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Editorial Note

"What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself." (Camus, *The Rebel*).

The Bi-centennial of an iconic cultural figure like Michael Madhusudan Dutt offers us an opportunity to reflect on the larger implications of what he represented. Renegade, prodigal, profligate, poet – he was the romantic rebel, led forever by hope, but betrayed repeatedly by his weaknesses. His life, led against the grain of orthodoxy both Indian and Western, provides a springboard to reflect on the question posed by Camus. A colonial subject and an intellectual prodigy, his restless and ultimately futile search for a new identity was accompanied by personal tragedies which destroyed the man, though nothing could destroy his creative output.

The nihilism of the rebel which Nietzsche proclaimed in *Will to Power*, may be described as an 'act' – in effect as well as in performance- with which the silenced and marginalised people of the world defy erasure. The desire to assert their existence, to force a place within cultural and political formations which would otherwise consign them into irrelevance is common to all categories of rebels. Thus, in seeking to demolish existing structures of power and systems of thought, rebels, across time and continents are one: they strive to annihilate but in order to create. The terror of the rebels infused with the promise of the optimist make them pathfinders who cut through the morass of entrenched custom.

The third volume of *Interlocutor* commemorates the spirit of rebellion manifested in its various forms in culture, criticism and activism across the span of time and geographies. From the latter part of the twentieth century, we are seeing a turn towards theory which often originates from the perspectives of groups whose histories had not been acknowledged in the wisdom of mainstream intellectual discourse. The ever-broadening circles of critical lenses, women's studies to gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial studies to identity politics, the finessing of subaltern studies to more and more sub-groups, disability studies, may all be seen as the various manifestations of the same desire: to be counted as individuals or groups who have rights and aspirations even if they are not readily included into the normative moulds of society.

Since *Interlocutor* began its journey just a couple of years ago, the Advisory Board and the Editorial Committee felt that it would be a good idea to organise special lectures addressing the theme of the volumes henceforth so as to encourage scholars and academicians to contribute to the journal as well as to set the tone of the volume with an expert's view on the area. With this vision, a special lecture commemorating the bicentenary of Michael Madhusudan Dutt was delivered by Professor (Dr.) Niladri Ranjan Chatterjee on 3rd July 2024. In his lecture, Professor Chatterjee addressed some lesser-known areas of the life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, locating it within what Professor Chatterjee terms "The Floating Signifier of Friendship". The same was later transcribed and has been included as the first article in this volume of *Interlocutor.*

The next article entitled ''Who loves me not, tho' I do love him well": Situational Eros in Select Poems and Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Gour Das Bysac'', by Soumyajit Chandra, taking cue

from Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Sei Somoye*, explores the intricate layers of friendship between Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac. The article traces this depiction of friendship through the critical lenses of homosociality and situational homosexuality. It also maps the idea of situational eros through the letters and poems exchanged between Dutt and Bysac, enabling us to look into the life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac from different perspectives.

Suchismita Karmakar's article "Unsexing the Bourgeois: The Lesbian Resistance of Inez in *No Exit*" reads the complexities of a lesbian character, Inez's resistance against patriarchal, bourgeois hegemony and her quest for a lesbian-proletariat liberation from the subaltern object-state. Karmakar deals with Inez as a central character in Sartre's narrative and her being instrumental in breaking the hegemonic, heterosexual-bourgeois continuum which is a structure that Garcin is imprisoned by again and again. Heteronormativity is stressed and critically looked at – the bourgeois becomes associated with the heteronormative, while the proletariat becomes the subversive character. She further explores how the proletariat and bourgeois as markers of social and cultural classes, become critically opposed to each other and are used metaphorically in the struggles and relationships of Inez.

In the fourth article titled "Re-visiting George Egerton: Reclaiming the Subdued Voice of Fin de Siècle New Woman Fiction", Semanti Nandi traces the literary contributions of Mary Chavelita Dunne, known by her pseudonym George Egerton, whose non-traditional and experimental approach attracted both fandom and notoriety. As one of the most prominent authors of New Woman fiction of the fin de siècle, Egerton explored the ideas of feminine subjectivity and sexual emancipation. Her provocative style, as reflected in *Keynotes* and *Discords*, sets a precedence for several female writers whose creative aspirations and potentials suffered immense compromise in the hands of the patriarchal codes of writing and publishing. As a feminist icon of the nineteenth century, Nandi argues how Egerton initiated an alternative feminist tradition thereby rescuing the lives of women, as writers and subjects of exploration, from obscurity and insignificance.

Draupadi, a legendary figure of *The Mahabharata* remains one of the most striking women characters in Indian literature, and is recognised as one of the earliest assertive female voices to have echoed in the realms of literature- resilient and questioning. She is iconic in her resistance for not accepting her humiliation passively on facing an attempt at being disrobed in a royal assembly. Neetisha Jha's "Deciphering Draupadi: Representations and Recontextualisations", the fifth article in the volume, foregrounds Iravati Karve's *Yuganta*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi". It examines the representations of the character which builds on the germ of rebellion inherent in her character, positing her sustained relevance to be re (presented) in the modern-day discourse. Jha also traces the idea of Draupadi becoming a metaphor in her ability to transcend a mere theoretical analysis.

Emily Gerard's *Transylvanian Superstitions* (1885), refers to Transylvania as a fertile breeding ground for creatures opposed to Western science and rationality, including vampires and werewolves. But with Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* the vampire took a different literary turn, open to multiple readings and interpretations. The vampire, as a literary and cultural trope, continues to adapt to the ever-changing sociopolitical concerns. With the emergence of countercultural discourses in the twenty-first century, there has been a resurgence of the vampire iconography in cinema that caters to the evolving sensibilities of a globalised audience.

As a metaphor, the vampire highlights gendered cultural representations and the societal discomfort surrounding it. Contemporary female filmmakers seek to reinterpret this vampire iconography as an alternate expression of resistance. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and Hamid Naficy's Islamicate Gaze Theory, Ria Banerjee's article "Aesthetics of Dissent: A Critique of the 'Averted Look' in Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*" examines Ana Lily Amirpour's film as a critique of the 'averted look', in the context of Iran, and highlights the desexualised representation of Iranian women on screen. Banerjee also explores the role of inter-generic hybridity in fostering a sense of solidarity that challenges gendered cultural norms and suggests alternative modes of representation.

The seventh article in the volume continues to explore how Popular Culture manifests the voices of resistance through counter-cultural positions against the hegemonic ideologies and societal frameworks. Purbali Sengupta's ''The Shifting Paradigms of Humanism on Celluloid: Exploring the Analogous Cinematic Visions in the Works of Abbas Kiarostami and Amit Masurkar" maps the discursive analysis of two pioneering filmmakers' visual texts known for their subversive cinema voicing the subaltern. She investigates Amit Masurkar's *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) along with Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). Masurkar and Kiarostami's films foreground the invisible native voices by representing and de-familiarising the quotidian struggles of the masses against systemic and systematic marginalisation of the subaltern. The article reflects the urban/rural alienation, severity of communication and ambivalence of knowledge against the backdrop of emerging propagandist films.

The next article titled "Representation of Intimate Partner Violence and its Traumatic Impact in *Thappad*" by Srilekha B.P., examines the representation of intimate partner violence and its traumatic impact on women across different social classes in the movie *Thappad* directed by Anubhav Sinha. The study critically analyses different stages of trauma recovery experienced by the women characters in Sinha's movie. Drawing upon trauma theories, data from governmental health surveys and critical articles on Bollywood movies, Srilekha B.P traces the psychological journey of the women characters from victimhood to resilience. The article also offers a nuanced reading of the process of healing that can be actualised through the evocation of a range of coping mechanisms accessible to women in a given class context.

Moving away from celluloid, the volume turns to literary representations, once again, with Ritu Bhabna and Soham Debsarkar's article "The Deified, Defiled Mother: Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* as a Critique of the Phallocentric Ethics of Sexuality and Motherhood" which critiques the patriarchal machinery and the deified symbol of motherhood as portrayed in Damodar Mauzo's 1981 novel *Karmelin*. Considering a fruitful milieu of women's emancipation in the twentieth century, the mother-icon as supplanted within the nation had little to offer in terms of identity beyond patriarchal structures. They reinforced the orthodox strictures keeping the mother-icon in a confined heteronormative space. This article explores the idea of the mother-icon in Konkani Literature which is often overlooked in the mainstream. The contextualization of Kristeva's ideology associated with 'Abjection' as theorized in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* finds expression through the justification of the undefined sexual encounters of the protagonist. The consideration of *Karmelin* through the ideas of body as a site of violence and self-expression, and the contradiction of care and conflict towards the subject of relevance is well discussed throughout the article.

The tenth article in the volume "From *Panchanamas to Dalits*: A Literary Journey of Resilience" by Anushka Sejal focuses on the experiences, struggles, pain, exploitation, prohibitions, resistance, and injustices perpetrated on the Dalit community. The situation of the Dalit woman as a crude victim of patriarchy and multiple forms of oppression have also been highlighted. Sejal explores the historical trajectory of the untouchables, a journey marked by immense hardship and sacrifice. Literature produced by the Dalit writers has empowered them enormously while also offering a first-hand depiction of the suffering and torment they have endured. She also examines how as literature of resistance, their autobiographies emphasise on the transformative effects of artistic creation and literature's ability to initiate positive changes in society.

As part of the Progressive Writers' Movement, the poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi offers a staunch critique of society during the Partition and its aftermath. The sufferings and woes of the disenfranchised have often found poetic expressions in his writing. His honest interrogation into the position of women, the exploitation of the marginalised class, the effects of political miscalculations among others have enriched his critical outlook. He understood that the responsibility of a poet was not only to show the flaws of society but also to suggest ways to remedy them. The final article in the volume by Bhavna Jagnani titled "Poetry as Mirror: A Reading of Select Poems of Sahir Ludhianvi" offers an analysis of select poems of Ludhianvi through the postcolonial and feminist lenses, and brings the volume back to its fundamental theme of exploring rebellious selves and their resistance to the hegemony of dominant cultural practices.

In *The Rebel,* Camus asserts, "Become so free that your whole existence is an act of rebellion". Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Wilkie Collins have voiced this idea through their lives, choices and works. In the present era of generalised submission to dominant ideologies, it is important that these lost rebellious selves are brought back to the academic arena to trace a continuity in the counter-discursive traditions that link the past with the present. The third volume of *Interlocutor* makes an attempt to do so.

The Editorial Board of *Interlocutor* would like to express its profound gratitude to the members of the Advisory Board for their invaluable guidance, the Editorial Team for their assiduous assistance and prompt cooperation and the peer-reviewers for their meticulous assessment of the articles. We also deeply thank the Management of The Bhawanipur Education Society College, Kolkata, and Dr. Subhabrata Gangopadhyay, our honourable Teacher-in-Charge, for extending their unwavering support in our endeavour to publish this volume.

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Special Lecture Series, Chapter 1: Transcript

''Just Good Friends'': The Floating Signifier of 'Friendship'

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Today I have chosen the topic of friendship, because I think what I intend to state at the very beginning is that sometimes friendship need not necessarily happen between two individuals or three or four, sometimes it can happen between one individual and an institution. I think this is exactly what seems to have developed between me and The Bhawanipur. So, thank you, The Bhawanipur Education Society College, for accepting me as a friend.

The first part of the title, ''Just Good Friends'', is suggested by something that we are all very familiar with, which is when two people are suspected of having a romantic relationship. I think what has not worried me is the ''friends''' part, or the good part, but the ''just'' part. Therefore, when you are actually using ''just'' to define friendship, you are denigrating it, you are putting it on a slightly lower pedestal. And what you are creating is a binary, a Manichaean binary, where relationship is above friendship. In one of my YouTube videos I talk about what is more than friendship, that is what the video is called ''What is more than friendship?'' What is it that a relationship offers you that friendship does not? It is a very important and a very searching question for me. I came up with the answer that relationships offer you something that friendship does not. Relationships offer you ownership of the person. Therefore, you are not going to ask your friend, why was your mobile phone engaged at midnight? You will ask that to the person that you are in a relationship with. There is a certain notion that a relationship is exclusive while friendship is not. Why is it that this exclusivity is so much more attractive to us? That is really where it begins. Was it always like this? Was a romantic/sexual relationship always meant to be exclusive? Was friendship meant to be more expansive, more generous, more nonjudgmental? It is also self-contradictory, because that person is supposedly offering you unconditional love with a number of conditions applicable. However, it will be framed in the discourse of love. Having said that, let me go a little further back, and let me talk about friendship, to 1500 BC. So, I start at the very beginning.

You know, we Indians, have a tendency to go to the Vedas, especially in these troubled times, when we start anything. The people in the West, they don't go to the Vedas, they have Plato. But we will start with the Vedas over here. Let me talk about what the Vedas say. This is the way in which Ruth Vanita talks about it in her book, *Same Sex Love in India*. She says that the Rig Veda presents an ideal of friendship as a very sacred relation. While it represents the man-woman relation as oriented towards procreation, it constructs friendship not as reproductive, but as creative. Therefore, there is a binary that is already being held over there. What is interesting is, in that binary, friendship is seen to be superior to marital monogamy.

This is something which I have a lot of time, a lot of fun with, because my students, who are all very well trained in patriarchy (as indeed we all are), are horrified when I read out the words from the *Mahabharata*. It's from the *Shanti Parva*.

Brahma says that, once upon a time, human beings could reproduce through a fiat of the will. So, you could imagine that you want a child, and there was a child. This is something that at least one God did very successfully, which is Brahma. Then Bhishma says, in Kali Yuga, people began to have sexual intercourse to reproduce. Therefore, there is a hierarchy, with sexual reproduction occupying a lower rung. The best kind of childbirth is when you just imagine a child into existence.

So, what's really happening then is that sexual reproduction is clearly being taken a very dim view of. Therefore, sexual reproduction is being tied with a debased form of life. Now, you can read it in various ways, but the basic point over here is that whether you look at the *Mahabharata* or whether you look at Plato, there is a very covert, incipient binarisation that is happening. It is the binarisation of the mind and the body where the mind is being held as being superior to the body. Now, it may seem to be wonderful, except for the fact that all binarisations are problematic. This binarisation is problematic as well in the sense that the mind is regarded as being superior to the body. No problem there. However, what begins to happen is that the body gradually begins to be feminised and the mind begins to be masculinised. Therefore, the mind becomes male and the body becomes female. And that is where I think there is a problem. Just a slight deviation over here:

We are all familiar with Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, ''Let me not to the marriage of true minds''. Every heterosexual wedding that happens in the West, there is a possibility that someone is going to get up to make a speech referring to Sonnet 116. What they are actually doing is that they are focussing on the word "marriage". However, what Shakespeare wants us to focus on is "true minds". Now, remember that Shakespeare is writing during the Renaissance, the time when there is a revival of classical learning. During the classical Greek period, the primary purpose of women's existence was procreation. Therefore, friendship was exclusively almost framed as the friendship between men. Hence, when Shakespeare is talking about "the marriage of true minds" he is possibly talking about gay marriage because women were not allowed to have a mind!

In short, the only way in which a marriage can happen of true minds is between two men. So, it seems that in a very queer way Shakespeare is repurposing ancient classical learning to bolster this idea. This is why Shakespeare is quite subversive - he will appear to be patriarchal, but then he is not quite patriarchal, but then he is patriarchal. So, you never know where you are with him. I think that is the most annoying part of Shakespeare because had he been so easy to read, I don't think he would be such a great playwright. It's the fact that meaning in Shakespeare is so amorphous, so undecided, such a floating signifier that you just don't know where you are with Shakespeare.

This talk is going to be very poststructuralist because I'm going to not pay any attention to chronology. I'm not going to pay any attention to time and space. So, we move back to the *Mahabharata*. I think there is an extraordinary line that Arjuna says to Krishna when he wants Krishna to show him the Vishwarup.

And after seeing Vishwarup, Arjuna pleads with Krishna to bear his faults as a father bears his son's, a friend, his friend's, a lover, his beloved's, *Priya* and *Priyaya*. Both nouns are masculine. Therefore, Arjuna is being very clear about exactly what kind of relationships he is talking about. He is talking about the relationship between a father and son, a friend and a friend, but he is also talking about the relationship between a male lover and his male beloved. When you are talking about *Priya* and *Priyaya*, remember that this is something that Arjuna is extremely aware of. Now, what I want to point out is not just this *Priya, Priyaya* part, but the fact that friendship and being a beloved or a lover, are put on the same plane. It's almost as though there is an oblique. Therefore, they are all of equal value. This is the sort of univalence of these three relationships that I would want you to keep in mind, because this is something which is going to haunt us in the later part of the talk.

Moving on to the West, going to ancient Greece.

These are just a few of the people who wrote about friendship. Empedocles wrote about it. Archytas wrote about it. Aristotle, of course, is very famous for having said "a true friend is your second self, as it were" in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. When he is talking about a true friend, he puts our mind to various ways in which we regard the friendship. But, looking eastwards, when we talk about the husband and the wife, the wife is always spoken of as *Ardhāngini* - half of my body. Now, what is important for us to remember is that when Krishna talks about Arjun, he uses the term *Sharirārdha*, again, half of my body. Whether we talk about a heterosexual relationship or about the friendship of two men, it is the same idea that is being impressed on them, which is to say that I am your other self or I am half of you.

This is a very powerful idea because it travels all the way down, into 1970s Bollywood where we have *Ye dosti hum nahi todenge* (*Sholay*, 1975). If you look at that song, if you change one voice to a woman's voice, it becomes a romantic song because all the tropes of romance are there. However, it is two men who are singing it, and we are automatically conditioned to think that they are just good friends. Therefore, what is really going on is that we have been conditioned to read certain friendships in a heteronormative way. That is something which popular culture banks on.

The queer theorist therefore comes in and says, no, there could be other versions of this going on as well. A true friend is your second self, as it were. When I first came upon Plato's *Phaedrus*, I could not believe my eyes. I have never read a text that is so completely hysterical. Plato frames the entire text as a conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus. Plato makes Socrates say the most extraordinary things, collapsing the boundaries of a friendship and a sexual relationship. Therefore, he genuinely does not see any difference between the two.

If we take a proper look over here, the lover becomes a friend. That is the point that I am trying to impress upon. Therefore, there is really no difference between a friend and a lover. We are going to get back to this notion very soon in the 19th century, because that seems to be very much the focus of the journal as well. Or at least of this special issue.

Now, we come to Roman times.

We come to Cicero and *De Amicitia,* which is written around 44 BC. This is where we begin to notice something very strange that is happening - friendship so far has been indistinguishable, as far as discourse is concerned, from the state of being in love. There was no difference between the two. Now, what begins to happen is that there is a separation. Friendship becomes more practical. Understandable, because every civilisation that we have is a protest against the previous one.

So, friendship had been romanticised and also, sexualised. This was the way in which ancient Greeks were working. The Roman idea of friendship, however, was something different. Cicero says it's about virtue, calculation, reasoning, and judgement. Therefore, the very strange thing that happens is that the emotional part of friendship somehow gets denigrated. So you are not emotionally invested in the friendship at all. It is purely a calculation - pretty much like marriage. Therefore, you are looking at friendship the way in which people do matchmaking these days. The friendship does not have any emotional component left anymore. Of course, you can later on give it an emotional colouring, which is what marriage does. We have managed to give this purely capitalist, practical act a romantic colour, and that is the way in which patriarchy works. What has happened is, and of course, we all know, that according to some Hindu wedding rituals, you have the *saath phere.* Let me remind you that there is an original Sanskrit line, which is *saptapadam hi mitram*, which means seven steps taken together constitute friendship. Or *pada* also means word. Therefore, seven words spoken to each other constitute friendship. What patriarchy has done here is that it has taken the definition of a friend, what constitutes a friendship, and applied it to marriage. What we have managed to do is to give this incredibly hierarchical relationship, the relationship between the husband and the wife, which I don't think is equal the last time I checked, and they have managed to give it the colour of friendship.

Therefore, a term that is meant to be generous, nonjudgemental, and open-minded is being constricted, and it is being applied to this toxic relationship and is being called partnership. So, what is really going on then, is the subversion. This is related to the concept of deep structure. Deep structure is basically something that patriarchy is a dab hand at because patriarchy has been consistently undermining and subverting whatever progress feminism has made. Therefore, every time you try to make some kind of a feminist progress, patriarchy is going to undercut it, and it is going to somehow co-opt it and make it about themselves. For instance, there are a lot of Women Studies Departments in the universities but if you check the syllabus, there are significant exclusions - no lesbian narratives, no trans women's narratives and no hijra narratives. Why? Why aren't they there? I believe what is really going on there is that there is this extraordinary way in which we have managed to take a generous term, and totally conscript it and constrict it and apply it there.

So, Cicero says friendship is based on virtue and virtue attracts virtue. So, what happens if virtue is attracted to virtue, and attraction turns to love? According to Cicero, when two men fall in friendship, it is virtue that attracts virtue. Now, it's not a coincidence that virtue often happens to be very good-looking as well! Attraction turns to love. I think Cicero is very well aware that *amor* is the root word that is present in *amor* and *amicitia.*

Therefore, whether you look at *amor*, which is sexual love, as in amorous, and *amicitia*, which is friendship, the root word is *amor*. This is the point that I am trying to make: you cannot entirely divorce the romantic and the sexual from a friendship. What then happens is that these friendships, especially those between men, struggle with this anxiety to de-sexualise friendship.

Girls are constantly tactile with each other, holding hands, hugging each other, kissing each other. No problem. As for the men, there is an actual code for men hugging men. I don't know whether you are aware of this or not. So, you hug each other, you give each other three pats, and then you disengage because if there is a fourth pat, you are apparently gay. Also, when you are shaking the hand, give it a firm handshake. What we really are looking at, is this very peculiar anxiety regarding friendship, just because the ancient Greeks confused it and made it about love. Since we are Romans, we are rather going to make it all about the mind. It is going to be about judgement.

Then you come to Montaigne and 16th century friendship. This is what Montaigne said: ''Finally, all that can be said of the Academy is that it was a love which ended in friendship, which well enough agrees with the stoical definition of love''.

What is the stoical definition of love? Love is a desire of contracting friendship arising from the beauty of the object. So, you are choosing your friend depending on how good-looking he is. It's still friendship, right? Montaigne uses the word "pulchritudinous", which clearly means beauty. So, what he is actually talking about is that love is a desire of contracting friendship arising from the beauty of the object. I don't know how many of you have copies of my translation of Krishnagopal Mallick, but if you have it, the book is all about this. And what is peculiar about these men – Krishnagopal Mallik and, before him, Shibram Chakraborty who are circulating (remember Chakraborty is setting his narrative sometime just after the Jallianwala massacre) is that they are apparently becoming friends exclusively with only good-looking men. And when they become friends, their friendship takes an amorous turn.

So, Shibram Chakraborty wrote this book called *Chele Boyoshe* (never a more misleading title). He wrote this book sometime in the mid-1920s. Whenever he was asked about it, he would deny that he ever authored the book. He used to constantly claim that his first book is *Bari theke Paliye*. Factually incorrect! Can you imagine how horrible it must be to disown your first-born child! But that is what Shibram Chakraborty did.

So, I return to Montaigne. And this is when Montaigne says that only those are to be reputed friendships that are fortified and confirmed by judgement and the length of time. Do you see how Montaigne is doing this sort of tightrope thing? There is a very peculiar sort of indeterminacy. Montaigne is trying to be true to the ancient Greek way of looking at friendship, but Cicero has come before him. So, he has to pay tribute to that as well. Mind you, I have not mentioned Francis Bacon over here, but if you look at Bacon's essay "Of Friendship", it is virtually a reproduction of what Montaigne says. It is all about calculation, while Montaigne gives you this sense that it is all about judgement.

Bacon is very explicit about it - the benefits that you are going to get from friendship. So, that I think it is very important, the way in which Montaigne appears to be confused. But this is where

Montaigne reveals himself. He tries very hard to be as intellectual as possible, but it does not hold much water beyond the point. He says, "If a man should implore me to give a reason as to why I loved him [a friend of his], I find it could not otherwise be expressed except for the reason that it was he, it was I"**.** All that talk about judgement and calculation goes out of the window. So, you see, and I believe that these are Montaigne's own words, this is where he is not riding on the shoulders of the ancients or anybody. What is wonderful is that all the time when Montaigne was talking about friendship and judgement, calculation and reasoning, it somehow wasn't getting across to us.

Shelley was so impressed with the statue of Young Bacchus and Ampelos that he wrote an actual note on it. He describes how Ampelos with his left arm embraces the waist of Bacchus, "yet how seldom from this disturbing and tyrannical institutions do you see a younger and an elder boy at school walking in some remote grassy spot of their playground with that tender friendship towards each other, which has so much love". Again, what Shelley is doing is he is merging friendship with love. He goes on to say, "...Like the pleasure of love with one whom we most love, which having taken away desire, [this is where he is very careful] leaves pleasure, sweet pleasure". So, this is again, something that Shelley is doing, a balancing act on the one hand is that there is no desire. But what is weird is that he is talking about a relationship where there is no desire by talking about a statue, which is about desire, because Ampelos and Bacchus, they are absolutely positioned in mythology as lovers.

I will switch over to the late 20th century and talk about Michel Foucault. Foucault and Derrida - who are both primarily poststructuralist theorists - are much more interested in language and words, and they believe that our identities constitute entirely of words. Without words, we don't have an identity. And then they go on to say - especially, Derrida - that words are floating signifiers.

Therefore, this whole myth of having a stable identity is a lie, because you are building your identity on words, but the words themselves don't have a consolidated meaning. Then where is your identity? I think that it is a very poststructuralist turn that our understanding of language takes and which is why I talk about queer theory as poststructuralist feminism, Queer theory is poststructuralist feminism, because it takes feminism away from the body, unlike the first and second wave feminists, who were still (whether they like it or not) pretty much tied to the body. And what poststructuralism does, which is why Judith Butler gets a lot of flak, is that, you just sort of sit in academia, and talk and play with words, what about the on-ground happenings? What people do not realise is that you try to talk about what is happening on the ground without using language. Sorry. So, this incredible sort of misunderstanding of Judith Butler is something that I have got no patience for.

Anyway, what Foucault is talking about here is not sex, but affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship among homosexuals which is troubling to the larger society. The point that Foucault is making is that the larger society, the heteronormative society, is extremely happy with gay men having random sexual encounters with strangers. For, if gay men get to have random sex with strangers, without any kind of affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, companionship, then the heteronormative majority gets to claim that they are better because they understand affection and tenderness, while for the homosexuals, it's just sex.

So, what is really going on there is Foucault is trying to say that look, that is not really subversive. What would be really subversive is if all the gay men got together, and they created this kind of camaraderie and companionship. He uses the word fidelity, which I am going to deliberately interpret to mean fidelity, in a broader sense. Therefore, fidelity to the idea of camaraderie and companionship, rather than a sort of monogamous fidelity. Therefore, affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, companionship to be precise. Remember, Foucault is talking about it in 1997, which is 16 years after the first reports of AIDS came to light. The AIDS crisis did two very contradictory things. One is that it decimated a very large part of the gay population in the West. In Africa, it was a different story. But in the West, a large part of the gay population was decimated. But okay, so that you may regard it as a terrible thing. It also brought those surviving gay men who were still alive together and it politicised them in a way in which that politicisation still had not happened even after the Stonewall Riots of 1969. So, there was some kind of a politicisation that had happened post-1969, which is to say that, we should get together and we should fight patriarchy. And then the notion amongst a lot of gay men was that sex was political.

Of course, the unfortunate ramifications of this led to the outbreak of the AIDS crisis. And then gay men again came together. But this time, it was all about how do we protect ourselves? So, how can we have safe sex? Therefore, a discourse on almost compulsory usage of condoms, and being more careful, not only about the pleasure that I am providing myself, but also to the others**.** Foucault posits that homosexuality was one of the conditions in the armies of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, especially in the trenches of World War I, on which was predicated soldiers' ability to follow their captain into danger, living in close quarters for weeks at a time. Well, of course, we have examples of that. I mean, those of us who have read poetry of the First World War may be aware - Rupert Brooke was bisexual, Wilfred Owen was gay, and Siegfried Sassoon was also gay.

If you look at the poetry of Wilfred Owen, for example, his affection for his fellow men in the trenches, it's couched in friendship. So therefore, what is happening is that there are two kinds of love, right? So, there is one kind of love, which is the erotic love, and then there is this other kind of love, which is agape, which is sort of much more expansive, which is something that W. H. Auden writes about in ''Lullaby''. So that kind of love is there. What Wilfred Owen is doing is sort of creating a poetry, which seems to be about agape. But within that agape, there is also preserved that sense of emotional, sexual bond that may have existed between his fellow men in the trenches. So that, I think, is something which I would want you to take note of.

Now, by the time we come to Derrida, he makes a very interesting separation between Greco-Roman friendship and Judeo-Christian friendship. He says that Greco-Roman friendship was public and political, while Judeo-Christian friendship was private. I am not quite sure how tenable that binarisation is, but this is something that he suggests. Also, he recommends another politics, another democracy, a democracy to come, not requiring the trace of birth or family for membership. It's another type of politics. Therefore, what I have been trying to lead up to in this presentation all along is that, whether you like it or not, friendship is political. And you can make it as spontaneous as you can. But ultimately, consciously or unconsciously, you are being political.

It's another matter that you may not acknowledge it, but it is always there. 19th century. Walt Whitman. Look at the number of times he uses phrases like "my dear friend, my lover", "a friend, a lover", "dear love of comrades"," brotherhood of lovers". And this is in poem after poem after poem. You know, open up your copy of *Leaves of Grass*. It's all there. Walt Whitman is very smart. He is aware of ancient Greek philosophy. He is also aware of Plato and Aristotle. He knows it. He was a journalist and he went to war. Therefore, he has seen all of that stuff, and this is what comes out of it.

I am reminded of Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, who used to be my teacher at Jadavpur University, and taught us "In Memoriam". And she says, "You see, the relationship between Tennyson and Hallam", and I'm taking it down, it was, see, ''When Hallam died, it was a kind of widowhood". What? It was all there. Anybody who has even given a cursory reading of "In Memoriam" will know. Again, just good friends.

So therefore, the first lines of "In Memoriam" are not so much powerfully assertive, but an extrapolation, religious idealisation of the poet's earthly love for Hallam. You read the poem, it's very clear. And this is something which also the 19th century allowed. I would like you to pay attention to the work of one of my favourite figures from the 19th century, this complete madman called Edward Carpenter. And Edward Carpenter is very important because he had become something like a guru. And you know, he used to live there in the village, an aristocratic man, but completely idiosyncratic like most Brits are. He was living out there in the village. He had got a lot of money from his family with which he bought a cottage. He lived there with his boyfriend called George Merrill, who was from the working class. A lot of people were paying homage to him. So, they would go and visit him, people that you and I know about, people like D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster.

The first time that E.M. Foster visits Edward Carpenter, Edward Carpenter looks at E.M. Foster, a very long moment. And then he says, at very long last, "Do sit still". Foster was so excited. At the second meeting, E.M. Foster was about to leave, when George Merrill touched E.M. Forster at the bottom of his spine, just like that. And this is the only example that we have of the immaculate conception of a novel, because at that touch, a novel formed in his head. He came back home and he wrote the novel in one sitting. It was *Maurice.* So, *Maurice* was written literally by touch.

So, we now move on, now what is going on between Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac? I will simply read out, not my words, but those of Sunil Ganguly:

"Madhu answers instead of Gour, "No Gour won't leave right now. He's going to spend the day with me." [*perhaps implying the night too*]

Gour was sitting with his head bent and his cheeks aflame. Madhu ran to him, seized him within his arms and rapidly gave him a number of smacking kisses saying, "Oh, there's just you and me. Me and you. Gour and Madhu. Madhu and Gour. Ah, what bliss!"

Just friendship. Just good friends.

Further, Michael Madhusudana Dutta used to write these poems and all of them were dedicated to Gour Das Bysac, which was quite annoying to him.

This is not quite the standardized Michael Madhusudana Dutta that we were taught in school, is this? I don't think so.

Going back to Sunil Ganguly, I quote

"I heard you're often around Keshto Banerjee's these days".

"Yes, I've been there a couple of times".

"Why? Has some pretty daughters, does he, whose faces you hope to glimpse?"

"Gour, you are jealous. Yes, I'm right. You're blushing. Why don't you tell me you dislike me visiting a woman?"

Madhu drew Gour into his arms, covering his face with kisses, more kisses. He murmured, "But I love you best, Gour. Please don't be angry. Please don't".

Madhu dragged Gour into the bedroom, pushed him down on the bed and said, "Thou have forgotten thy promise of honouring my poor cot with the sacred dust of your feet. Fulfil that promise today. Bless my bed with the dust of your feet."

Just good friends.

"Unable to tolerate these excesses, Gour gave Madhu a violent shove. Losing his balance, Madhu fell spread-eagled on the floor. Gour was truly incensed. He didn't try to give Madhu a hand.

After a while, Madhu got up and said in a desolate voice, "Even you push me away, Gour. I shouldn't bother you anymore. One of these days I'll suddenly disappear, and you'll search and search, but never find me."

Therefore, you know, what was going on in the 19th century? What is going on between Michael Madhusudhan Dutta and Gour Dass Bysac? Is it friendship? Is it love? Is it both? Is it neither? We don't know. And I think the fact that we don't know is where the queer lies.

The fact that we don't know, the fact that it is so inchoate, the fact that it is so amorphous, the fact that it is so polyvalent, that I think is where literature draws its power from. You see, people very often ask me, what is the difference between literature and other discourses like legal or medical? I think literature blossoms in lack of clarity, and that is what gives literature its power.

And finally, we come to *Cheler Boyoshe* by Shibram Chakraborty.

So let me establish the context. So, there is this character called Debenda. Now Debenda is about 17, 18 years old. There is also a character called Ashanto. And Ashanto and Mohan, they are the lovers in the novel. They are the central, sort of romantic pair in the novel, Ashanto and Mohan. And Debenda has met Ashanto once before when Debenda was standing outside a theatre. He had

two tickets. Because that's what one does. One always gets two tickets. And mysteriously one is spare, because the ticket that is meant for the other friend never turns up. So, Debenda is standing there with two tickets, thinking. And then he immediately looks at a boy, approaches him and says, you know, I have got a spare ticket. You know, would you mind? And the boy is like, oh, sure! Then they go to watch the play together. And, you know, he falls onto Debenda's shoulder and all of that happens. And then they lose contact. And then at a later point, Ashanto is dripping wet in the rain, is lost and he takes shelter in a random house. Now, that random house turns out to be the house of Debenda.

And, you know, so I tell you, that novel is hysterical. It's like you can't stop reading because you think, what was Shibram Chakraborty thinking? I mean, he was in his late teens when he was writing this. So, you can tell, a very early book.

And so, what is really going on is they meet again. And then, of course, as conveniently as possible, it starts to rain.

You know, what is amazing about this novel is that there is one woman character. She appears for one scene and then she is gone. It's like this token woman.

It's an extraordinary book.

And so, you have this boy who's lying in Debenda's bed.

And Debenda, having finished his housework, comes in.

Ashanta says, “you're late, Debenda”.

“What's this? You're still awake?”

“I'm not sleepy”.

“Tell me a story.”

“A story this late in the night? I'm stroking your head. You go to sleep.”

“I won't be able to. My eyes are burning.”

“Right. I'm taking away the burn.”

He kissed his eyelids and said that he would definitely be able to sleep now.

Ashanta wrapped his arms around Debenda's neck. Debenda drew him closer into his chest, mesmerised by the taste of an entirely unfamiliar joy that coursed through their hearts, faces and entire being. They saw the dawn after a showery January night.”

Look at the way in which friendship is getting used as a frame and it is used as a very shapeless frame, so it can accommodate so many things. And I think that is really what I basically wanted to leave you with today.

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Lecture Transcribed by Mr. Gaurav Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Bhawanipur Education Society College, Kolkata

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"Who loves me not, tho' I do love him well": Situational *Eros* in Select Poems and Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Gour Das Bysac

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Abstract: Out of the numerous letters written by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) to Gour Das Bysac (1826-99), almost seventy are extant (Murshid 36). Select letters written by Madhusudan to Gour Das between 1841 and 1843 (and beyond) contain curious protestations of love which transcend Aristotelian *philia* and take up connotations of romance, making occasional, well-contemplated inroads into the realm of the erotic. One of the most earnest aspirations of Madhusudan in his college-days was to become a poet and compose exquisite verse in English; several of the English (and unpublished Bengali) poems which he composed as a student of Hindu College were addressed to Gour Das Bysac. Madhusudan composed acrostics in both English and Bengali which spelt out the name of this closest friend, and also feminised him in some of the poems and letters. Madhusudan's feverishly romantic letters to Gour Das Bysac elicit curiosity regarding the stance adopted by the latter in the face of these passionate overtures. In his historical novel, *Sei Somoe,* Sunil Gangyopadhyay portrays this friendship with vivid detail, constructing Madhusudan as an impetuous lover who expresses his affection both in words and action, and Gour Das as a level-headed companion who endures these advances stoically, remaining unresponsive and non-reciprocating on the whole. This article will attempt to, first and foremost, throw light upon the nature of emotions which Gour Das harboured for Madhusudan, based on his letters to and reminiscences of the former. Thereafter, the article shall study the friendship between these two Bengali gentlemen from the 19th century with respect to the theory of homosocialism propounded by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her influential study *Between Men*. Ultimately, acknowledging the impossibility of assigning any particular cognitive label to this friendship, this article will draw attention to its situational quality with reference to the works of Jeffrey Weeks, ultimately analysing the socio-cultural and intellectual factors which contributed to the situational *eros* in this passionate friendship.

Keywords: Madhusudan, Gour Das, homosocial, situational, epistolary, homoerotic

"G-o! simple lay! and tell that fair,

O-h! 'tis for her, her lover dies!

U-ndone by her, his heart sincere

R-esolves itself thus into sighs!"[i]

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Introduction

In a letter dated July 1861, Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote to his friend from his Hindu College days, Rajnarayan Bose: "You may take my word for it…that I shall come out like a tremendous comet and make no mistake." (Dutt 330) Widely celebrated in Bengal as a poet of epic grandeur, august dignity and a singular repertoire as resplendent (and oftentimes as inaccessible) as a comet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) is a pioneer and maverick who revolutionized the literary milieu of 19th century Bengal. A highly controversial figure in his own lifetime owing to both his literary and personal exploits, the legacy of Madhusudan survives chiefly in the form of his contributions to Bengali drama, inception of the sonnet and the *amitrakshar chhanda* (blank verse) in the Bengali poetic tradition, and the composition of his ambitious epic, the *Meghnadvadkavya* (The Slaying of Meghnad) which constitutes a highly stylized, individual and idiosyncratic adaptation of an episode from the *Ramayana*. However, his personal correspondences with friends and colleagues throughout his lifetime have received fewer studies, interpretations or literary treatments compared to their seminal role in furnishing biographical details about the poet-dramatist's life. While several biographies of Madhusudan have culled a lion's share of their content from his letters, it was a major work of historical fiction by Sunil Gangyopadhyay, *Sei Somoe* (Those Days)[ii] which drew popular attention to a remarkable aspect of Madhusudan's life to which his fervent epistles stand eloquent testimony: his friendship with Baboo Gour Das Bysac.

Gour Das Bysac (1826-99), who went on to become a Deputy Magistrate, a Fellow of Calcutta University and a member and general secretary of the Bengal Royal Asiatic Society (Sengupta 140), was a batchmate of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's at Hindu College. Having made Gour Das's acquaintance in 1840, Madhusudan could never forego this friendship for the rest of his days (Murshid 36). In his *Reminiscences of Michael M. S. Datta*, Gour Das writes:

My acquaintance with Modhu began in 1840, when we were in the 6th class of the old Hindu College. It soon ripened into warm friendship. After that, we were all along together (with Bhoodeb, Sham and Bancoo) in every class, in every promotion even in the long leap that we (five) had from the 5th to 2nd class, Senior Department (Basu 642).

Out of the several letters that Madhusudan wrote to Gour Das, almost seventy are extant (Murshid 36) and amidst the plethora of subject matters which people the pages of these passionate epistles, what stands out is Madhusudan's fervent love for Gour Das; this love seems to transcend Aristotelian *philia*, connote sentiments of Greek love and betray the subtle presence of homosocial and homoerotic desire, while at the same time evading all attempts at labelling, owing to its abrupt, fleeting, evasive and non-committal nature of expression. These letters are complemented by a collection of English poetry composed by Madhusudan in his college days, many of which are dedicated to Gour Das, addressed to him as verse epistles and deploying the acrostic form to spell out his name—all of these literary endeavours hinting potently, yet tantalisingly at the Wildean love "that dare not speak its name."

Sunil Gangyopadhyay (1934-2012), one of the foremost novelists of 20th-21st century Bengal, depicts Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac as characters in *Sei Somoe*, and he portrays this friendship as imbued with shades of affection that tend to invest "male friendship" with homosocial connotations. Though Gangyopadhyay was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Sei Somoe*, his literary endeavour also courted controversy with critics castigating him for supposedly libelling a prominent Bengali poet with seemingly nefarious suggestions about his character. In a review of *Sei Somoe,* Malashri Lal wrote:

> I refer to the sketch of Michael Madhusudan Dutt as an irascible debauch indulging in the pleasures of the flesh to liberate the poetry trapped in him. Not only are there unseemly suggestions of homosexuality…What compulsions of the narrative led Sunil Babu to embroider such fiction about Dutt? While one need not be sanctimonious about the private life of public figures, one need not be prurient either. (Lal 245)

A careful perusal of select poems and letters written to Gour Das by Madhusudan renders the question asked by the critic redundant, since these documents may function as possible, consummate literary evidence for an age-old tradition of homosocial/homosexual longing and affection that found expression in the multiform literary creations of the likes of Horace, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Whitman and Wilde. Therefore, this article will examine select poems and letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt addressed to Gour Das Bysac which seem to exemplify a "situational homosexuality" as theorised by Jeffrey Weeks, and corroborate undertones of male homosocial commerce as propounded by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, with occasional references to *Sei Somoe* by Sunil Gangyopadhyay.

"Belovedest./ Most dearly-loved and much-valued Friend": Madhusudan's Protestations of Love

The letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Gour Das Bysac are of varying length, and they make for a particularly engaging read due to their unpredictable shifts in tone and mood, with the poet waxing eloquent, displaying irascible flippancy, conveying petulant complaints or dissolving in feverish protestations of love at every random juncture. While Madhusudan was quite a gregarious young man within his personal coterie of friends at Hindu College, he was reserved and introverted with most of his other batchmates (Basu 661). However, he seemed to have forged an equation with Gour Das which surpassed his other friendships, and facilitated candid epistolary expression of exuberance or displeasure under any circumstance. Madhusudan had written to Gour Das from Kidderpore, Madras, Calcutta or Versailles while the latter was staying in Burra Bazar, Calcutta, Balasore, Khulna or Bagerhat respectively (Murshid 36).

An initial study of the salutations of Madhusudan's letters to Gour Das could function as a suitable foundation stone for queering this correspondence. A sequential perusal of Madhusudan's letters to Gour Das written between 1841 and 1842 reveals a sine curve in the intensity of passion woven into the salutations[iii]. While Letter 1 begins with "My dear friend", Letters 2, 3, 4 and 7 progress to "My dear Gour", suggesting growing familiarity through the spontaneous adoption of the sobriquet "Gour". Letter 6 shifts to an unexpected display of mock reverence and emulation of formal 19th century epistolary models in colonial Bengal:

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> The Baboo M. S. Dutt's compliments to the Baboo G. D. Bysac, and begs to inform him that he called here at sacrifice of time—and some money too—to have the pleasure of the Baboo G's company. (Dutt 277)

Letters 10, 11 and 14 suggest growing emotional involvement with the use of "my dearest Gour" and "My ever-beloved Friend" respectively. While the initial letters were much briefer in length, they have begun to expand markedly Letter 8 onwards, with their content undergoing proportional augmentation in their passion quotient (more on this later). The rising curve stabilises for a while as one encounters salutations of a consistent degree of passion viz. "My dear Gour Dass" (Letter 17), "My dear friend" (Letters 18 and 19), "My dear Gour" (Letter 21) and "Ever beloved Friend" (Letter 24). The culminating moment of these salutations comes in Letter 26 composed in 1843 which begins with "Belovedest. / Most dearly-loved and much-valued Friend," making a compulsive suggestion of homosocial, even homoerotic passion owing to the romantic flourish at the onset of the letter. Subsequently, there comes a curious decline in the passion quotient in salutations till Letter 35, with these constantly alternating between "My dear friend" and "My dear Gour", thus completing the aforementioned sine curve. Letter 26 onwards, it is observed that the ebullient passion for Gour Das seems to ebb, while the friendly emotions and longing for company remain constant, thus perhaps nodding at the cementing of a warm, lifelong friendship sans the initial romantic element. There is a versatile usage of salutations in the remaining letters to Gour Das, such as "My dearest friend" (Letters 36, 37, 44), "My dear Bysac" (Letter 38), "My dear Gour" (Letters 41, 47, 48, 49, 51-56), "My dearest Gourdass" (Letter 45) and "My dearest Gour" (Letter 46). This versatility is non-existent in Madhusudan's salutations in letters to his other friends such as Bhoodeb Mukhopadhyay or Rajnarayan Bose, whom he addresses simply as "My dear Bhoodeb" (Letter 39) and "My dear Raj Narain" (Letters 58, 59, 60, 61) respectively.

In February 1843, Madhusudan Dutt was found absconding from Hindu College, leading to much anxiety among his friends and family. In a couple of days, it became common knowledge that he had taken refuge with the clergy at Fort William with the desire to convert to Christianity. Madhusudan's baptism took place on 9th February, 1843 at Old Mission Church, Calcutta and he was subsequently cut off from his friends and family due to ideological conflict, controversy and unwieldy feelings on both sides (Som 32-39). Impatient with his ostracism and resultant solitude, Michael exhorts Gour Das to hire a *palkee* and travel to Old Church, Mission Row to meet him ("Come, brightest Gour Dass, on a hired Palkee/ And see thy anxious friend M. S. D.": Letter 22). What further renders this letter remarkable is the single-line epigraph "*O Gour! Doodeen char deenetaye ato*!!!" ("O Gour! Such upheaval in two to four days!"—my translation); this happens to be the singular occasion when Madhusudan includes an epigraph in a letter to a friend, the lyrical quality of the line speaking volumes for the turbulent emotions in the poet. While the "upheaval" could be assumed to be alluding to the controversy surrounding Madhusudan's conversion to Christianity, it may also imply the keen pangs of separation from a friend which has become almost unendurable over a mere span of two to four days. The latter interpretation seems to bring in overt suggestions of romantic shades to the love which Madhusudan felt for Gour Das—one which an Indian audience is most likely to associate with *viraha*, a state of abject suffering owing to a period of distance from the beloved, celebrated in Indian Vaishnav lyrics.

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A brief study of Madhusudan's terms of adulation denoting fraternal love for Gour Das will further underline the possible romantic and homosocial tinges to the love which he felt for the latter. Addressing Gour Das as "**Baboo** G. D. Bysac" (Letter 6), as mentioned previously, seems to be a quasi-humorous effort to import formal, adult epistolary linguistic usage into the comparatively young-adult space of college-day friendship through the adoption of the honorific "Baboo". The spectrum of emotions latent in these terms oscillates between the dramatic ("**most noble** Gour": Letter 12) to the playful irreverence common to male comradeships and fraternities ("You are one of the **best dogs** in creation, an honour, Sir, to human nature": Letter 54). There is also appreciation for Gour Das's geniality through candid statements such as "You are a gentleman" (Letter 21) and "I used to call you long ago— "an **amiable gentleman**"" (Letter 8). However, a particular statement in Letter 1 (1841) requires especial contemplation:

> You are *such a boy* that you scarcely deserve any favour at all. You see how many times you have disappointed me, but however, I am glad to see you at any time you please (My italics)

Gour Das Bysac was fifteen years old in 1841, and though being referred to as a "boy" does not qualify completely as a semantic anomaly (modern vocabulary would suggest terms such as "child" or "adolescent") the statement seems to suggest infantilisation of the younger Gour Das; Madhusudan steps into the role of the older *erastes* in a pederastic relationship who harbours similar patience in the face of any "misdemeanour" on the part of his student-beloved, the *eromenos* (typically boys of early teenage), and extends to him life-lessons with affection. Reinforcing the possibility of pederastic sentiment, Madhusudan writes to Gour Das in Letter 20: "Had you been my pupil, Gour, —depend upon it, I would whip you to death or do something worse." Homoerotic affection is further suggested when in Letter 23, Madhusudan qualifies Gour Das's previous letter with almost sensuous adjectives such as "kind", "sweet" and "*balmy*" and further states: "I am so happy to think that I shall see *sweet you*…", almost as one is likely to address their lover. (Dutt 286)

It is evident from Madhusudan's letters that he regards his correspondence with Gour Das to be of paramount importance. Being a prolific author of letters himself, Madhusudan seems to be incessantly anticipating replies from his friends, especially Gour Das, and does not shrink from remonstrances when he is disappointed ("…it is always an awkward task to write to persons from whom we receive no answer": Letter 16). Madhusudan's complaint is melodramatic and ultimately hilarious when he writes to Gour Das from Madras on 22nd November 1849:

> My dear Gour,/ Are you all dead! Or have I by some unintentional act or other offended you? I really do not remember having received a single line from you or Bhudeb for the last 3 months! *Et tu Brute?*...
>
> P.S. Mr. Bhoodeb Mookherjee is a humbug, so is Mr. Soroop Banerjee, so are you all! Bad luck to ye! (Dutt 298)

Madhusudan seems to be constantly unsettled by the length and frequency of Gour Das's letters, which are not to his satisfaction[iv]. He constantly exhorts his friend to write to him (Letters 26, 38), makes it known that it is a matter of personal agony to him if he is uncertain whether his letters reach him (Letter 17)[v] and apologises gracefully and fervently in the event of being unable to answer his

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letters (Letters 23, 31). The poet's exultation on receiving a substantial letter from Gour Das is also robust: "Your thundering letter of Saturday last came over me like a thunderbolt: Oh! with what a beating heart I read it!" (Letter 8) Madhusudan states unambiguously in Letter 19, "I like to read long letters from *you*" and then goes on to make a curious and emphatic statement in the very letter:

> I read your letters with so much attention that I can repeat them (each of them) word per word, tho' you couldn't recollect something of a letter of mine last evening at the M.I.'s! (Dutt 284)

Modhu-Kobi's claim that he can quote from memory the contents of Gour Das's letters betray a sense of obsession with them, bordering on a Poesque monomania, and this further illustrates how immeasurably precious these epistles were to him. Gour Das reminisces that while they were students at Hindu College, Madhusudan would see him frequently at his house (Basu 642). Co-existing with meetings with Gour Das in academic and personal spaces, the letters seemed to provide Madhusudan with a fragile sense of reassurance that he would not be forgotten by his closest friend[vi].

Amongst all of Madhusudan's batchmates and friends at Hindu College, Gour Das Bysac decisively emerges as his uncontested favourite. In Letter 18, the budding poet writes how he intends not to attend college till the return of his most revered Professor David Lester Richardson, whom he refers to as D. L. R. He is mindful of the fact that:

> This will do me no harm—none whatever—except one—a mighty one—that is it will deprive me of the pleasure of your company, of which I am passionately fond—as I am of *you*. This sounds like flattery *but it is not so*. It is *truth.* There is not in this wide world a soul I prize so much as thine… (Dutt 283)

Apart from vouching unparalleled affection for Gour Das, Madhusudan also expresses a vigorous desire for constant companionship, any exception to which is likely to cause him significant discomfort. Previously, when Madhusudan had been instructed by his father to return to the ancestral seat for an indefinite period owing to the former's desire to convert to Christianity, the promising student of Hindu College laments with remarkable affect the impending separation from Gour Das:

> Had I had the power of opening my heart, I could then show you the state of my feelings! Language cannot point them! To leave the friends I love—particularly ONE— (imagine who that 'one' could be) my poor heart cann't but break!...I wish I could see you;—but Oh! That cannot be! –I am not allowed! dear, dear Gour! dearest friend! do not forget me! (Dutt 278)

A delicate sado-masochism becomes evident as Michael seems to savour the ineluctable pangs of longing that will succeed his departure from Calcutta; he is able to muster the requisite rhetorical strategy to construct an air of suspense around the identity of the "one" which is already known, thus conjuring up an air of romance around a situation of genuine anxiety.

Writing to Gour Das from Tumlook, Madhusudan enunciates how all his thoughts are fixed on Calcutta, and that "all his dreams of pleasure—that is—about your visiting my house—and my visiting yours, have vanished like Alnaschar's Castle!" (Letter 14) It is almost unsettling to witness this rapid foreshortening of a term as universal as "dreams of pleasure" into a prospect as particular

and exclusive as exchanging visits with Gour Das Bysac. In Letter 11, Michael states that the pleasure which he derives from meeting Gour Das is "something more exquisite than the vulgar world 'pleasure'". Launching himself into fervent encomium of Gour in Letter 18, Michael writes:

> Never did I dream of finding a heart so true, so susceptible of *true friendship* as yours, in this deceitful world of ours (Dutt 282).

Apart from being convinced of Gour Das's excellence of character, Madhusudan also seemed to draw poetic inspiration from this wonderful young man. In Letter 18, he writes:

> Know, then, that I attempted lately to write some verses on a certain subject, but could not write a single line in about four hours. I have either left my Muse with you or she is *no more* (Dutt 282).

The acquisition of poetic inspiration from Gour Das is further corroborated in a poem of Madhusudan's composition where the latter quips "Gour excuse me that in verse/ My Muse desireth to rehearse/ The Gratitude she oweth thee;" (Dutt 483). It seems evident at this juncture that Madhusudan's love for Gour Das not only manifests itself through an uninterrupted craving for company and vigorous expression in his epistles, but also assigns to the young student of Hindu College an exalted, Parnassian pedestal in his psychic landscape, juxtaposing him constantly with his Muse.

Madhusudan dexterously incorporates the presence of Gour Das into his early English poems, frequently acknowledging his verses to this "brightest" "fellow collegian" and composing several acrostics which spell out his name. The acknowledgement section of the "The Fortunate Rainy Day" states that it was "written at the request of my beloved friend, Babu Gour Doss Bysack Mohashoy" (Dutt 478)[vii]. "Sonnet (Composed on the Ochterlony Monument)" is "Dedicated, as usual to G. D. Bysac" (Dutt 481). A verse epistle addressed to Gour Das, entitled "TO G. D. B." articulates something like a passionate lover's complaint: "There is a lad—his name I will not tell, / Who loves me not, tho' I do love him well" (Dutt 482). Poem 38, entitled "AN ACROSTIC" spells out the name "GOUR DAS BYSOC" and it is almost Petrarchan in its eulogy of a fair addressee. Madhusudan has also composed an unpublished acrostic in Bengali that spells out the name of Gour Das[viii] (Dutt 389). Poem 12 is extraordinary inasmuch it contains implications of erotic proximity with Gour Das, and it also conjoins the subtle erotic sentiment with an intellectual pursuit:

> I thought I shall be able,
>
> Making thy lap my table
>
> To write that not with ease:—
>
> But ha! Your shaking
>
> Gave my pen a quaking;—
>
> Rudeness ne'er saw I like this— (Dutt 483)

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Madhusudan sedulously portrays rhetorical brilliance and literary versatility through his poems and letters as far as his affection for Gour Das Bysac is concerned, alternating between covert nods at and stolid proclamations of his emotions. Two letters in particular bear testimony to Madhusudan's turbulent emotions for Gour Das inasmuch as both mention the word "love" with undisguised directness. On 27th November, 1842, Madhusudan writes to Gour Das:

> It is the hour of writing love-letters since all around, now, is love-inspiring. But alas! the heart that "Melancholy marks her own" imparts its own morbid hues to all around it: and how can I, the most wretched being, on whom yon "refulgent lamp of night" now shines, write love letters or gay letters? (Letter 21)

It is especially at this juncture that Madhusudan appears to lay bare the character of emotions that have spearheaded this entire epistolary endeavour—there is a strong suggestion that his letters to Gour Das are intended to be "love letters" but he fails to ensure this owing to his lugubrious state of mind. The most extraordinary protestation of love is encountered in Letter 24 where Michael writes:

> "Can I cease to love thee! No!" –said the poet to his mistress, but so say I to a dearer being, a friend, a true (which is very rare), a true friend! (Dutt 286)

The poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutta which celebrates his affection for Gour Das Bysac plays a role contrary to that of the letters. An acrostic upholds the possibility of clever concealment of the identity of the beloved within a syntactical labyrinth which may be traversed through a vertical scan of the first alphabets of every line. The letters, constituting a personal correspondence, present a greater opportunity for the uncensored expression of romantic feelings. Predominantly, Madhusudan refers to Gour Das as a true friend, but a catalogue of elements namely, rhetorical usage, poetic flourish, versatility of address, obsessive tendencies, drama, fear and insecurity, oblique sado-masochism and subtle feminisation of the addressee seems to suggest a deeper romantic longing which partakes of the homosocial and the homoerotic.

Gour Das Bysac: Literary Representations and Reminiscences

Perusing Madhusudan's poems and letters to Gour Das engenders several obvious curiosities regarding the addressee of these impassioned epistles, chiefly the nature of his emotions for Madhusudan, the expression of these emotions and the character of his friendship with his avowed admirer. In *Sei Somoe,* Sunil Gangyopadhyay portrays this friendship in vivid detail, drawing strongly from the poems and letters discussed in the previous section. Young Madhusudan is a brash, impulsive poet who basks in the ephemeral joys of inebriation and churns out poetry in elocutionary trances. Utilising the licenses offered by the genre of historical fiction to the fullest, Gangyopadhyay provides his readers with a precise description of the collegian Gour Das:

> Gour was a fair, slim youth with tapering eyes, joined eyebrows, and imbued with feminine grace in the lines of the lips and chin. He draws everyone's attention even within a crowd (Gangyopadhyay 29) (My translation) [ix]

This brief catalogue of Gour Das's remarkable personal charms seems to call to mind the description of young Dorian Gray who had so mesmerised the painter Basil Hallward [x]. Such a description also

situates Gour Das in the same category with mythical men of legendary beauty who had attracted the love of male deities, namely Ganymede and Hyacinthus, constructing him as an object of homoerotic desire. In *Sei Somoe*, Modhu (Madhusudan) drinks on the Hindu College grounds and vociferates his dislike for Professor Kerr [xi], while occasionally reciting at the top of his voice from his own poetic creations. Modhu's friends are of the unanimous opinion that none but Gour would be able to pacify him, and their words are corroborated when Modhu is diverted from his tipsy harangue at the sight of his beloved friend. What ensues proves to be embarrassing for Gour:

> Modhu jumped up at the sight of Gour. Embracing him tightly in his arms, he planted two kisses on his cheeks and cried, "Gour! Gour! How long it has been! I have come today only for you! I can't even see you at the Mechanical Institution these days!"
>
> Visibly embarrassed, Gour attempted to free himself from the embrace, but Modhu would not let go. He was slightly taller than Gour, and was physically strong despite being thin; he was hugging Gour tightly to his chest like an inebriated Bhima (Gangyopadhyay 29) (My translation)

Owing to Gour's intervention, Modhu gives over his drunken, chaotic behaviour and decides to travel to his Kidderpore residence with his friends Bhudeb, Beni, Buncoo, Ganga, and undoubtedly Gour Das. When the band of young men are about to depart after a few frolicsome hours, Modhu becomes instrumental in ensuring that Gour stays on: "No, Gour won't leave right now. He's going to spend the day with me. Perhaps even the entire night-who knows?" (Vanita and Kidwai 337)[xii] When Gour stays back, Modhu remarks ecstatically, "Now there's just you and me, me and you. Gour and Madhu, Madhu and Gour. Aaah! What bliss!" While Gour is disconcerted by certain snide observations on Modhu's acrostics made by their batchmates, the young poet is nonplussed, and gifts his friend with jars of pomatum and lavender water (Vanita and Kidwai 339). Repeatedly vouchsafing vigorous and exclusive love for Gour, Modhu gradually leads his charming friend to his bedroom and entreats him to "honour his poor cot with the sacred dust of his feet" (Vanita and Kidwai 341). Speedily leading to the climactic moment, Modhu makes an attempt to rest his head in Gour's lap and laments, "Why, why, why, Gour? I love you *so,* why don't you love me back? Why do you spurn me? I write so many poems about you, but still I can't win your heart. Today, I've got you all to myself after such a long time." This finally elicits a forceful rejection from Gour and the episode draws to a close with Modhu accepting this response with a modicum of stoicism. Gangyopadhyay depicts Gour Das Bysac as resistant to Madhusudan's advances, though neither unavailable to him in terms of friendly company, nor insensitive to his romantic overtures.

Posterity is indebted to Gour Das Bysac for having composed a reminiscence of Madhusudan Dutt, published after the death of the poet in 1873. The account is replete with the most delightful anecdotes from the college days of Madhusudan, one statement being particularly important in understanding the poet's disposition:

> But Modhu was a genius. Even his foibles and eccentricities had a touch of romance and a taste of "the attic salt" that made them savoury and sweet (Basu 642).

While Gour Das's tone retains admirable objectivity throughout the reminiscence, it assumes a sprig of passion towards the fag-end, thus suggesting the potent core of emotions which had sustained the friendship for such a considerably long period. Embarking on a description of Madhusudan's character, Gour Das writes:

> There perhaps had never existed a man of a more loving heart than he. His friendship was not an ordinary friendship. His heart always brimmed over with love (Basu 653).

Apart from citing many a plaudit for Madhusudan's convivial ways, Gour Das resorts to a mythical repertoire in the penultimate section of his reminiscence which seems, once more, to suggest a deeply appreciative fervour for the then deceased poet:

> He, like Krishna of old, was dark in complexion, but handsome in features, with eyes beaming with expression. His sparkling wit and brilliant repartee were to him the flute, as it were, with which he charmed and enthralled (Basu 654).

While this may appear to be a neutral enough eulogy for a soul blessed with consummate personal charm, the reference to Krishna still resonates strongly with an element of queerness latent in Vaishnav religious philosophy, which professes *Radha bhaav* (adoption of the Radha persona) in every adherent (irrespective of gender) vis-à-vis Krishna, who is supposed to be the singular, paradigmatic manifestation of the male principle. The aforementioned words of Gour Das may then be read as an unconscious acknowledgement of the feminisation which he had undergone in the poetic and epistolary endeavours addressed to him in his salad days.

The handful of extant letters written by Gour Das to Madhusudan do not betray the slightest sign of reciprocation of the romantic and quasi-erotic overtures constantly coming his way from his correspondent. Apart from expressing feelings of utmost elation at the warmth of Madhusudan's letters[xiii], and consenting to compose a biography of his friend[xiv] (Som 237), Gour Das seems to have harboured a general disinterest for the passionate wooing of Madhusudan as speculated by Gangyopadhyay in *Sei Somoe.* However, his reminiscence of Madhusudan facilitates academic contemplation on the element of homosocialism latent in the poet's outlook which might have spearheaded this versatile project of homosocial *eros*, as shall be examined in the succeeding section.

Between a Homosocial ethos and Situational Homosexuality

In the numerous letters which Madhusudan had written to Gour Das Bysac, there can be found no mention of his interest in women or any allusion to romantic heterosexual liaison (Murshid 42). However, the reminiscence of Gour Das throws light upon Madhusudan's romantic aspirations and outlook towards women. Gour Das has written:

> …though inspired by love at first sight, he would not, supposing adult marriage to have been prevalent in Hindu society, have acted with any precipitancy in the selection of a fit partner for his life…It is in fact that, before he became a Christian, his parents had elected for his bride a girl who was a cherub—a veritable Peri. But Modhu had not a heart to give away at the

> bidding of another…He could not realise the idea of a wife without experiencing before marriage the mutual "flow of soul and feast of reason" that characterises true love between the sexes (Bose 654)

Golam Murshid is of the opinion that exposure to European (especially British Romantic) literature had marshalled his opinions on love, courtship and marriage in a highly unorthodox manner (Murshid 42). Murshid states that Madhusudan's friends, and even his mother had confirmed that according to the poet, European women surpassed their Indian counterparts by a hundred times in terms of virtue and appearance (Murshid 42). The young son of Rajnarayan Dutt would dream of blue-eyed maidens who were impossibly out of his reach as far as he was rooted to the soil of the subcontinent, and in case of compliance with societal expectations pertaining to matrimony. Apart from this, Madhusudan's views on women's education qualify as utilitarian, patriarchal and borderline chauvinistic. In an essay competition on women's education organised by his alma mater, Madhusudan had written:

> Extensive dissemination of knowledge amongst women is the surest way that leads a nation to civilization and refinement…The happiness of a man who has an enlightened partner is quite complete…in India, women are looked upon as created merely to contribute to the gratification of the animal appetites of men… (Murshid 42)

In the garb of feministic sentiment, Madhusudan ends up being complicit in the furtherance of patriarchal interest in constructing women as model life-partners of men. Incidentally, Madhusudan married twice in life, and both women were Europeans[xv]. Hence, it would not be erroneous to opine that Madhusudan's college-day romantic endeavours had met with a situational and aspirational roadblock owing to the absence of women in his immediate surroundings (and within the marriage market) who inflamed his imagination; based, therefore, on the aforementioned sections, it would not be over-ambitious to enumerate the hypothesis that he found in the romantic pursuit of the handsome adolescent Gour Das Bysac a semblance of the gratification he believed he would find in the pursuit of a European maiden, thus upholding a surreptitious (yet badly disguised) homosocial ethos. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines male homosocial desire as the whole spectrum of bonds between men, including friendship, mentorship, rivalry, institutional subordination, homosexual genitality and economic exchange—within which the various forms of traffic in women take place (Sedgwick 256)—a traffic which makes male homosocial bonds cohere (Yaeger 132). In the current study, the "traffic in women" is almost non-committal and indirect, camouflaging itself well within a semblance of absence facilitated by poetic models and linguistic usage. Kosofsky cites Catherine MacKinnon in her influential study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*:

> Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms (Sedgwick 21).

MacKinnon's statement is partially relevant to Madhusudan's idea of what qualifies as attractive in a woman; while the poet was indubitably filled with fantasies revolving around Caucasian women hailing from European climes, external appearance (or "sexual attractiveness") was not the only

criterion he laid stress on in the context of marriage. Madhusudan was equally concerned with the intellectual capability of his prospective bride, and the "cherub" whom his parents had elected for him clearly did not measure up to his expectations (since it was most likely that the girl was eight to nine years of age). In Letter 21, he writes to Gour Das, "At the expiration of three months from hence I am to be married;—dreadful thoughts! It harrows up my blood…My betrothed is the daughter of a rich zemindar;—poor girl! What a deal of misery is in store for her in the ever-inexplicable womb of Futurity!" (Dutt 285) This anxiety shows genuine concern for a blameless girl who would fall prey to a marriage where it was unlikely for her to find love and appreciation from her husband. Therefore, despite being partially guilty of harbouring patriarchal interest in the context of women's education, and adopting a condescending outlook towards Indian women, we find Madhusudan obliquely constructing an eidolon of the desirable woman through a literary endeavour, mainly as a reaction to social mores surrounding matrimony with which he was at loggerheads.

Since the homosocial element in Madhusudan's letters coexists with suggestions of homoeroticism, the work of Jeffrey Weeks becomes relevant here. Weeks draws into question who is categorised as a homosexual individual, as one may participate in sexual acts with members of the same sex and not identify as gay (Nguyen 26). Weeks opines that there is no such thing as the homosexual (or the heterosexual for that matter) and (that) statements of any kind which are made about human beings on the basis of their sexual orientation must always be highly qualified (Weeks 134).

> The very unevenness of the social categorisation, the variations in legal and other social responses meant that homosexual experiences could be absorbed into a variety of different lifestyles, with no necessary identity as a homosexual developing (Weeks 134).

Weeks talks about a type of homosexuality which avoided all the problems of commitment and identity, was highly individualised, deeply emotional and possibly even sexualised relations between two individuals who were otherwise not regarded, or did not regard themselves as 'homosexual.' (Weeks 135). Such situational homosexuality possibly revealed more clearly than anything else a constant homosexual potential which could be expressed when circumstances, desire, or the collapse of social restraint indicated (Weeks 135).

Golam Murshid states in his influential biography of Madhusudan that the poet was potently influenced by the life and works of Byron, his primary exposure to Byron originating in Thomas Moore's *Life of Lord Byron* (Murshid 54). Murshid speaks of Byron's love of boys in his schooldays and terms it categorically as "homosexuality." It is not unlikely that Byron, a student of Harrow had indulged in intimate friendship with his peers; Jeffrey Weeks writes how "J. A. Symonds described his horror at the situation in Harrow, where every boy of good looks had a female name and was either a 'prostitute' or a 'boy's bitch'". Other examples of such situational homosexuality occurred then, as now, in the army, the navy and prison, each giving rise to specific rituals and taboos." (Weeks 135). A study of Moore's *Life* of Byron seems to corroborate this standpoint as the young student of Harrow indulges in friendships with his male classmates which he himself terms as "passions." Moore states how "like most proud persons, he (Byron) chose his intimates in general from a rank beneath his own…which enabled him to indulge his generous pride by taking upon himself, when

necessary, the office of their protector." (Moore). In a letter to William Harness (classmate at Harrow), Byron wrote, "…you were almost the *first* of my Harrow friends…There is another circumstance you do not know;—the *first lines* I ever attempted at Harrow were addressed to *you*" (Moore).

These anecdotes from Byron's schooldays, then, open up possibilities of regarding this homosocial and situational homoerotic enterprise in the light of literary inspiration. Murshid states at length how Madhusudan was much inspired by the literary career of Byron, and Byron's personal decision of leaving behind his diaries and memoirs with his friends which later served as primary material for his biography (Murshid 46). It is strongly possible, then, that apart from romantic longing, it might also have been a matter of intellectual curiosity for Madhusudan to have indulged in this epistolary enterprise where he regarded a younger, good-looking male peer with all the fervour of true friendship and the romantic passion he intended to direct at his blue-eyed European maidens.

Conclusion

Golam Murshid opines that the language deployed by Madhusudan in expressing his love for, or soliciting love from Gour Das is generally reserved by male lovers for their female beloved. He considers this love to be much deeper than that encountered in an average friendship (Murshid 36). Yet, it would be justifiably irrational and impossible to attach any label pertaining to sexuality/sexual orientation to Michael Madhusudan Dutt based on his epistolary romance with Gour Das Bysac. However, the homosocial dimension of this enterprise, and the occasional erotic asides in his poetry and letters do function as fertile ground for appreciating the situational nature of the *eros* that flourishes in the letters and poems under scrutiny.

The select poems and letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt addressed to Gour Das Bysac studied in this research article, then, uphold a situational *eros*, which is potently indebted to literary/epistolary precedents, and the transgressive sentiments born from disagreement with social strictures imposed on matrimony in 19th century Bengal. At a time when this stalwart-to-be of Bengali literature had felt claustrophobic due to the looming threat of arranged marriage on the horizon (to a much younger girl inexperienced in the ways of life, literature and culture), he had resorted to protestations of romantic and quasi-erotic love to a male friend from college who fascinated him with both his virtuous character and personal charms. Gour Das Bysac traverses a broad spectrum of being an androgynous presence in the poems, a feminised *eromenos* figure in the letters who is constantly on the receiving end of the poet's broadsides, reprimands and occasional playful threats of chastisement and a cold, distant yet sympathetic "Petrarchan mistress" figure in Sunil Gangyopadhyay's representation. Comparing Madhusudan with Krishna seems to liberate in Gour Das a thitherto repressed, silent romantic appreciation of the poet's multifarious charms. Though both men were married to women and led heterosexual lives, the poems and letters under scrutiny uphold a self-conscious, highly dramatized epistolary (and poetic) expression of an *eros* which was homosocial and situational—which bloomed only in a particular season in the lives of these two talented gentlemen.

Endnotes

[i] The first four lines of Poem 38 of *Madhusudan Rachanabali* (cited in the List of works). It is an acrostic which spells out GOUR DAS BYSOC.

[ii] Initially, *Sei Somoe* was serialised in *Desh;* subsequently, the novel was published in two separate volumes in 1981 and then as a bi-volume novel in 1991.

[iii] The source for all letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt is *Madhusudan Rachanabali* (cited subsequently in the List of Works).

[iv] I begin this with a critique on the pigmy letter you sent as answer to the gigantic one I wrote you. (Letter 20) (Dutt 284)

[v] My dear Gour Dass/ Do you receive the letters I write you? —'pon my word, —a most tormenting,— torturing –excruciating uncertainty it is.

[vi] Can't you write a few lines to me? Do not forget me, for by that you break a solemn and oft repeated promise. (Letter 26)

[vii] Poem 21 of the Collected Poems of Michael Madhusudan Dutt is "Dedicated to G. D. B. by his loving friend, the Author". Poem 33 entitled "THE HEAVENLY BALL—A Fragment" specifies a "Dedication to G. D. Bysac, Esqr." Poems 12, 13 and 35 are entitled "To G. D. B."

[viii] *Gobhir gorjon sada kore jolodhor, / Utholilo nod-nodi dhoroni upor/ Romoni romon loye sukhe keli kore, / Danavadi deb jaksha sukhito ontore!/ Samiran ghono ghono jhon jhon rob,/ Barun probol dekhi probol probhab/ Shadhin hoiya pachhe poradhin hoe,/ Koloho koroye kono mote shanto noe*

(The clouds roar constantly/The rivers overflow onto the earth, / Women indulge in games of love, / The gods, demi-gods and demons are all pleased, / The winds create a frequent din, / They are much powerful; their influence is great/ Lest they are imprisoned after breaking free, / The winds refuse to be pacified) (My translation)

Sunil Gangyopadhyay includes in *Sei Somoe* a fictional representation of the situation in which this particular poem was composed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt in the presence of Gour Das Bysac

[ix] In a letter addressed to Gour Das dated 25th November, 1842, Madhusudan had written that he was "prepared (poor as I am) to receive so **beautiful** a guest as yourself." (My emphasis)

[x] Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world (Wilde 16)

[xi] "I hate the d—d fellow K—r" wrote Madhusudan in Letter 18. James Kerr was the Principal of Hindu College when Madhusudan was a student there, and he had not attended college for a few days owing to his dislike for the former (Som 14).

[xii] The quotations from *Sei Somoe* from this point onwards in the article have been extracted from "*Sunil Gangopadhyay's* Those Days (*Bengali*)" introduced and translated by Shormishtha Panja from *Same-Sex Love in India* by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai.

[xiii] "I do not have words to tell you how happy and delighted I am to have received your letter infused with warmth and love." (My translation) This is an excerpt from Gour Das's letter to Madhusudan dated 5th January, 1856 (Murshid 148).

[xiv] In the meantime, let me tell you that I am anxious to begin your biography, I propose a short treatise for the present…

[xv] Michael Madhusudan Dutt's first wife was Rebecca Thompson McTavish from 1848 to 1856. In 1858, Madhusudan married Emilia Henrietta Sophie White who passed away a few days before the poet in 1873.

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Unsexing the Bourgeois: The Lesbian Resistance of Inez in *No Exit*

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Abstract: The three characters of *No Exit* are variations of Sartre's central existential philosophy. However, it is essential to redraw the contours of this thought, reorienting ourselves to Inez's perspective as a feminist, lesbian, proletarian, subaltern narrative of resistance. For this, she undertakes the strategy to unsex the heteronormative-bourgeois hegemony—along with other subsidiary socio-eco-political policies. She exposes their vacuous class respectability and charade of gender construct, superimposed by the patriarchal superstructure which Garcin and Estelle failed to fulfil. Misogyny and class prejudices whet Inez's class consciousness that amalgamate with her sexual enterprise and covert designs to capture power, concomitantly reinventing the status quo.

Keywords. Unsexing, Bourgeois-Heteronormativity, Hegemony, Subaltern, Lesbian Resistance

Introduction

Sartre's *No Exit* brings together three individuals post-death in a modernised hell (building with rooms and passages) for eternal cohabitation. The three individuals are the bourgeois heterosexuals Garcin and Estelle, obsessed with norms of propriety and proletarian lesbian Inez for crimes of ill-treating one's wife, infanticide and psychological abuse that leads to two deaths. Interpretations have usually equated Inez as an individual equal to Garcin and Estelle without adequate consideration of their sexual and socioeconomic differences. The postmodern world vests Inez's sexual orientation and class identity with an equally important meaning to shape her resistance narrative that has a bearing on the central politics of the play. Since Sartre never clarified the causes that could sour a relation enough to be hell for someone, this paper indicts the unequal power dynamics between hegemony and subaltern, bourgeoisie and proletariat, heterosexuality and homosexuality as the causes responsible for the creation of hell where Garcin and Estelle as hegemonic bourgeois-heteronormativity occupy the power locus from which Inez undergoes a tripartite displacement as a working-class lesbian woman. Each character's actions boil down to power politics, intertwined with a sexual motive of seduction. Estelle seduces Garcin to validate her attractive quotient. Although Garcin flits between the two women, he attempts to coax Inez to validate his identity of courage and respectability. Inez relentlessly seduces Estelle to combat the heteronormative-bourgeois hegemony, adopting the strategy of unsexing—stripping off of patriarchal, heteronormative standards of gender construct—against the bourgeois characters to strive for power and identity as part of her lesbian resistance.

Setting

The Second Empire style possesses a French aristocratic relevance, establishing the hell-space as a bourgeois setting since this luxurious style could only have been afforded by a wealthy capitalist. A bourgeois household demands the bourgeois notion of respectability, a reason why Garcin is affronted by the valet's insolence, demanding him to be polite since Garcin's class superiority is disturbed. The valet's insolence and pride stem from his familiarity with hell-scape realities—absence of torture instruments and toiletries—that Garcin is unaware of. This knowledge endows the valet with a certain power over Garcin. A class conflict ensues, jeopardising Garcin's image of manly courage to redeem which he boasts a facade of bravado of facing the situation. Hence, the hell-scape displays a propensity to challenge the gender-class constructs with the valet as a precursor to Inez. All three characters possess a conferred, egalitarian ownership of the room, rendering it a bourgeois family-setting. In the patriarchal familial hierarchy, the man occupies the topmost rung with the woman below. Though both Inez and Estelle are women, they do not occupy the same position. Estelle's contempt of Inez as a post-office clerk relegates Inez to the lowest echelon. Inez counters this marginalisation by infantilising Estelle as pet, "[p]oor child" (28), "little sparrow" (41).

Garcin questions the necessity of keeping a paper-knife in hell, underscoring his utilitarian bourgeois apperception of the world that determines worth. Functional utility of objects based on essence preceding existence is in stark contrast to humans' "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 290)—encountering oneself first, defining afterwards. Reimagining hell as a building with innumerable rooms and passages critiques the mechanistic world of man-made construction as infernal, drawing an analogy between the claustrophobic, incarcerated setting with bad faith and Modern existence. Since Garcin cannot sleep and dream any more, he reminisces his past dreams of open-air green fields as an attempt to liberate himself. The absence of mirrors—a metaphor of bourgeois artificiality—is strongly felt by the socially-trained Garcin and Estelle who being conscious of their appearance, tailor their manners to suit genteel decorum.

The BBC adaptation replaces Sartre's lavish aristocratic Second Empire furniture with a bare minimalist setting, perhaps critiquing the replacement of one exploitative regime (aristocracy) with another (bourgeoisie). The movie fashions the setting as a Modern art gallery to critique elitist bourgeois lifestyle of leisure, inaction and complacent intellectualism that fundamentally goes against the crux of Existentialism, which places importance on action and responsibility. Modern art encapsulates the fragmentary Modern existence signified by the movie's two disjointed art-pieces while the third is painted as a whirlwind, possibly symbolising the Sisyphian cycle and eternity. Human rationality fails to fathom eternity without the aid of measurement parameters that fashion eternity as time—a resource capitalised by the bourgeoisie to maximise utility and profit. Eternity distinguishes itself from measurable time as a hegemonic superstructure that cannot be measured, unlike time, for utilisation nor can be easily understood by human cognition. Eternity is an indefinite deferral of measurement and thereby utility—the materialist modes of human reasoning. Eternity is an abstract continuum.

Existential Perspective

Sartre, in an interview, had accepted the paradox of being a "bourgeois writer" and a "revolutionary activist" (Sartre, *Talking* 275)[i]. As an existentialist and playwright, Sartre can be hailed as the avant-garde of the philosophical-intellectual ambit. Roland Barthes opines that the avant-garde comprises a small section of the bourgeoisie, dependent on bourgeois money. Hence, there is no "political contestation," as the avant-garde contests the bourgeoisie ethically in "art or morals" (139) partly explaining Sartre's paradox. Although Sartre was well-involved in French politics, it was often criticised as discursive non-action. Perhaps to defend Existentialism from being criticised as a bourgeois contemplative philosophy, Sartre deliberately places Inez, a working-class woman to espouse the core idea: "You are—your life, and nothing else" (43). Sartre contends Existentialism as a philosophy of action. A proletarian can best illustrate this fundamental truth since though every class requires action for survival, blue-collar workers depend more regularly on arduous labour while the wealth of the bourgeoisie creates a propensity towards leisure, even decadence, something the working classes cannot afford. Inez laughs at Garcin's way of setting his life in order through post-death complacent contemplation and secret observation of his colleagues on earth which satirises the bourgeois lifestyle of comfortable inaction.

Sartre's revolutionary zeal was honed when he identified with other war-prisoners of being on an equal plane during the Nazi occupation of France. In fact, Sartre's Existentialism is quite egalitarian and socialist in essence since it accentuates individual responsibility, evaluating the impact of one's choices on oneself, others and the image of humankind as a whole before one acts on their choices thereby balking nonchalant liberalism and solipsism by acknowledging the plurality of perspectives, propelling the individual to question their "right to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself" (Sartre 293) following the individual's action as a standard. The individual's introspection and dilemma constitute the Sartrean anguish Garcin experiences in retrospection over his act of leaving for Mexico when called upon to fight that he fears was a cowardly move. This anguish "does not prevent their acting" but "is the very condition of their action" (294)—the reason why Inez deliberately chooses to pursue Estelle despite knowing that it would lead her to eternal torment. Sartre's philosophy permeates Garcin's statement of being "linked together inextricably" (29); one raises their hand, others feel a tug. Similarly, Inez accuses Garcin of having soiled every sound, intercepting it on its way. Garcin attempts an evasive strategy to ignore each others' presence but Inez underscores he "can't prevent [his] "*being there*" (22). His inaction would also be an action; whether he wills it or not, his existence would have a bearing on others.

In Sartre's dynamic of the Being-For-itself, Being-For-Other and Third, the 'Other' is only a look for the For-itself—"my transcendence transcended" because one is always seen in "irresolvable relations with instruments" like "seated-on-a-chair"(*Being* 263). The "act of being-looked-at" includes alienation and the realisation "that it is impossible for me to see" myself seated (263), while others can, explaining Inez's accusation of Garcin of having stolen her face; he knows it and she does not. This is the crux of their ontological war.

Since Garcin enters first, we tend to align our perspective with him as For-itself with Inez as Other and Estelle Third. Inez, by flattery, tries "forming a community" with Estelle as "they-subject" (415) which in Sartrean parlance is a subject-state constituted by more than one individual (Inez and Estelle) and experienced by the object (Garcin) who is being-looked-at by the they-subject. Initially

Inez attempts a power-sharing partnership with Estelle to marginalise Garcin. This is thwarted as Estelle hates Inez who hates Garcin, aligning with Sartre's: the "Third looks at the Other who is looking at me"(416). This metastable state decomposes when Garcin allies with Estelle "to look at the other" as "We-as-subject"[ii] (416) when Garcin reciprocates Estelle's attraction to avenge himself. To understand Inez's struggle, we need to reorient our perspective with Inez as For-itself, Estelle Other and Garcin Third. Garcin, the Third as the bourgeois-heterosexual man, brings about the existence of the "oppressed class" (421) by his look. Since Inez fears complete incarceration and isolation, she must "look at the Third" "to confer an object-state upon him"(416). So, when Estelle spits in Inez's face, Inez directs her antagonism at Garcin because she can "*experience upon the Other and apropos of the Other* the Third's transcendence-transcending" (416). Inez finds Estelle "no longer [belonging] to [her]...an object for another transcendence"(416). This is what Inez means when she realises, without any need of ocular proof, that Estelle would be making every sound to attract Garcin's attention. Inez also experiences herself "looked-at by the Third while I look at the other" (416) when Garcin favours Inez, rendering Inez unable to "keep" Estelle "in an object-state" (417)—a reason why she rejects Garcin so as to maintain her possessive grip over Estelle.

Inez weaponises attraction to conquer Estelle but her enterprise falls through because Estelle is attracted to Garcin and dislikes Inez. Both Inez and Garcin occupy object-states in Estelle's world but it is not homogeneous, involving a power imbalance. Garcin as Estelle's object of attraction holds an elevated position than Inez who alone is Estelle's object of repulsion that prevents Inez from identifying with Garcin. In Estelle's world, Inez occupies the lowest rung. Garcin as Estelle's object is slightly below her (theoretically speaking) yet virtually an equal for if Garcin reciprocates Estelle's attraction, he theoretically gains an upward mobility while Inez remains trapped as the lowest in their miniscule class structure.

When Estelle visibly recoils at Inez's profession, Estelle becomes the Third whose gaze begets the class consciousness in Inez. Inez's occupation ushers in the dynamic of the collective, becoming an Us-object as one of the postal clerks—through her awareness of the collective—who are relegated by the Third's gaze. Sartre believed that since experienced as shame, it would ultimately disintegrate with the For-itself reclaiming its selfhood, suppressing the Us-object. However, in "strongly structured cases" like "class consciousness" the "project of freeing oneself from the 'Us' must involve the "project of freeing the whole 'Us' from the object-state by transforming it into a We-subject"(422). This forms the crux of Inez's struggle for power against the incumbent bourgeois hegemony to liberate herself and the 'Us' from the subaltern object-state.

Twentieth-Century Lesbian Existence

Webber in *Rethinking Existentialism* points out that Ralf Tognieri had underscored how Inez's original French name, Inès, comprises the last two letters of Garcin and first two of Estelle. Hence, Inez is central to the play in breaking the hegemonic heterosexual-bourgeois continuum. Inez doesn't mention her place of origin but her name is preponderant in Spain, Portugal and France. Spain oscillated between bouts of legal discrimination against homosexuality—that peaked under Francoist dictatorship—and relaxation of legal prejudice while Portugal had codified homophobia into stringent laws criminalising homosexuality with imprisonment. France demonstrated more

homosexual repression than other countries. Even feminists promoted their "role as mothers," subtly condemning "lesbian visibility" (Bard 158). Christine Bard emphasises how Simone de Beauvoir "suggested that living a lesbian life was a 'feminist' choice," "social and political" (159), justifying Bard's argument of lesbianism as a conscious political construct in French feminism.

Tamara Chaplin demonstrates how pockets of French Sapphic-cabaret subcultures offered a butch-femme performance dynamic where women who had initially taken up a masculine role due to job requisites, got involved in lesbian relationships outside the cabaret. Despite these exceptions, France was mostly repressive especially in 1942 when the Vichy government raised the age of consent for homosexuality to twenty-one while that of the heterosexuals remained at thirteen. This is important to understand Inez's suffocating social milieu that causes her to feel trapped so much so that she squirms—like the serpent in Brauner's painting *The Palladist*—when Garcin approaches Estelle with a sexual intent, reminding Inez of the impossibility of free expression of her sexuality. Since a resistance simply based on sexual desires would not suffice for "those whose struggle to survive is laced with sexual oppression", it requires highlighting the "class dimensions of (sexual) identity and desire" (Hennessy 202). Hence, Inez's lesbian resistance must involve a class resistance. To combat the hegemonic power structure, the subaltern chooses cruelty as her weapon of rebellion for successful expression of her homosexual desires which otherwise would have been repressed by the socio-normative structure, frustrating her freedom, dignity, authenticity. Inez's revolutionary spirit is even calcified in her Whitefriars song. When Inez claims her inability to function without making people suffer, she posits a survival strategy and necessity, not genetically coded but a conscious choice. Case-in-point: Inez's admission of fright as a torturer implies a split in her self wherein a detached objective glance was repelled by the corporeal manifestation of her cruelty. This dissonance must have impelled her to make a conscious choice which renders her "rotten to the core" (29). "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (Sartre 291).

Cruelty is not merely her individual identity but strongly intertwined with her class and sexual identities; a rival political strategy of her lesbian resistance vis-à-vis hegemonic bourgeois-heteronormativity. In fact, queer theory itself is "a site of struggle, not a monolithic discourse" (Hennessy 53) where "race and class are always thoroughly inscribed within sexual self-definition" (Halberstam 260)[iii]. Inez's class resistance is thoroughly inscribed in her lesbian resistance as: a lesbian-proletarian resistance. To ensure the preservation of her identities she must dismantle the bourgeois-heteronormative hold on hegemonic power through her counter-offensive of strategically unsexing the bourgeois, possible because Inez is located between the traditionally-feminine Estelle and traditionally-masculine Garcin. Inez attempts forging a lesbian continuum with Florence and Estelle as a woman-identified experience of "giving and receiving of practical and political support", "bonding against male tyranny" (Rich 649) of Inez's cousin and Garcin. She successfully dissolves the patriarchal institution of marriage between her cousin and Florence as her form of "*marriage resistance*" (649) and successfully hinders Garcin and Estelle's heterosexual mating. Inez transgresses prescriptive heteronormativity, usurping her brother's hegemonic position as Florence's spouse[iv], challenging patriarchal gender norms and power dynamics as a precursor to her post-death unsexing. Inez actualises the 'Lesbian Existence'—breaking the homosexual taboo, rejecting compulsory heterosexuality, involving "direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women" (649). Thwarting the man's easy accessibility to women (Garcin's over Estelle, Inez's cousin's over Florence)

initiates her lesbian resistance. Lesbian existence suggests the "historical presence of lesbians and [their] continuing creation of the meaning of that existence" (648). This meaning is Inez's lesbian-proletarian identity established via her resistance. In fact, her lesbian resistance becomes her identity. Her identity is also established in the end as Logos—the origin of meaning—in hell-space as she replaces bourgeois-heteronormativity as the authority that creates meaning since bourgeois-heteronormativity fails to provide a satisfactory answer to post-death realities of time and eternity.

The Unsexing

Overdependence of the bourgeoisie on respectability begets strict conformity to heteronormative marriages that serve the utilitarian function of property inheritance along the patrilineal line of descent so that property remains within the bourgeoisie, preserving its superiority, thereby allying the bourgeois with the heteronormative. Estelle, though poor, became a bourgeois through marriage, evident via her lifestyle references to cabarets and generalising comment of everyone going to the Dubois-Seymours' parties, indicating her singularity of worldview that considers everyone a bourgeois. Inez's enquiry into the Dubois-Seymours' vocation denotes her socioeconomic class where a salaried job is a requisite. Garcin ran a pacifist newspaper, unequivocally belonging to the business class with the bourgeois mind-set of adherence to conventional dictums of bravery and uprightness for respectability. His insistence to be "extremely courteous" (9) underscores the bourgeois artificial facade of social interaction that Inez rejects. Similarly, Estelle finds the word dead 'crude' instead using 'absent' as euphemism. Garcin introduces himself as a man of letters, denoting his pride over his intellectual quotient, thereby viewing himself as human capital which goes with his idea of being an able-bodied, valiant man possessing excellent good health, intellect, daring, constantly bent on improving his skill-set to be a better-performing productive asset. This is a classic utilitarian bourgeois way of thinking wherein he evaluates his worth contingent on how resourceful he is to the socioeconomic structure. Inez unsexes Garcin to detonate his complacent image as a well-performing asset, exposing him to be a cowering liability who could not defend his country when called upon to do so.

Proprietorship of earthly assets govern Garcin when he, exuding pride, believes his coat, smeared with his blood, has transformed into a "museum-piece," "scarred with history" (24), an artefact of historical-cultural relevance to be calcified in public memory and historical discourse. However, he discovers Gomez and his colleagues denounce him as a coward which he believes will be ultimately fossilised as "legend" (39), regretting his inability to memorialise himself via his coat and join the ancestral lineage of able-bodied men proclaiming their masculine power of a valiant heritage instead being relegated to the fringes, having to resort to Estelle to regain his lost power through her validation who too needs him to validate her attractive feminine persona because Estelle discounts Inez's attraction as that of a woman's, thereby exposing Estelle's internalised misogyny and heteronormativity—reminding one of Atwood's statement of the internalised male gaze wherein a woman is a man inside watching a woman, being one's own voyeur. Estelle too evaluates her attractiveness and femininity through a male gaze. The aforementioned rationale based on which Garcin and Estelle seek one another's validation confirms their unsexed identities because it exposes their false facade of masculinity and femininity. Inez deliberately taunts Garcin as a "weakling, running to women" (44) for consolation to flay his tough-man gender construct.

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A case-in-point of bourgeois respectability and decorum, Garcin fusses over his toothbrush because loss of personal hygiene causes a loss of rank and human dignity to that of animals. Since a lower-ranking valet points this out, Garcin must declass him as "beastly," "bad mannered" (5), apparently for his paralysed eyelids but betraying the exclusionist construction of the bourgeoisie where non-bourgeois are bestial, unsophisticated, sub-human. When Garcin initially wanted to take off his coat due to the sweltering heat, Estelle is horrifically repulsed, treating it as ungentlemanly, an indecent working-class gesture but after she was goaded into revealing her crime, she lets him take it off, renouncing any pretence of bourgeois gentility, implicitly relegating herself and Garcin to the beastly sub-human position—a process that Inez catalyses for she was the first to compel everyone to confront the truth and as Webber rightly underscores was only reiterated later by Garcin. Webber describes this epistemic injustice as congruent with modern terms: bropropriating and hepeating. Inez ensures both Estelle and Garcin are instrumental in their own unsexing; the coat, a symbol of bourgeois gender roles, is stripped off Garcin's back, indicating a metaphorical emasculation, rendering him "naked" (30) as he accepts to Inez after the revelation of their saga of sin.

Inez counters Garcin's avoidance of one another by promoting a project of conflict[v]. Though hatred is often described as a repulsion—true of Estelle's for Inez—it is also a raw magnetic pull, condensing the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Inez gravitates towards Garcin but truly in the form of a confrontation vis-à-vis Garcin. This captures the woman-man, homosexual-heterosexual, proletariat-bourgeois dichotomous friction where the former constituent of the pairs are drawn to wrest hegemonic power from the latter. In fact, Inez undergoes a tripartite dislocation from the power nucleus being a woman, homosexual and proletarian post-office clerk, rendering her a subaltern in Gramsci's words as diametrically opposite and perennially subservient to the "ruling" (55) "hegemonic and dominant groups" (53) until " 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination" (55). Failing to fight when his country needed him, Garcin resorts to play-pretence of a soldier, assuming the role of a commanding officer, issuing orders to subaltern officers to be silently vigilant, programmed automatons. He espouses inaction, the bourgeois ideology of complacent, introspective "self-communings" (17) to scavenge his class identity under threat from Inez. It also partly explains Garcin's vexation with his wife whose "martyred look" (12) reflected a quality he lacked. Garcin views Inez as the ideal archetype of manly courage. His recognition of her experiential knowledge of dilemma, dissonance, turmoil implies tacit admiration for her disillusioned, courageous acceptance of truth. A product of internalised heteronormativity, Garcin views Inez adopting a traditionally masculine role—for he never considers women as rational beings but passive silent recipients or objects of sexual gratification—that gives his affinity for her a homoerotic dimension. Inez's presence unsexes him, concomitantly begetting a non-thetic[vi] consciousness of his inability to fulfil patriarchal constructs of machismo. The unsexing is not in the conservative meaning that homoeroticism strips a man of his masculinity but in the sense of emasculating false, manly standards of patriarchy and heteronormativity that both the bourgeois characters have internalised. Estelle is unsexed by Inez's attraction for it reflects her transgression of prescriptive feminine standards that she had violated by actualising what Lady Macbeth only claimed—a mother committing infanticide. Estelle's deep-seated, latent fear of being demonised unfeminine is embodied in Inez who is attracted to her "diabolical" (20) look. Estelle's xenophobic fear of Inez is the superego's detestation for the id. Hence,

she attempts to collaborate with Garcin to further her political-sexual motive to heal her wounded sense of self and femininity.

Inez quashes the heteronormative construct, usurping Gomez's position in Garcin's perspective. Characteristic of the bourgeois, Garcin offers Inez "instead of class solidarity a larger...natural solidarity, in which the worker and the employer are integrated in a *Mitsein* which suppresses the conflict" (*Being* 429). Garcin fashions this as "human feeling" (29) while it is solipsistic fear at work. Sartre probes the deeper id impulses—a clear Freudian influence—that Inez elaborates as dark motives of "fear," "hatred," "all the dirty little instincts" (38). Garcin wonders whether fear of death was his real motive. So do we: whether Garcin really wants to actively confront the situation in hell or is simply afraid of "disaster" (30)? In the post-truth world, plurality of truths, adulterated with psychological defence mechanisms like rationalisation hinders a single neat answer. Ultimately, action is the only objective that can be known. His solipsism lies in equating Inez with himself as identically rotten and cruel. So, if one has the power to conjure pity, so should the other—a lapse in Sartre's Existentialism that Webber underscores can be resolved by Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialism that explains how desires produced by an internalised "sedimented value" (115) clash with "recently endorsed values" (*Rethinking* 115). This accounts for the differences amongst people and one's inability to change one's actions easily. For Garcin, the battle is between a homogeneous, universalized solipsistic perspective and accepting the plurality of perspectives. For Inez, accepting Garcin's Mitsein would entail renouncing her class and sexual identities, leaving her vulnerable to be defined by bourgeois-heteronormativity. Garcin uses salvation as a hegemonic weapon to market his self-image as still capable of eliciting pity as basic human feeling. Inez resists by distinguishing herself from the hegemonic bourgeois-heterosexual class by forming her rival political project to paradoxically borrow bourgeois trade practices, not to subscribe to the superiority of bourgeois ideology but to dismantle the incumbent hegemony by its own weapons. In fact, Inez views bourgeois practices as an abstraction of the hegemony, as simply tactics transmuted into a subaltern weapon—a revolutionary redefinition of the whole class-power structure. It is not an indoctrination into the bourgeoisie as Garcin initially thinks who soon realises that Inez borrows selectively, maintaining herself distinctly from the incumbent regime and heavily relying on her sexuality to script her lesbian resistance as anti-assimilationist. Halberstam believes 'lesbian' is a label of stable identities that requires to be 'queered' since 'queer' is "resolutely anti-assimilationist," critiquing "traditional identity politics" (259). Borrowing capitalist business policies aid her anti-assimilationist lesbian resistance to decentralise heterosexuality, establishing proletarian lesbianism as hegemonic, permanently challenging the semantics of respectable bourgeois-heteronormativity. Garcin's preference for Inez improves her object-state than Estelle but his condescension affronts her since the bourgeois catalyses her positional elevation. Hence, she refuses help, striking a contractual agreement as two equal business partners. Her bargain with Garcin is an epitome of the homo oeconomicus; the quid pro quo entails marketing the promise to Garcin that she would refrain from harming him—minimum expenditure—in lieu of Garcin's promise to help Inez secure possession over Estelle—maximum utility—whose devotion to her would be profit accruing. Garcin's acceptance bolsters her foothold in the power domain, so much so that she directs Garcin commandingly who obeys her. For Inez, Estelle is the market she wants to monopolise, thereby resorting to lucrative endorsement of her complete eternal surrender to Estelle in lieu of reciprocity, apparently equal but actually Inez's

systematic conquest. Calling Estelle 'my' glancing stream/crystal is a case-in-point of Inez's queer materialism that views queer reality constituted by language—not matter or thought—since language defines the limits of human knowledge and rationality. The body is treated as a "vehicle of speech acts and discourses" (Morton 2). Barthes opines the desire underpinning all conscious communication to engage the interlocutor, has an erotic suggestion implicating the material body[vii]. Inez offers Estelle a quid pro quo: accept Inez's lesbian relationship and proprietorship ('my') in lieu of transcending bodily realities from a woman to a glancing stream/crystal through non-normative logic as Inez 'queers' conventional lexicology. Inez competes with Garcin to monopolise Estelle who competes with Inez to monopolise Garcin. Hence, Inez is eager for Garcin to leave when the door opens for after Garcin's exit, Estelle would also cease to function as a competitor, thus eliminating both competitors. Only Garcin does not actively compete with anyone for he is secured of his topmost position in the bourgeois socio-economic-political structure.

Barthes accentuates the "planned syncretism" (138), of the bourgeoisie merging into and constructing the nationhood, excluding the "allogenous" (138) elements and appropriating the rest. Inez's borrowed bourgeois stratagems—as a capitalist tycoon—align with a political leader seeking totalitarian control. Hence, Inez's lucrative false promises constitute her propaganda to snare Estelle as lark-mirror or predatory hunter through force, fear, craft that takes the form of flattery (welcoming her with flowers), attempt at intimacy (insisting Estelle to call Inez by her name), psychological coercion as revenge strategy against both the bourgeois, hyperbolic falsity that Estelle has been sheltering in her heart for ages, deception to inflict fear or slander when spurned. She hazards an attempt at force but recoils under threat of physical violence from Garcin, the regime, oscillating back to tact and divisive politics, sowing the seeds of distrust between Garcin and Estelle, propelling the former to see through the latter's designs of mystifying her true intentions.

Although Inez's borrowed bourgeois policies catalyse her lesbian resistance, establishing her as a political rival to de facto power-holders, they do not directly aid her triumph which is ushered in by her individual achievements, her ontological epiphanies. If her colonising seduction of Estelle's affective and cognitive apperception of the world had succeeded because of bourgeois manoeuvres, theatre would have been accused of espousing bourgeois ideology in tune with Barthes 'exnomination'—universal promotion of bourgeois culture that refuses to identify itself as bourgeois yet pervading all classes as a lucrative ideology. "[M]eaning flows out of [the bourgeois] until their very name becomes unnecessary" (137). Her mercantile manoeuvres would have caused a compromised victory—an impasse, a Sisyphian cycle of exploitation, damnation, eternal torment, not only frustrating Inez's feminist lesbian resistance, but also subsuming the identity of a hegemonic exploitative regime as a mere replacement.

Inez had wanted de facto control of power but her victory lies in Garcin's de jure[viii] acknowledgement of her cognitive and experiential superiority where his aim to defeat and convince her is paradoxically couched in securing her honest judgement affirming his self-image—an unequivocal feminist and class victory for her. It is not condescension or validation but the due respect Inez and her resistance deserves. When Inez had pledged to confront Garcin, he did not even deign bestow upon her the status of an equal rival. Later, he hazards to enlist her as an equal partner of empathy but she rejects due to which he spirals into attempting an equal game of challenge.

Moreover, it is Garcin who wants to be seen as an equal by Inez. Reinvigorated, he tries his level best to get Inez to ratify[ix] his heroism necessary for his redemption, vesting a quasi-spiritual Christian grace in her faith, almost elevating her to the level of God.

When "the oppressed class by...sudden increase of its power posits itself as 'they-who-look-at' in the face of...the oppressing class...only then that the oppressors experience themselves as 'Us' "(*Being* 429). Unable to acclimatise to the onerous task that has, in fact, empowered Inez (the oppressed class), Garcin vacillates back to sexism, allying with Estelle as 'Us' in a sexual enterprise to re-marginalise Inez using heteronormativity which in turn is weaponised by Inez in a final shot of unsexing—relentlessly reminding them of their failure in conforming to normative gender constructs like motherhood and toughness, enervating Garcin with the eternal presence of her boring gaze, a powerful version of the female gaze where the individual subsumes the collective, encapsulating the unified power of the oligarchy controlling and mobilising the mass embodied in Garcin's complete subservience as a "well-trained dog,"(45) culminating in obedient puppetry. Inez is emblematic of the "crowd" (45), mercilessly subjecting Garcin to surveillance not unlike an Orwellian Big Brother and successfully conquering him with her gaze that distils Caesar's Veni Vidi Vici[x]—Inez's strategy right from the beginning.

One limitation is Inez's inability to win Estelle's affection so as to transmute the androcentric worldview into a lesbian gaze of the male-dominated world, a reason why Inez strove to ensure both Florence and Estelle saw through her eyes, incessantly reminding the former of her culpability in her husband's death—symbolic of the death of phallocentric hegemony. However, Inez's ultimate aim was to expose the vacuous patriarchal edifice which she succeeds in by Garcin's final rejection of Estelle, indicating the triumph of her lesbian resistance to dismantle sexual stratification. Ethical grounds are another limitation as Inez is indirectly culpable in two deaths. However, her acceptance of having experienced horror, shame, fear, the emotional turmoil of knowing oneself to be a torturer, experiencing a split-second tenderness for the ordeal of Garcin's wife, humanises her, proving her to be non-pathological. It does not excuse her crimes nor does she do so but it underscores her cruelty being entwined with sexual repression and prolonged marginalisation as someone whom no one ever admired, starkly drawing out her educational and professional disparity with the well-admired, well-educated, qualified bourgeois, Garcin. Moreover, her unsexing constructively catalyses Garcin's project of realising his authentic self wherein Inez challenges him, assuming the role of athletic coaches or military leaders mentoring and training cadets. Hence, the subaltern becomes the leader through role reversals and shifts in power dynamics of the class-gender-sexual continuum.

It is, however, the "they" (23) who form the actual Orwellian Big Brother oligarchy, keeping the three under strict surveillance as a rigorous totalitarian regime, in a controlled environment like a scientific experiment to monitor their behaviour and draw inference. This 'they' forms the highest authority on jurisprudence, having sentenced them to eternal damnation and having chosen them to be together. The three don't have the unity to combat this supra-hegemonic power locus that keeps itself an absent-presence but Inez, by fashioning herself as a similarly disembodied presence of "mere breath...a gaze observing you, a formless thought that thinks you" (44), transcends to that supra-real Godhead figure dimension, leaving the bourgeois utterly powerless. By virtue of a proscenium play

that preserves the fourth wall, the audience transforms into a similar absent-presence whose judgement has also been challenged by Inez.

Garcin's vacillations parallel the relapse in the end of *Waiting for Godot*, deflating Vladimir's heroic realisation of existential truth. However, Garcin's vacillations are punctured in the end by his active initiative to confront the problem which seems optimistic as Sartre believed Existentialism to be. Beckett's text preserves the diurnal time-cycle which has been challenged in *No Exit*. Initially eternity is defined as measurable when Garcin states the earthly maxim of getting used to something in time. Gradually, the comparative time disparity on earth and hell aids in dissociating measurement from the bourgeois understanding of time as resource, leading to an epiphany, incredible to the characters, of eternity as an indefinite deferral, a realisation Inez had already realised that eternity is wrongly considered a perverted extension of measurable time in tune with the human definitive way of understanding. In fact, time both on earth and hell forms one single continuum: eternity but bourgeois rationality divides time-on-earth as measurable and time-post-death as immeasurable eternity. This realisation is new to the bourgeois duo because despite the fact that they knew they were trapped for eternity, they had not realised the full extent of its meaning. This realisation impels them to another that their bourgeois-heteronormative identities are superfluous accessories that fail to aid their realisation of the profundity of eternity.

Conclusion

Inez, via her mercantile policies, power stratagems and Garcin's de jure acceptance, successfully unsexes both bourgeois characters off their bourgeois notions of respectability, utilitarianism, time-eternity difference and gender construct. Though Estelle refuses Inez's lesbian continuum to bond against Garcin's male tyranny, Estelle is ultimately defined by Inez's gaze as an object of female attraction, attracted to a man who rejects her due to Inez's gaze[xi], failing to be traditionally feminine whose gender identity has been 'queered.' Garcin's acceptance of Inez's gaze—viewing himself as cowardly, non-masculine—by borrowing from Inez's experiential knowledge establishes and mainstreams this knowledge as lesbian-proletarian epistemology that fills the epistemic vacuum created by bourgeois-heteronormativity's incapability to negotiate with the new reality of hell and eternity. This epistemology emerges from Inez's lesbian-proletarian gaze[xii] and body as the repository of experiential knowledge whose centrality transforms Inez into 'Logos'—the point of origin of meaning—in hell-space whose knowledge is crucial to realise the authentic self. Inez's lesbian resistance is the revolutionary redefinition of her lesbian-proletarian identity as Logos, vesting her 'lesbian existence' with a new meaning as the source of meaning itself as post-death reality derives meaning from Inez's gaze, body and knowledge. Thus, her unsexing and lesbian resistance is executed unto fruition.

[i] Transcript of Sartre's interviews conducted and compiled by John Gerassi

[ii] The difference between they-subject and We-as-subject is of perspective. From Garcin's perspective, Inez and Estelle are a 'they-subject' that he experiences indirectly via his alienation from them as their object. Garcin and Estelle form a 'We-as-subject' that Garcin can directly experience as a subject

[iii] Though Halberstam's work focuses on the U.S., her statement is generally true

[iv] There is no mention of a marriage between Florence and Inez but their relationship is almost of spouses

[v] "fight it out face to face"(23)

[vi] A loan term from Sartre's terminology which he describes as "not to *know*. But it is in its very translucency at the origin of all knowing."(*Being* 69) Sartre illustrates it with an example of counting cigarettes which appears to one as an "objective property"(liii) of that collection, as a fact existing in the world. However, it conceals a "non-thetic consciousness of my adding activity"(liii) for if anyone questions the person as to what they are doing, the person would reply they are counting. This is the "non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible."(liii) Inez's presence shapes this subliminal, non-thetic consciousness as a nursery for his consciousness proper of the failure to fulfil patriarchal masculine standards because the failure to fulfil is something Garcin had all along refused to accept, keeping himself deluded. Even when he sleuthed himself to reveal his real motives, he is unable to account for the truth.

[vii] In Morton's "Queer Materialism"

[viii] Though there is no codified legal system in the hell-space, the de jure epithet and question of ratification implies a tacit unwritten agreement

[ix] Please see (vii)

[x] Latin equivalent of: I came, I saw, I conquered

[xi] "I cannot love you when she's watching"(45)

[xii] Her gaze replaces mirrors, symbolically the old bourgeois-heteronormative order

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Re-visiting George Egerton: Reclaiming the Subdued Voice of Fin de Siècle New Woman Fiction

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Abstract: Canon formation is often based on dominant ideological considerations. Texts like F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948) and Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994) showcase the institutional academic prevalence of such prejudices. One of the authors subjected to such systematic erasure was George Egerton (1859-1945), who wrote her fictional works in the late-nineteenth century focusing on issues like female sexuality, marital rape, alcoholism, non-conformist/deviant motherhood. For her explorations of such issues, she was not only lambasted by the contemporary periodical press but also excluded from the canonical estimates of the subsequent critics. However, since the publication of texts like Elaine Showalter's *a Literature of their Own* (1977) and *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* (1993), feminist critical tradition has reconfigured the canon by foregrounding the contributions of the fin de siècle women writers like George Egerton, claiming them to be the missing links between the eminent writers of the Victorian novel and the feminist writers of Modernism. My paper intends to focus the contributions of George Egerton, whose feminist aesthetic branded her as a notorious iconoclast of the fin de siècle, in view of the changed sensibility of the twenty-first century academia.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, motherhood, literary canon, feminist revisionism

In tandem with the emergence of the first-wave feminism, the literary works of New Woman writers came to the fore in the early 1890s. Although multitudinous addressing the Woman Question had flooded the periodical press throughout the 1880s and the early 1890s, it was Ouida who extrapolated the phrase "New Woman" from Sarah Grand's essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" primarily in order to ridicule the radical aspirations of the late nineteenth century feminists (Ledger 9). The New Woman was simultaneously a historical phenomenon and a discursive construct of the fin de siècle. While the 'real' New Woman included the late Victorian feminists and suffragists, it was the textual representations of the New Woman that became the center of controversy. As the term "New Woman' was essentially used to designate a deviation from the Victorian model of conventional femininity, the fin de siècle's dominant discourse on the New Woman – which was disseminated by the periodical press and anti-feminist treatises – denounced her as a sexual aberration, who was "a threat to the human race, [and] probably an infanticidal mother" (Ledger 10). Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality*, has argued that the appearance of a dominant discourse automatically invokes the emergence of a "reverse discourse" and "… discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also […] a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (101). According to Sally Ledger, the hostile dominant discourses on the New Woman during the fin de siècle led to the formation of a "reverse discourse" as several feminist

writers came forward to speak on behalf of the New Woman. One of the most eminent authors of New Woman fiction of the fin de siècle was George Egerton.

Mary Chavelita Dunne (1859-1945), predictably writing under the male pseudonym of George Egerton, was a controversial writer of the 1890s, whose experimental approach and provocative themes simultaneously earned her much popularity and notoriety. Although she has been branded by modern critics as one of the most influential writers of the fin de siècle feminist movement and claimed that, "I am embarrassed at the outset by the term 'New Woman'… I have never met one— never written about one. My women are all eternally feminine" (qtd. In March-Russell ix). However, Egerton's exploration of feminine subjectivity and sexual emancipation reverberated with New Woman preoccupations. While her literary oeuvre diversely comprised short-story collections, novels and even incidental contributions to journals, particularly *The Yellow Book*— which induced contemporary critics to associate her with the Decadents— my paper aims to focus primarily on her early short-story collections *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894), which, pre-dating the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895, were written during the heydays of her career. *Keynotes* (1893), Egerton's debut collection which announced her entry into the debate over the New Woman, was an instant success. Within the next six months, it was reprinted twice (O'Toole 2) and lent its name to a series of books published by John Lane which included the writings of various avant-garde authors. In spite of being a best-seller, *Keynotes* (1893) provoked an intense critical backlash from both the contemporary periodical press and anti-feminist commentators. While the *Punch* magazine parodied Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) in "She-Notes" by Borgia Smudgiton (Fitzsimons 2), *The Athenaeum* complained that the text was notable "chiefly on the account of the hysterical frankness of its amatory abandonment ("The Year in Review" 18). Even W.T Stead, a pioneer of new journalism who did much to publicize what he termed as "The Novel of the Modern Woman", singled out Egerton's *Keynotes* for his vehement disapprobation, arguing that the stories only "present one side, and that too an unpleasant one, of the modern woman' (68). The hostile critical reaction evoked by the *Keynotes* (1893) also went on to 'greet' Egerton's second volume of short-stories, *Discords* which was in 1894. James Ashcroft Noble, writing in the *Contemporary Review* in 1895 cited Egerton's *Keynotes* and *Discords* while commenting that the "fiction of sexual sensualism […] has largely made itself such a nuisance to ordinary decent and wholesome readers" as it distorted reality and presented one with "a series of pictures painted from reflections in convex mirrors" which unnaturally emphasized "the sexual passion" at the heart of all social relations (494). Based on such negative responses from contemporary critics, George Egerton, much like various other iconoclastic New Woman writers of the nineteenth century including Sarah Grand, Olive Shreiner and Mona Caird, was denied a position within the mainstream literary canon by the twentieth century critics like F. R. Leavis and Harold Bloom, who deemed such writers unworthy of entering the high echelons of literature.

However, it is to be noted that the notion of canon is dominated by various hierarchies of class and gender. Those texts which remain in tune with the dominant conventions of the time find themselves easily consecrated as canonical. Feminist critics have played a crucial role in the interrogation of the male-oriented canon and have sought to recreate the canon in a way that challenges patriarchal assumptions about aesthetic values and becomes more hospitable to the aesthetic tradition committed to the foregrounding of women's rights, consciousness and predicament. With the emergence of "Phallocentrism" and "Gynocriticism" during the 1960s, the

existing male-dominated literary oeuvre came under feminist scrutiny and they forwarded the concept of an alternative feminist canon in order to recuperate the voices of several female authors who, in spite of enjoying great popularity during their heydays, have eventually ebbed into obscurity.

Feminist critic Elaine Showalter, who has famously coined the term "Gynocriticism", employed her critically acclaimed work, *A Literature of their Own: British Woman Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977), to retrieve the voices of fin de siècle writers like Sarah Grand and George Egerton and appreciate the feminist aesthetics that characterizers their works. It is from this perspective that my paper aims to reevaluate the position of George Egerton, whose writings not only document the various concerns of late-nineteenth century, but also deals with the "Woman Question" in an innovative and iconoclastic manner.

With the emergence of the first-wave feminism during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, several writers, both male and female, championed the cause of the feminists who rallied in favour of civil rights of women. In this respect, Egerton seemingly occupied a liminal space. Apparently distancing herself from the term "feminist", he argued that her writing was not guided by an urge "to usher in a revolt or preach propaganda, [but] merely to strike a few notes on the phase of the female character I knew to exist…" ("How to Court an Advanced Woman" 194). This is further reverberated in "A Keynote to *Keynotes*" where she states:

> I realized that in literature, everything had been done better by man that woman could hope to emulate. There was one small plot for her to tell: the *terra incognita* of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man like to imagine— in a word to give herself away, as man had given himself in his writings. (58)

However, underneath this ostensibly modest and innocuous statement, Egerton seems to authoritatively claim that "women's writing both corrects men's myth about women and tells hitherto unarticulated stories about "the *terra incognita* of woman" (Fluhr 245) and thus offers an accurate depiction of female subjectivity. Parading against the conventional gender mores of the patriarchal Victorian society, Egerton employe her fiction to examine the various facets of femininity and promulgate her ideas about female emancipation. Her short-story collections, *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894) are no exceptions. Attesting to her attempt of portraying woman "as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine" ("A Keynote to *Keynotes*" 58), Egerton's *Keynotes* offers alternative model of womanhood which is driven by sexuality, agency and desire for self-fulfillment— a far cry from the traditional Victorian notions of femininity which demanded women to be sexually insipid, passive beings, who could be easily assimilated into the mould of a dutiful wife and self-abnegating mother. On the other hand, in *Discords* (1894), Egerton probes into the realities that shaped women's experiences during the nineteenth century and addresses various taboo topics like illegitimacy, infanticide and the predicament of the "fallen" woman. However, in this paper, I would like to focus on Egerton's texts like "Gone Under", "Virgin Soil" and "A Cross Line", featuring respectively in *Discords* and *Keynotes*, in order to explore Egerton's iconoclastic take on contemporary social concerns like prostitution, alcoholism, marital rape, sex education and birth-control. My literary choices also determined by the way these texts diversely undermine the dominant discourses of the time and

reveal perspectives on the nineteenth century British culture that are rarely locatable in canonized works and, in turn, push the readers to reevaluate their perspective of Victorian life and attitudes.

Egerton's "Gone Under" deals with the figure of Edith Grey, whom the female protagonist comes across during her journey on a steamer from New York to England. During a storm at sea, she responds to Edith's cry for help and, while nursing her through the night, grows interested in her new acquaintance, who drinks continually and confines herself to her room. As the protagonist develops a degree of tenderness Edith, the agony-ridden soul reveals her predicament. With circumstances conspiring against her, Edith, an orphan, was seduced at sixteen by her lover, whom she considered her husband and lived accordingly. Her wealthy lover, however, did not share her delight at her consequent pregnancy and rather made arrangements to wriggle herself out of situation. He duped the naïve girl into visiting an establishment called Madame Rachelle's where he conspired with the mercenary midwife to do away with the baby. Although certified as stillborn, Edith was certain that her new-born was murdered. Edith's plight sheds light on an issue which emerged as a pressing concern in Victorian England— infanticide. According to A. Cossins, "Infanticide was an offence that constituted the dark pool of criminality, since it amounted to the most common crime committed by women during the nineteenth century", with most infanticide being committed by unwed mothers soon after birth and by midwives who readily masked live births as stillbirths since they knew the ways to produce "a quiet 'un" (7). The loss of her baby shatters Edith emotionally and she resorts to alcohol to blotch out those tormenting memories: "…[B]ut it haunted. I could feel it [the baby] at night groping about for me, and the chill of its little hands clung to me, and I used to drink to get warm again and forget it" (*Discords* 100). On top of that, when her lover abandons her for Europe, Edith is propelled into a life of debauchery, guilt and shame. Although the protagonist sympathizes with the bereaved mother and claims that "a woman who mothers a bastard, and endeavours bravely to rear it decently, is more to be commended than the society wife who contrives to shirk her motherhood", she fails to ameliorate her situation (*Discords* 101). Judged harshly for her debauchery by her lover, who is himself responsible for her decline, it is hinted that Edith is finally abandoned to a life of prostitution. The female protagonist thus realizes, as she moves across Leichester Square which is the "rendezvous of leering, silk-hatted satyrs and flaunting nymphs of the pavement", that sometimes in this "city of smug outer propriety" the foot-walks are "crowded with the 'fallen leaves' of fairest and frailest womanhood, like wild rose leaves blown by a wanton wind into a stay" (*Discords* 109-110). This attests to the limited options that were offered by the ostensibly puritanical Victorian society to 'fallen' women like Edith to sustain themselves. While the 'fallen' woman is forced to a life of degradation, as the text critically points out, the man's existence continues unencumbered. However, Egerton makes the tragic figure of Edith Grey challenge the conventional Madonna/harlot binary— she emerges as a liminal figure of the 'grey' zone in whose character a subaltern sexuality finds harmonious coexistence with a strong maternal instinct. While the nineteenth century medical theorist Wiliam Acton, in keeping with the dominant moral attitudes of the time, maintained that "all illicit intercourse is prostitution, and that this word is justly applicable as those of 'fornication' and 'whoredom' to the females who, whether for hire or not, voluntarily surrenders her virtue" (qtd. In Logan 9), Egerton's text pushes the readers to probe into the circumstances that conspire to expose women like Edith to a life of depravity and degradation.

While Egerton's "Gone Under" sheds light on the harrowing experiences of an unwed mother, "Virgin Soil" bears testimony to the sordid aspects of conventional marriage and compulsory motherhood. The tale deals with the character of Flo who, at the tender age of who seventeen, is married off to a middle-aged but crucially wealthy man, as her mother considers it the best way to secure her future. Like a traditional Victorian mother, her parting advice to her daughter is that she must obey her husband in all things and that "marriage is a serious thing, a sacred thing" (*Discords* 148). However, apart from emphasizing the apparently sacrosanct nature of marital bond, the mother feels too hesitant to discuss the sexual aspect of marriage and lets her leave with her husband without any knowledge of sexuality. Five years later, when Flo returns to her mother, "the hollow-eyed, sullen woman is so unlike the fresh girl who left her five years ago" that the mother can barely recognize her (*Discords* 151). The narrative reveals that Flo, whose countenance betrays a "cynical disillusion", has left her husband and has come home to remonstrate with her mother, before heading towards a new life of her own (*Discords* 150). She informs her mother that Philip, her philandering husband, "has gone to Paris with a girl from Alhambra" and that his excursions with other women have seemed to her as "lovely oasis in the desert of matrimony" as she loathes her sexually demanding husband and this has made her conjugal life seem like "a nightmare" or "one long crucifixion, one long submittal to the desires of a man I bound myself to in ignorance of what it meant" (*Discords* 159). She chastises her mother for keeping sexually ignorant and sending her to "fight the biggest battle of a woman's life, one in which she ought to know every turn of the game with a white gauze of maiden purity as shield" (*Discords* 157). Subverting the ideology of marital bliss upheld by well-noted nineteenth century texts like Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854), a paean to marital bliss, Egerton's New Woman protagonist Flo reveals the harsh physical reality of conventional marriages:

> Marriage becomes for many a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children conceived in a sense of duty, not love. They bear them, birth them, nurse them, and bear again without choice in the matter, growing old, unlovely, with all the joy of living swallowed in a senseless burden of reckless maternity… . (*Discords* 155)

This not only sheds light on the shocking experience of marital rape that often tainted the lives of married women, but also highlights the way conventional marriages alienated women from their reproductive faculty that is coerced into replicating the will of the husband. However, Flo, like a typical Egerton-ian heroine, acknowledges that "I have my rights too, and my duty to myself" (Discords 159) and have seemingly resorted to the use of illegal abortifacients as a means of retaining agency over her reproductive faculty. This hinted when, as a response to her mother that the presence of a child would have alleviated her marital discontentment, Flo's outright negation of the proposition is accompanied by "a peculiar expression of satisfaction over something […] as a man has when he dwells on the successful accomplishment of some secret purpose" (*Discords* 160). Abortion, despite being illegal in England since 1803, was the chief form of birth-control that was employed secretly and widely by women of all classes, and abortifacients ranged from herbs, salts to castor oil, turpentine and, by the 1890s, lead pills (Bland 190). According to Lucy Bland, "all such potions were unreliable and many were poisonous, frequently resulting in ill-health, even death" (190). In Egerton's text, the extensive emphasis on Flo's physical deterioration post-marriage— with

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her skin being "sallow with the sallowness of a fair-skin in ill-health"— seems to covertly indicate the way prolonged use of abortifacients have taken a toll on the health of the sexually abused young wife (*Discords* 150). Furthermore, the text evinces the way patriarchal intervention can lead to the disintegration of mother-daughter bonds— Flo, instead of condemning her sexually demanding husband for her ruin, lays blame squarely on her mother for ideologically moulding her in a way that renders her vulnerable to such patriarchal oppression. Through this, Egerton seems to etch a new code of maternal responsibility— whereby a mother must not act as an unwitting agent of the heteropatriarchal order, but rather support her daughter to find herself a suitable partner who, as Flo claims "would satisfy me, body and soul […] of whom I would think with gladness as the father of a little child to come" (*Discords* 158). Egerton's text also validates the fact that maternity and female fulfillment cannot be always considered synonymous – motherhood can only be a fulfilling experience when it is espoused voluntarily by a woman with a partner of her choice.

While "Virgin Soil" illustrates the negative ramifications of compulsory motherhood, Egerton's "A Cross Line" advocates the idea of a sexualized motherhood. As per the dominant sexual ideology of the times were not supposed to experience any sexual passion. According to William Acton, the British medical practitioner whose perceptions on female sexuality held sway till the 1890s, women are primarily guided by the "[l]ove of home, children and domestic duties" and generally "a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him, and, but for the sake of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attention" (101-102). But in "A Cross Line", Egerton's heroine, appropriately referred to as Gypsy, seems to contradict such patriarchal parochialism. Manifesting all the characteristics typically associated with the New Woman, like smoking, drinking whiskey and moving around unchaperoned, the young wife in Egerton's text is depicted as a free soul who despises "life with its tame duties and virtuous monotony" and fantasizes escape (*Keynotes* 27). On one of such occasions, the married heroine adulterously fancies herself as a gauze-clad, bejeweled Salome-like figure dancing erotically before a congregation of admiring male audience:

> She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissome waist and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what it craves, be it good or evil […] she can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye. (*Keynotes* 27-28)

The "heroine's adulterous sexuality", as Sally Ledger opines, "is eventually sublimated, in the story, into a passionate maternal devotion, a narrative manoeuvre, recurrent in Egerton's fiction, which has often irritated twentieth-century feminist critics" (100). However, it seems that there is room for scrutinizing the apparently conservative ending of this tale. This is primarily because the question of the paternity of Gypsie's forthcoming child remains unresolved— it may either belong to her husband or to the fishing stranger with whom she has seemingly forged an extramarital relationship. But in either way, the unborn child becomes emblematic of her eroticized self and agency, since in the narrative Gypsy is depicted to play an active role ion the sexual foreplay even with her husband as she "shuts his eyes with kisses, and bites his chin and shakes it like a terrier in her strong little teeth" (*Keynotes* 25). This seems to be the reason as to why the revelation about her forthcoming motherhood fills the heroine with a pervasive sense of emotional fulfillment and she begins to

perceive herself almost "as a precious thing" (*Keynotes* 44). Also, by not directly divulging the paternity of the unborn child, Egerton's narrative seems to take a dig at the conventional patriarchal social order by relegating paternal identity secondary to that of the mother. Elated at her pregnancy, Gypsy calls off her relationship with the fishing stranger and shares the news of her forthcoming child with her maid, Lizzie, who, as it is revealed, has had an illegitimate offspring of her own. Transcending their class differences, they bond over their shared feelings of maternity as Lizzie reveals to her mistress the tiny belongings of her baby and "the two women pour over them as a gem collector over a rare stone" (*Keynotes* 43). Challenging the Victorian idea of motherhood premised on the notions of sexual passivity, self-surrender and duty, Egerton's "A Cross Line" offers an alternative model of sexualized maternity that is guided by volition and the ethics of self-fulfillment.

Both *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894) are predominated by feminine presence while men are mentioned only cursorily. Egerton's narratives thus emerge as an alternative realm for the articulation of feminine desires and disappointments, aspirations and anxieties, which traditional male-oriented society would have discounted as both insignificant and indecent. The world represented by Victorian mainstream literature had obscured and occluded various aspects of contemporary reality, especially those pertaining to the experiences of women. The significance of Egerton lies in the fact that her fiction introduces to the readers that marginalized or erased female experience through the platform of literature. Egerton's bold explication of issues like female sexuality, marital rape and enforced maternity has been crucial in shaping the thematic concerns of her New Woman contemporaries. Writers like Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Ella Hepworth Dixon and Victoria Cross seemingly took cues from Egerton's nuanced depiction of women's inner lives and struggles as they expanded on her ideas, albeit in diverse ways, to etch a new code of female autonomy beyond the dictates of patriarchy. Plunging into the mental recesses of her female protagonists, Egerton comes up with an impressionistic narrative that offers critical insights into the psychological workings of women at crucial junctures of life. Thus, Sally Ledger rightly notes that, "Egerton's short stories have characteristics which we now would associate with a modernist literary aesthetic: they are compressed, elliptical, impressionistic rather than explanatory, and focus on the inner consciousness of their female subjects" (187). Moreover, Egerton's exploration of issues like female agency, sexuality and the experience of motherhood seems to anticipate the subjects of twentieth century writers like Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich. Texts like *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Woolf, owing to their explication of the psychological realities of women's lives, seem to echo Egerton's emphasis on the workings of the inner recesses of the female psyche and the complexities of their lived experiences. Adrinne Rich, writing much later in the twentieth century, seems to echo Egerton's critique of traditional gender roles and socially constructed idea of motherhood — her eminent text *Of Woman Born* (1976) explores the way institutionalized motherhood becomes a potential tool for the subjugation of women within a patriarchal social structure. Thus, an examination of Egerton's works helps to locate the roots of a rich feminist tradition. Furthermore, besides authentically depicting contemporary social problems and, in the process, alerting the readers to the necessity and possibility of positive social changes, Egerton's works evince the way literature became for the late-nineteenth century New Woman writers an instrument to impel social reform. Although their overtly subversive content debarred Egerton's texts from entering the hallowed precincts of mainstream canonical literature and they

languished in relative obscurity till feminist intervention during the second half of the twentieth century incorporated Egerton within the feminist literary canon, Egerton's greatest contribution lies in the fact that her texts not only act as significant cultural artefacts of late Victorian times but also addresses issues like marital rape, birth-control and the importance of sex education, which transcend their topicality and continue to be potential subjects of debate well into the twenty-first century. Herein lies the lasting impact of George Egerton.

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Deciphering Draupadi: Representations and Recontextualisations

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Abstract: This article seeks to examine representations of Draupadi, a pivotal, intriguing and controversial character in the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata*, part of the epic tradition of poetry that weaves myth and history continues to exert a strong cultural, philosophical and spiritual influence. The galaxy of stories and the general perceptions about the figures such as Draupadi that this epic holds within its ambit remain more or less the same in popular memory. Born out of a sacrificial fire, known for her unfathomable beauty and intelligence, she becomes the wife of the Pandavas- the five great heroes of Bharat; she is lost in a game of dice and has to face an attempt of being disrobed in a royal assembly. Draupadi doesn't accept her humiliation passively, she raises her voice to question and demand justice. She becomes iconic in her resistance and it is this germ of rebellion that gives her continued relevance to be appropriated, accommodated, reclaimed and (re) presented in the modern-day discourse. In the last few decades, the figure of Draupadi has been reinterpreted and recast in a number of narratives which essentially problematise the politics of patriarchal storytelling. This paper focuses on four such works- Iravati Karve's *Yuganta*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi". The theoretical framework used in the paper includes feminist explorations of representation. Feminism may relatively be a modern development and to read women (or certain representations of women) of the distant past through a feminist lens might be considered an instance of anachronism but the fact that much of contemporary Feminist theory has germinated not only from academic; critical thought but also from the different movements and ground level activism that have and still continue to fight for women's issues is an important precondition of this paper. A part of the article focuses on the idea of Draupadi's ability to transcend specific representations to emerge as hyphenating metaphor between theoretical analysis and praxis.

Keywords: Draupadi, feminism, representation, recontextualisation, theoretical analysis, praxis

"You are looking at the story through the wrong window...you've got to close it and open a different one..." (Divakaruni 15). A myriad of windows have been opened to look at the intriguing character of Draupadi, the controversial heroine of the *Mahabharata*, and as 'a story gains power by retelling' (Divakaruni 20), so has the story of Draupadi attained newer dimensions with every retelling.

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The galaxy of stories and the general perceptions about the heroic figures such as Draupadi that the *Mahabharata* holds within its ambit remain more or less the same in popular memory. Born out of a sacrificial fire, known for her unfathomable beauty and intelligence, Draupadi makes her first appearance in the 'Swayamvara' ceremony held for her. She becomes the wife of the Pandavas – the five great heroes of Bharat. She is lost in a game of dice and has to face an attempt of being disrobed in a royal assembly. She is subjected to public insult and humiliation more than once and constantly finds herself to be the victim of the ire of male lust. Most of the major decisions of her life are thrust upon her by the men in her life – the 'Swayamvara' ceremony is organised in such a way that allows her little freedom to actually choose her husband; a polyandrous marriage is imposed on her and she is gambled away by her husband. However, what makes her unique is that she doesn't refrain from raising her voice to question and demand justice.

"Dhik! Shame on you!
If all these great Kaurava heroes
find nothing wrong here,
then the dharma of the Bharats is dead,
the dharma of the ksatriyas is dead.
Drona, Bhisma mahatma Vidura
And the great raja Dhrtastra
Have lost their greatness- else why
Are they silent on the great adharma?
Tell me, members of this sabha, answer me:
What do you think- have I been won or not won-
Tell me, O lords of the earth?" (Lal 424)

Draupadi does not accept her humiliation passively, her cry for vengeance rings reverberating. She becomes iconic in her resistance.

Ishwar Tripathi in his book *Mahabharatacharcha* refers to the two essays Bankimchandra Chatterjee wrote about Draupadi stating in one of them that whether in Ancient or in Modern writings, the heroines are portrayed in the same mould – a devoted wife, soft-natured, shy, an epitome of tolerance. This is the archetype of Aryan literature. Valmiki created Sita with these traits in mind and since then, the Aryan heroines have been moulded in a similar fashion; famous heroines like Shakuntala, Damyanti, Ratnabali are all imitations of Sita. Chatterjee states 'Aeka Draupadi Sita(r) chaya(o) sporsho koren nai' ('Only Draupadi remains untouched by the influence of Sita's powerful image'). Moreover, Sita has been imitated a million times but Draupadi has never been

replicated (Tripathi 47). Having said that, the question remains – has her character been able to escape the patriarchal mode of storytelling in the text of *Mahabharata*? Perhaps not. She, however, remains one of the most striking women characters of Indian literature , one of the earliest strong female voices to have echoed in the realms of literature- resilient and questioning.

The germ of rebellion that Draupadi's character holds is undeniable. It is this trait that makes her relevant even today and has allowed her to be appropriated and accommodated in the modern-day discourse. In the last few decades, the figure of Draupadi has been recast and reinterpreted in a number of narratives which further problematises the politics of patriarchal storytelling. Traditionally, Draupadi's representation has been pivoted upon her objectification and denial of subjectivity. Popular contemporary revisionist retellings posit and attempt to reclaim Draupadi's subjectivity and lend to her an agency to re-present and reinterpret the narrative built around her. The fluidity of the character, as that of the epic that she is part of, allows her to be transplanted into multiple contexts. "Re-vision –the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival." (Rich 18; Plate 1)

Iravati Karve's *Yuganta* (1967), a collection of essays, originally written in Marathi, adopts a historical and rational approach to study some of the major characters of the *Mahabharata* - Bhishma, Kunti, Gandhari. She contextualises them and attempts to highlight their humane traits, not their venerated demi-god images. The chapter on Draupadi as John Brockington states in the Introduction to the text, "forms the heart of the book in many ways" (Karve xv). Dwelling on the few similarities and the many differences she draws between Draupadi and Sita (Sita is seen as the ideal heroine of a Romance; Draupadi, a very real and complex character of history), Karve examines some controversial concerns related to Draupadi. In completely rejecting the idea that Panchaali was the cause of the war in *Mahabharata,* she makes an important statement, challenging the popular belief. Her reference to a verse in a Purana that calls Sita the 'Kritya' (a demonic female) of Satyayuga and Draupadi as the Kritya of Dvaparyuga, calls out the misogyny of the 'belief' that women cause quarrels that are fought out by men. She rationalises her argument by drawing attention to how the Pandavas were more interested in retrieving their share of the kingdom than in avenging their wife. Moreover, the seeds of the war were sown long before Draupadi was even born – when Dhritarashtra was denied the throne in favour of Pandu.

That Draupadi was offered to Karna by Krishna in an attempt to lure him to the Pandava camp is another proof forwarded by Karve that ascertains how little power she had in the world of men. "Draupadi did not cause the war. She wanted it, but as the true inheritors of India's patriarchal society, the Pandavas were hardly men to bow to the wishes of their wives" (Karve 86). In her study of Kunti and Gandhari, too, Karve establishes that despite their strong wills, these women were directed by their fathers, husbands and sons. "Men acted, men directed and women suffered" (Karve 40) she says of these women, a statement resonant of what Simone de Beauvoir says in her *Second Sex,* "Woman has always been man's dependant...has gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received." (De Beauvoir 19)

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Karve makes another observation about Draupadi, this time not a very favourable one. What has been regarded as a confirmation of the strength of Draupadi's character – her courage to question a court full of men, demanding justice, is termed by the author here as her "greatest mistake" (Karve 89). "Draupadi's question was not only foolish, it was terrible...Draupadi was standing there arguing like a lady pundit when what was happening to her was so hideous that she should only have cried out for decency and pity in the name of the Kshatriya code." (Karve 90). Her insistence on questioning the notion of 'dharma' and raising the question about the legality of Yudhisthir's right to stake her in the game of dice after having already lost himself and her overall conduct in the face of adversity are often cited as examples of her prowess.

For Karve to say that the best option for her would have been to submissively cry out for pity could be considered to be quite an anti-feminist idea. The author's reasoning that Draupadi "had spoken in the assembly of men, something she should have known she must not do" (Karve 91) reads as lopsided and compels one to question her apparent 'objective' reading of Draupadi. It seems to co-opt itself within the patriarchal frame of interpretation, undermining Draupadi's rebellion as an act of resistance to power and making it once again about a patriarchal "Kshatriya code" and an "assembly of men".

Karve's assertion of Draupadi's "mistake" raises several questions –would Draupadi still be considered to be a prominent female force had she begged for mercy, even if it did save her from being dishonoured? Would tears and acceptance of her fate ensure protection of her honour? Is such an assertion not an act of denial of agency to Draupadi and, by implication, to any woman who encounters a similar situation of humiliation and dishonour? These are unsettling questions with no easy answers. However, these questions bring into sharp focus the essential difficulty in the portrayal and positioning of Draupadi. Even narratives which posit themselves as either speaking on behalf of Draupadi or giving her voice to speak for herself, wrestle with the complexities that make her and often emerge as guilty of either sanitizing her representation and/or interpreting her 'unconventionality' through a critical lens drawn from a patriarchal discourse.

Much like Karve, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (1984), originally written in Odia, presents a similar instance of falling into the trappings of a patriarchal code of interpretation in its rewriting of Draupadi. As she expresses in the "Afterword" to her novel *Yajnaseni*, Ray, pained by the stigma still attached to Draupadi's name because of her polyandrous marriage, was driven to composing a work that would present the deeper aspects of Draupadi's mind. "I have tried to present a psychological picture of Krishnaa as a woman living a predicament-ridden life, full of variety" (Ray 401) she says and does seem to have successfully achieved this end.

However, a book written by a female author about a female character of prominence would also be expected to have certain feminist elements in it. Does it hold true for *Yajnaseni*? Toril Moi in her essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine", where she draws the difference between the three terms mentioned in the title, says – "A female tradition in literature or criticism is not necessarily a Feminist one" (Belsely and Moore 106). She refers to the essay "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" by Rosalind Coward in which Coward discusses the general confusion of 'feminist' and 'female' writing

and quotes her "It is just not possible to say that women-centred writings have any relationship with feminism"(Belsely and Moore 120) and goes on to elaborate-

> Since patriarchy has always tried to silence and repress women and women's experience, rendering them visible is clearly an important anti-patriarchal strategy. On the other hand, however, women's experience can be made visible in alienating, deluded or degrading ways (120).

Yajnaseni does raise some pertinent questions about the oppression women face but the character of the heroine as has been presented cannot be said to have completely broken free from a conventional projection. She is not a rebel. Yajnaseni in Ray's novel comes across as a character that has internalised patriarchal ideologies. She considers it to be her duty to fulfil her father's desire, whether it be to aid him in his quest for vengeance or complying with his wish of getting her married to Krishna – "...I had no separate desire of my own. Just now I had made a vow before my father. So I was an offering to Krishna..." (Ray 9). Ultimately, however, Arjun is chosen for her. She is disappointed – "Did I have no wish of my own?" (Ray 23) – but she soon readjusts her emotions.

Her veneration for Sita is perceptible throughout the novel and so is her desire to embrace the ideals of womanhood. Her mind rebels when it is ordained that she should be married to all the five brothers but the values instilled in her by a male-dominated society comes to work and for the greater good she submits herself. Some of her views seem to be steeped in patriarchy, to say the least – "My bed was at my husbands' feet...all ten feet would be placed on it. This would be my appropriate dharma as a woman" (Ray 65).

She does question the laws that allow one man to have more than one wife but see a woman with more than one husband as a sinner. However, her rage at this inequality attains an element of ambivalence as she goes on to perceive her condition of being the wife of five men as a challenge to prove her chastity – a value that the patriarchal society seems to necessitate only in case of a woman. Ray's Yajnaseni sees it as an opportunity to prove that she could remain pure, unsullied, a 'sati' despite the strange marriage conditions.

Her rage and resentment at being insulted; her disappointment at being left defenceless by her husbands and her firmness in the royal assembly are all highlighted. "I do not beg for anyone's pity. I demand justice. To protect the honour of women is the dharma of a king" (Ray 238). Having vented her anger, however, she is "exhausted" and "surrenders herself to Krishna"(Ray 242). There seems to be a sense of seeking protection. "Lord, I am not mine own. This body is not mine. Therefore, the whole responsibility of this body is yours. All is yours. Hurt, reproach, insult, shame, doubt, modesty, everything is yours. It is you who are the primal cause. I know nothing" (Ray 243). She expresses her gratitude to Krishna for saving not only her honour but the honour of all womankind and wishes to spend her life as his handmaid. On meeting him she opens up her heart and sobs "…Finding so understanding a friend as Krishna, how could I control myself? After all, I was a woman!" (Ray 250).

There are moments when her thoughts do reveal her awareness of the unfairness of the circumstances. After being abducted by Jayadrath and freed by the Pandavas, Draupadi agrees to pardon and free him for the sake of his wife Sushila, "Without any fault why should she have to undergo the ultimate suffering?"(Ray 322) She also curses "womanhood for the inequality in the rules and laws of society for the sexes"(Ray 322). However, despite these occasional expressions of outrage at the inequality, what comes strongly in the novel is not her image as a dissenter but the image of a woman who strives to be an ideal woman prompted by the expectations of the society.

Like Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) also offers a subjective reinterpretation of Draupadi, where she herself is the author of her story. In both these novels, Draupadi is demythologised and a woman writes her own story 'that lay invisible between the line of the men's exploits'. However, a very different portrayal can be seen in Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions.* A powerful voice dominates this novel as Draupadi is presented in less constricted, more frank terms. The germ of rebellion that is to be found in the original representation of Panchaali gains greater proportion in this projection. Some explicitly feminist ideas echo throughout the book and most of these are very contemporary and relevant.

Born out of the sacrificial fire in the fire ceremony her father had performed praying for a son who would aid him in his plans of vengeance, Draupadi's first memories are that of rejection. "He held out his arms – but for my brother alone. It was my brother he meant to raise up to show to his people...Only my brother that he wanted" (Divakaruni 6). The rejection faced by Draupadi stands true for hundreds of girls in the Indian society, born to parents who seek sons – heirs of their family. Next comes the question of her education. She hungers for knowledge but it is hard to come by. "A girl being taught what a boy was supposed to learn?" (Divakaruni 23). While she craves for lessons that conferred power, the attempts being made to instruct her in singing, dancing, painting, sewing and other arts meant for noble ladies makes her feel the "world of women tightening its noose around her" (Divakaruni 21).

We have before us an example of the curtailing powers of the society, the denial of opportunities on the basis of gender. Virginia Woolf in her piece "Shakespeare's Sister" in *A Room of One's Own* dwells on this idea – how a woman with Shakespeare's genius in Shakespeare's time would have stood no chance because she did not fulfil what was the major criterion to even attempt to make it big – she wasn't a man. "She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school...She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face…" (Woolf 71).

The Palace of Illusions not only depicts the disadvantages a woman has to face but also presents the burden of gendered roles in a patriarchal society. Draupadi's brother Dhristadyumna is thrust into the pursuit of revenge, to which, perhaps, his disposition is not suited. On the other hand, her ambitions of changing the course of history are constantly scoffed at. "He was too cautious, sometimes I told him that gods must have got mixed up when they pushed us out from the fire. He should have been the girl and I the boy" (Divakaruni 55).

A desire for independence; to free herself from the restricted life she leads at her father's is born in her at a very early stage and this want of freedom is seen constantly associated with her desire for a home of her own where she has control over her life. She says of her father's palace – "Staring down from my rooms at the bare compound stretching below, I'd feel dejection...when I had my own palace, I promised myself, it would be totally different...it would mirror my deepest being. There I would finally be at home" (Divakaruni 7). The craving for a place of her own continues even as she is welcomed into the Palace of her in-laws. It would never be home for her. When the Pandavas do build a Palace of their own, she plays an instrumental role in deciding what it would be like, elated, at finally getting what she wanted. She names it the 'Palace of Illusions' and her role as its mistress only makes her more independent, enhancing her personality. Virginia Woolf had emphasised on a sense of independence for the proper cultivation of the creative faculties of women authors – "...a woman must have money and a room of her own..." (Woolf 7). Draupadi's abilities are heightened by the control she has assumed in her palace – "Being mistress of the Palace of Illusions had transformed me in a way I hadn't realised" (Divakaruni 180).

The novel doesn't depart from the epic in so far as the portrayal of the major events concerning Draupadi's life; she is still subjected to decisions taken by the men around her. The novelty lies in presenting to the readers her protesting voice at every such juncture, which couldn't have been possible in the larger framework of the epic. As Yudhisthir and Drupad debate the prospect of her marrying all the five Pandavas, Draupadi has no say in the matter. Yudhisthir suggests that if all five can't marry her, none would, leaving her at her father's house and Drupad suggests that marrying five men would make his daughter a prostitute and being abandoned would leave her with no other option but to embrace an honourable death. This argument strongly hints at the passivity women are subjected to. Draupadi, of course, always believed that she deserved better and we hear her determined voice – "I didn't fear the fate they imagined for me. I had no intentions of committing self-immolation (I had other plans for my life). But I was distressed by the coldness with which my father and my potential husband discussed my options..." (Divakaruni 118).

Her marriage to five men perhaps made her unique in allowing her the freedom that only men had enjoyed for centuries – of having more than one spouse. However, the choice was not hers. The conditions might be different but the oppression is not negated and Draupadi realises this, "Like a communal drinking cup, I would be passed from hand to hand, whether I wanted it or not...Nor was I particularly delighted by the virginity boon, which seemed designed more for my husband's benefit than mine..."(Divakaruni 120).

Her attraction for Karna from the time she sees him at her Swayamvara, her regret at not having been won by him is evident almost throughout the novel. This marks a complete departure from her portrayal of a devoted wife (Pativrata) for whom even the thought of a man other than her husbands would be considered to be unacceptable – "I confess: in spite of the vows I made each day to forget Karna to be a better wife to the Pandavas, I longed to see him again..." (Divakaruni 172).

Dragged to the court amidst hundreds of men, as the slave of Duryodhan, she is resilient even in desperation. After a point, she lets go of her fear and sense of shame – "Let them stare at my nakedness, I thought, why should I care? They and not I should be ashamed for shattering the bounds

of decency" (Divakaruni 193). This attitude makes a strong statement. Even today, the society has a tendency of stigmatising the victims when the burden of the offence should clearly lie elsewhere. For the woman to get rid of the sense of shame imposed on her requires a lot of strength and it is absolutely essential.

She vehemently pines for vengeance, constantly reminding her husbands of how they had failed her. The Great War happens and she is avenged but she faces loss and pain too – her sons, brother, father all perish but the strength that has marked her character throughout the novel persists. She emerges as a powerful and an able Queen committing herself to the betterment of the women left destitute after the war. She becomes the upholder of women's rights.

> I knew how it felt to be helpless and hopeless. Hadn't I been almost stripped of my clothing and my honour in this very city? Hadn't I been abducted in the forest and attacked in Virat's court when men thought I was without protection? I resolved to form a separate court, a place where women could speak their sorrows to women... (Divakaruni 323).

If Divakaruni's Draupadi was given a powerful voice, the central character of Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi", originally written in Bengali, is endowed with much more than that. Her challenges to patriarchy are no longer only in the form of words; her resistance is more of an offence than defence. In this radical appropriation, the author completely reshapes the character of Draupadi. The transformation of the setting and context from ancient to the modern makes her more relevant.

The way she is portrayed here is a major subversion from her presentation in the epic. Draupadi no longer remains the high-born Aryan princess, said to be the cause of the Great War; here, she is a tribal woman who is a participant in a war – she is a part of the Naxalbari movement targeting those involved in the oppression of the landless peasantry. She is already a rebel. The reader is introduced to the reader between two versions of her name (Devi 10) – 'Draupadi', the name given to her by her high-class mistress, and 'Dopdi' – the tribalised form of it; the two names indicating the dual nature of the reinterpretation in this story. The character of Dopdi is a derivation of Draupadi; she is drawn from her and yet is different from her. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her Translator's Foreword to the story states that "Dopdi is (as heroic as) Draupadi. She is also what Draupadi – written into the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text as proof of male power – could not be. Dopdi is at once a palimpsest and a contradiction" (Devi 12).

In "Draupadi", Mahashweta deflates and transgresses the parochial, apolitical, socio personal framework within which the female protagonists have conventionally been restricted and defined in traditional feminist fiction. Dopdi is presented as an aggressive comrade and there can be no doubts about her thirst for vengeance – "His mouth watered when he looked at me. I'll put out his eyes", she had said during an attack on a landlord (Devi 30). Her resolve is strong, come what may, she is not going to betray her fellow revolutionaries. No degree of torture is going to break her. Her fortitude is soon put to test, perhaps in a crueller way than she had expected, but she doesn't falter. If anything, she comes out of it stronger. She is apprehended and in police custody faces brutal gang rape at the

behest of the police chief, Senanayak. The insults heaped on Draupadi of the epic are magnified in this case and what the former was only threatened with materialises into deed in Dopdi's case. "Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years... Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts...Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four – five – six – seven – then Draupadi had passed out." (Devi 35)

As attempts were being made to disrobe Draupadi in *Mahabharata*, her prayers to the God incarnate Krishna were answered and she was covered in never-ending drapes of clothing; her modesty and honour was preserved. A masculine force had come to her aid. In Dopdi's case no such thing happens. We do not hear a word of prayer. She has no one to turn to – no husband (who is dead), no God. In Spivak's words "Rather than save her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine comrade, the story insists that this is the place where male leadership stops." (Devi 12)

The resilience continues to assert itself as the night darkens. "In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth" (Devi 35). She is not one to beg for mercy. She is given no respite; till the morning comes she is repeatedly brutalised, then thrown into a tent. Now, it is time for Dopdi to reclaim agency. Summoned to the chief's tent, she agrees to go but will not put her white cloth back on. A woman, who has been shamed, walks out naked in the 'bright sunlight' with her 'head high'. This is incomprehensible for the men who have subjected her to rape, as a punishment. The desired effect is obviously missing. Yesterday she was stripped and shamed; today, she shames and shocks the men by insisting on remaining naked.

She challenges them to clothe her if they dare to; questions their position as men; chides them to do her more harm than they already have. It is she, who, now, attacks them. She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob and says, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do?" (Devi 37). An "unarmed target" launches an offensive with her two mangled breasts, leaving the Chief 'terribly afraid'. Dopdi, being doubly subalterned by her positions first as a member of the minority tribe, and then as a woman, even after being subjected to acute humiliation and agony, rebelliously transcends the limits of her existence and finds a voice of protest that silences the patriarchal system. The figure of Dopdi/Draupadi truly transforms into a modern figure of resistance modelled on the older heroine, taking her legacy to newer heights.

In "A Literature of Their Own", Showalter sets out to describe three major phases of female literary tradition and "to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture." (11)

> First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalisation* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, an *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity (Showalter 13).

Interpreted against such a viewpoint, Pratibha Ray's representation of Draupadi could be read as an example of imitation and internalisation of established patriarchal norms and standards. Mahasweta Devi's representation of Draupadi becomes an emblem of protest against the set patriarchal parameters of female representation while Divakaruni's representation of Draupadi, strikes the note of self-discovery beyond the circumscribed patriarchal space and definition.

Draupadi stands as a figure and emerges as an idea, a concept hyphenating the domains of theory and praxis; the world of fiction and the world of lived experiences. In "Draupadi" Dopdi transcends into a modern figure of resistance and is placed in a particular geo-political context- she is part of the Naxalbari movement and is subjected to custodial gangrape. By refusing to clean or clothe herself she refuses to allow those responsible for victimising her to remove the signs of the atrocities they have committed. She also offers her nakedness as an affront to their masculinity.

> Dopdi does not let her nakedness shame her, her torture intimidate her, or her rape diminish her…It is instead a deliberate refusal of a sign system (the meanings assigned to nakedness, and rape: shame, fear, loss), and an ironic deployment of the same semiotics to create disconcerting counter-effects of shame, confusion and terror in the enemy (what is a 'man') (Sunder Rajan 155).

The theatrical adaptation of Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" presented by Kalakshetra, directed by renowned Manipuri director Heisnam Kanhailal is another example of the character's malleability and adaptability and her relevance in multiple geopolitical contexts. The narrative of the short story "Draupadi" had at its centre the Naxalbari movement, its adaptation by a Manipuri theatre group attains greater significance in the light of the fact that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been in force in Manipur. The AFSPA grants the armed forces the power to shoot in law enforcement situations, to arrest without warrant, and to detain people without time limits. As a result of these powers, it has been often alleged that the armed forces routinely engage in torture and other ill-treatment during interrogations.

When the play was performed, Sabitri Heisnam played Dopdi, the victim of custodial rape. At the end she had become nude before the audiences. The play wasn't received very well at the time of its release in Imphal and Heisnam was criticised for nudity on stage. In an article published in The Indian Express, published on March 19, 2017, it is related how on July 15, 2004, Heisnam Kanhailal and his actor wife Sabitri Heisnam were in Delhi, taking a class at the National School of Drama (NSD), when they received a phone call. At Kangla Fort in Imphal, Manipur, where the 17 Assam Rifles were stationed, a group of middle-aged women had taken off their clothes and stood with a banner that read "Indian Army Rape Us". The demonstration had taken place to protest the custodial killing of a Manipuri village girl Thangjam Manorama. She was allegedly tortured and raped before being killed. In protesting the way these women did real life seems to have taken its language of protest from the theatre. The 17 Assam Rifles was moved out of the Kangla Fort within a year of the protest.

Sabitri Heisnam's decision to perform the act of disrobing herself on stage during the climax of the play had been considered to be culturally insensitive and allegedly disregarded the dignity of women. Deepti Misri in "'Are You a Man?': Performing Naked Protest in India" refers to Sabitri's reflections on the negative responses to her performance. She quotes Heisnam:

> Many people in Manipur said, 'Sabitri, what you have done is disrespectful to women. . ..' You write this because you don't think it through. Not one, many women have been stripped, and their rape took place in front of their husbands and fathers in law. You, who are educated, and write books . . . you don't understand that when I play Draupadi and take my clothes off, it's nothing to take my clothes off, it's about my insides, my feelings. (613)

Apart from the issues of custodial rape, institutional torture meted out in form of sexual humiliation, Heisnam's representation of Draupadi also seem to highlight some other extra-literary ideas. The fact that an actor's nudity on stage could have raised strong questions about the degradation of dignity of women but many incidents of disrobing, stripping in public go unprotested is a sad reality. These are 'punishment' given to women. Mahasweta Devi in conversation with Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak taped in Calcutta in December, 1991, says, "When a woman is raped the entire judiciary system is against the woman. The general consensus is: only women of loose character get raped, for India parades that India holds women in great honour" (Devi xiv, *Maps*). The fact that India 'parades' that it holds its women in great honour is a very strong and relevant statement. The idea that the notions that are held in theory are perhaps not translated into reality is close to truth. The shame and stigma associated with rape survivors is something that the society imposes on them. It is this idea of shame that these two representations of Draupadi have tried to subvert. Sexual humiliation might also be used as a retributive measure, as was perhaps the case with Draupadi.

> Draupadi's vulnerability lay in her polyandry; but, as we are told elsewhere in the epic, it is also her habitual pride, haughtiness, mockery and assertiveness that call forth the resentment and wish for revenge of the Kauravas. Since she is chaste she is saved, but because she is blameworthy she is subjected to the chastening ordeal." (Sunder Rajan 151).

Such instances time and again draw attention to the irony inherent within the concept of perceiving women as venerable particularly in the Indian context. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak states "If in the context of colonial production the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (287). In the most generic sense the term 'subaltern' implies workers, women, peasants, minorities or those social groups and individuals that have been marginalised, erased and rendered invisible within a nation's history writing/culture making enterprise. Spivak remains sceptical about the intellectual's ability to speak for the subaltern. Yet such an enterprise is necessitated to move forward towards a feminist praxis which could become an intersectional space for the multiplicity of identity and lived experience.

The measure of a successful feminist theory is its ability to make visible that which is hidden, silenced or distorted. Its very foundation pivots on forging a link between discourse and the lived experiences of women within power structures which create various types of oppression and

discrimination. Feminism and feminist theory cannot and must not be confined to abstractions, over generalisations and mere theorising. These need to posit that which is relevant to the objective of attaining an egalitarian society. Stories play a powerful role in reaffirming, challenging, subverting, disrupting and reshaping our cultural spaces and what these constitute. As accounts drawn from lived experiences, stories can be about the past, the present, or the future or they could serve to blur the demarcations between these three.

Accounts as multi-layered, complex and timeless as the *Mahabharata* offer to us a rich source of material to reclaim, revise and renew our perspectives and worldview. With its vast galaxy of stories and characters, the *Mahabharata* becomes an important case study towards a better comprehension of the functioning of the cultural power structures. Draupadi, as one of the central characters of this epic, emerges as a metaphor through which such power structures may be analysed. She becomes a ready site of resistance, providing avenues to challenge and possibly dismantle these power structures. The timelessness and continued contemporaneity of Draupadi arises as much from those of the epic to which she belongs as from the simultaneous possibility and impossibility put forth by her complex, layered, fluxional subjectivity. Kate Millett writes,

> The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the "Otherness" of women. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is the "Other" or alien. (46)

Draupadi continues to fascinate through her malleability to transcend the 'materiality' of the body marked by power, circumscribed by contexts and located in specific cultural/social positions to become an intersectional site of representations and re-presentations. An attempt has been made to trace the various recontextualisations of Draupadi in order to arrive as close as possible to a more comprehensive understanding of Draupadi's subjectivity, punctuated as it is by the subjectivities of those who attempt to represent her, and how she functions as a subversive metaphor continually disrupting patriarchal structures. Draupadi's representations hold testimony to how she, body and mind, inhabits oppressive spaces regulated by patriarchy, is shaped by them and yet, she carries power within her to reshape and redefine them.

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Aesthetics of Dissent: A Critique of the 'Averted Look' in Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*

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Abstract: The ambiguous configuration of the vampire—as a literary and cultural trope—attests to their ability to engage with the shifting regimes of sociological anxieties and political frustrations. With the proliferation of countercultural discourses, the twenty-first century had witnessed a resurgence of cinematic vampires that pander to the changing sensibilities of a distinctly globalised population. The metaphor of the vampire has served as an index of gendered cultural representations and the (dis)ease surrounding it. Owing to its protean constitution, contemporary female auteurs have reappropriated the iconography of the vampire as a viable conduit to enact and enable alternate idioms of resistance. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's formulation of the male gaze and Hamid Naficy's theorisation of the Islamicate Gaze Theory (as it relates to the regional geopolitics of Iranian cinema), this paper attempts to read Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014) as a critique of the semiotics of 'averted look', a theoretical framework that consolidates the efforts of the authoritative Iranian establishment to project Iranian women as desexualised presence on-screen. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate the role of inter-generic hybridity in activating a sense of solidarity that undercuts gendered cultural suppositions.

Keywords: Countercultural, Resistance, Gaze, Inter-generic, Hybridity.

Introduction

Emblematic of all that is virtually nebulous, the ambiguous configuration of the vampire—as a literary and cultural trope—attests to their ability to engage with the shifting regimes of sociological anxieties and political frustrations. In contradistinction to the formulaic rigidity of the traditional monsters, the vampires betray a remarkable malleability that facilitates their seamless invasion into the cultural consciousness of the masses. With the proliferation of countercultural discourses, the twenty-first century had witnessed the resurgence of literary and cinematic vampires that pander to the changing sensibilities of a distinctly globalised population. The metaphor of the vampire has served as an index of gendered cultural representations and the (dis)ease surrounding it. Owing to its protean constitution, contemporary female auteurs have reappropriated the iconography of the vampire as a viable conduit to enact and enable alternate idioms of resistance. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's formulation of the male gaze and Hamid Naficy's theorisation of the Islamicate Gaze Theory (as it relates to the regional geopolitics and the visual grammar of Iranian cinema), this paper attempts to read Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night* (2014) as a critique of the semiotics of 'averted look', a theoretical framework that consolidates the efforts of the authoritative

Iranian establishment to project Iranian women as desexualised presence on-screen. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate the imperatives of the role of hybridity in activating a sense of solidarity that undercuts gendered cultural suppositions.

The Ontology of the Vampire: Reappraisals and Reappropriations

Thriving on dichotomous discourses rampant in folkloristic tales, the figure of the witch has been mobilized to generate surreptitious social commentary. The vampire, in its various diverse as well as discordant incarnations, has exploited the universal fear of death and annihilation on the one hand and on the other, has replicated in the popular cultural imaginary as metaphors of latent human desire and deviant sexual fantasy. Emblematic of all that is virtually nebulous, the ambiguous configuration of the vampire—as a literary and cultural trope—attests to their ability to engage with the shifting regimes of sociological anxieties and political frustrations. Precariously wedged between its part-human and part non-human affiliations, the vampire occupies a liminal territory of operation. The notorious ubiquity of the vampire is often attributed to their power to traverse and overhaul the sanctity of borders and boundaries. In contradistinction to the formulaic rigidity of the traditional monsters, the vampires betray a remarkable malleability that facilitates their seamless invasion into the cultural consciousness of the masses. Nina Auerbach concedes to the transgenerational appeal of these predators by underscoring their potential for cultural re-invention. In her groundbreaking work, *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* Nina Auerbach contends,

> Vampires are neither inhuman nor nonhuman nor all-too-human; they are simply more alive than they should be. Ghosts, werewolves, and manufactured monsters are relatively changeless, more aligned with eternity than with time; vampires blend into the changing cultures they inhabit. They inhere in our most intimate relationships; they are also hideous invaders of the normal. (Auerbach 6)

Having outgrown its repulsive origin as the "immortal undead", the vampire has sparked raging debates and controversies in its contemporary avatar by dominating the fictional realms of representation. (Piatti-Farnell 2). The production, consumption and dissemination of the vampire motif can be attributed to the revenant's "detached and global mobility that has since become one of the hallmarks of its modernity." (Cameron and Karpenko, 4). With the proliferation of countercultural discourses, the twenty-first century had witnessed the resurgence of literary and cinematic vampires that pander to the changing sensibilities of a distinctly globalised population. Suspicious of fixed ascriptions and rigid categorizations, contemporary reworkings have sought to recalibrate the critical fortunes of the vampire figure by disrupting structures of oppression which, in turn, govern meaning making process. The attendant relentlessness of globalization—coupled with the demands of technological expansion and consumer culture—have paved the way for a virulent explosion of vampire narratives within a distinctly twenty-first century version of Gothic framework. As Lorna Piatti-Farnell argues,

> The over exposure of the vampire in contemporary media plays testament to the hyper-mediated nature of contemporary consumer culture, indulging in the fantasy of the forbidden,

> while, simultaneously, establishing its presence through the heteronormalised context of the everyday. In this sense, the vampire is the archetypal figure of want and yearning, the lateral representation of latent desires made manifest through the framework of consumerism that is intrinsic to the mediated contexts of popular literature, television and film. (Piatti-Farnell 1)

The metaphor of the vampire has served as an index of gendered cultural representations and the (dis)ease surrounding it. The enduring legacy of the female vampire in various cinematic portrayals have relied on a carefully regimented concoction of fear around women's sexual agency and the patriarchal intent to tame non-conforming sexualities into submission. Antipodal to the suave and seductive male vampires, the classical female vampire is a voracious male predator — a radically invasive 'Other' whose existence is a perpetual threat to the symbolic patriarchal order. Linking the hypersexualised body of the female vampire to the cultural phobia around women's moral vulnerability and degenerative sexual appetite, the image of the female vampire seems to conflate sexual pleasure with sexual violence. Amanda Hobson addresses the existing gaps and fallacies in the androcentric model that has come to define the cultural contours of female sexuality. Hobson argues,

> The vampire is a pre-eminently sexualized predator, who alternatively uses horrific violence and smooth seduction. The vampiress is a hypersexualised image that blends that violence and seduction with fears of the destructive beauty and charm of womanhood. In this manner, vampires of all genders are very similar in that they draw in their prey through seductive charm and violence, but ideas about the female body and womanhood amplify the fears surrounding female vampires and their sexuality. Beliefs about womanhood centre on a notion of idealized feminine weakness and passivity and one specific type of weakness: the purported moral weakness manifested through the voracious and destructive nature of female sexuality. The female vampire with her heightened physical strength and her longevity moves her firmly into the utterly uncontrollable category. She, therefore, embodies all of the cultural fears of women's sexuality; especially that is unquenchable and uncontained by male dominated institutions such as the Church, the family, and even the government. (Hobson 12)

Owing to its protean constitution, contemporary female auteurs have reappropriated the iconography of the vampire as a viable conduit to enact and enable alternate idioms of resistance. Identifying the vampire as agents of metamorphosis and social reformation, women directors have revitalized former vampire narratives by infusing them with "the disruptive powers of the erotic, centre-staging the vampire in a variety of forms." (Wisker 158). Twenty-first century cinematic ventures by women filmmakers have usurped the image of the female vampire as a conduit to activate critiques of social institutions that enforce gendered fixities. The practice of inter-generic hybridity has empowered women directors to unabashedly pursue the ideological mission of representing a vast continuum of gender non-conforming identities. Contemporary women's cinema includes "a questioning and denial of binary opposition between male and female in which the female is always weaker, and a challenge to the investment in heterosexuality and eternal romantic love ending in wedded bliss." (Wisker 160). Such radical revisions expand the horizons of intertextual exchange and encourage divergent readings and interpretations from a gender-based vantage point.

Inimical to the fundamental traits shared by the male and female vampire is their innate propensity to rupture. Theoretical scholarship on vampirism has incorporated recent developments from an array of disciplines to create an intersectional line of critical inquiry that probes into gendered depictions of vampires.

Iranian Cinema: Contexts and Dispositions

Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema, after 1978-79, saw Iran at the confluence of a state sanctioned modernisation, the authoritarian regime of Islamist politics, geopolitical upheavals and competing global forces that demanded political ascendancy in Iran. These varying trajectories of turbulent movements shaped the production and mediation of Iranian cinema. Cinematic representations, aesthetics and conventions in Iran had been subject to the dictates of a totalitarian government that keep western importations in check while being invested in consolidating a distinctly Iranian perspective. Westernisation brought about a cultural turn that was in quest of a national cinema that attended to the sociological malaise intrinsic to Iran and encouraged an increased participation of women on screen and behind the camera. Iran had obtained its distinctive peculiarities by sustaining binaries that informed the construction of women's subjectivities on screen—modern/anti-modern, presence/absence, sexualisation/desexualisation. Women's predicament was constituted in contradictory terms— her demand for social validation was accepted partially and yet, parochial forces legitimised gender discrimination. Women's representation was mostly guided by a gendered polarisation between the sacred and the profane—a polarisation that was triggered by exploiting sexuality as a tool. Over sexualised cinematic representations of women, although meted out in a derogatory manner, signalled an emerging trend of sexual license and autonomy. In such a cultural ecosystem, women were identified as agents of moral decay and disintegration and hence, were rendered abject. Social reality and representation were often at loggerheads with each other, fuelling the need for varying perspectives that gave voice to women's precarious position in the social sphere. It is in this context that New Wave directors launched poetic meditations on Iranian society by appropriating the aesthetics of dissent.

The Semiotics of the Gaze: The Male Gaze, Islamicate Gaze theory and the Metaphor of the Veil

Feminist psychoanalysis has been at the receiving end of severe backlash for their exaggerated emphasis on sexual difference, much to the exclusion of other kinds of difference. In their inability to account for historically contingent and culture specific categories of oppression, feminist psychoanalysis had often—rather unselfconsciously—advanced patriarchal objectives. Laura Mulvey's appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis in her foundational article on feminist film criticism, entitled, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* investigates the role of the formal visual machinery in the sexual objectification of women in classical Hollywood movies. Mulvey uses the Freudian notion of scopophilia and argues how the scopophilic privileges are reserved only for men. Mulvey's theorisation exemplifies how the male unconscious frames the dynamics of erotic pleasures that are involved in the act of looking. Mulvey's theorisation highlights a gendered splitting of desire:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* (Mulvey 838)

In response to the all-pervasive, assaultive male gaze, Hamid Naficy in Volume 4 of *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Globalizing Era* introduces the Islamicate Gaze Theory that refutes some of the fundamental assumptions that inform the canonical interpretation of the male gaze. Such a gaze, as Naficy argues, takes into account the contextual history of a region which is often outside the purview of Western critical canon. Often regarded as the "undertheorized engine of cinematic looking and storytelling in today's Iran, and which is radically different from Western feminist gaze theory", the Islamicate Gaze Theory is predicated on a dualistic and fragmented understanding of the self. (Naficy 106) According to the Islamicate Gaze Theory, this dualsim produces an "apparent contradiction between an inner private self and an outer public self, both available to individuals simultaneously". (Naficy 102) Naficy's formulation is based on four suppositions. For Naficy, eyes are active and invasive organs that engenders sexually aggressive gaze. Women's sexuality, codified as excessive, needs to be contained through appropriate acts of censorship to prevent moral corruption. Hence women's mobility in public spaces must be curbed. Women's exhibitionism, often leveraged by the thriving cultural industry, stimulates men's urges. Male gaze directed at the unrestrained sexuality of the immodest woman was detrimental for men. Naficy approaches the idea of the gaze through the cultural filter of modesty by adding a third category of the masochistic gaze to the dyad of voyeuristic and narcissistic scopophilia. The masochistic gaze produces a pernicious effect on the man by reflecting back the male gaze— —this gaze enthrals the man and subjects him to humiliation and abjection, which, in turn, is the root of this masochistic pleasure. This masochistic gaze is "not only based on the overcathexis of sexuality in women but also on the direct link between vision and political and moral corruption." (Naficy 107). Naficy proposes the need for 'averted look' for both men and women—a deflected form of looking that opposes direct eye contact. Naficy posits,

> Like the 'looking awry' that Slavoj Zizek formulated, the averted look theorized here is anamorphic, as it makes the power relations at work in the game of veiling clearer: anamorphic looking is charged, and distorted, by the voyeuristic desires and anxieties of the lookers and by the regulations of the system of modesty. For this reason, the averted look tells us more about Iranian culture than the direct gaze. (Naficy 107)

Scopophilic pleasure is often aroused through the interplay of veiling and unveiling. Naficy argues that women, under the garb of anonymity which is provided by the veil, can manipulate men and gain considerable traction since the veil symbolically performs the function of covering and revealing. This interplay turns women into fetishised objects and implicates the gaze of men and women in a complex maze of gendered power relations. Naficy's proposition of the Islamicate Gaze Theory acknowledges that veiling as a "social practice is not unidirectional" and that women's gaze in post-Revolutionary Iran is more robust and expressive. (Naficy 109).

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Of Vampire, Veil and Vengeance: Contextualising *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*

Ana Lily Amirpour's Iranian Vampire Western *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (2014)* transplants the contested ontology of the female vampire into a liberatory icon of cultural difference and feminist rage in post-revolutionary Iran. Amirpour's categorical repositioning of the female vampire vigilante within a matrix of transnational dispensations has garnered global accolades. Although Amirpour herself remains sceptical of feminist nomenclatures, scholars have deployed intersectional approaches to analyse the inherently feminist credo of the film. *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* is an eclectic fusion of disparate practices and aesthetics of filmmaking. Amirpour references the classical inventory of cinematic vampires to reconfigure it to a politically conscious end. Shot in the industrial wastelands of U.S to represent the derelict suburbs of Iran, Amirpour consolidates her cross-cultural lineage with unwavering persistence. Amirpour's avenging heroine arguably shares a long-standing legacy with her cinematic antecedents but emerges, in this feminist manifesto, from the anonymity of the fictitious Bad City in order to dispense wild justice. Culturally mediated narratives of women's vilification validated masculinist angst pertaining to the fear of male castration and subsequent disempowerment. Amirpour strategically feminises Arash, the love interest of the Girl, to deconstruct the myth of the hypermasculine man—someone who is indoctrinated to safeguard women's interests and reinforce populist fantasies surrounding women's vulnerability and powerlessness. Toying with conventions intrinsic to the imagery of European female vampires and the Middle Eastern trajectory of women's emancipation, Amirpour's chador-clad vampire (referred to, in the movie, as the Girl) terrorizes abusive and exploitative men while fearlessly skateboarding the streets of the Iranian ghost town. Seeped in discrimination and spiritual bankruptcy of its inhabitants, Amirpour conceives of the Bad City as a gendered epicentre of treacherous patriarchal horrors where unsavoury men maltreat women, transgenders and prostitutes with unapologetic barbarity. Rooted in a cultural terrain that has engendered condemnation to be a natural response to the sexualized foreign 'Other', Amirpour alludes to the ethnic bias that was rampant in cinematic history since time immemorial. Inscribed onto the body of Amirpour's protagonist are interlaced discourses of gender, ethnicity, enslavement that the chador seems to disavow. Akin to a cape, the chador—often misconstrued as a marker of regressive stereotypes in the international imaginary—confers on the Girl (portrayed by Sheila Vand) an enchanting monstrosity that is at once endearing and frightening. Amirpour's strategic handling of the metaphor of veiling and unveiling, through the symbolic use of chador, has often been scrutinized by scholars like Barbara Creed as a potent instrument to undercut Western assumptions about veiled attires in non-Western communities. As Barbara Creed opines,

> Amirpour's decision to garb the vampire in a chador is important in this context. As various critics have noted, the Islamophobia that was generated globally post-9/11 resulted in a wave of an anti-Islamic feeling that stigmatised the chador and hijab as signs of women's oppression. The figure of the Girl, wearing her chador, meting out justice to violent women, changes this dynamic. Her dress enhances her empowerment. (Creed 93)

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The Politics of the Male Gaze and the "Averted Look": Amirpour's Critique in *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*

Amirpour's representation of the Girl destabilizes the superiority accorded to the male gaze while simultaneously underscoring the shortcomings of Naficy's gaze theory to comprehensively engage with the broader politics of looking. Generically, it is the all-pervasive (male) gaze of the camera that facilitates the interplay of revealing and concealing. Amirpour deploys the shallow depth of field to activate a point of view that appears contrived, non-human. The vampiric disposition of the Girl is crystallised through this non-anthropomorphic gaze. The shallow depth of field uses a razor-sharp focus to single out characters by blurring the background—a technique that uproots the character from its immediate surroundings. This technique—materialised through close-ups and semi close-ups— coerces the spectator to align themselves with the camera's point of view and by extension, with that of the female vampire. This alignment debunks the presupposition of an overbearing male gaze in the first place and becomes the source of feminist visual pleasure. Lurking surreptitiously as a spectral apparition and framed by the rear side window of Saeed's car, the Girl becomes a witness to the vicious altercation between Saeed, an impetuous pimp and a prostitute named Atti, right at the onset of the film. The seduction scene in Saeed's apartment attests to the invincible power of the Girl. The sexualised gaze of Saeed that attempts to reduce her to a fetishised object is returned by the Girl with unimaginable violence and ends in bloodbath. The shallow depth of focus signals towards a deception—by concentrating on the mise-en-scene of Saeed's apartment, it negates the presence of a demanding gaze that has turned him into an object without his conscious knowledge. The Girl seeks vengeance on Saeed by biting off his fingers. After performing this symbolic castration as it were, she shoves his chopped finger and traces his lips with it in an ironic—and somewhat mimetic— reversal of his violation of Atti. This scene articulates a role reversal in which the Girl asserts absolute authority and power through which the male gaze is disciplined and subverted. In claiming narrative redemption for the disenfranchised victims of the Bad City, the Girl deconstructs the dissonances underlying the male gaze.

Traditional readings of the male gaze present the female on-screen as a passive receptacle of scopophilic desire. Amirpour plays with this imagery by positing her as a source of potential threat that generates castration anxiety in the male onlooker's psyche. As Lindsey Decker opines,

> The Girl, then, is a double threat of physical and psychological castration. We might also read the Girl via a Kristevan feminist psychoanalytic lens, as in Barbara Creed's work. She could be seen, as female vampires often are, as a representation of voracious female sexual appetite, abject between her liminal state. (Decker 175)

Within the ambit of conventional vampire narratives, the Girl's insatiable thirst for vengeance necessitates punitive measure to recastrate the female for her blatant transgressions. The concluding scene, with Arash and the Girl leaving the repressive hostility of the Bad City together, harbours the promise of transformative spaces that can accommodate her subjectivity and vulnerability.

Naficy's designation of the Islamicate Gaze Theory, within the cinematic periphery, offers an insight into the various configurations of looking in the context of post-revolutionary Iran. The 'averted look', in tandem with pre-ordained conditions of modesty, prioritises a regime that supports looking without any particular focus. Although it associates the discursive mechanics of veiling with a sense of autonomy by attaching a greater degree of premium to women's eyes and their gazes, it often leaves them bereft of individual subjectivities. Lindsey Decker identifies this to be a form of misplaced autonomy when she asserts,

> Thus the woman's gaze in Iranian cinema is much more powerful than the passive or reactive gaze of the objectified victim conceived of by Western feminist psychoanalytic film criticism—but powerful in terms of expressivity, not in terms of the threat of lack or appropriated phallic power. (Decker 178)

The Girl's encounter with Saeed involves a direct, continuous and sustained eye contact, which is opposed to the averted look. Her piercing, almost dictatorial gaze dissolves and loses its ferocity when she stares into the camera. In doing so, the Girl foregrounds her sense of individualism and resists objectification. Saeed misconstrues her powerful gaze as one that will implicate him sexually to devious ends—an interpretation that is in sync with the patriarchal underpinnings of the Islamicate Gaze Theory. The Girl does not use the averted gaze to sexually manipulate Saeed but rather, to carry out her vengeance. In doing so, she challenges the registers of looking that this regime offers. Through the 'averted look', Amirpour's voyeuristic camerawork infuses the Girl's point of view with an indomitable sense of omnipotence, saving her from the onslaught of de-personalisation.

Towards Inter-generic Hybridity

Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home at Night* remains acutely cautious of the phallocentric overtones that underline disparate modalities of cinematic gazing and offers a critique of their innate prejudices. Amirpour's chador-clad vampire, thus, rehearses the need for a transnationally inflected gaze that is at once empathetic, but not disembodied. Transnational negotiations renounce the epistemological underpinnings of singular spatialities by operating between, beyond and within borders. Standing at the borderland between Iran and America, Amirpour's visualisation of the Bad City and the Girl becomes a condensed expression of a cosmopolitan liberalism that conflates a medley of demographic traditions and practices. Amirpour appropriates the aesthetics of inter-generic influences to open up conversations that destabilizes and subverts the epistemic hegemony of the 'averted look'. The Girl uses her hypnotic gaze not merely to retain a sense of individuality but also to safeguard the transgender and the prostitute – those seldom acknowledged to participate in the interplay of direct and 'averted' gaze. In accommodating the sexually marginalised occupants of the Bad City, Amirpour propounds the urgency for a gaze that recognises the interlocking mechanisms of oppression across and beyond boundaries.

Amirpour's modern classic is an amalgamation of contending traditions of film practices—Italian spaghetti western, urban noir, Gothic sub-culture, Iranian New Wave, American horror—crafting a convergence that "enables the film to pose questions about cinema and gender that

culminate in a metacinematic feminist critique."(Decker 171) Receptive to provocative and fluid formulations, Amirpour dislodges hackneyed Gothic trappings of the orthodox vampire narratives to manifest a figuratively defanged and chic rebel. Amirpour's cosmopolitan ancestry—as an Iranian-American director— finds cinematic expression and extension in her intercultural aspirations. Amirpour resorts to postmodernist techniques of pastiche, pop iconography and monochromatic textures to add a hallucinatory effect, thereby internationalizing her vampire for a global audience. *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* porters between borders, languages, time zones, and generic categorizations. The movie traverses chronological indices of space and time, producing a symphony of American and Middle Eastern soundtrack. Amirpour interweaves a rich tapestry of inter generic influences that destabilizes and subverts the hegemony of generic classifications. This hybridized space accommodates distinct and diverse voices of defiance and dissidence. Amirpour illustrates the fallacy of totalizing regimes that genderise genres to further their exclusivist goals. By preventing women's foray into traditionally identified 'masculine' genres, female representation was curtailed to comply with gender roles that reaffirmed patriarchal injunctions. The unsteady assortment of multiple genres demystifies the essentialist conceptualization of gender binaries. Generic integration acknowledges gender as a performance and heterogeneity as a key modality of unrest. By proclaiming the need for generic instability, contemporary filmmakers endorse the need for an inclusivity that is predicated on choice and revolt. Barbara Creed correlates inter-generic hybridity and divergent ways of 'looking' with the fundamental lineaments of Feminist New Wave Cinema. Creed says,

> A major characteristic of Feminist New Wave cinema is its richly inter-generic nature brought about by directors who aim to bring together their own mix of genres to create their own space—a feminist space—in which to explore the nature of the heroine's revolt. Genre hybridity is central to Feminist New Wave Cinema. New Wave directors have re-evaluated horror and its fluid formations that enable it to pair with other genres, such as science fiction, the love story, historical drama, and the road movie, while retaining its power of subversive social critique and cutting-edge ability to undermine patriarchal ideology. (Creed 6)

The hybridised space of Amirpour's Bad City is modelled on Iran as the primary referent. Hybridisation, through a convergence of disparate registers of spatialities, individualities and personalities, creates a space of belonging. This sense of solidarity enables interpersonal alliances based on mutual recognition and respect. The Girl's attempt to eradicate patriarchal oppression is primarily aimed at constructing a community where women celebrate and support each other.

Amirpour's cinema operates in these in-between spaces of rupture and contradiction where patriarchal dividend collapses. Generic instability offers greater flexibility for transcultural assimilations by creating a sense of solidarity that transcends the cartographies of gendered segregation. Aesthetically, thematically, and conceptually, Amirpour —through the globalised figure of the female vampire—opts for counter narratives that have transversal implications. Amirpour's inter-generic transmigrations at the cinematic level reject the interpellation of women into pliant spectacles by promoting a dynamic subjectivity that is defiant and empathetic. The Girl's

embodiment of a feminist rage—appropriated through newfangled dialectics of gazing—is Amirpour's critique of the 'averted look' in the contemporary world of cultural globalisation.

Conclusion

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night can be interpreted as a crucial intervention in subverting the Eurocentric rhetoric of Western feminist psychoanalysis and the patriarchal sovereignty underlying Naficy's notion of the averted look. Recognising how gaze in Iranian cinema remains imbricated with issues of women's sexual agency and sexist discourses, Amirpour resorts to a feminist critique of the 'averted look', opting for an emergent space of solidarity through intercultural transactions.

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The Shifting Paradigms of Humanism on Celluloid: Exploring the Analogous Cinematic Visions in the Works of Abbas Kiarostami and Amit Masurkar

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Abstract: Counter-cultural positions germinate through acts of resistance against dominant ideologies, usually finding voice through mediums of popular culture. This study takes up two outstanding film makers whose body of work encompasses new-found positions of liberal politics that have subverted the normative framework of the cultural imaginary. Amit Masurkar is part of a group of idealistic artists whose film craft challenges the hegemonic practices in Bollywood. At a time when propagandist movies pander to the ruling class, Masurkar carefully curates a canon of films that deal with common men and women from the minority classes. A pioneer of neo-realism and a proponent of the Iranian new wave, Abbas Kiarostami is also a part of this investigative study, which places *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) alongside *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) of Amit Masurkar under the same radar of analysis. Both filmmakers have shown a fascination for the quotidian struggles of the masses against systemic marginalisation and for their powerful stance on empowering the subaltern. Their respective film crafts are also equivalent in representing the urban/rural disconnect, the severance of communication and the indeterminacy of knowledge.

Keywords: Hegemonic, Propagandist, Counter-Cultural, Communication, Minority Class

Introducing the Culturally Different Voices:

Cross-cultural currents have often challenged dominant cultural representations. This research study attempts to bring together two radical filmmakers whose crafts have left an indelible mark in the field because of their daunting cultural politics that run opposite to the established and conventional modes of film making. The body of work created by Amit Masurkar, an engineering dropout and self-taught independent filmmaker from Bollywood, is examined alongside one of the most experimental artists of the Iranian New Wave, Abbas Kiarostami. Against the backdrop of propagandist movies that have penetrated the fabric of mainstream Bollywood recently, Amit Masurkar is known for his meaningful cinema, intended to reclaim the voice of the marginalised. Since the debut of the BJP government, Bollywood has functioned as a soft power in peddling Hindu majoritarian sentiments (across the globe) through movies like *Panipat* (2019), *Samrat Prithviraj* (2022), *Kesari* (2019), or *Tanhaji* (2020), where the force of antagonism is always the Islamic Other. This fierce campaign of spreading Islamophobia has already stereotyped the craft of contemporary filmmaking, where the content is almost invariably manipulated to culturally interpellate every Hindu member in the audience as a subject of an ultra-nationalist discourse. Though such a backdrop is intensely jingoistic, Amit Masurkar's body of work has emerged with a different cultural agenda. In fact, his films are truly connected to the masses, their disempowerment and the quotidian coercion they are

subjected to by the bureaucracy. This study aims to examine two prominent films of Amit Masurkar, namely *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021), that deal with empowering the common man from the fringes (the minorities), who is more like a political tool puppeteered by the systemic machine. Abbas Kiarostami is a pivotal artist from another vantage point of the cultural spectrum (and from the past decade) whose filmmaking articulates a similar liberal philosophy. A graphic artist, painter, poet, and illustrator, Abbas Kiarostami, like Amit Masurkar, was a pioneer of independent films (Indie films), films that are subjective and yet intimately connected to objective reality. Connecting the macro and micro structures of power, Abbas Kiarostami glorified the common Iranian people with heroism and agency. *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) are part of this research study, both engaging with the struggle of the common Iranian folk, and blurring the line between the reel and the real through their cinematic content.

Cinema of Scepticism and Experimental filmmakers:

This study aims to evaluate two filmmakers from two diverse cultural backdrops and separate timelines through the interface of their analogous worldviews. While Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016), a pioneer of Iranian New Wave (the first wave starting in the late 1960s) lived in a milieu of censorship and rigid norms of cultural representation, Amit Masurkar (born 1981) burst into a scene of pro-establishment cinema that advocated, championed, and represented the sentiments of the dominant (Hindu) majority. Both these creative artists spearheaded their art against the prevalent established mode of filmmaking. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell in their book *Film History: An Introduction* (2003) document the evolution of revolutionary cinema in Iran; "In the early 1970s the mass entertainment cinema was counterbalanced by the *cinema motefavet* ("New Iranian Cinema") …The Ayatollahs' restrictive regime would seem an unlikely source of creative cinema, yet soon a series of imaginative, affecting films began to appear not only in Iranian theaters but at film festivals abroad" (669). Talking about Kiarostami, Thompson and Bordwell outline the features of his radical cinema that included "A realist, documentary style, poetic, allegorical framework with focus on rural lower class (670)".

M. Madhava Prasad in his book, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (1998) hails the 1960s in Indian cinema as the space that birthed "a new cinema which dwelt with the travails of the urban middle class, social satire, agitprop, critiques of feudal power structures, conflicts of modernity and tradition (225)" and features "a character who is an intermediary, who is neither organically a part of the represented world nor completely alienated from it (245)" Drawing reference from this, one can therefore safely state that Amit Masurkar's work may reflect and simulate a similar brand of social commentary that characterised a certain past era in Bollywood, alluded to by Prasad as 'New Cinema'. Both Kiarostami and Masurkar's work deals with a quest, sometimes literal, or socio-political and often speculative.

Alberto Elena, in his book *The cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* (2005) dismisses "Western critics who culturally essentialise his cinema through Eurocentric lens (20)" and rather urges viewers to probe the "Kiarostami Ellipsis, the epistemological gap that the audience must work out (25)" Zigzagging roads, the famous signature style of Kiarostami (often self-cited and self-referenced multiple times in

his works to signify intertextual allusion), area philosophical statement that refers to the quizzical nature of the protagonist's quest and his non-linear journey. Knowledge is categorically denied to the audience in both Kiarostami and Masurkar's films; if the reason for Mr Badii's suicide is kept undisclosed in *Taste of Cherry* (1997), or the ending of *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) is enigmatic and baffling, both *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) are open ended. One is unsure whether Newton's desire for fair elections is at all fulfilled (since the entire voting process was disappointing and only four voters turned up) or if Vidya Vincent could actually reform the forest bureaucracy or save the endangered species (the ending reveals a different scenario: after she could not save the tigress from being killed, Vidya moves to a new job).

Newton (2017) and the Trope of the Rural

Newton (2017), the film that received several accolades at international festivals, was also India's official entry for Oscars in the foreign language film category. Framed like a thriller, it depicts the adventures of a duty-bound, banal government servant (a clerk) who embarks on official duty to monitor the execution of an election procedure (a vote) in a Maoist-dominated territory (somewhere in central India). As the tale advances, the simple plot turns into a spoof on Indian democracy, which preaches fair elections as the only political goal of any presiding government. Labelled a black comedy with a bent of political satire, *Newton* (2017) stands apart from the run-of-the-mill, overtly nationalist (propagandist) films of the time by exposing the true nature of Indian democracy and its pseudo-patriotism. Like the science genius, his namesake, the eponymous protagonist functions like Isaac Newton, insanely insistent on honesty and integrity and the core philosophy that only incorruptibility can sanitise Indian democracy. The trope of the rural (tribal) is deployed as a narrative strategy to juxtapose the gaze of the urban outsider vis-à-vis the rural insider. Much like his counterpart (Abbas Kiarostami) in this comparative study, Amit Masurkar represents the wild landscape as liberating for the native insider but limiting to the urban outsider. Both in *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021), the rural folk/tribals are often perceived as exotic others through the epistemological lens of the documentarian protagonist (Newton and Vidya Vincent), whose efforts at constructing the country space ethnographically is often devoid of constructive signification. As a consequence, the widening rift between the country and the city is further intensified and communication fails. In India, the class/caste divide has always been politicised by different political groups for different ideological agendas. Amit Masurkar (in one of his interviews) confesses that *Newton* (2017) is not based on any cynical philosophy; rather, it debunks the myth of an inclusive India through the actions of the central protagonist, who is more a buffoon caught in the crossfire of bureaucratic hassles (and excesses of alleged secessionists and ignorant villagers) than an idealistic hero. *Newton* (2017) exposes the hypocrisy of the state machinery and the superfluous nature of the electoral procedure with its paraphernalia that performs like a strawman to distract us from the hollowness of the whole idea of democracy. In fact, the colonised mind-set that post-colonial India grapples with is graver than the existential crisis of democracy, and *Newton* (2017), advocating against political neutrality urges the common man to gain political literacy. Only then can the widening rift between the intersectional classes collapse. Though the filmmaker places his trust in the native, tribal folk (the adivasis), victimised as political pawns in the faceoff between the state, its armed forces and

the alleged insurgents, the rupture of communication (between the urban outsider/rural insider) is still evident in the brief conversation between Newton and Malko, a block level officer:

> *Newton: Kya aap nirashawadi hai?* (Are you a pessimist?)
> *Malko: Nahin, main Adivasi hoon.* (I am tribal).

The literal translation of these lines (my translation) emphasise the grave disjuncture in apparent, quotidian communication. The inadvertent humour is intentional. Given Masurkar's training as a scriptwriter for comedy shows, this dark humour is also a scathing critique against Indian democracy, that lays down the machinery of the electoral process meticulously but is nonchalant about the reality of its staging. The humour is also a conduit, conveying the shadow of scepticism that further polarises the urban/rural rift to an eventual impasse.

Sherni (2021): A retrograde chase?

If *Newton* (2017) challenges the nationalist discourse of a democratic India, *Sherni* (2021) takes a step further in exposing the systemic policy of oppression on the minorities under the present regime. Apparently guised as an environmental thriller, *Sherni* (2021) evokes a lot of other concomitant issues along with ecology, predation and conservation of wild habitat. As an allegory of racial exclusion, segregation and persecution in an ultra-right Hindu nation, Masurkar's film ideology gently prods the liminal space of racial politics couched underneath the agenda of a fundamentalist Hindu Rashtra. The plot engages with the hunt for a supposedly 'man-eater' tigress and a team of forest officials spearheaded by a female officer Vidya Vincent who is assigned the job of tracking the animal down. The chase is however a straw man; what the cinematic sub-text actually addresses is the silent persecution of minorities under a BJP ruled Hindu dominated nation-state. Much like the non-sequential journeys of Kiarostami's protagonists, Masurkar too plots Vidya's expedition with randomness and chronological uncertainty. Not only is Vidya met with resistance in her professional space but also in her domestic arena that disrupts and fragments her mission with unprecedented highs and lows to the final aborting of it. The zigzag journey that Vidya embarks upon to seek knowledge takes her to the interior of the jungle, to bureaucratic offices and to the humble abodes of the jungle natives (as stated earlier one witnesses an equivalent epistemological crisis in journeys undertaken by protagonists in the films of Kiarostami).

Reflecting on Abbas Kiarostami's film craft with specific reference to *The Wind Will Carry Us (1999),* Alberto Elena in his book *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami* (2005), points out how Kiarostami displays an apparent disinterest in urban life "by charting traditions untouched by evils of modernity". (77). Likewise, M. Madhava Prasad in his book, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (1998) evaluating the binary modernity/tradition observes; "The binary, whether it is employed to indicate conflict or complementarity, amounts to an explanation, a 'conceptual or belief system' which regulates thinking about the modern Indian social formation. This binary also figures centrally both thematically and as an organising device, in popular film narratives". (11) Prasad further points out how this "uneasy equilibrium coexists with the contrary drive to modernization". (15) *Sherni* (2021) appears to be an apparent study in cultural ethnography with the (female) urban outsider intruding into the unfamiliar space of a native habitat and their rituals. The clash of tradition and modernity is

evident not just in the segregated life style of the Adivasis tormented by the onslaught of bureaucratic projects of development and modernisation usurping their land, wild life and livelihood but also in the female protagonist's domestic space (the inter-generational, familial clash regarding Vidya's status as a married woman when her mother-in-law insists on her wearing customary jewellery in keeping with the norms of tradition).

Eventually, the retrograde chase; an inverted chase with Vidya chasing the tiger, the forest bureaucracy, the natives, and on the other hand she herself being chased by her own family/husband and the bureaucracy, ascends to the climax. The climax unravels through the solidarity between a Muslim man (a professor and environmental crusader who aids Vidya), a "lower-caste" Adivasi woman (read aboriginal/ tribal) and Vidya, a Malayali Christian woman, who together embark on this mission rife with bureaucratic hurdles and party politics. Masurkar carefully selects the racial position of his subjects and grants agency only to members of the minority class which is emblematic of how *Sherni* (2021) is a powerful statement against a regime that believes in Hindu supremacy and racial exclusivity. In an earlier work analysing *Sherni* (2021) I concluded that the dramatic tension is a natural cinematic response to the present ethnic segregation in the country; "The rapid and alarming marginalisation of minorities in contemporary India, fanned by ultra-right Hindu ideologues has led to inconsolable race riots and abhorrent identity politics. The Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party has diligently subscribed to Hindu fundamentalist (Hindutva) principles from the very germination of its power, which resonates in its majoritarian politics of appropriating historical discourses, manufacturing of counterfeit myths of origin to persecution of religious minorities like Muslims, Christians and Dalits, and this in its turn has become a permanent feature of Indian democracy" (Sengupta 80). The film transpires how a corrupt Hindu majoritarian class unleashes vigilance not just on the wild animals but also on the lower echelons of society inhabited by minority classes. Thus, social actors like those from the intelligentsia, namely Vidya Vincent (the female protagonist) and her friend, college professor Hassan Noorani have been either condescended or forced to concede to the dominant ideology. Like *Newton* (2017), there is an equal celebration of the underprivileged and their politics of resistance against the discriminating structures of power in *Sherni* (2021) through the unapologetic alliance of three members from minority classes who uphold the virtues of volition, agency and free will. As a consistent wave of Hinduization has gripped Bollywood through propagandist cinema premised on the reductionist formula of representing the force of antagonism through the figure of the racially different, Amit Masurkar advocates religious and racial tolerance through politically relevant cinema like the ones under the prism of investigation in this study. Like Abbas Kiarostami, Amit Masurkar's cinematic vision places equal reliance on the common folk, the tribal, the native, the subaltern, and the racial minority.

Abbas Kiarostami, the urban rural divide and the disjuncture in communication:

Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016), a pioneer of neo-realism in Iranian film making was a trailblazer in more ways than one. A graphic artist and a poet, the world of cinema that he created was often compared to either illustrative art or profound philosophy in lyrics. Subsequently, though accused by his detractors of exoticising the third world in the global platform for recognition, the body of work produced by him over the years has been exclusive and phenomenal. *Taste of Cherry* (1997) that received the Palme d' Ore at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival is the first Iranian movie to

have garnered such an award. Both *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) commence with a long shot of a car zigzagging a wild and rural landscape, which is a classic Kiarostami style, a frame of reference to his own work that keeps coming back like a text within a text. According to critics this superb intertextuality is indeed a Kiarostami signature, carefully incorporated in almost each of his work to convey a sense of meta-cinematic representation. Analysing Kiarostami's film philosophy and the nature of cinematic scepticism Mathew Abbott (2017) points out; "The meandering car is a giveaway that we are watching a Kiarostami film yet - deployed as it is with such deliberateness at the very beginning of *The Wind Will Carry Us* - it also gives away the fact that Kiarostami's signature is like any other signature, a technique that can be repeated, indeed mimicked or parodied. Importantly, however this self-effacing gesture is not simply ironic, and it is not only in spite but also partly because of its reflexivity that the opening sequence of this film (and all other films) is intriguing and gently funny" (33). However, the repetitive images of zigzagging roads incorporated by Kiarostami in his films are not just for banal self-citations but are intended for a more profound philosophical expression, a reflection on the chaotic journeys that all his protagonists engage in. *Taste of Cherry* (1997), a minimalist film, is a case in point. It follows a certain Mr. Badii as he is driving around a semi-industrial landscape in Tehran, encountering strangers and requesting help from them in arranging his own death. That Mr. Badii self-conspires to ingest sleeping pills to kill himself and is looking for someone who could check on him the next day in his self-dug grave to fill it up with earth or release him if alive, is revealed only through the conversations that he has with a couple of strangers. Labelled a "lifeless drone" by Roger Ebert, *Taste of Cherry* (1997) imbibes a slackened pace with long periods of ambient sound outside the captured shots which at the end is revealed to be the film crew recording. This abrupt distancing effect, often Brechtian in nature, not just convey the state of alienation of the protagonist, Mr. Badii, who is remote and alienated from the strangers whom he interacts with, this severance in communication is also evident in the subversion of our understanding of the real world through cinematic representations. The ultimate words of the film are symbolic: "Try to stay close to the tree. The shoot is over." As we keep deliberating whether Abbas Kiarostami meant the tree of life when he evoked the image of a cherry tree, we see the filmmaker himself sharing a light moment with the crew and the actor who plays Mr. Badii. The coda does not answer our grave concerns regarding Mr. Badii's suicide, it gives no clue either to the context or the reason behind such a drastic step, rather the ambiguity thrusts us to a deeper epistemological impasse that blurs the line between the reel and the real. The ending that is meant to frustrate and confound us, however grants us a philosophical liberty to conclude that we are forever displaced from what we want; simultaneously highlighting the predicament of a filmmaker regarding the philosophical problem of capturing the real through reel.

Taste of Cherry (1997) while being a humanist document that equates the motility of life to the physiological sensation of taste (of a certain fruit), is also about the precariousness of every single human life; how killing oneself might lead to killing others or vice versa. Like *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), *Taste of Cherry* (1997) too is about communication or the lack of it; and how all Cinema is eventually Meta-cinema in retrospect. Embodying a documentary-like texture, Abbas Kiarostami's creation casts spotlight on the quotidian Iranian life where significance or chronology of events or linearity of time is irrelevant or carefully ignored. Like Mr. Badii, most protagonists in a Kiarostami

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film are unreliable narrators, and willing suspension of disbelief being non-existent, it is ultimately the members of the audience who have to account for their own epistemological loss or gain.

If Abbas Kiarostami in introspective films like the *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) portrays the estranged relation between big city dwellers and country simpletons, he comes strikingly close to what Amit Masurkar does with his socially realist cinema in Bollywood. Both *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) unfold tentative journeys of urban outsiders whose attempts at integrating into remote, rural spaces generally end in fiasco and an identical epistemological crisis. Stephen Bransford in his article, *Days in the Country: Representations of the Rural Space and Place in Abbas Kiarostami* (2003) delineates how three different manifestations of space- the space of social practice, mental space, and physical space intermingle in Kiarostami's films. He points out the fact that "the urban outsider's views of the country are socially constructed" and "Kiarostami debunks their various projections and fantasies of rural space" (Bransford). He further observes; "Of course Kiarostami acknowledges his own status as a privileged outsider in making films about rural areas, and he doesn't pretend that he is totally exempt from the negative ramifications of being an outsider. He knows that privileged outsiders often view rural spaces through a distorted lens of nostalgia and a whole set of cultural biases, including gender and class biases….and it encourages the construction of the villager as an exotic Other and perpetuates a relationship of exploitation and voyeurism" (Bransford). To borrow a further quote from him; "Class is often the element that connects or disconnects 'main' characters from other characters, and this is especially true of the various filmmaker/subject relationships depicted in Kiarostami's films" (Bransford). *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) is a cinematic representation of an ethnographic project where the ethnographer (and the film maker) attempts to capture the cultural life of a remote community. Nominated for Golden lion at the 56th Venice International film festival, *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) documents the arrival of a journalist with his crew to a Kurdish village with the intention of recording a local mourning ritual involving an old woman anticipating death; though the event of the death is digressed to observation of mundane activities of the villagers, the paramount question of the dissolution of the self and the other as subject and object in that observation remains a philosophical (existential) concern for the film maker and his craft. As Mathew Abbott reflects on Kiarostami's style; "I want to read *The Wind Will Carry Us* - with its reflexive critique of the desire to capture the authentic, pre-modern culture on film- as a rebuke to certain orientalist tendencies in the international reception of Kiarostami, and a riposte to his Iranian critics, especially those who see him as deliberately performing an ethnographically inclined 'Third world' exoticism" (Abbott 39).

Communication or the rupture of it is a meta narrative strategy that keeps trans locating from one film of his to the other; the protagonist who arrives with his crew to shoot a native mourning ritual soon realises the difficulty of capturing real life, and it is then that the directorial vision disperses to other insignificant objects of less concern (mongrel dogs playing around, stray cattle, a boy and his soccer ball, women drying clothes etc.). These off-camera spaces are the actual hotspots of true cinematic depiction, as Abbott rightly points out; "And again, what happens to the film maker happens to the viewer too: Kiarostami's strategy, in this film and in his work more generally, is to effect a breakdown in the viewer's ability to tell the difference between the real and the artificial, a signature and its citation, the original and the copy, the important and the peripheral, and so on. The

neat trick of his cinema is that it is only by paralysing our claims to knowledge in this way that he can bring us out of our scepticism" (40).

The village of Siah Dareh in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) is continuously referred to as 'nowhere' with the protagonist and his crew expressing concern over reaching their destination (We are heading nowhere). Sparsely populated, the remote village community with primitive technology and poor telecommunications forces Behzad (the protagonist) to run across the barren lands to reach atop a hill every time he needs a phone signal. Consequently, all forms of communication fail to register in this rural space, forcing the urban outsider to lose interest in his mission (of documenting a death ritual in the village and returning to the city with the images for cultural consumption).

In reference to communication and social transmission, it may appear that the filmmaker and his unseen crew keep meandering in the wild landscape with apparent purposelessness but the quest in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) may not be utterly futile, there is perhaps an intangible bond forged between the material and the spiritual. As the protagonist keeps climbing up a distant hill for his cell phone communication, intermittently talking to an unseen grave digger and eventually finding a human bone as a talisman, the physical (human mortality) seem to sync with an unseen transcendental communication elsewhere up the hill, provoking almost a Hamletian deliberation about the plight of an urban intellectual attempting to record an ethnic, culturally divergent community life. During the course of the filmmaker trying to document a folk ritual, more than death or the philosophy of life, the moral dilemma of the elite ethnographer emerges; perhaps the same moral position that Abbas Kiarostami had to negotiate when filming human subjects (his objects) on screen. Kiarostami's body of work is replete with such cognitive conundrums, his codas are not conclusive but understood only in hindsight. This aspect of Abbas Kiarostami's film craft is quite indistinguishable from Amit Masurkar's vision; both *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) have well-crafted codas offering the audience ample space for speculation in their epistemic turmoil. *Newton* (2017) ends with a snippet from the eponymous clerk's professional life after the completion of the dramatic electoral process (after a temporal gap), leaving the audience conjecturing about a host of issues. Has Newton gained any wisdom on the convoluted nature of Indian democracy after his own experience in the voting procedure? Has he accepted the liminal position he occupies in the giant electoral process? Are integrity and honesty worth inculcating in modern democracies or are they redundant virtues? Such queries remain unresolved. The coda that *Sherni* (2021) ends with, has a comparable pattern; it presents the female protagonist Vidya Vincent in a new context, a fresh start in a wild life museum, perhaps a rumination of, and a contrast to her earlier role as a forest administrator. The audience is again left questioning her failed idealism, no clues are given regarding the status of her previous mission, or why she succumbed to the bureaucratic stranglehold, or left her designated position to accept the transfer. These unanswered questions are further overwhelmed by the codas that are meant to push the viewers into a crisis of comprehension.

Conclusion

Amit Masurkar, a pioneer in parallel Bollywood space has created a world of cinema that champions the struggles of the subaltern (from an intersectional grid of class, caste, gender, sexuality and religion) in the backdrop of recent propagandist films. Both *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) deal

with granting agency to the native, tribal, and the underprivileged. If *Newton* (2017) hypes the farcical nature of Indian democracy and its electoral process, *Sherni* (2021) exposes the nature of bureaucracy and its neo-liberal development programs. Both films also present an ethnographic projection of a socially/culturally marginalised community from the vantage point of an urban middle class (or elite) consciousness; and it is exactly that interconnecting cinematic space of Amit Masurkar and Abbas Kiarostami that this research study focuses on. Both these film makers are pioneers of cinema that subvert dominant cinematic practices, both have gained international recognition by representing and foregrounding the unrepresented native voices in their inclusive films and both deploy their cinematic gaze to de-familiarise the ordinary struggles of the common people. Abbas Kiarostami, a front runner of the second wave of Iranian New Wave Cinema, explored the real Iran, and its common population through a poetic prism and documentary-style story telling in his cinema. Both *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) are poetic, philosophical and humanistApart from their common agenda of valorising the marginalised, both Abbas Kiarostami and Amit Masurkar also document the awkward confrontation between an urban outsider and a rural insider, and the resultant interplay that evokes disruption in communication, in their respective films. This study illuminates the comparable elements of both the filmmakers to examine how their films show but not tell, compelling the audience to embrace their own quest for knowledge in order to escape the cognitive maze represented on screen.

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Representation of Intimate Partner Violence and its Traumatic Impact in *Thappad*.

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Abstract: Cinema has always been a medium for representing various aspects of life in society. It has dealt with numerous themes of a person's personal life and public life. Intimate partner violence has been such a phenomenon in one's personal life which is largely a societal problem. Representation of Intimate partner violence through movies is growing because of the changing scenario of prescribed gender roles in society. *Thappad* is one such movie which lashes out at the patriarchal norms and values associated with men and women and the compulsion to accept the Intimate Partner Violence and the trauma associated with them. Family life of women, Intimate partner violence and trauma are ignored despite its serious impact and *Thappad* has outright portrayed the distress of women who have faced Intimate partner violence. This study looks at the representation of Intimate partner violence and its traumatic impact on women from different social strata through the characters of *Thappad*. This study analyses the process of trauma recovery from trauma incident to healing. It also unleashes the different coping mechanisms adopted by women of diverse social backgrounds.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Representation, Traumatic Memory, Recovery, Coping Mechanism.

Introduction

Cinema is a medium of representing various aspects of life through different genres deriving concepts from the society in itself. Domestic Violence or Family Violence has been one such phenomenon in cinema which represents the violence committed against women by their partners or their family members. Representations of this theme have often appeared to condone domestic violence mystified as an expression of love. This idea has found resonance with more than 40% of women and 38% of men in the study conducted by NFHS-5. The report says that, both men and women have reported to government surveyors that it is acceptable for a man to punish his partner if she disrespects her in-laws, neglects her chores or children, leaves the house without informing him, refuses sexual intimacy or does not cook (Singh). Unlike other societies, India has always been bound to socio-cultural values imposed on women and likely to be followed by them and carried out to the next generations. Therefore, domestic violence remains a pervasive silent crime which most women experience but do not report or the possibility to report to police against their patriarchal family and male relatives is remote. Close to 77 percent of married women who are victims of domestic violence do not seek help or intervention (Vom Berg Nishi Mitra Tata Institute of Social Sciences et al.). This has made women silent sufferers of violence at home which is ironically considered to be the safest place for them.

In the recent years, the version of violence has changed itself to Intimate Partner Violence from the domestic or family because of varied underlying reasons such as urbanisation, industrialisation, nuclear family system, migration to work and education and the like. The concept of Intimate Partner Violence is recognised and portrayed in the movies since the early 21st century onwards. Movies like *Astitva* (2000), *Daman* (2001), *Ammu* (2022), *English Vinglish* (2012), *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), *Animal* (2023) and *Thappad* (2020) are a few movies which portray intimate partner violence and its impact on women and children.

Ultimately in most cases of domestic violence or Intimate partner violence women have been the sufferers because of various socio-cultural, political and economic reasons. The socio-cultural values imposed on women keep them silent tolerant of the violence caused by their partners or spouses. It is said that 'it is ok to be hit by your husband' because he is the provider of the family and women have to blindly adhere to the husband. The United Nations reports that "Worldwide, almost one third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner. The 2019-2021, National Family Health Survey- 5 concludes that 30% of Indian women have experienced physical or sexual violence by their spouses at least once since the age of 18. These results do not include women who have faced emotional abuse or experienced other forms of harassment from their partners. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) report from 2019 to 2021 states that 14 percent of married women who are victims of marital violence seek help and the remaining women are either silenced or cognitised to remain silent. Thus, the silent spectre of women's suffering evaporates from the silver screen and manifests into reality behind closed doors of Indian households.

Movies on Intimate Partner Violence are produced from Bollywood to Kollywood in India, which deals with Intimate Partner Violence to romanticising and normalising up to a certain level, which insists on correcting women who have deviated from the set standards of a wife/woman in the society or it is shown as a trait of those people in love. Exercising violence on their spouses is shown as a form of love as in the movies like Animal, Arjun Reddy, and many more which has normalised this behaviour and the heroine characters of these movies are ought to accept it as part of the script despite the fault being on the male hero. Cinema clearly establishes the facts on a wide range of acceptance of patriarchal notions and norms prevalent in the society. This angle of romanticising Intimate Partner Violence has underlying consequences on the psyche of women which is not represented in most of the movies because of the acceptance of violence to a greater extent. It is considered that taming a woman through language (words, tone, voice) or even slapping her is a man's right, to keep a woman under control. The other side of the truth is always hidden or underrepresented until the heroine is dead or she is facing serious health issues. In addition, the condition of women who face violence is merely represented as sacrificing herself for her children or abiding by the norms of the society by being trauma bonded with the offender as long as possible considering family honour, pride, shame, guilt and other varied reasons. However, the impact of facing Intimate Partner Violence on a daily basis in the private space, home, affects the mental health of women and children which is either ignored or discussed.

Intimate Partner Violence being the interpersonal violence between two partners is coercive and dangerous to one partner in the relationship due to established or unestablished factors. It can

induce physical and psychological issues on the weakest partner. Cinema has been representing women as physically weaker than men in a relationship so that they face abuse by their husbands as victims of violence. Such abused women either stay in the relationship or move away from it based on their support system and other circumstances. Women who move away or stay back in the relationship end up experiencing trauma based on the effect of such incidents. This trauma could create an imprint on their memory which never withers away for a lifetime. Intimate Partner Violence can be a chronic or complex issue in nature because it may continue for a lifetime or a short span of time. Despite being chronic or complex, it might induce a lifetime trauma for an individual particularly in women and children. Based on the severity the effects of trauma would vary from Acute Stress Disorder to Post traumatic stress disorder. Women being the victims of intimate partner violence face serious implications of physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and financial crises. These issues pull down women to face identity crisis, livelihood issues, physical and mental health concerns. Abuse or battering need not be chronic; rather it could have happened acutely just once and it can traumatise the entire life by leaving an irrecoverable imprint in the memory of the victim. The recent cinema has attempted to look at such concepts seriously and bring awareness in the society regarding Intimate Partner Violence and its effects on women and children especially on physical and mental health. *Thappad* is one such Bollywood movie which is used for the discussion in this paper to look after the effects of Intimate Partner Violence and its traumatic effects on the victim's life.

Thappad (2021) directed by Anubhav Sinha, represents women from different walks of life. Amrita the central character of the movie chooses to be a homemaker after marriage stating that she is happy with the decision. She takes care of her husband and mother-in-law and all physical and emotional labour needed for the household. She faces Intimate Partner Violence in an unexpected incident where her husband displaces his anger on her because of his issues with his employer which changes the relationship dynamics of the couple. Sunita, the maid of Amrita also faces domestic violence/family violence from her husband and mother-in-law where she manages to bear it every day, resists, escapes at times, badly hit by her husband at times. Netra Jaiswal a famous advocate who is in-charge of Amrita's case is no exception in terms of intimate partner violence. She is verbally and sexual abused by her husband Rohit who blames her as an incapable woman who just lives under his roof despite being successful in her career. All these characters undergo Intimate Partner violence and adopt various coping mechanisms to deal with their lives. Amrita divorces her husband; Sunita continues to live with her family and Netra has her way of dealing with it in the entire movie. Other female and male characters try to normalise Intimate Partner violence by stating it was one slap, he did it in haste, he was tense about his career, he was doing this job for both of you, women should adjust with such things. On the other hand, Amrita's father understands the plight of his own daughter and supports her decisions, whereas for Netra and Sunita, the support mechanism and the coping strategies vary. This movie deals with Intimate Partner violence and the consequences associated with it which is used in this study for further understanding of the sufferings of different women at all levels and layers of traumatic experiences.

Qualitative analysis is used to understand the gestures, words, statements and actions to identify the underlying meanings and hidden agendas of Intimate Partner Violence. Using Content

analysis as the methodology, certain terms and statements are decoded to look at the effects of Intimate Partner Violence in terms of verbal, financial, sexual, physical and psychological abuse and its traumatic effect on the life of the victims. In this paper, Judith Herman's theoretical framework of trauma has been used to analyse the lives of women in processing the traumatic incidents, reactions and responses, resistance and the socio-cultural factors leading to healing.

Intimate Partner Violence and Trauma responses

Intimate partner violence can happen in any type of marriage by altering the expectations and perspectives on life which is built prior to the incident. From minor to major incidents the range of affect would change out of one's own capability and coping skills. Different forms of Intimate partner violence include physical, psychological, sexual, verbal or economic abuse affect their lives permanently. Incidents and characters from *Thappad* are used to analyse the effect of IPV on women.

Amrita, the central character of the story is a well-educated woman from an upper middle-class family, decides to stay as a homemaker after marriage. She takes care of the home completely, where the audience can witness the dialogues from her husband stating that, 'your printer does not work, your kitchen, your responsibilities' (Sinha) which makes her happy until she gets slapped by him in a house party displacing his anger on her. This incident happens unexpectedly, where Vikram could not express his job dissatisfaction to his authorities rather, he hits his wife considering her as an easy target (Yadav & Jha, 7). This implies that it is ok for a husband to hit his wife and the wife has to adjust and accept it without questioning or talking about it and the next day she should act normal like nothing has happened rather continue to do all the household chores as usual. Certain dialogues from the movie emphasise the idea of tolerating violence and maintaining peace at home, "This much is acceptable, It is a woman's duty to manage the household and maintain the marriage". However, she reacts differently from the expectations of the society. Her immediate reaction to the slap is complete silence where she could not believe such an incident happened to her. According to Herman, freeze, flight and fawn would be the immediate reactions to the trauma incidents and Amrita is frozen at the moment where she could not respond rather, she is shell-shocked and her sense of self and the environment around her is devastating. She could not bear the fact of getting slapped by her husband in a public forum and the reaction of her husband and the family members towards violence is intolerable and suffocating to her. "Not everything is perfect in a marriage, it happens sometimes in anger, he hit me too, he got angry because he loves me" (Sinha).

Her psychological distress caused by the physical violence turns her into a different person from the next moment of her life. She was a happy home maker despite having good education and family status, left her job for him and his family, filled her with regret. Vikram's behaviour after hitting and the relatives' normalisation of the physical violence adds fuel to the fire. Justification stated by her husband and the advice provided by her family torments her psychologically which leads to prolonged sadness and stay in the frozen mode. Instead of apologising for his behaviour, he justifies the act and says it just happened in haste. Her family justifies it saying it is just one slap out of his work tension, why don't you understand the situation. This intends that it is common to be hit by the husband out of pressure and women should accept it and learn to live with it. Men having the

upper hand in the families justify the patriarchal violence on women in Indian society by stating that women should accept violence from their husbands because he is everything and women are nothing without them, hence she cannot leave him for various reasons.

This specific incident changes Amrita's life to become aloof where no one could understand what is going on within her including herself. The state of shattering and freezing converges with each other disrupting her idea of life itself. That one tight slap reminds her of a life that she has lost in the process of marriage and creating a family. The most affecting part of the trauma incident is that her family supporting her husband by saying that hitting her was a family matter accidentally happened in public, it was just a slap which can be forgotten and forgiven.

With this incident she regrets her choices and the life she has lost and she feels guilty of what she has sacrificed for all these years by losing her individuality and identity. The portrayal of her character in the film represents women who have lost their individuality and identity by sacrificing themselves for the sake of family and completely becoming dependent on their partners at all levels. This movie clearly establishes the fact that Intimate partner violence creates trauma in a woman for no fault of hers in her life. Her trauma affect becomes intense not just by the slap but the casual acceptance of it by her family and husband. Everyone in the family including her husband and mother-in-law expects her to be casual after the night which affects her constantly. The ignorance and acceptance of violence puts forth the patriarchal norms and its acceptance in the society. A man hitting his wife and being angry is accepted as a masculine trait and women are expected to be passive and receive the violence silently is reinforced in the society and the same is expected by Amrita in the movie.

In contrast to Amrita, Sunita, the maid of her family, faces physical and verbal abuse from her husband and Mother-in-law. Initially, she would get beaten up by her husband severely and ends up falling ill mostly. Sunita normalises violent behaviour of her husband “He’s a man; sometimes he hits in anger”. She accepts and believes that a man can hit his wife, “He’s my husband; he has the right to hit me” (Sinha). More than the psychological abuse, physical and economical abuse is highlighted in her case because of her financial condition and social status. However, the psychological distress is diminished by the physical and economic distress. As time passes, she tries to cope with the issue by taking the escape route such as shouting when her husband tries to hit her, so that the neighbours would save her or she would lock her husband in the house to escape the wrath of her husband. Her abuse is complex in nature because of varied problems for a prolonged period of time. Out of her trauma and traumatic stressors she uses escaping, abusing verbally as coping mechanisms. Her response to the abuse is that she becomes alert whenever there is brewing heat between the couple.

She had the preconceived notion that women from the lower strata would face violence from the family members especially by their husbands. When Amrita is hit by Vikram she is surprised and shocked by the incident which leads to vicarious trauma. She speaks to Amrita by stating this “Getting beaten is a part of every woman’s destiny” (Sinha). Her idea on lower class women getting hit by their husbands is changed as she realises that any man in the world would hit his wife despite

irrespective of his class position. She states this to her husband, that I am amused that you are not the only man who hits his wife which indicates her shock towards the incident.

Netra Jaisingh, another important character in the movie portrayed as a famous lawyer from the elite class faces sexual, physical and verbal abuse from her husband leading to an identity crisis. He always insists upon the lack of individual identity of Netra despite knowing that she is capable of independent action. She is criticised for not managing things at home rather focussing more on her career. Her husband states that "Managing both home and work is your responsibility, You are such a great lawyer, but you fail to understand matters at home" (Sinha). She is verbally and sexually abused and insulted which leads to her trauma. She realises that she is abused and traumatised for which she could not do anything other than cry alone but remains a reputable lawyer for the outside world by hiding her vulnerabilities.

"I'm fighting everyone's battles, but who will fight mine?" (Sinha).

She reconciles with her trauma through Amrita's case to prove herself as an individual who is capable of forming her own identity. Being a lawyer does not exempt her from abuse or trauma but her way of coming out differs from other women in the movie.

Sania, an adolescent daughter of Shivani, is shocked by watching Amrita getting hit by Vikram. She is vicariously traumatised by the idea of getting hit by the husband and questions if her mother has her father hit her any time. She is compelled to look at life as a tragic incident where every woman will be abused by her husband. A young adolescent is traumatised by the unknown future which has completely changed her sense of the world and future.

Physical and Emotional violence has its own effects on a woman's psyche. Physical violence can always create psychological issues and vice versa. Physical abuse faced by women like Amrita, Sunita and Netra in *Thappad* changes their entire psyche and their sense of self and the world. Physical abuse creates emotional stress which leads them to Acute, Post-traumatic and Complex Post-traumatic stress disorder. In most cases physical abuse is recognised and addressed by women themselves and if it exceeds their level of tolerance the law could help them. In case of emotional abuse, it is not always recognised and discussed by the victims as well as the perpetrators. The effects of physical abuse on a woman's psyche are overlooked but the physical injuries are treated but the emotional injuries are not recognised and left untreated. Emotional violence is not even a matter of discussion for decades in cinema. Emotional abuse is seen as keeping women under control of the husband which indicates the power structures of patriarchy and masculinity in the society. Making women powerless and dependent on men economically and psychologically in the name of love always threatens women's independence which is clearly picturised in *Thappad* through the characters of Amrita, Netra and Suita.

Every woman character in the movie has different life scenarios and their responses to trauma incidents differ and allowing us to look at their class, caste, social status, place of living, nature of job, living conditions and familial set up. The kind of abuse they face and the type of trauma they go

through, and the reactions and responses to the trauma incidents are decided by the social living conditions. The intersections of gender dynamics and trauma with regards to a woman's class, caste, ethnicity and so on is clearly portrayed in this movie.

Traumatic Memory

Thappad unfolds the psychological journey of Amrita, Sunita, Netra and other women depicted through the movie which represent the lives of many women who hide their trauma from society at large. Amrita faces acute post-traumatic stress disorder due to the incident which leads to traumatic memory. Memory serves as an important tool in traumatising or healing an individual from the actual incident. After that specific night, she is disturbed and devastated by the memory of the incident back and forth. Not just the memory of getting slapped but the memories of love, sacrifice, hitting and its after effects, her husband's reaction and family's advice towards the incident and the compulsion to accept it traumatises her intensively.

"Forget what happened and move on in life"
-Amrita's mother To Amrita
"A woman is the one who builds a home, and it's her responsibility to maintain it".
Vikram's mother To Amrita
(Sinha)

She is triggered by the memories of the incident and rethinks it repeatedly. Rethinking the trauma itself can act as a therapy but here it works as the trauma stressor to the victim. It gives Amrita sleepless nights and breaks her emotionally and psychologically. Amrita has been a happy home maker until she realises that her work is not valued by her husband and marks her as an economically dependent woman. That tight slap on her face within a second leaves a permanent mark in her memory for a lifetime.

Shivani is re-traumatised by the vicarious trauma effect on the incident of Amrita. She is reminded of her past which triggers unwanted and pathetic experiences of her life. According to Caruth's, *Unclaimed Experiences,* 1996, on traumatic memory she experiences her past in the present through her memory which reminds her of pathetic incidents from the past. Incidents from Amrita's life triggers Shivani to revisit her past. Traumatic stressors could often be incidents, things, human beings, sounds, light, places etc. These things often bring the past back into the present by traumatising the victim. A victim can be resilient and re-traumatised through their memory which indicates that trauma healing is a non-linear process which can always reoccur and reappear and also disappear when the triggers are removed or resurfaced. Netra is reminded of her traumatic incidents, yet she tolerates it until Amrita's encounter. Their meeting brings in a lot of changes in her and she decides to reconcile with herself to move out of her abusive life. In the case of Amrita and Shivani, the conscious and unconscious memories of their past appear and disturb them in the present where the memory of Sunita subconsciously appears which makes her alert in the intense situation.

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Social Norms and Expectations from Women

In Indian society, women are expected to be passive, weak, dependent, emotional and tolerate violence. In contrast to this idea, men can be angry, rational, dependent, violent etc. *Thappad* looks at how these assumed and assigned social roles and expectations on men and women destroys the gender equality and equity in the society. It does not destroy the women alone rather it destroys men too in certain ways despite the benefits. This movie has indicated that women need not tolerate the violence committed by her husband either once or multiple times. Certain instances from the movie are used to look at the idea imposed by both men and women:

"What will people say if you break your home over one slap?"

- Amrita's Mother to Amrita

"You ended your entire relationship over one slap?

- Priya to Amrita

"Divorce is not an easy decision, Amrita. Have you thought about what people will say?"

- Netra to Amrita

"He apologized, so why are you making it a big deal?"

- Vikram's father to Amrita
- (Sinha)
-

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2016 uncovered an alarming situation: a substantial 86% of Indian women who experienced domestic violence chose not to disclose their ordeal, refraining from sharing it with friends or family members. This silence is intricately tied to the victim's internalisation of social norms, leading them to believe that they are inadequate as wives and, consequently, deserving of the punishment (Hooda).

Thappad has tried to create awareness about violence and its effects on women for society at large. In the movie, Amrita is expected to tolerate and accept the physical violence committed by her husband. Most of the male and female characters in the movie advise and expect Amrita to reconcile with Vikram since it was just one slap out of anger and his dissatisfaction in his job which represents the mindset of the society in general with the prescribed gender roles.

When Amrita tries to reconcile herself with this, she is not able to do it because of her haunted memories of her trauma from the incident. When she gets pregnant everyone convinces her by saying that she should get back to her husband for the sake of her child in which Amrita has a difference of opinion. She does not want to go back despite her pregnancy for which she is criticised badly as a woman of disgrace. She makes a firm decision not to reconcile with her husband unless he regrets his behaviour. However, Vikram does not regret his attitude rather justifies his behaviour. This shows the cognition of socio-cultural values imbibed by him with regards to treating his wife and women in the society. When Amrita approaches for divorce, he falsely claims that she was not a good wife and that indicates that she cannot be a good mother too and claims for the custody of the child.

Custody of the child is given to Amrita since she was the mother and Vikram is proved to be guilty. The societal expectation compelling a woman to tolerate and accept the violence by her husband damages a woman's dignity and identity. This idea of woman being tolerant would sometimes kill them which is when the society awakes and calls the man a monster until then women are expected to bear the pain and violence. Misogynistic behaviour and victim blaming is casual when women decide to move away from the abusive relationship.

Sunita's life is shown as pathetic since her husband hits and verbally abuses her. The difference in class is clearly emphasised through the characters Amrita, Netra and Sunita. Power politics plays an important role in the picturisation of women from different social strata. Expectations on a woman and a man in society paves way for gender inequality. Trauma caused by social expectations has a greater impact on men and women and their lives in the society.

Trauma Recovery

Trauma recovery in *Thappad* focuses on women using their voice and agency to speak back for themselves. There is a recurring pattern of violence leading to the process of trauma from trauma incident to trauma resilience. In this movie, each character undergoes a different pattern of violence and trauma, socio-cultural factors and recovery process as well. Amrita speaks back for herself despite everyone around her tries convincing her to go back to her husband and she uses dance as a therapy to recover from her trauma. She reiterates on gaining identity of her own to become an empowered and resilient individual. She speaks back for herself and the child in the womb gives her power and agency to move away from the traumatic environment and the trauma itself. She makes it to the point where her individual self is recovered from the lost identity. She wins the case by using her available support system. She does not sit back in the same abusive relationship and complain about fate, rather she reverts back from her vulnerable condition through the available support such as legal right, family support and inner motivation.

Sunita, as part of her recovery process, goes through the violence completely and resists it. Her escapist behaviour was helpful at certain incidents which was not completely protecting her. This made her go through it completely and become resilient by resisting the violence and standing for herself. Netra resists the violence whenever she faces it and she has been silent about it for a long time. She was silent because of her husband's social status and her father-in-law's fame. She proves herself to her husband as a great lawyer and a person of her own identity. She being an educated woman and a lawyer she faces all these traumatic experiences herself. She recovers from the trauma by establishing herself as a lawyer and leaving her husband. Every woman in the story resists, reacts and becomes resilient using their ways of recovery from the trauma.

Conclusion

Thappad becomes a story of every woman who faces Intimate Partner Violence in their lives. The reaction to the different types of violence by any woman is shown through different characters of the movie despite their social strata. In addition, the reaction of the characters towards the violence seems

to be the reaction of the general audience too. Insisting women to tolerate violence, sacrifice for the children, misogynistic statements made on single women altogether represented the views of the society.

In this movie the recurring pattern of trauma in women is represented clearly through various characters. Trauma happens to a woman and the immediate reaction is silence for days and months until she responds to the incident. The other reaction would be crying and reacting immediately by shouting, escaping or calling for help from neighbours like Sunita. Coming to a consensus with the incident the trauma victim helps to react and respond to it by resisting or escaping. The next step would be moving towards recovery through various support systems available to them. It can be family, economic independence, therapy, spirituality and so on. This process is not linear but circular which can go back and forth and help the victim move towards resilience like Amrita, Sunita and Netra. In our society physical violence is addressed when it reaches a certain level unlike psychological, economical and verbal abuse. Psychological violence is mostly unaddressed and unrecognised by people. This movie has brought in the awareness and importance of addressing psychological violence which is caused by physical, sexual and emotional abuse. This movie has pointed out the need to look at the memory and psychological health of victims for their well being. The depiction of women and men of various strata has exposed the violence inherent in gender relations which could be intersected with other socio-cultural, economic and political factors. It has portrayed the idea that women from any class strata or educational background could face violence and become resilient using various coping mechanisms according to their availability. This film is an eye opener and brings social awareness on intimate partner violence and its traumatic effects on women alongside providing a panacea to the issues faced by women.

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The Deified, Defiled Mother: Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* as a Critique of the Phallocentric Ethics of Sexuality and Motherhood

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Abstract: This article discusses Damodar Mauzo's 1981 novel *Karmelin* as a critique of the patriarchal machinery and the deified symbol of motherhood that restricts women to their role as mere reproductive vessels. Not only does the deification of the mother-icon set dehumanising standards that women must admit to, but in order to preserve the pristine, unstained identity of the mother, it also necessitates the denial of female desire and sexual autonomy. Mauzo, in his construction of the protagonist Karmelin, problematises the socio-religious ethics that are imposed on the female sexed body under the garb of ideal motherhood. This paper investigates the novel's eponymous protagonist and her means of self expression through a body that creates a narrative of its own. Using Julia Kristeva's application of 'abjection', as is theorised in her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1980),* this paper discusses how in its objective to preserve the pristine image of motherhood devoid of female sexuality and desires, the mother-icon collapses upon itself, thus, failing to be upheld as the natural order.

Keywords: Abjection, autonomy, mother-icon, sexuality, transgression.

Introduction

Karmelin (1981), which won Damodar Mauzo his Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983, remains a landmark example of Konkani literature following its revival after the liberation of Goa from Portuguese rule in 1961. Konkani's recognition as a "language of importance" (Kripalani 7) by Sahitya Akademi in 1975, the National Academy of Letters in India, saw a rise of Konkani literature with key literary figures like B. B. Borkar, Ravindra Kelekar and Manohar Rai Sardesai. Having experienced a revival originating from the liberation of Goa, Konkani literature in the late 20th Century saw a remarkable dissemination of the spirits of freedom, self expression and identity.

Additionally, in the hands of writers such as Mauzo, Konkani soon became the locus of raising resistance against cultural erasure, as well as a fertile ground for voices and narratives of dissent within the community. Even before the subsequent translation of *Karmelin* by Vidya Pai in 2004 which led to its recognition and readership pan-India, the novel's treatment of female sexuality and

expression had received substantial critical admiration. In an interview with Jerry Pinto, Abhay Sardesai remarks:

> "Nothing prepared me, however, for the way the novel opened out to probe the multiple possibilities of human desire. Prior to *Karmelin,* one had read stirring erotic passages in the works of writers like D. H. Lawrence and Anais Nin. There was a delicate touch to the sensuous accounts in *Karmelin* and some of it was movingly atmospheric" (Pinto).

Owing to the long history of diversity and ethnic exchanges within, and beyond the geopolitical boundaries of the nation, India, by the middle of the 20th Century, had already been established as a melting pot of cultures and ideas. This created socio-cultural constructs and symbols that are variegated, but nationally relevant. The same rings true with the creation of the idea that is the ideal feminine, and by extension, the ideal mother. Borrowing from the centuries of cultural exchanges, the idea of the mother that was sublimated and reinforced upon the populace of the Indian subcontinent was the one that has been supplemented by the codices of the patriarchal machinery. While on one hand, this machinery relied heavily on the glorification of the mother-icon, on the other, it pruned away the agency and the meshed aspects of identity, desire and expression of the sexed female body.

Although a more favourable climate for women's emancipation had been generated at the beginning of the 20th Century, the mother-icon as supplanted within the nation had little to show in terms of identity beyond patriarchal structures that reinforced the conservative restraints that kept the mother-icon in place, granting her a cosmetically supreme space within the confines of the heteronormative family. This was further problematised by the binary of pre- marital and post-marital idea of the woman in the domestic space.

Within the domestic framework, the identity of the Indian woman rarely communicated roles beyond that of the wife, the mother, and the mother-in-law. The heteronormative family structure and the patriarchal ideologies sanctified the mother-icon, systemically dictating and enforcing the post-marital space over individuality and agency. The Indian socio-cultural scenario of the 20th Century being religiously rooted, mother-icon is also substantiated with the ancient paradigms of epic proportions, often carefully and selectively chosen so as to serve the narrative of the phallocentric power-wielders.

The Construction of the Sexed Body

While *Karmelin* opens in medias res, Mauzo adopts his novel as an introspective exercise where Karmelin recollects her life following the death of her alcoholic husband, Jose. In an attempt to scrutinise and piece back together her identity that has been fragmented by the patriarchal machinery, Karmelin relies on consolidating her memories of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In her construction of temporal lived experiences, Mauzo takes his readers along a journey through Karmelin's childhood as she loses her family to typhoid, and is adopted into a family comprising her paternal aunt Mai, Paai, and cousin Agnel. Karlemin's recollection also involves her Christian

upbringing, memories of her school, and Agnel through her stepping into adolescence and growing consciousness of her body and sexuality.

Karmelin's sexual exploration begins with her affair with Agnel, her cousin. For the first time, the body of the child metamorphoses into that of the woman, adding newer implications within the socio-cultural framework as that of the sexed body, and is therefore, subjected to social constructions of her appeal and fertility. As an adopted child in a Christian family, Karmelin is brought up in accordance with the religious dogmas that govern women. Although her first pre-marital sexual union with Agnel does stem from desire, Karmelin's conformity to her religious faith weaves within her the gravity of her transgression. Thus, in a moment of unsurety before giving into her desires, Karmelin is compelled to ask Agnel to promise if they will "get married soon" (Mauzo 61). Her hope in the eventual marital communion with Agnel encourages her to break the norms of tradition and religion. However, her body, in expressing its sexual needs and fulfilling them, creates a narrative of its own, a narrative of resistance against the patriarchal structure.

Although inexperienced the portrayal of Karmelin's desire was, her guiding Agnel on the way to her pleasure grants agency to the character. Her self-expression paves the way for her claiming the right to sexual satisfaction by being an engaged participant in the act of sex, rather than being a passive receptacle, conventionally perceived to the collective conscience as the castrated female, the sexually insecure body or the recipient of sexual objectification. In addition to Karmelin's sexual acts being an extension of her love towards Agnel, Karmelin's eagerness to participate in more such experiences with Agnel at the beach is also a expressing herself and gaining autonomy over her body. Karmelin owns her body and by her willingness to offer and receive pleasure, she claims her power and authority over her own body, putting a dent in the patriarchal structure: "Karmelin could hardly wait for Sunday to arrive. Like a tiger that has tasted blood yearns for it again and again, I've begun to yearn for sex, she thought." (Mauzo 63).

Karmelin and Agnel's trysts at the beach disturb the social order as Mai, Karmelin's adoptive mother, grows suspicious of them, leading to an evident surveillance and investigation of the affair between Karmelin and Agnel. Their premarital, albeit consensual sexual relationship, is perceived socio-religiously as an act of physical and moral transgression, and construed as a vigorous threat to the fabrics of society. It mandates the regulation of Karmelin's sexed body. As a result, Mai sees Karmelin as a threat to her plans of finding a lucrative bride for her son, and Paai, Karmelin's adoptive father is the one to remind her of the tenets she must uphold as a dutiful Christian, "Whoever bears sorrow with fortitude manages to survive in this world… You must learn to bear your grief too." (Mauzo 71). And in complying with having to lose Agnel, Karmelin's loss is not just the loss of her lover, but also her bodily autonomy, her desires, and her ways of self-expression that she must willingly lose in order to be able to exist in the space she considers home.

Following Belinda's birth, Karmelin's identification with the mother-icon is set into motion; examining the growing space between the identity of the mother and her body within domestic confinements. It is only with Karmelin's visit to Pali that temporarily reinstates within Karmelin her identity as a woman with desires, bodily autonomy, and the need for gratification. Pali, a region

known for being rich in natural resources, becomes an extension of the female sexed body, serving as a reminder to Karmelin of her own desirability, and briefly awakening within her the memories of Agnel and their trysts by the Goan beach. With Belinda asleep, Karmelin is momentarily rid of her identification with the mother-icon; although she makes sure her transgression would have no witness. Away from vilifying eyes, this remains Karmelin's only autoerotic expression, performed in suppression and secrecy, as Mauzo makes it evident:

> "She was quite alone here, she realised, full of delight. She shut the window and drew the latch on the door. She pulled off her blouse and under garments and ran a hand slowly over her bare breasts. A wave of desire coursed through her body again! She picked up the mirror that hung on the wall and held it before her body." (Mauzo 136).

It is interesting to note that while Karmelin's autoeroticism and gaze is vital in regard to her mode of self-expression as a way of reclaiming her body from the patriarchally constituted mother-icon, it is not simply a performance towards physical autonomy. Mauzo writes, "Karmelin stared at herself, entranced" (Mauzo 136). While Karmelin looking into the mirror as a form of self-expression and identification recalls Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is not merely a reconstruction of her identity as a sexed body. Rather, it is a celebration of having transcended not only the mother-icon, but having gone beyond patriarchal hegemony and gender conditioning altogether.

Within the spheres of her marriage to Jose, Karmelin is a mere object of pleasure that can be manhandled and violated by her husband, reducing her human value and stripping her of her agency within the post-marital space. To an abrasive Jose, Karmelin is but a body, a channel for his sexual release, a passive participant without any sexual desire and agency. Karmelin's autoeroticism thus stems not from her appeal through the male gaze as a desired object, rather, through having agency over her own body, through her self-identification that alludes to her subjectivity. Karmelin's ecstasy over having identified herself as the sexually desirable subject goes beyond mere sexual enjoyment, but is celebrated as for having been able to reconstitute an identity that can be desired and maintained by the self, that can outgrow the enforced mother-icon; where "everything was perfect" (Mauzo 136).

The Desexed Maternal Body and Establishing the Mother-icon as the Natural Order

In conjunction with the socio-patriarchal setups, religion plays a vital role in keeping the sanctity of the mother-icon intact by regulating women's agency, sexuality and desire. Through religious texts, doctrines, cultural narratives and rituals, the ideals of a sacred motherhood thereby created uphold a phallocentric context in shaping the binaristic role for women within the domestic space. Additionally, religion mandates fertility as a measure of a woman, further problematising how the female body is perceived within the scope of religion, where sexual union serves not the purpose of pleasure and autonomy, but in the interest of reproductive performance.

It is for the sake of the same reproductive performance that limits Karmelin's sexual availability as an object to Jose, and Karmelin's desire is hardly paid attention to. Her relation with

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Jose is only brought forth in the light of Jose's role to play the 'husband' every night. Mauzo further illustrates the lack of Karmelin's sexual desire and autonomy in her marriage as thus:

> "It was always like this, from the third day after their marriage till now…it didn't matter at all whether Karmelin was interested or not…But Karmelin didn't turn away, ever. It didn't matter to her whether Jose had his fill of her body as she lay before him, dead in mind and spirit." (Mauzo 106).

Karmelin, a devout Christian by faith, undergoes a similar indoctrination growing up, which in turn, dictates her experiences of sexual intimacy and expression, pregnancy, and motherhood. Karmelin's elder child, Belinda, is born within the socially-sanctioned conjugal ties between Karmelin and her husband, Jose, which invariably consolidates Karmelin's affections for Belinda, highlighting the all-pervading presence of religious doctrines that create the dichotomy between what is moral and what is not. The night before Belinda is born, Karmelin has a nightmare that marks the beginning of the parturition period. The nightmare wakes Karmelin up to the onset of her labour, presiding over and overwriting her individual identity with that of the mother-icon, an imposition which takes over as the natural order, something from which "she cannot move" (Mauzo 127).

With her labour pain intensifying, Karmelin seeks help from her mother-in-law, laying bare a new extent of the indoctrination that awaits her in her journey towards the mother-icon. Her call for help is further problematized by her predecessor as the mother-icon, her mother-in-law, who responds with, "The pain has just started, isn't it?...There is a lot of time left. Go back to sleep. We'll see what happens in the morning" (Mauzo 127). This response also aligns with the religious appropriation of pain as a physical symptom of parturition. The *Genesis Book* of the Christian Old Testament recalls labour pain as a suiting punishment for Eve's transgression, claiming, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy childbirth; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16).

Indeed, Belinda's birth is long and arduous, and by fulfilling the Biblical conditions of 'greatly multiplied' sorrow and pain, Karmelin steps into the role of the nurturing, benevolent, forgiving mother. Belinda's birth records a crucial moment in the trajectory of Karmelin's life. She is no longer Karmelin, or Jose's wife, but her identity as Belinda's mother takes over, establishing the mother-icon as the natural order as deemed by the collective consciousness, which must not be disturbed.

Transgression and Identification with the Mother-icon

Karmelin, as a novel, problematises the ethics of motherhood and sexuality as perceived by the collective consciousness. The image of the mother-icon in the Indian subcontinent has always remained that of physical and sexual purity, and is heavily insistent on demanding celibacy of the mother-icon. Reading *Karmelin* as a text and interpreting the female sexed body as a site of autonomy and resistance goes against the conventionally held views and values of the Indian mother-icon, essentially asking the readers to arrive at an alternate understanding of the mother-icon as the natural order.

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In this regard, it is crucial to look at Karmelin, her autonomy and journey as an active participant in offering and receiving pleasure, as well as her transgressions through Julia Kristeva's lens of 'abjection', theorised in her 1980 work *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* that suggests the maternal body as a site of abjection, an undefined liminal space that offers a blurred understanding between constructed and genuine performativity; and how the meaning-making and performativity of the same critique the phallocentric deification of the mother-icon as a vanguard or regulator of female sexuality and desire.

Kristeva's work lays down an understanding of the sociocultural and psychological dictates that influence the instinctive reaction of horror when faced with something it recognises to be repulsive, or as a threat to the defined distinction between the subject and object. Kristeva notes this in-between space of the subject and the object as the 'abject,' observing that "Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another in order to be" (Kristeva 10). And in order to preserve the integrity of a well-defined identity, it is the human reaction of horror that catalyses a forced breakdown of meaning of the liminal 'abject.' In *Karmelin,* the mother-icon having already established socio-culturally as the natural order, recognises female desire and sexuality as the deviant, or a threat to a defined identity of motherhood, which must be disarmed.

Karmelin's desirability, already having made concrete against her mother-icon, wakes her up one night with Rosario "right on top of her" (Mauzo 144). While the sexual encounter does offer gratification, it raises unanswered questions in Karmelin's mind, as she struggles to derive an objective meaning - "But why did she remain silent even after she awoke? Why didn't she drive the man away? Because she was scared? No! Her body had savoured these moments of pleasure… she didn't care for Rosario, maybe, but her body craved fulfilment…" (Mauzo 145). While Mauzo neither provide his protagonist, nor readers with a defined symbolic meaning, a possible interpretation may be drawn from Kristeva's application of the 'abject' in *Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection,* which forces a human reaction in a threatened breakdown of meaning when faced with the loss of distinction between the subject and the object. According to Kristeva, the abject inhibits the space that "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (*Powers* 2), suggesting a 'pre-objectal relationship.' It is only when the abject, or the undefined sexual encounter between Karmelin and Rosario threatens Karmelin's identity as an abiding Christian wife, whose "desire shall be to thy husband" (Genesis 3:16) that she is forced with the responsibility to separate herself, i.e., the subject, and coerce a possible meaning of the encounter.

Furthermore, Belinda's presence in the room where Rosario and Karmelin engage in sexual union is also crucial in encasing the narrative of shame and guilt that emerges from Karmelin's identification with the mother-icon. Not only does Jose's presence in the room amplify the dimensions of the act of Karmelin's infidelity by prioritising sexual autonomy and desire, but Belinda as the enforcer of the ideals of the mother-icon that completely decimates Karmelin's "bliss" following the encounter, essentially desexing her body and rendering her the status of the defiled mother. It is through Belinda's cry and the knowledge that she has been a witness of "grievous sin"

(Mauzo 150) that the mother-icon present in Karmelin mutilates the expression of her union with Rosario, replacing the sexual bliss with fear.

> "Rosario left her bed but Karmelin lay there trembling blissfully for a very long time. [...] She woke up at day break but she lay there with her eyes shut letting the pleasant memories wash over her. Suddenly she felt a twinge of regret as Belinda began to cry. Belinda! Karmelin felt that she had sinned last night and the child was a witness to that. She'd committed a grievous sin as she satisfied the demands of her body even as the child born of her womb lay by her side" (Mauzo 150).

Rachel Williamson in "Embodying Ambivalence: Abjection and The Problematic Maternal Body" observes the body "as a locus of evil and immorality in philosophy" (Williamson 142) where socio-religious dogmas have culturally appropriated the maternal body in order to regulate reproductive performance and "reduce women to their biological essentialism" (Williamson 143). When faced with the threat that her desire might once again lead to the desecration of the mother-icon, Karmelin's acute stress response is to flee from Pali, to virtually engage in self-mutilation by severing connections with the space that embodies and reflects her sexual desires, and is therefore deemed unsuitable alongside her ideals of motherhood. And "soon they were on their way" (Mauzo 151) back to the socio-religiously prescribed domestic space where the sanctified meaning of the mother-icon as the natural order will not be disturbed.

Abjection and a Critique of the Mother-icon

Kristeva in her work also notes the maternal body as the primary site of abjection, a liminal space where the forced breakdown of meaning arises from the loss of a distinct separation between the self and other, and in order to attempt a possible meaning-making, the maternal body must be treated as a site of abjection. The mother-icon having already constituted her union with Rosario as a sin, the abjection on Karmelin's part having realised she's expecting her second child arises out of the inability to distinguish herself from the "seed of sin" growing in her womb.

Once again, the patriarchal mother-icon that constricts the female body to the womb as the sign of her fertility and worth, as the natural order takes precedence, and dismissing Karmelin the mother's sexual identity as the abject. It is the mother-icon that dictates the expulsion of the foetus, a result of the transgressive sexual union, in order to preserve the sanctity of Karmelin's identity as the mother-icon, the construction of the domestic system with Jose, and the integrity of the order of her Christian faith. Karmelin resorts to wishing that the child is stillborn, and in an extreme effort where she "must wretch it out" (Mauzo 152), she moves past her Christian dogmas by wishing for the "evil soul" (Mauzo 156) to intervene during her gestation period, and in order to arrive at a forced separation of identities, although unsuccessful, attempts to induce a miscarriage by consuming a papaya.

Following the birth of Camilo, Karmelin's second child, the process of abjection is complete as having gained an entity separate from his mother, Camilo now becomes the sole proprietor as the

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embodiment of Karmelin's shame and guilt for having committed a 'grievous sin.' And while socio-cultural dogmas insist on Karmelin a performativity of her motherhood, the birth of Camilo marks a complete failure for Karmelin to identify with the mother-icon. Camlio's cries for maternal nourishment and sustenance are almost always ignored as Karmelin, with the pre-objectal space that characterises the site of abjection being lost, grows indifferent towards him.

Unlike Belinda whose presence can be noted throughout the novel, Camilo's name appears only once in the novel, as if in religious performativity, when he is baptised, and is henceforth mentioned as 'the child'. In addition to the forceful separation by denying Camilo an identifier, this also construes Karmelin's failure to identify as a maternal presence in his life. The mother-icon recognises only Belinda as Karmelin's child by virtue of socially sanctioned reproductive performativity and legal marriage to Jose and gains precedence over Camilo, although whose conception is resulted from Karmelin's pleasure and sexual autonomy, as the embodiment of the "seed of sin" (Mauzo 152).

The novel as a critique of the mother-icon comes as the admission of Karmelin's failure to be maternal towards Camilo by her general indifference and refusal to identify him as her own child. As a result, Camilo grows up fragile and malnourished; "he was two years old but he seemed like an infant of eight months, so stunted was his growth. Karmelin felt sorry for the child but she felt no affection for him" (Mauzo 178). Karmelin's only genuine maternal affection for Camilo shortly before his demise erupts not from her conscious mind governed by the mother-icon, but rather, from a subconscious performativity of motherhood when she is fevered and delirious. With her fevered state greatly influencing her actions, Karmelin refuses Isabel's offer to take Camilo to her house to avoid him getting afflicted with fever. Left alone with her child, Karmelin, in an penultimate attempt to reunite with a child she has shunned for long, draws Camilo closer and attempts to nurse him:

> "She was filled with remorse at the injustice of it all as she held the child close to her heart. She would lavish all her affection on him from now on, she decided as she lifted her blouse and held him to her dry breast" (Mauzo 180).

While her body's inability to nourish Camilo one last time is significant in the novel, this performance also marks for the first time since her union with Rosario, Karmelin's attempt to be dismissive of the patriarchal mother-icon, and by claiming Camilo as her own child comes Karmelin's acceptance and owning of herself as a being with desire and autonomy. Shortly after, Camilo passes away when he falls from his bed in Isabel's house. While the fall might not have been lethal for another child his age, it is Camilo's vulnerability arising from the failure of the mother-icon to identify Camilo as Karmelin's child that proves fatal for him. Karmelin admits the same and identifies Camilo's death as a fault on the part of her own in an attempt to console Isabel:

> "He died of hunger. There was no milk for him. [...] It's all my fault" (Mauzo 184).

Through the lens of Kristeva's observation of the abject and the need for the natural order to expel any perceived threat, *Karmelin* thus becomes a poignant text critiquing the patriarchal construct of

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the mother-icon, the dereliction of which in recognising the sexed female body can lead to the regulation of female autonomy and desire, and through its failure to preserve life the mother-icon collapses upon itself as the abject, and as the actual threat to the natural order.

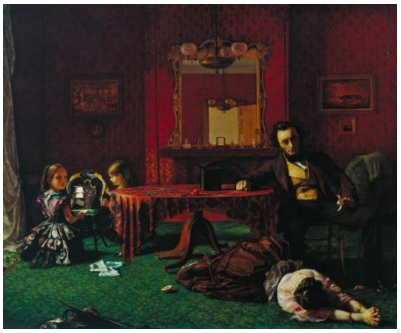

Fig. 1.Augustus Leopold Egg, *Past and Present,* No.1, 1858.

Fig. 2.Augustus Leopold Egg, *Past and Present,* No.2, 1858.

Fig. 3.Augustus Leopold Egg, *Past and Present,* No.3, 1858.

An intriguing connection can also be made between *Karmelin,* and a series of three oil paintings by the Victorian painter Augustus Leopold Egg, titled *Past and Present* (1858). The triptych can be interpreted as a sequential narrative examining the Victorian Christian dichotomy between the 'Angel in the House' and the 'Fallen Woman.' In the series of three miniatures, the first painting of the series documents the collapse of domestic bliss, as the 'sinful' woman prostrates before her husband, and the presence of her children testifying the gravity of her sin of having tarnished the image of the mother-icon. The second painting in the series mourns the untimely death of the heartbroken husband, with the third painting drawing a conclusion over the 'fallen wife', as she rests beneath the Adelphi Arches by the Thames, enveloped in shadows, clutching her possibly dead, illegitimate child.

On one hand, the triptych consolidates as a warning, taking note that infidelity and polluting the mother-icon are crimes that cannot be redeemed, while on the other, through its narrative of guilt framed through the untimely death of the husband, and the eventual arrival of the illegitimate child, possibly dead, it further lays down the urgency for the Victorian 'Angel of the House' to adhere to the Christian standards of the mother-icon. While *Karmelin,* as a novel, somewhat fulfils the conditions laid down by the triptych through Camilo's death and Jose's eventual alcoholism that takes his life, neither of them arise out of Karmelin's act of sexual transgression in Pali. This goes on to show that although the conditions were ultimately fulfilled, it was not an outcome of the transgressive act.

While Jose's alcoholism and gambling tendencies were foreshadowed earlier in the novel, they existed before Karmelin's transgression, as well as independent of Karmelin's presence in Jose's life. Camilo's death, in addition, was not an aftermath of Karmelin's 'grievous sin,' rather it was the abjection of the mother-icon that perceived Camilo's birth as the threat to the natural order. It was

the same abjection of the mother-icon that insisted on the inconsistency in the ideals of motherhood by refusing proper sustenance to Camilo and leaving him frail and malnourished, revealing how by failing to preserve life, it failed to uphold the primary requirement to be lauded as the natural order.

Conclusion

The assessment of *Karmelin* through the notions of body as a site of violence and self-expression, and the contradiction of care and conflict towards her children are subjects of relevance and insightful consideration. Tracing her passage through the vicissitudes of life, her character overcomes the exploitative and burdening dictums of the mother image and sexual expression. Her transgression goes against the structure laid down by the society which gives birth to the guilt and in transcending these constraints she eclipses the forces that bind her. Helene Cixous in 'The Laugh of The Medusa' conveys the same in the following lines:

> "Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst—burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune" (Cixous 876).

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From *Panchanamas* to *Dalits*: A Literary Journey of Resilience

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Abstract: Dalit Literature in India focuses on the history and experiences of the Dalit Community, highlighting their struggles, exploitation, and manipulation by the upper caste, especially the Hindus. Writers from the Dalit community draw inspiration from the Black American Natives and their Negro Movements. This study explores the literary journey of the Dalit community from their initial label "Panchanamas" to their current identity as "Dalits". The literature produced by Dalit writers has empowered them in various ways, particularly by allowing them to express their resistance openly. Their autobiographies provided a first-hand depiction of the suffering and torment they endured. It marked the liberation of Dalit people from long-standing chains, compelling the Dalit people to break free from their metaphorical imprisonment and transcend boundaries. While some resorted to violence, it was predominantly a reaction to their circumstances. It is important to note that the emergence of Dalits as a community and literary force was a response, rather than an initial action. The colonizers initially divided the country along religious lines, and the upper caste further divided it based on caste, prompting the lower caste[1] to retaliate.

Keywords: Dalit, caste, resistance, literature, suffering

Introduction

"We the People of India,… Justice, social, economic and political;… Equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them all;…"(Constitution of India, Preamble 1). The Preamble of India represents the constitution of our nation and emphasizes justice and equality. However, does our society truly reflect these principles? Are the divisions in Indian society justifiable? Does equality truly exist within the hearts of our society's members? One lingering question is whether we have effectively reduced the caste differences created by members of our society. We are talking about the lowest caste or "VARNA"[i] of the society i.e. Dalits.

The society was divided into *four varnas,* and the concept of four varnas was first introduced in the tenth book of *Rig Veda*[ii] in the Purusha Sukta. The Purusha Sukta describes how the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, the four groups that make up society, came from various sections of *Purusha's* body (the celestial man); the Dalits, however, did not even occupy the fourth position. Instead, they were excluded from the societal system and were called PANCHANAMAS[iii] or "Untouchables. The Dalits were subjected to extreme suffering by the

[1] The author does not believe in upper-lower binary and would prefer to use Dalit and non-Dalit as nomenclature; the word "lower caste" is employed to make understanding easier.

upper caste. They faced multiple forms of marginalization within their own country, first by the colonisers and then by the upper caste Hindus. In fact, Dalit women experienced triple marginalisation. When we talk about triple marginalisation, it includes the suppression through casteism, classism and sexism. These struggles and hardships led to the emergence of Dalit Literature as a form of expression for the Dalits. Once considered outcasts, the community now known as Dalits were previously referred to as Panchanamas, before finally gaining a voice to speak for themselves.

Review of Literature

The paper focuses on the lives of Dalits and their literature, presenting a narrative structure that delves into various aspects. It covers their experiences, struggles, pain, exploitation, resistance, actions, and the injustices perpetrated against them. It also explores the historical trajectory of the untouchables, from being referred to as Panchanamas to being recognised as Dalits, a journey marked by immense hardship and sacrifice. This topic holds significant importance as it sheds light on the harsh realities of society and the often overlooked past. Written with the aim of thoroughly exploring Dalit literature within the context of Subaltern Studies, this paper offers a comprehensive textual analysis.

The major Dalit writings and quotes come from various works by Om Prakash Valmiki, Namdeo Dhasal, Bama, and Ambedkar, among others. While there are numerous papers that discuss the historical movements and literature related to Dalit stories, other writers have overlooked the inclusion of contemporary works in films. There are several other works written in history that talk about the resistance and Dalit Literature, Dalit Struggles, Dalit Aesthetics, Dalit Feminism and more, such as "Repression and Resistance in Dalit Feminist Literature" by P. Kamble Shuddhodhan from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Vidyalaya and "Review of Dalit Literature and Criticism" by Raj Kumar. These works along with "Dalit Writings and English Translations: Its Global Reception And Circulation." is also referred.

The author made a note to read and understand the autobiographical approach of the works and took out some snippets from the works. The "leftover food" episode is read and mentioned with respect to the works like *Joothan*, *The Prison We Broke*, and *The Outcaste*. The literature and criticism by the women as witnessed in the works of Anupama Rao highlights the victimized approach towards the Dalit Literature with her experience in the field of gender and sexuality studies. The author used "Violence and Humanity: Or, Vulnerability as Political Subjectivity" as an important source for this paper. This paper talks about the experiences of the Dalits and their trajectory of survival using literary works as their centre and highlights the need towards the upliftment of society with the help of literature and proof for the people who question the mode of resistance i.e. literature.

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Methodology

The author has used textual analysis and qualitative research in this paper. The researcher has delved into major works of Dalit history such as *Annihilation of Caste*, *Joothan*, and *Untouchables*, as well as referenced additional texts. This research paper presents an extensive textual analysis while exploring how Dalit lives were transformed through literature. The papers include a thoughtful examination of the texts and an exploration of the literature's significance, themes, and stories. The paper includes in-depth discussions on resistance movements and the important role of literature in portraying resilience. Quotations and excerpts from various texts have been utilized to illustrate these points. Apart from that a comprehensive list of works is also given.

The Story and Life of Untouchables

In the early days, the lowest social caste was known as the Untouchables, meaning they were considered untouchable and the upper caste individuals had to cleanse themselves if they came in contact with them. The Untouchables were prohibited from entering the same temples and using the same wells as other. This situation bears resemblance to the systemic racism[iv] in The United States of America and The United Kingdom. However, the key distinction was that the Black community had the ability to protest against the White community because they were not integrated into mainstream society and could establish their own community. Conversely, the Dalit community lacked the ability to protest violently due to their marginalized status in society, which could result in the upper castes completely erasing their community. In fact, in ancient times, the Dalits were kept in the outskirts of the society/village. It was not simply a caste-created difference but also a political move. This was done in such a manner that even if attacks were made by the enemy states, the Dalits would be killed first.

The term Dalit came into practice quite later, initially, they were called Untouchables or HARIJANS.[v] The suffering extended beyond caste disparities, encompassing caste distinctions and economic factors. They lived in poverty and struggled to make ends meet. They received very little sympathy from others, their basic needs were ignored and were unaware of life's opportunities. Without Ambedkar, their situation would likely have remained unchanged. The condition of Dalits was even worse than that of animals, as they were subjected to dehumanization on multiple fronts. Their occupation included lowly tasks such as manual scavenging, maintaining drains and sewers, crafting footwear, and working as sweepers. They faced physical abuse, sexual exploitation, public humiliation, and even occasional homicide. Additionally, many members of the Dalit community succumbed to starvation, resorting to consuming leftovers from the meals of those belonging to the higher castes. As a result, they would contract various kinds of illness. The violation of Human Rights[vi] was majorly done in the name of purification of society.

The miserable lives of the Dalits were finally given voice by Dr B.R. Ambedkar also known as Baba Saheb, a prominent social reformer and father of the Indian Constitution. He belonged to the Dalit community himself and he observed that the caste system's byproduct is outcaste. He knew the importance of taking a stand and acted as the flagbearer for justice of the Dalit

community. In the Purusha Sukta verse the *chaturvarnas* were mentioned for the first time but then the famous work MANUSMRITI [vii] ELABORATED THE VARNA SYSTEM. IT WAS A FOUNDATIONAL BOOK FOR DHARMASASTRA[viii] or literature for legal matters, a discourse given by Manu and Bhrigu between 2nd and 3rd century BC. It is also called "Laws of Bhrigu" and it was more stringent towards the *varna* system and especially towards the Dalits. *Manusmriti* made sure to subject the Dalits to extreme oppression and ostracism. Thus, it was burnt by Ambedkar in Mahad in Maharashtra in public bonfire on 25th December 1927 to register his opposition because of its objectionable explanation of the relationship of the upper and lower caste as a master and slave relation. Mahad Satyagraha[ix] was an agitation arranged in order to provide the Dalits the rights to drink the water from the Mahad water tank, Dr B.R. Ambedkar took the initiative to help the Dalits get the same benefits as drinking water from same public area as the non-Dalits. He gave his speech, burnt the *Manusmriti* on a pyre and help the Dalits in attaining their wishful rights. Along with his rejection of the caste system, the declaration of Dalit rights and rejection of patriarchy as a reason also stands tall when it comes to the justification of his actions. With this, the beginning of Dalit political consciousness took the front seat and assertion of equality became the need of the hour.

Ambedkar rejected the title *Harijan* given by Mahatma Gandhi because of several reasons like lack of empowerment, passive acceptance, patronizing connotation, diversion from real issues, political and religious issues as well as lack of inclusivity. He supported the term Dalit because it meant "oppressed" or "broken" which is the actual condition of the Dalit community rather than "Harijan" which pulls the community away from its identity.

The term "Dalit" is not primarily used in a disparaging manner; rather, it empowers the members of this group to reflect on and address their past experiences. The Marathi term "Dalit" was first used by Jyotiba Phule in the late 1880s which meant "broken" or "crushed" and later Ambedkar made it a point to deliver the term as national consciousness… The caste created a struggle not only on the basis of birth but also a difference in social order and the Hegelian principle[x] can be used to analyse the situation.

Movement of Resistance

"Dalit is the name of total revolution; it is revolution incarnate"[xi] (Dangle, p. 289)

Arjun Dangle, a renowned Dalit writer and nationalist talked about how the Dalit ideology is majorly about resistance and revolution. The movement of resistance when it comes to Dalits was not just one movement but many movements concealed within one movement. The evil practices of society forced Dalits to take a stand for themselves. Dalit movements represent Dalit realities. It did not happen overnight, people like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Rao Phule, Ghasidas, Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale and many more, joined forces to eradicate the tortures inflicted on Dalit people. The first step towards the eradication of this caste division was taken up by Jyotibha Rao Phule along with her wife Savitribai Phule. They set up a Satyasodhak Samaj[xii] for the promotion of education and equality in the social mainstream for the Dalit communities in the year 1873. The Dalit movement started in Maharashtra but it went pan-India. One of the famous

movements of South India was the Temple Entry Movement started in the year 1927, led by Ambedkar.

With this movement, the dignity of the lower caste people was stopped from being jeopardized. The Dalits were allowed in the Hindu temples in the Princely States of Travancore and were allowed to fetch water from the same well, which was initially barred by the upper caste. It was Ambedkar's idea to let Dalits have the justice of their lives and he founded the All India Depressed Classes Federation[xiii] in 1942 that can fight for the welfare of the Dalits. Other movements like Adi-Dharm Movement in Punjab founded by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, wanted liberation from Brahminism in 1920s, the Namshudra Movement in Bengal by the father-son Thakur duos, the Adi-Dravida Movement in Tamil Nadu and Adi Dravida Mahajan Sabha were also established. The Self Respect Movement and the Justice Party and the Madiga Dandora Movement in Andhra Pradesh among others gained momentum inspired by the Maharashtrian movements. People like T.M. Nair, C.N. Mudalair, EV Ramaswami Naicker, Kaivartas, Harichand Thakur emerged as prominent faces in these Dalit Movements. The formation of Bahujan Samaj Party[xiv] (BSP) and its contribution is unforgettable. It was founded by Kanshi Ram in 1984 and he ensured the political mobilization of the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh. In order to enhance its pan-India characterization, the Dalit movements also engaged and connected with several other movements like labour movements, tribal movements, and formed intersectional alliances with these social movements.

In the spectrum of Dalit history, it is important to speak of the Dalit Panther Movement[xv]of 1972 that begun in Mumbai, Maharashtra but became famous worldwide. It is said that the fire was ignited by Dr, Ambedkar and the people who were leading the movement were highly inspired by the Black Panthers of the United States. The co-founders of this movement were Namdeo Dhasal, J.V. Pawar, Arun Kamble and Raja Dhale. It was these people who expanded the term "Dalit" to all downtrodden people, marginalized and minorities. It was a struggle movement led by the poets as a counterattack on the "socio-cultural hegemony" of the upper caste. Many movements like these in the various parts of the country grew to aid the Dalit community. There were several Dalit Caste organizations as well for providing support to the community. They were Dalit Mahasabha in Andhra Pradesh, Dalit Sangharsha Samiti in Karnataka, Arundhatiyar in Tamil Nadu along with the Panthers in Maharashtra.

How Dalit Literature Acts as Resistance

"Caste remains a key determinant of a person's future."[xvi] (UNDP Report 2014)

One may say that Dalit literature is a problem of the fourth world. The lack of inclusivity caused the Dalit writers to question if they truly wanted to be a part of mainstream society in general, which is why it differs from mainstream literature. Many writers have different definitions for Dalit literature, like, for Babu Rao Bagul, Dalit Literature is not simply about the stories of sorrow but that of resistance as well. It can be seen in his works like JEVHA MI JAAT CHORLI HOTI! (When I Hid my Caste), and MARAN SWASTA HOT AHE (Death is Getting Cheaper).

For him depicting the Dalit stories is humane and democratic, whereas for Sharan Kumar Limbale, Dalit Literature is writing the Dalit stories and histories by the people born out of Dalit consciousness.

Dalit literature is a genre of Indian writing that focuses on the lives, experiences, and struggles of the Dalit community. The phrase "Dalit literature" was first used during the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh's inaugural meeting in 1958. Although there were several writers like Munshi Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand who were known as the spokesperson for the Dalit Community from their works like KAFAN[xvii] (*The Shroud*) and *Untouchables* respectively, the Dalit community did not accept their works in the Dalit literature genre because of lack of first-hand experience and lack of sensitivity towards the community. Dalit writers presented their ideas about how Dalit representation should be done, but as of right now, we can see that Dalit literature is represented in subaltern studies and is still regarded as a marginalised genre in Indian society when compared to Black American or native Australian literature.

The major question is "Who can actually write Dalit Literature?" and this question has quite a mixed reaction. When Kashiram Singh[xviii] said that one doesn't have to be a horse to write about a horse. What he meant was that anyone with Dalit sensitivity could write, to which he received a reply from Omprakash Valmiki, the writer of the Dalit work JOOTHAN. Valmiki replied that one can write about the horse's outward features, canter, and neighs, but what one can't write is about his inner suffering or feelings towards his master when, at the end of the day, the same horse, having done his share of work, is starving and exhausted and is tied to a post in the stable.

With this, the query remains unresolved as to whether a non-Dalit can take part in Dalit writings or not.

Dalit literature is about change, has a purpose, and is a movement. The literature of this genre is majorly autobiographical in nature and maybe that is why major writers think that non-Dalits cannot delve into this. Dalit writers used themes of violence, brutality, struggle and fight against the suffering of the oppressor upper caste. Dalit autobiographies talk about community rather than focusing on individuals; it is fragmented, quite subjective and emotional and talks about otherness. The Dalit writers were a victim of the evil practices of society and were literally journaling their experiences in the form of literary pieces by adding fiction from their end and thus were said by the mainstream writers to lack aesthetic appeal. Several writers protested and said that the mainstream literature talks about the beauty and pleasure of the world and it is their form of aesthetics, whereas that of Dalit literature is based on the ideas of justice, liberty, equality. We see several writers coming forward in order to support this, such as TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC OF DALIT LITERATURE: HISTORY, CONTROVERSIES AND CONSIDERATIONS by Sharan Kumar Limbale emphasizing authenticity and social realism, DALIT LITERATURES IN INDIA edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak which is a collection of essays which distinguishes the Dalit Literature from any other form of literature and WRITING CASTE/WRITING GENDER: NARRATING DALIT WOMEN'S TESTIMONIES edited by Sharmila Rege talks about intersectionality of caste and gender. Dalits are not devoid of aesthetics; they just do not employ them in the same ways as mainstream writers.

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When we talk about the depiction of a Dalit individual or as a community in any art form, be it books or films, we see that it has been portrayed always in a negative light. This case is very similar to the depiction of Black Natives of America in movies. A film titled "Maharaj" on Netflix has a scene in which a Dalit is walking on the road with a pail of water hung to his neck with the help of a rope and he says "Raaste se hatt jao acchut aa raha hai" (get off the way an untouchable is approaching). (Saminathan and Murali). He is saying this and throwing water on the ground as he walks to purify it. One can only think and wonder about the condition of Dalits back in the day. There is a very similar reference like this in the work *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. The story revolves around an 18-year-old Dalit boy named Bakha, who is a sweeper by profession and cleans toilets and floors i.e. manual scavenging and that's why he is shamed for his profession and treated as an outcaste by the upper-caste. In one of the scenes, a priest shouts "polluted" because Bakha peeps through the glass. The priest has to take a bath because he is touched by Bakha. Truly the Dalit, life is so cheap[xix] for non-Dalits. There are other movies and series as well which are coming forward to support the Dalit culture and community. There is a series *Made In Heaven* in which we see the challenges faced by Dalits and despite all of that the character who was from a Dalit community, played by Radhika Apte, became very successful as a writer and didn't feel the need to conceal her identity. Her parents were ashamed of their caste but she was not. Another movie "Bandit Queen" was made in the year 1994 and it deals with the life of a dacoit Phoolan Devi.[xx] Because she was Dalit, she experienced discrimination and sexual abuse. She became a dacoit after rebelling after a few years of misery. This is the result of discrimination, exploitation, torture, and repression of individuals within a society. To oppress the oppressor, one is compelled to pursue a criminal career.

Autobiographical works by Om Prakash Valmiki, titled *Joothan* and *The Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble, share similar incidents where the Dalits were forced to consume the leftover food given to them by the upper caste people. The dehumanization of Dalits by all means has been a recurring image in the works of Dalit Literature. This incident of eating left over food is written by multiple Dalit writers including Sharan Kumar Limbale, in *Akkarmashi,* he also talks of the experience of hunger and poverty where the upper caste people's leftover food from a feast is licked and eaten by the Dalits. . Limbale uses a parallel to a pile of Jowar grains collected at a corpse's resting place to illustrate this lack of sustenance and its accessibility.

When we talk of the autobiographical works, we not only witness the sufferings and trauma of being poor, or from lower strata of the society. The suffering through identity crisis is also evident in the works of Dalit writers. For example, in *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi,* the protagonist is born of a poor Dalit mother and an upper caste father. He is the illegitimate child and is not accepted by either of the community fully. This hybrid identity is creating a void in his life and a lack of acceptance in the society is witnessed and a gap which cannot be filled. This questioning of identity is also seen in *Karruku* by Bama. The oppression and humiliation are experienced by Bama herself not only on the Dalit grounds but also inside the Catholic Church. This signifies how deeply rooted this caste system is that even Dalit Christian as a community cannot co-exist with Christians of upper caste despite Christianity to follow a modernist approach to life. These are the few works and there are many more like *Mother* by Baburao Bagul, *Murdahiya* by Tulsi Ram. There are various

works which talks about the various communities of Dalits like Chamars, Mahars, Bhangis, Cherumans about their different ghastly experiences of suppression and dehumanization.

Life of Women in the Dalit Community

Sylvia Plath in her *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950-1962* makes a statement that being born as a woman is a tragedy and it resonates well about the conditions of the women of the Dalit community. In a patriarchal society, being a woman is itself a different form of pain. But the extended marginalisation is witnessed when one is a Dalit woman. They are said to be triply marginalized, first by the colonisers or one can say the poverty common to the lower class, second by the caste Dalit and third by the patriarch of their houses. The reason Dalit women resonate with Black women is because they have shared trauma. We are reminded of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison when it comes to sufferings of the Blacks, especially the sufferings of the women. We are also teleported to the story of the Younger's family in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, from the lens of racism and women.

It is such a shame that oppression of women was already present in the society but the distinction made between people based on caste added a layer of suffering on Indian Dalit women and removed a layer of skin of sensitivity within them. Just like Dalit men, many Dalit women writers also took their first step to writing about their autobiographical accounts. It is known that Babytai Kamble wrote THE PRISONS WE BROKE and it was the first autobiography written by a Dalit woman. The book offers a vivid look at the patriarchal and caste-based oppressive systems of Indian society, but the writing never descends into self-pity. She penned it based on the Mahars of Maharashtra's lives. Many other women writers like Urmila Pawar, Bama, Meenakshi Moon, Shantabai Kamble, Sujatha Gidla, and many more, made their active participation in making pen their strongest tools of resistance.

As the women of the Dalit community were not provided opportunities and their rights, it was important for Dalit Feminism to handle the steering. Famous writer Dr Sharmila Rege is said to be responsible for introducing the term ''Dalit Feminism'' in the year 1990s. Dalit Feminism is different from the mainstream feminism in various ways. The global feminists saw all the women and women-centric issues as a common ground and worked towards helping or fixing them whereas Dalit feminists made it a point to talk of gender and caste as an intersectionality. Another key difference is the argument they produce i.e. the feminism in West talks about voting rights, reproductive rights, equal job opportunities and pay scale rights whereas Dalit Feminism tries to fulfil their bare minimum needs like caste-based oppression and violence, education, economic deprivation and untouchability in society.

There is a difference between Dalit Feminism and mainstream feminism and there was a need for it as well. Anupama Rao in her work *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*, talks about the fact that the mainstream feminism never talked about the 'caste issue' and Dalit movements never talked about the 'gender issue'. There was a need to combine them both and thus originated Dalit Feminism. The caste-based and gender-based oppression has a different

experience and was vividly witnessed by the Dalit women only. Caste and gender have a unique intersectionality and upper caste feminists did not tap it. Rao also witnessed that the voices of the Dalit women were missing when the patriarchal Dalit movements were in play. The most influential Dalit activist is Ruth Manorama of the current lot and she has ensured that the voices of Dalit women reach globally. She too talks about the need of having Dalit feminism. This double marginalization is also witnessed in the literary works of Shantabai Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* which depicts the suppression of women in rural Maharashtra and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of my Life* which critiques the caste-based and gender-based oppression through literature as a medium.

Famous works like *Ants Among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla and *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But...* by Gogu Shyamla talk about how caste and gender work parallelly at marginalizing the lives of the Dalit women. They do share the autobiographical accounts of the suffering caused within the family itself but also shows literature as a mode of resilience. With strong and opinionated women characters the fight against the oppression creates and atmosphere of fighting for the survival. When it comes to giving voice to Dalit women, we also have Gopal Guru who knows exactly that *Dalit Women Talk Differently* as they have different stories to tell and their concerns are different from Dalit men and upper caste women.

Major Writers and their Works

As mentioned earlier, the works of Dalit Literature focus on Dalit struggles, agony, exploitation, unjust, violence, frustration, and aestheticism of the fight for liberty and equality. K. Suneetha Rani in one of her articles 'Does Translation Empower a Dalit Text' mentioned that "the empowerment of Dalit literature has been achieved already when a Dalit writer has articulated his/her experiences and feelings which come from the deep sense of pain and shame…" It is important to go through several works of Dalit literature and here is the list of some of the major fiction and autobiographical works.

List of famous Dalit autobiographical works[2]:

Numerous noteworthy autobiographical works that provide deep insights into the living experiences of marginalised populations are part of the Dalit literary landscape. Of these, Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1978) is notable for being the first comprehensive Dalit autobiography. Additional noteworthy works include Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa*, Kishore Shantabai Kale's *Against All Odds*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*, Baburao Babul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (translated as *When I Hid My Caste*), Urmila Pawar's *Aidan* (translated as *The Weave of My Life*), and Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit: A Memoir.*

[2] The author has previously provided some details on a few of the works. Listing works encourages readers to explore these sources independently. Readers who are interested in particular works can refer to them directly for a more detailed study, thus extending their engagement with the topic.

Autobiographies are not the only important works that address Dalit issues. *Annihilation of Caste*, written by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, is still regarded as a foundational work supporting societal change. *Poisoned Bread* by Arjun Dangle is notable for being the first Dalit anthology. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild*, and Baburao Bagul's *Maran Swasta Hot Ahe* (which translates to "*Death is Getting Cheaper*") all add gripping stories to this collection.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchables*, Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, and Meena Alexander's poetry collection *Illiterate Heart* are examples of non-Dalit authors' works that deal with Dalit issues. The larger conversation on caste and its effects on society is reflected in these contributions.

Conclusion

Ambedkar knew that Dalits should be empowered and must be given a respectable position in society. The aspects of equity, equality and liberty all should be considered when it comes to fighting for the Dalit rights. The discrimination and violence against the Dalits pushed them to begin voicing their thoughts. Dalit Literature provided the platform for the downtrodden to speak up for themselves. The foundation was built by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Om Prakash Valmiki and many more and with this support, the other writers picked up their pen. The literature is quite multifaceted and it comes with several ideas and themes to deal with. Dalit literature is quite complex in terms of its understanding yet its motto remains simple that is to educate, to unite and to agitate.

End Notes

[i] In reference to Hinduism, India was divided into four "Varnas" i.e the caste based division in the society like Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudras

[ii] The earliest known Vedic Sanskrit text is the Rigveda.Among all the Indo-European languages still in existence are some of its earliest levels.Oral transmission of the Rigveda's sounds and texts dates back to the second millennium BCE.

[iii] Panchanamas was the title given to the lower caste people especially the Dalits who were out of the Varna system

[iv] Prejudice and discrimination against individuals on the basis of their race or ethnicity constitute racism. Social acts, customs, or governmental structures (like apartheid) that encourage the expression of bias or aversion in discriminatory activities can all be considered forms of racism.

[v] The word "Harijan," which means "children of God," was originally used in 1933 to refer to Dalits by Mahatma Gandhi, who was a fan of Narsinh Mehta's writings.

[vi] All people have the intrinsic right to human rights, regardless of their gender, colour, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other characteristic.

[vii] One of the several legal writings and constitutions among the numerous Dharmaśāstras of Hinduism is the Manusmṛti, sometimes referred to as the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra or the Laws of Manu. The caste system is institutionalised by Manusmriti. It provides justification for a small segment of society to oppress and take advantage of the great mass of people.

[viii] Sanskrit Puranic Smriti books on law and behaviour, known as Dharmaśāstra, make reference to Dharma-related treatises. Dharmashastra itself developed from Dharmshutra, and these books are intricate legal commentaries based on the Vedas.

[ix] Chavdar Tale or Mahad Satyagraha on March 20, 1927, B. R. Ambedkar spearheaded a satyagraha at Mahad, Maharashtra, India, to permit untouchables access to a public tank for water.

[x] Hegelian master-slave relations occur when two people behave in unison during a relationship. The slave complies with the grasp's rules although, to disclose, the grasp's present principles that the slave has agreed to

[xi] This is a quote used by Arjun Dangle and talks about how the middle name for Dalits must be resistance against oppression

[xii] Jyotiba Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers' Society) in 1873, and the Samaj's leadership was composed of people from lower social groups. He established a powerful campaign against Brahminical and upper caste supremacy.

[xiii] The All India Depressed Classes Association was founded by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to ensure that the Scheduled Castes were fairly represented in India's decision-making organisations.

[xiv] In India, the Bahujan Samaj Party was established to represent religious minorities and Bahujans, which include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.

[xv] The Dalit Panther Movement was a social and political movement in India that surfaced in the early 1970s. It was started by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, and Arun Kamble, among others, influenced by the Black Panther Party in the United States, aiming at eradicating the systemic oppression and discrimination towards Dalits in the Indian society.

[xvi] It was quoted in the The UNDP Nepal Human Development Report 2014 and it means an individual's caste remains a significant determinant in determining their life opportunities and outcomes in India.

[xvii] Many people mostly believe that "Kafan" or "The Shroud" represent the darkness and the most incredible work of the author. The story speaks about agony as well as the way the Dalits lead their lives.

[xviii] Kanshi Ram, also known as Bahujan Nayak or Manyavar, Sahab Kanshiram, was an Indian politician and social reformer who worked for the political mobilisation and upliftment of the Bahujans, the lower caste and backward people, including untouchable groups at the bottom of the caste system in India.

[xix] That's the translated reference of Baburao Bagul's work MARAN SWASTA HOT AHE

[xx] Phoolan Devi was an Indian bandit, or dacoit, who turned to politics and was a member of parliament until her murder. She belonged to the Mallaah subcaste and was raised in poverty in an Uttar Pradeshi village where her family was losing a property dispute that caused them a lot of issues.

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Poetry as Mirror: A Reading of Select Poems of Sahir Ludhianvi

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Abstract: Literature, irrespective of its genre, has always assisted in showing a mirror to society. Abdul Haye, popularly known as Sahir Ludhianvi, was one such poet writing in the post-Independence era, who was also a part of the Progressive Writers' Movement. Being a part of it, his poetry is revolutionary –writing during the Partition, he questions various issues, whether it is the position of women and how they were exploited and oppressed, or the effects of political decisions, sometimes the decision and the leaders themselves. He also encourages the public to voice their problems. His poetry is so nuanced that it contains various layers. He understood that his responsibility as a poet was to show the flaws of the society, while also suggesting ways to remedy them. This paper seeks to analyse select poems of his through various lenses, namely postcolonialism and feminism.

Keywords: Partition, mirror, revolution, question, oppression

Introduction

Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-80) was an Indian poet who wrote primarily in Urdu and is popular for his progressive poetry. The Progressive Writers questioned the social injustice within the broad framework of the Indian society. Javed Akhtar, while talking about them, says that the main aim of writers like Sahir Ludhianvi was

> to raise the consciousness of the people by protesting against all kinds of exploitations. They raised their voice against the imperial aggression and capitalist exploitation and called for a revolution through their writings. (Mukherjee 92).

In order to do this, he used the medium of poetry to showcase the follies of the society to people and awaken them to bring about a change for building a better future. Since it was a matter of the common masses, they wrote about Partition and their experiences in Indian languages as it was necessary to educate the oppressed about the injustice imposed upon them and empower them to raise their voices against it. His famous works include *Talkhiyaan* (Bitterness) and *Aao Ke Koi Khwab Bune* (Come, Let's Weave a Dream). His poetry can be viewed through various lens, particularly postcolonial and feminism –'postcolonial studies' analyses the "literature that was affected by the imperial process, the literature that grew in response to colonial domination, right from the time of contact between the coloniser and the colonised down to the contemporary situation." (Nagarajan 185), while the theory of feminism is applied in his poetry on the state of women, whether during colonisation or post-Independence.

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Discussion

Sahir's poems which are often remembered are romantic ones and the ones that are very easily overlooked portray the mundane realities of the marginal and oppressed class. Instead of celebrating Partition, he showcases the other side of the silence –his poetry brings to the forefront the negative effects that Partition had on people. While on one hand, some people were enjoying their Independence, on the other hand, some people were grieving their loss –loss of their home, their identity, and their loved ones who were killed during the riots. Through his poems, he voices the oppressed, showcasing their suffering during Partition which gave rise to religious disputes, while also encouraging them to raise their voice against the oppressors. Ali Safar Jafri wrote in the preface to *Parchhaaiyaan* (Shadows) that his "success arises from the directness of his expression aimed at capturing the harsh realities of our time." (Deol 183). Sardar Jafri writes about such poets that they "were serious folks, who were fully aware of their social responsibilities, and that was why their poetic outcomes reflected a high level of thoughtfulness..." (Narang 112).

The Undivided India was under the British Raj from 1858 until it got divided into India and Pakistan in 1947. The Indians were exploited in every way possible. Sahir Ludhianvi, the "poet of the moment" (pal do pal ka shayar), raised his voice on a lot of issues. With the change in time, readers have forgotten the purpose he wrote his poems for, but if delved deeper and analysed, keeping in mind the social scenario, they bring to the forefront the anguish of the people, even of those at the ground level. Urdu poets like Sahir, Faiz and Khusro, lamented and grieved about the helplessness of the Partition in their poetic works. He simply portrays the world he lived in, in his poetry. He writes in the frontispiece of his book, *Talkhiyaan*: "Duniya ne tajurbaat-o-havaadis ki shakl mein/ Jo kuch mujhe diya hai, voh lauta raha hoon main" (What the world, in the form of experiences and accidents/ Has bestowed on me; I hereby return). (Mir 139). He resonates a similar feeling in the lines: "Aaina-e-havadis-e-hasti hai mere sher/ Jo dekhta raha hun vo kehta raha hun mai" (My verses are a mirror, to reflect the vagaries of nature/ I have penned what I have seen, without an axe to grind). (Rajoria 3).

The creation of the two nations on the basis of religion –Pakistan for Muslims and India for Hindus –led to an agitation. Partition changed the bond of love and respect both the communities used to share. People were supposed to 'relocate' accordingly. The forceful displacement of the individuals induced in them a sense of identity crisis –neither did they remain 'Indians' (residents of undivided India) nor did they attain the identity of the newly formed country –they were tagged as refugees. Riots in the name of religion led to bloodshed. He questions the uncured malady of religion in his 'nazm', "Chhabees Janwary" (Twenty-sixth January): "Mazhab ka rog aaj bhi kyun la-ilaj hai" (Why even today is there no remedy for a disease called religion?) (Deol 162-163). Everyone was looking towards a free land; but none wanted the divide, let alone a riot. It may be said that while Independence was an event to celebrate, some people did so with violence and bloodshed –"Har kuucha sho'la zaar hai har shahr qatl gaah" (Every street is on fire and every city is a slaughterhouse) (Deol 163). The utopian society that everyone dreamt of turned into a hellish nightmare which seemed to have no end.

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Ludhianvi openly questions Nehru's regime and his promise to bring a just and egalitarian society. He claims that the leaders are to be blamed as much as the people are –"Mujrim huun main agar to gunahgaar tum bhi ho/ Ai rahbaraan-e qaum khata-kaar tum bhi ho" (If I'm the culprit, you're a sinner too./ And leaders of the nation, you too are not blameless.) (Deol 163). The same people who promised them a better world to live in were the ones who shattered their dreams. Claire Chambers notes that "most of the national leaders who replaced British colonizers were actually similar to the people they represented, in every area except their race." (Chambers 144). This sentiment is expressed in his poem, "Mufaahimat" (Compromise) where he says: "Ye jashn jashn-e-masarrat nahin, tamaasha hai/ Naye libaas mein nikla hai rahzani ka juloos" (This is not a celebration of joy, but a vulgar spectacle/ The same procession of robbers has emerged wearing new clothes) (Mir 57). The situation of the people at the ground level remained unchanged –they were earlier oppressed by the British, now they were being oppressed by the leaders.

The poet talks about the dreams that the leaders had shown them before independence and the failure of those dreams in the 'new' India. He calls for the necessity of critical introspection as to why these dreams have failed so miserably. After independence, the country's wealth increased gradually, he observes, but this increase was not egalitarian and poverty still ravages the nation. Long before, the political leaders talked about improving the lives of the people who were going to fight with them in the struggle for independence. After getting the power to rule, they forgot about those common people and only thought about themselves. India, thus, failed to live up to its ideal of the welfare state. He writes about his anguish in "Chhabbees Janwary" (Twenty-sixth January) –he questions the leaders who showed big dreams –"Jamhuriyat navaaz bashar dost aman khwaah/ Khud ko jo khud diye the voh alqaab kya hue" (Cherisher of democracy, friend of humanity, wisher of peace/ What happened to all those titles we had conferred upon ourselves?). (Deol 163).

He talks about this inequality in "Ye duniya do rangi hai/ Ek taraf se resham ode, ek taraf se nangi hai" (This world is double-faced/ One side covered with silk, the other naked) (Mir 38). He portrays the dual standards of the people. The progressive writers believed that this wasn't the end of the world; it can be changed if efforts are put in –to remove capitalism, to build a world where only equality thrived. He concludes this poem with the lines: "Jab tak oonch aur neech hai baaqi, har soorat be-dhangi hai/ Ye duniya do-rangi hai" (For as long as there are the privileged and the dispossessed, there can only be disorder/ In this two-toned world) (Mir 42). He writes in his 'nazm', "Vo subha kabhi to aayegi" (Surely, that morning will dawn some day), that the people have to strive to achieve such a world of their imagination: "Voh subha kabhi to aayegi...Voh subha hameen se aayegi" (Surely, that morning will dawn someday...We are the ones who will bring about that morning) (Mir 41).

Unlike some writers who only talked about the oppressed man's condition, Ludhianvi was among those few who wrote about women's state as well. He emerges to be a feminist who gives them a voice and brings to the forefront the way they were being treated by men. The major victims to the violence became women who were considered to be the 'honour of the house'. He laments about the scenario in his poem, "Ye zameen kis qadar sajai gai" (How the land is decorated!) (Ludhianvi): he says that the people decorated the roads with riots; giving each woman an image of Mother Sita, he portrays how she was being tortured by the rioters, as Ravana did in *Ramayana* –

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"Zindagi ka nasib kya kahiye/ Ek sita thi jo satai gai" (What can be said about the fate of life/ There was a Sita who was harassed) (Ludhianvi). Women became doubly oppressed –first due to patriarchy and second because they were termed as 'refugees'.

Violence was not only projected during the movement across the borders but also continued post that. The only profession that was available to women was prostitution. Ludhianvi consistently spoke against the oppression perpetuated upon the women, who were continuously being 'otherised'. He writes on this state of theirs –"Aurat ne janam diya mardon ko mardon ne use baazaar diya" (Women gave birth to men, they gave her a place to sell herself) (Deol 144). He talks about gender discrimination, when in the same poem, he writes: "Mardon ke liye har a'ish ka haq aurat ke liye jiina bhi saza" (Men seek enjoyment the way they want it, but woman is punished just for the sin of being alive.) (Deol 144). In the case of sex workers, the society has always judged and continues to judge the woman's character. They did not go into the depths to acknowledge why their number has increased. If there was no man to go to the 'red-light areas', there would not be the need for a woman to work as a sex worker. Men never face the judgement –they are allowed to enjoy themselves. It is even commented that maybe 'their woman' (wife) wasn't successfully keeping him happy (referring to their 'unhappy' sex life). Blaming the woman for their husband's desires and actions was something very common –Ludhianvi writes: "Mardon ki havas hai jo aksar aurat ke paap mein dhalti hai (Man's lust is laundered in woman's sin). (Deol 145). Their bodies were considered to be a commodity; they were exploited both physically and economically. This gave rise to a sense of alienation in women. Ann Foreman, in *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis,* notes that while "men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women, for women, there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are essential structures of her oppression." (Mukhopadhyay 71). The human relations became hollow; friendship became meaningless.

Expressing a similar sentiment, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, by whom Sahir was highly inspired –so much so that "when people sensed the delicate mood in [his] poetry, the beautiful interplay in his words and the lilting nature of his verse, they thought of it to be an absolute imitation of Faiz's poetry" (Manwani 77) –stated, in "Subh-e-Azaadi" (Dawn of Independence), that this wasn't what the people wanted –

Y daagh daagh ujaala y shab-gaziida sahar

Voh intizaar tha jiska y voh sahar to nahien

Y voh sahar to nahien jis ki aarzu le kar

Chale the yaar k mil jaaye gi kahien n kahien

(This blemished sunrise, this daybreak of a night –mangled and mutilated

What we were waiting for, this is not the dawn

This is not the dawn in whose expectation friends set out

in search of a journey's end, finding it somewhere) (Narang 115).

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According to Faiz, it defeated the purpose to have Hindus and Muslims "live in two countries, and there was so much tragic bloodshed and suffering because they worshipped different gods." (Narang 115). Like Sahir, who urges people to have faith and not lose hope, Faiz, through this poem, encourages them to keep moving forward as they have not yet achieved what they had actually wished for –"Chale chalo k voh manzil abhi nahien aaii" (Keep moving; we haven't reached the goal yet) (Narang 116).

Another poem of Sahir's, "Kabhi khud pe kabhi haalat pe rona aaya", raises multiple questions. He writes that the people cried for both themselves and the situation –for themselves, because they had lost their identity, there was an identity crisis; and for the situation because it was not what they thought or had planned when they were fighting for freedom. They wanted to be free from the British, which they did, but they also received a growing hatred amongst themselves. He questions the reason of their existence in a world of hatred, where humanity is dead, and the result of their meaningless life post Partition –"Kisliye jeetey hain hum, kiske liye jeete hain?/ Baarha aise sawaalat pe rona aaya" (Why is it that we live, who is it that we live for/ Sometimes, I cry at the thought of these questions). (Manwani 252). The last line of the 'nazm', "Sabko apni hi kisi baat pe rona aaya" (Everyone frets over their own petty considerations) highlights the idea of individual and collective trauma. (Manwani 252). Collective trauma is described by Rachel Thomasian, a therapist from Los Angeles, as a "distressing, fear-inducing experience that is felt collectively." A psychologist, Marianela Dornhecker, further argued that "while a whole group may be exposed to a collective trauma, not everyone is impacted the same." (Bologna). This difference in impact is what is known as individual trauma. Though everyone had to go through Partition, their experiences were different. The poem portrays the feeling residing in a man's heart –a mixed feeling of pain and loneliness.

According to Ravikant, "Till recently, we as a nation, in fact, have been sleepwalking through these decades until an odd film or a novel, or the actuality of a riot awakens us to momentarily remember and refer back to the nightmare of Partition." (Begum). If one goes by this observation, Sahir Ludhianvi's poetry should have made us recall the devastation but unfortunately, some of his poems which were written keeping Partition in the background, are romanticised. One reason of this can be the use of 'beloved' –he used this term to denote a communistic society but it has been misinterpreted by the modern readers to be a 'lover'. Hence, the poem which he addressed to the society is misread to be addressed to the lover. Another reason which might be possible is that sadly, his poems are still relevant. They are usually misread in today's world and are happily termed 'relatable' –this is problematic. Firstly, it is necessary to keep in mind the time he wrote in and the effect it had on him; secondly, if they are still relevant, it means that the society hasn't changed –it still has the same social issues that were there at the time of Partition. As Javed Akhtar in an interview points out that some people happily say that it is still relevant but this actually means that nothing has changed –the society is still the same; the pain, the suffering is still there. (Jashn-e-Rekhta).

Some of these poems, though addressed to the lover, bring to the forefront the intrinsic aspects of the 'romanticised' things in the world. For instance, he breaks the romantic association with the Taj Mahal –he critically questions the romanticising of the monument and reminds people of the hard work of the labours and how they were exploited, a fact that is easily and conveniently overlooked by the lovers. He turns "our attention from our admiration of this edifice towards the blood, sweat

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and tears of the workers who slaved in order to construct it." (Mir 141). He writes: "Un ke pyaaron ke maqaabir rahe be naam-o numood/ Aaj tak un pe jalaayi na kisi ne qandeel" (Their loved ones lie in unmarked graves/ Dark, forgotten, unvisited) (Mir 142). This poem intends to break the notion of measuring love on a materialistic scale instead of the true feeling. The obsession of capitalism and materialism had decreased the actual feeling of love. In the novel, *The Unanswered Question*, written by Sarat Chandra Chatterji, the "heroine, after pointing out some of the flaws in the myth of Shah Jahan's marital devotion, concludes that the Emperor would have probably built a monument like Taj even if Mumtaz had not died, that he would have found some other excuse to build it..." (Kumar 58).

For Ludhianvi, it is an unnecessary opulence ordered to be built by the ruling elite, which seems to mock the common masses and insult those who could not afford even a tomb upon their loved ones' graves–"Ek shahenshaah ne daulat ka sahaara lekar/ Hum ghareebon ki mohabbat ka udaya hai mazaaq" (Are but an emperor's display of wealth/ That mocks the love of the poor) (Mir 142). For him, the monument stood as a symbol of a man's arrogance for his wealth and his ability to exploit the hard labour of the poor workers. While this can be read solely as a romantic poem written by one lover to another, it can also be interpreted as Ludhianvi portraying the capitalist society –even after Partition, the rich became richer, the poor became poorer.

One of his longest poems, *Parchhaaiyaan* (Shadows), also portrays the story of two lovers torn apart due to the Second World War. While addressing their situation, Ludhianvi subtly merges with it the reality –he brings to notice the consequences the war can have on Indian landscape. All the points discussed above find a place in this poem. The poem that started as a love poem with beautiful imagery soon takes shape of the dreadful experience of the war. He portrayed the horrors through the life of two lovers. There were only two poets, Sahir and Faiz, who were able to mirror "the horrors of war against the backdrop of a relationship between two individuals." (Deol 185). The people involved in the riots became worse than animals –they, in reality, embodied the 'savage' nature that had always been associated with the Orient –they were considered by the West to be irrational and primitive. He writes: "Har gaanv mein vahshat naach uthi har shehr mein jangal phail gaya" (The dance of savageness was seen in each village/ And the wilderness of the forest spread into cities). (Deol 198). The status quo was such that when the farmers had nothing left –they had sold their bullocks, their farm, everything –they started selling their flesh to survive –"Kuchh bhi n raha jab bikne ko jismon ki tajaarat hone lagi" (When nothing was left to sell then the flesh trade started) (Deol 199). All relations ceased to exist; everyone was everyone else's enemy.

Ludhianvi urges the others to support the devastated souls in raising their voices against the oppressors –"Chalo k aaj sabhi payamaal ruuhon se/ Kahein k apne har ik zakham ko zubaan kar lein" (Let us address all those devastated souls/ That they should give their wounds a voice and let them speak) (Deol 201). Ludhianvi ends the poem with the depiction of the effect of war:

Guzashta jang mein ghar hi jale magar is baar

A'jab nahien k y tanhaaiyaan bhi jal jayein

Guzashta jang mein paikar jale magar is baar

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A'jab nahien k y parchhaaiyaan bhi jal jayein

(In the last war, homes were burned, but this time

Even the loneliness may burn away

In the last war, only bodies burned, but this time

Even the silhouettes may burn away) (Deol 202).

Partition had not only separated the nation but also its cultural identity. The 'new' India had no place for Muslims and their language, Urdu. Even though they neglected the language, they celebrated the Urdu poets like Mirza Ghalib. In the death centenary of Ghalib in 1969, Sahir was invited as a chief guest and he recited the poem, "Jashn-e-Ghalib" –a poem that openly questioned the hypocrisy of the government to organise such an event after mistreating Urdu all these years. He points out the, "exhibitionism of public personalities, the hypocrisy of paying tribute to Urdu's greatest poet while the language in which he wrote was being called the language of treason and being systematically excluded from public discourse and the country's education system." (Deol 172). He writes:

JIS A'HD-E SIYAASAT NE Y ZINDA ZABAAN KUCHLI

US A'HD-E SIYAASAT KO MARHUUM KA GHAM KYON HAI?

GHALIB JISE KAHTE HAIN URDU HI KA SHAA'YIR THA

URDU PE SITAM DHA KAR GHALIB P KARAM KYUN HAI?

(The government that crushed this effervescent language

Why should that government grieve over the dead?

The man called Ghalib, was a poet of the Urdu language

Why should they be unfair to Urdu and benevolent towards Ghalib?) (Deol 174).

In another 'nazm' of his titled "Bangal" that he wrote in 1944, he grieved the condition of the lower strata of the society during the Bengal famine in the preceding year. During the famine, the distribution of the food supply hindered as per the class difference –the people who had money had food, the rest did not; millions of people died due to malnutrition or disease. He highlights the disparity between both the classes: "Milen isiliye resham ke dher bunti hain/ Ki dukhtaran-e-vatan taar taar ko tarsen" (Do the mills knit silk/ So that the daughters of the land be deprived of the threads?). He questions the purpose of growing crops if everyone does not have an access to them – "Zamin ne kya isi karan anaaj ugla tha/ Ki nasl-e-adam-o-havva bilak bilak ke mare" (Is this why the earth sprouted grains/ That the race of Adam and Eve weep and die). (Ludhianvi (2019) 65).

While assessing Ludhianvi's use of poetry to show the mirror to the society, it should not be forgotten or eliminated that his film lyrics serve the same purpose. They had both the tune of a song and a social message that he used to present through his poems. Javed Akhtar mentions that he proved that "film songs and good poetry are not contradictory. They are compatible and they can be complementary." (Manwani 335).It can be said that the films, no doubtedly, played an important role

in portraying the revolutionary sentiments. Ludhianvi, when he entered the Hindi film industry, used the films as a medium to express and articulate the sentiments and continued to write thoughtful lyrics. As he himself believed and explained the 'cerebral quality' of his lyrics: "If they [films] are used to bring about constructive and positive change, people's thought processes as well as social progress can be influenced greatly and very rapidly." (Manwani 345).

Ludhianvi questions the whereabouts of the leaders in his 'nazm', "Jinhein naaz hai hind par vo kahan hai?" (Where are those who were proud of Hind?) –he questions how the women were pushed into prostitution in their leadership. In this particular poem, which was also incorporated as a song in the movie, *Pyaasa* (1957), Sahir questions the Nehruvian idea of nationalism and portrays the negative effect of Independence. Though the ultimate goal was supposed to be an egalitarian society, this was far-fetched –the immediate effect was a capitalist growth where the financially unprivileged section had to suffer the most. He understood that to achieve the dream of an egalitarian society, much work was yet to be done.

Ludhianvi wanted to leave a better world for the future generation. He intended to portray the follies of the society through his writings –he writes in the prologue to *Parchhaaiyaan* (Shadows) –"…every generation should strive to pass on to the next generation a world that is better and more beautiful than the one they inherited, my poem is a literary manifestation of the same effort." (Rao). Even though he criticises the society and shows them a mirror, he is quite optimistic that a day would come when the sufferings would stop to exist. In his poem, "Vo subh kabhii to aaegii" (That morning will someday arrive), he cherishes the dream of creating a just and egalitarian world. He writes:

Vo subh kabhii to aaegii

Jis subh ke khatir jug jug se hum sab mar mar kar jeete hai

Jis subh ki amrit ki dhun mein hum zeher ke pyale peete hai

(That morning will someday arrive

The morning for which we are waiting for eternities

To listen to its sweet music, we are drinking glasses of poison). (Ludhianvi).

Through his 'nazm', "Main zindagi ka saath nibhata chala gaya" (I partnered life on its roller-coaster course), he tells the sufferers in an optimistic note that it is useless to mourn over what has happened; instead, they should accept the way life has turned out. He writes: "Barbaadiyon ka sog manaana fazool tha/ Barbadiyon ka jashn manaata chala gaya…" (I felt it unnecessary to mourn the devastations/ I chose to celebrate them instead). (Ludhianvi).

In his 'nazm', "Ponchh kar ashk apni", Ludhianvi motivates people to take a stand for themselves, live with dignity and respect. Until they don't lift their head and speak for themselves, they won't get their identity or be recognised –"Sar jhukane se kuchh nahin hota sar uthao toh koi baat bane" (Nothing will happen by bowing your head, instead hold it high) (Ludhianvi). He teaches them that race, caste and religion has no significance in the face of humanity; the need is to spread love in this world where Partition has left only hatred. He urges them to come together, unite and

fight against the wrong –"Rang aur nasl jaat aur mazhab jo bhi hai aadmi se kamtar hai...Nafraton ke jahan mein hum ko pyar ki bastiyan basani hai" (Colour and race, caste and religion, whatever it is, is inferior to man...In the world of hatred, we have to create colonies of love) (Ludhianvi). He reinstates in them that they are first the children of humans, hence, religion comes second –"tu Hindu bane ga n Musalmaan bane ga/ insaan ki aulaad hai insaan bane ga" (You are neither a Hindu nor a Muslim/ You are a descendant of humans; you will grow up to be a human being). (Deol 167). Karim notes that his "poetry is permeated with a sense of loss, of poverty, of hunger together with the sense of hope, of courage." (Karim 142).

Conclusion

He drew the society's attention to "the plight of women to advocating communal harmony or stating his disgust for mankind's avaricious ways." (Manwani 343). Tagore, in the inaugural address to the Second Conference in 1938 in Calcutta, said that "...a writer isolated from the society can never become familiar with humanity...It must be a writer's duty to instil new life into the country, to sing the songs of awakening and valour, to carry the message of hope and happiness." (Sahni 181).

Sahir Ludhianvi has portrayed the devastations caused by the Partition and wrote about the situation of the country at that time. On the other hand, he didn't lose his optimistic attitude –through his poems, he reassured the readers that one day, each and every struggle of theirs would yield a good result. Though he was disturbed by how things turned out, he knew that mourning was of no help; they would have to accept the fact and try to start their lives anew.

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