

ISSN 09730524

LITERARY EXPLORER

An Annual Publication of Critical Studies in
English Language and Literature

A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BISHOP HEBER COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
(Nationally Reaccredited with 'A' Grade by NAAC with a CGPA
of 3.58 on 4 Point Scale)
(Recognized by UGC as "College of Excellence")
TIRUCHIRAPPALLI - 620 017
Tamil Nadu, India

Volume 16

Number 1

November 2021

About the Journal....

Literary Explorer (ISSN 0973 0524) is an annual literary journal, published by the Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli, TN, S.India. It looks forward to publishing quality work by teachers and research scholars who are motivated to write well-researched articles, book reviews and also interviews with renowned writers. Articles submitted for publication are reviewed and selected by a panel of experts in the field of English Language and Literature.

The writing should adhere to the 8th Edition MLA Handbook specifications, and should be between 1500 and 2500 words. It must be original and should not have been previously published in any other magazine or journal.

Articles for publication in Literary Explorer, November 2022 should reach the Editor by the end of May, 2022.

The annual subscription for individuals and colleges is Rs.1000/-which can be sent to the following bank account: A/C: No.:4134000100132021 /IFSC: PUNB0413400

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Editorial Note :

Greetings, Fraterns of English Studies!

The Literary Explorer has breathed a new lease of life after a sound rejuvenation of standards. The team decided to prepare the journal as an ideal platform for the upcoming budding researchers, and hence decided to include quality research papers from those presented in the conferences/ symposia the department will host annually in addition to those received directly for publication. In order to maintain the standards of the journal it will utilize the expertise of a three member jury of experienced academicians whose interest in writing and research is highly acclaimed. By this new arrangement we are assured that the production is all inclined to function true to its mission, To Serve and Be Served.

This issue comprises 25 select papers sifted from those presented at the national virtual seminar held in March, 2021, titled, Encumbrance to Emancipation: The Alchemy of Women's Writing in India, along with the scripts of the speakers, the chief of them, Geetha Hariharan, the renowned writer and critic of Indian Literature in English. Everyone one of them, a jewel in the diadem of women's freedom in Indian writing, they reflect a plethora of distinctive perceptions. My deep thanks are due to the concerted efforts of the staff proofreaders and especially, the Editor of this issue, Dr. G. Parvathy for their meticulous work in preparing this edition.

The Editorial Team records its deep indebtedness at this juncture to our former Head of the Department, Prof. Emeritus(UGC) Dr. Roopkumar Balasingh who turned the first sod by obtaining the ISSN registration for the journal in 2009, which has nurtured the healthy practice of quality publication for over a decade now. Today, we feel proud and privileged to be a significant part of this publishing culture.

Please send your feedback to litexplorer66@gmail.com

S. Sobana
Editor

Editorial

Honour women! They entwine and weave heavenly roses in our earthly life. - Friedrich Schiller

India has a rich and illustrious tradition of women writers who, with perspicacity and prescience, captured the various facets of the Indian social and cultural scapes. The varied themes and trends envisaged in women's writing in India offer a strong scaffolding to probe the nature of women's existence and experience, interrogate the challenges that confront them and extol the spirit and vitality of women in life and literature. This special edition of *Literary Explorer* is a curated collection of research papers presented in the National Virtual Seminar on Encumbrance to Emancipation: The Alchemy of Women's Writing in India held on 17 March 2021.

The articles of this special edition scales the gamut of Indian women's writing including the works of writers in English and those of regional writers in English translations, and writings by women of the Indian diaspora, and marshals evidences to legitimize and give credence to women's quest for empowerment and emancipation. Acclaimed writer Githa Hariharan's message emphasizes the alchemical power of narration. The writer archly affirms the need for women to articulate themselves and narrate their stories. Though patriarchal order has muffled and muted the voices of women and relegated them to the recesses of the household, women should break free from the zenanas imposed upon them by the draconian political order, the procrustean dikats of hegemonic powers and the decadent social and cultural practices to narrate their stories and that of their community which culminates in women 'narrating the nation'.

Dr. Sumathy's well-researched, scholarly article explores the geographies of environmental justice in Mahasweta Devi's "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha", laying bare the precarious lives of the

vulnerable tribal community as they bear the brunt of rampant ecocide, forced displacement, callousness of the officials and endangered survival amidst toxic environment. Decoding the interface between mind, body and gender, Dr. Shantichitra's explosive article cuts right to the root of toxic masculinity and grapples with rape as the demise of women's body and mind. Incisive studies on women writers of the past and the present have been attempted by the contributors to cognize the issues of marginality, identity and equality and to examine the elements of intersectionality played out in their fictional and non-fictional works. Themes pertaining to autonomy, economy and psychology are deftly explored in the short stories of acclaimed writer Salma. Revisioning and rewriting myth has been the focus of the many articles which attempt to study the works of Suniti Namjoshi and Githa Hariharan. An interesting study of Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within* exhorts the readers to identify themselves with and draw strength from mythical women characters who infuse wisdom and vitality and empower women to tide over life's challenges.

Insightful approaches to the works of Arundathi Roy explore the theme of amorality in *The God of Small Things* and lays bare the private anguish and social injustice meted out to transgenders in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The impact of Africana Feminism and the dialectics of confessionalism are analysed in the works of Kamala Das. The article on Polie Sengupta's hard-hitting play *Mangalam* offers a ringside view of serrated relationships behind an ostensibly normal household and exposes the violence and suffering inflicted upon women. Ecofeminist readings of the works of Anita Desai in comparison with those of Margaret Atwood - the doyen of Canadian literature – offer a unique prism to cognize the organic nexus between women and nature. Writings on Resistance narratives of insurgent writers like Bama, Sivakami, Baby Kamble make for engaging reading as is the paper which explores the nuances of resistance and survival in *Antharjanam: Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman*.

It is fervently hoped that the selections compiled in this special edition will provide a comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of women's writing in India and will open fresh avenues of research to teachers and researchers. I am gratefully indebted to the Executive Editor Dr. S. Sobana, Head, Department of English and Dean of Arts for entrusting me with the responsibility of compiling and publishing the papers presented in the seminar in this special edition. I am immensely thankful to the enormous effort put in by the assiduous team of teachers Dr. S. Melwin, Dr. R.S.A. Susikaran, Mr. D. Steve Loney, Ms. S. Devi Niveditha and Ms. G. Evelyn Jeevanandhini for their timely help in sifting, selecting and editing the articles.

G. Parvathy
Editor of the Issue

Acknowledgements

This issue of Literary Explorer wouldn't have been such a joy to publish if these people hadn't consistently supported this endeavour. The Faculty of Department of English owe much to:

Dr. Paul Dhayabaran, our honourable Principal of this esteemed institution for extending support and encouragement that enabled us to carry out this project. The timely provision of Financial aid from the Management helped us to bring out the journal on time. We record our heartfelt thanks to our Principal and the Management.

Our thanks and indebtedness are due very specially to Dr. Joseph Dorairaj, Dr. Joseph Albert, Dr. R. Roopkumar Balasingh, Dr. U. Sumathy and Dr. Subathini Ramesh for readily accepting to serve as Advisors on the Editorial Board of the journal. Their fund of experience and expertise are sure to help the department and the journal alike take bold strides in reseach.

The Associate Editors, who are our Faculty, deserve special appreciation and thanks for their help in meticulous proofreading and their invaluable advice in typesetting and bookmaking which made it possible to finish the work in time. We have always appreciated the oneness we cherish in working together.

I also thank and appreciate CSI Good News Printers, Tiruchirappalli for their enormous contribution in designing the book into a pleasing form.

S. Sobana

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On Narrating Women

Githa Hariharan

New Delhi, March 2021

It was a stimulating experience to be part of the National Virtual Seminar on "Encumbrance to Emancipation: The Alchemy of Women's Writing" in India organized by the PG & Research Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu on 17 March 2021.

When requested to deliver the keynote address, I suggested the topic "When Women Narrate the Nation". But as I began to list the points I wanted to make, I realised that before tackling the larger subject of the national discourse, I had to address the starting point: the power of narration.

Why is it so important for people – in this case, women – to narrate their own stories? And for all the world to hear?

The first step to equality is the freedom to express the self. And this expression requires a listener – an audience beyond the self and the household. A 'general audience' in public space in which the narrator makes herself audible; visible.

But the patriarchal system in different parts of the world has evolved strategies to muffle, even mute, the voices of women. In India, a range of strategies serves to keep women relatively invisible and inaudible. Caste, class and community influence these strategies, of course. But even upper-caste and upper-class women are not exempt from being pushed into the dark recesses of the household. Namboodiri women, for example, were reduced by custom to 'antharjanam', the 'inside people'.

Narrating the self – the small private world of experience – is the first step to self-expression, even if it is only in the 'informal spaces' of narration: the backyard, the kitchen, the extended family and neighbourhood. But our primary interest is in the outward journey from the traditionally sanctioned informal spaces – where reading and writing were often not allowed, or made difficult. This movement takes the narrating woman out of hidden spaces, and makes her narrative an assertion of dignity. “I am here,” says such a narrative. “Take note of me and my kind. Take note of our lives, and our dreams and hopes!”

This small circle widens through the 'alchemy of narration' from the individual to the group to a larger public space. To project one's voice into public space is to take hold of a bit of this vast territory, and make it one's own. It is from this space that the voice travels, with its story to the community at large, and even beyond, through the alchemy of print and translation.

How powerful is this assertion of the self, and subsequently, of the community? The significance of women narrating their way into public space is amply illustrated by writing from different parts of the country and in different languages. Consider a brief sample of such texts. There is description of the woman's drudgery in the kitchen, or the female bodily life, in texts such as Rassundari Debi's autobiography, *Amar Jiban (My Life, 1876)*. Questions are raised about what women should write about, and about the usefulness of individual rebellion as against the collective rejection of oppressive convention in the story “Pratikaara Devata” (The Goddess of Fury/Revenge) by Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-1987).

The dalit narrative by women has often been autobiographical, but not just of the individual self. It takes us, naturally, to a vivid view

of the collective experience. On occasion, it is acerbic and polemical. From Muktabai (1841-?) to Baby Kamble, to contemporary writers such as Bama and P. Sivakami, it confronts women's lives in spaces where deep-rooted caste discrimination leaks into every aspect of human experience. Caste and patriarchy form an unholy alliance in their day-to-day lives. But there is also the power of questioning; of anger; of polemics; and the resistance that a clear-eyed narrative can express. Such resistance brings a fierce challenge by women, by dalit women, into the arena of public discourse. It is as if all of them are saying, in their unique ways, what the fourteen-year-old Muktabai said in her essay on mahars and mangs as early as 1855: "O learned pandits, wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say..."

For many women writers, the immediate community operates rules and conventions on behalf of the larger patriarchal system. In stories such as the collection *Irاندام Jaamangalim Kadai*, (*The Hour Past Midnight*), the writer Salma describes the hemmed-in lives of Muslim women in rural Tamilnadu. She brings to light the psychological underpinnings of such lives. Also, she does not shy away from the central place the woman's body occupies, whether in her own marital life or in that of the family, or the community as the 'vessel' of 'honour'.

The body – its vulnerability in a patriarchal society divided by other fault lines such as caste, community and class – is a recurring theme in literature by and about women. Narrating this vulnerability is the first step. It is an insistence that the world at large see the various ways in which the female body is inscribed upon. What completes this narrative is that of probing, or insisting on, or celebrating, female sexuality. And, more than anything, using both

the body and the voice to make the alchemical transformation from the inscribed upon to the inscriber.

The woman's body is a familiar site on which nations are defened, defended, lost or won. This is seen most sharply in times of warfare. But it's the warfare in what are supposedly times of peace that make the context for some rich stories by Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016). Mahasweta's stories "Stanadayini" (Breast-Giver) and "Draupadi". Both stories take on the hegemonic cult of representing (and having women see themselves as) goddess, mother or slave. Mahasweta turns this familiar trope of the woman's body as site into something else, first in "Breast-Giver", and then, as if to take that movement to its logical conclusion, in "Draupadi". In "Breast-Giver", Jashoda is a wet nurse whose breasts are at first spectacularly alive with milk; then they empty and sicken to become hard wounds that will nally kill her.

The power of the story "Draupadi" lies in that one brief but lightning-like flash at the end when the ravaged site of the woman's body, the "unarmed target", elicits fear in her plunderers. The gang-raped tribal revolutionary, Dopdi, is told to dress because the Sahib, Senanayak, an expert in combat politics, wants to see her. But Dopdi chooses to remain naked: "Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts two wounds." And what she says terrifies Senanayak as much as the sight of her naked body: "You can strip me, but can you clothe me against Are you a man?" Her female powerlessness has become powerful enough to threaten his manhood, the very source of his power.

In a sense, the female body becomes the metaphor for the nation, the nation ravaged, on the one hand, by the process of marginalising its citizens. But also, on the other hand, a nation in which the only

hope for survival lies in the resistance to exclusion that is narrated by its citizens. How do we work towards the emancipation for women, for dalits, for all our citizens, promised by our Constitution? Where does our hope for the future lie? Hope lies in the eloquent and continuous struggle between the exclusionary facts on the ground and the narratives that call for inclusion. It is this struggle that makes literature, and the women's narratives we are speaking of, political. Writing such narratives is a political act. And so is reading them; so is understanding, and acting upon, their call for equality, diversity, and inclusion in the sharing of power.

Mahasweta Devi's “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha” and the Geographies of Environmental Justice

Dr. U. Sumathy

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Mahasweta Devi's long short story “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha” has a deceptively simple beginning. Talking about the protagonist's birth, his name and his domestic life, the uncharacteristic personal tenor of the tale soon changes into a typical Mahasweta narrative plunging deep into the crises in the lives of the Pirtha tribals. The author, with a sweeping stroke, covers the diverse contours of Environmental Justice – in a hundred pages – issues which the Environmental Justice Reader painstakingly deliberates upon in its anthologized essays. Problems relating to changing geographical landmarks, place identities, the tribal non-tribal divide leading to unjust treatment of the marginalized, the land ethics of the tribals all lie mired in a sordid tale of life and death and life-in-death.

When the problem of toxicity looms large in the world today and when toxic discourses hold centre-stage in contemporary writing, Mahasweta casually mentions about it almost as a passing reference to highlight the inhuman and callous manner in which this grave issue gets handled by the authorities. From the unsuspecting first line: “For a long time people have been dying in Pirtha” (98) to the causal link that gets established in the next page through the words of the SDO, “The enteric fever started from the polluted water supply. When it rains, the water flows down the hill side. How I know if something

poisonous came with the water?” (99), there is a vicious touch in the outsider's perception of the tribals' lot. Much later, the reader is given to understand that it is a sinister game of revenge played upon the upright Block Development Officer, Harisharan, who had earlier suspended those responsible for swindling the quota of pesticide meant for the tribals. “Characters came down from the Block Office and saw there was no agriculture at all, and they sprayed all over the dusty fields, . . . The rain fell on the fields and fallow lands on the hillside and the poisonous water flowed into the wells . . .” (122). The unsuspecting tribals die drinking that very water and eating the tubers of the Khajra that had sucked up the water. The crime becomes all the more grievous as it is unleashed on the ignorant tribals who don't even report the deaths. “You don't know it until the patient gets to the Health Centre” (123). Even if some manage to get to the hospital travelling in the rough palanquins and shoulder poles, the doctors are not equipped to treat them. As for the tribals themselves, “If something happens beyond the limits of their knowledge they think of mysterious reasons, divine rage, the witch's glance and so on” (123). Hence, the efforts made by a stray Harisharan turn out to be a miniscule drop in the ocean of troubles faced by the tribals. Terrel Dixon, in a roundtable discussion on environmental justice made this statement: “toxicity fractures the potential for community” (24). But in a community as in Pirtha, which does not comprehend the dimensions of toxicity, it is too much to expect that they will establish the links between toxicity and community.

Another aspect that is central to Environmental Justice is “place based identities” (Pena 74). Mahasweta firmly grounds the tribals to the Pirtha hills as she tells their tale. The environmental ethics of the tribals of Pirtha are governed by their intense attachment to land. They are also aware that their land has changed over the years, and

how the shifting geographical landmarks of their land have degraded their lifestyles.

Shankar, the only educated tribal reminisces thus: “Once there was a forest, a hill, river and us. We had villages, homes, land ourselves. In our fields we grew rice, kodo, kutke, soma, peacocks danced, we lived” (119). They had slowly settled down in these lands, cultivated them and the land witnessed their cultural imprints. Back then their ancestors fought the enemies near the river. “But now there’s a bridge there, the map is changed” (146). Shankar in his own unique way then narrates how forces of mal-development changed their life patterns irrevocably: “Why did the foreigners come? We were kings. Became subjects. Were subjects, became slaves. Owned nothing, they made us debtors. Alas, they enslaved and bound us. They named us bondslaves . . . Our lives vanished like dust before a storm, our fields, our homes, all disappeared” (119). These words reflect the agony of the tribal as he is affected by the loss of qualities that made people like him to “define place as the corresponding biophysical anchor of local identities” (Pena 66). It is very plain that the loss has touched his sense of being in a deeply troubling and disquieting manner.

This story of usurpation is an inevitable component in the history of indigenous people all over the world, Leslie Thomas, chronicling the lives of the Inuits of the Alaskan Arctic writes: “it was a time when much was hidden, before outsiders came on bended knee to learn from us. Outsiders came, but it was to change us” (10). Shankar’s wail, “Why did the foreigners come?” (119) is yet another resounding echo.

Crossing the thin line that separates history and story, Mahasweta recounts the illegal ways in which tribal lands were sold. “The non-tribal buys land in a fake tribal name, by force of political

clout. The owner of the land gets no money, it's an inside arrangement” (125). Even though there are special officers who are particularly entrusted with the job of looking out for the tribal interest, honest officers get transferred resulting in legal-aid cells remaining a hoax. Finally the tribal who was once the owner, works in his creditor's land at wages of two-and-a-half rupees.

Policies are framed by politicians who are far away who do not even know of the existence of Pirtha. The heady mix of caste, bureaucracy and red tape confounds the conundrum. Much energy is spent on debating over the two terms: 'drought' and 'famine'. Does Pirtha suffer from famine or drought? The Chief Minister, who had built a luxurious residence after the Bhopal Union Carbide disaster, would not declare Pirtha 'a famine area'. The State Government will not declare famine even if people die. A famine can be declared only if a certain percentage dies. And the agonising question is, “How many people live here, that millions can die?” It is an obvious case of fitting a square peg in a round hole. There is no story there, as per the State Government's version and it is just a case of drought. Ironically, the drought inspection team comes in the rainy season. “So, ok, they said, there's lot of water in Pirtha, Nothing can be done” (100). But the fact remains every year, people die of starvation, of eating rotten scavenged material and of dehydration. “Pirtha is a place of perennial starvation. They have no resource, and they will never. A few thousand people have now accepted despair. They don't know how to ask, don't ask, but they take if given” (104).

It is highly ironical that what they don't need is given to them. Shankar reasons: “Oh, we climb hills and build homes, the road comes chasing us. They build roads, houses, schools, hospitals.

We wanted none of this, and anyway they didn't do it for us”

(120). The MLA with all his nonchalance is ready to provide them with solar ovens and biogas. Harisharan had to hammer it into his head, "... the problem in my Block was what to cook, not what kind of oven to cook in. There is no cattle that there'll be bio from dung" (132). This is one little example of the complacency of the policy makers. Mahasweta Devi's pungent humour comes to the fore in showing how the tribals use the family planning posters with the slogan, 'Only one child, no more'. Even though this policy does not sell with the tribals (who believe in the dictum, a poor household needs many children), they find ingenious ways to make use of the posters. They cover cracks by putting them on the wall and stop the cold by spreading them on the floor. When the tribal doesn't get help to stay alive, even with rice and wheat rotting away in the Food Corporation of Madhpora, he is dumped with incongruous schemes. In addition, he even gets bombarded with accusations as: "No one can fulfil their needs, sir. They sell everything they get, they have standing clients in Rajaura you know" (108).

In his introduction to the book, *Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*, Robert D. Bullard points out that the goal of Environmental Justice framework is to make environmental protection more democratic. "It brings to the surface, the ethical and political questions of who gets what, why and in what amount, who pays for and who benefits from technological expansion" (11). True to this statement, it is the government "which doesn't even know that there are human beings in Pirtha" (117), that decides what Pirtha gets. Mahasweta goes on to generalize as to how in India even a famine is being bought and sold "to whom it may concern" (125).

Straightforward officers like Harisharan are misfits in a corrupt system. Individuals like him try to do whatever they can within their limited capacities. He admits his inability to roll back the years, and

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bring back the tribals' pristine forests and their flowing river. He cannot help them win back their ethno-national identity, their stolen dignity and freedom from slavery. He can only bring them rice, medicine and powdered milk. He has to pay a price even for that. He gets transferred on the charge of inventing famine where there is no famine.

Yet another imperative of Environmental Justice is to address the threat of forcible and violent relocations of the indigenous people. Loss of lands, territories and means of subsistence and the lure of greener pastures push them towards such a move. In Pirtha it is Kausalji, who runs a Non-Governmental Organization, yet another player in the tribal game, who calls the shots: "I will get the land back from the government, let them come down from the hills, they will farm there, plant trees there, there's plenty of water. I'll build a housing development for them" (151). The hidden agenda behind these caring words is to move the tribals and in their land, plant some more trees so that the spot with the river, the hills and the trees will make an excellent picnic area. Thus in the name of ecotourism yet another modern fad, the land that is unfit for the residence of the forest dwellers is deemed fit for picnics (151). The right of the indigenous people to be what they are, to remain on their lands and to practise and live their traditional cultures, languages and religions are basic human rights and fundamental freedom guaranteed by the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights. The people of Pirtha may be ignorant and illiterate and may not know anything about their rights, yet they will not give up what is theirs. They will not put the past behind them, tear up their roots and leave their place to go to a housing development. "Tribals in a tribal colony" (152). The reiteration comes later too: "They will not leave, they will not go anywhere leaving these stones, hills caves and river. To the fertile fields, to the plains, where there is plenty of water and many supports for survival"

(195). This may have happened anywhere in India as in the case of the dislocated tribals of the Narmada Dam Project. As Arundati Roy points out that once they start rolling, there is no resting place (2). The memories of their earlier times, the ancient glory – sagas would have become blurred in the mind. But the case of Pirtha is different, “These people are fully in exile. They have not received anything from modern India” (146). In this denial lies the victory of the Pirtha people. Their forests are gone. There is nothing around them. Still what matters is this: “The graves of our forefathers are in Pirtha” (151). Elsewhere, indigenous people have to compromise and accept the proposition “You have to change, but you don't have to die” (Pena 72). But in Pirtha, the resolution is, 'you may die, but you don't have to change'. The sordid fact as expressed by Shankar is “We are dying, our members are decreasing... Not so many are being born, they are sold” (166). He almost sends out ultimatum thus: “. . . No we won't go anywhere. Let them give us our dues here. If not let them forget us. Atmost we'll die, nothing worse can happen” (196). The resolve in Shankar's voice is evidence enough to prove that even if they are reduced to the last member of their species, they would not descend from the hills, would not abandon Pirtha. Community based struggles find prime places in all Environmental Justice initiatives. In Pirtha, there is no struggle as such. No protests, no slogan shouting and no fist raising, but only resistance – resistance to change. Refusal to budge. Unwavering as against temptation, stoic endurance as against weak yielding. Here in lies their victory. It is not environmental activism. It is just a question of survival. The emergence of resistance identities in violently disturbed places (Pena 73) need not be unique to Pirtha, but commendable nevertheless.

By retaining their place based identities, the tribals of Pirtha cling onto their cultural moorings since sustaining the land is tantamount to

sustaining cultural identities. Apart from underscoring their cultural practices, their rituals and their superstitions, Mahasweta cleverly introduces the myth of the pterodactyl to ground the tribal in his reality. The people of Pirtha see the ancestral soul in the pterodactyl. Hence their conviction becomes all the more stronger: “Why should we leave? Isn't this our place? Now no tribal will leave. The ancestor's soul let us know that all the places it visited are ours” (195). The stone tablet where the image of the pterodactyl gets engraved is another justification for them not leaving the place. The pterodactyl at another level becomes a symbol of the incompatibility of ancient civilization living in a modern atmosphere. It goes to reflect the menaced existence of the tribals and the extinction of their being, being pushed to the brink.

Puran's musings as he draws comparisons between the nursing Bhikia and the dying pterodactyl are pertinent: “He is a tribal, an aboriginal, you are much more ancient, moreoriginary than his experience, both your existences are greatly endangered” (156). Another ground of commonality is that there are insurmountable communication barriers between the pterodactyl-tribal duo on the one hand and the modern man on the other: “There is no communication point between us and the pterodactyl. It was a myth and a message from the start. We trembled with the terror of discovering a real pterodactyl” (196). Similarly, “We built no communication point to establish contact with the tribal, leaving it undiscovered, we have slowly destroyed a continent in the name of civilization” (196). At the third level, the pterodactyl serves the purpose of sending out a prophetic message to the modern man: “We are extinct by the inevitable geological evolution. You too are endangered. You too will become extinct in nuclear explosions, or in war, or in the aggressive advance of the strong as it obliterates the weak” (157).

The bird seems to have come from the past to sound a warning: It is a crime to take away the forest and make the forest dwelling people naked and endangered. As the futuristic vision enlarges, a dystopian world unfolds before the eyes. A world where forests are extinct and animal life is obliterated outside of zoos and protected forest sanctuaries. Having murdered nature, in the soil will be grown “Deadly DDT greens / charnel-house vegetables / uprooted astonished onions, radioactive potatoes / explosive bean-pods, monstrous and misshapen / spastic gourds, egg plants with mobile tails / blood-thirsty octopus creepers, animal blood-filled tomatoes?” (158). Mahasweta thus brings into the microcosm of Pritha with its poisonous wells, the macrocosm of the outside world with its infinite possibilities of toxicity.

The ultimate prerogative of any Environmental Justice movement or discourse would be to record the efforts of the local groups to organize, mobilize and empower themselves so that they take charge of their own lives, communities and environments. Teresa Leal, yet another participant in the Roundtable discussion best expresses the need for all to work for solutions to environmental and social problems. She makes a clarion call to everyone to “throw rocks at the sun” (13). Environmental Justice workers know the enormity of the challenge, they know that they are fighting against odds, they know that they are aspiring for an impossible goal. But “change comes only when a few brave hearts dare to throw the first rock” (13). In the Pritha predicament there are a few brave hearts in Puran and Harisharan. When Puran wholeheartedly realizes that the tribals are more civilized and even though exploited to the core, there is no synonym for exploitation in their language and it is the modern man who is barbaric, he takes upon himself the responsibility to throw a

rock on their behalf. And when he envisions a future for the tribals by providing them with life sustaining alternatives like farming and making hassocks, baskets, and mats and arranging to sell them, he is preparing to throw the first rock. In his realization that only love, a tremendous excruciating, explosive love can dedicate him to this work, lays his aim for the first rock. Mahasweta's concluding reminder that Madhya Pradesh is India and the tribals of Pirtha represent the entire tribal society underscores the desperate need for more Purans to throw rocks at the sun.

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An Interface between Mind, Body and Gender

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Encumbrance to Emancipation: The Alchemy of Women's Writing in India is a reality which is not even realized by all today. It has for some time now become indeed an unbearable burden simply because freedom is no easy. Freedom has let women to think and execute. When in past she was merely a follower of dictates now she is the decision maker and being in an era of I- Feminism – Individualistic Feminism the individualist Feminism where she takes the responsibility for her choices and is not ready to settle with the role of merely being a victim. Unfortunately the opposite gender is still living from the past the distance between the two types, the genders is huge and differences are humongous and at the end of the day to live together with such differences is a burden. In such a situation is the interface even possible? The interface of even knowing the differences? Even if it is made possible is the density of either minds similar or complementing each other? For all these to happen, establishment of an understanding is required. But like how Freud said that he can never understand women till date there is only this statement heard everywhere about women. Are women really complicated? Is there any difference between the way male mind and works a female mind works? How are these two genders different? I find that women writers are trying their best to simplify themselves and expressing themselves in their writings but ... are they really being understood?

Many a time almost every literature written on a woman is related by almost every woman who reads it. At the same time there are occasions where not all men are able to understand a female writing. One of my professors a great professor who with such an ease used to teach post structuralism and deconstruction theories told that he couldn't understand Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe*. He said it gave him a headache and he couldn't complete it. That's evident enough to prove that women's writings are different from that of a man's and men are not comfortable with the real women. When she comes out with her true self expressed in her writing. He goes uncomfortable. He feels he can make no sense of it. He organizes Yagyam for Toxic Feminism- they called it "Pishachini Mukthi Puja". This was held in 2018 in Varanasi by around 150 men. This is disturbing because all the endeavor to communicate seems have gone in vain. And it also shows a pattern.

So where is the pattern emerging from. what is it making every woman's story similar? How did we become just another brick in the wall? How is it that every woman's voice be it a narrator's voice or any artist's or mother's a wife's or a daughter's at the end only goes unheard?

I am calling this seminar a reality made possible because sometime back in this very century when a woman director Deepa Mehta started one of the most beautiful movies of hers "Water" a film based on the woman writer Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Water, Deepa Mehta's sets were burned down in Varanasi saying that the film tarnishes the honor of the Nation. Because the disturbing India is something which our fundamentalists never wanted the world to recall. Not because they were ashamed of their past but because they didn't want it get known to the world... or simply make the traditions of this nation be shown in a "wrong light" according to them. What was

that wrong light that they feared off That in India, widow in 1940s who were customarily rejected as an illluck and forced to live in destitution on the edge of society. Her husband's death was considered as her fault and she was made to tonsure her head for she was never to look beautiful after ... kill her taste buds... forbidden from having salt or sweets and remarriage was not allowed even in dream... as child marriages were in tradition then. Children of five or 8 years old were married off to a much older bed ridden man and if he dies (mostly he does sooner) then the same rule applies to even a five- year child. A German novel *The Reader* written in 1995 by Bernhard Schlenk was not received well by the Germans because the new German generation somewhere felt that the act of annihilation executed by the Nazi seemed were being justified in a very subtle manner in the novel. So here the rejection of the novel was not because they didn't want the world to know why the Nazis were thus but they never wanted any to start sympathizing with the Nazis thinking that they were uneducated and hence did they indulged themselves into all the holocaust. This sympathy they never wanted any to have for their ancestors. They just allowed themselves to wallow in the guilt.

But the case of Indian collective psyche is entirely different. The past acts the past literatures, the Smrithis are still quoted as an essential part of our tradition.

Why? why is there any such difference? What is it that we are made off Our men or our system made off How is it possible for our society, our men to go so callous after all the violence that has been inflicted upon women?

Crimes against women in India particularly constitute murder, rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack, cruelty against women and kidnapping of the total 4.05 lakh crimes against women

registered by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) during 2019, 1.26 lakh (over 30%) were that of domestic violence inflicted by the husband or his relatives. under the category of Assault on women to outrage her modesty were around 27.6% and the next in the list were the acid attack on women. These are only the registered cases but there is much which a woman has never even thought as a violence against her or even if she had understood it so she has been silenced by for various reasons.

Why have they harbored this much hostility against one particular gender alone? As far as my understanding goes the reason is just one: The stories, that has constructed us. Our mind. The men's mind and the women who some times are the custodians of the patriarchal mind have all got created only through these stories. The mythologies which run in our blood has raised us. Where almost every woman is silenced even after a rape and even after defacement, after mutilation of her face she is silent.

There are many instances, there is Ahalya, there is Renuka Devi, There are many but I would like restrict myself to two important silenced characters one is Vrindha and the other is Surpanakha... One was raped another was mutilated .by who? We all know.

When we would look into these characters or rather the characterizations of these characters we will know that this denial of expression and restrictions imposed on woman today is not of recent origin – it is a collective psyche which has been passed on from our past and it has travelled for a very long time and its roots are so deep that uprooting seems almost impossible. They all start from our mythology. And it cannot be denied that every mind basically is constructed by a story. The kind of stories that has been told again and again has the ingredients which has created our very gene pattern.

When a woman expresses her love or lust for a man he can deny. If she is still adamant and she provokes his anger why hasn't he tried to stab her instead? Why cut her nose off? A nose after which she is named. Such a slender beautiful nose she had had that she is called Surpanakha... and none in the entire story is with any regret for what has been inflicted upon Surpanakha... the whole battle starts after this and none has any remorse for the violence caused on this woman. I do not see any difference between this attack and that of the tendency to attack a woman's face with acid. A psyche of men again in our nation.

Vrindha the wife of Jalandhar is raped by the God and later given the compensation of becoming a worship able plant Thulasi. Vrindha also has not much questions. For all these acts when the Gods were questioned their justification was to cause the balance, to establish dharma they had to they told. It only reminds of the post structuralist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's State of Differend. Where in a catch 22 situation where total justice is not possible one is either conveniently made to appear evil or one is simply silenced. Or maybe they were voicing or may be even screaming but its not heard at all simply because her language cannot be decoded by men. Her point of views is simply too above his faculty of understanding. All he can see her is as a mad woman in the attic screaming for her rights but in actuality, she was wording everything which can be understood only by another woman and never by a man. And hence she was raped and was believed that she was compensated with.

Today we look at Rape more as of an honour being taken away from a person or the family or form the society that she belonged. This abstract idea which is imposed upon about is another myth into which all are forced to live in.

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Naomi Wolf says that, "Rape and sexual assault ... should be understood not just as a form of forced sex, they should also be understood as a form of injury to the brain and body, and even as a variant of castration."

This intention to disrobe her dignity this desire to kill her from within seems is the only intention. Do we naturally have this much hostility in men? If so Where do they come from? has it got to do with the limbic part of the brain? So it's the body and the chemicals which decides?

How many of us do understand what it is to become a woman or be a man. What is it to be a man? What makes him fall so easily? Stoop down to such a level and yet walk around with no guilt what soever?

If we look back at the yagna performed in Varanasi. invariably the news makes all including women to laugh. But at the same time we shall not miss that there is a que for the helplessness that men are going through now because of the new women that they are made to experience with. We are not taking any effort to make the men equal to the new women and this shall be a great pit later for equality once again shall never be established.

Looking at a body and deciding if the one is a woman or man is not the right conclusion. The dominance of the chemicals decides it to a great extent. It is very much is possible for a woman also to inflict the same pain to the other for there are quite a number of innocent men who are getting punished by women by deviously using the legal protections she is ascribed with. At the end it only leads one to a conclusion that the idea the thought of being a woman or being feminine or being genuine or being human seems is facing the hostility. The insanity that is part of the natural world is to fail. That should be the collective battle that we all should be endeavoring at.

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We have to remember that we shall never repeat what has been done to us. Here comes the responsibility the encumbrance and here is the moment when we have to start understating I feminism. Individualistic Feminism. May all the deliberations rendered in this Seminar leads us toward better understanding of human minds and may we help in creating a better and more accommodative world.

Thank you

'It's just one bleach for a new dhoti, one child for a young girl': Autonomy, Economy and Psychology in Salma's Short Stories

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When literary works are analyzed for their aesthetic merit and social ethos, the feeble line of gender dichotomy in relations to the writer begins to blur. However, it is rather a quintessential experience to probe into the trajectory of women's writing as it "integrates" to construct a wide range of voices such as strangled screams, muffled grunts and outspoken opinions. Refusing their relegated status as 'woman' writers, they have transcended from the very idea of labeling and confining their works to specific genres and themes. Besides creating a rupture in the received philosophies, Salma's works can be seen as an unapologetic handbook to smash the patriarchy and critique society. Nevertheless, she does not confine her works to just critiquing patriarchy as she endeavors to explore the notions of body writing in them. Born in Thuvankurichi, as Rakkiah, she was deprived of education from her early teenage. Tackling the challenges of forced marriage and patriarchy, Salma continued her writing after marriage by secretly penning them down in tattered bits of papers ("OR Books"). With the publication of her first novel, she gained eminence as a writer and started her political career as well. Kim Longitto, a British documentary filmmaker, has produced a film on the life of Salma and has addressed her as an "extraordinary beacon of hope" (Ramnath, "mint").

Published as an anthology of short stories in 2020, *Curse Stories* was translated by N Kalyan Raman. From unmasking the layered phases of patrilocal households to interrupting the normative codes of behavior, Salma “writes from the gut, and she tells the universal story of women. She does it not just from the body, but also with a very keen sense of how society is organized” (qtd. in Dutta, “The Indian Express”). Two stories from the collection will be undertaken as a part of this study in order to testify and prove my argument. Both “Black Beads and Television” and “Childhood” vary from each other as they are situated in emotionally and thematically different landscapes. By analyzing the socio-economic and socio- psychological aspects of both the stories, the paper will highlight the intrinsic intertwining of various issues such as agency, economy, education and schema. The fetishization of women in the male gaze and the alienation of women from their body will also be probed in order to cluster them as a complementary effect of the ‘capitalist patriarchy’. As Salma situates her stories in the realms of domestic spatiality, the crucial trajectory of ‘place’ becoming a ‘space’ can be witnessed as well.

The revelation of the constructedness of the social mores and the exposure of the strategic entanglement of class, gender and power will be decoded, besides reiterating the crucial play of social psychology in constructing social reality. The conditions determining the aforementioned themes can be delineated using the philosophical and theoretical insights of both Socialist feminism and Social psychology. While Marilyn Friedman delves into Marxist political ideologies, Gary Wood deconstructs human psychology through the lens of gender and social psychology. The three categorical changes encompassing Friedman’s conceptualization of autonomy, “involve female protagonists, redefinitions of autonomy that avoid

stereotypically masculine traits and redefinitions of autonomy that somehow involve social relationships or at least not antithetical to them” (570). In the phase of applying the aforementioned principles, the social psychological theories of ‘gender-role identity’, ‘gender expression’, ‘social learning theory’, ‘self fulfilling prophecy’ and ‘schema’ will be put to test in apropos of deconfiguring and reconfiguring the socially sanctioned sets of attributes. The employment of this ontological merger in the selected short stories will possibly lead to gaining a clearer understanding of the workings of both personal and political maneuvers. Salma’s “Black Beads and Television” respectively narrates the story of Zakiramma and Mahmuda, where she conspicuously engages in the technique of comparing and contrasting, appeasing and confronting the moulds of society. She ingeniously ropes in the idea of sketching stark images of the ideas of both autonomy and vulnerability through Zakiramma and Mahmuda, respectively. Zakiramma acknowledges her presence as an individual, which leads her to claim her agency, whereas Mahmuda confines herself within her relational construct of being just a devoted wife. The deliberate juxtaposition of ‘self’ and the ‘other’ can further be derived from here, as Salma herself reveals ‘Zakiramma’ as her favorite from the story (Shekar “The News Minute”). While Zakiramma sells her ‘golden black beads’, which is a cultural marker of married women, Mahmuda sees herself becoming a victim of back-breaking domestic labor. On the other hand, “Childhood” depicts the horrors of child marriage and continuous abortions. The story’s focalization through the eyes of Meher helps the plot in recounting her past where she was forcefully withdrawn from education to be pushed into the clutches of child marriage. Here again, the careful juxtaposition of Meher and Abu Tahir’s friend can be perceived. While engaging in the very act of comparing her life

with Abu's friend, Meher unconsciously enters and take notice of a complex socio-economic web comprising of education, social status and independence. In this story, Salma's withering criticism on gender roles and cultural stereotypes are wedded carefully to mirror her prime concern on women's mental development and physical health.

Sara Ahmed observes feminism to be "happening in the very places that have historically been bracketed as not political: in domestic arrangements, at home, every room of the house can become a feminist room" (qtd. in Afzal 411). The selected stories of Salma align perfectly with that of Sara Ahmed's statement, as they are craftily located in typical Muslim households. The very idea of home turns out to be a political space for subversion, as Zakiramma buys a television without the consent of her husband. Even before buying it, Zakiramma had gained an identity for herself as a cinephile, who asserts a hold on her life by confronting the oppressive norms of religion. She rather creates a rupture in the stifling codes of capitalist patriarchy, by retaliating "I'll go when I want to. I love MGR movies like my own life" (Salma, 82). Besides threatening and transgressing the binds of religious fundamentalism, Zakiramma exhibits autonomy, which according to Freidman, "involves acting and living according to one's own choices, values, and identity within the constraints of what one regards as morally permissible" (571). The careful negligence of stereotypical masculine traits and the redeûnition of the agency occurs only via the character of Zakiramma. Concomitantly, Mahmuda fails to acknowledge her identity, as she consolidates and validates the paradigms of masculinity as reflected in her foreign returned husband, Shaukat.

When Mahmuda retains the notions of biological essentialism and gender role identity, Zakiramma refutes it by challenging the schema and stereotypes. In the process of "mothering" Shaukat,

Mahmuda loses herself and lacks becoming self-aware and conscious. While this story satisfies the first condition of Friedman's theory by producing female protagonists, "Childhood" too decisively adheres to the condition through that of Meher. The self-reflective and self-reflexive attitude of Meher can be justly categorized under the 'procedural conception of autonomy', which "is realized by the right sort of reflective self-understanding or internal coherence along with an absence of undue coercion or manipulation by others" (574). During her meeting with Abu, Meher's waves of thought urge her to think of an alternate other in her life. She bemoans her loss of innocence and education as "Had she too gone to college, she would have dressed as elegantly as that girl, isn't it? And perhaps she might not have got married yet, or had any childbirths or abortions?" (Salma 136). Nevertheless, the constant abortions she undergoes can be viewed as a subtext of revealing her physical vulnerabilities and sexual 'agency-lessness'. Here, the theoretical prism of bell hooks becomes very pertinent, as she opines, granting women the civil right to have control over their bodies is a basic feminist principle. Whether an individual female should have an abortion is purely a matter of choice. It is not anti-feminist for us to choose not to have abortions. But it is a feminist principle that women should have the right to choose (114). hooks' argument here specifically conveys or rather exhorts the womenfolk in having the ability to exercise autonomy over their life and body. The crude imbibing of dominant determiners of culture in the minds of Amma and Meher can be viewed as a consequence of the 'social learning theory', which further distances Meher from her own body; This theory places emphasis on the child's environment and learning experiences, and according to Gary wood, "gender roles are learned through a mixture of observing the behavior of others and modeling (imitation of same-sex care givers)" (37). His depiction apparently

illustrates the plight of Meher despite insinuating a difference between “motherhood” and “mothering” (qtd. in Afzal 415).

Incidentally, the linguistic and semantic ambiance employed in the story further nurtures and expands the theme implied; for instance, the vocabulary used such as ‘shame and humiliation’, ‘anaemic, tired and pale’ denote Meher’s premature ageing tendency, pain and vulnerability. Meher starts developing a sense of consciousness only during her meeting with Abu and his friends. Here, Friedman’s concept of the ‘relational approach’ of gaining autonomy can be aptly applied as the conscious raising of Meher and her ‘competency for autonomy’ develops “through social interaction with other persons” (574). Friedman further explains that “these developments take place in a concept of values, meanings, and modes of self-reflection that cannot exist except as constituted by social practices”(574). Salma’s curious juxtaposition of Meher’s braided hair and the college girls’ ‘loose stack of layered hair’ (133) subtly assimilates the politics of hair as well. Certain traces of autobiographical elements can be witnessed in the characterization of Meher, as Salma herself reveals in an interview that she has got “sort of, a yearning. Why am I not like the other women. . . Why was I denied a college life. . . Such things made me realize how unequal this society is and consequentially, how it had caused a lot of pain. My stories are on this” (qtd. in Shekar, “The News Minute”). Friedman’s analysis disturbs the very character of Meher, as she fits in both of his categorizations in a paradoxical way. The absence of heroes and villains and the fragmentation and plasticity in characters hue Salma’s works with the postmodern technique of discursive narratives.

The violence meted out to women in both the stories reifies the idea of universal servile status of women besides reiterating the socialist feminism principle, which holds women’s oppression and

exploitations as inevitable consequences under patriarchal capitalism. Both Meher and Mahmuda apparently become the product of social connection and societal consequences. Whereas, Zakiramma refuses to pay heed to the elusive yet dominating constructs of social conventions and disruptions, thereby becoming a woman on her own. It is only by violating the constraints of patriarchy and trespassing its 'self-fulfilling prophecy', that Zakiramma starts owning a space. The rupture between her and Sultan occurs plausibly as an anticipated consequence of autonomy, as Freidman discerns that "The connection between autonomy and social disruption is merely contingent... an autonomy-idealizing culture increases the risk of (though it certainly does not guarantee) ruptures in social relationships" (576). Zakiramma's addiction to cinema and television can be seen as the impact of the global in the local and regional spheres. It rather replicates the "affect" that has been produced as the result of consumerism and globalization. If analyzed through Edith Stern's conceptualisation of 'forgotten worker', Zakiramma refuses to be one, whereas both Mahmuda and Meher helplessly become one. Susan Ferguson cites Edith Stern in her essay on Labour as, The housewife is the "Forgotten Worker" who enjoys no minimum wage, no health and safety standards, no mandated periods of rest, she laments, "Free individuals, in a democracy perform personal services for themselves or, if they have cash, pay other free individuals to wait on them (qtd. in Ferguson 358).

What can be inferred from her argument is that the prime role that the economy plays in the life of the womenfolk imbibes a positive transformational potential. An interesting analogy can be drawn here as Salma's recognition of this potential becomes obvious as she implies, "All women are not in a position of strength. Only when they have power can they help others" (Dutta, "The Indian Express").

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Here, the symbiotic bond among autonomy, economy, education and status is vividly unraveled besides denoting their indispensability to maintain a life of equality. Salma insinuates that Mahmuda's domestic labour and Mehru's child marriage could have avoided lest they were provided with proper education. As Friedman rightly opines, both of them an despecially Mahmuda become "a woman who does not reflect on her relationships, communities, norms, or values is incapable of recognizing for herself where they go wrong" (574). However, even without any educational support, Zakiramma enjoys the bliss of autonomy as a "free individual" due to her hold on the economy. The wrathful cries of Sultan over Zakiramma's act decidedly prove Friedman's stand as 'autonomy becoming antithetical to social relationships is often a good for women' (579).

"When a woman and a man get married, they are starting a new life together. Why should one give money to the other" ("Development in Action") emphatically remarks Salma, besides sculpting her stories based on it. By considering writing as a political act, Salma also critiques the validation and consolidation of power relations in families. For instance, the power politics in her stories evidently portrays and satisfies the four basic structures of powerlessness of Mitchell theory (Eisenstein 12) on capitalist society, which includes production, reproduction, sexuality and social realization of children respectively. Besides writing against the schema, Salma offers a glimpse of a supposedly egalitarian view on life through the character of Zakiramma. Thus the convergence of autonomy and social psychology which can be derived from her stories, proves to be exposing the politics of privilege besides nurturing a sense of awareness. From critically commenting on child marriages to upbraiding the violence of patriarchy and access to birth controls, Salma's stories plainly expose the warp and woof of the workings of a religious fundamentalist and capitalist patriarchal society.

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Debunking Mythic Maxims: A Close Reading of Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables*

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"Re-vision -the act of looking back, ... of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" - Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken" (18)

Maxims are considered to be rules and self-evident truths whose validity is pervasively accepted, while 'Myths', though we understand them to be tales and stories which are again age-old and widely accepted, when it comes to the word itself, a 'myth' means a lie. A lie nevertheless, which is widely understood to be the truth. Debunking the mythic maxims then constitutes exposing the fallacy of the falsehoods which are widely accepted as truths, an act of urgency especially when it pertains to how women have historically been and continue to be perceived in society. This perception is grounded in the way the second-sex-ness of women as a distinctly categorizable gender (and an inferior one at that) in relation to the centrality of men is a pervasively accepted myth (Armengol 4).

I intentionally begin the paper with this focalization on the decoding of words and their accepted meanings as this is a prelude to what the paper delves into, which is the tyranny of language itself as a patriarchal tool that subjugates women and poses an obstacle to the feminist writer. To this end, I have taken up Suniti Namjoshi's rewriting of a host of traditional mythic tales, folk tales and fairy tales in her seminal work titled *Feminist Fables*.

Feminist Fables consists of twenty-six pieces of such rewritings. It was first published in the year 1981, and as Namjoshi has herself commented on it, it came at a time when there were not many takers for 'feminist' writings, especially those which were expressly labelled so (UoH Visual Dossiers). *Feminist Fables* takes up the task of re-visioning or rewriting a host of traditional texts like the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *Beauty and the Beast*, the tales of the Monkey and the Crocodile from *Panchatantra* and so on.

As this cursory list of rewritten texts shows, Namjoshi does not limit her rewriting merely to texts of Indian origins but also branches out to fairy tales and stories from Western countries and this is significant as this reveals the author's self-consciousness of the language in which she is writing, namely English and the readership of the said language which has been latterly transposed unto the tradition of Indian writings as opposed to many of the stories from the *Panchatantra* that the text contains.

The Indian English literature reading audience, within India itself, is also part of a cultural context where these western tales have been read, orated and published so often and widely that they are part of the living mythic imaginary of this readership (Das 151). *Feminist Fables* thus aptly targets the deeply entrenched patriarchal, homophobic and casteist predilections of this pseudo- intellectually progressive class which usually squarely lays the blame of Indian society's so- called backwardness on the shoulders of the less educated, the lower caste and folk or rural population (Thomas 12). The culpability of this superficial upper class and upper caste strata in society and its instrumental role in upholding oppressive structures in society is thus exposed.

To substantiate this let me take up some instances from the text. The very first piece of the text which is titled "From the Panchatantra",

dives right into the comingling of caste and patriarchal hierarchy on which the foundations of our age-old cultural texts, like the *Panchatantra* are built (Namjoshi 11).

There are reaffirmations of caste superiority in the piece such as the protagonist saying, "It is true that I am poor but I am a Brahmin" and the claim to superiority internalized by this character as also society in general, springs forth from this statement. But even then, his disappointments in life are many as he is given no sons, only a daughter. And then again the narrator makes the following bitingly sarcastic statement, "Though only a woman, she was a Brahmin, so she learned very fast". The unquestioned eruditeness of Brahmins in Indian society without acknowledging the centuries old murderous oppression that it is built on is tangentially alluded to in this statement, as also the double-edged sword of caste and gender oppression that women across India face as the text goes on to elucidate in subsequent pieces. The story ends when the Brahmin's daughter demands to be acknowledged as a human being, and the god in response to this appoints a Commission (Namjoshi 11). This ending nods to the frustrations faced by feminist movements in India when bureaucratic terminologies are thrown at them as weapons to ward them off. These commissions come disguised as benevolent efforts being made by the government to make changes to the system while they in fact are further co-options to the changeless structure of the system.

A retelling of the Beauty and the Beast, titled as "A Moral Tale", takes a look at the well-known story and finds a homo-erotic love story unfolding in it between two women, wherein the 'beast' is not the ugliness encapsulated within a Prince or a particular person, but the ugliness or the beastliness is the love of these two women itself which threatens the normative heterosexual order (Sorrel 25). Interestingly, in this story, the protagonist asserts her non-normative

identity whilst still a child, and she asserts it to her parents. The identification of homo-erotic desire is seen inextricably existing only when there is an identifiable couple in question, and thus the assertion of one's identity even in the absence of an identifiable person or an 'other' as an object of desire is very significant. It reaffirms the witness accounts of many people asserting their homosexual identity, as being something that they had identified even when they were children, this further attacks the patriarchal negation of non-heteronormative desire as something that is unnatural, or just a phase or a result of environmental/ peer pressure influences. The parents of the child of this Moral Tale story, are not violent villains, they are in fact much the worse for being understanding parents who uphold the institutional oppression under the veneer of being very accommodating. They tell the child that, "It's not that we disapprove of homosexuals as such, but people disapprove...homosexuals are not happy and that's the truth." (Namjoshi 17). This tale gives us a glimpse of how the age-old structure is upheld through the suppression of 'deviant' identities within the apparently safe- space of the home itself and how this suppression commences at the hands of a child's primary care-givers themselves.

Moreover, tales like "The Giantess" also bring in the question of Nationalism, wherein the woman's body is made to stand in for a deified personification of the nation as a whole, case in point being the jingoistic celebration of the figure of "Bharat Mata" in our country in contemporary as well as colonial times (Gupta 4291). The reluctance or the complete lack of agency of this puppet figure is expressed in this story as well as the allegation of invisibilizing the herculean labour of women which has gone into the task of nation building. In the story, once the nation building is done and the men, who are like unruly selfish children are revelling, the narrator says

how, "things might have gone on in this way forever, were it not for the fact that the giantess grew tired" and Namjoshi allows her giantess to refuse all the coaxing that the men of the country are willing to offer her (in the form of poems being written in her honour and so on) and simply cross the mountains and leave, in utter rejection of this oppressive role of a Nation-mother-goddess, hence the significance of the title of this story (Namjoshi 19).

The work of revision undertaken in *Feminist Fables* is not merely restricted to the changes in the plot and narratives of these fables and mythic stories, the reclamation of language through loaded usage of words but also through an innovative use of literary form. The various tales in *Feminist Fables* do not come to us neatly packaged as well rounded tales, but as fragments and interrupted musings. Their very fragmentary nature facilitates the expose of the gaps inherent in the naturalized and rationalized indoctrination of women as inferior in the gendered structure of literature and society. The tales of Red Riding Hood and the story about the hunting down of Daphne by the Greek god Apollo and Daphne's subsequent turning into a mute tree, have been jotted down in single paragraph pieces (Namjoshi 12,13). The brevity of these tales, especially the broken- structure of Red Riding Hood's story titled "Case History", serve to do away with the complacency of cause and effect plot structures which are meant for leisurely reading (and insidious patriarchal conditioning) and instead highlight the violence perpetrated on the little girl and the young woman, respectively.

For instance, this is what Red Riding Hood's tale's ending is changed and reduced to: "Mother thinks wolf is extremely nice. Please to see shrink. Shrink will make it clear that wolves on the whole are extremely nice. R. gets it straight. Okay to be wolf. Mama is a wolf" (Namjoshi 12).

This fragmentariness persists in a lot of the tales within this text, where the message is driven home through the non-conformative use of language. This very rebellion against the normalized dictated and structured use of language systems also enacts within the literary form of the text the act of defying the tradition, the same way that this defiance is being executed within the revised plots of the stories themselves.

In a subversion of the didactic ending of moral tales, in the piece titled "The Oyster Child", the ending is itself turned into a question. A modern day MCQ question moreover, wherein each option speaks of the various ways in which the oppression is being perpetrated. The answer here would of course be the "all of the above", an option we are used to seeing in question papers in educational institutions. But this option is not provided here. This multiple choice in fact serves to highlight the actual lack of choice available to women, in the subjugation of the feminine identity within the oppressive patriarchal structures (Namjoshi 29).

These interruptions in traditional stories and methods of storytelling have been the highlight of this paper as this project of reclamation is of monumental significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, the very act of writing itself is not to be taken lightly especially when it happens in a tradition like that of myths and legends, where the feminist writer has hitherto never had a place. Here then, the task of the feminist writer is clearly laid out in having to carve a foray into this dark thicket of literary meanings and allusions which have been written and forged by men to uphold their centrality within the institutionalized patriarchal systems which surround society (Rich 24). What is relevant for us to note here is that language, through it's repetitively established meanings and allusions becomes a weapon to orchestrate the subjugatory project of patriarchally defined gender categories.

In writing *Feminist Fables*, Suniti Namjoshi fully realizes the limits of language itself when used for the project of feminist reclamation and her answer is to turn the tables on its head. Her answer in the face of this oppressive potential of language is not to shy away from it but to reclaim it through the very means of acknowledging this hierarchization inherent in the way language operates in society and solidifies meanings and paradigms. Namjoshi views this cognition of the oppression of language as the primary means on which the consequent project of feminist writing is then to be founded (UoH Visual Dossiers). Adrienne Rich in her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" has highlighted how women have long been used to reading themselves in literature as written by men (Rich 21).

Following from the previous assertion, it can be said that the mere act of writing itself by a woman is not enough. Adrienne Rich feels that the feminist writer has to carve out for themselves a means of writing where in the woman can know herself and exist irrespective of the man (Rich 22). This requires a newer mode of writing because as we see in the mythic tradition as well, what is (or was available back in the previous century) to a woman writer was a tradition of writing where she was trapped within the pages as seen in the figments of men's imagination. Recreating this style or writing within the pre-existing tradition would mean that the woman writer would write unlike a feminist, would fail to excavate her own self and realize her existence as a non- relational being in a tradition dominated by men. Feminist writing thus must go a step further. It must not just create but also act as a negation of the clanging voices of masculine writing already thriving and proliferating before us.

The paper asserts that this dual task is seen to be executed in *Feminist Fables*, wherein the duality unfolds within the single

revisionary act of firstly identifying the patriarchal mythic structures, highlighting their fallaciousness and then through a rupturing of this very structure, re-writing liberatory feminist meanings unto the erstwhile strait-jacketed narratives.

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Keywords- Fables, Rewriting, Myth, Literary Form, Feminism

Individualism of Iconoclastic Women in the Poems of Meena Kandasamy

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To give vent to our emotions and feelings is one way of ameliorating our pain. Writing is the most powerful tool in healing and mending the unheard ordeals. Women are daring, courageous and iconoclastic in every feministic text and it is only through writing they are able to express their long back unpleasant times and unfulfilled desires. Meena Kandasamy is one such writer who finds solace for all the scars she has endured earlier in the name of societal norms. All her women characters break through the shackles of stereotypes. As she felt that her individuality is questioned often and when she sensed that her mere existence is not valued, she got into the relationship with the pen and paper. With every meticulous portrayal of women, the essence of individualism is highly apparent in her notion. Meena Kandasamy, the dream icon of the womankind, in her poetry collection *Ms. Militancy* creates a strong wave of resistance and opposition against the deeply ingrained line of patriarchal system.

Keywords: Iconoclastic, societal norms, stereotypes, individualism, patriarchal system.

Indian writings spark a little brighter with the intensity and rage filled words of Meena Kandasamy, a Chennai based writer, social activist and translator. To her credit, she has published two poetry collections namely *Touch and Ms Militancy* in the years 2006 and 2010 respectively. Feminism is not a new subject in the current scenario. It has been travelling with us in every aspect of literature. Meena Kandasamy demolishes the mythical women characters from

their subservient conditions and reconstructs them with the raging rebellious quality which is worth exploring in the present time. Her works echoes the unheard voices of the downtrodden, subjugated and marginalized people of her own society. This research article is mainly intended to expand the theme of individualism of iconoclastic woman with reference to the poems "Princess - in - Exile" "Backstreet Girls" and "Ms Militancy."

In the preface, Meena Kandasamy sketches out the myriad of mythical male characters like the suspicious Ram, Indra, Brahma, Sage Gautama and Adi Shankara. In this entire introductory part, she had employed the format of first person 'I' which certainly makes the point clear that she gives priority to her own self and for her self rights. No one can deprive her of the rights she deserves naturally by birth. The repeated usage of 'I' makes people to comprehend that she wants to be seen as an inimitable woman unlike the compliance women. She wants to elevate herself from the mire of patriarchal society. And in order to achieve such a great stance, she has taken pen as a weapon to fight against all the injustice that is prevalent in her current era. She says in the Preface, that she had to write poetry to be heard.

Meena Kandasamy's evolution as a writer is remarkable and noteworthy in today's Indian writings. What prompted her largely to write is the cycle of ordeals she personally witnessed in the lives of those marginalized and moreover she herself is the victim of an abusive life. She has been forced to encounter double suppression. One being the caste she has born in to and the other being her female sex. Her marriage turns out to be a nightmare and within a short period of time she left behind the abusive relationship and took pen and paper in her hands which gave her solace to some extent. In one of the shows, Meena Kandasamy has expressed that, owing to the particular way

of using the Tamil language and by the slang, people find out her caste background and thereby make her feel let down. This was the reason why she took the international language English and begins to delineate the reality of social conditions and life in her writings which we could see on par with the lines of Kamala Das when she writes in her poem titled, "An Introduction" "Every one of you? Why not let me speak in any language I like? The language I speak, Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses, all mine and mine alone" ("An Introduction").

To start with the poem "Princess-in-Exile" would be perfect to explore the theme of individuality. The poet here directly refers to the story of Indian mythological epic poem Ramayana, where the heroine Sita is trapped under the hands of the male hegemony. On the one hand Ravana abducts her and on the other hand Ram gives her the test of virginity called Agni Pariksha. Amidst the two, she waited patiently for a long period thinking her husband would reach her and shower the same love as he did before and thought his search for her would bridge the gap of these estranged years. But things did not happen so. Sita was given a tremendous punishment for waiting loyally for him. With this note, Meena Kandasamy empowers the docile Sita with a different story. In accordance with the author, Sita's self-reliance dominates over the suspicion of her husband and that is why she walks out and gets vanished from the sight of her suspicious husband. She no more wants to live with the man who doubted his own life partner.

The character Sita from the great epic poem is set as an example for the stereotypical portrayal of wives. No matter what women must be in the shadow of the husband and should never cross the boundaries drawn by them. If they violate the norms, then she will be labelled as a 'whore' or 'slut.' As Shashi Deshpande rightly points out in her

work *That Long Silence* that, "No women can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman? A woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated"(75).

This kind of rule is never applicable to the lives of men. Here raises the question of why the husband Ram was not even questioned about his status of loyalty. Why is it not asked for a man but woman? Why such a difference of opinion does exist? This shows that Sita, the remodeled daring woman in the version of Meena Kandasamy attempts to break the chains of male domination by protesting to take the Agni Pariksha and simply walking away from him. The fearless Sita in the poem does not want to prove her worth. So, being a self-respected woman, she walks out of the scene of patriarchs.

Another interesting poem of hers is "Backstreet Girls" where Meena Kandasamy creates a stage for womankind to take up as much as different roles as their souls long for. This poem becomes the platform for womenkind to play the part as she desires, regardless of what this society would think. As the lines follow, "This woman, she is the slut. And that girl Over there, she is the glutton. And I'm a bitch with tattoos on my lusty thighs..."(Ms. Militancy).

Apparently, this particular poem is dedicated to the moral policing. It makes many direct statements saying they (women) are no more the submissive figures confined to the cages either of culture or marriage. They are the re-constructed versions which sometimes may not be accepted by the conservatives. These lines of openness can never be tolerated by the male society, as these words of the poet let women to live in accordance to their needs. Every living soul dwelling on this world is an individual being. Each has its own likes, dislikes, needs, requirements and demands. "Backstreet Girls" is a perfect example of the constructive societal norms. Why should

women alone begiven restrictions? Why are they expected to stay within the circle of suppressive? Why women are seen as a grotesque creature when she behaves out of that illusionary societal norms. And why men are not seen as such when he does the same thing? The only role she is expected to play is that of a silent pain bearing wife, sister or mother. Why should not she livefor the needs of her own? Who imposed such walls on them? A woman is always expected to render her service all the time for her family until she gets married and after marriage the duty has to be continued in the in lawsfamily.

When Meena Kandasamy says "There's self-love on our minds" (Ms. Militancy) she emphasizes the sacrifices, a woman performs in order to satisfy the society. The above line exactly means that never more will they look for the others welfare. It is now high time to give their soul and heart, the self-love.

It is very crucial to analyze the essence of the poem "Ms Militancy" as it bears the title of the collection. The mere word "Militancy" is ironical as the arrogance and violence are associated with the mankind in general. Meena Kandasamy with her altered powerful women characters militates against the army of chauvinistic male. In this poem, the character referred to is Kannagi, the wife of Kovalan. The poet brings back the revolutionary traits of Kannagi in the following lines, "Vending vengeance, she made a bomb / Of her left breast and blew up the blasted city" (Ms. Militancy).

This poem is a bit different from others in this collection since Meena Kandasamy does not voice out for Kannagi who has been betrayed by her husband Kovalan, who, infatuated by the external beauty of Madhavi abandons his wife and starts to lead an illegal loving life. Kannagi patiently waited for her husband and even when he returns, Kannagi seems to have the same love she had earlier for

him and decides to embark on a new life journey. Kovalan was not questioned by the poet here whereas only the other aspect of Kannagi who burnt the city of Madurai, claiming for the justice is sketched here. The poet invokes or triggers the Dalit women to vent the underlying rage they have as Kannagi when they are mistreated or neglected as a part of this society. Caste, religion and creed are just a shelter which man has built for their personal gains and advantage. All humans are equal and must be treated with love and friendliness. The poet envisions the Dalit women as making their stance strong in their existence.

Similar to the writing style of Meena Kandasamy, another famous writer from British Carol Ann Duffy has also meticulously recorded the ordeals and sufferings of the wives. She, in her poetry collection, *The World's Wife* has presented the wives from biblical or mythical stories and the poems are written from their perspective against the patriarchs. The collection has poems such as "Pilate's Wife" "Mrs Faust" "Mrs Darwin" "Anne Hathaway" "Mrs Icarus" and so on. One of the poems is "Penelope", as described in the lines, "I was picking out the smile of a woman at the center of this world, self-contained, absorbed, content, most certainly not waiting" (<https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-penelope-annotated>).

Penelope is the wife of Greek king, Odysseus. In this poem, she presents Penelope as a wife who has decided to ignore the absence of her husband and she tries to build a new arena of her own through the act of embroidering. Though both the poets have taken the female characters from the ancient writings and to discuss their subservient life, Meena Kandasamy differs in a point when she empowers her women with valor, the mindset to transcend the stereotypical life and be brave enough to stand for their own stance.

The writings of Meena Kandasamy aptly fit into the third phase of feminism as given by the American literary critic Elaine Showalter in her feminist essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics". The third phase 'female phase' which began from 1920 and continuing in the present centers on the importance of re-interpretation of the text against male language. They created a canon of new writing and built a world of their own. It is obvious that writings of Meena Kandasamy do not merely paint the resistance but developed a new arena in her poetry and novels for all the shackled women in the stories written by a patriarchal society.

Meena Kandasamy does not limit her rebellion with herself alone, she through her spark filled writing, caters the chained womenkind to stand for their self. In order to witness victory in this attempt, she has brilliantly taken up the action of writing. Especially she employs the mythological characters. Rather than portraying the autobiographical elements or some women of ordinary, she specifically goes for the women like Sita and Kannagi, because only through such epic characters she can make people understand how women are unconsciously made to stay bound in shackles. Highly revered characters are made to protest in her writing so that she can communicate to the general public that how women are tricked to blindly follow the epic story.

By critically analyzing these poems, it is obvious that the individualistic rebellions take along with them an element of self-identity too. Poets like Meena Kandasamy lay a strong path for the still subservient women kind to search and sustain their quest of self.

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Crossing the Line: Reappraisal of Subjectivity and Exploring Memory, Body and Place

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Abstract

Meena Alexander reigns the poetic realm as "undoubtedly one of the finest poets of contemporary times" (*Atmospheric Embroidery': Six Poems by Meena Alexander (1951-2018)*). Her works are notable for projecting the turmoil and psychological desolation of the subjects who are exclusively immigrants and emigrants of a particular country. She expresses these notions in her poetry through lyrics i.e., her poetic style is lyric poetry. She portrays the internal and external compulsion of the migrants who are all compelled and forced to expel and evacuate from the root in order to maintain and sustain the economic stability of the country as well as keep hold on the certain political parties in the interest of peculiar groups of people in that country. Unlike other Indian Feminists like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, etc., Meena Alexander has made her revolutionary views stoutly and laid the way to uplift the laymen through her poetics.

This research paper "Crossing the Line: Reappraisal of Subjectivity and 'Exploring Memory, Body and Place'" intends mainly to focus on the theme of subjective exploration and polemical of countries. And six of her poems from her book *Atmospheric Embroidery*, published in 2015 ("Atmospheric Embroidery", "Shook Silver", "Udisthanam", "The Journey", "Torn Branches" and "Black Sand at the Edge of the Sea") have been chosen for analysis. This paper unravels Meena Alexander's encumbrance to emancipation by

her "verses embodied both the deeply personal and widely political" (Darling).

Keywords: Polemical, Subjectivity, Immigration, Emigration, Laymen life, Economic Stability, Memory, Body, Place, Emancipation

Meena Alexander was born in Kerala and brought up in Sudan and settled as an English professor at Nottingham University. The Statesman, a famous Indian English-language broadsheet daily newspaper, describes her as "undoubtedly one of the finest poets of contemporary times" (Coming Home - Society & The Arts News - Issue Date: May 15, 1991). She has written numerous collections of poetry, such as *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018), *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013), and *Illiterate Heart* (2002). *Among these collection of poetry, Illiterate Heart* (2002), won distinguished PEN Open Book Award. The volumes of poetry penned by her have been translated into several regional and European languages. The main themes of her poetics revolve around 'migration, trauma, and reconciliation.' In one of the interviews given by her to the famous literary magazine, she discusses how her fluency in multiple languages shapes and informs her poetry, as "I have always grown up in a world where there were things one did not understand, because there were languages that were not completely accessible... I think this is a very good hedge against a certain kind of rational understanding, the presumption of linguistic clarity or transparency, post-Enlightenment, that sense that everything can be known and a light can be shone into all parts of one's thought" ("Meena Alexander, a Consummate Woman of Letters").

She also has written many prose works. We can categorize her prose pieces into different varieties. *Fault Lines*, (1993, 'expanded in 2003') a phenomenal work comes under the label of 'memoir.'

Broadly she is known for the two novels she has written and these novels brought her fame and recognition throughout India as well as in the western world. Those novels are *Manhattan Music* (1997) and *Nampally Road* (1991). Among these novels, *Nampally Road* is her debut novel and that is renowned for 'her double vision.' This novel depicts "the inner world of Mira Kannadical, who after four years in England, getting her Wordsworth and the Romantics right, returns to teach in Hyderabad - the classroom is 'a converted bedroom in what had once been the home of the poet Sarojini Naidu'". Interpreting Meena Alexander's poetics and her style, Maxine Hong Kingston deduced thus, "the reader sees her visions and remembers and is uplifted"(Atmospheric Embroidery by Meena Alexander | Jaggery). Meena Alexander realistically depicts the life of the people who are crossing the international borders through legal and illegal means and in that process; they encounter lethal violence and unexplainable hindrances that makes their daily chorus from heaven to hell.

She has written essay collections such as *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009) and *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996). She was also an author of many critical essays and her critical studies are, *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (1989) and *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979). She is the editor of *Indian Love Poems* (2005) and *Name Me a Word: Indian Writers Reflect on Writing* (2018).

She has been honored by grants and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Fulbright Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, National Council for Research on Women, Arts Council of England, the Imbongi Yesizwe International Poetry Award, and New York

Foundation for the Arts, as well as the South Asian Literary Association's Distinguished Achievement Award in Literature. Alexander taught at the University of Hyderabad, Columbia University, and Al Quds University, and was a National Fellow at the Indian Institute for Advanced Study, Shimla.

Crossing the Line:

Dislocation of people from the place where they have been used to living since their birth and moving to some foreign lands by the compulsion and expulsion of the Government, is the major theme dealt by Meena Alexander in her poetics. She has also experienced this kind of migration, not because of the compulsion, but because of her familial situation. She "embraced the excitement and disruption of dislocation while honouring cultural legacy and assimilation" (Coming Home - Society & The Arts News - Issue Date: May 15, 1991). She implied that there is not just one way to write about migration, there are multiple ways to portray about migration. Sometimes migration is nostalgic for some people and at the same time it would be the nourishing environment for some writers. She states that migrating to some unfamiliar landscape would give writers a new dimension to see the world where they used to be before. In science, we can call it as a 'frame of reference'. This reference can shift one's perception on some simple things entirely and gives new insight on it. And these kinds of insights gave men to devise and innovate new things to humanity. She used "poetic images and metaphors of fracture and being torn brought to life the raw, rough-edged beauty of dislocation" ("Meena Alexander, a Consummate Woman of Letters"). Her theme deviates from her contemporaries and she used lot of diversified themes in her poetics such as, loss, assimilation, and sifting identities. Shikha Malaviya, one who has

written critical commentary on Alexander's poetic collection, *Atmospheric Embroidery*, writes, "Her themes make up the spinning globe from which Alexander's poems emerge, one whose meridians she has been riding the past four decades, charting new territory while altering old ones" ("Meena Alexander, a Consummate Woman of Letters").

Atmospheric Embroidery is her eighth book of poems in her collection. In this collection of poems, she imagined herself as a cartographer of the world and written about the journey which she imagined as engaged. She has taken lot of myths and used it in her poetics in a diversified manner. She took these mythologies largely from Christianity and Hinduism. She also projected her experience in dislocation and assimilation into different lands and culture. As Shikha Malaviya stated, "Alexander, reflecting her own experience of having lived in India, Sudan, England and the US, explores Mappa, a series of embroidered maps of the world, created by Italian conceptual artist Alighiero Boetti" (*Atmospheric Embroidery* by Meena Alexander | Jaggery).

In Boetti's embroidery, in his mapping of the world Everything is cut and coupled,

Occult ordering - silk and painted steel

Sun and electric moon, butterfly and naked man (Darling)

Atmospheric Embroidery is one of the collections of poems which project the theme of memory. And also, this collection shows varied landscapes and myth. The varied landscapes implies that the multiple homes which gives the poetess a new dimension to see the world.

Wads of ice-cream glisten on Route 6.

We stroll into summer, thoughts thrust into a bramble Oriental
bitter-sweet pocking the hedges,

Fists in pockets, lemonade dripping from a child's hem. (Darling)

Above lines are taken from the poem, "Atmospheric Embroidery." It shows how the author recollects her memory from the past and uses it in her poem. She remembers exactly the Route 6 where she roamed. She recollects her memory of each and every small thing without anything left with exact scenario and feeling. For instance, "...Fists in pockets, lemonade dripping from a child's hem" ("Meena Alexander, a Consummate Woman of Letters"), is one of the finest images that she has produced through her words to illustrate the image. That image appears so real to the readers and gives the immense sensation of the summer season, the light, noon, air and all the things behind it, as if, we also lived there with the poet.

"Shook Silver", "The Journey", "Udisthanam", "Torn Branches", "Black Sand at the Edge of the Sea":

Shook Silver is another poem in this collection *Atmospheric Embroidery*. In this poem, she really talks about crossing the line. Travelling from one place to another injects fear on one's heart. The poet also feels the same. She easily remembers when she was to begin her journey in the boat which was heading towards Africa. The poet was playing with her friends in the deck of the boat. And her mother was knitting saffron Sari. The boat had cows and goats which also transported to Africa. She felt they travelled too like these animals. There was no difference between the humans and animals. In that boat, everything seemed equal. She recognized the phenomenon of crossing the sea. And she quoted her mother and grandmother in this poem.

“The Journey” is another poem which illustrates the condition of the poet after she had got down in the foreign land. She was a small girl then. She witnessed the civil war which was going on in that foreign land. She encountered lot of violence and mounting of boulders outside of her window resulting of the civil war. She metaphorically indicated the crushed jasmine flower for that chaotic state.

“Black Sand at the Edge of the Sea” is a philosophical poem in this collection. It says about the death of a human being. It also discusses the paradoxical nature of the life and death. "...The twin sisters Night and Death? / Will they wash the ground clean?" (Foundation)

She equates death and life with day and night. Normally day indicates life, new spring, new beginning and so on. Likewise, night, the eternal darkness, indicates the diminishing of life, light and decay of living and non-living beings. When we see this contradictory philosophy, we can obtain that darkness is eternal and it is omnipresent. Darkness pervades everywhere, but light exists only somewhere. Lot of philosophies and religious teachings taught us that darkness is something dangerous and life threatening. But it is not so. Darkness is full of life and vitality. She questioned these ironical things in her poetic collection, *Atmospheric Embroidery*

In one way, memory, body and place are interrelated and travel parallel in this universe. From the title, we can infer that without place and body we couldn't collect memories. So, the memory is nothing but the combination of these things in it and vice versa. And for collecting memory, place plays very crucial role. We collect memory through our body with the aid of place i.e., geography. Meena Alexander, explored memory, body and place in her poetic collections. She has used the imagist technique in her poems. When we read these poems we can easily grasp the images which she

intended. These poems clearly depict the turmoil of the emigrants. When migration occurs, they have to leave everything, such as place, land, house where they are used to live, air, space, nature and emotions. Emotions play very pivotal role in our human life. Memory brings forth the emotions. Memory and emotions are interconnected. For instance, if you want to kill a man, you don't need to kill him physically, instead just kill his memories, and then he would be of no use. Alexander's poetics revolves around her own memories in her life. It is imbued with autobiographical elements.

Meena Alexander's works are notable for projecting the turmoil and psychological desolation of the subjects who are exclusively immigrants and emigrants of a particular country. She expresses these notions in her lyrical poetry. She portrays the internal and external compulsion of the migrants who are all compelled and forced to expel and evacuate from the root in order to maintain and sustain the economic stability of the country as well as keep hold on the certain political parties in the interest of peculiar groups of people in that country. We can explore lot of themes in her poetics. There is ample amount of scope to do extensive research on Meena Alexander. Her exploration of Body, Mind and Place is thought provoking and stunning. This paper would change the perception of students of seeing her poems. This paper would give some new frame of reference to see her poetics.

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From Lihaaf to Happiness: Queer Women Finding Representation and Acceptance in Indian Literature

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Abstract

Since the ban of Ismat Chughtai's "*Lihaaf*" in 1942, queer movement in India has significantly gained impetus decades later in the 21st century, and has seen some remarkable progress in terms of accepting gender and sexuality. Though there are still those who remain marginalized on account of their identity, the massive literary and other artistic inclusivity of queerness enable an open conversation about acceptance. This paper aims to analyse how literature in India has grown to explore more women-centric, non- traditional sexualities and gender. Visionary literary works like Kamala Das' numerous short stories, Ismat Chughtai's "*Lihaaf*", Arundhati Roy's *Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Maya Sharma's *Loving Women*, among others, have had major contribution in challenging the heteronormative norms for women and enabled candour never seen before.

Keywords: Women- centric, Non- traditional sexuality, heteronormativity, queer literature, Chughtai, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das.

Queer has never been something borrowed from the West. Almost always has the heteronormative Indian society buried the argument of a third gender and homosexuality as a borrowed Western culture. In *Queering Indian Sociology*, Dr. Pushpesh Kumar has pointed out, "Study of sexuality in general and subordinate sexualities

in particular has received little attention in Indian and south Asian sociologies" (Kumar 2). While mainstream literature taught in schools and institutions seldom have queer literature as part of the syllabus, it is unwise to assume that Indian writers do not produce such extensive and insightful materials.

The question here lies: why is heteronormative narrative considered so important? The answer is simplified by Chayanika Shah who rhetorically writes whether compulsory heterosexuality is only about controlling desire or is it about dictating that the world can have only two kinds of people—women and men.

Before delving into the discourses on gender and sexuality, it is imperative to unlearn all the stereotypical gender roles and sexualities that stem from patriarchy. While the middle East countries openly condemn homosexuality as sexual transgression and considers it punishable by death, the laws in South Asian countries are lenient and somewhat open minded. Though both believe that anything challenging heteronormativity is a foreign phenomenon.

In India, the transgression was not the uniform knowledge though. Shakuntala Devi's *The World of Homosexuals* published in 1977 was her dive into the world of outted homosexuals men. But way before the penetrative same-sex intercourse was considered ludicrous and vile but traditional, feminine sensibility was being documented by writers like Ismat Chughtai dated as early, in India, as 1942. "Lihaaf", a short story by Chughtai received much controversial attack and was eventually banned. This paper traces the beginning of feminist writing challenging heteronormativity which will include short stories by Kamala Das, Ismat Chughtai and Arundhati Roy.

Ismat Chughtai's "Lihaaf" has traces of homophobia. Consider this: Both Begum Jan and Nawab Saheb are in a position of privilege.

Sure, there exists pages of same-sex attraction as seen through the eyes of a child. As the story progresses, the now-grown adult analyses the relationships in the short story. Nawab Sahed, adored young fair skinned boys with small waists. Begum Jan's preference for Rabbu, a maidservant, comes more as a result of not being satiated by Nawab Saheb. Here is where the texts get problematic; problematic on account of wrong and somewhat limited depiction of homosexuality and homosexual couples. Chughtai's protagonist Begum Jan, though is ahead of the customary role appointed by patriarchal society, is lonely. Her "cheeks became rosy; beauty, as it were, glowed through every pore" (Chughtai 6) on the arrival of Rabbu. Chughtai defines Begum Jan's beauty as a reciprocation or an affirmation at the introduction of a potential partner or the lonely housewife. Begum Jan, the "prisoner of the house" suddenly became aware of the presence of someone who she enjoys spending time with. Rabbu's status as the help, someone who has to follow every wish of the mistress of the house is innately depicted as a homoromantic affair but in the light of recent readings, Begum Jan's persistent itch (Chughtai 7) was more dreadful and dissatisfying to represent homoromanticism. Here is an excerpt to illustrate the point.

"Come here and lie down beside me..." She made me lie down with my head on her arm "How skinny you are... your ribs are coming out." She began counting my ribs. I tried to protest. "Come on, I'm not going to eat you up. How tight this sweater is! And you don't have a warm vest on." I felt very uncomfortable. "How many ribs does one have?" She changed the topic. "Nine on one side, ten on the other," I blurted out my school hygiene, rather incoherently. "Take away your hand... Let's see... one, two, three..." I wanted to run away, but she held me tightly. (Chughtai 180)

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* writes "those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and

heterosexist power' [and] are written into our very psyches as well as into the dominant institutions of political and social life" (2485) and this is exactly the sphere where "Lihaaf" comes out in the lead as a feminist tale. But dig deeper and there's intra-class representation, though aptly represented, falls short of feminist tales. Begum Jan, a nobility, tries to rid of her malevolent itch in the arms of Rabbu - the help. When Rabbu leaves to visit her family, it is the child narrator she depends on. While re-reading the narrative from a contemporary perspective, Begum Jan is sexually exploitative. To make things worse, child sexual abuse is masqueraded as homoromantic relationship. This is exactly the kind of limited representation that challenges sexual heteronormativity, propels to strive against patriarchal hegemony, but fails massively. Despite being banned on the context of obscenity, Lihaaf falls short of an equivocal representation of homosexuality. The text, when read in the contemporary times, needs to be questioned on the validity of representation. Begum Jan's metanarrative of the exploration of her sexuality falls short in the glaringly alarming narrative. It is this kind of representation that holds homosexuality in the wrong light. But Begum Jan's portrayal is as similar as Nawab Saheb affliction with young boys and small waists. To view this text as a feminist reconstruction of the self is far from the truth.

In the light of Chughtai's text, queer representation has largely changed over the years. The feminist wave that shifted from the hetero-patriarchal paradigm to a truthful depiction of homosexuality and can be found in Kamala Das' short stories. Before delving into the literary analysis of the short stories, the current queer Indian population needs to be addressed. The beginning of the 21st century was not as open and accepting of queer as it is now. Satya Katyal, a prominent openly gay writer, was unaware of his sexuality until he came across Hoshang Merchant's Yaarana. The multitude of

independent zine available as a proper educative platform for the LGBTQIA community is on the rise but according to Gaysi found Sakshi Juneja, there has been a scarcity in the narratives available for the community. While social media plays a pivotal role in creating a more open discussion about the topic, the circle of scholarly approach to queer literature is still small. The hetero-patriarchal paradigm shift is brought forth by Vivek Tetuja's novel *So now You Know*, graphic novel *Kari* by Amrita Patil and other upcoming literature that has started an educative, non-violent approach to talking more freely about the community.

Kamala Das' short stories that were vehemently feministic in approach also depicted homoerotic, asexual homoeroticism, which though was imperceptible in the 20th century have gained massive scholarly analysis in the light of the movement for freedom. Unlike "Lihaaf" that propagates a homophobic and problematic approach, Das' narratives are more truthful and apt. The sense of self in Kamala Das narratives can be found in "The Sandal Trees", "Pathimoonnu Vayassaya Makal" ("Thirteen Year Daughter") and *My Story*. Often deemed as an unapologetically candid, forthright and inconsistent in her writings, Kamala Das' style of writing was considered confessional to the likes of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Homosexual representation, though were not the main themes in her writings, she did not refrain from it.

In "Thirteen Year Daughter", the story ends with a subconscious note. A father finds a love poem from his daughter to her teacher but does not react in a traditional homophobic manner. Rather he kisses his daughter good night and goes to bed. 1984 India though liberalised from the colonial clutches still remained under the spatial and societal grasp of a traditional, hetero-patriarchal paradigm. The father in "Pathimoonnu Vayassaya Makal", though surprised and worries, lets

the daughter's expression of her self - her love for her teacher - remain personal. There was no rebuke; no violent uprising to bring the daughter over to the heteronormative side. This kind of progressive thinking makes Kamala Das' story more relevant in the recent times. However, Das chooses to end the story with a dream; a dream of a sinking boat. The father dreams of the family and the daughter as a two-year-old, out on the sea on a wooden boat and the daughter trying to sink the boat. Even though there is acceptance of his daughter's sexuality, the subconscious conflict of shame and homophobia is brought forth, symbolic of the dream. Das ends the story with fear of societal pressure, a fear of shame being brought upon the family because of his daughter's sexual orientation. The truth in Das' ending is underlying the fact that despite loving one's children, the dread of judgement, stigma and unacceptance often accompanied open-mindedness.

Das not only depicted homophobia in the domestic households more daringly than other Indian writers back in the 20th century, she coined the term *Swavargapremi*, which loosely translates to homo-lover. In a society that still views homosexuality a vile and unnatural thing, Das' stories take a feminist liberation while depicting her protagonist. In "The Sandal Tree", Das depicts the toxic hetero-male who forces his wife Sheela to sever contact with a childhood friend Kalyanikutty, even though they are in love. Neither of these women are confined in the heteronormative household patriarchal world. The love story of these women, though interrupted by their married lives, spans over five decades. They are both accomplished doctors. Sheela battles out the complexities of her married life but Kalyanikutty divorces her husband. It is imperative to point out that in the short story, Das challenges the norms of women being enslaved to her husband. The complexities of married life take the autobiographical

account of Das' own marriage that ends with a divorce. Both Sheela and Kalyanikutty have different agencies of staying or leaving the shackles of marriage. While one chooses to self-express her freedom, the other attempts fitting in the hetero-patriarchal world. The representation of homosexual love between Sheela and Kalyanikutty stands true even today. One can break free, while the other struggles against the heteronormative traits but refuses to do anything about it.

Speaking of challenging heteronormativity, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is Khwabgah (Roy, 14) for trans narratives. Roy, a champion for equal rights and a stark critic of capitalism, moulds the novel as a narrative dominated by transgender, marinating the city of Delhi as a shrine, a cosmopolitan, not as a central but more as a transcendence, symbolic of a conflict ground for the whole of India.

Roy's novel, written after more than two decades after *The God of Small Things*, revolves around the Tilo-Musa lovestory, set against the cruel society where heteronormativity still prevails. Khwabgah - The House of Dreams - is the refuge - no, home - for transgender people who are so far marginalised that the graveyard seems like a better choice to live in than in the heteronormative society. Aftab, the protagonist, has been mocked and abused for her love of music and dance, which is why Aftab chooses to become what she always has been - a woman, Anjum. The regressive society mocked the "man" for wanting to venture out of the paradigm of heteronormativity and Roy's inclusivity is fanned out in pages in the form of the Dream Guest House, the graveyard and the inclusivity of everyone - every hijra - who cannot find shelter in the society.

What's so characteristically Roy is the enmeshment of political, sexual, freedom and contemporary. Roy takes us through the streets in Delhi and from Kerala to Kashmir. While being feminist in her writing, Roy does more than that. The inclusivity of the third gender

in *The Ministry* is politicised, much like Kashmir is. Kashmir is both inclusive and exclusive in the spatial structure of the country. While the third gender is the other in the novel, they too, find their paradise in Khwabgah. "The Khwabgah was called Khwabgah, ..., because it was where special people, blessed people, came out with their dreams that could not be realized in the Duniya. In the Khwabgah, Holy Souls trapped in the wrong bodies were liberated" (Roy, 53). The question of gender and identity is dealt with in the most contemporary manner by Roy. The feminist approach lies not just with the gendered woman - a term that has come under much discussion, but feminist in choosing to believe the other gender exists in the hetero-patriarchal paradigm of society and must be represented. The narrative of marginalized transgender is given an extensive background. Aftab becomes Anjum and Anjum is the utopian society that one day will be inclusive of everyone. Roy, through Anjum writes a perfect description of the self, "It doesn't matter. I'm all of them. I'm Romi and Juli, I'm Laila and Majnu. And Mujna, why not? Who says my name is Anjum? I'm not Anjum, I'm Anjuman. I'm a meh? I, I'm a gathering. Of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing. Is there anyone else you would like to invite? Everyone's invited" (Roy 3).

In conclusion, representation of women, queer or straight in a hetero-patriarchal world, has changed over time. All three writers - Chughtai, Das and Roy - have re-read the changing times and have managed to create a narrative that is inclusive of all. Women-centric writing in India, especially queer community and their representation have undergone massive changes since post-colonial times. With more discourses and progressive thinking and criticism, the inequality in the heteronormative society can be challenged.

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Revisiting Ahalya and Draupadi in Pratibha Ray's *Mahamoha and Yajnaseni* - Exploration of the Feminine Self

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Retelling and revisioning of mythological stories from feminist points of view, in recent years, has opened new vistas of female consciousness. Many Indian women writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Amrita Pritam, Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni redefine myth and project 'female self-exploration.' These Indian women writers divert their energies to deconstruct the past and reconstruct a new history and struggle with patriarchy. Unfortunately Draupadi and Ahalya are two such symbols who suffer a lot owing to male atrocities. Pratibha Ray, Murti Devi award winner Odia novelist, tried her hands to present and re-interpret these most misunderstood women characters of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Pratibha Ray's *Draupadi* and *Mahamoha* (The Great Lost) are the epitomes of 'humanist feminism.'

Truly, Indian womanhood has suffered a lot in the pages of mythologies. Her predicament is that whenever she has displayed the power to choose and step out of the predefined outline that a patriarchal society has drawn for her, she is either mythicised and turned into a supernatural being or glorified and put on a pedestal so that there remains a separateness or a distance between her and the multitudes of her gender. In the name of satitwa, her emotions have been ignored and she has been blamed for her having deviated from the patriarchal norms.

In the recent years revisioning and revisiting mythological stories has added new social, psychological and creative dimensions to Indian literature, not only in English but also in its regional variations. As we understand there have been hundreds of retellings and reinterpretations of mythological stories. However in all these, the male authorial voices are strikingly prominent. The patriarchal overtones can't be ignored while visiting the characters like Sita, Sabitri, Ahalya, Draupadi, Tara, Kunti and many more in *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and other puranas. In the recent years, these characters have been introduced from new perspectives and a feminist interpretation has been made by the writers like Shashi Deshpande, Amrita Pritam, Mahashweta Devi, Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Koral Dasgupta, Anuja Chandramouli, Irawati Karve, Ira Mukhoty, Usha Narayanan, Falguni Kothari, Vrinda Sheth, Kajal Oza Vaidya and a host of others who redefine myth and project 'feminine self-exploration.' These Indian women writers have attempted to deconstruct the past and reconstruct a new history and challenge patriarchy. Thus, Indian mythology is a new medium of choice for feminist narratives.

These telling revisioning can initiate and ignite someone to think twice before blaming Draupadi for the battle of Kurukshetra, eulogizing Rama as maryadapurushottama, cursing Ahalya for her incestuous relationship with Indra and taking Tara, Kunti and Mandodari's loyalty for their second husbands for granted.

One must take time to understand that all these stories were originally written from male perspectives and women being just supporting cast. One can understand that the patriarchal society underestimated women and after manipulation put them on the pedestals by glorifying them in these words: Ahalya Draupadi Tara Kunti Mandodari Tatha/ Panchakanya Smare nityam maha pataka

nashinim (Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari: constantly remembering these five virgins destroys great vices). Is this not sheer hypocrisy - throwing someone into the ditch and then washing her body with milk? After reading the new revisions of myths, one can understand that there are many sides to any story, and the same story might be read completely differently from the perspectives of women and other minor characters. Two of the novels- *Yajnaseni* (The story of Draupadi) and *Mahamoha* (The Story of Ahalya) - of Dr. Pratibha Ray, the prestigious Moorti Devi and Jnanapitha Award winner Odia novelist, have been wonderful revisionings of the myths of Draupadi from the *Mahabharata* and Ahalya from the *Ramayana* respectively. Researching in the realms of mythology, Pratibha reconstructed the life of Draupadi, the rebellious heroine of the Mahabharata in a feminist mode in her successful novel *Yajnaseni*. Her novel *Mahamoha* is a classic work on Vedic culture which elevates the misunderstood and misinterpreted Vedic characters, especially Ahalya from biological self to ontological being. It is considered to be a work of great myth making and demystifying of frosty metaphysics. It is a landmark in the Indian fiction scene. It is through such myriad gestures that Pratibha Ray's characters break out of the prison-house of the self and live a life of fulfilment.

Pratibha Ray is a well-known name in the literary and cultural circles of India. Among the contemporary fiction writers of Odisha, Pratibha Ray is widely translated, perhaps the best known and widely read voice in Odisha and India. Her translated works appear regularly in different Indian languages. She has a significant place in the literary curriculum of different universities of India.

Pratibha Ray's novels contain a variety of subject matter and interest. At the same time, she has adopted appropriate techniques to suit the particular theme and discourse. Her motivations too, vary,

and she tries to bring different levels of perception in one structure. Pratibha Ray's voice is a self-searching one, in the quest of true identity. In her works, the woman is redefining her role and determining parameters for herself and the society, in every walk of life and perhaps revolutionizing the concept of womanhood itself.

Dr. Pratibha Ray has twenty one novels, twenty six short story collections, ten travelogues on different countries, ten books for children, ten books for neo-literates, three anthologies of thought provoking essays, one anthology of poems, one rare collection of tribal myth of five primitive tribes retold by her and one autobiography to her credit. Pratibha brought alive the Vedic, historic and mythological past through her novels. She became famous for her successful novel *Yajnaseni*, which brought her the "Moorti Devi" Award of Bharatiya Jnanpith for 1991. She is the first and only woman to bag this coveted award till date. She received the Sahitya Academi Award for her short-story collection *Ullanghan* for 2000. She is the recipient of Padma Shree by President of India for 2007, Bharatiya Jnanpith for the year 2011 for her total contribution to the field of Indian Literature. Apart from this, she has got numerous awards and honours of State and National level. She has been honoured as the Best Writer by the Odisha Society of Americas twice in their annual convention in USA and Canada. She has been awarded Honorary D.Lit. by Utkal University of Culture (2011).

The search for a social order based on equality, love, peace and integration continues, ever since the novelist and short story writer first wielded her pen at the age of nine. When she wrote for a social order based on equality without class, caste, religion or sex discrimination, some of her critics branded her as a communist and some as feminist. But she says "I am a humanist; men and women have been created differently for the healthy functioning of society." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pratibha_Ray)

Although *Yajnaseni* is all about Mahabharata, in tone and temper, and *Mahamoha* is a rendering of a Vedic saga, both can also be read as feminist texts because they throw up many gender-based issues and sensitize the reader through the point of view of Draupadi and Ahalya who, through their personalized narratives, could actualize their identities even while they go through a lot of complex situations.

Draupadi has a strong sense of her 'self'. Born of fire, she has this inborn gift for being fearless and bold in many a situation. She is fiercely intelligent, strong-willed and with a sense of pride in herself both as a woman and as a queen. When we look at other women from Indian mythology, we can see how hardly any of them were bold enough to speak out and express what they thought or felt. Draupadi is the exception. Even during one of the most humiliating experiences any woman can have at the hands of Dushasana in the Kuru court filled with wise men, gurus and elder relatives, she has the courage and the strength to raise questions relating to dharma and the conduct of the elders while her husbands are mute spectators.

Draupadi's response to the happenings in her life are essentially what one might say 'a thinking woman's' reaction. Draupadi questions the idea of her swayamvar. After Arjun wins her hand in the swayamvar and she accompanies him to his home along with his brothers, Kunti inadvertently asks the five brothers to "share" whatever they got equally. Yudhisthir as the eldest brother vows that obeying Kunti should be the first supreme aim in their lives. All the brothers silently agree. But Draupadi muses: "Did I have no say? Then what was the meaning of the swayamvar? Why did Father prescribe such conditions for it? Which conditions have these brothers fulfilled for marrying me? I had placed the garland of bridegroom-choice around the neck of one already. By law, and according to dharma, it was he alone who was my husband. Why should I accept the other brothers as husbands? Would that not destroy my dharma?" (Pattanaik 56).

Draupadi's mind rebels against what is clearly an atrocity on her sensibility as a woman. At this point, she subverts other epics courageously and questions why Sita in Ramayana never had to face this dilemma and the brothers Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughna could be loyal to Rama without getting Sita as their wife. Draupadi is tormented by the shame and ridicule that she would have to suffer because of this preposterous condition to her marriage. She would later face the biting sarcasm of Karna about her marriage.

Draupadi is conscious right from the beginning of her life that she has come into existence in order to fulfil her father's vow of taking revenge on Guru Dronacharya. She is first offered as a bride to Krishna and this thrills her. But then Krishna tells her father that as she was not an ordinary woman, a svayamvar should be arranged for her. He further tells him that his great friend, Arjuna would be the most suitable man, worthy to be lovely Draupadi's husband. For Dhrupad, the only thing that mattered was that his son-in-law should be a great warrior - whether Krishna or Arjuna - capable of defeating Drona's arrogance. But Draupadi thinks: "The garland that I had been weaving since the morning to put round Krishna's neck would have to be put around Arjun's neck. That too at Krishna's behest! Did I have no wish of my own? No desire? No craving? Simply because I was 'Yajnaseni'- born of the sacrificial fire? My birth, life and death - all were directed by someone else. Why had I come and why should I remain alive?" (Pattanaik 24).

Towards the end when Arjun declares: "I vow before everyone that till I have killed Karna I shall abstain from wine, meat and Draupadi herself," (Pattanaik 305) Draupadi questions this from her perspective. What is the place of a woman, or a wife, in a man's life, she asks: "Why do they take vows to remain far from women until they achieve their desired goal? Does the company of a woman suck

out the strength of a man? Is this lack of confidence in the strength of his character or is it due to the fear of a woman's charismatic attraction?' (Pattanaik 305).

Draupadi, as we can see, is a woman of learning and exceptional courage. How can such a woman be accepted in a patriarchal society? We can recall the context in which Shakuni speaks against Draupadi as a woman who asks unsettling questions because she is a learned woman? He goes so far as to say that she brought much ruin upon herself because she is educated. When Draupadi was dragged to the Court, she addressed the elders and questions the ethics of such an action: "In my condition is it not shameful to drag me by the hair into this crowded hall? Will no one answer my question?" (Pattanaik 238).

All were silent. Here Shakuni said to Karna: "The greatest offence a woman commits is to try to be learned. It is because she became wise and scholarly that her condition is thus! If she had groveled at our feet and begged, perhaps she might have escaped such a gross insult. Just as knowledge and power enhances a man's attraction, similarly ignorance and helplessness increase the charm of a woman. However, Draupadi, strengthened by pride in her learning and wisdom, is like a burning tongue of flame. Can anyone have pity on her?" (Pattanaik 238).

The feminine self in Draupadi got explored by Pratibha Ray in an epistolary format where Draupadi speaks of her heart to Sri Krishna, her Sakha, but Sri Krishna also doesn't understand her 'true self'. Yajnaseni fights for her own battle in the Mahabharata and loses it when she feels that her last moment has come when her foot slips on the golden dust of Mount Meru while following her five husbands who were climbing in the Himalayas, ascending to Heaven. However, all her sacrifices, her travails, her loyalty to the five Pandavaas and

her commitment to their cause are in vain as at the end of it all, she is deprived of going to heaven. At this final stage of her troubled life she slips and falls in the foothills of the Himalayas and naturally expects atleast one of her husbands to wait for her or help her up. Of all of them, only Bhima turns around and is concerned to see if she is hurt or needs assistance. But then the eldest brother Dharmaraj Yudhisthir, Lord of righteousness issues a heartless command: "Don't look back. Move forward". (Pattanaik 272). Not one of the others even glances at her or feels any sympathy for her plight. They all then just walk away, leaving her broken and helpless to wait for death!

Like *Yajnaseni*, Pratibha's *Mahamoha* - the Story of Ahalya is also a bold and innovative statement on modern femininity. In this epic novel a transformative dimension has been given to the Ahalya myth, celebrating the free soul of Pratibha's concept of the new woman. Pratibha's Ahalya is beautiful with a divine touch but she is not a doll. She is erudite, scholarly and her self-esteem is beyond a parallel in contemporary Indian literature. The two persons in her life were Indra, the king of heaven and Gautam the crest jewel of Vedic learning. Ahalya however, always thought that she deserved a man like Indra. The cloistered life of saintly purity to which she was fated to be conjoined was an injustice to her feminine perfection. But after being sage Gautam's wife she does not protest or rebel, and accepts the disciplines of the enclosed order of penance- purity without regret or angst. However her wishes were not fulfilled by Gautam. The Rape of Ahalya by Indra is the central event in this myth. But *Mahamoha* reinterprets this myth by showing Ahalya as a woman with her mind in its own place, which acknowledges her feminine self with a bold statement of truth. Ahalya admits that it was not a rape, but a union of love. Indra did not force her for lust, rather it was a love-fulfillment for Ahalya.

Whatever was done, it was done with Ahalya's body and soul surrendering willingly, longingly for the first and the most graceful experience of love. She confesses that she was fulfilled as a woman. Gautam's scholarship and his rights of husbandhood had never made Ahalya feel like a woman. But Indra makes the woman complete. The punishment that follows and the final redemption which Ramachandra gives her have also been interpreted in a modern light. The narrative in this novel is an example of the Grand Style. Vedic knowledge, the mythic frame and the bold statements of an emancipated woman have been fictionally woven into an epic tapestry.

Logic, wisdom and even an argumentative fervour have been morally refreshing and fictionally charming. Ahalya's bold assertion of her sexuality does not compromise her feminine dignity. Ahalya remains unique because of the nature of her daring and its consequence. Her single transgression, for having done what her femininity demanded, calls down an awful curse.

In *Mahamoha*, Ahalya is portrayed as an eternal emblem of women's quest for equality and love. In the foreword of *Mahamoha*, Pratibha Ray says 'in all the narratives where the myth of Ahalya occurs, it occurs not to highlight Ahalya's failings and atonement due to that, but to eulogize Rama's greatness by emancipating her'. (Ray, Pratibha: Preface) Pratibha Ray says, "In all the ages one who instigates woman to commit crime, one who emancipates her with touch and one who gives moksha to her is no one but one Indra or Goutama or Rama, namely a Man". (Ray, Pratibha: Preface) When a Man touches her, her body gets spoiled and when He touches her she gets emancipated. Woman is not the medium of enlightenment for her own self. Ahalya had never had a scope to speak about herself. Pratibha Ray ponders over the fact that if Ahalya had to speak about the goal of life, what she could have chosen for herself? The novelist

has made Ahalya a kranti, a rebel, an epitome of women's rebellious self against the society and patriarchy.

Traditionally, Indian mythology has tended to serve the purpose of patriarchy, keeping the woman where she belonged - at the bottom of the social ladder. But the tables are finally turning. The marginalized are getting empowered. So the verse 'Ahalya Draupadi Kunti Tara Mandodari tatha / Panchakanya smarenityam mahapataka nashinim' conveys the apt gratitude towards the Panchakanya, whose rebellious and fiery nature had given such recognition to them to be remembered daily. The credit goes to the writers like Pratibha Ray and a host of other new age writers who have captured the narrative space and revised the mythical stories of the characters like Draupadi and Ahalya who needed voice to express their feminine self.

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Revisiting the Mythic, Recreating the Identity: Poetry of Suniti Namjoshi

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Abstract

This paper argues that Suniti Namjoshi's poetry makes use of mythic characters and animals to represent the repressed or Id, to speak in Freudian terminology. Her poems "Sycorax" and "Unicorn" present two discordant incidents of how she expresses the repressed desires through these characters. Her revisiting of the character of Sycorax and the mythical figure of Unicorn gives her space for exploration of identities which otherwise are suppressed, repressed or remain hidden under the traditional, conventional and conservative norms of society which are essentially patriarchal and heteronormative. The reality which Namjoshi confronts deprives her of the means of representing the real (which is not 'normal'). The alternate experience is explored by her in a fabulist and mythic manner. Therefore, she creates an objective-correlative, to use the phrase of T.S Eliot, to express this state of sexual, gender or racial otherness.

Suniti Namjoshi is an India born women, lesbian, diasporic, postcolonial writer. She was born in Mumbai in 1941. She was brought up in India and had qualified for Indian Civil Services examination in 1964. Later she further carried on her education and completed her Master's degree from the University of Missouri. She did her doctoral thesis on Ezra Pound from McGill University in 1972. She taught in the Department of English, University of Toronto. Following her career

she became a research fellow at the Centre for Women's Studies at Exeter University in the United Kingdom. She is currently settled in Devon, England and lives with English writer Gillian Hanscombe. She has established her reputation as a poet, fabulist and children's books writer. She has also translated Poems of Govindagraj by Ram Ganesh Gadkari along with Sarojini Namjoshi. Her literary significance can be estimated by the translations of her works in other languages like Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Hindi.

Identity plays a very important role in Suniti Namjoshi's poetry and fables. However, she breaks the conventional notion and representation of these identities. She creates an 'alternate universe' in textuality by undertaking "a comparative approach in selecting subjects for producing a neo-textual universe, and a comparative study of cross-cultural identities remain central to the analysis of Namjoshi's work" (Rath 142). This also results in, what Alka Kumar writes "a varied heritage of identities and thus many confusions as well as many burgeonings" in works of Namjoshi (185). For Namjoshi understanding of selfhood lies at the heart of her literary endeavours. She defines "subjectivity as a process rather than through difference, as contradictory and changing within unstable cultural, sexual and social contexts, social relationships might come closer to an ideal of plurality without hierarchy" (Steinisch 275). The result is an exploration of many identities at the same time emphasizing the fluidity of identity (Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow* 32). This also becomes evident in her work *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* where she registers the growing consciousness of Suniti as a child, student, teacher and writer.

In her literary oeuvre Suniti Namjoshi is placed along with other women writers like Anne Sexton, Angela Carter and Michelene Wandor who engage in reclaiming the identities of women through

fairytale and myths (Griffn 193). "Namjoshi's complex intelligence, inched by her Indian heritage and her broad culture, has given her work a shimmering complexity" (Kumar and Beena 1742). She uses "fabulative mode" for dismantling the structural and functional workings of patriarchy (Goel 67). She writes as a fabulist than as a realist (Nasta 275). She "enjoys juggling with ideas and with words; she has experimented with genre and with dialogic forms of writing" (Vanita, Book Review 216). The relationship between language, power and identity is clearly noticed in Namjoshi's attempt "to make sense of the multiple resonance emerging from the English language she uses, together with her Hindu milieu and suggestions from various theoretical backgrounds, from feminism to postcolonialism" (Guarracino 134). She writes back against the canons established by "straight narrative" (Merchant, 2020). She uses magic realism not only in the widening scope of utopian discourse but also in postcolonial, queer and feminist discourse (Pordzik 109).

The feminist appeal in Namjoshi poetry and fables has been noticed by critics and authors (Chaudhuri 76-77; Christina 41; Chandra 183). According to Ralph Pordzik, "Namjoshi advocates a form of feminism that includes all aspects of womanhood-psychological attributes as well as those significant for the socially, culturally or ethnically defined constructions underlying them" (113). Like other feminist writers who have reworked the traditional fairytale narratives, Namjoshi too attempts "to counter the destructive tendencies of patriarchal values and the prevailing male-female arrangements and present an alternative female paradigm by bringing women to the centre and erasing the margins" (Koshy, 2010). She thus dismantles the phallogocentric structures and re-orders the world by raising questions on sexual politics, challenging society's gender arrangements and attempts to dethrone the myth of femininity, and the construct of patriarchy.

C. Vijayshree observes "Namjoshi's poetry reflects a mind that is fragmented and is at war with itself and the world around" (SN 49). This becomes evident in her poem "Sycorax" which raises many concerns in the context of existence, survival, lesbianism, feminism, eco-feminism, postcolonialism, transnationalism, and gerontology. Equally important in Namjoshi is her experience abroad as a diaspora (Puri, 2020). Namjoshi's diasporic identity becomes evident even in Sycorax, as C. Vijayshree points out that women are eternally exiled from patria making them expatriate (SE 130). Sycorax for Namjoshi becomes an objective correlative for many threads connecting the narrator, the protagonist and the reader in the dynamics of binaries of race, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, Sycorax who in *The Tempest* is an absent figure is given voice and subjectivity to "to narrate her life story" (Toth 127).

Namjoshi thinks beyond the heteronormative discourse based on patriarchal notions and thus instils an element of lesbianism in her characters (Vanita, "The Straight Path" 276). Sycorax opens with a revelation "Old women do not die easily, nor are their deaths timely. They make a habit of outliving men, so that, as I'm still here..." (Namjoshi 21). Sycorax then expresses her desire to "learn the language of birds, of all sorts of animals, even pigs, but most especially birds" (21). The existential issues of Sycorax are revealed in Section 3 "Physicality" as she had too many children to feed so they starved of hunger and now she faced old age "the flesh is loosening its grip, problems of survival manifest themselves" (22). In Section-4 "Copies" Namjoshi connects memory with time and space as Sycorax's mind starts making "copy after copy" of hers. Section-5 "Ariel" discloses the dichotomy between Ariel and Sycorax. Ariel tries to intimidate her "Ariel made me! That's absurd. I'm becoming paranoid. That is Ariel's doing! He has done it so that then he might matter to me" (22).

Section 6 "The Old Woman's Secrets" unfolds four secrets of Sycorax's life: She is lonely, talks to herself, she is self-critical, and at night she turns into a witch (23). In Section 10 "By the Wayside" Sycorax "sits by the wayside mourning her death" (24). Section 12 "The Death of Sycorax" shows how common and unnoticed death she suffers:

When Sycorax died the island did not sink into the ocean; mud and rubble did not, at once, dissolve in the sea; and nobody clapped. The stage was left empty, till later, somebody else occupied it. (Namjoshi, Sycorax 24) Epilogue ends with a note sycorax must be saved from oblivion, from complete erasure as there would be no trace left of her. In the poem "The Unicorn" Namjoshi tries to connect the real with the mythological. There can be noticed a strong link "between homosexuality and animality" (Vanita 281). Not only Namjoshi finds an objective correlative for sexuality in her creatures but these creatures also acquire their own identity (Ross 179). In "The Unicorn," not only the real and the unreal, but also the love and the idea of love are contrasted. This poem can be looked at from multiple angles depending on how you look at the speaker.

A Modern Speaker- If you consider the speaker as belonging to modern age then you can look at this poem from the point of nostalgia almost like W. B. Yeats poem "Sailing to Byzantium" where Yeats wants to go back to Byzantium because he does not find himself compatible to live in the world around him. Just like for Yeats "Byzantium" is an objective correlative for mythical past, Namjoshi too uses Unicorn to symbolize the mythic existence. This world cannot give her the solace or meaning and therefore, she brings in the unicorn that existed or perhaps not but in ancient societies where its myths could be found.

A Taming Speaker- Taming speaker in the sense that it talks about the "wild unicorn". When the speaker rides that unicorn it has actually tamed its spirit. This taming can be looked at from colonial or anthropocentric point of view in the attempt of taming Nature as the speaker is able to ride past "leaves and silver thorn" and "foul weather."

An Existentialist Speaker- This speaker asks the beloved "Love, will you ride with me?" But the beloved stays behind. What happens is actually a heart break. These two lines connect the two parts in the poem. Once again nostalgic by recreating the image of "past" and of "past love" and once again connecting the two lives of the same person- when the person is in love and when it has passed that love. Existential mode comes in for the sheer loss of the cause to continue life. Virtually it is the death of love. A philosophical death but then the speaker moves beyond that point and continues with the same spirit but with a sense: "But my love stayed behind, / Far away behind me."

A Female Speaker- This will describe the man-woman relationship. You can connect this with Maya Angelou's "And Still I Rise." Why? Because the lady wanted her man to ride on the unicorn with her but the man refuses. But she continues her ride. You can correlate this with Robert Browning's Poem "My Last Duchess." In this poem the Duke of Ferrara feels insulted when his wife rides a "white mule." He finds it ridiculous for a queen to behave in such a manner. The duke of Ferrara looks at his queen from the monarchical and patriarchal lens. Likewise, when the speaker in this poem is riding the unicorn her love just stays behind. Simply for the fact of being ashamed or perhaps unable to have courage to go along with the speaker.

A Lesbian Speaker- The movie V for Vendetta showed a young female couple who were in love during high school. Both the girls

had dared to accost their families, so one of them leaves the house, the other one takes her love in her parents' house. Obviously, in a society governed by heteronormative, heterosexual and monogamous relationship between man and woman are unable to accept this pair. What happens is that the partner who took the girl to her house lacks the courage to follow and leaves her. Narrative voice in the movies says that as adolescents we like to carry on that love, but as adults we just forget it or want to forget it as childishness. This is precisely what you can find in this poem *The Unicorn*, Namjoshi being a lesbian writer can think of a speaker who is lesbian and is in love with a girl. It is likely that her love will stay behind as she will not be able to take such a strong step to go along with the speaker being a woman. So woman-woman relationship is something that is not only questionable in the conventional societies but also unacceptable. So the speaker carries on her ride.

A sexual speaker- If not sex, then talking about sex is at least a taboo in most of the families and even the advanced cultured society. Riding a unicorn is a mythic act and for sex one needs someone to love. Reference to "wild unicorn" indicate the element of Eros present in almost all beings. "Green light of trees" and "Dark light of night" convey the time for love making. While the "Past leaves" symbolizes image of female genital, "silver thorn" becomes metaphoric of phallus. Besides, unicorn as belonging to the horse family already enhances the sexual emphasis, "silver thorn" adds to that libido. However, the irony is that since the love stays behind it means the speaker has to carry along the task solely which is a clear indication of masturbation. The unicorn then becomes a symbol for sex toy. That efficacy of speaker to exist by himself or herself is suggested by the last lines as the poet mentions that when love stay far away behind me, And I rode the wild unicorn, past love and foul weather.

This poem is about seeking and following life in one's own self-reliance mode as Ralph Waldo Emerson point out in his essay "Self-Reliance." One should be able to trust oneself and not be moved by what the world thinks about you. The speaker shows that firmness and the decision-making power that s/he need to have though s/he may be disheartened, lost and uprooted. The speaker continues the journey "past love and foul weather." The poem culminates in an ecstasy and epiphany when the speaker is able to realize the victory over that sense of loss by "past love and foul weather."

A. N. Dwivedi following an older school of thought criticizes Namjoshi on the basis of her literary merit distinguishing her former works as imbued with aesthetic and later works affected by artifice and pretensions (210-222). On the other hand, one can read through her works finding her "neither freakish, producing tame and time-worn images from the poet's conventional laboratory nor ... lacking in discrimination in choosing subjects and fashioning her tones" (Shahane 219). What can also not be denied is the impact of Namjoshi's feminist and lesbian literature which influenced the creative impulse of her time (Batra 164). Exploring the fragmented self and engaging with ever expanding identities, Namjoshi connects the mythic with the real, the repressed with the expressed, the ideal with the practical, the silence with speech and the marginal to the centre.

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Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*: An Exploration of Gender Issues in the Journey of Self-discovery

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Abstract

The notion of identity has evolved over the years as it is no longer perceived as something that is fixed and static rather it is conceived as being fluid and dynamic. However, the rigidness that is associated with gender identity has led to the emergence of patriarchal ideologies that are often propagated through mythical stories. Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* undermines the notion of an "ideal" woman by reinterpreting the mythical characters from a different perspective. Hariharan's novel demonstrates the process of self-annihilation in the institution of marriage and appears to be a quest for autonomy and selfhood. This paper attempts to analyse the ways in which the author tries to dismantle the gender stereotypes in order to depolarize the differences between a man and a woman. In addition, the paper also explores the notion of selfhood and its role in the emancipation of women.

Keywords: Identity, Patriarchy, Mythology, Self-annihilation, Autonomy, Selfhood
Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* revolves around the issues faced by women who are tied down by the institution of marriage. The novel explores the lives of women from three different generations: Devi, a young woman who returns to Madras after completing her post-graduation in America; Sita, Devi's mother and a widow who decides to stay alone after her

husband's death; Mayamma, an old woman who does household chores in Devi's in-laws home. The novel lays bare the loss of individuality and identity crisis being experienced by women in their marital lives. It highlights how the institution of marriage is deeply entrenched in patriarchal laws that ridicule the dreams and the aspirations of women.

In the novel, Devi recalls the memories of her childhood days spent in her grandmother's house every summer with a sense of fondness and nostalgia for the past. Devi's grandmother narrated stories of god-like heroes and heroines from Hindu mythology and these stories made her inhabit a different world that aroused the dreams and fantasies of her childhood. During the later stages of her life, Devi manages to create a link between the world that she lives in and the mythological world in which she lived vicariously during her childhood. Devi, who becomes increasingly disconcerted in her marital life, interprets the stories of mythological figures in a different light in order to come to terms with her own self. Devi's reinterpretation of mythical stories demonstrates the manner in which gender stereotypes are constructed and propagated through the process of story-telling. Devi's grandmother plays a crucial role in this process as she constructs the image of a 'real woman' who should be fair, virtuous and devoted to her husband without any individual dreams and desires. According to Devi's grandmother, Gandhari, the blindfolded queen of Dhirtarashtra, has "embraced her destiny with a self-sacrifice that is worthy of her royal blood" (Hariharan 29). Devi's grandmother projects Gandhari as a selfless woman who sacrificed her vision out of absolute devotion for her husband. However, Devi connects the story of Gandhari with that of her mother and reinterprets the mythical figure in a different context.

LITERARY EXPLORER

Devi's mother Sita had to give up on her passion for music in order to fulfil her 'duties' as a wife and a daughter in law. When Sita's father-in-law rebukes her for being so absorbed in her music that she had failed to do the household chores, she breaks the strings of the veena in a fit of rage and decides not to play again. She learns to make sacrifices and eventually becomes "a perfect housekeeper" and a "blameless wife". Devi connects the lives of her parents to that of the mythical figures as she says "my parents too were afflicted by a kind of blindness" and "in their blinkered world they would always be one, one leading the other, one always in the grasp of another" (29).

Devi's interpretation seems to suggest that neither Gandhari nor Sita can be taken as models for an "ideal" woman as she perceives their self-sacrifice not as noble and heroic but as an act of ignorance. Both the women lose their individuality as they consciously undergo the process of self-annihilation to become one with the other. They surrender their autonomy and selfhood and offer themselves to the clutches of patriarchy. Through the act of re-visioning, the novel challenges and subverts the stereotypes associated with the image of an 'ideal' woman. As Adreinne Rich says, "Re-vision is the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (11). In that case, Devi's Re-visioning is certainly an "act of survival" as she attempts to resolve the complexities of her present life by trying to understand the implications of the stories from her past.

Devi's grandmother also narrates the story of Amba to show how fate plays a key role in determining the lives of people and that women of royal household are no exception to it. Amba, who is rejected by king of Salwa after being abducted by Bheeshma, denies the material world and wanders through the forest in her desire for

revenge. She does penance to invoke Lord Shiva who offers the garland vested with power to kill Bheeshma. However, no King was willing to wear that garland and Amba had to take another birth to avenge her honour. Amba's story undermines the differences between a man and a woman. A woman avenger who could earn manhood through her penance could never be an avenger herself. She has to transform herself into a man in order to satiate her desire for revenge. Such stories construct the notions of "masculinity" and "femininity" where the former is associated with strength and power while the latter is assumed to be fragile and powerless. The existence of this binary opposite where one exerts superiority over the other is emphasised by Devi's Grandmother, who says, "Can a daughter raised as daughter become a man?"(39). While rationality is seen as a man's domain, passivity is expected out of a woman who wishes to project herself as "good" and "pious". Such stereotypical notions are continually perpetuated by the social structures and are being internalised by the younger generations who eventually traverse the path laid by the patriarchal laws only to avoid the risk of being a non-conformist. Yet, women like Devi experience a state of limbo as she constantly expresses her scepticism over the rigid social norms and customs that guided her initiation into womanhood. Devi's mother-in-law, who abandons her marital home to set on a mystical journey, helps Devi in realising her potential to override the patriarchal laws and become an emancipated woman with independent will and autonomy.

Devi also creates a picture of herself as an incarnation of Durga, a woman warrior who has the ability to cut off the heads of evil demons. This emphasises the fact that there are multiple dimensions to women's selfhood. The individuality of a woman is constituted both by Gauri and Durga. She exudes beauty and sweetness like Gauri and at the

same time, she can manifest herself as Durga if she had to fight with her tormentors and restore a sense of balance to her being. Devi's grandmother narrates the story of a woman who married a serpent and looked after his needs as a devoted wife. A woman is expected to remain voiceless and extend her service to the husband even if he behaves like a poisonous snake or a cruel animal. Devi narrates the story of her cousin Uma who had to endure physical abuse at the hands of her husband and father-in-law. But such issues are dismissed as incidents of fate and misfortune. Even in such cases, the woman is accused of being the victim of disaster or misfortune, not the man for being the perpetrator.

While Hariharan's novel explores the attributes of "womanhood", it also highlights the things done by a man to become a "man". As Devi says, a man "trembles if you climb a tree, a foolish, unaided girl. He holds you back from journeys, mistrustful of devils, snakes, young boys' legs, books, anything at all. He ties a fine chain of beaten gold around your outstretched neck, he marks you with his name" (92) and that he need a woman to satiate his desires. This echoes what Beavouir says in her introduction to *The Second Sex*, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (16). The construction of woman as the "other" is done to reinforce the superiority of man. However, as Butler says, Gender has no ontological status and that it is performative with no real essence or identity.

The mythical stories contribute a great deal to gender performativity as they constantly assign the roles and responsibilities for a man and a woman. In addition, they also offer subtle hints about the punitive consequences that one has to face in the event of failing to perform one's gender. Ambai, in the epic *Mahabharatha*, decides to marry a man of her choice and thereby, fails to perform her gender role as feminine gender has often been deprived of choice and

freedom. Ambai's tragic fate forebodes the punishment that will be inflicted on those who appear to be non-conformist. Through the character of Devi, Hariharan exposes the performative nature of gender and attempts to subvert the stereotypes that led to the polarization of gender differences. Hariharan's novel explicates how such socially constructed differences have engendered discrimination and prejudice against women. A wife and a daughter-in-law like Sita is expected to do her household duties at the cost of giving up on her personal interests. Once sworn to fulfil her duties as daughter-in-law, wife and mother, she determines to perfectly fit into the given roles. "In this chain of causality we see how the family first distorts and represses women's desire, and then co-opts or browbeats them into submission to its structures by turning them into either stoic sufferers (Mayamma), or the grim agents of domination (Sita), or confused conformists (Devi), who perpetuate patriarchy's dominion" (Rajan 238).

Devi retrospects over the social laws and customs that have relegated women to the margins since time immemorial. While the stories told by her grandmother initiated her into womanhood, the stories from her father-in-law highlight the restrictions associated with womanhood. According to him, "the woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting" and that "by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens" (55). However, he also says that women have always been the instruments of the saint's initiation into bhakti and that during the days of Manu, women were honoured by men if they wished to please the Gods. Such conceptions highlight the hypocrisy of the social world that deprives woman of her freedom and choice but insist that she be honoured so that God would shower his grace upon them.

The novel shows the different facets of the socio-cultural world such as mythology, history, laws and customs, and explicates how they foster an unequal relationship between a man and a woman. Devi listens to the story of Mayamma who had endured inexplicable sufferings all through her life in marital home. Devi frequently contemplates over the relationship with her husband, Mahesh, who is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies. Devi is neither allowed to learn Sanskrit nor is she allowed to work outside. She says that marital home is like a "precious dungeon" and she compares herself to a wooden puppet at the hands of her husband. Devi's self- introspection makes her realise the loss of her own self in her marital home as she says "I seem to have lost, along with many other things, my sense of humour, even my girlish ability to giggle. I am someone else now" (91). She decides to escape the sacrificial knife of her marriage. Through the act of re-visioning and by drawing parallels between the mythical figures and the women in her immediate present, Devi understands the implications of societal norms and their role in the oppression of women. She understands that the picture of an "ideal" woman is painted by the society and that it is unstable without any ontological origin. Rather than conforming to the role of a wife and a daughter-in-law, Devi decides to go on a journey to reclaim her selfhood. She leaves her marital home and finally returns to her mother's place, a place where she can fix her roots and discover her own self.

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***Ms. Militancy* by Meena Kandasamy as a Narrative of Identity, Gender and Resistance**

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Feminism in India is still a topic of controversy for various reasons. This is because of the inevitable notion that feminism is a western ideology. The assumption ignores the key differences between western feminism, Indian feminism, African feminism and critiques of many other women. The assumption needs to be contested to gain a holistic understanding of women's writing with regard to their own cultural differences. Writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayanthara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Arundati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakurani, Kiran Desai, Meena Kandasamy and many others have expressed their feminist concerns in their writings pertaining to cultural identity, social class, marriage and sexuality, motherhood and resistance against patriarchy. Some of the decadent cultural practices discussed by writers include Sati, female infanticide, child marriage, purdah system, restrictions on female education and sexual abuse of women. This paper will attempt to probe into some of the significant themes that become very important while discussing the literary ventures of Indian women writers from encumbrance to emancipation. This paper in particular will study *Ms. Militancy* by Meena Kandasamy who has outrightly discussed some of the contemporary women's issues.

Before discussing the texts chosen for study, the paper will highlight some of the key theoretical insights which will prove very useful with regard to the texts. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in her text *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, is attempting to compare her ideas with that of Susie Tharu in her book *Women Writing in India*. Drawing on critical aspects from poststructuralist theory and cultural studies she is pointing to the conflicts that exist between representation and reality. She insists that there is always a conflict between nationalist ideology and communal conflicts in terms of how a woman is portrayed and she tries to resolve the position of women within the above mentioned debates. Sunder Rajan identifies the need to locate the difference between a real woman and an imaginary woman (the woman who is constructed ideologically). According to her the study of a real woman cannot take place without understanding the woman who is ideologically constructed. She also calls for a reconsideration of the female subjectivity that will enable the reconstitution of a feminist praxis. She claims a constructivist position on the idea of gender as contrasted between a nation and a community. According to Sunder Rajan, if theory is to effect change, it must be a particular kind of theory. Here she means that the theory needs to be well structured with regard to its intellectual departures and conclusions and also its purpose and goal in resolving and catering to the needs of the subject. Another important idea which the writer is talking about is the difference between the individual discourse of western women and the collective discourse of Indian women.

The work of Meena Kandasamy resonates well with the theoretical concept proposed by Sunder Rajan in her text. In the collection of poems titled *Ms. Militancy*, Meena Kandasamy explores

the theme of resistance, cultural identity and gender. Her poems outrightly express resistance towards the subjugation imposed on them by patriarchal and upper caste society. In the preface to the poem titled *Should you take offence*, she employs mythological characters to demean the upper caste men and resist their patriarchal ideologies. On one hand, she subverts the norms of the idea of 'woman' by contrasting the woman in her poem with the mythological characters, and, on the other hand, she is trying to establish grounds for the theoretical positioning of a mythological (which tells how a woman ought to be) woman and a real woman.

The title of the poem is very significant as she is portraying women as powerful, outrageous and independent. The language she uses needs to be highlighted as she is making use of unapologetic verses in exploring the plight of the woman. The very idea of Meena Kandasamy equating women with mythological characters needs to be paid attention. The poet's incorporation of mythological characters highlights the idea of subversion. Meena Kandasamy seems to again impinge on the theoretical note discussed by Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan. As she later had mentioned that there is a conflict in the image of a woman as perceived by a nationalist ideology and that of a communal representation, the former seems to record that in the poem by subverting the mythological characters to represent those at the periphery. Here, Meena Kandasamy is deliberately trying to register the conflict between representation and reality.

In the poem "*Dead Woman Walking*", the poet is focusing on the suffering, dejection and abandonment faced by a woman. She was once a beautiful wife but now she is walking in an asylum. The words 'faltering step', 'bulging eyes' and 'welts' describe her dilapidated physical condition. She had been an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva which was considered mystic by her husband. Her husband

married another woman when he had been to a new place for his job and she could never again find her beloved's love in her life. In this poem, Meena Kandasamy impresses upon the idea of gender and the bias that exists in power roles. In the poem the man decides whether he can live with a woman or abandon. The woman is left alone in the asylum wherein she grows old and her dilapidated physical condition, reflecting how unstable her mind is. She is devoid of the love of her beloved and merely exists there. "Backstreet Girls" is another poem wherein she explores the plight of the women who are sexually exploited. This poem gives an explicit description of how men belonging to "so called" upper as well as lower caste perceive her sexuality. She is merely an object of sexual pleasure who doesn't deserve to live a dignified life. The poet speaks for the 'sexually oppressed' and highlights their frustration and disillusionment with the society. Also, these women are doubly marginalized as they are looked only as sexual objects of pleasure by men of both upper and lower castes. These women are devoid of their identity as men don't accept them as wives, and life partners, but they only want these women to fulfill their lust.

In the poem "Facing the music", the writer describes the plight of a young woman whose lover has been lynched. Though the reason was not stated explicitly the writer states, "for one of those readily available reasons" (Kandasamy 21), which points to the fact that the lover of the young woman had been lynched probably for safeguarding the honour of the family and the community. The writer doesn't speak much about the death of the lover and the reason for his death, but she describes the life of the young woman after the death of her lover.

The title of the poem is apt as the young woman is paying the price for a humanly behaviour of falling in love with her beloved. After the death of her beloved, she is unable to go on live her life and

avenge those responsible for the death of her beloved, at the same time she is also not ready to kill herself. The writer puts it this way, "Too weak for suicide, too meek for murder" (Kandasamy 21). The young woman could not even believe the fact that her lover had been lynched, as he used to be the one who was once vibrant and youthful, but now mere ashes remain of him. She tries to remember their fond memories and use them for her survival and she continues to live a life recollecting the short-lived memories of her lover. The writer ends the poem with a note that she lived her life of undying love which poets praise and sing. "One Eyed" is a poem that appalls the readers with the fact that a school girl was punished for having water from a pot that wasn't allowed for her. The writer just says these words, "dhanam sees a world torn in half./ her left eye, lid open but light slapped away" (Kandasamy 41).

The readers come to know that the price she paid for drinking water from the pot was to lose an eye. The writer is expressing her contempt and disgust for such an act. On a theoretical note, the writing is accepted but on the note of praxis, the reward of resistance is not always welcoming. It is merely a probability that the girl could have drunk the water to resist the norms of the school, but her resistance is not welcome and appreciated when it comes to praxis. It might seem a contradiction here, as the paper is titled with the word 'resistance' while the poem describes the punishment for resisting, but what is put forth here is the idea that Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan states pertaining to the idea of theory how it ought to be. This gap between theory and praxis can be resolved, only by acknowledging and accepting that such gaps exist. As Sunder Rajan rightly puts that a theory has to be some kind of theory if it had to bring about a change. Meena Kandasamy's poem points to the lacuna that exists in

the discussion of Indian feminism. This gap and lacuna need to be resolved so that resistance is welcome and appreciated in terms of praxis too.

Meena Kandasamy gives us an engrossing picture of the position of the women at the periphery in the society. The exploitation of these women in terms of physical, mental, sexual and spiritual aspects gets highlighted in her poems. In addition, she is very different in registering her discourse of women. The readers are able to grasp the idea of a real woman as proposed by Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan reflected in her poems as she clearly demarcates how a woman is perceived and how a woman really is. Women are perceived as mere entities who should abide by the dictum of a system. Here, the experience of a single woman represents the collective predicament faced by women. Also, by incorporating the idea of how women are represented in myths, she tries to highlight the idea of imaginary woman and also while subverting the norms of how a woman ought to be, she is registering the discourse of a real woman of contemporary society. She is presenting the images of an imaginary woman and a real woman for the reader to get a perception about who the real woman is. The women in Meena Kandasamy's poems are the ones who are exploited sexually, the ones in asylum devoid of the love of their beloved, the ones who become traumatic after the death of loved ones, the ones who face deadly repercussion for tasting water from the "privileged" well and the like. These women face predicaments throughout their lives and are forced to undergo severe punishments and sometimes even sidelined as outcasts for their deviance from the set standards. In this context what is allowed as a humanly behaviour for one group of people is not allowed to another group of people and the reason cited happens to be caste, religion and gender.

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'Sisterhood' of Suffering: Interrogating Violence in Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam*

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Abstract

History has often betrayed Helen, Sita, and Draupadi as women undoubtedly often lack the means to express themselves clearly. Women are held responsible for other women's exploitation, yet the one-sided interpretation of their stories is able to homogenize these women characters on the basis of suffering at the hands of patriarchy. In her play *Mangalam*, Poile Sengupta tries to break the set course and revisits the subjugated position of women at the core of certain relationships. The paper is an attempt to understand the pain, trauma and exploitation women bear because of their gender. The present paper proposes to critique Poile Sengupta's play *Mangalam* from the perspective of different women characters highlighting the multi-facets of violence inflicted upon them by the patriarchal society.

Keywords: Betrayal, Marriage, Oppression, Rape, Patriarchy

Mythology: an account of human history is often narrated from the viewpoint of men. The popular narratives of the Ramayana, Mahabharata and even the Battle of Troy holds Sita, Draupadi and Helen responsible for the enraged wars that disturbed the social, political and personal order in the lives of men. Such portrayal recognized women as the force of destruction and unites as well as vilifies them. Even though the widespread nature of this certain

perspective is contributed mostly by male authors yet they were unable to conceal women's suffering in such narratives. These narratives are responsible for stereotyping women as the reason behind every little argument or barbarous wars in society. Patriarchy uses such examples to justify the oppression of women and violence done to them in both the domestic and the social sphere. Violence is often used as a means to control women who desire to break free from the patriarchal molds of sexuality, movement, position and conditioning. Poile Sengupta's *Mangalam* (1993) a two-act play, first performed in 1994 deals with, "serrated relationships behind ostensibly normal household whether in a small town in southern India of the 1960s or a modern cosmopolitan family perhaps in Chennai" (Sengupta 1). The play wright's choice of using the play within play technique gives the reader an insight into the lives of women across two different yet similar circumstances. The play stands out not only in the choice of writing but also in terms of performances where the same actors from the first act reappear as new characters in the second act of the play. In the introduction of the play Poile Sengupta herself points to the unchangeable situation when she explains her decision, "I have used the same actors as in both 'plays' as an indication that nothing really changes; the sameness of it all to me is deeply disturbing." (ibid) The play within play enables us to see how even in two different families, different women suffer the same fate, it also explores how even across different time and space the condition of women yet remains the same.

So it is not just the history that has betrayed women but the current situation is no different. Women were and still are subject to oppression if they do not adhere to the set standards of patriarchy. *Mangalam* plays on revealing the extent of violence women suffer and how it is inflicted upon them by the people who are no strangers but their loved ones. The play penetrates into the boundaries of

domestic life and uncovers not one but two instances of acquaintance rape. According to the 2015 National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), "in 95 percent of all rape cases, the offender knew the victim" (Sharma n.p.) similarly in the play both Mangalam and Sumati become the victim of sexual violence at the hands of her sister's husband and uncle respectively. Sengupta explicitly uncovers various instances of sexual abuse and violence and she reveals to the readers the prevailing hypocrisy in the society. It is the men who violate women sexually and it is the men who call them names like whore, slut or prostitute. Dorai is certainly the representative of this ideology as throughout the play he addresses his dead wife Mangalam as a whore. Sengupta by creating and naming the play after the character Mangalam who is entirely absent in the play echoes the pathos of her life through other women's sufferings. Thus she paves way for reading these women characters in the light of a pain they all share. Sengupta's portrayal of sexual violence overlaps with physical, emotional and mental abuse.

Dorai chooses to engage in extramarital affairs in order to take revenge upon Mangalam who he sees as a characterless woman. Instead of seeing it as betrayal he rather justifies his engagement with other women as an answer to his wife's disloyalty. He hints at Mangalam being pregnant before her marriage the truth of which is revealed later towards the end of the first act where it is disclosed as the result of her being raped by her sister Thangam's husband. Due to the sexual violence done to Mangalam, she is physically assaulted in her marriage where Dorai punishes her in order to get to know the name of the man whose child she carried in her womb. Sengupta writes, "When a man knows this, her fragile secret, He holds the power to tear it to shreds" (Sengupta 17) to depict the complexity of Mangalam's position who thus become the microcosm of all women.

The pain she bears in her marriage is reflective of the pain all women bear in different relations. Dorai who married Mangalam an upper caste and class girl due to his greed finds no satisfaction in the luxuries that were part of the dowry when he recognizes his wife as characterless. His marriage to Mangalam should be celebrated by him for climbing above in the social order but instead, his appreciation of himself and his life is rather attached to the chastity of his wife.

Mangalam an absent character is able to speak through her silence. She is the victim of sexual, physical and even psychological abuse. She suffers silently not just to save her marriage but also to protect Thangam. She hides the fact that the illicit child she had before her marriage was not because of an affair but her being violated by Thangam's husband despite Dorai's consistent torture. Mangalam suffered a lot in silence to keep the sisterhood alive. Her silence only adds to her suffering. Dorai's says, "She would not tell me. Then I beat her. She stayed quiet. She would not even cry out in pain. She was so obstinate...it became a game to see how I could take it out of her." (Sengupta 34) These lines represent how women are destined to suffer in all situations if they express themselves or chose to remain silent.

For Sengupta 'sisterhood' is a two-way street. It is not just Mangalam who sacrificed for her sister's happiness by hiding the fact of her being raped but Thangam throughout the first act defends Mangalam when Dorai abuses his dead wife for being a whore. In both the acts Thangam is betrayed by her husband where in the first one he rapes her sister and in the second one he engages himself in an affair. It is not just the name that both Thangam shares but also the fate which becomes representative of all women who are betrayed in one or other relations. Thangam is not only betrayed in her marriage

by her husband but also betrayed by her sister who concealed the truth from her. Thus raising some serious questions whether the said 'sisterhood' is one's strength or just another weakness.

Though the 'sisterhood' remains intact in terms of suffering but the tension between Revathy and Thangam to assert dominance in a patriarchal construct of the kitchen reveals how history has been able to put women in the way of other women's freedom and happiness. Thangam accuses Revathy of putting up too much makeup and being unable to cook good food and Revathy retaliated by calling her ugly and says that, "You hate me because you are jealous...of my beauty...my husband does not look at any other woman." (Sengupta 31) It is in the suffering targeted by men in the lives of women the spirit of sisterhood finds its existence but is also men who become the cause of hatred and rage among women for their 'suffering sisters'. Sengupta tries to capture the echoes of violence across generations through the character of Sumati a new generation feminist who is also a victim of physical abuse in her relationship with an unnamed man. Despite the agency given to her through the means of education she too suffers in her relationships. Sumati a loving woman is forced to change herself and restrict her emotions once she becomes the victim. Due to the mistreatment, she is subjected to in her past relationship she is not able to reciprocate Vikram's feeling of love for her. Through her character, Sengupta explores into the emotional and psychological repercussions of violence. She starts doubting men and questions the intentions of men in her life and in general. Her doubts are confirmed when Nari, her father's friend attempts to force himself upon her at her own home in the presence of her family.

Thus the play raises serious questions about how men impose themselves upon other women even when they are in a committed

relationship and how the concept of consent means nothing when it comes to asserting dominance. Women are victimized across generations it is their suffering that separates them from the male-dominated society and unites them into the bond of sisterhood. Apart from the portrayal of parallel suffering Sengupta's play falls short to provide a dominating voice of resistance. Only Sumati's disgust for Suresh's attitude towards using women for sexual satisfaction can be read as a form of protest which is very subtle and lacks proper presentation. Sita, Draupadi or Helen may not have been able to voice them in the past but women writers like Poile Sengupta ensure that her characters be it Revathy, Thangam, and Sumati or even Vikram, Suresh and Dorai are able to express and exhibit true emotions equally towards both men and women.

Mangalam thus enquires the position of women in various relationships and finds them to be problematic as women are betrayed and violated at the core of every relationship. Women's lives are full of violence in every form, as they have to bear assault and it is not just their body that men rape but women are also stripped of respect, loyalty, safety, happiness, care and love.

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Gender Trouble in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to unravel the gender trouble that lies very evident in the backdrop of the novel, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The paper would provide an analysis of the novel within the premise of the theory- Gender Studies. The identity crisis and other difficulties faced by the transgender character Aftab (Anjum) and other minor characters in the novel are deeply analysed in this study. Aftab, a female trapped in a male body, embraces the identity of a woman and hopes to realize his/her true self. In Judith Butler's opinion we need not consider gender to be passively determined but "it is a process of constructing ourselves". Concepts from select transgender theorists are used to analyse the novel from a transgender perspective. Aftab's transformation to Anjum is narrated as a passage into another world. Anjum in the novel has to endure the pain and suffer the trauma of identity crisis. The marginalisation of queers or transgenders finds a perfect place in the novel.

Keywords: Transgenders, marginalisation, Identity crisis, Transgender studies, Transformation

Transgender studies have long been misrepresented and sidelined by social, political, moral, theoretical and methodological constraints, yielding a multitude of transgender representations in the field. As a result of theorisations informed by these constraints, transgender

people have been presented as villains, demons, victims and minions of patriarchal heterosexist binary orders. At the same time, they have been displaced from the very field of research named after them, as scholars have used transgender as a medium for other theoretical pursuits that have no direct relation to the lived experiences and emancipation of transgender people.

The novel under discussion, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* deals with various transgender characters and explores their plight and dilemma in the course of their collision with the outside world. The transgender characters in the book include Kulsoom Bi, Gudiya, Bulbul, Bismillah, Razia, Nimmo Gorakhpuri and Anjum. In fact, the entire world of Hijras is intensely crammed. In the course of the novel, they try to leap over and gather a new life live from the ashes of gender discrimination.

Aftab, a female trapped in a male body, embraces the identity of a woman and hopes to realize his/her true self. In Judith Butler's opinion we need not consider gender to be passively determined but "it is a process of constructing ourselves" (Butler 31). Body is considered as a locus of dialectical process and in this process, what has been imprinted on the flesh gets a new set of historical interpretation. Aftab's transformation to Anjum is presented as a much-awaited passage into another world, a new world of hope and peace. She lives with other people, a heterogeneous community of hermaphrodites, which incorporates men who don't believe in surgery, Hindus, and Muslims.

The dichotomy of the ordinary world, Duniya and the world of Hijras is presented in a subtle manner without much exaggeration. Anjum learns that the Hijras were a chosen set of people who were endowed with the power to curse and bless. But the irony is that the

very same chosen people bestowed with this power are confined to a near peripheral existence. In the case of Aftab, his own family seems to be unable to accept him as a transgender, especially his father. For Aftab initially, the transformation into Anjum is a mode of self-transcendence. But Anjum often reflects about the miserable condition of the Hijras.

We find that Anjum in the novel has to endure the pain and suffer the identity crisis. Similarly, Anjum had to sacrifice her singing for the price of being a Hijra. She had to abandon education because social conventions imposed a limit on her, to move about and think and reflect independently. Anjum lived in the Khwabgah with her patched-together body and her partially realized dreams for more than thirty years.

Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analysing gender identity and gendered representation. It includes women's studies (concerning women, feminism, gender, and politics), men's studies and queer studies. Its rise to prominence, especially in Western universities after 1990, has been noted as a success of deconstruction. Sometimes, Gender Studies is offered together with study of sexuality. These disciplines study gender and sexuality in diverse fields of literature, language, geography, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cinema, media studies, human development, law, public health and medicine. It also analyzes how race, ethnicity, location, class, nationality, and disability intersect with the categories of gender and sexuality.

Regarding gender, Simone de Beauvoir said: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (16). This view proposes that in gender studies, the term "gender" should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity and not to the state

of being male or female in its entirety. However, this view is not held by all gender theorists. Beauvoir's view goes hand in hand with that of Judith Butler's. Gender is performative and it doesn't have an essence or origin in itself, but rather it evolves.

Gender is pertinent to many disciplines, such as literary theory, drama studies, film theory, performance theory, contemporary art history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics and psychology. However, these disciplines sometimes differ in their approaches to how and why gender is studied. For instance in anthropology, sociology and psychology, gender is often studied as a practice, whereas in cultural studies representations of gender are more often examined. In politics, gender can be viewed as a foundational discourse that political actors employ in order to position themselves on a variety of issues. Gender Studies is also a discipline in itself, incorporating methods and approaches from a wide range of disciplines.

The concept of gender performativity was popularised by the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler through her work *Gender Trouble*. In Butler's terms the performance of gender, sex, and sexuality is about power in society. She tries to subvert the conventional notion of gender through this radical statement: "When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one" (7). She locates the construction of the "gendered, sexed, desiring subject" in "regulative discourses". A part of Butler's argument concerns the role of sex in the construction of "natural" or coherent gender and sexuality. In her account, gender

and heterosexuality are constructed as natural because the opposition of the male and female sexes is perceived as natural in the social imaginary.

According to Mark A Yarhouse, "Gender dysphoria refers to the experience of having a psychological and emotional identity as either male or female, and that your psychological and emotional identity does not correspond to your biological sex-this perceived incongruity can be the source of deep and ongoing discomfort"(19). The author gives a detailed account of Gender dysphoria and how it affect transgender persons:

"Gender dysphoria, is on the one hand the experience of being born male (biological sex) but feeling a psychological and emotional identity as female. Similarly, gender dysphoria is the experience of being born female (biological sex) but feeling a psychological or emotional identity as male and vice versa. When a person experiences gender incongruence and it is causing them significant distress or impairment, they may meet criteria for the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria. However, as we broaden the discussion to transgender issues, we begin to extend the discussion beyond merely the experience of gender dysphoria, an experience that might be characterized by gender incongruence in which the person does not experience an aligning of birth sex and psychological sense of gender (19-20).

With respect to their studies on transgender, gender theorists such as Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna often entertain the thought and possibility of a theoretical and practical elimination of binary gender through the conceptualisation of transgender. "Transgender is a complicated and contested term whose meaning has considerable cultural, historical, and situational specificity, not

just over many years and lives but also within a single day and life" (353). In contrast to academic developments in the 1970s in which gender was then understood as socially defined and culturally varied, they see transgender as a theoretical challenge to the social construction of gender, that such possibilities to be arisen from this challenge are limitless.

In the essay "Transgender Liberation - A Movement Whose Time Has Come" from the book *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Leslie Feinberg is quoted as a person who redefined the term transgender:

"Previously, "transgender" had referred most frequently to biological males who lived socially as women, but who did not undergo genital modification surgery. In Feinberg's redefinition, the term came to refer to a "pangender" movement of oppressed minorities-transsexuals, butch lesbians, drag queens, cross-dressers, and others-who all were called to make common revolutionary cause with one another in the name of social justice." (Stryker, Susan and Stephen Whittle 205)

Yet another instance from the book quotes Judith Butler in elaborating on transgenders: "While it argues that all gender is performative-that "man" and "woman" are not expressions of prior internal essences but constituted, to paraphrase Butler, through the repetition of culturally intelligible stylized acts-Gender Trouble presents the transgendered subject as the concrete example that "brings into relief" this performativity of gender" (262).

In Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the character Aftab is a transgender who reassigns himself with the female gender and names herself as Anjum. The marginalisation of queers or transgenders finds a perfect place in the novel. In the very first page of the novel, Anjum is seen as being thrown stones at and

as called by names just because she was a transgender: " When people called her names-clown without a circus, queen without a palace, she let the hurt blow through her branches like a breeze...".(Roy 3). Like what Judith Butler stated man and woman are not expressions of prior internal essences but constituted by performativity of gender. In Aftab's case even though he was born as an abnormal male, he couldn't find peace in the robe of a male. He always found happiness in dressing up like a female. And it is for the same reason that he absconded to the Khwabgah.

The inner turmoil of a hijra or a transgender is presented by the character Nimmo in the story. As she says "God made hijras as an experiment, a living creature that is incapable of happiness..." (23). Aftab joined the Khwabgah to be happy like all other inmates of the house. But this statement of Nimmo was a sudden blow upon his dreams. Nimmo continues her conversation telling him that while normal grown-ups are unhappy about many material things, hijras like them are troubled with a never-ending war or a riot inside them.

As the novel proceeds Aftab realises the truth behind Nimmo's words. As Aftab grew into a youth, his body had suddenly started to wage war on him. As stated in the novel, he grew tall and muscular and hairy. But he frantically wanted to remain as a girl which is evident in the actions which succeeded. "He tried to remove the hair on his face and body with Burnol...he then tried Anne French hair remover...he plucked his bushy eyebrows" (24).

Finally, Aftab becomes Anjum, disciple of Ustad Kulsoom Bi of the Delhi Gharana, one of the seven regional Hijra Gharanas in the country. It is said in the novel that over the years Anjum became Delhi's most famous Hijra. In interviews when the organisers encouraged her to speak openly about the abuses and cruelty she

faced from her family and society, she could only speak about how cruel she was towards her family. But this was not the condition of Hijras worldwide, they faced social stigma and humiliation.

Later as she always yearned for, she became a permanent resident of the Khwabgah. Then she was able to dress in the clothes she longed to wear-the sequined, gossamer kurtas and pleated Patiala salwars, shararas, silver anklets etc. But many a times she passed through mental tortures when her sexual instincts collide with her gender construct. Thus she even tries for a gender reassignment surgery. After the surgery Anjum "felt as though a fog had lifted from her blood and she could finally think clearly" (28).

In the book *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates*, the Transsexual theorist Roseanne Allucquere (Sandy) Stone is quoted as a writer who traced the debates surrounding transsexuals in her paper, 'The "Empire" Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto': "The problem for Stone with these procedures lies not only in their stereotypicality, but also in their (related) assumption of some kind of (gender) purity. After all, she notes, the aim of most transsexuals is to pass (see above), 'to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a "natural" member of that gender' (Francis, Anne et al, 173). In the novel we can see that Anjum (Aftab) was also a person who was forced to live in the wrong body for many years and it was only many years later that she was allowed to live as a girl in the Khwabagh and afterwards as a "real woman" after the surgery.

The book *Gender Studies* also cites a writer Marjorie Garber who supports this position, referring specifically to the transsexual experience of the travel writer Jan (formerly James) Morris: 'Morris now believes that the transsexual era may be ending, that cultural change and other things may have obviated some person's need to

seek a surgical solution to their gender dysphoria' (173). In the novel too, Aftab tries for a gender reassignment surgery or a shift to Khwabagh because no one seems to accept him with his fractured gender identity. So he tries to acclimatize to a gender which he feels will provide solace to him.

In the book *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, there is a quotation from Richard Carroll: The clinician is now confronted with an often-bewildering array of individuals with transgender experiences, including transsexuals, transvestites, she-males, queers, third sex, two-spirit, drag queens, drag kings, and cross-dressers. The phrase "transgender experience" is currently used to refer to the many different ways individuals may experience a gender identity outside of the simple categories of male or female. It should be remembered that there are many individuals who have blended genders in some way, who never seek treatment, and who may be very comfortable with their atypical gender identity. (Yarhouse 63-64)

But characters like Aftab are forced to do surgeries because they are unable to cop up with the pressures of the society and the conflicts within. They are so much affected by the anxieties of sexual binaries and the societal constructs around it. Even though the surgery of Aftab was not a definite success, still that attempt was satisfactory enough to Aftab atleast to a little extend in expelling his worries.

Later she finds her dwelling place in a graveyard, and lived there next to her father for the rest of her life. It was the beginning of her new life. On her first night in the graveyard, Anjum placed her Godrej cupboard and her few belongings near Mulaqat Ali's grave and unrolled her carpet and bedding between Ahlam Baji's and Begum Renata Mumtaz Madam's graves. Not surprisingly, she didn't sleep. Not that anyone in the graveyard troubled her no Jinns arrived to

make her acquaintance, no ghosts threatened a haunting. (Roy 61). Anjum was so desolate and distressed that she was least bothered of Jinns and ghosts in the graveyard. She looked like a lifeless body. Her emotions have been crushed to the ground. But she bravely fought against all the evil forces, within and outside to survive and prosper. Her tin shack scaled up. It grew first into a hut and then into a small house, over the time she began to enclose the graves of her relatives and build rooms around them.

Gradually her house came to be known as the Jannat Guest House, because it was the hub, for Hijras who, for one reason or another, had fallen out of, or been expelled from, the tightly administered grid of Hijra Gharanas. (Roy 67-68). The character sketch of Anjum is build through the course of sixty years. The novel with its digressions and deep political and historical accounts from partition to the present day, allegorically deals with many of the contemporary issues. In the final chapters Jahanara Begum's son had become her daughter, and the bandicoot was now a bride. But other than that, nothing much had changed (415). The other female characters in the novel also suffer the most. The residents of Khwabgah, a community of either female or transgender characters also become the prey of all those who wanted to feed on them.

Arundhati Roy's famous novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* begins with the birth of a muslim transgender Anjum. By birth he was a hermaphrodite. His parents brought him up as a boy. When he reaches at the stage of puberty, he was terribly confused with the gender roles in which he was born. His gender dysphoria or his trouble with gender begins here. He adopts the behaviour and attitudes of females. This was not warmly welcomed by his family. Infact his mother was terribly disturbed when she saw the genital part of her child right after her childbirth. Even a mother is not willing

to accept her child as it is because our society has assigned some gender roles to each individuals on the basis of their sex. They know only the roles of males and females. Anyone outside this gender binary is not considered or accepted as normal.

The socio-religious doctrines on gender binaries from east to west, reduce vast transgender population into a hopeless void where they neither can live nor can die. Aftab who surpasses all conventional qualities yet have to endure the pain of living a dual creature, a 'dual being' oscillating between hope and despair, forced by the hostile world to surrender all the dreams and live a life of seclusion. Aftab, now, torn into pieces by the hostile social forces asks the Imam “you tell me, where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets? Do you not think that the All-seeing, Almighty one who put us on this earth has made proper arrangements to take us away?”(5).

Aftab has developed a thirst to express himself. So he got entrance into the House of Dreams and changed his name and identity. Hence Aftab becomes Anjum and later on she had genital surgery but her vagina did not work. Her thirst or quest for motherhood can be seen in this novel. This shows the transgressive sexual desire of Anjum. The problems faced by hijras in our society is not less. Once Anjum herself was caught up in the infamous Gujarat riot and traumatized. She was forced to leave her Dream House and was pushed into the peripherals of the society. There she created a space of her own - a third space for her own liberation. Hence a graveyard has finally become the ministry of utmost happiness for her as well as for all the refugees and neglected ones. The novel certainly plays a pivotal role in depicting the trauma experienced by transgenders in our society.

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Theme of Amorality: Sexuality Decoded in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things* broke the social moralities that had been in the society from time immemorial. In this novel, she attacks the cultural, traditional and ethical laws laid by the institutionalized society. The novel unravels love laws that had been maintained from time long-established to show the world how erotic human bonds are. Sense of eroticism overwhelms in the novel only to show how conscientiousness can go ratified when the desire for sex is not met out. The characters transgress to exhibit themselves to be vulnerable to sex when their mental agony goes beyond redemption. Science knows no morality. And hence human desires too. Arundhati Roy in her novel tries to establish how amoral is a human susceptible to sexuality. Though the events in the novel are not narrated coherently, as the characters walk to the past and leap to the present, the readers are kept under the grip. The novel portrays trauma unveiled episode after episode and the characters experience emotional constraints overlapped by social medians. The lovemaking of individual characters defies the norms of social standards and their physical intimacy and transgression violate institutionalized norms of the nuptial policies. The author has chosen the incidents related to sexual transgression to propagandize the fact that we are living in a nation where the society speaks of convention and assigns modalities

for moral codes and of stage enacts the lethal sin of sexual abuse against innocent beings irrespective of their sex.

Keywords: Amorality, Transgression, Sexuality, Sin, Upper-caste, Dalit.

The God of Small Things is Arundhati Roy's first novel and it broke the social moralities that had been considered for long as cultural, traditional, and ethical. The novel unravels love laws that had been maintained from time long-established to show the world how erotic are human bonds. Sense of eroticism overwhelms in the novel only to show how conscientiousness can go ratified when the desire for sex is not met out. The characters transgress to exhibit themselves to be vulnerable to sex when their mental agony goes beyond redemption. Science knows no morality. And hence human desires too. Arundhati Roy in her novel tries to establish how amoral is a human susceptible to sexuality. Sadness and sex go hand in hand in the novel. The novel portrays trauma unveiled episode after episode and the characters experience emotional constraints overlapped by social medians.

The events in the novel are not narrated coherently and the characters walk into the past and leap to the present often. They tread into the memory lane as and when the necessity arises and the events are narrated so vividly so as to allow the readers to get afixed to the theme of the novel. The author while commenting on the compiling of this work has said that in gender politics, there is no place for women without the biological difference. The theme that she has chosen is not to explain the nobility of the working-class but to define the indifference and biological nature of the men.

The talk of a noble working-class seemed very, very silly to me . . . like other women, I would be brutalized so much by men. It

made no difference whether they were proletarian or not, or what their ideology was. The problem was the biological nature of these men. The only real conflict seemed to me to be between women and men. (Frontline 107)

Though the novel is a debut attempt, the novelist had eminently handled the situations where the characters transgress sexually. The narrative sometimes seems to lean on words and phrases that allude to sexuality. While narrating the Kathakali performances, the author ventures in to explain the scenes with a tone of sexuality.

The performances were staged by the swimming pool. While the drummers drummed and the dancers danced, hotel guests frolicked with their children in the water. While Kunti revealed her secret to Karna on the river bank, courting couples rubbed suntan oil on each other. While fathers played sublimated sexual games with their nubile teenaged daughters, Pootana suckled young Krishna at her poisoned breast. Bhima disemboweled Dushasana and bathed Draupadi's hair in his blood. (127)

This particular passage is a fine example of how sensual the narrative can be. Fathers playing sublimated sexual games with their teenage daughters, Kunti revealing her premarital relationship that she had with Surya Dev to their illegitimate son, Poothana feeding Krishna from her poisoned breast, Bhima taking revenge upon Dushasana for his abusive disrobing of Draupadi - all go handy to the sensual narrative. And again, Draupadi being a wife of five husbands defies the norms of social institution whereas it may not infringe the norms of biology.

Ammu, the woman who belongs to the earlier generation, divorces her husband and travels from Calcutta to Ayemenem with her two twin-children. She has done so to escape the frigidity of her

husband who is habituated to ill-treating her and her children. The freedom that she could enjoy now is legal and morally recognized by the institutionalized society. But the great question ahead of her is that whether, at the age of hers, she could lead a life free from conjugal bondage shedding physical intimacy. And if not, how far the impending issue of adultery will keep her going smoothly in her life, would be the question ahead of her future. And no doubt, her move would do great harm to her partner, Velutha, the innocent and politically active servant of her household. The very thought of committing such an illegitimate act would be demurred by the members of her conventional home if not by the rigid society.

Secondly, there is the staging of obscene in the theatre episode where the Orangedrink Lemondrink man molests the young chap, Esthapan sexually. Unaware at an age of what sexual abuse means, Estha experiences a traumatic nuisance when the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man wets him with his hot and sticky semen. "The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's hand closed over Estha's. His thumbnail was long like a woman's. He moved Estha's hand up and down. First slowly. Then fastly." (103) The man had been interviewing Estha in the course of his self-gratification. "Then the gristly-bristly face contorted, and Estha's hand was wet and hot and sticky. It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarter-boiled."(104)

Estha feels vomiting and manages not to touch his body with that hand. This act of sexual abuse has an internally sickening feeling. It is nothing but a sexual assault on an innocent boy. This sexual abuse would have laid the first stone to his final lovemaking with his own twin sister who had shared his mother's womb with him for not less than 10 months. The writer has chosen this particular incident to propagandize the fact that we are living in a nation where the society speaks of convention and assigns modalities for moral codes and

enacts of Stage, the lethal sin of sexual abuse against innocent beings irrespective of their sex.

The bond that Rahel and Estha have with Velutha makes Ammu court interest in him. She starts loving him by night. They become intimate and their physical intimacy is short-lived and leads to the tragedy of the family. The family comes to know about the relationship between Ammu and Velutha. The family locks Ammu in her room and disowns Velutha as a man-servant. Frustration causes Ammu to frown at her own children and both Rahel and Estha decide to run away.

The physical need of Ammu is subjective and it is her choice that she trespasses the threshold of conventional society. She quenches her thirst for bodily pleasure using the naïve and innocent Dalit and no doubt, to pay for the consequences of such adultery would be borne by him. The sin committed by these two, the upper caste woman and the lower caste man is in no way different from the sin committed by Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale of *The Scarlet Letter*. Ammu's personal life is in no way different from Hester's. Ammu, being a young woman suffers the problem as was suffered by Hester. Hester has a husband who is found to be missing and who had left her for America. She experiences sexual desires unfulfilled and she catches up with the young and attractive bishop as her partner to commit adultery. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu has no other option than to choose the handyman of the home who could come in handy to meet out her physical needs. The pity is that in both the novels, the weakest of the society gets punished. Hester, being a woman, is sent behind the bars with the letter "A" in the colour of scarlet hung on her chest. Velutha, a red man and Dalit, is punished to death. Society sees that if the sin or crime of adultery involves people of two different social standards, the one that belongs to the

upper caste or socially affluent is always excluded from the sin and not shunned away for his or her deeds. The philosophy behind such discrimination has never been an issue for a society that energizes a certain code of morality. The death penalty for such a transgression is approved by society and unfortunately, in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy includes both the sinners, irrespective of social standards, to take up the ordeal of death. Judgment reserves that Velutha, being a Dalit, should die for involving in such a heinous sin and Ammu has to die for the same cause not because she had committed the sin of adultery but her adultery had been with a Dalit. The upper caste family cannot resist such a crime and safeguard the interest of their reputed family. They even seal up the fact that there had been such a crime committed. Instead, they spin the story of the kidnapping of children of the family and murder of one child, Sophie Mol by Velutha. The well-respected Party member had to budge to the accusations of the imperial laws and his "Untouchable" skin kisses the charges of the police lathy. "Velutha didn't live through the night. Half an hour past midnight, Death came for him." (320) ". . . the body had already been removed. Dumped in the themmady kuzhyi - the pauper's pit - where the police routinely dump their dead." (321)

The visit of Ammu to the police station frightens Baby Kochamma. She tries to get Ammu out of Ayemenem at the earliest. She easily portrayed Ammu as the culprit for the death of Sophie Mol and her twins too were involved in the accident. Ammu packs off and moves on. Later, she dies alone in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey. There she had gone for an interview to find a job as someone's secretary. "She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but viable, die-able age." (161)

The free play of heightened madness of erotic desire is seen in the sexual intimacy of the twins, Rahel and Estha. Their lovemaking

defies the norms of social standards and their physical intimacy and transgression violate institutionalized norms of the nuptial policies. The seed for this had been sown by the Orange drink Lemon drink Man. And the final staging of sexual intimacy between the twins, Rahel and Estha is to be viewed as an act of amorality for such an act would never be entertained and encouraged by a society circumscribed by sexual taboos prohibiting adultery between siblings born to common parents. "She moves her mouth. Their beautiful mother's mouth. Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested, takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and kissed. . . They lay like that for a long time. Awake in the dark. Quietness and Emptiness." (327) Biology does not stick to morality. "Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief... Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much." (328) Howsoever, Vellya Paapen, the father of Velutha, and Baby Kochamma, the spinster of the family had no role to play to measure the social standards of the lovemaking of the twins.

Of course, the writer vehemently allows the process of lovemaking between the twins to ratify the amorality of the biological norms that entice all the living beings. The transgression of these two involves no approval of social standards as was the case with Ammu and Velutha. The novel on the whole demarcates the boundary that Inter-caste adultery or transgression is sin and is considered unsocial and unethical. On the other side, the lovemaking of the twins just passes the test and approved by the laws of love. 'Fulfil your wish and perish' is for Ammu and Velutha whereas 'relish and rejuvenate' is the dictum of the Siamese souls to get out of their nausea.

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Confession as Emancipation: A Study of Select Poems of Kamala Das

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The paper titled "Confession as Emancipation: A Study of Select Poems of Kamala Das" attempts to study how Kamala Das seeks emancipation through an open expression of her unquenched thirst for love. She transcends the stereotypical feminine modesty and breaks the boundaries decided by the male dominated world for a female poet by writing about female.

Pleasures and her quest for love. Kamala Das allows her poetry to mediate between her personal life and the public. This paper explores how she gives new dimensions to the conventionally.

Feminine themes of love and domesticity by discussing topics like sexuality and intimacy, thus widening the scope for feminist writings in India. This paper endeavours to prove how her confessional poetry becomes her feminist tool for emancipation.

Confessional poetry that emerged in the American literary scene is a style of poetry in the 1950's and the 1960's that is largely autobiographical and explores themes and subjects that were considered taboo and had not been discussed before. Sexual desires, private experiences and feelings about death, trauma, depression and relationships are subjects for this type of poetry. In confessional poetry, the subject is largely autobiographical and the poetic persona and the author are the same. This style of poetry came into existence as an extreme form of modernist approach and as a reaction to the impersonality theory of T.S Eliot and New Critics which argued that

the poet's personality is not revealed through his/her poetry. It was M. L Rosenthal's review of Lowell's work *Life Studies* titled, "Poetry as Confession" that brought the coinage 'confessional poetry'. Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath dominated the Western literary scene, while Kamala Das pioneered this style in Indian literature.

Kamala Surraiya, born in 1934 in a village in Malabar, adopted "Madhavikutty" as her pen name for her Malayalam works and "Kamala Das" for her English works. The controversies surrounding her heightened when she chose to convert to Islam. Her life had been a desperate search for love. She had a terrible childhood as well as unhappy adulthood. Shattered by her marriage with a self-centred man, she began to seek love through illegitimate love affairs. Yet, to her disappointment, she found no love in them. Being sensitive and daring, Das transformed her mental agony and feelings to poetry, resulting in an unconventional form of poetry that was boldly new in the Indian literary scene. "An Introduction", "Freaks", "The Old Playhouse" and "The Suicide" are her confessional poems in which the wounded self is delineated. "Kamala Das speaks with rare courage of her heart, humiliation and loss of identity in the dominated society" (Mishra).

Das's themes mostly dealt with love/lust and marriage for which she was criticised as being immodest and shameless in the use of language. According to Naik, "The most obvious feature is of Kamala Das's poetry is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex, referring, nonchalantly to the musk of sweat between the breasts, the warm shock of menstrual blood and even my pubis" (*History of Indian English Literature* 88). Thus her venture into a less travelled road to express herself not only gives a creative impetus for writers but also challenged a patriarchal value system that glorifies woman's coyness and sexual ignorance and passivity. T.S Eliot in his literary

critical essay "Tradition and The Individual Talent" says, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (bartleby.com). Kamala Das directly challenges T.S Eliot's personality theory in her autobiographical work *My Story*. "Poetry is not a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of the personality ... I could not escape from personality..." (109).

Writing sexuality into poems was perceived by the readers with shock, since it was based upon her sexual experiences with men. The Indian society could not comprehend the idea of a woman speaking about matters related to lust and sex. In "An Introduction", she vents out her discontent in her marriage and justifies her extramarital relationship with another man. "I met a man, loved him, called him not by any name, he is every man who wants a woman, just as I am every woman who seeks love" ("An Introduction"). This open confession of her desire for love and lust establishes women as sexual beings like men. The poem ends with a confession of her 'sin': "I am a sinner. I am a saint. I am the beloved and the betrayed". Such a declaration demystifies the female, humanising her flaws and desires instead of placing on her pedestal that enslaves her to the patriarchal norms and values.

"Freaks" is a lesser known poem of Kamala Das that resonates with many of her poems like "The Looking Glass" in its thematic similarity. The main idea of the poem is her deep craving for emotional intimacy and depth in sexual union that most men in her life failed to give her. The feminine persona in the poem seeks love in the act of lust. She contrasts the feminine need for love and the masculine desire for physical pleasure. Like many of her poems, she proudly speaks of female sexuality and her sexual needs, and indulges in discussions

on topics that are conventionally not associated with female writers and poets. Confessional in tone, she dares to challenge patriarchy in the society and within family.

The poem begins with her description of her partner's beastly face with mouth cavernous implied by the phrase "a dark Cavern" with uneven teeth that resembles stalactites. The couple although wants to feel and "race towards love" in the moment of intimacy, there is something that hinders the emotional intimacy. Their sexual act becomes just an exercise of lust or a wandering in "the puddles of desire". She questions her man's ability to satisfy her emotional need for love. The poem depicts her deep craving for love, while the men in her life just focus on deriving physical pleasure. Her desire to seek emotional connection does not lead her into rejecting the physical aspect of love making. However, sex is not just to satisfy the "Skin's lazy hungers", it should be a fodder that feeds into building an emotional connection between two human souls. She exposes the superficiality of the sex they have by the use of the metaphor "skin's lazy hunger". It is a lazy hunger because lust is easy to satiate while love requires much more. Even in the act of "love-making", she feels emptiness in her heart by the failure of them to love, which is filled by "coiling snakes of silence". Coiled snake is an extremely metaphor for erotic pleasure. However, it is not pleasure but a repulsive and dangerous silence that she senses. The last lines illustrate the sad reality why women stay in unhappy marriages. "To save my face, I flaunt, at Times, a grand, flamboyant lust ("The Freaks"). Since the masculine world respects a woman only by her relationship to the man, a woman out of the institutionalised patriarchal marriage does not have an identity or a "face". She unashamedly and confidently says that she has a "flamboyant lust" and she cannot walk away from him aware of the near-impossibility to have sex outside marriage and

have a "face" or social respectability. It could also suggest her feigning the masculine role with flamboyant lust but concerned about feminine virtue and chastity.

The title refers to her partner and herself who are in a loveless marriage or a sexual partnership. She considers the man to be a freak because he does not satisfy the emotional need of her partner through sex. He could not go beyond the skin's lazy hunger. Besides, through her lines, she paints a hideous monstrous face of her partner. Freak also means monster. Freak means unusual or anomalous. His behaviour is not what she expects from a partnership. She includes herself in the category of freaks because it is an anomaly to stay in a marriage without love.

Through this, she aims to de-normalise such marriages. On the other hand, she may be considering herself as a freak because the woman dares to express her dissatisfaction at her husband's ability to fulfill her desires and because her expectation of love in marriage itself is an anomaly.

"Grandmother's House" also deals with her need for love. However, the treatment of the theme of love is different. Nostalgic in tone, she reminisces about her days at her grandmother's house where she felt loved: "There is a house now far away where once/ I received love.....That woman died" ("Grandmother's House"). The poem also acknowledges her desperate attempts to receive love in the present: "beg now at strangers' doors to/ Receive love, at least in small change?" ("Grandmother's House"). The perusal of the two poems presents before the readers a connection with the feminine world that her grandmother represents and a masculine world represented by her husband. It is in the feminine world, she feels love and warmth. Her desire to go back into that feminine space is evident when she says, "There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or/

Just listen to the frozen air" ("Grandmother's House"). In contrast, she is stuck in a loveless marriage with her husband.

She also voices to society her dissatisfaction of a woman in the protected walls of domesticity. A similar sense of loneliness and alienation can be found in Kamala Das's works. "The Old Playhouse" presents the pathetic condition of a girl in the domestic realm. The protagonist positions herself as a meek creature whom her husband wants to tame and control through sex. She writes, "There is no more signing, no more dance. My mind is an old playhouse with all its lights put out" ("The Old Playhouse"). There is a clear indication of her utter hopelessness and despair. She criticises patriarchal norms that make her a victim of husband's pride and ego. Lack of freedom and identity coupled with her domestic suffering leads to alienation. "An Introduction" traces her growth from childhood to adulthood. Her quest for an identity that does not limit her as a conventional wife is evident in the poem. Her words resonate with anguish and pain. A melancholic tone is maintained throughout her poems that springs from her own bitter experiences in life and her frustration in love.

Confessing about mental illness is another typical feature of confessional poetry. The "Sunshine Cat" is a Das poem describing her mental turbulence caused by her marriage. The lines resonate with her frankness. "Her husband shut her in, / Locked in a room of books / With a streak of sunshine / Lying near the door / W h e n H e returned to take her out she was a cold and / Half dead woman now of no use at all to men" ("Sunshine Cat"). Das's poems also manifested suicidal tendencies. When her desire for love is unfulfilled, she craves for death as in "The Suicide". "O sea, I am fed up/ I want to be simple/ I want to be loved/ And/ If love is not to be had/ I want to be dead" ("Sunshine Cat"). Considering the time it was written, when mental illness was not discussed openly and was perceived as a social

taboo, she freed herself from such restrictions. By discussing topics hidden from the dominant view, she becomes a symbol of freedom, emancipation and empowerment.

Robert Phillips comments, "Confessional art whether poetry or not, is a means of killing the beasts which are within us, those dreadful dragons of dreams and experiences that must be hunted down concerned and exposed in order to be destroyed" (2). There is an absence of barrier between the poet and the readers. Frankness and honesty are the hallmark of these writings.

Kamala Das exploits the technique of confession in their poetry to speak about their private thoughts and emotions. For Kamala Das, her desire for love was never quenched, resulting in her alienation. Directness in addressing mental chaos and suicidal tendencies is common for both of them. Being a woman, Kamala Das ponders on the quest for her own space and identity. She lashes against the repressive code of patriarchy. The works reflect the melancholic life they led. Their boldness to strip the "armour of impersonality" perceived as a "shockwave" accelerated the growth of a new genre in poetry. The emancipation she achieves through her choice of subjects for poetry, and ability to expose her deep and dark self as in a confession yet without guilt sets her as a feminist in the Indian society.

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Mythology and Women Empowerment in Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within*

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Abstract

The timeless tales from Hindu mythology are not only exciting but provide realistic solutions that would help us alter our mindset and exceed limits. Usha Narayanan's *Awaken the Durga Within: From Glum to Glam, Caged to Carefree* (2018), help us identify the Shakti that resides in every woman. The stories rendered from mythology assist women to affirm themselves at home and at workplace as well. We have enormous roles and options amidst us. We would become empowered if we choose the perfect role models and infer the stories of the goddesses in our day to day life. Usha Narayanan has incorporated the kernels of wisdom she learnt from *Bhagvad Gita* in the book. The valuable lessons needed for our life are retold in tales wrapped in mythical characters. Freedom and fulfilment is indispensable for us. At times women are unable to trace the immense Shakti that is present in us struggle to find her place in the world. We need to find the abundant power and tap them to believe in ourselves and become an inspiration for others. The book acts as every woman's guide to reclaim her power and happiness. The stories portrayed reveal the powers of goddesses, aid women realize their strengths and emerge stronger with new hope.

Keywords: mythology, journey, strong, reclaim, empower

Indian mythology is unique and has different stories that have passed from one generation to another. Indian myths are found in epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, the Puranas etc., Many of the beliefs and myths are the oldest and have had many retellings. Our mythology has rich history, mysterious characters and reverberating stories that are repeated over period. These myriad stories are both recreational and educational as well. These are abundant and convey maxims and rules to lead our lives. A goddess is highly revered in the Hindu Mythology. Each individual in our society should be given their due only based on their capabilities and not on their gender. Our rural India and its folk practices have always revered goddess- worship which goes before even the worship of male god. They were represented by natural environments such as rocks, ant hills and trees and thus signify their nearness to the natural surroundings. Though revered highly in the form of goddess a woman often is considered weak and powerless. Many modern writers retell the tales from mythology as not just merely story telling but function as conveying ethics and desires to society. Usha Narayanan in her *Awaken the Durga Within: From Glum to Glam, Caged to Carefree* (2018), help us identify the Shakti that resides in every woman. The objective of this research paper is to analyze, explore and celebrate women empowerment in the work of Usha Narayanan.

Usha Narayanan gives sacred dimension to the goddess stories from the mythology. She identifies women empowerment through the female mythological characters. The demon Makisha had sought the boon of immortality from Brahma after performing a fierce tapasya for 10,000 years. He asked, 'Let my death not come by the hand of man, Deva, or by the powers of the Trimurti-Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. Let death come to me only through a woman.' He thought that women are weak and powerless and would not be able to kill him. Hence,

he would be as good as immortal. He then went on a rampage with his savage demon commanders, decimating the armies of mighty kings to become the overlord of the earth. To destroy him, the three gods combined their powers and created a woman to kill him. From this brilliance was formed a beautiful yet fearsome woman who was tall as the sky and had eighteen arms. She was Durga-the Invincible One. She killed the fierce asura commanders while her lion expanded its form and swallowed her foes whole or tore off their heads. Mahisha came forth himself to confront her but grew weak with desire when he set eyes on her luminous beauty. He turned into many forms but goddess Durga sent forth her glittering Sudarshana Chakra and it sliced off Mahisha's head from his body. The invincible Mahisha had been destroyed by the glorious Shakti, the mother of the universe, and the world was at peace again.

Usha Narayanan presents another story to reiterate the concept of Shakti in us. Goddess Sati was born to Daksha. As years passed her mind was fixed on the great three-eyed god who lived on the mystic, snow topped mountain of Kailasa. Shiva though initially refused to marry Sati finally agreed to marry her for the sake of his devotees. He became an eager suitor and asked Daksha for her hand in marriage. When Daksha hesitated, Brahma commanded him to accept Shiva's request. Daksha was unhappy as he did not like the son-in-law who lived in cremation grounds, surrounded by ghouls and goblins. He performed a great yagna to which he invited all the gods and sages, but excluded Shiva and Sati. Sati confronts Daksha as Adi Parashakthi, angrily destroys those who had dishonoured her and Shiva and her soul leaves the body. Meanwhile the demon Tarakasura gets a boon from Brahma that he should be killed by no one except Shiva's son. Adi Parashakti again incarnates on earth and marries Shiva as Parvati. She reveals to the world the transcendent power

hidden under Shiva's macabre forms. Thus, the stories of goddesses liberate us and give us the warrior-like energy.

In a patriarchal country like India, women are not much empowered and are always held back by their own family or society. We are often instructed to be an ideal girl to obey our parents, husband and later our children. Even the little education and the job that they are employed, do not increase their status and not bring much difference in their lives. The book by Usha Narayanan, is a guide with simple language and steps that assists every woman to assert themselves at home and at workplace and reclaim their life. The book presents us the interesting stories of goddesses from Hindu Mythology that is known to us. It suggests practical solutions that can be adopted without negotiating on our own principles. On reading these stories, it enables every woman to realise the Shakti within her and thus helps in transforming their minds and walk the extra mile. It help us hold back our fears and explore our inner strength and take control of our life and give due respect. We can relish the rewards only when we make choices that appeals right to us. The real spirit of feminism lies in exhibiting the options and rights given to us. Usha Narayanan thus retells myths and also expresses her views through feminist lens. When it is said that it is cultural norm to worship husband, Usha asks, "Even by their logic, if a husband is a god, does it not make the wife a goddess?" (8) She asserts goddesses are never inferior to gods. Still, many communities underrate women and expect them to be stereotypes. While the tales in mythology portray many strong male characters there are just handful of strong female characters in it. They are not equally portrayed as strong as men but as ideal or even negative sometimes. As depicted in Puranas, Shakti- the foremost of all deities creates Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Our ancient stories present more instances that goddess were more revered than god.

Unlike the previous decades, more opportunities and roles have opened up for women in this evolving society. To stand up on our own legs, we need to choose the tales of these goddesses that empowers us.

Feminism is not just a movement but a daring self exploration to look beyond our accustomed statements. The divine feminism can promote love and beautify the world. It embodies all the qualities within and embraces both that is beautiful and terrifying. While there are goddesses of wonderful beauty and softness, there are also goddesses with fangs and arms bristling with numerous frightful weapons. The energy displayed by these goddesses is seen in each one of us in natural environment, politics, business, corporate and culture. When we understand this and engage with these elements personally, it turns on concealed powers in our own consciousness and eventually transforms us. Worshipping these goddesses not only tunes us holy but also reveals the hidden forces outside and we can witness this transformation happen. We indeed have goddess energy in our personality. While some are visible, some occur from various circumstances of our lives. Mediating with these goddesses help us discover and mould constructive qualities. The wisdom, beauty of inner self, courage is many times invisible to us. Often we feel disconnected from the world unable to look into the enormous sources of this power. The book *Awaken the Durga Within* is an opportunity to open ourselves to the energies that run through the pages. The goddesses referred are embedded in a rich tradition and philosophy. Reading about these goddesses in her various expressions identify our qualities that we have wished for. Women become divine when her unrecognised and undeveloped energies are realised.

A softening heart is needed to prosper though it has innumerable powers. Only then the balance sought will be achieved. Goddess

Parvati's story is a metaphor on how feminine strength transforms the entire world. Both knowledge and love is necessary to become whole. Parvati speaks convincingly of Shiva's immeasurable glory to sages. She reveals his transcendent power to the world. The eternal bond they share tells the world that a man is united with his female half and throws light on an ideal couple who are rational and caring as well. Parvati is not just a beautiful woman but also a wise soul with the wisdom of Vedas and Upanishads. Parvati embodies both power and love and shows us how to flourish retaining ourself- esteem. The story of Durga-the Incincible One, the slayer of Mahishasura exhibits that fearless and confident women are the creators of their own desires. The eighteen arms of Durga represents that women are capable of playing multifarious roles to survive and safeguard their family, society, nation and the world. The story represents a woman's courage to stand against the evils around her.

Women empowerment is the process for women to redefene gender roles that allows them to acquire the ability to choose that has been restricted from such ability. Mythology is sacred and tells us our origins and enriched with women empowerment concepts. It reveals all the quests we have that is philosophical and beyond human understanding. It is a manifestation of our needs, wishes and agonizing struggles too. Our culture and tradition are in fact deep rooted in it. Since the ancient ages goddesses are an undeniable part of mythology and give the spirit of courage, love and safety. Many goddesses have immense power and provide us with inspirational stories that help us overcome obstacles. They have discovered their power and reading about them empowers us. The goddesses presented in the chapters of the book portray what we look for in our lives. Their stories of courage and confidence guide us in our day to day life. We have indeed descended from these strong figures unaware of the strength

we possess. Indian mythology might have few women goddesses but their stories are powerful and significant in epics. The ancient poets spun the tales of these gods and goddesses encompassed in conquests and conflicts just like our human beings.

They wanted to show us that though there are different situations and emotions when we stand up with a clear vision we will achieve. We have to be smarter by facing both the internal and external conflicts. We should remember the power we have and respect ourselves as an achiever. Fixing to our rights and being strong on our stance is significant for us. We have the right to be happy no matter what happens in life. Applying three Cs like 'choosing to get ahead, speaking up for what we need and ignoring the comments that be little us take us closer to success'. Since women empowerment plays a crucial role in their well-being, family and in the development of nations they should choose freedom entailed in responsibility and liberation combined with wisdom.

India is a vast land with diversified cultures and heritages which are being reflected through Indian literatures. They had created a strong impact on the life of every individual. The two great epics The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the Upanishads are being treated not only as mythologies but also retold or rewritten with multiple interpretations by numerous writers. The stories of the various goddesses in these enlighten and inspire us, help us invoke the Shakti within us and reclaim our power and happiness. Since Usha Narayanan uses simple language, readers have an inclination to her. The divine Shakti takes forms of goddesses and personify with energies needed for our survival and realization. Thus the objective of this research paper is met by discovering women empowerment in the work of Usha Narayanan.

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Man into Woman: *The Life of an Indian Transwoman in The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi

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The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story is an autobiographical tale from a transwoman who moves across the socially imposed boundaries of her assigned sex at birth to find a life of dignity. She writes in depth about the culture of hijra community, the rituals they follow, how they earn their living, the grinding hardship in their daily lives, how they are ill-treated by the society and how they have to fight for their rights as a human being. It is a moving insight into the difficulties of a transwoman existence dealing with alienation, discrimination, sexual abuse, sex work, violence and oppression. The paper recounts the stigmatized condition of hijra community in India and the challenges faced by the author and how she confronts the heteronormative notions of sexuality and lives socially as a woman.

A. Revathi is a writer, theatre person, actor and a transgender activist who works at 'Sangama'-a sexual minorities human rights organization. She was born in Tamil Nadu and was given the name Doraisamy and assigned a male identity at birth. As she grew up, she felt disconnected from her gender and acted in a manner traditionally considered to be feminine. She is the author of *Unarvum Uruvamum* (Feelings of the Entire Body), which became one of the first books to be written by a transgender person in Tamil and her autobiography is, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. The book was translated from Tamil by V. Geetha, a social historian and activist. Its language

is sheer and simple. It is sometimes exciting and joyous, but more often sad and violent, physically and emotionally abusive and tells about a life of alienation and extreme frustration. The book brings in trans issues, gender identity, culture and rituals of hijra community to a wider audience in an accessible way. Revathi merits social and historical recognition both for her activism and inspirational writing on gender identity. In the Preface to the autobiography she clearly states the purpose of writing this life story:

As a hijra I get pushed to the fringes of society. Yet I have dared to share my innermost life with you - about being a hijra and also about doing sex work. My story is not meant to offend, accuse or hurt anyone's sentiments. My aim is to introduce to the readers the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires. I hope now that by publishing my story, larger changes can be achieved. I hope this book of mine will make people see that hijras are capable of more than just begging and sex work. I do not seek sympathy from the society or the government. I seek to show that we hijras do have the right to live in this society. (Revathiv-vi)

Hijra, a Urdu-Hindustani word derived from the Semitic Arabic root *hjr* which means leaving one's tribe, and has been borrowed into Hindi. Its Indian usage means a 'eunuch' or 'hermaphrodite', where the irregularity of the male genitalia is central to the definition. India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh -all legally recognized the existence of a third gender.

The term hijra: describe[s] different forms of transgender/homosexual identity as specific to India. To refer to the whole variety of identities which question the heterosexual framework we have used the term queer which arose in the context of a dissatisfaction with lesbian and gay politics and a need to embrace the diverse ways in

which heterosexism was contested. (People's Union for Civil Liberties, Karnataka 2003: 15)

To build a sense of family with other hijras, one must become a chela (daughter) to another elder hijraguru (mother). Guru adopts these chelas, and these chelas are viewed as part of guru's lineage. Chelas are expected to give all their earnings to their guru, who manages the welfare of the household. Chelas have to bent and touch their guru feet saying paampaduthiamma. Then the sari-clad guru will say jiyojyobete. Once the chelas undergone nirwaanam (removal of penis, scrotum and testicles) they have to follow certain customary rituals. Only after the 40th day after nirwaanam, they were allowed to leave the house, just like the rites done after the first menses. Revathi while narrating in details the customs and rules of the hijra community also refers to the importance of dress to earn respect:

If born a pottai, and when living amongst pottais, it is important that a person pierces her ears and nose, grows her hair. If you merely wear press-button earrings and a wig, no one really respects you. Likewise, if you happen to see a man crossing your path, you are expected to make way for him, bend your head bashfully and make sure that your chest is covered. (Revathi47)

Revathi towards the end of her autobiography, tells about the brutal murder of her guru, who had been taking care of her in Bangalore, by a group of rowdies. She was then at Tamil Nadu as part of her project at 'Sangama'. Being a chela to the dead person, she and other chelashas had to do certain customary rites for the dead person.

Society's Attitudes towards Transgenders

They struggle to find acceptance within family. The family members often do not accept a hijra's presence. It shows the problems

LITERARY EXPLORER

hijra's face - verbal and physical abuse, isolation and rejection, denial of family property. To 'correct' Revathi, her family tricked her into return home, where she was beaten and her hair was shaved clean as an offering to the goddess to 'cure' her.

We are not accepted by our families. Initially my family didn't accept me, but today I can visit them in a sari. However, there are many others whose desires and dreams buried deep within them. (240).

The society stigmatizes and discriminate hijras. They were labeled and looked down upon. Revathi speaks about how she felt odd when looked at and spoken about. People frequently called her 'Ali' or 'Number 9' - shopkeepers throwing rotten tomatoes - college students yelling at her, poking and making fun of her - touching her breasts asking original or duplicate. Denied of a drivers' license - when later issued it referred her as 'Revathi who is Doraisamy'.

Men and even woman stared at us and laughed, and heckled us. I realized what a burden a hijra's daily life is. Do people harass those who are men and women when they go out with their families? Why, a crippled person, a blind person - even they attract pity and people help them. If someone has experienced physical hurt, they are cared for both by the family and by the outsiders who come to know of it. But we - we are not considered human. (83)

The hijras were forced to lead a double-life. Revathi recounts how people ridiculed her after she got her nirvanam done. From her appearance they sense that she has had an operation and they keep on asking her, why cannot she be like other men? why cannot she be normal? Find a woman, get married, and be a good householder, who works for a living, they suggest. Fearing the society many hijras are forced to lead a double life - pretending to be masculine at home but complete feminine with their peers.

Their lack of education and 'unusual' lifestyle makes them not suitable for many jobs.

It seems like there is nothing for us hijras to do but sex work. We lack the education to do much else, and there's no one to offer us work. Sex work brings with it all kinds of problems- we suffer at the hands of both the police and rowdies. (240)

They were pushed to do begging, badhayi or sex work. Hijras who do sex work, landed in the job because they look more feminine than their peers. Revathi mentions sex houses where she had to work. The houses there mostly employed women, but there were also houses run by hijras who hired hijras for sex work and tried to pass them off as women. A job outside begging, badhayi or sex work does not exist for them. She speaks about the community's anger at her for accepting a different job. They cursed her whenever she went to talk to them. They were angry that she was serving in an office because they believed that hijras are supposed to give badhayi and not work in offices.

One of the major abuse is violence and oppression from the hands of their own family. They were beaten in order to 'cure'. They were exiled or alienated from families. Revathi had to go through all these circumstances - abuse from family - denied of family property. The hijras were subjected to violent and brutal abuse- especially as sex workers. Revathi recounts an instance where she was picked up by a man and upon finding her as a hijra, he publically beat and humiliate her. She narrates a graphic scene where she was physically and sexually abused by a policeman. Hijras are in constant fear of rowdies who exploited them sexually and economically.

Revathi's guru in Bangalore was stabbed to death by a rowdy, when she refused to give him money. They were exploited within the community. She describes the intense competition within Hijras themselves for clients & the exploitation suffered in the hands of gurus often leading to fights among one another. For instance she tells us about Shakuntala whose guru claimed a hand in her income, even when she started leading an independent life.

A hijra cannot afford to fall in love. Love-relationships most often ends up with heart breaking incidents. Shakuntala was approached by a local rowdy in guise to be in love with her. He took advantage of her and demanded money from her. Revathi was in two relationships: at first with Babu, a film operator- even though liked her for her personality, leaves her once he finds she is a hijra. Then with a senior colleague at 'Sangama' and they got married but leaves her after a year.

Revathi, asks others to recognize and treat hijras as fellow humans, with the same hopes and desires as everybody else.

We want to live as women, and if we are granted the facilities that will enable us do so, we'll live as other women do. We were not born to beg or do sex work. Circumstances, faulty laws and social hatred have left us with no course but to beg and do sex work. Our parents begot us like they did other children. We are also human. (262)

The book is a powerful plea for us to radically reconsider what it means to be male and female at the same time as it urges us to seek the third way of transcending the rigid binary division between male and female and work towards a notion of humanness beyond and above gender is conventionally understood.

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The Impact of Africana Womanism in Select Works of Kamala Suraiyya

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Abstract

This paper explores and analyses the elements of Africana womanism. Kamala was among the first women in India to speak frankly about sex and negatively of marriage in a deeply conservative society. *My Story* instantly drew criticism after its release for being 'obscene' and designed to encourage adultery. Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately prioritizes race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk. All this will be discussed in detail in the paper.

Keywords: Africana Womanism, Black feminism, Afro centrism

Kamala Das is a reliable voice expressing the female born out of felt experiencing and true participation. Her poetry, though rooted in her personal crisis, private disgrace and failures, reflects the emotional, psychological and social crisis experienced by women at large. A part of her childhood was spent in her ancestral home in Malabar, Kerala and the other part in Calcutta where her father was posted for work. Kamala Das belonged to a family considered the literary royalty of Kerala. Her mother Balamani Amma was a famous poet and her grand uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon a respected

writer. Das' childhood as described in her autobiography was very culturally enriched. The book *My Story* is about her personal and professional experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society and her quest for love in its rightest form. Her writing consisted of vivid descriptions of menstruation, adolescence, love, lust, lesbian encounters, child marriage, infidelity and physical intimacy. She introduced her readers to the concept of female sexuality, a notion that was non-existent until then.

Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately arranges race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk.

The eroticism expressed in Das' poetry was merely an outgrowth of an insecurity born of not getting the love she yearned for—from her parents or her husband. Her father was always busy with his work at the automobile firm where he was employed, selling Rolls Royces, Humber's and Bentleys to Indian princes and their relatives. Her mother, she says, was unclear and indifferent and spent her time lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems in Malayalam. Her husband, an employee at the Reserve Bank of India, was 20 years older than her and turned to her mostly for sex. She talked of her 'brush with love' with an eighteen year old girl, right before Das was about to be married of. She talked of having to look for love 'outside its legal orbit' because she was unhappy in her loveless marriage. She talked with a bravery never seen before as she wrote unapologetically about everything the conservative Kerala society had managed to box in for very long. It managed to evoke such a

widespread reaction which was equal parts tremor and equal parts adoration that it has become a cult classic in the genre of Indian autobiographies ever since.

On being asked why her book shocked the Malayali audience, she felt that it never really did, that they were pretending to be shocked to prove their 'innocence'. She believed she was merely being vocal about things that had been happening for years. She was married off to Madhava Das, an employee at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) at the age of 15 and moved to Bombay with her husband. At a very young age, she had to find a way to pursue her passion for writing while being weighed down by the expectations of her husband, her family and the society at large of her 'duties' as a wife and mother. In 1973, her autobiography '*Ente Kadha*' (*My Story*) was released in Malayalam. It consisted of a gathering of her weekly columns in Malayalanadu that had already become a sensation across the state. Fifteen years later, it was translated into English with more text added, many parts rewritten and published with the title *My Story*. K Sachithananthan, in his forward for the book, concludes: "I cannot think of any other Indian autobiography that so honestly captures a woman's inner life in all its sad solitude, its desperate longing for real love and its desire for transcendence, its tumult of colours and its turbulent poetry" (xviii).

With her poems she tried to give voice to a generation of women who were confined to their households, and considered a product to be exchanged through marriage. She portrayed the women in her poems as human; with desires, pain and emotions just like men. With her poems she tried to give voice to a cohort of women who were confined to their households, and considered a commodity to be exchanged through marriage. She portrayed the women in her poems as human; with desires, pain and emotions just like men. Paradoxically,

the more she was disrobed of her fantasies, the more she took refuge in them. The more her husband disenchanted her of notions of love, the more she invented imaginary refuges for the immense love she wanted to give and receive. "Like alms looking for a begging bowl was my love which only sought for it a receptacle," she wrote. "At the hour of worship even a stone becomes an idol. I was perhaps seeking a familiar face that blossomed like a blue lotus in the waters of my dreams. It was to get closer to that bodiless one that I approached other forms and lost my way. I may have gone astray, but not once did I forget my destination... <https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/kamala-das-feminist-writer-was-so-much-more.html>)" Kamala Das says, that the female ego is not harmful to make dominated society. So she increases her agitation defining the oneness between the two worlds- one masculine, the other female. The Indian poets writing in English use English language rather efficiently for presenting effective pictures of India. In all respects, Indian civilization and culture are not at all omitted in their writing. Their approach is entirely different, but despite this fact they never do aloof and go reserved from Indian traditional way of thinking and writing as these people have started some new colour and vitality to literature in general and Indian literature in particular.

Her writing was both fantastical and feminist, but I think it was the fantasy that defined it and the feminism was merely incidental. As she wrote: "The essence of the writer eludes the non- writer. All that the writer reveals to such people are her oddities of dress and her emotional excesses. Finally, when the muscles of the mind have picked up enough power to read people's secret thoughts, the writer shies away from the invisible hostility and clings to her own type, those dreaming ones, born with a fragment of wing still attached to a shoulder". (<https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/kamala-das-feminist-writer-was-so-much-more.html>).

Kamala Das has achieved the most celebrity status. She is a major poet in her presentation, and the other poets do not possess the individuality that she achieved. In fact, many other contemporary Indian poets have sung songs in honour of the gender's love and expectations in her life- such poets as Shiv K.Kumar, Pritish Nandy, Nissim Ezekiel, R. Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra and A.K. Ramanujan- but in her emotional curve and lyrical rapture Kamala Das surpasses them all. The gender and discrimination is the citadel where her personal cares and anxieties, her own quandaries and predicaments, are safely anchored in her poems.

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Imposing Masculinities in *Lajwanti* and The *Ice-Candy Man*

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Abstract

Patriarchy, in simple terms, connotes the rule of the male head. The male member stands as the head of the family unit who remains accountable for the family. However, the complexity of the patriarchal ideology is due to its tenacity that normalises male domination and violence. Patriarchal ideology unquestionably affirms male supremacy over women and younger one's lives. Their existence and respectability is determined by factors that are dictated by men and male-driven culture. Norms and behaviours are set in a fashion that legitimates even the most irrational and violent nature of a man; while, women and her body become site of violence and domestication. The phallogocentric approach of the society has been victimising women since time immemorial; women remain at the mercy of the menfolk. Beginning from Sita in *The Ramayana* to *Draupadi* in *The Mahabharata*, women turn scapegoat in the clashes of male ego. The twentieth century too is a testimony for the victimisation of women during the conflicts and violence. Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Ice-Candy Man* and Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti* are narratives that are moving account of disturbing occurrences for women during the violence. The paper demonstrates the masculinity that licenses violence against women as portrayed in the chosen partition narratives.

Keywords: Patriarchy, domination, violence, conflicts, partition

Body holds a prominent position in the discourse on feminism, gender and sexuality. Women's body, as according to the feminist

theorists Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet, remain a major hurdle to women's liberation. Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* maintains inequality between women and men as based on biological differences in the body's reproductive functions that evolved over time into culturally based differences. Kate Millet in her seminal work *Theory of Sexual Politics* discusses the difference between gender and sex; and how they are interchangeably used by layman. She, in her essay, discusses the ways in which biological differences are exaggerated and bolstered to pave way for an unequal relationship between the man and woman. She delineates the ideological, biological, physiological and psychological factors that strengthens the differences between the two genders viz. man and woman. All said, body becomes the fundamental site of difference between the sexes. Further, the cultural meaning attached to the body in the patriarchal set up restricts and coerces women into inferiority. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* mentions that the 'body' is not a being but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. The patriarchal discourse on body manifests meaning in a fashion that legitimises gender hierarchy and promotes compulsory heterosexuality.

The discourse is pervasive enough to lend credibility to the cultural associations ascribed to each gender. The difference between male and female bodies is exaggerated through cultural practices as masculine and feminine bodies. Body increasingly embodies itself as social constructs with dictum of behaviours and roles appropriate to either of the sexes. The young girls and boys behaving differently to the societal norms and practices are policed into the acceptable behaviours expected of them. They are socialised into a culture that has different dictates for different sexes. The temperament, attitude

and role imbibed by the young ones in the growing years become the truth of their existence. Socialisation plays a pivotal role in grooming the man and woman in compliance with the strictures of patriarchy.

Feminine identity in a patriarchal society is unduly emphasised. Femininity in patriarchy epitomises the ideal of self-effacement, shyness, passivity, submissiveness, chastity, fidelity and loyalty to the ties. The stereotypical ideals of the patriarchal society, in regard to femininity, is upheld by moral policing and reinforcement of the ideals through reiteration of myths in respective faiths. The young girls grow to be the women listening to the stories of female characters that represent the said qualities expected of them. Sita of *The Ramayana*, Savitri of Satyavan Savitri, Helen of Troy, Eve of *Paradise Lost*, Damayanti are household names. Girls grow listening to their stories so as to internalise the consequences of adherence/defiance of the strictures of patriarchy. The stories of the idealised married women are purposefully deliberated to the young girls so as to restrict the possibilities of transcending the nuptial ties even for respite when in grief or agony. While the young girls are discouraged from reciprocating to their carnal desires anytime, man is hassle-free to pursue his desires. Chastity of women is of prime importance in patriarchy. The unmarried young girls are pursued by polygamous men if and only if, the woman is found or believed to be chaste. Monogamy was strictly imposed on the women while men's polygamous nature was far from debated. Monogamous life for a woman is the end-result of male ego who find it an assault on manhood if the woman were to free herself to pursue another man. The double standards of sexual morality practiced by the patriarchal society is exemplar of the subjugation of women.

While young girls in Asian societies, specifically, India and Pakistan are treated as temporal members at home, their lifespan is

majorly determined at the husband's household. Girls are raised in patriarchal societies with constant reminders about their obligation to filial connections; to remain virtuous in patriarchal terms so as to be the 'marriage material'. Her 'chaste' status was more important than her life. The family though treats her as a member to be parted from in due course of time, she is shouldered with the responsibility of upholding the family's repute. The family's repute is just another means to weigh down on her heavily and consequently disabling her from acting to her own free will. The 'chaste' status chokes unmarried and married women alike. Even if she becomes a victim of a sexual assault against her will, she bears the repercussions of the unfortunate tragedy. While the prospect of marriage is shut down for an unmarried young girl in the wake of such a tragedy, the married woman is equally shunned by her husband and maternal family.

The patriarchal times have testimonials evidencing the assault on women as a means to avenge a male ego that dejects failure. Humanity, since ages, have been witness to various conflicts. Conflicts come in various guises such as war between two nations, two continents or even two regions. India as a nation has had its moments of conflicts; from being colonised by Portugal to East India Company, the partition and the continuing feud with few of the neighbouring countries. Though the said events find a mention in the historiography of India, the turmoil that the politically-motivated events caused in the individuals' lives who lived through those times found lesser mention. However, the keen eyes and expressive words documented them in the stories, novels, plays and poems. War narratives and partition narratives have capaciously captured the trauma the incident inflicted upon the individuals' lives. While humanity in totality remained affected by the political phases of the nation, women remained doubly

tormented due to the outbreak of violence. The torture inflicted on women had more to do with the stereotyped masculinities.

Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Lajwanti* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Ice-candy Man* are partition narratives that primarily focus on the victimisation of women in the wake of political conflicts. "Lajwanti" is a short story of the young woman Lajwanti who was abducted during the partition. The narrative begins with the mention of measures and initiatives taken up by the volunteers towards rebuilding the lives of the afflicted ones. While people were quick to join voluntary organisations that worked towards rebuilding the refugees' lives, there were little attempts at bringing back the abducted women to their homes. The society expresses dissatisfaction at the attempts of restoring abducted women into their respective homes. Apart from a handful of them and the committee headed by Sunderlal whose wife Lajwanti also was abducted, the rest of the community remained sceptical about bringing back the abducted women. Miss Mridula Sarabhai in the story arranged for the exchange of abducted women in India and Pakistan. The scene during the exchange of abducted women leaves the readers teary-eyed as most of the women stood stranded on the face of rejection by their close ones. The women lost their individual identity and were reduced to being "the old", "the young" and "the young and beautiful".

Except for Lajwanti, most of the women who were brought in during the exchange remained rejected. Sunderlal's acceptance of Lajwanti overjoys her. She was elated on being treated with respect unlike the tenure before abduction. Sunderlal, in their initial days of marriage, bet her and humiliated her for the silliest of the reasons. But, he regretted his behaviour after her abduction and decided on treating her with reverence and respect. As promised to himself, he treated her like a queen and never abused her. Lajwanti, initially

overjoyed, increasingly grew uncomfortable with the unwanted silence about the unfortunate incident that she became a victim of. Sunderlal discouraged her from speaking her grief which choked her gradually. In fact, the story has a mention of Sunderlal's reaction to seeing Lajwanti hale and healthy contrary to what he expected her to be. He failed to see the grief in her eyes which she wanted to wash away by speaking of the dreadful incident. Lajwanti though fortunate to return to home was not fortunate enough to return to her old life.

The story has mentions of reactions of the orthodox traditionalists who objected to the rescue of the women stranded across the borders. The citation of excerpt from *The Ramayana* found a mention among the traditionalists to justify the rejection of abducted women. Lord Rama abandoning Sita after overhearing the conversation of a dhobi was lauded. There was a continual insistence to follow the same. Reactions to the Rehabilitation Committee for Abducted Women implies the hesitation to receive back women who were possibly sexually assaulted by other men. Women's chastity is largely emphasised over rescuing her life. Lajwanti's concept of husband too talks about the stereotypes of masculinity. Her dream of marrying a man who would physically abuse her normalises male violence on women's body. Further, the abduction of women on either sides was an attempt to assault one's rivals by defaming their women. Women like Lajwanti become victim amidst the clashes of male ego. Sunderlal's own inner conflict and disappointment on seeing a healthy Lajwanti despite all his claims to embrace the innocent women hints at the stereotyped attitudes that are deeply ingrained in the minds. Even as he attempts at transcending the notions of femininity and masculinity ascribed by patriarchal society, he is unable to completely undo the values imbibed till then.

Rejection of abducted women demonstrate the importance given to the bodily changes of women over what they feel from within. The external factors affecting the body is of priority in the phallogocentric society. Women's biological body becomes the prime focus in the patriarchal society. Women in phallogocentric culture is locked in her body. The process of turning the body into a cultural sign turns women into symbols of purity, fertility, sacrifice, family and social honour.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Ice-Candy Man* is a novel presented through the eyes of Lenny, a Parsee girl afflicted by polio who sees the outbreak of violence after the announcement of partition. People of different faiths lived harmoniously until the proposal of partition that disrupted the lives of common man thereafter. The communal hatred, the sexual assault of women and public frenzy follows the decision of partition. Lenny, the young narrator shares a close association with her Ayah, a mother figure to her. Ayah is an 18 year old Hindu girl whose name is Shanta. She is young and beautiful and have a lot of admirers among all the religion. Lenny's Ice-candy man is one among the admirers. Ayah conducts herself gracefully despite loud professions of love for her. However, the admiration for Ayah vanishes amidst the communal frenzy that unleashed post the announcement of partition. Lenny's visit to the village where people of different religion lived in harmony changes dramatically thereafter. The riots in Pindo turn horrifying with only few of them left behind to grieve the death of the closed ones.

Lenny remained mostly unaffected by the riots until she accidentally betrays Ayah who is dragged out of the house by Ice-Candy man whose love for her had changed into hatred after the communal clashes. Ice-candy man leads a Muslim mob to Lenny's house and has Ayah abducted. Ayah is nowhere seen. Lenny keeps worrying about Ayah who is later discovered by godmother who rescues her from Kotha. Lenny's aunt and godmother involve in taking

care of 'fallen' women. The abduction and raping of women was considered as means of political and religious revenge towards the members of opposite community. Attack on women aimed at assault on the honour of the community since women were treated as carriers of culture and embodiment of honour and purity of the community/religion. Though Ice-candy man's role in abduction and sexual assault of Ayah was a part of communal riots, the readers don't fail to recognize the individual jealousy of unable to have her as the reason for his attack on Ayah. He was avenging the assault of his ego that was hurt because of Ayah's cold responses to his love advances. Though Ayah is rescued, she is not the same person anymore. The trauma of the incident drained her from within.

Women's body in both the narratives becomes means of inscribing power relations and as a symbol to assault on the rival community. The cultural meanings attached to women's body becomes a curse to her as she becomes a battle ground of opposite forces. Women's stand for self is viewed as a threat to masculinity.

Lajwanti's return as a healthy woman stalls Sunderlal for a minute as he is unable to come in terms with the fact that she was doing well for herself in his absence. Male monopoly over woman's body was so customary in the times that Sunderlal is unable to bring himself to listen to her physical abuse by another man. He doesn't want to listen that his personal asset is intruded by an outsider since women were believed to be male's possession. A woman protecting her life at the stake of chastity is viewed as disgrace to femininity and threat to masculinity. Rejection of abducted woman suggests the said. Ayah being assaulted by Ice-candy man implies his vengeance. Her rejection pricked his masculinity and he looked for a means to avenge his cause. Communal riot just brought up a reason for the same. Men like him saw assault on womenfolk of the rival community as bringing about

disgrace to the community. Women continues to be victimised because of the stereotypical images of masculinity andfemininity.

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Cultural Suffocation in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*

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Abstract

Anita Desai's novels are populated by women who are in continuous search for the meaning and value of life. The existential struggles of the women form the core of Anita Desai's novels. Her characters refuse to surrender their individual selves and try to swim against the current of the river called life. Their inability to compromise and surrender inevitably results in isolated loneliness. The female protagonists of Desai are conscious of their individuality. This paper highlights the plight of the protagonist Anamika engulfed in a cultural suffocation. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) is the delicate web of family conflict. The title itself is equally meaningful or meaningless (i.e.) they are just the same. Anamika, though bright and beautiful, happens to be a typical stereotypical character as she does not raise her voice against any sort of discrimination and suppressive or abusive act done to her. She is so brilliant in her studies that she bags a scholarship to oxford. But her parents do not even think of sending her to oxford. No woman in their family had gone to college. Even when she meets a tragic end, the parents do not interfere and the society upholds the rules that govern it. The apathetic society does not care for lives instead gives importance to customs and rules. Anamika sacrifices her life to cultural suffocation, conventional hiccups, and moral codes. Anamika, as a passive victim of never-changing Chauvinistic

oppression shows an unquestioning acceptance to traditional sex roles that nurtures the destruction of women to nothing.

Keywords: Subjugation, Cultural Suffocation, Discrimination, Conventional, Oppression.

Anita Desai's novels are peopled by women who are in the perpetual quest for meaning and value of life. The existential struggle of the women, who refuse to float along with the current, forms the core of Anita Desai's novels. Her characters refuse to surrender their individual selves. Their inability to compromise and surrender inevitably results in isolated loneliness. Her deepest interest is in the life of the mind, particularly of her feminine protagonists, which enables to see the Indian woman adequately for the 'inside', her works have unconsciously contributed to the feminine cause, and expressions of inner preoccupations and of the modern idea of building a society freed from male domination. This paper highlights the plight of the protagonist Anamika engulfed in cultural suffocation.

The female protagonists of Desai are conscious of their individuality. Desai in her novels explores the ways and means by which the protagonist would find a way of living, which could provide their freedom and self-dignity. She views the struggle of her protagonists in the context of the human struggle for survival. She holds a mirror of life and in the process she is unable to explore the mystery of human existence.

In Anita Desai's novels, life is depicted as it really is - life, as a rule of the upper-middle class which she knows very well and which she can treat sympathetically. Her stories are as to how she views life, by giving authenticity and validity of her own to her works. This ample knowledge of life is obtained through direct observations and insights. Her careful observations help to make her treatment of

events, actions and characters more realistic. Desai herself states in an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia:

"In countless, small ways, scenes and settings certainly belong to my life. Many of the minor characters and incidents are also based on real life. But the major character and the major events are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters and happenings. One can use the rawmaterial of life only very selectively. It is common among writers to pick out something from real life and develop their situation around that, while there are others who start from some real experience which continuously grows in their imagination. You use it as a base but don't confine yourself to it". (Times of India, 1979)

Desai points out that women themselves build their card- houses of happiness and fulfilment by those attitudes and then miss the real values of life, the pride, and happiness in building up individualism. She must satisfy her inner self first, through whatever role she intends to play, and then only she can achieve success in the relationships established with others.

As a novelist she is acquainted with the dilemma of the modern woman who has to continue to play the role of the propagator of the human race and housewife and also that of a human being with a vocation, seeking full expression of her personality. According to her, the novels are not meant to explain theories of philosophy and psychology, but her involvement in the upbringing of women who are seen as worst sufferers, highly suppressed, and oppressed by social tantalization or marital discord.

Anita Desai in many ways is a representative Indian woman novelist in English. One of the major fields of interest for Anita Desai is to show her readers how the characters in her novels react to the

various situations that confront them. She deals with all the minor details with a very keen sense of observation and hence things are made very clear to us. Even the unimportant details are made very important. She has succeeded in describing the beauty and sordidness of the nature in which her protagonists live. Her attempts to portray individuals, unique in taste and behaviour convey a secret sense of life that draws a distinct line of demarcation from others.

Goddesses (female) are adored and worshipped on one side, whereas wives or women, on the other side are slighted and abused. Women tend to remain, calm, suppressed and adjust as they abide by the advice of elders in order to maintain or bring about peace in the family. This suppression and adjustment to those suppressions turn out in such a way that the male takes advantage of the female and hence they are being dominated by them.

The feminine mystique says that femininity is so “mysterious and intuitive and close to the creator and origin of life, that man-made sciences may never be able to understand it.” (Frieden 38)

The women in literature are very much contented to play the roles of Sita, Savitri and Shakuntala. They are gentle and forgiving, self-effacing and self-sacrificing as it is the real life. There are also many male writers who bring out the feminine representation of women - the subservient wife, the evil temptress, and the doting mother. Few contemporary writers have such feminine characters in their novels. The dominance of patriarchal attitude and complexity of caste, class, and race in India have been responsible for subjecting women to feminine roles. John Ruskin opines that in general the task of the woman is to serve man and the family through "womanly guidance", exercises some vague and remote good influence on everyone, and dispense a bit of charity from time to time. It is to this end that education should prepare her... It is sufficient that a woman

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be well-intentioned and a model listener: "A man ought to know any language or science he learns thoroughly; while a woman ought to know the same language or science only so far as may enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasures and in those of his best friends." (Millet, 96-97)

Fasting, Feasting (1999) is the delicate web of family conflict. The title itself is equally meaningful or meaningless (i.e.) they are just the same. Uma, the main protagonist is the most subdued, rather a crushed member of the Indian family. She is lost in the jungle of duties—parents, family, siblings, country—all these ties, often oppressive, comes with one's birth, not by choice but there is surely some way out of the darkness and happiness into a cheering sunlit world.

Women have no category, says Beauvoir, she is merely a projection of male fantasies and fears. The cultural representation, which is the work of men, is available in myth, religion, literature, and popular culture. Women have learned to dream through the dream of men by internalizing these definitions. Hence by renouncing autonomy, a true woman accepts herself as the other for man by making herself an object.

The protagonist Anamika is Lawyer Bakuls' daughter, who has exemplary physical beauty and mental sharpness that makes her win a British scholarship. Her manly, demeanour and conduct are so graceful.

"Even the adults looked on Anamika's glossy head, her thick dark braids and her big dreamy eyes, and smiled, sometimes sadly as if thinking how their own daughters and daughters-in-law could never measure up to this blessed one... Uncles and grandfathers liked to have Anamika near them, ask her about her school and studies, for it was the astonishing truth that Anamika was not only pretty, and good, but an outstanding student as well." (FF68)

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She is not only lovely but also good at studies, she wins a scholarship to Oxford but her parents look upon the letter of acceptance as a trump card which shall be useful in their search for a husband for her. Her scholarship wins her a husband, who is not only an extraordinary person but is also aware of his superiority. In a way, she is an instrument for her husband to enhance his superiority, but he in turn doesn't have any love for her. She becomes pregnant but she has an abortion as a result of beating by her mother-in-law.

"What the mother-in-law said was that she always had Anamika sleep beside her, in her own room, as if she were a daughter, her own child. Only that night Anamika had insisted on sleeping in her own room. She must have planned it, plotted it all. What Anamika's family said was that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika's destiny." (FF 151)

But destiny has in store for her apathy from her husband's side. Cruelty and beating by her mother-in-law result in abortion, later infertility, and finally death. Anamika, though bright and beautiful, happens to be a typical stereotypical character as she does not raise her voice against any sort of discrimination and suppressive or abusive act done to her. Anamika - the lovely, docile, intelligent, and modest cousin of Uma - presents an example of sheer sacrifice of young, talented life at the altar of the male-dominated society:

She was simply lovely as a flower is lovely, soft, petal skinned, bumblebee - eyed, pink - lipped, always on the verge of bubbling dove - like laughter, loving smiles, and with a good nature like radiance about her wherever she was there was peace, contentment, wellbeing. (FF 67)

Her parents are helpless and do not take any initiative to reach out to her. Even when she meets a tragic end, society upholds the

rules that govern it. When Anamika was experiencing hell, her parents did not interfere. The apathetic society does not care for lives instead gives importance to customs and rules. To quote Simon de Beauvoir:

One of their distinguishing traits is resignation. Women are born to suffer 'they say, Its life - Nothing can be done about it'. Their resignation inspires the patience often admired in women. They are capable of stoical courage when circumstances demand it, lacking the males' aggressive audacity; many women distinguish themselves by their calm tenacity in passive resistance. (597)

To her, marriage has turned out to be domestic slavery, and when she realizes that she could not give birth to a child she pulls back until she commits suicide. In her own terms, academically, Anamika had been a success, whereas her failure in marriage is a result of her subaltern position as a woman in society.

But Anamika's character is not the one with which a Bombaite girl of similar talent can wish to identify herself. She is so brilliant in her studies that she bags a scholarship to Oxford. But her parents do not even think of sending her to Oxford. No woman in their family had gone to college. Though Anamika was lucky to get an offer from Oxford, destiny had other things in store. She is shown leading a torturous life after marriage.

Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by or approved - or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for his family which was large so that meals were eaten in shifts - first the men, then the children, finally the women. She herself ate the remains in the pots before scouring them. If the pots were not properly scoured, so they heard, her mother-in-law threw them on

the ground and made her do them all over again. When Anamika was not scrubbing or cooking, she was in her mother-in-law's room, either massaging that lady's feet or folding and tidying her clothes. She never went out of the house except to the temple with other women. (FF 70-71)

All of a sudden news reaches that Anamika is dead. She either commits suicide as reported to the police or is burnt to death by her mother-in-law as the neighbour's gossip.

Financial freedom is not women's cup of tea. They are reduced to mere objects of possession. They take the role of brides to enter into the household of their husbands and get subjugated till they are exhausted and women like Anamika end their lives committing suicides or suicide committed. The lives of women are entrapped in marriage - an institution that makes both of them hold the responsibility towards procreating and rearing up children to enliven the pattern of subjugating women again to be married to men. Also to procure jobs that gives assurance of a decent living to support their families. Tradition plays the role of tyranny and it is always cruel in claiming the lives of victims like Anamika.

Cultural suffocation is all about the feeling - sensing of power that inflates egos and the monomania of the individuals who constantly live under the illusion that society demands such living conditions. If not life would be meaningless for them. Such an environment suffocates and hampers the growth of the individual, and their creativity minified. Anamika has adopted tolerance. Anamika sacrifices her life to cultural suffocation, conventional hiccups, and moral codes. Anamika, as a passive victim of never-changing chauvinistic oppression shows an unquestioning acceptance to traditional sex roles that nurtures the destruction of women to nothing.

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An Ecofeminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

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Abstract

Ecofeminist reading of women's writings probes the interplay between women and nature in literature and deals with parallel relationship between the subjugation of women and deterioration of nature. Both nature and woman resemble in terms of their generative capability and nurturing character. Instead of co-existing with nature and woman rejecting anthropocentric and biased attitude towards genders, the human and man have exploited nature and women since ages. For a balanced and harmonious existence on the Earth, the preservation of nature and dignity of women are the utmost requirement. With such a background, it is important to study Ecofeminism i.e. a political and a philosophical movement that integrates feminist and ecological concerns in the patriarchal order of modern social set-up. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the ecofeminist characteristics present in select novels of Indian writer Anita Desai and Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. The two female writers despite having diverse cultural backgrounds exhibit the ubiquity of depletion of ecology and suppression of women in the modern world. The objective of the present study is to show that women and nature have the same destiny throughout the world.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Women, Nature, Subjugation, Deterioration

Ecofeminism is a term coined by the French writer Françoise D'Eaubonne which refers to a philosophical and political movement that combines ecological and feminist concerns, regarding both as a result of patriarchy. Ecofeminist critics assert that man dominates women and humans dominate nature and consider the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature as interconnected phenomena. Nature is portrayed as a woman because of its fundamental functions encompassing reproduction and nurturing. Since they were perceived closer to nature, women were discarded with it by a more mechanical culture. The same relationship made women the best advocates to talk about nature and environmental problems. Susan Buchingham argues that,

The essentialist argument that underpinned some of the North American and Australian analysis proposed that women had a particular relationship with nature by virtue of their biology. Predominantly as actual or potential child bearers and that this proximity to nature qualified them to speak more eloquently on nature's behalf. (1470)

Atwood's 1972 novel *Surfacing* is the best example of an ecofeminist novel that delves into the nature of the oppression of women and nature. The novel highlights Atwood's ecofeminist attitudes regarding the destruction of the feminine and the natural worlds at the same time. The female protagonist of this novel succeeds in healing her wounds through her total assimilation with nature.

The unnamed narrator started her journey with her lover and two friends to look for her missing father. The trip soon transformed into the narrator searching for herself. The wilderness she was travelling through was described as a destroyed land that was spoiled by the hand of modernization. The tourists and developers who went

into that raw place introduced new changes and "developments" that lead to the destruction of the natural landscapes that mark a great importance for the life of the narrator. The novel's protagonist starts to realize that the relationship between nature and men is a relation of exploitation; men use nature for their own benefits. From the very first lines of the book, the narrator shows instances of a dying nature as she states, "I can believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire" (3), the narrator relates the death of birches to a disease. Even though it doesn't show, but having this disease spreading from the south proves that it is a social disease.

I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place."- (*Surfacing*, 236)

Margaret Atwood, in an interview with Geoff Hancock, states that the word Atwood means, "pearl of the woods" from "atter wode" (212). Her first name also means pearl. This double association with nature, of the land and of water, relates her intimately to the natural world as does the intriguing and engaging body of her work.

The writing and publication of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* coincided with the emergence of the feminist and ecological movements and reflects these major issues of its time. The novel introduces issues pertaining to feminism and environmentalism; it constitutes a representative literary example of ecological feminism and could even be read as a 'prototypical' ecofeminist text. Patrick Murphy designates it as, "one of the first of the current generation of ecofeminist novels" (qtd. in Hartmann 98). Jaidev opines that, "so rich in its texture and so disturbing in its implications is Margaret Atwood's short novel *Surfacing* that no single study can do justice

to it. A feminist text which transcends all 'isms' including feminism; a romantic novel which is hard and anti-romantic in its treatment of such romantic themes as nature. a book whose pagan and ecological concerns will move many Indians, especially those who endow water, earth, fire, birds, trees, and animals with a sacred status. *Surfacing* is easily one of the most impressive and relevant texts of our times" (276). The novel can be studied from many angles and a very rewarding one is to study it with relation to ecofeminism. In the novel Atwood focuses on the relationship between woman and nature as a possible means for women's self-discovery.

The relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature is at the center of the novel. The society now devaluates whatever is associated with women and nature at the same basis. The scientific, industrial, and technological practices and institutions that prevail in social set-up now, push nature into a corner and make it unimportant in the lives of humans. It is only used or exploited for the benefit of Men; nature is subjected to the necessities of culture.

Surfacing is a novel of her self-discovery as Cristina Nicolaescu states that Atwood makes it clear that the unnamed protagonist sets up an inner journey through the nature and during this journey she challenges the idea of women's and nature's inferiority against men and culture. The heroine undergoes a deep process of self-analysis throughout her investigation. The struggle to find her father becomes an excuse for the inner journey which leads her to natural world and helps her to find herself at the end.

The narrator dotes on the importance of nature as she remembers the peaceful childhood, she had even during a war period. Thanks to nature, the narrator's war descriptions were just imaginations she draws in her head from what her brother told her. The destructive

world caused by the war was just a dangerous myth that nature protected her from. The narrator of *Surfacing* seems to respect the rules that were made by the early societies who have more respect for nature and all natural elements.

As her love for Joe fades away, she started to lose her faith not just in civilization, but even in human communication away from nature. Her decision to live in nature was derived from her faith that the natural world is the only place where she can be fully understood even without talking. While she melts into nature, "She feels herself to be powerful, for she is natural, human and saintly at the same time. She is no more the same person whom one saw at the beginning of the novel she understands the essential pain in the life of her parents and realizes that this is the only truth in her life" (Bhalla, 2012. 5); being in nature allowed a woman, who was wrecked before, to be strong, free and confident. She chose to abandon the "civilized" life of culture and turned to wilderness to live in peace and harmony with a nature that is considered her source of power. Monica Seger (2010) insists as well that novels like *Surfacing* present "scenarios in which women physically give themselves back to nature in an act of purification, identifying nature as the right, "natural, environment for a woman".

The ecofeminist reading of the novel *Fire on the Mountain* depicts nature as a looking glass which mirrors the alienation, barrenness, and desolation of the protagonist Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul represents a hypersensitive character who is a true emblem of Indian woman as a wife and a mother who sacrifices her personal desires and freedom of choice for her husband and children. The protagonist in the novel *Fire on the Mountain* spends all her life being a dutiful wife and an ideal mother whose duty is to obey her husband and love unconditionally her children regardless of her personal

happiness. A socially ideal image of Nanda leads to suppression of her personal desires and ambitions. The imposed duties and sacrificial nature overburden her heart gradually. Despite being an obedient wife, as the society expects from a woman, she faced betrayal of her husband in the form of his extra marital affair with Miss Davidson which further forces her to question her own abilities which have caused her husband's extra marital affair. The death of her husband finally gave her "discharge" from all the duties she has been performing not out of love but out of obligation. "After the death of her husband she has been so glad when it was over..... Discharge me. I have discharged all my duties" (FOM 30).

The word husband does not stand for a person who takes all her responsibility of emotional and financial support but it creates void of emotions in the life of Nanda Kaul. Despite enjoying all the privileges being wife of Mr. Kaul, her heart always desires for love and emotional fulfilment. After suffering the betrayal of her husband and society, Nanda finally takes refuge in Carignano in Kasauli. There she establishes space of her own and embraces a life of solitude, privacy, and confinement. Carignano is known to be place of remoteness and barrenness. It is said that very few people know about the existence of this place. The barrenness of Carignano and emptiness of Nanda's heart are inter-connected. The inner state of mind of Nanda is well portrayed by the natural surroundings of Carignano in which she is living. Nanda's living outside in her old age in isolation in a Himalayan town is not because of any religion or social responsibilities but "out of vengeance for a long duty and obligation. (FOM 30)

The place in which Nanda seeks shelter also suffers exploitation due to the human centric activities. The Pasteur Institute is a good example of the oppression and violence of non- human species. The

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institution was opened for the treatment of dog-bite and the cantonment area was the home of this institution. Normally one would associate it with humane studies, yet it stresses the abuse and exploitation of animals for purposes of research. "They have rabbits and guinea pigs there, too, many animals. They empty the bones and ashes of dead animals down into the ravine." (FOTM 44). The line is a good example of the human intrusion into the natural world of animals. They have been treated as objects for experimentation. The humans are using the innocent animals to ensure the efficiency and adequacy of the newly invented medicines. The anthropocentric attitude of modern human has reduced nature to a subordinate entity which has become the victim of destructive attitude of mankind. The interference of army and research scientists dominated the natural world and finally fire completes the gradual destruction of the place. As Nanda says, "Too many tourists. Too much Army". (FOM 57)

As the solitude and serenity of Carignano was disturbed by the tourists, research scholars and army men, the solitude of Nanda was troubled by the unwanted visit of Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda. Her arrival made the protagonist recall her duty-bound life from which she wants to escape. As Nanda Kaul says to Raka, "Its really sad. One would have liked to keep it as it was, a-aheaven, you know. The biological differences of a woman from a male and non-reactionary nature of nature have granted the limitless freedom to men and humans to victimize and exploit them.

The title of the novel *Fire on the Mountain* also symbolizes the depletion of natural sources with fire. In Desai's novel poor people suffer the consequences of fire in the forest as it burns their only shelters. The fire in the ending of the novel symbolizes the burning of suppressed emotion of female characters as well. The emotions and

desires which were suppressed from long time were burnt eventually as the female characters failed to fulfill them. Fire also destroys so many plants and animals which proves destructive for the existence of nature as well. So the image of fire depicts the destruction of female desires on one hand and nature's living being on the other.

Conclusion: To conclude, ecofeminism is an ideology which exhibits the parallel relationship of women's oppression and the exploitation of nature in the hands of men and humans. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* depicts the destruction of raw form of nature by human activities and also the oppression of the protagonist who is unnamed. The female character of Margaret Atwood does not want to replace male dominance with female domination. She only wants harmony and balance between the genders. She also finds the human intrusion in undeveloped Island, Northern Quebec unjust. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* shows the gradual destruction of Kasauli hills by man-oriented activities and its eventual destruction with the forest fires. It also shows the brutal death of the protagonist who strangles herself after failing to cope up with the male dominated world. Both the novels display the inter connectedness of women and nature. The male oriented society has reduced the females to the subordinate position and anthropocentric attitude of humans have crushed the natural world for their own personal benefit. This disharmony has troubled the natural world which is harmful for our coming generation.

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Ecofeminism and Resistance: Locating Power and Dominance in Sarah Joseph's Novels

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Greta Gaard and Patric Murphy define ecofeminism as a "practical movement for social change arising out of struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the 'maldevelopment' and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism." (1998, 2).

"Forests have always been central to Indian civilization. They have been worshipped as Aranyani, the Goddess of The Forest, the primary source of life and fertility, and the forest as a community has been viewed as a model for societal and civilizational evolution. The diversity, harmony and self sustaining nature of the forest formed the organizational principles guiding Indian civilization; the Aranya sanskriti (roughly translatable as 'the culture of the forest or the forest culture') was not a condition of primitiveness, but one of conscious choice" (Shiva 53).

In addition to articulating a phenomenological perspective, the above quotes compliment the ecocritical behaviour entranced by the magnitude of power and a desire to possess. They fit the patriarchal paradigm in their obsession with the mechanical and represents the patriarchy and its efforts to control everything. Ecofeminism as an ideology and theoretical discipline, emerged in 1974, with the coinage of the very term by eminent French feminist Francoise d' Eaubonne in her famous book *Feminism or Death*. She has emphatically explained the basic tenets between the gender binaries, re-evaluated

the patriarchal or non-linear structures in relation to environmental issues. Later on, in the late twentieth century, ecofeminism ushered as a diverse movement, a distinct mode of thinking as well as activism, where all forms of oppression and dominance, degradation of women and nature found voice. As a literary and rhetorical form of criticism, it raises questions concerning topical problems of contemporary times, theoretical intersections which provides insight into the hierarchical subjugation, complexities and torture upon nature and or metaphorically woman. Related to this is the cultural ecofeminism which celebrates the association of women with nature whereas radical ecofeminism rebukes patriarchal society which suppresses both women and nature. Sarah Joseph's "Oorukaval", which is translated by well established translator Vasanthi Sankaranayanan titled as "The Vigil" is a mythological retelling of 'Angada'- a peripheral animal character in the famous epic Ramayana. The narrator takes a traditional theme, locates it in a cultural context and gives it a contemporary concern. In this sense "The Vigil" turns into a treatise which addresses the global issues and not the times of a particular place. She introduces contemporary feminists, ecological, socio political outlook to the epic, rather than giving a primitive overview. "Gift in the Green" underscores eco feminists' critiques that poise the monological threads of patriarchal systems that exploit both human and non-human. "Gift in the Green", is the translated work of the narrator, was published and translated in the year 2011.

Plumwood notes, (1999, 211), how the Oppression of western dualism is an interwoven web of domination; it naturalized male/female, human/nature, mind/body hierarchies, and it supports the inferiorization of many other groups of humans seen as more closely, identified with nature. Turning attention to the Gift of the Green, the narrator tells about Aathi, which is an island surrounded with its

mysterious natural beauty, hidden and untouched from/by the common people. Kumaran, who abandoned the island Aathi seeking a better prospect, comes back to Aathi after a long gap in pursuit of material gain. He looks for profit in Aathi. This return points to the anthropocentric view about the ecological injustice in the novel. The motif of the novel revolves around various kinds of ecological destruction, degradation of the natural environment, concrete invasions. The narrator makes clear that desecration of life- of any form- may have ramifications beyond human speculations and understanding, she, nonetheless, advocates the commonality of suffering and intersubjective experience influence and implemented by insidious power. When reading the story we witness the symbolic representation of several things. The unique practice and eco-friendly culture of the island Aathi, advocates the dignity of all life forms, regardless of the size or scope, but unlike Kumaran, who initiates a symbolic intersubjectivity between nature as victim and oppressor to be imagined and felt. There are picaresque descriptions of disease, pollution, migration, torture, displacement and nature's form of resistance to all of them. This process manifests itself through the sympathetic practices based on respect towards nature, compassion and mutual love and care towards nature. Selling and buying of lands in Aathi, is strictly prohibited for outsiders. Greedy people looking for lands are also not allowed, thus it shows the sustainable development and use of natural resources and aims for a holistic development in spite of pervasiveness of power. Nature also here empowers people. People not abiding by the island's rule have to face the cruel catastrophic situation. For Sarah, here in the novel, nature was itself a home. There are several life elements which actually are evident in every page. There was no definite distinction between the natural caregiver and natural caretaker. Private- public, outside-inside, self -other all were the same. Since there are limits to natural

resources, she believed, there had to be limits to human consumption and greed. Not only did she voice against the exploitation of nature and natural resources, she also drew a parallel with women being exploited, an apt example of 'écriture féminine'. Worried about human greed and abuse of power, Sarah opposed the justification of urbanization in the name of growth over preservation of nature as Aathi. The native people of Aathi make their livelihood by engaging in alternate farming (pukkali farming) and fishing, primarily. The water of Aathi is so pristine and transparent which provides the people with abundant fish and mussels. People live inseparable with nature and in return nature provides them in abundance. In explaining Kumaran's experience with nature, the author explains;

"Watching the willow leaves fall noiselessly on the water, then float towards and accumulate at the bank, he would weave the tapestry of his life - interpretations. He would listen to the blessing of flowers, watch the moss dance, the glow worms emerge from their hideouts, and read the trails of tiny worms. His mind would clear; his lungs fill with a new vitality and his stomach with heavenly happiness". (Joseph, 25).

Advocating compassion for common humanity and common women, Sarah Joseph in her novel objects to anthropocentric conventions by incorporating sexist male characters such as Kumaran. For instance, he is willing to exploit the land and subordinate it to human desires. Such an incident is also apparent in the 20th century British novelist, Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Lolly Willows" (1926). She has also created such male characters who described the land as "with progressive gestures". While reading the novels one marvels at how Sarah turns mundane realities and prosaic utterances of power into a poignant saga of nature. He then carefully depicts the

suppression of women in contemporary times, showing dominance. Remembering Michael Foucault, he states power is omnipresent, flowing in each and every direction. Following that, the daily denial to maintain integrity with nature is the root cause of ecological destruction. The natural imagery so carefully implemented in the text finds its culmination with nature gaining and manifesting her own power over tyranny. It lines a parallel between habitual control of Earth and abuse of females. The narrator probably knows that power, dominance and sex has remained one of the the most available form of mystical oneness between opposites in modern times but she witness how patriarchal society and dominance lays waste the prospect of fragile unity. The prospect of calmness, wisdom and coexistence is thwarted everywhere. The novel thus not only gives us a profound and distinctive description of ecofeminist problem but also offers a diagnosis and prognosis. Opposite elements that have split into parallel but disengaged sets of one- sidedness should combine again in that integrity which is of a corporeal, open ended, dynamic, sensitive and participating transcendence. And thus can be achieved through re- mending, re- integrating, the world of numerous awareness and the world of material being (Terblanche 2016,78). Again, analyzing the position of nature and women in patriarchy, Karen J. Warren (2000) bring forths again the hierarchical dualisms, a masked form of power as up/down dialectic and speaks, among other things, feminises nature, viewing it as subordinateandinferior, thus authorizing the power and dominance. Referring to symbolism and imagery deeply embedded in the human unconscious, Warren (2000, 27) reiterates that it is " Mother Nature (not Father Nature), that is raped, mastered, conquered, possessed, mined. Nature is simultaneously ' aligned with many stereotypes of women", though eventually emerging as a visionary countering the masculinists developments of the narrative. This is also what Plumwood (1993,19)

encourages ecological feminists to do: counter the relationship between nature and power. Warren's (2000) ecofeminist philosophy is not only a way to problematize patriarchy as an unjustifiable practice of domination but a way to suggest alternative practice and approaches. Kanjimanthu's perseverance and indomitable spirit to save her land are depicted in a heart rending manner in the novel. Shailaja, who is married to Chandramohan of Chakkamkandam is the other major female character who discloses a strong connection between women and nature and their alienation and exploitation from men. Sarah Joseph also brings out the water- life in Aathi community as an exemplar of the proposed integral and primordial vision. In the book, she writes:

"There had been a covenant between them and the water. The fish, the frogs, the crabs, the oysters, the birds, the butterflies, the reptiles, the grass, the bushes and the mangrove forest were all signatories to that water covenant. You will give us water and livelihood. We shall work with you and take care of you". (201)

Martin Heidegger has written, "Man is not the lord of the universe. Man is the shepherd of Being" (Glazebrook 22). Therefore, human beings have the moral responsibility as well as authority to ensure that every being and species on earth has their needed and essential share of food, water, air, shelter and dignity. That is confirmed by Barnhill (1) who elaborates that Nature has unqualified intrinsic value, with humans having no privileged place in nature's web. Emphasis is placed on value at holistic levels, such as populations, ecosystems, and the Earth as a whole, rather than a fragile entity. Again, the close tie between humans and nature is clearly depicted in the words of the omniscient narrator. To be a man, one must have a body made firm by working hard on the land, tilling and sowing. To know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first, the mind of the land' (Joseph,20). The Vigil directly links the patriarchal dominance

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and violence against nature and of which animals are an indomitable part. There is also a huge ecological destruction with the construction of the Sethu, as being described in the text, to regain it from Lanka. Connection to the natural world is particularly evident here, as the construction is the pervasive result of uprooting of numerous trees, cutting of rocks and hills etc. It questions the habitat of millions of creatures as it at the same time destroys their home. This is physical power exercised upon them. Rama then demanded sacrifice from Sita which is an example of state power operating in personal lives. Throughout history men have in every aspect violated women. The phallus being the ultimate representation of patriarchy, has been utilized as a weapon to control and oppress women and nature. Two of the characters Sita and Angada, a woman and an animal, reveal personal and social sacrifices of opposing the seemingly absolute power of absentee corporate condition in the community. Just as intensely, they share their inner struggles as they move new terrain, whether literally in their discovery of the vast destruction of the hills or metaphorically in their burgeoning self respect and consequently to take a stand. In her quiet, reflective way, Sarah passes onto the reader an ecofeminist ethic, for she recognised interconnectedness of all living things and refuses to place humans (males) at the top of some socially constructed hierarchy.

Sarah's novel remains an important fictional expression of the ecocritical doctrine that engages contemporary, ecologically concerned readers who see the present ecological crisis as a crisis of women. She goes on to describe the spiritual melding of the characters with nature, significantly Thanksgiving. According to Scott Slovic, the revolution in thought that is needed to change the ecological relationship of human beings to earth (nature) will depend upon the "power of awareness" (Slovic 1992, 169).

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The Hegemony over the Dalits by the Dominant Caste in Sivakaami's *The Grip of Change*

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"I lived in a country where I couldn't live where I wanted to live. I lived in a country where I couldn't go where I wanted to eat. I lived in a country where I couldn't get a job, except for those put aside for people of my colour or caste (<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/oct/08/features.burhanwazir>) according to the opinion of Sidney Poitier, who has mentioned from some other country where he lived but it is apt to quote that to India where, Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy, and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution. Its paradigmatic ethnographic example is the division of Indian society into rigid social groups, with roots in India's ancient history and persisting until today.

In today's society, Dalits are the most oppressed and exploited. They are considered as untouchables, half-human, half-animal and so on by the so-called upper caste people. But, in fact, Dalits own a rich heritage, history and culture which have been deliberately manipulated and destroyed in a well-planned caste structure by the dominating class out of jealousy over the Dalit's intelligence and growth. Today, the word 'Dalit' (Parayar) is understood as 'untouchables' and 'oppressed'. It is because of the negative meaning and understanding of the word Dalit. Dalits are feeling ashamed and are not ready to be called themselves as Dalit.

The acceptance of identity as Dalit is to downsize or belittle them and to distinguish the marginalized people. From the non- Dalit. Instead of creating solidarity among the Dalit, the so called dominant caste has exploited that the entire crew to be slaves of their.

The assertion of identity will enable the Dalit to come together as one fold to fight for their denied human dignity and rights. Dalit have been denied their rights to education, job opportunities and political power just because they are Dalit and belong to a particular caste. The number of atrocities and injustices exercised against them is rapidly increasing day by day even in the 21st century.

These figures would however be substantially higher if one takes into account the Dalit who embraced non-Hindu religions. The Indian government considers only the Dalit within the Hindu community as the Scheduled caste/tribes; Dalits who has converted to Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam are not considered a part of this social category since these religions claim to be casteless. This is the major reason to postulate that the Dalit population would be much larger than the numbers suggested by the census of the Indian government. This paper is about how Thangam the protagonist of the novel *The Grip of Change* by Shivakami's translated version of Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum. Thangam belong to the most marginalized group in India have been for centuries kept under the hegemony of the dominant caste and have been ostracized from the mainstream society because of their birth into a particular caste. Simone de Beauvoir says, "One is not born woman, but, rather, becomes one"(16). The statement itself states the dominance of patriarchy to make a woman an object of second sex. Though born free and struggled to be the free, they are bound in prison of patriarchy. This same patriarchal dominance made them vulnerable to face violence inside and outside of the society. While showing two different strata's of society struggling for justice

unjustified, Thangam and her case is discussed here through many angles like: caste angle, power relations, vulnerability of woman, prejudices, violence, woman and politics, notions, unjustified justice and triple violence in form of social, communal, and patriarchy.

'Ungrateful whore! Even if she was hurt, she was hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A Parachi could never dreamt of being touched by a man like me! My touch was a boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births! And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face world with my name thus polluted?' (The Grip of Change, 31)

The words of Paranjothi Udayar, has proved his hegemony towards Thangam a Dalit women, Here we can find the arrogant attitudes of the Landlord, first one she is a Dalit and second one she is a women and considered not even as a human being. Both are patriarchal in the Indian Society. Here, one can see that the violence on the Dalit widow is not the big matter to anyone, what matters more to everyone is the Police case, caste concern and fake pride. Kamalam, a higher caste woman and her attitude of showing no emanation towards the matter is worth observing. Thangam's story of violence is the oldest of its kind. The power-relation between the Dalit Woman and her landlord is the age old story woven newly. While working in the fields of Paranjothy Udayar she was constantly gazed by him. He prepared himself to exploit her thinking that she was his servant. Besides, Thangam was no princess or minister's daughter and she does not even have a husband. He found her a helpless poor widow for whom no soul will turn to rescue. Therefore, he made it a routine to slake his lust whenever possible. The sexual violence she faces on very first day left her dejected forever. She had spent her three years of widowhood untouched by a man; she hated succumbing to the loathsome old man's lust. She sobbed with anger

sitting alone in the field. For Thangam, there was no choice left. Through the novel, P. Shivakami questioned the vulnerability of Dalit women. She allows her character to awake at right time and be conscious against the violence imposed upon her. Even Paranjothi Udayar is shocked by her extreme step. He always thought about Thangam as a hapless vulnerable widow whom he can buy with his small amount of money. He never expected Thangam to act to the extent of filing a Police complaint. Thangam further dares to ask Kathamuthu to go to court for her matter related to her husband's share in the land. Thangam's daring in the first matter gives her courage and inspiration to move forward.

Thangam's case takes political stand in the hands of Kathamuthu who once was the president of the Panchayat union in Athur. Kathamuthu interferes and change Thangam's story to gain some political importance among his caste people. The Dalit woman and her dignity is not very important for him in this matter. He is the man who gets ready to handle the Thangam's matter out of the court by taking cash from Paranjothy Udayar. Unabashedly he asks Thangam for the same money on the word that he will return it whenever she needs it. Kathamuthu's intention towards her was never pure and his action in the case is not more than that of a middleman. For him she is merely an option to make his two wives jealous and have sex. Such a man's dominant and patriarchic curve of mind turns out whenever he talks with his daughter, Gowri. No wonder, he never justifies with Thangam's or anyone else's matter.

The violence on lower caste people in the form of aggression is too an age-old story told in a new way. Here, no one justifies with lower caste's suppression. Upper caste people knew their ways to take their money back in every matter.

The Grip of Change creates the impression that the upper caste had handled the incident as a man-versus-woman problem, whereas the lower caste had given it the caste slant. But, Thangam, a subaltern Dalit third world woman goes on facing problem everywhere. The violence in the form of physical, emotional, psychological, and religious ways is not the matter of today. Since centuries, women, are being dominated by the hands of patriarchy. In the novel triple violence faced by Thangam is unjustified and thus the issue of grave thinking. One can clearly observe that the social structure denies her natural right, the caste Hindu community treat her as a slave and the patriarchy treats her as an inferior. At the end, reader gets a hint that the women and their role in the society are changing and so the patriarchy and their role must change. Moreover, women are doubly suppressed, doubly affected and the societal structure also encourages even if it is the same or higher caste issues.

"We all are human beings" who are created alike to live together as one species in equality, liberty and fraternity. This fact has been totally and entirely forgotten by the people in the world especially by the people of India. In my opinion, peoples inner urge for power is the primary reason for the prevailing caste based divisions and discrimination in the society. People in the society are very much after power and long to be the leaders and superiors for others. This mind set of the people is the main reason for the creation of this caste belief to gain supremacy over others. Yes, caste is man made and from God. No religion advices to rule over another human being and treat them in an ill manner. However the so called higher caste people wanted to rule over some one and by not knowing the truth that themselves are under some regulation. Hence, people are of the opinion and also propagate the idea that the existing social hierarchy in the Indian society is from God not by man. Therefore, as it is from

God, we are bound to comply with it, without questioning. No, it is purely created by humans in the name God to have control over a group of people considered as untouchables as they would call them. There is no one in this world who is untouchable and impure. It is only a fake and false idea framed by certain to people to cheat others and to suppress the people belonging to other castes. It is a doubt whether religion recognizes the three basic premises of democracy—equality, liberty and fraternity.

As we see the dominant religions in India has stopped practicing these values of democracy and it has created disparity between the caste people and the untouchables. Caste system is purely the idea structured by religion to gain hegemony over others especially Dalits. We are in a developed digitalized society where we do follow different cultures. In our country people are inclined to that, in all aspects and they are curious to know about their caste and not appreciating the person talents are skills, Awareness has to be created and to make them understand that we all are human beings and the pledge of our nation has to be remembered not only in words but also in action that "All Indians are my brothers and sisters".

'Dalits are also humans and Dalit rights are also human rights.'

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Psycho-social Conflict in Baby Kamble's *Prisons We Broke* and *Bama's Karukku*

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The proposed study tries to investigate the autobiographies written by Dalit Women. Baby Kamble's *Prisons We Broke* (2008) translated by Maya Pandit is an exploration of woman's life in the Dalit Community. Bama's *Karukku* (1992), translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom: Bama Faustina Soosiraj is a Tamil novelist who became very famous by her autobiography *Karukku*. The most striking is her distinctive narrative technique employed by her. The study reveals how her conversion to Christianity did not bring change in her life and how in the crisis of identity she emerged as an individual, writer and an activist. At the end of the book, is an Afterword written by Bama, seven years after she wrote the book. She says, "It is a great joy to see Dalits aiming to live with self-respect, proclaiming aloud, 'Dalit endru sollada; tala inimirndunillada'. You are a Dalit; lift up your head and stand tall" (Bama 138). The study discusses on the resistance of dalit women towards hunger, poverty, child marriage and caste based humiliation.

Baby Kamble's autobiography throws light on self-assertion. It is a socio cultural analysis of the society. She voices against the Hindu caste system which dehumanized dalits for centuries and praises Dr. Ambedkar who fought for his people and brought a drastic revolution. Baby Kamble was brought up in this transition movement and has witnessed the ordeal of dalit women in the pre and Post Ambedkar period. It is not only the story of dalit women prisoners but about the fighter in her who broke her shackles to assert herself.

Kambli had a better opportunity to lead a better life in comparison to her mother. Her mother was never allowed to go out of the threshold. In the words of Kamble, "My father had locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage" (5). Baby was well known in her locality among the Maharwada of Veergaon. The fifteen to sixteen houses were like family to her where she roamed around calling mama and mami. Mahars led a very pathetic life due to poverty. They were the poorest among the poor with nothing to eat and nothing to wear. The huts were made up of stones arranged vertically with some mud coating and being banished from the society they were forced to lead a cloistered life. They used utensils made up of clay to store water and coconut shell used as a cup for drinking water. It was not easy to drink water from it as there were three holes in the shell. Every time one has to cover the holes by finger to drink it properly. Though Mahars were expelled from the society and treated like dirt by Hindus still they lovingly followed Hindu culture and Hindu rituals. Even in their arrant poverty they indulged in the rituals of ashadh month. It was the golden opportunity for Mahar women to get revenge against their husbands by getting possessed by Gods. Men afraid of the possessed God were ready to fulfill all their wives demand and even touched their feet. Mahars were encircled by so many superstitious beliefs that nobody tried to free them from those practices and they blindly followed for their doom. Baby in a rebellious tone protests the discrimination done on them by upper caste from generation to generation. The awful life lead by the Mahars engulfed with the filth and dirt, the lack of education and superstitious practices, poverty and helplessness stings her soul. There was nobody to share their pains and sorrows. They were even deprived of the use of soaps and suffered all sorts of epidemics. Upper caste people who enjoyed all the privileges were responsible for their animal like existence. They never treated them like humans but encouraged them to become beasts

like. The Mahars were not given any work so they were forced to beg for food. The staled food was thrown on them which they ate as a sumptuous food.

Mahar women were very protective about the kumkum on their foreheads. The irony was that, these masters of kumkum bestowed nothing but grief and suffering. Still these women looked up high to this as a precious Kohinoor diamond. Among the illiterates only Baby's grandfathers were educated and spoke excellent English as they were working for European Sahibs as butlers. Hence Baby's family was seen in respect by others and everybody looked them in awe. Baby's grandmother received ten rupees every month and was able to help her people in many difficult times. Kamble's heart bleeds for her people who lead beastly life. Her neighbor's hair which looked like a basket turned upside down on their heads without combing and oil application. Baby cries out "we were imprisoned in dark cells, our hands and feet bound by the chain of slavery" (49). Mahar women collected the leftover food from Maratha households by cleaning their animal pens. Every woman of Mahar sang an aspirational song that their future would be bright enough while grinding stone. Their children were left alone soon as she needed to earn for her family. Children are brought up without any caring hands of their parents, without any monitoring eyes and they would hurt themselves. When their mothers return with bundles of firewood on their heads they would follow. Women who had drenched with sweat in the scorching Sun many days did not have anything to eat. As Kamble witnesses "having had no breakfast in the morning and with no food in the house, hunger gnawed at their empty stomach like wild fire" (52).

Many times it was Kamble's grand ma who helped these hard working hungry ladies with dried bhakris. The bhakris which they relished with onions were so hard that it sounded like machine

thundering in some factory. The collected firewood by women were later cut into small pieces and carried to the village for sale. The Mahars were not allowed to use the main road that was used by the higher castes. When they found any upper castes in the opposite direction they were supposed to vacate the road and climb down into the shrubbery and walk through the thorny bushes on the road side. The next important thing a Mahar lady should perform without fail was that she needed to cover herself fully when faced by upper caste men and say, "The humble Mahar women fall at your feet master. This was like a chant, which they had to repeat innumerable times even to a small child if it belonged to an upper caste" (52). If this routine was missed by any newlywed girl in the group then she was to face the rage not only of the masters but of her in laws, neighbors and relatives. So it was like a custom followed from many generations. Even there was a customary dress code for Mahar women. Their Saries were made up of cloth stitched out of rags patched up together. Their pallav reached to their knees and a veil fell over their forehead. The Mahar women were denied of wearing the border so they had to tuck it hidden as it was only the privilege of high caste women. Their foreheads were smeared with huge kumkum marks. When they reached the upper caste home they were supposed to stand in the far of corner of the platform and call out, 'kaki and firewood! The Mahar women are here with fire wood' (54). The Upper caste lady would bargain for lower price then the Mahar lady had to stack wood very carefully checking no trace of her hair or thread from her saris not to pollute their house. For all the kind services done she was thrown with the coins to avoid the touch of pollution. Kamble calls Hinduism as a beastly thing for creating the concept of pollution. It is with the sweat and blood of Mahars that upper castes lead a comfortable life. It was the Mahar's ignorance that, they were subjected to the bad treatment by the Upper caste. Again and again they were tormented

by the whip of pollution. "The one who has transformed them from beasts to human beings is the architect of our constitution that shining jewels of sheel and satwa Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar" (56).

The Mahar women suffered more in her unhygienic delivery. It's absolutely rebirth as she would battle with death without any proper care and nursing. The new born was cleaned with the saliva of elders. "Many young girls on the threshold of life succumbed to death. One in every ten lost their lives during child birth. Infants died as well" (61). Thousands of generations were ruined and their sacrifices were ignored. Till 1930 they were in dark and their animal like existence turned towards humanity by Buddha and Bhimraja. Bhimaraja awakened and enlightened his ignorant people by organizing meeting in Jatras. The words of this Oracle Bhim were very heart touching to Mahars. He made them to realize the importance of education and the role of superstitions in their fall. He ignited the fire of living in them and said, "We are humans, we too have the right to live as human beings" (65). Babasaheb worked hard to bring revolution among his people. The main call of his was to educate children, stop eating dead animals and non-belief in gods and religion. He sets as the God of Mahars and pioneer in revolution and people began to change themselves gradually. Kamble's grandparents followed him divinely. Without education Mahar girls were married early and were tortured in their in laws house. Mothers- in law were so jealous of their daughters- in law that they always found faults in them and poisoned their sons against them. Even they were subjected to wife battering, being a small girl it was difficult to survive with them. If she had been successful to escape from her in- laws she would have been packed back very soon. Mutilation of nose of a wife was common among them in 1940s the girl chopped of her nose were called muddy and was not allowed in any good homes. Thus the innocent

girl was tormented mentally and physically while the husbands were remarried. "The life of the women in the lower castes was thus shaped by the fire of calamities. This made their bodies strong, but their minds cried out against this oppression" (102).

Even the girls were ill-treated if Mahar women did not draw their pallavs forward from the forehead down to the nose. The trapped women were thus rescued by the Hindu code bill by the great savior Baba sahib. Bama says, "it is because of him that my pen can scribble some thoughts it is because of him that, I understood truth that I can now see how morality is being trampled upon. It is because of him that I got the inspiration to join the struggle against oppression and contribute my small might to it" (102). Baby Kamble is grateful to Veergaon and the people who nurtured her with love and affection. She was very homely with everyone. Only in their home tea was prepared and they were seen in awe by the rest of the Mahars. When she was eight or nine years she was moved to her parents in Phaltans. Her father was contractor but saved nothing as he was known for his generosity. From her childhood she was greatly influenced by Baba's personality and qualities. "Our young minds were absorbed. Baba's various names- Dr. Ambedkar, Bhimraj, Baba Saheb- became holy chants for us" (106). Thus Kamble was sent to school for the first time by her father to school no 2 and she was enchanted by Baba's philosophy and his writings. Her brother joined politics and all the time her father spoke of Baba. Kamble remembers her school going days when she along with her friends had taught a lesson to the upper class girls who had hurled stones and thrown dust into their eyes. This revolt had come to the young girls by the influence of Baba's words. Later Baba's birth anniversary April 14th became a festive day of celebrations. "I made a firm resolve at a young age, to lead my life according to the path sketched by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar,

the light of my life. His principle shave exercised a strong influence on me" (115). She chose to lead a clean life with self-respect and dignity. Even she made her family to follow the path of righteousness. Baby is thankful to Baba for providing them education. Because of education they were able to become rich and achieve the higher post. But she is sad that educated Dalits have forgotten Baba and his principles. She voices to follow Baba's life and serve others. Kamble remembers the life time struggle of Ambedkar to get them humanity, education and the religion of Buddha. Kamble aspires the younger generation to follow, the footsteps of Ambedkar, and gives importance to the development of character, truth and morality. She feels, "character is the pillar of this constitution, truth is its roof and morality, its foundation. This is the home of humanity" (123). Being a daughter of activist father she had attempted with her friends to enter the Radha Krishna temple. Kamble was married at the age of 13. Even her husband followed the words of Baba and did business. They started a grocery store and earned well. All her children are well educated and are in good post. Finally Kamble was able to break her prison. "Baba's words showed me the way. I decided to begin my struggle through my writing I followed Baba's advice verbatim to the best of my ability" (135). Baby Kamble started an Ashram Shala for Orphans from the backward castes. Kamble became the president of Mahatma Phule, DnyanVikas, Prasarak Sanastha and her dream to serve the community has come true.

Kamble strongly appreciates the contributions of women which was immense. They dared to send their children to school and thus by educating them they broke their own prison. Even they actively participated in Dalit political movement. Baby Kamble had written her autobiography and hidden for twenty long years as her husband was like any other man of community who considered her as an inferior

being and called her an ignorant woman. Even she remembers an instance when her hubby slapped and hit her in a train as some guys were staring at her. He was very suspicious and she struggled hard to prove her innocence. She was very patient and constructive in her thoughts. Only he scowled where as she had received good words from other members of the society. Her people were her strength even her father and brother were very supportive to achieve something in her life. Kamble in an interview given to Maya Pandit opines: "Women are still slaves. And it is not just Dalit women; I see around me many women from both upper and lower castes. All women are facing problems. Especially, women from villages! Their oppressions does not come to light. All cases of the rape are suppressed for fear of family honour, pressures from the dominant communities and political parties. Women works very hard and yet face so many problems in spite of slight improvement in the financial position" (154). Baby Kamble's writing is inspired by the Dalit deity, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambekdar. She is able to articulate only because of his motivational words which had a long lasting impact not only on her mind and heart but on her soul from the childhood. Thus she confesses, "The suffering of my community has always been more important than my own individual suffering. I have identified myself completely with my people. And therefore Jina Amucha was autobiography of my entire community" (157). Dalit Women are doubly oppressed being a woman first and then being a Dalit woman. Along with caste based social, cultural and economic marginalization. Kamble as a Dalit Woman writer tries to assert her rights, strive for self-identity with new attitude aspires for revolution and transformation of Hindu society. Her autobiography is all about women suffering and how they free themselves from the prison of poverty, caste, class and gender oppression.

Bama's *Karukku* was awarded Crossword Award in 2000. Karukku means Palmyra leaves with their serrated edges on both sides are like double edged swords. *Karukku* has been translated to English and *Kusumbukkaran* and *Sangati* to French. Bama has set up her own school for Dalit Children in Uttiramerur Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu. Bama is also sister of famous Dalit writer Raj Gauthaman. She is a devoted teacher and writer. Her grandparents were Dalits who converted to Christianity. Karukku directly deals with caste oppression within the Catholic Church and institution. It speaks about her trust as a catholic and finally acquiring self-accomplishment of herself as dalit. She discovers as a Dalit, shedding away the Chistianity. Bama belives Dalits can be empowered only by the realisation of their self. With her hard work and ability she declares "because of my education alone I managed to survive among those who spoke the language of caste - difference and discrimination" (22). When Bama joined a school as a teacher her battle with self was regarding becoming nun and to help the poor and downtrodden. In that school she had witnessed the collective oppression of Dalit children by the teacher. When she joined the order there also she was humiliated due to the caste. She was told that they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and there was even a separate order for them. Bama had lamented that there was no place that was free of caste and finally she became nun and was sent to a convent. It was a very heartrending situation for her when they all spoke ill of low caste people. Bama had zipped her mouth and survived there. She was confirmed "In this society if you are born into a low caste, you are found to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death" (26). Bama is very proud of her village which is surrounded by Western Ghats. Like any other village it is also divided into different streets of the Thevar, Chettiyaar Aasaari and Nadar. The upper caste and lower castes communities were

segregated in such a way that all the essentials like post office, Panchayat Board, the milk depot, the schools and the church were in the upper caste streets. Bama had experienced the tongs of untouchability. Though her school was near just ten minutes walk she was supposed to go around for thirty minutes avoiding upper caste street. At the very young age Bama was angry when she learnt about the concept of 'Polluting' by the mere touch of Parayas. She says "because they had scraped four coins together did that mean they must lose all human feelings? What did it mean when they called Paraya? Had the name become that obscene? But we too are human beings. Our people should never run these petty errands for these fellows". (16) Bama had felt very ugly when she had seen her grandmother took the left over from the Naicker which was thrown from a distance to her vessel. Bama had asked her grandmother to reject the unwanted food that naickers threw to her pati's vessel. But her grandmother had said "These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them how will we survive? Haven't they been upper caste from generation to generation and haven't been lower caste? Can we change this?". (17) Its very sad that her grandmother never felt humiliated rather she had accepted it as her fate. Bama was very good in studies. It was inculcated into her mind when she was young by her brother. It was her brother who was studying in the university channelled her thoughts and reasoned in right way. He had warned her "because we are born into the Paraya Jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress we can throw away these indignities. So study with care. Learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons people will come to you of their own accord and attach them to you. Work hard and learn" (18). Bama had followed her brother's words and always stood first to class and studied well.

In her teens Bama understood the harassment and humiliation her community people were undergoing. She remembers an instance when she was studying in class seventh and while playing had climbed the coconut tree and had unknowing dropped the unripen coconut. Without her mistake she was held responsible by her friends and was thrown out of the school by her headmaster.

Her headmaster or the priest whose help she was seeking to get back to the school was abusing her caste. They had thought as she was from lower community it was obvious she could have done it. When she joined high school in nearby town and was staying at hostel there also warden sister had scolded them for no reason as they were from low caste. Even in the bus fellow passengers would talk well till they know her caste but after learning the truth they would change their seat. This concept of pollution made Bama feel sick she never took her mother's advice to lie about her caste. She would tell herself "but why should I pretend to these people that I'm from a different caste? All the same, the pain I felt was not a trifling one" (21) Bama remembers how she used to get humiliated when only Harijan Pupils were asked to stand among others in the assembly or class room. But she was proud when she excelled in SSLC and stood by her mother happy for proving that even she could study well like others. Bama did well in her B.Ed. also. Bama feels very pathetic that the low caste born has to suffer mutely and struggle throughout their lives. If anyone excels then he is made to realise his low status in the society, constantly crushing his self-respect and sense of honour. Bama strongly feels that " we must not accept the injustice of our environment by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings we must dare to stand up for change" (28). Bama says "everyone in my community had to work hard for their livelihood. Only a few of the teachers families lived in any degree of comfort"

(49). Even her people were not paid properly for their hardwork. Bama furiously account that "Our hard work was exploited half the time by our Naicker employers. The rest of the time we were swindled by these tradesmen. So how was it possible for us to make any progress? It seems that it is only the swindlers who manage to advance themselves. But there is no way at all for the Dalit who sticks to fair methods and who toils hard all her life to make good. (53) Bama is surprised by the strength of her community the way they struggled whole day and work hard till their death. Its more painful for her to see them doing so much work just to half fill their bellies. She thinks this is a community that was born to work and however they toil it is the same Kuuzh every day. The same broken grain gruel. The same watery dried- fish curry" (55). When Bama got admitted to the convent school she was able to eat proper meals and study but when she came back for holidays even after writing tenth exams she did all sorts of work she did earlier. When her father used to come for his holidays nearly for two months they would eat good food but later it was the same fate. When Bama grew little older she was able to learn about the plight of Mahar women who were oppressed immensely by their caste as well as their gender. Without rest her mom and grandma used to slog whole day neglecting their pains of their body. She remembers her mother who started vomiting blood after collecting firewood. Bama used to accompany her grandmother to collect dried cowdung from the fields. There was even gender disparity in the payment. Labour for the same work men received more wages than women. Women from Bama's Community were banned from watching cinema. The reason was women from Dalit community were pulled by other community men and this would sparkle fight. Women of her community were even stronger than their male counterpart. Bama's father was in army and it was her mother who worked hard and looked after her children doing coolie. Bama

recalls a man who used to beat his wife daily for one or other reason. He used to drag his wife by the hair and beat her up as if she were an animal with his belt. Everyone witnessed this mutely without trying to stop him. As a child without any gender discrimination she had seen boys and girls playing together. The games were simple they mocked their own lives. When they grew little older played Kabaddi and later they were tuned towards indoor games. Bama had fire burning in her that only upper caste had money and her people did not have which is the reason they are denied them from all sorts of comfort. She thought "I would study hard and make good" (23). She worked really hard to stand on her feet. But after the completion of eleventh class her parents were unwilling to continue her education. The reasons were they didn't have money to finance her studies and they thought it would be difficult to find a match in their community, if she studied more. Bama had spoken about her plight with the nun who had taught her in the ninth class. She spoke to Bama's mother and even sponsored for her college by pawning her earrings. Bama got admitted to the college with just the clothes she was wearing. When she had worn the same skirt, jacket and daavani for a whole week her classmates looked at her as though she is a different creature. There was no support from her father's side and she had sworn not to go back home. "There was this certain something in me that urged me to go on complete my studies. Thats why I endured all the shame and humiliation and stayed on" (75). Bama stood first in all the tests and had gained every body's attention towards her. In the annual day function of her college she had hidden herself in the bathroom and cried for the lack of money to buy good clothes for the function. Life changed once Bama finished her B.Ed. and stated to work. Economic independence had brought new strength and made her life comfortable. Even it created an awareness that "if you have a little

money in your hands you can gain some authority and status, and prestige" (76). Education had made her to think and realise that only education can save her community from the wretched lives they had been living. "But then, how are they to educate themselves? The struggle to fill their bellies is their main struggle after all" (77). Bama had strong desire to help her community people so she wanted to become nun and join Convent to teach but after joining only she understood that the convent treated the poor totally differently from the rich. Bama was disturbed and frustrated left the convent and came back home. It was not easy for her to lead a normal life after coming back as the convent life had made her fragile. Bama was so depressed that she had thought to herself that "it would be better to be dead and gone rather than carry on living like this" (78). Bama was unable to witness the unjust done to her community by the upper caste. In the name of untouchability the society had been divided and marginalised her community people to toil hard and remain poor whereas the other section would progress unconditionally. Bama aspired for the change in the society. She knew that "They have made use of Dalits who are immersed in ignorance as their capital, set up a big business and only profited their own castes" (80). In the dire poverty girl children cannot afford schooling at all. They would look after their house, caring for the babies and doing household chores. Bama is upset by the unhygienic way of life lead by her people and says "If you look at our streets they are full of small children, their noses streaming without even a scrap of clothing rolling about playing in the mud and mire, indistinguishable from puppies and piglets" (79). Being brought up among the nuns and Spiritual Christianity Bama was instigated to become nun and wanted to serve the poor. At the very young age she was able to learn the prayers by heart. She had a deeply held wish in her heart to become a nun like them and give herself to God. But she was very disappointed after her education when she joined

as teacher of the school run by nuns. She was more troubled when she saw that Dalit children were not educated in many matters and there was no scope of change. Bama wanted to become nun only to bring changes in the lives of Dalit Children. "I felt a yearning to treat these children as all children ought to be treated, to look after them rather than torment and exploit them" (104). Bama after reading much through the Bible understood God has always shown the greater compassion for the oppressed and Jesus also associated himself mainly with the poor. The oppressed are not taught about him but rather taught in an empty and meaningless way about humility, obedience, patience, gentleness. (104) When Bama became nun and joined the convent her motto was to live her life use fully and meaning fully. Bama was crushed inside when the poor and the rich were not treated equally and even they held poor opinion about Dalits. Bama had not revealed about herself that she belonged to Dalit community in a fear of her ill treatment after learning the truth. Bama was tormented by leading a camouflaged life. After she left convent when she tried for job she was rejected as she was dalit. Bama had struggled to be herself and to and to come in terms with her life after the convent life for seven years. "Because I had been caged within that special world it was difficult when I came outside to find a way of dealing with the energy of the real world. The strategy of the convent had been to transform my identity completely" (121) Bama had felt like a bird whose wings were broken. Still she had faith in herself to lead a meaningful and useful life. After she left convent she didn't go home as she was afraid of her father and had thought it was not right to trouble them at their old age. She had decided to get a job and make her livelihood and never to marry. She had joined convent in a desire to help the poor and be useful to the society and even after coming to the outer world she adhered to that desire. She decided not to waste her life for one man rather committed her to the society and worked

for the betterment of the Dalits. Bama had faced many problems being a single woman and Dalit. But Bama is a woman of enormous strength and dignity. She dedicated her life for the liberalization of Dalits. Bama had risen like phoenix leaving the dark side of her life. Cathy Caruth rightly opines "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also fundamentally, an enigma of survival". She had expressed great joy to see Dalits aiming to live with self-respect and proclaiming aloud "say you are a Dalit; lift up your head and stand tall". (138) It takes a great courage to be Bama. She stands as towering inspirational figure to all Dalits. She is indeed a motivational Dalit Mother Theresa. Bama declared her selfhood through the technique of self-counselling and accomplished the sense of fulfillment. These autobiographies express the suppression and oppression caused due to the caste based discrimination. It holds a mirror to the agony experienced by an individual and gives a voice against casteism and wish for an egalitarian society.

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Nuances of Resistance and Survival: Reading *Antharjanam, Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman*

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Abstract

Antharjanam, Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman, is the first full-length account of a Namboodiri (Kerala Brahmin) woman's life, a compilation of Smt. Devaki Nilaymgode's memoirs, translated from Malayalam by Radhika P. Menon and Indira Menon, which reads like a single book with logically sequenced chapters. Nilaymgode's position as an old, homely, semiliterate Brahmin woman and a non-professional writer, who had experienced life within the confinements of a pungent paternal world, and as a witness to the orthodox society's transformation into a neocolonial, globalised platform, help her to render new scripts for women's lives, liberating literature to the expanse of woman's consciousness. Dealing with the subjective resources of the author's memory, I attempt to foreground how Namboodiri women of pre-independence period had survived amidst and despite ritual-ridden elitism and caste exclusiveness, inventing a new identity beyond their caste/gender frame. I have adopted a flexible theoretical application of feminist, Marxist, Postcolonial critical approaches, with modifications suitable to women's experiences in the textual context to decipher the re-presentation of the marginalia that had eluded the grasp of compressive categorizations.

Keywords: Marginality, Gender-Expectations, Power-Relations, 'Other', Subversive Potential

The social class structure of Kerala during pre-independence period can be conceived through various interactional axes of gender, caste, class and community identities. During the early Middle ages, Kerala Brahmins---Namboodiris---shaped the society on the lines of the caste system. Brahmin community, occupying the privileged top cluster, was interwoven with rigid proscriptions rooted in patriarchal ideology of male domination, subsequently displaying a blunt suppression of the 'other', especially women. Caste and gender hierarchy are thus interconnected factors that formed the organising principles of Brahminical social order. Smt. Devaki Nilayamgode, in her 'book of memories', effortlessly reflects the history of an age through the sieve of memory and provides direct visions of the lives of Namboodiri women confined to the sombre corners of domesticity and their fervent attempts to free from their clogged life.

In Kerala, Namboodiris held a powerful position with a long history of socio-cultural and economic dominance and command over resources. They constructed and perpetuated a set of social arrangements that preserved their exclusivity and cultural uniqueness. Patrilineal succession, the emergence of private control over land and their claim to the ritual and ideological leadership of society through sacred knowledge have helped them to establish and preserve their hegemony over different socio-economic channels. Namboodiris thus reinforced their feudal elite status as the landowning religious aristocracy through their adherence to orthodox traditions and rituals and administering grip on land, temples and their subsidiary villages. Their regulated interactions with different groups aided them to maintain strategic relations with each of them, extracting different sorts of services and benefits. They retained a sense of pride in their conscious display of materialistic and cultural superiority and asserted their eminence by clearly marking their caste prestige and distinctness, fortifying their high-ranking in the given social arrangement.

Nilayamgode's writings typify the significant position and aura of superiority that Namboodiris commanded in society. The Illams (residence) were very spacious with Nataka shala for staging performances like Kathakali or to serve meals to a thousand people at a time, a big kitchen called Oottupura, where men enjoyed coffee and snacks leaning against the railings, (6) and Pathaayams (place to store grains or vessels) filled with golden grains of paddy, golden coloured Uurulis (large vessels) and utensils made of bell metal, brass, bronze and wood, the spacious Nilavara (underground cell in the house) with granite floor, walls and ceiling and the smooth shiny Chinese jars used to store food-stuffs inside Nilavara were all pointers to the prosperity of the family. (138)

Though the Brahmin women were honoured members in society, they were considered inferior by their men-folk. "Antharjanams have always been a source of great fascination in popular imagination of Kerala. To an outsider's eyes, they were living exotica. Cocooned in luxury, shielded from public view, always escorted by an entourage of obsequious attendants and endlessly enjoying a hedonistic life full of festivals and elaborate feasts, these upper caste women appeared to lead a charmed life. However, what most people never realised was that the antharjanam's awe-inspiring exclusivity concealed the cruellest form of patriarchal oppression that robbed them not only of independence and education but even the simplest and most innocent of joys"(3). A Namboodiri girl had no right over her father's property. Preferential treatment and consideration were given to boys from their early infancy. The birth of a girl was not considered auspicious. Prayers were conducted only for "the boy's long life and good fortune"(83) because it was believed that sons had the power to "elevate their wandering spirits to the higher plane inhabited by their departed forefathers."(83) The world of colours and fragrances were

banned for girls since childhood, conditioning their impulses to a dull, unexciting life pattern. "Colourful and sweet-smelling flowers were used only in the pujas for deities ... or in the temple" (16) and they were expected to dress "very simply without any redeeming colour." (24) Education was denied to them and could not get into any profession. They were not permitted to read and were excluded from learning Vedas or religious texts. "Initiation into learning, studying alphabet and reading the Ramayana - this completed a girl's education" (30) and the only prayer they were taught to repeat was to have plenty of food, clothes and enjoy marital bliss. (31) The large hall where Sanskrit was taught, held a wide collection of books; but "this was a place only for men." (137)

Namboodiris practised a peculiar set of marriage and inheritance system to keep the control over the family-property intact. Only the eldest male member within the family was allowed to marry a Namboodiri girl. Many Namboodiri girls had to remain unmarried throughout their life as they were prohibited from marrying outside their caste -group. Many of them were forced to marry aged-men, who were already married and had to endure a drab life with co-wives. Often, small girls, whose Uduthu thudangal (Puberty ritual) had not even been performed, were forced into marriage and no one paid attention to their refusal. They were forcibly taken to the bedrooms by the matrons of the Illam; frightened and anxious, these little girls waited to get the door opened in the morning, to escape (115). Women had to prioritise their husbands' needs over everything and Antharjanams very rarely got chance to take care of their own children, as most of the time they would be busy with customary temple visits, assembling Pooja items for daily worship, cooking sumptuous meals to the family and guests and preparing offerings for the deity (16). It was women's duty to maintain the purity of food,

and their taintless domestic management became a pivotal element in the maintenance of purity of rituals. Delicacies like and snacks were meant only for Namboodiris; children looked pale and consumptive, but cow's milk was never meant for them. It was used to make ghee- in which lamps were lit at the temple or to prepare coffee or to make currys to serve the Namboodiris at feasts (14). When Nilayamgode writes how the women folk longed to drink coffee and waited eagerly in the evenings for a small portion of snacks to reach the inner rooms, what is disclosed before us is a life of impoverishment that had been imposed on Antharjanams, children and the servant-class at the Illams.

Antharjanams were mainly confined into routine domestic chores. They rarely got opportunity to go outside their Illams and were not allowed to use or move freely around Verandhas (a roofed platform along the outside of a house) or Poomughams (portico), which were used by male members and visitors. However, on such rare occasions of their visit to near- by temples, they had to cover their entire body with white cloth (Ghosha) and should use Olakuda (palm- leaf umbrellas) to cover their face. Usually, they were accompanied by servants, who made sounds to drive of low caste people to avoid pollution. Widowhood was a stigma and strict patriarchal rules ensured that even young widows did not attract the attention of other males. Any shadow of suspicion would condemn them to Smarthavicharam, the inhuman ritualistic trial by elderly males, and outcasting. "In the Namboodiri community, nothing was considered a greater sign of misfortune than the sight of a widow" (78). Weak, vulnerable and abandoned, they tolerated their dreadful life, cursing themselves. Well-known social reformer V.T. Bhattathiripad aptly observed that the women of Namboodiri community were insignificant scapegoats of male ascendancy that formed the axis of social system and the notions of nobility of clan, superior family status and dowry

system were holy weapons employed to demoralise the dignity of the individual. Referring to the isolation and seclusion they were kept, Namboodiri women were called 'Antharjanams' or 'Akathulla aal' - which means 'Person Living Inside', indicating their extreme home-bound existence within the vast feudal estates.

Nilaymgode's narration also abounds with subversive female figures who possessed the grit to live the world differently from the generally accepted ways of perception. Even while remaining within the patrilinear, class-structured society, they refused to be reduced to the role of a silent 'other' and subverted the gender/role expectations of the hegemony by discovering new definitions for survival. She also narrates about subversive instances of resistances that could be read as flat refusals to swallow objectifications with stoic resignation.

Nilayamgode remembers that, though girls were not permitted to read, they took pains to read in secrecy and managed to familiarise themselves with the works of famous writers and world classics (32). Little girls were also smart enough to sneakily enter the kitchen to take away some coffee powder, sugar and a huge quantity of thick milk to make coffee, the exquisite drink savoured only by the male Namboodiris of the Illam, smartly hiding the evidences of their risky deed (17). There were women at her Illam, including her mother, who overlooked the norms, when it came to rendering a helping hand to others in their crises, and hurrying to the needy with positive thinking (100). At a time when girls were barely educated, they could read even Puranas and efficiently manage the household (4). Staying even within the confining areas of domesticity, Antharjanams had managed to establish female spaces of support, companionship and modest enjoyments. While meeting at temple premises, they decided the venue of each year's Kaikottikkali, (type of dance performed by women with a set-pattern of steps and clapping of hands) and all the

women gladly hurried towards the venue unflinching, to be part of the enthusiasm (49). Mutual help and friendship among Antharjanams were also quite common at that time and some of them undertook the responsibility of nursing sick women with unfeigned concern and deep care (122). They were instantly ready to offer a helping hand to the forlorn women and permitted them to stay on and accepted them as part of their daily living (73).

There was no reluctance on their part to preserve grains and seeds for future necessities and also preserved with care the sackful of grains their neighbours brought in for safekeeping (140). Antharjanams did not have money to satisfy even their slightest demands, as they did not have right to own property or meaningful professions. Thus, they saved money for their most pressing needs from the Pidiyari, a fistful of rice they put away in their personal container daily to be sold outside (9). We also come across strong female figures who displayed extraordinary will power to hold themselves together with confidence (9) even when widowhood had deprived them of their status in family and society. Nilayamgode also writes, how Namboodiris, initially unwilling to adapt to changes in wider society, also could not remain isolated from the resurgent phase of modernisation started of with the advent of colonialism. A flurry of socio, cultural and economic changes associated with colonial modernity had forced them to shift towards a wider consciousness of being a united community, leading to the formation of socio-cultural organisations like Yogakshema Sabha and Antharjana Samajam, which sought to instill in Antharjanams the importance of education, self-employment and steady income for women. Many women dared to define themselves differently by discarding their traditional umbrellas and enveloping cloth wraps, and accepting a life style and body image that they were comfortable with (109). Centres were also setup to

give vocational training to *Antharjanams* (153) which motivated them to stand up for themselves and seek diverse experiences and a full-fledged partaking in different domains of the wider world. Nilayamgode attests that the process of humanising the Namboodiris had levelled out most differences and succeeded in bringing mere homemakers to the forefront of public life. (154) The public also began to respond to the changing needs of the time, irrespective of caste, creed and gender. Ethos against social disabilities and the quest for social justice naturally helped to improve women's social conditions, helping them to be conscious of their rightful place and opened up new vistas before them, affirming their privileges and responsibilities in the larger society.

Though essentially an autobiography, *Antharjanam, Memoirs of a Namboodiri Woman* is an important record too, that constitutes a useful standpoint from which one could read the cultural evolution of Kerala through the early 20 c. Nilayamgode's narration becomes a unique cultural production from within a dominant culture, a kind of calling forth of marginal existences, and that is what makes her personal narration inevitably political, like any other subversive practice of potential. Without any burdening attachment to a bygone era, in unadorned, yet grippingly realistic language, her narration opens up threads of appreciation for the ongoing capacity of progressionist adaptations in edifying humanity towards a more accommodative world. It makes us realise how far we have reached compared to those days, how changes can happen when the urge to change evolves from within, and how time and progress have brought it to a point where today every individual is guaranteed better civil liberties for a harmonious development of subjecthood, than it had been a few decades ago.

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Astha's Stormy Road to Freedom, Dignity and Identity: A Reading of Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*

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Abstract

This paper examines Astha's unrelenting struggle and unflinching endeavours to discover her freedom, dignity and identity as represented in the novel *A Married Woman* by Manju Kapur. Women have been undergoing blatant discrimination and marginalization since time immemorial. The injustice meted out to her on the strength of the purported designs of the patriarchy and the invisible and invincible ways of introducing the hegemony in the society, women most often, if not always, find themselves in the receiving end. The reawakening of female consciousness as an aftermath of the second wave feminism in the 1960s in fact has touched only up on the women in the academic world in the sense that it did not get translated to the women at the lower rung of the society. It is in this context that the representation of Astha, the protagonist of the novel under discussion gains significance. She resisted the crude stratagem of the family and her husband to pin her down to the four walls of domesticity and she has struggled to find her way to the vast universe of public sphere. Astha becomes actively involved the campaign against the growing communal chasm; uses her art and painting to be the means of liberating her suppressed self. The paper specifically examines the agency that Astha gains, the artistic creativity and the articulation of women's freedom and renewed political consciousness and political engagements of

women's movement etc represented in the novel. Manju Kapur's portrayal of women characters, her strong sense of what constitutes women's freedom and individuality are also analysed in the paper as a background to Astha's struggling route to freedom, dignity and individuality.

Keywords: Woman and agency, political involvement, marginalization, independence

Since time immemorial, women have been grossly marginalized, vehemently oppressed, and systematically kept away from mainstream. The voices across the political spheres in the 19th century, the women suffragist movement that gained momentum later, the interventions in the form of the works like *The Vindication of Women's Rights* by Mary Wallstonecraft and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* have indeed been path breaking in the history of women's struggle to reach main stream and walk on the path of freedom and liberty. The voices emerged out of literary works in fact lent it a new dimension since they could effectively pierce through the conscience of the society and provide new perspectives and insight into their quest for equality and freedom in a society which is largely constituted by the patriarchal values. The voices of women were loudly heard through different genres like poetry, novel, drama resonate in fact the deeper anguish and anxiety of the real women in blood and flesh who live even in the 21 century.

The representation of the plight of women and their incomparable struggle for freedom and choice has been highlighted in the novels written and published in India. The condition of women were / are not better in India too. She has undergone discrimination and marginalization in the socio, political and economic fronts. The rituals and customs like Sati or the self immolation of women in the funeral pyre

of her husband. The suppressed voices of women have been represented by many women writers who have chosen to write in English in India. Indian writing in English is a distinct genre of writing in India where the Indian sensibility and experience are sought to be reflected through English which is of course a colonial legacy. There have been number of discussions of the position of English and the status it should enjoy in the post Independent India. Debates as to the status of the official language be granted to English once shook the nation. But now, over the decades, it has become quite conspicuous that English is very much India and this language posses the flexibility and resilience to represent unieque Indian experience. Starting from the trios of Indian writing in English like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, the country has produced many novelists and poets who are either bilingual or those who prefer to write in English. Manju Kapur is one such prominent novelist who has preferred to writing in English about the plight and predicament of the middle class women in India. Most of her writings are centred around the familial circle and the struggle of the women characters who are fraught with tensions of balancing their ambitions with their social expectations. Her writings in fact poses probing questions about the social agency of women as Myerson observed, "Kapur is generous, far seeing writer who knows there are no answers, no conclusions to be drawn" (Myerson). She began to be noticed in the literary circle with her debut novel *Difficult Daughters* that came out in 1998. The novel won the Commonwealth Writers's Prize. Her novel *Home* also points at the patriarchal structure of the society where women do not enjoy economic powers even in her society. Her fourth novel *The Immigrant* discusses the transnational cultural encounters of Indian couple. The novel under discussion in this paper is *A Married Woman* that was published in 2003. It tells the tale of

Astha, a young woman and her journey towards self realization and independence. Her father was an employee in a public sector company with nominal salary and her parents had pinned all their hopes on Astha. Astha initially develops a crush for Bandy but her mother discourage it as it feared that it might affect her studies. In the college she then has an affair with Roshan, a son of a rich technocrat. But Roshan ditches her on the pretext of going abroad. Astha finally gets married to Hemanth, a young MBA graduate who is with a bank. Their relationship went normal as Astha performed her uxorial duties as a dutiful wife would and Hemanth simply got along as was normal and expected of a man like him. They have one daughter Anuradha and a son Himanshu. Astha writes poems and paints well. Her husband does not, however, finds this to be an appreciable quality. As the days and years went by Astha began to feel the vacuum in her life. Her mind got filled with a sense of meaninglessness. It was then that she was informed by her kids that there is a theatre workshop in their school led by a social activist Aijas and she has been invited. The workshop brings forth the hidden talent in her. She is profusely praised by Aijas for her disposition and taste in poems and her penchant for painting. Suddenly, she begins to feel that her life has a purpose and meaning. Meanwhile, Aijas gets killed when an angry mob set fire to the matador van they are travelling in the backdrop of the escalating tensions on the Babrimasjid- Ramjanmabhumi dispute. Egged by his another woman she plunges in to protests, goes out and travels to spread the message of peace and harmony. She boldly participates in the protest marches, awareness campaign against communal disharmony, agitation for women's rights etc without paying heed to the disdainful approach of her in laws and husband. She is the character who openly questions her husband's callous and insensitive attitude towards burning social issues, his lopsided priorities, his autocratic decision making when it comes to the spending of their money.

Though Astha initially refuses to accede to the match making endeavours of her mother, she finally surrenders and decides to marry Hemant who has been working in a bank and later started his own color TV Manufacturing unit. Astha starts working in a school where she is to meet a Professor turned theatre activist Aijaz Khan. He has come to their school to organise a drama workshop. Aijaz requests the help of Astha in the workshop. Being instigated by him, she prepares the script and everyone appreciates it when staged. The relationship with Aijaz finds a new face to Astha's views on her self worth. She begins to get concerned with sociopolitical matters. She starts standing up for her individuality and freedom. But Hemant, her husband grows suspicious at her social involvement. For him, women have remain herself in the four walls of domesticity. When Astha got married of to Hemant, her mother gives her the following piece of advice. "Don't assert your ego -don't argue. Employ wisdom to solve the problem, accommodation and acceptance keep families together" (*A Married Woman* 83). Astha is quite adept at writing poems and painting. But Hemant does not give her even a word of encouragement. When Aijaz notices that Astha paints well, he supports her making her resume her once stopped habit of painting. Because painting was found to be a liberating phenomena to her tormented self. When she paints continually, she wants more spaces that she can call her own. Astha attempts to find a room of her own for painting. When she starts painting at her house, her in-laws objected to it saying that all the kitchen smelt of turpentine and they could not stand it. Astha told her husband to get one vacant room allotted to her for painting. One of the rooms there had belonged to Sangeetha, her husband's sister. The request was, however, rejected by her in laws on the pretext that Sangeetha was too sensitive to see that her room was allotted to someone else. Astha, being an artist, wanted a room of her own at any cost. She took a

pledge that she would have her own studio after earning enough money. This novel undoubtedly explores the trajectory of Astha from a confined woman both physically and mentally to a liberated woman and the struggles she has undergone and trails she went through and the rejection and neglect she faced were all portrayed in this novel *A Married Woman* by Manju Kapur.

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