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## Editorial

Literature has always been studied in relation to life; the kind of life it expresses, the social reality that shapes its content and form etc. etc. The relation between these two is not restricted and extends to various dimensions. Their interaction provides broader framework for understanding phenomenal and experiential aspects of life. The theoretical perspectives that relate to an understanding of language and literature provide significant insights into the nature of human existence. The views concerning life, on the other hand, offer valuable thoughts for interpretation and analysis of literary writings. This inter-relationship between the two looks more obvious and prominent in certain theories focusing on language learning.

The Chomskian views about language learning, that have revolutionized language learning and its study, emphasise the existence of an inherent universal grammar of language. The innate ability to learn a language that man possesses makes ground for the acceptance of something fundamental for all existence. The assumed existence of a fundamental system for language learning involving inherent competence, in a way, contests the ideas propagated by constructionist theories including postmodernist perspectives that contest all pre-givens.

The ideas concerning the existence of an underlying competence for language learning provide basis for an understanding of life in terms of essence that precedes existence. It further carries connotations for interpretation of life by relating it to specific values that carry universal relevance. And these insights can be extended to point out that the standardization of art often contested in the name of challenging hegemony and oppressive practices of literary establishment is something required and cannot be rejected for promoting essentialist thinking and unitary attitudes. In a way, this view again is related to the presence of certain features or qualities that make a work of artistic

All these perceptions are significant in understanding the need

for maintaining sanctity of literature and literary art to check the infiltration of the unwanted subject matter under the guise of providing voice to the unvoiced and silenced or marginalized forms of life. No doubt, the forms of life concerning abnormal forms of sexuality and immoral social behaviour have always formed a part of main stream reality; it does not mean that these elements should be highlighted to the extent that they tend to form the mainstream reality.

These thoughts that reject the very existence of something fundamental to life and literature have encouraged the depiction of abnormal sexual behaviour and political ideas in overt terms in literary writings. The result of all this has resulted in a deliberate neglect of decency in art and caused a fragmentation of this art. Now we find literature categorized in terms of feminist literature, diaspora literature, dalit literature, postcolonial literature etc. Instead of the artistic qualities of art, the kind of views presented in a writing take the centre stage. It tends to make this highly valued form of art a tool that explores the functioning of power politics only.

Our concentrated efforts need to be directed in a way that unscrupulous writers do not exploit people's interest in sensational writings providing pleasurable reading only. It requires an unshakable belief that the purpose of art is to provide value oriented pleasure if not propagation of values. It will certainly give a new direction to literary practice and literary studies.

## Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* : A Feminist Critique

Dr. Harbinder Kaur\*

### Abstract

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) dramatized unconventional and forbidden themes that were hitherto a taboo. Ibsen wrote his plays more than a century ago but still he is regarded as the greatest contemporary dramatist. He universalized both social and individual problems in his plays in such a way that Norwegian literature assumed the stature of world literature. In his plays, he has attacked conventional morality, double code of values, dead and old beliefs, institution of marriage, family and even patriarchal society. In a *Doll's House*, Ibsen championed the cause of women through its protagonist Nora Helmer. She was treated as a doll child and a doll wife. Like every other women of her age, she has no existence and identity outside the domestic world. Economic dependence of women on men was highlighted as the major cause of inequality and subordination of women in marriage.

**Keywords :** Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, Norwegian literature, cause of women, doll wife, doll child.

Ibsen wrote his plays more than a century ago but still he is regarded as the greatest contemporary dramatist. It is because his plays are modern in form as well spirit. He wrote for an age and for all ages. He universalized both social and individual problems in his plays in such a way that Norwegian literature assumed the stature of world-literature. He was the first modern dramatist to emphasize the conflict between individual and society. This conflict takes the shape of his protest against conventional morality. This protest assumes several forms in the plays and leads to anything from a revolt to current ideas of morality, to deviance, or a political or social revolution and at times even suicide. He was a non-conformist like all Victorian writers. In his plays, he has attacked conventional morality, double code of values, dead and old beliefs, institution of marriage, family and even patriarchal society. All those institutions that cage the spirit of a free being, an individual, specially a woman, are under attack. He delineated the society with its double standards most convincingly: "Modern society is not a society of the people. It is merely a society of males" (McFarlane 97).

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Ibsen championed the cause of women to a great extent. He demanded that laws be changed so as to grant women more freedom and equality. In 1879, in an impassioned speech to the members of Scandinavian society in Rome, he urged that the position of Librarian be filled by a woman and that women in the society be given the right to vote. Henrik Ibsen along with Bjorson, Jonas Lie and Alexander Kielland, supported a written petition demanding that women be given the right to own property, and, in more general terms, be awarded legal authority. The woman must know and feel, that she is entering into marriage with the same legal rights as the man and "...it is in the interest of society that a married woman ceases to be legally incompetent" (Hanson 72). Ibsen commented that "to consult men in such a matter is like asking wolves if they desire better protection for the sheep" (McFarlane, 1970: 97). A speech made by Ibsen at the banquet given in his honour by the Norwegian Women's Rights League on 26th May, 1898, is often cited by those who argue that Ibsen's concern was broadly human, not narrowly feminist or political. Ibsen declared:

"I am not a member of the Women's Rights ... must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the Women's Rights movement. I am not even quite clear as to what this Women's Rights movement really is. To me, it has seemed a problem of humanity in general" (McFarlane, 169).

In fact, for Ibsen, these three causes – the socialist cause, the women's cause and the human cause were not mutually exclusive. It also reveals his disinclination to belong to parties or societies of any kind. Besides, socialism and idealism were synonymous ideologies for Ibsen. Ibsen believed that emancipation of women is the emancipation of all human beings. In his views, Ibsen was influenced by the pioneers of the Feminist Movement in Norway, Camilla Collett and Aasta Hansteen. These women believed that legal rights alone would not free the individual. They demanded a spiritual emancipation, greater respect for women as women and for feminine emotions – feminine personality. Feminist influence began right from his own family, his wife Suzannah Thoresen. Ibsen and her step-mother and former governess Magdalene Thoresen. Magdalene Thorsen was a Danish writer of novels and dramas and translator of plays the young Ibsen staged at the Norwegian National theatre in Bergen. She was probably the first 'New Woman' he had ever met.

*A Doll's House* embodies the frustration and tragedy of a woman named Nora who is trapped in a conventional patriarchal set-up. Though a conventional wife and mother, Nora behaves in a very unconventional and bold manner by 'slamming' the door of her husband's house. Such behaviour by Nora in the 19th century society, created a lot of hue and cry: It generated more heat than light. "It exploded like a bomb in a contemporary society ... *A Doll's House* knew no mercy; ending not in reconciliation, but in inexorable calamity, it pronounced a death sentence on accepted social ethics" (Meyer 478). This 'bomb' contributed momentarily to the social debate by Nora's defenders as well as detractors. It was applauded as 'Magna Carta of Feminism,' a 'theatrical sensation' and 'thrilling to the very marrow.' It was also strongly criticised as 'a strong meat not fit for babes,' 'misleading and mischievous,' 'probably the weakest of Ibsen's plays'.

This play had really brought a shift in thinking. As Bernard Shaw puts it, "Nora's revolt is the end of a chapter in human history" (Ibsen, 1985: XXV). Michael Meyer finds that "the terrible offstage slamming of that front door which brings down the curtain resounded through more apartments than Torvald Helmer's ... No play had been so widely and furiously discussed among people who were not normally interested in theatrical or even artistic matters." In the same vein, Lucas remarks, "that door slammed by Nora shook Europe" (Lucas 131). The discussion of Nora's dramatic exist was so extensive that stories circulated about "certain Scandinavian families (who) even went so far as to add to their cards of invitation to evening parties the request : "Please do not discuss *The Doll's House*" (Lucas 149). William Archer writes "that in the minds of thousands in Scandinavia and Germany, Nora Helmer lives with an intense and palpitating life such as belongs to few fictitious characters" (Archer 62). Nora's desertion of her husband and children was found so intolerable that its ending was altered in Germany to suit the taste of public where Nora demanded forgiveness from her husband for such an offence.

In this play, Ibsen attacks the institution of marriage, family and society which do not allow freedom and liberty to women. Women are caged by the conventions promoted by the patriarchal set-up to such an extent that they are reduced to a non-entity, even non-beings, In marriage, woman is treated like a contracted unpaid worker for life-time who has to dance to the tune of her male master. It is the system

and the society which forces woman to merge her identity with the role of wife and mother. Economic dependence is seen to be one of the major causes for his inequality. Inequality creates houses where individuals are treated as dolls. Through the unconventional behaviour of Nora who walks out of her marriage to get her place in the society, Ibsen gave a call to women to rise and claim their due.

Nora is introduced as a young woman married to a barrister named Torvald Helmer. She strongly adheres to the traditional social and moral values due to her conditioning at home and in the society. A conventional wife, she is fully conversant with social, familial and cultural taboos. She regards it her prime duty to look after her husband, children and home. She is always on toes to win the attention and love of her husband. She makes every effort to please him 'by dancing, dressing and reciting.' She has always done so as also in her father's house. Nora is like a doll who is manipulated first by her father in her formative years and later by her husband. Her passive and docile behaviour promoted by the conventional man-made society has given her a doll-like existence. She has only got an ornamental value and is without a voice of her own. Society has never given her an opportunity to grow and become an independent individual. She tells Helmer:

When I lived at home with Papa, he used to tell me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinion. If I thought differently, I had to hide it from him, or he wouldn't have liked it. He called me his little doll, and he used to play with me just as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house" (Ibsen, 1977: 247).

She has accepted this passive, subordinate and secondary role in the house where she has no identity except as wife and mother. Nora is a woman with 'Feminine Mystique.' Torvald's first address to his wife is "Is that my skylark twittering." "Is that my squirrel rummaging around" (p. 148). Torvald calls her a lark and a squirrel treating her like an animal caged in the house. But Nora is not aware of this cage thinking it to be her natural position and role. But in reality, it is a social construct where women are relegated to the margins through their secondary existence. She tells Helmer, "I will do everything I can think of to please you, Torvald – I will sing for you, dance for you" (p. 187). She has been living according to the standards of womanhood set by man due to which she has not grown as an individual. She

behaves in a child-like manner to please her husband. In the words of F.L. Lucas, "Nora, like David Copperfield's Dora, is an infantile child-wife who has failed to grow up" (p. 135). Actual reason behind it is the whole set-up. In the words of Hélène Cixous (1989:484), "And because she thought the image was herself, it became just that. Actually 'she' is given the images that don't belong to her and she forces herself as we've all done, to resemble her." So, her role as a 'doll-child' and later as 'doll-wife' is not something biological, but a given. In the words of Brian W. Downs: "The disagreement of which the drama of 'A Doll's House' is built accordingly is not so much that between a wife and a husband as one between a woman and society in which she lives, the society which imposes its laws upon her" (Downs, 1948: 161). It is the society, the patriarchy which propagates the myth of female subservience and ascribes silence to them. Simone de Beauvoir (1970: 5) rightly says:

One is not born a woman  
One becomes one

It is the society which is responsible for giving roles to individuals and the scales are unevenly loaded. This was the fate of woman in the 19th century and is to some extent even now. In the 19th century, domestic virtue was regarded as the sole road to the otherwise hapless woman's salvation. In the words of Barbara Walter, "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, the neighbours and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman" (Walter, 1976: 22, 30-31). And the proper playing field for these virtues was, of course, home. To provide domestic comfort was her utmost duty. She had no existence and identity outside the domestic world.

One of the major causes of inequality and subordination of women in marriage as highlighted in *A Doll's House* is economic dependence of women on men. Kristine Linde, a close friend of Nora who happens to be her age-mate had married a sterile man just for economic reasons. She is a conventional woman, a gender stereotype who represents the values of patriarchy and tries to promote them. When she learns from Nora about the loan taken by her on her own, she immediately retorts.

'A wife can't borrow without her husband's consent' and that 'it's rash to do something without his knowing' (p. 160). She finds her existence meaningless because she can't live for herself. As her husband hasn't left anything for her to live on, she has to work herself after his death, but she never liked it nor enjoyed it. Mrs. Linde is a foil to Nora who seeks independence and freedom and walks out. Helmer becomes serious as 'playtime is over' and lesson time has started but Nora is no more ready to get tutored from Helmer. "Ah, Torvald, you're not the man to teach me to be a real wife to you" (p.226). She feels that she must 'educate' herself but he was not the man to do so. 'I must do it alone' and must stand on 'ownfeet' and see the 'world outside.' She must get experience now but Helmer tries to stop her by reminding her of her duty towards her husband and children but now she feels that she has another duty, just as sacred and that is 'duty to myself' (p. 227).

Nora represents the 'New woman' who is no longer subservient to man, she defies all conventions and endeavours to find her own way of life. Nora refuses to be an ideal woman who is 'an angel in the house' and is passive, docile and selfless creature. She rejects marriage whereas Linde enters into another marriage with Krogstad. She can't see herself except in the role of wife and mother. Patriarchal set-up and economic dependence of women on men has enslaved their very existence, their psyche. In contrast to her, Nora, the female protagonist of '*A Doll's House*,' though treated as a doll, proves to be more than a woman and even a man. She is bold, courageous and strong enough to manage loan to save her husband's life when the circumstances so demanded and interest even without the knowledge of her husband. This extra work i.e. embroidery, copying, crocheting is not a burden to her. She enjoys working as it gives her the feeling of 'earner' and in the dominant role.

'The title of the play '*A Doll's House*' is also suggestive. '*A Doll's House*' is a world of imagination and make believe, much away from reality. It is a plaything meant for the entertainment of its master. 'A doll' is a feminine toy, a non-living object having no identity or existence of its own. It is merely a toy, a plaything in the hands of the master or the owner. It has to act and dance according to the wishes and desires of its master. A 'House' stands for the institution, here it means a dwelling of conventions of patriarchal society that subordinates

the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior. Nora is shown here to be the 'doll' due to her doll-like existence in her house first as 'doll-child' and later on 'doll-wife.' When the truth of her existence in the house i.e. marriage, family and society, dawns on her, she walks out of it by slamming the door of the house. Family is the 'micro society' which reflects the nature of 'macro society.' The status of individual in the family is the illustration of his/her position in the wider society. The power structures within the walls of the domestic home reflect the hierarchical power structure which prevail in the wider world. Nora's position is that of individual in opposition to a hostile, conservative and stagnant society.

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## Split Image of Woman a Study of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*

Dr. Kiran Arora\*

### Abstract

This paper traces the journey from myth and archetype to the integration of the female image in Harold Pinter's works. It foregrounds the character of Ruth, in *The Homecoming* who is fiercely independent because she single-handedly silences and subsequently subjugates the male characters in the drama to assert absolute, uncontested domination. This paper locates the play in feminist movement of which the first is a political position, the second a matter of biology and the third, a set of culturally defined characteristics. Pinter sensed a paradigmatic shift in which feminist theorists called into question the phallogocentric language with which they were attempting to describe their subjects. Pinter's *The Homecoming* encourages its audience to reconsider their conditioned perception of gender in society. Through undermining the false binary of humour and tragedy, Pinter asks the audience to reassess the supposed binary of male/female as it occurs in the play. Through combative, polemical and radical texts, they contested the existing patriarchal structures and revolutionised the identity of the woman at the hands of various writers.

**Keywords :** Feminism, feminine dominance, obnoxious behaviour, Bitch-Goddess, matriarch mother, phallogocentric language, paradigmatic shift, feminine.

Feminist theory emerged as a reaction to the patriarchal, myopic notions of man that regarded the body of the woman as a hindrance, a prison, "The female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities. We should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness. (Beauvoir 15). In contrast, Harold Pinter's plays convey a vision both darker and more delightful, that suggest that a human being's actions at the private level may have profound implications on the public and even global levels of life. Like the originator of modern existentialism, Martin Heidegger, Pinter's plays deals with man's confrontation with himself and the nature of his own being. Elizabeth Sakellaridou says, "His interest gathers round the revelation of character, he focuses attention on the subtext, the Freudian slips, compulsive repetitions that

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give the character away. They move in a pre-conscious world where dream, fantasy, myth, ritual, instinct and primitiveness are important elements" (Sakellaridou 65).

When a critic once tried to establish a link between Pinter's female characteristics and his Jewish mother, Mel Gussow reports, "He took violent exception...to a recent article that suggests a key to Pinter may lie in his Jewish matriarch mother." (Gussow 6). However, the influence has been noted in the earlier plays until *The Homecoming*. In *The Room* Mr Kidd believes that his mother was Jewish. In *The Birthday Party* Goldberg is a Jew. Max's household in *The Homecoming* is considered a Jewish family. Ruth is ceremoniously installed as a new matriarch in a family of men. Pinter's insistence on stressing his distance from his mother and his wife, Antonia Fraser and denial on any connection between his life and art might suggest a continuous struggle to shake off a deeply felt feminine influence. This is thus manifested in the behaviour of his male characters to their women. As a result, the delineation of his female characters as *dramatis personae* and their role as theatrical characters are dictated by a prevailing masculine discourse, which produces archetypal female figures in the models set by patriarchal society.

*The Homecoming* is the turning point in the dramatist's feminine characterisation through the portrayal of Ruth. Ruth is both the "nexus" and the "pivot", not because she becomes the recipient of constant male adoration and abuse, but also because her female psyche becomes the focal point of a male writer's scrutiny. "Ruth's centrality does not yield only a strong archetypal figure of the Earth Mother or the Bitch-Goddess, but also a very realistic female character" (Sakellaridou 107).

Ruth has been brought by her husband, teddy, to his parental home in London. The family consists of the old tough patriarch Max, his two younger sons Lenny and Joey and the effete bachelor, Sam. The reception of Ruth in this male ménage is very ambiguous. Their male chauvinism dictates hate, abuse and sexual demands of the woman, their childishness induces them to plead for her motherly care and affection. In the end, Ruth stays with the family, taking up the vacant place of their dead mother Jessie, whose memory is respectfully remembered as well as violently cursed by both her husband and sons.

Ruth, "Don't be so sure though. Look at me, I ... move my leg, That's all it is. But I wear ... underwear ..which moves with me. It

captures your attention. It's a leg ... moving. My lips move. Why don't you restrict your observations to that? Perhaps the fact they move is more significant." (Pinter:65) What also strengthens the interpretation of Ruth as a prostitute is her identification with Jessie, the highly praised and mercilessly abused dead mother, the absence of whom causes her to enter the family and take up her place. But Ruth's complexity lies in her rejection of deification as she rejects the image of the woman as a disembodied, fragile beauty. Ruth: "No...I was a model for the body. A photographic model for the body" (Pinter:55), shows that for the first time Pinter allows his woman to speak about her past. Critic A.R. Braunmuller says, "The metamorphic power of memory allows Ruth to not only form the future, but reconstruct the past." (Braunmuller: 5). Hugh Nelson says, "Ruth comes home to herself, to all her possibilities as a woman." (Sakellaridou: 111). By the end of the play, she forms for herself a compact personality, synthesising all aspects of the female principle, the mother, the wife, the whore and attains equilibrium. In Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, Max repeatedly calls his dead wife a bitch and a whore. Teddy acquiesces to, and to some extent pushes, his wife to stay behind in England to be a prostitute and maid for his family. Joey, a boxer, admits to coercing women into having intercourse with him without proper contraception. Lenny, a self-confessed pimp, admits to beating and killing women on a regular basis. And yet, in *Modern Marriage in Collapse: A Study of Selected Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter*, Eugene Ngezem writes "Ruth's obnoxious behaviour (prostitution) partly constitute[s] the moral tragedy of the play" (104). In "G.B. Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming: Comedies of Implosion*, Emil Roy writes that "Ruth rejects her husband, Teddy, who may have offered marriage as a form of redemption" from her assumed life as a prostitute (336). And, in *The man in the Glass Booth* Arthur Ganz writes of Ruth's "thirst for . . . violence" and the ways in which the play is about "feminine dominance" (181, 186).

There is an overt dramatic clash between the male and female principles as Ruth is the image of the modern woman that was sketchily conceived in the characters of Virginia, Flora, Sally, Sarah and Stella in his earlier works. She is placed in the middle of a male ménage, but remains an immovable rock. The inadequacy of the males suggests that they see themselves as fragments of the whole, in contrast to Ruth's search for wholesomeness. As soon as she is sanctified through holy matrimony and maternity, she becomes the object of worship for the

entire family. Lenny's attitude to her is surprisingly similar to that of his father. When he first meets her, he treats her in a very offensive way. Later, when at the beginning of the second act, she is established in the "bosom of the family" as a wife and mother, his attitude changes from vilification to romanticism. He then narrates to Ruth a third story about a girl for whom he had bought a hat with flowers, "I bought a girl a hat once. We saw it in a glass case, in a shop. I tell you what it had. It had a bunch of daffodils on it, tied with a black satin bow and then it was covered with a cloche of black veiling. I'm telling you, she was made for it" (Pinter 73). Critics such as Yan and Prentice are beginning to broaden our understandings of Ruth as a character, yet the scholarship devoted to her is still widely skewed: she is continuously read as a victimizer and a whore, despite evidence to the contrary. While many of the goals of second-wave feminism have been reached, this blatant buying-in to this simplistic understanding of womanhood shows that the goals of third-wave feminism continue to elude us.

Rather than looking at *The Homecoming* as a play in which a domineering mother/whore figure comes to dominate her husband's family, one can look at the play as though Ruth is an embodiment of our misunderstandings and assumptions about women. There are two benefits to looking at Ruth as an embodiment of our assumptions about women: first, it allows Ruth to emblemize the belief that women are entities whose meaning is imbued by men. The second reason for looking at Ruth in this way is that it finally relieves Ruth from her position as a scapegoat, and, instead, allows audience members to analyze her actions as they are presented rather than as they have frequently been assumed to occur. There is significant textual evidence that indicates that Ruth embodies certain characteristics frequently assumed to be essential to womanhood. The first evidence that Ruth is an archetype is that she is seen, simply, as a figurative reincarnation of Jessie. In a two-act play with little back-story, it is imperative that characters be aligned in such a way as to inform one another and provide the audience with some sort of characterization: any information we receive regarding one character's past can be, in essence, understood to apply to his or her parallel character. The use of interdependent pairs is seen frequently throughout Pinter's work and assists audience members in the understanding of characters by providing pieces of information that can be dispersed among the characters. In *The Homecoming*, the usual interdependent pairs, typically two men or a

male and a female, are actually composed of triads. The most interesting pair, however, is an actual pair: Ruth and Jessie. However, Jessie and Ruth will of course be compared because they are the only two significant women in the play and the only two women in the family, the fact that they are both women tells us little about them, but rather exploits presuppositions about gender. The first time that Jessie and Ruth are compared, it is through Max's understanding of each woman as a whore. When meeting Ruth for the first time, he says to Teddy, "I've never had a whore under this roof before Ever since your mother died" (Pinter 42). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues against Max's categorization of women, saying, "the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' is constructed" (Butler 19). Throughout the play, we learn about each male character by what he does and how he interacts with other characters, but for Ruth, we are only privileged to learn about her through what the male characters say about her and through her alignment with a dead woman. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray explains that "to correspond to a man's desire, [a woman] has to identify herself with his mother" (70). Though Ruth, having never met Jesse, has not identified herself with her husband's mother, the men in the play immediately begin to align the two women. Furthermore, only through her alignment with Jessie do we understand any motivation behind Ruth's character. Ruth also has no past, save for the one that the men—critics and characters—insist she had as a prostitute. We learn none of these things from Ruth herself. In the same way that a puppet is imbued with life through the puppet master, Ruth's past is shaped completely through our understanding of Jessie and the assumptions that have been made about these women and, to a certain extent, all women. That Ruth agrees with almost everything the men say and ask of her further proves that Pinter was playing with characteristics of the stereotypes of gender. Ruth is a non-subject whose personality is formed by men, as are all women, Lin Yan might argue. Yan explains that "man possesses the power to speak and to represent; he gives woman an image that is based on his idealization of women in general" (289-290). In fact, all women in the play are characterized merely by the ways in which men react to them and, as characters, the way they are presented by the men to the audience. This is most obvious in Ruth; however, Jessie is only understood by

the ways in which she is represented by her abusive husband and incompetent children, and it is the only way that she can be represented since she is deceased. Interestingly, though the play seems to provide ample evidence that Ruth is an overly passive woman, critics have often found her to be an aggressive character while simultaneously ignoring the men's frequent violent outbursts. The text, however, is contrary to the notion that Ruth is violent. Through a number of particular scenes, audience members can see that, rather than being the aggressor, Ruth is simply following the lead of the men; yet, somehow, she gets blamed for the corrupt events that take place in the play.

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## Anti Essentialism in the Mid 20th Century Literary Theories and Criticism

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### Abstract

This paper aims at highlighting the revolutionary angle in the literary and intellectual traditions beginning from Deconstruction, Post Structuralism ranging across Post colonialism and New Marxism of 1980's in the academic scenario of West. The dismantling of the very concepts of essence, truth, idea in their absoluteness invites the recognition of multiplicities and differences that works towards the equal power sharing between people of different gender, class, race, region and religion.

**Keywords:** Essentialism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, difference, Postcolonialism, representation, decentred entities, authoritarian, meaning, polarisation, gender

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche viewed that humans are the prisoners of their perspectives drawing attention to the idea that we incessantly wallow and consume ourselves in establishing our viewpoints based on our presuppositions, biases and prejudices or the received notions and value systems. Essentialism draws itself from essence ie fixing our glance at the so called 'essential' characteristics of a person, group or thing while making evaluation or passing judgements about ourselves and others. The quickest and the easiest way to assess other is to look at him or her through the lens dipped in the notions based on the circumstances of her birth, gender, race, colour and region etc.

Postmodernism that supposedly initiated after World War II brought radicalisation of critical thinking in the intellectual spheres with the supplementation of hierarchies with pluralities; literature with literatures and knowledge with knowledges. Taking on the rigid concept of tradition, Michel Foucault in his seminal work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* published in 1969 points out that it (tradition) "allows a reduction of difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin". This very 'origin' which is fixed, invincible, dictatorial is repudiated by Derrida in his well known essay "Structure, sign and Play in the Discourse of Human

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Sciences”, something which like centre governs the structure and keeps the margin always in its fixed ie underrated position. Although he declares later the incoherent position of the centre which is both inside and outside the structure it is trying to rule over.

Deconstruction that became associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida worked towards the democratisation of everyday thinking of each one of us that was so used to conceiving the outside reality or truth in a particular way. Derrida pointed out at the inherent contradiction within the language made up of words conveying the endless shifting of meanings if treated against different contexts, denotations and connotations as well as the etymology. Rather than fixing on one single meaning in language, the sign system by which we understand the world or life around us, we might think of the possibility of many other aspects or meanings inherent inside it which mark the contradictions, accepting the life thus, in the most tolerant manner or as it is said being cool about it.

We are so habitual of finding and relying upon one truth, idea, value system or essence that in its absence we feel angry, helpless, desperate and violent. We can imagine what happens if someone’s idea of good, beautiful, essential or superior or as a matter of the inverted ones as bad, ugly, nonessential or inferior are challenged. The consequences in the form of hatred, torture, destruction and subjugation are no stranger for us coming to us through various incidents grounded on gender, race, class, caste region and religion. Post Enlightenment period had already made us wary of the reason, logic or rationality that in its ugly manifestations in Nazi killings, racism, and sexism had been appropriated by the powerful and the privileged. Deconstruction in its mode of suspicion for the reductivist tendencies exposes its liberal angle by which a gender structures, for example. Based on the idea of fixed sense of feminine and masculine attributes whereby the definition of best women and men are sealed and sanctified by the society resulting in the inequalities and stunted growth of its individuals.

Poststructuralism initiated by deconstruction in 1960’s got itself linked with Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva and Lacan was a reaction as well continuation of Ferdinand Saussure’s ideas of linguistic structuralism by adding the concept of deference to that of difference in comprehending sign system in language. It argued that a particular signifier or word spoken or written not only attains its meaning through

difference from its related or contrasted words but there is permanent deference of its meanings. A text hence cannot claim a fixed structure as it is made of words and words do not have fixed but varied and contradictory meanings .A text thus challenges the presence of any authoritarian voice through the presence of sub texts already sedimented in its structure. Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality also propagates the same that is how the pre existing texts influence the texts and cancel the idea of an original text that could claim dominance and an overarching control. The death of the author, the single meaning or essence thus frees the text from grip of meanings and ideologies which may work on the reader or the subject. “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author”( Barthe 150). Barthes does not leave the control of the text on the reader even as that would mean the birth of another essence through the overall control of the reader. Even reader as a subject with distinct predispositions and prejudices has to die for the text to emerge free.

The anti foundational stance of the deconstructuralists and poststructuralists sounds non-functional if taken at the face value. Undoubtedly, comprehending life through difference as structuralists believe, comes to us quite naturally and is imbued with practicality. It is absolutely required to identify the difference between things, ideas marked by similarity or strangeness in order to go about life as responsible beings but what if such differences as of race, colour gender or castes transform themselves into hierarchal and polarised structures whereby we tend to downgrade other group or individual in comparison with ourselves and our group.

Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* brings out the assumption laid out by German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel that each conscious being enters into a struggle for existence with another conscious being and each concludes that he is an essential subject ie self and all others are inessential i.e. the ‘other’(Beauvoir17) As far as the achievement of identity and self recognition is concerned it is affirmative but what is problematic is playing identity politics on this ground trying to rule, control and hold power over the other. Sometimes we are told , how empowering women means disempowering men and these two terms are naturally bound, and are reciprocal. And quite interestingly the image of a see saw depicting humans endlessly playing the ego games of power politics as men and women occurs to our

mind. Revelling in each other's show down whatever gender race class and religion we may belong to undoubtedly prove fatal for all of us as humans if we fail to curb it.

The dehumanised and slave subject is the concern of the Postcolonial literary criticism which looked back to review the harm done to the colonized subjects and their culture through misrepresentations over a period of time and brought out some replacement formula, the possibilities to recover the loss. Postcolonialism in the non hyphenated sense, as one word, draws its focus on the existence of hierarchical structures within the postcolonial societies and the formation of unequal power relations gender, class and caste based .In the words of John McLeod, "The term postcolonialism is not the same as 'after colonialism' as if colonial values are no longer to be reckoned with. It does not define a radically new historical era, nor does it herald a brave new world, where all the ills of the colonial past has been cured. Rather, postcolonialism recognises both historical continuity and change."(McLeod 33)

Colonialism in the form of interpellation of the colonised subject worked like racism in order to perpetuate the stereotypes and to make the other believe in its otherness. Frank Fanon in his seminal work *Black Skin White Masks* offers a very telling account of how he felt when a white French girl pointed out to his blackness and racial difference with great derision as 'dirty nigger'. He writes: "What else could be it for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematisation. All I wanted was to be a man among other men."(Fanon 20) I am reminded of when someone asked what is feminism. The reply from a well known feminist was it is about treating women as human beings.

Despite the thrust of the postcolonial thinking on the humanity issue of the colonised subject, it does invite criticism for practicing gender discrimination for ignoring the contribution made by women in the nationalism discourse and also silencing them ironically in the very attempt to speak for them. Western Feminism had already been repudiated for practicing double colonisation for ignoring the specific concerns of the black and Asian women in their mainstream discourse and hastily applying their version of solutions to their problems through their ethnocentric bias and the treatment of third world women as one

category. Hence as Gayatri Spivak stresses that the critics must be conscious of the specifics of their positions and recognise the cultural and historical contexts while speaking for the third world subjects and that the relationship between the critic and her research needs to be more interactive. Here like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, she is referring to various scholarly works by the first world women to write for the women from the erstwhile colonies.

In her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak expresses her suspicion by taking a poststructuralist stance towards the very attempt of the scholars to describe the subalterns as subjectivities knowable and united. She refers to the Subaltern Studies scholars, the works of Ranajit Guha and others, who were on the mission of retrieving the voice of the oppressed subalterns who participated in the insurgency movements during the British times. Her premise was that human subject is not a sovereign subject in control of his or her self rather is the one constituted by the shifting discourses of power situating them in different positions and relations. Hence in the patriarchal society retrieving the voice of the lost subaltern as women becomes all the more problematic. Her attempt in this work is to warn the critics of the problems which may occur if the system of representation "endorses the discredited models of essential centred subjectivity".(Spivak, Beginning Postcolonialism 194)The very idea of bringing to crisis such representations is to defeat the tradition of taking recourse to the essentialism while defining the other who may be strategically and racially different from the observer, writer or critic.

As Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher believes the social structures as decentred entities where various levels exist in complex relations of inner contradictions and mutual conflict and that we humans are the subjects of ideology which summons us to take our places in the social structure. He defines ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence"(Althusser108) One can reach the point that the we are constructed as different gender, class, caste and race due to the interiorisation of certain ideologies and social values which interpret the external reality for us. But in no way entrap us completely, as Raymond Williams argues in concern with the relationship of dominant, residual and emergent formations in his work *Marxism and Literature* .

“...it a fact about the modes of domination that they select from, and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. What they exclude may often be seen as personal or the private, or as the natural or even the metaphysical. Indeed it is usually in one or other of these terms that the excluded area is expressed, since what the dominant has effectively seized is the ruling definition of the social.”(Williams 17) Here lies our hope to free ourselves from the chains and change the society.

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## Gender Re-visited: Reading Mahesh Dattani’s *Dance Like a Man*

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### Abstract

Masculinity and femininity are often treated as polar opposites. Indian society has always been more or less phallogocentric, where men have always been found to be at the zenith of power and hegemony. Steeped in stereotypes, it looks down with ridicule and scorn upon any deviations from the essential gender or sexuality. It is difficult to find writings in Indian English literature where the deviations and the deviants are celebrated. There has been little focus on the subversion of patriarchal stereotypes. Mahesh Dattani, seen as one of the pioneers of Modern Indian Theatre, seems to unearth the excesses and repressive forces behind gender constructions. He takes on what he calls the “invisible issues” which have traditionally been kept hidden so as to maintain the status quo and keep away any speck of rupture which can put to question their normative existence. A study of Dattani’s *Dance Like a Man*, therefore, is truly rewarding when read through the prism of gender and its nuanced presence in the Indian context. In this paper, I aim to highlight how the playwright has exploited the role of patriarchy in the play, *Dance Like a Man*, and shall explore the issue of gender construct vis-à-vis the male!

**Keywords:** Essential, Stereotypes, Sexuality, Subversion

“A woman in a man’s world may be considered as being progressive. But a man in a woman’s world is pathetic” ( Dattani 427). This is precisely what Dattani writes about in his play, *Dance Like a Man*. He does not take sides with either of the sexes; on the contrary, he simply points out the inconsistencies in the prevalent gender hegemony in the society. Society constructs roles for each gender, roles that are internalized in such ways so that an individual acknowledges that he shall emerge as a subject only in conformity to them. Gender construct is as oppressive to the male as it is to the female. Critics like Butler do not believe that there is or can be an “essential” woman or man because these are meanings that emerge in performances relative to each other. The postmodern views of gender are anti-essentialist and

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reject the notions of authenticity, authority, universality and objectivity. Hence, texts such as Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* question the desperately strict adherence to gender roles in the conventional social framework which gives birth to a caustic relation between a father and a son, a husband and wife, and also ruins an artist of his innocent passion for his art.

Dattani portrays a patriarchal society and the narrative spans three generations - Amritlal Parekh, the patriarch; his son, Jairaj; Jairaj's wife, Ratna; their daughter Lata; and future son-in-law, Vishwas. Throughout the play, the past, the present and the future are seamlessly connected, depicting the struggles of each generation against the expected gender roles of the society, till the future generation experiences the freedom of choosing the roles they prefer, regardless of their gender. The play focuses on issues that are both contemporary and timeless. The play, *Dance Like a Man*, explores the life of a budding dancer, Jairaj, and how he loses his career, passion, dream, and consequently, his purpose in life to the societal notions of gender. Jairaj and his wife Ratna are dancers, living under the shelter of Jairaj's father, Amritlal Parekh. It is implied in the text that Ratna marries Jairaj because he is a dancer and he will allow her to dance post-marriage, so that her career would not be compromised. But Amritlal Parekh, being a man of fixed notions, believes that dance is the "craft of a prostitute to show off her wares", hence a man has no business to learn such a craft and anyone who, "learnt such a craft could not be a man." (Dattani 421). He stands as a metaphor of the unwritten rules of authority that many come to accept as part of the Indian joint family.

Dance, particularly, Bharathanatyam, is a very beautiful art form and is elevating and spiritual; but the middle class Indian society does not approve of a man being a practitioner of this form, as it is considered to render him effeminate. A man must act like a man, be the provider to the family and indulge in manly sports that befit his 'sex'. Of course, not all men accept patriarchal ideology, and those who don't, are often derided, by both patriarchal men and women, as weak and unmanly, as if the only way to be a man was to be a patriarchal man. Dattani questions the norms of being a man. The title itself becomes the topic sentence for the play.

Through the character of Jairaj, the playwright shows the struggle of an artist, who desires to find his creativity within the stereotypical

society he is forced to inhabit. Jairaj, by choosing dance as his profession, wants to demolish the stereotype that dance is only for women. It is generally believed that women are at the receiving end of the oppressive patriarchal society; however, the play reveals that at the receiving end of the politics of gender is not Ratna, but Jairaj. He is not only kept on a leash by his father, but his wife too deliberately overshadows him in all their dance performances together.

As Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues that phallogocentrism is understood as regimes of power and hence, Amritlal is afraid that his dancing son would lose power in the heterosexual society that he lives in. In a bourgeois society, power is synonymous to earning money, and Amritlal believes that dance cannot be a way of earning money for Jairaj because in a highly gendered society, dancing can never be considered to be a man's profession. Amritlal's concern has always been to make his son a 'man'. In a question that he asks to Ratna, 'Do you know where a man's happiness lies?' (389), he immediately answers himself, "In being a man". Amritlal remarks: "I can recognise a clever woman when I see one ... And you are intelligent enough to realise that the decision to let you dance is in my hands, now". Amritlal plays an ideal sexual politics as he robs his son Jairaj of his dreams. Ratna falls in the patriarchal troupe set up by Amritlal and forms an unlikely alliance with him. Both enter into a pact to achieve their own selfish ends, thereby perpetuating the old stereotypes. Amritlal wants Ratna to help him make Jairaj an adult, "Help me to help him to grow up" (389). A deal is struck and Ratna buys her freedom to dance at the expense of Jairaj's ambition to become a male Bharatanatyam dancer. Jairaj is the figure whose predicament occupies centre stage, but his position is defined in opposition to his wife, Ratna. Ratna demonstrates her dominance in various ways, overtly and covertly, throughout the text. Ratna, a South-Indian herself, for instance, takes it for granted that the beverage served in the home will be coffee, and breakfast would be either dosas or idlis; to which the subdued Gujarati Jairaj cannot object. "Not only does Ratna operate in so-called 'typical' female ways by throwing tantrums, being unreasonable, constantly launching into a litany of her personal failures and woes, but she also completely dominates her husband and daughter" (Multani 29).

Ratna calls Jairaj a mediocre dancer and blames him for destroying his career by not accepting invitation to dance alone. "If you dance

alone, your mediocrity would be exposed? Yes, ask yourself your true worth and you will get your answer. Yes, I did cut you off but then you deserved it! So don't come to me saying I destroyed you. I didn't have to. You did it all by yourself. And don't expect me to feel sorry for you, because I'm too busy feeling sorry for myself and Shankar". Jairaj tries to defy the expressive model of gender and the notion of true gender identity but his defiance ends in a tragic note. He tells Ratna, "I want you to give me back my self esteem! Bit by bit you took it when you insisted on top billing in all our programs. You took it when you made me perform my weakest items, you took it when you arranged the lighting so that I was literally dancing in your shadow" (443). Jairaj's tragedy is that for his father, he stopped being a man when he started learning Bharatnatyam; and for his wife he's a "spineless boy who couldn't leave his father's house" (421). He is weighed down under his father's censure which stunts his growth as a dancer. He is also no match for his dominating wife. His only ambition in life remains to train his son, Shankar, as a dancer so that Shankar could dance Lord Shiva's tandava nritya, the dance of destruction, and avenge his father's humiliation from his grandfather. But Shankar dies in childhood because of an overdose of opium by an irresponsible ayah. Jairaj's deepest regret remains that he has not been able to dance like a man.

Dattani draws the character of Ratna as a foil to Jairaj. She has succeeded well in the manly world, deftly managing both the appreciators and the critics. She has also succeeded in creating a favourable atmosphere for Lata, their daughter, to "shine as a star" and hence takes the full credit in doing so. Jairaj, on the other hand, now looks for opportunities to highlight Ratna's failures. Hence, he recedes back to the 'essentialism' of fixed gender roles so as to point out Ratna's failure in emerging as a caring mother, for to him, it is due to her negligence that their son Shankar died. This is in conformity to social construction of gender roles that it is the mother's duty to look after the child. He takes to drinking, holding Ratna responsible for his drunkenness because she has, under a deal with his autocratic father, deprived him of dancing. On her part, Ratna blames his addiction to alcohol for his mediocrity.

The boundaries of gender and body are thinly placed. They often spill over each other in social discourses. The performances of the body do go on to identify the gender of the individual. Body may

complement the performance of an art, but when it is internalized in such ways so as to repeat it in terms of performatives, socio-cultural normative is put to question. Hence patriarchal heads like Amritlal find enough space to question the 'normalcy' of the individual. The Guru in *Dance Like a Man* keeps long hair for it enhances the "abhinay", but to Amritlal, he becomes a butt of ridicule, for he fails to appreciate the art inherent in such a performance, and rather questions his "sanity".

Speaking of the three generations and the three time frames of the past, the present and the future, we see that Amritlal carries the baggage of his own times and tries to manipulate the next generation, Jairaj and Ratna, to carry it forward. Jairaj and Ratna ironically do the same with their own progeny and try to pass on their preferences to their daughter, Lata. Jairaj is very happy when Lata Parekh is announced as the "star of the festival" by the Herald and the Times. They are extremely proud when the review reads, "Her nritya and abhinaya were unparalleled and truly remarkable in a dancer so young in years. Under the expert guidance of her parents, Smt. Ratna and Sri. Jairaj Parekh, she has blossomed into a superlative dancer. This is one star which will shine bright in the sky of a bharatanatayam" (432). Though Jairaj and Ratna try to transfer their own ambitions to Lata, she proves to be very different altogether. She is a talented dancer, but is quite happy to marry Vishwas, the rich mithaiwala's son, who for his part, is charming and comfortable with the complete ignorance of bharatanatayam- the passion of the preceding generation. "Vishwas: I like those poses they did; they remind me of sculptures like ... You know, the one you see on a postcard where the dancer is talking to a parrot or something ... it looked good ... I liked the way she finished with a flourish. We knew then it was time to clap" (433).

Unlike her parents who believed in perfection and could not think of committing a mistake during the performance, Lata is able to laugh at herself, for her flaws in dance. "I forgot the last Jathi and simply posed till the music finished and I finished with a flourish" (434). The future generation represented by Vishwas and Lata seem to have a better understanding between them, unlike the elderly couple, Jairaj and Ratna, who were from the same field of dance but had several moments of misunderstanding, unnecessary quarrels and tension that spread over the years, creating harsh and bitter memories for each other. While Ratna was ambitious and manipulative, dance is an important hobby for

Lata; it never becomes a wild passion. "When I was a little girl, I used to stand near the door and watch mummy and daddy practice. It was magic for me. I knew then what I wanted to be" (430). At the same time, marrying Vishwas was also important and she wouldn't sacrifice her love for dance. However, when the question of having children arises, Vishwas also faces the same male dominated gender description. Lata is not ready to have children and when she proposes this idea to Vishwas, his masculinity is in for a shock.

Angelie Multani reads Ratna and Lata as "transgressive women" - Ratna has married outside her community and Lata is preparing to do so. Neither of them has the necessary female virtues of demureness, quietness, and obedience, both are ambitious and outspoken. The play therefore also seems to reflect on the reversal of gender roles. Dattani here has conceived the two as more masculine than the men, for both of them emerge as characters who successfully manipulate the public space. Hence the play is a brilliant questioning of the social boundaries for the activities of men and women, the gender stereotypes, the gender roles and the ensuing gender trouble under the garb of a fine domestic conflict.

Dattani treats men as victims of their own fates. He shows them as powerful, authoritative pillars of the family, and at the same time, he creates other male characters who, question the normative roles of men and become social deviants, raising questions on the hegemonic social structure and in a way, subvert the socially constructed stereotypes. In an article, 'Men will be Men...Stuck in Patriarchal Role', Nandita Dasgupta writes, "She may have got rid of her meow, but he's stuck with his alpha roar. For men, there seems to be no other way to be. Sure, he may wax his chest and do the washing up today, but he's still trapped by patriarchal stereotypes and continues to play protector, procreator and provider." On the one hand, we find reflections of the aggressive, heteronormative portrayals of men like Amritlal, who are stuck in their roles of power and authority; while on the other, there are people like Jairaj, who do not fall in line and choose to be fall-outs or deviants. Dasgupta, in her article, quotes Roop Sen, who conducts workshops on gender imaging and roles, "We question the stereotype. Because if you're not in the mould, every part of you is questioned. If you're anything else, you are demasculinised". Dattani himself, in one of the interviews, says: "Thematically, I talk about the

areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand this space. They live on the fringes of the society and are not looking for acceptance, but are struggling to grab as much fringe space for themselves as they can" (qtd. by Karthika). Mahesh Dattani towards the end expresses the sad and very painful reality- the consequences and repercussions of gender conflict overwhelm Jairaj and lead him to an empty space and loneliness. While his obstinate father makes him feel worthless, Ratna takes away his self-esteem and confidence.

*Dance like a Man* is a play that presents characters in all possible hues and shades. Dattani deftly poses the question of gender constructs and demands to know whether the world is really progressive or are we still in search of that utopian era where gender boundaries fade away. As the global intellectual climate moves from modernity to post-modernity, it is time to transcend gender politics, genre boundaries and narrative discourses; and understand that gender equality means oppression of neither gender. Ignoring the universal metaphysical and existential hues of human existence is probably a circumscribing of vision. Gender is not a fixed or stable category across the world. Gender, like a text, is a performance, the playing out of roles, that has to be repeated and validated within specific social and cultural contexts, but which is also open to contest and negotiations.

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## A Kingdom of her Own : 'Re-creation' of Nur Jahan in The Taj Trilogy by Indu Sundarasan

Dr. Navjot S Deol\*

### Abstract

Mughal Period in Indian history was a time when women were subjugated and marginalized by a heavily patriarchal setup. They led cloistered lives, seldom stepping out of the confines of their homes or harems, if they were royalty. In this period rose to power Nur Jahan who not only broke the glass ceiling by attaining unprecedented power as an Empress of Mughal India but she exerted tremendous influence on all aspects of life of those times. She was the twentieth and last wife of Emperor Jahangir but her influence was phenomenal. Unfortunately, Nur Jahan in popular memory is now an obscure figure, often confused with Mumtaz Mahal or Anarkali. This paper investigates how Indu Sundarasan brings to life the character of Nur Jahan in her fiction and how her depiction differs from that of European writers or the screen adaptation in the Hindi movie 'Nur Jahan'.

**Keywords:** Mughal India, subjugation, marginalization, patriarchal mindsets, woman power, de facto ruler .

The unique aspects of Nur Jahan's character and life make her a suitable and powerful personality for recreation in literature. Despite her circumstances, her gender, the era she was living in and the patriarchal society, times when royal women were 'seldom seen and never heard', times when it was difficult to conceptualize a woman stepping out of the cloistered harem and having a say in matters of the state, rose a woman who became the virtual ruler of the vast Mughal Empire. Rather she acquired a Kingdom of her own. She was Nur Jahan, the twentieth and last wife of Jahangir, the fourth Mughal Emperor.

Nur Jahan married Jahangir in 1611 and with consummate ease acquired unprecedented power and soon became the de facto ruler of Mughal India. She ruled for 16 out of the 22 years that Jahangir was on throne. She appeared in Jharoka with Emperor and her name appeared with Emperor's on royal farmans and coins were struck in her name. She owned trading ships. She influenced architecture and fashion. She

practically ran the affairs of the state with the help of Junta comprising her father, brother and Jahangir's son Khurram, later known as Shah Jahan whereas Jahangir in the grip of dipsomania, by his own confession, was content with consuming 'six drinks of wine and half a ser of meat' - a documented fact.

An extraordinary woman, an intriguing historical personality, her chequered life from her birth as Mehrunnisa, daughter of a Persian nobleman, to her romance which finally culminated in marriage with Jahangir as his twentieth wife forms the subject of the novel by the same name *The Twentieth Wife* (2002) by Indu Sundarasan. Sundarasan is a historical fiction writer and this work fetched for her Washington State Book Award in 2003. The sequel *The Feast of Roses* deals with the life of Empress Nur Jahan which traces her life from her marriage to her demise in 1645 in Lahore where she was living with her widowed daughter Ladli Begum in exile. These two works are a part of *The Taj Trilogy* and these are the texts I shall explore.

Nur Jahan is mentioned in the travel journals of the Europeans who visited Mughal Empire in the 17th century. They were all men and their biases percolate into the writings of the Queen. This paper offers a critical appraisal of the construction of the character of Nur Jahan by the writer and seeks to explore how the gender of the writer impacts the way Nur Jahan is portrayed and the narrative in *The Taj Trilogy*. It explores the circumstances that led to her becoming an all powerful ruler and the stance of the writer in her works as far as her depiction of the Empress and her life, her romance with Jahangir and his portrayal is concerned and study if she breaks any new ground. I shall also compare her version of Nur Jahan with the 1967 cinematic version of 'Nur Jahan', a historical film starring Meena Kumari and Pradeep Kumar, directed by Mohammed Sadiq .

In *The Twentieth Wife* the writer embarks on the onerous task of plausibly building up the character of the Nur Jahan, staying true to the historical facts of her birth as Mehrunnisa. She is shown to be an extraordinary beauty courtesy her Persian ancestry, with blue eyes and flawless complexion. It is her looks that captivate the Emperor in the first place. The writer imbues the character of Mehrunnisa with a sense of feeling special as she was considered by her father to be 'a child of good fortune' ( *The Twentieth Wife* 22) for it was her birth that led to circumstances which were instrumental in ensuring that the

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family was introduced to Akbar. She was beautiful, intelligent and grew up feeling no less than men.

Sundarassen builds up her character to show that Mehrunnisa had the inherent qualities which later made her 'Nur Jahan' the most beloved wife of Jahangir and a powerful and influential queen. Mehrunnisa is shown to be ambitious, harbouring a desire to be a princess from childhood, musing often 'I wonder what it would be like to marry a prince... and be a princess...' (The Twentieth Wife 21) or 'How she wished she could have been born a princess. Then she would marry a prince - perhaps even Salim.' (The Twentieth Wife 21). Sundarassen's Mehrunnisa offers a stark contrast with Muhammad Sadiq's Mehrunnisa who says that she is a mere commoner and therefore not deserving of Prince Salim's attentions. Sadiq's Mehrunnisa played by Meena Kumari exhibits none of the qualities that could lend credibility to her having become such an important person in her later life. Sundarassen's Mehrunnisa on the other hand never for once considers herself to be inferior.

Indu Sundarassen's interpretation of history is more plausible as she shows Mehrunnisa growing up and spending her entire childhood in close proximity to the life of Mughal Emperor's court and Zenana, for it is here that she learnt the intricacies of governance and the politics of zenana through observation, and this familiarity was responsible for her learning the ropes of governance swiftly upon her marriage. Therefore, it can be concluded that Mehrunnisa might have harboured a soft spot for Prince Salim. But Sundarassen stretches it a little too far by showing a Mehrunnisa who from the age of eight is besotted with the idea of marrying Prince Salim so much so that when she visits the imperial palace at the age of eight, her only thought 'is to find a good spot at the screen to see the prince' (The Twentieth Wife 28) who she later declares is more beautiful than her brothers. She yearns for a meeting with the Prince. And even before she meets him, acknowledges the fact that if she were married to him she could not bear to share 'Salim with anyone else' (The Twentieth Wife 65).

Though historians differ as to when Prince Salim and Mehrunnisa met. One version is that they met before her marriage to Ali Quli and Jahangir was responsible for the death of her husband. Contemporary historians do not agree citing the gap of 4 years between her widowhood and her marriage to Jahangir to refute the above theory.

Sundarassen shows their first meeting in zenana gardens and the second meeting during Mina Bazaar after her betrothal to Ali Quli. Prince Salim is so taken in by her beauty when he first sets eyes on her that he feels he is in paradise (The Twentieth Wife 81). Mehrunnisa delights in her ability to capture the attention of Prince Salim. Prince Salim's main wife Jagat Gosini is a witness to his obvious attraction and tries to snub Mehrunnisa who really stands up for herself and in Prince Salim an admiration rose for 'the beautiful woman who sparred so brilliantly with his wife' (The Twentieth Wife 83).

During the second meeting the famous episode of Mehrunnisa releasing the second pigeon to show how the first one flew away takes place (The Twentieth Wife 93) and the feelings they have for each other strengthen during their third meeting resulting in Prince Salim's asking Akbar for permission to marry Mehrunnisa. Akbar refuses and Mehrunnisa is married off to Ali Quli. This account is corroborated by Beni Prasad in 'History of Jahangir'.

Her hopes of one day marrying Prince Salim are dashed to the ground when at the age of 17 she has to bow before the imperial command to marry a mere soldier Ali Quli who is old enough to be her father, being only 6 years younger to her father. She mourns the death of her dreams with: 'Gone were the dreams of being an empress, of ruling the great Mughal Empire. How absurd the fantasies had been. They had been childhood dreams, better left in childhood.' (The Twentieth Wife 76) Like a dutiful daughter she does as she is ordered to keep her family honour intact. Her dreams are shattered by her loveless marriage. Though the writer says that 'more than age separated them; their minds were distanced too' (The Twentieth Wife 207) Time and again she dares to voice her opinion and is snubbed by her husband. 'Confine your interests to the house... This is a man's world' (The Twentieth Wife, 174) he says to her.

Sadiq's Mehrunnisa is happily married and is cherished by her husband. Sundarassen shows a marriage that is an emotional drain on Mehrunnisa. This is to explain the ruthless streak that Mehrunnisa displays later on in life when she deals sternly with her enemies. The hardships in her life had strengthened her and her widowhood had hardened her soul and this fact is even observed by her father.

Showing a feminist streak, she exhibits a lot of self pride when

she is widowed and prefers to work in the harem to make a living for herself and her daughter by working as handmaid despite her father's insistence that she live with him. It is probably this spirit Jahangir is drawn to. For it is here in the zenana where she was earning her livelihood that she met Jahangir again. Jahangir is totally enamoured with her despite her age and circumstances. She was 34 years old, a widow and if that was not a disqualification enough she had a daughter. Moreover, her husband had been openly disloyal and defiant towards Jahangir during his lifetime, yet Jahangir's love transcends these limitations.

Mehrunissa's ambitious streak propels her to climb the ladder of power steadily and there is no looking back after her marriage to Jahangir. Her name became synonymous with Jahangir. European travelers portray Nur Jahan as a ruthless, conniving and malicious power hungry woman. Francis Pelsaert (1596- 1630) describes her as a "crafty wife of humble origin" and Peter Mundy (1596-1667) says that Jahangir "...became her prisoner by Marryeing her" (Schuster). Sundarasan on the other hand very skilfully balances the character of Mehrunnisa, tapping into her emotional side to show her as a loving wife, mother, daughter, sister and even an aunt to stop her coming across as a merciless, self serving ruler.

Her marriage to Jahangir is a turning point for her. Jahangir like a true feminist believes in her, thinks nothing of the disapproval of his court and his subjects, and openly defies them. Her wish is his command. Despite his obvious weakness for Mehrunnisa Sundarasan creates a Jahangir who continues to exude a royal aura with masculinity in equal measure. He comes across as a man ahead of his times. I quote '... she was there, to him as important as his life. He did not care about any filthy insinuations about his manhood or virility in allowing a woman to run what had essentially been a man's business. He was a man enough not to care about it' ( *The Twentieth Wife* 342).

Sundarasan's Mehrunnisa is a woman with a mind of her own and conscious of it 'Sometimes she spoke out aloud when a thought occurred to her, when an idea came, then she stopped knowing that the screen put her in a different place. That it made her a woman. One without a voice, void of opinion' ( *The Feast of Roses* 6).

Sundarasan makes the reader empathise with her especially when she is caught in a loveless marriage to a man who is indifferent and

harsh towards her. The reader feels the pain of Mehrunnisa when she yearns for motherhood which alludes her for a long time, making her emerge as a strong willed person who is equally ambitious. She wants the title of Padshah Begum, the privilege of the royal seal and the privilege to stand in Jharoka and Jahangir's undivided attention. She gets all she asks for and more. She shows grit and determination. After her dismal performance at the hunting expedition she learns to shoot and finally redeems herself when she shoots four lions with six bullets.

She is finely tuned into the public reaction to her priveleges. She is amused that people think that she resorts to sorcery to keep Jahangir by her side. She is supremely aware of the people's reactions and to a certain extent indifferent. She makes enemies and believes that it is a package deal. Mehrunnisa is a shrewd and ruthless statesman who gets even with her adversaries. She packs off Mahabat Khan to a posting where he was in virtual exile for daring to incite Jahangir against her. She wants her daughter to be married to the heir apparent. But she has to settle for marrying her to Prince Shahryar who is her only option as Khurram refuses to comply with her wishes.

Sundarasan touches upon all historical episodes and controversies concerning the reign of Jahangir and Nur Jahan. She shows patriarchal attitudes, and sexism. Nur Jahan is shown as a woman ahead of her times and therefore viewed with suspicion and even hatred in the men's world for daring to step out of the harem and trespass into the men's territory. Khurram expresses the general sentiment when he says to his wife 'Mehrunnisa emasculates my father, makes him less of a man by insisting that she play his role' (*Feast of Roses* 175). Nur Jahan was exiled in Lahore after the death of Jahangir by Khurram who ascended the throne as Shah Jahan. She died in 1645 and *Feast of Roses* ends there.

Sundarasan arouses our sympathy for Nur Jahan by stating that despite her greatness she did not get a fair deal in history as it is her niece Arjumand alias Mumtaj Mahal who is remembered whereas Nur Jahan has been relegated to the back pages of the history books and popular memory. In *Feast of Roses* she says "...Mehrunnisa did not know then, would never know that by giving her blessings to this marriage she had set into progress a chain of events that would eventually erase her name from history's pages. Or that Arjumand would become the only Mughal woman posterity would easily recognize.

Docile, seemingly tractable and untroublesome Arjumand would eclipse even Mehrunnisa, cast her in shadow...because of the monument ... the Taj Mahal” (130)

Ellison Banks Findly, a woman historian in her biographical work produced in 1993 revises the myths that project Nur Jahan as a power hungry woman and unlike European men of the 17th century shows her a historical figure who deserves her due. Indu Sundarasan weaves her fiction around well documented historical facts, filling in the lacuna with vivid imagination, thereby producing a work of fiction that almost reads like a biography that is compelling and engrossing yet empathetic in its narrative and stance towards the queen and this can be attributed partly to Sundarasan’s gender and partly to the times in which this work has been written. It is no coincidence therefore that Indu Sundarasan’s work comes close at the heels of Findly’s work - both women writers, both settled in the U.S.A. and writing at the beginning of the 21st century with empathy and objectively in equal measure about a 17th century Empress of India- almost like a tribute to the forgotten Queen whose achievements have been obscured in popular memory.

Every chapter of Sundarasan’s works opens with a citation from a different historical work to lend weight to the writer’s claim that The Taj Trilogy is ‘a work of fiction rooted in history’. Despite Sundarasan’s contention that Nur Jahan is an almost forgotten queen, Nur Jahan continues to be an interesting subject for numerous books that have been written on her plus a number of movies that have been made on her. Incidentally, this Taj Trilogy has been televised and the series titled *Siyasat* was aired on The Epic Channel in 2015. The Taj Trilogy is a moving and a successful tribute in fiction to one of the greatest queens that India has seen.

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## N. K. Neb's "The Flooded Desert" : A Feminist Perspective

Dr. Avinash Chander\*

### Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyze N. K. Neb's fictional narrative *The Flooded Desert* from a feminist perspective. There are a number of feminist theorists, both western and Indian, who have written about the predicament of women depicted in the novel in the patriarchal socio-cultural symbolic order. The present paper looks at the plight of women from the theoretical position taken by Julia Kristeva, a French and Bulgarian feminist critic. She finds women at the margin of patriarchal, hegemonic order. But Neb's beauty lies in the way he has Indianised the whole western feminist discourse and included in it the elements of region, religion and caste. His focus is on the way different women characters try to cope with their marginalized position. The three principal women characters viz. Leelawati, Devika and Anamika belong to three different generations and deal with their border-like position differently. In Leelawati, we find a passive acceptance of her peripheral and subjugated position. But it is in Devika that we find a real social and psychological dilemma. It is she who passes through various vicissitudes in her struggle to find a niche for her between her social responsibilities and individual aspirations. In Anamika, her daughter, we find the emergence of an independent woman who places her individual aspirations above everything else and leads the life at her own terms.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal, Marginalized, Feminism, Discrimination.

Feminism is a socio-political discourse that gained momentum in the western world in the 1960s. But its roots can be traced back in the 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft in her "A Vindication for the Rights of Woman" points towards the appalling contemporary position of women. There was no proper education, career, economic independence and support network for them. She appealed to women to make efforts to acquire strength, both of mind and body. She regarded education to be something integral for their emancipation, both literally and metaphorically. In the subsequent years, feminists like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Dale Spender, Elaine

Showalter, Helene Cixous, and Julia Kristeva etc. focused on the issues concerning women from different perspectives.

Julia Kristeva, a French-Bulgarian linguist and critic, finds women at the border of the patriarchal symbolic order. She contends that women have been pushed to the margin by the patriarchy. Their marginalized position has bestowed them with the characteristics of the border, which is both inside and outside. In this way, they are both inside and outside the human order and occupy a position between men and chaos. It is this position of women that has made patriarchy to think of them either as the Virgin mother of God or as the whore of Babylon. In the former case, the margin is seen as inside and therefore desirable, while in the latter case, it is viewed as chaotic and therefore threatening. Julia Kristeva lays emphasis on the equality between the sexes and insists on an equal access to the symbolic order.

It is in this sense that N. K. Neb's debut novel "The Flooded Desert" can be viewed as a feminist novel. He has appropriated the whole feminist discourse to suit the Indian socio-cultural milieu and has incorporated in it the factors such as region, religion, caste and class. The novelist has chosen the days of terrorism in Punjab as the temporal setting and the border districts of Punjab as spatial setting for the story. The novel mainly deals with the life of three women viz. Leelawati, Devika and Anamika in the patriarchal social structure. As these women belong to three different generations, their response to their marginalized position is also different.

Leelawati, the mother-in-law of Devika, belongs to the first generation of women presented in the novel. She is a traditional, orthodox woman who has passively accepted the patriarchal norms. She has no desire to cross the established boundaries rather she supports them. She feels agitated when she finds her daughter-in-law, Devika, moving towards the undesirable side of the margin. When her daughter-in-law visits a beauty parlor for the first time to have her looks refreshed, her response is exactly in line with the patriarchal norms, "Didn't you have any sense of shame.... What'd people say? Your father-in-law would die of shame.... We didn't object to your moving around in the city.... Now you have crossed all the limits! You should have poisoned us before doing this." (Neb, 96-97).

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But the novel is primarily the story of Devika, the protagonist, who compelled by the circumstances, moves from one stage of her life to another. In the patriarchal symbolic order, she has been placed at the marginal position. Being a widow, she follows the norms of the society and suppresses all her desires. But the moment she moves to the city and comes under the influence of TV serials, she starts thinking about her own needs as a female. She begins to assert her personality. Seeing her crossing the boundaries, even her mother-in-law starts raising her eyebrows.

When the novel opens we find Devika as a good-looking, submissive, docile and sincere girl. She is married to Suraj, a boy from a neighboring village, who due to some physical problem fails to consummate the marriage. Devika feels that she has been deceived. She finds herself in an "awful situation of food being snatched after administering appetizer". (28) Even the women who are known for their outspoken behavior comment on her awkward situation, "Even trees have borne fruit. What about you, Devika?" (Neb, 29) She feels like a plant in some desert. She comes to know that her mother-in-law and her father-in-law were aware about their son's position before their marriage. She feels that they have played a cruel joke with her and in this way ruined her life. They have used her as an experimental object for the sake of their son.

Learning from her marginalized position in the patriarchal society, Devika decides to send her daughter Anamika to a public school in the city. Her father-in-law and mother-in-law are quite apprehensive and they express their fears, "She'd be travelling alone to the city. We cannot send her to the hostel. In her tender age, she may go astray .... Have you seen any other girl from our village going to the city for studies?" ( 74) But all their fears and arguments fail to dissuade Devika. She ignores the sarcastic comments of the villagers and attires her daughter in grey and white uniform of the school. Her dress and carefree behavior invites a lot of criticism from the villagers. They often comment sarcastically, "Did you notice the way she has got her hair cut? She wears skirts and trousers! She looks like a boy. She is unlike her mother. She has adopted the city ways. She moves around like boys. When she grows up, she'll certainly do something shameful." (Neb, 74) But for Devika, her daughter has a special place in her life. She often says, "She is more than an officer to me. People cannot

realize, I'm here just because of her. She's the only purpose of my life now. I'm to see her always happy and progressing". (73) In a way, Devika challenges the peripheral position of women and becomes a trend setter in the village. After some time, following Anamika's example, two-three more girls from the village start going to the same school. People in the village have now started talking about the education and jobs for their daughters and daughters-in-law.

The bomb explosion in a Ram Navami procession and many other similar incidents of violence in Punjab force Devika and her in-laws to leave their village and settle in Jalandhar. It is not only a shift from one spatial locale to another but also a shift from one set of values to another. Here in the city, Devika and her in-laws are forced to pass most of their time watching TV. This has an impact on their life style and value system. There are frequent scenes on the TV in which lovers are shown in physical intimate positions. Then there are programmes in which women are shown in assertive and aggressive roles. Bansilal, Devika's father-in-law, becomes apprehensive about the impact of these programmes on his daughter-in-law. He often expresses his concerns to his wife, Leelawati, "The women in the show always say something strange. I've often seen them put startling ideas into the other women's head.... They inspire women to go for a divorce if they don't find their life happy. What do they want to teach people? .... Become promiscuous.... Give up all sense of shame, right or wrong!" (90) About her daughter-in-law he says to his wife, "If she is exposed to such things, it may have an evil impact on her also.... I have often seen rebellion in her eyes. Once these things have a sway over her she too may start behaving like these women". And this turns out to be true. From her marginalized position, Devika starts making efforts to come to the centre. Now she wants to have a view of the world beyond the four walls of the house. Under the influence of her friend Lakshmi, she even starts visiting the beauty parlor to have her looks refreshed. Her contact with Mrs Bhanot takes her to the world of kitty parties. Here she finds women challenging the patriarchal norms about the sanctity of matrimonial ties. Smriti, one of her kitty friends, talks about her extra-marital relationship with Jagmohan, "Life's not cooking, washing and nourishing only. I have no inhibitions in admitting, I feel alive in his company more than that of my husband!" (115) These views have an igniting effect on Devika and she starts thinking about

her physical needs. Of course, there is a dilemma in her mind regarding whether she was moving in the right direction or not. The views expressed by one of the panelists in an interview on the TV also hover in her mind, "I'm a single mother I've no hesitation in accepting this. I am in a live-in relationship with my friend. We don't believe in marriage. We like each other, isn't it enough?" ( 149).

Sharda Aunty, a childhood friend of Devika and now an NRI, is also instrumental in sowing the seeds of aspirations in Devika's mind. She tries to impress Devika by saying that she has her own flat, a big car and a lucrative business in the foreign land. She acquaints Devika with the type of freedom enjoyed by the women in Canada. She says, "Had you been there in Canada, you would have seen how wonderful life is! You must have experienced the freedom that we enjoy there". (Neb, 163) She also instills the seeds of guilt in Devika's mind by reminding her of her miserable life here in India, "You, Devika, have simply wasted your life; kept worrying what'd people say." (Neb, 163) Devika finds it strange when her friend, Sharda, says that has no regrets about her divorced status. She is further shocked to learn that one of Sharda's sons, Tom, is a gay and is living with a friend, a handsome young boy of his age. Later on, when Devika takes Sharda to the market, she is impressed by the special treatment given to her by the shopkeepers simply because of her NRI status. The writer humorously remarks that the attendant boys in the shops "looked so charged and excited as if going to procure some life-saving drug for a patient in the ICU." ( 169).

The influence of TV serials, her kitty friends and Sharda Aunty so empowers Devika that she decides to cross the boundaries erected by the Indian socio-cultural norms. She ponders over Devender, a young man from her in-laws' village, and his visit to their house in the absence of her in-laws. She seems to regret that she has not allowed him to step into the prohibited zones. And then after passing through the dilemma for some time, she ultimately resolves, "I won't behave like a pure woman of the myths and legends. I won't keep anything unoffered to him." ( 173) Now she has no inhibitions, no fears, no feeling of sin or guilt. On the stipulated day, on the pretext of going to the market, she goes to a hotel and to satisfy her physical needs offers herself to Devender. In this way, she demolishes the boundaries of the patriarchal social and cultural order and enters into the forbidden territories. Now she is not ready to play the role of a submissive and reticent woman.

Anamika, Devika's daughter, belongs to the third generation of women presented in the novel. She is educated, independent and has more liberal views than her mother and grandmother about her life and career. The visit of Sharda Aunty implants in her the seeds of a desire for going abroad and settling there. About Sharda Aunty, Anamika thinks, "Life is fun and romance for this woman due to her being an N.R.I. Only she enjoys life. The rest of us are just spending time. The world she inhabits is full of glory, joy, amusement and wealth." ( 162) Her resolve to settle in a foreign land further gets strengthened when she finds the shopkeepers giving Sharda Aunty a special treatment just because of her being an NRI. She ruminates, "It's this money only that makes her look much younger and beautiful. If I also get a chance to go abroad, it'll be like a dream come true. I'd look more beautiful than her. I'll have all the pleasures of life." ( 170) Her resolution of settling abroad further gets a boost when her friend, Harneet, decides to dump her boy-friend Sandeep and marry a boy from Canada selected by her uncle. Harneet's response to the situation is: "Leave yaar, this love-shove is not meant for everyone.... Money matters much.... How much can Sandeep earn if he becomes an officer?" ( 180) All these developments make Anamika marry Gurnek who has plans to go abroad and settle there. When Gurnek fails to take her abroad in spite of his best efforts, she gets restless and disturbed. In the meanwhile, she gets pregnant and gives birth to a son whom they name as 'Goldy'. She is so much obsessed by the idea of settling abroad that she starts pestering her husband to visit the various travel agents. In the process, they are duped by one of the travel agents of rupees ten lakh. Then, the moment she comes to know that she can go to Canada through contract marriage, she convinces her husband about it. She marries someone from Canada, goes there and gets settled. Her husband continues to wait for the day when the whole family will be together there in Canada. But she never comes back and in order to fulfill her aspirations decides to leave her husband and son.

In this way, N. K. Neb's "The Flooded Desert" is the story of three women belonging to three different generations. They try to deal with their marginalized position in the patriarchal social set up in their own way. In Leelawati, there is a woman who has passively accepted her marginalized position. Devika, the protagonist of the novel, is a character that in the course of the story evolves from a meek and

docile woman to a woman who in order to fulfill her social, psychological and physical needs crosses the boundaries erected by the patriarchal social order. Her daughter, Anamika, belongs to the third and the last generation. She refuses to be at the margin at all. In order to fulfill her cherished goal of settling in Canada, she leaves her husband and son and goes abroad and settles there. The novelist has presented the story of these women in an impassive and objective manner. He refrains from giving any kind of value judgement about the various decisions taken by and actions performed by these women. He leaves it to the readers to draw their own conclusions. In this way, he seems to be close to Roland Barthes, a French literary theorist and critic, who assigns a more active role to the readers and believes that there are as many meanings in a text as there are the readers.

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## An Interplay of Gender and Identity in R. Raj Rao's Novel *The Boyfriend*

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The specificity of gender identity politics is to be understood in context of geographical location, time, culture, and criss-crossing of other available identities. For many social thinkers, the answer to the question, "what is identity?" would be like a bamboozling conundrum. This paradox is there because of the intricate ways in which subjectivity and objectivity are intertwined with each other. The daily ways through which we fabricate our identity through scheming social skills, emotional responses to others, and interpersonal relations. In other words, individuals are extremely accomplished and acquainted performers. Their identity performances are influenced by the systems (administrative, financial, technical, legal etc.) in which they are immersed. In R. Raj Rao's novel *The Boy Friend*, the fluid nature of identity marks a complex functioning of an interplay of gender and identity. The present paper is an attempt to analyze this interaction against the background of new developments in human thought that defy earlier definitions of gender and gender roles.

**Keywords:** Gender, Identity, Sexual Identity, MSM, Essential,

The notion of identity as a lived experience is quite baffling and contradictory in the contemporary society. People are always busy in reshaping and remolding their identity through endeavors of giving a new version of their identity. Some are engrossed into slimness, fitness, and sex appeal into their new identity make over, some are busy in consumerism of shopping culture on-line through internet, some are mollycoddling themselves into various types of cosmetic surgeries to give an instantly new look to their identity and there are others who are addicted to anorexia, bulimia, and obsessive compulsive disorder due to self-indulgence into various self-caring styles for a novel identity. This leads to dysfunctional identities. Anthony Elliott in an Introduction to his edited book, *Routledge's Handbook of Identity Studies* aptly observes, "it is as if the freedom to explore and experiment with identities inaugurated by our 24x7 world of intensive globalization has led to its opposite –that is to say, a shift toward non-entity, or the attempt to close down on (and perhaps eradicate?) any existing identity"(Elliott

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xii).The term gender like identity is like chameleon.It is very restless, slippery, and much contested concept but at the same time it is the unification of gender and identity that gives rise to another expression , gender identity which produces new inflections of malleable meanings. Judith Butler 's *Gender Trouble* is a crucial text to understand the radical implications of gender. The illusion of gender is very dominant in our life and involves an idea that gender is the core of our identity. She emphasized the free will and voluntariness to choose gender and did not presume that discourses totally determine gendered individuals. She says that gender is only a masque or pretence with no substance behind it and it is ever changing with discourses depending upon the given time and place.

In the 1980s and 1990s, AIDS attracted a great deal of energy and attention in the research of gay psychology which gave an equivocal indication that LGBTQ issues could no longer be ignored. As far as the situation in India is concerned , the queer studies scenario is dismal. In the least quoted book, *Invisible Minority –The Unknown World of the Indian Homosexual*, Arwind Kala, a journalist, refers to some case studies in India and concludes that homosexual behaviour is considered as unnatural, abnormal, and categorized as mental illness. Even Bindu Madhav Khire, in his novel. *Partner*, refers to electroconvulsive therapy given to a gay character. American Psychological Association (APA)has discarded homosexuality as an unnatural illness. In India many queer writings reflect this state of affairs prevailing in India. That is why most of the gays remain closeted and revealing their gender identity for them is a big stigma. For example in Rao's all novels, the protagonists remain in the closet. *The Boyfriend* which is considered as the first openly gay novel of India, Yudi, a gay journalist in Bombay has promiscuous homosexual escapades with many men till he falls in love with a teenager, semi-literate boy. Similarly, Sandesh in *Lady Lolita's Lover* toes the same course. But all of them have this psychological assumption and consternation that they are leading an unnatural, abnormally diseased life according to socially perceived and legally sanctioned sexual norms in India. Bruce Bagemill in his revolutionary work, *Biological Exuberance* challenges the notions of the word "natural" and in his study of 1500 species of animal kingdom proves that homosexuality occurs freely and frequently in nature and ranges between many life long bonds and short encounters.

The impending danger of secret monster of AIDS has necessitated a serious debate on society's gender(ed) identity paradigm. The historiography of gay subculture was documented by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in their epoch-making book, *Same-Sex Love in India – A Literary History*(2000).After the publication of this book, discourses of same-sex love and friendship entered into a dialogue with the new western legal and medical discourses of homosexuality in India. Perhaps the definition of identity given Mary Bloodsworth –Lugo in the book, *The Essential Glossary-Sexuality*, edited by Jo Eadie is quite striking and sustainable. She says that identity is a way of self-assertion and defining oneself, that is, imparting origin, certain attributes, features, and aspects to the self. And queer identity is a product of sexual recognition received through the debate between essentialist and constructionist viewpoints.So, one's identity is a self naming ritual. Some scholars and activists have used the term 'identity 'to convey the 'gayness' but that gayness does not necessarily refer to only sexual desire and behaviour but it includes history, culture and a ritual. It is important to understand the difference between behaviour and queer identity.

The potential transitory nature of queer identity and slippery sexual behaviour MSM(men who have sex with men/MWHSWM) in the wake of AIDS predicament has turned out to be very fatal.MSM is a behaviour, a disguised cover by a certain category of people whose behaviour questions the cultural values. Jo Eadie describes MSM as those "participants in same-sex male relationships regardless of self-definition in terms of sexuality(Eadie132).R.Raj Rao in his book, *Whistling In The Dark: Twenty-one Queer Interviews*, co-edited with Dibyajyoti Sarma defines MSM as follows: "MSM are those for whom sexual activity with persons of their own gender neither constitutes an identity nor a preference. At best they see it as a tendency, something they have got addicted to like tobacco or alcohol, and find it difficult to relinquish. Obviously, there is an implicit sense of denial in their stance, in their perception of themselves that needs to be dealt with through counseling".(Rao and Sarma:xx).Yudi (the Boyfriend) refers to his many gay flings with many married men. He gets frustrated with his gay affairs and tells himself that 'lies were what thieves spoke, gay love in India thrived on lies.(Rao 2003:38).

The novel, *The Boyfriend*, starts with the homosexual (mis)adventures of the protagonist, Yudi, on Sunday morning at the

Bombay Metro-railway station of Churchgate. His mother's flat which is symbolically situated between "two old cinema houses-Metro and Liberty", becomes a place for his gay sexpades due to its proximity to his mother's flat. MSMs do not belong to any fixed identity in India rather they belong to an amalgam of queer identities already available in our country like gay, bisexual, transgender, Koti, Panthi, hijra etc. Yudi went into the loo in order to search for his potential sex partner, where homosexual sex was in progress. But he came out of the loo and took a cruising round the shop on the metro station, After having a visit to voyeuristic landscape of homoerotic calisthenics, Yudi found Milind around a stall and took him blindfolded to his mother's flat for gay sex. Yudi had never paid for sex and keeping his masculinity away, he allowed Milind to have sex with him first. The protagonist's transgressive indulgence in passive sex pushes him to a severe compromise with his patriarchal privilege. Yudi's intergenerational, cross-class, and cross-caste sex negotiated Foucauldian formation of Freeman/slave sex formulation as mentioned by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*, vol.1. According to Foucauldian formation, gay sex with Milind (teenager) can be considered as an act of homonormativizing the heteronormative by Yudi.

Yudi's unceasing, licentious lust and transgressive tenaciousness for gay sex coerces him to compromise his sense of patriarchy and masculinity. Moreover, his fear of being blackmailed, blackmailed, exploited and falling a prey to homophobic violence by the strangers assented him to offer an active role to gay strangers. So, Yudi has many one-night stands. And one of them he elaborates is with Dnyaneshar, a trainee policeman. He is a true example of MSMs. He is a bisexual. In India, there is a fairly large number of such men who indulge in a clandestine gay sex. Such type of community is hidden and such acts are rarely acknowledged or described. They have certain reasons for such affairs. First of all, it is free and secondly they feel that by having sex with men, they are able to keep themselves away from STDs including AIDS. Indian queer theory cannot ignore such a larger chunk of people who is a serious threat and a big hazard to the health and hygiene of society.

MSM is a different category in itself. Jeremy Seabrook in his only noteworthy book of its kind about MSM in India, *Love In A Different Climate-Men Who Have Sex With Men In India*, writes-"men who have

sex with men : the expression is critical because in India-as in many other cultures in Asia and Africa-concepts of being gay. or bi-sexual are not applicable to such relationships. It is in order to avoid projecting Western projections onto other cultures and other ways of structuring same-sex contact that the more neutral term is used (Seabrook1).

Many reasons can be assigned for such a behaviour. There has always been a strict compartmentalization and separation of sexes almost everywhere in India including schools, colleges, railway stations, prisons, dormitories monasteries, defence forces, and religious places. Boys and girls or men or women are strictly made to stay separately and wear their essentialist identity. Even in case of matrimonial in every newspaper, it is a compulsory alliance between a man and woman, castes, and similar classes, races, and ethnicity. But MSM is a behaviour pattern of deviant sexual dalliance which refrains from accepting a sexual identity. It does not conform to 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990). MSMs disguise their ideological construction of sexuality and thereby posing political question about their legitimate or illegitimate sexual behaviour in the society. As a heterosexual norm, MSMs enjoy a heterosexual privilege (Hutchins, Lorraine, and Ka'ahumenu, Lani, (eds):1990. Through this heterosexual privilege, MSMs cause violence to their identities by posing as straight and refute the notion of hierarchy of oppressions.

According to Edward King MSMs identity may lead to yet more 'degaying' of the AIDS crisis (Eadie, 2004:133.) He further observes that some conservative governments have adopted the statutory term in order to reflect that they do not wish to be seen to 'promote' homosexuality. Dnyaneshar in the Rao's BF desires for gay sex but does not want himself to be labeled in their category. When he exploits, tortures, and causes homophobic violence to Yudi, Yudi makes up his mind and takes him to Teststerone, a gay bar in order to teach him a lesson. Dnyaneshar mocks at the sight of the queens and bursts out laughing and remarks, Chhakke Log. Ek dum hijre" (35) Expressing a liking for same-sex relationship and still not identifying oneself as gay is very significant. It is at the heart of the differences between a gay identity and MSM identity. Rao writes "Riyad Wadia believed that MSMs did not suffer from a gender identity crisis and were unable to distinguish between men and women during penetrative sexual identity (Rao, 2017:23).

The Boyfriend's chapter nine, AK Modeling Agency is a reference point to identity paradigms of transgressive desire. This fake modeling agency is a male prostitution agency that explores the expression of their identities. Everyone including the CEO of the company has closeted identity. Using his Swiftian humour, Rao describes modeling agency's queer culture and lifestyle. An austere health **regimen** is implemented in order to make all the boy models healthy, fit, alert, and physically attractive. Ironically the title 'Gurukul' is used for agency. All the models are provided with stylish outfits and some of the T-shirts carry the slogans like the popular one is 'PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN SWORD'(179), a very little space was left between PEN and IS and another trademark slogan which was more literary and less popular read as 'My LILLIPUTIAN IS A BROBDINGNAGIAN'(175) More than half of the customers were married and indulged in libertine gay sex. Penetrators were made to pay much more than the penetrates. Most of the boys did not mind and felt themselves abnormal or perverted if they played an 'active role'. There is a complete segregation of types of sexual identities in the modeling agency. Milind was identified as a Panthi (penetrator) and made to sleep in the Panthi dormitory sandwiched between the Koti dorm in the east and the hijra dorm in the west. The hijra dorm included hijras, hermaphrodites, and high society blokes who has had a sex change operation(184). They were strictly prohibited to have sex with each other.

Milind has some dilemmas about the instability of sexual identities of his customers. He asks Sam if he was a passive Koti or inactive Panthi. Sam without having any feeling of sense of shame replies humoursly, "You see, I used to be active when I was younger, but now I'm passive because as a man grows older, his hardback penis becomes a paperback one"(187).

Due to urbanization, industrialization, ownership, individualism, and systems of amassment, gender roles have undergone a radical transformation. The growth of capitalism and mobility of wage labour brings about a great change in the structural dimensions of family affairs. Milind joins modeling agency to become gay for pay. So, there is an interplay of multiple sexual identities. But MSMs remain hidden and they do not allow themselves to be labeled with a gay identity, The term sexual identity is used to avoid the debate between essentialism and social constructionism. To be gay has to be a part of the culture,

community, rituals, and history. Many members of modeling agency do not entirely conform to rigid gay identity. To belong to gay identity is to organize one's desires and behaviour in relation to a community and that identity is to be publicly established through performance of particular codes of speech and dressing which can be suffocating also if they are too rigid and harsh. Thus, identity can be considered as a problematic concept or term and so for oppressing and minoritizing (Sedgwick, 199) 'gay men' and lesbians. Few identities like hijras and transgenders appear true in India. There are so many idioms of sexual identity and all of them are mobile, ephemeral, and shifting. Jo Eadie writes, "identification is as much a process of refusal as it is of acceptance, for as one identifies with 'man', for example, part of the identification is as 'not woman'; as one identifies with homosexual, part of the identification is 'not -heterosexual'(Sedgwick100). It is very difficult to arrive at the consensus for the identifications to unfold.

The identity is a quagmire of indeterminate sequence of attachments and detachments from others within the social milieu. To conclude in the words of Mary Holmes "gender is done (to us and by us), undone and redone and every now and then momentarily forgotten. It is thought about, but sometime unconscious or done habitually, in some circumstances it is practiced with great care, It is felt through bodies and emotions. Most of all gendering is an ongoing process, situated firmly within the social interactions that constitute our lives. Relationality is not about how a self/other distinction defines identity, but about how gendered interactions with fellow embodied humans determine our everyday answers to the question :who am I?"(Holmes, 2014:201)

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## **An Insight into Gendered Tribal Identity : Recalling Mahasweta's 'Draupadi'**

*Dr. Ritu Dewan\**

### *Abstract*

Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' is a brilliant work of revisionist historiography in which she places a tribal woman – a subaltern at centre stage and casts her in a role that is both traditional and revolutionary. Her writings always addressed the issues of exploitation and marginalization that exist in the class and caste system. In 'Draupadi' the writer presents the dalit tribal exploitation and the way a heroic woman responds to it. The protagonist in the story offers certain parallels with 'Draupadi' in the epic *Mahabharata* as well as 'Draupadi' of Mahasweta. While Draupadi of the epic gets her robe miraculously, Mahasweta's 'Draupadi' refuses to be clothed. This paper attempts to analyse Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' as a text representing the heroic resistance of a 'gendered' subaltern that brings out an entire paradigm shift.

**Keywords:** Subaltern, marginalization, dalit, tribal, gendered.

The story 'Draupadi' first appeared in *Agnigarbha* (Womb of Fire 1978), a collection of short political narratives. Draupadi is the name of the central character in the story. She is introduced to the reader between two versions of her name. Unlike the Draupadi of the epic the woman protagonist here is a simple tribal woman having no royal lineage. The author rather uses the resonance of a classical myth, and an icon of classical traditions, Draupadi, to claim her gendered tribal subject in history. In Draupadi, Mahasweta Devi 'signifies' on the story of the *Mahabharata*, which too was a drama centering on land, and having Draupadi as its central female character, the singular woman who had five husbands.

Draupadi of Mahasweta Devi, is an activist in the Naxalite movement of the seventies. She traces her ancestry to Champabhumi which, in Santhal folklore, is one of the places they had to abandon to the mercy of outsiders. She is arrested, stripped and gang-raped by the police. Mahasweta portrays her as personification of defiance, and she in her act of refusal to cover her nakedness, valiantly declaring that her torturers are not males and she is not ashamed of standing naked

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before them for a tribal woman believes that a true male never insults a woman, attains a larger dimension than Pandava Queen, her namesake and exposes a violent truth about manhood.

By placing a tribal woman and a Naxalite activist at the centre stage, and casting her in a role that is both traditional and revolutionary, Mahasweta Devi rewrites some dimensions of the epic from the standpoint of gender, and contextualizes the whole narrative into history and myth. 'Draupadi' is a type of revisionist historiography that like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* performs a double task of cultural reclamation by foregrounding both gender and race. In the story, Mahasweta Devi makes race, class and gender "signify" in a way, that a tribal woman whose race, gender and class had not met with much representation in mainstream writing or discourse, becomes not only the seminal focus of a story, but also of history. It also explores the contemporary implications of the personality of the mythical/historical Draupadi of the Mahabharata.

In an interview with Gayatri Spivak published in the book *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta declares that Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* is a black woman. She must have been a tribal. In the State of Himachal Pradesh where people practice fraternal polyandry that Draupadi was supposed to have practiced in the *Mahabharata*. The polyandrous tribal women of Himachal Pradesh are said to belong to the Draupadi Gotra or clan. Such views point out the writer's stance as that of a revisionist historiographer. It implies the continuous history of the tribal people in India that gains greater significance in the context of recasting of the Aryan Draupadi as a tribal woman, and in highlighting the Naxalite movement through the agency of a woman. (Spivak, IX) Mahasweta creates alternative genealogies of culture by imparting a mythical status to a tribal woman by conferring on her the name of the lead woman protagonist in the *Mahabharata*.

Draupadi appears in the story at a moment of crisis in revolution when the Naxalite movement is in its last phases. The government has succeeded in capturing many peasant activists. Draupadi's husband and fellow comrade, Dulna, has been brutally killed at a moment when he lay on his stomach on a "flat stone, dipping his face to drink water" (Devi 189).

Draupadi of Mahasweta Devi, a woman of epic energies and epic resolve, now faces the hydra-headed and immensely powerful antagonist

alone in the jungle space. The army reports type her as "most notorious" (Devi 187) and "long wanted." (187) who with her husband was responsible for the murder of Surya Sahu (landowner) and his son, who polluted upper caste wells and did not "surrender" (187). Instead of conch shells summoning the warriors to battle, we are told of a black skinned couple ululating like police sirens before the episode" (188) and singing jubilantly before any action in a tongue whose meaning the text tells us was undecipherable even to Santhals (188). The war song sounded like "Samary hujilenako mar goekope" (189).

Dopdi's principal combatant in this story is Senanayak whose name means head of the soldiers, and thus the name fulfils a symbolic function in the mythical economy of the text. Mahasweta might be working within the realist mode of fiction, but the mythical mode allows her to essentialize attributes in characters, thereby creating an atmosphere of epic combat between a woman, who is a tribal and a radical left wing revolutionary, and on the other hand, a deracinated intellectual representing institutional power. Perhaps, the text also stages through Draupadi and Senanayak, the dramatic confrontation of tribal vitality and feminine vitality vis a vis the ageing traditions of the dominant political and cultural order of India. The end of the text quite fittingly witnesses the unmanning of Senanayak by Draupadi.

In the character of Draupadi Mahasweta Devi perhaps creates a powerful model of indigenous feminism, in having Draupadi perform actions through intellectual conviction (that land should be redistributed among its original cultivators), and also demonstrate a capacity for unselfish love and consideration. That Draupadi loved her husband is beyond question. Thus the character of Draupadi takes on aspects of virtues or qualities that one traditionally associates with womanhood in India. Her actions are for the collective good, not for individual advancement. She does not strive for self-definition with a purpose, she is spontaneously a woman of action. As if to build her epic stature the narrator of Dopdi's own voice informs us, Dopdi's blood was the pure unadulterated black blood of Champhumi. From Champa to Bakuli, the rise and set of million moons .... Dopdi felt proud of her forefathers. They stood guard over their women's blood in black armour (193).

Eventually, she is captured and Senanayak's instructions to his men at that moment is "Make her. Do the need full" (195). Parallel to

the incident of the disrobing or attempted disrobing of Draupadi's body in the Mahabharata, Dopdi Mehjen now becomes the object of multiple rape. It is at this moment the text transcends its specific cultural boundaries and becomes a testament to woman's primary biological, anatomical, social and cultural significance – that she is a body. The narrator describes the event:

Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years ... slowly the bloodied nail heads shift from her brain. Trying to move she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under ass and waist. Her own blood ... Incredible thirst. In case she says water she catches her lower in her teeth ... How many came to make her? (195)

Having been reminded of her physical identity so forcibly, she performs the final act of subversion that almost unmans Senanayak. Draupadi's act is an interrogation of all that culture and power stand for, and becomes a forcible reminder of the fact that for the gendered subaltern her only instrument of retaliation against the powers that oppress her, is her body. In *Beloved*, Morrison stages such an act of subversion when she has Sethe kill her two-year old child, because she wished to prevent the latter's return to slavery.

When Draupadi is summoned to the Burra Sahib's tent, she stands up and tears off her flimsy piece of cloth. The narrator describes the moment: Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanyak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation. What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Arc you a man? (196) The story ends with these lines, "Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid. (196)

It is interesting to note that at the end of the story Mahasweta does not use the tribal name Dopdi anymore; she is consistent in her use of the epic name Draupadi. In the concluding moments of the story, one feels that not only does Mahasweta's story signify or offer an alternative cultural reading to the Mahabharata, or the character of Draupadi in it, but finally also claims the Draupadi of the Mahabharata. The issues of power, subordination and gender merge into each other

in both texts to suggest paradigmatic histories of gender. A central paradigm is the question of the inevitability of woman's destiny in her body.

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## Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* : A Quest For Identity

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### Abstract

Girish Karnad is the foremost national playwright in Indian writing in English. His plays rooted in myth and history, are very relevant to the modern times as they are replete with issues that at once touch our contemporary concerns. The plays question the weaknesses and ills of our society. They stifle the mind of the reader towards rethinking certain age-old customs that should be discarded in order to bring parity among the various sections of society. In *Nagamandala*, Rani is a newly wedded girl, who is ill-treated by her husband, Appanna. Rani, transgresses the path set for her according to the rules of a marriage, although without being aware of it. Her journey of a young girl to that of a mature mother marks the storyline of the play. The objective of this paper is to study gender discrimination in the light of Michel Foucault's precepts of power as enumerated in *History of Sexuality and Power and Knowledge*.

**Keywords:** Power, body, identity, subject, society.

The plays of Girish Karnad, the modern Indian playwright in Kannada, carry the imprints of modernism rooted in the traditional past. The plays enriched with history and myth, are deft with contemporary issues. All his plays have been translated into English and have been successfully staged. A majority of the plays represent complex female characters. Karnad's plays are replete with social realism wherein the writer paints his characters in a way so as to fit them to the contemporary issues of immediate concerns. The oppression and subjugation of women find an ample representation in his plays. The play under discussion, *Nagamandala*, has Rani as its lead character. *Nagamandala* is based on two oral tales that Karnad had heard from A. K. Ramanujan (Karnad 16). The play derives its origin from the concept of the fertility rites performed by women desiring to have children.

This paper is intended to study the predicament of Rani as caught up in power relations in a marriage as depicted in the play, *Nagamandala*. The study will focus on the body of a female as a strong determinant of her identity. Gender is a social construct. The

issues concerning gender are not divorced from power relations. Inequalities between men and women lead to a differentiation in defining and de-limiting the roles assigned to men and women in a social construct. The study deals with Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* using Michel Foucault's precepts regarding power and the recurrent theme of "subject" which finds an expression in his works.

Power, according to Foucault operates in the day to day life of an individual. According to Foucault, power is "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation" ( Fillingham 140). It is this existence of power at the basic level that categorizes the identity of an individual and marks him as a subject. A power relationship includes the existence of "the other" and maintains it as a "subject" throughout. Foucault mentions the word 'subject' in two senses: firstly, controlled by someone else and secondly, tied to one's own identity by a conscience. Both ways, it is subjugation or subjection. Rani is oppressed by Appanna through the institution of marriage which in patriarchy gives the man, the right to set up rigid rules for the woman by forcing discipline on her. As Sara Mills presses forth Foucault's assertion, that in a disciplinary regime, a body is subjected to a series of rules and regulations (Mills 93). The body takes those rules as being a part of their own selves and turns them into desirable qualities, thereby, fulfilling the requirements of a disciplinary regime in a patriarchal set up. Rani is expected not only to remain shut in the house but also not to open her mouth in front of her husband. It is after her marriage that the young bride learns to maintain silence in her new home. A female body is forced to put into compliance the requirements of a discipline.

The body is the focus of Foucault's analysis rather than the individual. The body falls outside the realm of the site of struggle and discursive conflict. The body is the place where power is enacted and resisted. Appanna lets lose his power as a man on his young bride and considers it irrelevant to tell her what business keeps him away from home day and night. Appanna is ensnared by a market woman. All he wants from Rani is to cook food for him and look after his house. Foucault asserts that "Power had to be able to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour" (Gordon 125). Appanna uses the power of being a male to control Rani as he is considered superior to Rani for she is a woman

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who is considered weak and inefficient. He uses violence and slaps Rani for what he considers her misdemeanour towards him. She falls on the floor, unconscious. A woman's body is her very inefficiency. Body is closely allied to one's identity. Rani introduces herself to Kuruddavva as "They call me Rani" (Karnad 31). A girl comes to recognise her identity through the perspective of her parents or her husband. The "I" for a woman has no significance. Foucault examines power in terms of minor processes that identify and invest the body. It is very easy for Appanna to confine a young wife all by herself inside the house. The emotional turmoil that she is subjected to is of no consequence to her husband. The poor girl takes refuge in her dreams where she keeps on longing for the affections of her parents. Her words to Kurudavva mark her discomfort, "I am so frightened at night, I can't sleep a wink. At home, I sleep between father and mother. But here, alone- Kurudavva, can you help me, please?" (Karnad 32) The body of the female is considered the site of discursive regime for the male to oppress and subjugate it the way he considers it useful for him. It is the body of the female, "the other" that becomes the subject and hence the target of power. Subjugation is achieved by "excluding forcefully" the one who is not required.

Foucault views the body as 'an historically and culturally specific entity' (Mills 83), that is the social context and the historical period in which it is placed also determine its destiny. Since times immemorial, women have been denied the dignity of being an equally important part of a social construct. Rani is brought before the village elders after she declares her pregnancy to Appanna. Appanna, being a man, is not questioned by the same society when he lives with a market woman and locks his wife in his house. Women's bodies and sexualities are shaped by social pressures (Mills 93). Rani's transgression is held in strong contempt by Appanna and the village elders. Rani's transgression is totally unintentional as suggested in the play. It is only towards the end of the play that she becomes aware of her transgression. The female 'body' is the site of political struggle where the male subjugates not only her body but also her soul. Rani is, at first, fearful of going through the hot iron ordeal and she also fails to understand why she is being questioned for a fault that she has not committed. Rani is required to take an oath by holding a hot iron rod. She prefers to put her hand in ant- hill and hold a cobra in order to prove her chastity. She is

forced to confess in-front of the village. According to Foucault, "Confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship..." (Hurley 61) A confession takes place in front of an authority, who not only judges but also prescribes a punishment to the subject. This is where power still operates and this is what Foucault means that power works from everywhere. Prohibition and punishment are the instruments through which power relations are made operative.

The concept of resistance is also allied to power and as Foucault maintains that power is often accompanied by resistance. Power is not said to exist without resistance. It is not easy for the village elders to convince Rani to succumb to the punishment in the form of an ordeal set for her in order to prove her chastity. She pleads her case in front of the village elders when they force her to accept her guilt, "But I have not done anything wrong. I am not guilty of anything. What shall I plead guilty to?" (Karnad 56) Rani shouts angrily at Appanna, as the latter tries to stop her from running after Kurudavva for help. Rani's words to Appanna are also noteworthy of her resistance, "I was stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot" (Karnad 32). Rani takes courage at last and puts her hand in the ant hill. She takes the oath by touching a cobra and claims to be chaste. The cobra coils round her and the village stands dazed looking at her. Rani is declared a "goddess". Appanna is directed by the village elders to fall at her feet and take her home. The workings of social pressures result in forming the identity of an individual. The mere fact, that Rani, being a woman, is publically forced to demonstrate her purity, shows her inexistence in the social set up that she is a part of. Foucault asserts, "Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification" (Hurley 84). Rani has to forego her identity. She cannot refuse to undergo the ordeal although she knows that she has not done anything wrong as far as her knowledge allowed her. She is a victim caught up in a set of power relationships. The patriarchal set up demands Rani to be faithful to her husband whereas the same set up has no such provision to question the infidelity of a man. It is the workings of power that result in subjugation and the subject therein is made an object to be analyzed and criticised. Rani's identity in this process is objectivised and this is achieved through the workings of power on the body identified as

inefficient and fit enough to be pushed to the periphery. It needs a miracle to liberate a woman from oppression as depicted in the play. Rani's body initially reflects her innocence and later the same body rebels and revels in its triumph over her destiny. Towards the end of the play, Rani is a mature woman and a mother to a son.

J. Dodiya in his book *The Plays of Girish Karnad: A Critical Perspective*, puts forth the view, with respect to Nagamandala, that the concept of chastity has been invented by patriarchal culture and it is accepted by women. I am of the contention that Rani could have refused to go through the ordeal set up for her to prove her chastity. Babu M. Sarat in *Indian Drama Today: A Study in the Theme of Cultural Deformity* writes about gender deformity with respect to Nagamandala. He says that gender deformity leads to a taboo on the sexual indulgence of women and chastity for women is considered supreme and preferable. It is definitely not a matter for taboo or no taboo. It is essentially a matter of bridging the gap of inequalities and disequilibrium between male and women. There exists an incessant fight against the unjust norms laid upon women by family and society. The playwright aspires to give a voice to the oppressed female lot in our society. Myth is so engrained in our cultural past that it gives us a reason to look forward with hope towards future by following a concerted action.

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## Incessant Sexism in P. Sivakami's The Taming of Women

Dr. Darshan Lal\*

### Abstract

Sivakami is one of the female Dalit writers. In her novels, she has written about Dalit-exploitation, patriarchy and female subjugation. Her first novel *Pazhaiyana Kazidalum* was first written in Tamil and later it was translated into English by the writer under the title *The Grip of Change*. Her second novel *Anandhayi* was written in Tamil and it was later translated into English by Pritham K. Chakravarthy under the title *The Taming of Women*. I have chosen her second novel *The Taming of Women* for my presentation. In it the writer has given a plethora of examples of gender-discrimination, sexual abuse, poverty, incest, lust and male-domination. In my paper, I shall try to highlight how the women are marginalised everywhere. Inside the house they are exploited by their own men and outside by other men. Whenever they resist for their dignity, they are silenced by their own men folk.

**Keywords:** gender-discrimination, patriarchy, sexism, women, resistance, lust.

Women are exploited across the world. They are considered second class citizens. They toil as hard as men but they are paid less. Dalit women are doubly exploited—being women and being Dalit. In this novel Sivakami shows how the women are exploited by men of their family and caste and how they resist for their dignity and honour. They are considered just commodities. Women are ill-treated like animals. They are brutally tortured every time. This very paper brings into light the utmost sufferings and exploitation faced by women.

When the novel started, *Anandhayi* was in labour pain. Her husband Periyannan was with his paramour in his room. When she came downstairs, *Anandhayi* caught her by her hair and she fell on the ground. Listening to this Periyannan came down the stairs. His torso was bare. The writer remarks: "Periyannan, his torso bare, came thundering down the steps. He released the women from *Anandhayi's* grip and pushed her aside. *Anandhayi* crashed to the ground with a sob."(4)

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Periyannan was a man full of sex and arrogance. When his wife was in labour pain, he even didn't spare her. He hit her and went away. Sivakami remarks: "Even as she is in labour, he knocks her down, doesn't even bother to look at the newborn but dresses himself in white and takes off."(11) Periyannan like Kathamuthu was very cruel and powerful, who wanted to bring women under control through lust and sex. Kathamuthu in *The Grip of Change* had a concubine Nagamani and Periyannan like him also had a concubine Lakshmi. There is an example of Periyannan's sheepish attitude. When Anandhayi was unable to do the chores after her delivery, Muthakka a maid-servant helped her. When she (Anandhayi) was normal to do all the work, Muthakka said that she wanted to leave. Periyannan insisted her to stay for just ten days. He blackmailed her emotionally. She was touched by Periyannan's words and decided to stay for ten days. He remarks: "For whose sake are you going? It is not as if there's a husband or child waiting for you there. Stay! There's a just-born baby dependent on you here' He came close, wiped her cheek ..." (7) Periyannan pressed fifteen rupees for vegetables into Muthakka's palm and went, "Brushing against her body, Periyannan walked out of the kitchen." (7)

One day Muthakka was bathing the newborn child and Anandhayi was in the kitchen at that time. Periyannan stealthily escaped Anandhayi and came close to Muthakka on the pretence of caressing the child. He sheepishly brushed his hand on Muthakka's breast. The writer observes: "Muthakka propped the child on her outstretched legs and began to bathe her. Anandhayi was in the kitchen draining out the kanji. He chose to come, avoiding Anandhayi's line of vision, and on the pretext of fondling the child, he brushed his hand on Muthakka's breast." (21) Anandhayi's cousin Iyyakannu visited Periyannan's house. He asked for his bulls for tilling the land. Periyannan refused to give him by saying: "You are free to take your sister, but don't touch my bulls. What am I to do without my bulls...don't make me say things I might regret." (43) This clearly shows his arrogant and mean nature. He was more concerned for his bulls than his wife. These words of Periyannan expose his true nature in this male dominated society and also his materialistic attitude and insensitivity towards his wife. There is another example of his insensitivity. When Anandhayi gave birth to a girl child, he didn't come to see the child. He went to meet a whore. He returned home in the evening and entered Anandhayi's room. He took the baby in his arm and

kissed her but Anandhayi was lying like a log--emotionless and expressionless. Anandhayi was very disappointed. She kept weeping. Her mother-in-law advised her by saying: "What the hell do you have to weep for, I say? Why should a woman who's just given birth starve? So, the husband went to a whore, uh! Still, why should you go hungry? Is he all that you have in your life? Don't you have your children, enough wealth? Acres of fields and cattle of your own? Just because he went off with someone, here she wants to pine away. After all there are five children; can't she just wash her hands off him forever?" (17)

Periyannan became a building contractor. He lived in a rented house with his concubine Lakshmi. Now he rarely visited his house. One day he was in his house. During night he went to toilet and saw a man against the wall. Periyannan went near him and shoved him. He fell on the ground and pleaded to Periyannan for mercy. After sometime Periyannan came to know that he was a deaf wanderer. When Anandhayi showed some pity towards him, Periyannan suspected her loyalty. He ill-treated Anandhayi by saying: "Endi, is he your secret lover? Why are you so sorry for him?" (59) At this Anandhayi retaliated: "Your mind was always in the gutter. The poor man is deaf. You beat him rashly and dare to call him my secret lover?" ...I sit at home entertaining every passer-by. Who is here to stop me? Because you want to hide your shady doings, you are shifting the blame on me." (59) Listening to all this Periyannan said very arrogantly: "Adiye, why the hell should I be scared of you? I only have to whistle and I can have any woman I want." (59) This clearly exposes the dominating, arrogant and mean nature of Periyannan. In such society where woman is merely a thing of joy, the justice is impossible. Man does all the wrong things, and he blames the woman for it.

Periyannan lived with his concubine Lakshmi. He was working on a bridge as building contractor. The bridge was about to complete in a year. He asked Lakshmi to live with him in his house with his family on the first floor. He also assured Lakshmi that Anandhayi wouldn't speak a word against her. The writer observes: "Anandhayi is a patient woman. She got married to me as a very young girl. She is scared of me and will not even squeak." (99) This shows that women are treated like animals.

Sivakami has described in this novel that women are not only ill-treated by the grown-ups but even very small children misbehave with them. There is an example of such ill-treatment. One day Anandhayi

after gathering cow dung 'came to the water tank to rinse her soiled hands.'(104) Vadakathiyaal was sitting under a lemon tree. Anandhayi was shocked to see behaviour of Vadakathiyaal's son towards his mother. The boy was ready to hit her face. The writer opines: "Her son stood by, with one leg raised, ready to kick her, saying, 'If I kick your face your teeth will fall off.'"(104) She also lamented by saying: "We have been unlucky to be born as women. We cannot complain."(105) Vadakathiyaal was also brutalised by the members of her family—her husband, son and brother-in-law. She remarks: "I was thrashed around even after my children grew up. See this loose tooth; it was he who knocked it. Once he threw a heavy lock on my face and this is the scar."(105) She again told Anandhayi that she was tortured by her brother-in-law. She says: "When I question him he says a younger brother's wife is as good as one's own wife and an elder brother's wife is half one's wife."(105) This shows extreme exploitation against women. They are merely things to be used and thrown out by men.

Kala's father Periyannan chose a boy for her marriage. She pleaded to her mother Anandhayi that she didn't want to marry the boy who was chosen by her father for her. These words reached Periyannan's ears. He severely rebuked Anandhayi: "Is she going to be his wife or just sleep with him? How dare she say she doesn't like him? Let her say that once more and I'll skin both the mother and daughter alive."(113) It is the irony of fate that women are not allowed to express their emotions even in matter of life partners. They are handed over to other men like dumb cattle.

Kala knew that her father was not at home. She took the advantage of learning bicycle with her friend Banu. Periyannan returned home at nine in the night. He saw Kala riding bicycle on the road. Seeing her father, she stopped peddling and ran away to her house. He directly entered the kitchen. Anandhayi was adding curd to the milk in the kitchen. Periyannan tugged Anandhayi with her bun and dragged her until she fainted. The writer opines: "Periyannan went straight to the kitchen. Anandhayi had just added curd to the milk and was scraping the bottom of the milk dish....As soon as Periyannan entered he grabbed Anandhayi by her bun and dragged her up...Anandhayi fell in a faint on the kitchen floor."(83) At this Anandhayi asked what his mistake was. Periyannan abused her enormously: "Get up you bitch, bloody pimp!"(83) Again she retaliated: "...tell me what I did before you slap me around. I

warn you."(83) Listening to this, Periyannan became very angry. He picked up a broom and went for her: "He Picked up the grass broom lying on the ground and went at her."(83) Anandhayi again retorts: "Ayyo, he is hitting me! He is one who has sluts all over the town and he dares to call me a pimp!"(83) Kala hid herself inside the room. Periyannan picking up the broom ran after Kala. When he was running behind her, his mother Vellaiyamma came between them and she tried to stop him. Vellaiyamma asked why he was hitting her. He hit his mother with a blow: "A blow landed on the old woman. Without a word, she fell on the wall."(84) This shows the gender-discrimination and male-domination over the female of the family.

Periyannan suspected that there was an illicit relationship between Manickam and Lakshmi. They often quarrelled. One day when Periyannan was beating her mercilessly, she injured him with a sickle for self-defence. She ran away from the house but she was brought back by Periyannan. She was even tortured by Periyannan's son whom she considered like her son. Periyannan's daughter Dhanam fell in love with preacher's son Daniel. Lakshmi warned Dhanam to break her affair with Daniel. This created commotion in the family. After this incident Dhanam started disliking Lakshmi. Lakshmi talked to Anandhayi about Dhanam. She remarks: "You watch out, any day now she is going to elope. Take her to work in the fields with you."(179) After that they both hardly spoke. After this incident, Dhanam troubled her (Lakshmi) extremely.

When Periyannan became a building contractor, he earned a lot of money. He threw a bundle of money at his mother's feet in an insulting manner. He shouted at her by saying that she had not ever seen such huge money in her life time. Sivakami observes: "This was because after getting a big building contract, Periyannan had thrown a bundle of currency at her feet and demanded, 'Have you ever seen this much money before?'"(63) This again shows that he doesn't have any human feelings and respect for women.

From the beginning, Periyannan exploited Lakshmi physically. His daughter's words assaulted her mentally. Lakshmi told Anandhayi that she came with a hope that Periyannan would treat her like a queen and would love her much. But this was all a mirage. At this Anandhayi comments: "If you do not like him, then you should return to your parents, not elope with a stranger."(216) Listening to all this, Lakshmi

fumes: "It is not that I want sex that desperately. I want love, a relationship, a support, a comfort, a kind word---not like this, everyday torture. Kicks, punches and slander."(216) This shows that how Dalit women aspire for love and care. This is the basic need of every woman in our society.

In the end, due to frustration Lakshmi committed suicide. She got only in the end—her successful suicide. Even the death of Lakshmi didn't bring any change in the temperament of Periyannan. He brutalised his wife and called her ill-omened. It is very clear that women sacrifice everything for their family's happiness. They suffer from birth to death. They are not given their due place in society. Whenever they resist for their dignity and honour, they are silenced by their family members.

Sivakami has expressed the pitiable condition of women. But the mother of Periyannan lived with dignity on her own finances. If somebody asked her to stop the petty savings and take rest, she became furious. She remarks: "I am an able woman. Why do I have to depend on him? I will eat from my earning."(63) The memory of Vellaiyamma's husband always haunted her. He committed suicide by drinking yercum milk. Vellaiyamma's husband was a spendthrift and drunkard. When she refused to give him money that she kept for emergency. Vellaiyamma's husband became very angry and slapped her. The writer remarks: "He flew into rage, called her a squanderer and slapped her on her cheek. It was a strong blow; after all, he was used to hard labour. Her cheek swelled up like a paniyaram."(63-64)

To sum up, it can be said that Sivakami, through her writings has brought the reality of men's ill-treatment and exploitation against women in this patriarchal society to the forefront. She gives a message that every man should give respect, love, care and platform to women so that they can live happily and live freely.

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## **The Ethical Imagination in The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah**

*Kanak Raj Chandna\**

### **Abstract**

Ayi Kwei Armah is a brilliant novelist of Ghana of the last quarter of the twentieth century. He is not only an articulate spokesman of African history but also a spokesman of the African identity. His literary output when compared to those of his Nigerian counterparts, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe is slender. In his five novels, beginning with *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and ending with his novel *The Healers*, we have before us, a diagnostic analysis of the African reality of his age and a reconstruction of African history in a manner altogether unique. The topic of my proposed study is *The Ethical Imagination in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* and I have definite reasons for the justification of the study. Armah is known the world over as a severe critic of colonialism and post-colonialism. The critics of Armah's novels who have emphasized on the twin aspects of colonialism and post-colonialism in his writings are Robert Fraser, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayo Mamadu, Chidi Amuta and Emmanuel Ngara. All these critics have shown the malaise afflicting the African society. But no critic till date has devoted himself exclusively to the ethical aspect of Armah's imagination.

**Keywords:** Ethical, colonial, neocolonial, postcolonial.

A careful analysis of the novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, gains importance when we see the novel in the context of polarization of critical opinion. There is a dialectical relationship between the vision of Armah and the actual "blasted landscape" which he presents in his novel. This dialectical relationship manifests itself in a structural pattern, and this structural pattern is not only baffling but also flamboyant to the readers. The structural pattern requires a close scrutiny on the part of the readers. Once we come back to Achebe's criticism of the novel, we realize that the answer for the structural pattern is not too distant from our reach. In one of his interviews with Kalu Ogbaa Achebe states:

We all admit that there is a lot to protest against in every community, in every civilization. If things were perfect, there would be

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no need for writers to write their novels. But it is because they see a vision of the world which is better than what exists, it is because they see the possibilities of man rising higher than he has risen at the moment that they write. So, whatever they write, if they are true practitioners of their art, would be in essence a protest against what exists, what is. (Research in African Literatures, Vol.12, No.1 (Spring 1981), pp.4-5.

Charles Nnolim in his review of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* equates Armah's novel to that of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. He finds parallels between Armah's Ghana and Dante's *Inferno* and also the events which take place in both the literary works: Symbolically, Armah's Ghana is Dante's *Inferno*, and much of the events take place in the circles of the avaricious, the gluttonous and the lustful, which contains sinners who are aptly appeased with dirt and filth and who stink in the mire of their own occupation. (African Literature Today No.10, p.210)

The two groups of critics show their misunderstanding of Armah's first novel and their comments evince their misunderstanding. One group holds Armah guilty for the lack of what in fact is his major concern. The other group denigrates him for portraying what really exists. Emmanuel Obeichina, while reviewing the novel goes to the extent of stating Armah's total ignorance of neo-colonialism and the way it operates on the thought process of the Africans: On the level of parable, it might pass on the particularized level of fact, it raises numerous weighty questions which, given the limitations of the fictional medium, cannot be adequately dealt with. Maybe Armah has not heard of the word 'neocolonialism' or how it operates on the African man and on the African political destiny. Maybe he underrates what has been called 'the colonialism of the mind. (Review in Okike, Nigeria, NUSUKKA, April 1971, p.49)

Robert Fraser observes two angles of the book and thereby demonstrates the historical dimension of the book: "The short perspective of recent Ghanaian politics and the longer perspective of a centuries-old cultural betrayal." (The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah pp.25-26) Though the essay of Neil Lazarus is entitled, "Pessimism of the Intellect and Optimism of the Will" yet the underlying note is primarily optimistic. Lazarus says that the novel is "couched as a voyage of discovery," which ultimately turns out to be "preeminently a dialectical

work." (Research in African Literatures, Vol.18, No.2, (1987), p.137) Critic Rand Bishop is all praises for its compact plot construction and powerful delineation of neo-colonialism. For Bishop the novel "remains one of the most tightly constructed and powerful novels of any literature and century." (World Literature Written in English, Vol.21, No.3 (Autumn 1982), p.532)

Armah casts his sardonic gaze on the decadence and rottenness in contemporary Ghana. He is shocked to find that in post-independent Ghana corruption is rampant. Fanon had made certain predictions regarding the corruptions that would follow many African nations close on the heels of their independence. Armah realizes that the prophetic vision of Fanon came to be true with devastating effect. His first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a manifestation of Fanon's prophecy. Armah states that the prophecy of Fanon is materialized with 'obscene haste' (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* p.88) Armah makes a critical examination of the national bourgeoisie with the psychology of a businessman and their "activities of the intermediary type". Armah makes the critical examination of the national bourgeoisie and their activities with the clinical precision that one comes across in the work of a surgeon. He castigates the nationalist leaders for their unbridled greed and inordinate acquisitiveness. In his article entitled, "African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?" he rants mercilessly against the African politicians and their love for high flown rhetoric or to put it more naïvely, their demagoguery: African politicians love flashy scenes and high-flauntin' words. That is only a partial exploration. More important is the historical fact that in a very radical sense of nationalist leaders of Africa have found themselves sucked into the role of hypocrites, actions involved in a make-believe situation. (African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?, Presence Africaine, No.64 (1967), p.28.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* Armah is a strong witness to the dislocation of ideals in the aftermath of independence in Ghana. This is what adds to the novel not only a political dimension but also a historical dimension to the dialectical processes that are at work. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah came to hold the reins of power in post-independent Ghana after the British quit the state of Ghana. The Nkrumah regime in Ghana kicked off on a promising note but very soon it fell into the quagmire of corruption and degeneration. Taking advantage of the credulous people, the bureaucrats of Ghana vied with one another

for their selfish gains and comforts and threw all the concerns of their well being for the state to the winds. The people also imitated their egocentric leaders and in doing so, tried to push back the state to its previous colonial position.

The protagonist of the novel is an ordinary railway clerk at Takoradi; he is a protagonist without a name. The kind of life which he leads is listless and monotonous. The two qualities which set him apart from others of his class and group are his trenchant mind and powers of perception. They are certainly his two redeeming qualities. Armah is all praises for the co-ordination of the protagonist's mind and body. To quote Aidoo, "a mind and body which together form the nerve centre of a radio-active kind of searchlight." ('No Saviors', African Writers on African Writing p.14) He is often bewildered by the 'squat massiveness' of the building which houses his office. His keen perception makes him observe the 'great deal of care' that went into the 'making of even the bricks'. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 11)

The protagonist observes men and manners and his sensitive perception helps him in his authentic judgement of the beautiful persons and the ugly persons. It also enables him to exercise his moral choice between the good and the bad. Secondly, the protagonist is not a man who has his head lost in the clouds. He is keenly alive to the social realities around him. What causes him his heartache is the problem of corruption which has reached gargantuan proportions. In the given context, the corruption in Ghana is not only rampant but also implacable. He stands aloof from the madding crowd, the members of which desire to be blessed with a sordid boon of money. Such persons are always on the lookout for personal gains, power and pelf, let alone material comforts. The reader is struck by his reluctance to take part in the 'national game' of dishonesty and self-advancement.

As we make a character sketch of the unnamed protagonist, we find that he is the just inheritor of the traditional ideals and values. But the socio-political situation has forced him to be a stranger in spite of himself. His family is critical for what they term as lack of punch on his part. Even the society of which he is a member dismisses him with despicable indifference. In this connection we are reminded of the protagonist's confessions to The Teacher: 'I am the one who feels strange' (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 54) His 'movement'

whether physical or moral is natural but the inconsiderate members of the society prefer to label him unnatural. Though he attempts to preserve his own integrity, yet the society views all his attempts with its strange logic. The members of the society in which he lives consider, "there was too much of the unnatural in any man who imagines he could escape the inevitable decay of life and accept the decline into final disintegration." (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born pp.47-48)

The moral integrity of the unnamed protagonist can be strikingly contrasted with the unethical ways of his friend, Koomson. Koomson can stoop to the nadir of dishonesty to rise to the apex of prosperity. By his immoral ways, he has carved a niche for himself in social and political spheres. He makes capital of the situation prevailing around him by reading the pulse of the people accurately. His story from rags to riches or his meteoric rise from that of a dock worker to a cabinet minister is stupendous but it is not something that inspires awe, more particularly, if we bring into focus his manipulative skills or his implacable belief in easy gain. Though Koomson is a member of the socialist party yet he does not cling to socialist ideals. He practises several schemes in making quick money and his monetary successes urge him to declare that socialism is a 'nuisance' (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 136) He unmasks the hypocrisy of the Nkrumah regime when he confesses that, 'the old man (Nkrumah) himself does not believe in it' (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 136) All the actions of Koomson are replete with moral depravity; hence he comes to symbolize the ethos of a whole nation in the given context.

On the other hand, the unnamed protagonist is one who follows scrupulously all the norms of the party. He strictly follows all the values of life that opens up possibilities for all the members of the society. In times of his crisis of conscience, he visits one of his worthy friends, teacher from whom he seeks advice and guidance. The Teacher remains almost naked and aloof. The Teacher is socially oblivious; it is a social oblivion which the Teacher has imposed upon himself. His social oblivion can be attributed to his disaffection with the situation that has arisen in post-independent Ghana. What forces him to adopt a lonely posture is the degradation in all spheres of life. This degradation, in Armah's opinion, is a result of the 'easy slide' (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 31) towards the 'blinding gleam'. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 56) This degradation compels

the Teacher to adopt a lonely posture. He realizes that it is impossible to redeem the nation and the party from the 'blinding gleam' so he redeems himself in his own way by not participating even in the normal social activity. Small wonder he withdraws into his shell of isolation and in this isolated shell his freedom is indistinguishable from its non-existence. The Teacher's notion on freedom is different from the notion of the members of the party:

It [freedom] makes no difference. If we can't consume ourselves for something we believe in, freedom makes no difference at all. You see, I am free to do what I want, but there is nothing happening now that I want to join. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 61) The statement of the Teacher on freedom is two-edged. The Teacher not only makes a statement on his own freedom but also makes a fitting commentary on Ghana's independence.

Armah makes judicious use of the flashback method. In a flashback the Teacher remembers two of his former friends who shared the revolutionary fervour which was deep within him. They were Maanan the prostitute and Kofi Billy. Kofi Billy was a dock worker who had unfortunately lost his leg while doing work, particularly that kind of work 'that was cruel to white men's hands'. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 65) They smoked 'wee' together and 'swallowed all the keen knowledge of betrayal'. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 65) Maanan was one of the earliest in Ghana to greet the 'new one' (to use a circumlocution for Dr. Kwame Nkrumah) She saw the dawn of a new hope in the person of Nkrumah. But all their hopes were consumed in smoke and the Teacher, more than anyone else was compelled to comment thus: 'How could this have grown rotten with such obscene haste?' (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 88) The malfunctioning of the ministers in the Nkrumah government creates psychological stress in the lives of the three persons which is full of inconsolable sorrow. Maanan loses his senility, Kofi Billy commits suicide and the Teacher goes into his shell with a grim realization that the line of division between the white rulers and their black sycophants is very thin:

There is no difference then. No difference at all between the white men and their apes, the lawyers and the merchants, and now the apes of the apes, our Party men. (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet

Born 89) As Maanan oscillates between sanity and insanity, her concern for the plight of the people is phenomenal. The last words which she voices against the Nkrumah regime evinces her soul agony: "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything." (The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born 180)

So we see that the imagination of Armah is shaped by his ethical concerns. Though the novel may be read from an anti-colonial perspective yet it is the novelist's concern for ethical values in post-colonial Ghana which shines above everything.

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## Feministic Perspectives in Shashi Deshpande's Selected Fictional Works

Dinesh Kumar\*

### Abstract

Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent and towering place among the Writers of Indian writing in English who has dealt with problems and hardships faced by women of twentieth century. In her delineation of female characters, Shashi Deshpande has projected the middle-class women who are the victims of patriarchal society and that is why, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she realistically portrays an authentic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist.

**Key-Words:** Feminism, hegemony, humanist, patriarchy,

It is commonly believed that feminine inscriptions are different from male expressions; words and allusions often appear to have different meanings for men and women. Sita, e.g, is the female archetype of ideal womanhood for Indian men; but for women, she may be the model of an oppressed and exploited female. Apart from this, it has been claimed that the main problem for women has been their 'invisibility' in any serious study of history or society. The hiatus between the different ways in which men and women express the understanding, the circumambient realities can be seen as an important factor operating behind the problem of women's invisibility, for it has been mainly the prerogative of men to portray those realities in literature. The political scope of feminism has been broadened by the impact of Marxist ideology that has made feminists challenge sexism along with capitalism for both encouraged the patriarchal set-up.

The study of Shashi Deshpande's women characters in her manor novels against the backdrop of various phases of feminism forms the main thrust of this paper. For this purpose it is necessary to have some

discussion of feminism and feminist literature. As far as the origin of the term, feminism is concerned, it was derived from the Latin word, *lamina* meaning woman, and it was coined for the advocacy of woman's rights in all spheres of life. In other words, it refers to the social, economic and political rights. This term gained more momentum in the twentieth century for women's suffrages or voting rights in the Western countries. But, later on, this movement gained socio-political form for the emancipation from patriarchal oppression.

Writers like Jane Austen, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Virginia Woolf pledged for the equality of opportunity for the woman based upon the equality of value. But, it was left for Simone De Beauvoir to come out with a bold manifesto for a frontal attack on the patriarchal hegemony in our society. In her famous treatise, *The Second Sex*, she has, like a raging rebel, hit hard at the andocentric customs and conventions, art and culture, philosophy and religion which have always assigned women the secondary or rather slavish position to men.

Shashi Deshpande has powerfully portrayed the position of woman in a patriarchal society — someone without a clear sense of purpose and without a firm sense of her own identity. Her women characters do not place themselves in the centre of a universe of their own making, but rather are always painfully aware of the demands and needs of others, and always searching for their identity in a male-dominated society.

In her novel, *That Long Silence*, the protagonist of the novel is ensconced in the structures and prescriptions of security, accultured firmly into socially-determined roles and attitudes. Jaya, the narrator protagonist, is confronted with the basic problem of fixing her identity, of recovering the "self" from the roles of dutiful daughter, submissive wife and caring mother. Jaya strongly rejects the very idea of a unitary self, as if there is no such thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other.

In *That Long Silence* the protagonist raises her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother, and revolts against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal set up. Thus, the novel can be seen as a feminist critique of patriarchal practices. Similarly, it is an

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established fact that in *Roots and Shadows* the protagonist, Indu, struggles to assert her individuality to achieve freedom which leads her to confrontation with her family and the male dominated society.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents a graphic picture of male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage. A mature Saru shuns extremes and takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage. Shashi Deshpande has expressed the concept of search for identity through the protagonist, Urmila, of *The Binding Vine* as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter's death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who feels like having entered a chakravayuha from which there is no escape. She can make the best of her life by hardening herself to face the harsh realities of life. In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi accepts her husband's desertion without any protest. In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rabid diatribes. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy. Besides, Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women's needs of the head, heart and the anatomy. Deshpande has ventured out of the cordon she had confined herself to and articulates the agony, pain, doubts and fears of her protagonists — male and female alike. She does not fight for justice of women at men's cost, but presents their respective limitations as spouse. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande fight the prevalent gender stereotypes and assert their individuality.

Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by Shashi Deshpande. But, there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning a long fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu undergoes great mental trauma in

her marriage due to her husband Jayant's double standards who, though educated and liberal, does not tolerate any deviation on Indu's part from the traditional role of a wife. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the marriage is on the rocks because Mann feels embarrassed and insecure with the rising status of his doctor wife and is intolerant about playing a second-fiddle role in their marriage. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya has been told that her husband is like a sheltering tree. She has to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if she has to water it with deceit and lies. Hence with her new self-awareness, Jaya ironically views herself and Mohan as "a pair of bullocks yoked together", moving together merely because it was more "comfortable." In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila has a long distance marriage since her husband Kishore is in the navy. She craves for some physical gratification during his long absence but she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage and remains virtuous. In *A Matter of Time*, the marriage breaks because Sumi's husband walks out on her. In the end he returns to a new Sumi, who has coped with the tragedy with remarkable stoicism.

A sense of non-fulfillment, of incompleteness, lays dormant in Shashi Deshpande's characters, suppressed out of fear of denting the facade of a happy marriage. The woman learns to adopt certain strategies in order to survive within marriage. These strategies conceal her true self much like a purdah hides the line of the body. Silence is, perhaps, the most common strategy of survival. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists withdraw from their families for a while; analyze their circumstances objectively without any external aid or advice. Then they return to the home and family knowing full well as to what is to be expected of themselves and their respective spouses.

Shashi Deshpande has presented a woman's world from a woman's point of view. None of the novels discussed have well-developed male characters, and are seen only in relation to the protagonists as husbands or fathers or brothers. In Deshpande's novels husbands have been indirectly made responsible for their wives' troubles. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are strong. They refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role models laid down by society for women. But they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita returns to her paternal home to escape from her husband Manohar's sadism. This temporary withdrawal helps her view

her situation objectively. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu frees herself of the constricting traditional role of a wife and mother, and dons the mantle of the family matriarch at Akka's bidding. She realizes that her husband Jayant need not determine the role she should play in her own and other people's lives. After having rejected traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists display great strength and courage in evolving their own role models as per the requirement of their social milieu.

Deshpande's protagonists display a tangible development during the course of the novel. They go through a process of self-examination before they reach self-actualization. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies, and face life with great courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear to be more life-like and more akin to the educated, middle-class, urban Indian woman of today.

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant strident feminist. She believes that we are all part of society, and we need a family and some ties. More than being a feminist, she is a humanist. Her views are more akin to the modern feminist thought which is no longer regarded as radical. She expresses her desire to be a humanist. She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things. Her writing is known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and intractable themes affecting the lives of women. Her works, therefore, constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.

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## **Treatment of Gender, Race and Class in Partition Literature: A Study in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What The Body Remembers***

*Daleep Bali\**

#### *Abstract*

The literature written on partition theme not only gives us a glimpse of the bloody-days of partition, but also carries us to an early-era when the ambience of the country was healthy and harmonious. In the course of presenting the snapshots of India's resplendent past and its evolution- on social, political and cultural fronts, which subsequently led to the divide of 1947- the partition literature dextrously dealt with the issues of gender, class and race. While depicting the mayhem of partition, the writers, almost on a parallel plane, have caught the sentiments of the common man, talked about the class-conflicts, un-earthed the racial prejudices and also addressed the gender concerns. However, it would also be imperative to mention here that every narrative on partition has a distinct shade of its own and it has tried to trace and treat these issues in the light of new dimensions. This paper is an attempt to study Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* to see how the aspects of gender, race and class impact the presentation of partition violence in it.

**Keywords :** Gender, Class, Race, Communalism, Partition

Partition literature occupies a pivotal position in the annals of Indian English Literature. Ever since the division of the country a galaxy of writers have shown a keen interest in exploring the divide of 1947 and have, thus, embellished the partition literature with myriad new dimensions. This rivulet of literature has been enriched further with the influx of innumerable narratives, including the writings in regional languages and translated literature. On account of its realistic fervour, emotive appeal and humanitarian concerns the partition literature has continued to flourish along the troughs and crests of time and has thereby firmly established itself in the genre of Indian English Literature and Translated Literature.

If we traverse back through the corridors of time we come to know about the multicultural tradition of India. From the perusal of

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history it becomes clear that the invaders of different faiths, castes, and communities came to India and got assimilated with its rich and composite culture. Even the foreign Islamic conquerors; be it the Arabs, Turks, Pathans, Persians or Mongols- who invaded India from time to time were mesmerised by its' pluralistic tradition. Commenting on pluralistic culture of India Maulana Abul Kalam Azad opines, "It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil and that many a caravan should find rest here..."(Azad 26). Acclaimed for its 'unity in diversity - India, thus, became a nourishing and flourishing ground for the people possessing distinct class (set of people grouped together or differentiated from others), race (group of people connected by common descent)and ethnicity (people having common national or cultural tradition).

*What the Body Remembers* is also an absorbing study of the grim and gruesome partition phase in which Shauna Singh Baldwin has exquisitely woven the issues related to gender, class and race. The novel comes from a female author, who not only analyses the gender concerns amidst the morbid atmosphere of partition, but by placing Roop -a Sikh woman, at the focal point of her narrative also makes an insight both into her conscious and sub-conscious mind. The novel, thus, throws ample light upon the inward and outward life of Roop in particular and consequently explores the world of women in general. The novel also portrays the communally charged atmosphere of the Punjab province wherein a threefold communal dimension, existing amongst the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, created antagonism on the lines of class and race and thereby resulted in mass massacres of the highest magnitude. The winds of change had begun to stir the communal harmony of Punjab and Sardarji – a rich landlord of Khanewal, was quick enough to sense these developments. He not only feels concerned about his own welfare, but also contemplates over the fate and future of the Sikh community - What if the random lines are drawn to split the nation?

The other issue that worried Sardarji was related to his wife Satya. She had not delivered a child though they were married for several years now. Sardarji's sister Toshi was not at all pleased over these developments. Consequently she constrained her brother to remarry. Roop, the daughter of a Lambardar of Pari-Darwaza, thus,

came in Sardarji's life as his second wife. This marriage made Satya apprehensive about her fate and future life in the household of her husband. A grave feeling of insecurity, i.e., of losing her husband intensified her miseries the day Roop delivered her first child. In a bid to overcome her fear Satya stressed Sardarji to put the child in her custody. Sardarji, being least concerned with the emotions of the mother, asked Roop to hand over the child to Satya saying, "You will feel the joy of sacrifice, the happiness of giving."(Baldwin 175) Roop strongly resented this decision of Sardarji, but to no avail, ultimately, she had to curb her feelings, her affection and bow before the unjust decision of her husband. In utter dismay, Roop surrendered her first child- Pavan, to Satya, Later, as a passive protest against her husband's arbitrary move, she left for papaji's house. However, her miseries were multiplied further when her father Bachan Singh too condemned Roop for leaving her husband's house in such a reckless manner and said, "Beti you should go back to him.... Go back, before the eyes of the world are turned upon us, before men in the village council begin raising questions about you."(Baldwin 269) Unwillingly, Roop leaves her papaji's house and once again becomes prepared to follow the dictates of her husband. She feels as if "after marriage the woman becomes a property of the husband.,"(Flevia 154) and "for a man woman's mind has no value, to him only woman's body is important, that too as it is useful to him."Chopra116) So, to procure a legal heir for his large landed estate Sardarji uses Roop and thereafter both his wives become mere puppets in the hands of this wealthy Landlord.

The docile nature and attitude of passive acceptance adopted by Satya and Roop settled the household affairs of Sardarji, but the country was in a state of turmoil. The harmony of the bygone days was tarnished by the communal strife's and political provocations. A threefold communal dimension existing in the province intensified the problems furthermore. Now, the Sikhs too began to polarise themselves from the other two communities -the Hindus and the Muslims. Bachan Singh, thus, directs the womenfolk of his family to obey the tenets of Sikhism in the strictest sense and avers, "From this day forward no one in this family will go any more to the Hindu temple."(p.50) He also curses Gujri, the maidservant, saying, "Gujri, no more Muslim meat is to enter this house..." (p.53) This polarisation of races on the parameters of faith diluted the identity of the Punjabis. "Earlier people of different

religions.... proudly defined themselves as Punjabis. Their association with the land of Punjab made them Punjabis.”(Chopra103) However, with the advent of partition phase religion became the sole touchstone of one’s identity – whereas, all the other factors were marginalised.

The polarisation of people had caught humanity in the vicious ebb of communalism. Sardarji was completely agonised with these turn of events. At times he discoursed upon the political developments of the country and cursed its leaders saying, “A Sikh homeland has been rejected by Gandhi-who allowed Jinnah to have his Pakistan,” (p.390) while on other occasions he would sit silently contemplating over the future of the Sikh community thus, “a massacre by Muslims or a slow death under the Hindus it was like choosing between cancer and tuberculosis.”(P-388) Thus, Sardarji now began to think in terms of his own race -his own religious class, and the element of nationalism or that of being Punjabi fumed away from his personality.

Migration across the frontier was really a challenging task during that lurid phase. After the division,” Even by a conservative estimate 10 million people took to the road in search of a new home. A million did not make it.”<sup>15</sup> The women, in particular, had to pay a heavy price during this exodus. “Since women were seen as a symbol of community production, the rival community took it as an opportunity to sow the seeds of their community in the wombs of the women who belonged to the other communities. The modus operandi included gang rapes, stripping and parading naked women through the towns and cities.”(Chopra 123) In the narrative Bachan Singh kills his daughter-in-law, Kusum, to protect the family honour. Later, when the rioters ransacked Bachan’s house and found the corpse of Kusum lying on the floor they became mad with rage and left a written message near the body of the girl, “We will stamp your kind... This is a war against your quom.... We take the womb so there can be no Sikhs from it...” (p.450) This barbaric act indicates the magnitude of hatred and intolerance that the people had developed along the lines of class and race in those bleak days. Roop too underwent a harrowing experience at the Delhi railway station when someone in the crowd pulled down her salwar., In a fit of fury she yelled, “See me, I am human, though I am only a woman... See me not as a vessel, a plaything, a fantasy, a maidservant, an ornament, but as Vaheguru made me.”(P-439) The cry of Roop not only registers her anguish against male-chauvinism and

patriarchal social order, but also reveals her desire to lead a life of equality and dignity.

Finally, like thousands and thousands of other survivors of the partition holocaust, Sardarji and Roop too began to redeem their shattered lives. “We are Punjabis, we will re-build,” (P-471) was the instant reaction of the people of Punjab province to the flurry of partition violence. Drawing inspiration from the religious ideals of the sacred Gurus, in a resurgent mood, they recited in unison -“Kirat Karo, Vand Chakho, Naam Japo” (P-466) [Work hard, share with your neighbour, repeat the name of God] The author, thus, concludes the narrative on an optimistic note. By deposing faith in moral and essential human values she seems to overcome the barriers of class, race and gender and thereby endorses the idea of establishing an equitable social order The following lines from K.M.Panikkar’s “The Waves of Thought” quite aptly sum-up this vision of Shauna Singh Baldwin thus:Real peace can only be known, through an even mind rooted in loveAnd nourished in the feeling of oneness, with all created things.(Panikkar 610)

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## The Treatment of an Oppressed Race in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

Prabhleen Toor\*

### Abstract

The chasm between the environmentalisms of the poor and the rich and the discriminatory attitude towards human and non-human beings bring to mind the 'land ethic' of Aldo Leopold that extends the boundaries of a community to include soils, plants and animals. He says, "Land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (204). In this context, *Animal's People* portrays what happens to an environment in the absence of land ethic as the world is intricately connected in ways that often escape our notice. *Animal's People*, through its depiction of the abandonment of the pesticide plant, necessitates rethinking of "the international framework of law, justice, and rights" (DeLoughrey & Handley 216).

It has become crucial to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community. Mother Earth's most controversial 'offspring' has been perpetrating acts of exploitation against his co-inhabitants, resulting in a situation of disequilibrium and crisis. Indra Sinha's seminal novel, *Animal's People*, takes the reader to the heart of the global environmental crisis and engages with the consequences of the 1984 toxic chemical spill in Bhopal. Set in the fictional Indian town of Khaufpur, *Animal's People* presents a thinly veiled representation of Bhopal some twenty years after the night of the explosion, chronicling the ongoing disasters – environmental, health, social, political and legal. The chasm between the environmentalisms of the poor and the rich and the discriminatory attitude towards human and non-human beings bring to mind the 'land ethic' of Aldo Leopold that extends the boundaries of a community to include soils, plants and animals. He says, "Land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (204). In this context, *Animal's People* portrays what happens to an environment in the absence of land ethic as the world is intricately connected in ways that often escape our notice. *Animal's People*, through its depiction of the abandonment of the pesticide plant,

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On the night of December 2nd, 1984, the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, leaked forty tons of deadly methyl isocyanate gas into the air, resulting in the immediate death of thousands of people. For thousands of others, death arrived gradually; for the next generations, gas-related cancers, illnesses, injuries preserved the legacy of that night. Disparate and sparring narratives surfaced in the aftermath, all of which attempted to salvage meaning from the raw material of disaster. Union Carbide presented Bhopal as a unique and singular accident, one that "couldn't happen in the United States" and that ended with the dispersal of cash settlements (Fortune 12). Indra Sinha's novel functions as an urban analogue depicting the crisis as being suspended in a state of irresolution. The Kampani, a stand-in for Union Carbide, skirts accountability through mechanisms of endless deferrals, leaving their impoverished victims few avenues for retribution. Rob Nixon's essay on *Animal's People* is part of the reason that this novel has become, as Lawrence Buell has suggested, a kind of paradigmatic text for contemporary ecocriticism, replacing Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as representative of contemporary toxic discourse. Whereas Carson offered a pastoral-nostalgic memory of an idyllic middle-American town as eco-ethical norm to counter the health hazards of chemical pesticides, Sinha refuses this sort of nostalgia. Indeed, at one point, *Animal's People*, the protagonist-narrator, recalls a childhood memory of having enjoyed swimming in the lakes behind the Kampani's factory and dispels the very image of a bucolic past a few pages later by calling them "clay pits" (16).

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Sinha chooses to tell his story from the perspective of this four-footed boy, Animal, who proudly cherishes his position as a member of the animal kingdom and rejects any attempts to push him higher in the chain of evolution. Animal himself represents a missing ring in the Darwinian chain of evolution, “free of ties and, where necessary, cruel and devoid of guilt” (Goodbody 187). Different members of the non-human world are shown expressing their verdict on events that affect their wellbeing and proceeding into action to execute their will. With his bones “twisted like a hairpin,” Animal gains an intimate understanding of the geography of Khaufpur. “From a height of eighteen inches,” he asserts, “you get to know a place very well, every crack in the road, every stone, every dropped, not-picked-up coin” (135). Deeply acquainted with the spatial arrangement of Khaufpur, he demonstrates a wealth of local knowledge shaped by his memory of that night: “That huddle of roofs, it’s Jyotinagar. Lanes in there are narrow; I don’t like to think about what happened in them. My friend Faqri, he lost his mum and dad and five brothers and sisters in those lanes (31). Far from understanding the city through the logic of the market, Animal draws a map of Khaufpur through the lens of crisis and collective experience.

Sinha’s Animal is fairly explicit about the likely privileged status of his readers – whom he calls “eyes” (14): “What can I say that they will understand? Have those thousands of eyes slept even one night in a place like this? Do these eyes shit on railway tracks?” (7). The ongoing effects of the chemical leakage have not only been visited disproportionately on the poor but have also been magnified by a byzantine suspension of justice that has allowed the various forms of malpractice, criminal violence and contempt to go largely unpunished. This is especially evident in the outrage arising from the limited liability settlement agreed by the Indian Supreme Court in 1989, which valued the lives of the dead at around \$2000 each and failed to account either for the myriad injuries caused by ecological toxicity or for cleaning up Bhopal’s poisoned environment itself. Yet despite continuous challenges from the disaster’s victims, Union Carbide and its current parent company, Dow Chemicals, persist in exploiting the gap between US legal jurisdiction over a ‘foreign’ case and the Indian court’s incapacity to convict corporate actors who operated through a defunct subsidiary. The leak was no accident but a massacre that continues to exact human and animal deaths, and injuring more than half a million people

in the decades since the explosion. Roos and Hunt (2010) bring forward the idea that ‘justice’ is a vital term in foregrounding the theoretical framework of post-colonial ecocriticism. Arguing that “environmental justice has moved ecocriticism to consider how disenfranchised or impoverished populations over the world face particular environmental problems”, they highlight the extent of environmental degradation particularly in the global south and assume that this type of degradation stems from the broken relationship between human beings and the environment or the animate and inanimate (Roos & Hunt 1). The dominance of the white, reasonable and able human beings over dehumanised groups and non-human environment is represented as the underlying reason behind the ecological disasters in post-colonial lands which end up with fatal consequences both for human and non-human beings living in these areas.

The crisis represented by Animal’s People concerns the fate of environments such as Bhopal where the nature of eco-criminality is at once manifestly transnational and imbricated in state interests, rendering small-scale governance limited in its capacity for opposition. The novel unsettles the human-animal dichotomy that is one of the dualist forms of thinking which environmental philosophers such as Val Plumwood claim underlies environmental crisis as well as colonialist discourses (120). Domination over nature and the non-human world is defined as an “inevitable act in the history of civilization” (Arikan 38). The correspondence between anthropocentrism and Western-centrism leads to discriminatory approaches towards not only dehumanized beings but also non-human nature. Ecocritical engagement with postcolonial discourse suggests that this correspondence goes beyond the concerns of racism and evolves into environmental racism that threatens the sustainability of the planet earth through malpractices particularly in the global south. Curtin’s claim of “a self-perceived ‘center’ of power and civilization exploiting ‘distant’ places and peoples for its economic benefit” (19), brings out the parallel between the oppression of races and environments.

The question of “spatial politics of environmental toxicity” (DeLoughrey & Handley 216) stands underlined in the environmental tragedy of Khaufpur/Bhopal, where the region was targeted for ‘development’ after having been assessed as ‘backward’. An eco-crime materialized under the ownership of an American multinational company, engaged in moving toxicity from the global north to the global south, in

the name of 'progress'. The environmental issues, hence, took a backseat in comparison with the economic interests. Khaufpur is portrayed as a place where irresponsible industrialization has backfired in the form of anti-developmental repercussions like the chemical disaster, malnutrition and crumbling of nature. The pesticide plant built by the Kampani in Khaufpur to enhance agricultural output turns into a biocidal attack, resulting in environmental contamination and 'slow violence'. The poisoned environment of Khaufpur yields poisoned and unnatural vegetation depicted thus by Animal, who resides in the dead factory: "a forest is growing, tall grasses, bushes, trees, creepers that shoot sprays of flowers like fireworks" (29).

Animal's People is fully engaged in the act of subverting the encapsulating of the disaster within the logic of the market. The events of that night mark the bodies of the Khaufpuri citizens, thereby foregrounding the ongoing nature of the crisis: Somraj Pandit, a local music teacher, loses his lung capacity and consequently, the ability to sing; jars of partially formed foetuses line the shelves of a local doctor's clinic and most notably, Animal, the quadruped protagonist, navigates the streets of Khaufpur on all fours, his curved backbone a testament to corporate irresponsibility. While it is true that Animal's physical form may serve as a "bodily shorthand for Khaufpur's transnational plight", and that in many scenes "his posture is precisely that of a beast of burden" (Nixon 450), his insistence on being non-human points towards his status as 'other'. Animal, as a toxic and disabled body, embodies the environmental crisis that Khaufpur has been through since the gas-leak in 1984. His body presents "the medium through which injustice is experienced, understood, and combated" (Ray 103). Animal and his people live with the chemicals just like the factory that was abandoned with the dangerous chemicals inside. A concrete embodiment of the disaster, Animal's body is turned into an exotic object to be seen by the visitors, the curiosity of whose gaze "feels like acid" (Sinha 7) on his skin. This troubling gaze symbolizes the continuation of toxic penetration into his body, ripping him of his humanity and making him feel like a non-human. The identification of the non-western races as animalistic in the colonial period finds a parallel in the identification of Animal as an 'animal', making him an 'ecological other'. His reflection upon his disfigurement shapes his mental and physical actions, stopping him from placing himself among healthy and productive males. It becomes

impossible for him to believe in the existence of a proper mate for himself, which causes him to suffer from a psychological disorder called voyeurism. This results in his frequent involvement in voyeuristic activities while spying on Elli Barber, the American doctor who came to Khaufpur to open a free clinic, and on Nisha, Animal's love interest. The novel portrays that an unhealthy environment gives rise to an unhealthy body which supports Alaimo's claim that the well-being of human beings cannot be considered independent of the rest of the planet (Alaimo 18). Another toxic body suffering from a disability is Animal's adoptive mother Ma Franci, who begins to suffer from a kind of aphasia after the gas-leak:

On that night all sorts of people lost all kinds of things, lives for sure, families, friends, health, jobs, in some cases their wits. This poor woman, Ma Franci, lost all knowledge of Hindi. (37)

She forgets all the languages she knew except her native language French and is left grappling with "stupid grunts and sounds" (37). This communication disorder limits her capacity to help the Khaufpuris, driving them into despair on all fronts. By often using the metaphor 'apokalis'(apocalypse) (63), Ma Franci might prophesy that the earth and its inhabitants come closer to an eco-apocalypse everyday with their anti-ecological and environmentally racist practices. Based on the notion of environmental racism (Huggan & Tiffin 5), postcolonial ecocriticism argues that those living in the global south such as the Khaufpuris are more vulnerable to exploitation and ecological alienation due to neo-colonial practices threatening sustainability in the global south.

One of the youngest victims of the Kampani, Kha-in-the-Jar, the unborn two-headed foetus, narrates stories about the ramifications of unjust decisions and unhealthy practices in Khaufpur. The decisions to build the factory in Khaufpur, to decrease the safety precautions at the plant due to their costs and not to remove the plant from the land even after the disaster, all result in the emergence of disabled generations and environments that endanger global sustainability at the human and non-human level. This highlights the fact that the present generations potentially have control over the lives of the future generations through such irresponsible decisions. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries witness an upsurge in the ecological degradation and exploitation of the socially and economically disadvantaged subjects and their lands.

There has been much debate about the extent of the destructive impact of colonialism on nature. The classification of nature was a critical element in the rationalizing gaze of colonialism: the 'othering' of nature in science, art and society is the 'ideological practice that enables us to plunder it' (Katz and Kirby 265). Colonial scientific discourses about nature drew on pre-existing views of nature in the colonial periphery, taking possession, institutionalizing and re-exporting them to the colonized world. Colonialism promoted the naming and classification of people and places, as well as nature, with the aim of control. It favoured modern techno-scientific knowledge over folk knowledge, and privileged centralised and formalised ways of knowing nature over localised and informal ways. In the colonial mind, nature was 'out there' and the possibility of knowing human engagement with nature was rarely considered. *Animal's People* deals with schisms produced within humanity by inscribing coloniality onto the minds of people and promulgating the logic of objectification. This colonial logic of objectification is based upon the "thing-ification" (Aime Cesaire 42) of the so-called subaltern people and the non-human world. The living environment and other species are not seen as subjects in their own right, but as objects that can be mastered and exploited.

For these 'objectified' characters armed with the power of nothing, what they can withhold is their bodies, and in this way the novel, *Animal's People*, stages a kind of boycott. When an American woman, Elli, comes to town to open a new, free clinic, the Khaufpuris are understandably suspicious that the Kampani might be funding it, since the Kampani would have an interest in reading the data their bodies might produce in ways that shift responsibility off of itself. Zafar, the social activist, notes the coincidence of a major court victory for the victims of 'that night' and the government's approval of the free clinic. In this case, the turning of bodies into data and the expert knowledge necessary for its deciphering becomes just one more means to the end of abdicating corporate responsibility.

The whole world may not be literally in Khaufpur, but insofar as Khaufpur, like Bhopal, is a poisoned city among others, the whole world may be characterized by the slow apocalypse. Indeed, one of Sinha's most colourful characters, Kha-in-the-Jar, informs *Animal* that everyone on this earth has in their body a share of the Kampani's poisons. This, too, might be taken as metaphor, but reading Sinha's

*Kampani* as Union Carbide suggests something more literal. Union Carbide had been, after all, long involved in the nuclear industry, processing uranium and plutonium at facilities in Kentucky and New York. When, in *Animal's People*, Zafar has a dream in which he sees the Kampani as a giant edifice whose basements contain bunkers full of atomic bombs, this is a revelation of a historical fact. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* contributes to the transnational visibility of the consequences of an ecological tragedy in a post-colonial land. It depicts an environment left disabled due to the discriminatory economic policies that fail to take into account the vulnerability of post-colonial environments in terms of social and physical conditions, leading to multi-level damages.

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**Women Characters in The Short Stories :  
Guy De Maupassant's 'The Umbrella', H. H. Munro  
Saki's 'The Story Teller' and William Somerset  
Maugham's 'The Luncheon'**

*Kirandeep Kaur\**

*Abstract*

The present paper aims at studying the representation of women characters in the three short stories: The Umbrella, The story teller and the Luncheon. In each of these short stories, there are two main characters: One male and the other female. The paper explores how the writers in an endeavor to evoke humour, ended up creating caricatures of the three female protagonists while the male protagonists are shown to be outstripping them in intelligence, etiquettes and demeanor. The authors, through their representation of women characters show the overwhelming influence of their respective eras (the nineteenth & twentieth Century). The Victorian culture, replete with the representations of ideal wives, provided women with their role models. A wife's proper role was to love, honour and obey her husband. She was required to be The Angel in the House. And if this equation is reversed i.e. instead of the husband, the wife is the head of the household then the woman would be caricaturing herself in the role of head.

**Keywords:** subordinate, Victorian, stereotype.

In the portrayal of women in the aforesaid short stories, the writers have revealed their Victorian mindset. The women characters in these short stories are the obtrusive victims of Victorian male chauvinism. Victorian period, was an era when women's lives were mainly oriented around a sphere of domestic life and family. A woman's place was in the home; the home was regarded as haven from the busy and chaotic public world. It was an era where women were considered less than a man. So long as women are subordinate to men biddable, dutiful and under their control, they are innocent, virtuous and adorable but if they try to defy the stereotype, they are to be projected as creatures ignorant of intellectual opinion. The women characters in the three short stories mentioned above have been given significant roles to play: Madame Oreille is the dominant, decision-making authority in the house; the old

aunt is in charge of the three children travelling along with her in the train, and the lady who is an admirer of the author's stories. These three female protagonists are shown to have failed in performing their respective roles of a sensible and obedient wife, responsible aunt and an admirable follower. They are depicted as dumb, foolish and ill-mannered while their male counterparts are shown as embodying dedication, intelligence, wit and decorum.

In contrast to the stereotypical way of representing women as fragile, delicate and domestic, Madame Oreille, the female protagonist in "The Umbrella" is expressed as someone who is completely dominant and ruthless. She is a housewife; she does not work, yet is the manager of all the money in the house. In the beginning of the story, it is mentioned that her maid and her husband Mr. Oreille had great difficulty in squeezing pocket money out of her purse. Spending money even on basic necessities of life is regarded as a wastage of money. In spite of the fact that his colleagues tease and cut jokes at her husband, she refuses to buy him a new umbrella. She tries to save money at the expense of her husband's embarrassment in his office. At last he can stand the chaff of his colleagues no longer, and insist on Madame Oreille's buying him a new umbrella. But when she does let him have one, after all, calamity befalls. The umbrella is damaged and Madame Oreille is beside herself with rage. "You--- you – she stammered --- you --- you must be crazy. Do you want to ruin us?"

Though Madame Oreille is shown have an authoritative and disrespectful attitude towards her husband, she is shy, timid, diffident and incapable of making decisions when she has to deal with the society at large. Then she is an epitome of Victorian qualities. "She was timid in society and had a habit of flushing at merest trifles, while she never felt at ease in conversing with stranger... what was she to do? Hour followed hour, and she was still irresolute...." The narrator has strengthened the view that the husband is the befitting head of the household. A wife's place in the family hierarchy is secondary to her husband. A wife's proper role is to love, honour and obey her husband, "Man must be pleased; but him to please is woman's pleasure...." (The angel in the House)

Madame Oreille being a dominating, cruel, disrespectful wife is defying the 'ideal' wife of the Victorian culture, which expects a tirelessly

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patient, self-effacing, sacrificing wife. So, she must fail; she must end up as a caricature seeking compensation from an insurance company for a trifle (The Umbrella).

In H.H Munro Saki's the story teller, the female protagonist is an old aunt who along with the three children is travelling by train. While the aunt is unable to satisfy the curiosity of the children, a bachelor sitting opposite to her intervenes and tells a tale enriched and spiced with impromptu nice details that feed the curiosity and imagination of the children. Although a good girl in the tale told by the bachelor is devoured by a wolf to the lost morsel, everybody feels delighted and refreshed. In the end when the aunt condemns it as " A most improper story to tell to young children," the bachelor comments " At any rate, I kept them quiet for ten minutes, which was more than you were able to do".

The narrative shows that the aunt lacks an insight into child psychology. she lacks imagination and does not have the skill and art to satisfy the curiosity of children. The story told by the aunt is dismissed as commonplace, absurd old- granny story of goodness rewarded." In a low, confidential voice, interrupted at frequent intervals by loud, petulant questions from her listeners, she began an unenterprising and deplorably uninteresting story about a little girl who was good.... and finally saved from a mad bull by a number of rescuers who admired her moral character." It leaves the children totally unimpressed. "It's the stupidest story I have ever heard..." "I did not listen after the first bit, it was so stupid."

On the other hand, the bachelor knows the mind of the children so well that he uses his wit to garb it with new, unusual and even silly details and to answer their questions readily and ingenuously without bothering about their rightness or otherwise. He thus succeeds in holding their attention and amusing them."It is the most beautiful story that I ever heard", said the bigger of the small girls, with immense conviction."It is the only beautiful story I have ever heard," said Cyril.

The author demonstrates that the reader's focus should be on the man's story by describing it in detail, while he briefly summarizes the aunt's story. The aunt, though old and experienced, is devoid of any talent as a capable storyteller. The aunt's reputation as a story teller is extremely belittled of with the striking contrast of a "bachelor" story

teller. The bachelor is shown to be in the proud possession of the improvisational ability to take a challenging question posed by the children and instantly adjusting his narrative to fit the query. But the "poor" old aunt lacks this ability, wit and presence of mind which the bachelor is endowed with. The author has expressed aunt's inability to make this sort of adjustment herself.

The aunt is described negatively by Saki, hated by the children and the bachelor. Though the bachelor is able to answer the children's questions imaginatively, he lies to them and acting as if he is an expert. Furthermore, at the end of the story, he leaves the children with their aunt....rather than feeling pity or camaraderie for the children, he feels only a sense of amusement.

The bachelor lacks sympathy for the inquisitive and restless nature of children's his success to keep the children quiet for ten minutes is shown to be of greater significance than the old aunt's patience with the children's persistent prattling. At the end of the story the aunt is ridiculed by the bachelor who proudly observes to himself." for the next six months or so those children will assail her in public with demands for an improper story?" A woman's endeavor to surpass a man in intelligence and wit is thwarted because intelligence and wit are the prerogatives of men. So, when a man in the scene/ context woman can never be the controller/master.

The Luncheon by William Somerset Maugham exposes the pretensions of modest eating habits of a lady, a reader of the author's stories. But in the wake of exposing the hypocrisy of the lady. The author creates a caricature in the form of the female character. In story, the lady makes the author host her a lunch at one of the most expensive restaurants in Paris. She repeatedly says.... "I never eat anything for Luncheon" but eats almost everything delicious and costly available in the restaurant. The narrator has never dared to go to that restaurant by himself because he is living on a very meager income. But being flattered by the attention being showered on him by the lady and green in judgement about the worldly affairs, he cannot decline the request and agreed to see her at the restaurant. Financially he is commits himself to something he does not wish to and at the same time remains unsure as to whether he has enough money to pay the lunch bill. And, at the end, he is left with no money for the month.

Again the male protagonist, that is the author himself is ingenious one; educated, polite and from a good family tradition. He is naive, gullible who readily agrees to have lunch with a woman though he knows he cannot afford it. As for the female character, we can get a clear idea about her from what the author tells about her " she was not so young as I expected and in appearance imposing rather than attractive. She was in fact a woman of forty (a charming age, but not one that excites a sudden and devastating passion at first sight) and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large and even than were necessary for any practical purpose".

While it is the lady who is shown to be a greedy hypocrite who keeps on repeating that she does not eat anything for luncheon, eats some of the most expensive things the restaurant has to offer, the actual hypocrite is the author. He gets disappointed with the physical appearance of the lady and has a very low opinion of her personality but pretends to be courteous, sophisticated and gentlemanly by letting the woman have what she wishes despite his financial situation. He keeps up a smiling facade while inwardly he is suffering agonies, "My heart sank..... they were horribly expensive....I watched the abandoned woman thrust them asparagus down her throat..."

In these short stories, it is shown that women characters who dare to feel important or assert themselves are rendered to the status of ridiculous fools by the Victorian mindset epitomised by the male characters. The stories are humorous but humour is created at the expense of the women characters.

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## Treatment of Gender in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi: An Unarmed Rebel in A Verbal Combat

*Aabroo Sharma\**

Draupadi of Mahabharata, the daughter of the emperor of Panchala, King Drupada, was an epitome of impeccable beauty, grace and chiefly of honour and chastity. Even a woman deemed so perfect had to undergo the wrath of the villainous Kauravas after she humiliates Duryodhana in the palace of illusions. Pandavas lose everything in the game of dice including Draupadi. Despite the protests of the few in the sabha, the Kauravas remain persistent in witnessing her getting disrobed. While no human could protect her honour, Draupadi had to beseech to the divine Krishna to come to her rescue, which He miraculously does, and she is provided with layers and layers of saris to cover her. Henceforth, Draupadi is saved from disgrace cast upon her honour presumably because she was a princess of a high birth. In the midst of the chaos, Draupadi's backlash raises a very feminist question to the people in the sabha: if Yudhishthira had lost himself in the game, did he retain any authority upon her, for she essentially was his other self thereby giving him no legal right to stake her. Her undaunted spirit does raise our eyebrows and at the same time foreshadows the impending catastrophe likely to turn up. Post the assault, the nation had to witness a horrendous disaster of a deadly war.

Mahasweta Devi's ground-breaking work 'Draupadi' attempts to undo rather dismantle the notion that by having sovereignty over her body a woman can be oppressed emotionally and mentally. Her heroine, Draupadi, a tribal woman is on the loose and the Indian government has put a handsome prize money to capture her. She and her husband are branded as anti-nationalists for having indulged in anti-governmental activities. Towards the end, Senanayak and his men succeed in capturing her. She is cross interrogated for hours but does not utter a word. Senanayak commands his officials saying- 'Make her. Do the needful'. She is tormented, brutalized and subsequently raped throughout the night by scores of lustful brutes.

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In the light of the mythical Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*, Mahasweta Devi delineates the heroine of her play subjected to a somewhat parallel plight in the sense that both the women are victimized by male egotism where each becomes a target in the hands of patriarchal forces since both are equated with property. It seems as if Dopdi is a distorted version of Draupadi. Interestingly, in the novel the name of the protagonist is changed from Dopdi to Draupadi, which subtly reverberates the similar fate of the two. Nevertheless, the propinquity between the two women drifts apart, while the one is saved, the other damned. The legendary Draupadi is rescued whilst Dopdi Mejhén is gang-raped in police custody by the men of Senanayak. Draupadi of the *Mahabharata* had to beg for divine intervention, necessarily from a male demigod to safeguard her honour, on the contrary, Devi makes her Dopdi ululate, whereby her significant ululation, then becomes her war cry and at the same time repudiates the primeval text, which she contends, is intrinsically patriarchal.

The tables are turned nonetheless, when Dopdi instead of clinging to her clothes shuns them altogether, thereupon Devi, makes her one of the most unconventional woman protagonists of the times. Devi makes her walk naked in front of Senanayak and this intrepidly daring act chills us to the bones. Her unfathomable demeanour baffles us. She retorts: "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush-shirt to spit the bloody gob at and says, There isn't man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me come on...and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid." (p.196)

The common presumption that a woman is just a body and that her audacity in seeking political empowerment and justice could be countered by sexual battering is proved wrong by Dopdi's moral strength. Her refusal to accept the manifestations of skin deep respectability in the form of a saree after the rape and her insistence on facing Senanayak in her terrible disfigured nakedness is a statement against conventional confining assumptions. The brutality against her body fails to crush her spirit. In such cases as hers, fear and shame are not experienced by the victim rather they only denigrate the tyrants. The body then becomes the voice of this defenceless rebel. Her nakedness

is her power, the only weapon against her oppressors who have always sought to subjugate and silence her. She subverts the system of oppression by turning her apparent weakness into her source of power and Senanayak does not know how to deal with this defiant woman. She claims her body as her own, to which no male is entitled to. In a profound sense, she is born again, like a phoenix which rises, having with this act, recreated her own body. The idiosyncratic form that her rage takes, is unparalleled, so much so, that it can devour anything which might come its way. Surpassingly stalwart by spirit and categorically ungovernable by temperament, Dopdi unleashes horror before Senanayak only leaving him vulnerable as adduced by Spivak in her foreword: "It is when she crosses the sexual differential into the field of what could only happen to a woman that she emerges as the most powerful "subject," who, still using the language of sexual "honour," can derisively call herself "the object of your search," whom the author can describe as a terrifying super object—"an unarmed target." (Spivak, 388).

After the dreadful pall which had previously enveloped her spirit, has gone, does she find herself in triumph, now that the worst has already been done, she has nothing more to fear about. In doing so, Senanayak thus become an agent in Dopdi's new revelation. Once innocuous, her being, has been elevated to a stature of grandeur which only leaves readers in admiration for this iron woman.

Had she made her Draupadi embrace her garment, the readers and spectators alike, would not have gone back to the legendary Draupadi of the epic *Mahabharata* in an endeavour to reconsider the antediluvian magnificent text. The writer targets at the gist of this presumption deconstructing it and recreating a very novel theme. Through the tribal Dopdi, Devi comes out yelling at the top notch that by hitting out at her anatomical self, only gives the male counterpart an occasion to rip her exteriority yet her spirit remains relentless and unwavering. Through the character of Dopdi Mejhén, the writer lends an additional dimension to the tale, giving voice to the otherwise silenced communities particularly the Naxalites. She belongs to the marginalized sections of the society, a representative of the downtrodden, an absolute insurgent, at loggerheads with the system which encompasses her and others around.

By and large, the treatment of gender in the ancient text without exception pertains to a norm. The act of disrobing does not materialize

for Krishna intercedes primarily because the honour of the tribe solely vests upon its women. Any taint upon their integrity whatsoever would explicitly put the entire tribe's prestige into question which is supposedly unacceptable. Devi takes a dig at the notion that women be not viewed as objects and that the burden of honour not be transferred only upon their shoulders. Quite evidently, such texts do substantiate male chauvinism all the more which the author abhors. On the other hand the norm-deviating writings like Devi's 'Draupadi' puncture the patriarchal discourses, by recreating their own asexual treatises.

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## Desire and Sexuality of Widows in the Balli Kaur Jaswal's *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows*

Manu Bansal\*

### Abstract

Human sexuality is a matter often kept isolated in society. Women and particularly the widows are denied space to talk about their desires related to sex. In particular, sexual desires of women are suppressed under the patriarchal domination. In fact, the sexual matter is not discussed within the family and it is considered a taboo. However, literary writings tend to give voice to this aspect of women's existence. *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Women* is one such example. It shows how sexuality is manifested in both language and desire functioning in a society where repression is exercised. The idea of the repression of sexuality was originally raised by the French social theorist Michel Foucault. His idea of sexuality reflects 'repression' among people, and emphasizes a need for pleasure and expression.

**Keywords:** Desire, repression, sexuality.

In contemporary arts, sexuality has become an unavoidable issue and often finds explicit expression. The central argument of the paper is that repression of sexuality is transferred to erotic stories, the discourse with which everyone is so obsessed. It also finds relevance in providing expression to the suppressed desires of widows indirectly. Apart from facing social problems of child-caring, lack of companionship, violence, hindrances in remarriage, control over sexuality, victimization, and psycho-social adjustment with her own family and society, widows live in acute insecurity, deprivation and violence. They face sexual harassment and unequal social treatment from their in-laws too. Their needs are ignored and they are isolated from the mainstream society. Even in an educated society, they are isolated and placed under several restrictions. Because of the question of control over their sexuality, widowhood is insisted on them to confine themselves into the four walls of their homes. They are not allowed to attend any social and religious functions and live a restricted life in public sphere.

In India, a widow loses her identity and rights with the loss of her husband; she is excluded from the community in which she lives,

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from all the social events and exploring her sexuality. Her husband's death marks the end of her social life as a normal woman and becomes a member of socially denied space. In India, marriage is the legalisation of sexual intercourse. Sex is permissible only in the social institution of marriage beyond that it is considered as illegal relationship. The widow's sexual desires are entirely different from her reproduction system. The sexual desire of the widows are expected to abandon after the loss of her husband. Widows are considered sexually dead in the society.

In Twenty first century women are still fighting for sexual liberation. As people become more and more aware of sex and sexuality they aspire to get power to act on that awareness. But that still leaves us with the question: are people sexually repressed? Today, women fight for sexual liberation in terms of societal acceptance. However, this doesn't necessarily mean a repression. Logically, and according to Foucault's propositions, power comes from the masses within a society and comes from the bottom and works its way up. We, as a society, have always been able to act upon our sexual urges, or lack of, and, therefore, sex and sexuality—including the levels of restriction and liberation—are constantly being reshaped and redefined. The fight for sexual liberation is merely a change informing how sex and sexuality are now expressed.

Balli Kaur Jaswal is a Singaporean novelist, having family roots in Punjab. Her first novel *Inheritance* won the Sydney Morning Herald's Best Young Australian Novelist Award in 2014. Her third novel *Erotic Stories For Punjabi Widows* (2017) has a dark look at the lives of the Punjabi minority community in Southall and focuses on the taboos about sex in the Indian community. The author wanted to create a world where women had a safe space to talk about things that mattered and feels that "This could absolutely happen. If you get a group of women in a room, there's a power to talk about things that have been silenced"(Jaswal, 45). Her *Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows* depict the life of widows, who are conservative in attitude even after migrating to London. Each of the widows has her own tale of suffering in the past and some of them have had an affair after the death of their husbands. Sheena is the youngest and the most educated among them. The only literate Sheena writes down the stories to get them printed.

Widows sharing their feelings, forms a powerful medium in the

process of friendship, the construction of personal identities and the maintenance of socially created gender divisions. It is also a key aspect of leisure activities, arguably of the most satisfying and sustaining kind. E.Green quoted Riddick, an American researcher on the life satisfaction and leisure of older retired women suggests that: "leisure activity participation emerged as the strongest contributor to the life satisfaction of older females" (Green, 77).

Adopting analyses of friendship and humour as part of a theoretical framework or 'lens' through which to understand the potential of women, only leisure activities as a site of empowerment and resistance to gender role stereotyping, leads to link 'talk', rationality and shared humour as significant aspects of women's leisure. The choice of women's humour can be taken as an example of spaces for re-working gender identities via resistance to stereotyped gender roles, are linked to the previous discussion about the importance of women's friendships as a site for leisure and relaxation. Widows afford and take the chance to 'let share their erotic stories' and 'behave badly' i.e. outside the limits of 'normal, acceptable, womanly behaviour' bring about freedom and empowerment which has previously being denied to them.

Eileen Green in her article describes that "The choice of women's humour as an example of spaces for re-working gender identities via resistance to stereotyped gender roles, are linked to the importance of women's friendships as a site for leisure and relaxation" (181). That is how Manjeet tells Nikki "people see us and assume that we're just filling our empty evenings with gossip but how much of that can one do? It's far more fun to discuss the things we miss" (Jaiswal, 66). What Widows share are the experiences of leisure with other women as an empowering source of maintaining their identity and personal growth. Jaswal's narrative reflects that how women characters are open to express their sexuality and desires and also investigate the issues related to feudal mind-set and sexual identity. These tales are told by characters but with obvious reference to the story-teller's life. Most of the tales are revelations of untold points of views. Balli Kaur Jaswal successfully captures how widow characters represent themselves in the form of stories which are being told by them. The portrayal of women as abject victims of the patriarchal family has been challenged and transformed by contemporary feminist writers. Apart from such challenges to the master narratives, feminists may risk

perpetuating derogatory views of women as victims and men as agents. Today, women writers are reasserting their identity in a manner that has transformed the stereotypes into liberating modes of selfhood.

Nikki is surprised that the white dupatta of the widow hides more than just her modesty. These are the women who have spent their lives in the shadows of their fathers, brothers and husbands. They have been dutiful wives to their husbands, have raised children and gone to the temple, but their inner lives remain as rich and fruitful as their untold stories. Though these widows lack the necessary vocabulary, the stories are filled with references to “aubergines”, “cucumbers”, “sticks” and “lady pockets (Jaswal, 67). It becomes clear that these supposedly conservative women do not lack imagination. They express their repression and manage to please themselves whether it is socially illegal and denied.

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