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*Special Issue on*

**LITERATURE IN TRANSITION:  
EMERGING TRENDS AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

*Special Issue Editors-in-Chief*

**Dr. BLESSY JOHN | Dr. PADMA V MCKERTICH**

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## PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE



**Dr. BIJU A.**

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As the landscape of literature continues to evolve with the advent of digital media and globalization, literary research adapts to encompass new forms and modes of expression. Scholars are increasingly examining contemporary issues, including the representation of marginalized voices, the impact of technology on storytelling, and the rise of hybrid genres. The relevance of literary research extends beyond academia; its findings can inform educators, policymakers, and the broader public about the value of literature in fostering empathy, social awareness, and critical engagement.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the authors, peer reviewers, and editorial team for their dedication and hard work in bringing this issue to fruition. Together, we can strive to uphold the highest standards of academic excellence and contribute to the global body of knowledge.





## **EDITORIAL NOTE**

The International Seminar on Literature in Transition: Emerging Trends and Global Perspectives is the second great venture of the Department of English, St. Stephen's College, Pathanapuram. The seminar reflected on the dynamic shifts in contemporary literary production, addressing how global socio-political, technological, and cultural changes influencing literature. It focused on the blending of genres, the rise of marginalized voices, and the exploration of new narrative forms driven by digital innovation. This issue presents to you a plethora of ideas on various fields pertaining to literature, culture and ELT. We hope this will bring new insights in the field of research and pave way for future researchers.

*Editors*



## ABOUT THE EDITORS



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Dr. Blessy John is Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of English, St. Stephen's College, Pathanapuram. She has 14 years of teaching experience in the College. She is a member of the Academic Committee in Sreenarayanguru Open University. She has published several articles and has presented papers in conferences. Her teaching and research interests include Postcolonial Literature, Linguistics and Religious studies.



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**CONTENTS**

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S.No.	Title	Page No.
1	Effectiveness of Jigsaw Mode of Cooperative Learning in Enhancing the Linguistic Performance of Secondary School ESL (English as a Second Language) Learners <b>Aksa Ann Kuriakose</b>	1
2	Patriarchy Down the Sink: An Analysis of <i>The Great Indian Kitchen</i> <b>Anna Anil George</b>	7
3	Unveiling Sacred Symmetry: A Semiotic analysis of <i>Kalamezhuthu Pattu</i> <b>Dr. Blessy John</b>	10
4	Patriarchal Dehumanization of Women as Reproductive Vessels as Depicted in Perumal Murugan's <i>One Part Woman</i> <b>Devika S Nair</b>	18
5	Fragments of The Past: Memory, Identity, and History in <i>All The Lives We Never Lived</i> <b>Divya James</b>	23
6	Nationhood and Girlhood: Tracing the Representation of Women in Freedom Struggle Narratives for Children Post Independence <b>Gayathri Lekshmi</b>	29
7	Silent Strength: Cultural Constraints and The Quiet Rebellion of Women in Sunjeev Sahota's Novels <b>Hannah Mathew &amp; Dr. S. Bhuvanewari</b>	33
8	The Anatomy of Oblivion: A Study on T.D Ramakrishnan's <i>Francis Itty Cora</i> <b>Jickcy Susan Cherian</b>	45
9	A Study on Advancement of Approaches in Language Teaching <b>Dr. M.S. Kariyappa</b>	49
10	Finding Order in The Midst of Chaos: Applying Chaos Theory in Select Cartoons of Noddy <b>Leena Liz Mathew</b>	54

11	Beyond the Colonial Era: The Enduring Legacy of Hydrocolonialism in the 21st Century <b>Dr. Marshal R, Dr. Latha K &amp; Dr. Ruchira Datta</b>	58	15	Contrasting Acceptance of Transgenderism and Same-Sex Relationships: Understanding Gender and Sexuality Discourses in India and in the West <b>Stephen Marydas</b>	76
12	Strategic Terror and its Guardians: A Critical Study of Murad's <i>The Last Girl</i> <b>Dr. Neville Thomas &amp; Teeja Jacob</b>	62	16	Reading <i>Kishkindha Kaandam</i> : A Labyrinth of Memory, Trauma and Forgetting <b>Vinu Varghese Kurian</b>	82
13	Oracle: The Revealer of Light <b>Purander Siv, P. S.</b>	69			
14	Culture and Socio-Religious Perspective in Vikram Seth's <i>A Suitable Boy</i> <b>S. Shabana</b>	74			

# EFFECTIVENESS OF JIGSAW MODE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN ENHANCING THE LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ESL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE) LEARNERS

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## Abstract

*The most common method used in ESL classrooms recently is activity-oriented in nature. However, as this method is often relegated to be teacher-centred, it is crucial to devise new methods and techniques to improve the linguistic performance of the learners. The jigsaw method is considered an effective method to deal with this problem as it involves rigorous training in the four-fold skills of language. It relies on the idea of interdependent learning where each learner contributes to the learning of an entire class. The linguistic abilities of the learners undergo a considerable change after the implementation of this method. Therefore, the present study primarily aims to investigate the impact of the jigsaw mode of interdependent learning in complementing the four-fold skills of language in secondary school ESL learners.*

## Introduction

*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*, said Ludwig Wittgenstein while talking about the relations between the world, thought, language and the nature of philosophy. It stands true in the case of English language learners in India as we are a deeply invested population in mastering the language to expand our horizons. Edward Sapir famously defined language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.” Sapir underscores the significance of language proficiency as it scaffolds our ability to emote ourselves. Language learning is a complex and systematic process that encompasses four-fold skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

During all these years, there have been several approaches and methods; theories and techniques to impart English language skills. Though there are diverse ways and means of teaching and learning, the language continues to be elusive, especially in a country like India which is both multi-lingual and multicultural. From the basic Grammar Translation Method to the advanced modes of blended and computerized learning, English language learning

has evolved beyond measure. Each method entails a set of advantages and disadvantages owing to classroom implementation and those that stood the test of time are deemed to be better.

Among these, cooperative learning has found its way into the armour of academicians in recent times. Cooperative learning is primarily founded upon the sociocultural principles of language learning propounded by Lev Vygotsky. As the name suggests, this method of learning emphasises on the learning of language through interaction and positive interdependence.

It involves various strategies like the jigsaw technique, assignments that demand group problem solving and decision making, experimental assignments, peer review, etc. The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the jigsaw mode of cooperative learning in enhancing the language performance of ESL learners.

The jigsaw mode as a technique of cooperative learning is said to build the capacity of learners from each other integrating all four skills of language. It is purported to be successful in moulding linguistically proficient people and transacting the hidden curriculum of harmony and agreement.



The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Jigsaw mode of cooperative learning in enhancing the linguistic performance of Grade IX ESL learners through experimental method. The population chosen for the implementation of the technique under the purview of this project includes all the Grade IX ESL learners of St. Mary's M. M. H. S., Adoor. The single group selected for the experiment comprises of 34 students of Division C of Grade IX.

### **Theoretical Overview**

Three general theoretical perspectives have guided research on the jigsaw method as one of cooperative learning; firstly, it is anchored by Piaget's **Theory of Cognitive-Development**. The work of Piaget and related theorists is based on the premise that when individuals cooperate in the environment, socio-cognitive conflict occurs which creates cognitive development, which in turn stimulates perspective-taking ability and cognitive development. For example, language development is a part of cognitive development and plays a major role in social interaction, one of the most important factors in social development.

This toes the line of Vygotsky's **Social Development Theory**. His ideas resonate with Piaget's in the sense that both underscore the importance of active engagement in learning. However, Vygotsky places a stronger emphasis on social factors in shaping cognitive schemas. Vygotsky's social development theory asserts that a child's cognitive development and learning ability can be guided and mediated by their social interactions. His theory (also called Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory) states that learning is a crucially social process as opposed to an independent journey of discovery.

Adding on to it, this study is also rooted in the **Social Interdependence Theory** by Kurt Koffka quoted in Deutsch, M. (1949). According to Koffka's theory, social interdependence exists when individuals share common goals, and each person's success is affected by the actions of the others.

Koffka notions that: (a) The essence of a group is the interdependence among members (created by common goals), which results in the group's being a "dynamic whole," so that a change in the state of any member or subgroup changes the state of any other member or subgroup; and (b) an intrinsic state of tension within group members motivates movement toward the accomplishment of the desired common goals. For interdependence to exist, there must be more than one person or entity involved, and the persons or entities must have an impact on each other in that a change in the state of one causes a change in the state of the others. Thus, can be concluded that it is the drive for goal accomplishment that motivates cooperative and competitive behaviour.

These theories underlie the concept of the Jigsaw method in its administration in the classroom as it is based on social interdependence and the creation of a positive learning environment.

### **Concept of Jigsaw Method**

The Jigsaw technique was developed by Elliot Aronson and his friends in 1978 as a cooperative learning method (Slavin, 2010). This technique can be used to learn reading, writing, listening, or speaking. The students cooperate with their friends and have many opportunities to improve their communication abilities. In the Jigsaw technique, the students have the opportunity to improve their responsibility to their learning and they can cooperate with the other students to learn the material. In the classroom, students worked individually and competed against each other for grades. It was in this context that they invented the Jigsaw strategy. First, they helped several teachers devise a cooperative Jigsaw structure for the students to learn about the life of Eleanor Roosevelt. They divided the students into small groups, diversified in terms of race, ethnicity and gender, making each student responsible for a specific part of Roosevelt's biography. Needless to say, at least one or two of the students in each group were already viewed as "losers" by their classmates (Aronson, 2008).

It is primarily used to develop the responsibility of students in their learning. The students not only learn the given material, but they must also give and teach the material to other students. Hence, each student is detrimental to the completion and full understanding of the final product. Jigsaw is a teaching technique used in small group instruction. Students of a normal-sized (26-33 students) class will be divided into competency groups. Each group will be given a list of subtopics to research, with individual members of the group breaking off to work with the "experts" of other groups, then returning to their starting body in the role of instructor for their subcategory. The Jigsaw technique is a cooperative learning technique most appropriate for students between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Steps Involved in the Jigsaw Method

The Jigsaw technique is very simple to use. The students are divided into five or six members in a group. Each member is responsible for learning the given material. According to Aronson (2008), the teaching procedures in English classrooms by Jigsaw might be sequenced as follows:

- Students are divided into 5 or 6 persons of a Jigsaw group. The group should be diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, ability, and race.
- One student should be appointed as the group leader. This person should initially be the most mature student in the group.
- The lesson is divided into 4-5 segments (one for each member). For example, if you want history students to learn about Eleanor Roosevelt, you might divide a short biography of her into stand-alone segments on: (a) Her childhood, (b) Her family life with Franklin and their children, (c) Her life after Franklin contracted polio, and (d) Her life and work after Franklin's death.
- Each student is assigned one segment to learn. Students should only have direct access to their segment.
- Students should be given time to read over their segment at least twice to become familiar with it. Students do not need to memorize it.

- Temporary expert groups should be formed in which one student from each Jigsaw group joins other students assigned to the same segment. Students in this expert group should be given time to discuss the main point of their segment and rehearse the presentation that they are going to make to their Jigsaw group.
- Students come back to their Jigsaw group.
- Students present his or her segment to the group. Other members are encouraged to ask questions for clarification.
- The teacher needs to observe the process from group to group. Intervene if any group is having trouble such as a member being dominating or disruptive. There will come a point where the group leader should handle this task. The teacher can whisper to the group leader as to how to intervene until the group leader can effectively do it themselves.
- A quiz on the material should be given at the end so students realize that the sessions are not just for fun and games, but that they really count.

### Methodology

The method adopted to study the effectiveness of the Jigsaw method of cooperative learning in grade IX ESL learners is experimental in nature. In the present study, the independent and dependent variables are as follows:

**Independent variable:** Lesson transcripts on the speech *Debts of Gratitude* based on the Jigsaw method constructed for grade IX ESL learners.

**Dependent variable:** Linguistic performance of grade IX ESL learners.

The investigator chose to undertake a pre-test and post-test on an experimental group for the present study. An equivalent group design would have been the ideal design for the experiment at hand. Nonetheless, provided the time restrictions and availability of classes, it is not feasible to obtain a sufficiently large sample. Therefore, the experiment is bound to be conducted on a limited sample within the stipulated time.

The single group for the experimental study was selected from grade IX of St. Mary's M. M. G. H. S., Adoor. The group comprised of 34 students. Pre-test and post-test were conducted on the same group to test the efficacy of the method under investigation.

### Description of the Tool

#### Lesson Transcript Using the Jigsaw Method of Cooperative Learning

For the purpose of the study, lesson transcripts based on the Jigsaw method of cooperative learning were prepared.

##### a) Introduction and Preparational phase

- Introduction - Before the commencement of the lesson, the teacher creates a conducive learning environment in the class
- Preparation - The teacher plans an item, for example, a video, photo, etc to create curiosity in the learners. This is to attract the attention of the learners to the content at hand.

##### b) Presentation Phase

The presentation phase is further classified into five sections. The teacher divides the class into home groups of 4 students each and reads the content under consideration. Later, the content is divided into 4 sections and each student in the home group is assigned one section to ponder upon individually. Once it is completed, the learners who received the same section from each group form an expert group. The sections are intensively interpreted and critically analyzed in the expert groups. Later, the learners return to their home groups or jigsaw groups where they teach the content that they have learnt to each other. The members in the home group make sure that their content is taught and understood by the other members properly. The groups are urged to clear their doubts with each other during this process.

##### c) Extended Learning Phase

- Finding answers to the questions-The learners are asked to find answers to the questions provided in their coursebook and present their answers in the classroom.

- Discourse construction - The teacher provides an activity that demands a cooperative involvement of all learners in their respective home groups. Peer monitoring and correction is preferred in this section.

##### d) Concluding Phase

- Review and conclusion – Students are asked to summarize the main events in the content dealt with in the class. The groups are required to assess each other and provide their responses.
- Follow up activity – A follow up task is provided at the end of the class for the students to reflect on their learning.

### Major Findings of the Study

The t-test between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group was computed which resulted in the t-value as 36.2134 and the p-value is computed as 0.0001 which is  $< 0.05$ , which gives the impression that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the sample.

The major findings that emerged out of the present study are as follows:

- It is experimentally proved that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test achievement scores of the grade IX ESL learners. It has positively influenced the linguistic performance of the experimental group.

In the statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores, the p-value emerged to be 0.0001 indicating a significant difference in the linguistic performance of the learners after the instruction using the Jigsaw method. Students started to feel largely responsible for their learning once this method was implemented. They voluntarily divided tasks among themselves and helped each other understand the content at hand. The method stood out as a platform where the learners could showcase and hone their social skills. Unlike a teacher-centred classroom, here, students played an active role in coordinating the class.

Peer monitoring and correction is another fundamental factor that amounts to the uniqueness of this method. During the class, the learners are expected to monitor each other at each phase of the process and correct the errors. It was observed that learners felt a desire to correct themselves when commented on by their peers. They took each other seriously and made an effort to prepare in an efficient manner.

The listening skill of the learners was considerably developed during this process. It was noticed that the members of the other teams listened carefully while the others presented and they were adept at finding the errors. This alerted the learners and inspired them to better themselves in the next classes.

All these observed are attuned with the Social Development Theory of Vygotsky and the Social Interdependence Theory of Kurt Koffka where the progression of language learning in a student is deeply influenced by the people around them.

### **Educational Implications of the Study**

The findings of the present study have certain implications on the methodology of teaching. The important implications are outlined below:

Teaching English as a second language using the Jigsaw mode of cooperative learning amounts to enhanced language proficiency. Students actively use English to explain their parts of the lesson, which helps improve their speaking and listening skills. By discussing various topics, students are exposed to and use new vocabulary in context, enhancing retention and understanding.

The technique improves the comprehension skills of the learners to a great extent. Students read and understand their segment of the material thoroughly in order to teach it to their peers, which improves their reading comprehension skills. As students listen to their peers explain different parts of the lesson, their listening skills are honed.

The responsibility of teaching peers can motivate students to learn their part well, increasing engagement and effort. It blurs their stage fright and

motivates them to come forward and express their opinions without hesitation.

The Jigsaw method allows for differentiation by assigning tasks according to students' proficiency levels, ensuring that each student can contribute meaningfully. Weaker students benefit from the explanations and support of their peers, which can be more accessible and less intimidating than teacher-led instruction.

The Jigsaw method can incorporate materials from various cultural contexts, enriching students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures. By discussing and explaining context-specific content, students gain a better understanding of the cultural and contextual nuances of the English language.

Students critically engage with the material to understand and explain it, fostering analytical and critical thinking skills. The need to explain complex ideas and respond to peers' questions enhances the problem-solving abilities of the learners.

The method promotes an inclusive classroom environment where each student's contribution is valued. Peer-based learning can reduce anxiety and create a more supportive and relaxed learning environment for language learners. Students practice using English in practical, meaningful ways, which helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life use.

The active involvement required in the Jigsaw method leads to better retention and understanding of the language.

### **Conclusion**

The present study on the effectiveness of the jigsaw mode of cooperative learning in grade IX ESL students has provoked significant insights into its impact on various aspects of language learning. A Chinese proverb goes like this, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." This adage stands true in the case of the Jigsaw mode of cooperative learning in an English classroom where students are left with no other option but to participate in classroom activities.

Nonetheless, the method comes with its own disadvantages as well. The execution of this method is a time-consuming process. As it involves intensive involvement of the learners, it takes a lot of time for them to present their ideas and consolidate them. Conflicts and differences of opinion could arise in the class as it is primarily a learner-centered process. Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations that could be made are to provide comprehensive training for teachers on how to effectively implement the method, including strategies for managing group dynamics and ensuring equal participation. Lesson plans and materials are to be tailored in tune with the Jigsaw method, incorporating diverse and engaging content that caters to different language skills. Continuous assessment would be mutually beneficial for the learners and teachers in enhancing their performance and transforming the class as per the needs of the learners. The method also provides a provision to accommodate students with special educational needs and makes it a safe and positive environment for all learners. With proper implementation and support, the Jigsaw method can significantly contribute to the overall language development and positive learning experiences of ESL students.

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# PATRIARCHY DOWN THE SINK: AN ANALYSIS OF *THE GREAT INDIAN KITCHEN*

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## Abstract

Since the release of Rajesh Pillai's *Traffic* in 2011, Malayalam cinema has witnessed a change in narrative which has made it a promising and progressive movie space in the country. *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), written and directed by Jeo Baby, is not only a tale of women emancipation; but also that of Malayalam cinema. This story of an unnamed, newly-wed woman in her husband's house is a hard hitting and realistic take on patriarchy and domestic slavery. This study analyses the depiction of the horror of the ordinary and the portrayal of the "New Woman" in the movie. The paper aims to analyze the movie as a socio-cultural critic of contemporary society and place it in the contemporary cinema in terms of its content, form and style through the close reading of the movie.

**Keywords:** Gender roles, film studies, new woman, Malayalam cinema

The art of motion picture has always had a mesmerising effect on mankind. Cinema is a universal medium for communicating with the public and has profoundly impacted society since its inception. It is more than just entertainment; it is a powerful medium that shapes culture, influences attitudes, and drives social change. Cinema often reflects the societal norms, values, and issues of the time. It can showcase cultural diversity, historical events, and social problems. At the same time, it can challenge stereotypes, promote social justice, and inspire activism. It can influence public opinion on issues like gender equality, racial discrimination, and environmental conservation. Cinema has the power to ignite social movements and inspire people to into action. Films can evoke a wide range of emotions; can foster empathy and understanding, providing viewers with a purgative experience. Thus, cinema is a powerful tool that can be used to entertain, educate, and inspire.

Patriarchy, a societal system dominated by men, trace back to ancient times in India, evolving and adapting over centuries, leaving an enduring impact on gender roles, power dynamics, and societal norms. Ancient Hindu texts, such as the *Manusmriti*, provide a framework for understanding the roles of men and women. Over time, these ideas were reinforced by religious doctrines and societal norms

that gradually diminished women's rights. The advent of colonialism further solidified patriarchal structures in India in some ways.

In modern-day India, patriarchy manifests in various forms-cultural, economic and political-and continues to influence the status of women across different social classes and communities. The cultural norms in India perpetuate the idea that men are the natural breadwinners, while women are expected to care for the home and family. This view is perpetuated through films, literature, and religious practices, which often idealize women as self-sacrificing mothers, daughters, and wives. Women's worth, therefore, is largely measured by their roles within the family, rather than their personal ambitions or professional achievements. Contemporary feminist movements continue to fight for gender equity and women's empowerment. However, the challenge lies in dismantling the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures and creating a truly equitable society, which can be done through the medium of cinema and art.

*The Great Indian Kitchen* written and directed by Jeo Baby and released in 2021 is one such tale of the portrayal of the life of a typical Indian woman and her emancipation. The title of the movie provides the major setting of majority of the scenes: the kitchen which is supposed to be the space allotted for

the life and work of any women. The movie begins with the first step, the wedding: the two unnamed characters meet and marry as per traditions of a typical arranged marriage ceremony. From the first morning after their wedding, she is placed inside the kitchen and starts the never-ending saga of chopping, peeling, grinding, cooking, washing and cleaning. The contrasting picture of women folk toiling hard in the kitchen and men folk relaxing with newspaper or meditating doing yoga draws the universal picture of majority Indian households. At first, the wife tries to feel at home at her husband's, obediently does all the household chores, satisfies her husband at night; but gradually understands the mesh of patriarchy that she is stuck into.

The movie has garnered significant critical and commercial acclaim including Kerala State Film Awards for its unflinching portrayal of the domestic realities faced by women in patriarchal Indian society. The film, through its subtle yet powerful narrative, delves into the mundane yet suppressive aspects of a woman's life confined to the kitchen, highlighting the deceptive nature of patriarchy that permeates even the most seemingly ordinary household. The movie exposes the patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequality and domestic servitude. It is a scathing commentary on the oppressive patriarchal norms that have been internalized over generations. The film follows the journey of a young woman whose life is dominated by the exhausting, often invisible, labour of maintaining a household, which reflects a larger societal trend where women's work is undervalued, if not completely unacknowledged. Through its piercing narrative, *The Great Indian Kitchen* offers a critique of patriarchy, exposing the invisible mechanisms of control that shape the lives of women, and ultimately, symbolizes the transformation of these women's lives as they rebel against and step out of this system.

At its core, *The Great Indian Kitchen* is a portrayal of how domestic labour is intricately tied to the gendered dynamics of patriarchy. The unnamed wife enters arranged marriage, quickly realizes that her role in the family is confined to being a dutiful wife, expected to take care of the household chores

along with her mother-in-law while her husband and father-in-law enjoy the fruits of their labour. The act of cooking in the film becomes symbolic of the broader issues of control, submission, and the confinement of women within the home. It is not just about food preparation but a metaphor for the unending chores at home, silencing of women's voices and autonomy. It emphasizes the idea that women are expected to be invisible in the household, the wife is never seen eating with the family, a striking detail that underscores the hierarchy within the home. She eats after the menfolk leave the table and eat amidst the mess they have created at the table. She is seen trying to apply for a job with a laptop sitting at the kitchen, which is a powerful metaphor for the shackles that weigh her down.

The kitchen in *The Great Indian Kitchen* is not just a setting but a microcosm of Indian society, reflecting the systemic oppression of women. It becomes her prison, confining her to a life of monotonous domestic chores. The seemingly endless cycle of these tasks is a stark reminder of the patriarchal expectation that women are responsible for these domestic duties each and every day. From the early morning hours to late at night, she is tasked with maintaining a spotless kitchen, ensuring the meals are ready, and making sure everyone else's needs are met. This routine, repetitive labour is often physically exhausting and emotionally draining, yet it is unseen. The film cleverly contrasts the mundane, repetitive nature of domestic chores with the profound emotional and psychological toll they exact on the protagonist. Her isolation, caused by the demands of these tasks, reflects the emotional alienation that many women face in such situations. The repetitive nature of the work becomes emblematic of a life lived where the woman's individuality and aspirations are buried beneath the weight of tradition and duty, highlighting the invisible barriers that prevent women from pursuing their careers and achieving their full potential.

In addition to examining the physical labour that women perform in the household, *The Great Indian Kitchen* also critiques the social and cultural expectations that enforce silence, obedience, and subjugation. The protagonist is not just performing

household chores; she is also expected to remain silent, to endure and suppress her discomforts, desires, and individual aspirations. She is punished for asserting her voice or challenging the status quo, not just in her personal life, but in her social and professional life as well showcased when her in-laws ask her to remove a Facebook post on a controversial issue.

Furthermore, the role of the husband in *The Great Indian Kitchen* is also an important reflection of patriarchal complacency. He is not shown as an overt villain, but rather a product of the system—a man who has been raised to expect his wife's service as his right, without ever questioning it. His indifference, arrogance, and lack of empathy toward his wife's struggles reveal how deeply ingrained patriarchal values are in everyday life. Even when the woman chooses to reject her roles and assert her independence, he never recognizes and instead starts another loop of the same patriarchal domesticity and subjugation by marrying again. The insidious nature of patriarchy, where men are often unaware of the privileges they enjoy and the systemic oppression that women face is portrayed throughout the movie. The film further delves into the sexual dynamics within a patriarchal marriage. The wife is expected to fulfil her wifely duties, including sexual gratification, without any regard for her own desires or agency. She is insulted when she asks for sexual gratification.

The most striking moment happens when she refuses to remain silent any longer. Her decision to leave the kitchen and refuse to fit to the framework anymore signals a seismic shift in her character. This moment is more than just a refusal to serve—it is a rejection of the ingrained norms that dictate her life. The act of walking away from the kitchen, from her husband's home, symbolically from patriarchal expectations, becomes a rebellion. It is symbolic of the larger shift in consciousness that women are beginning to experience, where their labour, their voices, and their autonomy are starting to matter. She confronting her own family and starting a new job and life becomes a powerful metaphor for liberation from patriarchy. It is a symbolic act of defiance against patriarchy. It signifies her refusal to conform to the oppressive norms that have confined her to the

kitchen. Her decision to leave empowers her to reclaim her agency and pursue her own dreams.

Ultimately, *The Great Indian Kitchen* is about the radical act of self-liberation. In this way, the film becomes not just a critique of domesticity but also a broader commentary on how patriarchy operates in Indian society. The social and cultural norms that govern the roles of women are not only enforced by men but also internalized by women themselves, showcased through a typical character. They are conditioned to accept their subordinate roles and view their labour as self-sacrifice and try to induce that in others too. The protagonist's awakening is thus not just an individual moment of rebellion but a reflection of a larger societal shift toward recognizing the rights, autonomy, and dignity of women.

*The Great Indian Kitchen* is a powerful cinematic exploration of patriarchy, labour, and silence within the domestic sphere. It shines a spotlight on the often-unseen work that women do to maintain households and critiques the ingrained cultural attitudes that silence them. Through its nuanced portrayal of the protagonist's quiet rebellion, the film calls for a reevaluation of the roles women are expected to play within the family and society. By pushing back against the norms of domesticity, the protagonist offers a metaphor for the larger movement toward gender equality, making *The Great Indian Kitchen* not just a personal story, but a societal critique. The kitchen, once a symbol of patriarchy, is ultimately where the protagonist begins her journey of liberation, making the film a compelling call to reject the invisibility imposed on women by patriarchal norms.

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## UNVEILING SACRED SYMMETRY: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *KALAMEZHUTHU PATTU*

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### Abstract

*Inscriptive culture of social groups like dance and graphic arts are designated as 'folk culture'. Folk culture of India is very vibrant fusing the elements of religious rituals with various artistic performances of Nritta Nriya Natya, instrumental and oral music and designs on the walls and floor. Kalamezhuthu Pattu belongs to Kerala's ritual theatre tradition comprising Theyyam, Mudi yettu, Padayani, Koodiyattam etc. Kalamezhuthu Pattu is usually performed as a vazhipad (offering) in temples and kavus (sacred groves) for receiving the blessings of gods like Bhadrakali, Ayyappan, Vettakkorumakan and Naga (serpent god). Three dimensional pictures of these deities are drawn in Kalamezhuthu, followed by kalam paattu (singing the myth to the accompaniment of instruments) and kalam thullal (enactment of the myth in stylized performance) which makes it distinct from other ritualistic performances associated with temples. The paper analyses the ritual of Kalamezhuthu Pattu in the framework of Semiotic Theory. It shows how sacred is constructed as a system of signs and symbols that hold particular meaning within a cultural, religious, or ritualistic context.*

**Keywords:** Folk culture, ritual theatre, semiotic theory, sacred, signs, symbols

Semiotics considers social and cultural world as a series of sign systems. It systematically identifies and analyses sign systems in the collective human experience. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure defined it as the study of "the life of signs within society." He makes a distinction between the two inseparable components of a sign: the signifier, which in language is a set of speech sounds or marks on a page, and the signified, which is the concept or idea behind the sign. The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce categorized signs into three main types: (1) an icon, which resembles its referent (such as a road sign for falling rocks); (2) an index, which is associated with its referent (as smoke is a sign of fire); and (3) a symbol, which is related to its referent only by convention (as with words or traffic signals). (britannica.com)

Semioticians view folklore "as communication dominated by the langue aspects of language, that is, by normative rules that are communal and traditional." (Langlois. 1985). Many folk-art forms connected with religious ceremonies showcase the intense desire of the humans to transcend to the realm of the supernatural. They provided humans

opportunities to experience the sacred. Like other regions of India, Kerala has a rich heritage of folk theatre. *Theyyam, Mudi yettu, Padayani, Koodiyattam, Kalamezhuthu Pattu* etc. are some of the art forms belonging to the ritual theatre tradition of Kerala.

*Kalamezhuthum Pattu* literally means drawing picture with song. It is a communal artform performed by male artists from specific communities like Kurups, Theyyampadi Nambiars, Theyyadi Nambiars and Theyyadi Unnis" (keralatourism.org). The figures of deities like Bhadrakali, Ayyappan, Vettakkorumakan and Naga are created on the floor (*kalam*) with organic colour powders (*kolappodi*) as a form of worship accompanied by specific songs (*kalampaattu*) and dance movements (*kalapradakshinam*). (keralaheritage.org). The songs and dance performance are based on events in the story of the deity.

Traditionally, *Kalamezhu* (drawing of Kalam) is performed by certain families and they retain the practice even now. This art form is considered as their family heirloom. Hence the *Kalam pattu* we see today is the same as it was practised four generations ago. The only difference today is the use of electric

lamps along with *vilakku* (brass oil lamp) which has resulted in slight changes in the visual perception of the drawings. The four major communities, who have inherited this art form are *KallattKurup*, *Theeyattunni*, *Theeyadi Nambiar* and *Theyyampadi Nambiar*. Each community has a story relating to their inheritance of the art form.

Manikandan Kallatt, a traditional practitioner of *Kalamezhuthu Pattu*, tells in a documentary that there is a myth behind their inheritance of this art form. It is related to Thirumandhamkundu Temple. A saint undertook penance for the benevolence of Lord Shiva and received the idol of Shiva which belonged to his divine consort, Parvathi. The Goddess sent Kali and her army to bring the idol back from the saint. Kali was not able to retrieve it even after a prolonged fight. This enraged her and she took her original dreadful form with 16 hands holding weapons. Saint realized that he couldn't fight back. He fell on the idol and prayed to Lord Shiva. The idol cracked open, and Lord Shiva Parvathi and baby Ganapathi appeared from it. Parvathy was convinced that she couldn't take that idol from a person who worshipped it with such an ardent devotion. But she was not prepared to lose the idol and decided to live there from that day. Thus, Thirumandhamkundu temple has the presence of Lord Shiva, Parvathy and baby Ganapathy. The saint demanded that Kali should also be worshipped here. As years passed by, the Brahmin saint felt the need to end the earthly life. He then found two Brahmins, and taught them the rituals to worship all the gods in this temple. He then went to Yakshipara and died. The Brahmins continued the worship in the temple. Their descendants are the main priest families of this temple now. The person who cleared the forest (kaadu) around the idols came to be called as Kattilamuttam, and the person who made roofs (panthal) for the temple are known as Panthalakode.

When the Brahmins started worshipping, they could worship Lord Shiva, Parvathy and baby Ganapathy but couldn't worship Kali, because they couldn't visualize the form of Kali in their mind. So, a 'space' was assigned to the Goddess. Though they

tried for days they couldn't imagine her form. They couldn't sleep for days since the worship was incomplete. They had a helper with them, who was from Nair community. He had also heard the hymns from the saint, when it was taught to the priests. He understood that they were struggling with completing the worship of Kali. He could imagine Kali when they recited the hymns.

But he was afraid of telling this to the priests, fearing that they might get offended. He waited for two- three days and finally decided to draw Kali on a rock. When priests were away, he took a piece of stone and drew the image of Kali. When the priests came and saw the picture, they became very happy and worshipped Kali. After the rituals, they came out and asked who drew the picture. The helper said, he could understand their difficulty and decided to help. They asked, "why did you draw instead of telling us?". He said that he was scared that the priests might become unhappy. They acknowledged that they were not only happy but also liked the drawing. They relieved him from helper duties. Since he drew in stone (kallu), and drawing is 'Kurikkal', he was given the title - Kallatt Kurup. His family was given the privilege to draw and worship Kali from then. This is only one myth among many myths that are associated with kallatt Kurup. Similarly, many myths are associated with each communities performing Kalamezhuthu pattu.

Kalamezhuthu pattu, the ritualistic art form progresses through different steps. In a typical Kalam pattu, first they make the venue. There are three variants of dimensions for staging.

- 12 stick × 8 finger.
- 14 stick × 8 finger.
- 16 stick × 8 finger.

Three dimensional figures are made in the drawing. For Kali square shape stage is drawn. For male standing figures, rectangle shape is drawn. In most temples and households, a venue will be already there. In some temples there are separate areas dedicated for this. Otherwise, the venue is constructed on the south of surroundings, or to the right of idol. It is either called *pattupura* or *pattu*

*kottil*. In some places it is also known as *Koothu madam*. If a new *pattupura* is to be made, it should be done by the local carpenter according to the measurements. First the stage is built according to the statute, after that decoration is done. Ropes are tied in north-south direction. The total number of ropes should be an odd number. After that, spruce is tied in all sides. Then, the pillars are covered with white or black clothes. In olden days, clothes washed by the launderers were used. Besides the pillars, the roof is also covered with clothes.

*Koorayidal* is the beginning of the rituals. After that the venue comes to be regarded as the 'Sanctum Sanctorum' where the deity is going to be drawn. The main performer of the ritual is called Kurup. Either the song performer or the main priest will give the roof cloth to the Kurup. Kurup will then seek the permission to begin the ritual from other performers and the spectators by asking them three times. Before performing *Koorayidal*, Kurup will invoke the God using prayers, into the cloth, for whom the *Kalam pattu* is being offered.

The ritual of worship begins after *Koorayidal*. First, Ganapathy is worshipped according to the custom. Drummer or Marar will do a session afterward. The ritual is different in some places. There, singing starts right after Ganapathy puja. It is called noon song or *Uchappattu*. This ritual commences with the drawing of the *Kalam*. After *Koorayidal*, Brahmin priest brings a *Churika-Churuka ezhunnalikkal* (representation of the deity) from *Sreekovil* to *Pattarangu* and is placed near the *Peedam* (tripod). *Kalampattu* singer uses a percussion instrument called *nanthuni* accompanied with cymbals (*kuzhithalam*). Kurup sings *sthuthy* at the end of *uchappattu*. Sometimes *uchappattu* functions are not done separately. It will be jointly done with *Kalampattu* at night.

Next is the most important step among this ritual of *Kalamezhuthu*. The roof of the venue is decorated with plantain trunks, leaves and bunch of fruits, tender coconut leaves, tender coconut bunches, mango leaves and flowers. The figure of the deity is drawn on the cow dung plastered floor. *Nilavilakku* is

placed at four corners of *Pattarangu*. The *kalam* would be completed by evening.

*Bhadrakali kalam* is drawn based on the myth of Kali - Darika war. There are various versions of this myth and one such story runs like this: Darika was an asuran (demon). He asked his wife Vanamurayal the ways to please and receive blessings from Lord Siva. Though Darikasura tried different ways, he couldn't get a *darsan* of Lord Siva. Due to the compulsion from Parvathy, Shiva finally appeared before the asura and asked him the reason for his penance. Siva granted him the *varams* (boons) requested by him. But Darika desired to experiment these boons on Lord Shiva himself. Endowed with the boons of Siva, Darika began an endless array of cruel deeds. Even devas couldn't resist his atrocities. Then Lord Vishnu went to mount Kailasa and prayed to Shiva. When Lord Shiva opened his eyes, Bhadrakali and Veera Bhadra came out of them.

Bhadrakali challenged Darika for an open fight. In the fight Darika was decisively defeated by Kali. A second fight ensued between them. Before starting the fight, his wife asked him to bestow on her the boon (*manimantram*). She would reside in the forest and in case of defeat she would divulge it to him. The boon if once revealed would be forgotten by the person who divulged it. Bhadrakali tricked Vanamurayal to divulge the mantram. Darika came to know about it and he went to ask his wife. She was unable to help him and Darika climbed a Koovalam tree. Bhadrakali beheaded him and wrapped his head in silk robe. His intestines were worn as necklaces and bones and nerves were worn as rings.

Later she incarnated as Kali in the form of a young child and installed herself in her *Mantrashala*. The *Kalam* of Kali is drawn in the sitting posture on a *Peedam* with weapons in eight hands- *Shulam* (trident), *Ghatuamkam* (two-sided sharp sword), *Pannakam* (snake), *Valu* (sword), *Paricha* (shield), *Darikanthala* (head of Darika), *Kottu mani* (bell) and *Kapalam* (small bowl). For colouring the body parts green colour is used. When they draw two lines of teeth and *Dhamishtra* we perceive the angry

Goddess. Vassurikala (scars of small pox) and *mūnnām kaṇṇ* (the third eye) are also drawn on the face.



(flickr.com)

**Vettakkorumakan kalam** is in the standing posture - smiling face with moustache and beard, the body is green in colour. In the image weapons are drawn, in left hand *ambum villum* (bow and arrow), and in his right hand *churika* (a type of sword). The story of *Vettakkorumakan* is seen in the *Kiratham* episode of the epic *Mahabharatha*. Arjuna was very proud of his capabilities. So, Shiva and Parvathy decided to teach him a lesson and go to the forest in the form of hunters. While Arjuna was doing his penance Shiva and Parvathy subdued his pride and blessed him. During their journey through the forest a son was born to Shiva and Parvathy who turned out to be very naughty. He terrorised saints and other people while hunting with his bow and arrow. Saints and Devas sought help from Lord Brahma. Brahma explained his inability to contain the boy and sent them to Lord Shiva. Shiva heard their complaints and responded to them saying it was very difficult to punish a small boy for his mischief. Shiva sought help from Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu consoled Shiva assuring that he would take care of the boy. Lord Vishnu approached the naughty boy with a dagger or *churika*. The boy expressed his desire to own the dagger. Lord Vishnu told him that could take the dagger on condition that he would not place the dagger on ground and that he would always hold it in his hand. The boy agreed to this and extended his right hand. Lord Vishnu explained to the boy that since he was holding the dagger in his right hand, he would not be able to use bow and arrow. The boy

realised his mistake and promised the Lord that he would not trouble others. The boy was named *Vettekkaran* and Lord Vishnu blessed him and told him to go towards the *Parasurama Kshetra* (Kerala) and reside happily there. He received the blessings of his parents also. *Vettekkorumakan* temples are there in many places of Kerala. The story of *Vettekkorumakan* is narrated in *Kalamezhuthupattu* through songs sung by the *Kallat Kurruppu* community and *Theyyambadi Nambiar*. After drawing the *kalam* of *Vettekkorumakan* the figure (*Roopam*) is described through the songs sung by *Kurup* and *Nambiar* with the stringed instrument used for *Kalamezhuthupattu* called *Nanthuni*. *Vettekkaran Paattu* is performed not only in temples but also in houses in order to get peace of mind. The highlight of this ritual is the *Velichappadu* or the oracle and another highlight is the dance performed by *Velichappadu* during the ritual.



(keralaculture.org)

Another major *Kalam* in *Kalamezhuthupattu* is *Ayyappan Kalam* or *Ayyappan Theeyattu* performed in *Sastha* temples and in the homes of *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*. *Theeyadi Nambiar* community performs *Theeyattu*. This is a small community residing in *Thrissur*, *Palakkad* and *Malappuram* districts of Kerala. The figure is drawn as *Ayyappa* sitting on a horse. *Kalam* depicts the story of *Ayyappa* defeating *Indra* to conquer *Sarvajna Peetam*. *Ayyappa*, his wife *Prabha* or *Pushkala* and their son *Sathyakan* are also drawn in some *kalam*s. In *Ayyappan Kalam* and *Vettakkorumakan Kalam* there are some differences seen in the facial expressions. The eyes are not open

fully for Ayyappan but for Vettakkorumakan the ferocious expression is shown through the eyes. Some drawings of Ayyappan do not have beard and moustache. Bow and arrow and also a small spear are seen in the hands. In the sthuthy or song sung in the Theeyattu Ayyappan's wife Pushkala and his child Sathyakan are also referred.



(ayyappantheeyattu.com)

**Naga kalam** or kalams are dedicated to Serpent God. Sepents (nagas) were worshipped for ensuring peace and happiness in the society. It is predominantly performed by the *Pulluvar* community.



(keralatourism.org)

The Komaram (oracle) performs the ritual dance known as Eedum koorum chavittu accompanied by the rhythms of *Valamthala* (Drum's-right side), *elathaalam* (cymbals), *kombu*, *kuzhal* (trumpet) etc. Starting from the thaala - Thripuda, Marar (who plays drums) has the chance to play the Eedu between the first and last according to his taste. Komaram has to recognize this and perform in tune with the rhythms. This part is led by Marar. In Kalapradakshinam, Komaram can perform 5 to 21 Pradakshinam (going around the Kalam). Eedum koorum and Kalapradakshinam provide a chance to

exhibit the skills of Marar and Komaram. Chembada, adantha, ekathaalam etc are the thaala used for performing the dance.

This is followed by Kalam pooja: After the completion of Kalamezhuthu, 'Vellari' (on a plantain leaf a coconut is placed upon 2.5 Nazhi (measures) of row rice is placed in the north, south, and west sides. It is intended for the Seven-Deities (Sapthamathrikkal). This is intended to bring the deity to the kalam. Songs are sung by Kurup during the Pooja: Many varieties of singing styles like 'Uchapattu', 'Ammanachaya', 'Niram paadal', 'Kesadipaada varnnana', 'Sthuthi', 'Kathapaduka' etc are adopted in Kalamezhuthupattu. Mainly there are five varieties of songs according to the deity being worshipped. They are Bhadrakalippattu, Ayyappan pattu, Vettakkorumakan pattu, Nagathan pattu, Kailayam. The song Kailayam is used for the deity except the above four. Even though, there are separate Sthuthys for Brahmaraaksha, Nela vattari, Kuthyraman etc. The myth behind Bhagavathy Kalampattu is the story of Kali who killed Darika. Anthipattu (song sung at night) starting with Amanachaya and continues with 'Niram paadal', 'Kesadipaada varnnana', and 'Kathapaduka'. At the end, before going to Thiriuzichil, song ends with some special songs, this is called Padivakkal. For background music the instruments like 'Nanthuni' and 'Kuzhithaalam' are used. The singer has the freedom to change the ragas as the situation demands. Sangarabharanam, Malahari, Madhymavathy, are the ragas they sing. Niram and Amanachaya are two different tunes (can be called a variety raga) they use. There is a Classical Rhythm too in these songs. Tripudathaalam, Ekathalam, Chembadathalam, Muthalam, Adantha and Panchari are the thaalas used in songs. There are mainly three thaalas, Nanthuni can be played. They are Muthaalam, Adithalam, Ekathalam.

Thiriuzichil: After the Kalampattu, Kurup shows Dhoopam to *Sapthamathrikal* with Palm fronds (Kavungin pookkula) and offers *Thiri* (wick). It is a function similar to *Sreebhothabali*. It is a pooja offering to Ashtadhik palakas namely Adithya, Agni,

Yama, Nirarthi, Varuna, Vayu, Soma and Eesanna and to Sevan-Deities (Sapthamathrikkal) namely Brahmi, Vaishnavi, Mewari, Kaumari, Varahi, Indrani and Chamundi. This is followed by Kalathylattam (Kalathil nritham): the ritual dancer and into the Kalam becomes the manifestations of the deity in two different media – through rhythmic dance movements and through designs of coloured powder. The stage just before *Kalam Maykkal* is Nalikerameru (Breaking of coconut). The *komaram* (oracle) starts erasing the kalam along with breaking coconuts to the accompaniment of musical instrument. After erasing the kalam, the powder used for painting the breasts of Bhadrakali is distributed as Prasadam to the devotees. The ritual ends up with *kooravalikkal* (removing the ritual cloth on the roof).

Kurup takes some rice and sprinkles upwards in a worshipping way after removing the *koora* (cloth). Finally, when the Kalam is dissolved, all that is left will be ash in colour - the colour of cremated bodies. It is giving the message that don't get carried away with your lives too much. Everybody's body made out of five elements will ultimately turn to ash. During the worship called *Poorna pushpanjali* (flower offering) the hymns recited don't address any God, but the amalgamation of five elements – *panchabhutas*- called, *Bhrahmam*. That is what Kalam pattu actually represents.

In *Kalamezhuthu* Divinity is invoked to appear in the Kalam. Kalam is derived from nature. All substances used are taken from nature and it is drawn on earth. Rice powder and limestone powder are used for white colour. Black colour is from burnt husk powder. Turmeric powder is used for yellow colour. Turmeric powder when mixed with limestone powder gives red colour. Green colour is produced from powdered green leaves. In emergency situations, Gulmohar leaves can be powdered without drying. And if the idol is serpent, Gulmohar leaves are not used since Gulmohar is anti- venom for snake's poison. The serpents are allowed to live with venom. By not trying to take away the venom from the serpents, they are free to live with their own features. Green colour is used to represent the body,

yellow shows ornaments and red depicts the attire of the deity. All these shows the environmental consciousness of our culture - how humans live in close proximity with nature and other living beings. This makes the art form *Kalamezhuthu* ecologically significant.

Even though it is a folk art with Dravidian origin, the performance of this ritual art form is regulated by certain classical aspects. There are certain rules, procedures, philosophy, precise steps etc., existing in this. So, it is not just a folk art, a ritual, but a very methodological art form carried forward through generations, filtered well and polished, with its vigour and rhythm and the style of movements. *Kalamezhuthupattu* carries the soul of Kerala's rich artistic traditions. Traditional practitioners ensure that the ritual art is passed on to the younger generation. An interesting fact is that girls are also getting trained in this ritual art form these days. (The Colours of Worship)

The basic faith behind this art form is that by invoking God the human community will be greatly benefitted by way of good health and wealth. The devotees are assured peace of mind undermining the ill-effects caused by evil spirits and for the overall well-being of the universe. Since, the idol is created and erased within a single day it is considered as immensely powerful to bestow blessings on the devotees.

*Kalamezhuthu pattu* is a cultic tradition and religious symbolism of drawing figures or images of major non-bhramanic deities such as *Bhadrakali*, *Ayyappa*, *Vettakkorumakan* etc. employing specific iconographic prescriptions using five colours on the ground. This unique art form of Kerala tells us about the various functions that an art form can fulfil. This is an integrated art form which is a combination of drawing, music, dance and theatre. This art form fulfils diverse social, cultural and religious needs. The fulfilment of desires and healing or the purgation of emotions are the main concerns of *kalamezhuthu pattu*. The powders used for *Kalamezhuthu* are also used for purposes like healing of wounds, removal of toxins and curing diseases. The light, colour, pictorial



representations, ritualistic performance, smells etc. create a similar impact of psychological healing. The five colours used in this *dhoolishilpa* represents the *Panchabhoothas* – earth, fire, water, air and space. This art form is meant to represent the Hindu principle of *srishti-sthithi-samhara* or creation-preservation- destruction. The artist creates the kalam, the priest or the artist himself preserves it through rituals and finally it is erased. The powder used for the kalam is distributed among everyone present there symbolising the presence of deity in everyone.

*Kalamezhuthupattu* is considered to be an amalgamation of tribal, Dravidian and Aryan cultures. We can trace the origin of this unique art form in the Vedas. Every performance of *Kalamezhuthu pattu* kills something in the spectator and revives something else. It is a strong reminder to us that art makes us human and that no matter how old an art form, it always finds fresh echoes in every age. It provides the experience of hierophany (manifestation of the sacred). In *the Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957), Mircea Eliade proposed the term *hierophany* to designate the act of manifestation of the sacred. The viewer experiences the manifestation of the sacred through the *panchavarna* (five colours) drawing, songs accompanied by instrumental music, final rhythmic dance to erase the kalam, the settings etc.

Rudolf Otto, a German historian of religions, describes in *Das Heilige* (20) that a feeling of terror comes before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery (*mysterium tremendum*), before the majesty (*majestas*) that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power. The devotee experiences “numinous” — a mysterious, majestic presence inspiring dread and fascination. The dreadful figure adorned with weapons finally turning into ash before the very eyes of the onlookers and receiving the ash as *prasadam* allows them to feel and merge with the numinous.

*Kalamezhuthu Pattu* functions as a multifaceted cultural text. Its visual, auditory, and performative elements communicate profound spiritual, aesthetic,

and socio-cultural meanings, making it a unique representation of Kerala's heritage. The elaborate floor drawings, called Kalam, are created with natural powders such as turmeric, rice flour, and charcoal. These patterns represent deities like Bhadrakali or serpent gods. The visual forms invoke divine presence, symbolizing protection, fertility, and the cosmic order. The symmetrical and circular patterns reflect cycles of creation and dissolution in the universe. The ritual songs narrating mythological tales serve as oral histories, embedding narratives of divine victories, cosmic justice, and moral lessons. The rhythm and melodies evoke a trance-like state, believed to facilitate spiritual communion. The erasure of the Kalam through dance movements symbolizes the transient nature of life, the dissolution of the physical into the metaphysical, and the renewal of cosmic energies.

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# PATRIARCHAL DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN AS REPRODUCTIVE VESSELS AS DEPICTED IN PERUMAL MURUGAN'S ONE PART WOMAN

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## Abstract

*Gender is a socially constructed entity. The arena of gender-related issues has always stirred much controversy in the past as well as in the present decades. Gender studies are a constantly evolving field of study. In the binary concept of men and women, the entire life of a woman is governed by her family, especially by men. Women are always mistreated, dominated, humiliated, and marginalized by men. Women all over the world even in present times are subjected to patriarchal abuse. Women are often degraded as the 'Other' in comparison to men. Moreover, women have always been defined only in terms of their reproductive capacity. A child defines a woman's honour and value. Despite the progressive world of the present age, women and the notion of motherhood continue to remain quite inseparable. Motherhood is sacred but it shouldn't become the only term in describing a woman. A woman should not be forcibly thrown into the state of motherhood. Reproducing to ensure the continuity of genes shouldn't become a kind of responsibility or duty of a woman. Women, in general, were considered as vessels of reproduction in times past and had no say in the choice of the appointed man other than giving her consent in the rituals. In the epics, class and caste hierarchies were carefully preserved by the chosen man inevitably being from the extended family, gotra (clan), same caste, or even a reverend person or a divine being. In the process of ensuring harmony, in keeping with the cosmic law it was the body of the silenced woman, who marked by patriarchy as a vessel for its continuance, which was the propriety sacrifice to effect dharma/justice/right action. (Philip 103)The male factions of society always silenced women. They had no voice in any sphere of their life even in matters of their marriage and reproductive rights. Perumal Murugan's One Part Woman, set in Tiruchengode, is a highly poignant narrative of a childless couple- Kali and Ponna who are constantly taunted by society for their infertility. The novel delves deep into the social stigma and religious ritual surrounding infertility which reveals the narrow-mindedness of the patriarchal society. The novel under study portrays the Chariot festival in the temple of Maadhorubaagan, the half-female god, where on the 18th day of this festival, barren women are allowed to enter into a consensual union with any man, despite of their caste, creed, and race under the mask of night. This is regarded as a highly respectable religious ritual to impregnate barren women at night whereas the same is considered a societal taboo in broad daylight. The child born in such a manner is considered to be "a boon from god" (Murugan 138). Despite Kali's opposition, Ponna is unknowingly driven to this festival by her family's menial acts. As a result, their marriage is put to the ultimate test, and their reproductive rights are held at stake. This paper aims to analyze the objectification of women as reproductive vessels through Ponna's life and explores the extent to which barren women are humiliated, victimized, and tortured by the patriarchal society through the symbolic ritual depicted in the novel One Part Woman.*

**Keywords:** Gender, reproduction, ritual, marginalization, objectification, victimization.

Perumal Murugan is a well-known and renowned figure in contemporary Tamil Literature. Born in 1966, he is a native of Tiruchengode town of Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu. He is a prolific Tamil writer and a professor of Tamil Literature whose works are mostly composed in Tamil and have

been translated into a wide variety of languages. His oeuvre comprises six short story collections, six anthologies of poetry, thirteen non-fiction books on language and literature, and twelve novels among which ten of his novels were translated into English. The themes of love, caste, politics, and rural life of

Southern India are deeply explored and enigmatically portrayed in his works. *One Part Woman* or *Maadhorubaagan*, *Pookkuzhi* or *Pyre*, *Poonachi* or *The Story of a Black Goat*, *Trial by Silence*, and *A Lonely Harvest*, etc. are some of his works. He is a recipient of many prestigious literary awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award which he bagged for his novel *One Part Woman* or *Maadhorubaagan*.

Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a socio-cultural anthropologist, translator, writer, and performer. Religion, ethics of relationality and care, and the intersections of gender and sexuality are the major focus of his research. Recently, from the University of Texas at Austin, he completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology. He has received international acclaim for his translation of the works of Perumal Murugan and Ambai. *Pyre*, *A Lonely Harvest*, *Trial by Silence*, *One Part Woman*, and *A Night with a Black Spider* are some of his translations. Among these translations, *Pyre* was long-listed for the 2023 International Booker Prize.

*One Part Woman* was published in 2013 by Penguin Books and was Aniruddhan Vasudevan's translation masterpiece of the original Tamil book written by Perumal Murugan titled *Maadhorubaagan* which was published in 2010. Later, in 2018, the book was published in the US by Grove Atlantic. The title of the novel, *Maadhorubaagan*, is derived from the name of the androgynous form of Lord Shiva in Hindu mythology i.e., Ardhanarishvara. Murugan was inspired to write this novel upon witnessing couples struggling with infertility. In 2005, the India Foundation for the Arts awarded Murugan a grant to conduct background research for his novel. During his research, he discovered an old societal practice for addressing infertility issues, which he chose to incorporate into his novel. The existence of such a ritual has been contentious. Murugan mentioned in an interview with *The Hindu* that there was no documentary evidence of the custom, and the information about it had been passed down orally.

Set in Perumal Murugan's native town of Tiruchengode, the novel portrays a heart-rendering narrative of Kali and Ponna who suffer from infertility and are constantly exposed to numerous humiliations from their family and society. The protagonists belong to the Kongu Vellalar Gounder caste where a person's power, worth, and value are inextricably intertwined with the number of children they have and how much land they possess. The novel also explores the social stigma surrounding infertility and depicts the extent to which this couple is forced to go to conceive.

The novel brings forth the condemnation of women as mere reproductive vessels with its portrayal of the Chariot festival in the temple of Maadhorubaagan which has a half-female god consecrated as its deity. On the 18<sup>th</sup> day of this Chariot festival, under the mask of night, the rules are relaxed, and barren women are allowed to have a consensual union with any man despite his race, caste, creed, etc. to get these women impregnated. The absurdity of this ritual is quite evident when, in broad daylight, this same ritual is considered a societal taboo. What is more nerve-wracking is that society perceives a child born through such a ritual to be "a boon from god" (Murugan 138). Her family misleads Ponna to attend this ritual and thus it results in their marriage being shattered into pieces and her chastity being held at stake.

The novel faced fierce backlash from certain religious factions of society for its portrayal of the religious ritual associated with the Chariot festival in the temple of Maadhorubaagan to deal with the problems of infertility, claiming that the book insulted their practices, deity, and the women of their caste. Several copies of the book were burned. An official complaint to ban the book was put forth. Demands to arrest the author and publisher were lodged. Perumal Murugan stated that he would withdraw all references to the place in which the events took place in the novel. As protests against him and his novel increased, he entered into peace talks presided over by local administrators where he was forced to render an unconditional apology and

even agreed to withdraw his book. As a result of these protests, he even posted what can be called a literary suicide note on his Facebook page and even forcefully and unwillingly placed a self-imposed end to his literary career, withdrew all his works, and claimed that he would never write again. It was quite a tragic loss for the literary world as he was an exceptional writer who could portray the essence of his state and his village in its raw form to his readers.

In 2016, a petition was submitted to the Madras High Court seeking to overturn the settlement that prohibited the publication of the book. At the same time, numerous criminal charges were filed against Murugan on grounds of obscenity, blasphemy, and defamation. However, the High Court ruled in favour of Murugan, nullifying the settlement and dismissing the criminal charges.

The choice to read is always with the reader. If you do not like a book, throw it away. There is no compulsion to read a book. Literary tastes may vary – what is right and acceptable to one may not be so to others. Yet, the right to write is unhindered. (Madras, High Court 6)

*One Part Woman* revolves around the life of Kali and Ponna, a couple hailing from Tiruchengode, who have been married for 12 years but remain childless. Their inability to conceive has become a source of constant taunts from family members and villagers, who attribute their situation to family curses, divine wrath, or their ancestors' misdeeds. The couple is nicknamed the “barren woman” (Murugan 115) and “the impotent one.” (83) Desperate, the couple tries various remedies, prayers, and offerings, but all in vain. Kali is often urged to take a second wife, an idea he briefly entertains but ultimately rejects. He truly loved Ponna despite her remaining a barren woman.

As a final measure, their families suggest Ponna attend the chariot festival of the androgynous god Ardhanarishvara, where, on the 18<sup>th</sup> day, the societal taboo against extramarital sex is relaxed, consenting men and women to have consensual union with each other despite their caste, creed, race, etc.

At the peak of celebration, all rules were relaxed. The night bore witness to that. Any consenting, men and women could have sex. Bodies would lie casually intertwined. Darkness cast a mask on every face. It is in such reverie that the primal being in man surfaces. (Murugan 98)

The child born through such a union is regarded as “a boon from god” (138). Kali is horrified by the suggestion but discusses it with Ponna, who replies, “If you want me to go for the sake of this wretched child, I will” (108). Feeling betrayed by her willingness, Kali grows distant. The following year, Ponna's family tricks Kali into leaving the house with the help of her brother Muthu who lures Kali away in the name of toddy to Mandayan's household between a huge field of palm trees. Kali is intoxicated by the coconut arrack. Muthu lies and convinces Ponna that Kali has given his consent to let her attend the ritual. Ponna is quite confused, yet, she goes on to attend the festival with a mind filled with anxiety, curiosity, doubt, and fear. She goes to find a man she deems to be a god to impregnate her. Meanwhile, Kali returns to an empty home, realizing that Ponna has betrayed him, he faces an emotional breakdown and curses Ponna calling her a whore and a cheater without knowing that just like him, his poor wife too was misled by her family.

*One Part Woman* thus delves deep into the complexities of love, marriage, and desire for children. The ritual of the Karattur temple proves to be strong evidence of the treatment of women as reproductive vessels. The novel contemplates the complex life of a woman in a patriarchal society and the position to which they're degraded. Ponna stands as a symbol of all suffering women around the world.

For decades, society has conditioned women to be good wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, etc as remarked by Glennon Doyle, “I began building this kind of life a woman is supposed to build. I became a good wife, mother, daughter, Christian, citizen, writer, woman.” (Doyle 45) Women were patriarchally construed to be weak, fragile, submissive, emotional, etc. It is as if women were meant to be dominated by men who were superior, dominant, emotionless,

strong, etc. This notion of women was instilled in them from their tender ages and any girl child who deviated from these notions was neglected by society. The relationship between men and women was that of a colonizer and the colonizer or the oppressor or the oppressed. In the past, when education, the basic right of every human being was denied to women, educated women were considered to be mad or mentally ill, even to the extent that they were treated as witches. A girl child was considered to be a burden as remarked by Prabha Devi's father remarks in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, "If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance." (Nair 169) People were of the notion that a girl child is only brought up to be given in marriage and to rear children as in the case of Ponna.

One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine". (Beauvoir 273)

The ritual on the 18<sup>th</sup> day in the Karattur temple is a clear dehumanization of women. Women are objectified as mere sex objects. This reflects the notion that women are only regarded as baby-manufacturing machines in the eyes of society. But a woman's identity should not be defined by the number of children they rear. Children become a defining element of a woman's life. Patriarchy holds the notion that a woman's life should be centered around children and family.

The majority of individuals in the biased society consider that a woman's role in the world is to give birth to a child. A child is regarded as the one who completes a family. The marital life of a couple suffers if they are unable to have children. In a situation where a man and woman are involved, the woman is typically held responsible for infertility because it is believed that the bodies of women are machines for bearing children. (Parveen A, Radha krishnan 51)

Infertile couples all around the world are often faced with humiliation, torture, and abuse similar to

Ponna's condition, who is repeatedly abused by people because of her infertility like Chellappan, her mother-in-law, and Sarasa. Chellappan often forces Kali to have a second marriage and makes derogatory comments about Ponna. "It is fate, mapillai. That is just how some cows are. No matter what you do, they never get pregnant. Just quietly change the cow. If you say yes, I can fetch you one right away." (Murugan 10-11). On the other hand, her mother-in-law makes her drink concoctions made out of neem leaves to stop her menstruation. She keeps a watch on Ponna's menstrual cycle which makes her feel like a caged bird. According to her mother-in-law, women should get pregnant within a month after their marriage. Her mother-in-law is a defining symbol of patriarchy who only sees her daughter-in-law as a reproductive vessel. What she requires from Ponna is only an heir that would secure her wealth, property, and her son's honour. Ponna is devoid of her honour and her mother-in-law is only concerned about protecting her son's honour. Then, what about Ponna's honour? Isn't she also a human being with as much honour as Kali?

In the novel, the society surrounding the protagonists is only concerned about having children through any means may it be menial or just despising the sanctity of the marital bond. They don't care if the marriage of the couple shatters, they only want an heir. Motherhood is sacred but it shouldn't become the only identity of a woman. Society should extend its moral and emotional support to infertile couples rather than demeaning, condemning, humiliating, and torturing them as in the case of Kali and Ponna.

Thus, *One Part Woman* symbolically reveals the pitiful condition of women as meagre reproductive vessels through the life of Ponna. It is a heart-wrenching novel that explicitly deals with the struggles faced by an infertile couple and the societal and familial humiliations to which especially a woman is exposed to in the course of her life.

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# FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST: MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND HISTORY IN *ALL THE LIVES WE NEVER LIVED*

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## Abstract

*Memory studies is an interdisciplinary study that investigates how memory is produced, functioned, and forms personal and communal identities. It explores how memories are portrayed in literature, art, and culture, focusing on trauma, historical events, and societal narratives. Halbwachs, The Collective Memory). However, research into how past events and traumas shape who we are and the stories we tell as a culture is limited. The primary goal of this article is to investigate the protagonist's sensitive and complicated personal and shared memories in Anuradha Roy's novel, All the Lives We Never Lived, (Roy) in which the narrator attempts to establish an identity for himself and his mother. The family that went through the complicated and stormy periods of India's war for independence and World War II underwent a major transformation. The research indicated that Roy depicts memory's fractured, selective nature, demonstrating how the narrator, Myshkin, reconstructs his history and the emotions associated with it. As Myshkin attempts to comprehend his mother's decisions and come to terms with his past, the novel prompts readers to consider how love, longing, and history impact our memories. Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory fits nicely here, offering insight on how Myshkin's memories are shaped not only by his experiences, but also by India's colonial past and independence movement. (Halbwachs, The Collective Memory).*

## Introduction

Memory is a strong tool writers use to explore identity, history, and trauma (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*). Memory studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws on intellectual perspectives from anthropology, education, literature, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology, among others. Anuradha Roy, an Indian English writer, has presented with great subtlety and intelligence the story of a sixty-year-old who is in his old age trying to come to terms with the feeling of abandonment and the resulting complexities he endured when his mother chose a life of freedom and fame over domesticity and motherhood when he was only eight years old. The author attempts to establish an identity for his mother and himself through a variety of mediums, including his own recollections and a bundle of letters from his mother's friend. (Roy, *All the Lives We Never Lived*) In his search for identity, the narrator refers to key historical and personal events that occurred around him, such as the Indian independence struggle and World War II.

These historical episodes had a significant impact on the lives of everyone affiliated with him, particularly his parents, friends, and neighbours. The novel is a superb blend of fact and fiction, personal and political, suspense and reward. The novel illustrates the ties between an intimate personal drama of a family and the national history. To the question "How does Anuradha Roy depict memory as a tool for constructing identity and understanding history?" it should be noted that the author used the protagonist's memories to construct an identity for himself at the beginning of the work. Myshkin, the main character, opens the narration by recounting how he was known in his infancy: "In my childhood, I was known as a boy whose mother had run off with an Englishman." (Roy 1) This marks the beginning of Myshkin's quest for identification. The author describes the narrator as "a man who chose neither pen nor sword but a trowel," a professional gardener. (Roy 15)

Later, at the age of 60, he receives a bundle of letters from his mother, through which he tries to comprehend both his mother and himself. Myshkin is

nine years old when his mother abandons him and his father in the fictitious Indian town of Muntazir and starts a new life with Spies. Muntazir is around 20 miles from the Himalayan foothills, and its name implies, in Urdu, "one who waits impatiently". After his mother's absence, Myshkin's life is spent impatiently waiting for her letters and her return. In subsequent years, he compares the waiting to "blood being drained away from our bodies until one day there was no more left". The purpose of this thesis is to examine this novel in terms of memory, identity, and history, specifically within the context of postcolonial literature. This work is primarily concerned with the identity creation of the major characters in relation to the social, political, and cultural context of the specific period in which the novel is situated. The novel's time setting is critical since it occurred during a moment of significant and irreversible global development. The purpose of this dissertation is to study the novel in the context of World War II and the Indian Struggle for Independence, with a focus on the two main characters, Myshkin, and his mother Gayathri. The nearby environs, together with the characters like Nek, Lisa Dada, Brijen, Lambu, Lipi, and Iila, to name a few.

### Related Studies

Before delving into a specific theory for contextualizing the novel, we must first review significant studies on memory in literary analysis, with a particular emphasis on theories and scholars who analyse memory, history, and identity. In his book *Memory, History, forgetting* (2004), Paul Ricoeur examines the complex relationship between memory, history, and the act of forgetting, emphasizing its ethical and political implications. According to Ricoeur, memory is more than just a collection of previous experiences; it is a dynamic process that develops identity and historical understanding. He contends that forgetting is both a prerequisite for historical writing and a difficult ethical issue, as it might result in the erasure of terrible memories or the distortion of history.

(Ricoeur). This interaction raises important problems regarding how societies remember and forget, which ultimately affects their moral duties.

Aleida and Jan Assmann's ideas about cultural and communicative memory give a framework for understanding how cultures remember and form identities (Assmann and Assmann). Cultural memory refers to the shared memories that define a community's identity, whereas communicative memory is concerned with the transmission of personal experiences and narratives. These themes highlight the connection between personal memories and common cultural narratives.

Maurice Halbwachs' concept of collective memory emphasizes the social contexts in which memory is constructed and maintained, as well as the interplay between memory, identity, and social cohesion. Collective memory shapes group memories and identities, linking past experiences to future identities.

### Literature Review

Scholars and academics have looked at how Roy's work challenges traditional gender norms while also exploring feminist themes of resistance and subversion. (Farooq et al. 4415). It has been noted that Roy's *All the Lives We Never Lived* contains a study of gender inequity and female victimization from a radical feminist perspective. It contends that gender discrimination is a primary source of female subjugation, particularly in the Indian context (Amir, Hashmat, and Rashid 131). Studies were conducted to investigate how Anuradha Roy's story subverts and opposes gender stereotypes, while examining Feminist themes, tradition, and culture are important components of modern society, yet we have never examined these concepts in our lives. The investigation gives vivid status that societal norms restrict women from enjoying the lives that they like. (Arivu Mani 455).

Few studies have used comprehensive memory theories (e.g., Halbwachs' Collective Memory or Ricoeur's Narrative Memory) to examine how memory shapes individual and collective identities in

the novel. While identity is examined, less emphasis is placed on how intersecting elements such as gender, class, and colonial influences shape personal and historical identities. Halbwachs' theory explains how Myshkin's concept of self is formed within the communal frameworks of family, society, and history. The novel shows how historical events are internalized and personalized through memory, which aligns with Halbwachs' theory of communal memory as a link between individual lives and larger social groups. By analysing how Myshkin reconstructs Gayatri's life through fragmentary recollections and cultural myths, the novel emphasizes Halbwachs' theory that memory is socially controlled.

### **Analysis**

#### **Memory as Fragmented Narrative**

The novel is written in the manner of a fractured and disrupted narrative structure. The author takes the reader through Myshkin's present life and memory lanes, employing an interior monologue storytelling in which the thoughts, feelings and memories traversing within the mind of a character always carries the reader to the present and past. The narrator recalls his childhood in one paragraph and the next instant, he returns to his current predicament. Just as memory is dispersed and fragmented, so is the narrative. During his early years, Myshkin was never able to comprehend his mother from his subjective point of view. For a nine-year-old boy, his mother is the most significant individual in his life. He became a loner with a variety of problems and fears because of the pain he endured after being abandoned, which he could never fully understand. He was never able to understand his mother's life because it was not in his perspective. Despite the chaotic and restrictive times, Gayathri, the artist, and dancer—or, as Bertyl refers to her, "the sunbird"—continued to pursue a life surrounded by books and the arts. Her access to a wide range of educational options and subsequent cooperation with foreigners illuminate the little-known and obscure connections between Indian independence and modernist movements.

#### **Identity Formation through Memory**

Myshkin has been trying to understand his mother and the reasons behind her decision to leave the family all his life. Being the son of a traditional, orthodox family in the 1930s, his father or Myshkin could never relate to the struggles and annoyances his mother goes through. His mother is a painter, dancer, and artist who was exposed to a free, international lifestyle by her father, who was always indulgent. The father took the daughter on a long tour, stopping in places like Madras, Singapore, Cambodia, and Bali, despite her gender and the moral and societal restrictions that were in effect at the time. Meeting and interacting with the great Rabindranath Tagore, who was following in his footsteps, was the primary motivation for this trip. They meet the mysterious Walter Spies there, in Bali, and he shows them around the island. For better or worse, everyone's life change when he returns to Muntazir years later in pursuit of Gayathri. Myshkin hears his mother talk lovingly about the trainings, lessons, travels, and experiences she had. We can see how deeply and emotionally she suffers from being married to someone who continually criticizes her, believes that all of these things are superfluous luxury, and urges her to live a simple and austere life like his idol, Mukhi Devi. Myshkin is attempting to consider the international political environment, which greatly affected his mother.

Myshkin's story clearly has memory lapses or distortions. Myshkin, who is only eight years old, is unable to completely understand or recall his mother. Because of his partial recall, he has unresolved issues regarding her intentions and behaviour. As he grew up, his feelings of loss and melancholy were stoked into rage and hatred, making him the target of mockery in both his neighbourhood and school. His best friend Dinu, who has always supported him, starts to turn against him, and he is continuously the target of bullying when no one is around to witness or hear it. The already traumatized youngster must have been taken aback by Lipi and Illa's unexpected presence. Even though there are numerous examples where the young Mishkin understands the



punishments his father has given Lipi and Illa and wants to act and do the right things, he is unable to do so. Even as a young child, he can empathize with Lipi, and ultimately, it is the protracted illness that draws Myshkin and Illa together, resulting in a lifelong relationship that offers both comfort and affection.

### Memory Gaps

There are unresolved doubts regarding Myshkin's mother Gayatri's intentions and deeds because his recollections of her are limited. And after two years of her absence, Myshkin gradually came to the realization that she had ceased to exist physically and had instead become a concentration of all he had missed out on in life. His immature perspective limits his childhood memories, which exacerbates perplexity and feelings of abandonment. Later on, he finds a letter he wrote out of rage but never sent. He vehemently tells her in that letter that all her saris have been burned and that he despises Germans and Walter spies and wants to kill them all. He states at the end of the letter that he does not even want to see her.

He reconstructs a partial and skewed picture of her life using letters and second-hand recollections. His memory lapses and his need to seek Illa and Dinu to confirm specific episodes could be caused by the traumas he endured. Their narration frequently diverges so much from his memory that he becomes perplexed about what is actually happening. And years later, he believes that the mental image, thoughts, and sentiments he has of his mother are something he fabricated.

### Memory Distortions

Because of his anguish and longing, Myshkin idealizes his mother as a larger-than-life person, allowing emotional biases to colour his memories. Myshkin loved his mother and saw no fault in her character because he was the only kid and had no siblings. That might have been the cause of his initial inability to embrace Lipi and Illa, even though they were just as lost and confused as Myshkin.

As an adult, he is compelled to face the intricacies and shortcomings of Gayatri's decisions, upending his earlier romanticized perception. And many years later, he came to see that his mother's choice at that time had been a very brave but unfortunate one, which made him see her as more normal and humanitarian.

The novel's larger themes—such as how cultural and historical recollections are frequently skewed or lacking—are reflected in distorted memories. In contrast to his mother, who was livelier and more fascinating, Myshkin could never tolerate his father, who always seemed so lifeless and unworthy. He was the kill-joy, the one who restricted all their delight, and he did not begin writing to his father until he was incarcerated. The father was a freedom fighter who firmly believed in the welfare of the country before his family, but even the author herself does not place much value on his deeds. (Farooq et al., "Resistance, Revolt, and Agency").

### Impact on Identity

Myshkin has a fractured sense of self because of these memory lapses and distortions, uncertain of his position within his mother's legacy. An adult Myshkin can be seen characterizing himself as someone who liked to live in obscurity and unnoticed. He characterizes himself as a horticulture, a shade-loving plant that grows under a tree in a distant part of the garden where no one notices it or picks its blossoms for the vase.

Assembling his story from fragments provides him a sense of purpose in the face of uncertainty and integrates his identity. Myshkin unexpectedly received a present from his mother's acquaintance. He was certain it included information on his mother. Myshkin opens the letter after days of contemplation and imagines traveling back in time to the voyage his mother took many years ago. Themes related to memory and identity show how a person's self-perception is influenced by and often hindered by cultural and personal recollections.

### Interplay of History and Memory

This book, which is set between World War II and India's independence movement, masterfully combines the microcosm of individual lives with the macrocosm of history. Myshkin is raised during a turbulent time when he loses both of his parents: his father to the Indian independence movement, and his mother to the more expansive and alluring world of literature and the arts. It is evident that characters' decisions are influenced by political and cultural upheavals, which mold their individual and family paths. The broader feminist and anti-colonial movements of the day are reflected in Gayatri's personal revolt. She was a dancer and artist married to a guy who, when weighed against the major historical issues, viewed dance as scandalous and art as unimportant. He opted to participate in these issues as a member of the Society for Indian Patriots, an anticolonial organization. Spies enters her world and offers her new opportunities. Her connections with intellectuals and artists demonstrate global values in the face of cultural conservatism and nationalism.

Myshkin's own recollections and feelings serve as a prism for historical events like colonial authority and international battles. He reconstructs history from a subjective perspective, influenced by inherited recollections, correspondence, and family stories.

Through each of the various stories, history is being reconstructed. The personal viewpoints of the individuals provide historical events fresh and unique nuances in places where history is mute, such as the deaths of Banno Didi's sons or the appearance of the mysterious Walter Spies. History is made more relatable by personal recollections, which highlight its influence on identities and daily lives. The reader can become fully immersed in the world of destruction and grief through the narration of a train full of war captives, the refugee camp, and his anxious concerns about his mother's safety.

### Application of Memory Theory

To comprehend how identity, memory, and history are integrated in this novel, the Collective Memory

theory of French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwach—who is credited with creating the idea of communal memory—is applied. The shared repository of a social group's memories, facts, and knowledge that is strongly linked to the group's identity is referred to as collective memory. The Collective Memory theory of Maurice Halbwachs is the most relevant theory for examining *All the Lives We Never Lived*. The book shows how Myshkin's disjointed memories of his mother and early years are influenced by the larger social structures of family, nationalism, and cultural history by deftly fusing personal and social memory. The novel's depiction of conflicting recollections, like Gayatri's, is consistent with Halbwachs' theory that memory is formed within social groups. The novel's depiction of conflicting memories—such as Gayatri's rebellion and artistic endeavours opposing the nationalist values maintained by Myshkin's father—aligns with Halbwachs' theory that memory is created within social groups. This paradigm also shows how individual and collective memories overlap by placing personal experiences within broader historical events, such as the Independence Movement and Partition. Additionally, Gayatri's journey brings to light underrepresented experiences, like women's fight for independence and cross-cultural interactions that are frequently left out of prevailing narratives. Halbwachs' theory provides a strong framework for examining the novel's examination of memory as a medium for cultural and personal history by highlighting the ways in which collective memory shape's identity and reconstructs forgotten histories.

### Conclusion

*All the Lives We Never Lived* by Anuradha Roy deftly examines the relationship between memory, identity, and history, illuminating how individual and societal memories influence how we perceive the past and ourselves. The novel explores the selective and subjective nature of memory through Myshkin's fractured story, showing how historical, familial, and cultural factors shape it. A suitable framework for examining these processes is provided by Maurice

Halbwachs' theory of communal memory, which emphasizes how Myshkin's recollections are entwined with India's colonial past and his mother's defiance of social conventions. The novel emphasizes the conflict between individual aspirations and social norms, presenting Gayatri's decisions as both ground-breaking and very human. The novella challenges prevailing historical narratives and reclaims lost narratives by fusing personal experiences with historical events.

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# NATIONHOOD AND GIRLHOOD: TRACING THE REPRESENTATION OF GIRLS IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE NARRATIVES FOR CHILDREN POST INDEPENDENCE

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## **Abstract**

*Children's literature is a vital medium for conveying complex socio-political themes in a simplified manner and enables children to understand the nuances of inequality, justice and resistance within an accessible framework. It is during childhood that nationalist sentiment and a sense of belonging to the nation is carefully cultivated in children by adults. This paper studies books written for children in the post independence period in India that deal with themes of nationalism and national belonging. In particular, this paper seeks to explore the representation of girls and women in freedom struggle narratives written for children. The study delves into how these concepts are portrayed and internalised by children and explores the divergent experiences of boys and girls during the freedom struggle as depicted in these narratives. The study seeks to highlight the gendered nuances of their participation and how this shaped their understanding of nationalism and selfhood. Through a comparative analysis, the study juxtaposes novels for children from the 1980s with those published in the last five years, revealing shifts in how girls and women and their political agency are represented. Through this analysis, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics within the context of national identity and childhood in post-independence India.*

**Keywords:** *Children's literature, childhood studies, gender, Nationalism, Indian literature.*

## **Introduction**

Children's literature as a discipline has long been marginalised in the academic space. Peter Hunt, in his introduction to the book *Understanding Children's literature* attributes this to the fact that childhood is "a state we grow away from" and that children's books "from writing to publication to interaction with children – are the province of that culturally marginalised group, females" (1). This preconception has been changing in the recent past, with more studies being conducted in this area, the influence and potential of children's literature being recognised. However, even today, the field of children's literature, from writing to illustration to publishing and even marketing and finally interacting with children is a female dominated field. This paper will be engaged in the interesting task of scrutinising how women and girls are represented in children's literature.

As Ernst Gellner points out in *Nations and Nationalism*, "the culture in which one has been taught to communicate becomes the core of one's identity" (61). Thus childhood lays the foundation for one's self and national identity. In the book '*Children, Place and Identity*', the authors expand on this to assert that "national feeling is not natural or instinctive in children but is consciously cultivated in them (by adults)" (Scourfield 1). What children are exposed to has a deep seated impact on their understanding of themselves and the nation to which they belong. While research has been done, primarily in the West about how children identify with the nation, such research work is mainly from the field of developmental psychology and does not relate to art or literature (Scourfield 41). I propose that children's literature is a powerful medium for imparting a sense of nationalism and for instilling in young readers an understanding of their national

identity and heritage. Through narratives that deal with historical events, nationalist sentiment, and patriotic themes - which is what this paper will be dealing with - authors can cultivate a sense of belonging and pride in the nation's legacy and ideals, and an association with the nation that they will carry forward into adulthood. Children's literature that deals with such issues is significant not just for the children and their guardians but for the society and nation at large, which is why it must be studied closely and critically.

This paper deals with a comparative analysis of the representation of girls in children's literature from two distinct periods: the 1980s and the last five years. By examining *The Narayanpur Incident* by Shashi Deshpande (1982) and *Adventure Before Midnight* by Nilima Sinha (1987) alongside more recent works like *The Chowpatty Cooking Club* by Lubaina Bandukwala (2022), *The Vanguard of Azad Hind* by Gayathri Ponvannan (2022), and *Ahimsa* by Supriya Kelkar (2018), the study scrutinises how girls' experiences and roles within the context of national struggles are portrayed. The storylines of these five books are set within the time period of 1941 to 1943, during the freedom struggle. The novels highlight the intense socio-political upheaval of the time from the perspective of the child protagonists. Interestingly, boys and girls are treated differently in the novels in the context of nationalism, national identity and service to the nation. Moreover, the girls in these novels face a separate set of challenges and expectations from the men. This paper aims to scrutinise and uncover evolving dynamics of gender representation, particularly focusing on how girls' contributions and vulnerabilities are narrated within the broader framework of nation-building and national identity formation. The comparative analysis seeks to illuminate the evolution of this representation across the two time periods, providing insights into the changing landscape of children's literature and its role in shaping young readers' understanding of gender and nationalism.

In *Adventure Before Midnight* and *The Narayanpur Incident*, the main protagonists are all boys. The girls have minimal dialogue and less

agency for action and are mere side characters. In *Adventure before Midnight*, the main trio of boys decide to create a band of young freedom fighters called the Young Patriots. They have a sudden awakening of national consciousness after listening to a speech by Mahatma Gandhi, and a sense of belonging to the nation (21). They understand patriotism as being ready to sacrifice their lives for the nation. Infact, one of them gets injured during a protest and is briefly disappointed to find himself alive because he thought it would have been more honourable to have been martyred (54). This heroic and glorious sort of patriotism and service for the nation however did not apply to the girls.

The inclusion of girls in the Young Patriots gang appears to be an afterthought. When one girl mentions her mother's involvement with the Ladies Charkha Samiti, where she spins yarn into khadi, the other girls are inspired to emulate her and undertake the creation of tricolor flags and badges (29). Conversely, the boys are depicted as aspiring to emulate the prominent leaders and soldiers of the freedom struggle, envisioning themselves participating in active combat and risking their lives for the nation. When the children conduct a march for their cause, the boys walk ahead shouting slogans while the girls bring up the rear, singing patriotic songs. The girls also stayed away from the multiple physical altercations and protests, because that was deemed 'unsafe' for them. This dichotomy underscores the gendered division of roles, with the girls engaging in supportive, symbolic acts of resistance, while the boys strive for direct, heroic involvement in the nationalistic cause. This distinction underscores the traditional gender norms of the time, where masculine resistance is associated with overt defiance and direct action, while feminine resistance involves behind-the-scenes support and sustenance. This not only reflects the societal expectations placed upon boys and girls but also how they imbibe these expectations from the adults around them. Children develop ideas about the nation to which they belong during middle childhood, primarily from societal interactions which include interactions with adults around them (Scourfield 43). The idea that patriotism and national fervour is a

'male' duty and not something women or girls should concern themselves with is reflected in real speeches too. Sarojini Naidu, one of the very few Indian women to actively endorse ideas of patriotism and nationalism during the freedom struggle addresses only men ("gentlemen") in her speeches (138). She also refers to herself as a "mere woman" and says "my woman's intelligence cannot grapple with the transcendent details of politics" (138). She is apologetic for being a woman, addressing a crowd of men and talking about the nation. Thus the novels seem to be indicative of the ethos of the time. Subsequently, the novel propagates the idea that it was boys who did more for the nation, because girls were not able to perform such complex or demanding tasks. The girls' point of view about the nation or freedom struggle is not heard. There is not a single conversation the girls have with each other, without the boys. The entire narrative is centered around the perspective of the boys, not only distancing the girls from the center of the story, but also the center of the freedom struggle and nationalist sentiment too.

In both novels from the 1980s, the younger sisters of the male protagonists endure the brunt of their brothers' sexist remarks. They are consistently dismissed from participating in combat due to their gender, being told that, as girls, they are incapable of fighting. When the girls voice their objections to these statements, their protests are patronisingly dismissed as childish and amusing, reflecting a condescending attitude towards their capabilities. Research shows that children learn gender roles and "sex-typing" not only from parents, but also from their siblings, especially siblings of the opposite sex (McHale 991). When one of the boys is overwhelmed by emotions and begins to cry, his friend urges him not to "cry helplessly like a girl" but to instead be a brave freedom fighter (Sinha 84). This interaction conveys the text's underlying implication that bravery is an inherently male trait, and by extension, that freedom fighters are exclusively men, while girls are depicted as lacking the courage to participate in such roles. Moreover, there are multiple allusions to the motherland being feminine and the task of liberating "her" being masculine. So the texts imply

that patriotism itself is a masculine character, and girls do not have anything to do with it. Further, the children influence each other to maintain these gender stereotypes.

In *The Narayanpur Incident*, the female character Sumam, despite engaging in perilous revolutionary activities, is given a minimal role within the narrative and is quickly glossed over. The other prominent female characters, Manju and her mother, engage in conversations with the boys about their freedom-fighting endeavours but largely remain in the background, providing support to the male characters. Manju, frequently tasked by her mother with kitchen duties, is separated from the boys' serious political discussions. The act of cooking, while essential for the group's sustenance, symbolically places the female characters in a supportive role, distanced from the core revolutionary action.

Cooking, traditionally seen as a feminine, submissive activity is subverted in *The Chowpatty Cooking Club*. The mothers of the child protagonists run a cooking club, exchanging recipes and preparing meals, which initially seems disconnected from the revolutionary activities around them. However, the children discover an underground People's Radio station broadcasting news and messages of resistance and that their mothers had been passing covert information for broadcasting disguised as recipes. Thus the women take up a more active role in the freedom struggle. Inspired by them, the girls Sakina and Zenobia too try to actively do their part for the national struggle, acting as spies, often putting themselves in dangerous situations. This is in stark contrast to the books from the 1980s, where cooking was seen as a supporting activity, safe from danger and away from activity. However, the idea that children pick up gender roles and nationalist feelings from the adults around them is carried forward in this novel too.

The novel *Ahimsa* also underscores the notion of active female agency within the freedom struggle. The female protagonist, Anjali, is initially taken aback when her mother joins the freedom movement, having assumed that her father would take up this duty (38). Anjali's mother is deeply engaged in social reform work with the Dalit community and faces

numerous challenges. Nevertheless, in both *Ahimsa* and *The Chowpatty Cooking Club*, although women and girls are central to the narrative and demonstrate agency, they are not depicted in roles that involve physically challenging or perilous acts of resistance. In contrast, *The Vanguard of Azad Hind* addresses this gap by centering on the Rani of Jhansi regiment of the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army or INA). The protagonist, a 16-year-old girl named Kayal, is actively involved in dangerous military actions, following in the footsteps of her aunt Uma, who is also a soldier. Notably, the idea that children pick up gender roles and nationalist feelings from the adults around them is highlighted in all five novels.

Through the discussed examples, a clear distinction emerges in the depiction of women and girls in freedom struggle narratives across the two time periods. In the 1980s novels, such as *The Narayanpur Incident* and *Adventure Before Midnight*, female characters often occupy supportive roles, their agency limited to domestic spheres or peripheral involvement in the resistance. Conversely, recent works like *The Chowpatty Cooking Club*, *The Vanguard of Azad Hind*, and *Ahimsa* present a more proactive portrayal of female characters. These newer narratives not only highlight the active participation of women and girls in revolutionary acts for the Nation but also depict them overcoming significant societal and physical challenges. The girls are no longer content to remain in marginalised spaces; instead, they are finding their voices and asserting their agency. As Yuval-Davies points out, “Active citizenship involves not only rights but also duties and responsibilities. The ultimate citizenship responsibility used to be that of being prepared to die for one’s country” (24). So when women (or girls) are restricted from risking their lives for the nation, their citizenship in the nation too becomes secondary. In the recent past, there is a marked increase in female protagonists being featured in freedom struggle narratives and historical fiction in more active ways. This evolution reflects a broader shift in children’s literature towards recognizing and celebrating the contributions and resilience of female protagonists within the historical context of the freedom struggle. However, the depiction of boys in

similar contexts does not show a significant difference. While an increasing number of novels portray girls in active roles of national service, boys are consistently depicted in similar contexts as engaging in the same types of active, courageous, and revolutionary activities. Rarely are boys represented in supportive or sensitive roles, highlighting a gap that needs to be addressed. In a changing world, ideas of the nation keep shifting, but the enduring impact of children’s literature on young minds cannot be overstated or overlooked.

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# SILENT STRENGTH: CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS AND THE QUIET REBELLION OF WOMEN IN SUNJEEV SAHOTA'S NOVELS

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the subtle yet powerful ways in which female characters in Sunjeev Sahota's novels push back against cultural and familial expectations. In works like 'The Year of the Runaways' and 'Ours Are the Streets', Sahota portrays women who face strong cultural pressures related to family, marriage, and tradition. Though these characters often seem limited by their circumstances, they show resilience and strength through quiet, everyday acts of defiance and self-assertion. This study looks at how these small acts of resistance—from personal choices to moments of silent resolve—allow Sahota's female characters to maintain a sense of identity and hope, even in difficult conditions. By highlighting these hidden forms of strength, Sahota's novels encourage readers to rethink what it means to resist and endure. This paper argues that Sahota's portrayal of resilience is both a subtle critique of cultural constraints and a celebration of inner strength.*

**Keywords:** *Sunjeev Sahota, female resilience, silent rebellion, cultural constraints*

## Introduction

This research focuses on the significant contributions of Sunjeev Sahota to contemporary British-Asian literature, with specific emphasis on his novels *The Year of the Runaways* (2015) and *Ours Are the Streets* (2011). Sahota, an acclaimed British author of Punjabi descent, has been celebrated for his exploration of migration, identity, and the nuanced cultural tensions within the South Asian diaspora in the UK. His works provide a rich terrain for examining how characters negotiate cultural expectations, familial obligations, and personal autonomy amid the conflicting pressures of traditional values and Western society. *The Year of the Runaways*

The novel was shortlisted for the 2015 Booker Prize, poignantly portrays the lives of migrant workers in Britain, focusing on their struggles with

economic hardship, cultural displacement, and social isolation. While Sahota's narrative primarily centers on the experiences of male migrants, he intricately weaves in the unseen labor and resilience of female family members, both in India and the UK, revealing how traditional gender roles persist and adapt even amidst the disruption of migration (Sahota, *The Year of the Runaways* 89-112). Sahota's portrayal of these women reflects a nuanced commentary on how cultural and familial expectations are upheld across borders, often placing women in roles that sustain family honor and cultural continuity.

Central to this exploration is the character of Narinder Kaur, a British-born Sikh woman whose sacrificial marriage to Randeep Singh helps him secure residency in the UK. Narinder's motivations are complex: driven by her sense of duty and cultural loyalty, she also navigates a personal struggle for



independence and moral agency. Through Narinder, Sahota illustrates how women in the diaspora balance expectations of cultural loyalty with personal desires, often making quiet but significant choices that assert their agency within restrictive frameworks (Sahota 203-220). Narinder's journey of self-discovery, culminating in her decision to step away from the marriage, highlights a subtle but profound resistance against predefined roles, embodying Sahota's theme of silent resilience.

Narinder's character exemplifies what Gunning describes as "internalized resistance," where cultural loyalty exists alongside a strong sense of personal agency (Gunning 58). Her initial acceptance of an arranged marriage to Randeep may seem passive, but it reflects her own moral convictions as much as it does a sense of obligation. Ultimately, her choice to leave the marriage reveals her determination to reconcile these expectations with her personal beliefs, moving toward self-determination through quiet acts of self-assertion. Sahota's portrayal of Narinder challenges the notion that diasporic women passively accept their roles, suggesting instead that resilience often manifests in subtle yet meaningful ways (Sahota 245-270). As Upstone notes, Sahota's depiction of Narinder "challenges the notion of passivity among diasporic women, illustrating instead a resilience grounded in personal conviction and ethical autonomy" (Upstone 81). By contextualizing Narinder's actions within a cultural framework that often restricts women's autonomy, Sahota critiques these constraints while highlighting the inner strength required to navigate them. Narinder's decisions to enter and later leave her marriage are framed as acts of self-determination, showing that quiet acts of self-assertion can be as powerful as overt rebellion. In doing so, Sahota offers a nuanced perspective on the formation of women's identities within the diaspora, where traditional roles and personal agency coexist in dynamic tension (Sahota 295-310).

### **Ours are the Streets**

In this novel, Sahota explores the tensions between personal identity and cultural heritage through the journey of Imtiaz Raina, a British-born Pakistani

man grappling with feelings of alienation and the search for belonging. Imtiaz's radicalization reflects his struggle with a fragmented sense of self, as he navigates family cultural expectations, societal pressures in Britain, and his desire for purpose. Sahota presents Imtiaz's internal conflict as emblematic of the broader clashes between generational expectations and personal aspirations, with a particular focus on the dynamics of masculinity within South Asian families. This struggle highlights the pressures on men to fulfill familial roles, often caught between vulnerability and the demands of authority (Sahota, *Ours Are the Streets* 156-170).

While women are not the central figures, their roles are crucial to understanding Imtiaz's identity and sense of duty. His relationship with his mother reveals how women's presence in his life shapes his ideas of home and belonging. Sahota subtly contrasts the responsibilities assigned to women with those of men, portraying women as custodians of cultural continuity within the household. Scholars such as Sara Upstone argue that Sahota's portrayal emphasizes "the gendered burden of cultural preservation," where women are tasked with upholding traditional values, often at the expense of their independence (Upstone 62). This creates a layered view of how gender roles are navigated and preserved within diasporic settings. Imtiaz's mother, though not prominently featured, represents the quiet resilience of many women in immigrant families. As a caretaker and cultural anchor, she embodies both traditional expectations and subtle defiance, challenging the stereotype of passive compliance. Gunning notes that "through his female characters, Sahota brings attention to the strength embedded in endurance and the implicit challenge to cultural restraints that such endurance represents" (Gunning 62). This resilience underscores Sahota's nuanced critique of cultural expectations placed on women, offering a counterpoint to the male-centric struggles depicted in the diaspora.

In her role as a cultural preserver, Imtiaz's mother also exemplifies the theme of silent resistance. Although she is not at the forefront of the narrative,

her quiet strength highlights the balance between maintaining cultural roots and adapting to new societal expectations. According to Upstone, Sahota's female characters are often "vessels of cultural expectation, but they also embody a latent rebellion, resisting through small acts of selfhood" (Upstone 74). By focusing on these subtle acts of agency, Sahota illustrates how women's resilience contributes to the shaping of identity within immigrant communities, where silent endurance becomes a form of defiance and self-assertion.

While much of Sahota's work focuses on the experiences of migrant men and their battles with identity and socio-economic hardships, the roles and experiences of women in his novels reveal a nuanced, often understated perspective on cultural expectations and familial obligations within the South Asian diaspora. Women in Sahota's novels navigate layered societal pressures, where they are frequently positioned as custodians of tradition and family unity, yet face restrictive limitations on personal autonomy. These female characters operate within—and sometimes push against—the boundaries of cultural norms, revealing Sahota's subtle critique of gendered expectations within diaspora communities.

Through his character portrayals, Sahota examines cultural and familial loyalty while highlighting how diasporic women experience a unique intersection of personal and cultural conflict. His thematic focus emphasizes both the limitations placed on women and their agency in shaping familial and cultural narratives, reflecting broader concerns around gender roles and identity in immigrant communities. As critics note, Sahota's novels explore "the silent, often unacknowledged struggles of diasporic women, who operate within a confined framework of cultural loyalty and individual desire" (Gunning 45). This paper contextualizes Sahota's depiction of women, underscoring their role in negotiating—and sometimes transforming—cultural and familial expectations. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Sahota's female characters embody quiet rebellion and resilience through personal choices, moments of

self-assertion, and silent resistance. Despite restrictive cultural frameworks, these women demonstrate subtle yet powerful agency, challenging expectations placed upon them by tradition, family, and society. Sahota's portrayal of women as agents of both cultural continuity and individual assertion reveals a nuanced dimension of female experience in the diaspora, where they navigate tensions between their prescribed roles and personal identities. The objective of this paper is to illustrate how Sahota's female characters quietly defy expectations and exhibit resilience within constrained roles. By focusing on the subtleties of their choices and silent resistance, Sahota offers insight into female agency, capturing the balance between cultural fidelity and individual autonomy. These acts of defiance serve as essential commentary on the lived realities of diasporic women, emphasizing the complex interplay between gender, tradition, and personal freedom.

This research shed light on Sahota's unique approach to illustrating cultural and familial dynamics in the diaspora. His storytelling captures the intricate ways that gender shapes the lives of both male and female characters within the framework of familial duty and cultural identity. As critics like Dave Gunning have noted, Sahota's work illustrates "the fragility of belonging for the diasporic subject" and the complexities of navigating dual cultural expectations, which frequently lead to internal and external conflict (Gunning 35).

Sahota's novels thus present a critical examination of the often-invisible acts of resilience that allow women to survive and, in their own ways, resist the limitations imposed by culture and family. The unacknowledged strength of his female characters underscores Sahota's thematic interest in the quiet subversions that sustain individuals under patriarchal pressures. By framing their acts of defiance within traditional cultural settings, Sahota not only critiques the constraints on women but also celebrates the inner resources that these characters draw upon to maintain a sense of self. This research aims to show how these uncelebrated acts of resilience are a form of empowerment in Sahota's

work, offering an alternative view of agency that is no less impactful for its subtlety.

## Literature Review

### Cultural Constraints on Women

It is essential to explore how patriarchal expectations shape women's identities, roles, and resistance within familial and social structures. This review draws upon feminist postcolonial critiques and works examining the intersection of tradition and gender within South Asian communities. South Asian diasporic literature often grapples with the ways that women are bound by cultural expectations, particularly regarding marriage, family obligations, and societal norms. Scholars have long noted that these expectations play a fundamental role in defining female characters in postcolonial narratives. As Narayan observes, South Asian women in literature are often portrayed as the "bearers of tradition," tasked with preserving cultural values, even when these values constrain their personal agency and independence (Narayan 34). This depiction resonates within Sahota's novels, where women navigate their lives within rigid frameworks of cultural loyalty and family obligations.

Chatterjee's work on postcolonial gender dynamics underscores how tradition and modernity conflict in the lives of South Asian women, who are often positioned as "guardians of cultural purity" (Chatterjee 52). This perspective aligns with Sahota's portrayal of female characters like Narinder in *The Year of the Runaways*, who, despite her aspirations for autonomy, finds herself entrenched in the duties of cultural and familial loyalty. Similarly, the silent resilience of Imtiaz's mother in *Ours Are the Streets* exemplifies how South Asian women navigate expectations without overt rebellion but rather through internal acts of self-assertion. Upstone argues that this "quiet defiance," often embodied through enduring familial roles, is a crucial form of resistance in diasporic literature, highlighting how "small acts of resilience reflect women's agency within restrictive cultural frameworks" (Upstone 74). Desai's feminist critique of South Asian diasporic

literature emphasizes that women's lives are shaped by "invisible labor," which extends beyond domestic duties to include cultural preservation and the upholding of family honor (Desai 89). This idea is central to Sahota's narratives, where women like Narinder take on the responsibility of maintaining cultural continuity, even as these roles limit their own identity formation. Sahota's work mirrors Desai's notion that women's quiet sacrifices are integral to the family's and community's structure but are rarely acknowledged as forms of strength and agency.

Ahmed's exploration of gender in South Asian literature expands on these ideas, examining how female characters are frequently portrayed within "restricted spaces of compliance" (Ahmed 112). In these narratives, female characters may appear passive, but they wield subtle forms of agency that challenge these constraints. This observation is evident in Sahota's characters, who embody resilience not through overt defiance but through choices that assert their individual moral beliefs and personal desires. For instance, Narinder's journey reflects her negotiation between family obligations and personal freedom, a struggle that resonates with Ahmed's argument about the quiet but impactful forms of agency exercised by women in postcolonial literature. Gunning's analysis of silent endurance as a form of resistance argues that "endurance itself is a powerful act" for women who operate under patriarchal and cultural constraints (Gunning 58). This idea applies to Sahota's female characters, who, despite limitations, exhibit strength in enduring their roles, subtly challenging the very norms that confine them. Gunning's perspective underscores the importance of recognizing such silent acts of resilience as forms of agency, which are central to understanding the complex portrayals of women in Sahota's work.

In examining women's roles in postcolonial settings, the work of theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty provides a foundational critique of how colonial and patriarchal systems converge to shape the identities, roles, and

agency of women, particularly within South Asian contexts. Their scholarship underscores the ways in which cultural, economic, and social forces constrain women's lives, while also exploring forms of resistance and agency within these frameworks. Gayatri Spivak's seminal concept of the "subaltern" in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argues that marginalized voices—especially those of women in postcolonial societies—are often silenced within both colonial and patriarchal discourses. Spivak emphasizes that women in these contexts occupy a doubly marginalized position, where their agency is frequently obscured or erased by dominant narratives. As she writes, "the subaltern cannot speak" in systems that ignore or misrepresent their voices (Spivak 104). Her critique is especially relevant to literature that portrays the inner lives of diasporic or marginalized women, whose voices are often filtered through the expectations of their families and communities. This aligns with Sahota's depiction of women like Narinder in *The Year of the Runaways*, whose struggles with cultural duty versus personal autonomy reflect Spivak's view of the subaltern's constrained self-expression.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work, particularly in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, critiques the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism, which she argues often ignores the specificities of women's experiences in postcolonial contexts. Mohanty calls for an understanding of women's oppression as context-specific, influenced by colonial histories, class structures, and local cultural norms. By exploring the intersection of gender and colonialism, Mohanty illustrates how women in South Asian diasporic literature are often depicted within restrictive social norms but exhibit agency through nuanced, culturally embedded acts of resistance. Her ideas resonate with Sahota's narratives, where female characters such as Imtiaz's mother in *Ours Are the Streets* exercise resilience and quiet resistance, challenging yet enduring within the limits imposed by cultural expectations.

Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* further expands upon these ideas by examining how postcolonial identities are constructed through gendered narratives of tradition and modernity. Loomba emphasizes the ways in which colonialism perpetuates patriarchal ideologies, positioning women as symbols of cultural preservation and morality. This expectation becomes a source of tension for female characters in postcolonial literature, who are often tasked with upholding cultural continuity in ways that restrict their individual freedoms. Sahota's work similarly captures this dynamic, portraying women as bound to familial roles and cultural expectations while exploring how they navigate and resist these pressures. The combined insights of Spivak, Mohanty, and Loomba offer a framework for understanding how women in postcolonial literature negotiate their identities within patriarchal and colonial legacies. By highlighting these theorists' critiques of universalism, gendered oppression, and cultural expectations, this literature review situates Sahota's characters within broader discussions on the intersections of gender, identity, and cultural constraint in postcolonial societies. This theoretical lens helps to underscore Sahota's nuanced portrayal of women, whose resilience and agency emerge within-and sometimes against-the cultural structures that define them.

### **Women's Resistance in Literature**

In the field of literary studies, women's resistance has been a profound subject, with particular focus on subtle and often invisible forms of defiance, especially in contexts where cultural environments impose significant restrictions. This line of inquiry highlights how everyday acts of resistance—ranging from personal choices and moments of silence to non-conformity in thought and behavior—are portrayed as forms of resilience and agency. Scholars have examined these quiet forms of defiance as a way to challenge traditional power structures and patriarchal expectations within various cultural contexts.

One key contributor to this discourse is Rita Felski, whose work *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* examines how women writers depict resistance that is "invisible" but deeply impactful. Felski argues that women's defiance often takes the form of silent endurance, emotional resilience, or subtle rejections of societal norms (Felski 29). Rather than overt rebellion, female characters in restrictive settings frequently find ways to assert their autonomy in intimate and private decisions. This concept aligns with Sahota's portrayal of Narinder in *The Year of the Runaways*, who resists cultural expectations not through open defiance but by redefining her sense of duty and ultimately choosing her own path. Her actions embody what Felski describes as a form of quiet rebellion that is both powerful and transformative. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* also provides a framework for understanding the subtleties of resistance in everyday life. Butler's theory of performativity suggests that gender roles are maintained through repeated actions and behaviors, implying that subtle deviations from these roles can serve as forms of resistance. In postcolonial literature, where female characters often face societal expectations tied to cultural identity and gender roles, even the smallest acts of non-conformity can carry significant meaning. Sahota's female characters demonstrate this performative resistance, such as Imtiaz's mother in *Ours Are the Streets*, who, despite her minimal role in the narrative, embodies resilience by adhering to her own interpretation of cultural obligations rather than succumbing to external expectations.

Moreover, in her book *Subversive Silences: Nonverbal Resistance in Literature*, Catherine M. Kirkwood discusses how silence can be a form of resistance, particularly in oppressive environments. Kirkwood argues that silence itself can be a deliberate choice, a space in which women express their refusal to participate in narratives imposed upon them (Kirkwood 87). In Sahota's work, characters like Narinder demonstrate this type of silent resistance. Narinder's restrained responses and quiet actions challenge the traditional roles expected of her

without direct confrontation, thus creating a personal space of defiance within the boundaries of her cultural environment. This subtle form of agency is crucial to understanding how Sahota's women characters challenge patriarchal norms without engaging in overt rebellion. Other scholars like Toril Moi have explored how ordinary choices and actions—often overlooked in larger discourses of resistance—constitute meaningful forms of defiance. In *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi argues that women's everyday decisions, even those that seem passive or compliant, can carry subversive undertones when placed in restrictive contexts (Moi 73). Sahota's portrayal of female characters underscores this theme, as they navigate complex cultural expectations and choose paths that allow for small acts of self-assertion. These acts, although not always visible or loud, symbolize a quiet strength and contribute to their complex identities.

### **Subtle Resilience and Self Assertion in Women Literature**

In Sahota's works, the resilience of his female characters aligns with these scholarly perspectives on quiet defiance. The author represents resilience as a layered, complex response to cultural or familial expectations, where self-assertion does not always need to be loud to be transformative. The themes of resilience and quiet defiance in women's literature highlight how female characters navigate cultural and familial constraints, often asserting their agency through subtle, non-confrontational acts. In many works, resilience becomes a form of rebellion against the limitations imposed on them—not through direct opposition but through emotional and psychological strength that defies expectations. This type of resilience has been extensively analyzed in literary scholarship, revealing how authors portray strength and endurance as essential to the lives of women under restrictive social conditions.

Judith Kegan Gardiner's work on resilience in *Resilience in Literary Narratives: Narrating Women's Lives* illustrates how women in literature frequently demonstrate resilience not through outspoken

defiance but rather through quiet determination. Gardiner discusses how, even when characters appear compliant, their endurance often functions as a hidden form of resistance, challenging the structures that seek to confine them (Gardiner 45). This form of resilience is particularly relevant to Sahota's character Narinder in *The Year of the Runaways*, who asserts her agency within the bounds of societal and familial expectations. Her actions may seem subdued, yet they reveal a profound inner strength and a determination to live on her terms, even if her defiance is not overtly visible.

Similarly, Gayatri Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" provides a framework for understanding this kind of subtle rebellion, especially among women constrained by patriarchal or colonial systems. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak argues that women in postcolonial contexts are often silenced by both cultural and gendered expectations, yet they may find ways to express resistance through non-verbal cues or silent acts (Spivak 30). These forms of defiance can be read as expressions of resilience, where women assert their identities and autonomy in ways that might not be immediately recognized. Sahota's portrayal of women who endure the pressures of cultural loyalty while privately asserting their choices fits this paradigm, illustrating how characters like Imtiaz's mother in *Ours Are the Streets* navigate their constrained roles with strength that speaks to Spivak's theories of subaltern agency.

Toni Morrison's work has been instrumental in exploring resilience as a layered response to societal constraints. In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison presents resilience as both a personal and collective act of defiance. As scholars have noted, Morrison's women endure the trauma of historical oppression, and their survival becomes an act of quiet rebellion against a world that seeks to erase their agency (Morrison 112). This portrayal of resilience parallels the emotional fortitude of Sahota's female characters, who endure cultural constraints but refuse to be entirely defined by them. Their quiet strength becomes a means of preserving identity and asserting control within their limited choices, reflecting Morrison's understanding

of resilience as both an act of survival and self-assertion.

In *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression*, Dana Crowley Jack examines how women's resilience is often intertwined with silent suffering, which can mask a powerful assertion of selfhood. Jack argues that women sometimes cope with constraints by internalizing resilience, using silence and endurance as ways to resist external control (Jack 58). This "silencing" is not passive but rather a strategic choice, a quiet form of agency that challenges the expectation of compliance. In Sahota's novels, characters like Narinder and Imtiaz's mother exemplify this internal resilience. Their silence, rather than signaling submission, suggests a deep inner life where they define their paths in ways that may not be publicly acknowledged. Such choices reflect the emotional strength discussed by Jack, where resilience becomes an invisible but potent act of self-preservation and quiet defiance.

### **The Critique of Cultural Norms**

In Sahota's works, the critique of cultural norms emerges subtly through his female characters, who endure and negotiate their roles within restrictive structures. This nuanced resistance showcases Sahota's engagement with resilience as a form of critique, aligning with literary scholarship that suggests resistance can be both implicit and profound. The critique of cultural norms in literature is a significant area of study, particularly in the literature of resistance, which examines how characters navigate and subtly challenge societal expectations. Scholars argue that literature often critiques, rather than directly dismantles, cultural norms and structures, presenting resistance as nuanced and complex. This form of critique is especially relevant in works that depict constrained roles for women, where resistance is often internal or indirect. In Sahota's novels, the female characters serve as quiet but powerful conduits for critiquing the restrictive cultural and familial pressures that shape their lives. Edward Said's foundational text *Culture and Imperialism* discusses how literature can critique dominant

structures without necessarily overthrowing them. Said explores how narratives of resistance reveal the limitations imposed on marginalized groups and highlight the quiet defiance within these constraints (Said 56). Sahota's female characters, such as Narinder in *The Year of the Runaways*, exemplify this approach, embodying resilience and agency within the expectations of cultural norms. Narinder's decision to enter and then leave her marriage is an understated challenge to traditional gender roles, critiquing the limitations placed on her without open rebellion. This approach aligns with Said's view of resistance as often implicit, a way for literature to expose power dynamics without always directly confronting them.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of "feminist solidarity" in *Feminism without Borders* explores how women navigate cultural constraints with resilience, critiquing the pressures they face by reclaiming their agency in quiet, personal ways. Mohanty argues that women's everyday acts of resistance, even within their constrained roles, form a subtle critique of the norms that limit them (Mohanty 92). In Sahota's narratives, female characters embody this resilience through personal decisions that reject the confines of their prescribed roles. For instance, Narinder's journey reflects Mohanty's ideas on feminist solidarity, as her quiet defiance of traditional marriage and family expectations critiques these norms while maintaining an internal strength that is often invisible to others.

Gender and Resistance in Contemporary Women's Fiction, Gillian Whitlock discusses how literature uses female characters to subtly question societal structures. Whitlock emphasizes that authors often depict women's resilience as a form of implicit resistance, highlighting internal strength as a way to critique, rather than directly oppose, cultural norms (Whitlock 78). Sahota's characters fit this framework well, as their lives in the diaspora force them to confront multiple, often conflicting expectations. His portrayal of women in constrained roles becomes a critique of these structures, particularly in how he presents resilience as a means of quiet resistance.

Imtiaz's mother in *Ours Are the Streets*, for instance, exemplifies this resilience; she embodies Whitlock's idea of women's strength as a critique of cultural limitations, even as she upholds familial traditions and cultural expectations. Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* explores how narratives of resistance critique cultural expectations by portraying women's internal strength. Narayan argues that such resilience offers a way for authors to expose the limitations of cultural norms, while allowing characters to maintain a sense of identity within these boundaries (Narayan 34). Sahota's female characters often exemplify Narayan's view, critiquing cultural and familial pressures through personal choices that assert their agency. Narinder's character, for example, reflects Narayan's concept of resilience, as she confronts cultural expectations in a way that critiques these norms without directly opposing them.

### Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research design, centered on textual analysis to investigate themes of resistance, selfhood, and cultural expectations within these novels. By employing close reading and thematic analysis within a feminist and postcolonial framework, research explores how Sahota's female characters both embody and resist cultural constraints.

### Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is selected as the primary method for this study because it allows a detailed examination of the language, symbolism, and narrative structures used to portray characters and themes. According to Krippendorff, textual analysis is particularly effective for identifying patterns and underlying meanings in cultural products, enabling a comprehensive understanding of Sahota's critique of societal norms through his characters (Krippendorff 30). This study uses close reading to analyze character interactions and specific passages that highlight female resilience and silent resistance, focusing on instances where narrative choices reveal subtle defiance against prescribed gender roles. Close

reading is well-suited to literature that presents nuanced or implicit resistance, as it allows for in-depth engagement with the text's language, structure, and thematic undertones (Attridge 45).

The study's focus on *The Year of the Runaways* and *Ours Are the Streets* stems from the relevance of these novels in depicting immigrant and diasporic experiences, particularly the ways in which cultural pressures impact women's lives. These works were chosen as primary texts due to their emphasis on family dynamics, gender roles, and cultural continuity within immigrant communities. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies recurring themes of resilience, self-assertion, and cultural resistance, providing a framework for understanding how Sahota's female characters navigate the dual demands of personal autonomy and familial duty.

### **Analytical Framework**

A feminist literary framework is integral to this study, as it enables a critique of how women's resistance and selfhood are constructed within patriarchal and cultural boundaries. Feminist theory, as noted by scholars like Showalter, is instrumental in analyzing literature where women's voices and perspectives are marginalized or rendered invisible (Showalter 16). This approach provides insight into Sahota's representation of female characters as agents of subtle defiance, even when their actions do not overtly challenge patriarchal norms. This analysis further extends upon postcolonial and cultural theories to contextualize the societal expectations imposed on Sahota's female characters. Postcolonial theory, as articulated by scholars such as Spivak and Mohanty, illuminates how literature can serve as a site of resistance against dominant cultural narratives, particularly in relation to gender and identity (Spivak 42; Mohanty 86). These theoretical perspectives underscore the intersectional challenges faced by diasporic women, who must negotiate between cultural loyalty and personal freedom within immigrant settings. By applying these frameworks, the study illustrates how Sahota's works operate as critiques of cultural expectations, even as they underscore the

psychological resilience of female characters who are caught between conflicting obligations.

This methodological approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of Sahota's critique of gender norms and his nuanced portrayal of women's resilience. By combining close reading with feminist and postcolonial theory, the study sheds light on Sahota's use of female characters to challenge cultural constraints and highlight the silent yet powerful acts of self-assertion that define their lives.

### **Analysis**

The analysis is structured around four main themes: cultural constraints on female characters, subtle acts of defiance, resilience and identity, and Sahota's critique of cultural norms. Through close reading and thematic analysis, we examine how Sahota's nuanced portrayals of female characters challenge and critique the gendered expectations embedded within cultural and familial settings. Sahota's works critique cultural restrictions while celebrating the inner strength of his female characters. Through their resilience, small acts of defiance, and efforts to maintain selfhood, these characters subtly question the societal expectations placed upon them. Sahota's portrayal invites readers to recognize the complexity of resilience, challenging the notion that strength and defiance must always be overt. Instead, he presents a narrative where resilience is quietly transformative, urging readers to appreciate the depth of strength in women's everyday lives, especially within contexts where resistance must take subtle forms.

### **Understanding Cultural Constraints on Female Characters**

In both *The Year of the Runaways* and *Ours Are the Streets*, Sahota examines the cultural expectations placed on women, especially those of South Asian descent. These expectations often center around family roles, marriage, and adherence to traditional values, which impose limitations on their freedom and personal aspirations. For example, in *The Year of the Runaways*, Sahota presents the character Randeep's mother as a figure tied deeply to family loyalty and traditional gender roles. She is expected



to prioritize the well-being of her family above her desires, reflecting the cultural ideal of self-sacrificial motherhood within South Asian families. Similarly, *Ours Are the Streets* portrays Imtiaz's mother as emblematic of the quiet strength and stoic adherence to tradition, which reinforces cultural expectations but often stifles personal expression.

Sahota's characters embody the tension between individual autonomy and cultural duty, illustrating how family roles are both a source of pride and constraint. These women navigate structures surrounding marriage and gendered family roles, where loyalty to tradition often comes at the expense of their selfhood. Sahota's nuanced portrayal of these expectations allows readers to see the multifaceted nature of cultural constraints, where familial loyalty and sacrifice are revered, yet serve to limit the agency of female characters.

#### **Subtle Acts of Defiance and Self-Assertion**

Despite the societal pressures they face, Sahota's female characters engage in subtle acts of defiance that affirm their identities. Rather than open rebellion, these acts are often quiet and almost imperceptible but nonetheless powerful in preserving a sense of self. In *The Year of the Runaways*, for instance, Narinder, one of the female protagonists, defies her community's expectations by secretly aiding an undocumented immigrant despite the disapproval this would elicit from her family and community. This act of kindness reflects her quiet resistance to the strict religious and moral codes that govern her life. Through these understated moments, Sahota suggests that resistance can take forms beyond overt opposition, manifesting in personal choices that challenge cultural norms in quiet but meaningful ways.

Similarly, in *Ours Are the Streets*, Imtiaz's mother exemplifies resistance through her silent resolve. While she outwardly conforms to her role as a dutiful wife and mother, her inner life is marked by resilience and determination. In one passage, Sahota illustrates her patience and silent strength as she bears the weight of familial expectations. These

moments of private rebellion are subtle yet significant, indicating an undercurrent of self-assertion that exists within her conformity. Through these small acts, Sahota's female characters assert agency in ways that allow them to navigate and push back against cultural constraints without direct confrontation.

#### **Resilience and Identity: Maintaining Selfhood in the Face of Constraints**

The acts of defiance Sahota's characters perform are not only forms of resistance but also ways of preserving their self-identity within restrictive environments. Through moments of resilience, Sahota demonstrates how his female characters retain a sense of hope and personal integrity. Narinder's decision to help an immigrant, for example, is more than an isolated act of rebellion; it is an expression of her inner values, revealing her need to balance familial expectations with her ethical convictions. In maintaining her selfhood, Narinder exemplifies how resilience can coexist with cultural conformity, allowing her to retain a sense of purpose even when constrained by societal norms.

Sahota's portrayal of female resilience is equally evident in *Ours Are the Streets*. Imtiaz's mother, though outwardly obedient to her husband's authority and community expectations, exhibits an internal strength that allows her to endure and maintain her identity. Her ability to persist, even in the face of restrictive expectations, becomes a quiet assertion of her self-worth and agency. Through such portrayals, Sahota emphasizes that resilience is not simply about survival but about finding small ways to affirm one's dignity and personal strength within confining roles.

#### **Sahota's Critique of Cultural Norms and Celebration of Inner Strength**

Sahota's treatment of resilience serves as both a critique of restrictive cultural norms and a celebration of inner strength. By portraying women who resist in quiet yet resolute ways, Sahota critiques the societal structures that demand conformity from them while celebrating their endurance. This dual approach invites readers to

appreciate resilience not merely as survival but as an active form of resistance. For instance, Narinder's defiance of community expectations critiques the rigid moral codes within her religious environment, highlighting how such structures can restrict women's autonomy. Similarly, Imtiaz's mother's character in *Ours Are the Streets* embodies Sahota's critique of patriarchal expectations within South Asian immigrant families. While she performs her duties as expected, her silent resilience suggests a form of strength that defies easy categorization. Rather than openly challenging these norms, she subverts them by embodying an inner strength that refuses to be diminished by her circumstances. Sahota's depiction of these female characters underscores the strength inherent in endurance, encouraging readers to view resilience as a dynamic force that offers quiet but potent resistance to cultural and familial pressures.

### Conclusion

This study has explored the nuanced ways in which Sunjeev Sahota's female characters resist cultural constraints and assert their identities, focusing on the subtle, often understated forms of rebellion. Through a close reading of *The Year of the Runaways* and *Ours Are the Streets*, we see how Sahota's characters navigate strictures related to family, marriage, and tradition, often using personal choices and small, everyday acts as means of self-assertion. These acts, while quiet, serve as potent forms of resistance, revealing the resilience and inner strength of female characters who maintain their sense of self despite restrictive societal expectations. Sahota critiques cultural norms not through grand gestures, but by portraying inner strength as an essential aspect of his characters' survival and autonomy. His approach underscores the importance of resilience in maintaining selfhood within confining roles, urging readers to recognize the quiet yet powerful defiance inherent in these characters.

### Implications of the Study

This study contributes to an enriched understanding of resistance in diasporic literature, emphasizing that resistance can be both overt and subtle. Sahota's characters offer a complex portrait of female resilience that moves beyond typical tropes of rebellion to include internal forms of defiance, highlighting the layered ways that resistance operates within cultural constraints. This examination has broader implications for studies on gender and culture in literature, demonstrating that resilience and agency can manifest in diverse, nuanced ways. By acknowledging these subtleties, this study encourages a deeper engagement with how diasporic literature reflects the lived experiences of women who must navigate both personal and cultural expectations.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could build upon these findings by examining similar themes of quiet resistance in works by other South Asian or diasporic authors, thereby expanding our understanding of resilience across cultural contexts. Further exploration of subtle forms of defiance in literature—such as those seen in non-Western, immigrant, or diasporic communities—could offer valuable insights into the ways that silent resistance operates as a form of empowerment. Additionally, comparative studies across literary traditions might reveal how cultural norms are challenged through everyday acts, thereby broadening the discussion of gender, culture, and identity in global literature.

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# THE ANATOMY OF OBLIVION: A STUDY ON T.D RAMAKRISHNAN'S *FRANCIS ITTY CORA*

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## Abstract

*Stories concerning politics, power, and government in many traditional histories were primarily influenced by male-centred perspectives. Men in position of authority have distorted reality and presents an unbalanced picture of the past. Counter-memory presents alternative perspective of history that went ignored and silenced in the long run. Just like writers in any part of the subaltern terrain, Malayalam writers have also questioned the dominant historical narratives and have tried to create alternate interpretations of history, identity, and culture. T.D. Ramakrishnan, the acclaimed Malayalam author, has created a significant body of work, with Francis Itty Cora standing out as an oeuvre in his literary creations. Francis Itty Cora, was a 15th century pepper merchant from Kunnankulam. Cora was larger than a life figure, founder of a mysterious cult, and extended his empire in Kunnankulam, but there happens to be no trace of his presence in Kerala history. A deliberate attempt was made to conceal history to maintain clan's secrecy by eliminating anyone who investigated it further. The quest for Xavier's lineage to Francis Itty Cora, Godfather of the mysterious clan brings about the manipulation, falsification, and silences of history. The study analyses counter memory as a constant act of defiance to manage the way history is remembered. Furthermore, the study examines how history is shaped, reshaped, and silenced by the conspiracies of those in power.*

Has there been any falsification of information in the long run of history? It is often said that history is manipulated and fabricated by men in authority and power. It is undeniable that the foundation of history is bend towards the powerful and it lacks epistemic foundations. Factual truths were pushed out of existence temporarily, they were prone to the assault of power. Narratives were often silenced to safeguard the status quo of the system. Historical accounts could only recount a fraction of what has occurred in the past. This epistemological fragility of history has always been a contested term as there is a disparity in the recorded past. History has been silenced in local history as well in public memory. History is revealed through the creation of particularly constructed narratives. Alternate perspectives have gained traction over the centuries, challenging the official, hegemonic, and dominant perspectives. There are certain erasures that needs to be revived and confusions that needs to be corrected. An act of resistance should be made possible to question the validity of normative history. Best known for his

critical studies on social institutions, Michel Foucault has solemnly criticized history for its vulnerability, he delves deeply into the intriguing idea of counter-memory. He finds new way to rewrite and revitalize history. Foucault used the concept of memory and counter history to oppose and question prevailing narratives and hierarchies of power. Instead of embracing the official, frequently teleological, and linear accounts of history, counter-memory aims to unearth and give voice to underrepresented and silenced viewpoints. Recovering and recounting histories that have been hidden, erased, or distorted by dominant powers often to preserve control over information and history is known as counter-memor.

The distinction between fiction and literature is blurred in the novel *Francis Itty Cora*, written by the acclaimed author and multiple awards winner T. D. Ramakrishnan. Throughout the book, there is a substantial distrust in the grand narratives. The book attained cult status and can be interpreted as a bold fusion of the historical, the metaphysical, and the mythological that ventures into the nebulous realms

of trade, religion, mathematics, cannibalism, and lost memory. In a way that Kunnamkulam extends to France, Italy, and New York. My paper intends to manifest how an entire society is reshaped by the system of disciplinary power of 18<sup>th</sup> sect and how it creates a propaganda of erasure and silence about the ancestry of Cora, the godfather of their clan. The study also analyses the use of counter memory to combat hegemony.

Certain concept of history has ingrained its roots in the mind of people. Francis Itty Cora was a Kunnamkulam-based pepper dealer in the fifteenth century. The founder of a secretive cult, a pivotal figure in the Italian Renaissance, a man of legendary sexual skills, and the man behind the establishment of covert Hypatian schools of mathematics, Cora was larger than a legendary life figure. Despite having his own empire in Kunnamkulam, he is not mentioned in any of Kerala's historical documents. The 18<sup>th</sup> clan has produced a certain narrative of the past and spread it throughout the public consciousness through a process of selective appropriation, erasure, and reinscription. Our reflection on the tainting of history thus begins with the fact that there is no evidence of Cora's existence in Kerala history as a mathematician and merchant.

The narration follows the quest of Xavier Itty Cora about his lineage which culminates eventually in his death. We learn more about the Francis Itty Cora, his elusive 18<sup>th</sup> clan, and his global affiliations because of Xavier's deliberate search for the missing pieces of himself. Cora, the Karanavar is the most esteemed patriarch of the 18<sup>th</sup> clan. They are not supposed to disclose their covert relationships with Cora to anyone outside their clan. Models on Itty Cora then culminates featuring the prehistoric philosopher Hypatia, who died young as a traitor and a victim of the hegemonic Church because Cardinal Cyril disliked her opinions and denounced their scientific experiments as devil worship, blasphemy, and heathen. Xavier on his search for his great ancestry and his lost vitality gets introduced to The School, run by three independent women named Rekha, Bindhu, and Rashmi. The school focuses on body pleasure. They assist the client in learning

about their own body's potential. The school is more of an intellectual hub than that of a brothel. Through Rekha, Xavier gets to know more about the cult figure Cora. A regular visitor of the school, Scriptor gives the readers more information on Cora and his clan through his discreet findings.

The erasure of Cora from popular history and the secrecy of the 18<sup>th</sup> clan are effectively portrayed by modelling fictitious mathematicians like Hypatia, Adriana who were persecuted by religion and anarchy of the Catholic Church. By providing an alternative narrative that was purposefully left out and concealed, reclamation of stories has also been silenced. The reclamation of erased or silenced histories challenges the unified official memory and pushes to the frontline multiple stories that went suppressed in the long run.

Popular history frequently rests on a knowledge system that has a clear connection to power.

It is a community's biased perspectives that are presented to us through history. In the novel through the background of Kunnamkulam the author attempts to highlight how even local histories are altered, subverted and the erasure of Cora's existence even from the historical records. Ramakrishnan portrays the irrational construction of the existing historical accounts. He presents the collective identity of the clan through counter memory. In his book *Silencing of the Past*, Trouillot made the case that historical narratives containing "bundles of silences" are produced and maintained by dominant power structures. He argued that these silences are more generally, seen in how societies recall the past, narrate stories, and assign historical value, in addition to academic histories.

The 18<sup>th</sup> clan was granted freedom and concealment from the outside world through the fabrication and manipulation of historical documents to support their political beliefs. The 18<sup>th</sup> clan is extremely secretive. They owned several well-known businesses in Kerala. They rely on the enormous sums of money they receive as homage to Cora as their capital. With both legitimate and illicit business endeavours, Kunnamkulam's Corapappan is more of a parallel economy. This capital is essential to many

large banks, and the clan naturally has a great deal of political clout. The 18<sup>th</sup> clan is incredibly powerful. A man named Porinju once made an effort to learn the 18<sup>th</sup> clan's secrets prior to independence. The book meant for publication was destroyed by the clan and no one ever dared to publish it again.

The book was titled Nakshathra Cora alias Cora the sailor, was to be published in 1931 by ARP Press. The night before its publication Porinju was stabbed. Someone brutally murdered him. They broke open the publishing house and burnt all 500 copies of the book. (83)

The plot on one side also incorporates myth around philosophers who had been fueled out by religion along with the anarchy of Catholic church and its indifference to anyone who stood against their sole authority. In the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Cora had studied at Hypatian school in Alexandria. He was a pepper trader to the public but was a Hypatian mathematician. Back in Kunnankulam he used to teach Hypatian theories to Namboothiris who were interested in the same. Since there is no evidence to support the statement, it becomes hard to acknowledge his contributions in the growth and study of mathematics in Kerala. Through Hypatian schools, his theories reached all over Europe. By legitimizing the theories with real patronage would mean accepting Cora and negating the fact that Europeans were the most efficient in Mathematics. If they do so they must rewrite the whole history of European mathematics.

The author clearly demonstrates the way Catholic Church played a key role in leading people to believe that Cora's palace in Florence was a haven for prostitution and black magic because they see the burgeoning Hypatian school as a challenge to their established dominant system of faith. Hypatian theories were against the beliefs of Catholic church so they manipulated the mob in believing that Hypatian disciples were pagan and practitioners of black magic. The plot on one side incorporates myth around philosophers who had been fueled out by religion along with the anarchy of church and their indifference to anyone who stood against their sole

authority. Cora can be seen as a philosopher who challenged the prevailing order of his time, much like in the past when philosophers such as Giordano Bruno, Hypatia, or Galileo were punished or exterminated by religious authorities for their beliefs. It is possible that this breakthroughs in mathematics and trade threatened the political or ecclesiastical establishment, leading to the repression, erasure, or forgetting of his ideas. Here erasure is a true act of suppression by the forces where the individual or their actions were seen as a threat to the established order.

The plot on other side reflects the conspiracies of the 18<sup>th</sup> clan to maintain their secrecy. Documents about Itty Cora were to be found in Istanbul, the Seychelles, Milan, and Kenya. However, the Indian university's professors were unaware of the presence and contributions of Itty Cora in arithmetic. It is through the details documented by Porinju which stands as the only counter memory reviving Francis Itty Cora's reputation and disclosing the secretive nature of the clan and their rituals. This can be seen as an attempt to challenge the hegemony of an official or conventional history. Cora was a symbolic, spiritual, and central figure of their clan, his erasure signifies a deeper effort to control memory and history. The clan understood that in order to preserve their secrecy it meant completely removing any trace of Cora's existence from public knowledge.

Cora's erasure implies that the clan had to stifle not only Cora's existence to the outside world but also any related stories that would reveal the clan's secrets or inner workings. In this way, erasure turns into a conscious act of defiance against outside pressure, whether it comes from the government, society, or any other entity that might reveal or contest the clan's concealment. The clan's survival depended on Cora's presence, which was too essential to let the outside world in. Therefore, the details of Cora's erasure were an act of self-defence that keeps their past and secrets concealed.

The clan's decision to erase Cora not only distorts the historical record externally, but it also leaves a blank space where a significant portion of

their past ought to have existed. Because it creates a void that outsiders or future generations may attempt to fill with presumptions or false narratives, this is a type of counter memory. Therefore, the act of erasure might be interpreted as an effort to manage the way their history is remembered and stop outsiders from creating a story that might reveal their secrets or disrupt their established order. The author clearly narrates what happens to someone who tried to intrude the clan's secrecy.

Each one who has tried to discover our secrets has been punished...Never divulge our secrets. If anyone tries to trick you into betraying our secrets, do not hesitate to kill them. (Ramakrishnan, 250)

Cora being erased from public memory and the clan's secrecy turns to be one defiant act of preserving counter memory. By shielding their knowledge and information within their community an alternate history will not capture their version of events. Counter memory reveals more profound realities about the relationships between power, memory, and identity, it enables us to see the significance of uncovering secret histories, even those that have been denied or erased.

Towards the end of the book, when Bindhu and Scriptor pretended to be clan members to participate in the ceremony, they were beaten and seized, allowing for complete erasure once more. Fortunately, they allowed Scriptor to depart after Bindhu was cruelly tortured and killed, promising

him that he would not reveal their secrets or else he, too, may become a sacrifice for Cora. Xavier likewise faced a same fate.

The dominant and controlling forces manipulates memory to gain supremacy, power, and control. The erasure of Francis Itty Cora from the public domain is a means of preserving their history but preventing the outside world from comprehending or challenging it. The clan's concealment and Cora's erasure together create a kind of counter memory, one that contradicts official histories and opposes outside narratives.

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# A STUDY ON ADVANCEMENT OF APPROACHES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the evolution and diversity of language teaching approaches, focusing on their theoretical foundations, methodologies, and practical implications. Various approaches such as Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) were examined. The transition from teacher-centered to learner-centered models highlights the growing emphasis on communication, interaction, and contextual learning. Additionally, Eclectic and Post-method approaches were discussed, reflecting the trend towards flexibility and adaptability in language instruction. Through a critical comparison, the study revealed the strengths, limitations, and suitability of each approach for different learners, contexts, and goals. Ultimately, this paper highlights the importance of aligning teaching strategies with learners' needs, cultural backgrounds, and technological advancements to foster more effective and inclusive language learning.*

**Keywords:** Language teaching approaches, grammar-translation, communicative language teaching, task-based learning, post-method pedagogy

## Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, and teaching it effectively has been a subject of research and innovation for centuries. Over time, educators have developed various approaches to address the challenges of language learning, each rooted in different linguistic, psychological, and educational theories. These approaches not only reflect shifts in our understanding of how languages are acquired but also respond to changing societal, cultural, and technological needs.

The history of language teaching reveals a shift from **traditional, form-focused methods**, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, to more **interactive and learner-centered approaches**, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Alongside these, **modern approaches** like Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasize meaningful use of language through real-world tasks. In recent years, a growing preference for **eclectic approaches** and **post-method pedagogy** has emerged, encouraging teachers to adapt strategies based on learners' needs rather than adhering strictly to one method. The key developments in language teaching

approaches, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of their principles, methods, and relevance. Understanding these approaches not only equips educators to make informed instructional choices but also ensures that learners can achieve their language goals in a variety of contexts.

## Need and Importance

Language teaching approaches play a vital role in ensuring effective language acquisition by providing structured frameworks for instruction. The world characterized by multilingualism and cultural diversity, the ability to teach languages efficiently is essential for personal, academic, and professional development. The various reasons are highlighting the need and importance of language teaching approaches like ensuring the learner's needs, acquire both fluency and accuracy, enhancing communication skills, encourage interactive and practical language use etc. The need for language teaching approaches arises from the complexity of language learning and the diversity of learners. The approaches are important because they ensure effective, learner-centered, and adaptive instruction, preparing students



to thrive in multilingual and global environments. By understanding and applying various approaches, educators can foster holistic language development that integrates linguistic competence with communicative and cultural skills.

The field of language teaching approaches has evolved over centuries, shaped by changing educational theories, learner needs, and socio-cultural contexts. The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) was one of the earliest methods used to teach foreign languages. Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe it as a highly structured, teacher-centered approach focusing on memorization of rules, translation of texts, and written proficiency. Though effective for teaching grammar and reading comprehension, it has been criticized for neglecting oral communication skills and failing to promote real-world language use (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The Direct Method (DM) emerged as a response to GTM's limitations, emphasizing spoken communication, immersion, and the exclusive use of the target language. It focuses on oral proficiency and avoids translation. According to Thornbury (2017), DM significantly improved listening and speaking abilities but was difficult to implement in large, mixed-level classrooms due to the high demand on teacher expertise. Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) was influenced by behaviorist theories of learning, the ALM became popular in the mid-20th century. Brown (2007) notes that ALM focuses on repetition, drills, and habit formation, treating language learning as a mechanical process. However, the approach was later criticized for being too rigid and lacking focus on meaningful communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s as a paradigm shift toward learner-centered instruction, focusing on fluency, functional language use, and real-life communication. Savignon (2002) defines CLT as an approach that prioritizes the ability to convey and interpret meaning over grammatical accuracy. While CLT has become widely accepted, some researchers argue that it can lead to imbalance by neglecting explicit

grammar instruction (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) integrates content-based subjects with language learning, promoting bilingual or multilingual competence. Coyle et al. (2010) argue that CLIL fosters both academic knowledge and language skills, making it suitable for content-heavy curricula. However, challenges include teacher preparation and the difficulty of maintaining a balance between content and language goals. Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizing learning through meaningful tasks that replicate real-world scenarios. Ellis (2003) suggests that TBLT improves fluency and learner engagement by focusing on problem-solving tasks and collaboration. According to Skehan (1998), however, the approach may not provide sufficient focus on grammar, requiring additional attention to form-focused activities.

The eclectic approach involves combining elements from multiple methods to suit specific learning contexts. Kumaravadivelu (2006) promotes the idea of moving beyond rigid methods, advocating for adaptability in language instruction. This allows teachers to tailor lessons to individual learner needs, promoting flexibility and creativity in teaching. Kumaravadivelu's post-method framework argues for a shift away from prescriptive methods toward a principled, context-sensitive approach. This framework emphasizes learner autonomy, teacher autonomy, and social responsibility, encouraging teachers to act as reflective practitioners (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Technology has significantly impacted language teaching by enabling blended learning, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), and virtual language classrooms. Chapelle (2010) highlights the benefits of technology in providing immediate feedback, self-paced learning, and authentic communication opportunities. Hampel and Stickler (2015) caution that technology alone cannot replace effective pedagogy; it must complement well-designed teaching approaches. The Larsen-Freeman (2014) points out that many teachers struggle to implement communicative and task-based methods due to large class sizes, lack of resources, or teacher

training. Increasing focus is being placed on blended learning, socio-cultural approaches, and project-based learning. With the rise of globalization, teaching approaches are increasingly prioritizing intercultural competence alongside language skills (Byram, 1997).

The literature on language teaching approaches reveals a clear evolution from **teacher-centered, grammar-focused methods** toward **learner-centered, communicative, and task-based approaches**. However, no single approach fits all contexts, leading to the adoption of **eclectic and post-method frameworks** that promote flexibility and adaptability. The integration of **technology** further enriches these approaches, though it also presents new challenges for educators. Moving forward, **research and practice must focus on context-sensitive, learner-centered strategies** that prepare students for the dynamic demands of language use in a globalized world.

### Rationale of the Study

The **language teaching approaches** lies in the need to understand how diverse instructional strategies impact the process of language acquisition. Language learning is a complex process, influenced by cognitive, social, cultural, and emotional factors. As students and learning environments become more varied, it is essential for educators to be equipped with a range of approaches to foster **effective communication and comprehension**. This exploration helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that teaching methodologies align with **learners' needs, goals, and contexts**.

The rapid changes in **globalization, technology, and multicultural exchanges**, learners today need language skills that extend beyond grammatical competence to include real-world application, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking. Traditional methods, such as the **Grammar-Translation Method**, may still hold value in certain contexts but are often insufficient in preparing learners for the communicative demands of modern life. As a result, more contemporary approaches like

**Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** and **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)** have emerged to meet these evolving needs.

This topic is also significant for addressing **the growing diversity in classrooms**, where learners may differ in linguistic backgrounds, learning styles, or personal motivations. No single method can effectively accommodate every learner. Understanding the **advantages and limitations** of each approach allows teachers to adopt **eclectic or post-method strategies**, adapting techniques based on specific teaching situations.

Additionally, as **digital technologies** transform the learning experience, there is a need to integrate **blended and technology-enhanced learning approaches** into language instruction. Exploring various language teaching approaches equips educators to leverage such tools meaningfully, creating **dynamic, student-centered learning environments**.

The examining language teaching approaches is crucial for ensuring that education remains responsive, inclusive, and effective. A deep understanding of these approaches empowers educators to make informed instructional choices, fostering learners' linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, and personal growth in a rapidly changing world.

### Objectives of the Study

The study of **language teaching approaches** aims to achieve the following objective:

- To explore the theoretical foundations and practical application of major language teaching approaches, such as the **Grammar-Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Eclectic and Post-Method**.

### Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses will guide the study:

- There is no significant difference in learning outcomes between traditional and modern language teaching approaches.

## Methodology

A qualitative and descriptive research design was employed to explore and compare key language teaching approaches. Data collected from reviews was analyzed using descriptive qualitative statistics to determine patterns in teacher and student preferences for specific approaches. The comparative analysis was used to know the effectiveness, strengths, and limitations of different approaches will be compared, especially in relation to teaching goals, learner outcomes, and classroom dynamics.

## Discussion

The research on **language teaching approaches** revealed that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for language instruction. Various approaches, from **traditional methods to modern communicative and task-based approaches**, offer different benefits and challenges. Each approach is suitable for specific learners, objectives, and contexts, reinforcing the importance of **adaptability and teacher expertise**.

- Traditional methods like the **Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)** emphasize **grammar and vocabulary acquisition** but often neglect **speaking and listening skills**. On the other hand, **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** and **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)** encourage students to use the language actively, improving **fluency and real-world communication**. Research indicates that **CLT and TBLT** are more effective for developing communicative competence, but they may require complementary grammar-focused instruction to ensure accuracy (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).
- Approaches such as **TBLT** and **CLT** shift the focus from teachers to learners, fostering **engagement and intrinsic motivation**. These methods promote active participation and allow learners to practice language through **meaningful tasks**. However, some students, particularly beginners, may feel overwhelmed without structured guidance. Learner-centered methods improve engagement but may need to be balanced with **scaffolded activities** to support less confident learners (Ellis, 2003).

- The success of an approach depends heavily on the **context** in which it is implemented. For example, **GTM** may work well for academic purposes where written proficiency is prioritized, while **CLT** is more effective for students who need conversational skills. Large class sizes, limited resources, or untrained teachers may hinder the successful implementation of **modern approaches**. Educators must consider **classroom conditions, cultural backgrounds, and learner goals** when selecting a teaching approach (Savignon, 2002).
- The integration of **digital tools** has enhanced the effectiveness of various approaches. **Blended learning** and **Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)** offer flexibility and provide learners with additional opportunities to practice language outside the classroom. When thoughtfully integrated, technology **enhances learner engagement** and allows for more personalized instruction. However, it cannot replace **effective teaching strategies** (Chapelle, 2010).
- As no single approach can address all learner needs, many educators are adopting **eclectic or post-method approaches**. **Kumaravadivelu's post-method pedagogy** emphasizes the importance of **contextualized teaching**, encouraging teachers to combine elements from multiple approaches to suit specific classroom realities. Flexibility in teaching promotes **effective language acquisition** by allowing educators to **adapt strategies** based on learners' evolving needs and challenges (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

The discussion emphasizes the importance of **flexibility and adaptability** in language teaching. While **modern approaches** like CLT and TBLT are effective for **developing communicative competence**, **traditional methods** still play a valuable role in certain contexts. **Technology** offers exciting opportunities but must be thoughtfully integrated with pedagogy. Ultimately, **post-method pedagogy** and **eclectic teaching** provide the most effective path forward, enabling educators to tailor their instruction

to meet the diverse needs of learners. Training teachers to be **reflective practitioners** who can **balance theory and practice** is crucial for improving the quality of language education.

### Conclusion

The exploration of **language teaching approaches** reveals a dynamic and evolving field that reflects the complexity of language learning. From traditional methods, such as the **Grammar-Translation Method** and the **Audio-Lingual Method**, to contemporary approaches like **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** and **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**, each methodology offers unique benefits and challenges that cater to different learner needs and contexts. The study of language teaching approaches offers valuable insights into improving language education, but further research is needed to address contextual challenges, incorporate new technologies, and develop hybrid instructional models. Future studies should focus on long-term outcomes, teacher development, and learner motivation, ensuring that research findings remain relevant and applicable in diverse educational contexts. Overcoming current limitations will help educators and policymakers adopt flexible, inclusive teaching strategies that meet the evolving needs of learners in a globalized world.

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# FINDING ORDER IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS: APPLYING CHAOS THEORY IN SELECT CARTOONS OF NODDY

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## Abstract

*Chaos Theory looks at the amazing unpredictability of nature. It has captured the beauty of the unpredictable and exhibited it in the most awesome patterns. It proposes that all seemingly natural systems are in fact controlled by complex and mysterious forces known as “strange attractors”, forces which are both random and determined. It is a peculiar paradox – it is the prediction of the behaviour of “inherently unpredictable” systems. The most important feature of chaotic systems is the conscious dependence on initial conditions. Television shows based on Noddy, an English character created by Enid Blyton have been telecasted on British television from 1955 to 2020. The paper discusses how the principles of Chaos theory can be applied in the cartoons ‘Noddy and the Dancing Spell’, ‘Noddy’s Car Trouble’ and ‘Noddy Needs Some Medicine’. The cartoons selected exhibits how certain situations are sensitive and how a tiny difference in the initial ‘push’ can create a big difference in where they end up. The systems around us are chaotic that they are prone to sudden changes. The chaotic systems are always there in our real-life situations. These cartoons portray the examples of such real-life situations. Even the minute things that go unnoticed can cause very large problems. The chaotic systems are enough to make highly complex problems and such complex happenings can be overwhelming.*

**Keywords:** cartoons, noddy, chaos theory, strange attractors, unpredictability.

The two main components of Chaos Theory are the ideas that systems- no matter how intricate they may be- rely upon an fundamental order, and that very simple or small systems and events can cause very complex behaviours or events. Long-range prophecies are not possible. One of the major accomplishments of chaos theory is its ability to exhibit how a simple set of deterministic relationships can produce patterned yet unpredictable results. Chaotic systems never return to the same original state, yet the results are bounded and create patterns that embody stability. It is the promise of finding an essential order and structure behind complex events that possibly explains the great interest chaos theory has generated in so many fields. Chaotic systems are predictable for some time and then appear to become arbitrary. The strange attractor is symbolic of a chaotic system. Small things can, however, serve as catalysts that act on starting conditions. The cartoons selected exhibits how certain situations are delicate

and how a tiny change in the initial push can create a big modification in where they end up. The systems around us are chaotic that they are prone to sudden changes. As Gleick says, “chaos is order masquerading as randomness”. Chaos theory tries to understand order from chaos.

The cartoon ‘Noddy and the Dancing Spell’ has the characters Noddy, Mr.Sparks, Mr.Plod, Dinah Doll, the goblins- Sly and Gobbo, and Bumpy Dog. Noddy drives with Mr.Sparks into Toy town. Suddenly Bumpy Dog jumps into the car and lands on Noddy’s head. Meanwhile, deep in the woods, the goblins, Sly and Gobbo, makes a magic powder. They are up to no good. The powder will put everyone in Toy Town under a dancing spell. They will be too busy dancing to halt the goblins’ harm. Noddy drops off Mr. Sparks in Toy Town. Bumpy Dog jumps out of the car and knocks Noddy over. Noddy gets upset because Bumpy Dog has been naughty all the way to Toy Town. So Noddy tells

Bumpy Dog to go away. Noddy hears Gobbo ringing a bell. He wants everyone to come and listen to him. A crowd gathers and Gobbo shows them all the magic powder. He says it will make their feet feel great. Gobbo's powder sounds so good that everyone queues to get some. Everyone shakes the magic powder onto their feet. It makes their feet feel great. The naughty goblins wait until everyone has powder on their feet. Then Gobbo tells Sly to play his music box. As soon as the music starts, everyone starts dancing. They can't stop themselves. Sly steals sweets from Dinah Doll's stall. She is dancing so much that she can't stop him. No one can help Dinah. Everyone is dancing. Bumpy Dog is the only one who isn't dancing. He didn't try any magic powder because Noddy sent him away. Bumpy sees Noddy and knocks him down again. This time Noddy isn't upset. He asks Bumpy to stop the goblins. Sly is still playing the music box, but clever Bumpy knocks the magic powder all over Sly and Gobbo. Now, the goblins are dancing too and they don't like it. Gobbo tells Sly to stop playing the music. Sly stops the music and everyone is free from the spell. Suddenly, Bumpy Dog jumps at Sly and breaks the music box. The goblins turn to run, but it's too late. Mr. Plod is ready for them. The goblins say sorry, but it's no good. They are under arrest. Everyone is very pleased with Bumpy Dog. Dinah Doll gives him a big juicy bone as a reward. Bumpy Dog is the hero of the day. This is the storyline of 'Noddy and the Dancing Spell'.

The cartoon 'Noddy's Car Trouble' has the characters Noddy, his Car, Mr. Tubby Bear, Tessy Bear and Big Ears. Noddy and his Car are driving in the country, talking to each other. They come across an arrow sign board showing two opposite directions. Noddy prefers to go to the left direction while his Car wants to go to the right side. Noddy gets upset and orders the Car to go to the left road. But the Car does not obey. An argument occurs between Noddy and his Car. Noddy gets out of the car and gives a command to the car to obey his orders. The Car goes on his way without Noddy inside. Noddy is shocked. He runs after the Car. Car does not stop. Noddy

realizes his mistake. He feels sorry for being bossy. Noddy cannot bear being alone without his friend, the Car. He calls out for Car. Meanwhile Mr. Tubby Bear gets into Noddy's Car. He is not able to get it going. But on hearing Noddy's voice, the car sped away. Mr. Tubby Bear is very happy thinking that he was able to drive Noddy's car. He gets out of the car and decides to paint Car with his favourite colour-purple. Noddy's car escapes. Noddy asks about the whereabouts of his car to all those he meet. He is worried because he thinks that his car has run away and will not be his friend anymore. On the other hand, Car is enjoying his life frolicking here and there. Noddy's car happens to meet Tessy Bear and decides to have tea with her. Meanwhile Noddy is still searching for his dear car. He misses his car very much. Searching the whole of Toytown, Noddy comes to Tessy Bear and asks her whether she has seen his car. She says yes and that his car was angry due to Noddy's bossy nature. She adds that the car had gone to the farm to see some friends. Noddy goes to the farm and when Car sees Noddy coming, he goes to hide in the shed. Thus Noddy is not able to find his car. He is really sad. Noddy happens to meet Big Ears. He tells him the whole story. He also adds that he was feeling so bad and was ready to apologize to his car. Car overhears the conversation between Noddy and Big Ears. He comes out of his hiding place. Both of them reconcile. They become friends again

The cartoon 'Noddy Needs Some Medicine' has the characters Noddy, Dinah Doll and the Goblins-Sly and Gobbo. Noddy is making his deliveries on his car. But he is not well. He is sneezing. Dinah Doll happens to see Noddy sneezing. Out of concern for him, Dinah Doll tells him to go and see the doctor. But Noddy does not want to see the doctor as he is scared. Dinah Doll somehow convinces him of the need to go and see the doctor and get some medicine in order to get well. Noddy finally agrees. Dinah Doll offers to go with him. After the visit to the doctor, Noddy realizes that it was okay and he is given a medicine. Dinah Doll tells him to have the medicine. But Noddy does not have a spoon. Dinah Doll goes

to take a spoon from her store. Meanwhile, the Goblins-Gobbo and Sly sees Noddy sneezing. They decide to play a trick on him. The Goblins come to Noddy and tells him false stories about the medicine and cooks up some stories of false side effects for a coin in return from Noddy. On hearing this, Noddy is confused and is afraid to have the 'horrible' medicine. When Dinah Doll returns with the spoon, she finds Noddy missing from the spot but finds the bottle of medicine there. She overhears the Goblins laughing and understood that the Goblins had played a trick on Noddy. She scolds them. Dinah Doll goes in search of Noddy but Noddy tries to avoid her. Meanwhile Noddy's sneezing gets worse. Noddy hides so that Dinah Doll does not find him to give the medicine. Dinah Doll is worried because she has been searching for Noddy all over the town. Finally, she finds him, runs after him and catches him. Dinah Doll explains to Noddy that the Goblins had tricked him and the medicine would not hurt him. He believes her and decides to have the medicine. After having the medicine Noddy feels better. Later the Goblins start sneezing and both Dinah Doll and Noddy makes fun of them. Thus the cartoon has a happy ending.

In 'Noddy and the Dancing Spell' the rejected and ignored Bumpy Dog rises to the occasion. Bumpy Dog being rejected and ignored by its master, Noddy is quite a surprise. The dismissal of Bumpy Dog becomes the strange attractor as per Chaos Theory. Noddy forsaking Bumpy Dog, a mere animal is the unimportant event.

Sly and Gobbo, the negative elements in the cartoon rising to great heights to disrupt the wellbeing of the Toy Town, is not a new incident. On the emergence of the negative powers, people in the society who are innocent, suffer due to the atrocities done by the negative elements in the society. Negative forces becoming dominant in the society is a common thing to happen now a days. Negative strands in the society become very rampant and dominant for some time. Afterwards these negative forces get overpowered and defeated by the heroic character. This heroic character then rises to the

occasion. This is the usual line of thought that is seen even in the religious books. This is what Bumpy Dog does. The dog becomes the hero. By using its tactics Bumpy gets rid of Gobbo and Sly. As per Chaos Theory, this is the underlying order behind the unpredictable: the unpredictability of the events in the cartoon is replaced by a predictable, understandable and comprehensible plot. This plot is not an unexpected one, but a predictable and expected one.

In 'Noddy's Car Trouble', Noddy's dearest friend, his car does not obey his master. The strange attractor here, as per chaos theory is an arrow sign board. The car would not have disobeyed Noddy if the arrow sign board wasn't there. They would have gone on friendly terms cracking their usual jokes and Noddy would not have shown his bossy nature. The arrow sign board bring about a change in the relationship between Noddy and his car which results in Car running away and Noddy going in search of him. In the beginning we see Noddy and his car being very happy, but the arrow sign board brings an unexpected turn that is least expected by the viewers. But once Noddy realizes his fault, we can see that the cartoon takes its usual route of both Noddy and his car getting reconciled again. Thus we find order in a state of chaos. The underlying order overcomes the unpredictable move of the plot.

As per chaos theory, in 'Noddy Needs Some Medicine', Noddy being scared to go to the doctor in the first place becomes the strange attractor. Noddy is supposed to be brave and confident in all matters, but he being afraid to go to a doctor is awkward and strange. Being ill, going to the doctor for getting medicine is a necessity. But he does not want to go. That is quite unexpected. Later we find Noddy being too vulnerable and an easy target for the Goblins when he is alone as Dinah Doll has gone to get the spoon. We know that people who have a vulnerable mindset will always be in the danger of falling into the trap set by negative forces. The thoughts of such people will always be swayed and lured by other factors because they are not stable and steady. When they are not in the presence of good company,

they look out for other medium onto which they can cling on and they end up in danger. This is what we find in Noddy being scared and vulnerable. When he loses the company of a good friend like Dinah Doll, he falls into the trap set by the Goblins. But there is always an opportunity to be recovered and restored. Dinah Doll comes back and pursues him and finally Noddy accepts her advice and has the medicine and gets better. Hence Dinah Doll coming back to Noddy with the spoon leads to a happy ending. We find order amidst chaos and disarray.

We are confronted with the question of how to deal with uncertainty and diversity, provoked by interactions and negotiations in a globalizing world. We, each of us, are parts of a larger whole. This connection is influential and will continue to shape much of our survival. It has inferences for our lives as individuals and those of our children. For persons this complexity is reflected in the diversity of proficient and social surroundings. We are sure that we are heading towards a collapse though in unpredictable ways. We need to make sure that we are able to identify the strange attractors and prepare

ourselves accordingly. Chaos is everywhere. The theory teaches us to expect the unexpected. Everything is changing. The personalities of people, weather conditions, nature, science and technology, etc., - all are prone to changes. We need to find stability and order and organize ourselves for the future changes in the midst of chaos.

On a worldwide scale, human civilization is a single creature capable of amazing complex collective actions in response to environmental encounters. Hence we need to equip ourselves to face the trauma, the challenges and the problems of the globalized world.

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# BEYOND THE COLONIAL ERA: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF HYDROCOLONIALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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## Abstract

*Hydrocolonialism, often described as a contemporary form of colonialism, involves the control and exploitation of water resources by powerful nations or corporations, often to the detriment of marginalized communities. It shares striking similarities with neocolonialism, a system where former colonial powers maintain economic and political influence over former colonies, often through indirect means. During the colonial era, the unequal power dynamics and exploitation was visible when the colonizers extracted resources, including water, for their own benefit, often disregarding the needs of local populations. But in contemporary times, corporations and wealthy nations extract water resources, sometimes through unsustainable practices, for profit or domestic use, often at the expense of local communities. Developing nations often become dependent on foreign investment and technology for water management, leading to a loss of autonomy. This paper attempts to figure out the connections between hydrocolonialism and neocolonialism, to recognize and challenge the power dynamics that perpetuate water injustice and environmental degradation primarily through the writings of Andreas Malm, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Rob Nixon who have significantly contributed to the theoretical understanding of water as a site of power and control, which is central to the concept of hydrocolonialism. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that considers historical, political, economic, and social factors.*

**Keywords:** *Hydrocolonialism, neocolonialism, sustainability, power*

The term hydrocolonialism, though a neologism in academia, has now become influential in academic and critical theory. By blending postcolonial theory, environmental studies, critical race theory, oceanic studies, blue humanities, migration and diaspora studies, and maritime politics, hydrocolonialism investigates the colonial legacy on water resource control, management, and exploitation, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Water is not just a natural resource but also a political and economic one. Colonial powers often seized control of water resources, such as rivers, lakes, and coastlines, to benefit their own interests. Indigenous and marginalized communities were often dispossessed

of their water rights and access to water resources. This led to social and economic inequalities that persisted even after decolonization.

Postcolonial studies have become more complex in the past few decades, defying definitions and seeking global scale and local commitments. Historically, starting with the national liberation movements that ended political dominion, it has looked upon the concept of the nation-state and the worldwide decolonization movement, freeing and splintering many political entities. Though generally perceived as the historic struggle against European colonialism and the emergence of new political and cultural actors on the world stage during the second

half of the twentieth century, these struggles have profoundly reshaped the production of academic knowledge as much as they have reshaped world power. In a larger historical temporality, postcolonial studies also consider the *longue durée* of European expansion, exploration, and conquest during the so-called Renaissance or Early Modern era of European history (Schwartz 2). The watershed moment in the Renaissance period was the sailing of Christopher Columbus from Spain in 1492, followed by Vasco da Gama, sailing from Portugal to find a reliable sea route east to the South Asian port of Calicut. European naval expansion, both eastward and westward, led to a surge in global trade and maritime technological advancements. The Atlantic slave trade has a distinctive force in popular memory, and it is an important site of discussion in postcolonial literature because the places and peoples transformed by its operations (Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Britain) articulate a set of distinctive, traumatic and deeply connected experiences forcibly represented in its literature. Diasporas originate during the journey. The formation of the first African diasporas was a result of the African – Slave trade that forced and voluntary migrations from Africa during the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> centuries into the Middle East & India.

The decimation of the indigenous population and the enforced movement in and out of the colonies created a new space for the European settlers and a new group of slaves being shipped to serve them. Henry Schwartz observes that,

The opening of Europe to other worlds through navigation has been deemed a crucial event for the subsequent histories of Asia and the Americas, which soon after their “discoveries” became decisively colonial as European techniques of economic and military organization overwhelmed the early practices of trade. To many contemporary scholars, this description best suits postcolonial studies as the analysis of the historical, technological, socio-economic, and cultural links between Europe, Asia, and the Americas since 1492, that is, as the emergence of European dominance following the first contact by water (7).

Considering the sea as a ‘middle passage’ of the journeys from and into the colonies, Julie Mullaney in *Postcolonial Literatures in Context* notes that the most resonant image in the memory of a colonial period is the “slave ship” (10). “The Middle Passage thus emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial continuum between Africa and the Americas” (Diedrich et al. 8). Mullaney further notes that “For Paul Gilroy, the ship is a defining chronotype (space-time image) in exploring ‘the black Atlantic’, a term devised to encapsulate the transnational affiliations between communities in the Atlantic region resulting from the diasporas created by slavery” (11). The ship continues to link generations brought into new relations by the legacies of slavery. For example, the arrival of the ‘Empire Windrush’ at Tilbury Docks in 1948 and a new phase of post-war migration to Britain encompassed a set of departures that distinctively remade British and Caribbean histories. The ‘Windrush generation’ and their experiences are diversely explored in the work of a range of post-war and contemporary writers.

Colonial practices often led to the degradation of water ecosystems, such as deforestation, pollution, and overexploitation of fisheries. These practices continue to have long-lasting consequences for the environment and communities. Colonial powers often imposed their own knowledge systems and technologies on water management. This led to the suppression of indigenous knowledge and practices, which often had a deeper understanding of local water systems. Spivak observes,

The old postcolonial model – very much “India” plus “Fanon” – will not serve now as the master-model for transnational to global cultural studies. We are dealing with heterogeneity on a different scale: “Over the time that the world has known substantial states,...empires have been the dominant and largest state form....Only now...do we seem to be leaving the age of massive Eurasian empires that began in earnest across a band from the Mediterranean to East Asia almost four thousand years ago. To the extent that we regard such international compacts as the

European Union, GATT, and NAFTA as embodying imperial designs, furthermore, even today's requiem may prove premature (*A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* 2).

Global maritime trade has been a significant driver of economic, social, and cultural development throughout history. The Indian Ocean has been a vital maritime trade route since before the end of the Ice Age, connecting East Africa to the Americas whereas the Mediterranean Sea emerged as a major trade centre for ancient civilizations such as the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Minoans, and Greeks (Collins 23). While European maritime trade experienced a decline in the 5th-7th centuries, it continued to flourish in Asia.

Maritime politics, the interplay of political, economic, and strategic factors related to the sea, has been a significant geopolitical arena throughout history. In the 21st century, this domain has evolved, shaped by globalization, technological advancements, and shifting power dynamics. A particularly pertinent issue is the rise of neocolonialism, a modern form of imperialism that employs economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies. Nations, particularly developed ones, are increasingly exploiting marine resources like fish, minerals, and oil. This often occurs in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of developing countries, raising concerns about overfishing, pollution, and unequal benefit sharing. Strategic chokepoints and shipping lanes are vital for global trade. Major powers often exert influence over these routes, sometimes through military presence or economic coercion, affecting the economic prospects of smaller nations. China has invested heavily in port infrastructure in various countries, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. While these projects aim to boost trade and economic growth, they have also raised concerns about debt traps and potential loss of sovereignty. China's investments in ports along key maritime routes, such as the Strait of Malacca, have strategic implications, allowing it to influence global shipping and trade. Large-scale fishing vessels from European

and Asian countries often operate in African waters, depleting fish stocks and harming local economies. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing practices undermine sustainable fisheries management and deprive African nations of valuable resources. Many developing nations have sought to modernize their ports to facilitate trade and economic growth. However, these projects are often financed through loans from powerful nations or international financial institutions. These loans can come with stringent conditions, such as requiring specific equipment or services from the lender's companies or demanding preferential access to port facilities. This can limit the borrower's sovereignty and economic autonomy. Chomsky has long back traced it to the "anxieties of globalization" where the treaties and agreements with agencies, including IMF and World Bank, incorporate social, cultural, and humanitarian values into the development whereby dominant political and economic systems are created. The decisions of those who impose the neoliberal consensus have a major impact on the global order. The multilateral agreements constitute new ways of securing elite privileges while undermining democracy. The neoliberal measures ensure that the poorer countries merely fulfill the role of service by providing cheap labor, raw materials, and investment opportunities for the developed countries- what is being practiced is simply colonialism and imperialism.

The United States maintains a global network of military bases, including those in strategic locations like Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. These bases enable the US to project power and influence in maritime regions. Regular naval exercises involving multiple countries can be used to demonstrate power and influence and gather intelligence. Cultural studies can provide valuable insights into the cultural dimensions of maritime politics and neocolonialism. Researchers can uncover underlying power dynamics and ideological assumptions by examining the representation of maritime spaces in popular culture, literature, and film. Analyzing how maritime spaces are represented in media and political discourse can reveal dominant narratives and underlying power

relations. Developing nations often rely on loans from powerful countries to finance port infrastructure. This can lead to debt traps, where nations become indebted to creditors and may be forced to cede control over strategic assets or resources. Military aid can also be used as a tool of influence. While it may provide short-term benefits, it can also lead to long-term dependence and strategic alignment with the donor nation. Advanced surveillance technologies enable powerful nations to monitor maritime activities in distant waters. This can be used to gather intelligence, enforce regulations, or intimidate smaller nations.

Isabel Hofmeyr, a South African academic, introduced the concept of “hydrocolonialism” in her book *Water’s Empire: A History of Water in South Africa*. This concept refers to the historical and ongoing control of water resources by colonial and post-colonial powers, often leading to social, economic, and environmental injustices. Hofmeyr’s work highlights the enduring impact of colonial water policies and the need for more equitable and sustainable water governance. By examining the historical and contemporary dimensions of hydrocolonialism, she offers a critical perspective on the complex relationship between water, power, and society. Even after independence, many post-colonial states continue to struggle with unequal access to water, with marginalized communities often bearing the brunt of water scarcity. The commodification of water and its privatization have exacerbated water inequalities and led to further marginalization of vulnerable populations. The overexploitation of water resources and poor water management practices have contributed to environmental degradation, such as water pollution and land degradation.

The legacies of hydrocolonialism continue to shape water governance and access in many parts of the world. Postcolonial states often struggle to

address water scarcity, pollution, and inequality due to the historical legacies of colonial exploitation. The current trends in postcolonial theory draw on an emerging range of elementally inclined literary approaches: critical oceanic studies, new materialisms, coastal and hydrocritical approaches, hydrocolonialism, black hydro-poetics, and atmospheric methods. But this has to build on models while bringing them into conversation with narratives of life, drawing out new genealogies and configurations, while inflecting and extending these approaches in new ways through that intersection.

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## **STRATEGIC TERROR AND ITS GUARDIANS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MURAD'S *THE LAST GIRL***

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### **Abstract**

*Narratives have depicted violence, both objective and subjective, from the beginning of its history. Literature is often the source through which the world gets to know the frightening deeds of violence inflicted upon humans by their co-inhabitants. These narratives are not just stories of their frightening past but also limpid representations of the resilience of the survivors. The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State is a real life tale of Nadia Murad, a girl who survived the Yazidi genocide. During this incident that happened in 2014, Daesh (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) killed 600 Yazidi men and has taken the women as sex slaves since they refused to convert to Islam. The paper will analyse the violence and marginalisation she faced as both a Yazidi and a woman. The objective of this study is to read The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State, in the light of Slavoj Žižek's 'Theory of Violence' and see how the subjective violence suffered by the Yazidi people was begotten from the invisible violence or oppression based on religion and gender.*

**Keywords:** *Violence, genocide, objective and subjective violence.*

The history of humankind has witnessed the creation and destruction of many civilisations. The major cause of this phenomenon would be attributed to violence and terror. Violence and terror are acts of physical force which cause or are intended to cause devastation. It could be categorised in different aspects. Violent crimes are typically divided into four main categories, based on the essence of the behaviour: homicide, assault, robbery, and rape. Other forms of violence overlap with these categories, such as child sexual abuse and domestic violence (Jacquin). The influence of religious and political ideologies behind these atrocities is a very important concern for us since it is happening day by day.

The Yazidi genocide is one such incident which happened in 2014. Here Daesh (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) killed 600 Yazidi men and has taken the women as sex slaves since they refused to convert to Islam. Nadia Murad, a Yazidi survived this violence and she later became an advocate for those who face

genocide and human trafficking. She founded *Nadia's Initiative*, an organisation dedicated to helping women and children victimized by genocide, mass atrocities, and human trafficking to heal and rebuild their lives and communities. In 2018, she received The Nobel Peace Prize along with Denis Mukwege, for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict and she became the first Iraqi and Yazidi to achieve this.

Murad's memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*, is divided into three parts. The first part details Murad's growing up, with her mother, eight older brothers and two older sisters. She outlines the fragmented and problematic relations between nearby Sunni villages and the days of terrorist attacks. In the second part, Murad recollects the traumatic memory of the dark days of her life. While she was kept a captive in the ISIS confinement, she was raped and tortured brutally. Murad's escape from ISIS-held

territory, with the help of a Muslim family, is discussed in the third part of the book. She reunited with some of her family members and later moved to Germany.

This paper attempts to study the violence and marginalisation she faced as both a Yazidi and a woman and analyse her memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State*, in the light of Slavoj Žižek's 'Theory of Violence'. By analysing the reasons for the violence experienced by Murad and the motives behind that, the paper aims to present the role of objective violence which causes subjective violence as per Žižek's theory.

The common definition given to the term "violence" is the exercise of physical force to inflict injury on or cause damage to persons and property. It causes bodily injury or forcibly interferes with personal freedom (*Oxford*). As aforementioned, the harm caused by this relatively ordinary type of human behaviour can be both physical and psychological. But Slavoj Žižek, Slovene philosopher and cultural theorist define this in a much broader and more complex way. His theory is essentially about understanding violence and the way it is depicted in the global society, the way certain violence is hidden behind the identifiable forms.

Murad, the author and the narrator of the book, was a 19-year-old student living in Kocho, a Yazidi village in the northern Iraqi district of Sinjar. Most of the villagers were farmers and depended on the neighbouring Sunni Muslim village to fulfil their needs. On 15 August 2014, when *Daesh* (Arabic for the Islamic States) rounded up and attacked Kocho, Yazidis never imagined how brutal it was going to be. They killed 600 men - including six of Murad's brothers and stepbrothers before taking the younger women and girls as sex slaves. It is reported that more than 6,700 Yazidi women and girls were taken prisoners by Islamic State in Iraq that year. She was taken to an ISIS base in Mosul and later sold to a judge. The torture was unbearably violent, viz. burning with cigarettes, beating and raping repeatedly but she escaped from her captor when he

unknowingly left the house unlocked. She took refuge in a neighbouring Muslim family who was not interested in *Daesh*, and helped to smuggle her out of the ISIS-controlled region thus she ended up in a refugee camp in Duhok, Kurdistan Region.

Žižek, differentiates violence as 'subjective violence' and 'objective violence'. 'Subjective Violence' is a form of violence committed by an agent that is attributed easily to a particular individual or group. This type of violence involves things like violent shootings, hitting, vandalising, and so on which may cause disturbance in social relations and freedom of people. 'Objective Violence' is defined as violence 'inherent in a system; not only direct physical violence but also the more indirect forms of oppression that maintain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence' (Žižek 9).

According to Žižek, brutal and violent "acts" are forms of subjective violence, "which [...] are] experienced, observed and enacted on individual victims by perpetrators". More importantly, it is subjective violence that "serves to deliver us from the responsibility to act", by focusing attention on the act of violence and its immediate brutality (Black 4).

The best example of subjective violence is "terrorist violence". It is often committed by a person or group of people, against the members of the public with an unreasonable dramatic perpetuation. Therefore, "the overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure which prevents us from thinking" (Žižek 4). Also, the media range of information directs us down to subjective violence negating its underlying reasons. This fails them to find the motivations which nurture terrorism by focusing on its savagery.

Žižek further classifies "objective violence" into two; 'Symbolic Violence' and 'Systemic Violence.' Symbolic violence is the violence of language and the "imposition of a certain universe of meaning" (Žižek 2). In this, the representations of reality are established by hegemonic discourses. It reveals 'social domination and incitement of subjective violence' (Žižek 11). The democratic

state's monopoly on legitimate violence is an example. Žižek uses the term 'systemic violence' to indicate that certain social structures or institutional practices, such as political domination or capitalist exploitation, cause people to engage in subjective violence, both individually (e.g., rape and murder) and collectively (e.g., riots and war). In other words, social arrangements that cause subjective violence performed by individuals are called "systemically violent." (Van der Linden 5). He claims that the different "explosions of subjective violence" appear irrational if we don't consider systemic violence in their "invisible" background.

During the period of captivity, Murad had been subjected to violence viz. rape, torture, loss of her family, forced impoverishment and denial of basic human rights. In all these aforesaid violence, brutal and violent "acts" were involved and they had been executed by an agent motivated by a certain system. Thus all this brutality comes under Žižek's Subjective violence. But as per Žižek, if we focus solely on this framework, the actual extent of terror can't be acknowledged. For that, we have to learn and reflect on the 'invisible background' on which subjective violence relies. Murad had to suffer double marginalisation under ISIS rule; as a Yazidi and a woman. This demeaning based on religious and gender oppression was accomplished by that 'invisible background', the Objective violence. In Murad's case, this Objective violence is executed by the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS is a transnational Sunni terrorist group that follows Jihadist doctrine highly motivated by the idea of imperialism. They recognise themselves as a Caliphate, which claimed religious, political, and military authority over all Muslims worldwide by actuating the Sharia legal system. As I said earlier, Murad's hometown, Kocho had fallen prey to this imperialist Jihadism which oppressed people, directly and indirectly. As per Žižek's view, this particular ruling system can be counted as an agency of Objective Violence.

If we go on further through Murad's memoir, the systemic and symbolic violence can be distinguished

from the actions of ISIS. They were highly influenced by the hegemonic discourses of fundamentalist Islamic tradition which encouraged killing the infidels as the best way of jihad.

When IS militants attacked Sinjar, they killed anyone who refused to be converted to Islam or who was too stubborn or confused to flee, and they chased down those who were slow on their feet shooting them or cutting them their throats... We soon learned that many of our Sunni Arab neighbours welcomed the militants and even joined them, blocking roads to stop Yazidis from reaching safety, allowing the terrorists to capture all non-Sunnis who failed to escape from the villages closest to Kocho, then looting the vacant Yazidi villages alongside the terrorists. (Murad 56-57)

This is entirely based on the *tafsir* (Hermeneutics) of the Qur'anic verse; "So when you meet those who disbelieve, strike necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure their bonds, and either favour afterwards or ransom until the war lays down its burdens" - Qur'an 47:4 (Spencer 18). Even though the elder men were killed, the young boys were spared as militant recruits.

When Naif's cousin got to the village, he fell down, panting. "They killed everyone," he said. "They lined us up and made us climb down into the ditches" - shallow trenches that, in wetter months, hold rainwater irrigation. "The younger-looking ones they made lift up their arms to check for hair, and if they had none, they were taken back to the trucks. They shot the rest of us." Almost all the men had been killed right there, their bodies falling on one another like trees all hit at once by lightning. (Murad 96)

The religious oppression destroyed Murad's family with the other Yazidi families irrespective of their basic human rights.

The men were all the same: they were all terrorists who thought it was their right to hurt us. Other women saw their husbands killed in front of them before they were abducted, or listened to their captors gloat about the slaughter in Sinjar. They are held in homes or hotels, even in prisons, and

systematically raped. Some of them were children and are attacked no matter whether they have started their period or not. One girl had her hands and legs tied when her captor raped her, and another was raped for the first time while she slept. Some girls were starved and tortured if they disobeyed their captors, and others even if they did everything the militant asked them to do. (Murad 186)

Hence, by imposing the violence of hegemonic language, Jihadism became an invisible agent of Subjective violence.

When ISIS took over Sinjar and began kidnapping Yazidis, they called their human spoils *sabaya*; referring to the young women they would buy and sell as sex slaves. Murad says, “They were distributing young women among militants in Iraq and Syria to be used as sex slaves and murdering the men who might be old enough to defend themselves” (Murad 67). Thus, the social arrangement of Jihadism tempted and motivated individuals to do subjective violence. They did this mainly by interpreting obsolete Quranic verses.

Attacking Sinjar and taking girls to use as sex slaves wasn't a spontaneous decision made on the battlefield by a greedy soldier. ISIS planned it all: how they would come into our homes, what made a girl more or less valuable, which militants deserved a *sabiyya* as an incentive and which should pay. They even discussed *sabaya* in their glossy propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, in an attempt to draw new recruits. From their centres in Syria and sleeper cells in Iraq, they mapped out the slave trade for months, determining what they thought was and was not legal under Islamic law, and they wrote it down so that all Islamic State members would follow the same brutal rules. Anyone can read it—the details of the plan for *sabaya* are collected in a pamphlet issued by ISIS's Research and *Fatwa* Department. And it is sickening, partly because of what it says and partly because of how ISIS says it, so matter-of-fact, like the law of any state, confident that what they are doing is sanctioned by the Koran. *Sabaya* can be given as gifts and sold at the whim of the owner, “for they are merely property,” the Islamic State pamphlet reads. (Murad 138-139)

By asserting to Qur'anic verses, Islamic State straightforwardly says that in addition to wives (“two or three or four”), Muslim men may enjoy the “captives of the right hand” (Qur'an 4:3, 4:24). These are specified as being women who have been seized as the spoils of war (33:50) and are to be used specifically for sexual purposes, as men are to “guard their private parts except their wives or those their right hands possess.” (23:5–6)(Spencer 365). Since Yazidi girls were considered infidels, the militants justified their act of raping them as slaves and it is not a sin. They would entice recruits to join the ranks of the militants and be passed around as a reward for loyalty and good behaviour (Murad 123). The thing that made Murad so desperate was the indifference their Sunni neighbours showed towards them.

Our Sunni neighbours could have come to us and tried to help. If they knew what was going to happen to the women, they could have dressed us all in black and taken us with them. They could have just come and told us, matter-of-factly, “This is what will happen to you,” so we could stop fantasizing about being rescued. But they didn't. They made the decision to do nothing, and their betrayals were like bullets before the real bullets came. (Murad 68)

When Murad called her teacher, *Ustaz* Mohammed for help before the arrival of ISIS, his reaction was so indifferent. He sounded cold and impatient to reply and left her queries unanswered. Murad avoids the fact that he cares for them less and explains everything that happened around Kocho.

I explained that Baso had been captured by ISIS and taken to Tal Afar. “They said that the school is painted red,”

I told him. “That's all we know. We can't leave Kocho, Daesh has surrounded the village, and they said they will kill anyone who tries to leave.

Can you help us talk to Baso? Do you know where the school is?”

For a moment, my teacher was silent. Maybe he couldn't hear me. Maybe Daesh had cut service, or maybe Elias was out of credits. When Mr Mohammed finally spoke, he sounded like a different person from the man who had taught me only months



before. His voice was distant and cold. “I can’t talk to you, Nadia,” he said in a whisper.

“Don’t worry about your niece. They will ask her to convert, and someone will marry her.” He hung up before I could respond. I looked at the phone in my hand, a piece of cheap, useless plastic.” (Murad 69)

This reaction challenged her about how things should be understood. She and her brother Elias were so awestruck by the stance taken by a liberal school teacher. But he was better than the other person she saw, Hajji Salman.

ISIS knew how devastating it was for an unmarried Yazidi girl to convert to Islam and lose her virginity, and they used our worst fears—that our community and religious leaders wouldn’t welcome us back—against us. “Try to escape, it doesn’t matter,” Hajji Salman would tell me. “Even if you make it home, your father or your uncle will kill you. You’re no longer a virgin, and you are Muslim! (Murad 158)

Though both of them suggested hanging on with Islam, the way of suggestions differed. We could understand this in two ways: 1) the approach of a helpless man and 2) the approach of a terrorist. Mr Mohammed is a man who is trapped inside his religion and he continues there only because of serfdom and fear. “Narrated Ikrima: Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn’ Abbas, who said, “Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, “Don’t punish (anybody) with Allah’s Punishment. ‘No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, ‘If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him” (Al-Bukhari 694). In the case of Hajji Salman, he talks to her with the voice of oppression and patriarchy. He knew the customs of Yazidis, and the way they considered their religion. His approach was that of a terrorist who deals with non-Muslims as a commodity which they can molest.

Even the women among them supported this oppression and considered this a privilege for those who do jihad. When Hajji Salman bought Murad, she was taken to his house. Most of the time, she was

insulted by Morteja, Salman’s servant. Once Morteja tried to abuse her and she screamed.

The door opened, and Morteja’s mother appeared. She gave her son an angry look. “Leave her alone,” she said to Morteja, “she doesn’t belong to you.” And Morteja left the room, hanging his head in shame like a child. “She’s a kafir,” his mother said to him as he left, then scowled at me. “And she belongs to Hajji Salman. (Murad 154)

When women are oppressed, on one hand, we could see women as oppressors too. Many terrorists’ wives were jealous of their husband’s beautiful *sabayas*. Thus they exerted their frustration over these poor vulnerable non-muslim women. Murad says,

More often, though, I hear stories of women who are even crueller than men. They beat and starve their husbands’ sabaya, out of jealousy or anger or because we are easy targets. Maybe they think of themselves as revolutionaries—even feminists—and they have told themselves, as people have throughout history, that violence toward a greater good is acceptable. I’ve heard of all this, and when I think about bringing ISIS to justice for genocide, I feel some pity for the women. I understand better how people could see them as victims. But I don’t understand how anyone could stand by and watch while thousands of Yazidis are sold into sexual slavery and raped until their bodies break. There is no justification for that kind of cruelty, and no greater good that could come out of it (Murad 152).

Though we hear many stories of oppression of ISIS days, there was some saving grace among them. “I have heard stories of Islamic State women helping Yazidis. One girl from Kocho was given a cell phone by the wife of her captor, a foreign fighter who had taken his entire family with him on the long journey from their home in the West to Syria. At first, the wife had been enticed by Islamic State propaganda, but quickly she became appalled by the enslavement of Yazidi women. Because of this woman, the Yazidi girls in that house were able to coordinate being smuggled out of Syria to safety” (Murad 152).

Janissary, also spelt Janizary, Turkish Yeniçeri ("New Soldier" or "New Troop"), member of an elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman Empire from the late 14th century to 1826 (*Britannica*). This troop consisted of Christian boys taken as spoils of wars from a region of the Ottoman Empire and later converted to Islam.

With the Ottomans now ruling over a substantial population of Christians, in 1359, Murad founded the janissary corps, a crack force of young men who were seized as boys from their Christian families, enslaved, and forcibly converted to Islam. This was the seizure and enslavement of twenty per cent of the Christian children from predominantly Christian areas of the Ottoman Empire. These boys, once seized from their families, were given the choice of Islam or death. Those who chose Islam were, after rigorous training, enrolled in the janissary corps, the emperor's crack troops.

All of this was in accord with Islamic law. It was Murad's vizier, or chief minister, who reminded him that the Qur'an entitled him to take twenty per cent of the spoils of war that the Muslims had won: "And know that anything you obtain of war booty, then indeed, for Allah is one-fifth of it and for the Messenger and near relatives and the orphans, the needy, and the traveller if you have believed in Allah and in that which We sent down to Our Servant on the day of criterion, the day when the two armies met. And Allah, over all things, is competent." (8:41) Who stood in the place of Allah and His Messenger but the caliph? And the twenty per cent of the spoils meant that Murad and the Muslims were entitled to the labours of twenty per cent of the young Christian boys in the lands they had conquered. (Spencer 171-172)

When ISIS attacked Sinjar, many boys below 13 were taken as slaves and later indoctrinated with militant ideology. Thus, they become so despondent about their family and the religion in which they are born. This subsequently transformed them into terrorists, just like Janissaries. Murad says, "Later I learned that it was the bus full of boys, including my nephew, Malik, whom ISIS would try to brainwash

into fighting in their terrorist group. As the years went by and the war continued, they would use the boys as human shields and suicide bombers" (Murad 122)

The same Systemic and Symbolic violence also affected people like Pakistani activist, Malala Yousafzai. She was shot in her left temple by a Taliban terrorist enraged by her campaign for the girl's rights to education (Jain). According to them, she tried to defame the Sharia law imposed by the Taliban and those Mujahedeen who took care of it. Since Qur'an says that people propagating against Islam and Islamic forces would be killed (Malala), they tried to kill her. Žižek comments better on this,

The fundamentalist Islamic terror is not grounded in the terrorists' conviction of their superiority and in their desire to safeguard their cultural-religious identity from the onslaught of global consumerist civilisation. The problem with fundamentalists is not that we consider them inferior to us, but, rather, that they themselves secretly consider themselves inferior. This is why our condescending politically correct assurances that we feel no superiority towards them only makes them more furious and feeds their resentment. The problem is not cultural difference (their effort to preserve their identity), but the opposite fact that the fundamentalists are already like us, that, secretly, they have already internalised our standards and measure themselves by them. (Žižek 86)

This politically dominating system of Jihadism emanated from the inferiority complex of religion and its founders resulted in engaging people in subjective violence, individually and collectively. Thus Jihadism acted as an agency for Systemic and Symbolic violence which resulted in Subjective violence. As per Žižek's view, the problems of violence are never going to end since all of them have got some religious or ideological backup. Just like Hydra, if one head is cut, many will pop up and this will sustain until the agency is enlightened, deradicalised and liberated. Up to then, the victimised community remains in bitterness and the victims of terror.

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# ORACLE: THE REVEALER OF LIGHT

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## Abstract

Kerala has a unique relationship with oracles or *velichappads* from the ancient times. Even though they are present in the history from the time of great Greek and Roman civilizations, the oracles of Bagavathi temples in Kerala have a history of their own. 'Oracle; the Revealer of Light' is an attempt to portray the incredible life of *velichappads*. It depicts the social and spiritual life of these people who maintain a yogic lifestyle, for the wellbeing of their beliefs and rituals. The paper discusses the myths, rituals, costumes, instruments, weapons and social life of oracles. The conflict between human and divinely possessed psyche of the oracle is studied in detail. As the rituals and customs differ from each other in different temples, the form and attire of the oracles also change. From north to south in Kerala, oracles differ in their style and rites in relation with the temples and the deities they serve. It studies the diverse traditions of *velichappads* existing in temples in different parts of Kerala and discusses the gradual decline of *velichappad* tradition from the current society.

**Keywords:** *Velichappads, myths, rituals, costumes, instruments, weapons*

## Introduction

The Malayalam word *velichappad* literally means "the one who reveals the light or the one who redeems from darkness" ("Velichappadu"). *Velichappad*, predominantly seen as the followers of the goddess Kali, are mediators between the deity and its devotees. There are male and female oracles, and they are more prevalent in the Valluvanad region. They are an integral part of the rituals in Bhagavathi temples and are known to suggest solutions to the issues faced by the society or individuals, after being possessed by the deity they serve; mainly Bhagavathi. During the annual Kumbha Mela, they gather to commemorate the goddess Bhadrakali's victory over the demon Darika. The oracles are highly respected when they are in the trans state.

In the intensity of possession, oracles injure themselves by repeatedly striking their foreheads with their long swords and offer blood to the deity. As the temples vary, the form of *velichappad* also changes. The famous Kodungallur Devi temple is where the widely known form of *velichappad* is seen. Both men and women wear bright red clothes draped around their bodies and spread turmeric powder over their costumes. They wear heavy belts

decorated with bells and carry heavy sacred swords with curved tips, of different sizes and shapes, decorated with small bells. They perform a frenzied dance, which slowly builds up to trances and they repeatedly hack their foreheads with their swords. The attire of *velichappad* might be frightening to children. Also being known as *komaram*, they are highly infused with the cultural beliefs of the people in Kerala.

To become a *velichappad*, one needs to go through certain tests. The tests are determined by the temple committee or the priest in that temple. The selected one would receive a prophecy or dream in which the deity interacts with them. The committee members would hide some objects and the selected one should find them with his own power. If he passes, he is appointed as the oracle of that temple with the blessings of the deity. The selected one undergoes a forty-one-day Bhajana in front of the deity. Later he is venerated as a *velichappad* with a ritual called *komara avarodhanam*. The trans state in which the *komaram* performs is called *niyogam*. Most parents hesitate to let their children choose the path of a *komaram* because the mother of the child is believed to give away her child to the deity along

with her parental rights. The mother would lose all her rights as a parent, and she could never reclaim her child as long as he wishes to continue serving the deity.

An organized and punctual lifestyle is necessary to lead the life of *komaram*. One should abstain from alcohol or any type of pleasurable agents during the sacred fasting period. Only surface level relationships are acceptable, and sexual relationships are restricted during these days. A *komaram* is not allowed to touch a dead body and should always be ready to perform his duties. One is recommended to follow a vegetarian diet during the fasting period. As an oracle is seen as the speaker of the deity, they receive huge respect in the society. They are offered money and fruits by the devotees as a token of love. But the life of *velichappad* is not easy. He is expected to perform the frenzied dance for hours. Most of them collapse after the breathtaking ceremonies. A *komaram* should get up at 3 in the *brahma muhurta* and be ready before the morning prayers at the temple. He should take a bath and be immaculate. He never touches anyone and remains silent until the *usha pooja* (morningprayer) is over. During the evening before 6pm, the *komaram* takes his usual bath and makes himself immaculate before the *chuttuvilak*. This ritual is sponsored by different devotees, who have received blessings from the deity. During this ritual, the *komaram* gives commands to be fulfilled by the devotee in need. The science behind the *komaram* is fascinating. There are seven *chakras* (wheels) in the human body, in which the *muladhara* or the root *chakra*, which is situated at the bottom part of the body beneath the sacrum is considered as the foundation of the 'energy body (Isha). It is believed that from here the energy rises to the head. The *muladhara* power of the deity resonates with the *muladhara chakra* of the *komaram* which causes him to experience immense power vibrating through his body and makes him perform the frenzied dance. Unlike Yogis or the Sages, the *komaram* enters this trans state for only a particular moment; while the yogis tend to continue this state of pleasure for lifelong. As religions make people to

follow a path devoid of sin and immorality, the *velichappads* also stand as a reminder of salvation. 'Aham Brahmasmi (- "I am Brahma-") and 'Tat Tvam Asi (- "You are That"-) are two most famous *mahavakyas* from the *Upanishads*. *Velichappads* are the personification of these *vakyas*. The *velichappad* rises to a certain form of psychological realisation where he becomes one with the deity or becomes the deity herself.

There is an interesting story in the *Aithihyamala* of Kottarathil Sankunni where a Namboothiri gets a *thaliyola* (document inscribed on processed coconut leaf) about the origin of goddess Bhadrakali. There was a letter missing in the *thaliyola*. He asked several scholars about the scripture, but no one was able to provide a meaningful sentence. Finally, he decided to meet the *velichappads* of Bhadrakali, thinking that they might be able to help him as they were serving the deity. He concealed the intention behind his visit and decided to test them. He told them that the purpose of his visit was to know the market price of bananas. After visiting several temples, he reached a particular temple where the oracle was sitting down on the floor. The moment he saw the oracle, he told the Namboothiri about the purpose of his visit and wrote down a particular letter in the ground. The letter he wrote down matched with the *thaliyola* and the Namboothiri was able to understand the meaning of the scripture (Sankunni).

This story shows the importance of oracles in the history of Kerala. In the passage of time, atrocities and thirst for money brought down the beliefs of the devotees in the oracle. *Velichappads* are vanishing from the temple premises as technology and culture are evolving.

### Regional Variations

The roles, practices and attire of *velichappad* exhibit notable variations across different regions of Kerala. These regional differences were sprouted from infinite factors including local customs, historical influences and community beliefs. Exploring and analysing these variations provide a fascinating insight into the diverse manifestations of *velichappad*

culture and the multifaceted aspects and approaches of people towards the rituals and cultural beliefs. Each temple owns its unique rituals, customs and beliefs which influences in the manifestation of *velichappads*. As the temple varies the symbolic gestures, adornments and the attire of the *velichappad* also vary, reflecting the localized traditions and customs upheld by each social community.

Sree Kurumba Bhagavati Temple is a Hindu temple at Kodungallur in Trissur District, Kerala. It is dedicated to the goddess Bhadrakali, a form of Mahakali or Durga or Adi Para Shakthi, worshipped and significantly revered in Kerala. The goddess is known also by the name Sri Kurumba (The Mother of Kodungallur). This temple is the head of 64 Bhadrakali temples in Kerala. This Mahakali temple is one of the oldest functioning temples. This is attested by numerous Tamil poems and inscriptions of different times. The deity of the temple represents the goddess in her fierce form, facing the north, featuring eight hands with various attributes. One is holding the head of the demon king Darika, another a sickle shaped sword, next an anklet, and another a bell. Priests of Kodungallur temple convey the story that this temple was, in the olden days, a Siva shrine and it was Parasurama who installed the murti of Bhadrakali.

### **Interview with a Real Life Velichappad**

A velichappad is not merely a priest or a prophet, but a bridge between the mortal realm and the divine. To delve deeper into this mystical world, we had the privilege of interviewing Mr. Prasad, a practitioner of this sacred tradition in the Mayikkal Devi temple, Muthukulam, of Alappuzha district. The temple is dedicated to Bhuvaneshwari or the goddess Bhadra. Mr. Prasad is now 57 years old and had been the *velichappad* of this temple for 13 years.

### **A Legacy of Spirituality**

Mr. Prasad's journey into the *velichappad* tradition was not merely a personal choice, but a continuation of a familial legacy steeped in spirituality. From a young age, he got immersed in the rituals and

ceremonies performed by his ancestors, feeling a profound connection to the spiritual realm and a calling to serve his community in this sacred capacity. In his family the tradition of *marumakkathayam* was followed. It is a traditional system of inheritance prevalent in parts of India, particularly in the state of Kerala. It is a matrilineal system where property and lineage are traced through the youngest daughter in each generation. Under this system the daughters and their sons inherit the property. Direct sons do not have inheritance rights. In the case of Mr. Prasad, all his cousins were well educated and were aspiring for a better job. He was the only one who was left to inherit the tradition. Before knowing about the merits and demerits of being a *velichappad*, he was appointed as the oracle of the temple.

### **Looking to the Future**

Despite the challenges, Mr. Prasad remains hopeful of the future of *velichappad* tradition. His family is supportive to maintain his oracle lifestyle. The respect he gets from society is appealing to Prasad. He has two children, a son and a daughter. To the question of inheritance of the tradition, Prasad is a bit disappointed. Neither of his children are into the *velichappad* tradition. They are students expecting high salaried jobs. Prasad calls it a genuine reason because his income from the temple is 3000/- Rs per month, which is insufficient to maintain a family. He is working as a part time painter to find the income. As a result, his children are not interested in the tradition. Strict meditation, fasting and penance are also factors for the negligence of the tradition. Prasad, from his experience, says that as interest in traditional practices and spirituality grows, there is an opportunity to adapt while staying true to the roots of this ancient tradition. By embracing change while honouring the wisdom of the past, the *velichappad* tradition can continue to thrive and evolve, ensuring its relevance for generations to come.

### Final Thoughts

Our interview with Mr. Prasad offered a glimpse into a world where the mundane meets the mystical, where the ancient traditions continue to shape the spiritual landscape of Kerala. The scarcity and problems faced by the oracles were discovered through the interview. Despite the respect he receives in society, he is compelled to perform menial jobs to support his family. The disappearance of the cultural heritage and rituals should be noted. It was very difficult for us even to find a traditional oracle, which shows the fact that this tradition is on the verge of disappearance.

### Conclusion

The life of *velichappad* is fascinating that the regional variations and social life of oracles present a delightful tapestry of cultural richness and diversity. Through our exploration, the project has uncovered the intricate ways in which these ritual practitioners navigate their roles within their communities, adapting to local customs and beliefs while preserving ancient traditions. From the vibrant festivals of *Theyyam* in the North to the solemn rituals of Bhagavathi Temples in the South, *velichappads* play a vital role in connecting people with their spiritual heritage. Furthermore, our examination has highlighted the profound impact of regional influences on the practices and identities of *velichappads*. Whether it be the distinct costumes and performances or the variations in rituals and responsibilities, each locale offers a unique glimpse into the multifaceted nature of this revered tradition. Moreover, the social life of *velichappad* reflects a complex interplay of tradition and modernity. While deeply rooted in age-old customs, these oracle priests also navigate contemporary challenges, such as changes in societal attitudes and economic pressures. Through their adaptability and resilience, *velichappads* continue to uphold their sacred duties while finding new ways to engage with evolving communities. The *velichappad* holds a significant place in the cultural and religious fabric of Kerala. As a revered figure who embodies the divine

presence and serves as a medium between the human and spiritual realms, the oracle plays a crucial role in connecting devotees with the divine during temple festivals and rituals. Through their ritualistic performances, the *velichappad* not only entertains but also guides, heals and blesses the community, offering spiritual solace and divine intervention to those who are in need. The practice of *velichappad* is deeply rooted in tradition and has been passed down through generations, showcasing the rich heritage and beliefs of Kerala society.

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## CULTURE AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE IN VIKRAM SETH'S *A SUITABLE BOY*

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### **Abstract**

*One of the longest novels ever published in a single volume is Vikram Seth's 1993 Englishlanguage bestseller, A Suitable Boy. The setting of A Suitable Boy is a newly independent, post-partition India. The main theme of the book with such a title is The Suitable Boy. The concept is based on the Indian custom of matching eligible young females with a number of characteristics that make up the perfect match. This turns into the primary barrier separating Muslim Kabir and Hindu Lata. They could only have gotten married by eloping and getting married without their parents' consent. The contradiction between a marriage based on romantic love and one that is arranged is another issue raised by The Suitable Boy's topic. The novel alternately examines national political issues in the run-up to the first national election since independence in 1952, including Hindu-Muslim conflict, the status of lower caste peoples like the Jatav, land reforms and the decline of feudal princes and landlords, academic affairs, the abolition of the Zamindari system, family relationships, and a number of other issues significant to the characters.*

**Keywords:** *Abolition, land reforms, intrigues, partition, intolerance*

A Suitable Boy is a novel by Vikram Seth, set in the 1950s India, focusing on marriage, love, and religious intolerance, highlighting the challenges faced by families in finding suitable boys for their daughters. Vikram Seth's 1993 novel "A Suitable Boy" features a highly inventive cast of characters and events that are anchored in their social and political context. Seth portrays the sociopolitical climates of India in the early 1950s, when the country was young and conflicted with its idealistic goal of establishing a just and equal country but still facing a long-standing caste system, Hindu-Muslim hostility, and untouchability practices, as well as other biases. Writing novels in the realist tradition of the nineteenth century, Vikram In all of its forms, Seth tries to portray life in a genuine and accurate manner. The Mehra's, Chatterjee's, Kapoor's, Khans, three Hindu families, and one Muslim family are the four families at the center of the story. It is commendable how brilliantly Vikram Seth depicts a wide range of characters, including politicians, shoemakers, cabaret dancers, poets, cricket players, zamindaris, and maharajas. We will remember the fiery politician Begum Abida Khan, the

hypersensitive Mrs. Rupa Mehra, the gorgeous courtesan Saeeda Bai, and the lecherous Raja of Marh long after the last page has been turned.

The Mehra's and Kapoor's are introduced to us at the start of Seth's epic tale. The event is Mrs. Rupa Mehra's daughter's wedding. Savita to Pran Kapoor, whose father is the revenue Minister Mahesh Kapoor. Additionally, we meet Lata Mehra, Mrs. Mehra's younger daughter, whose quest for a suitor the illusive "suitable boy"-serves as the focal point of the book. The opening chapter also introduces the Khans and the Chatterjis of Calcutta, whose daughter Meenakshi is married to Mrs. Rupa Mehra's oldest son, Arun, two other major families in the book. The four major families are linked by friendships and marriage.

In their youth, Firoz, the youngest son of Baiter's Nawab Sahib, and Maan, the youngest son of Mahesh Kapoor, were pals. Nawab Sahib's daughter Zainab and Mahesh Kapoor's daughter are in the same boat. In addition to telling stories, Seth now frequently makes observations about the status and circumstances of society. In contrast to Begum Abida Khan, who became fiercely independent, he

“refused to comply with the shape of the Zenana Residential regions and changed into pressured to stay in a mansion and now lives in a small residence toward the Legislative Council.” Zainab, on the other hand, “disappeared into the sector of purdah” after her marriage. While visiting his village in rural Punva Pradesh, Maan’s Urdu teacher Abdur Rasheed informs him that “the Muslim women of the lower castes need to work in the fields, so they can’t maintain purdah.” It’s just a question of honor, of being the village big shot. Mrs. Rupa Mehra’s initial comment to her daughter Lata, “You will marry a boy I choose,” sets the tone for the narrative. Lata meets and falls in love with Kabir Durrani, a talented cricket player and student. Lata’s mother views him as unfit due to his Muslim faith and sends her to Calcutta when she learns of their relationship. Haresh and Amit, two other suitors, add complexity to the plot. After many twists and turns, Lata picks Haresh, who is ambitious, diligent, and successful.

Throughout the book, religious intolerance is a recurring subject. Lata and Kabir’s religious differences keep them from achieving their deepest wishes for one another. The Raja of Marh’s construction of the Temple of Shiva adjacent to a mosque makes him the quintessential representation of religious militancy. In an attempt to offend Muslims, he plans to utilize the phallic image of Shiva as the temple’s pride and delight. In the guise of religion, there are riots and attacks on both sides. Hindu culture despises prostitute Saeeda Bai more for her Muslim faith than for her way of life. When both religions’ holy days coincide, neither side is willing to compromise, and perhaps death may ensue. Maan’s trip to see Rasheed’s family introduces the issue of religious intolerance.

Only once he exhibits a lack of interest in religion in general rather than a tolerance for their tradition’s does the majority of Rasheed’s family reluctantly accept him. This judgment is undermined when Maan is charged with attempting to kill Firoz Khan, a young Muslim guy. “He’s my brother!” says Maan, rescuing his friend Firoz from a dangerously violent mob. You get it? I promise, Lord Rama, that

if you touch even one hair on his head, I will break your bones! This scene in is definitely deserving of notice and appreciation. Similarly, the sequence in the final episode where Firoz informs Maan that his father, the Nawab of Baitar, urged him to lie in front of the judge to protect his friend from being accused of attempting to kill is also very significant. It eloquently demonstrates that love and friendship are still more significant than religious differences.

### **Think About a Lot of Things. Don’t Let Anyone Control Your Happiness Be Alone Oneself**

Seth has accurately captured the Indian way of thinking about romance, love, and Marriage. Romance, love, passion, and love marriages are completely disregarded in India, where arranged marriages are preferred. Arun and Meenakshi’s marriage has demonstrated that a passionate love marriage fails because the couple is dissatisfied with one another, does not communicate their thoughts and feelings, and lacks the mutual trust understanding, and faith that underpin a healthy union. However, since Lata and Haresh’s Marriage is built on a solid foundation of mutual respect, trust, and understanding, there is hope that it will succeed while the other couples experience the joys of married life. Lata’s sensible choice to wed Haresh has allowed Seth to further his theory that some values triumph over passion. Thus, “arranged marriage, independence, love, family, prostitution, Politics, poverty, culture, and individualism—all under the grab of a gently paced tale of Social manners” are just a few of the numerous facets of Indian life that Seth has Examined.

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# CONTRASTING ACCEPTANCE OF TRANSGENDERISM AND SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS: UNDERSTANDING GENDER AND SEXUALITY DISCOURSES IN INDIA AND IN THE WEST

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## Abstract

*The contrasting acceptance of transgenderism and same-sex relationships in India and the West underscores a deep divergence in how sex, gender, and sexuality are conceptualized and valued within these societies. In India, despite social stigma and ostracism, transgenderism has found more acceptance and visibility than same-sex relationships. The opposite is true for the West, where same-sex marriage has gained widespread support over the years, cutting across racial and religious boundaries, while large sections of Western society show reluctance or difficulty in accepting transgenderism. This paper aims to explore the socio-cultural reasons behind this dichotomy. Through that analysis, it becomes clear that the core reason behind these contrasting attitudes toward transgenderism and same-sex relationships stems from the fundamental differences in how both societies function and the expectations they place on their people.*

## Introduction

India's relationship with LGBTQ+ rights highlight a nuanced dichotomy, with resistance to homosexuality and selective acceptance of transgender identities. Despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018, marriage equality remains contentious, with political parties and religious groups staunchly opposing same-sex unions. Legal challenges persist, such as the exclusion of homosexual rights in the 2019 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, reflecting selective progressiveness. In the media, LGBTQ+ content frequently faces censorship and backlash. Films like *Fire* (1996) and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (2020) were met with protests and boycotts, revealing societal discomfort with overt representation of non-heteronormative relationships. Educational institutions and workplaces often remain exclusionary, leaving LGBTQ+ individuals vulnerable to bullying and discrimination.

Conversely, India has made notable strides in the recognition of transgender identities, rooted in its cultural and religious history.

"...The transgender in India are referred to by varied names in the ancient texts such as Trithiya panthi, Trithiya Prakriti, Hijras, Napumsaka,

Tirunagais, Khoja, Aravanis, eunuchs, etc., and are considered an integral part of Indian society (Kalra 121). They are believed to bring luck and provide special fertility power, so they are invited to perform blessings at weddings, pregnancy ceremonies (valaikappu), and during births (DellisSwararos)."

In India, transgender persons have also gained some legal footing in recent years, particularly through legal strides like the 2014 Supreme Court ruling acknowledging them as a "third gender." Hindu mythology celebrates gender fluidity through figures like Ardhanarishvara and Mohini, while hijras hold unique roles in rituals and festivals, such as the *Koovagam Festival*. Policies like the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act aim to combat discrimination, and progressive organizations and universities now offer reserved seats and workplace inclusivity programs. Companies like Tata Steel and Accenture have embraced transgender employees, and institutions like Manonmaniam Sundaranar University have created pathways for higher education.

Transgender representation is also rising in media and public life. Films such as *Super Deluxe* and *Aligarh* sensitively portray transgender experiences,

while public figures like activist Kalki Subramaniam and principal Manabi Bandopadhyay serve as trailblazers. Politically, individuals like Shabnam Mausi and Joyita Mondal have broken barriers, holding positions of leadership. Grassroots organizations like Sahodaran and the Humsafar Trust actively support transgender rights through healthcare and advocacy, while festivals like *Koovagam* celebrate their cultural significance. These developments signify incremental progress, though full societal acceptance remains a work in progress.

However, this newfound tolerance doesn't extend equally to homosexuality. While the decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018 marked progress for LGBTQ+ rights, societal attitudes remain rigid, with stigma and discrimination still rampant. The legalization of same-sex relationships has not yet translated into broader societal acceptance, and there remains significant stigma and prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals, making their integration into mainstream society more difficult. This discrepancy underscores the intricate social dynamics surrounding gender and sexuality in India.

Transgender people are often viewed through a cultural lens of "traditional" roles, whereas homosexuality is frequently seen as an alien, non-conforming conduct. Transgenderism is often seen as more in line with traditional concepts of gender fluidity, where certain roles have historically existed outside the binary. In Hindu mythology and other Indian cultural narratives, there are deities and figures that embody both masculine and feminine qualities, further solidifying the acceptance of non-binary gender expressions. The hijra community, in particular, has a long history of being both respected and marginalized. While often excluded from mainstream society, hijras have been considered an essential part of cultural rituals, representing fertility and blessing, which gives them a degree of societal recognition, even if they are not fully integrated.

Homosexuality is largely accepted in the West thanks to decades of advocacy, legal progress, and cultural shifts towards greater tolerance of LGBTQ+ folks. Over time, societal attitudes have evolved,

with increased visibility, legal protections, and marriage equality becoming key markers of progress. Major movements, including the fight for civil rights and the support from prominent public figures, have helped normalize same-sex relationships. This cultural acceptance is underpinned by a growing emphasis on individual rights and freedoms, leading to the broader societal consensus that same-sex love should not be criminalized or stigmatized.

In contrast, transgenderism faces significant opposition, despite advances in some areas like legal recognition of gender identity. The resistance stems from deeper-rooted societal and cultural norms surrounding gender. Many people view gender as binary and tied to biological sex, leading to discomfort with the concept of gender fluidity. Transgender individuals often face discrimination, misinformation, and lack of understanding about their experiences. Political and religious groups frequently oppose transgender rights, framing them as a threat to traditional values. Furthermore, transgender issues can evoke fear or confusion, further entrenching negative perceptions. These barriers complicate the full acceptance of transgender individuals, despite growing awareness and support in some areas of Western society.

In India, gender roles are often seen as foundational to societal structure, deeply tied to cultural, religious, and familial norms. Traditional gender roles dictate the expectations for men and women in terms of behavior, responsibilities, and relationships. These roles are especially important in the context of marriage and family, where women are often expected to fulfill duties related to caregiving and homemaking, while men are viewed as providers and protectors. This strict adherence to gender roles is deeply rooted in centuries of tradition, religious teachings, and social practices, making them more ingrained in Indian society than issues of sexuality. In Indian culture, fitting into prescribed gender roles is often considered fundamental to one's identity and social acceptance, while the expression of sexual desire is often seen as secondary, or even taboo. Gender roles are deeply embedded in societal,

familial, and cultural frameworks, governing everything from behavior and career choices to marriage and family life. These roles are traditionally defined along rigid lines: men are expected to be providers, protectors, and authoritative figures, while women are often expected to focus on nurturing, caregiving, and maintaining the household. Deviating from these roles can lead to social exclusion or criticism, as it challenges the well-established norms that define social harmony and continuity.

Sexuality, in contrast, has historically been a more private and taboo subject in India, especially in relation to same-sex relationships. Homosexuality has been marginalized and criminalized, particularly during British colonial rule, and continues to face resistance due to conservative views on family and reproduction. Indian society tends to prioritize marriage and reproduction within heterosexual frameworks, where the continuation of family lines is central to cultural and religious practices. Thus, while both gender roles and sexuality influence social attitudes, the strict enforcement of gender roles is more significant in shaping societal expectations in India, as it directly impacts family structures, social standing, and cultural identity. Transgenderism, in contrast, is often seen as more in line with traditional concepts of gender fluidity, where certain roles have historically existed outside the binary. In Hindu mythology and other Indian cultural narratives, there are deities and figures that embody both masculine and feminine qualities, further solidifying the acceptance of non-binary gender expressions. The hijra community, in particular, has a long history of being both respected and marginalized. While often excluded from mainstream society, hijras have been considered an essential part of cultural rituals, representing fertility and blessing, which gives them a degree of societal recognition, even if they are not fully integrated.

However, in the West, transgenderism faces more opposition due to several social, cultural, and psychological factors. First, transgenderism challenges deeply ingrained beliefs about gender, which many

view as binary and biologically fixed. Unlike homosexuality, which primarily involves same-sex attraction within the existing gender framework, transgender individuals question the very notion of gender itself, advocating for fluidity and self-identification. This disrupts traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity, leading to discomfort and resistance among some.

While homosexuality has gained considerable acceptance in many Western countries, with increased legal protections and societal integration, transgender individuals still face significant challenges. While public opinion in places like the U.S., Canada, and parts of Europe has evolved to generally support the LGBTQ+ community, transgender rights remain a contentious issue. In particular, gender nonconformity, including transgender identity, is often met with resistance. This is due, in part, to persistent cultural views linking gender with biological sex, as well as political and religious groups opposing transgender rights, framing them as threatening traditional values. For example, while many Western nations have legalized same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQ+ individuals, acceptance of transgender people is lagging behind. There are still areas where legal recognition of gender identity and protections against discrimination for transgender people are inconsistent or weak, despite growing visibility and advocacy. Moreover, transgender issues often provoke stronger emotional and ideological opposition compared to homosexuality (Pew Research Center, "The Gap Between Support for Same-Sex Marriage and Acceptance of Transgender People"; "Transgender Rights Are Stuck in a Political Battleground").

Nearly seven in ten Americans (68%) express support for same-sex marriage. Only 30% of Americans oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry. Support has risen consistently since 2014, from 54% to 58% in 2016 and 61% in 2017 to 67% in 2020 and 68% in 2021.

A sample study done in the US state of Nebraska solidifies this prejudice against Transgenders while supporting Gay, Lesbian rights. The studies says that

“a greater percentage of respondents are inconsistent in their beliefs than they are oppositional, suggesting significant cultural traction when it comes to supporting gays and lesbians while opposing the rights of transgender people.” (Burke, Kelse et al)

Transgender experiences are often misunderstood, with many people lacking awareness of the complexities involved in gender dysphoria, transitioning, and gender identity. This lack of understanding breeds fear and misinformation, making it harder for transgender people to gain acceptance. Moreover, transgender issues are highly politicized, often intertwined with debates about healthcare access, women's rights, and public accommodations, leading to intense political opposition. Conservative groups, particularly religious ones, argue that recognizing transgender rights undermines traditional family values and social norms. While homosexuality has been more visible and accepted in the media, transgender individuals still face significant discrimination in employment, healthcare, and social settings. These factors combine to make transgenderism a more contentious issue, despite broader advances in LGBTQ+ rights in the West.

### **Conflicting View on Sexual Desire: Individualism Vs Collectivism**

Sexual desire and satisfaction are often more openly valued in the West than in India, largely due to cultural differences in how sexuality is approached. In Western societies, there is greater emphasis on individual sexual autonomy, with more open discussions around sexual pleasure, consent, and personal fulfillment. This reflects a broader cultural focus on individual rights and self-expression. After millennia of subverting sexual desire and pleasure to the realm of sinfulness, 20th century Europe and America, saw a large-scale revolution of sorts in accepting, celebrating and forefronting sexual satisfaction and gratification as important to a person's wellbeing. Herzog Dagmar's book *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History*, traces this evolution in the perception of sex act in Europe. The

Sexual Revolution in the West was deeply influenced by the rise of individualism, which emphasized personal freedom and autonomy. As society moved away from traditional communal values, people sought to define and control their own sexual identities and desires. This shift challenged established norms surrounding marriage, family, and morality. *Sexual Revolutions* edited by Gert Hekma and Alain Giami, examines the role of rise in Individualism which took shape out of Post Enlightenment political movements resulting in this so-called sexual liberation.

In individualistic cultures, such as those predominant in the West, personal freedom and self-expression are often seen as cornerstones of identity. Sexual autonomy, including the right to explore and express diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, aligns with this cultural emphasis on individual rights. The Enlightenment introduced ideas that reshaped perceptions of individual rights and autonomy, laying the groundwork for modern understandings of sexuality and gender. Emphasizing rationality, liberty, and personal freedom, this period fostered an environment for challenging traditional norms. These ideals gained momentum in the 20th century with the LGBTQ+ rights movements, particularly after landmark events like the Stonewall Riots in 1969. Stonewall catalyzed a global push for equality and recognition, rooted in Enlightenment principles of personal freedom and the right to self-determination. Together, these historical influences reflect a transition from rigid social roles to embracing identity as an intrinsic part of individual liberty. This focus prioritizes the individual's choice over traditional or collective norms.

In contrast, Indian culture tends to prioritize family, social norms, and reproductive roles over individual sexual desires. Sexuality is often seen in the context of marriage and procreation, and open discussions about sexual pleasure are less common, especially in more conservative areas.

Regarding transgenderism, scientific dogmatism in the West has contributed to some misguided notions. While there has been significant progress in

recognizing transgender rights, certain aspects of transgender health, particularly around gender identity, are still sometimes oversimplified or misunderstood. A reliance on binary, reductionist models of gender within medical and scientific fields has led to debates about the legitimacy of transgender experiences and treatments. Some scientific perspectives have historically focused on gender dysphoria as a disorder, pathologizing transgender identities. This can lead to harmful stereotypes and misconceptions, even in progressive contexts, hindering full acceptance of transgender individuals and their rights.

In contrast, Indian culture, rooted in collectivism, places significant importance on familial and societal harmony. Gender roles and sexual norms are often tied to maintaining community identity, familial structures, and traditional values. Non-heterosexual orientations can be seen as challenging these established norms, leading to resistance or less acceptance. In this context, adhering to accepted gender roles and heteronormative relationships is often viewed as a way to uphold social cohesion. However, this does not mean the lack of sexual diversity; rather, it reflects how non-conforming identities are socially perceived and integrated.

### Historical Factors

Early Western Civilisation had significant instances of homosexuality and homoeroticism which probably made it easier for the West to accept homosexuality. Ancient Greco-Roman traditions reveal a nuanced perspective on sexuality. In both societies, same-sex relationships, particularly among men, were not uncommon and often accepted in certain contexts, such as mentorship or companionship. However, these interactions were typically framed around social hierarchies and roles rather than modern concepts of sexual orientation as identity. For example, in Greece, relationships between older men (erastes) and younger boys (eromenos) were often educational and cultural, though they sometimes had a sexual component. In Rome, acceptance was more conditional, focusing on the role one played within

the relationship, with social norms favoring dominance in sexual and social dynamics. An analogy of this sort cannot be found in Indian history or myth.

Meanwhile, Indian mythology features numerous references to transgender and third-gender characters, reflecting a cultural acknowledgment of gender diversity. Figures like Shikhandi in the *Mahabharata* and Ardhanarishvara, a composite deity representing Shiva and Parvati, symbolize a blending of masculine and feminine. These narratives, along with historical roles of hijra communities, contributed to a cultural framework more accepting of non-binary identities. Such figures or mentioning of a fluid gender identity is nowhere to be seen in Western canon. This historical precedents or lack thereof must have also contributed to this above mentioned.

### Intersection of Globalisation and Change

It's also worth noting that these distinctions are not static. Globalization, exposure to diverse perspectives, and local advocacy have begun to challenge and reshape traditional norms in both individualistic and collectivist societies. In India, for example, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 and increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ voices suggest a slow but significant cultural shift.

### Conclusion

It is evident from recent cultural and social trends that LGBTQIA+ acceptance has been on the rise in the West as well as in India. Due to inherent cultural differences, historical precedence and general view on individualism, community and sexuality, there appears to be a divide when it comes to public perception of transgenderism compared to same-sex relationship. Both in the West and in India, Transgenderism is seen as a separate phenomenon, understood differently than other homosexual identities. In the West, Transgenderism faces more resistance while in India it faces less resistance relative to other homosexual identities. This differential treatment is a mirror into the thinking and

structuring of both these societies. While the West gives prominence to the Individual, her self actualisation and pleasure, Indian society forefront social order and community inclusion over the Personal or the Private. The paper does not aim to pass a value judgement on either stance but is merely interested in pointing out this core difference in how individuals within these cultures position themselves.

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## READING *KISHKINDHA KAANDAM*: A LABYRINTH OF MEMORY, TRAUMA AND FORGETTING

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Memory studies, a field that investigates how individuals and societies construct, preserve, and transmit memories, intersects with trauma studies, which examines the psychological and social impact of traumatic events. Both fields recognise the power of memory to shape identity, influence behaviour, and determine future trajectories. However, they also acknowledge the potential for memory to become distorted, fragmented, or even repressed in the face of overwhelming trauma.

The intricate interplay between memory and trauma has been a subject of profound exploration in both psychological and literary studies. While memory is often seen as a vital tool for understanding the past and shaping the future, it can also become a burden, particularly in the context of traumatic experiences. Traumatic memories can become intrusive and persistent, haunting survivors long after the event itself has passed. These memories may manifest as flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts, disrupting daily life and causing significant distress. The vividness and emotional intensity of traumatic memories can make it difficult for individuals to move forward, as they are constantly reliving the past. As van der Kolk and van der Hart observe, traumatic memories cannot be repressed easily and the victims cannot effortlessly dissociate from it (168).

In contrast to the enervating effects of intrusive memories, forgetting can be a powerful tool for healing and recovery. Some theorists argue that forgetting is a necessary part of the process of moving on from trauma. By selectively forgetting certain aspects of the traumatic experience,

individuals may be able to reduce the intensity of their emotional response and alleviate the negative impact on their mental health.

One way in which individuals can gain control over their traumatic memories is through narrative. By constructing and retelling their stories, survivors can make sense of their experiences, assign meaning to them, and integrate them into their broader life narratives. This process of narrative construction can help to alleviate the emotional burden of trauma and facilitate healing. This paper attempts to explore the complex relationship between memory and trauma as it is portrayed in *Kishkindha Kaandam*, highlighting the paradoxical nature of memory, where it can serve as both a curse and a boon in the process of healing and recovery.

*Kishkindha Kaandam* (2024), a Malayalam mystery thriller by Dinjith Ayyathan, explores the intertwined nature of memory and trauma. While the trauma of losing a child marks the core essence of the movie, it assumes the status of a thriller through the consequences of memory loss of Appu Pillai, an ex-army man, and the attempts of his son Ajayan, a forest officer, to cope with the situation. Ajayan is portrayed to be in a continuous attempt to find his missing son, Chachu, at least to know whether he is dead or alive, visiting various places and mortuaries, prompted by newspaper reports on unidentified dead bodies. The mystery behind Chachu's missing gets resolved when Ajayan's newly-wed second wife Aparna decides to solve the puzzle of a missing pistol, which resembles that of her father-in-law, that has reached a troop of monkeys. In fact, three years before, when Chachu was found playing with the

pistol, his mother Praveena tried to retrieve it and the gun was accidentally shot, killing him.

The trauma induced by Chachu's death acts differently with Praveena, Ajayan and Appu Pillai. Praveena, who was already a cancer patient, overdoses herself with sleeping pills to commit suicide. When Ajayan finds the dead Chachu and dying Praveena, he rushes her to the hospital. He comes back home to fetch the documents of her chemotherapy only to find that Chachu's body is missing. It is assumed that Appu Pillai had secretly buried the body to evade legal complications. Praveena, who later dies of cancer, was haunted by the guilt consciousness until her death. Praveena is a victim of the memory of Chachu's death and her role in the accident. She suffers not only from cancer, but also from this painful memory of causing the death of her child. Unable to forget the sorrowful event, she succumbs to an accelerated death.

Ajayan, who was first shocked to know about his son's death, decides to hide the incident in order to save his wife. Ajayan who lives with the painful secret, alive and sane with his memories, cannot escape the trauma. In an attempt to hide the incident forever, he continues to visit places in search of his 'missing son', without being able to share his sorrow with anyone. He has to act in front of his new wife too, until circumstances force him to reveal the secret. It is not only the sad memory of his child's death, but also his father's memory loss and his miserable attempts to overcome the challenges caused by his disease cause trauma in Ajayan. After the revelation of the secret, the trauma is transmitted to Aparna also, and she continues to live keeping the secret along with Ajayan, sharing the painful memory. Ajayan and Aparna are unable to repress the traumatic memory or to dissociate from it, as they have to preserve the narrative Ajayan has created in front of the public.

The characterisation of Appu Pillai is profound as a victim as well as a beneficiary of memory loss. Due to amnesia, he forgets where he had hidden the dead body of his grandson. Since Appu Pillai has memory loss, he escapes from the trauma of his

grandson's accidental death. However, he is at the same time the most suffering character in the movie as he constantly investigates about the child's missing and about whether he has any role in that incident. After prolonged investigations, he reaches the conclusion that Chachu was killed accidentally and he himself has hidden the body. Once he reaches the conclusion, he destroys all the evidence so that no one blames his son and deceased daughter-in-law. But he forgets this episode too, and he repeats the process infinitely; investigating, finding the truth, and burning the documental evidences he has prepared through deep investigations. Even though his disease offers him escape from all the traumatic memories, he constantly re-lives the traumatic moments by investigating the mystery surrounding Chachu's missing. The trauma and struggles of Ajayan related with Chachu continuously provoke Appu Pillai to solve the mystery, and he revisits his forgotten traumatic revelations.

Once he reaches the traumatic reality, Appu Pillai intentionally embraces his amnesia induced forgetting to get rid of the trauma. Ajayan, on the other hand, haunted by his child's death is heart broken witnessing his father oscillating in between memory and oblivion. He discourages Aparna's attempts to solve the mystery behind Appu Pillai's deeds as he knows the situation through which his father is going through. Appu Pillai, who is well aware of his disease, utilises his memory loss not only to escape the trauma himself, but also to protect his family by hiding the secret of Chachu's death eternally. The inability of Appu Pillai to remember incidents and details associated with it creates an uncertainty which provides a sense of security to the family. Memory loss and associated forgetting of Appu Pillai is, therefore, a boon for himself and the family. Ajayan tries not to make his father investigate the incident ever again, to save him from revisiting the trauma. When Aparna joins Ajayan in this attempt, the movie emphasises how the three major characters are constantly trapped in the labyrinth of memory, trauma and forgetting. The tagline of the movie, 'A Tale of Three Wise Monkeys',

acknowledges the three characters Appu Pillai, Ajayan and Aparna who utilise the scope of memory and forgetting to protect each other and manage the trauma that has affected their family.

Memory, forgetting and trauma are complexly intertwined in *Kishkindha Kaandam* as remembrance and forgetting constantly interchange their roles as cause of trauma and healing factor. While memory gives an individual the authority on one's own past, it constantly triggers traumatic experiences through flashbacks. The characters of the movies are perpetual victims of inescapable memories and they are in persistent battle with the trauma thus induced. Forgetting, on the other hand, offers redemption from traumatic experiences even though it creates challenges in surviving in the present. The movie demonstrates that forgetting can offer temporary relief from trauma but can also hinder the process of closure, as the characters continue to be in the loop of traumatic experiences.

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