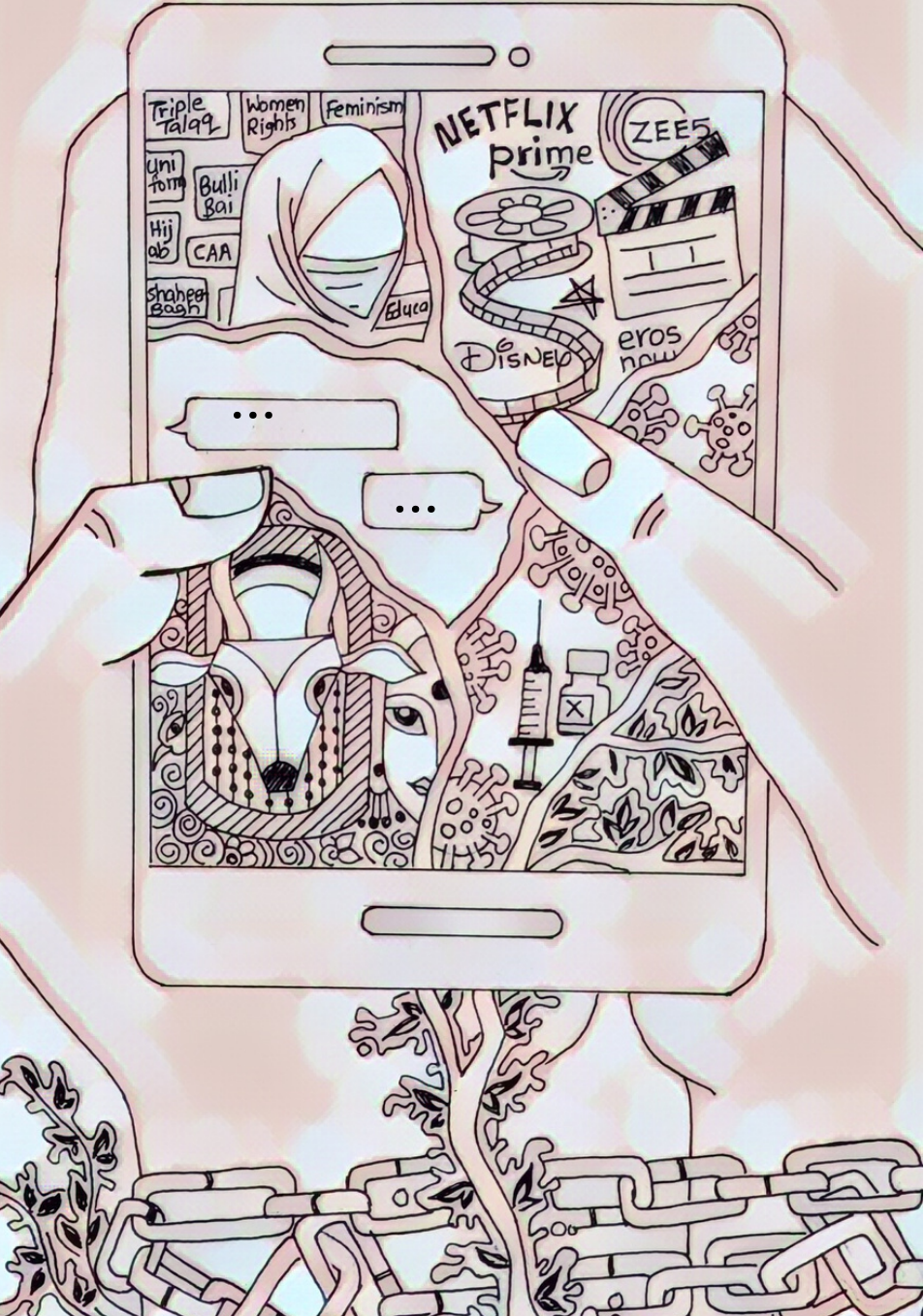


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# **Littscape: A Journal of the Department of Post Graduate Studies in English**

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## Preface

*Littscape* is a journal published by the Post Graduate and Research Department of English, Govt Victoria College, Palakkad. In the initial years of publication, the journal comprised academic, creative and artistic content. Now that the department has become a Research Centre focussing on a gamut of areas that come under the rubric of Cultural Studies, the issues of *Littscape* published henceforth, starting with the current issue published in 2023, would have a more academic character.

Apart from exploring areas of language, literature, culture and critical theory, the journal aims to conceptualize aspects of human and non-human life from the vantage points of gender, religion, class, caste, nationality, ethnicity, indigeneity, culture, education, ecology, science and technology, to name a few. Interspersed with practices and theoretical perspectives spanning the socio-cultural, political, historical, geographical, environmental and technological spectra, these investigations coalesce with the area of studies known as Critical Humanities. Transdisciplinary in nature, the deliberations become critiques of the positionings of power and oppression inherent in various aspects of life.

The articles in the current issue of *Littscape* engage with various forms of human expressions like cinema, literature, music, new media and dreams to bring out the politics of texts. Social stigmatisation, identity crisis and trauma caused by a variety of societal pressures,

geographical and cultural displacements, overbearing and highly limiting societal norms in every wake of life including that of physical and mental realities, gender and other discriminations based on caste, class or region and a plethora of other contexts of minoritization are referred to in these papers. Cumulatively they encompass the critical analysis methodologies of the domain, Critical Humanities. Emphasizing on the need for intersectionality in feminism, two papers highlight the resistance and resilience with which Muslim women survive in an Islamophobic world. One article examines the pitting of nationalism and patriotism against selfhood and individuality in Bollywood movies, whereas another discusses how writers of the North East of India reaffirm regionalism and tribal identity by upholding indigenous practices like nomadism and hunting in the face of an overarching and obliterating nationalism.

Analysing contemporary socio-political crises that are induced by contexts like war, economic sanction, oppressive forms of governance, control capitalism and neo-imperialism that has affected the lives of people in the Middle East, Egypt or India, these papers assimilate the emerging understanding of individual trauma as stifling social oppression, thereby offering a scathing critique of the global present.

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# **The Struggle Towards Social Stigmatisation in the Movie *A Mind of Her Own***

Abdul Haseeb. T.

Social stigma is an extreme disapproval of the individual based on social characteristics that are perceived to distinguish them from other members of a society. It is so profound that it overpowers social feedback regarding the way in which the same individual adheres to other social norms. Stigma is when someone sees a person in a negative way because of a particular characteristic or attribute such as skin colour, cultural background, disability or a mental illness. Kesley Lisley points out, “Stigmatization occurs when a negative attitude is adopted with regard to a group in general as opposed to basing one’s judgments on the specific characteristics of individuals”(2). Social stigma and discrimination can make mental health problems worse and stop a person from getting the help he needs; social



stigma can also be related to other characteristics including gender, sexuality, race, religion and culture.

The consequences of stigma can be serious and devastating. With stigma comes a lack of understanding from others which can be invalidating, it also carries more significant consequences including fueling fear, anger and intolerance directed at other people. People who are subjected to stigma are more likely to experience social rejection, avoidance and isolation, poor understanding among friends and family, harassment and increased feelings of shame and self-doubt. Niel Alexander Passe says, “Stigma and discrimination go hand in hand as part of the medical model of disability (a disability that needs medical intervention to be cured)” (208).

In today’s world, stigmatised people are on the receiving end of stereotyping and generalised grouping due to misinformation and prejudiced beliefs. They often start to act in ways that others expect of them. It not only changes their behaviour, but also shapes their emotions and beliefs in turn, can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. The linking of negative attributes to

certain people by the majority can come in the way of seeking help or forming bond with others. Shrivastava points out, “causes and consequences of stigma are often indistinguishable and lead to prejudices that influence attitudes, which in turn increase prejudices perpetually”(72).

Being diagnosed with a learning disability makes a child vulnerable to stigma that relates to academic performances and emotional disturbances. The stigma and judgments he faces when he interacts socially with his peers are what really disheartens and upsets him the most; more so than when compared to his academic difficulties. Oftentimes, gaining acceptance from family members can also be a struggle. This clearly indicates that there is a lack of awareness among the general population about learning disabilities which makes the identification process even harder.

In most cases, parents and teachers perceive the child as lazy,slow,distracted, trouble-makers and so on. Most students report poor relationships with teachers and peers as one of the main reasons for either shifting or

dropping out of school or college. The stigma also makes it extremely hard for the learners to get the adequate help and guidance they need to improve.

Having a learning disorder like dyslexia, dyspraxia or attention deficit disorder can make life difficult for many children. They find they have a difficult condition in keeping up with their peers and as a result they fail to make meaningful connections that are so important for young children's social, emotional and mental development.

*A Mind of Her Own* is a British movie released in 2006. Based on a true story, the film is directed, produced and written by Owen Carey Jones. The most significant character in the movie *A Mind of Her Own* is Sophie Smith. Sophie Smith determines to go to medical school but is discouraged virtually by everyone as she struggles with dyslexia. Sophie eventually puts herself through college and graduates. Later she develops a cure for paralysis. The British actress Nicky Katt stars as Sophie Smith in the movie *A Mind of Her Own*.

The film portrays the character Sophie Smith's life from childhood to her youth. Since her childhood she understands she has a severe problem with reading. However, she does not attempt to disclose her problem with anyone due to her fear of social stigmatisation. She is afraid of how others will react if they find out about her difficulty in reading. Although she does not know the scientific and linguistic conditions of her problem, she often feels the troubles she experiences while reading. To avoid the state of socially stigmatised, she escapes from all the opportunities to read.

The movie provides several scenes which indicate social and emotional trauma endured by the character Sophie Smith. Most of the scenes indirectly depict the non-academic consequences of dyslexia. Individuals with specific learning disabilities are at the risk of failure not only academically but also socially and emotionally. The continuous experiences of academic failure lead to various emotional maladjustments. Learning how to minimise the effects and make positive impact from it are essential.

In early elementary school, dyslexic kids may complain about going to school, performing learning tasks, or doing homework and as they get older, they resist reading out loud and have trouble sounding out unfamiliar words. This condition is similar to that of Sophie Smith in the movie *A Mind of Her Own*. She struggles to cope at school. Her teachers are not able to handle her and a lack of sufficient awareness about dyslexic children among teachers exists there; hence, she gets grumpy and does not want to go to school. Samuel. T. Orton was one of the first researchers to describe the emotional aspects of dyslexia. According to his research, the majority of pre-schoolers who would later be diagnosed with dyslexia were happy and well adjusted. Their emotional problems begin to develop when early reading instruction does not match their learning needs. Over the years, the frustration mounts as classmates surpass the student with dyslexia in reading skill.

Unlike physical disabilities, dyslexia is often characterised as an invisible disability. Invisible disabilities have no signs or cues to make them easily

perceivable by others. They are not noticeable in an individual's everyday actions. It is a common learning disability characterised by difficulty in acquiring and processing language in many individuals (Blace 2). The effects caused by an individual's dyslexia may only show up in certain environments, such as, educational environments. Unfortunately, the invisible nature of these disabilities often perpetuates ignorance and differential treatment.

Sophie tolerates all the stressful atmosphere at school and her intimacy to school diminishes day by day. Students with dyslexia are typically bright children, so that when they find out they have troubles in reading and writing, it will be a shock to them. Sophie does not usually get her school work completed due to her struggle with reading and writing. This makes it seem as if she is not working hard enough and that she needs to do more, when in fact she is really working hard but her troubles stop her from doing what her classmates can do.

Proficient reading is an essential tool for learning a large part of the subjects taught at school. With an ever-

increasing emphasis on education and literacy, more and more children and adults need help in learning to read, spell, express their thoughts on paper and acquire adequate use of grammar. Sophie finds the acquisition of these literary skills difficult and it leads to the occurrences of anguish and trauma, which further causes abuse from her peers within the school environment. Her class teachers are particularly confused by her consistent underachievement and they reach the conclusion that it is due to her carelessness or lack of efforts. Sophie's lethargic behaviour in the classroom is the result of her fear of social-stigma.

Sophie is afraid of the people's assumption about her problem that she is not intellectually capable as others. Stigma and discrimination have a significant pessimistic impact on the lives of people with a certain learning disability. Social stigmatisation can become internalised in such people resulting in "self-stigma". Here, Sophie does not want to be isolated from her peers and her teachers.

SOPHIE'S FATHER. James is still doing his home works.

MOTHER. He's gonna be primeminister one day, that boy.

FATHER. Can't say the same for Sophie. She asked me to read for her.

I haven't done that in ages. Then I asked her to read a bit of the story herself; she was, well, really struggling with it.

MOTHER. Yeah, I know. I've asked about it at school but they just said not to worry about it. Apparently, she's just a bit lazy but she'll catch up soon.

FATHER. Maybe she's spending too much time at the gym club.

MOTHER. Maybe. (00:6:01-00:6:38)

The above scene is the conversation between Sophie's parents. Both of them worry about her reading condition. They have much expectations towards their elder son. But



in the case of Sophie, they have no idea what her future will be. Her mother has already discussed her troubles in reading with her teachers; however, they ignored it. They think she is lethargic and this is due to her overspending at the gym. They hope that she will grasp everything soon. This scene reflects on the parents' lack of awareness about dyslexia and their inability to handle their dyslexic child. Due to Sophie's constant struggle in reading, her parents realise that all is not well with her reading. Instead of consulting a diagnostic specialist, they remain silent.

Parents' awareness about dyslexia and its impact on their children is imperative in ensuring sustainable development of the children. Thus, parents need to be made aware of their children's conditions as early as possible. In reality, the effects of dyslexia go beyond biological or genetic mechanisms to include psycho-social and cultural processes, which are influenced by society's reactions to the term. Sophie does not receive optimum academic support and as a result struggles to keep up with her non-dyslexic peers. Dyslexia represents significant challenges not just for the student but can also

be traumatic for their parents. It is evident in the above scene. Learning to read is a fundamental core skill of schooling and becoming educated; it opens doors to literacy, employment and adult well-being. Parents of dyslexic students display higher levels of anxiety than parents of non-dyslexic students. Sophie's parents experience stress in coping with their daughter's apparent poor academic progress, particularly, when they lack proper understanding of the dyslexic implications. Her mother exhibits higher levels of stress and depression and reports significant impact on the family. It also leads to increased difficulties in their everyday life.

The most common maternal worry involves both sentimental and practical difficulties, as their child's poor performance at school relates to her losing self-esteem, getting frustrated easily and developing withdrawn or aggressive behaviour. In addition, maternal anxiety is increased when attempting to seek appropriate help for their child. Mothers, by necessity, become advocates for their child and are frequently required to meet school teachers who appear uncooperative and unconcerned

about their children. Sophie's mother often discusses her difficulties with her teacher. But they consider her as a lethargic child. They do not attempt to search for the troubles beyond it; hence, her parents unintentionally approach her problem faultily.

TEACHER. Becky, you can read Macbeth and yes, Sophie, I think you can read

Lady Macbeth. Let's see what you're made of, shall we?

SOPHIE: But I haven't got a book, miss.

TEACHER. Alice, lend her your book.

SOPHIE. But I don't know it, miss.

TEACHER. All the more reasons for you to read it. Off you go, Becky, from...

'I have done the deed'

BECKY. I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

TEACHER.Sophie, that's your cue. That means it's your turn to read.

BECKY. Why don't you leave her alone, miss. It's her first day. Let someone else do it.

TEACHER.Oh, do be quiet, Becky. Well, you gonna read the line, or not?

SOPHIE. Not. (13:20-14:36)

The above scene is a classroom scene where the teacher instructs Sophie to read the text of *Macbeth* written by William Shakespeare. Sophie does not obey teacher's words and she makes certain excuses to get rid of it. She argues that she does not have a book and she is unaware of where to read. Her teacher rejects all her excuses for pressuring her to read. Later, she leaves the classroom by expressing her reluctance to read. As Dr. Michael Ryan describes it, anxiety causes human beings to avoid whatever that frightens them. The dyslexic is no exception. However, many teachers and parents misinterpret this avoidance behaviour as laziness. In fact, the dyslexic's hesitancy to participate in school activities

such as homework is related more to anxiety and confusion than to apathy (Ryan).

If a person has a disability, the society does not empathise with him or her but instead make it harder for the person to lead a normal daily life. Sophie detaches from reading the specific portion of *Macbeth*, because she is afraid of the marginalisation of her circumstances. Her teacher is not trained to instruct students like her. If the teacher chooses to be ignorant of the disability, it is harder for the child to learn, as the child is constantly demotivated by the harsh comments from her teachers and peers. When Sophie refuses to read, the teacher underlines her character as an arrogant one, instead of attempting to enquire the root cause of her behaviour.

Children like Sophie can be made to feel different from their peers simply because they are unable to follow simple instructions, which for others seem easy. It is a class teachers' responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning for all pupils of their class. Class teachers need to have an understanding of the problems that the dyslexic child may have within the classroom

situation. In a positive and encouraging environment, a dyslexic child will experience the feeling of success and self-value. From a biological and medical perspective, dyslexia is seen as a natural neurological variation. In contrast, the Social Model of Disability popularised by Mike Oliver, the British Sociologist, order and disability right activist, emphasises the idea that people are disabled by the barriers in society. He further said that disability is a social state and not a medical condition (Oliver 3). In this way, learning disabilities are socially constructed often by societal barriers, such as negative reaction and responses.

Societal barriers including prejudice, stigma, a lack of thorough understanding and social exclusion can all prevent neurodiverse individuals from leading a fulfilling life.

THE CLASSMATE OF SOPHIE. What do they think they are?

SOPHIE: What did you say?

ANOTHER CLASSMATE. She said, who do you think you are?’

SOPHIE. Oh, well, you see, I know who I am, and it’s not some cow of a girl with bad teeth and zits  
(Other students laugh)

THE CLASSAMTE. Yeah, well it’s time you realized that guys like a girl with

a brain. (*A Mind of Her Own*00:16:23-00:16:44)

The above scene is the conversation between Sophie and her peers. They mock her for her reluctance to read in the English period. Although she replies to them boldly, her face portrays how much she is insulted by their words. Her peers claim that they are girls with brain. It hints at the hidden meaning that she is not an intelligent girl. The insults of other students towards the dyslexic students for their learning disabilities are depicted here. Sophie Smith’s resolute attitude to them displays her determination to live as a normal person amid stigmatisation.

Many students with dyslexia have low self-esteem due to their surroundings, because they are forced to see themselves as different from their peers. Their peers and teachers often focus on what they cannot do and how much they struggle each day. It can cause the dyslexic students like Sophie to act out with aggression as a way of getting out their negative feelings or a way of making themselves feel more powerful in relation to their peers. According to Dr. Peter Byrne, the Consultant Psychiatrist and the former Director of Education for Royal College of Psychiatry, the experience of stigma include shame, blame, secrecy, isolation, social exclusion, stereotypes and discrimination. There is a cycle to stigma which begins with the initial condition such as disability which leads to stigma, then discrimination, then disadvantage, leading to lower self-esteem and more disabilities as a result. This then leads to resistance and reinforces the initial condition (65-72).

TEACHER. Sophie Smith, remove those sunglasses this instant.



SOPHIE. They're not sunglasses, miss. They're to help with my reading.

TEACHER. I will tell you again. Take them off, now. (Students laugh and Sophie looks at the teacher furiously after removing the glasses).  
(00:23:04-00:24:05)

The above scene is a classroom scene. The teacher asks everyone to read silently. Sophie is not able to read and she observes other students, then takes the glasses prescribed by her doctor, making sure no one is paying attention to her; however, her teacher notices it and shouts at her to remove the “sun glasses”. Teacher presumes it as Sophie’s act of insulting the teacher. She claims that these are the solution for her better reading. The teacher does not recognise her problem, instead, she criticises her. Eventually Sophie is forced to remove it.

In *The Dyslexia Handbook* 2004, Mike Johnson states that students with dyslexia does not like those teachers who behave rudely towards them and those teachers who get angry when they ask things more than

once or do something wrong. Dyslexic students want peace and safety and friendly environment with their teachers in the classroom. They want to be supported by their teachers with their differences; hence, the teacher's awareness to deal with dyslexic students is necessary (Johnson qtd. in Kalsome et. al).

Individuals with dyslexia often struggle with low self-esteem. It is usually caused by the frustration and desolation that they experience in their lives. Besides having to deal with trouble at school, a child with dyslexia may also be subjected to ridicule from the ignorant society. As their difficulties in life continue, they may start to believe that their struggles are due to being incapable and not smart enough, which leads to a decline in their self-esteem.

TEACHER. Good morning, Sophie.

SOPHIE. Morning sir. Sir, can I ask you something?

TEACHER. Go for it.

SOPHIE. What subjects do you need at A level if you wanna get into medical school.

TEACHER. Well, the usual ones are physics, chemistry and biology.

SOPHIE. Physics, chemistry and biology.

TEACHER. But you don't just need to do the right subjects, you need to get good grades as well.

SOPHIE. Meaning what?

TEACHER. Sophie, you are struggling to pass your GCSEs and now we know you're dyslexic as well.

SOPHIE. Yeah, no thanks to you. It took a supply teacher to tell us that. Thanks for your help, sir. (00:35:00-00:36:00)

The above scene is the conversation between Sophie and her teacher. Sophie has an intense desire to be a doctor. Therefore, she asks her teacher in which subjects she is

required to get higher marks in order to get admission to a medical school. Her teacher suggests the specific subjects as well as he states that it is complicated for someone like Sophie to get high marks in such subjects. Because she is a dyslexic person, it is difficult for her to select an academic course due to her trouble in reading. He suggests that she should pursue something less academic. Sophie is not able to accept the judgement of her teacher and she plainly expresses her discontentment to him.

When an individual understands their disability, he or she is able to overcome the stigma by building steps towards better self-confidence. In turn, students identified with learning disabilities in the school setting are entitled to many resources. It is in this instance of an appropriate diagnosis, that the 'label' of a learning disability can bring clarity and much needed resources and support. As self-education occurs, making the leap towards educating others about the misconceptions of learning disabilities is a critical step in this learning curve. The stereotypes regarding dyslexia include the notion that individuals with

this condition are considered to have poor social skills, limited ability and lower intelligence. These perceptions can affect more than the educational issues of individuals with dyslexia and often have long lasting impact on their self-esteem. Sophie Smith suffers stigmatisation due to the misconception of society. Even her teacher presumes that she is a low intelligent girl and is not capable of achieving valuable grades in academic field.

If a student has dyslexia, they have difficulty with reading and spelling. They struggle to match the letters on the page with the sounds of those letters. This means that students with dyslexia can find it hard to read fluently and spell words correctly. It is important to note, however, that this condition doesnot mean the person isnot intelligent. In fact, although people with dyslexia areusually slow readers, they are often quick-thinking, creative and have strong reasoning abilities. Sophie Smith is scared of revealing her dyslexic condition to others.

The inclusion of learners with dyslexia at childhood level in most mainstream schools is based on a number of factors. One of these is the attitude of relevant

stakeholders which comprise teachers, school management teams, parents or caregivers and other learners in the school who do not have this disability. Myths, certain beliefs, lack of detailed knowledge about dyslexia are some of the causes of negative perceptions towards the affected individuals.

It can be concluded that Sophie Smith is the dyslexic character in the movie *A Mind of Her Own*. Dyslexia is a common learning disability characterised by a difficulty in acquiring and processing language. It is often manifested in the form of reading, spelling and writing difficulties. Children with learning disabilities, have notably higher chances of being bullied, teased, ridiculed and hounded, which result in high rates of loneliness, despair, depression anxiety and low self-esteem.

An influential component of one's emotional stability is his or her support system. Therefore, it is understandable why those who are characterised as having more life struggles and more negative peer relationships as well as weak emotional support systems

are also perceived as less emotionally stable. At the global level, governments need to be more proactive in reducing the barriers such as discrimination that are encountered by people with intellectual disability, such as discrimination, through improving their access to mainstream services, investing in programs and adopting a national disability strategy. In particular, people with intellectual disabilities should be involved in the design.

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**Nation and Emotion: A Deconstructive Study  
of the Portrayal of Patriotic Love  
in Select Movies**

Abhinaya A

In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals to insist on the near pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love.

(Anderson 143)

One of the most obvious questions before our aspiring societies is how to shape the emotions that citizens feel toward their nation.

(Nussbaum 201)

Patriotism is commonly defined as love for one's country and people are conditioned to compartmentalize

patriotic love as an unquestionable emotion that can never be judged or criticized. What is the nature of the love that one should feel for one's country if he or she should be a good citizen? Can this be explained within the popular notions and parameters of personal love? Are people naturally inclined to accept the hierarchy of love that always places patriotic love above all other personal emotions and desires?

Various philosophers and thinkers have differed in their views about patriotism. When Tagore and Einstein looked forward to universal love, philosophers like Richard Rorty argued not to disdain patriotism as a value but to give it the stature of the emotion of national pride. The earliest arguments regarding the nature of patriotic love can be seen in the works of Greek masters. In Plato's *Crito*, Socrates, when condemned to death, turns down Crito's offer to help him escape by asking him, "Do you think you have the right to retaliate against your country and its laws?" (Plato 53). He then compares a man's relation to his nation to that of a slave's to his master and a child's to his father. Socrates goes to an extent to argue that one's country should be worshipped and admired

more than anything in this world. But the feeling of patriotism did not stop Aristotle from leaving Athens. He valued his philosophy and instincts more than his love for Athens. Pericles' funeral oration gives a different point of view, for him patriotic love is neither filial obligation nor philia but erotic love. He asks his people to “fix your gaze upon the power of Athens and become lovers of her” (Thucydides 137).

These classical Republican concepts cannot be called outdated even in the twenty-first century. But one cannot overlook how cosmopolitan views that emerged during the twentieth century challenged patriotism and defended universal reason and love. Martha Nussbaum explains why cosmopolitanism could not offer the pride and comfort that patriotism offers,

If one begins life as a child who loves and trusts its parents, it is tempting to want to reconstruct citizenship along the same lines, finding in an idealized image of a nation a surrogate parent who will do one's thinking for one. Cosmopolitanism offers no such refuge; it offers only reason and the

love of humanity, which may seem at times less colorful than other sources of belonging. (Nussbaum 160)

For some, patriotic love is agape, for others it is philia and for some others it is eros. But what thinkers have always overlooked is how patriotic love competes and collides with personal emotions. A mother who disdains her son once she gets to know that he is an anti-national and a sister who kills her brother once he is proved to be a terrorist become true patriots and are celebrated. But is it that easy to overcome personal emotions and love one's country? Is it because it is in the country that people live, get married, give birth that the country has the supreme right to ask for anything from its citizens, as Socrates puts it?

Benedict Anderson has famously argued that nations are imagined communities and has explained the role played by print media in the making of a nation and later Arjun Appadurai used the term “electronic capitalism” to explain the role of electronic media in the nation "making". As a postcolonial nation, India has the

herculean task of imagining a community despite the cultural, social, geographic differences before her. Bollywood, being the most popular film industry played a significant role in this. From the 1940s, Bollywood has made various movies on patriotic themes and post 2014 has seen a steady rise in the number of patriotic films produced. Theorists have argued that more than patriotism they are nationalist movies and some even jingoistic. But a deconstructive analysis of these movies will unveil the conflict between personal emotions and patriotic love even though all these films hail patriotism in the end.

It was Maniratnam's *Roja* (1992) that inaugurated a new wave in portraying nation and emotion. Later movies like *Fanaa* (2006), *Yahaan* (2005), *Mission Kashmir* (2000) and recent movies like *Raazi* (2018) explored various aspects of the same. *Roja* tells the story of the romantic awakening of a couple Roja and Rishi and how their otherwise calm life gets disturbed when a terrorist group kidnaps Rishi, a cryptographer, demanding Wasim Khan their leader back. The film has at its crux the attempts made by Roja to get her husband

back. When she goes to Colonel Rayappa played by Nazar, he questions her, “Are you not a citizen of India? Don’t you have any duty for your country? Haven’t you seen how these men are away from their homes to protect the country?” (01:21:21) But unlike the terrorist who lets Rishi go and rethinks his decision to choose extremism as a result of Rishi’s long sermon on patriotism, Roja is adamant in her decision to get her husband back. When she encounters Wasim Khan at the jail, she shouts at him for being the reason why her husband is made to suffer. Roja doesn’t feel any psychological conflict between her love for her husband and her love for her country. For her, the life of her husband comes first and this unacceptance from her part for a sacrifice that the nation demands is what makes Rayappa angry with her. Roja counters this, “If a minister’s daughter or son was kidnapped instead of him would you have reacted in the same way?” (01:23:21). Even though Rayappa remains silent to this, the larger political and philosophical implication of the question that Roja asks leads us to Mbembe's argument that ultimate sovereignty resides in the right to kill, allowance to live and exposure to death.

After six years, Maniratnam made *Dil Se* (1998) and shifts his camera from Kashmir to North East, another troubled borderland of India. Amarkanth Varma, a programme executive at All India Radio meets a woman in a Railway station and falls in love with her from the very first sight. He gradually gets to know that her name is Meghna but is completely unaware of her whereabouts. Meghna who is a member of a liberationist group has come to New Delhi as a suicide bomber. She uses Amar to escape from suspicion and stays at his house. The CBI suspects Amar of having links with the terrorists and arrests him. He somehow manages to escape and stops Meghna from executing her plan. When Roja's and Rishi's love for each other is unproblematic as neither of them belongs to the "Othered" territories, Amar's love for Meghna is problematic, because she is a terrorist and a suicide bomber, a threat to the country. Meghna's secluded lifestyle is perhaps an armour plate that she wears to protect herself from the personal emotions that would affect her dedication to the cause of her organization. The movie ends with Amar managing to not let her go to the place of the republic parade and they both



get killed once the bomb tied to her body explodes. Amar is not a stereotypical patriot like Pratap Singh of *Maa Tujhe Salaam* (2002) or Divakar of *I Love India* (1993). In a flashback, Meghna's past is revealed--the mass killing, rape and violence done by the security forces in North East appears in a montage. Meghna at the age of twelve was raped by the officers and when Amar tells her that it is the military that saves the nation, he is silenced by her descriptions of the brutalities done by the military. Meghna represents what Nussbaum has written about--a patriotic love that one feels for a state or a city that comes into conflict with the patriotic love for the country:

Our focus here is on the nation, but we should not forget that other forms of patriotic love—addressed to the state, the city, the region— can coexist with the love of the nation and reinforce it. Sometimes there will be tensions, as when a city or state pursues goals that the nation as a whole has not embraced. (Nussbaum 209)

*Mission Kashmir* (2000) directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra tells the story of Altaf whose parents were killed

during a search operation led by Inayat Khan played by Sanjay Dutt. Khan who recently lost his son takes Altaf to foster care. Altaf, unaware of the fact that it was Inayat Khan who killed his parents, slowly gets accustomed to his new way of life. But he is tormented by the recurring dream of a man wearing a balaclava who killed his parents. He gets to know the truth and leaves his foster parents and joins a terrorist group. The trauma of the loss makes Altaf an angry young terrorist. Sufi, a childhood friend of Altaf, who is working in Doordarshan, an Indian public service broadcaster meets him and their love is rekindled. Like Amar, Sufi is unaware of Altaf's hidden motives. She knows that she loves him and she is shocked when she comes to know that Altaf is using her to get access to the TV tower. Like Colonel Rayappa who questions Roja, Inayat Khan questions Sufi's commitment to the nation. Like Roja who repeats she wants her husband back, Sufi repeats "I don't know anything except I love him" (01:19:08). But she helps the police to draw a sketch of Altaf and advertises the lookout notice in her TV channel.

*Yahaan* (2005) portrays the love story of Adaa, a Kashmiri Muslim woman and Captain Aman of Indian Army. She is caught between the love for her brother who has joined extremist groups and love for Aman who symbolizes the nation as a whole. She saves Aman who was captivated by her brother and when this is known to the public, Aman is suspected of having links with the terrorists and is arrested. Adaa writes letters to the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister seeking help for Aman. She is invited for an interview on a TV channel and she tells her story to the world. Like Sufi, Adaa has romantic ideals and according to her, it is the inability to love that has led people to do all violence. What Adaa talks about is not patriotic love but universal love.

*Fanaa* (2006) too tells a similar story where the protagonist Rehan is a terrorist who falls in love with Zooni, a blind Kashmiri woman. Zooni gets her eyesight back through surgery but Rehan makes all believe that he is dead in a bomb blast that was actually executed by him. After seven years, they both meet again when Rehan, disguised as a soldier, takes refuge in her house because

he gets mortally wounded in a fight with the army men. In the end, Zooni comes to know about Rehan's true identity and shoots him. She hugs his corpse and tells him that she loves him meanwhile the helicopter of the security forces flies above them. Zooni's final dialogue offering flowers at Rehan's tombstone is "Zooni loves Rehan". Rehan's anti-national acts, his extremist thoughts and the murders he committed do not make Zooni hate him. The complexity of human emotions is evident in the last dialogue of Zooni, but this doesn't make her an anti-national because through the act of killing Rehan she has done her patriotic duty.

When these films give space to portray the conflict between duty and emotion, all the directors are cautious enough to end the stories on a patriotic note. Released in the year 2018, Meghna Gulzar's *Raazi* stood apart from other patriotic films made on queens, freedom fighters, kings, or military men. Set during the 1970s, *Raazi*, inspired by real-life incidents portrayed Sehmat, a young Kashmiri woman who marries a Pakistani not out of love for him, but out of her love and loyalty for India. *Raazi*

offers larger possibilities to study how human ethics and morality get into conflict with patriotic love. In the beginning Sehmat's dialogues reverberate with Socratic ideas of patriotism, but her later experience as an agent working for RAW makes her rethink her beliefs. Sehmat is a Kashmiri woman whose ancestors worked as agents for Indian Intelligence Bureau. Her father befriends Brigadier Syed of the Pakistani Army disguising as a Kashmiri who spies on India but does the opposite. But unlike her father, Sehmat has to go to the extent of using her age, her body, and her status as a Kashmiri Muslim for the sake of her country. She marries Brigadier's younger son thereby getting access to the top secrets of the Pakistani army. But in the meantime, emotions take a toll on her and she falls in love with her husband.

Sehmat's teaching of a patriotic song to the young students is her own attempt to overcome the psychological dilemma that she faces. "Ae watan, mere watan, Tujhpe koi gham ki aanch aane nahin doon" (00:56:16) It connotes not only love for the country but also the readiness of the true patriot to bear all sorrows to keep the country safe. When she feels that the servant of the house,

Abdul an aged man, has found out her true identity, she kills him. Sehmat escapes all sorts of suspicion, but finds herself again in trouble when Mehboob, her brother-in-law uses all available sources to find the murderer. She kills Mehboob and in the end her husband finds out her true identity. She points a gun at her husband and with tears tells him that she loves her country and no love is more important than that. After managing to escape from the Pakistani army, Sehmat asks Khalid Mir, a Research and Analysis Wing officer of India why she was put into a situation where she has to sacrifice her conscience. Mir tells her that this is the way war works, nothing and no one matters in the war. He is not telling her that this is how patriotism works, but uses the word 'war' thereby pointing out one of the major foundations on which patriotism is built.

Patriotism is Janus-faced. It faces outward, calling the self, at times, to duties toward others, to the need to sacrifice for a common good. And yet, just as clearly, it also faces inward, inviting those who consider themselves "good" or "true" Americans

to distinguish themselves from outsiders and subversives and then excluding those outsiders. Just as dangerous, it serves to define the nation against its foreign rivals and foes, whipping up warlike sentiments against them. (Nussbaum 37)

Sehmat is not only haunted by her conscience, but she comes face to face with the sovereign power of the State when she learns that the RAW plotted to kill her. Like Roja questioning the state that doesn't value her husband's life, here Sehmat questions the state that doesn't value her life even after all the sacrifices that she has done. Sehmat, Zooni, Adaa and Sufi are Kashmiri women and their way of reacting to the conflict between emotion and patriotic love is different from Roja, the non-Kashmiri woman. Roja is adamant about her decision to get her husband back, but all the Kashmiri characters choose the nation above their emotion. This new wave of nationalist movies having roots in the 1990s has promoted patriotism but a deconstructive reading brings out the underlying friction between nation and emotion, and the psychological conflict that members of "imagined

communities" undergo in the process of sacrificing their desires to the "ego- ideal" that always places nation at the apex. From the moment a child is born, he undergoes various conditioning tactics to become a patriot. From history that is learnt in primary classes to the pledge and the national anthem, every nation has its own way of teaching its citizen the hierarchy of love that places love for the nation above all other emotions and desires. Every citizen is expected to sacrifice his or her emotions--love, grief, fear, anger and desires--the desire to love, desire to live, etc. for the wellbeing of his or her nation and these movies become celebrations of such sacrifices. Though *Razi* stands apart by deviating from the love/hate dichotomy in which all other movies are built where loving one's own country means hating the other.

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# **Deconstructing the Social Hierarchy: An Analysis of the Marathi New Generation Cinematic Movement**

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According to the French thinker Michel Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance”. The relation between power and resistance is organic and inevitable. Resistance to the versatile manifestations of domination and oppression can be seen as a natural phenomenon. In art, it can be felt more creative and original. Those who react to the social issues and turmoil around them through art can wake people from a heavy slumber to the stark realities around them. Art can function as an effective weapon of resistance against oppression. The never-ending discussions of the function of art--whether it is social or aesthetic--remain in vogue even after centuries. In such a scenario whenever art directly intervenes in the social affairs and tries to effect progressive changes, it gets support from unexpected quarters as well. A popular artistic medium like cinema can do wonders in this regard.

It can influence society and bring about positive and progressive changes. Auteurs like Satyajit Ray, AdoorGopalakrishnan, MrinalSen and RitwikGhatak portrayed the boiling social issues without sacrificing artistically. They held a faithful mirror to the society and engaged in a sincere discourse which had great influence on the medium of cinema. Slowly, the chasm between artistic and commercial cinema widened resulting in the market holding sway over the medium and cinema's endeavour to converse with the society slowly ceased. In contemporary Indian cinema, Bollywood represents the thriving globalized market and its overambitious sums which may look exaggerated whereas regional cinema tries to portray life and society with utmost sincerity to the medium. Regional cinema shows the courage and determination to discuss issues which are overlooked by the mainstream cinema.

### **The Marathi New Wave**

Mumbai, the epicentre of Bollywood created a cinematic system of its own which influenced Marathi cinema too. Earlier, the mainstream Marathi cinema

offered nothing other than a mere imitation of the Bollywood. But the new millennium saw the revival of Marathi cinema and the arrival of a bunch of filmmakers with iconoclastic vigour. They possessed a novel cinematic language and courage to deconstruct the medium. Directors like PareshMokashi (*Harishchandraci Factory*) and UmeshVinayakKulkarni (*Vihir*) were noted for their vibrant films. Umesh's*Deool*was a strong commentary on the Indian scenario where religion and politics combine to make a lethal social cocktail. Following these, came films like *Sairat*and *Fandry* by NagrajManjule, *Court* by ChaitanyaTamhanewhich announced the significance of the Marathi new wave to Indian cinema. They dissected society, found out the maladies and discussed about them impartially. These films spoke for the underprivileged and flayed the aristocratic, culturally hegemonic societal values and conventions.

### **The Stone that was Aimed at Casteism**

Indian society is still governed by casteist value systems that systemically oppress the subaltern. The

cultural hegemony of the upper castes keeps the Dalit aesthetics outside the mainstream sociocultural arena. The value systems that govern the society are Brahmanical and their Bible is *Manusmriti* which is the root of caste system in India. In such a social scenario, the film *Fandry*, by NagrajManjule holds great significance. The film lays bare the casteist attitude of the society and shows how Dalits are discriminated and oppressed. The film is a sharp commentary of the social reality. Maharashtra, which is the birth place of Dr Ambedkar, is infamous for its deep rooted caste malaise. *Fandry* employs the tool of dark humour and shows the world what life is all about for the underprivileged. Apart from romanticising the struggles of Dalits, cinema in India seldom tries to ask serious questions to the society regarding the terror unleashed on them. Dalits are tasked with manual scavenging even in the scientifically advanced 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mainstream political parties, especially of North India never consider caste discrimination as a serious issue to be dealt with as it may affect their calculations regarding caste based vote banks. Casteist 'khappanchayats' are given impunity due to their heavy influence on the electorate and they

function as quasi-judicial system. *Fandry* becomes a powerful artistic symbol in this context as it nonchalantly attempts to unravel the evil structures of caste domination.

The word '*fandry*' in Marathi means pig. The film tells the story of Jabya, a child whose family belongs to the Dalit caste "Kaikadi" and they live by catching pigs. The director shows the viewers the unbelievably inhuman caste practices existing in the Indian villages. Jabya, the 13 year old is in love with his classmate Shalu, who belongs to an upper caste. Caste remains as a humongous wall between Jabya and his love towards Shalu. The traditional job of Jabya's family is catching of pigs and the elites view them with utter disdain. Pigs are supposed to be polluting the roads travelled by the Savarna sections. Thus pigs are equated to Dalits and the hierarchical social order places them at the bottom. Jabya belongs to the Dalits of the new age who find themselves cornered and are desperate for resurrection. They are earnestly attempting to get out of the existential crisis created by the casteist social norms. *Fandry* doesn't fall

back on the often repeated tales of pathos, instead portrays the inevitable resistance of the subaltern.

In the film, a character mocks Jabya's family saying that the profession of catching pigs is like an IPL cricket match to them. Using powerful wry humour, Manjule shows the desperation of the upper castes as their cleanliness becomes the duty of the Dalits.

Throughout the film, Jabya and his friend are shown following a black sparrow. The myth says that if the ashes of the bird touch the body of the beloved, he/she will reciprocate the love and this is Jabya's last hope. Even though he tries hard to catch it, the bird escapes at the last moment. The bird here is the symbol of social justice and it shows however hard the Dalits are trying to reach it, it moves away like a mirage. In the most notable scene in the movie, Jabya's family chases a pig and reaches a school. Suddenly, the national anthem is played from the school and the family stands at attention whereas the pig escapes in front of the hapless Dalit family. This scene brilliantly captures the Indian situation where Dalits are placed outside the discourses of nationalism. The last



scene of *Fandry* is symbolic of the boiling fury in the minds of the Dalits against the casteist social structure. The character of Jabya throws a stone at the camera and this gesture is filled with socio-cultural meanings. The stone is thrown at the echelons of caste hierarchy as well as the unresponsive society. The film shows how art can imaginatively react to social situations and be a catalyst of progressive social change.

### **Caste that Prohibits Love**

According to Alok Mukherjee, “the shape and nature of the Dalit subalternity, then are quite unlike those produced by colonial relations. The Dalit’s subaltern status is inherited by birth and sanctioned by sacred authority. It is eternal and unalterable” (Mukherjee 3). The subaltern status of Dalits is static and cannot be changed as the society is deep rooted in caste system. Even time cannot heal the wounds created by actions that subverts the rules of the caste game. Even human feelings are not beyond its grasp. Love and hatred are determined by caste relations and status. In India, the social evil called “honour killing” exists. It is a hate-crime which is a

reaction against the attempt to bypass the caste diktats in the name of love. Recently, a number of such instances occurred where Dalit youths were mercilessly killed by upper caste goons. Ilavarasan in Dharmapuri (Tamil Nadu) and Kevin in Kottayam (Kerala) are the recent martyrs. *Sairat*, a film by NagrajeManjule shows the pathetic plight of a loving couple who belong to two different castes. The film was a commercial hit which collected over 100 crore. The film portrays the merciless caste hierarchy and its spiteful wrath against the Dalits.

*Sairat*, released in 2016, tells the story of the intense love between Parshya and Archi. The film unravels the inhuman face of the existing aristocratic power structure. In *Fandry*, Jabya's love remains unrequited whereas in *Sairat*, Archi, who belongs to an upper caste family, loves Parshya a Dalit youth. As Jabya was mocked and made fun of by the casteist society, Parshya was denied the right to live a dignified life. The unrelenting hatred of the elites towards the Dalits results in both Parshya and Archie being killed. Honour killing is an Indian phenomenon where the Caste Hindus consider

the inter-caste marriage as a sin and grant themselves the right to kill either the Dalit/backward caste man or both the man and the woman. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a shocking tale of such a tragic love affair between a Dalit youth and a Syrian Christian woman where, the Dalit man, Velutha, gets killed in the end by the police. Society often remains a silent spectator in such instances which gives the Savarnas the confidence to take law in their hands under the pretension of safeguarding the social morality principles. In *Sairat*, the couple elopes to a faraway land for their safety, fearing the fury of Archi's upper caste family. The movie shows that caste hatred has no boundaries as the members of the family travel miles and cross state border to hunt down the couple. The film efficiently portrays how politicians remain puppets in the hands of the influential upper caste people. Indian socio-political reality which saw the erstwhile feudal lords wearing the garb of politics keeps up their positions of power by carefully manipulating the caste equations of post-Independence. This ensured that the elite social and moral codes won't be touched in spite

of having a constitution that speaks in volumes about the need for social and political democracy and justice.

*Sairat* throws light on significant aspects regarding the power play involving society and gender. In the film, Archi is portrayed as a relatively independent woman who even rides a bike and takes decisions on her own. But as the movie progresses, it becomes clear that her social mobility and decision making are only permitted within the casteist familial arena and once she decides to break free of the regulations imposed on her, she loses her identity and freedom. The same system which permitted her a free life within its ambits starts to hunt her from the moment she breaks free. Khap Panchayats that enforce strict casteist and patriarchal regulations on individuals portrays an Indian social reality. They function as kangaroo courts where instant “justice” is provided to the aggrieved party who are almost always the upper castes. The film *Parched* by Leena Yadav has shown the atrocious roles played by such designs in the persistent discrimination faced by women. Women are treated as a property by the caste system and the honour of the

caste/family resides on her actions. This chains the Indian women and spread like a dark shadow of control from her birth onwards. *Sairat* critiques the nexus between casteism and patriarchy. The film is a perfect example of how the Marathi new wave is using the medium of cinema for its constructive social criticism.

### **Courts and their Brahmanical Sympthies**

In her article “The Nauseating Nepotism and Caste-based Discrimination that exists in Indian Judiciary”, KirubaMunuswami, a Dalit lawyer has pointed out in detail how the Indian legal system is partisan in favour of the upper castes. By means of statistical data, she argues that 95 per cent of cases under The SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act result in acquittals. The high number of Dalits and Muslims in Indian prisons (Joy) also raises certain significant questions. The Marathi film *Court*, directed by ChaitanyaTamhanebrilliantly portrays the caste hegemony and the inner rot within the Indian judiciary. The film narrates the story of Narayan Kamble, a Dalit activist who is arrested for abetting the suicide of Vasudev

Pawar, a Dalit manhole worker. The film shows the trial of Kamble, and with it the prejudiced and Brahmanical perspective of the court is unravelled. The film guides the viewers to the stark reality of the Indian judicial system.

A number of social activists, who were the spokespersons of human rights and Dalit emancipation, were arrested in relation to the Bhima Koregaon incident in Maharashtra (Thanawala). In the film the prosecution argues that Narayan Kamble is guilty because he has made Pawar aware of the pathetic living condition through his folk songs which might have resulted in his death. Such an absurd claim is supported by the court as well. Even though everyone present in the court knows very well that Narayan Kamble is innocent, he is kept in jail. The film shows the desperate attempts of a young lawyer Vinay Vora, who tries in vain to get Kamble bail. The film is yet another instance of Marathi cinema showing its bold demeanour in portraying the social realities by sympathising with the underprivileged.

The films mentioned bear testimony to the fact that Marathi cinema finds a niche of its own in Indian cinema. These films are a part of the a social movement in Marathi, where the market-driven aesthetic schemes of Bollywood are rejected outright and a novel cinematic language is created with the eyes of the medium wide open to social realities. The inception of this trend can be traced back to AnandPatwardhan and his brave attempts to face power and speak truth through his powerful documentaries. History shows how the emancipatory ideas originated from Phule and Ambedkar got erased from the land of Maharashtra. In the contemporary era, these film makers who are sympathetic to the causes of the subalterns are creating a cinematic movement that has historic proportions. The Marathi new wave takes on casteism directly and employs the tools of art to spread awareness about it. In this pursuit, they must be lauded for not compromising on the artistic and aesthetic front. As the clarion call by the revolutionary “third cinema” puts it, cinema has to be in constant communication with the society. The Marathi new wave is showing Indian cinema the right trajectory in this regard.

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***And the Mountains Echoed* as an Epitaph for  
Expatriates: Exploring the Cultural  
Displacement and Fractured Identities of the  
Afghans in Exile**

Jasna Nafeesa P.K.

Exile, migration or expatriation, is not only a physical condition but also a state of mind. It does not matter where your feet are, in your own native land or in an alien land. The sense of exile results in a deep feeling of loss, ache, separation, yearning for recuperation and restoration and this is the most favoured and fertile site for creative activity, especially that of literature. (Shukla 7)

For almost three decades now, the Afghan refugee crisis has been one of the most terrifying events happening around the globe. War, hunger, anarchy and oppression forced millions of people to abandon their homes and flee Afghanistan to settle in neighboring countries. At the height of the exodus, as many as eight million Afghans were living abroad as refugees. This paper, on the Afghan

expatriates and their experience in Afghanistan, focuses on the socio-cultural context of Afghanistan, with special reference to the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) by Khaled Hosseini.

Being an expatriate is a very difficult experience. Expatriates usually show lamentation in the name of their original homeland, mixing memory and nostalgia. They experience displacement and homelessness. Usually, expatriate experience is deeply melancholic. In *And the Mountains Echoed* there are different varieties of expatriate experience where one is in contrast with another. This study does not explore each and every expatriate of this novel; instead, it stresses on the most important characters of this novel including Idris Bashiri and Nila Wahdati. The main goal of this study is to address how these characters faced expatriation, whether they are happy or sad and do they show any affection towards their homeland. The author Khaled Hosseini is himself an Afghan expatriate. So, this paper also aims at finding “survivor’s guilt” of Hosseini and Idris. By examining Hosseini as an Afghan expatriate, this paper

will also study the elements of Afghan Diaspora in this novel. Hosseini has a very similar experience to one of the characters of this novel, a young doctor who goes back to Kabul with his cousin. For both Idris and Hosseini there is a tremendous sense of homecoming. There is a sense of guilt about their undeserved good fortune and that was part of the impetus of starting Khaled Hosseini Foundation. Hosseini's perspective is that of the Afghan exile and the Diaspora.

First of all, this paper attempts to study the character of Idris who is indeed an Afghan expatriate more than a foreign doctor. His compassion is tested by a trip to his homeland. The character is deeply autobiographical. Hosseini presents Idris Bashiri as his other half in *And the Mountains Echoed*. When we examine Idris thoroughly, we can see *And the Mountains Echoed* is an example of autobiographical fiction. Both the author and the character suffer from "survivor's guilt" as Afghan expatriates. They feel like tourists in their own homeland on their return. They have become strangers to Afghanistan. It is Idris' plight of being an expatriate that

forms the main focus of this study. Idris is a troubled character caught in exile and longing for the past.

After all those twenty years, Idris and his cousin Timur returned to Afghanistan to reclaim the property that belonged to their fathers, the house where both of them had lived for the first fourteen years of their lives. In Amra's view, Idris is one of the wealthy, wide eyed exiles who has come home to gawk at the carnage now the bogeyman has left. Idris is just the opposite of Timur, his cousin. When Timur lies to Amra, a foreign aid worker in Afghanistan, Idris is unable to prevent him. Idris is well aware of the fact that they haven't come back to "give back". He hasn't come back to "reconnect", to "educate", or to "bear witness" to the aftermath of all those years of war and destruction in Afghanistan. He does not intend to go back to the States, to raise awareness, and funds, to "give back". Idris simply returned to his homeland to earn something more, to make more achievements by draining the blood of his motherland. After the war, his property's worth skyrocketed and thousands of foreign aid workers descended on Kabul requiring a place to live. In fact, Idris

was simply trying to exploit those men who had come to save his country and countrymen. They are those people who were trying to provide humanitarian aid to the war-torn Afghanistan. Idris' money-making mind changes when he meets Roshana, an Afghan girl who had narrowly escaped death. There was a true Afghan inside Idris hidden under his air of a foreigner. He didn't want to act the ugly, entitled Afghan-American and go around backslapping people, pretending to be one of them, full of bonhomie. Idris had misgivings about the fanfare, the flaunting, the unabashed showmanship, the bravado of his cousin Timur. He was simple and he was a true Afghan in his attitudes. When a foreigner schooled him on an Afghan artist, Nila Wahdati, Idris felt ashamed of himself. He himself was doubtful of his loyalty to Afghanistan.

During his conversation with Amra, a foreign aid worker in Afghanistan, Idris confesses his reason for the return after twenty years. He thought he should respect those Afghans who suffered wars. He considered himself as a "lucky one" because he wasn't there when Afghanistan was getting bombed to hell. "The stories

these people have to tell, we're not entitled to them” (Hosseini 148). Idris received the stories of Afghans as a gift. He always sensed a vague reproach from the locals, the government officials, those in the aid agencies. He was sure of the fact that it was just because he appeared as a foreigner to them. This is the gift that awaits an expatriate. He will continue as a foreigner always. Homeland sees them as alien people. It is this agony that expatriates like Idris experience. Anyhow, the whiff of money and power affords him unwarranted privilege in his own country. For an expatriate, money matters. Through money only locals can accept him as one among them.

In the USA Idris felt a cultural clash where his Afghan identity collapsed. Inside him, there was a foreigner fighting an Afghan. That is why Idris comments, “for the price of that home theatre we could have built a school in Afghanistan” (Hosseini 164). He has felt survivor's guilt in Afghanistan. On seeing the war-torn Afghanistan Idris felt ashamed of himself and his achievements. It tormented him very much. Idris' experience as a foreigner is worse. Amra's emails haunted

him in the USA. Always he gave her good hope. Actually, Idris' promise was his mistake.

To some extent, we can connect Idris and Khaled Hosseini. The experience of expatriation is deeply within Hosseini. That's why *And the Mountains Echoed* is an Afghan novel concerned with the Afghan Diaspora. Hosseini also feels longing for the past. He experiences survivor's guilt. Being an Afghan by birth, Hosseini moved to Paris in 1976. When they were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, Afghanistan had witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet army. The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the USA. While practising medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*. It was indeed an epitaph for the Afghans who lost their lives in the war. Hosseini was very much concerned about his homeland. This longing for the past enabled him to write three marvelous books on Afghanistan. Being a fortunate expatriate, Hosseini felt sorry for his homeland. He felt survivor's guilt on hearing about the tragic stricken Afghanistan. What was being written about Afghanistan in earlier times



and sadly, still now, revolved around the Taliban, Bin Laden, and the War on Terror. Misconception and preconceived notions about Afghanistan abound forever. Hosseini gave Afghanistan a more humane face with the publication of *The Kite Runner*.

Compared to Idris, Nila Wahdati in *And the Mountains Echoed* is a different kind of expatriate. She never felt sorry for her homeland. In fact, she was always troubled with her half-Afghan identity. She always showed a rebellion against Afghanistan and Afghan culture. She was inspired by Queen Soraya, the wife of King Amanullah in Afghanistan. The gender apartheid that was forced on Afghan women has been one of the great unresolved injustices of the modern world. Queen Soraya said:

Do not think, however, that our nation needs only men to serve it; women should also take their part, as women did in the early years of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted throughout history. And from their examples, we learn that we must all contribute

toward a development of our nation. (qtd. in Gornall & Salahuddin)

Nila took this as her Bible. She was a modern woman trapped in Afghan identity. “I’ve divorced myself from my more trouble-some half” (Hosseini 180). This is Nila’s response to her escape from Afghanistan. She thinks that if King Amanullah had succeeded in Afghanistan, she might have been a proud Afghan woman. King Amanullah was a visionary. He prohibited wearing of the veil for women in Afghanistan. His wife, Queen Soraya, once appeared bare faced in public. He prohibited forced marriage of women. And he completely abandoned polygamy in his country. This was the reform Nila wanted in her country. But unfortunately, King Amanullah died as a disillusioned old man in exile. He was abdicated by his countrymen. Nila earnestly protested against the Afghan culture of subjugating woman’s identity. She was far away from her homeland both physically and mentally. She abandoned her troublesome half-Afghan identity.

Nila Wahdati is symbolic of an ongoing struggle of Afghanistan's female poets. She is unhappy with Afghanistan and troubled with Paris. Even though she abandons Afghanistan, she is not free from her Afghan identity. That's why she feels troubled in Paris. Paris is her dreamland, but Afghanistan haunts her always with such power that she cannot stand it. She is psychologically all alone before and after her marriage. Always she feels lonely. Hosseini wanted Nila to be real--full of anger, ambition, frailty, insight and narcissism. She came when a certain stratum of Kabul's middle class was undergoing Westernization. She is the morally complicated female poet of Afghanistan. She broke out the tradition of Afghan women completely. She is one with a formidable will. Being an Afghan by birth, she had always had an inclination towards France, her maternal homeland. She considered herself as half Afghan and half French. She drank, smoked and took lovers as part of a rebellion against her homeland.

Nila is a woman of formidable will. She always had an inclination towards France. During Saboor's visit

to Kabul, Nila's home seems like a heaven to Abdullah. Actually, she purchased Pari from Saboor. She fulfilled her dreams by draining the tears of a poor family. While she was in Shadbagh with Nabi, she acted like she belonged there in their low-ceilinged mud house. She pretended that she was interested in the countryside, the real Afghanistan. It was Nila's craving for company which made her purchase Pari. "Today I have seen the charm, the beauty, the unfathomable grace of the face that I was looking for" (Hosseini 41). To Nila, Pari was her other half or she seemed to hope that she would be her other half.

Nilā longs for a child to take away her loneliness. "It will be good to have a child around the house, for a change, a little life" (Hosseini 43). We cannot blame her completely for adultery. She didn't get any satisfaction from her husband both physically and mentally. Together with her inability to reproduce children loneliness made her vulnerable. It was well known in Kabul that she had no nang and namoos, no honor, and that though she was only twenty she had already been "ridden all over town"

like any vehicle. She had made no attempt to deny these allegations, but she wrote poems about them. Her poems were filled with desire and physical pleasure.

Everything Nila did--the way she spoke, the way she walked, her smile--was a novelty for Afghanistan. Nila pushed against every single notion an Afghan had of how a woman was to behave. She was mysterious. She found her husband aloof and often arrogant. He had no sense of fun or adventure. "Suleiman is a brooding old man trapped in a young man's body" (Hosseini 89) Mr. Wahdati was uniquely comfortable with solitude. Even though Suleiman was there Nila craved company. This made her befriend Nabi, her servant. She accompanied Nabi to Shadbagh. She displayed great patience and kindness with children. But, the eyes of bearded men fixed on Nila and her bare arms with a look of displeasure. Tradition never accepted Nila as an Afghan woman. Nila appears vulnerable because of her inability to reproduce. In order to avoid her solitude, Nila arranged two or three parties a month. While she was a party woman, Suleiman made limited efforts to engage his guests. They were

definitely in contrast with one another. Nila represented women empowerment whereas Suleiman represented male domination.

It is true that Hosseini “describes the boundless miseries of Afghan women who were imprisoned in the power structure of men and institutions of power such as family, society and the government” (Asghari et.al 262). Anyway, Nila protested against the values and norms by falling in love with the wrong sort. People always accused her by saying that she was “cavorting”. Her father thought he could terrorize her into submission. But Nila haunted him with her poetry. She wrote long, scandalous poems dripping with adolescent passion. They speak beautifully of loneliness and uncontainable sorrow. They chronicle her disappointments, the crests and troughs of young love in all its radiance, promises and trappings. There was always a sense of struggle against the tyranny of circumstance--often depicted as a never named sinister male figure who looms. No one in Kabul considered her a pioneer of anything but bad taste, debauchery and immoral character. Her father said her writings were the

ramblings of a whore. He was a patriarch. She was a direct challenge to all he knew, all that he held dear. Nila argued in a way, through both her life and her writing, for new boundaries for women, for women to have prestige in their own status, to arrive at legitimate selfhood. Nila was defying the monopoly that men like him had held for ages. She was saying what could not be said. She was conducting a small, one-woman revolution.

Nila always wanted to be protected from her own body. She did not approve of the view that women were emotionally, morally and intellectually immature. She didn't believe that they lacked self-control; or, they were vulnerable to physical temptation. Nila acted like a whore as a protest against this notion of inferiority of women. When she lost her uterus, she felt diminished like she had left something vital of herself behind somewhere. Quite contrary, her father was encouraged. He thought that her encounter with mortality had shaken her out of her immaturity and waywardness. He didn't understand that Nila felt lost. She felt disoriented, suspended in confusion, unspeakably depressed as well.

Nila always maintained a tragically conflicted relationship with her writing throughout her life. She is a symbol of Afghanistan's female poets who enjoyed eras of flourishing freedom of expression and endured eras of forced secrecy. She pleaded for the right of women to be seen as individuals and free from society's inequities. Nila, with her fluency in French, her love of literature, her high heels, sleeveless dresses and sunglasses, is a recognizable product of modern Afghanistan. Nila's outward expressions of female desire remain controversial in the story. She takes advantage of an opportunity unavailable to many Afghan women.

Nila appears as a troubled character throughout this novel. She doesn't have any affection towards her homeland. But she is always an alien in a foreign country. Nila's dual identity is her main problem. She wanted to make Pari her "other half". Anyhow Pari was totally a failure to Nila. She always linked Nila with her homeland. That was Nila's problem. Even though Nila always wanted to be a foreigner the depressing fact was that she



always sensed an Afghan inside her. Her disgust of Afghanistan itself was her bonding to her homeland.

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## **Analyzing Dreams of the Visually Impaired**

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Dream or what the most celebrated psychologist Sigmund Freud rightly called “a message in disguise,” (Jenkins 10) remains to be a mysterious realm to its interpreters. Though there have been enormous efforts by the best minds in the world to decode and unravel the secrets and to elucidate the complexities of dream, a detailed, convincing record is arguably yet to be presented. Nevertheless, we have come to a consensus that dream is an unconscious activity of human mind which is directly or indirectly rooted in the repressed desires of an individual.

An individual, whether he/she is aware of it or not, therefore possesses the complete authority over his/her dreams or more specifically, on the manipulation of his/her day-to-day affairs into colourful, and at times, fearful fantasies. But it seems a little hard to understand the roots of dreams if they are presented in such a way that the individual has nothing to directly link with it from

their conscious activity. Since the unconscious is structured like an iceberg inaccessible to the individual in the consciousness, dreams are sometimes seen to be far from the reality.

People often experience dreams when they sleep. It is neither restricted to any particular stage of one's life nor with certain conditions. We regard dreams as fulfilment or realization of our desires otherwise impossible. But, have we ever thought of a dream with no colours and light? Do the dreams of a person with visual impairment have colour and light? Since dreams are universal among all human beings, and since there are associated with the imaginary but colourful evocation of one's feelings, the question cannot easily be ruled out of its significance. Rather it is to be attended with the importance of a knowledge subjugated by the rigidities of the so-called mainstream ideas and concepts.

Visual impairment, as with the case of other non-mainstream ideas, is also associated with a fair deal of myths and misconceptions. Its nature and concerns were predominantly defined by the dominant groups outside.

Hence, many of the ideas related to visual impairment were either over exaggerated or simply underestimated. Therefore, the mainstream depiction of the dream of a visually impaired individual also contains certain elements to be re-examined and to be ruled out, if necessary.

The major belief existing in the society with regard to the people with visual impairment is that they live in a dark world. It indeed seems to be convincing for a person with sight as he/she sees nothing except dark when his/her eyes are closed. But, when it comes to the matters of visual impairment, the case demands to be reviewed.

A sighted person understands darkness only because he/she is directly exposed to the light. So the absence of light is indeed darkness and something difficult for persons with sight. But, when considering a person who is visually impaired, the reality changes a lot from the prevalent social notions. The visually impaired people have never experienced light in their lives. Therefore, for them, the ideas of light and a colourful

world or the absence of both are just like the idea of a man with beautiful wings. Human beings do not ever feel the absence of wings as they are not used to it. In the same way, visually impaired people do not feel the absence of light as they never possessed it in their entire lifetime. Thus, equating blindness to darkness does not make any sense.

So, the dreams of the visually impaired do not differ much from the happenings and experiences of their day-to-day lives. Since dream is a manipulated version of our own concerns and actions, the visually impaired also experience dreams to be the exact and often highly exaggerated version of their routine. In reality, they pursue things through other sense organs they are gifted with. Thus, their dreams can only be dependent upon these four sense organs. So, the visually impaired experience things through touch, sound, smell and taste even in their dreams. Although elements of the real world undergo transformation in a dream, chances are few that they have entirely new elements pertaining to light and colour. Dreams may blend reality and concepts together but

certainly cannot introduce ideas unknown. Instead, the dreams may connote the ideas of both light and darkness to be some of their most familiar experiences. Hence, light may be experienced as something pleasurable such as coolness, romance or happiness in their dreams, whereas darkness may possibly be experienced as something disagreeable such as heat, sorrow and death. In an article titled “The Dreams of Blind Men and Women: A Replication and Extension of Previous Findings”, the authors tested the validity of this argument and found that the congenitally blind people and those who became blind below the age of five usually experience little or no elements related to light or colour in their dream.(Hurovitz et al. 192). The same question has also been considered in another article titled “The Sensory Construction of Dreams and Nightmare Frequency in Congenitally Blind and Late Blind Individuals”, the conclusion is similar to the earlier one. The authors claim that the congenitally blind individuals have significantly less visual and an increased number of auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory dream impressions (Meaidi et al.).

So far, we have discussed about the nature of dreams and what it means for a visually impaired person. This has been the case with those born with visual impairment. What about those who were born sighted, but lost it later? Here, things become a bit hard to comprehend as these persons have a clear idea about light and the colour spectrum. They know everything as they have been directly exposed to it in their lives. There exists a deep-rooted belief in the society that these people who lost sight midway are thrown into a completely dark world. However, researchers are likely to pose an idea that being aware of light and colour, people who lose vision may see the reflections of their lost reality in dream.

Although the arguments seem to be supported to a certain extent in society, this paper presents hypothesis to substantiate the author's view which contradicts the prevalent view. As we have already discussed in this paper, people understand darkness only because they see light. In short, it is the same capability of their eyesight that presents both these realities to them. Losing eyesight could not be compared with closing one's eyes. On



closing eyes, we immediately see the darkness between our eyelid and eyeball. Consider the case of a person who has lost his or her eyesight midway in life say, after fifteen or twenty years of their life. It is to be understood that this person can neither see light nor sensedarkness as he/she is totally devoid of the capability to distinguish between them. They have a clear understanding of all these realities as they have once experienced them.

The prominent belief with regard to the chances of these people experiencing colourful dreams also lacks enough scientific support. People may see the reflections of their colourful memories for a short period after the incident by which they lost sight, but not indeed forever. Once they get adapted to the new situation, there are high chances that the frequency of colorful dreams gradually diminishes. They also become more or less similar to the visually impaired by birth except in a few ways. These include the concept of light and colours. Unlike the first category, the second can easily link everything that they experience in their life with colours. Thus, on trying to recollect the dream experienced the previous night, they

can visualize colours as well. This intentional or unintentional manipulation of a dream is closely associated with the Freudian term of “Secondary” in a dream-work. Since they are aware of a clear colour spectrum, it is impossible for them to view things outside this rigid framework. Though light and colours occur in their dreams, there is very less chance for the occurrence of activities that are eye-centred such as driving a car on a heavy traffic road or shooting a bird at a distance. The adaptation process that they have gone through shifts the focus from eye to some other sense organs. However, it does not alter the universal concept of the dream being the reflection of repressed desires. They understand the evocation of all their repressed emotions and feelings in their dreams but experience it in a way different from those with eyesight. For instance, carnal needs and sexual desires may be boiled down to a touch and to erotic conversation.

The ones who recently lost their eyesight may still be governed under their already established colour concepts. Due to this reason, their imaginations and the

recollection of dreams shall be inextricably associated with all these colour concepts. They cannot think or recollect a particular object without a colour associated to it. For them, the absence of colours questions the very existence of these objects, just as a sighted person cannot imagine a wall with no colours or the milk without its white. Though the colours they associate may not resemble the original, they always intentionally or unintentionally do it to complete their imaginary process. A fat person may therefore remain to be a slim figure in their imagination unless and until the truth is revealed. So, a visually impaired person may probably say that he or she had a colorful dream last night but, the credibility of this claim can easily be questioned. If we are to accept it to be something valid, we are to also accept that a visually impaired person, though not accurate as a sighted person, is able to see all the worldly objects in the colours he assigns to them.

The only way left to understand the situation of visual impairment is to step into the shoes of a person with it. Unfortunately, it is impossible for two reasons. The

first is that all the individuals are the total of their own different experiences and emotions in their life. The second is that we do not experience a condition by only pretending to be in it.

Conventions and social conceptions help a sighted person to mould the way he sees the world. Though all these concepts are just socially constructed, an individual without his or her proper intention, becomes a part of them. This is how the task of placing oneself to be outside the box becomes impossible for a person. We cannot even think of a dream without colours. We think that there is no reality beyond it. The case of a person who lost his sight midway is similar to it. They imagine things in different colours. But a person who is blind by birth, is totally unaware of it. There is no reality for him in light and colours.

Nevertheless, it is not to judge that colours hardly matter for the visually impaired. In fact, it matters as they are also part of the society in which it is prevalent. We are all conscious of colours. We even bother about the colours of the dress we wear. The visually impaired can also be

conscious about the colour code even if they have not experienced it in their lives. It is a result of persistent exposure from their childhood that they become subjected to such ideas. It enables them to build certain concepts with regards to the suitability of colours to them. They blindly follow this trend in the literal sense of the word. Georgina Kleege, in her article titled “Blindness and Visual Culture: an Eyewitness Account” comments that “the language we speak, the literature we read, the architecture we inhabit, were all designed by and for the sighted” (429). While living in the same society, the visually impaired are also compelled to be a part of it.

Therefore, the acquisition of colour concepts among the visually impaired is something similar to the involuntary acquisition of a language. People who are visually impaired by birth, apart from the words they use to refer to certain colours, never understand the visual distinction. However, regarding recent researches in connection with the dream analysis it is argued that, as discussed in “Visual Dream Content, Graphical Representation and EEG Alpha Activity in Congenitally

Blind Subjects”, certain responses in a totally blind person can be considered to be indicators of visual contents in their dreams. (Bertolo et al. 278). More research is to be conducted to test the validity of this. It is also worth noting that the category of visually impaired persons analysed in this paper are those who experience hundred percent impairment by birth or those who lose complete eyesight at some point in life. The case of partially sighted people has been intentionally excluded as they possess features from both sighted and visually impaired. Also, we have seen how people on losing their sight, get adapted to the situation. But this period of adaptation may last longer in case of people who are acutely worried about their disaster. They may have their dreams in colours. But it is difficult for the person to sustain in this plight for a long period of time. He/she may easily slip into depression or into certain other mental illnesses, an issue that is not considered in this discussion as it has to be separately dealt with.

However, either of the two categories of visually challenged discussed above experience dreams to be the

pleasant or sometimes unpleasant manipulations of their own repressed emotions. Instead of attending to the concerns through a common spectacle, it ought to be seen in a different perspective. Also, it shall be considered not as an extended reality of the mainstream but as having a separate existence of its own and in the light of its own peculiarities.

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# **Defining “Masculinity” in Contemporary Indian Queer Fiction: An Analysis of Saikat Majumdar’s Select Fiction**

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Masculinity can be defined as the “qualities or attributes regarded as the characteristics of men”. Masculinity and masculine traits are defined by the social construction of what it means to be a man in a particular cultural setting (Martin 1). The central goal of any work which deals with sexuality is to tell the world that, what society calls “queer” is normal to many people. Hence the queer works argue for sexual justice and normalisation. Since literature plays a crucial role in identity construction, it becomes essential to analyse the construction of identities in the works that specially focus on this area.

“For many people ‘queer’ is simply the latest trendy word used to describe homosexuals”, but ‘queer’ must be understood as a theoretical approach to sexuality (Benshoff and Griffin 1). The queer theory posits that sexuality is a vast and complex terrain that encompasses

not just personal orientation and/or behaviour but also the social, cultural, and historical factors that define and create the conditions for such orientations and behaviours. Hence queer theory rejects essentialist or biological notions of gender and sexuality and sees them instead as fluid and socially constructed personalities. The word “queer”, once a pejorative term used to humiliate gay men and women is now used by academics to describe the broad, fluid, and ever-changing expanse of human sexualities.

Discrimination on the ground of sex in a democratic society like India results in the violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Moreover judging a person by their looks and whom they love has led to a lot of violence and inequality in the world. In September 2018, the Honourable Supreme Court of India reviewed section 377 of the IPC and decriminalised same-sex marriage in a landmark judgment. This verdict ended the British Law of 1860 that had declared homosexual relations unethical and criminalized it under section 377 of chapter 16 of the Indian Penal Code. Though the legal war of more than one

and half centuries ended in 2018, it is a long journey ahead for the queer communities to get fair treatment in Indian society.

The forerunners of Queer English fiction in the early twentieth century include the works like Suniti Namjoshi's *The Conversations of Cow* (1985), Hanif Kureishi's premier narrative *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), ShyamSelvadurai's first text *Funny Boy* (1997), P. Parivaraj's *Shiva and Arun* (1998) and Manju Kapur's novel *A Married Woman* (2003). Firdaus Kanga is a writer with Indian ancestry, who openly supported gay rights and sexuality in general when it was not a movement. His most well-known work is the autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1990), in which he addresses a number of sexuality-related subjects. In 1994, Shobhaa De came out with her *Strange Obsession*, a clearly lesbian story with a sinister undertone (Chanda). Anita Nair gave a new voice to this movement with her 2001 book *Ladies Coupe*, which tells the narrative of five ladies from very diverse backgrounds. One of the characters brings up lesbian encounters in the story.

Indian queer literature entered a new phase in the twenty-first century with a lot of writers openly expressing their sexuality. The first name to mention will be that of Ramachandrapurapu Raj Rao, the first Indian professor to offer a university course in LGBT. His novel *The Boyfriend* (2003) is regarded as the pioneering work in Gay fiction and bisexual relationships. The novel openly discusses the theme of gay relationships in the backdrop of the Bombay Riots. It also extends the concept of sexuality with nationalism. The novel argues how a new 'Hindu' masculinity is conceptualised by the nation-state that abhors homosexuality. The novel also "sees the construction of a hyper-masculine 'Hindu' India as a reaction to colonial feminization, and guerrilla warfare against Muslims as a way of displaying such masculinity" (Bakshi). *The Boyfriend*, therefore, becomes crucial in the manifold ways in which it steers postcolonial fiction toward newer routes that include representation of queerness as central to the significant theme of fractures within the nation (Bacchetta).

Farzana Doctor is a Zambia-born Indian English writer with three notable queer novels to her credit. Her

works *Stealing Nasreen* (2007), *Six Meters of Payment* (2011), *All Inclusive* (2015) and *Seven*(2020) speak not only about pure lesbian/gay relationships but also the possibility of normal bisexual relationships. Indian queer literature of the twenty-first century will not be complete without two more writers. In 2014, Devdutt Pattanaik published a groundbreaking work *Shikhandi and the Other Tales They Don't Tell You*. The book is a collection of myths from various Indian texts, like the Puranas, the Mahabharata, and the oral traditions of various Indian communities. Each of these myths reveals the fluid nature of gender and sexuality in India. According to him, even while Indian philosophy champions flexibility, Indian society is becoming more rigid as a result of the traditional feeling threatened by modernization and the West, as well as the fact that many educated Indians feel empowered to make fun of everything Indian, especially Hindu (Pattanaik). Thus it is clear that Indian literature of the twenty-first century abounds with stories and problems related to sexuality, nationalism, masculinity, and lesbian and gay lives. At the same time, only a few writers have discussed the notions of masculinity in the realm of

bisexual men. This paper tries to address this gap. The paper does not deal with any lived-in or autobiographical experiences but focuses only on the fictionalised narratives on sexuality. Some of the other questions the paper wishes to raise will be on the definition of masculinity in bisexual men, the treatment of masculinity in contemporary Indian queer literature and furthermore, the very meaning of the words “masculinity” and “bisexuality” from different theoretical perspectives.

Saikat Majumdar is such a writer who has gone beyond the self-conscious identification of gender into a more deeply human world. He is the author of four novels *Silverfish* 2007, *The Firebird* (2015), *The Scent of God* (2019), and *The Middle Finger* (2022). He has also published a book of literary criticism, *Prose of the World*, a work of general prose fiction, *College*, and a co-edited collection of essays *The Critic as Amateur*. His *The Scent of God* has been one of *Times of India*'s most talked about books and a finalist for the Mathrubhumi Book of the Year award. The notion of sexual variation is not a new phenomenon and has been found in almost all cultures across the world. Recent researches in the field of

psychology and medicine reveal that sexual behaviour need not necessarily be pathological. Sexual pathologies/deviations are discursive weapons to set the social standards that constitute heterosexual gender and sexual norms.

Every culture has set certain norms that define what is abnormal and what is deviant. In Indian scriptures, literature and poetry same-sex love has been described and explained in a number of ways. Attitudes of society along with family and cultural stigma may stigmatise these individuals and their behaviour patterns. One of the central aspects of any person is to lead a happy, normal and accepted life.

Indian culture lays strong stress on family and cultural values. So, most Indian English fiction is written to reinforce the established ethics, values and culture. T. N. Madan in his essay *The Hindu Family and Development* suggests that most of our value systems related to family were formed during the eighteenth century through western civilisation. “The Concept of bisexuality is deeply embedded in Indian mythological thought and is closely related to the cherished image of

conjugality and creativity. The traditional psycho-biological concept of *ardhanariswaraor* the bisexual image of Shiva- Parvathy transcends the barriers of sexual selfhood in creation” (Sengupta 126).

The term “bisexuality” encompasses a lot of sexual experiences that can be categorised briefly as

1. Bisexuality Among Self-Identified Heterosexual College Students
2. Experiences of Bisexual Women in Early Adulthood
3. Mixed-Orientation Couples
4. Experiences of Bisexual Women and Bisexual Men
5. Bisexual and Gay Husbands (Fox)

The concept of bisexuality, introduced into classical psychoanalytic theory in the 1890s and early 1900s, was used as a way of understanding evolutionary theory, developmental aspects of human sexuality, the balance of masculinity and femininity in the individual, and adult homosexuality (Barker and Langdridge). Upto 1970, the American Psychological Association classified “bisexuality” and “homosexuality” as mental illnesses



and declassified them later. This led to the publication of personal narratives and lived experiences of gay men and lesbians. The second major shift in bisexuality happened in the late 1980s with the identification and construction of multidimensional modes of sexual orientation and sexual identity. The more visible, vocal and vibrant sexual communities emerged in the early 1990s with leaders that encouraged personal narratives of bisexual men and women (Fox). Major research during this time focused on bisexuality and HIV/AIDS, and bisexuality in communities of colour and cross-cultural perspective. The concept of bisexuality as a distinct sexual orientation was only established around the end of the twentieth century. One of the central themes of studies in this area is knowing whether “bisexuality” is a temporal or permanent phenomenon. Another study focuses on how bisexuals maintain polyamory in their relationships.

The theoretical debates on gender were established by Judith Pamela Butler, an American philosopher and gender theorist in her magnum opus *Gender Trouble*(1990). She challenged the conventional notions of gender and developed her theory of gender

based on “performativity”. She critiqued the feminist notions of gender which strongly believed that gender is a cultural construction. This fixation on culture had bought a distinction of sex/gender. The binary division is problematic because it assumed only two genders.

According to Judith Butler, gender must be independent of sex. In other words, the body is not a criterion to decide a person’s gender. She argued that the feminist notion of gender as the cultural interpretation of sex leads to certain determinism of gender and causes problems to the anatomically differentiated bodies. In short, gender should not follow sex, because certain kinds of gender identities fail to conform to the norms of cultural intelligibility (Butler 31).

The concept of masculinity first came under theoretical scrutiny in feminist studies. Two major feminists Simone De Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray were the first ones to define “feminine” as the negative of “masculine”. They also argued that language, which is phallogentric in nature, can never properly represent outside its realm including gender. In this context, Judith Butler argued that feminism should operate in the realm

of heterosexist domains than limiting it to the female body alone. Feminism should address the variety of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of women is formed, as opposed to the exclusivist strategies of “masculinism”.

The Australian sociologist Robert W. Connell’s theory of masculinity is regarded as the most influential theory in the field of men and masculinities. His seminal work *Masculinities* was published in 1995. “A crucial part of its enduring appeal across a wide range of disciplines is that it provides a critical feminist analysis of historically specific masculinities whilst at the same time acknowledging the varying degrees to which individual men play in the reproduction of dominant forms of masculinity, thus overcoming the social determinism of sex-role theory” (Wedgwood). Connell’s book was published at a time a lot of debates were going on in the domain of feminism and so he studied the life histories of his students and came out with his first concept “hegemonic masculinities”, “to refer to particular kinds of behaviour and ways of being which are made culturally dominant and come to be seen as the pattern of

masculinity in general” (Wedgwood). Later he theorised the notion of the construction of masculinity and the social power structure of patriarchy. His studies into “sociology masculinity” paved the way for a new area of studying men.

Followed by Connell, Carrigan and Lee studied masculinity from the feminist domain because they were gay liberation activists and found the role of “visibility” of men’s bodies in constructing masculinity. Connell found that men derive power through three structures--labour, power and cathexis. Later he added the fourth element symbolisation. In short, Connell argued that gender has more to do with social structure than personal identity.

The novel *The Scent of God* is set in the 1990s in an elite monastery for boys somewhere on the outskirts of Calcutta. It is the transformational journey of a fourteen-year old boy Anirvan who experiences sexual pleasure from his boyfriend Kajol and women later. Anirvan is also called “Yogi” because he loved the scent of the *ashram*, thought of becoming a monk one day. But his love for words makes him closer to his teacher Sushant Kane who

takes him out of the ashram to participate in debate competitions. This exposes him to the outside world where he comes into contact with politics, sex and the harsh realities of life. He campaigns for the sex-workers' cause for respect and was attracted to the left politics of Bengal. Soon he experiences a lot of sexual adventures. In the ashram, he was raised to hate Muslims, but when he sees the real struggle of migrant Muslims in Calcutta he becomes a changed person. By the end of the novel, he realises his true purpose. He returns to the ashram and becomes a monk.

Although the novel is set in the 1990s, it resonates with several aspects of contemporary urban young life in India of urban youth towards the sexuality of the present era. Studies published as early as 2001, reveal "a growing trend towards the liberal views with regard to sexuality" (Leena Abraham). In India, it is common to view the notions of being a "masculine male" in liberal terms. Like, it is not confined to the social institutions of marriage and monogamy.

The novel abounds with men representing different shades of masculinity. The four types of masculinity are represented by hyper-nationalists, disciplinarians, revolutionaries and spiritualists. Kamal Swami, the head of the monastery is the symbol of spirituality and celibacy. The highest form of masculinity that is worshipped in any religion is the celibacy of a male who can control his sexual urges. In this novel, this highest form of masculinity is represented by the saffron-clad monks. “The Saffron men were kings because they owned nothing because they had given up this world” (98). Hence saffron is symbolised in this novel with a lot of devotion, and worship and is put on a pedestal. At the same time, Majumdar shows the other side of this when he describes a secretary monk of a Calcutta Ashram who “wore ten rings” (141) and his influence as, “the state leaders came to see him on special days” (141). Similarly in the first debate competition Anirvan participates the author makes him think that, “everyone knows that speaking of Great Saffron one would get them more points with the judges” (142).

The male body, especially the athletic one has been idealised in western culture. The muscular and hyper-developed male bodies are an embodiment of physical and cultural power (Oates and Durham 301). Robert W. Connell called this kind of idealised masculinity “hegemonic masculinity”. In the novel, the boys at the ashram have to spend their evenings in compulsory physical training, especially playing football. If anyone misses the sessions, they will be severely punished with “a cane on the soft part of their legs (10). The male players of football epitomise the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. “Football was sacred as the young saffron prophet has said that you’ll be a lot closer to God if you played football than if you read Gita” (26). Football is also seen as a violent signifier of masculinity, where violence serves as a symbolic assertion of power (Oates and Durham 308). In this novel, violence is expressed to the people who come to watch the boys play on the ground and also help them by returning the ball when it goes outside the ground. Instead of seeing the good intention of people, the coaches try to inject Muslim hatred into the minds of young ashram boys to make them believe that violence is

masculinity. This is clearer in the history of the Ashram which was built by grabbing the land of hapless Muslim people. As a character Nitai says, “We came with sticks and spears and chased the split-dicks out of their homes” (52).

Anger and masculinity have been stereotyped since the 1950s with the “angry young man” movement. The movement represented a rebellious, radical and striking-out youths who rebelled against the established order and discipline of society. In this novel also such kind of masculinity is voiced by a teacher at the ashram Susant Kane(Srk), the class seven teacher, who does not follow any rules. Moreover, he smoked in his room and went out at his will with Anirvan and ate beef. “SrK belonged to the ashram ... he did not belong here. He made the world outside real and fantastic at the same time” (25). One night, the boys at the ashram caught a pigeon and cooked it in a rustic way and ate it. Anirvan too got a small bite of it. When later this incident was narrated to SrK, he voices his strong criticism of the ashram, saying that the ashram does not feed the boys properly. Srk was drawn to Anirvan because just like him, Anirvan too broke rules by



slipping into the library during the physical training hour and reading voraciously. “Susant Kane had a reputation. He cheapened serious things. He was allergic to the cheap glow of the saffron (59).”

One of the themes Majumdar is trying to propose is that relationships happen when one feels they lack certain qualities in them. For example, Anirvan worships Kajol, who has the strength and character that Anirvan feels he lacks, while both are quite up to par in school. Curiously, Kajol appears to admire Anirvan deeply, although it is hard to say exactly what Kajol feels beyond being worshipped. Their touching arrives erratically during the day, with no question of shame or need for any label for their actions. Even sexuality is removed from gender in this novel. When he experiences sex from Renu, the sex worker, sexuality serves as a concomitant tool of impassioned struggle. He learns that masculinity has more to do with being good to all people and not with self-assertion.

The categories like 'bisexuality' or 'masculinity' seem insufficient to encompass the layered sexual experiences of the characters here. Some people have

voiced that bisexuality is not treated without much importance in LGBT works. But what these characters experience seems to elude even “bisexuality.” Their experience is more about the most basic human substance that existed far before formal politics hit the scene in human prehistory. It is the substance that made humans human.

Thus by analysing the text of Majumdar one comes to the conclusion that masculinity is neither fixed nor static, rather it is a result of the complex behaviours that are dynamic and relational and have power and meaning in the context in which it is produced. “Masculinity is not a “thing”; rather it is enacted, practised, carried out. In many ways, masculinity is more a verb than a noun, because it is in relational actions that it is communicated and understood” (Martin 2).

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**The True Self: Exploration of Gender  
Identity and Cultural Expectation in Tom  
Hooper's film *The Danish Girl***

Ramlath A

As the psychologist Erik Erikson puts it, identity is defined as the fundamental organizing principle which develops constantly throughout the lifespan of a human being. It includes experiences, relationships, beliefs, values and memories that they hold. Identity helps create a stable self-image that remains fairly constant and acts as the base of a person's behavior. The most crucial identity of a human being lies in the identification of gender to which he or she belongs. It roots in the belief of an individual that he or she is male or female. This includes the social norms and how individuals should interact with people around them. While fitting into the social construction of gender and identity, many individuals face dilemma in identifying themselves with the biological body they are born with. In this phase, the problem of

identity crisis arises and they find it difficult to tackle the situation. In this context, society needs to have an entirely different lens to view the experiences. Transgender studies that focus on representing gender identity, gender expression and gender embodiment is acting as a framework for understanding these unraveled experiences. *The Danish Girl*, a film directed by Tom Hooper, tells the story of Lili Elbe who was originally born as Einar Wegener. The identification of herself as female gender and the struggle she underwent to transform herself to a transwoman is the theme of the film. This paper scrutinizes the gender identity, sexuality and cultural expectation in the film *The Danish Girl*. The study intends to focus on the subjective experiences of Lili to explain the concepts of identity and sexuality.

The film *The Danish Girl* directed by Tom Hooper and released in 2015 is the film adaptation of the biographical novel with the same name by David Ebershoff. It tells the story of the Danish portrait painter Einar Wegener who later became Lili Elbe, a transwoman. The film centres on the emotional experiences Einar

underwent to identify her true self. The film uses a subjective lens to unravel her identity crisis. It helps the director to explore the inner thoughts and emotions of the character. Through the detailing of minute expressions and impressions, the film successfully paints the dilemma the character holds. The film starts by picturing Einar and Gerda as a loving couple who enjoys each other's company. Even though Gerda is not a successful painter, Einar is accepted by everyone as a talented one. Einar supports Gerda by giving her suggestions on painting portraits. But the character of Einar is too soft to be presented as a masculine character. In the initial section of the movie itself, he appears to be shy and soft. He has a special attraction towards the smoothness of the clothes he touches in the studio. It is being presented in a subtle way. Gerda, on the other hand appears to be bolder. In Gerda's confession about their relationship, Einar appears to be very shy that Gerda asked him for a date. "When I said hello to him, he actually blushed. He was so shy, so I asked him out." (*The Danish Girl* 16:57-17:03)



The film-maker chooses minute details to reveal the inner dilemma the character carries through his life. The first scene opens with the landscape of Vejle, Einar's home town. It continues to be in the pictures painted by Einar which is appreciated by everyone. The landscape of his hometown becomes a symbol of his inner dilemma to become a woman. As Gerda says "Sometimes I think you're going to slip through the surface of the painting and vanish. Into the bog" (14:01-14:05). To that, Einar replies, "don't worry, I won't disappear into the bog. The bog is in me", (14:43-14:46). His heart is burdened with childhood memories with his friend Hans. His father beats Hans for kissing him. That incident makes him suppress his real urge to identify him as a woman. The emotion he felt towards Hans in the childhood is not a passing fancy, but it is the feeling aroused out of his self-identification. The landscape that he portrayed in the painting resembles the time he spent with Hans. He uses his talent as a painter to express his real identity.

The film presents Einar's life as normal in the initial section of the film. It is Gerda who actually faces

some sort of existential crisis because of the failure in getting attention from art dealers. Both Einar and Gerda shares love and affection. One day, Gerda insists Einar to pose as a model for her painting since her model was late and it is in this context that Einar's suppressed gender feelings start to uncover. Here, the hidden feelings start to pop up. It becomes worse when Gerda suggests dressing him up as Lili for the ball. He was excited for the transformation as Lili since it gives him a space to breath as a woman. When Gerda attempts to paint Einar as Lili, he expresses female emotions as if they were already with him. The initial constraint of dressing up like a woman slowly changes into the revelation of him as a woman. In the ball, he meets Henrik Sandahl who seems to be attracted towards Lili. Einar enjoys being accepted as a woman. It seems that Einar sheds the identity as Gerda's husband for that time and it is Lili who speaks with Sandahl. He tries to kiss Lili and she is happy for that. When Gerda angrily asks about the incident Einar says "but I wasn't always me. There was a moment when I was just Lili" (35:24-35:27). Even though Gerda warns him

not to repeat his fanciful dressing, he sneaks out as Lili again and meets with Sandahl.

The theatre acts as a performative space where Einar can put the dress of the identity he realized with. It gives him a space where he can be Lili without any restriction. He can perform the femininity he wishes to express. The space in the theatre where dresses are hung acts as a temporary stage for his performance. In the first section of the film in which he enters the theatre, he takes a deep breath as if entering the stage to perform. The theatre gives him a space to hide, but also enables him to discover himself and perform Lili. This assuring space gives him knowledge without doubt that he is a woman, but is not able to envisage quite yet all the consequence of such knowledge. This also means that Einar might be able to realize that what he considers as an act--the act of performing as Einar--thus echoing his own word "I feel I am performing myself" (22:24. In this context, the real world becomes a theatre and the theatre becomes a reality for him.

The fascination to dress and identify like a female gender is equivalent with the undressing scene. The act is violent and he is relaxed after removing his male clothes-hat, tie, braces, suit and shirt. These are all obstacles for him in the attaining of his real self. He starts to explore the body like a child who becomes aware of his own body for the first time. The filmmaker uses tender and delicate hand movements to shape the amazement and curiosity in Einar's mind. The transformation is made explicit when he tucks his penis between legs to hide that which is an obstruction in his body to attain female identity. By doing this, he creates an illusion of vagina. After creating such an illusion Einar appears to be more confident than before. In fact, it is not Einar who is reflecting in the mirror but Lili. This identification of Einar in the theatre scene is similar to the enactment of female body in the Parisian peep show. What he performs there also stands as his transformation fully into the female self. Even the performer in the peep show recognizes at a certain moment that he is not here for enjoyment but to imbibe the femininity in her. His performance is a way of being and becoming Lili.

After the identification of the self, she is reluctant to go back to Einar's self. Unlike Einar, Lili is more confident and outspoken. When Hans visits their place in Paris, Lili is very confident to converse with Hans and she shares the childhood memories with him even though they belong to Einar. Gerda realizes that this is no more Einar but Lili. Hans comes as a help for them and suggests they should consult doctors. Lili is confident about "her" existence and she wants to change the body in order to turn herself fully into Lili. But she has to face many obstacles since the society is not exposed to such a condition. Some doctors declared that he is schizophrenic. But her urge to transform her into a fully female self does not fade away. When they meet Professor Warnekros, Einar explains "I believe that I am a Woman, inside" (1:22:32-1:22:34). He understands Einar since he has taken similar cases before. He explains the possibility of sexual re-assignment surgery. The unprecedented nature of the surgery does not discourage Lili from undergoing the surgery.

The change of setting from Denmark to Paris marks drastic transformation in the personality of Einar. The conservative society in Denmark is not ready to accept the trans Lili. In order to undergo the surgery, he has to divorce Gerda legally. During the 1920s, Paris is more liberal in attitude. The culturally stimulating backdrop of Paris gives Lili a chance to gain more confidence. Being far away from her town, it gives her an open space to dress freely as Lili. It is in Paris, Lili asks Gerda for a nightdress. When Gerda is reluctant to give the dress, Lili says “It doesn’t matter what I wear. When I dream, they’re Lili’s dreams.” (1:06:15-1:06:19) Einar stops painting pictures after he turns into Lili and no one in the Parisian society expect him to paint. She is relieved from all the constraints which make Lili uncomfortable.

When she visits the hospital for the first surgery, she takes the surname Elbe. She says “Lili Elbe, like the river.” (1:28:01-1:28:03) Like the river, she transforms herself into a fresh self. It is with that new identity she wants herself to be identified after the surgery. Her happiness when she meets a pregnant woman is

boundless. She might have hoped to become pregnant like that lady. When she meets Sandahl after the surgery, he asks her “he made you a woman” (1:37:05-1:37:08). Then Lili answers “No, God made me a woman.....the doctor is curing me of the sickness that was my disguise” (1:37:09-.1:37:12). The journey of her gender identity is clear in her words. The male body is only a disguise that she chooses to please the society. It is followed by the second surgery but it turns to be fatal for her. Lili dreams about her childhood days in which her mother looked down at her and called her Lili. She dies in the film after the complications of the second surgery. The end of the film which shows the visit of Gerda and Hans to Vejle is an indication of the self-fulfillment of Lili.

Even though it invited much appreciation for depicting the story of a trans woman, the movie has been criticized for its twisted depiction of many facts. In the movie, the time setting is somewhere in the 1920s in Copenhagen. It is shown in the movie that they moved to Paris in the late 1920s. But in reality, Lili moved to Paris in 1912 since it is more liberal to live in Paris as a trans

woman. The director conveniently changed the date and setting to fit into the film framework. It also received criticism for casting a cisgender actor to play the leading role of a transwoman rather than choosing trans-actors. Apart from these, the movie stands as a record of transformation of a man to a woman.

The movie *The Danish Girl* is an account of the gender exploration journey of Einar. The subjective viewpoint focuses on the character's minute facial and physical movements, and the mild musical background adds to the strong but subtle transformation of Einar to Lili. The movie is different from other movies which pictures the struggles of a trans-person. The film-maker focuses on the emotional dilemma of the character. From the painting that Einar creates to the wardrobe in the theatre, the details are laid down to reinforce the emotional state of the character. Einar chooses gender performativity in the initial section to hide what is lying originally in his self. At first, he does not have the courage to reveal her true self. But when he gets a chance, he boldly embraces his gender identity. Here, Einar proves



that gender is not what is assigned in birth. Everyone has the chance to identify their gender identity. The journey of Einar to Lili proves that sexual identities are not truthful representation of gender. It reinforces the fact that the question of human subjectivity and encourages the viewer to be aware of gender fluidity held by human beings.

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# **Muslim Woman in New Media: Identity, Politics and Perception**

Shani A Mopila

“Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror - not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us.”

(Radio Address by Mrs Bush)

This is the statement given by Mrs Laura Bush in 2001, in which she directs the world's attention toward the plight of Afghan women. But who are the “cultured people” in this statement? Who are the saviours of Muslim women in Afghanistan? Who are their oppressors? What challenges do the perpetrators of such terrorist activities pose to the world? What are their religion and tenants? What is the position of women in that religion? These were the questions that came up in global politics, human

rights and feminist discussions after 9/11. Answers to all of these questions have been gradually unravelled to the world by the news channels like BBC, writers like Khalid Hosseini and women's education activists like Malala Yousufzai. Their channels, novels and autobiographies took the global market by storm. People started believing that Muslim women all around the world are oppressed, disenfranchised and suffocating inside *chadors* and *burqas* under the tyranny of Islamic fundamentalists as in Afghanistan. But has the quality of life for Muslim women in Afghanistan improved after the American military attacks? What are the losses incurred by them as a result? What did the American government do for the Afghani women? These questions are left unanswered.

Leila Abu Lughod in her book *Does the Muslim Women Need Saving?* observes that after 9/11, the western liberal-secular organizations have taken up the "humanitarian mission" of rescuing Muslim women all over the world with such enthusiasm which was never seen before (6). With the events of 9/11, the Western media gave a new interpretation to the long-existing

oriental bias towards Muslim women in the guise of an authentic humanitarian cause. But Muslim feminists were not ready to accept such rescue plans and liberal feminist interpretations of their lives. Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Laila Ahmad and others have argued through their studies that Muslim women's identity and politics cannot be easily read from the limited perspective of the West. But what these Islamic feminists focused on in their studies were the inconsistencies among the Muslim woman's political rights in the contemporary period, what the Qur'an insisted upon and how it was misinterpreted by the patriarchal conventions. Some radical Islamic feminists also tried to subvert the Islamic legal codes for making them compatible with the concept of gender equality. In 2005, the *Jumu'ah* (community prayer) led by Amina Wadud in New York City was celebrated in such a manner.

Mernissi and Wadud argue that Muslim men used the Qur'an to limit the freedom and agency of their women, and feminist readings of the Qur'an were its only remedy (49 & 7). However, another group of Muslim

feminist researchers, starting with Saba Mahmood, point out the pivotal role played by western secularism and today's global political environment in determining the complexity of the life of Muslim women (7). They strongly oppose the vilification of Islam by using gender discourses.

In a multi-cultural, multi-religious nation like India, the situation of Muslim women becomes more complicated. Various *madhhabs* (schools of thought), organizations, religious scholars, and political parties based on religion, majoritarian rule, law-making, economic backwardness, lack of education, state fascism, communalism etc. play an important role in determining the identity of Muslim women in India. In Kerala, the mainstream feminist discourses which are informed by the global feminist trends, view Muslim women, who consider religion as important, as mere victims and pawns of Islamic patriarchy.

In Malayalam literature, the stories of mourning by Muslim writers like Khadijah Mumtaz, B.M. Suhara and ZaheeraThangal are still regarded as authentic experience

of Muslim women and function as testimonies from the community. If we examine the Muslim woman in Malayalam movies, from *Kuttikuppayam* directed by M. Krishnan Nair in 1964 to *Biryani* directed by Sajin Babu in 2020, the Muslim woman is only a slave of the religion and commodity for men. The Malayalam films, which celebrate victimized Muslim characters like Khalmeyi who is shut inside her house in *PonmutayidhunnaTharav* (1988), and Ayesha who cannot breathe inside her Burqa in *ThattathinMarayath* (2012), tactfully ignore the cultural and political advancement of Muslim women.

Unlike what is represented in literature and cinema, Muslim women in Kerala are adopting very complex and diverse political positions through the new media. The new media such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Clubhouse*, web magazines and blogs are bringing Muslim women together and becoming public forums where they can express their viewpoints.

In connection with the recent hijab-ban controversy in Karnataka, the most relevant voice among the Keralites was that of a Muslim woman named Adv. Fatima Tahlia.

She marks her politics precisely amidst the secular lamentations that Muslim girls should be rescued from the hijab. In an interview with the news channel *Media One*, Tahlia says: "We are not publicizing religious symbols, we are embracing and practising our faith. Dressing like this is part of practising that faith" (00:04:05-14).

In new media like *Instagram*, Muslim women not only state their political perspectives but also mark their presence in the emerging fields like fashion vlogs, home baking, food vlogging and travel vlogging without completely rejecting their Muslim identity. Their use of the hijab/burqa and its political dimensions are quite different from the mainstream discourses. When you search “girly\_.\_life” on *Instagram*, you will find the trio of hijabi girls doing reels with trending songs. There are 1,29,000 followers of these Keralite Muslim girls. They flaunt their burqa/purdah, match it with jeans and trendy spectacles and give a stylish aspect to the so-called “oppressive attire”.

Sameera from Trivandrum runs a *Youtube* channel named *Salu Kitchen* which has 1,300,000 subscribers. It



is the biggest food vlog by a woman from Kerala. Majiziya Bhanu (Majiziya\_bhanu), a powerlifting champion from Kozhikode, has 3,48,000 followers on *Instagram*. This hijabi has found her place in powerlifting, a field that is generally difficult for women to enter, without compromising her identity, faith and beliefs. Women like them are debunking the myth that it is impossible to reach the mainstream of society without completely rejecting the Muslim identity and that the hijab is extremely oppressive to women.

The various liberal feminist activists in Kerala who analyse Islam through the lens of Western liberal/secular paradigms arrive at the absolute conclusion that Islam is purely a misogynist religion. They tend to take up the position of radical feminism, which was a part of Western feminism emphasizing body liberation and negation of religion as the only path to Muslim women's emancipation. Rehna Fatima, Jesla Madassery and Jamitha belong to this category. Rehna Fathima's *Pulikkali* performance in Thrissur, her interventions in the Sabarimala issue, and the *YouTube* nudity controversy all

point towards the micropolitics of liberating the body from religious, gender, social and legal systems.

Feminist activists Jesla Madassery and Jamita received Islamic religious education and had lived by that identity; but later on, they turned towards liberal secular politics and formulated severe criticism of Islam based on individualism and personal freedom. Both are active on social media like *Facebook* and *YouTube* and have ample support from the feminist/atheist community. The criticism of the Prophet by Jesla Madassery and the community prayer performed by Jamita were interventions that questioned the Islamic religious tenets. Their past Muslim identity and their life within the Muslim community were generalised and presented as the experience of the entire Muslim women of the world. But their positions, which emerged as feminist or rationalist or individualist had gradually transformed into radical Hindutva or nationalist or Islamophobic politics. In discussions about Muslim women's rights, freedom and agency, they reduce their arguments towards two discourses: religion and patriarchy, leaving aside the lived

conditions and alienation that Muslim women face as members of a minority religious group in a majoritarian Hindu nation.

Sherin BS, in her work *Deshiyatha Feminism Muthalaq: Prathivyavaharangaude Rashtreeyam (Nationalism Feminism Triple Talaq: Politics of Counter Discourses)*, argues that the political awareness of Muslim women in India is different from the mainstream feminist concepts. She analyses how laws like the Triple Talaq Prohibition Bill are used, under the guise of protecting Muslim women, to actually criminalize Muslim men. Moreover, the struggles of Muslim women for emancipation are portrayed by the majoritarian groups in India as anti-Islamic:

It is a fact that the Muslim woman is seen only as a victim of patriarchy in the religion, without taking into account the resistance she carries out in public spaces within the religion. At the same time, the irony when the public is ready to mark the Muslim woman's agency only when she comes out of her religious faith and fights against it should be noted (Sherin).

Ummul Faiza is a notable name among those who argue that the problems of Muslim women in India need to be examined by considering them as members of a minority community and as individuals of a marginalized group. Based on research in the fields of political philosophy, Islamic feminism and Muslim personal law as well as in-depth studies in Islam, Western feminism, secularism and decolonial feminism, Ummul Faiza's writings in social media articulate a strong Muslim feminist position. Through her Muslim identity, her writings address the injustices of secular/liberal feminism and state fascism. Her articles in various online magazines such as *Uttarakalam* and *Sanghatita* and constant political debates on *Facebook* mark Ummul Faiza apart.

Noorjahan K, researcher and co-author of the work *Pathrathipa: M.Haleema Beeviyude Jeevitham* also adds to the politics of hijab and Muslim women on *Facebook*:

While accepting the truth in the narrative that *makkana* is not at all a personal choice of women who wear it, why can't we see each Hijabi's choice as the politics of her daily life and its negotiation,

no matter what the reasons? Where do we include such women's micro-struggles and negotiations when we always judge liberation and freedom through our commonly created definitions (Noor Jahan).

Ayesha Renna and Ladeeda Farzana became the target of cyber-attacks and hate speeches after their protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) in Delhi to the extent that an app named 'Bulli Bhai' put up the pictures of these students for sale. Hashtags titled "#sullideals" were circulated for defaming them. Ayisha Sultana, the film director, actress and public figure from Lakshadweep was labelled an anti-national for protesting against the Union Government's proposed regulations which permit the administration to capture land, penalize the natives and promote liquor sale in a Muslim-majority setting. The very Muslim women who are supported by the state for being "victims of Islamic patriarchy" in the Talaq issue are regarded as traitors and anti-nationals when they criticize the ruling party or their fascist regimes. Patriotism often transforms public consciousness

into a sentiment that can only be expressed outside the Islamic identity. However, these Keralite Muslim women have transformed cyberspace and new media into creative and political canvases which not only dismantle their old stereotypes but also project their new identities. Their creative ventures and political resistance proclaim that the worn-out images of Muslim women imprisoned inside iron bars and dark burqas that were put on the colonial postcards should no longer be recreated. They prove that Muslim women are capable of logically analysing whether it is the religion or the state which is oppressing them.

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# **Unveiling the Myth of Muslim Women: A Study of the Representation of Women in Mappila Songs**

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The public refuses to believe that Islam encourages the emancipation of women owing to the prejudiced and dominant conceptualisation of the religion as a major geopolitical source of terrorism and tyranny. The western press, the overarching establishment which influences both local and global demonstrations of Islam, frames public opinion, and over the years has managed to broadcast Islam and Muslims as the new public enemy; promulgating Islamophobia, thus escalating hate crimes as well as disseminating intolerance among the populace. From the 1979 US-Iran hostage crisis onward subsist the prevalent association of Islam with terrorism, and it amplified in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attack in the city of New York.

Europe maintains the East-West dichotomy by juxtaposing the fundamentalist “Muslim world”--ardent



followers of a faith driven by violence, fear, sexism and rigid laws--as an adversary to “Christian West” which exemplifies individual liberty, equality and free will. Susan B. Maitra, in her essay “Islam and the West: Ominous Misunderstandings” argues that the conflicts between East and West are not a discord of religious views. “The problem is geopolitics, or the rule of international relations by overt and covert activity of private elites who use religion (like money) as a tool of manipulation of entire people in their game of maintaining world dominance, endlessly pitting one group or region against the other” (202). She opines that Islam becomes Europe’s “Other”, uncivilised and barbaric, in opposition to the world view venerated by the West. In this scenario, women empowerment commissioned in Islam, a patriarchal construct according to the critics of Islam, fails to be true to the media-trained perceptions of the masses.

Predominantly, dual images of Muslim women wearing veil or *Hijab* circulate among the Western public. On one hand, it symbolises the difference between Western and Muslim values--signifying the supposed

backwardness, subjugation and seclusion of Muslim women contradictory to the progressive West. The gender dimension of the veil signifies the low legal status or secondary status of women in Muslim society, as the veil is worn only by the ‘second sex’ of the religion. On the other hand, the veil represents Islam itself, an established threat to the security of the West. As a result, *Hijab* clad woman--a visible and exclusive sign of religion, has become the most accessible target of hate crimes and Islamophobia. This senseless act of violence has reciprocated into political propaganda against the *Hijab*. A number of nations banned women from wearing headscarf in the public accompanied by the justification that *Hijab* is a symbol of oppression. Talal Asad, a distinguished anthropologist of religion, especially religion in the Middle East, criticises the obsession of the West on veil as a religious sign. He argues that,

It is assumed that a given sign signifies something that is clearly “religious.” What is set aside in this assumption, however, is the entire realm of ongoing

discourses and practices that provide authoritative meanings. The precision and fixity accorded to the relationship of signification is always an arbitrary act and often a spurious one where embodied language is concerned. In other words, what is signified by the headscarf is not some historical *reality* (the evolving Islamic tradition) but *another sign* (the eternally fixed “Islamic religion”) which, despite its overflowing character, is used to give the “Islamic veil” a stable meaning. (97)

Problematizing this notion, unveiling or removing one’s headscarf is generally perceived as a sign of education and progress. The fact that many young, educated and independent women choose to enrobe themselves in the Islamic way has baffled Westerners from time to time. Media patronize tales of the miseries of veiled Muslim women who endure exploitation, mental torture, physical abuse and oppression which, they

assume, is sanctioned in the religion. Moreover, Muslim women who negate Islam and criticize it with the aid of their testimonies of oppression are widely encouraged by the European publishers. Such writers are shown as basking in the freedom offered by the West fostering the conviction that Muslim women in the East are waiting to be rescued and unveiled by the liberating West. Their texts, celebrated and canonised, assist in spreading Islamophobia.

Western derivative of feminism and women empowerment associate freedom of thought and expression, to an extent, with freedom of dressing, and a liberated woman in the West is considered to be free to flaunt her physique. But Islam considers covering one's own body as a form of liberation and freedom, and this mandatory modest dressing is a hot topic of criticism. The outfit of the female is never a parameter in Islam to measure her freedom of thought. It actually emancipates and liberates her from the clutches of patriarchy manifested itself in the male gaze. One can simply deduce that the freedom of dressing offered by the west,

obviously, nurtures scopophilia (Freud) and male gaze, delineating woman as a passive object of pleasure. Laura Mulvey in her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* emphasizes that,

[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (19)

Islamic feminism, a term acquired currency during the 1990s, attempts to reinterpret Islamic sources from a gender-oriented perspective. Islamic scholars and community activists endeavour a diplomatic revolution against the cultural male supremacy, demanding God-given gender rights and justice. They argue that varied

gendered rules and doctrines endeared by repressive governments found on the false assumption that men enjoy God-ordained superiority over women, exigency reassessment based on the *Qurán* and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *Hadith*. Islamic feminism postulates that the *Qurán* itself is “inimitable, inviolate, inerrant, and incontrovertible” and it is the “interpretive process, both imprecise and incomplete, that is open to critique and historicization, not revelation itself” (Barlas 33- 34).

‘A’ishah ‘Abd al-Rahman (1913-1998), known by her penname Bint al-Shati, pioneered the process of female reading of the *Qurán*. She argues that the *Qurán*, “must be understood in terms of the time and place of its revelation” to emphasise its moral and spiritual guidance rather than historical facts (Jawad 113). Amina Wadud, in her book *Qurán and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (originally her Ph.D. thesis), as the title itself suggests, revises the Holy text to counter the rulings on gender roles. Her opening statement declares that her “objective in undertaking this research

was to make a ‘reading’ of the *Qurán* that would be meaningful to women living in the modern era” (1). This problematic address undermines the postulation that Allah has revealed the *Qurán* for the entire period of humanity. It was meaningful in the past; it still continues and it will always be. According to Wadud, her interpretation transcends the limitations of previous biased interpretations by men which fail to reflect the overall intent of the text, and had a damaging effect on the lives of women.

Thus, it is evident that Islamic feminists as well, by rejecting earlier interpretations of the *Quran* taken up by men as patriarchal and misogynist, endorse the notion of a socially and historically constructed gender which is propagated through texts and various discourses, proposed by Western feminist thinkers like Simon de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. They anticipate gender as a socio-historical construct, while sex is biological.

To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to

conform to a historical idea of ‘woman’, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility. (Butler 522)

Islamic feminists reject prevalent interpretations of the *Qurán* claiming it as male-centric and influenced by the socio-cultural practices and prejudices against women and consider it as the major source for the limitations entrusted upon Muslim women, fortifying the notion of gender performance and patriarchal construction of gender roles.

In addition, Butler’s observation suggests that culturally appropriated gender performance or culturally ‘becoming a woman’ delimit women. But Islamic sources never delimit a woman and one cannot conceptualise the *Qurán* through Western philosophical framework. In Islam, one might conform to the roles and responsibilities of women in Islam, and it is universal, but never a delimiting entity same as in the case of covering one’s body mentioned earlier in this paper. Further, Islam promotes gender justice rather than gender equality. Ziba Mir-Hosseini opines that, her own “initial premise is that



gender roles and relations, and women's rights, are not fixed, not given, not absolute. They are negotiated and changing cultural constructs, produced in response to livid realities" and she accentuates on feminism as it is necessary to "locate women's demands in a political context that is not isolated from women's movements and experiences elsewhere in the world. Feminism is a part of the twentieth century politics, and only through participation in this global feminist politics can Muslim women benefit from it and influence its agenda" (6-7).

Paradoxically, feminism in the west started among the privileged white women demanding basic rights, principally with a focus on suffrage. But the *Qurán*, which addresses the whole of humanity, from the time of revelation itself, has focused on empowerment of women. When Islam revealed in 600 CE, it taught the ignorant and misogynist Arabian society about gender justice and provided all rights to women like right to vote, right to property, right to earn etc. So, it is futile to participate in a global, ideologically charged movement to demand gender justice when Islam has already done it centuries

earlier. Ironically, Western countries ridicule *Hijab* clad women as subjects of oppression when they have acquired justice and emancipation long before their Western counter parts. But, as mentioned earlier, it is unlike the Western model of freedom and emancipation.

However, when Islamic feminists search for new interpretations of Islamic sources with a European mindset, it actually masquerades the political ideology that Islam subjugates women. Further, when they reject traditional interpretations of the *Qurán* as masculine and misogynist, they accuse men in Islam as the perpetrators of oppression, and this further entertains the dominant conceptualisation of the religion as sexist and anti-women. To counter this notion, the later parts of this paper analyse the representation of Muslim women in *Mappila* songs by prominent male authors of this genre to expose the treatment of feminine subject by Muslim writers, which differs from the one by Western men. Western feminist criticism has itself long engaged in reading canonical texts to conceptualise the representation of women, which is either fully neglected or peripheral.

The age-old mercantile interactions between Arabia and the coastal areas of India have given rise to several communities, especially through marriage of local women to Arab sailors and traders. Malabar (Kerala) was a vital trade centre on the Western coast of India, and the Muslim community emerged in Malabar owing to Arab contact later came to be addressed as *Mappilas*. The vibrant artistic stimuli of both cultures are evident in their writings, essentially in *Mappila* songs, a popular form of folk poetry written in Arabi-Malayalam script or *Mappila* Malayalam (Malayalam words laced in Arabic script). Numerous versatile poets, even from early seventeenth century, enriched this poetic tradition by integrating various thematic expressions.

The earlier *Mappila* songs were panegyrics which eulogised Prophets and his followers, and many poems have been dedicated to great women in Islam, like Khadija, Aysha (wives of Prophet) and Fathima (daughter of Prophet). Later in the nineteenth century *Mappila* songs shifted its attention to local or more contemporary themes and events, and it amplified the representation of

female roles. The first ever popular feminine character in *Mappila* songs, other than historical figures, is Husn al Jamal, in the magnum opus *Husn al Jamal Badr al Munir* (1872) composed by Moyinkutty Vaidyar (1852-1892). Enclosed in a fictitious and fantasy tale of love and adventure, Vaidyar portrays a daring, determinant, clever, selfless but self-asserting young Muslim woman who embarks on a journey to unite with her lover. Passivity and silence usually associated with feminine gender roles in most mainstream narratives are questioned and subverted by the author through Husn al Jamal. This kind of disposition was never expected from a woman in the nineteenth century Malabar, and Husn al Jamal shattered the accepted feminine stereotypes. Vaidyar succeeded in creating a feminine character who altogether altered the hitherto perceptions about female psyche and femininity which influenced later narratives about women.

Mariyakutty in *Mariyakuttide Kathupattu* (*An Epistolary Song by Mariyakutty*, 1924) written by Pulikkottil Hyder (1879-1975), set in the British colonial period as well, depicts the passion and audacity

of local Muslim women. Pulikkottil Hyder had been adamantly vocal about the social evils prevalent in the society, especially maltreatment of women, and *Mariyakuttide Kathupattu*, placed in the backdrop of Malabar Rebellion in 1921 against the British colonial rule and prevailing feudal system, attends to the issues of immediate divorce or *Talaq* without reconciliation, and it is composed based on an authentic occurrence. The rebellion resulted in the imprisonment of its conspirators in either Bellary or Thanjavur jail by the colonial masters. Mariyakutty's husband, Hassankutty, is among the inmates of prison, and he divorces Mariyakutty through a written letter when some jealous men fabricated stories and informed Hassankutty about her infidelity. Announcing divorce via letter was widespread among the populace during Hyder's time. Islam abhors divorce, and Prophet Muhammad has declared that, "The most detestable of all permitted matters to Allah the Exalted is divorce". Yet divorce without any grounds and reconciliation was very normal, and the issue persists even today. Mariyakutty, taken aback by the immediate *Talaq*, requests Hyder to compose an epistolary song

addressed to Hassankutty. Hyder skilfully captures Mariyakutty's emotional turmoil, and emphatically executes her stipulations in this song thus revoking the issue of divorce. By employing divorce as a major concern in his song, Hyder battles against blind societal customs which render women powerless in society.

Here, Mariyakutty is daring and demanding as she never accepts divorce as her fate. She willingly confronts her husband and demands justice. Hyder writes that:

*Karal kathi karinjuponitha, en jeev!*

*Ballarikkudane njan varam, ottu vazhiyundo?*

*Vallikalk avidek varaan paadundo? Umathe*

*Varukil kandidan valla nivrithiyumundo?*

(Lines 33-36)

The above lines show that she is obstinate and unwavering in her decision to prove herself innocent in front of her husband as she asks through the letter, is it possible for her to visit him in the prison and confront him. She also

enquires whether women are allowed in the premises of Bellary prison, if she travels there. Although it articulates the grief and affliction of a despondent wife, a close reading of the song offers the vision of a steadfast and tenacious woman who vociferously makes herself heard. Later parts of the song divulge the events that progress to the rumour and epitomize Mariyakutty as morally strong and chaste, in contradiction to the world view of women as morally weak. Hassankutty has been imprisoned for five years, and Mariyakutty who awaits his arrival, explains that a fellow from Urakam has been trying to woo her. She resisted his advances by thrashing him with a broom which might have tempted him to start the scandal. The valorous nature of Muslim women, valiant enough to defend themselves from aggression and molestation, is astoundingly depicted here.

Another such literary representation is Aminakutty in the eponymous song written by SKS Jaleel Thangal (1923-1980), widely known by his penname Mehar, a renowned socialist *Mappila* poet, and created intense female roles who questioned vehement societal

atrocities against women. Mehar succeeded in splendidly portraying Malabar in the aftermath of the Second World War driven by unemployment, penury and subsequently illness and ailments. Most of his songs, set in meagre and indigent milieu, showcase the sufferings of the poor, and the hypocrisy, apathy and ignorance of the privileged and financially secure class of the society. *Aminakutty*, a romance in its construction, as well, depicts the benefits brought in by wealth and aristocracy as the love saga between the wealthy titular character and the deprived Mammali evolves, but never solemnises owing to the class differences between the two families. Nevertheless, *Aminakutty*, studious and well-mannered, is portrayed as a strong and compelling woman. In an instance in the song, the poet advises *Aminakutty* to abandon grief, and pursue her love as a rebellion against the forces that separate them even if it costs her to relinquish the material and wealthy possessions. In Islam, there is no class hierarchy among Allah's creations, but the follies of men created social strata which are exclusive spaces.



*Ninte premam nishkalankamenkil nee  
karayano?*

*Ninte nadhanippozhum  
theruvathilalayano?*

*Kai koduth nee uyarthi medayil  
vekkendayo?*

*Kai churutti mushkine nee  
velluvilikkendayo*

*Sadyamalle? Kaamukante koode  
neeyiranganam*

*Thyagamanu premamengil meda nee  
vediyanam. (Lines 1354-1359)*

Here, a paradigm shift from the usual mainstream discourses is observed as the feminine character assumes the subject position and becomes the active one who saves the affair. It contrasts the passivity associated with feminine trait when women are usually portrayed as receivers or bystanders.

Yet another prompting song by Mehar is *Vidhavayude Vilapam (The Lament of a Widow)* which depicts the angst of a destitute widow who criticises and questions the upper-class men who exploit the impoverished and cumulate wealth. The affluent class of bluebloods maintain their social status through deception and manipulation of the needy. She educates and empowers her only girl child by revealing the pretence of the wealthy class and urges her to rebel against the wolves in sheep's clothing.

*Paavapettavarude chuduninam  
pavanaakkum*

*Paapikal kanivillaaverum dushtanmar*

*Nannayi samudayagunamthinnu  
vilambunna*

*Chennaaikkal ivarellaam manushyarano?*

(Lines 16-19)

Similar premises, where proletariat women interrogate and revolt against the societal set up, result in numerous

other songs by the same author. *Theruvinte Chintha*, *Premavum Karavalum*, *Aavalathi*, *Akramaraahithyathinte Lathi*, *Paavathinte Tharattu*, *Abalayude Avalathi* etc are some among them.

The feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Mary Ellman, Kate Millet and Adrienne Rich criticise the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omission and misconceptions propagated about women in male perceptions and imaginations, and demand a feminist reading or feminist critique of masculine literature. They claim that mainstream literature disgraced feminine sensibility and experience through distorted and demeaning representations. But, *Mappila* authors dealt with feminine characters with reverence and admiration even far before the surfacing of ‘feminism’ in Kerala, and these characters were well accepted and endeared by the audience. Further, these representations assist in demolishing or counter positioning the Western model of Muslim women, propagated through media images, as oppressed and subjugated under Islamic misogynist commandments. These types of picturization had

indulged in spreading hatred and Islamophobia, and ‘woman in Islam’ has been always a tantalising question. Aforementioned literary representatives disprove the prevailing Western conception of Muslim women as subjugated under the oppressive Islamic veil. Obviously, they are characterised as commanding and rational; they make their own choices and decisions. They fight for their justice, and never succumb to the whims and fraudulent adulation flaunted by men. They even question the societal power structures and revolt against aristocratic hypocrisy. They strappingly articulate their position in a traditional male centric society, and apparently these aren’t characteristics of oppression. The Mappila authors, familiar with the valiant stories of historical Muslim women like Khathija, who embraced Islam transgressing the societal norms when the whole nation was raging against the Prophet, and Sumayya, a slave, who retorted at her master and stayed adamant in her belief when he threatened to assassinate her for believing in the Prophet during a time when slaves were terrified of the commands of their masters, were acquainted with the courage and determination of Muslim women, and these

women modelled and inspired the writers to mould daring female characters.

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**Black Flowers that Fade Out: Anti-Dalit  
Representations in the Film  
*Kammattipadam***

Shilpa. B

“For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.” -Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Even after 75 years of Independence, the excruciating condition of Dalits remains unchanged in India. Caste as a system of injustice and a form of social difference has extended its vile clutches into our social fabric for centuries, turning it to a characteristic feature of Indian society. Grounded on the terrain of exclusion, suffering, exploitation and marginalization, Dalit communities all over India have been relegated to social, political, economic and cultural realms by the upper-caste authoritarian powers. Though the impact of caste system on the social fabric of India is wide-reaching and deep, the exact time of origin of this stratification process and

hierarchy is uncertain and theorists posit different opinions regarding its origin.

In the current scenario, the subaltern population is conscious of its rights and asserts its identity in all social structures including media. However, the ‘representation’ of the subaltern in visual culture, especially in films, remains flawed with plenty of misrepresentations and stereotyped images. “Ethnic/minority groups are denied with the authority to represent themselves; they sustain to bear the stereotypical images and ideologies which the pervasive mainstream powers enforce on them. Media’s main sphere of operations is the production and the transformation of the ideologies” (Hall 100). Creating a visible presence for the marginalized by overcoming the politics of presentation on the screen is a tough task similar to distinguishing between the ideas of representation and presence as observed by Derrida.

“A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon 9). Similarly, film as a language can’t be divorced from the socio-economic and political

condition of the world in which it operates. Indian cinema with wide regional varieties of film industries has attracted massive audience and gained global attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The representation of the subaltern in Indian films has remained consistent: “Films tend to portray a dominant caste/dominant Hindu society, offering subaltern subjects only a limited form of escapism; through cinema, Brahmans and allied castes have actively imposed their hegemony on the medium of mainstream cultural expression” (Yengde 4). However, directors like Pa. Ranjith, Mari Selvaraj and Nagraj Manjule who transgress the elements of commercial films to provide a counter narrative to caste issues are exceptions.

The history of Malayalam film embarks on its relentless journey from *Vigathakumaran* (1928) directed by J.C. Daniel, the first silent movie in the list of new wave Malayalam movies that attempted to tackle caste issues, voicing their concerns and addressing their grievances. P. K. Rosy, the first Dalit-Christian heroine in *Vigathakumaran* (1928), with her portrayal of a Nair lady

infuriated the upper-caste Hindus. The caste fury that began in the 1920s with the ostracization of Rosy still continues in multi-faceted ways in the political consciousness of people and in the realm of films. Reminiscing the catastrophic tragedy met by P. K. Rosy, it can be said that Malayalam films have not regenerated from the norms of *savarna* casteist ideology. Dalits and ethnic minorities have a stake in the movies after 2000, but the assertion of their identity and the presence of an ideology are obscure in these films. A plethora of Dalit characters flash in front of our eyes in these movies, but their representations remain adulterated. Does art have a caste identity? This question seems to be valid in the case of Indian cinema as a whole.

### **Black Flowers that Fade out at *Kammattipadam***

*Kammattipadam*, a 2016 Malayalam film directed by Rajeev Ravi and written by P. Balachandran is a kind of *sthalapurana*. As a whole, the tale unravels around a tract of land of the name “Kammattipadam”, a slum locale situated in the heart of Ernakulam. The film highlights the exploitation and oppression faced by the Dalits in the

wake of modernist capitalist society. Expeditious urbanization of Kochi has transformed the land that once belonged to the Dalit communities to a land controlled by corporate hands with tons of skyscrapers at the centre and the poor slum dwellers relegated to the margins. Land is the symbolic signifier of power and the immediate sense of identity in this film: “The margin remains as an exotic imagination representing the ‘other’ of the city where the educated and the civilized live.... Though the city was presented as a meeting point, something similar to purgatory in which both parties meet, the city was presented as the cultural other of the village” (Remesh 127).

The ramification of this process of exclusion and erasure results in the deracination of Dalits from the sense of belonging to their land. Devoid of a sense of belonging to land, love and life, the three characters in this film -- Gangadharan (Vinayakan), Balan (Manikandan), and Krishnan (Dulquer Salman) grow up in the swampy wilderness of Kammattipadam indulging in all criminal activities for the sake of the capitalist agent namely Surendran (Anil Nedumangad). The metaphor of land

becomes the metaphor of life for them; the displacement and uprooting from the land is the displacement from life with fading “memories attached to this land” (Maitreya 5).

*Kammattipadam* (2016) is exquisitely applauded in the present scenario as a pro-Dalit film which primarily focuses on Dalit lives. On the surface level, it seems to be a true but subtle analysis of the film revealing a different perspective. As an ordinary film with all commercial elements, it holds solely the ideologies and consciousness of dominant upper-caste groups. In reality, the so-called celebrated Dalits are obliterated from the film with an overpowering presence of elite capitalistic powers.

The foremost and explicit evidence that inclines us to mark this film as a misrepresentation of Dalits is the identity of the architect of this film. *Kammattipadam* (2016) has been directed and scripted by a person who hails from an upper-class family, Rajeev Ravi. How can the life he witnessed from afar truly articulate the lived experience of Dalits? So, the problem of representation arises from the very core of the film and from such a point of view, the film wholly takes its ride on an anti-Dalit

perspective. Choosing Krishnan as the protagonist and narrator of the film, the director sets forth his ideology. The entire plot of *Kammattipadam* is driven forward by the upper-caste and white skinned Krishnan. Why did Krishnan take the lead role to direct the lives of Dalits? The film is written with Krishnan at the centre, in line with the requirement of a non-Dalit hero for the film to work commercially (Geetha 66). It has become a credo that the lives of Dalits can only be described from the perspective of an elite-class-Hindu who perceives them as ‘other’: “The other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse” (Bhabha 31). Through this film Rajeev Ravi doesn’t mean to uplift the Dalits, instead the emphasis is on marginalizing them into darker spaces like the structure of their home and vicinity in *Kammattipadam*.

Dalit representation in Malayalam movies, to a large extent, can be traced to the aesthetics of their body. Dalit bodies form a distinct category from the mainstream in Malayalam films marking them as ‘other’. Partha

Chatterjee specifies the connection between caste and body as:

Caste attaches to the body, not to the soul. It is the biological reproduction of the human species within endogamous caste groups that ensures the permanence of ascribed marks of caste purity or pollution. It is also the physical contact of the body with defiling substances or defiled bodies which can be removed by observing the prescribed procedures of physical cleansing... The essence of caste, we may then say, requires that the laboring bodies of the impure castes be produced in order that they can be subordinated to the need to maintain the bodies of the pure castes in their caste of purity. (Chatterjee 194)

Without exception, Malayalam films remain scrupulous when it comes to the portrayal of Dalits by visualizing them as dark-skinned, short, bucktoothed and having several other odd features. There prevails an unconscious attitude to mark a person who is short and black-skinned as Dalit even though he/she does not belong to the Dalit community: "A dark and short man is



a Dalit because that is how Dalits are marked by the political unconscious of Kerala. Darkness and shortness are not specific to the Dalit communities of Kerala.... It is when the political voicing by Dalit begins that the colour and size of the body becomes problematic” (Anilkumar 8). The politics in this film only favors the upper-caste people whereas Dalits do not gain any benefits from it. So, what actually is the role of Dalits in this film? Pondering upon this, we may arrive at a conclusion that Dalits are only meant to cause brawls and kill others. This movie eluded Dalits from the mainstream and relegated them to a subordinate position only to work in favor of upper-class bourgeoisie.

*Kammattipadam* (2016) is an ‘A’ certified film pertaining to violence; physical violence stretches from the beginning to the end of the film. Even at a young age, the *Kammattipadam* boys are forced to violent acts. The series of brawls, fighting and murders eventually led the Dalit boys being regarded as criminals by the upper-caste bourgeoisie. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon introduces the idea of ‘collective catharsis’: “in every

society, in every collectivity, exists-must exist- a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the forms of aggression can be released” (145). Likewise, violence in this film can be viewed as an outcome of their identity crisis, leading to acts of aggression followed by cathartic effect among the Dalit communities.

Beyond the physical violence explored in the movie, there is a structural violence accompanied by it. The condition of structural violence has been explained as a form of social injustice by Johan Galtung and as a method to retain people in subordination by different social inequities. In simple terms, structural violence stems from the social structures or social institutions that cause distress to the people which consequently results in the sufferings and inequality among marginalized communities. In the film, we acknowledge myriad social institutions such as marriage, politics, caste system, capitalism, state, sexism and various other social exclusions that lead to the erasure of Dalits. Structural violence is a perfect example to show how Dalits are marginalized from other people. Far away from the eyes of the people, Dalits are pushed into dark spaces and

ousted from society. If any atrocities happen in the outside world, police men rush to the slums to probe Dalits due to an accepted notion that Dalit colonies are suffused with thieves, murderers and drunkards. The same message is conveyed through this film also. Dalits, who are totally innocent, are forced to take responsibility for crimes they have not committed.

A slow and steady transference of Dalit settlements to the control of corporate hands through violence is evident in the film. Expansion of buildings and cities through the process of gentrification occupies the major chunk of the film's narrative. Capitalistic monopoly, marked by terror and violence, is at work shaping the morality of the society. Surendran Asan, liquor and land mafia king, is the epitome of capitalistic monopoly in the film. Surendran, the owner of a tea shop in the village gradually rises at the end of the film as a spirit lord. He owns flats, apartments, companies, factories and the Dalits of Kammattipadam. Manipulating these people, Surendran had played a game from his earlier years to his death. Surendran traps Balan from a

young age, seeing his physical prowess and his ability to beat others. This film seems to provide methods and tactics to trap these people and tame them as villains. Dalits fall into these traps again and again; finally they couldn't escape from the abyss fabricated by exploitative capitalist owners.

Gender inequality, female sexuality and gender stereotypes need to be read together to focus on the world of female subaltern in the film *Kammattipadam* (2016). The conundrums faced by Dalit women epitomize the intersectional discrimination of caste, gender and most of all, class (Kumar 1). Subaltern women characters in Indian cinema are often subjected to humiliation. The archetypal female character is frequently presented as loyal, fasting for the welfare of her husband, but she is also overtly dramatic, deceitful, conceited, a scaremonger and a cheat who is very competitive towards other characters (Yengde 12). Through the female characters Anitha and Rosamma, the film reinstates the norms, values and ethics formulated by the society to limit their mobility in a patriarchal set up. Yengde also points out how the popular representation of Dalit women is

restricted to secondary characters, and are used as plot devices in the commercial cinema. Drawing attention to Anitha's dark skin, presenting her as desirable for the hero, it breaks the conventional beauty standards. However, it should be noted that the explicit mention of skin colour in several instances of the movie directed towards the Dalit character adds to their othering and hold backs the normalization of a dark hero/heroine but rather advocates caste-colour connotations (Geetha 58). Contrasting images of women are presented through Anitha and Rosamma. Anitha was in love with Krishnan but unfortunately, she has to marry his friend Ganga, whom she despises. Dealing with an unhappy marriage and unfulfilled love, she is a character who is much tormented in this film. All this points towards her misery and anguish in a male-dominated and a class-conscious world with her hopes and dreams scattered: "On the other hand, Rosamma is the stereotyped caricature of a Dalit woman who is confrontational, impatient and demanding but with the addition of being considered beautiful" (Geetha 59). In whatever ways the women are portrayed

in visual media, they are ultimately only objects to gratify men's pleasure and gaze.

Throughout the film, Dalit lives are shown as steeped in violence and abnormalities, devoid of perspective and lacking human qualities. In such conditions, how these people can get rid of their limitations and escape from their situation becomes an important question. For that, a white upper-caste person is deliberately chosen and the story unfolds through him. Dalits finally undergo a catastrophic situation by being victimized by the very capitalistic goons for whom they sacrifice their entire lives. The culmination takes place when Surendran, the liquor king stabs Ganga to death. The same stereotypical images and ideologies which were prevalent in earlier films find expression here too. At the end of the film, Krishnan pushes out Surendran from a building uttering these words: "The foundation on which the Ernakulum city has been is not so strong. It is found on marshy land soaked in the black blood of the Dalit. Ganga's blood. Blood calls for blood" (2:45:51 to 2:46:14). To note, Ganga is denied an opportunity to

avenge his destitution and emerge as a hero as it is the position saved for Krishnan (Geetha 66). Deep-rooted casteism and colour-consciousness are at work in the film and Dalits are destroyed by the absence of language and culture by depicting them as wicked, violent, deformed and dehumanized. There are many critics who saw this film as revolutionary for its realistic representation of Dalits, but in fact, it sidelines them to occupy a subservient position. Emancipation of Dalits can only happen when they voice their own experiences and orient themselves to leave their own stories for future generations.

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# **Being to Becoming: Revitalizing Indigenous Practices**

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The technologies of post-capitalist net worked and collective socialization have intensified debates and concerns over identity and subjectivity of individual. This unpredictable foray of post-capitalism into the contemporary social and cultural domain has necessitated re-inscription of discourses from indigenous repertoire. Critics and scholars alike have turned focus on indigenous ontologies. This paper proposes to examine how indigeneity is recreated through the workings of “nomadic consciousness” of an individual. Nomadic theory was first propounded by Deleuze and Guattari and later sanctified by another influential theorist Rosi Braidotti, who identifies nomadism as a “strategy for survival”. This paper explores nomadic qualities of an individual, a character in the short story of Temsula Ao. Ao is a reputed writer from Northeast India who has documented the ordinary lives of the

people of Nagaland, highlighting indigenous cultural practices and social life of certain communities of Nagaland. The characters in her stories are individuals experiencing the unfolding of a new sense of agency and identity. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical outlook is the framework to examine the different perception of individual's transition from *being* to *becoming*. Nomadic consciousness or nomadic existence provides inexhaustible prospects for transformation and empower individuals to revitalize traditional culture.

Reading Ao's stories helps us to understand her characters' attempt to retrieve Naga culture and she uses her creative space in literary landscape to register an inadequately represented region in mainstream discourses. Her stories are strategic articulation of unique Naga cultural practices. Her literary works are a truthful rendering of the lives of people inhabiting India's periphery, sensitizing readers to the precariousness of borderland existence and they address social and political issues particular to this region. These communities dwelling in Northeast have a distinct

cultural tradition embellished with folk songs, tales, myths and legends. Nagas are an indigenous group dwelling on the top of hills and their way of life is closely linked to their land, forest and hills. Traditionally they were war-like head hunters. But with colonial rule and the advent of Christianity in Naga Hills, they were compelled to abandon many of their traditional cultural practices.

It is essential to decipher the complex socio-political and cultural realities of Northeast India to create a scholarly article on that region. The story “Death of a Hunter” included in Temsula Ao’s collection of short stories *Laburnum for my Head* is selected here for analysis. The stories included in this collection have powerful characters belonging to Ao Naga community and portray terror-ridden lives of Naga people. Their history is marked with violence and bloodshed: their nationalist aspirations, inter-tribal conflicts, violence unleashed by nation-state’s governing policies are documented in her stories. The writers from North-east India have attempted to use their creativity to get proper representation both in literature and literary

historiography. In *Modern Practices in North East India: History, Culture, Representation*, K.B. Veio Pou writes, “Too little known to Indians of other parts of the country, the North East lives only in their imaginations. But much of the people’s ignorance of the region is due to the ill-representation of region in the knowledge database of the nation;” (Dzuvichu ed. 226). Writings from and on India’s Northeast, an insurgency tainted terrain, are attempts demanding representation in literature and literary historiography. All critical and academic achievements and writings on Northeast are engagements with violence and conflict. Nevertheless, there are narratives addressing socio-political complexities and cultural practices of the region and on the fast vanishing enchanting treasure trove of oral folklores. Despite the fact that substantial research on North-east India is gaining momentum, cultural and critical repositioning of north east studies has become an urgent matter. It is also necessary, as Babli Mallick states in, *A Disturbed Existence in the Backdrop of Serene Green? A Literary Analysis of North-East*, “to understand the internal structure, the psyche or the cultural construction of tribal society” (Mallick 359).

When colonial cartographers jigsawed hills and plains of Northeast India into shapes that decisively determined their political authority what remained in a postcolonial nation was an unruly amalgamation of radically different and distinct ethnic communities. The spatial configuration of Northeast states in a postcolonial situation has significant overlap between territorial politics and national sovereignty. All the eight Northeast Indian states share the common history of colonial encounter, but the political context of colonialism varied in this region depending on geographical and demographical factors. Though Nagaland state came into existence many years after Indian independence, more than millions of Nagas dwell outside the state space. It was the expedient political tactic of marking boundaries that created geographic diversification of Naga communities. In his book *In the Name of the Nation : India and its North east*, Sanjib Baruah writes, “Narratives of Naga Nationalism have long been imbued with the idea that Naga homeland includes contiguous areas in the Northeast Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, as well as parts of Burma/Myanmar.

This territorial imaginary has an interesting relationship to the uneven geography of power of this former imperial frontier” (Baruah 101). Nagaland was placed as an independent state in the postcolonial political map of India in 1963. This state tucked into the north east corner of Indian Union shares national and international borders. Three Indian states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, lie to the north, west and south of Nagaland and the Union of Myanmar is in the east. The state of Nagaland is home to more than 14 major tribes and several sub-tribes each with their own beliefs, customs and rituals. In “Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective” Temsula Ao remarks, “The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region” (Ao 7). Similarly, “Christianity, capitalism and consumerism have all, unintentionally or not helped in levering the Nagas away from their old form of communal life.”, says Jonathan



Glancey (88). Yet he believes that Nagas themselves will retain their communal life.

This paper focuses on how hunting, an indigenous practice in Nagaland, is revitalized by individuals embodying qualities attributed to nomads. To this end, this paper attempts to analyze Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadism as a tool to explore how the character Imchanok in the story "Death of a Hunter" makes choices and negotiate subject position to seek for a potential transformation of his subjectivity. The concept of nomad was first elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze has conceptualized the nomad as, "But the nomad is not necessarily one who moves: some voyages take place *in situ* are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people"(149). Braidotti also, following Deleuze, foregrounds a nomadic, non-unitary vision of the subject. For Braidotti,

Being a nomad, living in transition does not mean that one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community.... Rather, nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national fixed identity. (Braidotti 33)

Temsula Ao rightly puts it in the article, “Identity and Globalization : A Naga Perspective”, “Assigning a common identity to the ethnic groups now collectively known as the Nagas comprising of many different tribes, speaking many different languages and within a distinct linguistic group, many different dialects is problematic. For a Naga, identity is a many-layered concept” (6). Hence, analyzing the variations that exist in the individual identity-spectrum enables to understand the transition from *being* to *becoming*. Deleuzian state of ‘becoming’ refers to the process of transformation of the

individual based on his experiences. The very idea of nomadic thought presupposes deconstruction of established identities in favour of identities that welcome change and fluctuation. In this story “Death of a Hunter”, the main character Imchanok was a teacher in a village school” but that identity had long been eclipsed by that of the hunter” (21). His fame as a skilled hunter had grown over years. He accepted the order from the government to kill a rogue elephant which destroyed farmlands and killed people of his village. He was provided by the state with all the essentials required for hunting and given seven days to accomplish the task. Imchanok was unprepared for this challenging situation. Yet he has to comply with the government order since the government threatened to revoke the hunting licences of those who did not co-operate and he found himself committed to the task. To an extent, it has opened up new possibilities for Imchanok’s life and thought: conducive for being in a nomadic state. After this episode of elephant hunt he became even more famous. Though he accepted cash award sponsored by the state for his services, he declined the gun since he did not want to engage in such tasks in

future and being a nomadic subject, he surmised, he would be forfeiting his freedom of choice if he took the gun. Here again we see Imchanok relinquishing his idea or desire for fixity. His nomadic self must continue to act and is in search for new representations. As a nomadic subject he is reflexively aware of unstable subjectivities conditioned to temporal and spatial changes.

His hunting spree lasted for several more years which included killing of a monkey and a wild boar. Previously, he had thought about hunting as a necessary supplement to gather food for his large family as he was a provider for and protector of his family. Engaging himself in the rituals of hunting after each expedition, he allowed himself to become new, to adopt a new outlook that acknowledged the transitory nature of identity. Each hunting instance was new and unique and represented change in the threshold of becoming. His nomadic consciousness urges him not to take any identity as permanent. He never takes on fully the limits of one fixed identity (33). Here, nomadic thought or consciousness is a sensibility that encourages creativity and it can be seen as an epistemological imperative for

sustaining traditional cultural patterns. Nomadic consciousness is constantly evolving and Imchanok as a nomadic subject embodies this flowing of ideas. After killing the boar, his nomadic consciousness evades or resists sedantary ways of being and is not ready to accept permanently the identity of a hunter. The interiority of his self acknowledges the death of his identity as a hunter. As a nomadic subject, he must continue to act.

Nevertheless, the figure of the nomad allows us to think of ideas, “and ways of preserving ideas that may otherwise have been condemned to willfull obliteration or collectively produced amnesia” (Braidotti 24). However, nomadic existence entails exploring new possibilities for life and thought. Imchanok, in this story, embodying nomadic thought is empowered to accept government order, to register his identity as a hunter. Hunting is an indigenous practice, as it is interwoven in the social and cultural fabric of the villagers. The rites and rituals associated with hunting highlight their belief in animism and the sacredness of nature. These rituals also play a vital role in establishing the social status of hunters in the community. The activity of hunting is crucial in

determining individual and community interests. Hunting is not just an economic activity but plays an important role in the religious life of the tribe. Despite a decline in its traditional methods, hunting remains a contemporary practice, with its socio-cultural and religious aspects playing an important role in the day-to-day life of people. Imchanok, a true nomadic subject, is in constant search for his authentic self, hostile to settled patterns of thought, has the agency to subscribe to ways representing indigenous practices. It is this nomadic consciousness that empowers Imchanok to revitalize traditional practice of hunting.

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## Nonlinear Time in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs*

Syam Manmadhan

Ostensibly a plainly constructed and innocently told story, Mahfouz's angst-ridden work, *The Thief and the Dogs* relates the misadventures of a man, Said Mahran, who struggles in vain to wriggle meaning out of the complexities that sign his existence. As each chapter passes by, we are shown the picture of someone who increasingly loses authority over his self, to end up in events that he neither willed nor deliberately executed. Understanding the way Mahran conceives time and his existence in time is crucial in making sense of the plot and characterization of this deceptively simple work. Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of time and tradition along with his notion of fusion of horizons offers the best hermeneutic device that could be adopted to mediate Mahran's experiential and cognitive universe, the locus of the story.



A few pages into the novel, and the reader begins to feel the fault-line that runs through Mahran's perception of the world around him: "The same little street where *a year before* you'd been carrying home... *Glorious days--how real they were*, no one knows..." (Mahfouz 15). Mahran thinks of his past, the '*year before*' as an end in itself, and not as an ongoing process that contributes significantly to his being. Time, for him, is a distinct specimen that could be compartmentalized and subsumed under the mutually exclusive zones of 'past', 'present' and 'future'; they are autonomous, monolithic entities that are engaged in othering each other. As the quoted lines signify, Mahran erroneously tears him apart from the tradition in which he is and which is in him: he deems his past to be a dead, haunting object that comes from without to assault his present self. Ignorant of the presentness of the past, he attempts to extricate himself entirely from the immediate entanglements of his history. He counts in terms of absolutes; the concept of continuity goes against his grain. Mahran considers prejudices-- Gadamer's term for past consciousness (es) which account for the human ability to experience existence in

time, a non-entity. Thus, he fails to appreciate the fact that “the historicity of our experience entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience....They are simply conditions whereby we experience something”<sup>1</sup>(Gadamer, PH 9). Misled by afore specified delusions, he treads the path of self-destruction.

Chapter two of *The Thief and the Dogs* celebrates the fusion of horizons even as it bears testimony to the experience of alienation that one suffers when one fails to witness this fusion. The Sheikh, a cleric, manifests the spiritual ecstasy that one enjoys on coming into contact with the fusion whereas Mahran represents the alienation. “I got out of jail *today*,” (Mahfouz 27) says Mahran with his characteristic faith in the iron-clad ‘*today*’; the contrast is offered by the Sheikh in a deft stroke, “Your concern is the present hour” (28). Again, Mahran asks the Sheikh whether he remembers his father (a representative of the dead past) to which the cleric answers, “May God have mercy upon all of *us*” (28). That the Sheikh employs the term ‘*us*’- an all-encompassing pronoun that takes into

its fold both the living and the dead, testifies to his knowledge of the incessant interactions of past and present. For the cleric, past is as much a living being as present. Mahran but still remains in the dark; the essence of the Sheikh's words is lost on him. He merely brands the language of the Sheikh as mysterious--the "language of old times" (28), and utters, "What wonderful days those were!" (28). Ironically, the Sheikh's attempts to illuminate Mahran put him all the more at odds with his hermeneutic situation. He bemoans the demise of a past which stands diagonally opposite to a present with which it has no communion. Rooted as he is in what he thinks to be an insular present, he cannot perceive the fusion of horizons that happens before his very eyes- in the being of the Sheikh, who symbolizes time, and who speaks "in a voice like time" (27). Mahran is blind to the perennial to-and-fro movement of the past and the present that characterizes the Sheikh.

Mahran could save himself if only he heeds the advice, "Look and listen, learn and open your heart" (25). It is nothing but an exhortation to Mahran to look beyond

the immediate- his present which he assumes to be closed, and to acknowledge the operations of the prejudices which form “the biases of our openness to the world” and which “constitute our being”<sup>2</sup>(Gadamer, PH 9). But Mahran is blinded by his determination to avenge his fate, and so ignores the advice. His understanding of time and interpretation of his being-in-time is based on an essentially wrong assumption of linearity of time. To put it differently, his conception of time prompts him to invariably invoke the idea of an unbridgeable temporal distance that separates his ‘now’ from his presumed self-contained past. Hence his consciousness is bereft of any awareness of the presence of the echoes of the past in his being. Thus, by failing to respond to the resounding past that reverberates in the present he denies himself an opportunity to realise his hermeneutic situation.

Mahran’s construction of his identity and self-image pivots on his perception of time. So does his receptiveness to people and their ideas. The segmental nature of this perception implies that his sense of his self-in-time suffers from the same limitedness that marks his

experience of time. For Mahran, horizons of time are delimited; and, so are the horizons of his self. The merging of neither the horizons of time nor the horizons of self is possible in Mahran's cognitive universe. It is the very extension of this imagined impossibility that is reflected in Mahran's inability to productively engage in a dialogic relationship with others, something which would have afforded him a broader understanding of his being as well as of others'. This is exemplified by the fact that Mahran neither initiates any dialogue with others nor enters into one when prompted by others. He does not realize the self-renewing quality of dialogue; on the contrary, he deems it an anathema to take part in the constructive hermeneutic phenomenon of interacting with 'the other'. He shied away from horizons that seemed to him as not his own; had he not done so, he would have been aware of the limitations and finitudes of his faulty assumptions.

The Sheikh, as opposed to Mahran, does not limit or segmentalize his horizons; he, rather, facilitates their fusion. Thus, in his conversation with Said and others, he enters into a hermeneutic process or a ceaseless circle of

give and take, whereas Mahran is reluctant to throw himself into this enlightening circle. Consequently, while the Sheikh transposes his self, Mahran does not. Transposition of the self implies rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. It presupposes a sort of trans-subjectivity on one's part. Mahran is wanting in this quality; he denies space for any dialogue and indulges in a morbid monologue. Neither a productive dialogue with the Sheikh nor an enriching inner dialogue with his own self does ever take place. "You seek a roof, not an answer" (29), the Sheikh tells Mahran pithily. This could be attributed fundamentally to his imagination of time as a unilinear, unidirectional entity comprising discrete segments incapable of fusion, and the consequential projection and experience of self is impervious to the possibility of collusion with other selves.

The complex undercurrents that typify the functioning of non-linear time are revealed in the operations of language; time, in fact, reveals its nature in the performance of language. And the novel propounds this

proposition by contrasting the way language is assessed and employed by the Sheikh and the way Mahran reads and uses language. Mahran thinks that he cannot understand the Sheikh's language and calls it the language of old times. This failure is not just linguistic; it is ideological and temporal as well. He forgets the fact that language bears the life of the past in the present, and that no language could be archived as incompatible-with-the-present. By negating the living tradition of language, Mahran fails to recognize the redemptive quality of language- namely, to broaden and transform the intellectual and spiritual horizons of those who use it. Language, in this sense, is dysfunctional in Mahran's case. Thus, Mahran, despite his use of language, till the end retains the same perceptions with which he begins.

It is in language that individual consciousness and its horizons are explored; but such an exploration presupposes an inclination on the part of the user to transcend the immediacy of one's world view, leading as it does to an alteration of the view of one's self as finite and fixed. The presence and extent of this proclivity, in

turn, is dependent on one's predilection to visualize time as criss-crossing its varied coordinates, and not as moving from one fixed terminus to the other. That Mahran has no such predilection explains his linguistic-temporal incompetency to engage in any constructive conversation. "I'm in the company of Sheikh, who is lost in heaven, repeating words that cannot be understood..." (33) Mahran cannot grasp the meaning of the Sheikh's words because only the apparent and immediate meanings dawn on him; the countless connotations of words which permeate multitude of temporalities do not impinge upon him. It does not occur to him that language is by nature the language of infinite dialogues which freely traverses the temporal plane.

"My past hasn't yet allowed me to consider the future," says Mahran (43). This is precisely his tragic flaw--an inability to conceptualize a past that lives through the present in the future. Mahran cannot or would not experience the seamless, non-linear time; for him, horizons of past, present and future present distinct and fixed set of opinions and valuations. These horizons,



Mahran believes, can never be continually in the process of being formed; they are already well-formed and remain isolated from each other. His knowledge and experience of his self is limited, if not a wrongly construed one, as he fails to acknowledge the fusion of these horizons. He lacks historically effected consciousness, and hence cannot comprehend the dialectics of being. He encounters tradition as something external to his present, and at best has a blurred awareness of his hermeneutical situation. Hence he cannot look beyond what is close at hand to form a better, larger and truer horizon of his self. Mahran is virtually a prisoner of an imaginary frozen past. He thinks, “The other Rauf Ilwan has *gone, disappeared, like yesterday, like the first day in the history of man...*” (47). In Mahran’s consciousness, “*yesterday*” is a being of the past that has “*gone*” and “*disappeared*”; it is “*like the first day in the history of man*”, a day that he deems to have abruptly ended with its dusk. Mahran does not understand that human life at any point of its being mingles its past and present; his understanding conjures up a Rauf of today who is existentially and essentially insulated from the Rauf of yesterday. Rauf, for Mahran, is

a wholly new being devoid of any affiliation with tradition. He completely misses the point that the process of fusion of horizons is a continual process, in which “the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly fore-grounded from the other.”<sup>3</sup>(Gadamer, TM 287)Mahran’s distorted discernment is owing to his inclination to fore-ground either the past or the present; he is unable to visualize them as entities involved in a dialogical relationship, and for this reason he fails to combine them into something of living value.

“*If I could live without a past... I’d be relieved of a great weight, a burden; I’d feel readier to secure an easy life.... But unless I settle my account with them, life will have no taste, because I shall not forget the past. For the simple reason that in my mind it’s not a past, but the here and now*” (48). Mahran’s assumption is that the past is an “in-itself” object which could be brought to bear its significance on present as and when needed; the moment he has settled his account with the traitors, he could afford to “*forget the past*”. It is only because he hasn’t taken

revenge on them that the past is “*here and now*”; let him succeed, and he shall do away with the past once and forever. He never comprehends the fact that the past is actually the ever-transforming supportive ground on which the present is rooted. He misconstrues the past-present divide as a yawning abyss which could never be bridged. He cannot envision a temporal distance marked by continuity.

“Rauf Ilwan,” Said pleaded aloud, “tell me how it is that time can bring such terrible changes to people!” (112). More of a paroxysmal rhetoric than a genuine yearning for knowledge, this desperation exposes his complete ignorance of the dialectics of tradition and time. If only he realized that tradition is always a part of being, “a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance”<sup>4</sup>(Gadamer, TM 283), life would have turned out differently for him. He is at a loss as to understand the interplay of the movement of tradition and his own movement in time. He sees not the fact that even as he is situated within the tradition, he produces it in himself as much as he understands it, participates in its evolution,

and hence further determines it himself. Mahran reckons the moments of human life as absolutely fixed and immutable; each moment for him is a closed horizon. Mahran does not recognize the reality that all horizons, including horizons of time, are something into which we move, and which, in turn, move with us, effecting incessant evolutions--of selves and perceptions. He does not understand the fact that

Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; ... temporal distance is not something that must be overcome.... In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us.<sup>5</sup> (Gadamer, TM297)

Contrarily, he presumes tradition and custom as closed relics of bygone time, incapable as they are of presence. For Mahran, the horizons of tradition and custom are no more visible and hence irretrievable; they have no

potential to merge with or interact with the horizon of 'now'.

It is only quite logical that with all the aforesaid misconceptions regarding time and tradition, and consequently regarding one's self, Mahran met an end that he never intentionally set out to. Ignorant of the cross-currents and nuances that mark the non-linear movement of time, he sectionalizes his time and self, only to misconceive his ontological status and experience. Thus, Mahfouz, in his novel, emphasizes, subtly but effectively, the significance of appreciating the dynamics of non-linear nature of time in rightly evaluating one's lived experience.

## Notes

1. For a better understanding of Gadamer's use of the term 'prejudice', see his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 9.
2. See Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 9.

3. See Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (Continuum, 2004), p. 287.
4. See Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (Continuum, 2004), p. 283.
5. For more insight on Gadamer's conception of temporal distance, see his *Truth and Method* (Continuum, 2004), p. 297.

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