attitudes toward unconventional beauties in cinema. The platform, with its ability to amplify voices and foster discussions, serves as a catalyst for change, influencing not only industry practices but also contributing to the broader societal shift in defining and accepting diverse standards of beauty (Henriques and Patnaik 2021).

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of Nimisha Sajayan's performances in *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* illuminates a profound departure within Indian cinema from entrenched beauty norms. Sajayan's authentic portrayals courageously challenge and transcend conventional stereotypes that have long prevailed in the industry, offering a compelling alternative and paving the way for more diverse representations.

The impact of these films resonates across both cinematic and societal realms. Cinematically, they signify a pronounced departure from the stereotypical portrayals of women, ushering in a new era of authentic and nuanced representations of female characters. Socially, the positive audience reception indicates a burgeoning openness to embracing diverse and genuine depictions of beauty in cinema. These films, by underscoring the imperative for more inclusive portrayals aligned with contemporary values, possess the transformative potential to shape industry practices and foster a more inclusive film culture (Gogoi 2022).

As we contemplate the future, there is ample scope for additional research to delve into the enduring impact of such portrayals on audience perceptions and the evolving standards of societal beauty. A nuanced examination of the role played by other film industries in adopting more diverse representations would further enrich our understanding of the evolving cinematic landscape.

The significance of Malayalam cinema in challenging and reshaping established beauty norms is paramount. Reflecting the dynamic shifts in societal values, Malayalam cinema establishes a formidable precedent for more inclusive, genuine, and culturally representative portrayals in the broader film industry (Gopinath and Raj 2015). The profound impact of Nimisha Sajayan's performances and the overwhelmingly positive audience reception underscore the transformative potential of cinema in shaping societal perceptions and cultural narratives. This alignment with the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals, especially those dedicated to promoting inclusivity and equality in cultural representation (THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development), positions this research as a meaningful contribution to the ongoing global discourse on redefining beauty standards and fostering a more diverse, accepting, and culturally rich film culture.

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Bridging Education and Community: SCMS Cochin School of Business' Pedagogical Initiatives for Sustainable Development Goal 4 with special focus on Gender

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Abstract:

This paper delves into the strategic initiatives undertaken by SCMS Cochin School of Business, a distinguished institution in Kerala, aimed at fostering quality education and community skill development aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. The focus is on mapping the institution's pedagogical approaches and community engagement programs designed to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all while promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Specifically, the paper examines the institution's endeavours in achieving SDG 4.5, which emphasizes Gender Equality and Inclusion. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study highlights the innovative frameworks and practices implemented by SCMS Cochin School of Business to address educational disparities, promote gender equality, and empower diverse communities, contributing significantly to the global pursuit of sustainable and inclusive education.

Keywords- SGD 4, Quality Education, Pedagogical Initiatives, inclusive education, gender equality

1. Introduction

Emphasized in the National Education Policy 2020, higher education is envisioned not just as a pathway to individual employment but as a catalyst for societal transformation. This perspective underscores the pivotal role of quality higher education in cultivating enlightened, socially conscious individuals capable of addressing complex societal challenges. According to the National Education Policy 9.1.3, "at the societal level, higher education must enable the development of an enlightened,

socially conscious, knowledgeable, and skilled nation that can find and implement robust solutions to its own problems. Higher education must form the basis for knowledge creation and innovation thereby contributing to a growing national economy. The purpose of quality higher education is, therefore, more than the creation of greater opportunities for individual employment. It represents the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities and a happier, cohesive, cultured, productive, innovative, progressive, and prosperous nation” (p 33). The policy advocates for substantial revisions in pedagogical approaches and curriculum frameworks in educational institutions to enhance community engagement. It underscores that educational institutions, by imparting values, ethics, and quality education, foster a skilled human resource pivotal for both societal well-being and sustainable business development. The symbiotic relationship between society and businesses, where each supports and benefits the other, hinges significantly on the efficacy of a country's education system and its educational institutions. Such a paradigm aligns seamlessly with the goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4, specifically targeting Quality Education. Therefore, this study intends to delve into the strategic initiatives undertaken by SCMS Cochin School of Business in Kerala, exploring their pedagogical approaches and community engagement programs. The analysis seeks to shed light on the institution's efforts to promote gender equality, address educational disparities, and contribute significantly to the global pursuit of sustainable and inclusive education, particularly in line with the aspirations of SDG 4.5.

2. Objectives

- To understand the present scenario in higher education and identifying the gap proposed by NEP 2020.
- To analyse the role played by educational institutions in enabling community reach and bringing in gender equality.
- To suggest the initiatives put forward by SCMS Cochin School of Business which will make substantial changes in the outlook of community reach through sustainable education.

3. Literature Review

The literature review of the present study includes National Education Policy 2020 and Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 as the primary references. Within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the emphasis on quality education and community engagement within higher educational institutions marks a pivotal shift in India's academic landscape. NEP's directives prioritize a multidisciplinary approach, fostering critical thinking, and skill

development, all aimed at elevating the standards of education. Moreover, the policy underlines the imperative role of higher education institutions in actively engaging with local communities to address societal needs. By aligning educational programs with community requirements, NEP 2020 not only seeks to enhance the quality of education but also aims to create a symbiotic relationship between academia and society, fostering innovation, societal development, and inclusivity. In "The Engaged University" by John Saltmarsh and Edward Zlotkowski, the authors explore how higher education institutions can actively engage with local communities to address societal issues. They emphasize the importance of partnerships between universities and communities for mutual benefit. Studies by Tania D. Mitchell and Richard O. Jacoby explore how community engagement initiatives in higher education can address gender inequalities. They emphasize the need for inclusive practices that consider the diverse needs of communities and the role of gender-sensitive programs. Research conducted by scholars like Nirmala Tirupattur and Indira J. Parikh has explored participatory learning methods within higher education. These approaches encourage active involvement of students in community projects, fostering empathy, and promoting a deeper understanding of societal issues related to gender, caste, and other forms of discrimination. Studies by educational researchers like Rama Mathew emphasize the significance of culturally relevant pedagogies that consider diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. These pedagogies encourage inclusivity, respect for cultural differences, and sensitivity to social issues.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study primarily relies on gathering data from secondary sources and the personal observations of the author within the realm of higher education. Abundant and up-to-date information from credible sources pertaining to higher education and academic institutions was readily accessible. The utilization of information and communication technology, particularly the internet, proved immensely valuable in this pursuit. Vital data concerning higher education, continuously updated by key authorities such as UGC, AICTE, NBA, KSHEC and other educational regulatory bodies, was readily available on their respective websites, significantly benefiting this study.

5. Present scenario in Higher Education

The landscape of higher education in India, as illuminated by the National Education Policy 2020, stands at a critical juncture, beckoning transformative reforms. At the forefront of this educational evolution lies the formidable challenge of dismantling the entrenched age-old curriculum.

A curriculum that, in many instances, remains tethered to outdated courses and subjects, straining under the weight of relevance in our rapidly changing world. Simultaneously, the prevalence of rote learning within the system poses a significant impediment to fostering critical thinking and innovation among students. The ritualistic memorization of information often obstructs a holistic understanding and application of knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Recognizing the need for a radical departure from these archaic practices, the policy underscores the imperative of sustainable education. Going beyond traditional textbooks, sustainable education integrates environmental consciousness and ethical considerations into the curriculum, preparing students for the multifaceted challenges of the future. As a beacon of innovation in pedagogy, the policy advocates for "Learning by Doing" methodologies. This approach, emphasizing hands-on experiences, serves as a catalyst for bringing about novel changes in the education system. A pivotal example of this paradigm shift is found in Social Immersion programs within the management studies curriculum. These programs offer students a unique opportunity to transcend theoretical boundaries and gain real-world insights, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application. In weaving together these threads of change – from reimagining the curriculum to embracing experiential learning – India's higher education system can embark on a journey of transformation, one that fosters adaptability, creativity, and relevance in an ever-evolving global landscape.

6. Role of Private Educational Institutions in enabling Community reach and Gender Equity

The educational institutions in India hold a prime position in bridging the gap between education and community to a greater extent. The better financial positions, infrastructure and the greater number of resources have been adequately helping these institutions in carrying out various activities related to Social Immersion and Gender Equity. The relaxed administrative regulations in entering the public domains and underprivileged areas has also contributed to the elevated role of private, standalone and self-financing institutions in India.

Higher Educational institutions experience the viability in getting collaborated with various NGO s and nationally and internationally accredited bodies to extend their activities to longer distances, especially in a global world. This helps them to take up the mission and vision of social immersion programmes to a sustainable global world.



Table 2: Colleges in the State (Category Wise)

Sl. No	Sub Division	Category							Total
		Government	Aided	Government Self Financing	University Self Financing	Constituent College	Recognized Centre	Self Financing	
1	* Arts and Science	67	160	19	38	1	4	412	701
2	Engineering	14	3	24	0	6	1	119	167
3	** Medical	24	5	2	0	3	1	67	102
4	Teacher Education	5	14	0	5	12	2	143	181
5	Technical	74	3	0	0	0	1	9	87
6	*** Paramedical	8	0	2	1	5	0	161	177
7	Management	0	0	1	0	2	5	31	39
8	Architecture	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	14
9	Agriculture	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
10	Fine Arts	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
11	Law	4	0	0	0	0	0	19	23
12	Veterinary	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
13	Forestry	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
14	Fisheries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		202	185	48	44	36	15	974	1504

* It includes Various UITs, Arts and Science Colleges, Arabic, Sanskrit, Arts& Commerce, Home Science, Physical Education, Special Education, Applied Science, Advanced Studies, Social Science and Music Colleges etc.

** Medical colleges, Ayurveda, Dental, Homeo, and Allied Health Science Colleges etc.

*** It includes Nursing Colleges, Paramedical Sciences, Pharmacy, Optometry Medical Laboratory Technology Colleges, and Pharmaceutical Sciences Institutes etc.

Source: Kerala State Higher Education Policy, p: 48

The Kerala State Higher Education Policy of 2021 reflects a landscape where the prevalence of self-financing and standalone institutions surpasses that of public institutions. This abundance in private educational entities presents a unique opportunity to harness their resources for community outreach activities. Private institutions, often endowed with a diverse faculty possessing rich industry

experience, can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academia and practical application. Leveraging the expertise of faculty members in community service programs could significantly contribute to local development. Furthermore, the substantial student population enrolled in private institutions offers an extensive cohort for involvement in various community initiatives, ranging from educational support to health and environmental sustainability projects. The policy can encourage private institutions to actively participate in community engagement by setting aside a dedicated portion of their resources or time for these endeavors. The state can also consider incentivizing and recognizing institutions that excel in community outreach, perhaps through awards, accreditation, or other tangible benefits. The infrastructural superiority of private institutions, often manifested in cutting-edge facilities, can be opened up for community use during non-academic hours. This sharing of facilities could extend to sports complexes, libraries, and research labs, benefitting the broader public. Collaboration between private and public institutions can further enhance the effective utilization of resources, ensuring a synergistic approach to community development. Monitoring and evaluating the impact of these outreach activities should be integral to the policy framework, ensuring that they align with intended goals and contribute positively to the community, thereby fostering a harmonious integration of private higher education institutions into the broader societal fabric.

7. SCMS Initiatives to foster Gender Equality

SCMS Cochin School of Business, through the initiatives of its General Management Department, is making significant strides in promoting SDG 4 and Gender Equity. By fostering inclusivity, providing skill development opportunities, and creating platforms for dialogue, the institution is contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future. These initiatives underscore the commitment of SCMS Cochin School of Business to nurturing socially responsible leaders who can drive positive change in society. In a series of sessions spanning 10 months, the department is undertaking various initiatives to promote Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Gender Equity:

Commemoration of Days:

To engage and educate the student community, the department organizes a series of sessions commemorating significant days. These sessions include arts and literary competitions that focus on the historical and cultural significance of the day. By incorporating themes related to gender studies, women studies, Dalit studies, LGBTQ challenges, migrant women communities, and marginalized communities in literature, the initiative ensures a comprehensive exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences.

Memoir Series - Stories of Successful People:

In an effort to inspire and celebrate diversity, the department is conducting a Memoir Series featuring stories of successful individuals who have overcome challenges related to gender, caste,

sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. These stories serve as motivational tools for the student body, fostering a sense of inclusivity and empathy.

Project to Upskill Communication Abilities:

Recognizing the importance of effective communication, the department is conducting a series of four projects aimed at upskilling communication abilities among the canteen and cleaning staff. By providing targeted training, the initiative seeks to empower these staff members and enhance their overall workplace experience.

Conference on Marginalized Communities and SDGs:

To deepen understanding and engagement, the department is organizing a conference that delves into issues faced by marginalized communities. Subtopics include gender studies, women studies, Dalit studies, LGBTQ challenges, migrant women communities, and cultural inclusivity. This platform facilitates constructive discussions and knowledge sharing, aligning with SDG 4 objectives.

Management Skills Package for Kudumbashree Units:

In collaboration with Kudumbashree units, the department is developing a management skills package. This package focuses on marketing and accounting skills, empowering women in these units to take on leadership roles and contribute to the economic development of their communities.

8. Conclusion

The incorporation of gender-sensitive approaches in education is a crucial step towards achieving not only SDG 4 but also contributing to broader societal progress. SCMS Cochin School of Business has recognized the importance of empowering individuals of all genders through education, creating a platform for knowledge exchange and skill development that transcends traditional boundaries.

By prioritizing gender inclusivity in their pedagogical strategies, the institution not only prepares students for the challenges of a rapidly changing world but also plays a pivotal role in breaking down societal norms and stereotypes. The ripple effects of such initiatives extend beyond the classroom, impacting communities and contributing to the overall advancement of SDG 5 - Gender Equality.

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Tragedy and Solidarity: Examining the Impact of the 2002 Gujarat Riots on Muslim Women across Rural and Urban Divides

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ABSTRACT:

The 2002 Gujarat riots saw a new era of violence meted out against the Muslims of India. The systematic violence that occurred all over Gujarat for several months created a lot of trauma among the Muslims, women being the worst affected due to mass rapes and burning that was carried out against them in the most barbaric way possible by the Hindu men of Gujarat, backed by the Hindu right-wing organisations and the ruling government. This study aims to understand how the different classes of Muslim Women were affected due to the riots by juxtaposing the experiences of victims from rural districts to those of an urban background. This study takes the accounts of the riots from journalistic reports, and texts by those who witnessed the effects of the violence along with reports and studies that were carried out post-2002. Therefore the outcome of the study is to find links of solidarity between victims of the two social groups if there is any and how it can be improved further towards collective healing.

KEYWORDS: Muslim Women, Gujarat Riots, Social Classes, Sexual Violence, Solidarity

1. Introduction

India, a secular nation where the majority of Hindus live alongside the minorities of Muslims, Christians and people belonging to other religious sects and social classes is tainted with the history of communal violence even before independence. The conflicts between the Mughal Empire and the Hindu rulers mark the first instance of communal violence in this region. The Maratha rulers were able to weaken the hold that the Mughal Empire had over the region and by the 19th century the Mughal Empire was wiped out with the help of the British (Gaborieau 7). The British colonisers were also successful in employing the divide-and-rule policy that led to the partition that gave birth to the two new nations: India and Pakistan. The partition forced Muslims to leave for Pakistan while a few of them remained back in secular India. However Hindu right-wing organisations like the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh also commonly known as the RSS are known for their deep-seated Hindutva ideology that calls for a Hindu *Rashtra* or a Hindu nation by ignoring the secular values that India is famously known for. This ideology has its roots in the early-twentieth-century writings of D.V. Savarkar, a man known as the father of Hindutva, who argued that the Aryans, who settled in India had formed a nation which embodied the Hindu culture loosely translating that the Indian nation can

only belong to the Hindus (Desai 100). The basis of this ideology allows for the Hindus to hate on the Muslims which has led to the Hindu-Muslim conflicts prevalent all over the country. The RSS backed by the ruling government, the Bharatiya Janata Party painstakingly refers to Muslim settlements as 'Little Pakistan' and shouts slogans like 'Go back to Pakistan' towards Muslims settled in India. Also, the prominent leaders of BJP and RSS have always used dehumanising terms to refer to Muslims in their speeches, inciting hatred in the hearts of the majority general public composed of Hindus. Using narrative techniques that portray Muslims as terrorists who have secret connections with Pakistan, the Hindu right-wing organisations brought out the fiery national spirit among the people to defend their nation from the Muslim invaders. Another narrative technique that is still being employed is to brand Muslims as meat-eating barbarians as the Hindus, especially Brahmins consider themselves pure due to their strict vegetarian diet. This strikes a chord with the Hindus who consider the cow as sacred.

Thus we come to an understanding that the rifts between Hindus and Muslims are something that is entrenched within India's history and is something that continues, thriving under the current political climate. The next few sections of this paper will look into the violence meted out against Muslim women during the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom and how it impacted women hailing from different classes.

2. Violence against Muslim Women during the 2002 Gujarat riots

27 February 2002, marks one of the darkest periods in India's history which was just the beginning of the communal riots that engulfed all over Gujarat. What occurred after the Godhra train burning incident was a harrowing tale against the Muslims in Gujarat. The properties of Muslims were looted and burned by large Hindu mobs. Muslim men were ruthlessly murdered, the women were subjected to mass rapes, sexual violence and were burnt without mercy. Even the children were subjected to horrific and unspeakable violence at the hands of angry Hindu mobs who wanted to 'teach the Muslims a lesson' for allegedly carrying out the attack on the Sabarmati Express that saw 59 *karsevaks* die when a coach was set on fire. Even though there has been no concrete evidence pointing out that the deed was done by the Muslims, the politicians ruling the then Gujarat freely spoke against the religious minority and vehemently implied that they were the reason for the deaths. This was carried out without proper investigation or fact-checking before such violently charged statements were made. The government-sanctioned parade of the charred bodies from Godhra to Ahmedabad and the support given to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a Hindu right-wing organisation to carry out a bandh stirred the majority's sentiments to view the Muslims as their enemy.

However, reports point out that the large gatherings of Hindu mobs were mobilised systematically by local political leaders who were supported by the ruling party (Mander 62). It was as if they were given a free ticket to carry out anything they wanted against the innocent Muslims.

Witness reports also indicate that the then chief minister Narendra Modi gave out orders to senior police officers to be mere bystanders during the riots so that the Hindus could ‘vent their anger’ (Mander 20)

Harsh Mander in his book *Between Memory and Forgetting Massacre and the Modi Years in Gujarat* writes about the gut-wrenching incidents that Muslim women were subjected to, especially those who hail from the rural areas. The author dedicated an entire chapter to the experiences undergone by Bilkis Bano who was subjected to gang-rapes while she and her family were trying to escape towards safety while fleeing from their village. The brutal re-telling of the incident recounts how even a newborn child was not spared by the ruthless, merciless men venting out their anger. Mander also writes about the meta-narratives of women recounting horrific violence undergone by their pregnant relatives at the hands of the unruly mob whose foetuses were slaughtered after ripping open the wombs of the mothers (Mander 55).

The next section however covers the experiences of upper-class Muslim women during the riots to differentiate experiences of social classes in the face of sexual violence.

3. Were the upper-middle-class urban areas spared?

Before the violent riots of 2002, communal clashes and riots had taken place in Gujarat during the years of 1969 and 1985. Sanjeevini Badigar mentions the story of a Muslim lecturer who was forced to move out of their house during Advani’s *rath yatra* in the 1990s after they found a note stuck on their door which threatened them to leave. Therefore Muslims who had the means to move out from riot-stricken areas moved out for their safety. They either moved out of Gujarat or to Muslim localities where they thought they would be safer (Badigar 43). Towns like Anand and regions in western Ahmedabad developed due to these migrations. However, this trend became much stronger after the 2002 riots as the scale of which the crimes were perpetrated was so high. People who had witnessed the previous riots vouch that the 2002 riots were more brutal when compared to the 1969 and 1985 riots (Badigar 44). However, Verstappen notes that safety was not the only factor pushing for migration but also the search for better economic opportunities and social mobility held much importance. Better academic institutions providing English education were prevalent in Anand where the upper-middle class and elite Muslims migrated to give a better future for their children (Verstappen 67). The town of Anand is situated in the central part of the state and Verstappen also writes about how women were considerably safer in Anand (60). There was only one incident of a stabbing that took place in the town and the locality remained relatively safer amidst the riots, the mobs resorting mostly to loot and pelt stones at Muslim-owned properties (Verstappen 62).

Ward Berenschot who did a spatial study of riot-affected areas found out that the comparatively well-off areas of western Ahmedabad remained peaceful, while the violence mainly occurred around poorer localities where textile labourers were housed (222). He also writes about how poorer localities

in eastern Ahmedabad were easily susceptible to political mobilisation (227). Hence this easily allowed for mobs to be swayed and mobilised to be the perpetrators of violence.

Although there are exceptions in understanding who was safe and who was not among the upper-middle-class women, evidence points out that the intensity of the riots affecting those women was considerably less when compared to their rural counterparts.

4. Class structures in Muslim ghettos

The western Ahmedabad region where some of the upper-middle-class Muslims reside is a fairly recent development boasting affluent cityscapes (Laliwala et al. 118). This area on the western side of the Sabarmati River began to develop after independence. It was known as an elite area housing the upper-middle caste Hindus, a few well-to-do Muslims and some Dalit slums (Desai 107). Juhapura is a well-known Muslim ghetto in this area that developed after the upper-middle class Muslims migrated from the Walled City where they lived amongst Hindus. It emerged as a place where Muslims migrated to prevent themselves from becoming victims after seeing the trends of riots before 2002 (Laliwala et al. 110). Even though Juhapura can be termed as a ghetto, it boasts of posh housing societies that thrive alongside slums leading to internal spatial differences within the Muslim community (Laliwala et al. et al. 117). The large-scale migrations of people from different economic backgrounds added to the diversity of class structures as well (Laliwala et al. 111)

According to the report by Laliwala et al., Muslim women from the lower classes, those who moved to safer areas after the riots have been very vocal about getting their rights concerning class and gender, affordable housing, skill development, basic infrastructure facilities, women's rights, etc. However, the same report found that there is a failure in providing solidarities between the elite and non-elite Muslims as the women hailing from the upper-middle-class background did not seem very keen to align themselves with the concerns of the lower-class women, to an extent where they feign ignorance about the issues that grapple them.

5. Conclusion

When the riots were in full swing, Muslims turned to each other for comfort and solace. Uncharted levels of solidarity were found in relief camps where the Muslims sought refuge from the violence. With the state not giving any hand in re-building the lives of the victims who lost so much due to the riots, it was those Muslims who hailed from affluent and influential backgrounds along with the NGOs providing the victims the means to get back on their feet (Verstappen 62).

With the threat of immediate violence dwindling in recent years, there has been a considerable decline in sharing the same social fabric and providing solidarity within communities. As the ghettos of Gujarat possess self-sustaining qualities, they do not hold much importance if one section of women is abandoned or left to fend for themselves. While a few victims openly came out to share their stories of victimhood, some even attaining justice due to these brave acts, Mander notes that a

large number of victims opted to stay in silence over the atrocities that happened to them out of fear of retaliatory attacks or for fear of censure from their own families (55). Therefore acts of solidarity shown by those women hailing from the elite classes who have the resources to help these victims, especially by making them seen and heard through empathetic acts might provide the safety net and secure avenues for them to share their stories which could provide the means towards holistic healing or even to attain justice. Doing this will undoubtedly not only improve the status of Muslim women in India but also provide the necessary environment for victims to heal, recuperate and rehabilitate while orienting themselves as citizens of the community and the country, something that the nation failed to do so by not protecting them in the first place.

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Collective Experience and Socio-Cultural Trauma: An Analysis of Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*

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Abstract

Numerous problems and tribulations people face around the world, might lead to stress or despair in their lives. Trauma is the outcome of an event, sequence of events, or collection of circumstances that an individual perceives as harmful to their physical or emotional well-being or as potentially fatal. It negatively impacts the individual's as well as the community's functioning and well-being persistently. Jeffrey C Alexander, an American Sociologist says when people collectively believe that they have experienced a horrific incident that permanently alters their memories and fundamentally alters their identity going forward, they are said to have experienced cultural trauma. Gloria Naylor's novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* deal with the issues of the African-American community that experiences sociological harm, racial and gender discrimination, poverty and urban struggles, intersectionality, community and isolation, social hierarchies and class division, community expectations, and many other societal issues. In both novels, the community collectively collapsed, abandoned, and misbegotten. The characters in the novels come to terms with socio-cultural traumatizing experiences in their social situations. This article critically analyses the dynamics of socio-cultural trauma in these novels.

Keywords: Social issues, Cultural trauma, Discrimination, Violence, Collective memory and identity, Intersectionality.

Introduction

Gloria Naylor (1950–2016) was an acclaimed African American novelist known for her powerful storytelling and exploration of the complexities of African American life, particularly the experiences of African American women. Born on January 25, 1950, in New York City, grew up in a religious and socially conscious family. Her works often delved into issues of race, gender, and socio-economic challenges faced by individuals within their communities. Naylor's writing is characterized by its exploration of the African American experience, with a particular focus on the lives of African American women. Her works often touch on themes such as identity, community, family dynamics, and the impact of societal structures on individuals. Naylor gained widespread

recognition with her debut novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, published in 1982. The novel won the National Book Award for First Fiction. The novel is a poignant exploration of the lives of seven African American women living in a housing project in an urban setting. Through interconnected stories, Naylor addresses issues of poverty, discrimination, and the strength of female bonds, capturing the resilience and struggles of the characters. The major themes of *The Women of Brewster Place* are female solidarity and friendship, poverty and discrimination, identity and empowerment, resilience and survival.

Linden Hills is another significant work by Gloria Naylor, exploring the consequences of social ambition and the pursuit of success in an affluent African American community. The novel, named after the fictional affluent neighborhood it portrays, delves into the impact of socio-economic status on personal relationships and the cost of achieving the American Dream. *Linden Hills* delves into themes of socio-economic ambitions, critiques of materialism, identity, and the sacrifices demanded by societal norms, with the characters serving as conduits for these explorations. Naylor skillfully weaves a narrative that examines the sacrifices individuals make in the pursuit of material success and societal acceptance. She continued to produce significant works, including *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), and *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998), a follow-up to her first novel. The purpose of the article is to conduct a comprehensive literary analysis of Gloria Naylor's novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, utilizing Jeffrey C. Alexander's socio-cultural trauma theory as a conceptual framework. The aim is to explore and dissect the representation of collective experience and socio-cultural trauma within the narratives of these works. By applying Alexander's theoretical framework, the article seeks to examine traumatic events, understand collective experience, apply socio-cultural trauma theory, explore symbolism and cultural significance, conduct a comparative analysis, evaluate strengths and limitations, contribute to literary discourse, and offer implications for further research.

The main arguments of the article revolve around the application of Jeffrey C. Alexander's socio-cultural trauma theory to analyze the novels *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* by Gloria Naylor. Both novels depict significant traumatic events that profoundly affect the characters and communities. The analysis aims to identify and understand the nature of these events, exploring their emotional and psychological impact. Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory is employed to frame traumatic events within a social context. The theory helps interpret how these events are constructed and experienced collectively, considering the societal structures that contribute to the trauma. Characters in Naylor's novels share a collective experience of trauma, forming interconnected narratives that contribute to a communal understanding of suffering. The analysis delves into the ways in which trauma shapes the character's identities and relationships within the community. Impact of immigration on identity, discussing the challenges, treatment, and transformative potential

of the experience. It also provides insights into psychological and sociocultural aspects of immigration and identity [4].

Gloria Naylor's novels, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, explore the themes of collective experience and socio-cultural trauma. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the concept of Black Sisterhood is examined, highlighting the mystical relationship between women supporting each other despite their burdens. The novel portrays the ways in which black women overcome oppression and marginalization, influenced by the Black Feministic Movement and other Black Liberation Movements. Additionally, the novel emphasizes the importance of shared memories and dreams as a healing device and a mechanism for collective consciousness, enabling the women to challenge pain and fulfill their quest for selfhood and emancipation. These themes of collective experience and trauma are also relevant in *Linden Hills*, as it follows the emotional responses of a bicultural woman who experiences adversity and witnesses collective upheavals. The challenges faced by African American women during the Great Migration and the importance of community and safe spaces for their survival. It specifically analyzes the migrant stories of African American women [2]. Moral corruption and spiritual emptiness in an American black bourgeois neighborhood are depicted in Gloria Naylor's novel *Linden Hills*, which focuses on the disintegration of community values and the experiences of black female characters [3].

Socio-cultural trauma

Gloria Naylor's contributions to American literature extend beyond her works. Through her novels, she provided a unique and insightful perspective on the experiences of African American women and the broader challenges faced by African American communities. *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* stand as literary landmarks, showcasing Naylor's ability to explore complex social issues with compassion and nuance, making her a pivotal figure in contemporary African American literature. The relevance of socio-cultural trauma in literary analysis lies in its ability to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting the impact of collective experiences on individuals and communities within the context of a particular society.

Sociocultural trauma theory examines the impact of traumatic events on societies and communities, emphasizing the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape individual and collective responses to trauma. It's a form of trauma about the experience of marginalized and oppressed people. The impact of the toxic stress on people remains unresolved trauma triggers a response of either fight, flight, or freeze. In people of color (BIPOC i.e. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), these responses have often been mislabelled as defiant rather than protective, oppositional rather than guarded, disinterested but more accurately assessed as emotionally numb. Sociocultural trauma is caused by physical, social, or psychological assaults on an individual or group based on their racial or ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, abilities, religious belief

or lifestyle. Socio-cultural assaults can be implicit, making them unpredictable and unavoidable. This can have cumulative effects on physical, health, mental health, and health behaviors. A trauma response can be inherited from one's parents or from everyday societal factors and events. Individual's responses to trauma can be further precipitated by a biased treatment that one's parents, community, or ethnic group have experienced throughout history. The understanding of traumatic experiences, attitudes toward individual accountability, and acceptance of symptoms and seeking assistance are all influenced by culture. It is essential for mental health professionals to be aware of socio-cultural trauma, and treatments for individuals, families, and children should be based on an all-encompassing, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed approach.

Literary works often serve as mirrors reflecting the complexities of human existence, and socio-cultural trauma theory offers a lens through which we can analyze the profound effects of shared traumatic events. Socio-cultural trauma theory enhances literary analysis by providing a conceptual framework to delve into the intricate relationships between individual experiences, societal structures, and collective trauma. It offers a way to interpret the symbolic and cultural dimensions of literature, enriching our understanding of the profound impact of shared traumatic events on both fictional characters and real-world communities. Socio-cultural trauma theory enables readers and analysts to identify and dissect the shared experiences that characters undergo, reflecting broader societal realities. It allows the examination of how traumatic events become embedded in the cultural consciousness, influencing the narratives and stories that communities tell about themselves. The theory is applied to explore the social bonds formed in response to trauma. It helps illuminate how collective experiences contribute to the formation of communal identity and resilience. Literary devices and symbols are used in the novels to represent trauma, and these carry cultural significance. The analysis aims to decode the symbolism and explore the cultural dimensions embedded in these representations. Alexander's framework is utilized to interpret the symbolic elements in the context of collective memory. The theory aids in understanding how cultural narratives contribute to the broader societal understanding of trauma. A comparative analysis is conducted to identify similarities and differences in the portrayal of trauma in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*. The focus is on exploring thematic variations and any evolution in the representation of socio-cultural trauma across the two works. The theory provides a framework for comparing the socio-cultural dynamics of trauma in different contexts. It helps identify overarching patterns and themes that contribute to the overall narrative.

The article critically assesses how well Jeffrey C. Alexander's socio-cultural trauma theory captures the nuances of trauma in Naylor's novels. The evaluation includes a discussion of the strengths of the theory in enhancing literary analysis and an acknowledgment of any limitations. The theory's role in shaping the overall analysis is reiterated, emphasizing its contributions to a deeper

understanding of collective experiences in literature. Potential avenues for future research are suggested, building on the insights gained from applying the theory. In essence, the main arguments of the article focus on leveraging Jeffrey C. Alexander's socio-cultural trauma theory to dissect and interpret the representation of trauma in Gloria Naylor's novels, providing a nuanced understanding of how collective experiences shape the narrative and contribute to cultural memory.

Jeffrey C Alexander is a prominent American Sociologist known for his work on cultural sociology, social theory, and the study of collective memory and trauma. In his collaborative work, the book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004) states that “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” [1] (Alexander JC 2004). It discusses how societies collectively respond to traumatic events and how cultural meanings are disrupted and reconstructed. Cultural trauma is first of all an empirical, scientific concept, that suggests new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions. The key concepts presented encompass various aspects of trauma theory, cultural studies, and social psychology. They are as follows:

- Identification of Traumatic Events
- Symbolic Dimensions of Trauma
- Collective Memory and Identity
- Narrative Construction
- Public Sphere and Cultural Discourse
- Symbolic Resources for Coping
- Impact on Social Structures

Understanding these key concepts is essential for exploring the complex interplay between trauma and cultural, social, and individual experiences. Each concept contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how trauma is identified, expressed, and integrated into the broader fabric of collective and individual identities. Analyzing collective experiences and socio-cultural trauma in literature holds significant importance as it provides a nuanced understanding of the broader societal impact of traumatic events. Through literature, the cultural nuances, shared memories, and coping mechanisms of communities facing trauma are explored, contributing to a comprehensive exploration of the human condition. It allows for a deeper examination of how collective identities are formed, cultural narratives are constructed, and communities navigate and respond to shared traumas, fostering empathy, awareness, and critical insights into the complex interplay between individuals and their sociocultural contexts.

Collective traumatic experiences

1. Identification of Traumatic Events:

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the demolition of the wall represents a traumatic event, symbolizing the destruction of communal bonds. In *Linden Hills*, the revelation of hidden injustices serves as an identified traumatic event, challenging the facade of affluence.

2. Symbolic Dimensions of Trauma:

The wall in *The Women of Brewster Place* symbolizes the barriers and struggles faced by the women, while the tree becomes a symbol of resilience. In *Linden Hills*, the willow tree carries symbolic significance, representing both beauty and the dark secrets of the community.

3. Collective Memory and Identity:

The Women in Brewster Place share a collective memory of hardships, contributing to the formation of a resilient communal identity. In *Linden Hills*, the revelation of hidden injustices challenges the community's collective memory and prompts a re-evaluation of their identity.

4. Narrative Construction:

The narratives in both novels construct that give meaning to the character's experiences. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the interconnected vignettes form a collective narrative of survival, while in *Linden Hills*, the linear narrative constructs a tale of societal expectations and hidden trauma.

5. Public Sphere and Cultural Discourse:

The novels depict the public sphere through the character's interactions, conversations, and communal responses. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the women's stories become part of the public discourse within their community. In *Linden Hills*, societal expectations and secrets contribute to the cultural discourse within the affluent neighborhood.

6. Symbolic Resources for Coping:

Cultural elements such as blues music in *The Women of Brewster Place* serve as symbolic resources for coping, providing characters with a means of expressing and dealing with their emotions. In *Linden Hills*, naming traditions and the willow tree become symbolic resources that characters draw upon to navigate the challenges of societal expectations.

7. Impact on Social Structures:

Traumatic events impact social structures in both novels. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the demolition of the wall affects the community's social dynamics. In *Linden Hills* the revelation of injustices challenges the social structures built on success and conformity, prompting a re-examination of the community's values.

Applying these key concepts to the novels allows for a comprehensive analysis of how trauma is identified, symbolically represented, integrated into collective memory, and navigated within the broader cultural and social context of each narrative.

Surmounts of the victims

In Gloria Naylor's works *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, characters collectively experience trauma in the context of their respective communities. The collective experience of trauma is a central theme in both novels, shaping the identities and relationships of the characters. Mattie and Eva collectively experience the trauma of loss, displacement, and the disruption of their homes. The women of Brewster Place collectively face discrimination and economic struggles. The experiences of Cora Lee, who undergoes a traumatic abortion due to societal judgment, and Ciel, who faces rejection based on her sexual orientation, highlight the broader societal issues affecting the community. The women form a collective identity through their shared adversities. Their stories of resilience, friendship, and communal support demonstrate how trauma can strengthen social bonds. Trauma is transmitted across generations, as seen in the struggles of characters like Ben, whose impoverished upbringing reflects the systemic issues affecting the community. The impact of trauma is interwoven with the character's familial and communal relationships.

Characters in *Linden Hills* collectively experience trauma related to socioeconomic pressures and societal expectations. The pressure to conform to a certain standard of success creates a pervasive sense of anxiety and dissatisfaction. Characters like Willie and Lester collectively grapple with issues of identity within the affluent community. The trauma arises from the tension between personal desires and the expectations imposed by Linden Hills, leading to internal conflicts. The climax of the novel reveals hidden injustices and traumatic events within Linden Hills. The community's pristine facade is shattered, exposing the dark undercurrents that challenge the collective narrative of success. Characters like Teresa and Valerie collectively experience trauma related to isolation and alienation. The pressure to conform isolates individuals who do not fit the mold, leading to a shared sense of loneliness. The characters face collective struggles and they find strength through the formation of collective identity, strength in female bonds, resilience and survival, impact on future generations, public discourse and cultural memory.

Conclusion

One important finding in the study of collective trauma is the profound impact it can have on collective memory and identity. Collective trauma, such as significant historical events or experiences shared by a community, can shape the way a group remembers its past and forms a collective identity. The shared experience of trauma often becomes a central narrative in the community's history, influencing its values, cultural expressions, and sense of solidarity. This finding underscores the intricate relationship between historical events, shared memory, and the formation of a collective identity within a community or society. The sub-theme intersectionality of trauma in the context of this article would involve exploring how different intersecting factors, such as race, gender, class,

and other social categories, contribute to a nuanced understanding of collective trauma experiences within the communities depicted in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*, using Jeffrey C. Alexander's socio-cultural trauma theory. The strengths of the theory are highlighted in its effectiveness in analyzing literature. Limitations are discussed with a nuanced perspective, considering alternative frameworks where applicable. The article concludes by summarizing key findings and reinforcing the significance of socio-cultural trauma theory in literary analysis. Broader implications for understanding the intersection of literature, trauma, and societal dynamics are discussed. Holistic understanding, cultural sensitivity, collective memory emphasis, intersectionality consideration, and public discourse focus are the strengths of applying Socio-Cultural Trauma Theory. Potential oversimplification, cultural relativism challenges, and underemphasis on individuality are the limitations of this article. While socio-cultural trauma theory provides valuable insights, its application should be complemented by other perspectives to capture the full spectrum of individual and collective experiences in the context of trauma. Several areas that offer opportunities for further research and exploration are Comparative Analysis of Cultural Expressions, Transnational Perspectives on Trauma Narratives, Digital Narratives and Collective Memory, and Digital Humanities and Literary Analysis.

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Role of Society in Shaping Gender Roles: An Analysis of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Srikanta* and *Devdas*

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Abstract

Women and men are affected by most societal problems, and gender equality is vital to achieving success in all sections of society. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development embodies 17 sustainable goals and achieving gender equality and justice is essential to attaining all these goals. An important starting point for achieving gender equality is to revisit its representation in literature. Literature and literary characters are a representation of the reality that surrounds it. It also becomes an essential way of tracing the evolution and shaping of gender roles over time. This paper will analyse gender roles and the role of society in shaping these roles in twentieth-century Bengali literature, specifically in the noted Bengali author Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's eponymous novels *Srikanta* and *Devdas*. It will do this by using Simone De Beauvoir's theory of social construction of gender to show how Bengal's changing rural middle-class society, caught in the in-betweenness of Western rationalism and rural traditions, shaped gender roles today. Traces of Western influences as a by-product of colonialism are still prevalent in the current society and education system. Similarly, the negotiations between Western thought and rural traditions and their influence on gender roles have also carried forward over time. This study will highlight this influence and the importance of studying such influences to achieve gender equality, specifically SDG 5, in contemporary times by revisiting gender roles in select texts by Chattopadhyay.

Keywords: gender equality, sustainable development, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, twentieth-century, Indian literature, Bengali literature

Introduction

One can trace the roots of sustainable development goals to the UN Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and the UN Millennium Development Goals 2000. Achieving gender equality is

essential to attaining all UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015. Sustainable Development Goal 5 primarily focuses on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, eliminating all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and children and empowering women and girls (United Nations). Multiple policies and women's groups have contributed to developing these goals over the years, and governments have continuously tried to implement these goals. Understanding gender roles and their manifestation in society is crucial to developing these policies. Most discussions surrounding Sustainable Development Goals are limited to the related social and economic policies developed for implementation. However, an essential medium for understanding gender roles is also through literature. Literature often represents the relevant social and cultural reality of its times and is crucial in explaining societal gender roles. This paper aims to focus on understanding gender roles in society through a literary analysis of twentieth-century Bengali texts and argues that this can help attain SDGs effectively.

Materials and Methods

In the Indian context, a reflection of significant literary development takes one back to colonial Bengal. Between the introduction of English education, the influence of the colonial masters and efforts to retain a national identity, gender roles in the society also evolved. To attain gender equality through the SDGs in contemporary times, it becomes essential to understand how this evolution has taken place and how the colonial period has shaped specific gender roles carried forward by Indian society over the years. Simone de Beauvoir famously said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 330). In her book *The Second Sex*, she discusses different ways in which a child born into this world, ignorant of any categorisation and biases, is made to feel superior and inferior based on their sexual organs and society's perception of their power. Beauvoir states, "Up to twelve, the girl is just as sturdy as her brother; she shows the same intellectual aptitudes; she is not barred from competing with them in any area. If well before puberty and sometimes even starting from early childhood, she already appears sexually specified, it is not because mysterious instincts immediately destine her to passivity, coquetry, or motherhood but because the intervention of others in the infant's life is almost originary, and her vocation is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life" (Beauvoir 330-331). A manifestation of this can be seen clearly both in society and its representation in literature. This paper will explore Beauvoir's theory of the social construction of gender by undertaking a thematic and content analysis of the works of the noted Bengali author Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Srikanta* and *Devdas*. Chattopadhyay is one of the early Indian authors who considered women an essential part of social reform and 'true independence.' It will thus attempt to understand gender roles in society and their appropriation through its strong protagonists and argue that such an analysis can pave the way for effective policies

and social reform that can help attain the central goal of SDG 5, “Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls” (United Nations).

Results and Discussion:

Gender in Colonial Bengal

Scholars such as Gauri Viswanathan have referred to the effect of literature in shaping the culture of a particular age or group (3). Extending this, one can say that this culture also includes gender roles assigned by society. India was under the British Raj for the majority of the twentieth century. Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, was mainly the product of economic development, making it the critical link between England and India (Ghose 1255). Consequently, Bengal was an important site of both economic and literary development. Works by some of the earliest known women writers, such as Rashsundari Debi’s *Amar Jiban* (My Life) and Binodini Dasi’s *Amar Katha* (My Story), have brought attention to the plight of girl children and women. Debi shows that childhood for girls ended traumatically, mainly with the arrival of marriage (175). Pain and intense struggles fill even the few experiences that they recall from their childhood. Girls in the nineteenth-century period and before do not seem to have an identity outside the role of a daughter, wife and mother. Similarly, Dasi’s *Amar Katha* depicted how a woman’s public identity, cultural ideologies, and biases were hardly separated. Their experiences differed according to the class to which they belonged. Stereotypes regarding women in theatre (such as Dasi) and the exploitation they faced are examples of the struggles they experienced. Social discrimination and the limitation of available options directed the path she followed. An in-depth analysis of her text further clarifies that her entry into this profession was not an act of free, individual choice. In the pre-Independence period, Mahatma Gandhi also focused on issues concerning women. Among his ideas concerning the issues of *Swaraj* (freedom and self-rule), empowerment of the lower strata of the social order and women, communal harmony amongst socially divided identities, and the struggle against racial discrimination offered a contrary and the most acceptable socio-political development. As Scholars Anshuman Behera and Shailesh Nayak have pointed out, he lived during the ages of “fascist leaders, communist dictators, and the colonial masters” (1). His fights against untouchability and initiatives for women's empowerment are some of the most important contributions to social reform. His initiatives for women's empowerment are widely recognised in India (6). His efforts for women's empowerment functioned at three levels: social, political and personal. “At the personal level, Gandhi positioned women on an independent platform” (7). In the course of this, he envisioned women's independent role in society. “For Gandhi, women could play paramount roles in the society both as moral guardians and social workers, without competing with men in the sphere of power and politics” (7). He opined that any attempt by women to compete with men in power and politics would be a “reversion to barbarity” (Behra 7). He also believed in the ability of women to carry out

the non-violent struggle against the social evils and British colonialism simultaneously. The fact that 'masculine' aggressive qualities dominated the world for too long, and it was time for 'feminine' qualities to come to the fore, was the basis for Gandhi's position on women's leadership in peacebuilding. He was essential in mobilising women to participate in the independence movement. The large-scale participation of women in India's freedom movement had crucial social implications in challenging and dismantling the oppressive practices that had put women in secondary positions. (7).

Scholar Jasodhara Bagchi, in her article, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal," points out that "The ideology of motherhood was given an enormous importance in the cultural life of Bengal. Was the choice of the mother merely an accidental one? Or was there something about the culture of the Bengalis that created the requisite precondition for such a choice?" (65) While exploring this question, she quotes Claude Meillasoux, who states that the "great historical endeavour of man has been to reconquer the reproductive function over a woman and to fight off the incipient power derived from the latter's procreative capacities" (65). De Beauvoir points out that by denying women's reproductive power, the emancipation of women from the sphere of reproduction into the sphere of social production stands out (65). The greatness of their sons justified mothers, and loving, nurturing mothers and healthy babies were the most prized showpieces in the world of advertisements. Hence, this simultaneous privatisation and institutionalisation of motherhood is described as "one of the most spectacular ploys of capitalist patriarchy" by Bagchi (65). In his expressive Bengali, Ramahansa Paramahansa complimented the mother of the religious reformer Keshab Chunder Sen. He suggested that "people will celebrate her entrails," implying that her son has glorified her womb (65).

In "Beyond Bengal: Gender, Education, and the Writing of Colonial Indian History," Benjamin D. O'Dell states that when looking at Bengal in the context of colonial India, it becomes clear that three education projects emerged in the 19th century. Consequently, the projects were interrelated and changed over time. In the first project, higher education served as a means of privilege, influence, and representation for a particular group of Indian men, including the *bhadralok* class of Bengal. As part of the 19th-century reform movements, education was crucial in developing a collective sense of national identity and colonial citizenship. This group reacted to and engaged in various debates within the British Empire. In the second project, the British Raj aimed to establish a more general liberalising mission for the Indian subcontinent following the Sepoy Rebellion, which led to a more active role in India's economic and social development. One area of reform was education, which focused on providing basic instruction to marginalised groups within the colonial system. This shift in responsibilities during the latter half of the 19th century challenged the traditional Brahminical caste exclusivity surrounding knowledge (536-37). During

the nineteenth century, women found themselves caught between societal changes in Bengal. While some assumed that education for women was of secondary importance, it became a point of contention between different voices. This extended to the twentieth century as well. In her research on western India, Shefali Chandra notes that debates on women's education allowed English-educated men to shift gendered associations of Englishness and establish themselves at the forefront of a reconstituted normative gender hierarchy (537). Such a reconstituted hierarchy extended older forms of caste-based exclusivity into the modern era (Beauvoir 537). Scholars have offered different responses to the question "What is a woman?" as noted by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Some argue that her ability to reproduce defines a woman, while others reject this notion and acknowledge that possessing a uterus does not necessarily make one a woman.

Nonetheless, it is largely agreed that females are within the human species. As stated by Beauvoir, the concept of femininity is seen as vulnerable and in danger. It is important to note that not all female human beings necessarily identify as women; they must embrace and participate in this enigmatic and vulnerable notion of femininity. Additionally, advocates of Enlightenment philosophy, rationalism, or nominalism assert that women are simply those arbitrarily designated as such among human beings (333). The world consists of individuals with different physical characteristics and interests. Although these differences may disappear in the future, they are currently evident. The definition of a woman is not solely based on her biological function but on her autonomy and freedom. Boys who desire a less harsh existence may sometimes choose femininity or homosexuality (333).

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, a famous Indian novelist, wrote about the social realities of rural life and familial issues in his novels. His works were relatable to a wide range of readers due to his skill in depicting the lives of the downtrodden. As Narayan Chaudhari described him, he moved "on the planes of popularity and creativity with equal facility" (p. 87) and "outreached Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore in popularity" (p. 86). A Bengal-born Indian novelist, "he was known for his artistic excellence in weaving the words to depict the life stories of the extremely downtrodden section of the society" (Ali 72). Many of Chattopadhyay's novels, such as *Bordidi* (The Elder Sister), *Palli Samaj* (The Home Coming) and *Parineeta*, deal with rural socio-economic problems, women's problems and familial issues. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes that his novel evokes "vividly and with precision a complete world rooted in the ethos of the writer's past" (61). At the novel's beginning, the milieu is a closely knit homogenous society in rural Bengal, much like Chattopadhyay's *Devdas* and *Srikanta*. It has internal inequalities and exploitations "but are bound by customs, myths, rituals, food and festivals" (61).

Gender in *Srikanta*

Srikanta was published in four serialised sections in 1917, 1918, 1927 and 1933. Govind calls

this the most mature phase of Chattopadhyay's writings (p. 89). The portrayal of childhood adventures in twentieth-century Bengali fiction is very realistic. The initial three instalments of Part 1 of *Srikanta* exhibit a "regimented world of children" (89). Within this universe, the male figureheads of the household wielded the authority and subsequently passed it down to the elder siblings. The senior children supervised the younger brothers and took advantage of the powerlessness of these younger cousins. This story presents a situation where social factors influence power and control. (p. 4). As in his other novels, Gupta also points out that Saratchandra also puts women on a pedestal in *Srikanta*.

From childhood onwards, I have carried the mark of shame branded on me by friends and strangers alike, so that I can no longer view my life as anything other than a prolonged stretch of ignominy. Yet, looking back, it seems to me that the cross I carry is undeserved. It seems to me that only some chosen ones are pulled by invisible strings to the centre of God's amazingly diverse creation and exposed to all its nuances. He who is thus chosen is not the proverbial *good* boy who fares well in examinations and succeeds in life. He is a compulsive rover but is not among those who travel in luxury in the company of friends...He is intelligent but impractical and eccentric. Since his passion for experience overwhelms all norms of accepted conduct he is unloved and ignored by those around him (Chattopadhyay 3).

The novel, written in the first-person narrative, begins with the above passage and conveys the themes of socially accepted conduct and the consequence of not following it. In a subtle, light-hearted and subversive manner, the author conveys that only 'good' boys who study well and succeed in life have a good life experience. The life of his childhood friend, Indra, is an example of this tacit nature of life. Indra is the epitome of courage for the young boy Srikanta. He, as the protagonist recalls, "aroused the wanderlust" in Srikanta (4). While Srikanta was sacred of a group of Mussalman boys who came forward to attack him and refused to eat Shiddhi leaves (seen as improper conduct), Indra stood before him, daring them to come forward and later offered Shiddhi leaves to Srikanta. He unapologetically smoked cigarettes in the open while Srikanta warned him, "If someone sees you" (5). He dared to break social rules, and the local school banned him from entering it. The protagonist, Srikanta, on the other hand, "lacks drive and ambition only in pursuit of self-seeking goals. But he acts with energy on behalf of others" (Gupta 58). He is passionate and detached, ascetic and unworldly (p. 60). These two characters, who seem to be opposites in terms of courage in their early years, also draw an image in words that explicates the conditioned young mind that is constantly conscious of social rules and acceptance. Beauvoir claims that male children are expected to excel in everything. "More is demanded of boys because of their superiority; the pride of his virility is breathed into him in order to encourage him in this difficult path" (Beauvoir 333), and the intense pressure they face concerning this manifests in the lives of these characters. This pressure on young male children exists

strongly in contemporary societies as well.

Another example of similar pressure, characteristic of the colonial context of the text, is the education the characters undergo as children. Srikanta is described as a village boy sent to his aunt's house in the city to be educated. As Govind notes, *Srikanta*, among the other Saratchandra stories, highlights the extended family as the 'buffer zone' between the core family, the impoverished relatives and the world. Srikanta, a rebellious protagonist, also stayed at a relative's house for education. (p. 4-5). The novel describes the strict study routine the children were subject to in detail. A month after Srikanta's encounter with Indranath and his subsequent disappearance (hinting at Indranath's tendency to keep going on escapades), it was during a regular evening of "iron discipline" (7) that Mejda, Srikanta's second brother, that he met Indra again. The former and his cousins were doing their lessons by the light of an oil lamp. Education was given increased importance in colonial Bengal with the introduction of English education. Children were made to travel to the city, and strict discipline was enforced upon them. Mejda is referred to as preparing for the "Entrance" (7) after repeated failed attempts. The study time was strictly set between 7 pm and 9 pm. Once again, a juxtaposition of passive submissiveness to social norms is contrasted with the rebellious nature of Indra, who cuts off the small tuft of hair that hangs from the pundit's (the teacher at his school) hair. This act responded to the Sanskrit pandit's injustice in trying to make him wear a dunce cap. Children who dared to fight against what they were told to do were punished severely. As a result, Indra was forbidden from entering the school. It may be interesting to note here that no mention of girl children studying with them appears in this description of 'learning.'

"That afternoon, I discovered a presence that has remained with me. It was out of this encounter, in the most impressionable years of my life, that my lifelong vision of women has been formed" (Chattopadhyay 26).

The character Annada Didi in the novel is an adequate example of Beauvoir's socially constructed women. Indra introduces her as "didi" when he tells Srikanta she will not take his money anymore, thinking he stole it from his mother's trunk (Chattopadhyay 25). She defines 'woman' in the young Srikanta's mind. According to him, "A woman is noble, chaste and loving. If there is evil surrounding her, she can, I am convinced, shed it like a worn garment at any given moment and take her place among the purest and brightest of spirits" (26). Annada Didi's characteristics and manners have, in turn, been heavily influenced by society's imposition. The qualities Srikanta lists align with the notion of 'femininity' with which females are associated in Beauvoir's discussion. It was difficult for Srikanta to believe that a woman of such grace lived in the Mussalman's house (28). Having grown up in a Brahmin household, she was educated and was conditioned to be 'noble,' 'graceful,' and 'feminine.' Apart from hinting at caste discrimination, this also points to the social conditioning that women in Brahmin households went through at the time. Further, Srikanta's shock at her having

married a Mussalman indicates the expectations imposed on women about whom they should marry and what kind of families they should be associated with.

Gender in *Devdas*

“He was delighted to see Parvati, but he didn’t show any of his pleasure. He continued to smoke and solemnly said, ‘Come’” (Chattopadhyay 429).

The male protagonist, Devdas, is introduced as a rebellious child who does not follow instructions. In addition, he enjoys the privilege of being the zamindar’s son. He enjoyed being looked after by a male servant since the age of twelve, one that very few families could afford. For most of the story, Devdas struggles to express his emotions from childhood– resulting from a possible social conditioning that he has undergone as an upper-class male. When Devdas leaves school, he is appointed a master to teach him at school. However, when Parvati leaves school, her continuing education is not considered necessary. She takes part in household chores and spends her time playing around. Her family does not see the use of her studying much. Beauvoir’s notion of the pressure put on male children to take education seriously and succeed while it is not considered necessary for female children is reflected here. He is later sent to Calcutta to get access to English education. He soon starts using a walking stick and enjoys hunting more than fishing, which he enjoyed doing with Parvati in their childhood. The influence of British education and Parvati’s inability to identify with it creates a distance between the two protagonists.

‘What is the point? If she can write a few letters and read a few lines of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*, it is more than enough. Your Paro is hardly likely to study law or become a barrister.’ (Chattopadhyay, 433).

Parvati’s grandmother speaks the above lines after complaining that Govinda master (her teacher) beat her up. Devdas is shown to believe he has the authority to punish Parvati throughout the story. Parvati passively accepts her fate even when she knows she has not done anything and does not protest. Devdas committed the violence that she claimed Govinda master committed. The author repeats the words “Parvati was silent” and “Again, Parvati didn’t say a word” (433) in the text. Parvati's unnecessarily apologetic behaviour towards Devdas demonstrates that society expects girl children to be passive. She makes this an excuse to avoid going to school. As Parvati becomes a teenager, she becomes shyer. Her behaviour towards Devdas reflects this. Her education is considered useless by her family, and she is married to a wealthy family and restricted to being a wife and a mother. The problem that Beauvoir arises of limiting women to their reproductive power is manifested in this example.

Conclusion

According to Suneeta Dhar, in 2015, significant progress was made towards women's rights globally. This was highlighted by new data that assessed the successes and challenges faced in

implementing the UN Beijing Platform for Action and the UN Millennium Development Goals. These agreements paved the way for introducing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting areas where states have not met their gender equality obligations (48). One major challenge in attaining gender equality is the lack of understanding of the role of society in creating gender roles.

Gender roles, as discussed above, have existed in society for a long time, and various socio-politico-cultural factors have shaped them over the years. Gender roles have changed to a great extent in the years after the twentieth century. However, looking back at how colonial influence has affected these gender roles enables us to understand the subtle ways in which they live in society even now and how these are imposed upon children at a very young age. The pain that Parvati experiences and the struggles that Srikanta and Devdas undergo while not being able to identify with social norms make clear the difficulties experienced by children due to these imposed gender roles. Hence, a close look at literary narratives like *Devdas* and *Srikanta* and making them a part of active and academic discussions in schools and other platforms will help in sensitisation and in understanding individual experiences of gender inequality as opposed to an objective or detached account of the problem. It can thus help policymakers and society to get to the core of the issue and create effective policies to meet the sustainable development goals of gender equality.

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From Submission to Defiance: Discovering the Metaphors of Women's Long Hair and the Empowering Act of Cutting.

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Abstract:

Long hair on women has been a symbol of femininity and passivity throughout history, reinforcing traditional gender roles and societal conventions. However, shaving one's hair has become a potent act of defiance, challenging oppressive norms and expressing individuality. This research article explores the historical significance of women's long hair as a symbol of subjugation and societal expectations, delving into its profound symbolism. It investigates how diverse societies and cultures have used long hair to exert control over women, thereby limiting their autonomy and self-expression. The perception shift surrounding the act of removing one's hair and its transformation into an act of defiance is analysed through various historical examples. The article analyses the historical moments and cultural movements that have propelled hair cutting as a form of personal liberation, with a focus on the role of influential individuals and social movements in challenging traditional gender norms.

Key Words: Hair, Hair – Cutting, Power and Control, Freedom

Hair is perhaps one of the most complex and powerful symbols in the sociological/anthropological context. Although it is physical and therefore highly personal, under social-cultural-religious circumstances, it is public rather than private. It is the symbol whose consistency is baffling across genders, cultures, and social groups. Hair has been associated with beauty standards for women in different cultures for centuries. Hair is not just a body part but often symbolizes the person it belonged to. It brought about different psycho-social meanings to the person. "As hair is both an integral part of a woman's body and governed by external factors such as social, cultural and aesthetic conditioning, it lends itself well to the conceptualization of femininity both as a biological sex and as a socially constructed gender."(Ofek) Hair could be styled, colored, and cut to express the woman's personality and how she wanted to be seen by others. In some cases, hair could be used as a tool of resistance against societal norms and expectations. Very often, hair was treated as self, masking the identity of the person.

Apart from being personal, the psycho-social identity 'hair' often plays a crucial sociological function in determining the weaker sex's identity in the power paradigm. Hair could represent power,

sexuality, femininity, and vulnerability. "...historically, hair has been associated with power, and a woman's hair represented sexual power specifically". (Alexander) For women, their hair was often seen as a representation of themselves and their control over their bodies. Hair is seen as a symbol of exercising control. It becomes a visible marker of internalised control structure of the society. Externally controlled hair symbolically represents internally controlled self and existence. Hair which is a site of cultural production, a visible social marker, and a malleable cultural artefact divides identities between the controller and the controlled. While accommodating the rules of the controller-States of patriarchy, religion- in maintaining the strictures, the controlled- women-is ordained.

Hair has also been used as a symbol of control by those in power. The sign which was once a site of control can become a symbol of protest and rebellion through acts of resistance. Hair is often seen as a symbol of control over bodies, particularly women's bodies. Hair can be used to dictate what people can and cannot do, and it can be used to control how people look and present themselves. Hair contributes to the representation of women in society by dictating how women are supposed to look and by reinforcing the idea that women must be neatly groomed and styled. Metaphoric usages of hair symbol is abundant in popular culture and literature. Abrahamic religions and some eastern religions do focus on the symbol of hair as a tool for subordinating female bodies. "Muslims, ultra-orthodox Jews, and the stricter Amish and Mennonites insist that women must cover their hair to show that they are controlled by their male relatives or their community and lack independence, particularly in relation to sexuality." (Bell et al.) Some nationalities follow a significantly stricter code of law regarding public display of hair by women, marking control of women's self expressing through the symbolism of hair. "In some countries the normative constraints placed on women are really very great: in Saudi Arabia, women cannot vote or legally operate motor vehicles; in Iran, women who dare to expose their hair or wear make-up in public can be whipped." (Yasbeck)The way in which women hair is controlled, and acted upon implies that hair is used as the medium to gain the control of individual self and the persona. The visibly controlled hair gives away the meaning of controlled body and the subjugated self. The reduction of self to a visible marker and the dead cell implies the reduction of the self to 'hair'

Elizabeth C. Hirschman in her, "Hair As Attribute, Hair As Symbol, Hair As Self" (Hirschman) reviews the social psychological, sociological and anthropological literatures to substantiate hair as an attribute of the body. She attempts at social psychology research to indicate norms surrounding the use of hair in creating and communicating gender identity. Anthony Synnott in "Shame and Glory: The Sociology of Hair" (Synnott) contends that his propositions on hair are applicable to three "zones" on each person's body: head hair, body hair and facial hair. Synnott observes that head hair is much more likely to be manipulated by women than men. The idea that hairstyle could be used to effect or signal a change in the inner self was developed

further by McAlexander and Schouten in a 1989 article "Hair Style Changes as Transition Markers"(McAlexander) Hair style is used for asserting independence from parental control, i.e., "coming of age", sexual identity formation, and shifts in social membership/affiliation. In "Hair, Sex and Dirt" P. Herschman deals with the anthropological idea of taboo in connection with hair in Sikh community. His painstaking research on Sikh migrants for the period of one year, gives a valuable insight on negating Leach's idea that hair represents phallic symbol. Hair in Punjabi ritual and social life is used to express many non-sexual values. Leach in his 1958 article 'Magical hair' (Leach) is careful to say at the beginning that he does at least know of some societies where the ritual symbolism of hair is not phallic. In his later work (Leach 1963 :38) and (Leach 1965 :174), Leach ceases to discuss hair as a phallic symbol. Edmund Leach disparages the use by psychoanalysis of ethnographic material about hair symbolism from 'primitive' societies.

"Magical Hair as Dirt: Ecstatic Bodies and Postcolonial Reform in South India", (Ramberg) Lucinda Ramberg argues about the devadasi system in Yellama temple of Karnataka, wherein which lock of matted hair symbolised the presence of goddess in the body of women. It details about various reforms that were undertaken to get rid of Devadasi system, which was invariably connected with the hair. subjugating a woman to undergo hair cutting process in this context also meant that women bodies are subjugated.

'Hair' which is a visible symbol of beauty becomes a social symbol of subjugation by the other. Numerous women varying from famed tales to different eras of history reacted by relinquishing their hair on their own marking a symbolic form of renouncing the self. Freud equates this action to a sexual meaning. He Freud (1910, 32) briefly speculated that hair-cutters unwittingly 'play the part of people who carry out an act of castration on the female genital organ'; he mentions them as late as 1927 (Freud, 1927, 377). "What does the giving up of the self just by giving up the hair mean to women, and what drives them to be so need to be looked in a different context beginning with 'cutting hair' by women. It is right to posit that the weaker gender are pushed beyond are deeming point to relinquish the very mark of their social identity. It is not just a mere form or a symbolic act of protest but a psychological drive accompanied by melancholia. The very presence of hair marks social suppression leading to melancholic death drive. The presence of hair marks the Lacanian concept of melancholy, wherein Lacan contends that it is the presence of an object rather than absence of it is the sole provider of melancholia.

Freud's (Freud) explains melancholia is a result of a previously loved yet subsequently hated and internalized lost object. The triangle of loved, hated, and internalised object forms the basis for melancholic drive in individuals. But Lacan, locates melancholia mainly in the domain of psychosis. He insists on the death drive as enacted within the symbolic realm. The death drive understood not as a quasi-biological or organic force. For him death drive is the intentionality to break away from,

and to destroy the network of given symbolic roles, debts, and obligations that form the basis for social existence. "The death drive defined by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan does not describe literal death, but death within the symbolic order. After having rejected the symbolic order composed of language, conceptualization and categorization, however, the subject persists." (Dawkins). Lacan explains the state of being 'between two deaths' where in which the individual opts out of social life while endlessly thinking of actual suicide (Fink) Melancholic existence for him is the existence between 'the unreal world of social being' and 'the real world of solitude'

Russell Grigg (Clemens and Grigg) posits a counter argument to Freud stating that it is the presence of the object rather than its absence that is most fundamental in melancholia. The very presence of an object leads to melancholic feeling which feeds death drive in the symbolic realm. The very presence of hair marks the subjugation and societal condition imposed therein. Intentional breakaway from the symbolic order is performed through the act of cutting of hair, visibly marking the rejection of conceptualised social order and a deep longing for the solitude.

In the fairy tale Rapunzel, the cutting of hair is used as a symbol of protest and a struggle toward freedom. Rapunzel's long hair represented her confinement and imprisonment under the tower. Cutting her hair was a symbolic act of breaking free from her captors and reclaiming her independence. The cutting of hair is symbolic in that it takes place at a time when Rapunzel comes of age, meets the prince and develops urgencies of expressing her sensuality. The long hair which otherwise kept her tamed to the orders of the enchantress, kept her away from her liberated self. It was with the chopped off hair that she embraced her new identity and went off with the prince to give expressions to her sexuality. This chopping off is also symbolic of the separation with the mother. The melancholy of being a captive and the struggle to be independent leads Rapunzel to take the extreme step of annihilation of the self by cutting her own hair. Cutting her hair is not a spontaneous act, but rather a wilful action derived from death drive.

The Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's self-portrait with her hair chopped is another case-in-point. In her self-portrait Kahlo is seen to have cast off some of her 'imposed' feminine attributes that she often used to depict herself- such as traditional embroidered Tehuana dresses or flowers in her hair- and instead sports a loose-fitting man's suit and short-clipped haircut. Her high heeled shoes in opposing directions in this portrait, her dangling earring remain, however along with her characteristic penetrating outward gaze. With locks of hair strewn across the floor, severed braid lying on her lap and on the chair, and the artist herself holding on to a pair of scissors suggest that it is she who led the action of cutting them. This combined with the lyrics of a famous Mexican song that appear at top suggest the address of a lover: "Look if I loved you, it was because of your hair. Now that you are without hair, I don't love you anymore.", (Kahlo) justly suggests her condition of her mind that she experienced after her divorce with her husband, the artist Diego Rivera, which she expresses.

Here the hair makes the important point of defining a self. The hair is identified as the complete person in the absence of which the person will assume another identity altogether. The evidence of symbolic death drive is very much clear to the fact that a new identity can be forged only with the help of removal of the hair on which the identity of the person is conditioned.

In 2015, singer Sinead O'Connor shaved her head in public to mark International Women's Day. She wrote an open letter on her website explaining why she had chosen to do so: "I am reclaiming my body from the countless times it has been abused by institutions or people who thought they owned me." (Phil) "I didn't want to be raped, I didn't want to be molested." (Phil) The melancholic death drive is very much evident in the fact that a mere desire to exist as a commoner is much more important than being myself and be traumatised by having hair as an identity. Similarly, when actress Demi Moore famously chopped off all of her long locks in the movie G.I Jane (Scott), she was sending a powerful message of women's empowerment. Moore portrayed a strong female character who was determined to break down gender stereotypes and prove her worth in the military despite facing extreme adversity. She conveys a powerful message that to be identified as an equal being, she has to give up what defines her as a woman.

In the contemporary lens, the Iranian women's protest in September, 2022, (Kianpour) symbolically shows how the presence of an object, rather than the absence of it, leads to melancholia and to symbolic death drive in women. Masha Amini's case of improper wearing of the headscarf, 'displaying' hair, had led to her arrest by the moral police, from which she could not return alive. Women who protested against the Moral police of Iran, cut their hair off in public to showcase their drive towards freedom, hair here represents subjugation and repressiveness. So, the expression that the moral police wish to suppress has to do with one's expression of one's being, one's self, one's identity that includes their sensuality. Therefore it is natural that women find some means to get out of it when the physical part of the body can symbolise the whole self. The liberation of the self would mean assuming ne self without subjugating part. The cutting of hair is therefore more than just an aesthetic choice; it can be seen as an act of liberation and resistance for women around the world. By shaving their heads, women are able to reclaim autonomy and agency over their own lives.

Hair, thus, is understood as the social marker of the controller on the controlled. And the chopping of the same symbolizes the controlled subject's taking back of the power from the controller. Bringing the conception of melancholia and identity formation solely to the spectrum of female heterosexuality which in the heterosexual spectrum itself forms the other, would lend to bifurcating the identity into two- one, the constructed female identity by the controller- masculine, society- through social symbols like kempt, covered hair. And, two, the 'self' of the female that forms the radical other in this case; where the first category- the constructed identity- is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the other 'self' of the female that it disavows. This identity of the radical

other 'self' which keeps the constructed identity alive by a melancholic incorporation is gained back by regaining the control, which in case of hair as the social marker, is by chopping it off, which helps the 'self' to gain back the control and power over one's self, thus, getting rid of the melancholic identity which is otherwise embraced to celebrate the subjective controller. Thus, by doing this, women are ridding themselves off their melancholic identities which they had embraced so far, by eradicating their radical otherness, which is what they are revolting against, in a deeper understanding. This act that they are shredding off their pitiful 'melancholia' through symbolic death is what might prepare a path for the new feminisms to come.

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Gendered Cultural Norms: The Maternal Authority Paradox in Kerala's Muslim Marriages

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ABSTRACT

The shifting dynamics within Muslim households in Kerala have drawn attention to the rising divorce rates, primarily attributed to the intricate interplay between gender-specific conduct and familial authority. The pivotal roles of the mother-in-law and the societal expectations placed on wives have created a distinctive cultural norm, often overshadowing the principles outlined in religious teachings. In this cultural milieu, upon marriage, the mother of the husband assumes an authoritative role that surpasses the agency of the wife's mother. This power dynamic often leads to a situation where the wife's family is expected to be subservient and acquiescent to the demands of the husband's mother. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to the wife being deemed insufficient and her family, vulnerable to censure. Additionally, traditions that require the wife to seek permission before visiting her own parents reflect the deeply entrenched control wielded by the husband and in-laws over her autonomy. Surprisingly, these expectations, though culturally ingrained, find no basis in religious scriptures, creating a paradox between cultural tradition and religious doctrine.

Keywords: maternal authority, culturally ingrained, religious doctrine.

In the intricate web of sociology and cultural norms, a silent narrative unfolds—the struggles faced by women in Muslim marriages in Kerala. Rooted in time-honoured traditions, these dynamics paint a nuanced picture laden with expectations, especially for daughters-in-law. This exploration delves into the choreography of gendered behaviors, societal expectations, and the influence held by female members within familial constructs. It uncovers a rich tapestry woven with cultural norms, where women's roles, prospects, and limitations in marital homes are entangled with society's perceptions and gender-based behaviors.

In the realm of Muslim households in Kerala, wives' experiences reveal a poignant reality, often marked by impactful hardships, particularly from mothers-in-law. These adversities encompass

emotional distress, relentless scrutiny, and constraints on personal liberties. The enduring pressure to conform to predefined roles and the underappreciated influence of mothers-in-law create an environment that can suffocate, induce emotional strain, and erode agency for daughters-in-law. It's indeed a paradoxical backdrop against the principles of Islam, a religion that inherently champions freedom and empowers women across various spheres. Nevertheless, within the microcosm of familial structures, these hidden adversities intricately interwoven into the fabric of daily life significantly shape the emotional landscape for women in Muslim marriages within Kerala.

Examining women's rights in Islam, two papers, "The Historical Evolution of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) from Earliest Societies to Modern Age" and "An Eastern Perspective: The Relationship Between Mother-In-Law And Daughter-In-Law," highlight distinct aspects. The former explores international humanitarian law, while the latter delves into Eastern dynamics between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. My research aims to disentangle Islam from blame for human rights violations in Kerala Muslim marriages. Scrutinizing these papers unveils nuanced perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between culture, gender, and religious practices in this context.

In Kerala Muslim weddings, providing abundant 'salkaram' food indirectly scrutinizes the bride's family's financial status. There's an ongoing expectation for the bride's family to consistently honour and respect the husband's family, assessing financial capacity. Cultural practices create expectations and perpetuate societal norms. Post-wedding, rituals impose financial strain on the bride's family, requiring gifts, annual kitchen essentials, and providing food during visits. Pregnancy escalates financial responsibilities on her parents, burdening the bride's family and reinforcing societal perceptions of daughters as 'burdens' entrenched in cultural expectations.

In some Muslim households, a traditional custom involves the mother-in-law taking all gold jewelry from the daughter-in-law after marriage, storing it and retaining the key. The gold is only returned temporarily for specific events and then promptly taken back. In-laws often set strict expectations, including dowry demands, traditionally in gold and money. Despite discouragement of dowry, the insistence on gold persists due to concerns about unequal inheritance. Unfortunately, post-marriage, husbands may exhibit greed demanding more wealth perpetuating the idea of women as burdens, causing suffering and societal pressures.

Disparities between the treatment of the bride's mother and the husband's mother arise from cultural norms, elevating the status of the husband's mother as the 'mother-in-law.' This power dynamic, favouring the husband's side, grants them unique authority in the family structure, particularly after their sons are married. Interestingly, this authority doesn't emerge when their daughters marry, creating an unequal relationship. Some mothers-in-law continue to refer to sons-in-law as 'puthiyappla' or 'newcomer,' even when they with have grandchildren. Unfortunately, these

imbalances often persist unquestioned, challenging women to change or challenge these dynamics due to long-standing cultural obligations and acceptance.

In 2021, India recorded around 6.8 thousand dowry deaths, marking a decline from approximately 8.5 thousand in 2014. Kerala, known for its progressive stance, faced a tragic suicide case involving a PG doctor pressured for a hefty dowry. The state reported 25, 12, and 17 dowry fatalities in 2016, 2017, and 2018, with minor declines in subsequent years. In 2021 and 2022, Kerala documented 4,997 and 4,998 cases of abuse by spouses or family members. Over five years, 66 dowry deaths and 15,143 harassment cases were reported. Despite high literacy rates, the societal issue persists, as highlighted by the Kerala High Court acknowledging subsequent dowry demands triggering legal definitions. Unfortunately, societal values still prioritize men, perpetuating the prevalence of dowry practices. In Kerala, financial gains from a son's marriage often overshadow the essence of marital unions, revealing a paradox in the state's social indicators and literacy rates not directly correlating with solving deep-rooted social problems.

Arranged marriages are influenced by power dynamics and societal judgments from the beginning, such as during 'pennukanal' rituals. Elderly women often wield significant influence, vetoing matches based on trivial criteria like appearance or even eyeglasses. These stringent standards impact a girl's marriage prospects, perpetuating shallow judgments. In love marriages, the husband's family may express contempt, often starting with criticism of the girl's appearance. There's a pervasive societal notion that allows a man to be less attractive while expecting the woman to be conventionally beautiful, overlooking her other qualities. Comments blaming the girl and disregarding mutual decision-making are common, perpetuating a double standard where the girl's family faces scrutiny while the boy chooses freely. This sustains the power and privilege men have in choosing partners, while women are expected to conform and maintain a culturally appropriate image. Unfair expectations and judgmental behavior toward women in relationships result from these societal attitudes. Dynamics within the husband's family, especially involving the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law contribute to issues. There's a belief that the girl 'stole' their son or brother away, impacting discussions about the couple's independence and decision-making within the family.

India values close-knit family structures, emphasizing living together after marriage for familial bonds and support. However, this tradition can pose challenges, particularly for wives, as the expectation to please the entire family becomes burdensome. This disproportionate burden often leads to stress, emotional strain, and potential domestic conflicts or abuse. The pressure to maintain familial harmony may overlook the wife's needs, contributing to strained relationships. In Kerala weddings, a post-wedding tradition involves relatives evaluating the bride's appearance and skills, emphasizing culinary abilities as crucial for marital success. This mindset, linking a woman's worth to domestic

skills, diminishes the importance of her education and moral integrity. Establishing healthy boundaries, even with in-laws, becomes crucial to navigate these challenges.

This practice assigns significant importance to a woman's adherence to traditional gender roles, particularly in cooking and cleaning for her husband's family. Unfortunately, academic achievements and personal character often take a backseat in evaluating her individual worth. It reflects a societal belief that a woman's primary role centers around domestic responsibilities, overlooking her multifaceted capabilities and qualities.

In Muslim marriages, there's emphasis on the bride's proficiency in preparing non-vegetarian dishes. A light-hearted saying highlights the cultural importance of meat consumption, suggesting those who don't procure meat on Fridays may be considered outside Islamic norms. While colloquial, it underscores the significance of non-vegetarian foods in Muslim communities. Brides are expected to excel in cooking, especially non-vegetarian dishes, receiving additional acknowledgment for catering to larger gatherings. This expectation aligns with the cultural significance of food in uniting families and communities, valuing the ability to cook meat-based meals for larger groups.

Politics surrounding food and finances in Muslim households can be intricate. Serving beaten rice or suggesting simple meals may invite criticism, associating them with beggars or financial instability. Wives navigate a delicate balance, avoiding being labeled spendthrift or excessively accommodating. Financial challenges often result in blaming the wife, with the mother-in-law sometimes suggesting she's a 'bad luck' omen. These dynamics create a challenging environment where the wife's actions are scrutinized and criticized, impacting her role within the family.

In some households, wives facing health issues are criticized for the financial burden, while husbands receive care and sympathy when unwell. In rural and middle-class marriages, wives are pressured to seek pregnancy-related care at government hospitals, emphasizing frugality over potential healthcare benefits. This discrepancy in expectations and treatment highlights deeply ingrained gender biases, where wives face scrutiny for health expenses while husbands receive understanding. These societal pressures place undue burdens on wives, impacting their access to healthcare and support during times of need.

A power dynamic exists where husbands and mothers-in-law assert authority over children, limiting the mother's say in their upbringing. Mothers-in-law often prioritize their sons' children, considering them primarily part of their households, while daughters' children are seen as guests. This unequal treatment stems from societal norms where daughters are groomed for marriage, and sons are expected to stay with their parents. This focus on sons can create challenges for wives, pressuring them to prioritize husbands over in-laws to avoid being labelled as uncaring. Blame may be placed on daughters-in-law for sons' increased involvement in household chores, perpetuating gender roles

and influencing perceptions of responsibilities. The dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law can lead to tensions, reflecting broader societal norms and expectations.

In certain households, wives face significant restrictions and lack autonomy, akin to living as servants in their husband's family. Movement is curtailed, requiring permission not only from the husband but also from in-laws for simple outings or staying at their own house. Obtaining permission resembles a bureaucratic procedure, making spontaneity difficult, often resulting in cancelled plans. Seeking approval to reconnect with her own family, even her parents, takes an emotional toll on the wife. Throughout her life, a woman prioritizes her husband's family, enduring emotional distress. Even if her husband permits meeting friends, the mother-in-law opposes it, expecting the daughter-in-law to let go of her previous life. This contradiction highlights women being their harshest critics, limiting the daughter-in-law's autonomy in various aspects, enforced by women in rural households rather than men. This contradicts the notion that men are solely responsible for such limitations.

Societal pressure on women to quickly conceive defines their worth, overshadowing dreams and aspirations. Challenges in conceiving lead to relentless torment, even if the issue lies with the husband. If she has children, she faces scrutiny for not being a 'good enough' mother, perpetuating the notion that the wife is always at fault.

In traditional settings, a woman's post-marriage journey involves a significant shift, prioritizing her husband's family above her own needs and desires. This expectation, reinforced by both the husband and the mother-in-law, adds complexity with the contradictory nature of these expectations. Mothers-in-law reminisce about their sacrifices but endorse similar expectations for the daughter-in-law, creating a perplexing cycle of recounting past sacrifices while perpetuating these norms onto the younger generation.

As a result, it is clear that the control and limitations imposed on the daughter-in-law aren't solely orchestrated by men; instead, it's often the women in the household who enforce and regulate these restrictions. This contradicts the common assumption that men are solely responsible for restricting a woman's freedom or autonomy. The control over her choices—be it in her appearance, expression, or personal time—is often wielded by the older women in the family, leading to a complex dynamic where female relatives become the gatekeepers of societal norms and limitations imposed on the daughter-in-law. These expectations and restrictions perpetuate a cycle where women, consciously or unconsciously, become complicit in enforcing societal norms and limitations on other women, thus perpetuating a cycle of control and restriction within the household. This complex interplay of expectations, regrets, and enforcement of norms highlights the nuanced dynamics within traditional family structures, where control isn't solely wielded by men but is also deeply ingrained within the female members of the household.

It's disheartening to witness how these practices, often practised in the name of culture or religion, create an environment where women are subjected to emotional distress, limitations on autonomy, and unjust blame for societal norms they didn't create. This is especially prevalent in instances where these practices are erroneously attributed to Islam. In many Muslim families, there's a strong cultural expectation to fulfil rituals and please in-laws, almost as if one's spiritual destiny hinges on it. However, while Islamic teachings emphasize kindness towards family members, including in-laws, there's no explicit mention in the Quran or Hadith about specific duties towards in-laws. The focus primarily rests on fulfilling the responsibilities towards one's spouse and treating everyone with kindness and respect. According to Islamic teachings, a wife's duty to care for her husband is contingent upon him being a righteous and honourable individual. These interpretations can vary among families based on their cultural backgrounds and personal beliefs but nowhere it should be an obligation in the name of religion. Under Islamic feminist principles, stressing the significance of a wife's consent extends beyond marriage to encompass decision-making and matters impacting her life, prioritizing her agency and independence. This includes acknowledging her right to decline responsibilities like feeding her child or managing household duties if she chooses. Additionally, she isn't obligated to cater to her husband's entire family. It's regrettable that numerous practices, often misrepresented as religious obligations, disregard these fundamental rights of women. These interpretations and actions contradict the essence of gender equality advocated by Islamic feminism, fostering a need for more accurate and fair portrayals of women's rights within the Islamic context. The religion itself promotes harmony and mutual respect within marriages, emphasizing kindness and understanding between spouses. Islam advocates for the rights and dignity of women, highlighting their role as equal partners in a marriage based on mutual consent and respect. The teachings stress the importance of a husband being righteous and just, deserving of the kindness and support of his wife. However, these cultural practices, far removed from the essence of the religion, impose burdensome expectations on women, often fueled by societal judgments and entrenched gender biases. These practices lead to undue pressure, emotional distress, and limitations on a woman's individuality, contrary to the principles of Islam. It's essential to recognize that the oppressive dynamics within certain households, enforced by cultural norms rather than religious teachings, undermine the true essence of Islam. The religion never intended for a wife to suffer or endure emotional distress within a marriage. Instead, it aims to foster peace, understanding, and respect between spouses, rooted in mutual care and compassion.

Ending these atrocities against women, perpetuated under the guise of culture or religion, requires a collective effort aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Initiatives aimed at fostering awareness, initiating conversations, and educating communities align with SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality. By challenging and

dismantling harmful practices, particularly within the framework of true Islamic teachings that emphasize equality, respect, and mutual understanding between spouses, we contribute to SDG 5's mission of empowering women and promoting their rights and well-being. Creating a clear distinction between cultural practices and religious teachings aligns with the broader SDG agenda, promoting inclusivity, justice, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

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Exploring Sensitive and Dangerous Terrain in *Nirmala*

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ABSTRACT

Women in our society encounter unique social issues in certain areas, such as gender-based violence or discrimination. Exploring sensitive and potentially dangerous terrain in Indian society as a woman involves additional considerations due to unique cultural, social, and gender dynamics. Women have to be particularly attuned to cultural sensitivities related to gender roles and interactions. One such woman who is not mature enough to handle such things is Nirmala. Poverty and money played a major role in her life which changed the fate of a fifteen-year-old young girl. Gods must be crazy to create a melodramatic future for Nirmala. Munshi Premchand who has a par vision towards the reformation of society designed the plot in such a way to generate awareness among the people in this stereotype society.

KEY WORDS: stereotype – isolation – suspect – hypocrisies – poverty

FULL PAPER:

Terrain refers to a piece of land geographically represented in a map. Only based on the state of land, human settlement can be determined. The type of terrain is centered on the contour interval of the land surface. There are five major terrains like hill, ridge, valley, saddle and depression. Is it possible for human beings to live in all types of land comfortably? They can survive but living comfortably is bit doubtful. But these different features of terrain are natural and needed for a balanced environmental sustainability. Terrain determines the weather pattern, environmental quality, military operations and radioactive processes.

When this land becomes sensitive and dangerous, human survival becomes a chance. During extreme weather, heat or cold, floods, fog, tornadoes, lightning, avalanches, rock falls, landslides etc.. people lose their lives. The possibility of living with the family becomes less or nil. All those unexpected and dangerous situation requires some survival skills. Survival skills give some basic

knowledge and interaction with the nature. In present day situation, survival skills help people to save themselves during disaster situation. Survival skills are required not only to escape from natural disaster but also for human made disaster. Not only terrains become sensitive and dangerous even living in a family, to form a happy and peace family – is also difficult in this current situation.

It was the time of deprived state of women. Women were considered mere an object of beauty and for household work. Women were treated just as women, a secondary to man, to follow up the words of man, to oblige and serve the man society. Poor families worried about dowry when it comes to marry their girl child. Either the boy is educated or working or idle, dowry was compulsory. Munshi Premchand wanted to change this pathetic situation of the society which makes the country poorer. He brought thoughtful ideas in his novels to create social reforms especially to change the life style of women. All his novels dealt with issues of the society and a clear solution for the same. He wrote something very practical, realistic and natural.

Nirmala by Premchand depicts the realistic society during the pre-independent India. This novel is branded as a melodramatic fiction because of its sensitive plot. Premchand desired to bring out a social reform and raise the status of women through the character Nirmala. Nirmala's life style changes because of the poverty, dowry and culture of this static society. The transition from child to wife made her to suffer all the issues in the world. Complication in life started when the arrangements of her wedding started with the Sinha Family. Nirmala felt gloomy. She became serious, lost her bashful smile on her lips. She was not prepared to go out of the family. The very thought that she would be soon sent out with beautiful jewellery, musical band, dance and rejoice made her sad. She wished for a wing to fly from all problems in her life. The first and foremost sensitive incident was the death of her father, the only bread winner. Life became unpredictable for Kalyanai, the mother of Nirmala. Babu Udaybhan, a lawyer with good heart who had helped the less fortunate and poorer was murder. The fate of Nirmala has changed because of his father's death.

As Mary Wollstonecraft said in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that it was time to affect a revolution in female manners - time to restore to them their lost dignity - and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. Kalyani wanted to restore the dignity of the family by marrying Nirmala sooner to someone who was wealthy enough. Kalyani was not able to get just a lakh rupee that could have settled her daughter's life. Bhuvan Mohan Singha was very clear that just a lakh rupee is what he expected from the bride's family to get himself settled in his life. He was not reliant on his own income; instead he wanted something more than his monthly earning which was not affordable by Kalyani. When the mother was terribly sorry for Nirmala, Krishna viewed differently. "... mother it was very fortunate that sister was not married there. How would she have lived with them? This is something to feel happy about,..." (33). These words were very true. But how long Nirmala can be kept at home?

Half of the marriage arrangements were done. To start all these again was highly impossible for Kalyani. The girl Nirmala was young, beautiful and talented but dowry matters a lot. Kalyani loved her sons more than daughters, she did not like to spend much on dowry which could make her empty and the sons would be left in dark. Though Moteram brought five different grooms, Kalyani opted to get Nirmala married to a lawyer, widow, with three sons and a widow sister. No dowry was demanded and the lawyers earned three hundred rupees per month which was more sufficient for their happy living. In addition, he has his own house and other owned property. Kalyani thought that the money will give some sophistication since death was unpredictable to humans.

Nirmala was not comfortable to be with Munshiji who was of her father's age. He was a person to be respected and not to be slept with. She has love for him. It's a fatherly love and not as a spouse. The elder son Mansaram was sixteen years old: just a year older than Nirmala. The second one Jiyaram was twelve years and the third Siaram was seven years old. Nirmala understood that the place she has entered was sensitive but never thought that it would be dangerous to her and her family members. She was burning and fuming by looking at her enhanced beauty of herself with fine jewellery and gorgeous sari reflected in the mirror. The lawyer learnt the art of making his young wife happy by pouring unlimited love and passion on his wife; surrendering his monthly salary; cosmetics and perfumes; buying her sweets and new jewellery. But nothing amused her. The state of Nirmala reminds us the words of Mary Wollstonecraft:

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength state; usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity. (118, AVRW)

Nirmala was not excited or could not find any traces of love for Munshiji. All the gifts and love shown towards her was piercing her heart. "She felt that he did not deserve her beauty and charm" (38). She was a child still who wanted to play with the children. Rukmani Devi was very careful by not letting any of the children near her. She fed poison in the mind of the children and Nirmala was constantly criticized by her.

There was a well said saying by Param Pujya Dada Bhagwan in his Tri Mantra, that one should not be suspicious about anyone's conduct, it is very dangerous. How can one see faults in women, when women have given births to great tirthankars? Why should one doubt them? When it is done, there is tremendous liability. But the poison started spreading in the mind of Munshiji when Nirmala told him about learning English from Manasram. Men always think like men. He noticed sudden change in the behaviour and appearance of his lady and the environment. He even tested her with false promise of arranging tuition to learn English. But his age and experience let him to be patient

since the outburst on Nirmala or Mansaram might blow up the whole family. This suspicious behaviour made him to look for immediate arrangement of out hostel for his son.

Mansaram being very sensitive, soft and innocent thought that it was Nirmala who has complained his father about his studies and ill-mannered friends. He could not digest calling him as a “vagabond”. This was said by his father and his jiji. He could not take this. It made him very upset and disheartened. He lost his appetite and started longing for his mother. He did not want to have ownership of anything that belonged to the house. He was very much frustrated by the duel behaviour of Nirmala and wanted to go out at the earliest to reduce the burden of his step-mother. Nirmala understood the intention of her husband and avoided Mansaram. At the same time she could not bear the health of her son Mansaram deteriorating day by day. She desired to tell him the truth and console him. But her heart trembled when she thought of seeing him.

Munshiji did not stop Mansaram going to school hostel which did not have any basic amenities. Though Nirmala wanted to stop, she remained quite because of her husband. She was frequently blamed by her sister-in-law for sending him out of the house. The liveliness, happiness, peace and joy went along with Mansaram. She felt that it was all her fault. She was guilty since she thought that only because of her arrival, the relationship between son and father broke out. As Jiyaram and Siaram were studying in the same school, she regularly enquired about her elder son’s health and studies. When enquired once, “He said my life is a shame, and saying this he started crying.” (76) Hearing this Nirmala cried bitterly. Finally it was understood by Mansaram, the reason for sending him to hostel by his father. She was worried much about him than herself since she has nothing to lose or sacrifice. Mansaram, who was a young man of strong values and strong was shrunk by the shameful thought of his father. Nirmala decided to tell him the truth to save the life of Mansaram.

As Anzaldúa said in *Borderlands*, Nirmala determined to have her voice:” Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.” Nirmala was waiting for her time to come. In the meantime Mansaram became semiconscious because of high fever. Doctor advised Munshiji to take him home but even in such worse condition Munshiji thought that “there would be many problems, the biggest fear was that at home Nirmala would sit near him all the time and he would not be able to say anything. “ (89) The stone hearted father took him straight to the hospital rather than his house just because of distrust. Even felt what Nirmala felt when Mansaram left home that the marriage had been the root cause of all the troubles in the family. He questioned himself about the unhappy ending of his second marriage. He justified himself stating that marriage within similar age group will be happier than the mismatched one. Young women would be graceful to young husband not to older one. It was decided and confirmed by vakil without any proof that Nirmala was not loyal to him because of age difference. Whom to be blamed? Munshiji? Nirmala? Mansaram?

The long struggle of suspicion came to light with the death of Mansaram. Even the last words of Mansaram with Nirmala did not clear his doubt. When Nirmala came forward to give her every drop of blood shocked and surprised him. Finally he established that she was not an object of enjoyment instead a divine being to be worshipped. As Virginia Woolf mentioned in *To the Lighthouse*, the great day of revelation came. "What is the meaning of life? That was all- a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years, the great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one." (257) Nirmala's sacrifice became meaningful. It helped to prove the holiness of her existence.

Munshiji lost interest in everything. His job, health, food and self-care reduced. Sometimes he was not even able to take up a case successfully. Family ran into misery. Munshiji became a worried man. His eyes were filled with shame for marrying a young poor girl followed by the birth of girl baby. He did not dare to look into the eyes of Nirmala. Both money and young wife became distant and did not give him happiness anymore. He felt pity for the poor little creature that has born in his house. Amongst all these miseries Nirmala hugged the little infant with love and wailed for a long time. Munshiji recognized that "A mother's heart is so full of love that the problem and worries of the future do not hold any fear in the mind. She feels a divine power within her which can overcome any problems." (113)

Mansaram's death made neighbours and relatives to talk ill about the tortures of step mother. People complained the cause for the death was all the doing of the stepmother. They pretended to show false love and pity for the left over, Jiamam and Siaram. The children also observed the distance between them and their father because of step mother. The extra affection and concern shown on them and their talk about the children's mother started to change the attitude of the boys towards their father. Nirmala remained calm and patience. She complained her fate for every mishap of the family. She knew well that whatever happens in the house cannot be explained to everyone in the street. She bore all the insults from inside and outside. It was rightly addressed by Burnett in his novella *The Little Princess*:

When people are insulting you, there is nothing as good for them as not to say a word just to look at them and think. When you will not fly into a passion people know you are stronger than they are, because you are strong enough to hold in your rage, and they are not, and they say stupid things they wished they hadn't said afterward. There's nothing so strong as rage, except what makes you hold it in that's stronger. It's a good thing not to answer your enemies. (78)

Everyone became enemies. She was bit relaxed about money and some jewel she had. So far food was not a problem. Jiamam went out of way. His behaviour and activities changed a lot. He became

quarrellsome, adamant and rude after the death of Mansaram. Munshiji found very difficult to handle the boy. Constant fight and argument disturbed the family a lot. Nirmala did not show any interest to return from her mother's house. She did not find anything meaningful in her life being a wife and mother of four children. Munshiji's health condition and Jiam's unbending attitude forced her to return. Jiam completely blamed his parents that they had poisoned his brother Mansaram. The accusation was unbearable by Munshiji which led to tug of words every day. The unwanted friendship of Jiam let him to steal the jewellery of his stepmother followed by suicide.

The so far quite, kind, loving Nirmala lost her hope in life. She has nothing left to her daughter and son. Survival became difficult with the meager income of Munshiji. To save extra expense given to servant maid, Siaram was asked to carry out simple work like going to shop before going to school. Siaram was not happy since he was sent again and again to exchange things when the groceries were not up to the mark. Shopkeepers did not welcome the arrival of Siaram because of exchanging business. Nirmala was enforced to do this to save some thing for the future, to reduce the burden of the family. But it went wrong again which made Siaram to run away with a hypocrite ascetic. The whole family was ruined. All simple suggestion and risk taken by Nirmala went wrong and ended in misery. Munshiji and Rukmani cursed the ill fate of Nirmala and the family. As D.H. Lawrence said "A woman has to live her life, or live to repent not having lived it." (345, LCL) Nirmala was not born to live. She lived to repent. The six years of her married life made her to get through all sort of desolation. She proved the words of Ulrich, "Well-behaved women seldom make history." (45)

The righteous life of Nirmala went vein and ruined her life to death. This novel is a strong representation of consequences of child marriage and dowry. She missed both personal and social security because of her poverty. All her initiatives to solve the issues of the family failed and she became the sole responsible person for everything. All culpability and fault fell upon her. She developed to be a treat to everyone life in her family. Premchand through this novel highlighted the issue of dowry and child marriage of 1920s. But still it is an ongoing issue which engulfed the life of so many women and their families. Both educated and uneducated demands dowry either in the form of money or in some other way. The gas stove is still blasting. Money cannot make anyone happy at all times. Anything beyond limit is mere waste. There are so many in this world apart from money – love, humanity, peace, sacrifice, justice, kind which cannot be owned by money. People need to understand that, if not life will teach that at the earliest.

Child marriage is another issue which has to seriously attend to. Either the girl or a boy needs some maturity to understand the complication of life. A child will be always playful. It could not understand things like their parents. Nirmala when married loved to play with the children in the family. She did not realize that she is a mother/stepmother for them. She forgot the traditional relationship. It made her upset and angry. It would be the case of all kids who are married at the young

age. In this particular novel, not only Nirmala suffered but also Munshiji. He does not know to handle her. He spent much to match her with artificial cosmetics and hair dye. It was unsuccessful. He ran behind Nirmala to win her heart but it was an utter flop. Because of physical lust he forgot to listen to his sons. As a result they all saw him as their enemies. He started running behind each son one by one. He felt useless about his second marriage to a young girl. It is not only the girl who suffered but also the man and the whole family. Everything collapsed and lost. The relationship was entirely spoiled. No one remained in the family as a family. No one lived for no one. The smooth, fertile and fresh land turned to be sensitive and dangerous land because of culture, society and poverty. If such petty things were attended properly, so many losses can be stopped in families. Through experience one can understand the possibilities of life. Make sure it is not too late to be educated.

Unless one learns the survival skill, living becomes difficult. Being a woman, one has to be critical and patient to tackle the issues of the family. Even the dangerous terrain will become a suitable land to live when it is mended with care. Literature teaches people to learn the art of survival skills with suitable example from every day today life. Even marriage is also a kind of diaspora for every woman. It is in the hands of each woman to live or survive in the new land. Simple language and simple plot helps people to understand such complex issues of life.

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Beyond Mourning: Empowerment of Widows in Cinema and Culture

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ABSTRACT

A widow is a woman who has lost her spouse or partner by death and usually has not remarried. The treatment of widows varies significantly across cultures, societies, and historical periods. In some cultures, widows face discriminatory practices, social stigma, or exclusion. In certain cultures, widows may face social ostracization or discrimination due to traditional beliefs or superstitions surrounding widowhood. This can vary widely, from specific clothing to behavioural restrictions, and the duration of mourning can also differ significantly. On the positive side, many cultures have established support systems for widows. Families, communities, or religious institutions might provide emotional support, assistance with household tasks, financial aid, or access to resources. Movies often portray the intense emotional journey of a widow dealing with grief, loss, and loneliness after the death of a spouse. Some movies highlight the social stigma and isolation that widows face, depicting their struggles to find their place in a society that might treat them differently after their spouse's death. These films might showcase how widows cope with changing relationships and social dynamics. Other movies focus on the empowerment and resilience of widows. This paper delves into how the widows are powerfully liberated from social constraints and pursue their own lives, by taking examples from the portrayal of widows in movies; Devaraagam [1996], Dor [2006] and Pagglait [2021]. The plight of widows is universal, the collective unconsciousness of human beings refers to a part of the unconscious mind shared by all humans, containing universal symbols, archetypes, and patterns inherited from ancestral experiences.

Index words: Widow, Treatment of Widow, Movie, Collective unconsciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Widows in Indian society endure profound suffering, facing the harsh realities of patriarchal dominance. They endure physical and mental anguish without anyone to listen to or support them. In literature and film, these oppressed women are portrayed diversely. Widows are subject to the rigidity of both patriarchal and matriarchal systems, facing societal scrutiny regarding rituals, attire, diet, and

a life of seclusion. Living with a husband places them within society, albeit in a subordinate role, often labelled as the "second sex." However, upon their husband's death, they plummet to society's lowest echelons, facing profound marginalization and isolation. Indian literature poignantly reflects their plight, highlighting their marginalized existence and agonizing solitude. Their appearance in white attire with shaven heads is startling, but the mental torment they endure is far more distressing. Society seems to revel in suppressing their desires, leaving widows stripped of individuality and deemed transgressors. Some, out of loneliness or necessity, might rely on a man who isn't their lover, unfairly labelled as a "vamp." Yet, a select few authors and filmmakers endeavour to depict widows as symbols of strength and self-assurance, challenging biased social norms. This paper titled "Beyond Mourning: Empowerment of Widows in Cinema and Culture" tries to bring to light some exceptional movies that dared to represent widows as an embodiment of self-confidence and self-esteem. By breaking the social constraints and stereotypes these specific widows try to bring a new face to widowhood.

A. COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The collective unconscious, often termed the "objective psyche," represents a part of the deepest unconscious mind believed to be inherited genetically rather than formed through personal experiences. This concept was initially formulated by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Jung's teachings assert that the collective unconscious is universal among all individuals. Jung theorized that the collective unconscious is an inherent layer of our unconscious mind present from birth, linking each individual to the historical thoughts and behaviours of all humanity. Additionally, he believed that this shared reservoir of the unconscious mind is responsible for housing fundamental beliefs and instincts. Jung proposed that the collective unconscious comprises a repository of inherent knowledge and imagery present in every individual from birth, shared among humanity through ancestral experiences. While people might not consciously recognize the content within their collective unconscious, Jung suggested that during moments of crisis, the psyche can access this reservoir. Think of the collective unconscious as an inherited 'database' or a vast computing 'Cloud.' It's an extensive reservoir of ancient knowledge accessible to everyone, enabling us to have shared human experiences when necessary. Jung posited that the collective unconscious finds expression through universal archetypes—symbols, patterns of thought, or behaviours inherited from our ancestors. Archetypes are universal concepts that we instinctively grasp, described by Jung as "identical psychic structures common to all." They enable us to share thoughts and ideas with individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures, despite never having met them. These archetypes, in his view, aren't rigid; rather, multiple archetypes may intermingle or merge dynamically at any given moment. As Jung said, they can be seen as "the deposits of all our ancestral experiences, but they are not the experiences themselves". Similar to blueprints, archetypes transform into experiences

when unconsciously enacted, often triggered by life events or challenges. Due to our unique encounters, we each utilize and express facets of the collective unconscious individually.

A.1. COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS AND WIDOWHOOD

In societies where widows face discrimination or marginalization, these attitudes can embed themselves within the collective unconscious. For instance, biases against widows—viewing them as symbols of bad luck, social outcasts, or imposing strict norms upon them—can seep into the collective unconscious, influencing perceptions and behaviours across generations. This collective imprint might contribute to stereotypes, stigmas, and prejudices that affect how widows are perceived and treated within a society. The mistreatment or neglect of widows throughout history could contribute to the formation of certain archetypes or symbols associated with their plight within the collective unconscious. These archetypes might manifest in cultural narratives, myths, or symbols, shaping societal attitudes toward widows.

Here in this paper, the researchers take three archetypes put forward by Carl Jung to bring into light how the collective unconscious affects the life of widows and how it developed a stereotypical widowhood; The Persona, The Self and The Shadow. Persona represents the facade we present to the world, concealing our inner selves. The Self encompasses the entirety of one's personality, constituting the core of the complete psyche. Shadow signifies the unconscious, often darker or morally ambiguous aspects of the psyche.

To showcase unconventional and empowered portrayals of widows, researchers have selected three films. "Devaraagam" [1996], "Dor" [2006], and "Pagglait" [2021] are three films that challenge and break stereotypical widow archetypes by portraying widows in unconventional and empowering roles.

A. PORTRAYAL OF WIDOWHOOD IN MOVIES; “DEVARAGAM”, “DOR” AND “PAGGLAIT”

In the intricate tapestry of widowhood, the collective unconscious exerts a multifaceted influence, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions. On the positive side, cultural support and rituals emanating from shared archetypes provide widows with a sense of community and shared experience. The Collective unconscious becomes a source of solace, fostering emotional resilience and a connection to broader narratives of strength in adversity. The archetypes of widowhood often vary across cultures and traditions. Commonly, they include symbols like wearing white or pale colours, removing jewellery, breaking bangles and adapting more subdued clothing. These practices often carry cultural and societal significance, reflecting mourning and the transition to a different marital status.

In all three movies set in three different states of India, the collective unconscious of the mob has a terrible impact on the further life of the widow. Even though there is cultural support from the people around the trauma they give through societal stigmas and judgemental attitudes towards them is killing them in one or the other way. In all three movies, they are asked to be confined to darkness or society tries to isolate the widows; Baagyalakshmi in Devaragam, Meera in Dor and Sandhya in Pagglait. Without considering them human beings society compels them to follow oppressive cultural norms, society has already created a pattern on how the widow should behave, dress, or participate in social activities. The collective unconscious of the people around these widows is not allowed to break this pattern and instead forces them to accept it as it is. In Devaragam, the women around her bring a dress that is symbolic of their widowhood, remove their vermilion, throw away the jasmine flowers from their hair and break the bangles. By this, they are enforcing rigid norms that constrain widows and hinder their ability to embrace personal freedom and individuality. “What should I do? Should I shave my head? Should I wear white? Should I confine my life in the dark without longing for anything?” (Baagyalakshmi, 2:21). The community’s judgemental attitudes, influenced by shared cultural biases, exacerbate the widow. In Pagglait, Sandhya gets the title of madness when she laughs and is not provided with the food she likes to eat. Sometimes society just forgets the fact that these widows are also human beings and by taking the name of the collective unconscious they restrict the choices and autonomy of widows’ lives. They are denied the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. In both the movies, Dor and Pagglait, Meera and Sandhya are not aware of the discussions going on in their house regarding their remarriage.

Unfortunately, the negative impacts reach its peak when it deals with financial insecurity. All three widows are financially dependent and economic challenges are a huge threat in front of them. In Paggalit, Sandhya’s mother is not willing to take her back as she has two more daughters to marry off. As an after-effect of the collective unconscious, society treats these financially dependent widows as a burden. As a result of this, the widow has to face emotional isolation where she finds no shoulder to lean. In Dor, Meera lives with her in-laws and her mother-in-law accuses her of being the reason behind her son's death and never tries to give Meera any kind of emotional support. All the colourful dresses from her wardrobe have been substituted by a Blue saree which is symbolic of widowhood. Here the woman Meera loses all her identity and society gives her another identity as a widow. These negative aspects underscore the importance of challenging societal norms and promoting cultural shifts that empower widows to lead fulfilling lives beyond the confines of restrictive traditions and beliefs. The collective unconscious, when influenced by outdated norms, can perpetuate inequalities and hinder the well-being of widows, emphasizing the need for broader social awareness and change.

The process of breaking free from the collective unconscious in widowhood involves acknowledging and challenging societal norms, expectations, and beliefs surrounding widowhood. It entails recognizing that individual experiences and responses to loss are unique, and not necessarily defined by societal constructs or expectations. Breaking collective unconsciousness in widowhood involves challenging and transforming societal norms and beliefs related to widows. Widows share stories and experiences to create awareness about the challenges faced by widows. Education can be a powerful tool for challenging misconceptions. Establishment of a support group for widows where they can share their experiences and receive emotional support. Building a sense of community helps combat isolation. The most important way to break the collective unconscious regarding widowhood is to Integrate education about widowhood and related issues into school curricula to foster understanding and empathy from a young age. Widows should be empowered by educating them about their legal rights. Support initiatives that aim to secure legal protection for widows against discrimination. Moreover, they should be given opportunities to gain skills and become financially independent. Economic empowerment can be a powerful means of breaking societal stereotypes. In addition to that offering psychological support and counselling services to widows, addressing the emotional impact of societal attitudes can help them to build resilience and empower them to challenge stereotypes. Intergenerational Communication is another facilitator of open communication between different generations within communities. This can help challenge outdated beliefs and foster a more progressive understanding of widowhood. Breaking collective unconsciousness is a multifaceted process that involves addressing societal, cultural, and individual attitudes. Here the three widows are reflecting the Self (entirety of one's personality, constituting the core of the complete psyche) by breaking the collective unconscious.

"Dor" and "Pagglait" are Bollywood films that have been praised for breaking traditional stereotypes and shedding light on the complexities of widowhood in Indian society. Both movies challenge societal norms related to widowhood in the context of Indian culture. The film follows the journey of two women from different backgrounds—one a widow seeking justice, the other the wife of a man on death row. The film portrays strong, resilient female characters who challenge the norms associated with widowhood. Their journeys emphasize individual agency and the pursuit of justice. "Sometimes listen to your mind and then you will live if you find a rhythm with it" (Zeenath; Dor). "I am leaving because the world is ready to decide what's best for women, but nobody stops for a second to ask women" (Sandhya; Pagglait) In "Dor", Meera's character gets liberation as a result of intergenerational communication. Even though it's her friend Zeenath who liberates her, it's the deed of the grandmother that paves the first step to that. Both movies explore the bond that develops between the two female protagonists, transcending societal expectations. This relationship challenges stereotypes and highlights the

importance of empathy and understanding. “Don’t get angry friend, I can fight, I can refuse too” (Zeenath; Dor), here she helps her friend to come out of the frustration and isolation. In “Pagglait”, Sandhya does all her likes and fulfils her wishes with the help of her female friend. Sandhya goes to a cafe to have spicy food which is restricted for her. Here her female companion helps her to break the isolation. The narrative challenges the prevalent mindset by focusing on justice and empathy rather than conforming to societal norms. “I have snatched away my rights from time immemorial” (Zeenath; Dor), “No one gives power to the mind other than self” (Meera; Dor). In “Devaragam”, instead of confirming the societal norms and leading a dark life Baagyalakshmi chooses her life which is full of colours. It encourages viewers to question and reflect on the treatment of widows in certain cultural contexts. These three characters help to break the stereotypes and the collective unconscious which was then prevalent in their society. The films explore family dynamics and societal pressures surrounding the widow, highlighting the conflicts and contradictions that arise. This contributes to a nuanced portrayal that challenges collective unconsciousness. “Devaragam”, “Dor” and “Pagglait” contribute to breaking collective unconsciousness by presenting nuanced and empathetic portrayals of widowhood. They encourage audiences to question societal norms and reflect on the individual experiences and agency of widows, fostering a more inclusive and progressive perspective.

B. CONCLUSION

The portrayal of widows in Indian society is deeply entrenched in societal norms and collective unconscious biases that impose profound suffering and isolation. Throughout history, widows have faced harsh realities dictated by patriarchal dominance and societal scrutiny, often losing their individuality and agency. The collective unconscious, shaped by cultural beliefs and ancestral experiences, perpetuates stereotypes, stigmas, and prejudices that marginalize and oppress widows.

However, certain literature and films, like "Devaragam," "Dor," and "Pagglait," stand as beacons challenging these ingrained perceptions. These works depict widows as symbols of strength and self-assurance, breaking away from the shackles of societal norms. They shed light on the individual agency and resilience of widows, showcasing their struggles, aspirations, and the complexities of their lives beyond societal constraints.

These narratives not only challenge societal norms but also encourage audiences to question and reflect on the treatment of widows. They emphasize the importance of empathy, understanding, and intergenerational communication in empowering widows to reclaim their individuality, rights, and place in society. By portraying nuanced and empathetic depictions of widowhood, these works contribute to breaking the collective unconsciousness, fostering a more inclusive and progressive perspective toward widows in Indian culture.

Beyond Stereotypes: Unraveling Cognitive Diversity in Contemporary Literature's Gender Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the nuanced portrayal of gender-based cognitive differences in literature using feminist literary theory. It critically analyzes how literature reflects and challenges traditional gender roles, illuminating power dynamics and societal expectations shaping characters' cognitive experiences. Despite average cognitive differences between genders, individual variations are substantial, cautioning against misleading stereotypes. Historical literature often perpetuated gender norms, depicting men as logical and women as emotional. However, contemporary literature increasingly breaks these stereotypes, presenting characters with diverse cognitive abilities regardless of gender. This study, employing a multifaceted theoretical approach, unravels the intricate layers of cognitive representations in literature, acknowledging the dynamic interplay between societal influences, individual experiences, and diverse theoretical perspectives. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature shapes perceptions of gender-based cognitive differences, offering insights into the evolving landscape of gender representation in literary works.

KEYWORDS:

Stereotypes, Cognitive Diversity, Gender Narratives, Feminism, Postcolonial Theory, Narrative Theory

INTRODUCTION

This research paper intricately examines the portrayal of cognitive differences between genders in literature, employing a diverse array of theoretical frameworks. Through the lens of feminist literary theory, it critically assesses how literature both reflects and challenges conventional gender roles, unraveling power dynamics and societal expectations that mold characters' cognitive experiences. While acknowledging average cognitive differences between genders, the study emphasizes the substantial individual variations and cautions against misleading stereotypes.

Historically, literature often mirrored and reinforced societal norms regarding cognitive disparities, depicting men as logical thinkers and women as emotionally intuitive. Yet, as societal attitudes evolved, so did literary representations. Modern works increasingly defy these stereotypes, presenting

characters with varied cognitive abilities regardless of gender. Literature now serves as a platform for critiquing traditional gender roles, fostering a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of cognitive diversity.

Utilizing a multifaceted theoretical approach, the research delves into the intricate layers of cognitive representations in literature. It recognizes the dynamic interplay between societal influences, individual experiences, and diverse theoretical perspectives. Cultural theories rooted in feminist literary theory, postcolonial theory, and narrative theory offer analytical frameworks for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of literature, enriching the exploration of gender and cognition.

The study has dual objectives: firstly, to explore the contributions of cultural theories to understanding cognitive representations in literature; and secondly, to conduct a detailed analysis of contemporary literary works and movies, employing these cultural lenses to unveil the complex ways characters' cognitive landscapes are shaped by broader cultural attitudes. By achieving these objectives, the research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how literature reflects and shapes perceptions of cognitive differences between genders, shedding light on the evolving landscape of gender representation in literary works.

I. Cultural Theories and Cognitive Representation

Feminist Literary Theory: Interrogating Traditional Gender Roles

Cultural theories provide a comprehensive framework for dissecting cognitive representations in literature, with feminist literary theory at the forefront. This foundational lens seeks to dismantle entrenched gender roles in literature, unveiling the power dynamics inherent in societal expectations. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'Americanah,' the narrative challenges traditional gender norms, offering a contemporary exploration within the framework of feminist literary theory. The film adaptation of Gillian Flynn's 'Gone Girl' further delves into power dynamics, illustrating the consequences of conformity or resistance to established norms.

Postcolonial Theory: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Gender Roles

Postcolonial theory extends the analysis by offering cross-cultural perspectives on gender roles, rooted in the aftermath of colonial histories. Arundhati Roy's 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' serves as a contemporary example, intricately weaving postcolonial perspectives into the narrative. The novel explores gender roles within the broader context of India's postcolonial history. The film 'Belle' directed by Amma Asante provides cross-cultural insights into gender, race, and power dynamics during the colonial era.

Narrative Theory: Deconstructing Storytelling Elements

Narrative theory emerges as a crucial lens for understanding the impact of storytelling elements on cognitive experiences. Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' showcases narrative

complexity, unraveling layers of characters' cognitive landscapes. The film 'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind' employs inventive storytelling techniques to convey characters grappling with memory and identity.

Synthesis: Cultural Influences on Cognitive Representations

Synthesizing findings from feminist literary theory, postcolonial theory, and narrative theory reveals common themes and distinctive perspectives in cultural influences on cognitive representations. While feminist theory challenges gender norms, postcolonial theory adds cross-cultural understanding, and narrative theory emphasizes storytelling's role in shaping cognition. Case studies further illuminate the interplay of these theories, allowing a nuanced exploration of the complexities inherent in cultural influences on cognitive representations in literature. Examining specific characters and narratives enhances our understanding of the intricate ways cultural theories shape characters' cognitive experiences.

II. Embracing Diversity: Contemporary Literature's Expansive Exploration of Gender Narratives

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary literature, a profound transformation is underway, ushering in a new era of inclusivity and diversity in gender narratives. This comprehensive exploration delves into various facets contributing to the deconstruction of traditional gender roles, fostering a more nuanced understanding of identity. From the deconstruction of traditional roles to the exploration of mental health, diverse narrative perspectives, global perspectives, the evolution of language, and the critique of stereotypes, contemporary literature is actively engaging with and unraveling the complexities of gender cognitive variations.

Deconstruction of Traditional Roles:

Contemporary authors courageously deconstruct traditional gender roles, challenging societal expectations. Virginia Woolf's "Orlando" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" offer poignant portrayals of characters confined by patriarchal expectations, serving as metaphors for the oppressive nature of traditional gender roles. Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" subverts fairy tale motifs, empowering female characters to navigate their destinies. Sarah Waters' "Tipping the Velvet" challenges Victorian gender norms, exploring intersections of gender, sexuality, and class. Akwaeke Emezi's "Freshwater" delves into Igbo spirituality, challenging binary understandings of gender with a character possessing fluid and multiplicitous identities.

Agency and Empowerment:

Contemporary literature emphasizes characters' agency in shaping their identities. Colson Whitehead's "The Underground Railroad" follows Cora's escape from slavery, challenging racial and gendered expectations. Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower" features Lauren Olamina creating her own belief system in a dystopian future. Isabel Allende's "The House of the Spirits" explores

empowerment across generations. Nnedi Okorafor's "Binti" showcases agency as the eponymous protagonist challenges tradition to attend Oomza University.

Mental Health and Well-being:

Gender narratives explore the impact of societal expectations on mental health. Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" and Jenny Han's "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" navigate the mental toll of conformity. Celeste Ng's "Little Fires Everywhere" discusses sexual orientation and mental well-being. Susanna Kaysen's "Girl, Interrupted" questions institutional responses to women's mental health. Alison Bechdel's "Fun Home" explores how societal expectations and familial dynamics impact mental health.

Narrative Perspectives:

Diverse narrative perspectives enrich the exploration of gender experiences. Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" delves into issues of identity in postcolonial India. Maxine Hong Kingston's "The Woman Warrior" blends autobiography with mythology. Madeline Miller's "The Song of Achilles" adds a queer lens to Greek mythology. James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room" challenges conventional notions of masculinity and sexuality.

Global Perspectives:

Contemporary literature transcends cultural boundaries to portray gender narratives globally. Haruki Murakami's "Norwegian Wood" explores relationships and gender roles in 1960s Japan. Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" spans India, navigating gender and identity in times of social and political upheaval. Nadine Gordimer's "Burger's Daughter" provides a global perspective on gender and political activism. Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" portrays masculinity in Afghanistan amid societal expectations.

Evolution of Language:

Authors are conscious of language choices to reflect an expansive understanding of gender. Zadie Smith's "Swing Time" explores race, class, and gender with linguistic evolution. N.K. Jemisin's "The Fifth Season" introduces gender-neutral language in speculative fiction. Rupi Kaur's "Milk and Honey" offers modern language for discussing femininity, trauma, and resilience. Tayari Jones' "An American Marriage" explores love, fidelity, and gender expectations with language nuance.

Critique of Stereotypes:

Contemporary literature actively engages in the critique and subversion of gender stereotypes. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Half of a Yellow Sun" defies stereotypes associated with women in conflict zones. Naomi Alderman's "The Power" flips traditional power dynamics between genders. Alison Bechdel's "Fun Home" challenges stereotypes surrounding queer identities and family dynamics.

Fluidity of Gender Identity:

The fluidity of gender identity is a central theme in contemporary literature. Imogen Binnie's "Nevada" challenges binary understanding of gender. Leslie Feinberg's "Stone Butch Blues" delves into the experiences of a genderqueer protagonist. Maia Kobabe's "Gender Queer: A Memoir" explores the diverse and fluid spectrum of gender expressions. Torrey Peters' "Detransition, Baby" navigates the complexities of transgender identity.

Neurodiversity and Gender:

Contemporary literature explores the intersection of neurodiversity and gender identity. Hanya Yanagihara's "A Little Life" delves into neurodivergent experiences. Helen Hoang's "The Kiss Quotient" intertwines autism spectrum disorder with romantic relationships. Jen Wilde's "Queens of Geek" showcases a character on the autism spectrum navigating love and friendships. Mark Haddon's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" provides a unique perspective on autism.

Exploration of Non-Binary and Agender Identities:

Contemporary literature actively explores characters with non-binary and agender identities. Charlie Jane Anders' "All the Birds in the Sky" challenges traditional gender norms. Meg-John Barker and Alex Iantaffi's "Life Isn't Binary" explores non-binary identities. Malinda Lo's "Ash" features a non-binary character in a reimagined Cinderella story. Michelle Perez and Remy Boydell's "The Pervert" offers a portrayal of a trans woman navigating her identity.

Genderqueer Perspectives in Speculative Fiction:

Speculative fiction explores gender cognitive variations through fantastical worlds. N.K. Jemisin's "The Broken Earth" trilogy challenges traditional gender norms. Ann Leckie's "Ancillary Justice" introduces an artificial intelligence protagonist navigating a society without fixed gender roles. Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Left Hand of Darkness" delves into a world where individuals are ambisexual. Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples' "Saga" portrays a fantastical universe with characters embodying a wide spectrum of gender expressions.

Historical Perspectives on Gender and Cognitive Diversity:

Literature delves into historical settings to explore how cognitive variations in gender were perceived. Sarah Waters' "Affinity" explores spiritualism and mental health challenges in Victorian England. Emma Donoghue's "The Sealed Letter" delves into societal norms and perceptions of mental health intersecting with gender roles in the 19th century. Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" addresses the cognitive toll of societal expectations on African American women in the early 20th century. Jean Zimmerman's "Love, Fiercely" provides a historical perspective on gender dynamics and cognitive variations in 1920s New York.

Conclusion:

Contemporary literature emerges as a powerful tool unraveling the complexities of gender cognitive variations. From fluid gender identities to neurodiversity, non-binary perspectives, speculative explorations, and historical reflections, authors are weaving a rich tapestry that captures the diversity of human experiences. By embracing and exploring cognitive variations within gender narratives, literature becomes a potent medium for fostering understanding, empathy, and appreciation for the intricate nuances of identity.

This study extends beyond literary analysis, prompting a reevaluation of societal norms and cultural expectations. It encourages a nuanced understanding of cognitive representations, paving the way for future research to delve deeper into specific cultural contexts and genres, expanding our comprehension of how literature reflects and shapes cognitive experiences in the ever-evolving landscape of gender narratives.

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Indianness Within the Superhero/heroine Protagonists in Health Literacy COVID-19 Comics: A Graphical Exploration from a Gendered Lens

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Abstract

The COVID-19 phase before pharmaceutical and scientific interventions relied heavily on non-pharmaceutical preventive methods by creatively manipulating social media strategies. Indian COVID-19 comics released are mainly focused on child audiences and are from a health literacy perspective. An exploration of these comics indicates that an element of Indianness is explicitly visible, especially within the superhero and superheroine protagonists, as an attempt to create a certain degree of relatability and inculcate an idea of reclaiming the roots. This paper analyses two select Indian COVID-19 comics: *Priya's Mask (2020)* and *Nagaraj Strikes: The Attack of Coronaman (2020)*, where a superheroine and a superhero are the protagonists, respectively. The agenda is to decipher the element of Indianness expressed and how the portrayal varies along the gender of the superhero/heroine protagonists using the method of discourse analysis aided by the graphic theories of Scott McCloud. The focus befalls explicitly on the choice of the two protagonists, Nagaraj and Priya, and their mythological significance. This would be explored via a gendered lens, focusing on the comic characters' sartorial, physical, and physiognomic aspects. Using Judith Butler's concepts, the comics would be examined to understand how the social constructs on gender are further affirmed through the performative act of creating superhero/heroine comics. Post the dawn of COVID-19, the health authorities have significantly shifted to digitised multimodal Information and Communication methods to promote health literacy, thus revamping these pedagogical tools in a way that suits the Indian audience helps the knowledge and information disseminated to reach a larger audience in a country like India. Studying the same from a gendered lens reveals the twin sides of the psyche of the makers and the influence of the same on the consuming target audience.

Keywords: COVID-19, Health literacy, Indian Comics, Physiognomic, Superhero/heroine

COVID-19 Health Literacy Comics and the Indian Scenario

Reported initially in 2019 with a couple of cases spotted in Wuhan, the COVID-19 pandemic slipped humanity into a dystopian space. Around January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and various measures to taper the spread of the virus, like travel restrictions, social distancing, isolation, quarantine, and lockdowns, were declared by Governments around the world. The initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic was

hurling around uncertainty where medical authorities needed to be sure of the nature of the virus and treatment measures to tackle it. Only as the pandemic progressed could health professionals and scientists settle down on the proper vaccination, treatment, and preventive strategies. Before that, non-pharmaceutical interventions and preventive measures were a resorted strategy to control COVID-19. Public awareness and information literacy on battling the monster virus and preventative measures were circulated through creative manipulation of "the art and science social marketing" strategies in the visual era and these strategies were used to "influence people's knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviours and practices to adopt preventive measures against COVID-19" (Bhattacharyya et al. 7).

Focusing on the Indian scenario per se, the period before vaccination and medical intervention, pandemic prevention relied on health promotion through Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials. An analysis of the characteristics and quality of such publicly available COVID-19 IEC materials in India between March and December 2020 proved that "content aesthetics", "readability", and "audience engagement" were the pivotal aspects of such content (Biswas et al. 3). A quantitative content analysis within the same study found the characteristics of 265 IEC materials which were found to be used. These included posters, pamphlets, banners, brochures, comic books, and wall art, with 73.96% of these materials directed toward the general public (Biswas et al. 3).

This study focuses on health literacy comics in India during the pandemic. Comics are a very effective pedagogical tool, the use of which heightened further during COVID-19 to educate communities on health literacy. When used as a medium to convey information health literacy regarding health concerns, comics "cultivate scientific temper and rational approaches", thus making it an "impactful science communication" (Venkatesan et al. 1-2). This paper focuses on two health literacy comics published in India: *Priya's Mask (2020)* and *Nagaraj Strikes: The Attack of the Coronaman (2020)*. These two Indian COVID-19 comics released seemingly targeted child audiences. This study aims to decipher how this verbal and visual medium has been creatively manipulated within the Indian scenario to educate on health literacy. An explicit amount of Indianness is visible within these two comics, specifically in the thematic and sartorial construction of the superhero and superheroine protagonists and the mythical references within. The researcher seeks to highlight how using such ploys creates an element of relatability within the audience, thereby leading to reclaiming the roots. Furthermore, the researcher attempts to analyse the two superhero/heroine protagonists 'Priya' and 'Nagaraj' from a gendered viewpoint. The attempt to decode these questions is a descriptive qualitative study where these comics are seen as discourses and using the method of discourse analysis. The discourse analysis would be aided by the graphic narratives theories of Scott

McCloud, where he focuses on various aspects of comics like panels, colour and overall compositions, drawings and caricatures within the panel, usage of symbols, etc.

India's subject position as a postcolonial country brought forth many cultural productions from a global south angle through various mediums. There was a spiking of Indian superhero comics in the 1980s and 1990s within India, inhibiting the context of a post-liberal and nuclearised India, with *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Raj Comics*, and all being a couple of examples. This came with the agenda of bringing forth discursive practices and pedagogical tools to trample over the existing Eurocentric ones and for "an appreciation of postcolonial cultural productions without seeing them as shadows of a master print" (Kaur 3). Further, Kaur explains how these indigenous comic productions were discursive responses to "transnational and translational modernity located in the expressive cultures of urban India" (Kaur 3). These health literacy comics, during COVID-19, were widely circulated through internet mediums like WhatsApp and via school authorities. In most cases, teachers, parents, or other elders narrated through and aided in the reading process. Thus, these pictorial pedagogical discourses can be viewed as comic discourses promoting health literacy by using images, metaphors, and storylines with a higher degree of relatability and elements of Indianness, thus rightly fitting the Indian audience. In his *The Fashion Systems*, Roland Barthes articulates how fashion becomes a cultural sign system via which one can explore how clothing communicates meanings and contributes to identity construction. With this in context, the superhero/heroine and characters within the select comics seemingly are attributed with attires that directly and indirectly hint at the cultural space that India is on a very subtle level.

Comics, Element of Indianness and the Fighting Coronavirus

Giorgio Agamben brings forth this binary of "*zoe* and *bios*" or "bare life and political life" (Agamben 8), and the Coronavirus reduced society into the subject position of the former in a way. The two selected comics are structured within the typical good versus evil binary plot structure where Coronavirus is portrayed as the villain. The virus can essentially be viewed as the 'bare life' that is being fought against by society, which can be seen as the 'bios,' and the superhero/heroine guides this fight in the right way. The superhero/heroine within these comics seemingly encourages the reader to follow preventive measures and be a hero/heroine who protects the country from the attack of the evil Coronavirus. Thus, through the superhero/heroine character, an assertion of sovereignty is established in the pandemic era, where all the citizens follow the preventive measures and stay healthy, not putting the nation's health at a standstill. Thus, these comics became an alternative public sphere for Indian child audiences where they could also be the superheroes/heroines who fought for the safety of their nation by preventing loopholes of the villainous virus from attacking them.

Arjun Appadurai argues that consumer revolutions have been transforming the very idea of commodification by creating a "peculiar tension between fantasy and nostalgia" (Appadurai 81).

Further, he argues that the key to modern forms of consumerism is pleasure, and not leisure or satisfaction, and this "pleasure that has been inculcated into the subjects who act as modern consumers are found in the tension between nostalgia and fantasy, where the present is represented as if it were already past" (Appadurai 83). So, the Indian audience, precisely the child audiences, can be seen as the directly targeted consumers. To access them, parents, teachers, and elders can be seen as indirectly targeted consumers. COVID-19 preventive information health literacy is promoted to these two sets of target consumers by creating pleasure within the reading process and developing tension through the element of Indianness constructed via nostalgia and fantasy. Here, the mythical roots of the superhero/heroine figures and other characters, even the symbolic portrayal of the Coronavirus as the villain, are the nostalgic and fantasy element conveyed through these comics. In the two selected comics, the superhero protagonist Nagaraj, when juxtaposed against the superheroine protagonist Priya, reveals a demarcation of how a masculine versus feminine force fights against a threat like the villainous Coronavirus. This distinction is visible in terms of the emotional composure and approach of these characters, the sartorial composition of characters, and the overall mood of the storyline. All these are subtly conveyed through the nuances of the language of comics. Aligning along the concept that gender is a construct and Judith Butler's concept that gender is performative and socially constructed, the gendered depiction of the superhero/heroine represented through the social construct and further affirmed through the performative act of creating comics.

Stuart Hall argues that meaning is something that is thought to be produced or constructed rather than being found to exist (5), and this leads to his concept of the 'practice of representation', where through representations, specific concepts, ideas and emotions get embodied into a symbolic form which later transcends as meanings. Like any other medium of discourse, comics encourage the readers to participate actively in the meaning-making process. Therefore, meaning-making in comics can be defined as a dialogic process, referring to Hall's concepts. Here, the shared cultural codes and shared knowledge frameworks embedded within the representations of the comics initiate the dialogue between the producers and consumers of comics. This dialogue thus leads to the process of encoding and decoding, where the encoded inherent ideologies within the text trail from the agenda of the producers of comics are decoded by the consumers, here, the child audiences. The way the text is interpreted is somewhere channelled by the ideas encoded. These comics are channelling an idea of Indianness created via mythical references and the gendered construction of the superhero/heroine. Placing Priya against Nagaraj reveals the gendered concepts of masculine versus feminine, which is subtly conveyed through the ideas of hegemonic sexuality and hypersexuality. Now, contrary to sex, gender is a social construct. Thus, these comics that came in during an era of emergency to provide awareness and guidance shape the ideologies of the target consumers through a binary created within the super figures where they are either a female force or a male force. Hence, these two figures

become the 'bios' depicted by creating a tension between fantasy and nostalgia. However, they fall into the spectrum of either feminine or masculine, and there is a lack of fluidity within the binary distinction of 'bios'.

Nagaraj's Strike and the Coronaman's Attack

Nagaraj, which translates as 'Snake King,' was one of the pioneering and still constant superhero protagonists conceptualised within India by Sanjay Gupta in collaboration with Raj Comics in 1986. This superhero figure is the metaphorical blend, taking inspiration from the mythological 'Ichchhadhari Nag', shapeshifting snakes, and the historical 'Vishmanushya', or venomous humans. This superhero figure is used within the modern context, with distinctive changes within the body figure. Yet, the roots of this character are etched upon old and familiar archetypes and mythological footings. The back story of the birth of Nagaraj as a superhero goes this way: Nagaraj was the abandoned child of King Taksharaj and Queen Lalita; where the king's brother, in his greed to be the heir to the throne, tricks the queen while she was going to pray to the Snake God. He replaces her offering with a dead mongoose, which irritates the god, and he punishes her where when her child is born with the whole body being blue in colour and not showing any signs of life. Perceived to be dead, as per customs, the baby is thrown into a river and is rescued by King Maniraj and Queen Manika, the rulers of ageless Ichachhadhaari nags, Nagdweep. They take care of the baby, whose colour changes to green. However, an evil Tantrik again kidnaps and abandons the baby into the same river bushes where he was rescued from. Things change as Professor Nagmani takes in the baby and raises it, who later becomes Nagaraj but is used by the Professor to fulfil his evil agenda. Nagmani performs specific instructions on the baby by injecting snake venom into his body slowly, eventually converting the baby into the most powerful sovereign of snakes. After years, Nagaraj's body turns resilient and snake-like, but his face resembles a human, yet he is a tall man with green skin. His venom and breath are powerful enough to kill, and he has an internalised snake army where millions of microscopic snakes reside in the place of white blood cells. Nagmani, however, controls him by inserting a microchip inside him, but that is put to an end by Baba Gorkhanath, who learns about this and removes it. Post this, Nagaraj embarks on the journey to safeguard and protect humanity.

This character's sartorial and physiognomic design has been changing over the years. In one of the earliest comic illustrations by Pratap Mulick, Nagaraj was a relatively thin and dark green superhero. Wearing gold earrings was part of the sartorial aspects of Indian royalty and noblemen. Yet, in style, Nagaraj was similar to Western superheroes with a "figure-hugging costume underneath a pair of pants" (Kaur and Eqbal 94). Instead of snake scales, "snakeskin is alluded to by a pattern of curlicues on his outfit"; however, "the digitised effects on Nagaraj are heavily schematic, with cross-hatching to depict form, replacing curlicue scales on his skin" (Kaur and Eqbal 94). In the current chosen comic, Nagaraj's physique is much more muscular and has an overall modern outlook compared

to the initial versions. Wearing a body-fitting suit above, which is worn underpants, the muscular physique and the shade of light green faintly remind of the Western superhero, Hulk. Thus, Nagraj is an intermix of the Western and the mythological. Wearing mid-calf boots, around his neck coils snakes, making the audience feel a semblance to Lord Shiva. Compared to the older versions, the latest one pictures Nagraj with a sharp jawline and much sharper physiognomic aspects. His physique forays him onto the audience as a hypermasculine superheroic figure.

For ease of semiotic analysis, the comic can be divided into three parts: the introductory strips where Nagraj gets introduced, wherein it is just another day in Mahanagar and Nagraj, and his snakes are fighting a thief. Here, most of the panels have an almost full shot of Nagraj, and the physiognomic aspects on his face, like the structure of the eyebrows and the lips, convey a confident affirmative feeling that he is powerful enough to tackle anything. This applies to the facial expressions of the fighting snakes, too, having a ferocious, defeating look. On the contrary, the Snake that informs him about the virus, with the dialogue bubble "Nagraj! There's a bigger threat looming over the city" (Gupta 1), with glazed eyes and agape mouth, seems to have a petrified face. Juxtaposing the confident Nagraj and the petrified Snake within the same second panel, the might of the superhero is conveyed, and beyond that, their expressions convey a solid masculine figure in a fight against the virus.

The second part is where they get to see what Coronavirus is: here, depicted in the form of a monstrous villain, they fail to defeat him with physical force. On the second page, Nagraj and the Snake loom over the Coronaman, who yells, "There is no escape from me! I have come to end this world! Feel the wrath of Coronaman" (Gupta 2). On this page, there is a transference of physiognomic aspects on the faces of the characters. The juxtaposing faces of confident Nagraj and petrified Snake transform into two petrified, agape, and worried faces in the first panel of the second page. Meanwhile, the second and third panels show the Coronaman's evil face, all set to destroy humanity. In the first panel on this page, where the perplexity and anxiety on Nagraj's and the Snake's faces, the two faces almost look similar, and this can be viewed as a metaphor for the cluelessness of the medical authorities in the initial phase, where there was a bare clue on what precisely this vast spreading new virus was and how to tackle it.

The third page depicts the physical combat between Nagraj and the Coronaman. He "spewed his venomous breath", but it did not work, and "even the snakes were ineffective" (Gupta 3). Unlike the other panels, all the panels on this page give a close-up shot of Nagraj's face, further highlighting the physiognomic aspects of him being anxious and worried, contrary to the initial panels, where he seemed confident and composed enough. The fourth panel on the third page says, "...and knocked Nagraj away!" (Gupta 3) and shows his face alone. His slanted lips, wry eyebrows, and dissociated eyes convey this idea of fear towards the novel Coronavirus. With all this, Nagraj realises that it is

not physical force but precautionary preventive measures that would defeat the Coronaman, and the various panels towards the end display WHO guidelines and words like self-quarantine. Nagraj educates himself on all these measures and decides to promote these and educate humanity; that is where we can divide the comic into the third part. Here, Nagraj embarks on his mission of educating society on health literacy. In the sixth panel, a single panel, Nagraj, with a bunch of precautionary pamphlets, says to his companion snake, "We need to spread this message to the city!" (Gupta 6). This is followed by a pictorial depiction of Nagraj in the centre and his snakes delivering these pamphlets written with words like "stay home", and "wash hands" (Gupta 6) in caps to people around. This looks like a mythical circle. A circle best represents the Hindu universe because the Hindu belief system sees the world as something timeless and boundless and which is cyclical and infinitive. This is being placed in the centre, on the side.

Finally, the comic closes with a final page with a single panel and an enlarged half shot of Nagraj with his hands admonishingly and advisingly, almost resembling Vajra Mudra. The dialogue bubble says, "its your duty as a citizen to stay home...and help us win this battle! I have saved my city from Coronavirus! Now it's your turn to be the hero of your city!" (Gupta 9). Here, by asking the audience to be heroes by following the precautionary and preventive measures, a psychological approach educates the readers by validating. A validation that by following the health literacy measures given to them by the superhero, they can be heroes is made. The final vision of Nagraj with glistening eyes and golden earrings provides the feeling of a mythical cult divine god figure. All these pages reveal how the story world is constructed, along with many action sequences, thus creating a more conventional masculine superhero comic feeling within the audience.

Priya's Shakti and Masking the Virus

Priya and Sahas are a duo, where Sahas is the tiger Priya uses a means of commutation that is subtly metaphorical to the goddess Durga, who is seen as a motherly figure within the Indian context, often depicted as a beautiful goddess riding a tiger with many arms and each equipped with a weapon. Goddess Durga is an emblem of a positive force, and with her feminine energy, she protects her devotees from negative, evil forces and safeguards them. Her companion tiger is named "Sahas", which means "courage" in Hindi. The comic panel begins with Priya and Sahas feeling desolate about the absconding humans. Priya is then informed by the waters that "the world is faced with an invisible force- a virus, unlike any other you have met". Like goddess Durga, she dawns upon Sahasa and immediately embarks on her journey to the city to save her people from the evil force of the virus. Her physical appearance reflects her Indianness, and within the selected comic, she is seen wearing a salwar kameez, a traditional Indian garment. She has a gold ornament around her forehead, often metaphorically seen as a third eye on her forehead. In Hindu mythology, this symbol represents enlightenment and spiritual awareness.

On seeing that everyone in the city is wearing a mask, she uses the piece of cloth the water force gives her for her protection to cover her face, and she is seen to be saying, "This mask will help keep the virus out and stop the virus from spreading" (Prakash). The first panel on the third page shows the migrant worker's precarious plight during COVID-19. Within the eighth page, the second-last panel is a low-angle shot of Meena, where her posture and appearance seem like a superhero's. Psychologically, low-angle shots make the subject look strong and powerful. Meena post the ride with Priya and Sahas, is motivated by Priya at the hospital where her mother works. She says in this panel, "And there are still so many people to help! I promise I will be strong for you" (Prakash). Here, Meena is transformed into a powerful subject position. Priya makes her feel that by doing what is bound to rule by restrictive rules, she is a superheroine with her capabilities of following preventive and precautionary measures.

Then, there is the introduction of another superheroine figure, Jiya, described by Priya as her friend. She is up "in Chutneyville up North" and "is a teacher and the protector of her city" (Prakash). Jiya's secret identity as a Bhurkha avenger is revealed. Again, the sartorial aspects with which Jiya is depicted create an element of relatability within the Indian audience. In terms of her name and appearance, she resembles a regular ordinary Indian Muslim woman. Then, the villainous introduction of Baba Kaboom comes in, who resembles a very typical Indian folktale villain. Baba Kaboom says, "I will go myself and spread the virus and make sure Chutneyville is miiiiineeeee!!!" (Prakash). The first panel within the tenth page has a side back shot of Jiya and Priya standing on the terrace with the looming view of the Indian city and saying to each other that knowledge and kindness are the two weapons that would help them in this situation. Here, two regular women, clad in a salwar kameez and a burkha with their feminine energy, are all set to protect the nation by transferring health literacy to their fellow characters in the comic and fellow readers. After defeating Baba Kaboom and caring for him compassionately, Priya and Jiya part ways. The comic strip ends with a flying figure of Priya and her magical tiger Sahas amidst many kites, within which many preventive measures are written like "observe social distancing", "wear a mask save lives" (Prakash), and so on. Here, the usage of a feminine force as the superheroine figure transcends the story world into a more emotional one than compared to Nagaraj's world.

Reading Together the Story-worlds of Nagaraj and Priya

There is a clear demarcation that: Nagaraj is a 'superhero', i.e., a male 'bios', and Priya is a 'superheroine', i.e., a female 'bios' and both fighting against the Coronavirus and encouraging the readers in the 'zoe' stage to be active 'bios' in the fight against COVID-19. However, the binary of the female versus male force makes a difference in how the story world is created. When examined in close quarters, *Nagaraj Strikes: The Attack of the Coronaman* is more happening in a masculine world where any pivotal female characters are barely visible. We see two female figures on the fifth and

sixth pages, but they do not have any pivotal role within the storyline. Meanwhile, *Priya's Mask* is more female-centric with many pivotal female characters like Meena, her mother, and Jiya. Whereas, Nagaraj's story world is more action-centric, with five out of the six pages consisting of action sequences, visible through the visual representation within the pages and sound bubbles like "RAWRR" on page four, the scene where the Coronaman is breaking the window panes, the scenes where Nagaraj and Coronaman thrash each other. These sequences thus instil a sort of adventurous feeling and adrenaline rush for the readers. This constructs the superhero figure Nagaraj as a hypermasculine figure, which is further enunciated via his sartorial, physiognomic and physique design. His muscular physique, body-fitting suit, and assertive, confident physiognomy make him a powerful masculine superhero figure capable of defeating anything. Thus, Nagaraj's superheroic existence can be defined as conveying a hypersexualised masculine force.

Meanwhile, Priya's story world is entwined with the story worlds of other female characters like Meena, her mother, and Jiya. This comic seems to have a more emotionally developed storyline. More than conveying a hypersexually feminine feeling, the story arches of Priya and Jiya convey an emotionally compassionate tale. This is quite evidently visible on the last page where the antagonist Baba Kaboom post being defeated is taken care of by them. Priya is seen to be saying to Baba Kaboom "Sahas will take Baba Kaboom to the hospital", and Jiya consoling the anxious Baba Kaboom, petrified at the sight of the tiger by saying, "don't worry Baba Kaboom. This is Sahas. Priya and Sahas are our friends". In the panel where Sahas embarks on taking Baba Kaboom to the hospital, Jiya can be seen saying to Priya, "I know what you mean Priya. We will not survive without compassion for each other".

Contrary to the hypermasculine energy conveyed via Nagaraj, here, it's more of a feeling of compassion and solidarity conveyed. Interestingly, the fight sequence with the antagonist, Baba Kaboom, is all concised into a single panel. Further, it's visible that, portraying the Coronavirus as a villain, Baba Kaboom, a male figure and a potentially cruel carrier of the virus, is portrayed as the villain. This can be viewed as the female superheroines fighting against hegemonic masculinity, where what gives them this heroic identity is coupled with their fight against the virus and also his evil masculine force. This, however, doesn't transcend as hypersexualised femininity as these two female superheroines are portrayed without many ornamental additions like Nagaraj. Unlike Nagaraj in his heroic body-fitting suit and masculine figure, Priya is clad in a regular pink-coloured Salwar Kameez and Jiya in a Burkha. No attempt has been made to construct a hypersexualised feminine superheroine.

Conclusion

The superheroes in these comics, Nagaraj and Priya, metaphorically resemble Hindu mythological figures. Unlike health literacy comics like *Kids, Vayu & Corona: Who Wins the Fight?*

The selected two comics brought forth an existing comic series, a pandemic awareness, and a COVID-19 precaution and prevention edition. One advantage of this is that the characters and superheroes are already familiar to the readers. Moreover, even if unfamiliar, the readers would be prompted to decode the roots and history of the characters. Not using a regular Western superhero and using characters like Nagraj and Priya creates a feeling of strangeness and a feeling of relatability at the same time. As Appadurai puts forth the idea of commodification, these health literacy comics have been commodified with the agenda of transferring information. This commodification process is embarked on by entwining fantasy and nostalgia. The talking snakes and flying tigers and Priya's and Nagraj's superheroic powers constitute the fantasy element, and the metaphorical interconnection with Nagraj, the snake king, and Goddess Durga and the backstory behind this character formation constitutes the nostalgia element. Most of these comics, having meant for child audiences, in most cases, would be narrated to and aided in the reading process by elders, thus instilling the nostalgia element on two levels, one in the earlier versions of the comics and two in the mythological backdrop. Therefore, this nostalgia is transferred to the modern child audiences, which thus makes these comics a means to reclaim their roots.

However, a gendered notion of superhero figures and the binary between superhero and superheroine is also transferred. Creating a binary of superhero versus superheroine, where the former is hypermasculine, and the latter is feminine and more human-like, has the potential to manipulate the perceptions of the consumers of these comics in different ways. It may deconstruct the faulty assumptions associated with who exactly a superhero is or lead to a presumption of assuming superheroes have the upper hand over superheroines in terms of their aggression and action sequences. This again leads to the problematisation of the usual archetypes associated with super figures as violent and aggressive in their fight against evil. The winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity, which are quite specifically fantasy figures (Connell 184). This is visible within the construction of the fantasy figure of Nagaraj, but the absence of the same is visible within the construction of superheroine figures like Priya and Jiya. Judith Butler believes that individual actions are more habitual than conscious acts, and these habitual acts, through their repetitive reenactments, solidify the concept of gender, and this habitually gets coded into the culture. Through the trope of a superheroic figure, the imagery instigated is different. Coming to Nagaraj, through the character, it is a heroic imagery that is constructed, and through Priya and Jiya, it is a mother imagery that is created. Instead, the portrayal of Nagaraj as a hypermasculine superhero and Priya and Jiya as heroines with more humane emotions and actions again asserts the hegemonic masculinity that rules over the concept of who is a superhero. However, this portrayal within *Priya's Mask* can also be viewed as an attempt to deconstruct this binary of hegemonic masculinity associated with the concept of who a superhero is.

Resorting to Indian architectural setups and sartorial aspects makes the comics familiar to the readers and enhances the element of relatability. So, these Indian superheroes are advising the Indian audiences, more per se, children to follow the precautionary measures, via which they get transformed into superheroes who aid in saving their country in times of a medical crisis. The failure of these superheroes to defeat the monstrous virus through force and superhero powers reduces these superheroic figures into mere "zoe". However, at a later point, it is shown how these heroic characters realise that the only means to defeat the villainous virus is via following preventive and precautionary measures. Hence, the message conveyed here is that following these measures makes them, the other characters, and the reader powerful and transcends their bare life versions to an autonomous "bios" version. Thus, the cultural symbols and metaphors used within characterisation and the general structuring of these two comics make the context and story readable and relatable to the targeted audience, and the same cultural symbols become a tool via which subtly the audience is made to reclaim back with their roots.

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Malabar Muslim Women's Reading of Kamala Das' Poem *Middle Age*

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Abstract

Malabar is a region situated in the northern side of Kerala state which is famous for its cultural vibrancy and religious harmony. The region was notorious for its illiteracy and ignorance and backwardness in different manifestations of life brought about by the exploitative rule of the colonisers, stringent feudal system and caste discrimination in the society. Colonisation, feudalism and caste discrimination diminished from the mainstream with the attainment of freedom from the colonial shackles. But religious fundamentalism and patriarchy came forward to discriminate the people based on religion and gender. It was the Gulf migration from the Malabar region which brought about multifaceted changes in the society. Their remittance from the gulf changed the social, political and economic background of the region. The women in the society which suffered in the times of colonisation and in the postcolonial times were able to take the fresh breath of freedom and education because of the changes brought about by the gulf migration. But the gulf migration has affected the lives of the middle-aged women in Malabar.

The plight of the middle-aged women and the society is well portrayed in the poem *Middle Age* by Kamala Das. The poem explains the pathetic conditions of the middle-aged women in the society. The present paper is an analysis of the condition of Malabar Muslim women in the light of Kamala Das' poem *Middle Age*.

Paper

Kamala Das is famous for her confessional poetry, peculiar with simple language and elegance in writing, which discusses the innermost feelings of women's body and psyche. Hailing from the controversial region of Malabar, she spoke about the unexplored realms of literature through her poetry. She was a versatile writer with skills in both English and Malayalam. Most of her poems discussed her personal feelings and emotions which identified her and marked as a representation of the women in the whole region with a global significance. Her identity as a woman and as an individual from the controversial region of Malabar is much discussed in many of her literary expressions. Her poetry is peculiar with the exploration of unexplored arenas of discussions regarding the female psychology and identity.

Kamala Das's search for ideal love and the resultant disappointment seem to involve the psychological phenomenon of 'the animus' struggling to project the masculine imprint as interpreted

by Jung. The attempt to seek in every lover, the perfection of masculine being is destined to end in failure because of the impossibility of realising the ideal in human form (Chavan 64).

The areas of discussions which were considered as private and unexplainable at the mainstream, which relegated the women from the mainstream discussions, were openly discussed in her pieces of literature. She wrote her poems in English language and most of her prose works are in her native language Malayalam. Being a Malayali from the Malabar region, her experiences as a woman is significant because the region and the language has undergone multiple changes along with the changes happening in the lives of the women of the region. The poetic pieces she produced mark her identity as a woman in the mainstream literary arena and also create a representation for the whole community of women in the mainstream discussions and in the literature. She has accomplished in bringing out the innermost feelings of the women in the society representing herself in her literary creations and created a space for the women along with their challenges in the social, economic and political realms of the mainstream society. “It is a part of the strength of Kamala Das’s exploration of love-theme that it also follows her compulsions to articulate and understand the workings of the feminine consciousness” (Kohli 188).

Through her poem *Middle Age*, she focuses on an area where most of the writers were unable to focus on the lives of the women in the society. “The poem shows the poet’s intense awareness of women having been subjected to all kinds of discrimination: social, cultural, political, (and) sexual” (Chandra, xii). The feminist perspectives focus mainly on the rights of the women and identity creation of the downtrodden gender in the mainstream discussions. Identity creation became the pivot of discussion in the feminist discussions for women empowerment. The discussions revolving around women started from the very birth and existence. The issues began even from the evolution of an individual as a woman from female foeticide and infanticide. Starting from the gender creation of a woman to the range of attainment of puberty and the evolution of menstrual cycle and the evolutionary aspects of a woman became a subject of distinction and suppression of women in the society (Nayar). But the poem is peculiar with the focus on a specific time period and the life of a woman where she reaches the middle age undergoing multiple changes in her thoughts, feelings, emotions and physic. “Middle age is when your children are no longer/Friends but critics...”(1-2). The changes happening in the body and mind of a middle-aged woman is not much explored in the literary spheres. “Midlife is also a period in the lifespan where pertinent domains, such as mental and physical health undergo significant changes. Physical functioning typically begins to show decline and the onset of chronic illnesses arise, such as high blood pressure, cancer and arthritis” (Lachman). But Kamala Das is brave enough to bring out the life of a middle-aged woman with her problems and issues she faces from the family community and the society. The life of a middle-aged woman is peculiar with the physique which is not more attractive towards the opposite gender and she is considered to be

relegated from the mainstream discussions of the family and society because the duties and responsibilities of a woman are considered to be fulfilled when she reaches the middle age. The menopausal changes happening in the woman's body and psychological changes along with the distancing of the husband and the children from her attention and the end of the reproductive scope for the future generation creates confusion in the identity and role of women in the society, community and in the family (Ayranci). Kamala Das concentrates on the role of women in the middle age, along with her condition in the family and society, where she is considered to be an outcast in affairs of the family, community and society. "Mother, You are no longer so young you know"(15-16).

The middle-aged woman in the Malabar region never came to a discussion in the social and literary spheres before the publication of the poem, because they were undergoing discrimination and oppression even from the pre-colonial times. The pre-colonial women's condition was peculiar with discrimination based on patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, caste discrimination and feudalism. The arrival of the colonial powers to Malabar was the first intervention from the European powers towards the region though they came as traders to establish trade relationship with the whole region of Indian motherland. The arrival of colonial powers aggravated the discrimination and suppression towards the women and the condition of the women in Malabar was mounted with the problems of colonisation along with other challenges existing in the society.

The changes happening in the life and mind of the women in the society was not taken into consideration by the mainstream society because of the marginalisation existing in the patriarchal male centric casteist, feudal minded, society. Caste discrimination, feudalism, colonial powers, and patriarchy exploited the women of the times along with the crooked minds of religious fundamentalism. The suppression and oppression by the feudal powers and colonial rulers were established in the form of atrocities against the women in the society. Molestation and rape were the usual affairs of the society in the times of colonisation and feudalism. Women were not able to attain the benefits of education and exposure and they were relegated from the mainstream in the name of gender discrimination and caste discrimination. The identity of women were not a question in the colonial society because the social and political issues in the society were not addressed towards the gender orientation as the challenges of the society was concentrated on the discrimination based on colonialism, feudalism and caste.

With the attainment of freedom, the challenges in the form of feudalism, caste discrimination and colonisation came to an end, though caste consciousness existed in the society with all its manifestations. The women in the Malabar region got a slight relief from the challenges and suppression from the part of colonisation, feudalism and caste discrimination. But the problems created by gender discrimination, patriarchy and religious fundamentalism remained in the society

with all its pangs to attack the identity and freedom of women in the society. The crooked clergy who utilised and exploited the religious scriptures to control and suppress the women and the society continued their illicit ways and expressions to remove the establishment of identity creation of women in the society as they wanted the women to remain in the inner darker corners of their households, engaged in domestic works and taking care of the family members, children and their husbands. The women and the society were confined to the domestic works and taking care of the family members discarding the basic freedom for education and freedom of expression.

Muslim women of Malabar were the main victims of all the challenges existing in the society even from the colonial times to the contemporary society. Caste atrocities and discrimination based on feudalism and suppression of colonialism came to an end with attainment of freedom in the Malabar region. But the challenges in the form of religious fundamentalism and patriarchy remain in the society of Malabar with all its powers, though changes began to be visible in the political and social atmosphere of the society brought about by the fresh breeze of freedom and the eradication of casteism and feudalism. The victims of religious fundamentalism were basically Malabar rural Muslim women who were not able to enjoy the benefits of education and mainstream exposure. When the challenges of colonisation, feudalism and caste discrimination diminished from the society, the dominant powers became the religious leaders and crooked clergy who wanted to exploit the community and society through all possible means.

The clergy realized that education of the women in the society will make them aware of the contemporary society and changes happening in the mainstream society and the religious leaders and clergy kept them away from education and exposure. The ignorance and illiteracy of the women in Malabar helped the religious clergy to aggravate their exploitation and the women of the region were subjected to oppression and exploitation based on the false interpretation of religious scriptures. They were the victims of superstitions and they were not able to break the rules, regulations, norms and dogmas established by the religious authorities and their duties, responsibilities and freedom confined to the inner corners of their domestic households.

It was the migration to the Gulf countries from the Malabar region which helped the women of the region to have an access to education and freedom of expression to establish their identity into society, family and community. Migrant youth from Malabar region realised the value of education for women and they encouraged the education of Muslim women. The migrants who were earning for their family and society in the Middle East countries realised the value of global education and language acquisition as a result of their exposure to the globalised world. The religious dogmas and norms established as a result of misinterpretation of the scriptures began to diminish from the mainstream society as the Muslim women from Malabar come came in huge numbers to the mainstream social and political atmosphere to attain knowledge and laurels of education. The

educated Muslim women from the region made revolutionary changes in the society as they established their identity of their own challenging the threats established by patriarchy and religious fundamentalism.

But the physical and mental changes happening in the lives of women brought about by migration to Gulf countries never came to the mainstream of literary discussions. The Mappila songs of the region represented the aspirations and thirst of the Muslim women in the region brought about by the migration of the youth towards the Middle East countries. The poem *Middle Age* by Kamala Das throws light on the life of women in the region and the artistic creation is capable of exploring the life of middle-aged women in the region with their issues and problems created as a result of Gulf migration. The sexual urges dreams and hopes of the woman and the region is not fulfilled because of the separation from their husbands big who are working in the Middle East countries for the sustenance of the family and community. Though migration brought about education and development in the region of Malabar the question of middle-aged Muslim women never came to discussion in the mainstream literary or social arena.

The poem *Middle Age* is capable of discussing the problems and issues faced by the Muslim women in Malabar. It is an excellent example of unearthing the mental and physical aspirations of Malabar Muslim women. The central figure in the poem is portrayed as a middle-aged woman who is ignored by the mainstream society and the family as she is free from the responsibilities of taking care of the children because they have attained a stage to take care of themselves because of their age. As the children are mature with their own identity, the role of the mother in the family diminishes to the margins and the husband is also having little affection and care towards the wife as she is not sexually attractive because of her middle age and menopausal stage. “The age of menopause in Indian women is between 46 to 48 years. Women going through menopause can suffer from hot flushes, weight gain, depression and osteoporosis. The incidence of some female cancers also increases after menopause.” (The Indian Express)

Ignored by the mainstream society the middle aged women of Malabar region is suffering from the problem of separation from the husbands and their children, because they are free from the duties and responsibilities of the family and taking care of the children and their husbands. They feel an emptiness of liberation from the duties and responsibilities and the remnants of their toil for the family are not taken into consideration by the society or family. Her identity as a main member of a family who was the pivot of the affairs of the family diminishes to an insignificant member in the family, who has completed the cycle of her evolution (Tamaria). This confinement to a mere insignificant member of a family along with their physical and mental changes brought about by the age and menopausal stage creates a confusion about her identity and role in the family which is very well expressed in the poem by Kamala Das.

Malabar Muslim women in their young age were not able to establish their identity in the mainstream because of the lack of education possibilities and freedom of expression and exposure in the society. They were given only basic education up to secondary level and they will be married at an early age of 13 or 14 and the burden of the family and taking care of the responsibilities of the household and the family will be burdened on them in a tender age. The condition of Malabar Muslim women was in such a state that they were confused in a quagmire condition of immature mind and body but with the burden of responsibilities in taking care of the affairs of the family and the members in the family with a load of domestic works in the family. The girls of the region were having mental and physical problems because of the premature pregnancy and delivery and their life were affected because of the immature and untimely marriage and childbirth. The condition of the women in the region began to change because of the exposure and development brought about by the gulf migration. The remittance from the Gulf region because of the hard toil of the young minds in the region helped the women of the region to get exposure and education though the religious fundamentalist ideas still prevailed in the society and community to draw the women back to the world of illiteracy and ignorance. The women of the region established their identity through the education they attained but the middle age became a challenge for them.

According to A.N.Dwivedi:

The frequency of love theme may evoke repudiation from nuns and spinsters, and breed boredom in the minds of general readers, but like Sappho in Greek literature, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning in English letters, and like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath in modern American poetry, Mrs Das offers us a feast of vivid images of love couched in felicitous language. No doubt, love is her 'forte' in poetry.

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The Power Divide: Tracing the Roots of Segregation and Exclusion of Transgender people in India

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Abstract

As mentioned in the Kama Sutra, people with tritiya-prakriti have an antique recorded history. During the Mughal period, transgender people played a significant role in empire-making due to their political knowledge, power, and loyalty. They also exhibited a unique quality of blessing (or cursing) the newborns or newlyweds, thus ensuring them a position of great respect. Years later, the British government implemented laws that made hijra practices of earning a living as illegal, which marginalized and stigmatized them. Even after independence, they continued to face discrimination due to the societal stigma against transgender individuals imposed by the binaries. This coping mechanism of 'dominance' is still carried on to make subversive, the transgender community, in spite of their recognition as the 'third gender'. The proposal attempts to analyze how the inimical practice of segregation by the 'dominant' affected and still affects the transgender community in India even after the establishment of SDG 5. The central claim proposes the dominance and inclusion of the 'dominant' on transgender people still present in India through Amal Palekar's *Daayraa* (1996) and Kaushik Ganguly's *Nagakirthan* (2019) as a reference, to point out their situation.

Keywords: Hijra, transgenders, dominant ,SDG, India, segregation, binaries

Introduction

Television and film can be extremely powerful and impactful tools for every single individual. One's perspective of the world can be shaped by them. Focusing on the significance of films in exploring sexuality and gender fluidity, they have the power to destroy preconceptions, target marginalized populations, and expose the public visually and orally. It allows us to explore the subtleties of queer identities and relationships, providing a greater knowledge of the gender and sexuality spectrum. Films that include queer protagonists depict their pleasures, hardships, and victories, allowing the audience to connect on a highly emotional level. This link, in turn, fosters acceptance and knowledge, dispelling myths and encouraging inclusion. However, the influence of

films on queer portrayals is fraught with difficulties. Misrepresentation, tokenism, and stereotypes, if not addressed delicately, can prolong harm and promote prejudices.

In recent years, transgender people have been characterized in several ways. The term transgender is defined by Levitt and Ippolito in 2014 as "an umbrella term that refers to individuals whose gender presentation is different from the sex assigned to them at birth, which defies traditional notions of what is meant to be male or female." The hijra community in India has not always been comfortable organizing under the banner of 'transgender,' as the distinctiveness of hijras and the cultural space they occupy necessitate a different articulation (Ruchi et al. 2023). This needs to be mentioned as the paper deals with transgender people in India.

This article investigates how long-held prejudices and misconceptions against transgender people are still visible in Indian society even after the implementation of SDG 5, focusing on films like *Daayraa* (1996) and *Naagakitan* (2019) as references. It later focuses on the need to include all genders other than the binaries under SDG 5 (2015) to have equality for all, as Fannie Lou Hamer quotes, "Nobody's free Until Everybody's free." 2015 marked the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals as a global call to eradicate inequality and build an inclusive society for all (Thomas, 2021). A road map for sustainable development has been established by the 17 SDGs, which were voted on and approved by all UN member nations (UN 2016). The SDGs' "leave-me-behind" motto, which promotes gender equality across all 17 goals, is one of their defining characteristics. Even though it was a win for the women's rights group, there is still a need for other minority groups to be analyzed and included. Unlike other films, the setting of *Daayraa* (1996) and *Naagakitan* (2019) is rather simple and domestic. It focuses on the intense portrayal of characters, which paved the way for understanding how they are treated within the binaries. Though these transgender portrayals are in a confused state, the directors debunk the idea of heteronormativity during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Amol Palekar's *Daayraa* (1996) covers the tumultuous events surrounding a woman who was kidnapped on the eve of her wedding and saved by a trans woman whose name is anonymous. This depicts them not just as mere individuals but as a community that has continuously suffered through the same path. The story begins on the northeast coast of India, where an unnamed woman (played by Sonali Kulkarni) is forced into prostitution by a madam and her henchmen. Even though she managed to escape, she was gang-raped by some men while she was alone. Traumatized by the plight, she is cared for by a transwoman (played by Nirmal Pandey), with whom she falls in love. Pandey dresses her in men's clothing so they can pass as a 'straight' couple and journey back to her hometown in relative safety. The film portrays the helplessness of women in India during the 1900s. Provocative issues like rape and cross-dressing are woven together into a story using folk songs to narrate. *Daayraa* was never released in theaters due to its sensitive themes and concentration on sexuality and crimes

against women, depicting the actual state of India during 1990. The film does raise issues like sexual identity, problems raised due to arranged marriages, and a woman's status in a society that does not necessarily promote equality. Pandey, a traveling performer, intentionally decides to embrace her identity and publicly live as a trans woman. Through these characters, the director portrays real-life depictions of how different genders were treated during the twentieth century. Both Pandey and Kulkarni embark on a metaphorical and literal adventure, experiencing life within the confines of a capitalist society. Nirmal Pandey holds the unique honor of winning Best Actress at the 1997 Valenciennes Film Festival in France for his portrayal in Amol Palekar's *Daayraa* (1996). The film also examines the rights of those who are not part of mainstream culture, including transgenders, gays, and lesbians. It delves deeper into their feelings and how they experience persecution from society through no fault of their own. The film's thematic daring is an exploration of the conflict between gender identity and social context in a firmly conventional country.

Kaushik Ganguly's *Nagakirthan* (2019) travels through Puti's (a transwoman) hardships and struggles due to her gender identity. The story begins in Bengal, where Puti elopes with her lover, Madhu, a delivery boy at a Chinese restaurant. The flashback provides insights into Puti's childhood days when she was scolded by her father for dressing up as a girl. Later, she develops a relationship with her private tutor, Subhash da, who is aware of her gender identity. Puti advises eloping to America with him in the hopes of living freely and without concealment. She subsequently discovers that Subhash da is planning to marry her elder sister. Being unable to cope with the pain, she flees to the eunuch's ghetto in Kolkata, where she becomes a follower of their guru Arati. As she was living with the eunuch, she met Madhu who rents their upstairs apartment, along with an old man. Slowly, both start to develop feelings for each other and spend more time together. Understanding the greatest dream of Puti to be a trans woman through Nirvana, Madhu supported and helped her in every way possible, for which he even decided to sell all his properties. Later they decided to visit Madhu's village in Kirtaniya, Nabadwip. Ganguly's depthful portrayal of each scene carries a meaning, including the depiction of Madhu's family members as kirtans who worship Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Madhu and his family, along with Puti, decide to attend a kirtan performed by him, during which Puti, immersed in her memories, breaks down and loses her wig during the process. She runs away, and Madhu follows but loses her. Except for his sister-in-law, everyone blames him for having a relationship with Puti. Meanwhile, Puti, devoid of all her money and belongings, starts to beg for money to have food from a nearby food stall. The local eunuchs of Nabadwip, enraged by this and aware of the reputation of phonies acting up as eunuchs to rob people, apprehend Puti, and crowd her in the streets. Madhu, in search of Puti, finds a man who captured Puti's pathetic and helpless situation. When he reaches the police station, he finds Puti hanging herself inside the lockup. In the end, Madhu

da joined the same ghetto in Kolkata. The character Madhu is significantly a queer character who finds himself in a confused state of gender, as portrayed in the climax shot.

Nagakithan and Daarya portrayed the raw lives of transgender people across India. The situations faced by women and transgender people even after the implementation of SDGs can be observed through the film Daarya. Despite gaining independence, the British imprints are still visible among Indians, especially in the treatment of the queer, even though they were well-respected members during the Mughal period. During the 1700s, they worked as counselors, guards, and attendants to the imperial harem at the court. Hijras played important roles in celebrations by executing auspicious rituals and bestowing blessings. The Mughal emperors bestowed upon them advantages such as land grants and legal powers, as well as cultural significance. It is crucial to note, however, that the treatment of hijras varied across locations and times. During the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a substantial shift in the status and treatment of transgender people due to the establishment of British colonial rule. The British colonizers imposed their Victorian morality, which did not accommodate Indian society's cultural acceptance of gender variety. During this time, they experienced increased social exclusion, discrimination, and prosecution as British beliefs towards gender and sexuality diverged from pre-colonial India's historical acceptance. Overall, transgender people's experiences during the Mughal and British periods were entirely different. This colonial period continues to define the modern lives of India's transgender populations, as depicted in Nagakirthan.

The Need for Transgender Liberation for Reduced Inequality

The Bill, which was proposed in Parliament in 2016 and enacted in the Lower House in December 2018, provoked widespread outrage among India's transgender population. In September 2019, the Supreme Court of India commenced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which was brought into practice for the protection of transgender people. The reconceptualization of SDG 5 is necessary to produce a more expansive understanding of gender equality that trans and gender-diverse people can mobilize politically, legally, and socioeconomically to disrupt cisgender-centric approaches to inclusive development. Currently, the United Nations (UN), along with other transnational organizations and corporations, appear to be stuck in a never-ending cycle of gender equality politics—clinging to a binary sexual difference. This paves the way to gender diversity politics, which produces a growing list of sexual and gender minorities that require protection (Engel, 2021). Contemplating the topic of constructing feminist futures, Camminga declares that she is not interested in feminism and wants to only make men and women equal. By making this claim, Camminga draws attention to and disproves the underlying theory that genuine gender equality that benefits everyone can result from cisnormative interpretation. Therefore, Matthyse makes an

intriguing argument that a true definition of gender equality recognizes the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions to achieve liberation from gender-based oppression.

Theoretical Framework

From the primitive period to the modern era, sociologists have addressed the phenomenon of violence as a sociological human condition that accompanied the existence of human beings as a behavior related to the animal instinctive aspect of "love of survival" and control over nature and its material goods (Asbahy & Aleemudhin, 2020). Bourdieu presents the concept of symbolic violence, which plays an important part in his study of dominance in general and is essential in understanding how inequitable gender relations are maintained (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). He described it as soft violence, concealed, undetectable, and unknown to both its practitioners and its victims. This violence is mirrored in emotional, valuable, moral, and cultural practices and uses symbolic tools such as language, pictures, signs, semantics, and meanings (Asbahy & Aleemudhin, 2020). According to Bourdieu, those in authority can impose language, meaning, and symbolic systems on others, which helps the dominant party maintain its position throughout. He attempts to explain how underlying power dynamics in social systems sustain hierarchies and inequalities, masking how certain groups within society get marginalized (Shepherd & Hamilton). According to Bourdieu, the minority's complicity arises when they accept uncritical concepts produced by the dominant group as the way things are and should be : Of all the forms of 'hidden persuasion' the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 168).

Bourdieu analyzes symbolic violence in the context of everyday practices, demonstrating how symbolic violence goes unreported due to misrecognition. Symbolic violence is not only a component of a larger continuum of violence but also the most prevalent, hidden, and trivialized kind of violence against trans women. Bourdieu's work explores "why it is that many forms of domination persist with relatively few challenges" (Chambers, 327). Furthermore, according to Bourdieu (201), the lens of symbolic violence "enables us to anticipate the conditions under which a genuine gender revolution might become possible." Bourdieu's articles concentrate on the fixed binary of masculinity and femininity, with a focus on women's liberation. However, such a gender revolution has the potential to go even further and properly recognize the multiplicity of genders. It is a matter of daily construction to determine who is the subject or object. Bourdieu also ponders how it is viewed in many ways based on the position and disposition of gender in sign, symbol, and meaning. It perpetuates the symbolic hierarchy that leads to discrimination, marginalization, and dominance.

Analysis

There is a real need to include transgender people within SDG 5 due to the difficulties that they pass through daily. Firstly, misgendering is a challenge that trans people face in social interaction, which occurs when someone refers to, describes, or addresses a person as a gender other

than the one they identify with (Edmonds, 2023). It is one type of symbolic violence faced by transwomen and transmen, in which others purposefully or inadvertently refer to them using erroneous gender pronouns or names that do not correspond to their gender identification. Misrecognition of symbolic violence means "practices that would ordinarily be deemed problematic or 'violent' eventually gain social acceptance through particular discourses, practices, and policies" (Thapar-Björkert et al. 149). This behavior undermines their self-identity and supports the perception that they are not who they are, causing emotional misery and estrangement. Misgendering in films demonstrates a lack of empathy and information about transgender issues, eventually depriving these characters of their dignity. The depiction of the struggle of being misgendered is appropriate for the story being told; however, it is often done gratuitously, or the misgendering is not addressed by the narrative. In *Daaryaa*, Kulkarni asks Pandey his pronouns so as not to offend him. The practice of misgendering, whether deliberate or unintentional, worsened the erasure of their gender identities and experiences.

The "reveal" of a character's gender identity as a transgender person is handled as a surprise story twist, supporting the notion that transgender identities are deviant or deceptive. This sensationalistic approach can encourage transphobic sentiments and contribute to negative perceptions. In films, the deliberate "reveal" of a character's gender identification as a surprise plot twist adds intrigue and depth to the story. The approach Madhu's family had towards Puti when they found out her true gender identity portrays the transphobic attitudes of society. The scene created a strong emotional impact, causing Puti to run away from them. As they discover Puti's true identity, Madhu's family drives them from their Nabadwip home, serving as a harsh critique of humanity's hypocrisy. The livelihood of Madhu's family as Vaishnava Kirtaniyas, accepted by Chaithanya Mahaprabhu when reflected in a man of flesh and blood, her true identity disgusts them. This shows the bitter truth in our society.

On the one hand, transgender people are shunned and ostracized, but on the other hand, they are thought to be spiritually or religiously superior, leading individuals to feel that the community's blessings will aid them. This can be a two-edged storytelling strategy that presents provocative concerns about their representations. In *Daaryaa* two characters (Pandey and Kulkarni) are involved in a conversation during their first meeting:

PANDEY. I am a miracle of nature

KULKARNI. You..What are you?

PANDEY. Without, a man. Within, a woman (19:48-57)

The representation of the first contact with transgender people can be a critical moment that has the opportunity to handle complex issues of identity, understanding, and empathy. Open conversations, as mentioned above, play a significant role in dispelling misunderstandings and fostering a sense of growth for the characters involved.

Many "positive" stories depicting trans women end with their death portrayals. In Daayraa (1996) and Nagakirthan (2019), the trans characters are killed or are forced to hang themselves due to the cisnormative norms around them. These films chose to present a tragic end as a result of continuous assault or discrimination. The endings can highlight the harsh reality that transgender people frequently endure, shedding light on topics such as hate crimes and lack of support. Puti was portrayed as a victim of the cisnormative society. Her death reflects a deeply embedded cultural bias that prioritizes traditional gender identities and relationships. The men who tried to rape Kulkarni attacked Pandey and shot her. The unfulfilled desire of Pandey to live as a woman shows the upper hand of cisnormative society over the trans community. The repeated depiction of transgender individuals meeting terrible ends promotes negative preconceptions and reinforces the notion that their lives are intrinsically tragic. This reinforces the idea that transgender people are outcasts, unable to achieve happiness or fulfillment within conventional standards.

Conclusion

For the attainment of both the general and human rights aspects of the sustainable development goals, deeper knowledge is required—an intersectional and critical approach, that is, a post-colonial, de-pathologizing, non-binary, global understanding of what is commonly called 'gender'. It is well known that the categories of "sex" and "gender" refer to far more diverse and complex phenomena than specific views of men and women when discussing Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Baumgartinger, 2021). As a first step, there is a need to prepare a world that is not just safe for cisgender people but also queer individuals. So there is a necessity to intensify efforts to create political understanding that permits the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse people in the broader global conversation on gender equality. Films have increased transgender exposure while retaining the mainstream cisnormative community. The historical prohibition of some gender expressions by British colonial rulers is shown in films through unfavorable portrayals of transgender people as lawbreakers or societal misfits. This portrayal recalls the punishing sentiments fostered by colonial-era regulations. Still, the lingering influence of British colonial views remains evident in films as well as within the cisnormative society that is depicted in Daayraa and Naagakirtan. Despite the progressive conclusions obtained by the Department of Social Justice and Welfare, which include the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2019, much more work needs to be done to bring gender and sexual diversity into line globally. And to hold the state responsible for the gender minorities it displaces, all the while pursuing the goal of "inclusive development" for everybody.

With the implementation of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights), it is clear that there is a need to educate the people around them more than consider transgender people under SDG 5.

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Silent Dissent: Counter-Narratives in Indian Police Memoirs

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This research paper delves into the often-understudied aspects of counter-narratives within memoirs authored by Indian police officers. The narratives of these officers have traditionally been associated with duty, a sense of loyalty, and upholding the status quo, yet beneath the surface, a current of silent dissent flows. Drawing from a diverse selection of memoirs spanning various regions and periods, this paper explores the instances, themes, and implications of this juxtaposition of silence and dissension in their narrative, revealing a nuanced layer of critique and reflection. These counter-narratives often challenge the prevailing norms and practices, highlighting issues such as corruption, institutional flaws, and ethical dilemmas in policing. Through a combination of critical discourse analysis and the poststructuralist approach to narrative theory, the study sheds light on the motivations and consequences of police officers who speak about their individual experiences in the larger sociopolitical discourse of the nation and its policing episteme. The findings of this study contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of police memoirs as a complex and multifaceted genre, offering a deeper insight into the cultural canonicity and tellability of this antenarrative process. Decoding the stylistic choices, temporal dimensions and the self-censorship of this narrative contestation, the nation's significant and untold history can be brought forth. To do so, texts like *Biting the Bullet: Memoirs of a Police Officer* by IPS Ajai Raj Sharma, *Bihar Diaries: The True Story of How Bihar's Most Dangerous Criminal Was Caught*, and *Life in the Uniform: Adventures of an IPS Officer in Bihar* by IPS Amit Lodha, cater to the purpose of this study by adding an essential layer to the understating of police narrative in the contemporary corpus of cultural studies.

Keywords: police narrative, storytelling, counter-narrative, time, memory, transition

INTRODUCTION

“It was clear that these grievances had to be redressed as soon as possible to raise the morale of the Delhi Police and enhance its performance. Even though I was met with strong resistance, I was able to convince the government about the genuineness of all the three issues.” (Sharma, 114). Policing, as a profession, stands at the crossways of order and disorder, duty and dissent, often veiled in a narrative woven from tales of duty-bound heroism. Amidst this conventional portrayal lies an understated and intriguing aspect—whispered within the pages of police memoirs, where officers reminisce their journeys, struggles, and triumphs. This genre serves as a literary gateway into the

intricate world of law enforcement, unveiling narratives that extend beyond the uniform rubrics. Beyond the expected tales of upholding societal norms, there exists a subtle yet potent undercurrent of silent dissent, a narrative resistance that challenges the status quo. This research delves into the multifaceted landscape of police memoirs, seeking to unravel the layers beneath the surface narrative. The conventional portrayal of law enforcement, often associated with duty and adherence to established standards, stands in fabric against the nuanced expressions of dissent and critique found within the memoirs of Indian police officers as these officers navigate the intricacies of their profession, a current of silent dissent emerges, challenging prevailing norms and exposing the ethical dilemmas, institutional flaws, and shades of corruption that persist within the policing landscape. Spanning various regions and historical periods, this study draws from a diverse selection of police memoirs, each contributing to a mosaic of experiences that shape the cultural canonicity of the genre. By employing critical discourse analysis and a poststructuralist approach to narrative theory, the study aims to decode the motivations behind officers' decisions to share their dissenting narratives and the consequences they face in the larger sociopolitical discourse. This exploration is not merely an academic exercise; it is an endeavor to amplify voices that echo from the pages of memoirs such as *Biting the Bullet: Memoirs of a Police Officer* by IPS Ajai Raj Sharma, *Bihar Diaries: The True Story of How Bihar's Most Dangerous Criminal Was Caught*, and *Life in the Uniform: Adventures of an IPS Officer in Bihar* by IPS Amit Lodha, among others. These narratives add an essential layer to our understanding of policing within the contemporary corpus of cultural studies. By decoding the stylistic choices, temporal dimensions, and self-censorship inherent in these narratives, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of police memoirs as a dynamic and complex genre. The history of this genre of police memoir might seem new, but it goes way back to the time of the Imperial police in India. The role of the memoirs or, in broader terms, police narrative in the Police Reforms in India is undeniable. Now, the sturdy role of the police and the author is a crucial juxtaposition. They had plenty of dormant narratives in someone's journal, letters, or in their mind that came in light of a published form. Even at present, IPS officers are their accounts and are getting the privilege of publishing them. The credibility of the readership goes to the bureaucratic fame of the Civil Service Exams in this country. But the hierarchical suppression of the subordinate police officers: the constables, sub-inspectors, and inspectors who are the true frontier face of policing hardly cross the boundary of the institutional ground.

Do the common people get to know their side of the story? Or if it reached a bricolage of readers, would it make any difference in their sense-making? Counter-narratives are essential tools for rebutting the presuppositions of a dominant narrative framework, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges police officers face in their line of duty. Traditional police narratives often present the police as hardworking and diligent officers in challenging

situations. Still, they may leave out crucial context or details contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the incidents. By examining counter-narratives, researchers can gain a deeper insight into the underlying issues and dilemmas police officers face. Counter-narratives can reveal problems such as corruption, institutional flaws, and moral dilemmas in policing that may not be addressed in traditional narratives. This can contribute to developing more effective policies and practices within the police force. Counter-narratives can create critical social spaces that challenge dominant assumptions and promote social change. By examining these narratives, researchers can gain insights into the dynamics of narrative construction and the power of stories in shaping societal perceptions. Counter-narratives can help us understand the complex interplay of factors contributing to specific outcomes, as seen in cases where the same facts can lead to different stories. This can inform the development of more effective strategies for addressing various societal issues. In essence, our journey into the realm of police memoirs is an exploration of the untold narratives. This silent dissent reverberates within the echoes of duty, shedding light on this ante-narrative process's cultural tapestry and tellability. Through this lens, we aspire to uncover a significant and often overlooked chapter in the nation's history—a chapter written by those who have walked the thin blue line, confronting external adversaries and the complexities that lie within. To study these premises, this research addresses two crucial questions:

1. *What are the consequences (both intended and unintended) of police officers sharing narratives that contest prevailing norms and practices within law enforcement, particularly regarding public perception, institutional culture, and policy discussions?*

2. *How is silent dissent manifested within the narratives of Indian police officers, and to what extent does it diverge from the overt themes of duty and loyalty?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study has followed a brief survey of literature based on key concepts of the research not only of Indian police literature but also its international relationality. The chapter “Silence, Speech, and the Paradox of the Right to Remain Silent in American Police Interrogation” discusses the right to remain silent in American police interrogation, highlighting the paradoxes and limitations of this right. It provides insights into the challenges and complexities of staying silent within police interactions. (Ainsworth)

The article “What Studying Nonviolent Resistance Taught Me About Writing Stories That Matter” explores the concept of nonviolent resistance and its implications for storytelling. While not directly related to police memoirs, it offers valuable insights into the power of resistance narratives and their potential to shape social and cultural discourses. (Allagood)

The thesis titled “The Hate U Give as Counternarrative: A Rhetorical Site of Competing Frames & the Disruption of Dominant Narratives Through Counter-Storytelling & Homing” explores

the concept of counternarratives and the rhetorical action of counter-storytelling, focusing on the disruption of dominant narratives. It provides a framework for understanding the power and influence of counter-narratives in challenging and reshaping established narratives. (Camacho)

In the article “Police as “Helpers””: Social Studies Content Standards and Dominant Narratives of Law Enforcement,” the authors discuss the dominant narratives of police as a community benefit and the challenges faced in countering these narratives. It offers insights into the potential for counter-narratives to challenge established perceptions of law enforcement. (Kolluri & Young)

In his article ‘The End of “The Right to Remain Silent,”’ Moller discusses the erosion of the right to remain silent within the American legal system. While not directly related to police memoirs, it provides a broader context for understanding the complexities of remaining silent within legal frameworks. (Moller)

The essay “Ecotones of Resistance: The Contested Narrative of the ‘Refugee’ in post-Partition Bengal (1947–71)” elucidates the contested narrative of the 'refugee' in post-Partition Bengal, offering insights into the power dynamics and complexities of resistance narratives within specific historical contexts. (Chakravarty)

The book *Counter-Narratives of Crime and Punishment* compares and contrasts the stories of ex-convicts who are actively involved in criminal behavior with narratives of resistance. While not directly related to police memoirs, it offers valuable insights into counter-narratives potential to challenge established narratives of crime and punishment. (Bamberg & Wipff)

METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used as a theoretical framework for this research to identify the dominant discourses and power structures within Indian police memoirs. This involves analyzing the language, symbols, and themes that perpetuate the traditional narratives of the police. It helps examine how these dominant discourses marginalize or silence alternative perspectives and experiences within the police force and analyze how counter-narratives disrupt and challenge the dominant discourses and how they provide a platform for the expression of silent dissent within the memoirs.

The Poststructuralist Approach to Narrative Theory deconstructs the stability and diversity of meaning in the language and narratives of Indian police memoirs. This involves examining how meaning is constructed, contested, and subverted within the narratives. The poststructuralist approach can be used to interpret the motivations and consequences of police officers who present counter-narratives and how these narratives contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the cultural and sociopolitical context of policing in India. It helps analyze how counter-narratives open up new interpretations and understandings of the experiences and perspectives of police officers and how they challenge the traditional canonicity and tellability of police memoirs. By applying these

theoretical frameworks, the research can provide a deeper understanding of the power relations, language, and meaning construction within Indian police memoirs and how counter-narratives disrupt and challenge the dominant narratives, offering a platform for expressing silent dissent within the police force.

SILENT DISSENT IN POLICE MEMOIRS

Police memoirs that resist traditional narratives subvert expectations by portraying officers who deviate from the expected norms, thereby challenging the established image of law enforcement. Dissent often revolves around an individual officer's clash with institutional practices, as well as the resistant act of the accused or the criminal outlaws, the complaining family, an insurgent mob, and the list goes on and on. The practical police face the lacuna of how they are trained and what they actually face. On top of all those professional obstacles, there is the hierarchical chain of command: For instance, I still remember that after controlling a communal riot in Varanasi, I was summoned by the chief minister (CM), Shri Kamalapati Tripathi at the time, himself a local. He was sitting on the floor and taking minute details from me about the riot which had recently taken place while his attendant was giving him a shave. And after some time, the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, telephoned him asking for my suspension, as I had taken strong action to control the riot in the CM's constituency. (Sharma, 12)

Such circumstantial encounters with political leaders are recurring in their narrative of how that cause puppeteering turns in their professional lives. Memoirs may expose instances where personal values conflict with the broader institutional framework, sparking resistance. Resistance emerges through officers' reflections on ethical dilemmas, moral ambiguities, and instances where personal principles clash with prescribed codes of conduct, presenting a critique of the system. Some memoirs serve as whistleblowing, where officers expose corruption, misconduct, or systemic flaws within the police force, challenging the status quo and advocating for accountability. Memoirs may articulate dissent by shedding light on systemic injustices within the law enforcement system, addressing issues such as discrimination, abuse of power, and lack of transparency. Dissent can be directed towards leadership within the police force, with memoirs highlighting ineffective leadership, manipulation, or decisions that compromise ethical standards. Resistance extends beyond institutional critique to encompass broader cultural and societal norms. Memoirs may question the role of law enforcement in shaping and perpetuating societal inequalities. Officers expressing dissent may reveal personal struggles, internal conflicts, and emotional tolls associated with their roles, humanizing the narrative and challenging idealized representations of policing. Dissent within memoirs may present alternative perspectives on justice, questioning whether the prevailing legal frameworks genuinely serve the greater good and suggesting alternative visions of a just society. The very structure and style of the memoir can be a form of dissent. Unconventional narrative structures, non-linear storytelling,

and experimental forms challenge established conventions, signaling resistance. Memoirs may align with civil rights movements, expressing solidarity with calls for justice, equity, and police reform, contributing to the broader socio-political discourse. Memoirs expressing dissent may aspire to influence policy changes and institutional reforms by bringing attention to systemic issues and contributing to a more extensive dialogue on improving law enforcement practices.

MOTIVATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

The exploration of motivations and consequences in police memoirs is essential for understanding why officers share their experiences and the far-reaching effects of their narrative choices. Motivations provide insights into the driving forces behind the decision to document and share personal stories. At the same time, consequences encompass the impact (both intended and unintended) of these narratives on individuals, institutions, and the broader sociopolitical landscape. There are some conjectures implied in a varied corpus of such narratives, such as some officers are motivated to write memoirs as a form of catharsis, using the process of reflection and storytelling to come to terms with the challenges and complexities they faced during their careers. A desire for positive change within the police force can motivate officers to share their experiences. Memoirs become a platform for advocating reforms, addressing systemic issues, and challenging the status quo. Motivations can stem from a desire to leave behind a personal legacy or contribute to the mentorship of future generations of law enforcement professionals. Officers may see their experiences as valuable lessons for others. The motivation to document one's experiences contributes to the historical record of law enforcement. Officers may feel responsible for preserving their unique perspectives for future generations. Officers get their motivation to write memoirs as a response to criticism, controversies, or public scrutiny. This allows them to present their story and shape public perceptions.

Regarding the consequences, police memoirs can significantly influence public perception of law enforcement. The implications of these narratives extend to shaping how society views the police, either reinforcing established notions or challenging stereotypes. These memoirs can impact the institutional culture within police forces. Depending on the nature of the narratives, the consequences may include fostering a culture of openness and reflection or facing resistance from within the institution. The consequences of police memoirs may extend to policy changes and institutional reforms. The narratives can contribute to discussions surrounding policing practices, ethics, and the need for systemic changes. Officers may face personal and professional repercussions for sharing their experiences. The consequences may involve criticism from peers, challenges to credibility, or even legal implications, depending on the content of the memoirs. The narratives in police memoirs become part of the larger sociopolitical discourse. The consequences may include shaping public

debates, influencing academic research, and contributing to societal discussions on justice and law enforcement.

Understanding the motivations and consequences involves examining the delicate balance between authors' intentions in sharing their stories and the broader impact these narratives have on various stakeholders. Exploring the motivations and consequences brings forth ethical considerations surrounding the responsibility of officers in sharing their experiences. It prompts reflection on the potential implications of these narratives on individuals and institutions. Motivations and consequences are not isolated; they represent a dynamic interplay within the narrative landscape. Authors navigate the potential implications of their motivations, and the reception of their narratives influences future motivations. The motivations and consequences in police memoirs contribute to the complex interplay between personal expression, institutional dynamics, and societal impact. Unraveling these threads enhances the understanding of why officers share their experiences and the multifaceted repercussions of their narrative choices.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE AND POSTSTRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS

Unlike other forms of life-writings, police memoir is equipped with the Foucauldian toolbox of truth, power, and knowledge. The axis of truth here is a composition of autobiographical truth and legal facts. The power dynamic itself is self-explanatory. In this case, the Police is an institution that represents the Repressive State Apparatus of its geo-political body wielding the hand of control. The sense of power draws a line of societal antagonism between police and criminals and creates a new source of knowledge established by the more powerful side to the relatively lesser other. The narrative of criminology, hence, varies on the 'reported' truth. By means of the reliability of the text, this genre itself is narrative non-fiction, and the Oxford Centre for Life-writing suggests, "Life-writing includes every possible way of telling a life-story, from biography and autobiography, through letters and memoir, to bio-fiction, blogs, and social media such as Tweets and Instagram stories." These narratives are the intersection of memoir and fiction since the fictional quality comes from the roleplay of memory and censorship. Reliability from the readers' perspective is subject to their value judgment and submission to the narrative projection:

Determining whether a narrator is unreliable is not just an innocent descriptive statement but a subjectively tinged value-judgment or projection governed by the normative presuppositions and moral convictions of the critic, which as a rule remain unacknowledged. Critics concerned with unreliable narrators recuperate textual inconsistencies by relating them to accepted cultural models. (Nünning, 2008, p. 40)

The meaning of the narratives goes hand in hand with the cultural sense-making process. While interacting with the authors or even in their self-explanatory snippets in the larger narrative, it is clearly observable that, in most cases, the motivation behind writing was to let people know their

side of the story or the other side of policing where they have written a chronological account of their lives, especially etching those events that act as permanent whistle-blowing in the police ears. They even stated that these were the haunting riddles in their mind that made them dig more into the subject, and their life research comes forth as glimpses in the chapters of their memoirs. Research-Based Policing (RBP) is a novel approach for India, which technically goes by the term “Evidence-Based Policing” (EBP) first surged in the U.K., and the U.S. is now earning credibility here as well. However, the episteme of policing in India is still under colonial shadow, and the memoirs are a great vehicle of meta-narration for the historical transition of Indian policing. Each officer's experience is unique as they conduct their own research for their professional/ institutional investigation. Later, they tell their unique stories in a book of memoirs; although the triggering points in their narration might sound similar, their ‘tellabilities’ are different. In the acknowledgment of his book Sharma says, “When I was first thinking of writing my memoir, I was unable to make up my mind to do so, as this thought came to my mind after about twelve years of my superannuation.” (Sharma, 137). Throughout his book he can be seen to repeat this in several ways, “This memoir is a recollection of events that have shaped my professional journey.” (Sharma, 14). The author of this study, Mr. Lodha states, “In my long career, I have had a number of thrilling encounters, almost all them etched firmly in my memory.” (Lodha 14). To address the reliability issue he has included a statement in a form of disclaimer:

I would like to remind readers that this book is a work of non-fiction. The views and opinions expressed in the book are only mine and do not reflect or represent the views and opinions held by the Government of India. It is based on actual events that took place in my life and drawn from a variety of sources, including published material. It reflects my present recollection of experiences over time as truthfully as memory permits and can be verified by research. (Lodha, 15)

Poststructuralist narratology questions the objectivity or stability of various “interpretive structures, including those related to narrative” (Lewis) and challenges the traditional structuralist approach to narrative, which focuses on the formal elements of a story and their relationships. It provides a thick description that delivers detailed accounts of the context and discerns meaning of the narrative. The studied memoirs are the detailed accounts of the police authors and the tales of their lives. The epistemology of the genre in the twenty-first century does not instigate insurgence or Police Reform with direct triggers, but their storytelling harnesses a literary touch of that detailed matrix of the system that stimulates the passive resistance.

CULTURAL CANONICITY AND TELLABILITY

In the postmodern time of canonical deconstruction, the Euro-centric canon has diverged, but in the canonicity of autobiographies and/or life-writings, where does the genre of police memoirs stand? The targeted readership of this genre is those who aspire to be civil servants and those who are

to their job questioning the operational grey zone of ethical policing, I strongly believe that this memoir can also serve as a document for young police officers to learn how, even with a lack of resources, one can successfully perform his or her duty, if the intent is right. (Sharma, 14). On the similar context Lodha puts his opinion:

This book is about my journey as an IPS officer. I have truthfully recounted my experiences that helped me become both a better police officer and a better human being. I have had a lot of adventures along the way and, luckily, have been able to learn from them. I am nowhere close to the legends the IPS boasts, nor am I old enough to write an autobiography, but I am hopeful that this memoir of sorts will give the readers a better insight into the life of an IPS officer. Young civil servants, particularly those in the IPS, might find a lesson or two in the chapters. (Lodha, 11)

Understanding the cultural canonicity and tellability within the context of police memoirs involves exploring how these narratives become embedded in the cultural fabric, shaping perceptions, and contributing to the broader discourse on law enforcement. Cultural canonicity refers to recognizing and accepting certain narratives as influential, representative, or authoritative within a particular cultural context. Tellability, on the other hand, pertains to the qualities that make a story engaging, compelling, and worthy of being shared or transmitted.

Police memoirs can potentially shape a society's collective memory and historical consciousness. Contributing to the cultural canonicity, these narratives become part of a larger narrative about the nation's policing history. The stories told within police memoirs contribute to the construction of societal perceptions about law enforcement, crime, justice, and the role of police officers. The cultural canonicity of these narratives reflects their impact on shaping cultural attitudes and values. Memoirs that gain cultural canonicity legitimize particular narratives about policing. They become authoritative sources that influence public opinion, policymaking, and discussions about the nature of law enforcement.

The tellability of police memoirs lies in their ability to engage readers or audiences. These memoirs' narrative elements, storytelling techniques, and emotional resonance contribute to their tellability. Memoirs that successfully humanize police officers, presenting them as complex individuals with struggles and triumphs, enhance tellability. Readers are drawn to narratives that transcend stereotypes and offer a more nuanced understanding of the profession. The tellability of police memoirs often involves a delicate balance between creating narrative tension and providing resolution. Engaging storytelling keeps readers invested, while resolution offers a sense of closure or understanding. The interplay between cultural canonicity and tellability influences the broader cultural impact of police memoirs. Those narratives that achieve both recognition as canonical and tellability are more likely to influence public discourse and cultural attitudes toward law enforcement. Police memoirs that endure and remain relevant over time contribute to the longevity of their cultural

influence. Their ability to resonate across generations enhances their cultural canonicity. Cultural canonicity and tellability also depend on the diversity of perspectives presented within the memoirs. Narratives that reflect various experiences contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of policing and enhance cultural canonicity. Understanding cultural canonicity and tellability in police memoirs goes beyond examining individual narratives. It involves recognizing the collective impact of these stories on societal perceptions, historical consciousness, and the ongoing discourse about law enforcement. By exploring the qualities that make these narratives culturally significant and engaging, researchers can gain insights into how police memoirs contribute to a nation's cultural and literary landscape.

DECODING STYLISTIC CHOICES AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Analyzing stylistic choices and self-censorship within police memoirs is crucial for unraveling the intricacies of narrative construction, the negotiation of institutional boundaries, and the nuanced expressions of dissent. Stylistic choices encompass the deliberate use of language, narrative techniques, and structural elements. At the same time, self-censorship refers to the conscious or unconscious decisions made by authors to withhold certain information or perspectives. Both aspects contribute significantly to the overall texture and meaning of the narratives presented in these memoirs.

Examining the narrative voice and tone reveals the author's attitude toward their own experiences and the policing profession. Stylistic choices in voice and tone can range from objective and detached to subjective and emotionally charged, influencing how readers interpret the narrative. The use of imagery and symbolism adds depth to the storytelling. Decoding these elements helps uncover hidden meanings, cultural references, and metaphors that contribute to the overall impact of the narrative. Stylistic choices related to the temporal structure of the memoir, such as the use of flashbacks or nonlinear storytelling, can influence the reader's understanding of the chronology of events and emphasize certain aspects of the narrative. Delving into the language and rhetoric employed in police memoirs reveals the author's persuasion strategies. The choice of words, rhetorical devices, and linguistic nuances can convey authority, resistance, or ambivalence. They have lucidly written about the censorship while depicting their story. In Lodha's words, "I have deliberately chosen not to write about sensational cases or encounters with criminals. Nor have I gone into the technicalities of policing." (Lodha, 11). Sharma testifies his self-censorship as follows:

Some names have been changed to protect their identity, since they have been my informers, and for some, a generation has gone by, and it would not be fair to their children and grandchildren to see them in a bad light. (Sharma, 14)

Identifying what is left unsaid or omitted within the narrative involves understanding self-censorship. Authors may withhold information due to legal constraints, personal considerations, or

institutional loyalty, shaping the boundaries of permissible discourse. Self-censorship may emerge when authors grapple with ethical dilemmas regarding disclosing sensitive information. Understanding the moral considerations that influence self-censorship adds layers to the analysis. Police memoirs operate within the framework of institutional norms and expectations. Authors may self-censor to align their narratives with prevailing institutional ideologies, avoiding narratives that could be deemed detrimental to the reputation of the police force. Authors may also engage in self-censorship based on considerations of their intended audience. Authors may tailor their narratives to align with audience expectations, whether writing for a general readership, law enforcement professionals, or policymakers.

The integration of stylistic choices and self-censorship allows researchers to unveil the subtext within police memoirs. Decoding the interplay between what is expressed stylistically and what remains concealed sheds light on the complexities of the narratives. Stylistic choices and self-censorship contribute to the overall narrative contestation within police memoirs. Authors navigate the tension between expressing dissent and adhering to institutional constraints, shaping the contours of the narrative. Understanding how authors exercise agency in making stylistic choices and engaging in self-censorship provides insights into the power dynamics. It illuminates the degree of control authors exert over their narratives. In decoding stylistic choices and self-censorship in police memoirs, researchers understand how authors navigate the intricate terrain between personal expression and institutional loyalty. Unraveling these layers enriches the analysis, offering insights into the complexities of narrative construction within the context of law enforcement.

CONCLUSION

In traversing the labyrinthine corridors of Indian police memoirs, this study has sought to illuminate the often-understudied realm of silent dissent that flows beneath the surface of narratives traditionally associated with duty, loyalty, and preserving the status quo. Through a bricolage of memoirs spanning regions and historical periods, the juxtaposition of silence and debate within the narratives of Indian police officers has been revealed as a nuanced layer of critique and reflection. The counter-narratives unearthed within these memoirs serve as a powerful catalyst for challenging prevailing norms and practices within law enforcement. Corruption, institutional flaws, and ethical dilemmas emerge as focal points, punctuating the narrative landscape with instances that question established paradigms. The voices of dissenting officers resonate as echoes against the uniformed backdrop, disrupting the expected harmony and contributing to a broader discourse on the need for reform. Critical discourse analysis and the poststructuralist approach to narrative theory have been instrumental in deciphering the motivations that propel police officers to share their experiences. The consequences of their narrative choices reverberate within the larger sociopolitical discourse of the nation and its policing episteme. Motivations range from a desire for catharsis and reflection to a

commitment to advocacy, reform, and documenting a historical legacy. The implications extend beyond the individual memoirists to influence public perception, institutional culture, and policy discussions. The findings of this study offer a profound contribution to the understanding of police memoirs as a complex and multifaceted genre. Decoding stylistic choices, temporal dimensions, and self-censorship have not only unveiled the silent dissent embedded within these narratives but have also provided a means to bring forth the nation's significant and untold history. The ante-narrative process, marked by cultural canonicity and reliability, becomes a key to deciphering the complexities of law enforcement and its role in shaping societal values. As we conclude this exploration, it is evident that police memoirs stand as more than personal reflections; they are historical artifacts that bridge the gap between individual experiences and collective narratives.

The selected memoirs, including *Biting the Bullet: Memoirs of a Police Officer, Bihar Diaries: The True Story of How Bihar's Most Dangerous Criminal Was Caught*, and *Life in the Uniform: Adventures of an IPS Officer in Bihar*, have served as indispensable windows into the contemporary corpus of cultural studies. Their narratives add layers to the understanding of police storytelling, enriching our comprehension of a profession often confined to stereotypes. In the intricate dance of words and silences, these memoirs beckon us to question, reflect, and reshape our perceptions. As we decode the narratives of those who have walked the thin blue line, we contribute not only to academic discourse but also to a collective reckoning with the complexities and contradictions within the realm of Indian law enforcement. The untold stories, the silent dissent, and the nuanced reflections embedded within police memoirs serve as a testament to the power of storytelling in shaping our understanding of the past and influencing the trajectory of the future.

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Shaping Tomorrow: Unravelling the Social Construction of Youth in the Digital Age with special reference to the series *Made in Heaven*

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For a sustainable and peaceful environment to live-in it is necessary that every country should stay at peace and understanding by sharing the values of brotherhood. India being a country known for its uniqueness in diversity is one such place where people are bound to live with secular thoughts. India's culture shares a broad and complex ideology that encompasses shared beliefs, values, customs, behavior, traditions, languages and art and social institutions. Culture and traditions in our country is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of forefathers which is transmitted from one generation to another through learning. Indians often share common beliefs and values which include religious beliefs, ethical principles, and moral standards. Anyhow it is unfortunate to note that amidst all of these, the country still witnesses distressing issues regarding caste, color, culture, creed, religious faith, power, gender and so on.

While India has a rich tradition of religious and cultural diversity, it still witnesses instances of caste discrimination and the social stigma it brings throughout its history. Efforts to dissolve such discrimination in India involve various initiatives at the government, community, and individual levels. On a global level, when it comes to practicing sustainable developmental goals, destructed peace and harmony will affect the entire ecosystem of brotherhood in the planet. Customs and traditions which are related to religious practices and rituals also need to be well maintained and properly practiced with much patience keeping in mind not to hurt anybody's feelings. They can include ceremonies, celebrations, and rites of a particular faith or community. It's pathetic to note that it is in the name of such few practices, injustices like honor killing and untouchability still exists in a country like India where its citizens claim to be secular in thought.

Visual media is one source which influences the public in framing judgments regarding any such social practices. Media today occupies a major role in society and its ubiquitous presence signifies the enormous potential it has for informing people about everyday issues. Media discourse is the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. Movies and series from visual media has reached and shaped the changing political, social and economic thoughts of today's youth influencing them to nurture themselves for a better understanding and better life ahead.

One such media production popular in movie site is *Made in Heaven* directed by Zoya Akhtar which revolves around the rich and elite class of Delhi focusing on the issues which are often closeted in the name of protecting the honor or royalty of a family. Problems like dowry, homosexuality, the search of a 'pure' bride, beauty pageants to look for brides, honor killings, molestation, questionable Indian customs and the class divide of India can be seen in the series to be dealt with the clients and their idea of marriage. The series streaming in Amazon Prime portrays different characters chosen from different walks of life showing the ugly realities behind the Big Fat Indian wedding. Marriage being an inevitable institution of custom prevalent in the culture of India, has been a topic of discussion since time immemorial. Customs and traditions related to marriage such as dowry as one among them has always been a problematic target even now. *Made in Heaven* portrays such topics unhesitant with bold face to Indian viewers showcasing the ugly side of marriage, especially which is prevalent only in India. Nevertheless, it largely garnered positive reviews from critics and viewers alike, and was mostly appreciated for how it handled political themes with a great amount of sensitivity and nuance with continued conversations on topics that are usually brushed under the carpet within most Indian households.

From sexism and misogyny, to conversations around queerness, same-sex marriages, colorism, class and caste differences, and the morally ambiguous lives led by those in the wedding planning business, *Made in Heaven* intended to serve as a criticism of the concept of the marriages in India and succeeded to an extent. The narrative not only addresses these issues but also leaves much space for the viewers for contemplation and self-interrogation about the society, their identity, customs, beliefs and marriage as an institution. The clients of the elite class portrayed in the series, even with their education and privileges, restrict the meaning of marriage to mutual concessions and compromises in the name of honour, money and class.

Mainstream Bollywood, as well as other Indian film industries have been actively contributing towards Trans phobia over the past few decades by depicting Trans genders in an extreme disgraceful manner. For the benefit of artistic merit, even the respectful representation of transgender usually involved cisgender artists. The material condition of the transgender communities remained unchanged when all the praise and applause were grabbed by the actors. It is in this context where *Made in Heaven* becomes different by casting Dr Trinetra Halder Gummaraju for the role of Meher Choudhary, a post-op transgender woman who works as a production executive within the series. In the episode *The Heart Skipped a Beat*, her character plays a proactive role in correcting all the actively and passively passed casteist remarks by others.

Being a savarna ally, Meher Choudhry calls out Tara Khanna (played by Shobitha) for referring Pallavi Menke and her fiancé's savarna wedding ceremonies involving "pheras" as the main wedding and the Buddhist wedding as "Pallavi's wedding". Meher stresses on the fact that how important it is

to pay extreme attention while such statements are being made. Despite such bold portrayal of story lines and characters go along the mainstream Indian cinema in order to change certain attitude, it has to be scrutinized whether the Indian perspective about topics like these have attained the change it required or not. If at all the intention of the makers of the series was to critique Indian big budget weddings, it has to be questioned why that the modest Dalit wedding was only dedicated for just half time of the episode in a series where four magnificent nuptial ceremonies were showcased. Hence, when Menke's wedding which actually dealt with the theme of casteism — a social evil that has been plaguing Indian society for centuries — was wrapped up in less than half-an-hour, the ultimate take away from it was that the show inherently remains Savarna-centric. Pallavi Menke might have been a Dalit character, but she was still played by Radhika Apte who is a Maharashtrian Brahmin. Therefore, even if the stories of Dalit individuals are being included in popular culture, Dalit voices continue to remain absent. Not only is it needed for people of the DBA (Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi) community to talk about their own struggles, but also for DBA actors to be casted for such roles.

Beside these facts, issues regarding skin tone and caste in Indian society are often interconnected. Indian's preference for lighter skin tone stems from their inherent thoughts on casteism as well as Euro-centric ideologies in their mentalities. The fact that *Made in Heaven* overlooked the issue of colourism solely focusing the whole episode on casteism is another example of the makers just showing savarna ignorance apart from being savarna-centric. Nevertheless, portraying a Buddhist wedding as a homage to B R Ambedhkar on a mainstream Bollywood platform has to be considered a definite win but casting Radhika Apte, a Maharashtrian Brahmin to play the role was quite unfortunate though. Having a background in a privileged section of the society, most of the content writers get influenced by their roots. It's high time that Indian viewers do have the logic sense to differentiate right and wrong and empathize with the larger social and political reality of the society. If not, this only helps creators get away with inauthentic and problematic representations that escape criticism because they're hidden behind progressive jargon.

In a feminist perspective, the show also unveils characters like Faiza, Tara and Jazz as sexually independent ladies who are actually even more than that. Faiza, a character whom the viewer is unaware whether to pity, to sympathise with or to be angry at. Jazz, the sly girl from Dwarka, with her struggles of fitting in the South-Delhi elite crowd and being the sole bread earner of the family, is strong and vulnerable at the same time. Tara's character has so much depth where she undergoes identity crisis along with struggles of fitting in. Being born in a middle class family and then settling into a rich class creates a nuanced character in her. She was taught by her mother that her beauty was a tool which she can use as a weapon to get married into a rich family circle in order to achieve a better family life as well.

Karan, Tara's business partner is portrayed as a gay character who is not ashamed to acknowledging his sexuality though his life is full of 'shame' and secrets. The series also shows the struggle that he had to undergo in the name of family love as he is emotionally blackmailed by his mother who insists him to lead a so called 'normal life' by marrying a woman. It shows how certain culture is deeply rooted in Indian minds where normal family mindsets are not ready to accept individual choices no matter their children suffocate out of their orientation. Though Karan acknowledges his privileges of being an educated upper middle class person, his realization when he had to spend time in jail inspite of his privileged background, is one of the turning points in both his life and the series. In a scene where the 'mehendi wali' is offered money to keep silence for being sexually assaulted by a powerful rich man, Zoya Akhtar truly pin points the dirty politics prevalent in the country where how the powerless are exploited by the powerful. The entire situation echoes the power imbalances that women are often victim to. The way Adil, who plays the role of Tara's husband, treats the people who are of lower class is a telling of his class prejudices as well.

It is at this point we tend to question the truthfulness of what we visualize through media and other platforms. Most of the lives shown or publicized in social media tend to have a curtain behind their photos and reels posted. We tend to believe marriage as a holy tradition but the series Made in Heaven has made our eyes open to see the true color that certain culture holds in Indian culture. The lives of the characters, when viewed on screen seem to be different from ours. Class or caste or color or ideological differences might be the reason behind it. The series has anyhow succeeded in raising questions in the minds of the viewers which undoubtedly are matters to be discussed. Is marriage, our identities, our beliefs, the social conditioning, those cultures are as holy as our upbringing has taught us to believe? Are the customs and culture that what makes marriage a marriage? If not, what makes a marriage? Is it really made in heaven?

Casteism in India is a deep-rooted social issue that has persisted for centuries. While there have been efforts to address and eradicate caste based discrimination, it continues to sprout in the country especially when it comes to marriage and job opportunities. Despite being constitutionally abolished, practices like untouchability persist in some parts of the country. The DBA community still faces challenges in the form of discrimination and exclusion from social and economic activities. Limited access to education, employment opportunities, social stigma and biased treatment are some of the barriers faced by such marginalized communities. Economic inequality is yet another challenge faced by them where in some cases certain traditional caste roles often dictate occupation leading to such disparities limiting social mobility. Though governance policies like reservations are implemented to address such historical injustices in order to promote social equality, however these policies often face criticism and controversy with debates about their effectiveness, fairness and potential for creating new forms of discrimination. Stigma that still exist when it comes to inter-caste

marriages has been leading to social ostracism and in some extreme cases violence is shed against the couples who choose to marry outside their caste. Cultural practices and stereotyping associated with caste can only perpetuate discriminatory attitudes only to reinforce the already existing social hierarchies. Hence addressing casteism requires a multi-faceted approach that includes legal reforms, social awareness campaigns, educational initiatives and efforts to promote inclusive economic development. Though progress has been made, it's unfortunate to note that these matters still remain as a topic of discussion and for the sustainable development Goals to be implemented in the globe, it is important to eradicate all such injustices happening around us. Since all the 17 integrated SDGs recognize that action in one area will affect the outcome in others, it is also equally necessary to ensure that progression in the country must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Only then one can ensure peace, prosperity and well-being in the entire globe and SDG can be well put into practice.

Exploration of Hybridity: An Analysis of beauty standards in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Americanah"

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Abstract

Hybridity is the exploration of merging of cultures in common contemporary world. The world one lives in today has cultural, linguistic and racial hybridity, which affects the life of every human being. Immigrants live a life full of contradictions, but they come under a single ideology to live a life of confutations. The woman who undergoes hybridity as a subject always tries to achieve better than a man. Migrant women experience multiple cultural hybridity. This is specially experienced by Postcolonial African women characters. Hybridity enables to create new forms of transcultural images within the sector of patriarchy and misogyny. This paper interrogates the tortuousness of hybridity and the concept of beauty. In the novel *Americanah*, there have been proper formulations of hybridity with respect to sociopolitical freedom and a sovereignty to analyze oneself. The physical beauty of an African woman is strictly based on the beauty standards and beauty norms, laid by the white standard race. The whites believe in oppressing and under estimating the beauty of African's according to their race. The dorminant group enables the immigrant group to follow the rules and accept the norms of their country. This in turn creates a low self-esteem and hatredness among the immigrants. Those people suffer an inferiority complex as these norms and rules are unattainable by the Africans. The character suffers an identity crisis and later recovers from that, understanding cause for it. This study reveals the negative effect of cultural hybridity and beauty standards of the society.

Key words: Beauty Standards, cultural hybridity, transcultural, patriarchy, misogyny.

Introduction

Today's society is influenced by globalization, it has fragmented societies and cultures. This cultural influence has led to an identity crisis. An individual is often affected by individual identity crisis, which is a result of intricate merging of religion, language and societal scenario. This creates an isolated identity crisis which begins to imbricate on the other to achieve a amicable balance between individual identities and multiple identities an identity is a key element which bonds an individual to his/ her ancestral origin. This also helps the person have an individual identity or a group identity. Social civilization sprung on the key element of this foundation. Research in social science

and humanities have found that globalization, peregrination and colonialism have brought in developments in cultural and movements on identities.

African literature has tried to explore the diasporic life of African writers. Through their writings, the African writers were able to commemorate, their feelings untold both internal and external which subjugated their feelings of identity crisis. One can see that Novels of Adichie and Achebe portray the deft creation for arbitrary of identities. The Novel *Americanah* by Adichie transcends the readers into a trans- cultural phenomenon of modern age. African writings are no more confined to African continent; it has become a commodity which is available both inside and outside Africa. The novels of Adichie explore the theme of hybridity, alienation and identity crisis. Both trans- cultural complexities and socio – political issues are exhibited in Adichie’s novels.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an incipient Nigerian writer who with her exceptional writing skill has created a space for her in the Nigeria’s past and present history. Her artistic ability is keenly visualized while portraying the Nigerian civil war in her *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). On looking keenly into her literary inquisition one can find the plight of woeful Nigerians trapped in the oppressive radicalized America in the novel *Americanah* (2013). Adichie’s narrative style is similar to Chinua Achebe’s novelistic opus. Achebe’s artistic commitment to the socio cultural issues can be seen in the Nigerian project *A man of the people* (1966) *No longer at ease* (1960). Adichie is a transcultural writer as Achebe has a flair towards the global cultural tolerance in *Things fall Apart* (1958), Adichie portrays her global inter- cultural relationship in the novel *Americanah*. Dagnino has described transcultural writers as “imaginative writers, who by choice or by life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, live transnational experiences in multiple cultures/geographies/territories, expose themselves to diversity and nurture plural, flexible identities”(1). Dagnino comments that transcultural writers, writing are in the pattern of dialogic; this dialogue can be used across cultures and beyond borders to engage in communication and also to adhere to peace and harmony.

Hybridity according to Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is “A thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture.” The word hybrid had its origin during the 17th century to represent off-springs of two different groups, but in the 18th century it began to describe off springs of two different culture or races. After postcolonial influence this term resulted into the relationship between colonizer and the colonized. Their idea was to focus on the issues of the immigrants, Trans-culturalism, diasporic, and multi cultured sects. Post colonialists also focused on third space hybridity, which paved way towards cultural hybridity. This idea had been told by Homi K Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Bhabha defines Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, it’s shifting forces and fixities; it is the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal,

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (p. 112). Hybridity according to Bhabha tells the liaison between the colonizer and the colonized. All relationships are like two sides of a coin, it has understanding, independence and it also has culture in between. Culture which means culture of two different races. Homi Bhabhi addressed that both sides have a negative impact, as one analyses the power of the colonizer.

Americanah narrates the story of a young Nigerian women names Ifemelu who departs to America hoping of a better social and educational platform. But unfortunately, after migrating to America she had to face lot of trails and threats. She is neither able to accept the new culture or leave the reminiscence of her culture. She tries to assimilate but suffers alienation like the black sufferers in America. The discrimination created by the Americans, provokes a sense of belongingness to her mother country. Adichie here portrays the complexities and traumas suffered by the two Nigerians Ifemelu and Obinze, who standards as a symbolic representation of diasporic life. The two characters undergo obnoxious situations when they are in love, to escape from this they shift to America and England for a better livelihood.

In America Ifemelu being a well- educated and creative girl begins to write a blog about her lifestyle and also about the racial discrimination and gender consciousness faced by the black Immigrants in America. But while she came back to Nigeria her friends called her “Americanah” and annoy her as she seems to be very civilized to the standards of American culture, she seems to be an alien in Nigerian culture. “Americanah” is a novel where African diasporic experience is merged with cultural hybridity. One can easily relate the perspectives and views of two sufferers in a realistic sense.

During the British reign in Africa, the indirect rule system of the British brought in various changes in the cultural practices of the African community. The British were not happy with the cultural practices of African’s and they did not agree these practices as a representation of their culture. According to Hamm, Smaandych (2005) and White (2001), is a form of cultural imperialism where one culture is dominated by another by deliberate policy or technological superiority. Due to this the African culture had to undergo a shift in their cultural scenario. The British viewed the African practices as a taboo; they assessed and evaluated the African societies’ using the criterion of the British. They also maintained an indigenous scale of evaluation for the immigrants of America, which led to a cultural shock and trauma amidst the African community. In today’s world as all human beings interact with a divergent group, it often results in the transfer of culture, which influences the cultural identity of the person. As people are exposed to too many intercultural rendezvous in the contemporary world, a person’s identity is often challenges as it faces a change or discourse. Identities

according to Stuart Hall, “are a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”.

Similar merging of language and culture is evident in the life of the character Ifemelu. The character is in a plight between double-edged sword. If she talks in a Nigerian accent she will be looked down by the American's, at the same time Nigerian's will not assimilate her accent. Her American accent becomes a shock for the Nigerian's and they would say “she is an American”, which may not be recognized as a compliment. Hybridity here is presented with a negative connotation as cultural and linguistic hybridity has a unique margin merging with each other.

Ifemelu's plan to drop her American accent was not accidental; as it was a conscious decision brought by the conversation with a telemarketer. It had been three years since she moved to U.S., and now she had an American accent which was complemented, for which she thanked him. “Only after she hung up did she begin to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thinking him, for crafting his words “You sounds American” into a garland that she hung around her own neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?” (215). One is able to acknowledge that after moving to united states she has a hybridity of American and African culture, but in this she feels she has lost her Nigerian identity.

Even in the last section of the novel the first thing her Nigerian friends remarks to her upon her return is “ Americanah! Ranyinudo teased her often. ‘You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!’” (475-476). This she could have taken it as a pastime joke but Ifemelu grew up in Nigeria, now that she has lived in America for some time and so she feels a strange space of hybridity. She feels that she is neither in American culture nor into Nigerian, she is lost with time, though the world had a great technological development, in communication and transport there was a cultural suppression experienced by the protagonist.

One can also see that Ifemelu is categorized in a cultural group that can be viewed as per global arena on the basis of her cultural traits and physical appearance. The concept of beauty is marked by the beauty standards given by the colonial ideologies that suppress or eradicate other perceptions of beauty of different cultures, especially in this novel one finds in with African culture. Philosophers and scientists ranked the race according to their evolutionary scale. The ranking was done according to Linnaeus' taxonomy in which human beings are placed at the top as they are superior of God's creation. Further it is sub classified according to their lineage, which is classified according to physical characteristics such as colour, facial features, hair etc. According to this classification, the Europeans were placed at the top and the African (black people) at the bottom, more close to the species of animals, while the middle was occupied by the Asians and the red American's.

Physical and mental traits accompanied this grouping with the European described as hopeful, the dark Asiatic sad and rigid, the red American irascible and the black Negro calm and lazy (Smedley, 1999, p. 164). Linnaeus description of the race was further substantiated by Meiners (Isaac, 2006, p. 105) who added ugliness and beauty to the black and white descriptions respectively, emphasising on the ugliness of the black people as an indicator of a deeper intellectual, moral and social primitivism and depravity thus promulgating institutionalised racism. Gobineau (1915) carries the argument on race disparity further by claiming that the white races are endowed with extraordinary energetic intelligence and a remarkable instinct for life and order (p. 207), which is unknown to the black man.

In Adichie's *Americanah*, there is identity crisis which causes colour prejudices, which has seen between black and white. Racial discrimination still exists in America, which haunts the life of migrant Africans who aspire dreams to be in America. When it comes to the term 'beauty' women are the people who are affected more than men. Bartky (1990) explains that women are associated more closely with their bodies than men and are disproportionately for how they look. They are always under constant pressure to correct their bodies to conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of the time, and above all, to gain social acceptability. Thus when women engage in practices that give them the "ideal" feminine body, it is principally because an inferior status has been ascribed to that body (p. 71).

Black women are shamed for their skin colour, hair and bodily appearance; they are treated as inferior and grisly. They are also judged for their intellectual and professional ability. Thus black women undergo a embarrass situation, they are unable to rescue from their original culture or are they able to align with the alien American culture. The colour black is considered as ugly not beautiful, as per the novel. The colour black is considered as inferior and white as superior. There has always been superiority between white and black, where white race seems to be superior. Distinctions of aesthetic value, 'beautiful/ugly', have always been central to the way racism divides the world into binary oppositions in its adjudication of human worth. (Mercer 1987, 35).

Americanah is a novel which explores the politics of beauty; it has also raced the conversations of American society. Saah (2016), offers a critique on racism in American culture, pointing out that ignorance, preconceived ideas about, and classification of a particular group of people, especially people of colour, pressures them to change their beliefs and attitudes to keep in line with the "owners" of the ideas. One can see how racial constructions of beauty affect the migrants self-esteem, and the difficulty they face to overcome it. Clark's (2013) review of the novel brings to light the different kinds of oppression, gender roles, the layers of history it takes to construct national, racial and personal identities and the idea of home. Appearance is the key element in creating identity. One can see this in the appearance of the character Ginika. In Nigeria, Ginika was seen as the most

beautiful girl as she “had caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead Afro-like” (55-56).

Ginika had an appearance that resembled the beauty standards of west; she was praised by her friends for her beauty. But after she migrated to America, she was insulted by her friends for her physical appearance, she is remarked as “pork” (124). Ginika changes her appearance according to the needs of American culture. As Ifemelu notices “Ginika was much thinner, half her old size, and her head looked bigger, balanced on a long neck that brought to mind a vague, exotic animal” (122). She notices that Ginika has lost her weight and also straightened her hair with “blond streaks shiny in the sunlight” (123). Ginika changes completely to fit into the standards of American culture, but in turn loses her identity. Ginika says to Ifemelu that she was praised for her skin colour in Nigeria but now she was mocked in America for being “half- caste”,

Ginika narrates her experience to Ifemelu and tells her how boys were gossiping about her because of her half- caste. She feels offended as she is biracial and half- caste. She says if someone wants to race biracial child it’s better to race them in some other countries of in Nigeria. Adichie criticizes her own community of American society in a new kind of fourth category diasporic problem. Ginika also had to change her vocabulary to fit into the society. Ginika being a child belonging to upper middle class her parents were in good position but she had to face all struggles of the western society because of her physical appearance. However, unlike other characters, “Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth [and] the cultural cues had shaped into her skin” (Adichie 2017, 125).

Beauty as a concept is still prevalent in American society during 21st century which is well portrayed in Adichie’s *Americanah*. In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of the Darkness* a defamatory image of the Africans can be seen where the physical appearance of the African race is marked as ugly and inferior. Beauty refers to hair in particular- the black hair has raised a discussion among the philosophers, sociologists and anthropologist regarding the major issue of hair. Two significant issues raised in these debates are “how hair is a significant site of meaning in societies with a history of racial discrimination, and how hair can be used to mediate the lingering effects of racial legacy” (p. 3). Hair is designed as the feminine concept of beauty. Ifemelu meets a Senegalese hairdresser named Aisha who works in a beauty salon in Trenton, America. The novel begins by show- casing Aisha’s beauty salon and then introduces Ifemelu and her boyfriend. When Ifemelu visits Aisha’s saloon Aisha works on Ifemelu’s hair, the other women at the saloon discusses about hair – its beauty and migration. Aisha starts combing Ifemelu’s hair, she does “not understand how anybody would choose to suffer through combing natural hair, instead of simply relaxing it” (Adichie 2017, 12).

Aisha being a stylist had not treated natural hair. As Black women have curled hair, and all like long straight black hair, black curled hair is treated hair as inferior and ugly. Aisha’s identity can

be viewed as Afropolitan. One can identify third category diaspora in the character of Aisha. Aisha enquires her customer what color attachment does she require, this makes us understand her rejection for African customs. When Ifemelu responds that she wants color four, Aisha disagrees. For Aisha, that color is too black, and therefore, it looks fake (Adichie 2017, 12). Aisha easily adapts to western culture by using their cosmetics, she applies skin cream and lightens her skin tone, which later creates health problems in her. Later Ifemelu sees that Aisha “had a skin condition, pinkish-cream whorls of discoloration on her arms and neck that looked worryingly infectious” (10). “Skin-bleaching creams, facial peels, chemical strengtheners and hot combs all aid in the cosmetic transformation of black women who struggle to attain a Euro/Western aesthetic of beauty that is unrealistic” (Walters 2014). Beauty Salons are a representation of American custom and black women adopt these Eurocentric beauty practices, in order to maintain their beauty.

The women in Nigeria believe that beauty is that having “a big, firm, curvy woman, exulting in her weight and height (386), but in America size zero is valued. Therefore migrants experience a stress or pressure to change to the western ways of beauty standards. By adapting to their new beauty standards, the protagonist experiences a hybridity as a diasporic condition. Slowly one is able to recognize a change in Ifemelu, she chemically treats her hair to the western beauty standards, and she does not braid her hair, as she did in Nigeria. One day we find her looking into the mirror and running fingers through her hair, at that moment there is reclamation of identity and she recognizes her societal pressures to adapt to a new culture. This recognition compels her to stop faking American accent “a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers” (Adichie, 2013). She wholeheartedly returns to accept her own Nigerian heritage. Ifemelu though she is in her homeland she feels displaced between “third space” where we find her not American not African. She is able to view both the culture like an outsider. During a meeting Ifemelu is addressed as “Americanah” a term which she seen as a subsequent match to highlight her American persona.

Conclusion

Americanah is a story which echoes the life of many racialized people, these people who are forced into society’s expectation; face the deletion of the true multicultural people, who are forced to adopt the dominant culture, that is the culture of the west. But at the same time, she is unable to abandon her roots, as she embarks her new journey. But as her journey begins, she courageously adopts her new culture by creating an identity in the area of accent, her name and her hairstyle confining herself into her stereotypical environment. Today’s world belongs to immigrants with different cultural backgrounds; these immigrants are distinct from each other and also have an influence of their race. The novel portrays the long sense of identity of Ifemelu which in turn makes her return to Nigeria, where she grew up as a young girl. She had positive dreams about her life, her

childhood memories made her an aspirant of high dreams. But her hybrid experience made her feel that she doesn't belong to that modern world.

Ifemelu finds it difficult to root her with an affirmative approach to her new identity; she becomes negative in her diasporic world and fails to adapt herself to the new culture. Her longingness to return to her mother country and her roots show her as a representative of the postcolonial world. Adichie not only portrays as her characters intercultural encounters but also, she manifests interculturality in everyday situation. Immigrant characters are in oscillation between two cultures, as they are not free to have a common history or ancestral background. But they try to agree with the present and create a personal identity to the new world. They gradually adapt to the new scenario, they are forced to adapt to the new culture.

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From Bias to Breakthrough: Traversing the Shift in Gender Stereotypes of Women in Advertisements

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ABSTRACT:

The evolution of advertisements has progressed simultaneously with societal changes. This paper aims to investigate how advertisements have changed over time in how they portray gender by analyzing gender representations in a sample of advertisements from various media channels and by identifying major stereotypes that have been perpetuated in advertising throughout the years. Further the paper aims to explore the influence of empowering and progressive advertisements on making the lives of women more sustainable. The analysis commences by examining advertisements characterized by overt gender stereotyping, progressing to an exploration of those featuring subtle gender stereotypes, and culminating in an examination of contemporary advertisements that strive to challenge traditional gender norms.

Commercials often portray stereotypical images of women and men, reinforcing traditional gender roles. This paper provides a qualitative research approach by applying George Gerber's "Cultivation Theory" to delve into how gender stereotypes in advertising affect our perceptions of ourselves and others. Additionally, it also provides an outline of the historical evolution of gender roles in advertising and the power of advertising in shaping cultural perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Advertisements may promote unrealistic beauty standards and contribute to the objectification of people, especially women. This paper also discusses the potential negative effects of advertisements on self-esteem and body image. The paper further explores the need for a critical examination of advertising practices for fostering inclusivity. It is our duty as customers to challenge these stereotypes by supporting brands that champion progressive and inclusive advertising.

Key words: 5th SDG, Gender stereotypes, cultivation theory, male gaze, objectification, women in advertisements, scopophilia, superwoman, femvertising, inclusiveness.

Sustainability has historically been the fundamental strength of our species. The 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) centres on achieving gender equality and empowering women

and girls. This goal emphasizes that equal roles for women and men in families and society are essential for sustainable development, recognizing the need to provide women with equal rights and opportunities. The media has a significant impact on societal transformation. One of the primary media instruments that have the power to impact society is advertising. It also has the ability to alter people's attitudes. The issue of gender roles in ads is intricate and multidimensional, including several facets of marketing and advertising. The development of ads has kept pace with shifts in society. People's lives are greatly impacted by advertisements. George Gerbner's cultivation theory is one of the core theories of media effects. According to this theory, long term exposure to media shapes how consumers perceive the world and conduct themselves. The theory states that people who watch television frequently are more likely to be influenced by the messages from the world of television. Their worldview and perspectives begin to mirror what they see and hear on television on a regular basis. As a result, it is believed that media substantially influences how people view social reality (Perera). Certain commercials are so brilliantly done that they convince viewers to believe what they're saying and purchase the merchandise. Depending on the time period, advertising and marketing firms have developed various tactics to promote their goods. By employing popular morals to promote items, advertisements normalize undesirable societal standards under the pretext of promotions. They also delve into the subconscious of the society by trying to induce their ideas in ways that appeal to the potential consumers.

Till the late 19th and early 20th centuries, traditional gender norms were represented in advertisements, reinforcing the idea that males should be the breadwinners and women should stay at home by reflecting conventional gender norms. Women's lack of equality and respect is not a recent development in our society. Unfortunately, the media and advertising have been major contributors to this demeaning portrayal of women for a long time. They have been subjected to continuous attacks by commercials and the hidden messages that accompany abusive character attacks. Years of sexism in the media have shaped this messaging in an effort to increase product sales. The infamous practice of toxic gender roles is one example. In advertisements of that period, women were frequently shown in home environments endorsing household goods or highlighting their caregiving responsibilities, whereas in marketing, men were depicted as powerful, affluent individuals who backed business, technology, and financial items. Gender stereotypes of men and women were employed by advertisers for marketing purposes in an attempt to make the product seem acceptable. A gender stereotype is a generalized view on the roles that are to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men ("Gender stereotyping"). The advertising industry has consistently employed stereotypical depictions of men and women so that they could easily communicate and connect with the audience. In the 1980s, Usha featured an advertisement with the tagline, 'train' her to be the 'ideal housewife' (Bhattacharjee). This tagline is in every way problematic, as the primary

focus of the ad is that all girls should be raised to be perfect housewives. It talks to the girl's parents or other authority figures, asking them to 'train' her to be the perfect housewife by purchasing their goods, even if it doesn't explicitly encourage women to buy their products (Bhattacharjee).

By the late 20th century, there was a drastic change in the standards for depicting women in advertisements as the second wave of feminism challenged traditional gender roles and expectations. Advertisements began to feature women in a greater variety of jobs, including the workplace, in an effort to reflect the changing perspectives of society. Even though different companies come up with unique and innovative strategies to promote their brands, they ultimately objectify or stereotype women. Most of the commercial marketing techniques often portray women as sexualized objects or housewives that depend on a husband who is dominant and superior, thus conforming to the traditional concept of gender. Though advertisements often serve as a medium for the promotion of a particular product or service, they also end up becoming platforms that propagate unrealistic standards of beauty for women. According to media and advertisements, women with flawless skin and perfectly proportioned bodies are considered 'ideal' or 'perfect'. Advertisements associate the concept of beauty to fair complexion. They spread the misconception that people are judged and discriminated against based on the colour of their skin. Achieving other personal objectives like marriage, empowerment, employment and self-confidence is linked to having fair skin and they portrayed women with darker skin tones as unattractive and undesirable. They also equated fair skin to success, popularity and attractiveness, thus reinforcing the notion that it is a desirable characteristic. The preference given by Indian society to fairness led to the popularity of fairness creams.

Majority of marketing for fairness creams propagates the notion that having light skin or a fair complexion is now correlated with either having a good life or having the potential to attract a successful life partner. As a result, these commercials validate the biases that already exist in our culture, particularly those that are connected to gender and appearance. Furthermore, a powerful message in these ads is to simply bleach one's skin in order to overcome prejudice in society. Products like 'Fair & Lovely' promoted such unrealistic ideals of beauty. The 'Fair & Lovely' brand, which was introduced to the Indian market in 1975, was rebranded as 'Glow and Lovely' in reaction to backlash against the assumption that fair skin was the ideal for beauty (McEvoy). Even if the word 'fair' is substituted, the ads continue to instil in the minds of the viewers that light skin is the only acceptable standard of beauty. Certain advertisements diminish the value of women by focusing on their external appearance rather than their accomplishments, skills and talents, thus supporting the notion that a woman's value is related to her capacity to conform to socially acceptable beauty standards rather than her qualities. The self-perception of a woman can be profoundly affected by these portrayals.

Majority of food commercials present women as someone who is very attached to nutritious and healthy food products. Advertisements like the 'Lipton' green tea featuring Shradha Kapoor or the cereal brand 'Kellogg's Be Special' by Deepika Padukone, etc. normalize stereotypes by constantly reminding a woman to be slim so that people would find them attractive. They encourage women to lose weight to fit into society's idealized version of beauty. In both advertisements, actors consume the product, which helps them reduce weight and attain a body type that is desirable (Batra). Eventually, they assert the idea that having a desirable body is a need rather than a choice. Constant portrayal of such 'idealized' images with slim bodies and smooth skin through advertisements will lead to its normalisation which manipulates more and more women to buy such products that will enhance their beauty and appearance.

There are advertisements that market their products by portraying women and their bodies as commodities. Sexualizing or objectifying women is the most common method in today's advertising strategies. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey first used the phrase 'male gaze' in her seminal work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in 1975. 'Male gaze' describes how visual media such as movies and advertisements objectify women as passive objects of desire from the point of view of a heterosexual male viewer (Mulvey). Mulvey further explains 'scopophilia', which is essentially the erotic pleasure received by observing the other individual as an object of sexual arousal. The primary objective of these ads is to increase product sales, and for that the advertisers use women as mere objects of attraction. Most of the body lotion and cream advertisements include physically attractive models to satisfy the male gaze. Products like 'Parachute' body lotion describe how using it will make a woman's skin silky and tempting, which makes her husband fall in love with her again and again (Dey). This misleading representation makes a viewer believe that women use creams and lotions just to enjoy the touch of men. The commercial basically suggests that for a woman to appear attractive to her husband, she must conform to the mainstream definition of beauty. Women are simply used as eye candy or a piece of decoration, even if their presence in the commercial is not at all relevant. Their bodies are shown as objects for others to gaze upon for visual pleasure and as a commodity that exists purely for the satisfaction of men.

Even matrimonial advertisements are not an exception when it comes to the reinforcement of traditional notions of beauty, gender roles, and objectification of women. Indians' obsession with fair skin is evident in the matrimonial ads, where the skin tone of the brides and grooms is also mentioned along with their age, education, etc. In the marriage market, both men and women are treated as commodities, where their best 'qualities' or 'features' are highlighted. The ads also focus on certain words like 'handsome', 'beautiful', 'good-looking', 'reputed family', 'financially stable', 'slim', 'fair' etc., which seem to reflect the same kind of ideals of gender and beauty that are constantly given importance by society. A popular advertisement for Chavara matrimony ends with the tagline

“ishtakkedukal ishtangal aayi marunnu, cherunna jeevitha pankaliye kandethumbol” means “your dislikes turn into your likes when you meet the right partner”, which gives out the message that marriage is a solution for every problem people encounter (Chavaramatrimony.com 00:00:20-00:00:25). The ad begins with a voiceover that introduces the character Sara, who is an artist but doesn’t like kids, marriage, or the responsibilities associated with them. This concept of Sara changed when “Chavara Matrimoniyil.comilude Abiye parichayapett vivaham kazhikkunnath vare”, which means “when she met Aby through Chavara matrimony.com and got married to him”, and marriage helped her to conform to socially acceptable gender roles (00:00:07-00:00:11). Chavara helped her to ‘transform’ from a self-centered woman who wanted to escape from the societal norms of gender to a woman who enjoyed the bliss of motherhood. A woman who decides not to get married or has kids is considered ‘flawed’ by society, and the same ideology is re-established through this ad (Aarati). It further states that a woman’s value entirely depends on her capacity to be a wife and mother. Her aspirations, dreams and desires have no space when it comes to family life. On the one hand, when certain advertisements promoted objectification and unattainable beauty standards, there were others that portrayed strong, independent women. This period saw women playing multiple roles as housewives and working employees, and hence they were referred to as ‘superwoman’ and ‘supermom’ (The Swaddle). In fact, the patriarchal culture had brainwashed them into taking responsibility for all of this. Motherhood was overly glorified to the point that she was given full responsibility for all child care tasks.

Advertisements that have the power to shape our perceptions also propagated the idea that housework is a noble, charitable, and fundamental aspect of womanhood. One common stereotype of women is that of superwomen who effortlessly handle everyday situations, stealing the stage (The Swaddle 00:00:35-00:01:04). The shifting status of women in Indian society is being emphasized and promoted by the media. The media’s representation of women changed as a result of the women’s liberation movement from that of the traditionally oppressive wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and housewife to that of a driven professional. This marked the dawn of the concept of ‘superwoman’. Although the idea of more honourable depictions of women in the media going forward seems uplifting and positive, there are certain ambiguities in it. Such ads glorify women’s unpaid work. These commercials gently inculcate the notion of the modern, idealized woman, placing tremendous strain on both working and non-working women. “Superwoman as an advertising concept primarily refers to the idea of a woman as an ultimate all-rounder—someone who not only excels in her work but also effortlessly handles household tasks”, says Jean Kilbourne (Jathar).

In the Airtel Smart Network advertisement, a female manager assigns duties to her staff before wrapping up and leaving for the day. She calls her husband on the way home and enquires about his supper needs. She starts taking care of the household works as soon as she gets home, making supper

and making a video chat with her husband. We now realize that her spouse is one of her employees who continues to work there. The woman is represented in this advertisement as a superwoman who is capable of simultaneously being a housewife and a boss (airtel India 00:00:00-00:01:30). The second kind is the backstage lady who quietly contributes to every man's or child's success. Many detergent advertisements, such as Surf Excel, feature a woman supporting a man or son's development and achievement. It demonstrates how women are solely responsible for performing these kinds of household duties. It is as if they are obliged to be just housewives, or it can also mean that men in the family don't have to do any of that domestic work. This is an example of 'femvertising'. It is the empowerment of women through socially-focused marketing. (The Swaddle 00:01:07-00:01:13). There are advertisements that show couples sharing home chores. The slogan 'Share the Load' ("6 Indian ads that broke gender stereotypes over the years") was coined by the detergent Ariel, and it appears in their latest ads where a kid or spouse is shown helping out. The way this is done questions and even reverses the conventional dominant roles that Indian husbands, fathers, and sons play with the women in their lives. In actuality, though, guys are simply being praised for 'helping out' with what is still considered women's labour.

The sustainability of anything, be it an idea, a system, a law, or whatever, depends on how much it has been able to evolve according to changing times. Advertising and marketing agencies have also held on to this strategy for so long. There are many ads that were able to evolve and develop according to a transforming society. The diaper ads for Huggies and Pampers many years ago portrayed only moms taking care of kids. It was displayed in such a way as to get into the mind-set of the then-majority population. In contrast, recent Pampers ads have come up with really empowering taglines like "It Takes 2" and "Dads Can Change" that show that each and every father has an equal role and responsibility to play when it comes to taking care of children and household duties. They have progressed in such a way that it shows a father who takes care of the child and who shares the same load as the wife. A very emotional ad of Pampers titled "A Father's Promise" shows a man who has just been blessed with a baby. He promises that he will be there to take care of the baby, and the ad shows him taking care of both the child and the wife. He says that "just being called a father is not enough. I must become one" (Pampers 00:00:00-00:02:01). Such ads will eventually impact society as progressive and empowering thoughts get cultivated in the minds of men as well as young boys. As a result, they will be able to change their attitudes and take on equal responsibility.

Recently, Tanishq launched a special ad campaign as a part of International Women's Day with the question, 'Superwoman: a compliment or an expectation?' The objective was to disclose the truth about the challenges that women really encounter in their daily lives. The commercial film highlights how women are so focused on doing everything flawlessly and living up to the idea of multitasking that they fail to notice when it begins to take effect on them, from rising early in the

morning to making breakfast to dealing with hurdles at work and home. The ad came up with the tagline, “Before she’s a superwoman, she’s a human”. According to Ranjani Krishnaswamy, General Manager-Marketing, Tanishq, women are struggling hard to maintain equilibrium between the multiple roles they play in their lives. (“Before She’s Superwoman, She’s Human”)

Advertising is an essential component of marketing. It is an effective strategy that attracts customers and makes people aware of new or existing products or services. In the present scenario, the role of advertisements goes beyond mere commercial promotion of products. They also play a role in defining perceptions of gender roles. Advertisements often propagate certain behavioural expectations of gender that shape individual perceptions. There has always been criticism and discussion regarding the representation of women in commercials. Men in advertisements are often associated with power and authority, whereas women are often shown as submissive homemakers or wives. It is surprising to discover empowering and inclusive advertisements like the Bhima Jewellery ads, which feature a transgender person, and Pamper ads with the tagline “It takes 2”. However, there still exist stereotypical and toxic ads such as Chavara Matrimony, as well as great brands like Flipkart ironically celebrating International Women’s Day by sharing messages promoting kitchen appliances. Continuous exposure to such misrepresentations and harmful stereotypes would have a profound impact on men as well as women. They have the power to shape the thought processes of the society by perpetuating stereotypical images or messages. Thus, it is crucial that advertisements appropriately represent the diversity of our society by promoting gender equality and inclusiveness. Such progressive advertisements are an asset to society as they have the power to influence people’s perspectives. They are capable of enhancing the lives of many women by reducing stress and instilling the confidence to pursue their dreams. They empower women to accept themselves as they are, recognize their rights and freedom, embrace self-love, and cultivate self-worth and independence, ultimately transforming society into a more sustainable one.

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Beyond Boundaries: Migrant Women's Narratives in *The Grapes of Wrath*

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Abstract:

Migrant women and girls face a myriad of challenges and vulnerabilities as they navigate the complex landscapes of displacement. The migration experience often exacerbates existing gender inequalities, exposing women and girls to unique risks and hardships. In John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," the condition of migrant women and girls takes centre stage as a poignant and nuanced exploration of the human toll wrought by the Dust Bowl migration during the Great Depression. At the core of the narrative is Ma Joad, a formidable matriarch who becomes an emblem of strength and resilience. Steinbeck's portrayal of migrant women extends beyond Ma Joad, encompassing a diverse range of female characters who face a spectrum of challenges along the migrant route. The project explores how these women face the loss of traditional roles, encounter dehumanising conditions in labour camps, and grapple with the disruption of familial and societal structures.

It also delves into the ways in which women support each other, forming bonds that serve as a source of strength in the face of adversity. The women in Hooverville camps and labour environments form bonds of solidarity, highlighting shared struggles and mutual support networks. Amidst loss of traditional roles and the erosion of societal structures, the women in the novel strive to preserve their dignity and humanity. Additionally, it sheds light on the sacrifices made by migrant women, emphasising the toll of displacement on their physical and emotional well-being. Steinbeck's exploration offers a timeless commentary on the indomitable spirit of individuals facing systemic challenges, resonating with themes that transcend historical boundaries.

Key Words : *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dust Bowl migration, Great Depression, Migrant women, Ma Joad, Traditional gender roles, Resilience, Adaptation and Survival

Published in 1939, Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece depicts the hardships of the Great Depression, following the Joads, an Oklahoma farm family, as they are uprooted by the Dust Bowl and compelled to journey to California. Their struggles against the harsh realities of a divided America, split between the privileged and the disenfranchised, unfold in a deeply human yet

grand narrative. The novel explores the clash between the powerful and powerless, portraying one man's fervent response to injustice and one woman's resilient fortitude. Steinbeck's novel, simultaneously a naturalistic epic, a tale of captivity, a road novel, and a transcendent gospel, vividly captures the horrors of the Great Depression while delving into the essence of equality and justice in America. - expand here.

It's important to understand The Great Depression and Dust Bowl to appreciate the symbolism of the Joad family. The 1920s were a period of economic growth and life seemed to be full of promises. However following the crash of Wall Street on October 24, 1929, the economic hub of America, the economy failed and money lost value rapidly. This led to the Great Depression which left many homeless. At the same time, the Southern states of America (including Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas and Texas) were experiencing an extended sequence of dust storms triggered by drought and erosion.

The Dust Bowl, characterised as both a human and environmental catastrophe, were a result of agricultural practices that stemmed from ignorance of the nature of the Great Plains. Uprooting the tall grasses and reduced rainfall resulted in the land being dried and turning into dust. Feeling the economic pressure the banks forced the tenants out of their lands. Like many others, the Joads too had to leave behind their home. The poor tenant's protests that it was their land with which they had emotional connection fell into deaf ears. The owners even employed people like Jr. Joe Davis, Willy Feeley who were desperate for money and willing to tie hands with them in evacuating the poor farmers from their lands. They smashed the houses of the dissenters and pushed it off its foundations. The sheriffs also patrolled the lands to capture anyone who resisted the bank's orders and remained on their land. Left with no choice, many tenants decided to try their luck in California.

California has held a reputation as a land of opportunity since the mid-nineteenth century, dating back to the days of the Gold Rush. The state's allure stemmed from a combination of factors, including a favourable climate, abundant resources, and a visually captivating landscape. For many Americans, California represented a place where fortunes could be made and opportunities were abundant. The state's virtues were often extolled in popular songs and stories, creating a narrative that portrayed California as a promised land. This exaggerated depiction emphasised the state's plentiful attributes, further fueling the notion of California as a destination for prosperity. Notably, folk singer Woody Guthrie believed that the tales of California's sunshine and abundant employment opportunities played a significant role in drawing people to the Golden State.

Although California was also affected by the The Great Depression in the early 1930s, agriculture expanded in the state. Growers in the San Joaquin Valley notably quadrupled their acreage in the mid-1930s, leading to an increased demand for labour. This surge in demand resulted in higher wages for agricultural workers, with California cotton growers paying nearly 50% more for cotton

picking compared to farms in the southern plains. Furthermore, the state also offered higher unemployment relief than the southern plains states. Family networks played a crucial role in this migration pattern. Relatives who had previously moved to California in the 1920s and found success encouraged their family members in the southern plains to relocate. The positive word of mouth regarding job prospects, the state's climate, and the availability of relief programs set the migration in motion.

The hopeful migrants travelled along Route 66 to California. Almost 100,000 of them chose to live in Los Angeles and the rest, 70,000 chose San Joaquin valley. The city of Los Angeles handled the Great Depression much better than other states owing to its diverse economy based on several industries. The sectors of film, tourism, oil, agriculture, manufacturing, and trade were pivotal in shaping the economic landscape of the region. Among the migrants, those with specific skills found more favourable opportunities. Individuals with experience in aircraft and auto assembly, in particular, had promising job prospects. The construction of the Boulder Dam also emerged as a significant source of blue-collar employment. Conversely, migrants lacking specialised skills faced greater challenges. For them, reliance on personal connections, often facilitated by family members, became crucial in navigating the competitive job market.

However life in the valley was quite different. The fertile valleys produced over half of the nation's oranges, grapes, walnuts, carrots, and lettuce. The agricultural landscape was largely dominated by large commercial farms that specialised in a few crops. These farms relied on a seasonal labour force that arrived during harvest time and dispersed once the crops were gathered. Mexican farm workers played a crucial role in meeting the demands of this cyclical lifestyle; they would work in the harvest season and then go back home in the winter. The challenging times of the Depression disrupted this established system. Stringent immigration laws led to the forced deportation of thousands of Mexican workers. Their absence created a labour void, attracting Dust Bowl migrants to settle in California's farm valleys.

The great influx of migrants throughout the 1930s overwhelmed local and state infrastructures. They vied with the local residents for employment opportunities, accepting lower wages and disregarding picket lines. Many were also turned away at the borders. Migrants fortunate enough to secure employment quickly realised that the abundance of workers led to a substantial decline in prevailing wage rates. To survive, women and children too took up jobs. Children as young as 7 or 8 worked in the fields and earned 78 cents picking cotton. Although a meagre amount, it helped their families survive. Even with entire families contributing to the workforce, it became impossible for migrants to sustain themselves on these diminished wages.

During the 1930s in America, women predominantly occupied domestic roles, often overseeing home management and social responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, were typically the

primary earners for the family. In the 18th century, women in tenant families in Oklahoma, as in many agrarian societies, were integral to the functioning of the household and the overall agricultural operation. They were primarily responsible for managing the household and played a central role in ensuring the well-being of the family members. Throughout the course of the novel, women take on more than their traditionally ascribed roles and become the pillar of strength and support the family needs as they go through dire circumstances.

When the destructive forces of the Dust Bowl had taken over the once fertile green fields of corn and left them dead and dusty brown, the women played their part as caretakers and offered their silent support to their men. The men weren't worried that the women would break as they often displayed strength and resourcefulness when dealing with agricultural hardships. As primary caretakers of the family, women knew that everything was alright and there was hope for the future as long as the men didn't let down their hopes and stood helpless at the loss of crops.

“After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But it was all right. The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if the men were whole.” (Steinbeck 3-4)

The women are gratified that the men don't lose sight of the future as they are to lead the family. The men's utter disregard towards any concerns women might have, although concerning, isn't surprising as it was expected of them to be pillars of support that hold the family together in hard times. They take on their roles gladly lest their family fall apart. Thus they conceal their fear and leave them unacknowledged so as to protect their family. “And since old Tom and the children could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledged hurt and fear, she had practiced denying them in herself. And since, when a joyful thing happened, they looked to see whether joy was on her, it was her habit to build up laughter out of inadequate materials.” (Steinbeck 50)

Women are also not encouraged to be one who makes decisions of any kind - it's reserved for the man. When the landlords demand the tenants to move out of their land, the women stay behind with the children anxious but silent. “In the open doors the women stood looking out, and behind them the children — corn-headed children, with wide eyes, one bare foot on top of the other bare foot, and the toes working. The women and the children watched their men talking to the owner men. They were silent.” (Steinbeck 31) Their fidgeting, shifting legs shows their desire to be a part of the discussion that affects them equally.

Things take a turn with the introduction of Ma Joad, the central character around whom the events of the novel unfurl. She is the pillar, the citadel of the family that holds it together. She can be considered as a representative of all migrant women who took on more than their traditionally

ascribed roles in the face of labour deprivation and abject poverty the Dust Bowl migrants faced in California. Economic hardships and family survival necessities compelled women to take on roles traditionally ascribed to men. This shift in responsibilities arose from the urgency to meet basic needs in the face of poverty and limited job opportunities. Women assumed leadership within families, adapted to changing dynamics, and played crucial roles in community building within migrant camps. Ma Joad's subjective identity exhibits certain traits aligned with conventional gender roles which evolves through the course of the novel. She is first seen in the kitchen welcoming Tom and Jim Casy for breakfast even before knowing their identities. It is also Ma Joad who looks beyond the preacher Jim Casy used to be and values the guidance and moral support he could provide on their arduous journey. When Pa expresses his hesitation to include him on their journey emphasising the lack of space and extra mouth to feed, Ma stands her ground and says "I have never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin' food' shelter or a loft on the road to anybody that asked. They's been mean Joads, but never that mean." (Steinbeck 102)

As representatives of the Dust Bowl migrants, the Joad family has all their hopes pinned on California. While all the Joad men are excited and hopeful, it is only Ma Joad who expresses her concern whether it is all false. But she consoles herself thinking that no would waste their money on the pamphlets if the information was false. Her worries come true when they reach California. On reaching the Hooverville camps, Ma gets a firsthand understanding of the systemic hardship and reality of the employment opportunities publicised to be true in the promised land. In the camps, the impoverished migrants lived in squalid conditions. It is a microcosm of the Great Depression and economic hardships faced by a majority of the population in California. Upon seeing the camp, Ma Joad worries about the food shortage of her own family and the camp as a whole. She feels helpless when she's unable to give a helping hand to the starving children. "I dunno what to do. I got to feed the family. What'm I gonna do with these here?" (Steinbeck 269)

As the novel progresses, in the face of continued hardship, Ma Joad becomes resilient and takes on the role of the head of the family. This is a slow progress which began enroute to California. As the Joads were crossing the desert near California, Grandma Joad passed away. However Ma holds the news to herself in order to prevent making a stop in the desert as it could be dangerous to the vulnerable members of her family - two young children and pregnant daughter. When passing an Agricultural inspection station, Ma Joad makes a false claim that there's a sick old woman awaiting treatment to stop them from checking their truck. Ma assumes responsibility and calmly manages the accident with wisdom and decisive actions.

Later on in the novel when the Wilson's car breaks down, Tom and Casy offer to stay behind and fix it and suggest his family move ahead. Pa is in favour of the decision and wishes to continue their journey, anxious to reach the promised land. However Ma takes a firm stand and refuses out of

fear that the family would become divided when they should stay together in this tumultuous situation. She confronts her husband with a jack handle and expresses herself in the language traditionally associated with men. "I'll knock you belly-up with a bucket. I swear to Holy Jesus' sake I will" (Steinbeck 169). The open defiance, explicitly identified as a rebellion, marks the pivotal shift in leadership within the Joad family's journey. It is Ma who realises much earlier than anyone that once the family splits, it can never come again together. Contrary to everyone's expectations, Pa relinquishes his control in a non violent manner believing it to be temporary. Anger serves no purpose, and Ma has assumed the position of authority.

Anger becomes vital and sustaining as the prospect of work and security dissipates swiftly, akin to the pamphlets carried away by the wind. Ma takes full command of the family's emotions when she determines it is time to depart from the security of the government camp and venture into uncertainties elsewhere. When Pa sarcastically comments that times have changed and now women are in control, Ma riles him up further by saying men have the right only when they can put a roof over his family's head and food in their stomach. As Pa ultimately gives in to despair, expressing, "seems like our life's over an' done," (Steinbeck) Ma shifts her approach. Instead of provoking him to anger, she transforms into a wise nurturer, adapting her role within the family to meet the emotional needs of the men. She states that, "man, he lives in jerks – baby born an' a man dies, an' that's a jerk – gets a farm an' loses his farm an' thats a jerk. Woman, it's all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on." (Steinbeck 423) In the concluding pages of the novel, Ma Joad characterises her role by likening herself to the earth and water—a relentless force that can adapt to the constraints imposed upon it.

Consistently, Ma Joad moulds Rose of Sharon into the woman she must become to eventually aid her family's survival, underscoring that mere pregnancy does not inherently transform a girl into a woman. Throughout the novel, Rose of Sharon remains in the shadow of Ma Joad, an untested woman navigating the complexities of her first pregnancy, learning the essence of womanhood through her mother's resilience. The final chapter initiates the anticipation of new life as Rose of Sharon begins labour. While women assist in the labour, the men engage in unpaid labour to construct a levee against the rising river. She gives birth to a still born who symbolises the inability of new life to flourish, representing a failure in one of women's fundamental roles. Despite this, Rose of Sharon expresses only one line of despair, "the girl lay back again, and covered her eyes with her arms." (Steinbeck 449) This response demonstrates strength—an inherited ability to shield women's despair from the scrutiny of men.

This serves as evidence that Rose of Sharon has acquired a profound understanding of womanhood within the cultural context in which she will live. As she cannot nurture and sustain a new life, Rose of Sharon feeds a starving middle aged man, fulfilling her duty as a woman by

nurturing men even in the absence of children. The complete loss of dignity in the final pages of the novel are accompanied by an intense swell of humanity, Rose of Sharon gaining the courage of her mother, concealing her own inner grief, taking control of emotion so that life can continue. "She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and she smiled mysteriously." (Steinbeck 618) Her smile echoes her earlier "sly smile" (Steinbeck 134). By examining these distinct smiles, we discern Rosasharn's evolution beyond her previous self, embodying increased strength, optimism, and humanity. Through aiding others, she ultimately discovers her intrinsic value and secures a sense of female subject identity. In this way life continues.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck depicts a family that represents the thousands who endured the hardships of the darkest decade of the twentieth century. The novel doesn't aim to dissect the familial dynamics of Dust Bowl migrants but rather to present them authentically, as individuals with a history and a way of life they sought to preserve, not reinvent. The restructuring of the family that unfolds in the narrative is a response to the urgent need for preservation, fueled by the belief that displacement is a temporary setback and that the familiar aspects of life will eventually return. Within this male-centric framework, Ma Joad epitomises womanhood—a force that remains silent during prosperity but emerges forcefully in times of adversity.

Confronting significant changes, women surpass men in various aspects, echoing Ma Joad's assertion that "woman can change better'n a man... woman got all her life in her arms. Man got it all in his head" (Steinbeck 442). Transitioning from initial silence to later gaining negotiation rights and even assuming a form of "leadership," Ma Joad's female subject identity undergoes a reconstruction. Consequently, the westward migration becomes a process of forging a new subject identity; Ma and Rose, throughout their travels discover their opinion is just as important as a man's. Their maternal instincts thrive, and they become a powerful source. In contrast to the male figures falling apart due to new surroundings, Steinbeck shows that through the Depression there is an equal opportunity of both roles, as the male authority weakens which creates strong-minded female characters rising to the challenge and portrays an extremely weak American patriarch.

As patriarchal ambitions in financial gain were a major contributing factor to Depression-era society's failings, Steinbeck recognised that the mother had to take on the role of leader to restore American society to its "social origins." Steinbeck's understanding of "the primitive ascendancy of women is founded not on economic power but on the constitutions of the social group" (Briffault 96) is what makes Ma Joad the only one who can successfully carry out Steinbeck's theme of "group survival." Because she is a mother and because "human society developed" and initially survived due to maternal and "female instincts only," Steinbeck believes that Ma Joad is "valuable to society" (Working Days 70).

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Exploring multi-layered marginalisation in Rejina Marandi’s novel “Becoming Me”

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the life journey of a young Santal girl named *Liya* in the novel *Becoming Me* by Santal writer Rejina Marandi. This exertion attempts to uncover the anguish of the young Santal girl who becomes a victim of a prejudice carried over time because she belongs to an Adivasi tribe. Over time, nothing much has changed in the lives of the Adivasi women workers in terms of employment, wages, equality and living standards. As a Santal writer who is considered a *Bagania* by the outside world, Marandi considers her book an anecdote of women empowerment where she voices her ideas, thoughts, and experiences in her own way without using much Anglicised versions of names and usages. There is a touch of *Bagania* culture in her tone and language. Rejina Marandi’s narrative uncovers the never-ending tales of exploitation in the form of low payment, rape and trafficking of women from the tea gardens. Through her work of art, she exposes the harsh realities of caste discrimination and social hierarchies faced by the Tea Tribes of Assam.

Keywords

Double marginalisation, societal marginalisation, spatial marginalisation, North-eastern writers, migration, colonial, indigenous, tea plantations, tea-tribe, trafficking

Literature acts as a medium through which the decentralised masses can articulate their fragmented thoughts, memories, and feelings. It exposes the oppression and suppression faced by the marginalised and the downtrodden. One such literary work that depicts the tale of the exploitation of Adivasis is *Becoming Me* by Rejina Marandi. The life of the adivasis is one of violence, struggle, and exploitation. The novel brings to light the anecdotes of the distressed tribal workers. Rejina Marandi is a Santal, born and brought up in Gossaigaon, Kolkrajhar district, Assam. Her novel is an endeavour to form a collective tribal consciousness based on the several stories that have slipped out of the minds of people or remained suppressed within the Adivasi community. Language was considered a barrier for many of the tribes; “Language should no longer stop us to write The history of the Adivasis has always been written by others — the mainstream historians” (“Release of Becoming me” 2014). The novel marks Rejina Marandi’s debut and a fresh attempt to expose and document a dark corner in the long negation that Adivasis in Assam have suffered. Rejina Maranadi is one who has been identified as an ethnic tea-tribal or *bagania*. Society always looks down on her because of her title,

bagania. The novel *Becoming Me* is her way of empowering the women in her community whose voice has been silent for many ages or is misinterpreted by someone else.

The novel talks about how the tea garden workers are marginalised because of their occupation as well as their physical location. Bell Hooks, in the preface of one of her famous works said *that* “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole, but outside the main body” (*Feminist Theory from margin to center* 1992). The indigenous people living in colonies are marginalised based on their ethnicity, race and occupation. However, the condition of the women is worse and pathetic in these tea colonies as they have to experience issues of physical and mental abuse. Marginality can be defined as both societal and spatial:

Marginality is primarily defined and described by two major conceptual frameworks, i.e., societal and spatial. The societal framework focuses on human dimensions such as demography, religion, culture, social structure (e.g. caste/hierarchy/ class/ethnicity/gender..... Explanation of the spatial dimension of marginality is primarily based on physical location and distance from centres of development, lying at the edge of or poorly integrated into a system. (Gurung and Kollmair, 2007,9) Thus, individuals experience marginalisation and isolation based on societal and geographical factors. Tea gardens have become locations of modern-day slavery. Being labourers, the *bagania* live in villages inside tea estates established by tea planters. These tea estates are located in interior places and this contributes to their backwardness and exploitation by tea planters. The workers in a way have to live with the basic facilities provided by the tea-planters.

Becoming Me revolves around the life a young Santal woman named Liya Kisku. Written in the bildungsroman style, the novel chronicles Liya’s life from the age of nine till her marriage in the twenty-sixth year.

The novel is written in a simple, straightforward English fusing the Santal language, proverbs, metaphors and speech rhythms. She incorporated Santali culture and heritage into her work. The use of Santali dialect in the novel baffles and confuses the non-Santali readers. Maranadi deliberately uses this technique to expose the tension between the tribal and mainstream Assam society. A new voice comes out from the neglected tribal groups.

One of the unique elements in the novel is that it does not use the Anglicized version of names, but rather includes the Santal way of addressing people calling the male gender with the suffix-da and female gender with the suffix-di. Chinua Achebe remarked: ‘the writer should aim at fashioning out an English which should be universal at the same time, able to carry his peculiar experience’. The narrative technique of the novel is itself postcolonial. It is a method of subversion and appropriation of forms borrowed from the institutions of the colonizer, and then turning it back against them. She writes for a social purpose and is not art for art’s sake. The dual nature of the author’s existential

crisis of 'being' within and outside the mainstream linguistic or political discourse, is a marked feature of the work.

Becoming Me can be considered as a true piece of North-Eastern literature of India. She became one of the bold woman spokespersons of her community through her literary work. Northeast writers portray the political upheaval and violence affecting the everyday life of common public. The voices that are heard from the North-Eastern part of the country might lack in frequency, but are abundant in personal experiences and undoubtedly contribute to the rich culture of the natives. Northeast literature has for a long time focused on the images of internal resistance and the external conflict and has magnificently linked them together to showcase the extraordinary ability of the inhabitants. Maranadi's voice brings out the best of culture and tradition of the geographically isolated land.

Today, tea is a global product, just like Coca-Cola and MacDonal'd's. Tea was introduced into the Indian subcontinent as a colonial cash crop and it blurred the regional distinctions, occupying its position as a symbol of unity within ethnic and religious diversities.

The tea advertisements that are popular nowadays, portray tea gardens as natural parks which resemble a terraced land with a blanket of verdant tea plantations placed on its surface. Thus, these bring into the mind of the onlooker an image of an ecstatic kingdom surrounded by a thick mist of greenery and snow.

Despite the wonderful images, the tea-gardens and its workers do not have a fairy tale to tell to the outside world. Instead they have a tale of exploitation, bondage, and poverty. The tea-gardens have become sites of modern-day slavery. In the novel *Becoming Me*, Maranadi says that "The British left India in 1947 [,] but yet the Adivasis of Assam are slaves in the tea gardens" (Marandi, 2014, 132).

The strength of tea gardens are the tea-pluckers, of which majority are women, who have mastered the art of plucking the most suitable leaves and buds. The tea companies could never produce their brand-tea products without the tea pluckers' back breaking toil. Plucking tea leaves, is a delicate, labour-intensive and skilled job. However, this work is not recognized as skilled work. Hence, the women workers involved in plucking in the tea gardens are considered as unskilled workers" (Das, 2016, 6).

Lack of minimum wages is the first major crisis faced by tea workers, of which eighty-percent are women. These women workers are the ones who are responsible for taking care of their families. In spite of the massive revenue generated from the sales, workers who pick and pack the tea leaves face horrendous conditions and earn far below a subsistence wage. Rejina Maranadi clearly depicts it in her novel: 'Adivasis of Assam have just become an instrument to be used'. There are around 800 to 1000 big tree gardens and thousands of smaller tea gardens in Assam ... The Adivasis are paid a

nominal wage of Rs. 94 a day... How they [could] manage their everyday expenses and the children's education. (Marandi, 2014, 132) Indeed, the wage dispute settlements and wage agreements in tea industry of Assam always reflect the supremacy and dominance of the tea industry owners.

In one of the news reported by NDTV on the issue of 5000 women workers of Munnar tea estates on strike with a demand to hike their income. The women warn the unions to 'stay out.' They say that the plantation unions have cheated them. They protest that they work just as hard as the men, but still not paid equally. "In a few areas of Indian Subcontinent women are treated as second sex and there is a myth that that women only to do household works" (Priyanka & Sekar, 2022, 80). The tea labourers are a disadvantaged lot who for decades have been struggling to get reasonable wages. The narrator brings into account the plight of the workers whom she met during a train journey, "Some of our family members, work in tea gardens with very less wages which is not sufficient to run the family and nature has stopped giving us rains" (Marandi, 2014, 153).

Becoming Me showcases the neglected condition of these tribes, "their women can be dragged naked in the streets of the main society. They can be killed and thrown out from their houses and only be used as slaves to run the tea gardens of Assam" (Marandi, 2014, 132). The entire practice led to a clear case of constrained and forced labour. The labourers, basically being ignorant and poor, were tricked by force and fraud to leave home and to register as labourers under contract in the tea gardens. Once this was done, the labourers were under the total control of the tea garden manager. Far away from the public gaze, they lived virtually as slaves.

Becoming Me by Rejina Maranadi portrays the tale of exploitation, abuse, rape and, disappearances of women in the tea garden community. "Thus, their actual status turns out to be that of dependent daily wage labourer, who survives in a very damaging ghettoized environment in the colonies" (Das, 2016, 7).

Allowing personal and factual, voices to speak in the novel, Maranadi discusses the fetishization of women. Plantation labour is one of the lowest paid works, in which women are highly marginalised. The paper attempts to deconstruct the image of the tea pluckers in tea can advertisements and tea tourism brochures. It aims to showcase how the image of the exotic tea-plucking women shadows the consumer from the harsh working conditions in tea plantations. The life of women in plantations is miserable. There are many such accounts reported in various articles, "A group of women at one plantation said their supervisors used language with them so vulgar they could not repeat it. Further, the local stereotype outlook of tribal people as promiscuous, figure heavily in taunts" (Das, 2016, 9).

Trafficking is another problem which the tea workers, especially children and women face. There are reports of unending disappearances of female workers. The narrator's mother comments: "They have no hope of education. They escape from being the bonded labourers somehow. They

move out for more money, and they are misused even outside also” (Maranadi, 2014, 157). CNN Freedom Project has written an article on the trafficking of girls from tea plantations: The Traffickers approach the girls as placement agents ... Police say young girls see placement agencies as a way to escape the cycle, lured by promises of good jobs and a steady income. Instead, they too often find themselves sold as domestic labour and denied wages, or forced to work in the sex industry (“Human trafficking and tea: What's the connection?” 2016) The newspapers are filled with numerous reports of the missing Adivasi girls. The novel depicts how the *dikus* would entice the female workers and offer high paying separate jobs outside the tea gardens: “Leave the girls here, we will give them a better job here. They would get ... six to seven thousand as new joiners and the salaries will slowly increase to fifteen thousand rupees” (Maranadi, 2014, 153). Then another man bargained, “I will pay them fifteen thousand from the beginning... the innocent girls didn’t know that the bargaining was for them” ((Marandi, 2014, 154). The narrator is moved by the conversation between the sponsors regarding the Adivasi girls. “Trafficking of Adivasi woman is happening because they have no means to survive...There is no value for their life. It’s so inhuman to ignore my own dear ones who are victims of human trafficking” ((Marandi, 2014, 154).

In the website of tea tourism of Darjeeling, the female worker is portrayed as “The colourfully clad tea workers gently plucking the famous two leaves and a bud, humming many a merry tune” (“Tea Tourism in Darjeeling - Sikkim – Dooars”). Kailash Satyarthi, founder of the *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* says that “the owners of these international tea estates ... don't pay them minimum wages. The reality is abuse, the reality is a kind of sexual exploitation, the reality is endless slavery” (“The Tea Pickers Sold into Slavery”, 2014).

One of the attractive features of tea tourism is mimicking the female tea plucker by wearing her attire with the basket. This is one of the cruellest ways of commodifying of the worker. Her pain and labour are reduced to mere acts of fantasy. The female workers in the tea gardens face significant vulnerabilities. It’s so strange that the image depicted in the tea advertisements, brochures overshadow the gruesome reality of plantation life. The reality of tea workers is pushed into dark corners of imagination.

Rejina Maranadi as social critic conveys a strong message through her novel *Becoming Me* and raises the voice against tribal discrimination in the Indian society. She echoed the real situation of the Tea tribes and the Adivasis, their mentality and reality. In the Indian cultural context, marginality occurs on the basis of caste, class and gender.

The postcolonial act of constructing colonies has destroyed the original settlement of the country. Thus, *Becoming Me* by Rejina Maranadi is truly a novel that carries the spirit of women empowerment. It is a reply to the dominating power structures of the society that have always been

manipulated by the patriarchal rule. Rejina Maranadi's novel becomes a tool to deconstruct the romanticized version of tea garden women workers.

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Deconstructing Gender Expectations: A Scrutiny of *Udal's* Characters and Their Forced Gender Roles

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This paper intends to explore the psychology of diverse characters in the debut movie *Udal: Love and Lust Inside* (2022) written and directed by Ratheesh Reghunandan and thereby systematically validate the conflicted gendered identities. Flavouring this notion with the forced gender roles which later arouses violence and vengeance, the characters are subjected to scrutiny and it is palpable that the female character is enduring an intensified emotional and sexual frustration, making her cold enough to lash out her aggression. The objective of this paper is to identify the assigned role of gender in exposing them to commit a crime, switching off the humanity so as to save their name in the public and it makes the film dark and dense. The female character is bound to experience an emotional turmoil, stemming from personal circumstances to societal pressures, the character is carried out to unveil her criminal instincts as the film progresses. Maintaining a dark tone, the film takes unexpected twists and turns making it a domestic crime thriller. Focus being laid on the female protagonist, this paper scrutinizes the forced female responsibilities which she refuses to take up and that becomes the cause of darkness in the film. Conglomerating Social Role Theory and feminism, this 2022 film *Udal: Love and Lust Inside* investigates the nature and trajectory of each character and their visual sequences.

Keywords: Forced gender roles, feminism, social role theory, violence, gender stereotypes.

The term gender has always been a conflicting topic for discussion and unlike any other subject, gender studies have become a universal code of communication. It is observed that, gender is a term attributed by the society to an individual in order to configure and install him to that society. Just like how the society shapes him, he then becomes the definition of what that society should look like. As a statement, gender becomes a slave to the forced stereotypes existing in that social order. Sex on one hand determines the biological attributes of a person where as gender is credited by the social norms. People under each sex are expected to behave in a way adhering to the standards of that social structure. Gender roles are born when the individual has to confabulate and interact with the environment and it is then that the society accepts him. Ann Oakley, a British sociologist and feminist who has made momentous contributions to the fields of gender and health has once stated that the concept of "gender roles," refers to the expectations and behaviors that are thought to be apposite for men and women in a particular society. Oakley has claimed that gender roles are disposed to be constructed socially and they can fluctuate greatly across cultures and time periods.

Gender demands us to occupy certain characteristics so as to build a name and identity in that society. Men and women are asked to act with ample disparities for them to be called a part of their environment. Today's practices and principles become tomorrow's stereotypes. Literature is the closest entity that clamors these binaries. Literature includes texts, films, music, art forms etc. of a specific nation and it reflects their socio-cultural elements. Literature acts like a vehicle in transporting ideologies that link the aspects of gender and its rules.

In exploring gender roles, it's essential to consider the intersectionality of identities, acknowledging that gender intersects with other aspects such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and abilities, resulting in diverse and unique experiences for individuals. Analysing gender roles requires a multidimensional approach, drawing on sociology, psychology, anthropology, and feminist theory to understand the complexities and implications of societal expectations related to gender. Understanding gender roles involves recognizing the complexities and diversity of human experiences related to gender. It also involves acknowledging that gender is not binary but exists on a spectrum, encompassing a range of identities beyond the traditional categories of male and female. Gender roles are operated in a society with respect to the culture exercised there. Culture of a particular place has a crucial role in determining gender roles and its rules. Nations come into existence with the execution of culture. Every nation cultivates a culture that yields a national identity. Culture of a nation bears the definition that it "is the norms, behaviours, beliefs, customs, and values shared by the population of a sovereign nation. It refers to specific characteristics such as language, religion, ethnic and racial identity, cultural history and traditions" (Berrell). John Storey states that "Popular culture is mass produced commercial culture" (Storey). Popular culture as mentioned earlier is propagated through various social media platforms, music and most importantly the films of that era.

Movies are informal mediums for the dissemination of gender roles and it is easily decoded and deciphered by the audience. These moving pictures are mere reflections of a particular society and its cultural dimensions. Visual media such as films use moving images to tell a story and these recurring images create a perception in the audiences' mind. Social psychologists suggest that these images often alter the way people perceive social realities and make contributions in shaping the audience's outlook, including their attitude towards topical social issues ("Gender Stereotypes in Malayalam Cinema")

Mollywood movies are extolled to have realistic illustrations of people in Kerala. Tracing the vestiges, it is evident that the roles of males and females are structured and concreted. Males who act like the head of the family take in charge of making money and they are coerced to have a definite and secure job. As they become the bread givers of their house, decision making gets completely vested in them. Whereas, the females in the family who are mothers, daughters and sisters, they are

expected to remain inside the four walls, nurturing the family, cooking food and all the domestic chores are entrusted to them. They are supposed to caress and satisfy their tired and exhausted husbands, both mentally and physically. Emotions, with the passage of time and variation in circumstances, has acquired novel shapes and forms. Every day is an emotional battle that these women fight within themselves, and we are striving to plummet the negative impacts the novel situations have instilled in us. Literature in the form of texts as well as movies helps in the psychological development of a person.

Udal: Love and Lust Inside (2022) written and directed by Ratheesh

Reghunandan is a visually stunning and emotionally resonating contribution to the Mollywood industry. This movie manifests the obligatory gender roles taken by each character and the friction caused by it becomes the plot of the film. The character shiny, played by Durga Krishna presents a single-handed show, competing with other characters like Kiran, played by Dhyan Sreenivasan and Kuttichayan played by Indrans. These characters are put under the pressures of personal conflicts and societal compressions. This paper tends to explore the aspect of gender roles in the above- mentioned film.

A mansion like house with a Kerala style architecture is more than perfect as a setting to execute a story like this. As the movie was released in 2022, the director has not relegated the contextual elements of Covid-19 Pandemic and it plays an indiscernible character in the backdrop. The movie opens with the photograph of a married couple and then the focus is shifted to a packet of sanitary napkins kept on the table. It is not a common custom to expose sanitary napkins as it is considered as a taboo. Breaking the shackles of exclusion, female realities and forbidden frankness is brought in a single frame. The female character named Shiny is portrayed not as an ideal woman, but someone who is close to a slut as the society calls her. she is seen talking to a man over the phone and their conversation is more libidinous in nature.

The scene starts with her, where she is trying to comfort her from the menstrual cramps by applying a hot water bag and parallelly she tries to convince him that she's on her periods. It is later only we understand that she was talking to her illicit lover or her paramour and their conversations are erotic in nature. The male character Kiran, considers her as a mere distraction or a rebound to gratify his sexual cravings.

Objectifying the female body of Shiny, he tells her that she is the most desirable and sexually attractive female of that locality as people in general talks about her. She admits the cantankerousness she feels when she's scrutinized by such jobless tale- tellers. To show off his adeptness in courting a married woman, he has even spilled the beans about this affair to his friends. It is evident that their relationship revolves around the sexual requirements of both Shiny and Kiran and they try to fill the void that has been created by their circumstances.

A sudden transition is seen in her tone as she reflects on the realities of that house. She is shown as the mother of a 7-year-old boy and her husband is not seen in the picture until the end. Her mother-in-law is bedridden and has some serious ailment. The foul smell of faeces and the sickening scent of medicines dominate the air in house. Father-in-law who is half blind, is shown as a weak figure and he has a bedridden wife to take care of. Shiny had to quit her job in order to look after her sick parents whereas, her husband holds a reputed white-collar job and is away from home. She is forced to become a caretaker rather than excelling in a professional domain. Even though a home nurse is appointed to take care of her bedridden mother, the ultimate responsibility is vested in her. She seems to be alone in all these domestic domains and lacks the support and attention from her husband.

In such a scenario, women who is entrusted with the duty of being a mother, a caretaker and an ideal home maker, they tend to develop anxiety and depression. As they lack a personal space for happiness which incorporates her family, she might distract herself to keep her mental state stable. The International Journal of Indian Psychology states that, anxiety, frustration, anger and other psychological and emotional disturbances are leading forces that are causing chaos in the world leading conflicts among individuals. These are the stressor force to the people bonded into the marital relation to choose the different paths (Trichal, 2021). Women especially in unhappy marriages tend to fall into mental illness making them weird and wild.

When neglected, the feminine urge for individualism gets transmuted to some other forms of aggression and depression. This could be a pathway for both men and women to astray from their marital roles and they might find happiness which is vested outside of it. This could mark the beginning of an extra marital affair.

As the movie progresses, Shiny is left with a mother to take care of. The home nurse leaves as she wishes to go back to her family. It is with great disgust that Shiny does this job. The saturation that she felt in doing this could be the aftermath of the lack of support and care from her husband. The duty of a husband is not to provide financially alone, but he is in charge of the emotional wellbeing of his family. The sex- typical roles offered by the society might put us under pressure and it might open up a different path.

Shiny being the most frustrated soul in the film, she is in love with Kiran, who was a junior from college. The day the home nurse leaves the house, entrusting shiny to take care of the sick mother, shiny sends her son to her own house. This is a taken for granted opportunity for both Shiny and Kiran to meet that night. That night Kiran comes and they decide to make love. She considers Kiran as a shoulder to cry on. The movie now turns in to a silent pace, but clamours the violent and criminal instincts in her. She makes plans to murder her sick, bedridden mother so as to emancipate

herself from such a burden. She tells him that nobody would doubt if such a weak and indisposed person dies one fine morning. She suggests that it is better for her to die in order bring peace in her life. Even though Kiran hesitates initially, later they commit the crime together. Shiny uses a wet towel to choke this mother to death. She then goes to the restroom and bursts in to tears. As she is undergoing an emotional roller-coaster, we can see a rapid switching of roles in her. One moment she acts like a lover, a wife, a daughter and a mother with lovely attributes; but her mental state pushes her to unlock her fiendish behaviour. She tends to display her criminal instincts but again switches back to a female stuck with remorse and empathy.

Kiran did not want to commit such a crime as his conscience did not let him, but under Shiny's pressure he becomes voiceless and he is forced to do it. His past life or present relationship statuses are not updated in the movie but all we know about him is that he was Shiny's junior from college. As the movie proceeds, we understand that Kiran was not a terrible person. He finds pleasure in having an illegal relationship with Shiny, who is married to another man but not with criminal instincts.

Sexual infidelity was defined by Leeker and Carlozzi as "the occurrence of sexual involvement with a third party that violates the ground rules established by the couple (e.g., kissing, fondling, oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex)". Emotional infidelity was seen as "the occurrence of emotional involvement with a third party that violates the ground rules established by the couple (e.g., trusting another, sharing your deepest thoughts with another, falling in love in another, being vulnerable with another, being more committed to another, spending more money on another), ("Love and Infidelity: Causes and Consequences"). Kiran and Shiny engage in both sexual and emotional infidelity. Shiny seems to have a mental breakdown because of her unhappy marriage and she finds comfort in Kiran.

Regichayan being a husband, he does not care for Shiny's emotional and mental well-being. All he cares about is his father, mother and his job. He forces her to be confined inside that four walls and asks her to fulfil her roles. He fails to give her the desirable attention or support. Even though this character has appeared only once that is in the climax scene, he is constantly heard by the audience over the phone. He is truly a good son, but a typical male chauvinist and a failed husband. Kuttichayan, presented as a frail character initially, is also entrusted with gender roles. His love for his bedridden wife is a symbol of platonic love. At this age, he is ready to work hard and he never fails to look after his wife. In the first half of the film, he is portrayed as a father figure; nurturing, submissive and tolerant. But there is a sudden shift in the second half where he becomes a vengeful soul. He locks every possible door in that house so that Shiny and Kiran, who murdered his wife don't escape. His valour in the proceeding scenes are noteworthy.

Being a Mollywood movie, a typical patriarchal society is an inevitable component. The division of labour for men and women is seen to have multiple disparities. Women who are asked to nurture and bear children are not wanted in a social and public realm whereas, men being the bread-givers of the family are asked to rule the house. Slight disruptions in this social gender order would be a feast for the jobless tale-tellers of that society. These norms raised by a group of people would later be engraved in the rule book of a society thus making it a cultural aspect.

As The social roles men and women play in a society are closely linked with the development of gender role beliefs. These beliefs prescribe how men and women should think, feel, and behave. People develop gender role beliefs as they observe male and female behaviour and infer that both sexes possess corresponding dispositions. These gender roles are thus internalized by people amidst complex socialization processes and they exhibit them in their own social roles. Gender stereotypes have a great role in shaping a person's character. This has a direct connection to his mental well-being too. We have ample scientific proof to make this statement stronger. Gender stereotypes can have a serious impact on gender and mental health. Women and gender minorities are particularly vulnerable to gender-related discrimination, which can exacerbate depression and lower self-esteem. It's been found that gender identity can shape people's experiences with depression ("How Do Gender Stereotypes Affect Mental Health?"). Shiny is a perfect example of a female identity who is confined to her gender roles. She had to sacrifice her profession as well as her other pleasure to look after that family. In the climax scenes it is seen that she loses her temper and bursts out her rage like a beast. He thrashes her father-in-law and bashes him to the ground. She lashes out her frustration and turns maniac. She portrays herself as brutal and merciless. Her identity and her attitudes towards this circumstance is questionable. When the situation goes wild, she loses her temper and her criminal dispositions are unveiled. A similar scenario happens to Kiran as well as Kuttichayan. According to Wood and Eagly (2010), gender roles operate vis-a-vis bio-social mechanisms that influence many aspects of behaviour. Wood and Eagly (2010) point out that people experience an activation of such biological processes in response to the sociocultural factors that guide feminine and masculine behaviours within cultures. *Udal: Love and Lust Inside* (2022) written and directed by Ratheesh Reghunandan is not an exception from a Mollywood movie that illustrates the pressures of gender roles. Deconstructing the gender stereotypes, the director has manifested his idea of forced gender roles and especially female frustrations. It is worthy to note the treatment given to male characters and female characters. The audience is with full enthusiasm to lambast the character Shiny who is portrayed more like a prostitute rather than understanding the issues faced by her. Towards the end of the film, we are able to comprehend that she had multiple relations like that she had with Kiran. Shiny being a female, maintaining an extra marital affair is considered to be a grave sin and this would bring her downfall. If this same marital affair was found in a male, it wouldn't have been a topic for a hot discussion.

Visual media, as a powerful form of storytelling and cultural expression, showcase a pivotal role in disseminating societal perceptions of gender roles. The silver screen serves as a mirror reflecting and, at times, challenging the traditional norms associated with masculinity and femininity. *Udal: Love and Lust Inside* (2022) is a perfect example which epitomizes the forced gender roles and cultural stereotypes prevailing in the setting of a Mollywood movie. Manifested with just three characters, the film runs on a dark mode and comes under the category of a domestic crime thriller. The audience is kept on a pin point but at the same time, they are forced to scrutinize the visual representations of each character. Shiny, the female character is forced to do certain chores which causes displeasure in her and her criminal instincts are unveiled. In this movie, cinematic masculinity and cinematic femineity are portrayed without any vagueness. One scene leading to another, the scenes get darker and the characters in the movie exhibit a lack of stability with their mental dispositions. This could be caused by the weight of gender roles assigned to them on their shoulders. Infidelity in marriage, unhappy lifestyles, sickness and melancholy, crushed female dreams, forced gender roles and a perfect violent crime are all blended together making it an embodiment of the Malayali-pandemic society.

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